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Music in the Early Childhood Curriculum: Qualitative Analysis of Pre-Service Teachers' Reflective Writing

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Abstract

This qualitative study employed grounded theory to explore how a university-based summer practicum experience with community children ($N=55$) revealed and shaped pre-service teachers' ($N=24$) understanding of young children and their musical skills and dispositions; how early childhood music curriculum is designed; and supports and barriers to music instruction. We learned that a collaborative professional setting, training and mentoring, and access to developmentally appropriate music curriculum resources scaffolded pre-service teachers' abilities to develop a music unit within the curriculum. These university students gained understanding and appreciation for the music theme's connection to academic content and how music bridged cultural boundaries. We also observed contrasts in students' musical self-efficacy that seemed

to be related to their perceptions of the children's musical interests. Continued teacher education research is needed to discern the pre-service preparation that yields curriculum and teaching suffused with rich and joyous music learning experiences for young children.

Introduction

Early childhood professionals understand the inherent musicality of children and the importance of providing environments and experiences that nurture aesthetic development. Children's access to music and movement activities is a dimension of quality in early childhood programs. Arts-rich early childhood environments provide experiences with diverse types of music and include many musical materials that can be accessed by each child. Excellent programs provide daily group musical activities; free choice times to exhibit creativity; and regularly extend children's understanding of music through exploring musical concepts and experiences with musicians (Bond, 2015; Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2014). Developmentally appropriate practices include daily opportunities for creative expression and aesthetic appreciation that are integrated throughout planned and unplanned experiences. Music, especially in the preschool classroom, is also recognized as an important support for physical development as children inherently incorporate movement into their encounters with music. As children grow, teachers intentionally provide more experiences with music media and musical techniques, joyfully highlighting the elements of music in ways that children can understand (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Early childhood teacher education recognizes the place of music in the curriculum. Many teacher preparation programs in both the United States and other countries include coursework underscoring the value of music and the other arts as well as instruction and practice using effective music teaching strategies (Berke & Colwell, 2004; Naughton & Lines, 2013; Russell-Bowie, 2009; Vannatta-Hall, 2010).

Trained music specialists should be involved in planning and providing children's music education, but it is also important for the classroom teacher to be both confident and competent in leading music learning experiences and integrating music throughout children's daily activities (Naughton & Lines, 2013; Russell-Bowie, 2009; Vannatta-Hall, 2010). While having a trained music specialist in the school is ideal, in reality music specialists are not available in many schools in the United States and other countries. Serious equity gaps exist in the availability of trained music specialists and the variety and quality of music programs. Therefore, in many settings, the classroom teacher carries sole responsibility for designing and leading music instruction (Miksza & Gault, 2014; Nardo, Custodero, Persellin, & Brink Fox, 2006; Nierman, 2005).

While teacher educators seem to agree that music is an important component of preservice teacher preparation, great variability exists among both pre-service and in-service teachers' integration of music into the curriculum (Abril & Gault, 2005; Berke & Colwell, 2004; Bridges, 2012; Miksza & Gault, 2014; Miranda, 2004; Russell-Bowie, 2009). The apparent disconnect between what teacher educators recommend and the types of music experiences that teachers actually provide (or choose not to provide) warrants more research to help preservice teacher education support confidence and competence in leading children's exploration of music and acquisition of musical understanding.

Our study emerged from evaluating a summer program offered as a practicum for preservice early childhood education students. It explores pre-service teachers' thinking about music in early childhood education as revealed in their reflective writing during the course of the practicum. This paper focuses upon how the practicum experience revealed and shaped pre-service teachers' understanding of young children and their musical skills and dispositions, how early childhood music curriculum is designed, and supports and barriers to music instruction.

