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## Elementary General Music: Music Education Majors' Beliefs and Perceptions

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### Abstract

*This study explored preservice music teachers' perspectives of and beliefs about elementary general music (EGM), perceptions of preparation to teach EGM, and career goals. Participants were 99 undergraduate preservice music teachers (41% response rate) from one university in the Northeastern United States. Survey questions focused on memories of experiences with general music during elementary school, beliefs about EGM, perceptions of preparation and confidence to teach EGM, preferred specialization (general or ensemble), reasons for specialization preference, and influences on choice. Findings suggest preservice music teachers preferred ensemble specialization and secondary settings over EGM. Choral/vocal music education majors were more likely to choose general music specialization than instrumental music education majors. Gender emerged as a highly influential factor in relation to specialization choice and seemed to overlap with perceptions of preparation, confidence, and memories of EGM. Overall, preservice music teachers reported a strong belief that coursework prepared them to teach EGM, and they identified EGM methods courses and authentic context learning experiences with young children as highly influential. Feelings of preparation and interest in teaching EGM seemed related. Reasons for EGM specialization preference included strong beliefs in efficacy, fit for personality, and opportunity for more variety than in ensemble-based positions.*

**Keywords:** preservice teachers, teacher education, general music, elementary general music

Music education majors often enter their degree program intending to teach in ensemble contexts, but many find themselves teaching outside this preferred specialization after graduation (e.g., Corfield-Adams, 2012; Groulx, 2016; Kuebel, 2017, 2019; Robinson, 2010; Salvador & Corbett, 2016; Shouldice, 2013, 2017). Though tracked degree programs offered by universities satisfy state requirements for P-12 music teacher certification, they often do not comprehensively prepare teachers for all music contexts encompassed by this broad certification (Conway, 2002; Greher & Tobin, 2006). As a result, preservice and practicing music teachers report feeling unprepared to teach outside their preferred specialization—specifically elementary general music (Groulx, 2015; Hamann & Ebie, 2009; Kuebel, 2017, 2019). However, enrollment and employment trends suggest a growing need for qualified and successful elementary general music (EGM) teachers (Corfield-Adams, 2012; Kuebel, 2017; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; National Education Association, 2019).

Previous studies investigating music teachers outside their preferred specialization use a qualitative lens, are retrospective in nature, and focus on instrumentalists in EGM settings (e.g., Kuebel, 2017, 2019; Robinson, 2010; Shouldice, 2013, 2017). However, one may gain additional insight from a broader investigation of preservice teachers' beliefs and perspectives related to teaching in EGM settings. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore preservice music teachers' perspectives of and beliefs about elementary general music (EGM), perceptions of preparation to teach EGM, and career goals.

### **Literature Review**

This literature review focuses on research exploring how specialization identity (e.g., ensemble, general music) develops in music teachers. I briefly describe studies regarding preservice teachers' professional socialization experiences and the influence of those experiences

on perceptions of and beliefs about specialization identity and EGM. I also include research about EGM teachers' perceptions of specialization identity and career choice.

### **Evolution of Teacher Identity**

Music teacher identity is multifaceted and complex, evolves with time, and is influenced by professional socialization that begins before college (Conway, Eros, Pellegrino, & West, 2010; Dolloff, 2007). Professional socialization is a process through which people develop attitudes, behaviors, and skills necessary for success in an occupation (Isbell, 2015; Woodford, 2002). Preservice music teachers experience a variety of primary (pre-college) and secondary (collegiate and post-collegiate) socialization experiences that influence their identity (Isbell, 2015; Woodford, 2002). Based on a survey at eight universities, Rickels et al. (2013) found that prospective music education students identified high school ensemble experiences and interactions with high school ensemble directors as providing strong primary socialization. Additionally, Henry (2015) surveyed high school All-State musicians in Texas. He found prospective music education students experienced more primary socialization in the form of musical leadership opportunities (e.g., conducting, rehearsing, teaching private lessons) compared to other student musicians.

Many studies of secondary socialization experiences focus on navigating tensions between musician identity and teacher identity (e.g., Isbell, 2008; Jones & Parks, 2010; Pellegrino, 2009; Sieger, 2016). Austin, Isbell, and Russell (2012) surveyed music majors from three institutions and found preservice teachers report stronger teacher identity if they attended universities where music performance and music education majors share equal status and numbers were balanced. In a multiple case study, Sieger (2016) found that field teaching experiences were especially important secondary socialization experiences for reinforcing and supporting teacher identity. Additionally, in their case study of five preservice music teachers,

Haston and Russell (2011) found that authentic context learning experiences can positively affect professional identity and contribute to affirmation or renegotiation of career intentions.

