

## **An Examination of a Pre-Service Music Teacher's Reflection Across Consecutive Teaching Placements**

By

Christopher M. Baumgartner  
University of Missouri  
Columbia, Missouri

### **Abstract**

*Teachers reflect on their effectiveness in the classroom in both formal and informal manners. The purpose of this case study was to examine the reflective processes of one pre-service music teacher across two consecutive teaching placements. The pre-service teacher served eight weeks in an elementary music setting, followed by eight weeks in a comprehensive instrumental music program. Through written, guided reflections, classroom observations, and interviews, six themes emerged as areas of continual focus for the novice teacher: (a) preparation and lesson/rehearsal planning, (b) student achievement, (c) experience as an important factor in student teaching success, (d) classroom management, (e) extra-musical concerns, and (f) multiple forms of reflective practice. Written, guided reflections were found to be the most helpful form of reflective practice for the student teacher.*

Teachers are faced with the ongoing task of evaluating their effectiveness and instructional processes in the classroom. Informal reflection on these processes can occur between teachers in the lunchroom or individually when teachers think about their last class on the way home from school. Formal reflection, such as journal writing or videotaped teaching analysis, can provide a more analytical investigation into classroom procedures.

Creating a guided reflection that encourages students to think critically about their teaching is a difficult task for teachers and supervisors (Siebenaler, 2005). According to Berg and Lind (2003), students were able to make connections between their teaching in the field and prior coursework when given the opportunity to write and reflect on their success in the classroom. The transfer of theories learned in the classroom to their application in the field is a complex practice, one that does not occur naturally (Duke, 2005). To promote transfer, students must be prompted to relate theory to practice and evaluate their application of the process. Guided reflections that prompt students to recall prior knowledge may help to promote transfer to student teachers' classroom instruction.

### **Review of Literature**

Education majors are often asked to complete a portfolio at the end of their college career, which is a culminating project that showcases the student's experiences and successes throughout their schooling. A portfolio may include artifacts such as a written document detailing students' experiences, sample lesson plans, teaching videos, concert programs, written reflections, or evaluations. McKinney (1998) analyzed five student teacher portfolios, each of which included reflective commentaries, and found that in the

beginning, students focused on lesson plans and excerpts from journal entries when reflecting on their experiences. As their teaching experience progressed, students' reflections became more general, focusing less on details of the lessons and more on the experience as a whole. Although no specific details were outlined, the reflective prompt appeared to be open-ended and students were free to reflect on their experiences in any format they desired.

Reflection is a common component of portfolios in the education field. Berg and Lind (2003) included reflection as one of five categories to be addressed in student-teacher portfolios: "Students were encouraged to write about their successes, identify specific areas in need of improvement, and demonstrate how they engaged in reflective thinking" (p. 21). Students were also asked to make a connection between course content and experiences in the field, discussing how they worked through four "reflective-thinking stages: problem recognition, problem-solution generation, testing of the solution, and evaluation of its effectiveness" (Berg & Lind, 2003, p. 22). The four-step process provided by the researchers was intended to guide students' thoughts during the reflective process, as opposed to the open-ended method employed by McKinney.

In a more structured method, Siebenaler (2005) created four different sets of prompts to guide the respondents' thoughts over the course of four teaching episodes. Pre-service teachers were asked to reflect on various aspects of their teaching, including their feelings about the experience, teaching sequences, personal attitudes, student attitudes, and student responses to instruction. As the reflections progressed, pre-service teachers were prompted to compare a recent experience in the classroom to prior teaching episodes. Similar to Berg and Lind (2003), Siebenaler (2005) asked students to discuss how they

integrated concepts from course content into their teaching episodes. Siebenaler discussed responses for the various prompts, revealing that the participants focused on how their methods of classroom instruction influenced student learning. The guided reflections provided a structured format that, over time, solicited more specific responses from the participants.

Designing a meaningful system for reflective practice by pre-service teachers requires a specific pattern. According to Dewey (1933) there are five phases of reflective activity that bridge our observations and experiences with ideas:

1. Suggestion
2. Intellectualization
3. Hypothesis
4. Reasoning
5. Testing the hypothesis in action.

A well-structured, guided reflection can lead students through these stages of thought. In such a reflection, the student would define an issue and raise questions about its nature, and based on previous observations and prior knowledge, the student could then hypothesize a possible solution. The student would develop the solution through the application of learned knowledge and theoretical ideas, and the final step in the process, putting the hypothesis into action, would occur in the next teaching episode. Creating a guided reflection that takes students through these steps may lead them to think more critically about their classroom instruction.

Dewey's ideas are supported by research conducted by Eyler, Giles, and Schmiede (1996). In this research, four main themes emerged from the authors' study of reflective

processes. Connected reflection, one of the four themes, results from the synthesis of action and thought. Through the reflective process, students are able to think critically about their teaching, creating new ideas and solutions to classroom situations. Putting those thoughts into action in a later teaching episode then creates a link between their thoughtful problem solving and real-life situations. Challenging reflection, possibly one of the most difficult for instructors to implement, involves “challenging students to engage issues in a more critical way” (Eyler, Giles, & Schmiede, 1996, p. 19). Many reflective questions and prompts are designed to evoke a general response. For example, Siebenaler (2005) asked, “How did the students respond to your presentation?” (p. 26). Although isolating the pre-service teachers’ thoughts to focus on their feelings, the question does not guide the student to cite anything specific, and common responses described the energy, enthusiasm, and eagerness of the children. These responses are broad and could be more clearly defined by simply rewording the question: “In what ways did your students respond to your presentation?” This type of prompt might suggest a more specific, focused response.