Related Literature

Music in Early Education Environments

The subject of music is perhaps one of the strongest examples of how children's experiences, individual traits, environmental affordances, and teacher characteristics intersect to either promote or hinder development. Research continues to recognize that humans are musical beings (Trehub, 2001) and that music-making "permeates the life of the young child" (Nardo, Custodero, Persellin, & Brink Fox, 2006, p. 278). Kim and Kemple (2011) explored the role of music as an "active developmental tool" (p. 135) that supports a broad array of cognitive and psychosocial domains. Music and other arts can positively impact students' cognition (Eisner, 2002; Gardner, 1983) as well as their school-related attitudes, behavior, social skills (Hallam, 2010; Kern, Wolery, & Aldridge, 2007), and language acquisition (Paquette & Reig, 2008).

Music holds great educational value as a distinct subject as well as rich possibilities for integration with other subject areas (Barry, 2010; Burton, Horowitz, & Abeles, 1999; Deasy, 2002; Fisher & McDonald, 2004). The most effective arts-integration programs represent both high-quality instruction *in* music as well as rich opportunities for learning other subjects *through* music:

The bottom line for all discussion is that there is a growing body of evidence that music (and visual art, movement/dance, and drama) is essential for students. Additionally, teaching/learning in any discipline is an essential prerequisite to

teaching/ learning through that discipline. Strong music programs featuring sequential instruction of age-appropriate concepts and skills must be firmly in place before there is any consideration of infusion or integration across the curriculum. (Snyder, 2001, p. 33)

Budget Cuts and Influence of High-Stakes Testing

In today's early childhood classrooms, opportunities to engage in authentic music activities have diminished. Persellin (2007) reported that the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has presented significant challenges to early childhood music education with 71% of the nation's fifteen thousand school districts reducing time for music and other subjects to make more time for reading and math.

Equity Gap

An equity gap in which students in some demographic categories have far fewer educational opportunities compared to other more privileged students is another serious concern associated with budget cuts and program reductions (Darling-Hammond, Friedlaender, & Snyder, 2014). Students' access to music instruction is disproportionately related to their "school urbanicity (urban, suburban, rural), socioeconomic status (SES), and race/ethnicity" (Miksza & Gault, 2014, p. 5). Results of a recent National Center for Education Statistics (Parsad & Spiegelman, 2012) nationwide arts survey indicated that while there have not been significant overall national declines in the availability of music and visual arts instruction in elementary and secondary schools, there are severe disparities based upon school and student demographics.

Most troubling is an "equity gap" between the availability of arts instruction as well as the richness of course offerings for students in low-poverty schools compared to those in high-poverty schools, leading students who are economically disadvantaged to not get the enrichment experiences of affluent students. (Brenchly, 2012, para. 4)

Role of the Classroom Teacher

In a challenging music education context, it seems logical to consider the role that the classroom teacher plays in affording children the benefits of musical experiences. Regardless of whether a school has access to a music specialist, classroom teachers should incorporate music throughout the curriculum and increase children's repertoire of both melodies and lyrics as well as their understanding of concepts such as pitch, rhythm, and tempo (Bridges, 2012; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Despite the responsibility of the early childhood teacher to include music as an essential component of the curriculum, many have difficulty incorporating music and leading children in musical activities. Research suggests that teachers' attitudes about the value of music in education, as well as their perceptions of their own musical ability are important factors related to their willingness to include music in their class activities, the type of musical experiences that they provide for their students, and the effectiveness of their teaching strategies (Abril & Gault, 2005; Berke & Colwell, 2004; Bridges, 2012; Giles & Frego, 2004; Kim & Kemple, 2011; Miksza & Gault, 2014; Miranda, 2004; Russell-Bowie, 2009; Valerio, & Freeman, 2009). Clearly, more research is needed to inform our understanding of how best to prepare teachers to lead their students in high-quality music experiences with joy and confidence. This study is designed as one step toward filling this gap in the literature.

