

FIRST-YEAR MUSIC TEACHERS' JOURNEYS OF PLACE CONSCIOUSNESS

BY

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DISSERTATION

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## ABSTRACT

Education scholars have noted the importance of contextual understanding in the development of teacher knowledge (Carlsen, 1999; Grossman, 1990; Shulman, 1987). Examining contextual knowledge through a lens of *place* brings together elements of history, culture, environment, and experience which provides a foundation for beginning teachers to better understand their classrooms, schools, and communities. Through the framework of critical place-conscious education, this study examined how music teachers formed this understanding of their teaching contexts and built relationships with others in their first year of teaching (Greenwood, 2013; Gruenewald, 2003, 2008a, 2008b). This study explored first-year music teachers' journeys of place consciousness within a new classroom, school, and community, and how they manifested this knowledge and understanding in their pedagogy. Research questions focused on how first-year music teachers developed place consciousness and how first-year music teachers enacted place consciousness in their pedagogical decisions.

In this multiple case study (Thomas, 2016), three music teachers, teaching band, choir, and general music in rural and urban settings shared their experiences during their first year of teaching. Data generation methods included semi-structured interviews, observations, voice memos, mapping, and collection of material culture.

Relationships with students, colleagues, previous music teachers, and parent and community organizations enlightened each teacher about the recent history of the schools and their music programs, students' home cultures, and community assets. Through the material resources and organization of their classrooms, each teacher formed evaluative assumptions about music education in their schools and communities and its curricular history. Time and experience cultivated meaningful growth of place consciousness. The transition to virtual

learning due to the COVID-19 led them to reinvent their learning communities with little transfer from their in-person classrooms.

The first-year teachers in this study enacted their place consciousness in their pedagogical decisions by performing specific and varied roles within their teaching contexts. They began to center students in their classroom organization, environment, and curricula and pursued communitarian aims. Two teachers sought to change classroom traditions and rituals they found to misalign with their understanding of place. Two teachers struggled with disorientation when they made pedagogical decisions before developing sufficient place consciousness to inform these decisions.

While each teacher encountered typical first-year struggles, they demonstrated reflective thinking and agency in their place-making decisions that were particularistic to each of their teaching contexts. Implications included the recognition of beginning teachers' power as place makers and their ability to critically evaluate their teaching contexts as places.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The summer before I started my doctoral studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, a woman veered off Oregon Street crashing into the retaining wall that separates the side walk from the basement level of the School of Music. Bricks cascaded into the music building's basement entryway, and her SUV hung perched where the wall used to be. No one was hurt, but many were shaken as they imagined what could have happened since the School of Music was, as always, lively with people.

When I arrived to Illinois to begin my coursework, I was excited to begin a new stage in my life and career. Time seemed to move slowly during that season. One day as I walked from the School of Music to my office in the Music Education Annex, time seemed to stand still as my mind came into sharp focus to my surroundings and the sensations they created. At that moment I had an epiphany, I realized I was absolutely content and absolutely unsettled. Like the crash to the wall behind the School of Music, coursework and my teaching assistantships caused a shock to my thinking that crumbled the structures that I had previously assumed to be true in music education. Over the next year, construction workers outside the music building worked rebuilt the wall, this time taller and with reinforcements, while I was inside reconstructing my understandings of music education, this time with openness, permeability, and flexibility.

In the last few months of my dissertation writing, I read Marcel Proust's novel *In Search of Lost Time*. In this novel, the nameless narrator experiences a series of epiphanies that bring about feelings as though he has been given a hint to the meaning of the world around him, but he is always unable to fully decipher its meaning. Near the end of the novel, he trips on a cobblestone instigating another epiphany. This time, he experiences a flood of memories of the people he has met throughout his life, and he realizes that his life gains meaning from the

interconnected relationships of these people. The interlocking relationships of his lifetime create such a complex and beautiful architecture in his mind that he feels the only appropriate label is a “cathedral.” As I reconstructed, renovated, and reinvigorated my thinking during my time at the University of Illinois, I was surrounded by many people who aided me to critically examine my blueprints and help me piece together the materials. These were the people who helped me to construct my own vibrant and imaginative “cathedral.”

Dr. Janet Revell Barrett accompanied me from the start to the finish of my journey at the University of Illinois. I have met with her almost weekly for the past five years. She was the person who called and invited me to Illinois for the first time, and the person who announced my acceptance. A picture was taken of her placing a U of I ballcap on my head when I made the decision to come to Illinois, and a picture will be taken as she places my doctoral hood on me as I leave. She welcomed me but never allowed me to become comfortable until it was warranted. When others had felt that I had done things “good enough,” Janet saw potential for better. She has helped me diversify my thinking, honed my writing, guided me to new potentialities, and to act pragmatically but with imagination. With so much sharpening comes tension, but it was through that tension that Janet and I became close. The amount of laughter, tears, frustration, and stories that has been shared was inconceivable to me when I arrived, but has become some of my most treasured memories from Illinois. While she always encouraged me to diversify and expand my research interests, I am amazed to discover how this dissertation study has always existed between the two of us. During my first semester, Janet assigned me to develop a philosophy in action project for her music education philosophy course. Three years later, I re-discovered Janet’s comments to me about this project I developed about place and music education:

Jon, this is quite an intriguing project...I can imagine many different shapes that this project could take. For example, I think it would make a great workshop or institute

session. Can you imagine how valuable this would be at the beginning of a new year of teaching if new teachers would attend a session like this?...Second, I can imagine this as an MEJ-type piece of some sort...In my opinion, that wouldn't be difficult in preparation for sending an article version for review...Third, I could see the potential of this as the experiential pathway for a research project. Imagine, for example, if you followed a handful of first-year teachers through a process like this, studying the ways that they not only collected the information and dimensions of space, experience, and time, but also what they did with it...Fourth, fifth, sixth—many possibilities!!!!

I have presented on the topic of place at conferences and to future teachers. I have published an article in the Music Educators Journal that evolved from that project, and now, I have completed an experiential study about place consciousness. Who knew such candid feedback would prophesy so much?

Dr. Adam Kruse re-invigorated my love of popular music and directed me toward pursuing not only its study but actually “doing the thing.” His popular music pedagogy class led me to a love of music production and DJing. If he had his way, my dissertation would have been a DJ performance at the Canopy Club in Urbana. Working alongside him led me to new understandings of professionalism, assessment, and student centeredness. I see his influence each day in my teaching and in my writing.

Dr. Jeananne Nichols reminded me that I loved band every time that I started to say otherwise. She demonstrated to me that academic writing could be literary and that stories were powerful. Once in a while she would respond to my cascades of words and rambling speech with a twinkle in her eye. That twinkle would make me feel brilliant.

Dr. Stephen Fairbanks pulled me aside and checked in with me every week. He saw me crumble more than once as I compared myself to others, but he always encouraged me to make my own path forward. He saw potential in my work and emboldened me to share it.

Dr. Bridget Sweet allowed me to tag along with her at conferences and introduced me to many people in music teacher education. Most of what I want to say about Bridget is wrapped in

pop-culture references and inside jokes. By teaching alongside her, I was able to gain a richer understanding of empathy, care, and balance that is deeply needed in our music classrooms.

Dr. Donna Gallo kept her office door open, allowing me to visit her unannounced. She always shared with me her sarcastic wit with a smile. She respected me as an emerging colleague, and brought me to her side as a friend.

Dr. Joyce McCall helped me to question my assumptions about people and then question them again. She opened my eyes to “do the work” and not to remain comfortable in abstract discussion.

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*To Channing P, Jen T, and Matt M*

*who fed me*

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It is not down on any map; true places never are.

—Herman Melville, *Moby Dick, or the Whale*

The places we have known do not only belong to the world of space on which we map them for our own convenience. They were only a thin slice, held between the contiguous impressions that composed our life at the time.

—Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time: Swann's Way*

### A Journey Begins

*After parking my car, I walked into the middle school office to sign in for a student teacher observation. I had visited this school before and easily navigated the hallways to the music room to see Vicky for her final classroom observation as her student teaching supervisor. Vicky's lesson had just begun. I sat down in the back of the room, opening my laptop to take notes to guide our discussion after her lesson was finished. I hoped my comments would help Vicky to think back on her entire student teaching experience and forward to her future in music education.*

*Vicky had been a student in one of the first courses I worked with as a teaching assistant at the university. In the subsequent two-and-a-half years, I had learned that she was a singer and songwriter and had even released some of her music online and filmed a music video. I often saw her name on the marquee of the music club near the music school. She participated in our music education class discussions courageously, especially advocating for marginalized student populations even though she herself was a straight White woman and sharing her experiences with stigmas associated with mental health. Vicky and I were comfortable around each other and seemed to have an easy and natural relationship as student teacher and supervisor.*

*At the time, Vicky taught in a middle school located in a low and middle class White neighborhood not far from the middle class White neighborhood where she grew up. In her prior*

*placement, she had taught in a different but nearby neighborhood that was primarily low and middle class and Black. After the lesson, Vicky and I found a place to talk about her lesson and her future. I began by asking, “How do you feel your lesson went?” She recounted her feelings about her teaching, and we discussed potential approaches to such a lesson in the future. Then I asked her about what she would like to do after graduation.*

*“I would like to move to LA and work on my singing career while working at a school. Do you think I could work in Compton?” Vicky asked.*

*“Uh...”*

*My head swam through what seemed like a thousand thoughts simultaneously as I sat there with my eyes wide and mouth open, racing through, “Is she capable of working in that environment? She worked with non-White students in her last school but...is Compton actually non-White? Are the movies, music, and news actually real about that town? I don’t know anything about Compton to answer this question except what I’ve been told by media and movies. Does she know anything about Compton? Why Compton? Why not Compton? Did the university prepare her to be able to work in Compton?”*

*Slowly, I began to ask Vicky some of these questions, but my mind did not slow. Frankly, I am not sure what Vicky answered or said in the minutes after she asked me that question. I ended my conversation with her with a resolute warning, “Please do not make any assumptions about that community or any community. Please do as much research as you can by looking at school and community websites and visiting. Do not trust what the media are telling you because it may not be true.” We ended our conversation, and I congratulated her on a successful semester of student teaching. I walked out of the school and drove home, all the while wondering*

*“Do we prepare Vicky or any of our music education students to actually teach anywhere they want to teach? Can we?”*

### **Locating the First-Year Music Teacher**

Music teachers at the beginning of their careers tend to replicate past experiences that they have deemed successful and influential in their emerging pedagogy (Dobbs, 2014; Powell & Parker, 2017). First-year teachers who replicate these past experiences may find that they do not transfer to new teaching contexts or that they may lead to outcomes differing from their expectations. This misalignment of expectations with the reality of a teacher’s environment is known as praxis shock. Ballantyne (2007b) explained praxis shock as a discrepancy between a teacher’s expectations and what they experience as the realities of their situation, which prompts the teacher to re-evaluate their assumptions about teaching. Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) described praxis shock as moments when teachers confront the “realities and responsibilities of being a classroom teacher,” which “puts their beliefs and ideas about teaching to the test, challenges some of them, and confirms others” (p. 105).

First-year music teachers often experience praxis shock (Ballantyne, 2007a). Frequently, this “shock” or “shattering” (p. 181) causes beginning teachers to focus on survival rather than on learning to teach more effectively. Beginning music teachers find themselves situated within an existing space and interacting with an already existing context. Their initial experiences cannot be separated or dislocated from the contexts within which they occur. First-year teachers’ entry and resulting socialization into their new school contexts cannot be conceived as an inert action but instead as cooperative. Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) suggest “conceiving of teacher socialisation not simply as passively sliding into an existing context, but rather as an interactive process that occurs between the new teacher and the context” (p. 106). In this mutual interaction,

beginning teachers are influenced by their context, and at the same time their presence affects the context and environment in which they are socialized.

The school environment may influence the beginning teachers' actions and beliefs in ways that are more powerful than what they experienced in their preservice education.

Ballantyne (2007b) explained that beginning music teachers may reject the knowledge and skills they had acquired in their preservice education programs and uncritically adopt the teaching culture at their school. Teachers' reflections on and opinions of their preservice teacher education seem to be inextricably linked with the specifics of the school context in which they taught for their first position (Roulston, Legette, & Womack, 2005). To help preservice music teachers transition smoothly into their first years of teaching, Ballantyne (2007a) recommended that an examination of the "realities" of teaching in preservice education courses would better equip preservice teachers to be responsive to their future teaching contexts through a variety of integrated practicum opportunities, problem-based learning opportunities, and interactions with a variety of music teachers in many different contexts.

### **Knowledge of Milieus and Contexts**

The manner in which context has been integrated into teacher knowledge and curriculum has evolved over the past several decades. Schwab (1973) identified five bodies of experience or "agents of translation" (p. 502) that must be represented when curriculum is being written. These agents of translation are subject matter, learners, the milieus, teachers, and curriculum making. "Milieu" is a French word which refers, in a general way, to surroundings of a social or cultural nature. Schwab applied the concept of the milieu to education to draw attention to the school and classroom in which teaching and learning occur. Those who develop curriculum need to have experience with the milieus of the students and the communities to which they belong. In

addition, Schwab identified family, social class, ethnic groups, and religious communities as relevant milieus that should be considered when developing curriculum. He described these milieus as “manifold, nesting one within another like Chinese boxes” (p. 503). Besides their use as agents of translation, the milieu, the learner, the teacher, and the subject matter were identified by Schwab as four “commonplaces” to be included in educational thought (pp. 508-509). He explained that these commonplaces must be carefully coordinated with one other and designated them as equally important while warning against over-emphasizing one over the others.

As teachers develop understanding of the curricular commonplaces, they become increasingly familiar with their teaching context as a vital area of their teaching knowledge. Shulman (1987), who was influenced by Schwab, forwarded a multidimensional view of teacher knowledge, in which knowledge of educational contexts sits among other forms and types. Shulman elevated the importance of this understanding by naming it as parallel to other forms of teachers’ knowledge, such as knowledge of the subject matter known as content knowledge and the various instructional strategies for teaching subject matter known as pedagogical content knowledge. Shulman described the knowledge of context as the interactions of those who inhabit the classroom, the administration of the school and school district, and the cultures of the communities that the school serves. The structures and materials of schooling such as curricula, assessment, rules, organizations, and governance are interconnected and dependent on its contextual conditions. These highly contextualized conditions “will either facilitate or inhibit teaching efforts” (p. 10).

Grossman (1990) defined four cornerstones of professional knowledge of teaching: subject matter knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and knowledge of context. She explained that teachers must adapt their knowledge to specific needs

and demands of school settings and individual students. Grossman delineated the knowledge of context as the

knowledge of the districts in which teachers work, including the opportunities, expectations, and constraints posed by the districts; knowledge of the school setting, including the school 'culture,' departmental guidelines, and other contextual factors at the school level that affect instruction; and knowledge of specific students and communities, and the students' backgrounds, families, particular strengths, weaknesses, and interests. (p. 9)

Others have explored the relation of context with teachers' pedagogical knowledge.