Constructing challenging prompts for reflective response is the first step towards helping students to think critically about their teaching. According to Silcox (1995), the most incorrect assumption that teachers have regarding reflection is that transfer occurs automatically. Transfer, as defined by Byrnes (1996), is the ability to extend what has been learned in one context to new contexts, and Silcox (1995) stated that “transferability does not happen normally or without direct prompting at an efficient learning rate” (p. 34). By constructing reflective prompts in a way that directly asks students to transfer one context to another, students may begin to more frequently recognize how theory evolves

into practice. This thoughtful process may become more natural over time and could eventually result in the transfer of concepts during informal reflection.

The cyclical process of reflective thinking, no matter the theory or model, lies in a foundation of “Action-Reflection-Action” (Eyler, Giles & Schmiede, 1996). Silcox (1995) appeared to agree because both authors cited David Kolb’s learning cycle as an exemplary model for reflective practice. Kolb (1984) described four parts to his cycle of learning: (a) concrete experience, (b) reflective observation, (c) abstract conceptualization, and (d) active experimentation. Reflective observation and abstract conceptualization can be combined to represent the “Reflection” portion of the three-way model proposed earlier. Following this model while creating a reflective tool will guide the practitioner to connect the experience to the learned theory and be able to apply what was learned to future teaching episodes.

The lack of specificity in guided response prompts in prior research encouraged me to create a guided reflection that solicited specific thoughts pertaining to both teaching processes and future application. Research in music education does not appear to have focused solely on student teacher reflective practices, but rather on reflection as a part of the portfolio process. No single-case studies were found that gave detailed descriptions of what student teachers reflected on or what methods were used. Through the combination of interviews and classroom observation, I attempted to gain a deeper perspective on how a pre-service music teacher thinks about and applies reflective practice. The goal was to inform those involved in teacher education about the importance and effectiveness of a well-constructed guided reflection and how student teachers use reflective practices.

Students need to be challenged to think critically about their teaching, and through guided reflection, the instructor can aid in promoting transfer from theory to practice.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this case study was to examine the reflective processes of one pre-service music teacher across two consecutive teaching placements. The reflective process generally will be defined by formal, written reflections of single teaching episodes. The central research question guiding this study was “How does a pre-service music teacher reflect on his or her experiences during two consecutive teaching placements?” Additional research questions I sought to answer included:

1. In what ways does a pre-service teacher reflect critically on instructional procedures and processes?
2. How do a pre-service teacher’s reflective thoughts play a role in future teaching episodes?
3. What themes of reflection emerge during the transition from one placement to the next?
4. How does a pre-service teacher feel about reflecting on teaching?

### **Method**

#### **Participant Selection**

I was assigned two student teachers to observe during the semester in which this study took place. Both were invited to participate and one agreed. The participant was given the pseudonym Matt to guarantee that his confidentiality would be maintained. I

served as Matt's university supervisor/seminar leader throughout his student teaching experience. One of my responsibilities included leading bi-weekly seminars with other student teachers and seminar leaders in which reflection and informal conversations about teaching were regular practice. I also completed formal, classroom observations of Matt periodically throughout the semester. Matt verbally agreed to participate in this study, acknowledging that it would not affect his grade, because I did not serve as the teacher of record for his student teaching experience. He was also reminded of his confidentiality prior to each interview.

### **Description of the Participant**

At the time of his student teaching, Matt was in his early twenties and in his fifth year of college at a large Midwestern university. He spent his university career as an undergraduate music education major, with a focus in instrumental music. Matt participated in numerous university ensembles prior to student teaching and completed all courses necessary for graduation with a degree in music education. These included three music teaching methods courses, two rehearsal clinic classes, and field experience components that included instructional time with students outside the university. Matt held a part-time job at a local grocery store prior to and during his student teaching experience. During that time, Matt worked an average of 15 hours per week, mainly on the weekends. I came to know Matt primarily through the student teaching process as his seminar leader.

The research site included two locations: (a) an urban elementary school during the participant's first placement and (b) a suburban elementary, middle school, and high school during the second placement. At the first placement, his course load consisted of



general music classes at each level, grades kindergarten through five, and at the second placement included courses in instrumental music (band), grades five through 12.

### **Sampling Strategy**

As Matt's university supervisor for student teaching, I met with him regularly, which afforded me the opportunity to visit the schools and observe his teaching. Because I had observed his teaching and built a relationship with him through student teaching seminars, I asked him to be a participant in this study. My professional contact with Matt allowed me to gather multiple forms of data for the project, including: (a) providing weekly reflections which spanned from the end of his first teaching placement through the beginning of his second placement for eight consecutive weeks, and (b) two interviews, one during each teaching placement.

### **Data Collection**

**Guided reflections.** In order to understand how one pre-service music teacher thought about reflection, I employed multiple methods of data collection in this study. Weekly written reflections by the pre-service teacher were collected and analyzed on the basis of emergent themes. These researcher-created, guided reflections asked questions pertaining to the student's feelings about reflection, his thought processes, and future application (see Appendix A for a sample template).

**Classroom observations.** Serving as both the researcher and the university supervisor, I made formal observations of the participant in the classroom. I used a rubric consisting of eight content areas as a guideline for each observation. The content areas addressed the participant's musical skills, ability to detect and correct errors, organization of teaching sequences, ability to achieve music learning objectives, presentation of ideas,

and the use of supplementary teaching materials.