### **Specialization Identity**

Beyond dimensions related to musician and teacher identities, preservice music teachers accommodate further fragmentation of identity into specialization (Campbell & Thompson, 2007; Dolloff, 2007; Rickels et al., 2013). Campbell and Thompson (2007) surveyed music education majors from 16 universities. They found that the majority identified ensemble settings (choir, band, orchestra) and high school level as preferred to general music and elementary level. Similarly, Rickels et al. (2013) found that interest in EGM settings was low regardless of preservice music teachers' primary background (i.e., band, orchestra, choir). However, participants with choral backgrounds indicated higher interest than participants with band or orchestra backgrounds.

Additionally, males chose high school settings more often than females, and females chose EGM settings more often than males (Rickels et al., 2013). Similarly, Roulston and Misawa (2011) interviewed practicing music teachers about their concepts of gender. They found that male preservice teachers were less likely to choose EGM settings due to societal views of elementary teaching as a female role. Collectively, these studies suggest that early experiences, beliefs, and perceptions influence preservice music teachers' preferences for high school ensemble specializations.

### **Influence of Experience on Perceptions of Elementary General Music**

Although preservice teachers often prefer ensemble specializations, these preferences are not immutable. Miranda et al. (2007) investigated preservice teachers' experiences in EGM field experiences and found that preservice teachers compared memories of personal elementary general music experiences to their field teaching observations. During this process, they

confronted biases and misperceptions about elementary-age learners and teaching, which led to a greater appreciation for EGM and a shift toward embracing EGM as a potential future specialization. In Shouldice's (2013) instrumental case study, the single participant reflected on beliefs held as a preservice teacher. Before completing an EGM methods course, he believed that young children were less-capable musicians and that EGM jobs were not enjoyable and required less musicianship from the teacher. He suggested that his EGM methods course and related field teaching were pivotal experiences that changed his view of children's musical abilities and of teachers' responsibilities. Similarly, Shouldice (2017) interviewed six male instrumentalists who also held negative beliefs about EGM as preservice teachers (e.g., general music jobs were a waste of time, invaluable, unmusical, and unfulfilling). However, upper-level methods courses and field teaching in EGM transformed their perceptions of EGM and led to revised beliefs (e.g., children have more musical potential and are more capable than previously understood; EGM is important to students' future music successes; EGM can be a meaningful, musically complicated, and nuanced experience for the teacher). All three studies suggest that coursework and authentic context learning experiences in EGM contexts can be especially transformative in regard to specialization identity and perceptions of (a) children's musical capabilities, (b) complexity of pedagogical knowledge and musical skills required of the teacher, and (c) the importance of EGM for music development. Preservice teachers' transitions to EGM teachers seem to require critical incidents during which they challenge preconceptions, and transform identities (Miranda et al., 2007; Shouldice, 2013, 2017).

### **Choosing to Teach Outside of Preferred Specialization and Inside EGM**

Music teachers suggest a wide variety of factors contribute to their choice to teach EGM. For example, Corfield-Adams (2012) interviewed six instrumentalists whom each accepted general music positions at different points in their careers. Participants suggested the switch from

ensemble teaching to general music was replete with tension that resulted in a transformation of their professional identity. Kuebel (2017) interviewed five general music teachers who suggested practical reasons for accepting an EGM teaching positions (e.g., greater availability of elementary jobs and necessity created by a downturn in the economy). Some also expressed feelings of self-efficacy in EGM positions and suggested EGM was a better fit for their personality and values. Robinson (2010) interviewed seven female instrumentalists teaching EGM and found their reasons for choosing EGM included a preference for working with young children, desire for work/life balance, and discomfort in what they perceived as the male-dominated politics of instrumental music education. Conversely, Shouldice (2017) found male instrumentalists did not include work/life balance or desire to work with young children as factors in their choice to teach EGM but suggested that EGM allowed them to be more student-centered, autonomous, and creative. Collectively, these studies suggest that teachers choose to specialize in EGM at various points in their development and for a variety of reasons that include practical considerations and issues related to gender.

Although researchers suggest some music teachers begin to identify as EGM specialists during undergraduate coursework, we know little about how identity as EGM specialists develops during this formative period of secondary socialization. Multiple research questions guided this study:

1. What are music education majors' memories and perceptions of personal EGM experiences and beliefs about EGM?
2. Are there differences in these perceptions of memories and perceptions of personal EGM experiences and beliefs about EGM based on the year in school, gender, major, or preferred specialization?

3. What are music education majors' perceptions of their confidence in and preparation for teaching in EGM settings?
4. Are there differences in perceptions of confidence in and preparation for teaching in EGM settings based on the year in school, gender, major, or preferred specialization?
5. Which specialization do participants choose (general or ensemble)? Are there differences in choice based on the year in school, gender, major, and methods course completed?
6. What factors do junior and senior year participants identify as influencing their choice between general or ensemble specialization?