Carlsen (1999) examined the idea of teacher knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge from a poststructuralist view. He described pedagogical knowledge as not static or stagnant but evolving with political and historical dimensions that prevent a teacher from remaining ideologically neutral. First, knowledge is not fixed or systematic. "Words and concepts [such as pedagogical content knowledge] are not fixed objects of meaning, and cannot be bound to real-world referents permanently and unambiguously" (p. 139). One cannot "expect to find that teachers hold a single set of beliefs about the purposes for teaching [a subject]" (p. 139). Second, the interdependency of knowledge and power must be acknowledged. "By defining [a subject] in a disciplinary fashion, our structural model of teacher knowledge increases the likelihood that *teachers'* conceptions of subject matter will be subordinated to the conceptions of more powerful experts" (p. 139). *Who* teachers consult as experts becomes more important than the subject matter.

Lastly, Carlsen (1999), critical of Grossman's (1990) model of teacher knowledge, contended that subject matter structures are only ambiguously connected to those in the local context. Carlsen asked, "Where is the student?" and "for that matter, the teacher?" (p. 139) in prior models of teacher knowledge. Carlsen argued that the individual, specifically the student and the teacher, must remain at the center of meaning, advocating for more learner-centered

views of teacher knowledge. Further, the historical and cultural dimensions of knowledge must be considered. Carlsen related this last point to science education in particular: “Along with the first person voice, scientific writing typically eliminates reference to the social, gendered, cultural, and economic context of investigations” (p. 140). Carlsen concluded that teacher knowledge cannot be ideologically neutral. Instead, teacher knowledge is context-dependent, individualistic, and historically contingent.

Carlsen (1999) challenged how teacher knowledge is constructed by revising the basic constructs proposed by Schwab, Shulman, and Grossman. Unlike prior models, Carlsen emphasized the importance of context and its relationship to knowledge domains in his model. Unlike other models which placed context alongside other domains, Carlsen placed all domains within a contextual domain. In his model, he placed the domains of “general pedagogical knowledge,” “subject matter knowledge,” and “pedagogical content knowledge” within the larger domain of “knowledge about the specific context,” specifically further locating it with the labels, “this classroom” and “these students” (p. 136). This central domain is then nested within the larger domain “knowledge about the general educational context” which included the state and nation, the community, the school, and former students. Carlsen recommended: “the induction period to teaching is a wonderful time to examine the role of context in teacher knowledge, because the teacher’s movement from student to student teacher to teacher provides a physical-spatial and sociological ‘edge effect,’ where conceptions of subject matter are manifested in different places in different ways” (p. 141).

Teachers’ development of pedagogical content knowledge and subject knowledge is embedded within multiple contexts and milieus rather than knowledge that stands separated from its surroundings and historical antecedents. The multiple-layered contexts of classroom, school,

community, and profession affect teachers' ideology and experiences. In turn, teachers' ideology and past experiences affect change within classroom, school, community, and professional contexts.

### **Beginning Teachers' Construction of Teacher Knowledge**

Beginning teachers draw on a variety of sources as they construct their knowledge of pedagogy including their understanding of the teaching context. Beginning music teachers have spent considerable time in classrooms as elementary and secondary students observing their teachers. Lortie (1975) termed these periods of induction "apprenticeships of observation" (p. 61). These years of "unformulated experience" (p. 79) precede any professional opportunities for socialization into teaching and have lasting impact on an individual's formation of how teachers teach.

Many beginning teachers replicate strategies that their own elementary and secondary teachers used to teach specific topics without understanding the influence of their former teachers' goal setting, planning, decision making, and reflection (Lortie, 1975). As a result, an apprenticeship of observation is insufficient for building knowledge about teaching because it will result in a skewed perspective of the nature of teaching. Further, an apprentice model promotes conservative teaching practices. Teachers replicate the lessons they have seen by using the same curricular materials and sequence rather than develop new forms of instruction for new contexts. Field and Latta (2001) expressed the need for teachers to remain "open" in their experiences of teaching by remaining receptive to and in touch within the circumstances or contexts they are teaching. Grossman (1990) explained that apprenticeships of observation may also prompt teachers to rely on the memories of themselves as students in shaping expectations

for their own students. She expounded that teachers may assume their prior experiences as students in a classroom setting are representative of their current students' interests and abilities.

Professional coursework such as teaching methods courses paired with clinical experiences are the most logical venue for preservice teachers to develop pedagogical content knowledge and experience a wide variety of teaching contexts (Grossman, 1990). Haston and Leon-Guerrero (2008) found music teaching methods courses as the predominant source to acquire pedagogical content knowledge. Unfortunately, many music teachers expressed dissatisfaction with their teaching methods courses in failing to provide pedagogical teacher knowledge especially as it applied to their current teaching contexts (Ballantyne & Packer, 2004; Conway, 2002).

Beginning music teachers rely on their past experiences as learners in past classroom contexts to influence their pedagogy. In short, many teach as they were taught. While teacher educators help preservice teachers construct their pedagogical content knowledge, this knowledge does not become contextualized until music teachers have situated themselves within a classroom, school, and community. As a result, beginning music teachers need to remain open to their classroom, school, and community contexts and recognize the potential differences of these contexts from prior experiences.

### **Demographic and Geographic Context**

American education scholarship has often addressed the need for teachers to understand teaching contexts through the use of urban, rural, and suburban categories, arguing that teacher education programs focus too narrowly on preparing teachers for privileged, often suburban, contexts. Field placements are often named as a solution to address this issue. Introducing preservice teachers to a diversity of field placements, especially within contexts that are

culturally different than those they have experienced in the past, may help preservice teachers develop their knowledge of how context influences their teaching. Fry and McKinney (1997), in response to the overwhelming majority of their preservice teachers identifying as White and middle-class, suggested, “Field experiences in culturally diverse settings may be a key component to [affect] preservice teachers’ attitudinal and pedagogical change, which are necessary factors to achieve equity in schools and society” (p. 188). Often this translates as placing White students within an urban and primarily Black school, as was the case in Fry and McKinney’s study.

While commonly used, the terms of urban, rural, and suburban can be difficult to define, as one category is often defined in contradistinction to the other. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) defined urban and rural based on population and proximity to an identified urban area. The NCES defined urban areas through the United States Census Bureau’s designation of principal cities of a metropolitan statistical area, urbanized areas, and urban clusters. Rural areas are described as those not inside an “urbanized area or urban cluster.” The Census Bureau defined urbanized areas as those with populations greater than 50,000 and urban clusters as areas with populations of less than 50,000 and greater than 2,500 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Rural areas are those that are not included in urban areas. These “urban-centric” definitions depend on arbitrary designations by each agency and create a strict binary between urban and rural. The designation of “suburban,” which is often considered as a transitional locale between urban and rural areas, is not identified as a statistical category by either organization.

Regardless of this ambiguity, educational research and teacher education continue to focus on characteristics of urban, suburban, and rural schools to help educators better understand their teaching contexts. Unfortunately, labeling communities and schools with the demographic

categories of “rural” or “urban” often connote sociological assumptions. These assumptions, including those about race and class, create deficit perspectives that these communities are lacking in some manner causing shortfalls or failures in learning (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Research purpose statements and questions often address aspects of these schools and communities as being less effective or desirable than schools that are labeled differently, especially suburban schools. On the other hand, schools and communities labelled as “suburban” are frequently viewed from the perspective of affluence. Some scholars and researchers, especially in education, continue to fight the myths and misconceptions of these designations to promote the strengths of each community and their cultural assets. In the following section, I will discuss each categorical designation, common misconceptions in academic discourse, and the work scholars are doing to dislodge these misconceptions.

### *Urban*

Urban areas are typically associated with large population concentration. Scholars have found that what can be considered an “urban” area may not always be clear. Fitzpatrick-Harnish (2015), who wrote about music teaching in urban settings, used a framework developed by Milner (2012) to describe the wide variety of schools that may be labelled or self-designated as “urban.” Milner used the terms “urban intensive,” “urban emergent,” and “urban characteristic.” Urban intensive describes contexts in large metropolitan cities in the United States such as New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Atlanta. Urban emergent describes schools in large cities under the population of one million. Finally, urban characteristic describes schools that are not located in large or midsize cities but are experiencing some of the challenges sometimes associated with larger urban school contexts. As a result, this may include schools that would otherwise be labelled as rural by other definitions. For instance, Fitzpatrick-Harnish (2015) found that teachers

in small districts who encounter high rates of student mobility and large populations of English-language learners may also identify readily under the umbrella term “urban.” Likewise, teachers who teach in large school districts but not in a neighborhood school as well as teachers who teach in charter schools not affiliated with a larger school district may also find commonality with others under the “urban” umbrella.

The use of the term “urban” in educational scholarship often connotes deficit paradigms and perspectives (Milner, 2008; Weiner, 2003). Farmer (2015) found that the term “urban” is used in tandem with the terms “inner-city,” “at-risk,” “race,” and “diversity.” Farmer uncovered biases and depreciatory usage associated with these terms, especially since “urban” is rarely defined and frequently used as a euphemism for poor, challenging, minority, or low-achieving. Student underachievement and lack of school success are frequently attributed to students, families, culture, and communities under this nomenclature. As a result, policies and practices are sought to “correct their deficiencies” (Weiner, 2003, p. 305). In music education, the use of the word “urban” has been used to convey stereotypical assumptions, a problem that has historical roots. For example, the introduction to a special issue of the *Music Educators Journal* in 1970 on urban music education begins:

The face of America’s cities is pockmarked. Mass exodus has left festering inner cities—domiciles of the destitute victims of disease, hunger, crime, drugs, broken families, and hopelessness. Poverty, segregation, and bankruptcy blight the people and thwart the work of every institution. (Fowler, 1970, p. 37)

Music educators who may have looked to these writings to learn more about urban settings encountered a bleakly painted portrait of violence, destitution, and poverty.

Contemporary scholarship has attempted to thwart the “hopelessness” that supposedly exists in urban music education and challenge its stereotypical and deficient portrayals. Frierson-Campbell (2006a; 2006b) edited two volumes on teaching music in urban schools, bringing

together essays that moved past deficit perspectives and toward cultural responsiveness through more representative stories from teachers in these urban classrooms. Fitzpatrick-Harnish (2015) presented a contrasting narrative of urban music teaching. She asserted that every school music program and school setting is different from each other and cannot be considered inferior to others. Therefore, music teachers must develop contextually specific approaches in their pedagogy. She acknowledged that the “urban” label is only helpful to connect with other teachers in similar contexts but warned that this label remains simplistic and stereotypical. Instead, teachers should recognize student strengths and address culturally specific ways of learning and knowing.

### *Rural*

The use of the term rural seems to be easily understood and straightforward since it is readily used in educational scholarship without a definition. However, the connotations of the term rural appears to be more complex than the default definition of “not urban” put forth by the United States Census Bureau. The qualitative differences among rural communities complicate a definition of rural based solely on population density and geographic proximity to urban areas. Similar to urban areas, rural areas must also be understood as a complex set of sociocultural, demographic, and political arrangements (Corbett, 2016). A conception of space that combines the social and the historical with the geographic is needed. What constitutes “rurality” cannot be a singular conception but must include the persons who live, work, and spend leisure time in these communities, how these people inhabit these spaces, who has power, and how these relationships have evolved through history.

The use of term “rural” may conjure several stereotypical perceptions (Tieken, 2014). A common image connotes a romanticized view of a pastoral, simplistic, and nostalgic paradise—a

way of life that has since disappeared with advances in technology and globalization. Another view might be of deprivation and decline where the people who reside in rural places remain ignorant, uneducated, and left behind as the world continues to advance. These rural stereotypes often connote images of “Whiteness” according to Ticken (2014) by implying either White blue-collar citizens or “White trash.”

Rural educational theorists Howley, Theobald, and Howley (2005) believed that rural is not something that can be defined through geographic boundary but instead found in the meanings that people who identify as rural place on their experiences no matter where they live. Rural music education scholars draw on their own experiences as rural music educators in various parts of the United States and Canada to inform their writing and define rural contexts. Scholarship on rural music education challenges the concept of rurality strictly through demographic qualifiers by focusing instead on topics of rural experience. This includes scholarship on geographic and professional isolation (Prest, 2013), poverty (Isbell, 2005), musical diversity (Corbett, 2016), and community sustainability (Bates, 2011).

### *Suburban*

Portrayals of suburban life often assume affluence, homogeneity, a lack of people of color, and prefabrication. These stereotypes of suburbs can make the diversity of suburbs difficult to see (Teaford, 2008). Generalizations fail to capture the diversity that is found within and among the suburban communities found throughout the United States. The differences among suburbs are vast. Teaford explains:

There are straight suburbs and gay suburbs. There are suburbs for seniors and others for horses. Some suburbs are predominantly African American, others are overwhelmingly Hispanic, and still other are exclusively Anglo...And as America becomes more suburban, the suburbs will continue to reflect the rich diversity of the nation. (2008, p. 218)

Geographers categorize these suburbs in increasingly specific but often confusing designations such as “housing developments,” “edge cities,” “exurbs,” “micropolises,” “bedroom communities,” and “relovvilles” (Brooke, 2015). While supposedly each of these types of communities are defined differently, they all maintain a strong connection to the urban center with which they are affiliated. However, suburban communities may have urban or rural characteristics because of the experiences of their citizens, further complicating an easy delineation among urban, rural, and suburban communities. Just as it is difficult to find agreement in a definition of what is urban and rural, scholars should question normative and reductionist categorizations of the suburbs.

When the use of the terms urban, rural, and suburban are examined in educational scholarship, stereotypes, bias, and misappropriation often appear. While undoubtedly similarities and common challenges exist in the communities that are categorized within these terms, difference may be revealed through focusing on the lived experience of citizens. Therefore more nuanced examination of communities is needed. The experiences of those who live and work in these different communities overlap and converge. The ambiguity of rural, suburban, and urban challenges educational scholars to help teachers understand their educational contexts by focusing on the ways these communities are nuanced and multi-faceted due to their diversity.

## **Place**

Examining schools and communities through a lens of *place* brings together elements of context, demographics, and experience which may help give a foundation for teachers to understand their classrooms, schools, and communities. Each school and community is understood more fully by those who inhabit these spaces, and for which general definitions and designations fail to capture their richness and complexity. The particularities of a school and

community should be understood alongside people's lived experiences. Context, as described by Schwab, Shulman, Grossman, and Carlsen, points toward an understanding beyond that of only classroom communities. The demographic labels of urban, rural, and suburban refer to population, race, ethnicity, location, and movement from one category to the next. Neither context nor demographic labels capture the sense of lived experience that comes from a deep familiarity with a location and the meaning an individual derives from a rooted sense of that experience. While place is a term that is often used shallowly in conversation, an exploration of its meaning may enlighten teachers' pedagogical knowledge in their classrooms.

Humans delineate and give meaning to *space* to create places. The terms place and space are sometimes used interchangeably but have different connotations. Space is a mathematical and abstract construct of undifferentiated area and volume (Cresswell, 2015; Malpas, 1998; Tuan, 1977). Place is defined by Agnew (1987) as a meaningful location or a location with fixed coordinates which is shaped by those who inhabit it with subjective or emotional attachment. Cresswell (2015) addressed this relationship, "There is no 'place' before there was humanity, but once humans came into existence then place did too" (p. 51). In short, place is the social construct of space.