**Interviews.** Two participant interviews were conducted during the study. The participant was informed of the nature of the study and his right to have a pseudonym used in place of his actual name. Observations of multiple classes were completed in both placements, and both participant interviews were conducted in a room at the university. Interviews were recorded on a *ZOOM H2* digital audio recorder with the permission of the participant, each lasting approximately one hour. The first interview took place during week eight of the participant's student teaching experience, just prior to the beginning of his second placement. The second interview was held during week 10, the second week of his second placement. Each interview protocol was based on the format provided by Asmussen and Creswell (Creswell, 2007, p. 135-137). I addressed issues that cross-referenced the guided reflections to attain a deeper understanding of the participant's position on classroom instruction and future teaching episodes, and I included questions pertaining to the reflective process as a whole. Other prompts focused on the participant's feelings, the overall student teaching experience, and non-instructional related issues in the classroom.

## **Findings**

### **Data Analysis**

Validity was established through the use of multiple and different sources to provide corroborating evidence, with the use of guided reflections, interviews, and observations to achieve triangulation (Creswell, 2007). Analyzing each document line by line, I created two- or three-word codes for each sentence or phrase of the data. After

coding each source, I compiled a list of over 50 codes, which were then used to create larger categories. Six themes concerning Matt's focus on reflective practice emerged from my analysis:

- Preparation and lesson/rehearsal planning
- Student achievement
- Experience as an important factor in student teaching success
- Classroom management
- Extra-musical concerns
- Multiple forms of reflective practice

After I had completed the analysis, the participant reviewed my interpretation of the collected data. This process of member checking was used to increase the validity of the data analysis (Creswell, 2007).

### **Preparation and Lesson/Rehearsal Planning**

**Planning time.** During his first placement, Matt found it difficult to find time within the school day to plan and reflect. Having a full teaching schedule of general music classes at the elementary level provided him with little time in between classes to gather his thoughts and prepare for the next lesson. "Going into the half hour lessons, 'bang-bang-bang,' [with] no in-between time to reset, was really tough to get a hold of" (interview, March 10, 2010). He looked forward to working with the bands where he anticipated having a little more time to "reset, focus, reflect even" (interview, March 10, 2010).

When planning rehearsals for ensemble classes, Matt continued to focus on student achievement, but included a great deal of classroom management as well. Much of his

rehearsal planning was derived from formal and informal reflection with his cooperating teacher, in which they would “sit down at the end of every day, talk about each grade level...and make a lesson plan for the next time [they saw] them, based on the events of that day” (interview, March 24, 2010).

**Classroom activities and instructional procedures.** The student teaching experience provided Matt with a great deal of instructional time with students, and he referenced classroom activities often when responding to prompts in the guided reflection. For example, Matt felt he was able to assess individuals’ understanding of written pitches through the use of a worksheet in class. Matt first reviewed finding “do” on the staff by calling on students to respond to an example on the board. He followed up with an individual writing activity which focused on finding “do” and writing in the pitches “mi,” “sol,” and “la,” a standard in the district curriculum for first grade music. Locating these solfège pitches on the staff was a review exercise, but writing them was a completely new activity. Matt was able to move around the room, addressing individual students as they completed the worksheet. The lesson also displayed Matt’s ability to include measurable activities in the lesson.

In a separate lesson, Matt created an activity using the interactive white board in which students volunteered to compose their own rhythm in one measure of 4/4 meter. The activity included about one-third of the class composing on the interactive white board and everyone else evaluating the accuracy of the student-created rhythms. In my observation, I stated, “allowing students to create their own rhythms allowed [Matt] to assess their application of the [rhythmic] symbols individually” (observation, February 24, 2010). Matt’s use of activities was a strong point in his daily lessons.

In guided reflections, Matt discussed how activities related to instructional processes. In a third-grade class he created a “*Powerpoint* presentation demonstrating the solo instruments used in [Prokofiev’s *Peter and the Wolf*] ... showing how they represent different characters in the story” (guided reflection, March 12, 2010). After the presentation, Matt showed a portion of Disney’s *Peter and the Wolf* to reinforce the programmatic concept of the work. By beginning the lesson with the *Powerpoint* presentation, Matt felt that he “was successful in getting [the students] to make those connections before showing the film” (guided reflection, March 12, 2010).

The transfer of teaching techniques became evident during the interview process, as Matt often incorporated teaching techniques applied in one grade to another classroom. “If something went well in eighth-grade, and a technique we used, or a strategy we used in eighth-grade worked well, we may try that with the high school band or the fifth-grade band” (interview, March 24, 2010). Matt’s statement shows that he was able to reflect and evaluate his teaching effectiveness and adapt the technique for another grade or ability level based on the need for student improvement.

### **Student Achievement**

**Learning goals.** Matt’s primary focus, as evident in my observations and his guided reflections, was on his students achieving the high musical expectations he set for them, focusing on both district and national standards. In a response to the prompt “Describe your thoughts as you prepared for today’s class,” he felt that the material he taught was “excellent,” which included performing on instruments and writing rhythms. Both activities represent national standards of the National Association for Music Education (MENC) as well as the school music curriculum. Matt stated that he “was able

to accomplish many of the standards that had been provided by the district” while making the lesson “fun and educational for the students” (guided reflection, March 5, 2010).