Research Methods and Procedures

The Research Team

The researchers are faculty colleagues at the same public university in the Southeastern United States – a male Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education and a female Music Education Professor. The Early Childhood professor is also an accomplished musician and was the instructor of the Early Childhood Practicum course that was the setting for this study. He also co-authored a curriculum guide used in the practicum. The Music Education professor was not directly involved with the course, but visited the Summer Enrichment classroom to observe the activities and participated throughout the research process. Our different roles provided a good balance between the Early Childhood professor's insider knowledge of the course and the Music Education professor's objectivity due to lack of any direct involvement with this course. Being colleagues at the same university facilitated frequent face-to-face meetings throughout the data analysis process (as well as numerous email exchanges and phone conversations).

Participants

Twenty-four upper-division undergraduate students majoring in Early Childhood Education participated. These students had completed one semester (17 credit hours) within the early childhood teacher licensure program and had taken an introductory curriculum theory course, a reading methods course, a science and math methods course, a technology course, and an initial course in special education. The summer practicum that included preschool and primary age groups was their first direct experience teaching young children facilitated by the university program. Prior to the beginning of the teaching practicum, students had three weeks of coursework including readings, lectures, and discussion about curriculum development, child guidance, and developmentally appropriate practice. In addition, the students received four hours of training provided by Teaching Strategies, LLC on the Teaching Strategies GOLD Assessment System (Heroman, Burts, Berke, & Bickart, 2010). This authentic

assessment is widely used (Ackerman & Coley, 2012) and is an observation-based teacher-rating tool used to assess children birth – kindergarten in major domains of learning and development (Heroman, Burts, Berke, & Bickart, 2010; Lambert, Kim, & Burts, 2014). The students assigned to the preschool age classroom also received two hours of training on the *Creative Curriculum for Preschool, 5th edition* (Heroman, Dodge, Berke & Bickart, 2010).

Setting

Our study was set in an on-campus summer enrichment program that offers a needed service for the community, a small college town in the Southeast, and also provides a valuable teaching practicum for our early childhood students. The program's guiding philosophy is based largely upon a constructivist approach to early childhood education. Fifty-five children were enrolled in the program, divided into two separate classrooms -- preschool (children ages 3.5 – 5.5) and primary (children ages 5.5 - 8). The program operated Monday – Thursday, 7:45 a.m. until noon for six weeks.

The 24 university students were divided equally and assigned to one of the two classrooms, preschool or primary. As the program progressed, they rotated through three collaborative teams, each having distinct responsibilities:

- Curriculum – planning and conducting daily large and small group experiences
- Interest areas – planning and maintaining the physical environment and interest areas to support children's engagement and the ongoing project investigation
- Assessment – observing, collecting documentation artifacts, and assessment information about children; documenting large and small group teaching experiences for teacher reflection; composing weekly parent communication

The course instructor and program director selected music as the central theme for the program. University coursework had prepared students to guide children toward learning experiences by exploring musical topics. This emergent curriculum method is based upon the “project approach” (Helm & Katz, 2011) where either the teacher, the children, or the teacher with the children develop a project that recognizes children's interests, existing knowledge, and provides opportunities for children to investigate the topic and link to learning goals. In the preschool classroom, student teachers also received *The Creative Curriculum* study guide, *Music and Music Making* (Baker, Berke, & Durham, 2014). *The Creative Curriculum*. study guides provide a framework for the development of a topic investigation, a weekly “at a glance” lesson plan overview, detailed but flexible daily plans for large and small group experiences, suggestions for classroom interest areas, suggestions for parental involvement, and opportunities for authentic assessment.

The music study guide provided advice on teaching music concepts, instructions for stimulating children's interests through "wow experiences," and lists of common items useful for exploring the science of music. Pacing for developing the project was supplied through a suggested web of investigations and an ongoing "question of the day" (e.g., "What do we know about music and what do we want to find out?"; "What instruments can we play by hitting, tapping, or shaking them?"; "Did you hear music on your way to school today?"). University students initiated the project as detailed in the study guide and were given the option to eventually customize the study based upon emerging questions and interests of the children.