### **Method**

After receiving Institutional Review Board approval, I collected data via a researcher-created questionnaire that included one section with demographic items regarding major (i.e., choral/vocal or instrumental music education), year in the program, gender, methods courses completed, and preferred specialization (ensemble or general). The remaining section included 40 Likert items informed by previous literature (Kuebel, 2017, 2019; Miranda et al., 2007; Robinson, 2010; Shouldice, 2017): (a) five questions regarding memories of childhood experiences with EGM, (b) eight questions regarding beliefs about EGM, (c) and 19 questions regarding perceptions of ability to teach content and skills common in EGM curricula (based on Frego & Abril, 2003). Junior and senior music education majors responded to eight additional Likert items regarding factors influencing their choice of specialization. These questions were reserved for juniors and seniors because they related to students' perceptions of experiences and coursework not available to first-year and sophomore students.

## Data Collection and Participants

Data were collected over two weeks using a survey sent via Google Forms to all undergraduate music education majors ( $N = 241$ ) at one university in the Northeastern United States. Ninety-nine students completed the survey (a 41% response rate), and representation according to year (i.e., freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior) and major (i.e., choral/vocal and instrumental music education) was similar to previous studies of university students (Rickels et al., 2013). See Table 1 for demographic information. Due to low representation, I did not include data from students identifying non-binary/third gender ( $n = 3$ ) in the analysis.

Table 1  
*Demographic Information*

Year	Frequency ( $N = 99$ )
Freshman	16
Sophomore	19
Junior	34
Senior	30 (22 of whom completed student teaching)
Gender	Frequency
Female	55
Male	40
Non-Binary/Third Gender	3
Major	Frequency
Instrumental (Band) Music Education	55
Instrumental (String) Music Education	16
General/Choral Music Education	28

At this university, music education majors choose between two tracks: choral music education or instrumental music education. Students in each track complete four courses (45 contact hours each) specific to their track: elementary ensemble methods, elementary rehearsal techniques, secondary ensemble methods, and secondary rehearsal techniques. In addition, the



curriculum required that choral music education majors complete one elementary general music methods course and one secondary general music methods course (45 contact hours each); instrumental music education majors choose either the elementary or the secondary general music methods course. Rarely, instrumental music education majors elect to complete both general music methods courses.

## **Analysis**

Using SPSS, I applied several descriptive and inferential statistical analyses to answer the research questions. Questions one and two focused on memories and perceptions of EGM. For question one, I calculated frequency data in the form of percentages to describe all participants' responses regarding memories and perceptions of personal experiences and beliefs about EGM. Based on the ordinal nature of the data from Likert-like items, question two used nonparametric tests to investigate differences according to gender, major, year, and preferred specialization (Jamieson, 2000). Therefore, I selected Mann-Whitney U tests to compare responses based on gender (male and female), major (instrumental and vocal), and preferred specialization (ensemble and general). A Kruskal-Wallis H test compared responses based on year (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior).

Questions three and four focused on confidence and preparation for teaching EGM. For question three, I calculated percentages to describe all participants' confidence in teaching general music for each of the 19 Likert-type items regarding confidence for teaching EGM. For question four, I added the 19 Likert-type items regarding confidence to yield a total confidence score. Because the total confidence score was interval data, I applied parametric statistics to investigate differences based on gender, major, year, and preferred specialization (Boone & Boone, 2012). Additionally, question four included ordinal data from one Likert-like question regarding the perception of preparation for teaching EGM. Therefore, Mann-Whitney U tests

compared responses regarding the perception of preparation based on gender, major, and preferred specialization. A Kruskal-Wallis H test compared responses based on year.

Questions five and six focused on specialization choice for all participants and factors influencing that choice, as reported by juniors and seniors. For research question five, I calculated percentages to describe the specialization choice of all participants. Chi-square tests explored differences in specialization choice based on categorical data regarding year, gender, major, and methods courses completed (Russell, 2018). For research question six, I used descriptive statistics to calculate the frequency and percentage for junior and senior students' responses to items related to factors, courses, and experiences that influenced specialization choice.

## **Results**

### **Memories of Personal Experiences with Elementary General Music**

Participants rated agreement with four statements regarding memories of personal experiences with general music as elementary-age students using a 5-point scale (5 = strongly agree; 4 = agree; 3 = undecided; 2 = disagree; 1 = strongly disagree). Table 2 represents the responses for each statement. Overall, participants remember EGM experiences and perceive experiences as positive and enjoyable. However, only 51% perceive the quality of their EGM program as strong, 19% are undecided about the quality, and 30% perceive the program as not strong.