Matt felt that every facet of music instruction was important, including those found in the nine National Content Standards. When asked if he thought including non-performance based criteria into a rehearsal was natural for most teachers, Matt stated:

I definitely don't think it's natural. I mean, you could go in there and hammer notes, and get an ensemble lined up and play dynamics. Do all the mechanical stuff without ever knowing who the composer was, or why he wrote the piece. Or even what the name of the piece was. You could easily do that, but I think the history, and the context, and all that extra meaning, even the analysis...[is] important. If it gets somebody to take more meaning from that piece, then it's important. I think you definitely have to make an effort to teach those aspects of [the music] in your rehearsal. It would be easy to blow through three months, preparing for a concert, without even doing that if that wasn't something that was important to you. (interview, March 10, 2010)

Matt included historical information in a first grade lesson at the elementary level as I observed him introduce Saint-Saens' *The Swan*. Matt played a recording of *The Swan* and told the students why the work was composed, including how the different movements from *Carnival of the Animals* represented different animals. Although the students did not perform the work on instruments, they did participate in active music listening, a type of performance according to Bennett Reimer's synergistic philosophy of music education (Reimer, 2003). Matt did state that he wished he had asked the students to complete “some sort of work that showed [him] that they were making all the connections” (guided reflection, March 12, 2010). This provides evidence that the reflection prompted him to evaluate his classroom procedure even further, looking for a more formal assessment activity.

**Student comprehension of new information.** Student assessment and evaluation of musical content was determined in multiple ways. When responding to the reflection prompt “Explain how your students responded to your teaching,” Matt often began with a positive statement: “The students responded very well to my teaching” (guided reflection, March 5, 2010), “They respond very well to the teaching” (guided reflection, February 26, 2010), and “My students respond very well to my presence in front of the classroom” (guided reflection, March 12, 2010). These represent Matt’s evaluation of his teaching effectiveness and student understanding. When referring to the *Peter and the Wolf* lesson previously mentioned, Matt stated that he “was successful at getting them to make the connections before showing the film” (guided reflection, March 12, 2010). Statements such as this showed that Matt continually evaluated his ability to disseminate information to his students.

In a more formal manner, Matt displayed his determination to ensure that the students understood a musical concept. During a middle school band rehearsal, I witnessed Matt explain, model, and reinforce a specific musical style. First he explained how the written notation implied a certain performance style. Then, after an attempt on the students’ behalf, Matt modeled the style by singing the musical line using scat syllables. This helped to reinforce audibly what the students were seeing on the page, and after hearing the style performed, students were able to echo Matt’s interpretation. The students followed by applying the new knowledge to a similar passage later in the music. Matt informally assessed the students’ comprehension of style by listening to their performance.

**Recall of previous material.** Students are often asked to build upon prior knowledge when learning new information, a process that Matt included as a vital part of his lesson planning. When reflecting on his preparation for class, Matt stated that he planned to “review lesson material from the previous week” (guided reflection, February 26, 2010). In the same reflection, he stated that the review did not go well because he “assumed the students [had] retained the information better than they actually had.” When responding to the prompt “How might this be helpful to your future teaching episodes?” Matt wrote that he would “set up the review in a way that will get the students to recall the information in more detail” (guided reflection, February 26, 2010). However, he did not elaborate on how he might change his approach.

### **Experience as an Important Factor in Student-Teaching Success**

**Prior experience in the classroom.** Matt cited his methods courses and field experience as extremely important in his becoming comfortable, confident, and effective in the classroom, as referred to in his guided reflections. One prompt specifically asked him to discuss any concepts learned during his coursework or field experiences that were applied to daily lessons. Matt cited specific techniques as derivative of lessons from his field experience site: “This technique of having the kids write certain melodies and having them play rhythms on non-pitched percussion [instruments] is a technique that was used when I had my field experience at [the elementary school]” (guided reflection, March 5, 2010). In regard to ensemble classes, Matt referenced his instrumental and jazz methods courses for giving him “strategies and time to rehearse jazz bands” (guided reflection, April 2, 2010). He continued in the same response: “This has given me the confidence in myself to be able to do what I’ve been doing with the jazz bands here at [the high



school].”

**Teaching time during student teaching.** Not only was classroom experience prior to student teaching an important factor in Matt’s confidence and success, his instructional time during student teaching was as well. From the very beginning of each placement, Matt was involved in working with students. In the second interview, Matt said that “from the first day [the cooperating teacher] was asking me if I wanted to get up there and conduct, and I was more than willing to. So, from the first day, I was up in front of the group. So that helped a lot. After seven days or so now, I think I’m pretty comfortable” (interview, March 24, 2010). This statement shows that Matt had built confidence in the classroom through both experience and his cooperating teacher’s confidence in him. His enthusiasm to become involved immediately is representative of comments made in the first interview. When asked about his expectations for his second placement, Matt said “...I hope to get a lot of rehearsal time.” He was very anxious to begin “a piece and see it through to a final point – a performance point” (interview, March 24, 2010).

In his first placement, Matt reached a point where he was planning every lesson of every day. At the beginning of the first interview, which occurred during the final week at his first placement, Matt said:

It was my last week of full plan – I planned the whole week, except for fourth and fifth grade, which was recorders and keyboards, which we team-teach. So, a full day of my lessons, and how I teach them. It’s nice, [the cooperating teacher] just continued to just kind of be there to help discipline-wise – another presence in the room – and let me do it.

It was tiring, but it was good. (interview, March 10, 2010)

Matt grew more comfortable with both the students and lesson planning through his experiences in the classroom. It gave him a sense of what a full day of teaching was like,

and the fact that the process made him tired was a good thing to Matt. Being treated with this level of respect by his cooperating teacher gave him confidence for the future.

Teaching time was key to Matt's transitioning smoothly from one placement to the next: "For me it was just getting right in there, and getting in front of the kids..." (interview, March 24, 2010). Matt felt this was much easier than sitting in the back of the room, observing for a few days, and easing himself into the new atmosphere. He felt that by teaching immediately upon his arrival, the students were more accepting of him – "I'm not just some weirdo in the back of the room" (interview, March 24, 2010). This also displayed to the students the confidence that the cooperating teacher had in Matt.