The children were very interested in musical performances and the places where music is performed. Many of the children used musical instruments, (e.g., rhythm sticks, castanets, cymbals, guitars, small electric keyboards) that had been placed throughout the environment for performing alone, in groups, and for peers. Based upon this observed interest, the teachers arranged a field trip to the university theatre to see where performances were held. Children explored the areas of the stage, recorded details with the assistance of teachers, and produced drawings of stage equipment, lighting, curtains, backdrops, etc. The students also arranged a visit to a performance hall to hear a vocal music major sing an opera excerpt. These experiences prompted the children to expand the music topic to include an investigation of stages, props, lighting, and backdrops and other components of performance venues. As their exploration of musical performance emerged, children expressed a desire to recreate a stage within the classroom where they could share performances of music and drama. Ultimately, small groups of children created various adaptations of favorite books into skits and songs, used multiple media to make their own musical "instruments" (some were not playable but were children's representations of real instruments), and transformed an area of the classroom into a pretend music store. On the last day of the program, families were invited to celebrate the children's work by viewing performances on the stage the children had constructed and visiting the music store to use child-made currency (and even credit cards) to purchase the music-related items the children had made. Over refreshments, families were encouraged to review extensive displays documenting the process of their children's research.

Data Source

University students' journals submitted electronically throughout the course were the primary data source for our study. Any identifiable personal information was deleted from the transcripts prior to data analysis and student names were replaced with pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. There were three sets of electronic journals per university student for every two weeks of the six-week practicum experience, resulting in over 140 pages of text.

Data Analysis

We employed qualitative research methodology to examine university students' written reactions to assignments and practicum experiences in conjunction with the summer early childhood course and practicum. A qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate for our goal to develop “strategies and procedures to enable [us] to consider experiences from the informants’ perspectives” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 7). Our emerging understanding of the data was based upon a *grounded theory approach*. Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) examines data (participants’ own words in their journal entries) from a sociological perspective to generate theory and ground resulting arguments made in subsequent analyses. While grounded theory methodology may be interpreted somewhat differently depending upon the perspectives of different researchers, we elected to follow procedural steps as outlined by Age (2011):

1. We began with an “attitude of openness” (p. 1600) toward emerging concepts.
2. We engaged in a collaborative, open coding process, gradually generating various categories through a process of constant comparison.
3. By comparing concept to concept, we eventually established overarching core categories.
4. Our collaborative selective coding process eventually yielded theoretical memos that “represent immediate notations of emerging ideas about categories and how they inter-relate”. (p. 1600).
5. Once theoretical codes began to emerge, we initiated the theoretical writing process in which “all the details of the substantive theory are brought together in an overall conceptual description that is then integrated with . . . the extant literature on the subject”. (p. 1600)

The above procedures represent a cyclical *on-going process* of collaboration and deliberation rather than a distinct sequence of separate activities. We used Atlas.ti (a qualitative software package) throughout our data analysis to help us record and manage our coding process, and ultimately organize emerging themes. We continued working through this process until theoretical saturation was achieved.

Findings

Our data analysis process yielded five main themes that help us describe and explain the university pre-service teachers’ perceptions of their experiences with integrating music into the early childhood summer practicum curriculum:

- Wonderful Learning Experience

- Musical Self Efficacy
- Bridging Cultural Boundaries
- Developmentally Appropriate Music Curriculum
- Making Connections

Wonderful Learning Experience

Students generally expressed many more positive perceptions of the experience than negative. Their most positive statements consistently related to enjoying working with children and having collaborative relationships with their peers. Negative statements tended to express frustrations about working with a large teaching team and feeling overwhelmed with the responsibilities of planning and teaching along with other academic (and sometimes personal) responsibilities.

