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THE PERCEPTIONS OF PRESERVICE MUSIC TEACHERS THROUGH A PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE

A Master’s Paper

by

Abigail L. Harvey

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The Master’s Paper of Abigail L. Harvey was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Linda Thornton  
Associate Professor of Music Education  
Master’s Paper Adviser

Robert Gardner  
Assistant Professor of Music Education  
Second Reader

*Signatures are on file in the School of Music.
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Introduction

Providing music education majors with a quality education is crucial to their success as music teachers. A music student’s time spent in the university classroom composes a large part of their undergraduate experience. A music education practicum may be a significant component as well, laying the foundation for being a successful student teacher. Another significant step in their educational journey is student teaching. Both opportunities allow college students to gain experience planning and executing age-appropriate learning activities for children. They are also able to receive feedback on their teaching from experienced mentor teachers.

Researcher/Participant

The music education practica I experienced were very different from those that my alma mater provides to its current students. In my sophomore year in college, I was placed with the local middle school band teacher, as a component
of my educational psychology course. Some music education majors taking educational psychology, like myself, were placed in a music setting for their practicum, but some students were not. Students not placed in music settings found themselves in science or math classrooms. I took Elementary Music Methods while I was a junior, and my classmates and I observed one music lesson in the public school and then co-taught a lesson in that same classroom. Interestingly enough, this fieldwork took place in the school where I am currently teaching. Students currently taking Elementary Music Methods at the same university from which I graduated have a seven-visit practicum experience, which is more involved than what I experienced. I do not believe that my limited practicum experience helped prepare me for my student teaching as well as it could have.

My current teaching placement is located near my alma mater. I teach in two elementary schools in a small district in central Pennsylvania. Mostly I teach third grade general music, but I also teach two kindergarten and two second grade general music classes as well as fourth grade string lessons and string
ensemble. I also teach private piano lessons outside of school. I recently completed my fourth year of teaching, and I am now a tenured faculty member in our school district.

Since my first year of teaching, junior music education majors from a local university come to my general music classroom to observe and reflect on my teaching. They visit me a total of seven times, with each visit involving a 30-minute class period. They spend the first three visits observing only. They then spend the next three visits observing and participating in the activities with my students. We conclude the practicum experience with a team-teaching episode. All of the students tell me they enjoy their experience, but now that I have begun supervising student teachers, I am wondering if the practicum experience I provide truly makes students feel prepared for their student teaching experience.

Background

Research indicates that students value practicum experiences strongly in respect to their future teaching and teaching special populations. McDowell (2007) determined her participants were basically satisfied with their three
semesters of field experience. She suggested further investigation as to whether or not this field experience actually affects student teaching. In another study, VanWeelden and Whipple (2007) found that preservice teachers’ professional and personal attitudes improved after they planned for and taught special needs students. The knowledge and teaching skills combined with the hands-on approach changed the music education majors’ attitudes and made them more willing to work with special needs students. Roulston, Legette, and Trotman Womack (2005) also learned that beginning teachers valued any preservice preparation that was “hands-on.” Conway (2002) searched for the most valued and least valued experiences of music teacher education, and she found first-year music teachers highly valued their preservice fieldwork. Conway also found the quality of the fieldwork is more important than the mere presence of a fieldwork component.

Music teacher beliefs of themselves influence the length of their careers. Preservice teachers may hold expectations of their teaching career that may be too high, which could ultimately lead to feelings of frustration. Campbell and
Thompson (2007) determined that “preservice teachers hold views of teaching that are unrealistically optimistic and not related to previously taught or studied methods of teaching” (p. 173). Further, it seems that in-service music teachers ultimately feel isolated and not supported (Krueger, 2000; Hancock, & Madsen, 2002). Hancock and Madsen (2002) found that 35% of the music teachers they surveyed left the profession altogether due to the factors of isolation and lack of support. Due to these feelings of isolation and lack of support, young teachers may be unable to connect with more experienced teachers who would be able to help them be more realistic about what they can expect from themselves and their students. Perhaps certain kinds of practicum experiences may help music education majors to formulate realistic expectations, and may help lessen the attrition rate of novice teachers within the music education profession.

If students are not having beneficial practicum experiences, perhaps college educators and in-service teachers could modify the experiences to make them more valuable. Aspects of the practicum experience may be eliminated, enhanced, or created to better serve the needs of preservice music teachers.
Doing so may equip them with the tools to have a successful music student teaching experience, which may lead to long and successful music teaching careers. Many research studies have focused on investigating music majors’ perceptions of their practica. While most music majors view their practicum experiences as positive, the impact on their student teaching experiences is not yet clear. Few studies have investigated whether music education students feel prepared for student teaching as the result of practica or field experiences.