Place as a social construction is intrinsically linked to human experience. Place is experienced through the senses as persons conceive and interpret meaning (Tuan, 1977). Each person perceives a place individually through their senses and as a result a place initially becomes subjective to personal perspectives (Malpas, 1988). These perspectives and meanings commingle with others' experience and the objects of a place to collectively construct the *genius loci* or "spirit" or "sense of place" (Cresswell, 2015, p. 129). The *genius loci* develops and

evolves from the characteristics and identities that are constructed by those who interact with a place (Malpas, 1998).

The experience of location in space develops through the course of time. The historical nature of place as well as its imagined future become integral to the construction of place. Knowledge of a place obtained through experience grows and evolves; it is not static (Tuan, 1977). Relationships to location become defined as attachments or “rootedness” may develop (Relph, 1976, p. 37). Stauffer (2012) synthetically defined place as “a nexus – a synthesis – of time, space, and experience” (2012, p. 436). In other words, a place emerges through a person’s collective experience of a defined space through and across time.

If places are socially constructed, then people are the makers of place (Gruenewald<sup>1</sup>, 2003), as they decide how a place is developed, used, and what and who is in place and out of place. This place-making creates and maintains cultural significance for communities of people (Greenwood, 2013; Gruenewald, 2003). When humans become conscious of their role as place makers, they become aware of their power to create and shape the meaning and experiences that others have with places. This power can become hegemonic or shared through democratic ideals (Gruenewald, 2003). In North American music education, many teachers enact a dominant and sometimes hegemonic paradigm of teacher-centered and rehearsal-based instruction based in the Western classical tradition that does not always include creative and collaborative musical activities that have social relevance for all students (Hess, 2013). Instead, music educators might use their power as place makers in cooperation with their students to create places of democratic

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<sup>1</sup> David A. Greenwood was formerly known as David A. Gruenewald. As per Greenwood’s wishes (electronic correspondence March 27, 2019), his scholarship is cited by the name that he was known by at the time of its writing (e.g. Gruenewald, 2003; Greenwood, 2013).

learning (Allsup, 2003; Woodford; 2005). Further, music educators, in cooperation with their students, create places with and through music (Matsunobu, 2018; Stauffer, 2012).

### **Education and Place**

Teachers as place makers may create opportunities for students to find relevance with the surrounding community. Schools are places where this can occur most noticeably and readily, particularly since U.S. education is built on longstanding traditions of neighborhood schools and localized control (Beaumont, 2000; Dewey & Dewey, 1915; Doyle & Finn, 1984). Dewey and Dewey (1915) deemed the local U.S. public school as “the awakening of the spirit of liberty and democracy” (p. 167) as schools gained control by the populace rather than strictly by the elite.

In recent years, the ability of persons to communicate and interact with those around and throughout the world has created an increasingly globalized society. In the United States, this globalization has resulted in the belief that the main purpose of education is to prepare students for competition in a globalized economy (Burbules & Torres, 2000), rather than for cooperation or collaboration within their local surroundings. Competitive market-based approaches toward educational reform, derivative of neoliberalism, can be traced through government policies for standardization, high-stakes testing, teacher accountability, alternative teacher certification, competition among schools, and charter schools (Apple, 2011; Cochran-Smith, Piazza, & Power, 2013; Hursh, 2007). These policies have had an impact on school consolidation and closure, and the rise of school choice and charter schools. Students are often transported, educated, and encultured in schools that may be outside of their neighborhoods, eroding and rending apart the reciprocal relationship that schools can have with their surrounding communities. This economic movement has caused educational reformers to create mandates and establish standards in

schools and curricula to homogenize what teachers present in the classroom and regulate what students know and are able to do (Gruenewald, 2008a).

The push for centralization and homogenization of education ignores the impact of place and community and, as a result, renders schools and their curricula “placeless” (Gruenewald, 2003). In music education, Cope and Smith (1997) explained how music education, and explicitly instrumental music education, has become decontextualized from student culture and their communities. Shevock (2016) depicted music education as an “uprooting” and searched for ways to find “rootedness.” Stauffer (2012) has asserted that not only have music classrooms become placeless, they have become “place bound” through a narrow interpretation of how music education operates and functions in American society. Education and music education must be returned to the communities within which the schools and students exist, should music teachers wish to make musical experiences meaningful and relevant to their students’ lives. Berry (1988) implored, “There must also be love of learning and of the cultural tradition and of excellence—and this love cannot exist, because it makes no sense, apart from the love of a place and a community” (p. 112). To accomplish this, pedagogy must be based in place.

### *Place-Based Education*

Place-based education focuses on learning through the caring for and nurturing of places beyond the classroom and within the community (Gruenewald, 2008a). This ethic of caring and nurturing that Greenwood mentioned stems from the writings of Wendell Berry, a poet and environmental activist. Berry called for care of the places where we are located (1977) and the importance of developing and sustaining a “local culture” (1988). Berry (1988) explained that when a place lacks authentic local culture, it “is open to exploitation, and ultimately destruction” (p. 114) from those who do not live there. Local culture functions as “a collection of the

memories, ways, and skills necessary” (p. 103) for the sustenance of places. He reasoned, “If the local culture cannot preserve and improve the local soil [places], then, as both reason and history inform us, the local community will decay and perish” (p. 103).

The place-based education movement arose from ecological and environmental education. A central theme of this pedagogical tradition is that connections with the natural world are an important part of being human. Place-based education seeks to engage students in the study of places to help them understand and contribute to the well-being of the community through multidisciplinary, experiential, and intergenerational learning. Learning occurs outside of the classroom and the walls of the school so that students interact and build relationships with the places they are studying while learning to care for them (Gruenewald, 2008a; Sobel, 2004). Students engage in hands-on learning at sites such as a community garden, the river that runs through the neighborhood, the forest behind the school, or other locations that allow students to encounter the natural world firsthand as it exists in their community. The student thus becomes an integral part of the community and its environment. In place-based education the student is not learning to solve future problems, but rather participating in activities that make a difference in the present (Sobel, 2004).

Place-based educational approaches use the local community and environment as a lens to teach concepts across the curriculum (Sobel, 2004). Somerville (2010) called the knowledge of the local community the “beginning point” (p. 331). Experiences at the local level are used to inform discussion and perspective of those at the regional, national, and global level and vice versa. Place-based educational approaches seek to spiral localized knowledge outward toward globalized knowledge and then spiral that knowledge back to better inform local experience

(Bates, 2014; Greenwood, 2013; Gruenewald, 2003;). Greenwood (2013) explained, “The world is only knowable as a collection of diverse experiences with places” (p. 94).

### **Critical Place-Conscious Education**

Greenwood believed that place-based education focuses too much on the ecological features of places and not enough on their cultural functions. He drew on critical education theorists such as Paolo Freire, Henry Giroux, and Peter McLaren to infuse an approach to place-based education with criticality. By including critical pedagogy’s aim of questioning educational assumptions and traditions to look for purpose as well as potential harm and oppression, Greenwood blended place-based and critical pedagogies into a new educational framework, which he named “critical place-conscious education” (Greenwood, 2013; Gruenewald, 2003, 2008a, 2008b).

Greenwood forwards five dimensions of place that shape and develop a critical place-conscious education. These dimensions are the perceptual, sociological, ideological, political, and ecological. Each of these dimensions expand the notions of place and its socially constructed nature but elaborate further in describing how place shapes, moves, and directs people. This more robust conception underscores the pedagogical nature of place. When teachers begin to understand the dynamics of place they develop place consciousness, a term that originates from Theobald (1997). This framework helps teachers begin to think about the places and contexts they are in and how they influence student learning as well as how students might become more attuned to the particularities of place.

As teachers become more sensitive to their local environment through their attention to these five dimensions of place they begin to reflect on and critically examine the influences of these dimensions on their pedagogy (Gruenewald, 2008a, 2008b). Teachers and students act as

place makers as they examine and question ideas, traditions, and beliefs to determine their worth, value, and belonging to persons who cohabit a particular place. As incongruent, harmful, exploitative, or irrelevant aspects of the existing pedagogy and curricula are addressed, a critical place-conscious educator begins to resolve their instruction by embedding pedagogical discourse firmly within the community and culture of the community to create connectedness.

Greenwood's inclusion of culture in his place-based education framework is reminiscent of pedagogical paradigms based on cultural difference such as culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014) and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002, 2010; Lind & McKoy, 2016). Greenwood (Gruenewald, 2008b) presented critical place-conscious education as a "grounding" of culturally responsive teaching (p. 137). He argued, "Culturally loaded terms...need to be contextualized in order to avoid the abstraction that often accompanies their institutionalization and decontextualized overuse" (p. 137). Critical place-conscious education reconnects culture to its environment through place-based approaches. Greenwood (2008b) explained, "Talking about the cultural constructs of racism and poverty without talking geography and environment is to abstract these concepts from where they have been constructed and experienced" (p. 145). Greenwood concluded that a critical pedagogy of place is both culturally and place-responsive education. Place-conscious educators are attentive to the cultural *and* ecological places where their students live.

### **Place-Conscious Music Education**

Stauffer transferred aspects of critical place-conscious education to music education (2009, 2012, 2016). She explained that place-conscious music educators ask questions about "who" and "where" in regards to their pedagogy and curricula in order to evaluate their physical and cultural surroundings and their effects on musical practice. These reflections on "who" and

“where” attempt to address the needs of students and their localized sociocultural environment (Stauffer, 2009, 2012). As Greenwood (Gruenewald, 2008a) stated, the aim of place-conscious education is “to evaluate the appropriateness of our relationships to each other, and to our *socio-ecological* places” (p. 314, emphasis in original). Stauffer echoes Greenwood’s language, “A critical pedagogy of place for music, then, might be grounded in consideration of *socio-musical* places, considering and engaging the local and then moving to the wider world” (p. 443, emphasis added).

Through the attention to socio-musical places, the music educator has the distinctive power to connect students, families, school faculty and staff, community members, performers, audience members, and others to their surrounding environs through meaningful music-making (Matsunobu, 2018; Thomson et al., 2015). “The arts can bring people together to engage, as participants and audiences, in acts of shared meaning-making,” Thomson et al. (2015) wrote.

They offer ways for students and their extended families and friends to build a collective public expression of what it means to be ‘in this place’. Arts education might be seen as not simply responding to place, but as actively making and remaking what place means to young people, and to the people with whom they interact. When place-making events are put together as a practice and pedagogy, arts education has the capacity to not only offer knowledges, but also an enhanced sense of identity, and a lived experience of ways of living in the world together. (p. 303)

The implementation of critical place-conscious education in the arts and humanities places emphasis on the need for quality, critical engagement with local cultural artifacts that are legitimized by the classroom teacher as worthy of study (Ball & Lai, 2006). With this engagement, teachers and students begin to combine localized experiences and sociocultural practices with their music making, thereby legitimizing musical expressions from the local environment as worthy of study. As a result, a music teacher working toward place consciousness includes musical repertoire and practices that are localized or indigenous to the surrounding community. The teacher purposefully includes repertoire that is either composed by

members of the local community or repertoire that is about the surrounding community and culture. Further, localized and indigenous vernacular musical practices such as teaching, rehearsal, and performance techniques are included in music-making activities and are therefore acknowledged as legitimate.

Critical place-conscious music education does not aim to isolate thinking within a bounded system; the boundaries are permeable and not rigid. While one aim is to give value to local artists and musicianship, another is to give rise toward empathy for *other* localized cultures leading toward cultural sensitivity and appreciation. As a result, place-conscious music education becomes a lens for musicians to make sense of near and far off musical places while also learning about the community where they are living. Critical place-conscious music education encourages educators to be active participants in their local music community and can help them appreciate other musical places in meaningful and rich ways.

### **Need for This Study**

First year music teachers, if not adequately prepared for the realities of their classroom, school and community contexts, may experience praxis shock (Ballantyne, 2007a, 2007b; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). Preservice and beginning music teachers need to develop ways to become acclimated to a diversity of classroom, school, and community contexts. Some music education scholars have approached shaping an understanding of context through reductionist geographic and demographic categorizations such as urban, rural, and suburban. These categories have failed to encapsulate the relationships that teachers cultivate with their surrounding environment and the sociocultural aspects of their classrooms, schools, and communities.

A framework of critical place-conscious music education may be useful to examine how teachers develop an understanding of their surroundings and build relationships with others in their crucial first years of teaching (Greenwood, 2013; Gruenewald, 2003, 2008a, 2008b). Frameworks to describe how teachers develop teacher knowledge of context such as Grossman (1990) have been developed, but Carlsen (1999) questioned any essentialized view of teacher knowledge because of the particularities of each situation. Critical place-conscious music education expands understanding of the particularities of a music classroom and community rather than relying on shallow commonalities among categorical designations.

If teachers do not critically develop their place-consciousness, they compromise the well-being of their students and their students' communities and cultures. The indigenous peoples of the United States are arguably some of the most affected by schools and educators who were not only *unconscious* of place but actively worked to destroy the places where these indigenous people lived. Peshkin (1997), in an ethnography of a Pueblo high school in New Mexico, listed the losses that Native Americans have suffered due to settler/colonizer destruction. They have lost land and water resources due to theft, exploitation, and pollution. They have lost language, religion, and tradition through forced assimilation to European hegemonic cultures. They have lost their integrity of self through the use of their image as mascots and symbols<sup>2</sup>. Lastly, they have lost integrity of their environment as they continually have to fight against its exploitation and destruction. Teachers who neglect the places in which they teach may marginalize students and their cultures, perpetuate hegemonic thinking, and promote ideologies and policies that damage the local environment. Critical place-conscious music educators can use their knowledge of place to not only protect students and their communities from cultural and environmental

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<sup>2</sup> Alan Peshkin, a former professor of education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, explicitly named the university's use of Chief Illiniwek as an example.

destruction, but empower their students to use music as a vehicle to celebrate and strengthen their connection to place and cultivate their community's future.

A study exploring how first-year music teachers develop place consciousness within their classroom, school, and community may prove beneficial to help prepare for the realities of the first year of teaching. Richerme (2020) wrote "The focus on end points rather than paths, minimizes the process of philosophizing, robbing travelers of the voyaging that, while at times arduous, often gives increased meaning to their temporary destinations" (p. vii). In this study, journeys of developing and building place consciousness in its various dimensions are more important than a truly comprehensive understanding of their classroom, school, and communities as places. Exploring how multiple music teachers navigate pathways through their first year of teaching and develop their sense of place through "journeys" of place consciousness may benefit music teacher educators and practicing teachers by providing multiple models of place-conscious teaching.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to explore first-year music teachers' journeys of place consciousness within a new classroom, school, and community, and how they manifested this knowledge and understanding in their pedagogy. The following research questions guide this study:

1. How do first-year music teachers develop place consciousness?
2. How do first-year music teachers enact place consciousness in their pedagogical decisions?

## **Methodological Overview**

“What could be truer of placed experience—secure or fragile, pleasurable or repugnant, comforting or unsettling—than the taken-for-granted quality of its intense particularity?” (Feld & Basso, 1996, p. 11). The “intense particularity” of “placed experience” propelled me to pursue the line of inquiry for this specific study about the place consciousness of first-year teachers in the form of a multiple case study. The focused study of each case allowed me to drill down deeply into the particularities of its details to develop understanding. I conducted a multiple case study of three music educators during the last fifteen weeks of their first year of teaching in order to gain insight into the various ways beginning music teachers develop a knowledge of their surroundings and implement this knowledge in their pedagogy. The primary sources of data generation included interviews, observations, mapping, and the examination of material culture.