It has definitely been a wonderful learning experience. It's interesting to me how much cooperation between my classmates and our teams has played a role in the success of this experience. I have really enjoyed getting to experience the wide variety of personalities in my peers, as well as the children we work with. It has been so interesting to begin expanding the idea of music and making music with the children, and learning where each of their particular interests are. [Bella, Journal Weeks 1 – 2]

It is not surprising that these university students greatly enjoyed the opportunity to work with children during the practicum. Research shows that pre-service teachers' attitudes about music in the early childhood curriculum can be positively affected by appropriate field experiences (Kim & Kemple, 2011). Situations in which teacher education students engage in planning, leading, and participating in children's musical learning experiences promote positive attitudes about the value of music in the curriculum and boost teachers' confidence about leading children in music activities (Valerio & Freeman, 2009; Vannatta-Hall, 2010).

Musical Self Efficacy

While students enjoyed the opportunity to engage with the children in creative music activities, many also expressed trepidation about their own perceived lack of musical training and/ or "talent."

Personally, I have struggled with the whole music theme. I have never played an instrument so my background knowledge on music is lacking. It has been really difficult for me to stay engaged with the music theme because I have not had many previous experiences to relate to. [Mona, Journal Weeks 3 – 4]

These findings are consistent with research showing that teachers' attitudes about music in their classrooms are influenced by their own level of musical self-efficacy (Bainger, 2010; Russell-Bowie, 2009; Valerio, & Freeman, 2009; Vannatta-Hall, 2010). Kim and Kemple's (2011) work seems particularly relevant to our study, showing that beliefs about the importance of music in early childhood education are related to personal experiences, field experiences, teacher education coursework, and confidence in teachers' ability to implement music activities.

Children Do Not Like Music

An interesting, and rather surprising, sub-theme that emerged is the way that several university students (typically those expressing less confidence and/or personal interest in music) concluded that the children did not "like" music because of the ways that the children were responding to their teaching:

Even though a lot of things are going good there are many things that have been difficult. One thing that has been most challenging is trying to get the boys interested in music. We have gotten them interested in building the music store but in the beginning they had no interest in anything except for paper airplanes. [Alaina, Journal Weeks 3 – 4]

An unforeseen challenge was keeping all children interested in the topic. After a few lessons, the teachers discovered many children had absolutely no interest in music and did not care to pay attention to the lessons, or to do activities that involved music related things. [Anastasia, Journal Weeks 5 – 6]

The Korean kids in our class also do not seem to have much exposure to music because collectively they seem to have little interest in the music theme. [Claudia, Journal Weeks 3 – 4]

I have also observed several children who do not like music. It has been hard to find aspects of music that interest all of the children. [Mona, Journal Weeks 3 – 4]

Cases in which our university students concluded that children did not like music are consistent with research showing powerful relationships between low musical self-efficacy and negative personal music experiences and teachers' attitudes about music in their classrooms (Kim & Kemple, 2011; Ruismaki & Tereska, 2006; Russell-Bowie, 2009). These pre-service teachers may have been transferring their own negative attitudes about music to the children.

Bridging Cultural Boundaries

In contrast to those who came to believe that the children did not like music, other students wrote about powerful ways that music helped bridge cultural boundaries.

An unexpected award was working with Jasmine. She came into the class not speaking any English, or communicating with the teachers. During one of my lessons, I paired her with Matthew and had them categorize cards with pictures of instruments on them based on their physical properties and characteristics. As I observed them working together, I saw that when Matthew held up a picture, Jasmine said it in English. For example, she said “Piano” when Mark held up the card with a picture of a piano. It was such a reward seeing that she has been understanding English words during the past few weeks, and was comprehending the lessons about music. [Valerie, Journal Weeks 5 – 6]

One of the main challenges was the language barrier. It was really hard to engage children in the curriculum when they had no idea what you were saying. However, this also ties into the unforeseen rewards. I went through the majority of this program thinking Jasmine wasn’t getting anything from it because she didn’t know what I was saying, nor did I understand him. However, this last week, Jasmine started singing our welcome song... in English. Though this was such a simple thing, it was a huge reward to me because it showed that she was getting bits and pieces after all. [Bella, Journal Weeks 5 – 6]

While viewing music as the “universal language” may be cliché, research clearly supports the important role of music in bridging cultural boundaries with students from diverse cultures (Kelly-McHale, 2013; Paquette & Reig, 2008) and for students with special needs (Kern, Wolery, & Aldridge, 2007). Since a large percentage of the children enrolled in the summer practicum were from homes in which English was not the primary language, using music as a way to transcend language emerged as a prominent theme throughout the journals.