Table 2  
*Frequency of Responses to Statements Regarding Memories of Personal Experiences with and Beliefs about Elementary General Music*

Statement	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Undecided (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)
I remember my General Music classes from when I was in elementary school.	33	56	2	6	2
I had a strong General Music program when I was in elementary school.	23	27	19	23	7
I enjoyed General Music classes when I was in elementary School.	41	29	12	13	4
I had positive experiences in General Music classes when I was in elementary School.	3	4	10	4	0
I would choose a job teaching elementary general music because it fits my personality best.	38	40	14	5	2
I believe that General Music is an important part of the elementary curriculum.	82	8	1	1	7
I believe that strong Elementary General Music experiences are important for success in future ensembles and lifelong music pursuits.	48	39	8	4	0
I believe Elementary General Music is relatively easy to teach.	1	15	23	43	17
I believe my courses have prepared me to teach general music at the elementary level (kindergarten to fifth grade).	16	40	36	7	0

Note:  $N = 99$

For differences based on gender, major, year, and specialization preference, I examined participants' memories of general music. There were no significant differences in perceived ability to remember EGM experiences or perceptions of the quality of EGM program based on gender, major, year, or preferred specialization. However, the analysis revealed statistically significant differences for statements related to as enjoyability and positiveness of personal EGM experiences. Results from a Mann-Whitney U tests indicated that personal EGM experiences

were rated as more enjoyable by females ( $n = 55$ , mean rank 54.56) than males ( $n = 41$ , mean rank 40.37) ( $U = 794.0$ ,  $Z = -2.61$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $r = -.27$ ) and were rated as more positive by females ( $n = 55$ , mean rank 53.59) than males ( $n = 41$ , mean rank 41.67) ( $U = 847.5$ ,  $Z = -2.21$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $r = -.23$ ). However, a small effect size for both enjoyability and positivity ratings suggests a lack of practical significance. There were no significant differences in enjoyability or positivity of experience based on major, year, or preferred future specialization.

### **Beliefs about Elementary General Music**

Participants rated agreement with four statements regarding beliefs about EGM using a 5-point scale (5 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree). Table 2 represents the responses for each statement. Overall, participants believe that strong EGM experiences contribute to successful future ensemble experiences and lifelong music pursuits and that general music is important in the elementary curriculum. Beliefs regarding teaching difficulty were mixed: 16% believe EGM is relatively easy to teach, 23% are undecided, and 61% suggest EGM is not easy to teach.

To consider differences based on gender, major, year, and specialization preference, I examined participants' beliefs about general music. Concerning the statement "Without strong EGM experiences, students may struggle to be successful in future ensembles and lifelong music pursuits," analyses revealed no significant differences based on gender, major, year, or specialization preference. In relation to the statement, "I believe that EGM is an important part of curriculum in elementary schools," results from a Mann-Whitney U test indicated females ( $n = 55$ , mean rank 52.70) have a stronger belief that general music is important in the elementary curriculum than males ( $n = 41$ , mean rank 42.87) ( $U = 896.5$ ,  $Z = -2.57$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $r = -.26$ ). However, a small effect size suggests a lack of practical significance. Additionally, results from a Kruskal Wallis H test indicated differences based on year ( $X^2 = 7.83$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Seniors

report the strongest belief that EGM is important ( $n = 30$ , mean rank = 57.00) followed by sophomores ( $n = 19$ , mean rank = 51.39), juniors ( $n = 34$ , mean rank = 46.50), and freshmen ( $n = 16$ , mean rank = 42.66). Mann-Whitney U tests with a Bonferroni adjustment (alpha level of .008) indicated that seniors agree more strongly than freshmen ( $U = 171.5$ ,  $Z = -2.701$ ,  $p = .007$ ,  $r = -.40$ ). A moderate effect size suggests practical significance. There were no significant differences based on major or preferred future specialization.

In relation to the statement “I believe elementary general music is relatively easy to teach,” results from a Kruskal Wallis H test indicated statistically significant differences based on year ( $X^2 = 14.88$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Sophomores report strongest belief that EGM is easy to teach ( $n = 19$ , mean rank = 64.74), followed by freshmen ( $n = 16$ , mean rank = 62.50), juniors ( $n = 34$ , mean rank = 45.79), and seniors ( $n = 30$ , mean rank = 38.77). Mann-Whitney U tests with a Bonferroni adjustment (alpha level of .008) indicated no significant differences between freshmen and sophomores ( $U = 148.5$ ,  $Z = -.13$ ,  $p = .90$ ), freshmen and juniors ( $U = 175.5$ ,  $Z = -2.17$ ,  $p = .03$ ), freshmen and seniors ( $U = 133.0$ ,  $Z = -2.59$ ,  $p = .009$ ), or between juniors and seniors ( $U = 420.0$ ,  $Z = -1.33$ ,  $p = .19$ ). However, sophomores’ belief that EGM is easy was statistically stronger than juniors ( $U = 186.5$ ,  $Z = -2.703$ ,  $p = .007$ ,  $r = -.37$ ) and seniors ( $U = 145.0$ ,  $Z = -2.994$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $r = -.43$ ). Moderate effect size suggests practical significance. No other significant differences were found based on gender, major, or preferred specialization.