Student teaching is the culmination of many years of study and can help to prepare students for success in their music teaching career. If successful practicum experiences indeed help to prepare music education majors for successful student teaching experiences, the practicum could also contribute to a successful career; however, the relationship between practicum experiences and student teaching is not yet clear. Better understanding of this relationship may give those responsible for preparing students for a music education career insight into the impacts of a practicum experience. Perhaps this insight can guide institutions to create or improve practicum experiences in order to better
educate preservice teachers. Further, in-service teachers who host students for practicum experiences could benefit from learning about activities that seem to help prepare the students for student teaching.

The purpose of this study is to determine whether junior music education majors participating in a practicum feel the practicum experience prepared them for student teaching. In order to investigate this purpose, the following questions guided this study:

1. If the students felt they were adequately prepared for their upcoming semester of student teaching, what practicum experiences helped prepare the practicum students the most?

2. What recommendations do the students have for future practica to ensure other students feel more prepared for student teaching?

3. How did the practicum students’ feelings of preparation for student teaching change throughout the practicum?
Literature Review

Several music education majors have completed a junior-year practicum with me during my three years of teaching. I consider this an important responsibility because I believe it helps to prepare these students for their student teaching experience, and that the student teaching experience prepares the students for their careers in music education. While I consider the practicum experiences to be very important, I began to wonder if the students perceived their practicum experiences as positive preparation for their student teaching.

Music Teacher Attrition

Krueger, 2000. Krueger’s mission was to determine how satisfied music teachers were with their jobs and why they decided to leave the profession. She interviewed 30 music teachers that were in their first 10 years of teaching. The teachers taught in urban, rural, and suburban schools, and they were varied in their specialty area. Krueger’s questions dealt with challenging moments as a new teacher, satisfying moments as a new teacher, and support systems in place. Unfortunately, five of the teachers she interviewed wanted to leave the
profession immediately. Krueger also found that all of the music teachers felt isolated and that they had to deal with problems by themselves. She suggested that experienced teachers can help to provide support for less-experienced teachers.

Krueger’s implications are important for any public school teacher that has a practicum student or a student teacher. Perhaps if mentor teachers remain in contact with their mentees, they might serve as a resource and support system. Such communication may help the novice teachers feel less alone, and they would be able to continue the learning experience with their mentor teachers.

Hancock & Madsen, 2002. Hancock and Madsen (2002) also investigated the retention and attrition of music educators. Similar to Krueger (2000), Hancock and Madsen desired to learn why music teachers were staying or leaving the profession. All 225 subjects were certified music teachers who graduated from the same university in the previous 10 years. The researchers randomly selected the participants, and they asked these participants to comment freely about the
support they receive or why they were no longer teaching. Six years later, the researchers compiled data on the participants’ occupational status to determine who was still teaching and who was not. In the second part of the study, only 65% of the research participants were still teaching music. The music teachers’ concerns ranged from lack of support to being “not well-equipped for current and changing demands” (Hancock & Madsen, 2000, p. 14).

Music teacher attrition, especially within the first 10 years of teaching, is a concern of researchers in music education and professionals in related fields. In general, music teachers seem to feel they are not well supported. Other reasons for leaving the profession included a feeling isolation and pressure to deal with problems without assistance or guidance. In order to alleviate the frustration experienced by novice teachers, perhaps they could be paired with experienced teachers who are equipped to provide support.

Preservice Teachers’ Beliefs and Concerns

Austin & Reinhardt, 1999. The authors surveyed 137 students from six different universities, all of whom were enrolled in either an introductory music education
course, a music education methods course, or a music student teaching experience. The participants completed a questionnaire that inquired about their demographics and philosophical beliefs. The philosophical questions solicited their opinions about the validity and importance of music education programs in schools.

Austin and Reinhardt (1999) found that the students believed that all the philosophical statements were true or more true than false, but they found a more diverse set of beliefs as far as the advocacy statements were concerned. The researchers suggest an exploration of the subjects’ backgrounds to provide additional insight. The researchers conclude that students “enter college with well-developed beliefs about music education and then, despite the best efforts of music teacher educators, simply continue to ‘think as they were taught’” (Austin, Reinhardt, 1999, p. 28).