### *Participants*

Participants included three first-year music teachers. The first teacher was Alex Winfrey, who taught elementary general music and band in Williston, Illinois. The second teacher was Vanesa Reyes, who taught middle school band in Voyageur, Illinois. The third teacher was Caroline Victrola, who taught high school choir and a music survey course in DeMesne, Illinois. All names of participants, the people they mentioned, and the places they lived and taught are pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

### *Interviews and Voice Memos*

I conducted six semi-structured interviews with participants, one of which was a screening interview. In addition, each participant was asked to submit three voice memos over the course of the study responding to a prompt that I texted relating to significant educational

events. I prepared a protocol for each interview and voice memo, but I allowed flexibility for emerging topics in conversation.

### *Observations*

Over the course of the fifteen-week study, I observed each teacher three times. I observed Alex teach two classes at Washington Elementary and one class virtually. I observed Vanesa teach three classes virtually. I observed Caroline teach two classes at Park High School, one class virtually, and one choral concert performance at Park High School. Each observation lasted over sixty minutes allowing me to gain insight into the culture and environment of the classroom and school for a clearer picture of each teacher's locale and context. I looked for ways that each teacher interacted with their students, colleagues, and community members; how curricular decisions were made; and how references to the school and community were made.

### *Mapping*

Each teacher was asked to map their classroom and its environs, locating points of interest that they believed to be significant. Similarly, I drew a series of maps throughout the study, marking aspects of the classroom that I observed and that the teacher referred to in interviews and voice memos. Through these maps, I portrayed how each teacher interacted with their surroundings.

### *Material Culture*

I collected aspects of material culture that were created and distributed within the classroom. These included course descriptions and syllabi, course handbooks, handouts, schedules of performances and events, and other teacher-created material intended to clarify information about the music classroom to students and parents. Classroom displays such as bulletin boards and posters created by the teacher were photographed and included as data.

Lastly, social media posts that the teachers created under social media accounts affiliated with their classroom or music program were collected. Through these artifacts, I examined how the teacher referred to their students, classroom, school, and community over the course of the study.

### *Data Analysis*

Interviews and voice memos were transcribed and observations were transformed into field notes for analysis (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). Data were analyzed through the constant comparative method (Thomas, 2016). Data were read through multiple times to develop temporary constructs and themes.

### *Validation Criteria*

Transcripts were checked against recordings for accuracy. Participants were asked to read their portions of the data record and were asked to make deletions, additions, or clarifications as needed. Temporary constructs were solidified into themes through the method of constant comparison. Triangulation occurred through the examination of data from interviews, observations, voice memos, mapping, and material culture. I remained reflexive throughout this study by keeping a researcher's journal.

### *Reflexivity and Integrity*

In this study, I was an instrument of analysis. Therefore, my positionality influenced the design, analysis, and writing of this study. I attempted to remain aware of how my own experiences, presumptions, assumptions, and beliefs affected my inquiry. I approached this study as a White, middle class, cis-gender, gay and queer man. I am a musician with experiences in both choral and instrumental music, a music educator experienced with instrumental music at the elementary, secondary, and university level, and a scholar interested in the role of place on teaching and learning. These experiences have informed the design of this study.

## **Chapter Organization**

Chapter 2 contains the review of relevant literature. In this review, I describe Greenwood's framework of critical place-conscious education and its relevance to music education. I then present empirical studies related to the purpose of this study. In Chapter 3, I present the methodology used to conduct this project. I describe participant and site selection, sources for data generation and analysis, methods of validation and trustworthiness, and my own reflexivity. In chapters 4, 5, and 6, I present the cases of Alex, Vanesa, and Caroline respectively and the within case analyses I performed. In Chapter 7, I portray a cross-case analysis and conclude the study through discussion with reference to this study's related literature and its implications for music education.

## **Conclusion**

This multiple case study explored first-year music teachers' journeys of place consciousness within a new classroom, school, and community, and how they manifested this knowledge and understanding in their pedagogy. This study involved interviews and observations of three first-year music teachers teaching in various contexts. By studying these teachers' first year experiences through the lens of critical place-conscious music education, insight was gained into their relationships with the culture and environment that existed in their new classroom, school, and community surroundings. This study contributes to growing body of scholarship of place-conscious education and the importance of place and context in music education. It is my hope that this study will further the field of music education in understanding the role of place and place consciousness for first-year music teachers.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Introduction

This review of literature carves the boundaries within which this study will reside and be constructed. Literature is cited from scholarship in education and music education. In this chapter, I will begin by describing aspects of Greenwood's framework of critical place-conscious education that may develop an understanding of first-year teacher experiences. I will then describe how this framework has been brought to music education through the work of Stauffer who created a conceptual framework for music education. Empirical studies are then presented from the following areas to advance the focus of this study: 1) First-year teaching experiences; 2) Context in music education; 3) Place-based music education; 4) Music making as place making; and 5) Teachers and critical place-conscious education.

### Theoretical Framework of Critical Place-Conscious Education

Greenwood's theoretical framework of critical place-conscious education (Greenwood, 2013; Gruenewald, 2003, 2008a, 2008b) guided this inquiry. As a theoretical lens, it shaped the research questions, the selection of literature that serves as a foundation, and the methods I used to generate and interpret data. This section summarizes Greenwood's theory of critical place-conscious education and its pertinence to teachers in the music classroom. First, I present how Greenwood frames educational inquiry using place. Then I summarize the pedagogical function of place in place-conscious education. Finally, I will explain the enacted place-making processes of critical place-conscious education.

#### *Critical Place-Conscious Education*

Greenwood built his theoretical framework of place-conscious education from the following premise of Clifford Geertz about the anthropological nature of places (1996): "No one

lives in the world in general” (p. 262). Geertz argued that people do not live in the world in an abstract sense but instead are situated and live within a particular context. Places exist because a person has given their surroundings meaning through personal experiences. As a result, we people are place makers who create, shape, maintain, and sustain their environs, but they also can be place destroyers who destruct, collapse, neglect, or harm our surroundings. Greenwood (2013; Gruenewald, 2003) asserted that not only do people make places, but places can make people. A person’s identities and possibilities are partially shaped by the particularities of their surroundings and environment. Places not only help to shape people, but they also may teach how the world works and how people’s lives fit into their occupied space.

As people develop their awareness of the relationship that they have with the places they inhabit, their place consciousness develops. Place consciousness involves attention and responsiveness to the cultural and ecological nature of places and how people learn and live within them (Gruenewald, 2008a). This attention and responsiveness lead to understandings of the relationships between people and the “culturally situated, biophysical world” (Greenwood, 2013, p. 93). Greenwood bridged this idea to education. He illustrated that as teachers become place conscious, their notion of pedagogy and the persons they feel responsible for moves outward from their individuality toward the community they inhabit. In a place-conscious classroom, the firsthand experiences of teachers and students become important in the process of understanding and shaping what happens in their schools and communities. A place-conscious pedagogy extends like concentric circles from the teacher’s own experiences, to the lived experiences of their students, and further outward toward developing a relationship with the greater community outside of the school. Groups of teachers within a school can work together to meet this aim as they help infuse their school as an amalgam of their cultural and biophysical

surroundings. Within a place-conscious school, educational discourse and practice become embedded within the community in which the school exists rather than remaining generalized and decontextualized.

How does one become place conscious? How does one enact place consciousness in the classroom? Greenwood (2013; Gruenewald, 2003) explained that place consciousness develops through reflective attention to the pedagogical nature of places and is then enacted through place making. In the following section I explain how places are pedagogical. I will then explain how place consciousness is enacted in the classroom through Greenwood's conceptualization of place making.

### *Places are Pedagogical*

Places are centers of experience that help to shape and make our identities and relationships (Greenwood, 2013). Places also teach us through these experiences, which means places are fundamentally pedagogical (Greenwood, 2013; Gruenewald, 2003). Greenwood presented five overlapping and interrelated dimensions of place to demonstrate this fundamental assumption. These pedagogical dimensions are especially relevant to schooling and the growth and development of teachers and students. They include: the perceptual, the sociological, the ideological, the political, and the ecological.

First, places are experienced through the sensual perception of space (Gruenewald, 2003; Tuan, 1977). People enter into a participatory relationship with their surroundings through multisensory perception and experience. However, if people are concerned with the quality of this relationship, they must acknowledge that places have something to say and to teach. Greenwood (Gruenewald, 2003) states that people must learn to "listen" (p. 624) to, or in other words, perceive information through their senses about their surroundings. Greenwood argued

the way the English language has utilized the word place in everyday conversation has led its connotation as a stationary object on a map. A critical place-conscious framework acknowledges that places are “alive,” allowing people “to open their senses to the life that places make possible” (p. 624). Greenwood argued that schools continue to exploit places as objects by isolating teachers’ and students’ sensory experiences from the cultural life of the communities outside the physical school building. As a result, schools limit opportunities for people to experience their community context beyond that of the school as an aid to their continued development.

The second dimension of place is that places are sociological. Experiences with our surroundings can never be pre-cultural or pre-social (Casey, 1997). If places are those of experience, then they can be said to contain culture and identity. The experiences that people have with their environment are shaped by culture, education, and history. In architecture, the notion of the “built world” or “built environment” can be useful for thinking about this idea. The built environment is the “human-made space in which people live, work, and recreate on a day-to-day basis” (Roof & Oleru, 2008, p. 24). This term encompasses both the structural and social elements of a place. However, Greenwood notes that the biophysical environment also becomes a construction of culture and social experience, for example, the creation, conservation, and preservation of National Parks in the United States. Therefore, places foster connections among the physically built and biophysical world, personal identity, and cultural experience. Greenwood (Gruenewald, 2003) acknowledged that attributing the ecological attributes of a physical space as socially constructed, such a tree or a blade of grass, may be perceived as an “ultimate expression of anthropocentric hubris” (p. 626). However, Greenwood argued that it is people and their cultures that invest in their environment and give it and its objects (the tree and the blade of

grass) meaning and value. As mentioned earlier, humans become place makers, or they may become place destroyers. Further, these actions can happen simultaneously. They may deem the space valuable for construction of physical buildings such as schools or housing or objects such as roads and pathways. Humans also set aside spaces to be left in their natural state such as nature preserves. The value and purpose of these human-made constructs often become taken for granted and may be ignored because they often are not seen as cultural by-products and instead as part of the natural ecosystem. However, places are socially constructed and are not natural phenomena. Greenwood counseled that overcoming the tendency for people to ignore their surroundings as socially-constructed is a pedagogical process. By ignoring that places are an expression of culture and a representation of human choice and decision, these locations become noncontroversial or taken for granted. Instead, a person should pay attention to how places are created, maintained, and sustained since these processes produce and teach us particular ways to think and be in the world.

The third dimension of the pedagogical nature of places is the ideological. Places are expressive of their denizens' ideologies and relationships of power. These spaces are not dead or void waiting for someone to fill them with ideas, instead they are filled with people who are alive with beliefs, thoughts, and actions that shape those who experience them. Greenwood (Gruenewald, 2003) explained that places lead to formations of power relationships. Hegemony is maintained through not just a material force but also through the material forms that are created in a context. A place can reproduce and reflect the social relationships of power and domination through how it is created, organized, and maintained. Greenwood stated that if the explicit agenda of schooling is to prepare citizens to democratically participate in a just and equitable society, then attention needs to be given toward the power relations that are maintained

within its milieu. When schooling does not give attention to the ideological dimension of its context, the potential of democratic place making becomes thwarted. At risk is the uneven development of the school, where economic, social, and political conditions are experienced at disparate levels. As a result, schooling may reflect a situation where some students benefit and others may be limited or harmed. This ideological function of place has resulted in the displacement and colonization of people and the privatization and gentrification of public spaces, including public schools. If the aims of American schooling are truly toward a democratic and equitable society, then educators and students have the responsibility to interrogate and investigate how the places they inhabit are shaped by ideological forces.

Closely related to the ideological dimension of place and its distribution of power is the political dimension of place. While Greenwood (Gruenewald, 2003) elucidated the ideological dimension of place through the distribution of power, he explained the political dimension through identity and difference, especially as they relate to struggle and resistance. Greenwood described that geographical terms such as marginality, territoriality, displacement, annexation, division, and movement are used to describe the relationships that play a role in shaping landscape, culture, and identity. These terms have been developed as metaphors to illuminate social positioning through a geographical and spatialized lens. Marginalization is a concern in the current U.S. educational climate (Gruenewald, 2003). Those who inhabit the cultural and geographical margins of the United States are being pushed toward uniform standards. However, this standardization toward a centralized “ideal” strips away the power that is contained in opportunities to learn from difference. By stripping away possibilities of difference, assimilation is enabled and subjugation is more likely. Greenwood encouraged attention toward these spatialized dimensions of social relationships and the forces that push the margins to the center.

The final pedagogical dimension of place is the ecological. This dimension of place addresses the nonhuman world that exists in a location (Gruenewald, 2003). This nonhuman ecological system supports itself as well as the human communities that are proximal to it. The ecological dimension includes the natural resources that can be found within the boundaries of a place. These resources are often perceived by humans as opportunities for exploitation and economic gain. Greenwood explained that human exploitation may trigger domination and control over the ecological diversity of a region similar to the potential domination of difference in cultural thought. Educators and students who wish to work toward place consciousness must also recognize the benefits of ecological diversity and respond to it similarly as they would toward the other pedagogical dimensions of place. This includes teachers and recognizing the role water, forests, deserts, mountains, and grasslands play in the development and sustenance of their community through their provision of resources, food, and animal habitat.

*Summary: Places are Pedagogical.* Greenwood (Gruenewald, 2003) presented the perceptual, sociological, ideological, political, and ecological dimensions of place as influences that shape our perspectives. These five dimensions may be identified separately, but they are interconnected and synergistic. We learn about our environment through our senses and perception of both the built and the ecological world. Our collective perceptual experiences socially construct our environment through the development of ideological and power relationships that in turn inform our cultural artifacts and traditions. Critical place consciousness develops through sensitive and careful attention to our surroundings and acknowledgement of these intersectional influences.