### **Preparation and Confidence**

Participants rated agreement with statements regarding preparation for teaching EGM using a 5-point scale (5 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree). The majority of participants (57%) believe their courses have prepared them to teach EGM, but many were undecided (36%). See Table 2 for the frequency of responses. I examined participants' beliefs about preparation for differences based on gender, major, year, and specialization preference. There were no

significant differences based on major; however, analyses revealed significant differences based on gender, year, and specialization. Females ( $n = 55$ , mean rank 53.55) believe more strongly that their courses prepared them to teach general music than males ( $n = 41$ , mean rank 41.72) ( $U = 849.50$ ,  $Z = -2.19$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $r = -.22$ ), though the small effect size suggests a lack of practical significance. A Kruskal Wallis H test indicated statistically significant differences based on year ( $X^2 = 16.90$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Seniors report strongest belief that their courses prepared them to teach EGM ( $n = 30$ , mean rank = 64.73) followed by juniors ( $n = 34$ , mean rank = 48.76), sophomores ( $n = 19$ , mean rank = 43.84), and freshmen ( $n = 16$ , mean rank = 32.31). Mann-Whitney U tests with a Bonferroni adjustment (alpha level of .008) indicated a statistically significant difference based on year: seniors believed more strongly that their courses prepare them to teach EGM than sophomores ( $U = 161.50$ ,  $Z = -2.689$ ,  $p = .007$ ,  $r = -.38$ ) and freshmen ( $U = 92.0$ ,  $Z = -3.583$ ,  $p = .000$ ,  $r = -.53$ ). Respective moderate and large effect sizes suggest practical significance. There were no other significant differences based on year. Participants choosing general music specialization ( $n = 21$ , mean rank 60.57) believe more strongly that their courses prepared them to teach general music than those choosing ensemble specialization ( $n = 77$ , mean rank 46.48) ( $U = 576.00$ ,  $Z = -2.14$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $r = -.22$ ). However, the small effect size suggests a lack of practical significance.

Participants rated confidence to teach content and skills common in EGM curricula using a 5-point scale (5 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree). See Table 3 for individual item confidence scores according to year. For most items, the average confidence score increased as year increased, with freshmen indicating least confidence and seniors indicating most confidence. However, average confidence scores for freshmen were higher than sophomores in relation to confidence for teaching vocal improvisation, planning general music lessons, developing general music curricula, and working with special needs populations. The sum of

each participants' responses to the 19 questions composed their total confidence score. A 2 x 2 x 4 x 2 factorial ANOVA was used to investigate differences in total confidence score (dependent variable) based on gender, major, year, or preferred specialization (independent variables). Homogeneity of variance was established by the Levene test ( $F = 1.46, p = .12$ ). Results indicated no main effects for gender ( $F = 3.19, df = 1, p = .078$ ), major ( $F = 0.01, df = 1, p = .935$ ), or specialization ( $F = .38, df = 1, p = .54$ ), but there was a significant main effect for year ( $F = 9.80, df = 3, p = .000, \eta^2 = .30$ ). The low effect size indicates a lack of practical significance. Scheffe post hoc test indicated seniors ( $n = 28, M = 45.93, SD = 6.90$ ) and juniors ( $n = 34, M = 40.74, SD = 7.40$ ) reported statistically significantly higher total confidence scores than sophomores ( $n = 19, M = 33.47, SD = 9.77$ ) and freshmen ( $n = 16, M = 29.06, SD = 10.65$ ). No significant differences existed between freshmen and sophomores and no significant differences existed between juniors and seniors. Analysis also indicated a statistically significant cross-over (disordinal) interaction between gender and specialization ( $F = 5.75, df = 1, p = .02, \eta^2 = .08$ ) suggesting that gender had a greater effect on confidence to teach EGM for preservice teachers whose preferred specialization is general than for those whose preference is ensemble. Confidence to teach EGM for females whose preference is general music was higher ( $n = 16, M = 43.44, SD = 9.06$ ) than confidence of males whose preference is general music ( $n = 3, M = 33.33, SD = 18.90$ ). There were no statistical differences in confidence to teach EGM for females whose preference is ensemble ( $n = 37, M = 38.00, SD = 9.86$ ) and males whose preference is ensemble ( $n = 37, M = 38.46, SD = 9.54$ ). However, low effect size suggests the interaction between gender and specialization lacks practical significance.