### **Classroom Management**

**Classroom materials and configuration.** Although his second placement allowed for more time between classes, Matt found that the majority of this time was spent traveling, setting up, and organizing each room for the lesson:

...because at my last placement, one room, everything was in that room, any materials I need for lesson to lesson, hour to hour, was all in that room and I had time to get it set up. But when you're at the elementary school for an hour and twenty minutes each day in the middle of the day, you sort of just have to...(pause)...it's like jumping into someone else's room and doing your thing. It's just making sure all the materials are where they need to be, and it's just kind of been, in my mind, an organization thing. Just trying to wrap my head around going to three different buildings in one day, to teach. (interview, March 24, 2010)

Dealing with traveling and setting up a new classroom multiple times throughout the day was a concern for Matt. Compared to his elementary experience, traveling during Matt's second placement created a greater need for personal organization and planning ahead.

**Pacing.** Matt talked about pacing and how it related to the success of his lessons. In one guided reflection he stated, “the students respond very well to my teaching, because I try to be very animated and keep the pacing of the lesson quick” (guided reflection, March 5, 2010). Matt’s pacing not only solicited desirable student responses but also helped to prevent behavioral issues in the classroom.

In terms of preparation, the content of the lesson was not as difficult for Matt as the pacing of the instruction. In his second placement, the high school utilized a form of block scheduling, and Matt’s “biggest concern [was] keeping the kids interested and focused for an hour and fifteen minutes” (guided reflection, April 2, 2010), the length of one ensemble class. After a week of spring break, pacing was a difficult task for Matt:

This day was a bit of a scramble for me as I prepared to teach the lesson. Having just come off of spring break, I felt that I was still getting into the swing of things. I am very familiar with many of the charts that the Jazz Band is working on, so preparation was not as big of a worry for me, however, pacing is. (guided reflection, April 2, 2010)

Having been at his second placement for only two weeks prior to spring break, Matt was still in the process of refining his rehearsal plans and getting acquainted with new students and a new schedule. This proved to be one of the difficulties of changing placements in the middle of the student teaching experience.

**Rapport with students.** More so at his second placement than his first, Matt cited behavior issues in the classroom. He attributed much of this to building his rapport with the students, which he stated in the second interview was “not any different from [his] first placement” (interview, March 24, 2010). Matt also said that he felt “some of the behavior issues [were] because [he was] new” (interview, March 24, 2010) and that the students did behave slightly better for the cooperating teacher.

Matt felt that after a week and a half of being in his second placement, he was able to show more of his personality and still “maintain a good sense of leadership and control of the group” (interview, March 24, 2010). One method he used for maintaining control of the classroom was to use the same techniques that the cooperating teacher used. “I think I’ve pretty much adopted his routine just to sort of help me be an authority figure. He has some little things he does to get their attention, and I’ve gotten better at using those whenever it’s starting to slip out of my fingers a little bit” (interview, March 24, 2010). I observed Matt hold up three fingers and slowly count backwards from three. By the time he reached “one” the class was quiet and had refocused their attention to him. This was a simple technique but was also something with which the students were familiar. By using techniques the students knew, the class was able to see that Matt and the cooperating teacher were working together, which helped build his rapport with the students.

**Behavior in reflective practice.** When asked if he noticed anything interesting about his reflection at the second placement, Matt’s first response was “It’s a lot more behavior at this placement” (interview, March 24, 2010). Compared to procedural issues and student comprehension at the elementary school, Matt found himself reflecting more on “behavior strategies and behavior management”(interview, March 24, 2010). During informal reflection with his cooperating teacher, the following questions came up regularly: “How can we improve this band and be more productive in rehearsal? How do we get them to behave so we can be more productive” (interview, March 24, 2010)? Matt went on to say that some of the reflections did not deal with music or rehearsal strategy, but focused solely on behavioral issues.

Matt also talked about behavior in his guided reflections. When prompted about how his recent classroom experiences might be helpful in future teaching episodes, Matt stated “reflecting on what went wrong and [finding] better ways to handle behavior issues will help similar situations that occur in future weeks” (guided reflection, April 9, 2010). He also mentioned using some of the behavior and classroom management techniques learned from university education courses as additional resources.

In comparison, Matt seemed less concerned about classroom behavior in his first placement and felt that “at the elementary level you have a lot easier time being the authority” (interview, March 24, 2010). Whether he was referring to the age of the students or the class setting was unclear. However, Matt did feel that the elementary was “a really well behaved school” (interview, March 24, 2010). In his third-week reflection (the seventh week of his first placement) Matt wrote, “once I have to implement behavioral management techniques, most of the students tend to fall in line pretty quickly” (guided reflection, March 5, 2010). He attributed most of his behavioral issues in his second placement to end-of-the-day classes and student fatigue.

Changing activities and including hands-on materials for the students also caused Matt to re-evaluate his approach to introducing certain materials. “I believe I need to find a better way of getting the stick instruments to and from the students. This portion of the lesson seemed to be the time when behavior issues arose in certain students” (guided reflection, March 5, 2010). I mentioned in my observation of this lesson that, to eliminate extraneous stick tapping and off-task behavior, he might remind students to keep the rhythm sticks at their side until asked to play. Matt then wrote, “In the future I will come up with a listening activity...while I pass out the sticks” (guided reflection, March 5,

2010), showing that he would create better ways to introduce the same activity, or one similar to it, in the future.