Campbell & Thompson, 2007. The concerns of undergraduate music education students are significant for any teacher providing practicum experiences. Campbell and Thompson (2007) examined the concerns of music education
majors involved in different stages of their training. The four different groups consisted of students in an introductory music education course, students in teaching methods courses, students involved in field experience, and student teachers. Over 1000 preservice music teachers from 16 different institutions of higher learning in the United States participated in this study. They completed the Teacher Concerns Checklist. The first part of the checklist collected descriptive information about the participants. In the second part of the checklist, the students evaluated whether or not a teaching activity raised concern for him or her. One example of a statement is, “whether the students respect me” (Campbell, Thompson, 2007, p. 167). Campbell and Thompson found that the students doing field experience had higher levels of concern than any of the other groups. The researchers found that “preservice teachers hold views of teaching that are unrealistically optimistic and not related to previously taught or studied methods of teaching” (p. 173). They argue that preservice teachers should have experiences in schools as early as possible, and that it is helpful for preservice teachers to be able to express their concerns.
Yourn, 2000. In conducting her study, Yourn (2000) was determined to

“illuminate the perceptions held by beginning music teachers regarding how they learn to be teachers, and to address concerns that arise from their practicum experience” (Yourn, 2000, p. 182). Nine music education majors and mentor teachers, and a university supervisor participated in the study. Yourn administered a pre-practicum questionnaire, semi-structured and informal interviews, and observed the music education students teaching two different lessons. Before the practicum, the music education majors participated in a focus session where they discussed their concerns going into the schools and how to deal with these concerns. The students kept journals about their teaching, and participated in a final focus session after the practicum ended.

Yourn (2000) found that the students had many concerns. They were worried about classroom management, having sufficient teaching materials, and teaching lessons of poor quality. She also discovered that there were major discrepancies between what the music education majors wanted to achieve in their lessons, what they thought they achieved, and what they were observed
achieving by an observer. Yourn contends that the mentor teacher is a significant figure in helping beginning teachers, especially when it comes to the topic of self-awareness.

The beliefs and concerns of music education majors are significant factors in a valuable practicum experience. The beliefs that the students have formed are most likely a result of the way they were taught before they arrived at college, and the students may hold on to those beliefs strongly. Typically, the music education majors participating in fieldwork have the highest level of concern. Practicum students are often concerned about classroom management, having sufficient teaching materials, and teaching lessons that are poor in quality. Knowing the concerns and fears of future music teachers can help those responsible for their education and development to better serve the music education majors.

*Practicum Experiences*

Roulston, Legette, & Trotman Womack, 2005. The authors of this study found evidence that practicum experiences benefit music educators. They interviewed
nine beginning teachers, defined as people within their first three years of teaching, in order to explore their “perspectives concerning their work in the schools” (Roulston, Legette, & Trotman Womack, 2005, p. 66). The researchers held two open-ended interviews with each of the research participants. They asked the teachers about their undergraduate education, what they experienced in their first year of teaching, and their professional needs. The interviewees “valued preservice preparation that was ‘hands-on’ ” (p. 67). They were also helped by informal and formal mentors. These data indicate that practica and student teaching prepare students for their later careers in music teaching.

Conway, 2002. Conway (2002) evaluated music teacher preparation practices at one particular university in the Midwest. She sought to determine which experiences were the most and least valuable in the program, as well as to gather suggestions from the participants. Twenty-five first-year teachers from graduating classes of 1999 and 2000 who taught within 40 miles of the university participated. Two times during the year, Conway conducted unstructured individual interviews and classroom observations with all of the participants. At
the end of the school year, the music teachers completed a questionnaire. The music teachers reported that their most valuable experiences were student teaching, preservice fieldwork, and the growth of their musicianship. In relation to fieldwork, Conway determined that it was also the quality of the fieldwork that was important. The work in the field was only useful if the students were able to learn something specific.

Balantyne, 2007. While the music education programs in Australia may be quite different from those in America, this study offered important points about effective music teacher education. Many music teachers have been disappointed in their preservice preparation, and Balantyne (2007) sought to highlight some new thoughts on the preservice music teacher programs in Australia. Balantyne began her study by mailing questionnaires to graduates of music education programs from three different universities. Slightly over half of them responded, and Balantyne found she needed clarification on items from the questionnaire. She then interviewed the respondents, and she found that a majority of them were “somewhat satisfied or dissatisfied” (Balantyne, 2007, p. 123).
Balantyne (2007) analyzed her data to find commonalities among the interview results. Three themes emerged: contextualization, integration, and continuity. The theme that was most relevant to my topic was that of contextualization. According to Balantyne, students need practicum experiences so they can have real-world application to what they learn in their methods courses.