Table 3  
*Individual Item Confidence Scores According to Year*

	Freshmen		Sophomore		Junior		Senior	
	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
Knowledge of child development	16	2.56 (.30)	19	3.42 (.19)	34	3.47 (.11)	30	3.77 (.11)
Knowledge of musical development	16	2.5 (1.15)	19	3.47 (.77)	34	3.65 (.69)	30	3.87 (.68)
Knowledge of pedagogical approaches (e.g., Orff, Kodály, Gordon, Dalcroze, Suzuki)	16	2.00 (1.03)	19	3.11 (1.15)	33	3.61 (.83)	30	4.00 (.79)
Plan lessons	16	2.56 (1.36)	19	2.47 (1.17)	34	2.91 (.93)	30	4.16 (.99)
Develop curricula	16	2.25 (1.29)	19	2 (1.05)	34	2.53 (1.05)	30	3.57 (.94)
Assess student growth	16	2.50 (1.03)	19	2.79 (1.08)	34	3.32 (.98)	30	4.33 (.80)
Meet needs of special learners	16	2.25 (1.29)	19	2.05 (1.35)	34	3.06 (1.10)	30	3.60 (.86)
Meet needs of diverse learners (e.g., various learning styles/needs and cultural backgrounds)	16	2.38 (1.20)	19	2.58 (1.17)	34	3.29 (.91)	30	4.07 (.87)
Teach students to use singing voice	16	2.62 (1.09)	19	2.74 (1.28)	34	3.50 (.83)	30	4.27 (.87)
Teach students to sing a song	16	2.62 (1.09)	19	2.74 (1.28)	34	3.50 (.83)	30	4.27 (.87)
Teach students to use expressive movement	16	2.88 (1.15)	19	3.26 (1.28)	34	3.88 (.81)	30	4.37 (.85)
Teach students to perform steady beat	16	3.25 (1.18)	19	3.53 (1.07)	34	4.15 (.82)	30	4.60 (.72)
Teach students to perform rhythm	16	2.94 (1.12)	19	3.53 (1.12)	34	3.97 (.80)	30	4.37 (.81)
Teach students to play classroom instruments	16	2.94 (1.24)	19	3.47 (1.12)	34	4.06 (.92)	30	4.40 (.72)
Teach students to improvise using voice	16	2.50 (1.10)	19	2.37 (1.12)	34	3.18 (1.00)	30	3.93 (.87)
Teach students to improvise using instruments	16	2.56 (1.15)	19	3.11 (.88)	34	3.76 (.99)	29	4.14 (.92)
Teach students to compose	16	1.75 (.77)	19	2.16 (.76)	34	2.79 (1.07)	30	3.33 (1.06)
Teach students to listen to music perceptively	16	2.06 (1.06)	19	2.79 (1.08)	34	3.56 (.89)	30	3.83 (.95)
Teach students to read music	16	2.81 (1.33)	19	3.26 (1.28)	34	3.91 (1.08)	29	3.97 (.87)

### Preferred Teaching Specialization

Participants ( $N = 98$ ) identified either ensemble or general music as a preferred future specialization: 79% selected ensemble, and 21% selected general music. I used chi-square analyses were used to test for differences in specialization preference based on year (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior), gender (male, female), and major (instrument, choral). Differences for methods course experience were not analyzed because 50% of categories did not meet the minimum requirement for the expected counts. Although there were no significant associations



between year and preferred specialization, the analysis revealed significant associations between gender and preferred specialization and between major and preferred specialization. Females were more likely than males to choose general music; choral/vocal majors were more likely than instrumental majors. Medium effect size for gender and major suggests practical significance. See Table 4 for frequency, percent, significance, and effect size for specialization choice based on gender and major.

Table 4  
*Preferred Specialization with Chi Square Analysis for Gender and Major Differences*

	Preferred specialization				$\chi^2(df)$	$p$	$\Phi$
	General music		Ensemble				
	$n$	(%)	$n$	(%)			
Gender					7.64 (1)	.006	$\Phi = -.40$
Male ( $n = 40$ )	3	7%	37	93%			
Female ( $n = 55$ )	17	31%	38	69%			
Major					15.80 (1)	.000	$\Phi = -.40$
Instrumental ( $n = 71$ )	8	11%	63	89%			
General/Choral ( $n = 27$ )	13	48%	14	52%			

*Note: Total number responses used in analysis of Major is 98, due to one missing response for preferred specialization. Total number responses used in analysis of Gender is 95, due to exclusion of responses from three participants who identified non-binary/third gender.*

### **Perspectives of Junior and Senior Majors: Ensemble or General Specialization**

Of junior and senior participants, 73% ( $n = 47$ ) selected ensemble as their preferred future specialization and 27% ( $n = 17$ ) selected general music as their preferred future specialization. These students rated their agreement with six statements regarding factors influencing their specialization choice using a 5-point scale (5 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree). Table 5 represents responses from those choosing ensemble specialization, and Table 6 represents responses from those choosing general music specialization. Overall, those choosing the ensemble specialization did not do so based on the belief they would lack success at teaching

EGM. Influence of variety, personality fit, or work/life balance on their choice of ensemble specialization was less clear. However, data from those choosing the general music specialization indicated strong beliefs that they would be successful teaching EGM, that EGM is a good fit for their personality, and that EGM provides more variety than ensemble-based teaching. The influence of work/life balance on their choice of general music specialization also seemed less clear.