### **Extra-Musical Concerns**

**Cooperating teacher relationships.** Matt was very positive about the relationships he was able to build with each of his cooperating teachers, and when asked to describe his comfort level with his first cooperating teacher, Matt stated that they formed a relationship based on both professional and personal connections. This was important towards establishing a good rapport and comfortable environment with the teacher whom he was working for eight weeks:

Really comfortable. She's easy going, willing to just hand things over. Willing to accept new ideas and also willing to give her input, and not just sort of let – it wasn't a situation where she just threw me in there so she could take a break. She was *as* concerned with my education as she was her own students' education. And we could talk during our down time; we would talk about our lives and each other, and we got to know each other. So the comfort level was good; we built a relationship between each other. It wasn't always strictly professional [emphasis in original]. (interview, March 10, 2010)

Matt stated that by getting to know each other on both a personal and professional level, “it made it so that it was never awkward” (interview, March 10, 2010). Matt felt that the two of them built a very collaborative working relationship that allowed him to try new things in the classroom without repercussions from his cooperating teacher.

The second teaching placement resulted in a similar relationship between Matt and his cooperating teacher. However, Matt was the first student teacher that his cooperating teacher had ever worked with, so the experience was new to both of them. Matt stated at the beginning of his second interview that his cooperating teacher wanted Matt “to have a really good experience” (interview, March 24, 2010), and was given all the time he

wanted with the ensembles, except for the high school band, which was preparing for contest at the time. Despite their different personalities, Matt said, “it’s not gotten in the way of us interacting with each other and interacting with the students” (interview, March 24, 2010). He felt that they worked well together because they complemented each other’s personal traits.

Matt was very comfortable receiving feedback from both cooperating teachers, and because of the positive relationship he built with each mentor, receiving feedback “was sort of a jumping off point as far as [their] communication” (interview, March 24, 2010). Matt also felt comfortable criticizing the ensemble and the rehearsal because of the mutual respect that was generated between him and the cooperating teachers, and during reflection and planning, they would discuss how to better approach the next lesson. I asked Matt how he thought things would be different between him and the cooperating teachers if he did not have the support he had received:

...If I were just sitting at the back of the room, for the entire day, and then he were to ask me any things that I notice, I feel like I would just be some new guy in here telling him what his band is doing wrong. But if I’m on the podium, making mistakes of my own, and correcting mistakes myself, it’s one of those things where – then it doesn’t look like I’m just coming in and saying “well this is not good, and this is not good.” So our communication has been good because of that. (interview, March 24, 2010)

Talking to other teachers about teaching appeared to be quite important to Matt throughout his student teaching experience, and the relationships he built with his mentors created a line of communication from which Matt could learn a great deal about his teaching.

**Other teacher duties.** One of Matt’s greatest concerns going out into the field was learning about extra duties that often accompany a teacher’s daily schedule. Non-music

related activities such as after-school duties, working with administrators, and filling out paper work are typical responsibilities for classroom teachers. “All the extra requirements like curriculum stuff that you have to do, with who knows, all kinds of different teachers; paperwork; things like that... There’s a lot more to it than what you just do in the classroom” (interview, March 24, 2010). Although extra-musical duties were reviewed in his music teaching methods courses, Matt understood that many teacher responsibilities are best learned in the field. The number of extra duties was somewhat of a surprise to Matt, especially during his second placement, which included monitoring other classes and study halls, traveling between schools, and less downtime than he expected.

### **Multiple Forms of Reflective Practice**

**Informal reflection.** Matt cited a great deal of informal reflection throughout his placements, which he accomplished in many ways: (a) casual conversation with cooperating teachers, (b) thinking about his teaching while driving from school to school, (c) discussions with other pre-service teachers at student teaching seminars, and (d) while planning lessons. The most common informal reflection was conversation with other teachers. During Matt’s second placement, he and his cooperating teacher would sit down at the end of each school day and discuss the day’s lessons. Together, they would analyze teaching techniques, rehearsal techniques, behavioral issues, and student achievement. Matt also liked the fact that there were enough times during the day that he could reflect on his teaching and “kind of regroup as a team” (interview, March 24, 2010).

While in the car, Matt enjoyed the quiet time to think about past lessons and how he might apply things to future teaching:

It’s kind of nice... This placement I have about a 20-25 minute drive which has been – actually, it’s easy for me to plan going there. I can sort of think ahead on the drive. And



it's also been – on the drive home, I can look back on the day. It gives me time to think without any other distractions, or the TV, or anything else on. Just listening to music and thinking about the day. (interview, March 24, 2010)

Because Matt lived so close to his first placement, the drive to and from school did not offer the same period of relaxation and reflection as the second. During the interview, Matt appeared very excited about using this down time to think about his teaching.

**Formal reflection.** After a few weeks of focusing on reflective practice, Matt found that the guided reflections were the most effective for him:

Writing it down for me is a challenge, which means, I think it's probably the best way for me. I can converse with someone about it and just explain it. But actually putting into words that make sense to me, or like organizing my thoughts on paper somehow – if something doesn't make sense, I'll notice it quicker than if I'm trying to explain it to somebody. (interview, March 10, 2010)

Matt focused his written reflections heavily on classroom procedure and behavior management. He evaluated the effectiveness of class activities and teaching sequences using student comprehension as the basis for his evaluations. When responding to the prompt “How might this be helpful to your future teaching episodes?” Matt wrote:

This is helpful because I will know in future lessons what they are able to accomplish as well as what they need to work on. Also, I will know what exercises are effective to a specific classroom [and] what might need to be altered. (guided reflection, March 5, 2010)

This statement shows that Matt was thinking about the effectiveness of activities and teaching procedures in relation to student success. In the section about what he might do differently, Matt responded with how he would alter activities and teaching procedures. When asked how the guided reflection process helped him, Matt said, “Being forced to answer that question, I think, is probably the one thing that has been the most enlightening

for me from those forms, and from any method (interview, March 10, 2010).