VanWeelden & Whipple, 2007. In this study, the authors explored the perceptions of music education majors in respect to students with special needs. In the past, “little research has been conducted investigating the effects of field experiences with special learners on preservice teachers’ perceptions of music for these students,” and these effects of field experiences were part of the purpose of the study (VanWeelden, Whipple, 2007, p. 34). VanWeelden and Whipple found in a previous study that students had a more positive attitude after field experience with special needs students, but that study involved preservice teachers working only with one subpopulation of students with special needs. For example, one group worked with “students with emotional and/or
behavioral disorders,” and another group of preservice teachers worked with “students with acute cognitive delays” (p. 35). The 2007 study expanded to two subpopulations of music education majors, and the authors strived to compare the effect of a long-term field experience on music education students’ attitude and perception of teaching students with special needs. The 59 preservice teachers planned and taught various musical activities. They spent three weeks with students that had emotional and/or behavioral disorders and three weeks with students that had acute cognitive delays. The students completed questionnaires prior to and after the experience. In general, the questions dealt with the comfort level, willingness and preparation of the students teaching the special learners.

VanWeelden and Whipple (2007) found that the music education majors’ personal and professional attitudes improved through the field experience. When their new knowledge combined with hands-on teaching skill development their attitudes were changed. The researchers decided that most experiences with special needs students are beneficial.
One of my goals with my practicum students is that they feel prepared to enter student teaching after they have their experience with me.

Carol McDowell (2007) questioned whether or not the amount of field experience affects student success during student teaching. She found that “research supporting field experience as an essential component is contradictory” (McDowell, 2007, p. 46). Ten music education majors at a Missouri university participated in this study, and they were all in different “blocks” in their education process. Block I involves students taking an Introduction to Music Education course. Block II consists of students in the first half of their junior year who are taking course that involve field experience. Students in Block III have field experiences that are more involved than the field experiences in Block II. Block IV is the student teaching experience. At the end of each block, the students reflected on questions about how they viewed their field experience, how well it prepared them for their next block, specific activities that helped, and any concerns about their next component.
Overall, McDowell (2007) found that the students were satisfied with their three semesters of experience. She also states that “teacher preparation programs need to question students in order to know how to lead them, serve them better, and move music education forward” (p. 55). She suggests future studies should explore the effect of field experience on student teaching, not just on the perception of preparation for student teaching. McDowell’s recommendation to communicate with students to determine their level of need is an idea that I will remember. Communication has to happen between all mentors with whom the student comes in contact to ensure the student receives all the feedback and guidance he or she needs to be adequately prepared for future teaching experiences.

All of the researchers whose articles I studied state that practicum experiences are important in the professional development of preservice music educators. Out of all of the researchers, Conway (2002) was the only one to stress that the quality of the fieldwork makes a difference in the impact on a students’ preparation. In addition to the practicum experience, anyone responsible for
training future music teachers should have open communication with the undergraduate music students to determine their needs and address those needs in the classroom or through practicum experiences.

All of the articles that I read provide valuable insights for my future in working with college students. I will be a better teacher for them in their path toward a successful music teaching career because I understand their general needs in a better way now than I did before. I will also be able to engage them in thoughtful reflection about my teaching as well as their own. This way, they can arrive to solutions and develop their own skills. The studies I read about have mostly helped me develop my methods of data collection. A majority of the questions I plan to ask the students were inspired by the article by McDowell (2007). As a result of reading the article by Roulston, Legette, & Trotman Womack (2005), I discovered the importance of dedicating time in the interview to ask the participants for clarification or further information on their comments on the questionnaires.
Method

The purpose of this case study was to determine the effectiveness of a general music methods practicum for student teaching preparation. During the months of February through May of 2009, two college students completed their elementary music methods practicum with me. They observed, participated, and co-taught while they were in my music classroom. Following each visit, they completed an observation form used by the university. They also completed a questionnaire designed for the purpose of this study after the third and sixth visits. After the students’ co-teaching episodes, I interviewed each of them to learn about their perceptions of the practicum experience.

Participants

The participants in this study were three junior undergraduate music education majors. All three students were enrolled in Elementary Music Methods at a small university in central Pennsylvania. One student was an instrumentalist and the other was a vocalist. The participants were assigned to my classroom based upon availability and the possibility that they might student teach with me.
in the following year. The practicum students planned to complete their student teaching soon after this study.

“Calvin” recently completed his junior year as a music education major at a small university in Pennsylvania. He is a clarinetist as well as a talented singer. As far as musical activities on campus, Calvin is a member of the university choir and the symphonic band. He plans to complete his student teaching in the fall of 2009. His placement will be in a middle school and a high school band setting, with some classroom experiences at those levels. Calvin also belongs to the men’s music fraternity, Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia.