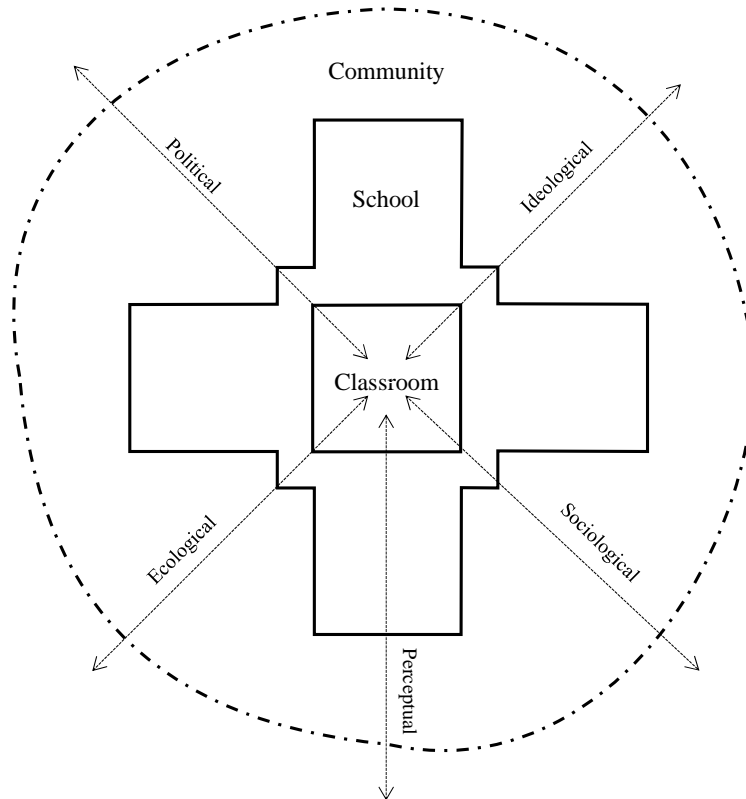
Greenwood's framework of critical place-conscious education aims to bring attention to the pedagogical nature of place "to acknowledge and address the problems that the educational

neglect of places helps to create” (p. 636). Teachers who develop a critical place-conscious approach to their pedagogy reflect on how the dimensions of place are influencing their experiences and teaching and interrogate whether these influences are perpetuating benefits or causing harm to their students, schools, and communities. Neglecting the problems that may potentially exist may inhibit the development of perceptual insight, marginalize student groups, perpetuate hegemonic thinking, or damage the local environment. By understanding the settings and communities that teachers and students inhabit and inquiring into how these places function, teachers can question how their surroundings influence their pedagogy and decide how to better teach within their schools to make possible an improved quality of life for their students and their communities.

In Figure 2.1, I have illustrated Greenwood’s framework of place-conscious education, specifically the pedagogical nature of places, and its relationship among the classroom, school, and community. The classroom is embedded within the school and community with perceptual, sociological, ideological, political, and ecological influences moving inward and outward among the various contexts of place. The community is presented with a dotted line with the arrows passing through its boundaries since a community is itself embedded within many other larger geographic contexts such as regions, states, and nations.

**Figure 2.1**

*The Critical Place-Conscious Classroom based on Greenwood's Framework of Place-Conscious Education*



*Critical Questions for Place-Conscious Education*

Teachers who are place conscious embrace the link between the classroom and the places outside of the school. Students and teachers can interrogate this relationship through the school curriculum by using the local context as a lens. Questions arise such as: “What is happening here? What happened here? What should happen here?” (Gruenewald, 2008b, p. 318). These questions shift the “gaze” (Gruenewald, 2008a, p. 149) of the students and teacher outward from the classroom, reframing their relationship with the wider community. According to Greenwood, the interrogation of the relationship between the classroom and a broadening view of the

environmental and cultural constructions of place will bring about actions of decolonization and reinhabitation (Greenwood, 2013; Gruenewald, 2008a, 2008b). While decolonization may be an appropriate action in places where a colonial power is present, I will not use the term decolonization for the purpose of this study, heeding Tuck and Yang's (2012) warning that "decolonization is not a metaphor" (p. 1). Instead, I will rely on the critical questions listed above that arise from "place conscious inquiry, dialog, and action anywhere" (Greenwood, 2013, p. 97).

**What happened here?** Fundamental historical knowledge of places can be lost through time. To answer this question, place-conscious teachers and learners to seek information about the original state of a place and its original inhabitants. Greenwood (2013) stated, "attention to indigenous inhabitation and the impact of settler society is fundamental to knowing a place itself" (p. 97). Place-conscious educators develop an understanding of the evolving nature of the places they inhabit and seek information about its various cultural, social, and environmental histories that include multiple voices and perspectives from its historical inhabitants. By critically reflecting on the answers to this question, place-conscious teachers and learners use their historical knowledge to inform their place-making decisions.

**What is happening here?** People learn about the places they inhabit firsthand. Place-conscious educators and learners do this through the pedagogical nature of places presented earlier. Greenwood (2013) named this as the socioecological question. He reiterated that places are "cultural products, the products of intended and unintended consequences" (p. 98). The interpretation of these consequences can differ among people who hold differing ways of knowing and being. Therefore, as place-conscious learners answer the question of "What is happening here?" they must acknowledge the diversity of experiences that its inhabitants have

had and how these experiences may compete with each for dominance. Further, these experiences could be in direct competition with the ecological needs and well-being of the land itself.

**What should happen here?** After place-conscious educators and learners have answered the questions of “What has happened here?” and “What is happening here?” they begin to make ethical decisions for a place’s future as they enact place-making processes. A person’s values and experiences will shape how they answer the question of “what should happen here?” Greenwood (2013) presented additional questions to focus place-making action: a) What needs to be remembered? b) What needs to be recovered or restored? c) What needs to be conserved or maintained? d) What needs to be changed or transformed? and e) What needs to be created? (p. 99). He explained that these questions apply both to the place making through cultural development such as maintaining an inclusive and democratic classroom as well through environmental development such as habitat restoration within the community.

The questions listed above prompt critical reflection and action on the part of place-conscious educators and learners. Teachers and students may identify and alter ways of thinking that injure and exploit others and places through careful and critical reflection, but then they must recover and re-create places in order to live well in the total environment (Gruenewald, 2008b). Place-conscious educators pair critique and undoing with reimagination and recovery (Greenwood, 2013).

*Summary: Theoretical Framework of Critical Place-Conscious Education*

Place-conscious educational inquiry relies on three specific questions: 1. What happened here? 2. What is happening here now? and 3. What should happen here? (Greenwood, 2013). Answers to these questions are informed by careful attention to the perceptual, sociological,

ideological, political, and ecological dimensions of the classroom, school, and community. Place-conscious teachers reflect on the diversity of traditions that have shaped their classrooms, schools, and communities including those that may have been lost or forgotten. They come to know their classroom in its present state by understanding that their classrooms and schools are cultural products and that the dominant story is not the only story. Finally, place-conscious teachers seek opportunities and possibilities for their students and communities to participate together toward making and re-making places for socially-just and equitable means.

### **Critical Place-Conscious Music Education as a Framework**

Stauffer explicitly brought Greenwood's conception of critical place-conscious education (Gruenewald, 2003, 2008a) to the attention of music education and music teacher education through essays exploring the relationship of place with music curricula (2009, 2012, 2016). In these essays, she illustrated the philosophical foundations of place, its relevance to schools and education, and its potential benefits to music education and music teacher education.

In the first of these, she suggested that philosophical and curricular approaches in the field need to foreground different categories of questions other than "what," "how," and "why." Instead, she suggested questions that address "who" and "where" as more fundamental to music education, especially in the twenty-first century. These types of questions may be more likely to engage music educators as catalysts for curricular change. Stauffer theorized that a philosophy of place may provide a useful lens to engage others in a critical dialogue about curriculum and other matters in music education. Drawing on scholars from cultural geography and philosophy, she developed a concise definition that has since guided her work in this area. Her definition of place, "a nexus—a synthesis—of time, space, and experience" (2012, p. 436) is the definition that I have used to support the philosophical underpinnings of place in this study.

To build this bridge to music education, Stauffer utilized a quote by Greenwood (Gruenewald, 2008a) stating that the aim of place-conscious education is “to evaluate the appropriateness of our relationship to each other, and to our *socio-ecological* place” (p. 314, emphasis in original). She transformed Greenwood’s language to apply specifically to music education. Stauffer explained, “A critical pedagogy of place for music, then, might be grounded in consideration of *socio-musical* places” (2009, p. 178, emphasis in original). This idea of socio-musical places is again reiterated again in her work in 2012. Stauffer explained that “a critical pedagogy of place for music, then, might be grounded in consideration of *socio-musical* places, considering and engaging the local and then moving to the wider world” (p. 443, emphasis in original).

The concepts of Greenwood and Stauffer can be aligned to apply to music education as they have in other fields. Stauffer (2012) defined place-conscious education as that which “seeks to account for the particularities of local conditions while simultaneously considering how the local and the particular intersect with larger sociocultural places, problems, and policies” (p. 442). Focusing on the cultural can readily imply the musical as well. What constitutes a socio-musical place and what is its relevance to music education? Stauffer illustrated the answer to these questions through two informal cases.

In the first case, Stauffer (2009) used the example of a band director named Keith who decided to create a mariachi course. In the second case, Stauffer (2012) used an example of a choir teacher named Jim who was asked to teach a guitar class. Both Keith and Jim approached their teaching and their curricula with critical reflection followed by corrective action to align with the needs of the students, school, and community. Keith determined what groups of students participated in the music ensembles at his school and which did not and sought ways for the

school music program to become more inclusive. He believed that adding a mariachi course would attract more Mexican-American students to the music program. This ensemble eventually became well-received and performed at many events within the community. Even though mariachi was not necessarily the music his Mexican-American students were listening to in their free time, they felt represented in their school and their heritage celebrated. The students and teacher appreciated the connections that this ensemble created with the community. Jim evaluated his own approach to prioritizing choral ensembles and adjusted his philosophical praxis to better align with the needs of his guitar students. He began to acknowledge and recognize the multiple ways that guitar intersected with his students' lives, particularly through their family and cultural traditions. Jim gave his students the opportunity to have more input on choosing the repertoire for the ensemble and eventually granted the leadership of the ensemble to the students. Both Keith and Jim remarked how the implementation of mariachi and guitar in their respective schools aligned with the sociocultural, and in the words of Stauffer, the socio-musical environment of their students' communities.

Stauffer (2009, 2012, 2016) offered several implications of critical place-conscious education for music education. Stauffer (2009) criticized musical works and practices that are disconnected from the people and cultures that originally produced them. Context, role, and meaning are recognized as relevant to the study of other cultures' music and the historical examination of music. However, these ideas are not always recognized as important to the lived experiences of students and the local musical practices of their communities. Stauffer explained, "When music and practices are about location (geography), not place (a human construction), meaning is lost" (2009, p. 181). Stauffer emphasized that the human element of place must be

recognized in the study of music no matter the location, but especially within the local context, if meaning is to be found.

Stauffer (2009, 2012, 2016) observed that most music teacher preparation programs in the United States aim to prepare those enrolled for careers in P-12 public school music education, which as a result privileges and elevates certain types and forms of music making and learning. Stauffer (2009, 2016) proposed instead that music teacher education programs should prepare community educators, including P-12 public educators, in ways that prioritize engagement with communities, their people, and practices. Stauffer explained that this “ethic would place people at the center of practice, who view practices as fluid, dynamic, and contextual, and who recognize the need for continual examination of the intersections of people, place, and practice” (2009, p. 183). Stauffer (2016) elaborated that through this approach music teaching and learning would not only occur inside schools, but anywhere people are making music of any kind. Instead of asking questions about what to teach and how to teach, she proposed, “What might occur, what catalysts for change might we uncover or set into motion if we began with different questions: Who is doing music, where, when, with and for whom, and for what reason? And, equally important, who is not here, and why?” (p. 450).

#### *Place-Based Education in the Arts and Humanities*

Bringing Greenwood’s critical place-conscious education and critical pedagogy into the arts and humanities may be potentially problematic as is illustrated by Ball and Lai (2006) in a review of literature of place-based pedagogy. This review was structured as a critique to consider what is needed for a critical place-based pedagogy for the arts and humanities, highlighting the tension between the aims of arts and humanities and place-based education. Ball and Lai contend that arts and humanities education aims to make students “belong to the boundless world of

books and ideas” (p. 264) rather than particular places. Although they acknowledge the emphasis on power, politics, and difference that critical pedagogy’s refinement of place-based pedagogy has brought, Ball and Lai addressed the practical limitations of implementing these approaches in an arts and humanities classroom. First, they contend that educators need to be aware that some students may potentially be indifferent to their local surroundings or resistant to transformative political pedagogies. Students may not be developmentally ready to critically address localized issues that may arise through the study of artistic and literary work. Further some students may wish to succeed in cosmopolitan or economically driven approaches to education, especially when they have been beneficial to them, and may push against approaches that may disrupt these desires. Second, educators may have difficulty in presenting local artistic and literary content that students may find provocative. Places where this difficulty may occur are neighborhoods where inhabitants have internalized the notion that they do not live in a community of importance, where many of the inhabitants are transient and have not lived or will not live in the area for long, or where people have benefitted from entitlement and privilege. These students in fact may want to gain the educational credentials to be able to migrate for potentially better job prospects elsewhere. As a result, Ball and Lai suggested what they term a more “radically place-based pedagogy” (p. 262) from which pedagogy emerges in a dialogical manner between the interests of local students and the objectives of the educator. Ball and Lai emphasize the need for quality, critical engagement with local cultural artifacts that are legitimized by the classroom teacher as worthy of study.

*Summary: Critical Place-Conscious Music Education as a Framework*

Applying a framework of critical place-conscious education to music education implies that music educators evaluate their physical and cultural surroundings and their effects on

musical practice. Place-conscious music teachers address issues of their curriculum and pedagogy by examining questions of “who” and “where” especially about their students and their localized sociocultural environment (Stauffer, 2009, 2012). As the relationship among the teacher, students, classroom, school, and community are addressed through the music curriculum and pedagogy, socio-musical places emerge. Teachers and students bring these localized experiences and sociocultural practices into their music making as they acknowledge that musical expressions related to the local environment are worthy of study. Place-conscious music teachers find musical repertoire composed *by* local composers or *about* the local environment or culture and legitimize localized and vernacular musical practices (Ball & Lai, 2006). The inclusion and critical study of these types of musical works and practices as cultural artifacts allow the music classroom to be a socio-musical place in alignment with Stauffer’s (2009, 2012) intentions.

### **Teachers and Critical Place-Conscious Education**

This current study sought to answer questions related to development of place consciousness in music teaching through Greenwood’s theoretical lens of place-conscious education and critical pedagogy of place. Studies that incorporate Greenwood’s framework of critical place-conscious education as a theoretical lens are rare compared to the number of passing citations that his work has received (Schindel Dimick, 2016). In this section, I present two empirical studies conducted by researchers who utilized Greenwood’s framework of critical place-conscious education in classroom inquiries outside of the field of music education. One of these studies is in the field of environmental science and highlights the implementation of place-conscious education focused on the locally built and biophysical worlds. The second study is in the field of English language arts focusing on the inclusion of the local socio-cultural

environment. These two studies emphasize the role of the teacher in the implementation of place-conscious education.

In the field of environmental science education, Schindel Dimick (2016) explored an urban environmental science teacher's curricular implementation of restoration efforts at two neighborhood parks and the students' experiences with these projects through the use of Greenwood's critical pedagogy of place (2013; Gruenewald, 2003). Schindel Dimick made weekly observations of the classroom over the course of one year, interviewed the teacher five times, and facilitated ten group interviews with the students. She found through activities facilitated by their teacher, the students drew on scientific understanding to question dominant and hegemonic practices in relation to the places they were studying. For instance, they questioned the cultural expectations of their community in regard to how they cared for their environment. Students pointed out that police in their neighborhood were nonresponsive to acts of littering in the park but would frequently give citations to homes with unmown lawns. Students believed that littering was more harmful to their community's biodiversity than unmown lawns. Schindel Dimick found that the past, present, and future of these locations and their inhabitants mattered to the students. They planted flowers, removed invasive plant species, and created green infrastructure to mitigate water runoff. They also drew attention to how their reinhabitation efforts had positive effects on the human inhabitants in the neighborhood and positively reframed their neighborhood from negative stereotyping. They transformed the dominant narrative that their community was failing by transferring focus from the abandoned buildings and homes toward the benefits for the communities that their work in the parks provided.