**Attitude toward reflective practice.** Toward the beginning of the study, Matt felt that most teachers would not naturally choose to reflect on their teaching unless they were forced to at some point. Having reflected in a number of undergraduate courses, Matt still did not feel that he engaged in reflective practice automatically – “having this format...having to [reflect] for classes...helps you to realize how valuable it is, and how much you gain from it as a teacher” (interview, March 10, 2010). Matt continued to explain that he feels reflecting “can be just as beneficial for your students as it is for you” (interview, March 10, 2010). Later in the interview, he said that reflection made him think more about how he will assess student achievement as opposed to just thinking about what activities he teaches.

When asked about his confidence in continued post-graduation reflection, Matt said that he felt he still had “a long ways to go,” and without someone guiding him, Matt anticipated having to video record his lessons in order to “physically go back and watch [his] teaching” for later self-assessment (interview, March 24, 2010). Matt has experience watching, reflecting, and evaluating videos of his own teaching, which has made him feel comfortable about using the same process in the future.

## **Discussion**

### **Summary of Findings and Themes**

The purpose of this case study was to examine the reflective processes of one pre-service music teacher across two consecutive teaching placements. Through the analysis of guided reflections, interviews, and classroom observations, I determined six themes that

encompassed the participant's responses, thoughts, and actions. The first theme that emerged was the participant's preparation and lesson/rehearsal planning. Citing participant responses related to planning, instructional procedures, and classroom activities, I found that Matt was concerned with how activities in the classroom coincided with student learning goals. He planned lessons and rehearsals on his own, as well as in conjunction with his cooperating teachers on a regular basis.

Matt also was highly focused on student progress, creating lessons and activities that promoted high levels of music achievement. Matt reflected on individual and group assessment in his guided reflections:

During the film I should have had them filling out some sort of work that showed me that they were all making the connections...If I were to do a similar activity [in the future] I will know that a worksheet with the film will allow me to better assess their understanding of the film, work, and composer, as well as the relationship of the instruments to characters. (guided reflection, March 12, 2010)

Experience in the classroom was an important factor in Matt's student teaching success. Having the opportunity to teach from the beginning of his placement, Matt felt comfortable with the students and became successful in executing his lessons. He cited theories learned in prior coursework as having a positive influence on his teaching, and these findings parallel those from previous research in which "students made connections between course content and field-teaching experiences" (Berg & Lind, 2003, pp. 21-22). Siebenaler (2005) also reported that students found a number of the learned teaching strategies helpful when applying the concepts to classroom teaching.

Classroom management was an ongoing concern for Matt, as evidenced by both interviews and a number of guided reflections, in which he discussed student behavior,

spacing, travel time, and materials as key factors when preparing for upcoming lessons. However, student behavior and its effect on planning was an even greater concern in Matt's second placement. Results of a study by Poulou (2007) indicated that classroom management was one of the greatest concerns among student teachers and that prospective teachers were especially concerned with student behavior at the beginning of their teaching practice. This may explain Matt's apprehension throughout his experience, noting that his placement changed after only eight weeks.

Extra-musical concerns, including duties not directly pertaining to the classroom, were subjects for discussion during the interview process. Matt wished that he was more prepared to deal with such issues as relationships with administrators, added teaching responsibilities, and after-school duties. Studies on teacher retention have revealed similar issues. Interviews with beginning teachers showed that novices were concerned with creating positive parent, colleague, and administrative relationships (McCann, Johannessen, & Ricca, 2005). Interview responses from the same study also indicated that new teachers were concerned with time management and workload, which could be negatively affected by the addition of extra teaching responsibilities and after school duties.

Written reflections are often cited as an effective form of reflective practice (Canning, 1991; Husu, 2008; Swain, 1998), and although Matt used multiple forms of reflection throughout his student teaching experience, he described the written reflections as being the most effective. Matt stated that the guided prompts in the written reflections forced him to focus on certain areas of his teaching that he otherwise would not have

thought about so intently, such as instructional procedures and continuous student assessment.

### **Research Questions**

In preparing this project, I set out to answer questions pertaining to student teacher reflection, and found that Matt was very focused on his class activities and their relation to learning goals and student achievement. Through my observations, I was able to deconstruct teaching sequences for Matt and offer feedback about his instructional procedures. His reflections continued to focus on how his teaching made a difference in student achievement.

Matt had the same focus in relation to my second question: How do a pre-service teacher's reflective thoughts play a role in future teaching episodes? He was able to learn from activities and class procedures, altering them in some way to increase success in the classroom. Learning from past experiences also influenced Matt's approach to classroom management, as he cited this as the basis for numerous discussions with his cooperating teacher at the middle school level. Matt and his cooperating teachers altered teaching procedures and planned lessons based on the need to correct student behavior. Improving classroom management, in turn, affected overall student achievement.

Matt was equally concerned with learning student names, meeting faculty members and administrators, and acquainting himself with school procedures when moving from one placement to the next. Matt stated his apprehension for transitioning from planning half-hour general music lessons to hour-long ensemble rehearsals. His schedule at the elementary school was full, with little time built into the day for planning and reflection. During the first interview, Matt was concerned that his second placement

would be similar. However, he found that his cooperating teacher was able to make time for joint reflection and planning each day, both during and after school.