“Andrea” has also recently completed her junior year as a music education major at the small university in Pennsylvania. She is a pianist and a singer, and she teaches private lessons on campus. Andrea will be student teaching in two very different placements. First, she will student teach with a high school choral director. In her second placement, she will teach elementary general music. Andrea is actively involved with the campus’ PCMEA chapter, and she is also a member of Sigma Alpha Iota, a women’s music sorority.
Data sources

Observation assignments. The first data source I used was observation papers written by each participant after every visit. I have not seen these papers in the past, but in order to learn about what the practicum students are seeing and how they are applying it to their own teaching, I reviewed the completed observation assignments. This assignment was developed and used by the instructor in the elementary music methods course at the university. In their observation papers, students were asked to write about physical characteristics of the room, the relationship between the students and the teacher, a summary of the lesson, and their application of what they saw to their own teaching. I was able to learn their responses to what they were observing in my classroom, and in examining the observation assignments at the conclusion of the practicum, I learned how their perceptions changed through the practicum. An explanation of the observation assignments from the course syllabus is in Appendix A.

Questionnaire. Another tool that was used for data collection was an open-ended questionnaire. Students completed one questionnaire after the third
visit and another after the sixth visit. Questions were inspired and adapted slightly from McDowell (2007). McDowell solicited the student opinions by asking them to respond to five questions: How did you view your field experience? Do you feel your field experience has prepared you to teach in the next education block? What specific types of teaching activities did you do in your field experience? What were five things that prepared you to go out and teach in your block classes? What concerns do you have about your next field-experience component? (2007, p. 49). I altered these questions so they used terminology consistent with what I had been using with the students, and to address the issue of student teaching preparedness. I did not use one of the questions in my questionnaire, but I did use it later in the interviews. The questions that appeared on the questionnaire were: What were your perceptions of your practicum experience? Do you feel more prepared for your student teaching as a result of completing this practicum? What activities, like observing or singing with my students, did you do during your practicum? Of these activities, which ones were most beneficial to you as you prepare to student
teach? The questionnaire was designed to provide data that would help me better understand how prepared the students felt, and what practicum experiences they believed contributed to their feelings of preparedness for student teaching.

*Interviews.* The practicum students were also interviewed as part of the data collection. The interviews occurred at the end of the experience as a review of the co-teaching episode, and as an overview of the entire practicum experience. Prior to the interviews, I reviewed the responses to both questionnaires: the questionnaire the students completed after their third visit and the questionnaire they completed after the sixth visit. The questions that were asked in the interviews were: What were your perceptions of your co-teaching episode? Do you have any areas of concern that were not met through your practicum experience? What recommendations do you have for changes to the practicum? These questions were derived from the questionnaire items. Clarification of responses to questionnaire items was also requested during the interview (Roulston, Legette, & Trotman Womack, 2005). In addition to the
information I drew from the questionnaires, the interviews provided another way to learn which experiences the students thought led them to feel more prepared for student teaching. The combination of interviews, questionnaire responses, and observation papers illuminated the ways in which the perceptions of the practicum students changed over the course of the practicum.

Procedure

To begin this study, the professor of the Elementary Music Methods course at the small university in central Pennsylvania received a schedule of my classes for the months of March and April 2009. After she reviewed my schedule and compared it to the availability of her students, she assigned two junior music education majors from her Elementary Music Methods course to complete their practicum with me **with a third-grade class**. I emailed both students prior to the start of the practicum to explain the study and request their participation. I also included the consent form for them to sign and bring to their first visit. Both students had the opportunity to ask questions about the study. I met briefly with my two practicum students before their first visit to obtain their signed consent
forms and answer any additional questions they had. The professor and I selected seven dates for visits from the practicum students. Finally, these visitation dates were approved by the Principal of the elementary school in which I work.

Following the preliminary steps, the junior music education majors began their practicum. The professor and I had arranged the dates so the students would only observe for 30 minutes at each visit. One student missed the first visit, however, so he had to stay for 60 minutes at the second visit. Other than this instance, both students attended a total of seven 30-minute third grade music classes. These visits encompassed three phases: for the first three visits the students only observed; for the next three visits the practicum students observed and participated in musical activities; then the final visit consisted of a co-teaching episode with me.

After each phase of visits, the participants completed a questionnaire. For example, the practicum students completed one questionnaire after the third visit, and they returned their responses to the professor. The professor labeled
the questionnaires “Student A” or “Student B” and kept the questionnaires in a locked filing cabinet until I was able to pick them up from the university. The participants completed another questionnaire with the same questions after the sixth visit. They asked the professor for their label, either “Student A” or “Student B,” labeled their questionnaires, put their questionnaires in an envelope together, and brought the envelope to their final visit. I placed the questionnaires in my locked filing cabinet in my classroom and did not view the questionnaires until after I completed their final evaluations.

The final step in this procedure was the practicum interview. Before the interviews and after I completed the participants’ final evaluations, I viewed the questionnaires and observation papers to find any areas where I needed further clarification. I interviewed the practicum students in the professor’s classroom at the university two days after each final co-teaching episode.