Table 5  
*Frequency of Junior and Senior Majors' Responses to Statements Regarding Factors Influencing Ensemble Specialization Choice*

	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Undecided (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)
I would not choose a job teaching elementary general music because I don't think I would be successful.	1	6	8	19	13
I would choose an ensemble-based job because it provides more variety for me as a teacher than a general music teaching job.	3	11	15	15	2
I would choose a job teaching ensemble-based music because it provides better work/life balance than general music teaching job.	2	7	17	19	2
I would choose a job teaching ensemble-based music because it provides more challenges for my musicianship than an elementary general music job.	4	11	11	16	5
I would not choose a job teaching elementary general music because it does not fit my personality.	4	7	12	17	7

*Note: Frequencies are based on the junior and senior majors who chose ensemble specialization (n = 47).*

Table 6  
*Junior and Senior Majors' Responses to Statements Regarding Factors Influencing General Music Specialization Choice*

	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Undecided (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)
I would choose a job teaching elementary general music because I think I would be successful.	10	6	1	0	0
I would choose a job teaching elementary general music because it provides more variety for me as a teacher than a primarily ensemble-based teaching job.	6	6	4	1	0
I would choose a job teaching elementary general music because it provides better work/life balance than an ensemble-based teaching job.	3	6	5	3	0
I would choose a job teaching elementary general music because it provides more challenges for my musicianship than an ensemble-based teaching job.	3	4	6	4	0
I would choose a job teaching elementary general music because it fits my personality best.	12	3	2	0	0

*Note: Frequencies are based on the junior and senior majors who chose general music specialization (n = 17).*

Participants who chose general music as their preferred future specialization indicated the course they perceived as providing the best preparation to teach EGM and the experience that was most influenced their choice of general music as a specialization (see Table 7). Courses identified as providing the best preparation for EGM were General Music methods and Early Childhood methods. The experience identified as most influential on the choice of specialization was the practical experience working with young children.

Table 7

*Experience Contributing to Choosing General Music Specialization and Course Providing Best Preparation for Elementary General Music (EGM)*

	Frequency (%)
<b>Experiences Contributing to Specialization Choice</b>	
Practical experience working with young children	8 (47%)
Practical experiences with teachers/students	5 (29%)
Experiences with university instructors	4 (24%)
Personal experience in general music classes as a child	0
Other	0
<b>Course Providing Best Preparation for EGM</b>	
General music methods courses (elementary and secondary)	7 (41%)
Early childhood music methods course (elective)	5 (29%)
Foundations courses (i.e., child development, sociology and psychology, philosophy and assessment)	3 (18%)
Ensemble methods courses	1 (6%)
Practicum experiences	1 (6%)
Extra-curricular workshops and conferences	0

*Note: Frequencies are based on the junior and senior majors who chose general music specialization (n = 17).*

### **Discussion and Implications**

The participants in this study are limited to one university, and readers should interpret results with caution. Although generalization is not appropriate, results suggest fertile ground for future research. Future researchers should include an increased number of institutions varying in size and type to increase the power of the statistical analyses and generalizability. Overall, this study supports previous findings that preservice music teachers prefer ensemble specialization and secondary settings over EGM (Campbell & Thompson, 2007; Rickels et al., 2013). Findings also suggest that, as with music teacher identity in general, specialization identity seems complex and sensitive to a variety of interlocking factors.

Similar to Rickels et al. (2013), choral/vocal music education majors were more likely to choose general music specialization than instrumental music education majors. However, there were no differences in the perception of preparation to teach or confidence to teach EGM based on major. Therefore, factors not examined in the current study, such as confidence in using

singing voice, perception of EGM as a vocal-heavy curriculum, and lack of instrumentalist role models in EGM positions may influence differences in specialization choice based on major. Future researchers should compare tracked and non-tracked degree programs for music education majors.

Gender emerged as a highly influential factor in relation to specialization choice and seemed to overlap with perceptions of preparation, confidence, memories of EGM. As in previous studies, females were more likely to choose general music compared to males (Rickels et al., 2013; Roulston & Misawa, 2011). In contrast to Shouldice (2017), preservice teachers suggested they remember personal EGM experiences, perceived them as positive and enjoyable, and believe EGM is important. However, when examined for differences based on gender, personal EGM experiences were remembered as more positive and enjoyable by females than males. Females also held stronger beliefs regarding the importance of EGM than males. Concerning preparation, male preservice teachers choosing general music felt less prepared by their courses and indicated lower levels of confidence to teach EGM than females choosing general music. Although some researchers suggest that gendered perceptions of EGM may be weakening (Shouldice, 2017), these findings suggest that gendered perceptions of EGM remain an influential factor on specialization choice and may be further evidence of gender bias (Roulston and Misawa, 2011). More research is necessary to determine how music teacher educators can neutralize gender bias and support male preservice teachers in transcending bias, overcoming challenges, and embracing benefits of being male EGM teachers. Similarly, researchers should explore specific strategies to support male preservice teachers in their preparation to teach EGM. Future researchers should investigate preparation, confidence, and professional attrition rates for male general music teachers in relation to factors including previous personal experience in EGM and the availability of same-gender role models and

mentors. Additionally, more research representing experiences and perspectives of transgender and non-binary gender-conforming preservice and practicing music teachers is also necessary.