Schindel Dimick found that the teacher helped students learn about historical and social conditions that had led to the parks' current state but did not facilitate a reflective interrogation about social, political, economic, and historical influences. The teacher and students did not engage long enough with these parks to have a deep historical understanding of these spaces and question potentially harmful practices that have influenced or currently influence the parks' current conditions.

Focusing on the socio-cultural elements of place, Dahle-Huff (2015) examined how a teacher implemented place-conscious education in an English language arts classroom. Dahle-Huff used Greenwood's (Gruenewald, 2003, 2008a; Gruenewald & Smith, 2008) critical place-conscious education as a lens for her study. This case study focused on a language arts classroom in a small public charter school in a large urban school district and included one teacher and twelve seventh-grade students. Dahle-Huff used observations, interviews, artifact collection, narrative analysis, and discourse analysis to generate data. The teacher purposefully chose classroom content to connect students' lived experiences with the curriculum. During a unit on World War II and Elie Weisel's *Night*, place-consciousness was demonstrated through the discussion of culture, social struggles, inequality, history, language, political structures, and economics. The teacher also chose the book *Tangled Threads* by Pegi Deitz Shea to ensure this narrative was represented within the school and classroom since there was a significant Hmong community located within the city. She provided an opportunity for her students to understand how intertwined people are to each other within their community. The teacher and the students made connections between the text and their surroundings specifically through their experiences with the Hmong artwork found throughout their city. However, no local members of the Hmong community were invited into the classroom to share their experiences. Throughout her

observations, Dahle-Huff witnessed critical conversations emerged from the texts they read and from the experiences that students had lived or witnessed such as news articles, art work, family stories, and other media sources. These conversations allowed students to engage more deeply with the curriculum and connect to the persons with whom they live. Dahle-Huff found that students were able to connect the elements of the place-conscious curriculum to their own lived experiences and as a result found relevance in their learning.

*Summary: Teachers and Critical Place-Conscious Education*

The teachers in Schindel Dimick's (2016) and Dahle-Huff's (2015) studies made efforts to bridge connections to the local environment and culture but did not purposefully implement Greenwood's critical place-conscious education. Schindel Dimick (2016) found that students engaged in critical reflection but surmised that this reflection was not deep enough to initiate any action to address cultural, political, and ideological influences that were harmful to the park. However, the teacher and students still participated in efforts to clean and restore the park to a usable space for people in the neighborhood. Dahle-Huff (2015) observed critical reflection in the units that were studied and the teacher's and the students' attempts to address hegemonic thinking. However, there was a lack of a firsthand connection to the lived experiences of the people who inhabited the city. Both studies inform this current study through their clear use of critical place-conscious education as an analytical lens to examine teacher pedagogy. Schindel Dimick and Dahle-Huff provide examples of qualitative empirical studies using Greenwood's critical place-conscious education as I seek to transfer this theoretical lens to a qualitative empirical study in music education.

## **First-Year Teaching Experiences**

In music education, the transition from preservice teacher education to the first-year teaching position often proves to be a challenge. First-year music teachers enter classrooms, schools, and communities that are filled with cultural meaning and values existing long before their arrival. However, the classroom undoubtedly changes with their arrival. The studies included in this section specifically address the transition of beginning teachers and music teachers from their student teaching experiences into their first years of teaching. The findings from these studies specifically point to the need for understanding school and community context for greater success through this point of transition. While there is a significant body of scholarship and literature about beginning music teacher mentoring and induction, I chose to focus on inquiry that presents strong implications for the importance of context and place rather than relationships between and among teaching professionals.

In response to critiques of the extant literature on the transition from preservice teaching to in-service teaching being mostly anecdotal or in the form of advice, Roulston, Legette, and Womack (2005) conducted a study on the perceptions of beginning music teachers' transition from university to teaching in schools. They examined beginning music teachers' perspectives about preparation, transition, the first year of teaching, mentoring, and professional needs. Nine music teachers within their first three years of teaching were interviewed. These teachers described their professional needs as mostly contextually driven. The researchers found that teachers' reflections on and opinions of their pre-service training seemed to be inextricably linked with the specifics of the school context in which they taught for their first position. The authors recommended that pre-service teacher preparation programs for music teachers provide

opportunities for students to discuss the various kinds of settings, problems, and issues they could face in their beginning years as a teacher.

Powell (2019) advocated for reflective dialogue with student and novice teachers to serve their needs and free them from standardized conceptions of music education in favor of contextual differences. He examined the structural and agential elements within the practices of novice music teachers from their student teaching through their first year of teaching. He specifically illustrated these structural elements as a strong hierarchy in the roles of music teachers such as the head band director, assistant band director, and student teacher that operate within a culture of competition among the secondary school music programs in the region. Student teachers often stated that they did not feel trusted by their cooperating teachers to teach certain classes or take certain responsibilities due to the competitive nature of the programs and as a result their agency was constrained. Powell explained that student teachers felt they were part of the structure rather than agents with free will. In their transition to their first year of teaching, they experienced a similar structural environment even though the constraints of their agency had changed. Powell found that these first-year teachers continued to sustain and reproduce these structures. Through the teachers' reflections, he noticed they were already yielding to the hierarchical and competitive structures they had previously protested in their student teaching. University supervisors and mentor teachers must enter into a dialogue with preservice teachers and in-service teachers to facilitate needed critical reflection. Powell concluded that music teachers must be able to move away from structural constraints that can hinder their ability to address their student needs and ignore the contextual differences among music classrooms.

Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) sought to understand the character of the interactions between the beginning teacher and the school as an institution and how these interactions affect beginning teachers' actions and beliefs. Kelchtermans and Ballet conceived teacher socialization as a mutual interaction and not as a passive matter of arrival into an existing context. Beginning teachers are influenced by the context, but at the same time their presence affects the structures in which they are socialized. In this multiple case study, they examined fourteen beginning primary school teachers in Belgium who had been teaching for three to five years. Kelchtermans and Ballet asked respondents to reflect back on their career and narratively share their experiences and the meanings they placed on them. Findings were summarized in five categories of professional or micro-political interests that were at stake during their induction phase: material, organizational, socio-professional, cultural-ideological, and self-interests. Material interests included the availability and access to teaching materials, funds, infrastructure, facilities, and time. Organizational interests concerned teachers' roles, positions, or the formal tasks within the school as an organization. Socio-professional interests included issues related to the quality of interpersonal relations within the school. Cultural-ideological interests focused on the normative values and ideals about "good" teaching that were demonstrated in their schools. Lastly, self-interests revealed issues of professional identity. Kelchtermans and Ballet cautioned that the micro-political significance of teachers' actions and experiences can never be properly understood without taking into account the specific context. They argued that understanding beginning teachers' micropolitical experiences is important not only for the theory development on teachers' career-long learning, but also for improving the quality of teacher education and induction programs.

Frequently, the school environment that teachers encounter in their first years may influence their beliefs and practices in ways that cancel out what they may have encountered in preservice education. Ballantyne (2007a) explained that first-year teachers may reject the knowledge and skills that they had acquired through preservice teacher education programs and uncritically adopt the teaching culture at their school. Ballantyne explored instances of praxis shock in Queensland, Australia among music teachers, and highlighted how teacher preparation needs to address early-career music teachers' perceived needs. Ballantyne conducted semi-structured interviews with fifteen early-career Australian music teachers. These teachers had between one and four years of teaching and came from metropolitan and rural geographic contexts and private and public schools; however, all participants taught in secondary schools. Ballantyne found that praxis shock was a common experience for these early-career music teachers. Most participants indicated that they felt ill-prepared for the realities of teaching. Ballantyne identified two factors underlying the experience of praxis shock: isolation and a high workload. Teachers felt that they had been left to fend for themselves with little support from other music teachers or mentors in their own profession. Participants felt that despite their preservice preparation, they were thrown into an unfamiliar environment where they had to figure out on their own how to survive. Participants also felt they had high workloads and were expected to perform multiple roles beyond those of other classroom teachers. These teachers cited the expectation that they must teach their own share of classes but also coordinate and promote extra-curricular music programs. Ballantyne recommended an examination of the "realities" of teaching that would better equip preservice teachers for their future contexts such as integrated practicum opportunities, problem-based learning opportunities, and interaction with a variety of music teachers in many different contexts. She also recommended that in-service

teacher education should address issues associated with praxis shock to assist early-career music teachers as they are experiencing difficulties.

In a similar study, Ballantyne (2007b) found that future teachers need to be prepared for future contexts in order for teacher educators to assist preservice teachers to have realistic expectations of teaching life. Ballantyne explored Australian music teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of their preservice preparation. Ballantyne conducted her study in two stages. In the first stage, she administered a questionnaire survey and received 76 responses. In the second stage, she purposefully sampled and conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 teachers who were somewhat satisfied or dissatisfied from urban, rural, public, and private schools. Ballantyne found that early-career teachers perceive preservice courses as inadequate preparation.

Participants identified general pedagogical knowledge and skills were satisfactorily addressed but not enough emphasis was given to pedagogical content knowledge and skills. Praxis shock was mostly felt in relation to the music teachers' experiences with physical and professional isolation and high workload and responsibilities associated with extra-curricular programs. Ballantyne found as an implication for music teacher preparation that music and educational theory need to be presented in a contextualized manner to prepare future music teachers for a specific context.

In response to a perceived failure of music teachers in Australia to respond to the needs of students in culturally sensitive and locally appropriate ways, Ballantyne and Mills (2008) explored early-career music teachers' perceptions of socially just and inclusive practices in the music classroom. They sought to provide insight into the ways that teacher education programs might approach such practices in more effective ways. Six preservice teachers were interviewed directly before they graduated from their university programs and then again six months into

their first year of teaching. All participants identified as “Anglo-Australian.” Ballantyne and Mills identified some discourses from participants suggesting that they held deficit constructions of students from non-mainstream cultures. Ballantyne and Mills suggested that teachers need to question their taken-for-granted beliefs and assumptions about themselves and others particularly those who identify as being part of the dominant cultures and who may, as a result, view students who are different from themselves as problems to be managed. Ballantyne and Mills admitted that theoretical decisions about curricula provide opportunities for teachers to be inclusive but some of these teachers continued to struggle with how to enact inclusivity in their practice. One teacher acknowledged the importance of connecting work in the classroom to students’ interests through rock and pop music. Ballantyne and Mills illustrated this as an example of the way that schools, instead of being sites of “dislocation” (p. 85) can relate curricula to students’ experiences and make classrooms more inclusive. They cautioned that teacher educators and preservice music teachers may be tempted to approach “practical” matters of teaching rather than engaging with issues of difference. Ballantyne and Mills concluded that teacher education programs that engender dispositions toward social justice will encourage music teachers to explore and reconsider their own assumptions, understand the values and practices of families and cultures that are different from their own, and as a result develop pedagogy that is locally appropriate and culturally sensitive.

*Summary: First-Year Teaching Experiences*

The studies that were presented in this section examined the transition from preservice teacher education to in-service teaching. A common theme was that teachers who seek to understand their teaching contexts are more likely to experience success in their first years of teaching. Roulston, Legette, and Womack (2005) found that the opinions and perspectives of

music teachers' preservice education was inextricably tied to specifics of their current teaching context. Powell (2019) found that music teachers must break from constraining structures found in their schools and music programs as they move toward addressing specific student needs in their distinct contexts. Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) found that teachers' micropolitical identity affects the relationship they have with their classroom and school. These beliefs and assumptions must be considered in conjunction with their specific teaching contexts. When a teacher's beliefs and assumptions do not align with the realities they encounter in their school, they may experience praxis shock (Ballantyne, 2007a, 2007b; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). Preservice education must try to alleviate this phenomenon. Ballantyne (2007a, 2007b) explained that beginning music teachers may reject the knowledge they gained in their preservice education if they have not been prepared to have realistic expectations for a wide variety of teaching contexts. The possibilities of what students will encounter in a variety of teaching situations need to be discussed. In addition, Ballantyne and Mills (2008) recommended that preservice and in-service music teachers must explore and reconsider their own assumptions in order to develop and implement pedagogy that is locally appropriate and culturally sensitive.

### **Context in Music Education**

Prior to Stauffer (2009), the use of "place" as a theoretical or philosophical construct in music education appears to be non-existent or used in a manner that is not aligned with place philosophy. However, "context" appeared more frequently in research literature, which may be attributed to Shulman's (1987) designation of context as a component of teacher knowledge. Because Joseph Schwab was Shulman's teacher, the understanding of context can be traced even further back to Schwab's (1973) commonplace of the *milieu* in the 1970s. In this section, I attempt to present a small number of studies that explore music teachers' understanding of their

geographic and cultural context. Most of this literature emerged from work that has been done in geographic and demographic contexts, specifically rural and urban school research. If these studies which examine particular places and contexts are examined collectively and in tandem with one another, they may inform how music teachers learn about places where they teach.

Bresler (1998) examined multiple contexts to understand the genre of “school music.” Bresler found that the genre of school music was shaped and defined by multiple and intermingling contexts, specifically what she defined as the meso, micro, and macro levels<sup>3</sup>. The meso was the school or institutional context, the micro was the personal context of the teacher, and the macro was the cultural context of music education in the United States. She analyzed data from two prior projects on the operational curriculum of music, visual arts, dance, and drama in U.S. elementary schools. For this study, she used only the data gathered from music instruction by music specialists and classroom teachers in five elementary schools. Data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers and principals, and an analysis of relevant materials. At the meso level or institutional context, the school’s schedule, classroom, and expectations for students influenced how music was taught. Music teachers were often marginalized and considered an “other” teacher because they taught a subject not taught by classroom teachers. This marginalization as well as the dispensability of the subject was reflected in that several participants did not have designated rooms for music. At the micro level, the teachers’ backgrounds and commitments influenced what was taught as they drew from their prior experiences with music. The personal micro context of music teachers also included race and ethnicity and other cultural experiences, which sometimes differed from their students. One teacher in this study, Pat, had prior experience at a White, middle-class school which was similar

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<sup>3</sup> The categorizations of meso, micro, and macro levels appears to be adapted from Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory though it is not cited in Bresler’s work.

to her background whereas during this study she was teaching in a largely low socio-economic status, African-American small town school. As a result, she expressed no longer feeling a sense of community with her students. At the macro level, music instruction reflected what was emphasized in university music education programs and what teachers were comfortable teaching in line with larger cultural values. Bresler found that while teachers had autonomy in developing their music curriculum, that curriculum reflected educational priorities and values in society such as emphasis on competitiveness, achievement, and success; notions of community and spirituality; and leisure and entertainment. Bresler's findings demonstrated a variety of influences that affect what types of music are taught in the classroom as well as how instruction is implemented. Even though music teachers may have had the autonomy to make curricular decisions, influences from the meso, micro, and macro contexts were at play and interacted with each other to influence what students gained from their music experience at school.