Analysis

Following the culminating interview, I examined all of the answers to the questions on the questionnaires. I also reviewed the transcripts of all three
interviews. Next, I identified themes that appeared through each participant’s response for each question on the questionnaire as well as during the interview. Through this analysis, I answered my research questions.
Results

Throughout the students’ elementary music methods practicum experience, they were completing observation papers for their professor, who sent these to me electronically. After their third and sixth visits, the practicum students wrote their thoughts on the questionnaires. I completed the evaluations of their teaching episode and interviewed them using prepared questions as well as asking for clarification and more information on data from the questionnaires. Lastly, I transcribed their interviews.

Review of Data

After I collected all of the data, I began extensive examination of all three sources. Prior to the interviews, I organized all questionnaire data into a chart for each participant. Then I transcribed both of the interviews and sent them to both participants for member checking. I read the observation documents prior to the interview to determine whether I needed further clarification on any items or not. Then I re-read these documents for further emerging themes.
I read all data sources multiple times in order to identify themes. For coding procedures, I equipped myself with multiple colors of markers. Every time I read something that addressed my research questions, I underlined it. If a statement was related to an earlier statement, I used the same color. If the statement was unrelated to any others, I used a new color. I identified three emerging themes, and there were a few statements from the participants that were interesting but not substantial enough to actually contribute to a theme. Once I felt I had my themes, I created another chart so I could have all evidence in one place and also to allow me to compare the two participants’ statements.

*Themes*

Three themes became apparent through the process of coding. The themes I identified are as follows: transfers to future teaching, activities that helped the students feel prepared, and disappointments or suggestions for future practica.
Transfers to future teaching. Both participants pointed out many instances they observed that would be useful in their future teaching, whether it be in student teaching or in their first job. Andrea decided that she may use the grand staff worksheet that we completed one day. She also identified several classroom management techniques that she plans to implement in her future teaching. For example, she liked my behavioral system, called BRAVO, that I use to teach students guidelines in music class. Other classroom management techniques she deemed useful were my organizational system for students’ recorders, voice levels for students, and using cardboard music stands for the students’ recorder music. The voice levels for students consist of four numbers: zero, one, two, and three. “Level zero” means students should not talk at all, “level one” means that students are allowed to use whispering voices, “level two” means that students can speak at a normal speaking volume, and “level three” is a shouting voice, which can only be used on the playground. Andrea also mentioned that she will “be tough on posture” when she is in charge of a classroom of students.
Regarding music teaching pedagogy, Andrea found that my method of introducing recorder will be useful in her teaching. She also plans to have students sing note names while they finger along on their recorders. A few other “steals” that Andrea identified in her observation documents were how to handle a one-on-one student aide in the classroom and how to informally assess student progress.

Calvin was viewing these transfers to his future teaching in a different way, because his plans are to teach instrumental music. He was looking for transfer of broader concepts rather than particular techniques for a specific setting. He first stated that he will would not have the opportunity to apply specific strengths and weaknesses of third graders in his student teaching experience. He felt that because he is not actually going to teach third graders, he will not need to remember specific skills they already have and areas in which they need to improve. However, he stated, that “planning the lesson accordingly...a skill that I can transfer no matter what grade I teach.” Preparing to teach was a general statement that appeared many times in Calvin’s responses.
The concept of using multiple resources in teaching is another item that Calvin identified would transfer to his teaching. He also remarked that including many students and dealing with students “who are having trouble with the material” will be “steals” from my teaching to his teaching. As far as including many students, Calvin remarked that “there was only enough time for six people to actually go up to the carpet, many other students got to participate by answering.” He noticed that I help students by reminding them “of the tools that they can use to find the answers themselves.” He identified several classroom management issues that would transfer, like time management, classroom set-up, student manners and how to teach them, positive reinforcement and feedback, beginning-of-class organization, and holding students accountable. Finally, Calvin felt that my method of teaching a song sequentially would transfer to his future ensemble rehearsals or older general music classes.

Specific activities. The second theme that emerged were the specific activities that helped the two participants feel prepared for student teaching.
Andrea felt that it was “extremely helpful to see ‘real’ children” as compared to teaching her peers in their methods course and watching how they learn in a “normal classroom setting.” She remarked several times about the significant role that being in front of the students teaching had in her feelings of preparation for student teaching. In her second questionnaire (which was completed before the team teaching episode) Andrea stated that “the observation was the most helpful.”

Calvin revealed that his feeling of preparation for student teaching resulted from similar activities as those Andrea highlighted. He felt that the chance to closely observe an elementary classroom and have a chance to teach was helpful. He also remarked that teaching “actual third graders and not 20-year-olds” was helpful. He also mentioned that working with “real” children was a component to his feelings of preparation. The concept of planning the team teaching lesson appeared a few times during the interview as well as how it contributed to how prepared Calvin felt for student teaching. In fact, he stated, “preparing to teach a lesson was the most beneficial part of the program.” The
observations of my students was another activity that helped Calvin feel more prepared for student teaching, specifically, when he observed the students and me during our note reading unit.