Developmentally Appropriate Music Curriculum

The music theme provided opportunities to construct knowledge about dimensions of developmentally appropriate practice including “intentional teaching,” evaluating the effectiveness of a curriculum, and integrating music across content areas. Students most consistently reported learning outcomes related to curriculum, classroom environment, and instructional delivery.

I learned that if their [sic] is a curriculum, a good developmentally appropriate one like ours, it should be followed. My group decided to deviate since it was the beginning of

the program, and we had some really great moments, but I think their [sic] could have been more if we had stuck more to the curriculum. I think our study of music would have progressed farther if we had. This is a mistake I learned from for sure. [Margaret, Journal Weeks 1-2]

High-quality teacher resources supported the students' confidence and preparation of the musical thematic unit. Students consistently expressed confidence in having the Curriculum Guides to support their planning and teaching.

My classroom used The Creative Curriculum during our weeks of practicum so I was guided along in my day's lessons. I took advantage of the Mighty Minutes, and Book Discussion Cards along with the Teaching Guide. Mighty Minutes were amazing when it came to transitions and even when planning the large group lessons. I was able to tie music and the other aspects of our study to Mighty Minute cards and that made a world of difference. [Suzanne, Journal Weeks 5 – 6]

The *Creative Curriculum* teaching guides provided a strong foundation for planning and leading developmentally appropriate music experiences for young children. The guides also seemed to be a source of great confidence for the pre-service teachers, providing a support system so that even those students lacking musical knowledge and skills could have a solid foundation for their planning. It seems likely that having the curriculum guides as a touchstone contributed to their general perception that this was a "wonderful learning experience." Our study with pre-service teachers is consistent with Bainger's (2010) work showing that comprehensive and collaborative professional development can bring about positive changes in early childhood teachers' attitudes about music in their classrooms.

Making Connections: A Thematic Approach to Music Integration

The value of a thematic approach to integrating music into the early childhood curriculum emerged as a prominent theme in journal entries. This was particularly evident within writings from the later stages of the practicum as students reported that music became a unifying theme for cross-curricular learning.

Music has led into just about every interest area of our classroom, and whereas the students may have not been interested in the theme early in the practicum I have since seen them emerging themselves in the music store and creating instruments. The children are making connections even when they are doing something as simple as tapping their feet, and realizing they are keeping a beat. Also, I feel like the music store has really taken off. [Brazile, Journal Weeks 3 – 4]

At the beginning of the program, one child stated that he was not interested in music at all, he simply was only interested in snakes and eels. However, as the study progressed, he began to make connections between the music snakes made (rattlesnakes with their rattle) and music. This connection began to form when the children made shakers one day. It was so cool to see one child, who before was not interested at all, begin to find a way to connect to the theme. This connection was fostered by teachers showing him respect, and letting him explore his interests as well. I can't wait to see what other discoveries the children make, and what projects continue to emerge as the weeks progress. [Bella, Journal Weeks 1 – 2]

These findings are consistent with the literature (e.g., Nardo, Custodero, Persellin, & Brink Fox, 2006) showing that early childhood teachers generally agree “that music plays an important role and can be both fun and educational for young children” (Bainger, 2010, p. 17). However, while teachers seem to value and even enjoy teaching other subjects through *connections* with music, the level at which they value and actively teach music skills and concepts seems to be largely related to their own musical self-efficacy and negative or positive perceptions of their own childhood experiences with music (Bainger, 2010; Kim & Kemple, 2011; Ruismaki & Tereska, 2006).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The early childhood practicum functioned as a worthwhile summer learning experience for both university students and children. Even those few students who expressed a great deal of frustration with the practicum acknowledged that they benefitted personally and professionally from this “wonderful learning experience” in music curriculum planning and teaching for young children. Their positive reactions to working with the children provided a stimulating (sometimes challenging) environment to support their learning and to help them gain enough confidence to begin to venture out of their comfort zone and move beyond their own perceived limitations about leading music activities. As Bainger (2010) observed, a collaborative and supportive environment can help increase teachers’ “willingness to be active musically with their children” and contributes to “a marked increase in the quantity and quality of the musical experiences and learning of the children in their care” (p. 26).