Bannerman (2016) portrayed a music teacher who was consciously reflecting on the cultural values of her students and the community and strategically used this knowledge to align her curriculum to meet their needs. Her study sought to understand how choir participation is enabled or impeded by school culture and explored how school culture interacts with meanings of singing in a rural, secondary school choral program. This ethnographic case study of a rural secondary school in the northeastern United States included the choir teacher, principal, guidance counselor, four parents of choir students, and seven middle school and twelve high school students who sang in choir. Data were collected from semi-structured individual and group interviews of the students, in-person and phone interviews of the other participants, and six months of observations of choral classes and events. Bannerman found that the choral program and school culture converged to enable students' participation in choir and singing. The school

promoted middle class values of the community even though it served a mixture of socioeconomic statuses. Choir was valued because it was seen as contributing to a well-rounded education. The teacher enabled participation in the chorus by implementing what Bannerman termed “contextually responsive teaching” (p. 173). The teacher found ways to strategically interact with the wider school and community culture and context through positive relationships with other teachers and school staff members to enhance her teaching and student learning. Impediments for participation in the choral program arose from misalignments between the choral program and school culture. These misalignments included various curricular tracking programs such as advanced placement and technical education, which Bannerman associated with socioeconomic status, gender, and academic status. Male singers in the study cited gender norms as impediments for participation in the choral program. Not all of these impediments for participation were necessarily seen as problems by school personnel and as a result were not addressed by the teacher or school staff. Impediments to participation that the teacher and school personnel addressed as problems that needed to be solved were inclusion of students with special needs, academic challenges, and financial hardships. Bannerman concluded that impediments and advantages for choral participation can be embedded in the curricular structure of the program and school as well as cultural beliefs. She recommended further research in contextually responsive teaching to “examine how teachers engage with their communities both in and beyond their classrooms in ways that specifically connect with local places and benefit students’ music education” (p. 206).

Fitzpatrick (2008) sought to learn about the ways that instrumental music teachers in Chicago navigated the urban landscape. She focused on the contextual knowledge that the teachers held regarding their students and communities. Her mixed methods study was

conducted in three phases. The first phase involved a focus group of seven urban instrumental music teachers. From what Fitzpatrick learned from the teachers, she developed a questionnaire for the next phase, which featured a survey of ninety instrumental music teachers in the Chicago Public Schools. Findings from the survey in the second phase showed that respondents had a strong knowledge of their communities, students, and schools. The final phase was a multiple case study of four instrumental Chicago Public School teachers. Four teachers were nominated for participation by the music curriculum supervisor in the Chicago Public Schools. Fitzpatrick selected in her study an inexperienced teacher in a struggling program, an inexperienced teacher in a thriving program, an experienced teacher in a struggling program, and an experienced teacher in a thriving program. Data were generated from a pre-interview, a day of observation, and a follow-up interview. Fitzpatrick spent a day in the life of each of these teachers by taking extensive notes, recording rehearsals, driving around the neighborhood each school was located in, photographing houses and businesses, and documenting as best she could the local culture that would help inform her understanding of each particular context. Fitzpatrick found that these four teachers had a broad knowledge of the context in which they taught and had an understanding of the ways in which they could function to provide a baseline level of resources for student success. They demonstrated a desire to help students overcome challenges in their lives and not just foster their musical development. This concern displayed a commitment to their students and to the broader communities in which they taught. Fitzpatrick also found that these teachers were resolved to expose their students to the elements of traditional “band culture” that existed outside of their urban experiences. For these teachers, the greater value was found not in connecting students with their own culture but expanding their knowledge beyond their own culture. Fitzpatrick found that knowledge of the context of the urban environment may be

situated within personal experience. Much of these teachers' context-specific knowledge was gained from personal experience rather than from training. Fitzpatrick raised questions about how performance ensembles should incorporate more community and popular music into the curriculum and how traditional ensembles should be made culturally relevant. She questioned if the teachers in her case study had seen successful alternatives to traditional approaches.

Fitzpatrick believed that students and programs must be evaluated on the basis of their own individual accomplishments and improvements within their contexts. Finally, she noted that because these schools are locally controlled, music programs should connect not just to students but also with parents and community members.

In a study exploring how successful urban choral music educators use contextual knowledge to inform their pedagogical practice, Shaw (2015) conducted a collective case study of four urban choral music teachers' contextual knowledge. Shaw adopted Grossman's (1990) model of contextual knowledge to inform the conception of her study and used culturally responsive teaching (Gay 2002) as a theoretical framework. The four teachers in her study were members of an urban community chorus organization that served 3,500 children ages 8 through 18. The choirs were divided into three levels: a top-level mixed choir, nine after school choirs that met in neighborhood centers throughout the city, and 60 choirs that met during the school day in the city's public schools. Shaw chose to focus on each participants' teaching in after school choirs since each was affiliated with a specific residential neighborhood. Each participant was employed by the choir organization to teach in 10 to 14 demographically contrasting music classrooms each week. Shaw generated data through individual semi-structured interviews, a focus group interview, ethnographic field notes, autobiographical notes, and a collection of material culture. She also observed three of the participants teaching in five after-school

locations and attended the choirs' performances. The participant in the first case was Lisa Rose, a Korean-American woman, who was born and attended public school in the same neighborhood where she now conducted an after school choir. The teacher in the second case was Troy Paris, an African-American man, who is originally from the city and had taught general and choral music for 23 years. The third case was John Peterson, a Caucasian man, who had recently established a new after school choral program in a predominantly Mexican-American community. The fourth case was James Moses, a Jewish man who was born and raised in Colombia to German immigrant parents. He conducted an after school choir in a predominantly Puerto Rican neighborhood and a second choir in a neighborhood where over 80 languages were spoken. Shaw found that each case exemplified how urban choral educators used their knowledge of learners, context, and personal practical knowledge to successfully navigate the urban context. Each teacher enacted this knowledge through the use of culturally responsive teaching by placing students' strengths and needs at the center of the curriculum. Shaw recommended that music teacher education programs should strive to equip preservice music educators with skills and dispositions necessary to cultivate their own contextual knowledge, rather than attempt to prepare them for every conceivable classroom context. She also cautioned that urban educators' professional growth cannot rely solely on preservice teacher education and instead professional development tailored to urban educators' needs is necessary. This professional development should help teachers deepen their knowledge of their teaching contexts and cultivate their continued professional growth.

A theoretical model entitled *Developing Contextual Awareness* (DCA) was proposed to be used with beginning music teachers to help them understand their teaching contexts. To develop this model, Hunt (2009) interviewed the people that she believed were the key

stakeholders in school music programs to understand their views and investment in music programs. She gathered data to inform music teacher education to help prepare preservice music teachers for urban and rural music programs. The nine interviewees included music teachers, administrators, and parents from two rural and two urban communities. Hunt found that the perspectives of the participants about what music teachers should know and be able to do were influenced by the contextual factor of geographic location. Participants believed that for music teachers to succeed they must develop contextual awareness in regard to their teaching position. Hunt subsequently developed the DCA model for music education consisting of four components. First, music educators must understand the music teachers' and music programs' roles. The location of the school district influences the expectations for music teachers and their programs. Music educators must be proactive in talking to the stakeholders of their programs to develop this understanding. Second, music educators should focus on advantages and accepting challenges as opportunities. Each community has a set of unique community resources and as a result, music teachers should reframe the challenges they encounter as possibilities for the future. Third, music educators should create specific professional development goals. Music teachers' skills affect their success regardless of their geographic location; however, they should identify critical skills that are best suited for their situations. Last, music educators should commit to persistence with patience. Successes will be achieved incrementally and music teachers need to have patience for them to accumulate. Hunt saw this model to be developed into a screening tool for music teacher education programs or as an aid for the development of professional development.

*Summary: Context in Music Education*

In this section, I presented a sampling of studies exploring the role of context in music education. These studies ranged from multiple geographic and demographic contexts (Bresler, 1998; Hunt, 2009) to more specific demographic contexts (Bannerman, 2016; Fitzpatrick, 2008; Shaw, 2015). Bresler named multiple contexts that are embedded within each other, demonstrating the complexity of the term “context” and its ambiguity. Bresler’s descriptions of the influences of meso, micro, and macro contexts on music education illustrated how institutional structures, teacher beliefs and backgrounds, and cultural values influence the music that is taught and included in music classrooms. Bresler demonstrated that these systems of influence are overlapping and interdependent. Hunt approached contextual difference from the demographic and geographic standpoint by creating the Developing Contextual Awareness model from data gathered from stakeholders of music education in rural and urban areas. She recommended the use of this model for preservice and in-service music educators as an aid for professional development.

Bannerman’s (2016), Fitzpatrick’s (2008), Shaw’s (2015) studies focused on music programs in either rural or urban contexts. These studies portrayed a need for understanding the particularities of the specific contexts that were studied. A major factor in Bannerman’s findings was the culture of the school and the community. Her case study portrayed a music teacher that was consciously reflecting on the cultural values of her students and the community and strategically used this knowledge to align her curriculum to meet their needs. Bannerman recommended the implementation of “contextually relevant pedagogy,” or pedagogy that is implemented based on the particularities of the community. Fitzpatrick found from her qualitative data that within urban schools—even within the same district—there is a wide variety

of communities, school contexts, and needs. The four case studies that were presented demonstrated a complex array of influences from the physical urban environment, teacher's philosophical approaches, each school's administration, and the surrounding neighborhood communities. Fitzpatrick simultaneously recommended that music teachers pay attention to the culture of the students involved in each school's music programs. Fitzpatrick questioned whether better models of implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy need to be forwarded in preservice teacher education and in-service professional development in order for teachers to understand its potential value in their classrooms. Shaw located four teachers who had deep contextual knowledge of their communities and used this knowledge to enact culturally responsive teaching which centered students' strengths and needs. Shaw recommended that music teacher education programs should help music educators to develop skills and dispositions that would allow them to cultivate their own contextual knowledge throughout various phases of their development and not only in preservice teacher education.

### **Place-Based Music Education**

Stauffer's work transferring place and place-conscious education into music education (2009, 2012) inspired scholars to use this conception in research especially in work that examined music teaching and learning and its relation to geographical context. The transference of the philosophy of place to music education led scholars to retrace Stauffer's translation of the philosophical conception of place from geography, cultural theory, and sociology into the music education context. Using place as a conceptual framework, the following studies in music education sought to understand the relationship that place has with music learning and teaching in various locations in the United States and Canada. The findings and implications of these studies support the conception and implementation of my study to explore how teachers develop

and implement their understanding of place in teaching. In this section, I summarize two studies that utilize the philosophical conception of place to examine the connection of the community with the local music program. These studies are then followed by a series of autoethnographic studies that seek to interrogate each author's assumptions about their local community and their approaches to music learning and teaching.

In a study exploring how a music program contributed to students' sense of place, Brook (2016) examined the features of a music education program in a rural school in Bella Coola, British Columbia. Brook relied on place-based education as a theoretical framework as she studied this context as experienced by teachers, students, and community members. The data generated for this case study originated from interviews, observations, and questionnaires. Brook also gathered concert programs, newspaper articles, and books about the community. The school offered band as a music course for students. She found the music teacher understood the variation in the needs of the community and his students' musical needs and tried to meet these as best he could. He allowed students to develop a common focus or goal for the class. At the time of this study, the ensemble began to play more jazz style charts to allow more opportunities for students to improvise. The students seemed to enjoy these opportunities stating that it allowed them to add their own expressive ideas into performing notated music. The ensemble interacted with the community at large through their performances and concerts, and Brook noted that students began to develop a sense of place through travel to provincial music festivals as they realized their connection to other people within the province. Western music framed the emphasis of the entire program. Brook noticed through the lens of place-based education theory that there was a lack of music in the program that represented the ethnicities represented in the community. Students received three hours a week in Aboriginal education about Nuxalk culture

which included language, culture, and songs and dances. Brook noted that while the music teacher was supportive and wanted to include Nuxalk music, he did not have the resources or expertise to do so. However, Brook stated that other musical skills and advice given by the teacher to his students enhanced students' after-school music-making activities.

Participants in a study by VanDeusen (2016) expressed a deep connection that the school music program provided in the cultural development of their community and described that this connection was healthiest when the music teacher was mutually invested in the community. VanDeusen examined a rural school music program in the Midwestern United States using a place-theory lens and drew on place-based education approaches. She explored the ways the school connected to the community and sought to understand the perceived value of the school's music program by members of its school community and to determine ways in which the school and community members showed their support. VanDeusen interviewed the elementary music teacher and the secondary music teacher. She also interviewed the administrators, guidance counselors, coaches, several teachers, two music booster members, and three high school musicians. VanDeusen also collected information from the school website and through school and classroom observations. She found that there was a strong tradition within the community since most of the study's participants were raised within the town or moved there early in their careers. This longevity allowed participants to understand the history of the community and schools as well as develop personal connections with others in the community. Noah, the secondary music teacher, sought to understand the community when he came to the school district and looked for ways to improve what was already happening within the music program. He stated that he approached the position with humility in order to get to know the people who have lived in the area and understand the program better than he did. VanDeusen posited that this

synergistic relationship between school, community, and music teacher might serve as a model for school and community leaders situated within similar contexts. She recommended that schools in similar contexts might examine their own history and relationships to understand the significance of each to determine the impact of place and context on the school music program.

*Summary: Place-Based Music Education*

Each author developed a conceptual framework of place from their own literature reviews. Both Brook (2016) and VanDeusen (2016) found an important link between the music classroom and rural communities and portrayed teachers who were committed to finding ways to relate their music classroom to relevant cultural aspects of their respective communities, echoing Stauffer's (2009, 2012) recommendation to consider the music classroom as a socio-musical place. The above two studies demonstrate the importance students, parents, administrators, and community members attribute to the relationship between music education and the culture and environment located within and outside the classroom. The teacher, Noah, in VanDeusen's (2016) study, demonstrated a clear pathway into the school environment for a new teacher that was celebrated by these stakeholders that could be a potential model for first-year teachers beginning their careers.

*Personal Stories About Place and Music Education*

Many studies in music education that examine the relationship between place and music making, learning, and teaching emerge from autoethnographic or autobiographical accounts. This may be potentially attributed to the personalized nature that both experiences with places and music have within people's lives. These accounts provide rich accounts that provide the field of music education with potent questions and criticisms. However, these accounts also must be examined in a highly contextualized manner. Most of these studies emerged from familiarities

with rural music education. These rural studies use a definition of rurality from their own experience rather than one that may be appropriate for all situations. Kruse (2014) used autoethnography to interrogate his own assumptions of education, place, and music through his interaction with a hip-hop artist. Each of these studies examine the implications that the study of places has for music education.

Bates (2011) questioned traditional music practices that appear to foster social mobility while ignoring the places that the schools inhabit. To explore this issue, Bates juxtaposed his own experiences as a poor, rural, White music student and later as a music educator and music teacher educator alongside the potential oppression of poor, White rural music students in the United States. Using his own personal reflections as a teenager to illustrate distinctions between his home and school experiences, he interrogated the belief that traditional school music practices are “good for” (p. 101) students, specifically with an aim to foster social mobility. Bates grew up in Utah’s West Desert. He viewed his school music education experiences in a positive manner but questioned if they were as fulfilling for later life as they could have been. He described his family as musically rich as they often participated in musical activities together. He remarked that he is the only person in his family who still plays a band instrument that was learned in school; however, they all still play instruments and sing styles of music that they learned through their family gatherings. Despite finding lifelong relevance of outside of school music genres and music-making practices, Bates postulated that out-of-school music practices are often approached with suspicion and not as legitimate as formalized music education found within schools. Bates questioned whether formalized music education contributes to social mobility or the ability to move in and among different social classes and cultures for its students. Social mobility, according to Bates, is attained at the cost of suppressing cultural identity and

abandoning beloved persons and places. Bates suggested that school music can offer transformative experiences if long-term outcomes are considered for school music. Teachers need to consider what poor, White, rural populations already find musically meaningful and explore ways to facilitate these musical practices. Citing Greenwood (Gruenewald, 2003), he advised that critical music pedagogies of rural places should involve students in localized musical practices and traditions, deepen the understanding of students' musical backgrounds and cultures, and enable students to explore local concerns through a musical lens.