_Disappointments or suggestions for future practica._ Andrea expressed many opinions about the disappointments she experienced or suggestions for future practica. She expected to observe more singing, but due to the timing of the practicum she saw a little singing with my students and me and much more recorder playing. She would have liked to have observed more of the singing aspect of the general music classes. In order to ensure students get a broader view of the elementary general music class, Andrea suggested that the practicum could be longer to allow for more observations. She also suggested that students could split up their practicum somehow and do part with another teacher or with the same teacher but a different grade level. Calvin’s only suggestion for improvement of the practicum experience was that the practicum teacher could have the practicum students “help more in the class as the teacher sees fit, during the first few observations.”
Overall, Calvin and Andrea both felt prepared for their student teaching experience as a result of the elementary music methods practicum. Both participants found many concepts they could transfer to their future teaching. Calvin found broader ideas that he could adapt to apply to the older students he will be teaching, while Andrea found more specific transfers to this particular age group. As far as practicum activities are concerned, Calvin and Andrea both felt that seeing “real” children reacting to a teacher as well as simply observing were the most helpful activities in the practicum. Finally, although the practicum students seemed to have little disappointment about the practicum experience, they still offered a few suggestions for improvement. Calvin suggested that the practicum students become hands-on earlier in the practicum, and Andrea would have preferred to see more of a variety of music classroom activities.
Discussion

The two participants in this study were preservice music educators. They were both juniors enrolled in a general music methods course at a small university in Pennsylvania. The two students attended a total of seven, 30-minute third grade music classes in my school. Their seventh and final visit was a team-teaching episode with me. After the third and sixth visits, the students completed a questionnaire. They also completed observation assignments that I viewed after their professor reviews the assignments. Lastly, I interviewed both students after their final visit. The three means of data collection provided answers to the following questions:

1. If the students felt they were adequately prepared for their upcoming semester of student teaching, what practicum experiences helped prepare the practicum students the most?

2. What recommendations do the students have for future practica to ensure other students feel more prepared for student teaching?
3. How did the practicum students’ feelings of preparation for student teaching change throughout the practicum?

The practicum students’ responses differed possibly as a result of their prior experiences and intentions for the future. Andrea already knew she would be student teaching in an elementary setting, and Calvin already knew he would not be student teaching in an elementary setting. Andrea also anticipated that she would take an elementary music teaching job after college, while Calvin had decided he would only take a job in an elementary music classroom if it was the only job available. Andrea had also been helping teach in the early childhood preparatory music program at the university, while Calvin did not have teaching experiences in the program. He only observed the early childhood classes.

Regarding the first research question, the students indicated that many practicum experiences helped them to feel prepared for student teaching. It appears that the experience of being in a public school with children, rather than being in their college classroom with their peers, was a major contributor to their feelings of preparation for student teaching. Most music education majors were
not critically attending to their elementary music classes, if they even had music class in elementary school. The opportunity for them to observe children, at the very least, is important because they have experiences with children before they are placed in an elementary school for their student teaching experience. Part of the benefit of seeing children in an elementary school is that the practicum students also have the opportunity to observe their theoretical knowledge in a practical setting. Balantyne (2007) found that students needed practicum experiences so they could have real-world settings in which they could apply what they learned in their methods courses. Calvin and Andrea both commented on the connection between their methods courses and a real-life classroom. I would imagine having exposure to elementary school children also diminishes future teachers’ anxiety on the first day of school.

I was surprised that Andrea stated that observing the students was most helpful to her. I was predicting that participating with the students and viewing the music teacher through the children’s eyes would have been a significant experience, especially by the second questionnaire. I speculate that Andrea’s
opinion reflected the fact that she could focus more on how the students were behaving when she was just observing and not participating, and she could gain the best insight at that time. This finding is consistent with that of Roulston, Legette, and Trotman Womack (2005). They also learned that participants found value in being immersed in a public school music classroom as opposed to spending all their time in university methods courses.

Calvin did not emphasize the observations as much as Andrea did. He thought they were beneficial, but the hands-on experience of planning for his team teaching benefitted him the most. The difference between the two students may have been simply because their learning styles were contrasting, although it also could be this way because of the difference in timing of when they had completed their questionnaires. For example, if Calvin had waited until after he began planning for his team teaching, he would have that experience to reflect upon. If Andrea completed her questionnaire immediately after that day’s observation, she would not have had that experience from which to draw. The difference could also be due to the fact that Andrea had many teaching
opportunities with young children in the early childhood music program, while Calvin did not involve himself in those opportunities. Perhaps Andrea spent so much time actually teaching or participating in the early childhood classes that she spent little time just observing. Then when she was in the classroom, she had the chance to just observe and focus on what the students were doing. Calvin, on the other hand, benefitted greatly from the actual teaching because he did not have those experiences with young children. He only observed the young children in the early childhood program.