In a few situations, university students’ lack of confidence and experience with music seemed to taint their perceptions of the children’s interest in and enjoyment of music, and may have limited their willingness to include music activities in their teaching. As the literature illustrates, teachers who lack confidence in their own musical abilities and/ or have had negative experiences with music during their own childhood tend to use music less frequently; and even when they include music, tend to be more limited in the types of music experiences

that they make available to the children in their classes (Kim & Kemple, 2011; Ruismaki & Tereska, 2006; Russell-Bowie, 2009).

Professional development for teaching early childhood music that includes rich opportunities for collaboration with musical novices and more accomplished musicians can be an effective way to overcome those negative perceptions (Bainger, 2010; Naughton & Lines, 2013). As we plan future courses, it may be useful to be more deliberate in matching our university student teaching teams so that levels of music experience will be well distributed. Another approach could be a collaborative pairing of our music education majors with the early childhood majors. Additional research is needed to design professional development that will empower both pre-service and in-service classroom teachers to provide frequent and varied learning experiences both *in* and *through* music (Snyder, 2001).

Over the course of the practicum, many university students came to view music as a “bridge” for cultural boundaries. However, their very strong (and often negative) reactions about trying to communicate with children who did not speak English are rich data warranting additional consideration. The effectiveness of future practicum experiences could be enhanced by providing more background and on-going support for working with English language learners. There are many gaps in the literature. Additional research is needed to help teacher educators better prepare pre-service teachers to meet the educational needs of diverse student populations. More focused studies about the role of music in both celebrating and bridging cultural differences, and connections between music and children’s language learning are needed.

Our study revealed that faculty guidance and resources for developmentally appropriate early childhood music curriculum served as touchstones for all students and may have been particularly essential for those students with low musical self-efficacy. Continued emphasis upon best practice in music in the early childhood classroom along with faculty support, training, and access to curriculum materials is recommended for all university courses that include teaching practica and field experiences. Additional research is needed to inform us about how best to empower classroom teachers to include a rich variety of developmentally appropriate music resources and experiences for their students.

The practicum was based upon a thematic approach integrating music with other content areas. The university students were generally keen to take up this approach and, by the end of the practicum, came to appreciate the many cross-curricular “connections” that the children discovered through their experiences. Our findings support the value and effectiveness of a thematic approach for early childhood field experiences and we recommend using a thematic emphasis in future practica. However, integrated approaches to teaching often are not

balanced across content areas and some subjects may be relegated to more of a supporting role. More research is needed to discover how best to equip teachers to integrate with integrity (Snyder, 2001) by honoring all subjects in a balanced and academically sound manner within a developmentally appropriate early childhood context.

This study provides insights as we continue to refine practicum experiences to support early childhood pre-service teachers in developing pedagogical knowledge, skills, and confidence in teaching music. We learned that working with young children in a collaborative setting, paired with training and access to resources for developmentally appropriate music curriculum, provided needed support for the pre-service teachers on their journey to incorporate the thematic music unit into the early childhood curriculum. Over the course of the practicum, these university students came to appreciate the way that the music theme “connected” with other subjects and how music could bridge cultural boundaries. However, we also observed differences in ways that students with greater musical self-efficacy perceived the practicum experience compared with those with lower musical self-efficacy. Additional research is needed to support both music and early childhood teacher educators in their mission to empower *all* early childhood teachers to infuse their curriculum with rich and joyous music learning experiences.

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