Overall, the preservice teachers reported a strong belief that their courses prepared them to teach EGM. Differences in confidence based on year suggest that the number of methods courses and authentic context learning experiences in general (regardless of the ensemble or general music context) contribute positively to preservice teachers' perceptions of preparedness for and confidence to teach EGM. A lack of exposure to authentic context learning experiences may be responsible for differences between first-year students and sophomore confidence scores related to lesson planning, curriculum development, working with special needs populations, and teaching vocal improvisation. Future researchers should investigate teaching confidence at various stages of the teaching career cycle. Confidence may ebb and flow during different stages of secondary socialization and immersion in the field, which may explain why some practicing teachers report feeling unprepared to teach EGM (Corfield-Adams, 2012; Groulx, 2015; Hamman & Ebie, 2009; Kuebel, 2017, 2019). Before first-year students gain experience in the field, confidence is high; when sophomores begin university field experiences, confidence drops but gradually increases over time; when practicing teachers begin to teach EGM independently for the first time, confidence may drop again.

Feelings of preparation and interest in teaching EGM seemed related. Participants who identified general music as their preferred specialization seemed to believe more strongly that their courses prepared them to teach EGM than those who identified ensemble specialization. As in previous studies, those who chose the general music specialization identified EGM methods courses and authentic context learning experiences in general music settings as best preparation to teach EGM (Kuebel, 2017, 2019; Miranda et al., 2007; Robinson, 2010; Shouldice, 2017). If feelings of preparation and interest in teaching EGM are related, music teacher educators need to

prioritize experiences that contribute to preservice teachers' feelings of efficacy and preparation in EGM contexts. Music teacher educators should consider increasing opportunities for preservice teachers to interact with young children (birth to preschool and elementary-age) in the context of authentic context learning opportunities early and often throughout their degree program, especially for the preservice teachers who have not yet developed an interest in or who lack efficacy regarding EGM. Future researchers should investigate strategies for increasing preservice teachers' preparation and efficacy for teaching in EGM settings, as well as investigating the qualities of courses and experiences that positively influence preservice and practicing teachers' perceptions of preparedness and professional identity in relation EGM.

Overall, EGM memories seemed positive; however only half of the participants believed they experienced a strong EGM program in elementary school. The perceived quality of personal EGM experiences may contribute to negative perceptions and misconceptions of EGM as well as a lack of interest in teaching EGM (Miranda et al., 2007; Shouldice, 2013, 2017). Future researchers should consider preservice teachers' perceptions of what makes a strong EGM program. Survey items that focus on specific aspects of high-quality programs might provide more detail regarding preservice teachers' EGM experiences and their perceptions of what makes a program strong. Music teacher educators should provide opportunities for preservice teachers to deliberately and carefully explore their memories of EGM and consider strategies for helping them reflect on the meaning of memories, perceptions, and misconceptions in the context of their development as teachers.

As in previous research, strong beliefs in efficacy, fit for personality, and opportunity for more variety than in ensemble-based positions (Corfield-Adams, 2012; Kuebel, 2019; Robinson, 2010; Shouldice, 2013, 2017) influenced the choice of general music specialization. Unlike these previous studies, practical reasons (e.g., work/life balance, economy) did not emerge as factors

influencing these preservice teachers' specialization choice. Compared to practicing teachers, preservice music teachers may not have enough life experience to speculate regarding such practical matters.

### **Conclusion**

Jobs for music teachers often include general music (specifically at the elementary level); music teachers must embrace this reality, and music teacher educators must prepare them for this reality. This study suggests the majority of music education majors prefer to teach in ensemble settings and that a variety of interlocking factors, some of which begin very early in their personal music experiences, influence their choice of specialization identity. More research is necessary to understand specialization identity of preservice music teachers, influences of primary and secondary socialization on specialization identity, processes related to accommodations and transitions in specialization identity, and the ways in which various experiences transform preservice and practicing music teachers' specialization identity related to EGM. Music teacher educators should focus on high-impact strategies to help preservice teachers examine personal experiences with and challenge misconceptions about EGM. Universities should continue efforts to provide balanced preparation for and representation of general music in elementary and secondary contexts within music education degrees. The profession needs to examine systemic biases and limitations that diminish the status of elementary general music teachers and relegate elementary general music teacher identity to an afterthought for many.



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