In Conway’s study (2002), she found that the quality of the practicum is important. Perhaps the difference in Calvin and Andrea in respect to helpfulness of the observations is due to the fact that a quality practicum experience differs between the two. It is entirely possible that Calvin equates hands-on experience in a practicum with “quality,” while Andrea equates seeing students in their element and how they react to the teacher as being a “quality” experience. Conway (2002) determined that teachers in their first year of service valued being in a music classroom as well. While Andrea was not a first-year teacher, she is still
a young teacher, and she still felt the observations were significant in preparing
her for future teaching. College students have different needs and as a result,
what would be quality to them differs from student to student.

   Another area of surprise for me was the amount of concepts both
participants were able to transfer to their own future teaching. I anticipated that
the students would be watching what I was doing and watching what the
students were doing. I did not expect, however, that they would be processing
transfers to their future teaching as much as they did. Campbell and Thompson
(2007) found that the students doing field experience had high levels of concern,
and this may be an explanation for why they found so many transfers. Perhaps
Calvin and Andrea were translating their concern about future teaching into
action to learn all they possibly could.

   Both students identified concepts that heavily related to classroom
management as well as useful techniques that were specific to an elementary
music classroom. The fact that they found many transfers to their own classroom
management conceptions is consistent with the findings of Yourn (2000), who
found that practicum students were concerned about classroom management.

Although Calvin was adamant that he will not teach elementary general music, he was certainly able to extract several items from my teaching that he can use in any setting.

**Implications for future studies**

This study highlighted many questions that could be addressed in further research. First, the same study could be replicated with many participants from other universities that offer a music education degree all over the United States. Using the same questionnaires and interviews, a researcher could compare the differences in music education practica in a variety of locations and contexts. Such methods courses could also involve some type of observation report because these were quite useful in inspiring the students to identify characteristics in my teaching that they could transfer to their future teaching.

This study could also serve as a starting point for a longitudinal study testing student teachers’ preparedness. In other words, junior music education majors could participate in this initial study. A researcher could then track their
progress through their student teaching experience in their senior year. The researcher could determine whether feelings of preparedness continue through the student teaching experience. College faculty involved in music teacher education could learn whether preparedness at the end of a practicum actually translates to success in student teaching. Both of the participants in my study also mentioned many transfers to their own future teaching. Part of a future study could follow them to find out if they actually transfer what they predicted they would transfer. For example, will Andrea actually use the different voice levels (zero through three) that I use with my students in the classroom?

Finally, future research could help determine whether or not a practicum experience ultimately leads to longevity in a teacher’s career. The idea that early experiences with children and public school music programs may lead to more reasonable expectations entering the work force could be tested in this instance.

*Implications for university music education programs*
The results of this study may influence the music education program at the small university which my participants attended. Overall, the participants were satisfied with the way the practicum is organized and were especially thankful that the professor and public school music teacher determine the schedule of visits. The professor of the elementary music methods course could ensure that students would have a well-rounded experience with each teacher that was selected to host students. Although this process can be time consuming, take it could certainly help the practicum students feel more prepared for student teaching. If students do not receive a well-rounded experience, the professor could possibly coordinate other observations with the same teacher or with another teacher in the same building.

Findings of this study could also have implications for all universities offering music education degrees. First of all, universities that do not have any kind of music education practicum should consider implementing a practicum either separate from an actual course or as a component of a course. Both participants agreed that being able to observe students in the public school
setting was a valuable experience, but ideally, any practicum that is implemented should provide opportunities for students to participate in class activities and team teach with the mentor teachers. The students should also have an opportunity to reflect on their observations because I found this to be the time they were able to think about how they could apply concepts learned from the practica experiences to their own teaching situations in the future.
Appendix A

Observation Assignments (taken directly from Elementary Music Methods syllabus)

1. **Elementary School Practicum**: 6 total *observation* hours
   
   a. Week 1: Observation of the environment and reflection paper
   
   b. Week 2: Observation of the teacher and reflection paper
   
   c. Week 3: Observation of the children and reflection paper
   
   d. Week 4: Participate and write a reflection paper
   
   e. Week 5: Participate and write a reflection paper
   
   f. Week 6: Participate and write a reflection paper
   
   g. Please remember that all reflections need detailed observation points and explanations as to the *why* and *how* of what you have observed. You are graded on writing, observation content, and transfer to teaching.
References