I found that Matt enjoyed reflective practice and found it very helpful. He was most affected by the outcome of the guided reflections because they prompted him to think about specific areas of his teaching. Matt also employed multiple forms of reflection, such as thinking about his teaching, talking with his cooperating teachers, and discussing my observations. When asked about his ability to reflect and improve his teaching in the future, Matt felt that prior coursework and the student teaching experience gave him the necessary tools to be productive and effective in evaluating his teaching.

### **Lessons Learned and Future Research**

A number of important ideas emerged from this study, the most prevalent of which was that of the participant's attitude toward the reflective process. Matt found the reflective process to be helpful and an important factor in improving his own teaching. Both the self-reflection and verbal reflections with his cooperating teachers proved to be beneficial in Matt's growth as a teacher. His use of multiple reflective practices supports previous research that shows teachers are capable of using numerous forms of reflection to assess their teaching (Husu, 2008). However, of all the forms of reflection in which he engaged, Matt found the written, guided reflections most helpful. This is an important finding for determining self-assessment activities for student teachers. The present study shows that guiding teachers' reflection with specific prompts was an important factor in creating a successful reflective experience for the participant. Further investigation may determine whether or not guided, written reflections elicit more specific and well-

constructed thoughts by novice teachers than do traditional open-ended formats, such as journals.

Teaching in two different areas of music throughout the student teaching process proved to be a very positive experience for Matt, which he felt helped prepare him to teach multiple types of music courses. He may not have had the same range of teaching experiences if he were at only one placement for the entire period. Matt's experiences at both locations increased his comfort level of adapting to a multitude of classroom situations and to any teaching position or classroom. I anticipated more apprehension before switching placements, but found that Matt was more excited than nervous for the upcoming opportunity.

Future studies including multiple student teachers seem warranted, given Matt's successes with teacher relationships, classroom instruction, and confidence in teaching. Cross-referencing the reflective practices and attitudes toward multiple placements of more than one student teacher may provide a better understanding of how student teachers think and feel. Including cooperating teachers' evaluations of the student teacher may be beneficial in explaining the student teacher's success in planning and sequencing instruction in the classroom. Although my observations were included in the analysis, I was not with Matt on a daily basis. Cooperating teachers may be able to offer more details to support the findings of this study.

Changing the prompts to the guided reflection for the second placement might be beneficial in determining, to a greater extent, how the student teacher feels about the change in placement. In this study, the second interview with the participant took place about two weeks after the change. Asking the student teacher to reflect on the new

placement specifically in their written reflections may offer a greater explanation of how they were affected by the change. Siebenaler (2005) changed the prompts to four different reflections that were given to students at different points throughout the teaching experience. By responding to the changing the prompts, teachers were guided to reflect on different areas of their teaching, which may be beneficial in eliciting a broader spectrum of responses from novice teachers.

### **Implications for Music Education**

Knowing how student teachers critique their own instruction is important for music educators (Siebenaler, 2005). Guided reflections, interviews, and classroom observations are useful methods of assessment for teachers when determining student teacher progress. Asking student teachers to write down how they feel and what they think about their teaching requires them to think critically about their progress in the classroom. Writing their reflective thoughts also helps novice teachers to transfer practices and theories from methods courses and field experience to student teaching (Berg & Lind, 2003; Siebenaler, 2005). Transfer does not appear to be an automatic process (Duke, 2005), thus, guiding students with prompts and discussions to make these connections is important. Through student teaching and other classroom experiences, novice teachers learn to reflect and apply what they have learned.

Findings from this study help support the dual-placement practice for student teaching. The participant found that having experiences at two placements was helpful and necessary in preparing him for future teaching positions. Matt's confidence in his ability to teach a wide range of ages and multiple areas of music grew because of his success in these different teaching situations. This is extremely important considering the current



state of music teacher positions in public school education that often require teachers to instruct various age levels and multiple areas of music. In the present study, having success in different teaching environments gave a novice teacher both confidence and experience when applying for and beginning a new teaching position.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Because I had access to student teachers through my position as a university supervisor, I was able to find a willing participant easily. Although I was not the teacher of record for the participant, my role as a mentor may have influenced his responses to reflective prompts and interview questions. In the future, it may be beneficial to study participants with whom the researcher had no prior relationship.

The limited time frame of this study should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results of this project. If I had started at the beginning of the student teaching experience and followed through until the end (a span of sixteen weeks), I may have obtained a better description of how the reflective process changed. Also, comparing final reflections and observations to the initial experiences at the first placement may have brought about different or altered themes related to the experience. Furthermore, a longitudinal study may be more beneficial in describing a more detailed experience.

Reflective practice in novice teachers is an important process for promoting self-assessment and evaluation of classroom procedures. Continuing reflection throughout their teaching career may promote continued growth in teachers' effectiveness in the classroom. This study illuminated the reflective processes of one student teacher in music education. Examining additional pre-service teachers may be helpful towards adapting

more effective methods of teaching self-evaluation and reflection in the music education curriculum.

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## Appendix A

## Pre-Service Teacher Reflection

Below are a number of questions/statements to guide your reflective thoughts as you self-analyze your teaching. Focus on ONE class period from this week for which you prepared and taught a lesson.

Date:

Grade/Class Taught:

1. Describe your thoughts as you prepared for today's class.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What were your concerns about working with this class?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Explain how your students responded to your teaching.

4. What about your teaching went well? Explain why you thought YOU were successful.

5. How might this be helpful to your future teaching episodes?

6. What about your teaching did not go as well as you had hoped? Explain why you thought YOU were not as successful.

7. How might this be helpful to your future teaching episodes?

6. Are there any concepts or instructional processes from previous coursework or field experience that you were able to apply to your lesson?