Shevock (2016) challenged music education as a displacing practice and proposed a praxis in which local places are seen as valuable resources that can be re-rooted. Through the use of autoethnography, he sought to understand how the intersection of rurality, Whiteness, and poverty has affected his attitudes, actions, and roles in relation to music teaching and learning. Shevock illustrated music education as an “uprooting” endeavor that transforms people into believing that meaningful music making can only occur after they have received a formal music education. As he progressed through music education, he felt that his out-of-school informal music experiences were not as important as the music and techniques he was learning in formalized music education settings even though he did not see much use for these skills beyond his lessons. He found playing popular music more fulfilling but continually tried to reject that notion. Later, his personal experience became the foundation for his commitment to class consciousness as an ethical teaching praxis in urban neighborhoods that were drastically different from where he grew up. He believed that his experience as White, rural, and poor cultivated his ability to recognize oppression and to connect meaningfully with the community and his students. Shevock recommended that teachers should focus not only on the unfamiliar but also on the familiar as a way to find rootedness. In music education, Shevock envisioned students

recording the songs of their families and elders to be compiled into a songbook that could be performed and published. He cautioned that new music teachers should enter into communities with humility, recognizing that students already possess musical knowledge.

Newly minted music teachers need to stop going into rural neighborhoods with “good” music (which the rural students are too backward or uneducated to appreciate) helping rural people “develop.” Rather music educators should enter communities in humility as guests, and respect these communities’ ways of living and musicing. (pp. 49-50)

Shevock reminded teachers that students are able to participate in music activities with or without being musically educated and that their local places are valuable resources for school music, which should not be overlooked in attempts in searches for “better” or “more cultured music” of “distant places” (p. 50).

Corbett (2016) advocated for place-based rural knowledge, which would bring a regional focus to prominent discourse in music education. He drew on his personal experiences in a rural Canadian town where country music and old time folk music were prevalent to explore how the music making in this rural space might teach others about diversity. Corbett sought to answer how teachers may seek ways to bridge place-based rural knowledge forms with discourses of musical forms unfamiliar to children living in the country. Drawing on his past experiences in music education, he found a distinction between those who learned formalized classical music and their ability to play music that they have never heard through their knowledge of standard notation compared to those who learned music through more participatory methods and their ability to join in with other musicians without having practiced as an ensemble. Corbett recommended discourse in music education that operates in particular geographic regions as opposed to a universalized approach. Corbett asserted that attention to place and space is crucial for the transformation of music education from an essentialist or universalized conception. Teachers need to look for ways to bridge the “emplaced” musical world with school music (p.

24). He recommended that rural children need to understand their families and elders are legitimate music producers, that the music they hear in the sonic backdrop of their lives is legitimate music, and that their experiential knowledge of music should be bridged to other discourses of music and other disciplines such as literature, history, geography, sciences, and mathematics.

Kruse (2014) sought to inform place consciousness in music education through his study of the social contexts of hip-hop music education and potential applications of hip-hop to school music settings. In his study, he explored the sociocultural aspects, especially those of race, place, and class, of hip-hop musicians' experiences in music education and school. His informant was an amateur hip-hop musician named Terrence whose experiences were contrasted with Kruse's own beliefs, values, and assumptions about school and education. Kruse acted as a participant observer by learning about hip-hop music production alongside Terrence in various settings. Kruse drew on place-based education and Greenwood's (Gruenewald, 2003) framework of place-conscious education. The study emerged as a multiple case study with Terrence (also known by his performance name T-spit) and Kruse as separate cases. Kruse and Terrence differed in beliefs, values, and assumptions about school and education—the most significant being Kruse as a White professional educator versus Terrence as a Black man having dropped out of high school. Kruse situated his findings in places and spaces of meaning such as the environments where they each grew up, their school experiences, and their work in music studios. He found that sociocultural and environmental contexts were important to Terrence through his own music and musical identity. A critical part of Terrence's identity as a hip-hop musician was his opposition to violence and crime found in his local surroundings. Likewise, Kruse found that his own musical identity was also placed strongly in his sociocultural contexts.

He hesitated to identify as a hip-hop musician because of his knowledge of the historical notions of hip-hop. His pathway to hip-hop was that of a scholar intending to employ hip-hop as a way to inform school practice. Kruse concluded that teachers should critically examine and address issues that are relevant to their communities and create meaning in these spaces with their students. He also reiterated that the same spaces can be experienced differently by each person who uses them, such as how Kruse and Terrence experienced music-making in the studio. Each entered these studio spaces with different aims and understandings which affected their experiences in different ways even though their composition processes were similar. Kruse recommended that future researchers use place philosophy, place-based and place-conscious education to explore the various contexts of music to expand ways of connecting music classrooms with the rest of the world.

*Summary: Personal Stories About Place and Music Education*

The studies presented in this section incorporate the personal experiences of each of the researchers as they examined questions about the relationship among music, place, and schools. Bates (2011), Shevock (2016), and Corbett (2016) noted how their communities valued specific types of vernacular music. These types of music were not seen as worthy of study in their school experiences even though all three found great benefit to learning about them. Kruse (2014) questioned his assumptions about music education as he learned beside the hip-hop musician Terrence and witnessed the connections that Terrence created between his music and his surroundings. Each study recommended attention to localized music-making in music education and diverse approaches to music education beyond the traditional in order to allow students to make meaningful connections to the world.

With the exception of Kruse's participant (2014), non-White perspectives are missing from these stories of place and music. Bates (2011), Shevock (2016), and Corbett (2016) approach the relationship of place and music making from rural perspectives, which are also explicitly White male perspectives. The contextualized nature of these stories needs to be accounted for since not all rural America is White male, but it is the manner of how these researchers frame their stories that points to the importance that place plays in the relationship between music education and people.

### **Music Making as Place Making**

If place is socially constructed, then persons act as place makers. Within a music classroom, the teacher and students are those whose collective experiences shape the cultural environment of the classroom specifically through their music-making activities. The following two studies in music education examine the role music has in the development of places and provide implications for the role of the music teacher as a place maker.

Spring (2014) demonstrated the importance of the music educator as a communitarian or community builder. In her study, Spring sought to understand how a sense of place intersects with professional praxis. She gathered stories from four music teachers in rural Ontario, Canada. Spring utilized a narrative research design and a "collaborative inquiry" approach (p. 43). Narratives were formed from autobiographies, interviews, journals, focus group interviews, and other participant narrative stories. Spring stated, "The music educator performs an important role as a place and community builder, creating music with her students and advocating for community through her music praxis" (p. 257). Spring found that the music educator plays the role of a communitarian, a notion that gives emphasis to the importance of an individual to shape a community ideology. The participants in this study forged community connections through

their extensive involvement with school music activities and performances at the school, churches, nursing homes, retirement homes, special events, and meetings. From the narratives of these teachers, Spring established that each rural place is unique. Each community had special attributes that were different than the other communities but often the uniqueness of each community is not taken into account. There is homogeneity in curriculum where students learn as though they are in the same geographic locations, in the same contexts, and with the same resources. Spring and her participants recommended putting into practice “rurally relevant” (p. 276) teaching where teachers, students, parents, and community members have a voice in what is best for their rural locale.

Matsunobu (2018) illustrated how place-conscious and place-based educational practices are analogous with place making. He investigated the ways in which a variety of musical engagements and educational opportunities were created in three Japanese communities. He employed a multiple case study design to examine three instrumental cases based in three distinct locales. The first case was a small island in southern Japan where people have attempted to form a place-based identity through creating songs. A man named Keita facilitated a project to revive a local traditional instrument known as the *gottan* as the community members practiced a song called *satokouta*, or “hometown short song.” This song and instrument gave islanders a piece of cultural heritage that could remain with them no matter their location. The second case was situated in a town in mainland Japan where an *ibasho* was created for teenagers to create and play rock music. An *ibasho* is the combination of the two Japanese words *i* which means “being” or “dwelling” and *basho* which means “place.” This word signifies a space where a person feels a sense of belonging and is valued and acknowledged by others. The project leader, Shigemi, transformed a storage space for local festival equipment into a place for local young people to

practice, perform, and share rock music with each other. The third case was an example of a school and community collaboration in the Kanto region near Tokyo that attempted to teach local elementary school children music for a specific local festival. The community benefited from this collaboration because it recontextualized and revitalized their local music.

Matsunobu found that music activities that embrace local themes and contents can also support the process of constructing a person's identity and sense of *ibasho*. Matsunobu presented the following four findings. First, music was experienced in terms of a particular place rather than through genres. Second, making and performing local instruments that embodied local sounds and expressions served as an entry point to place-based education. Third (and with the exception of the third case), the involvement of school teachers was non-existent. School teachers, many of whom were not from the local communities, were more concerned with following the national curriculum rather than introducing local music or responding to local needs. Finally, these cases presented and promoted diverse formats for localized styles of music making and learning. Matsunobu believed that through the flexibility and creativity in music activities, place-based music education can serve as an antithesis to the standardization of education.

*Summary: Music Making as Place Making*

The studies presented in this section illustrate the idea that the music teacher develops a sense of place for their students in the classroom and their community through the use of music. Spring (2014) labeled the role of the music teacher in this process as a “communitarian” where Matsunobu (2018) used the phrase “place maker.” In both studies, music was shown to create a strong bond to the participants' sense of geographic location and cultural heritage. Spring emphasized that each of the communities in which her participants taught were distinct and

should be approached as such through “rurally relevant pedagogy.” Likewise, Matsunobu, found that his cases originated from such diverse contexts that place-based music education provided flexibility in meeting the musical needs of each of these communities. As a result, the music teacher can play a significant role in developing musical activities that serve their students and community in developing connections to their surroundings and heritage.

## **Conclusion**

This literature review examined the fundamental aspects of Greenwood’s framework of critical place-conscious education and its implications for beginning teachers. Place-conscious teachers are cognizant of the perceptual, sociological, ideological, and ecological dimensions of their classroom, school, and community. Through critical reflection, place-conscious teachers enact the processes of place making in order for their pedagogy to find congruence with the places their students and schools inhabit. A framework of critical place-conscious music education implies that music educators begin to evaluate their physical and cultural surroundings and their effects on musical practice. As the relationships among the teacher, students, classroom, school, and community are addressed through the music curriculum and pedagogy, socio-musical places will emerge.

Several related topics were explored through empirical research. Studies on the transition into the first years of teaching in music education underscore the need for teachers to understand the educational context to find success in their first years and avoid praxis shock. Another group of studies explored the role of context in music education. These studies found many realms of influence that overlap and are interdependent with each other, supporting a need to study the particularities of specific classrooms, schools, and communities. Studies exploring approaches to music education using a philosophy of place revealed what various stakeholders find important

in the relationship between music education and the culture and environment located within and outside the classroom. Studies presenting personal relationships among music, place, and schools established the value of localized music-making in music education. Finally, studies have been conducted using Greenwood's critical place-conscious education as an analytical lens examining teacher pedagogy.

The present study contributes to this body of research by exploring first-year music teachers' journeys of place consciousness and their implementation of their understanding of place in their pedagogy. This study examined the first-year teaching experiences of music teachers and their pedagogical decisions. The research sought to delve further into the multidimensional meanings of context through the lens of critical place-conscious education. First-year music teachers' encounters, actions, and reflections with the culture and environment of their classrooms, schools, and communities were explored through the lens of place consciousness.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHOD**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the research design for this study. After a brief overview of the research processes, I describe my use of a case study and my selection of participants and sites. I provide my schedule and methods for data generation and describe how the resulting data were analyzed. Finally, I address aspects of trustworthiness, validation, and reflexivity germane to the study.

### **Research Overview**

This study was designed to explore first-year music teachers' journeys of place consciousness within a new classroom, school, and community, and how they manifested this knowledge and understanding in their pedagogy. The following questions guided this study: 1) How do first-year music teachers develop place consciousness? 2) How do first-year music teachers enact place consciousness in their pedagogical decisions? The goal of this study was to present first-year music teachers' journeys of place consciousness. To prompt a thorough discussion of their relationship to the places in which they teach as well as provide an illustrative account of their experiences, I employed a case study method.

### **Case Study**

Case study research seeks to look at a phenomenon from varied angles to answer questions of its "why" and its "how" (Thomas, 2016). The intensity of this type of inquiry allows the researcher to "drill down" to develop a better understanding of the phenomenon. By looking at the phenomenon from multiple vantage points, a balanced and richer portrait is developed. The purpose of case study is not to find generalizability or establish causality but to dive into the complexity and particularity of the phenomenon within a context. Thomas (2016) explained that

case study investigates a small number of cases to collect and analyze data about a larger number of features of each case. The cases are naturally occurring in their context, and variables are not controlled because quantification is not a priority. Instead, case study seeks to look at relationships and processes of the phenomenon under examination.

Binding the case to be observed is important to case study. According to Thomas (2016), the case itself allows the researcher to explore the complexity of what is contained within its bounds. This can be a set of conditions or state of affairs. Thomas (2016) described the arguments or the justification of reasoning by the researcher as the fibers that hold study or case together, stressing the interrelationship of various elements within the case.

Thomas's (2016) definition of case study is comprised of a subject and an object. The subject or the practical unity of the case is the person, place, or event that has been bounded. However, the subject by itself cannot be studied without an analytical framework or the "object," as Thomas names it. The subject of the case must be a representation *of* something that is of concern. Thomas explains, "The case that is the subject of the inquiry will illuminate and explicate some analytical theme, or object" (p. 23).

#### *Case Study in the Context of This Project*

I explored the experiences of first-year music teachers as they journey toward place-consciousness. First-year music teachers are the subject of my case study. As a music educator, I experienced my own first year teaching in a new classroom, and I have developed an understanding of this phenomenon through my own perspective. The subject of first-year music teachers is an example of a local knowledge case because it is something with which I have had personal experience, but I am seeking more information and understanding (Thomas, 2016). The

subject of first-year music teachers in this case study was also selected as a key case to be an exemplar of first year teaching experiences (Thomas, 2016).

The object of this study is the development of place consciousness by first-year music teachers, specifically how they journey to an understanding of their surroundings. While some aspects of first-year music teachers' experiences are known, the way they understand and make sense of their contexts is not known. As a result, this case study is both an explanatory and exploratory case study (Thomas, 2016). This is also an instrumental case study since the purpose is to explore how place consciousness is developed in first-year music teachers to aid music teachers in their beginning teaching experiences.

I employed a multiple case study design in order to analyze the richness of participants' accounts within each case as well as to analyze across cases (Thomas, 2016). This design allowed me to examine the experiences of first-year teachers, allowing me to write about the particularities of multiple journeys of place consciousness. I also studied the experiences of three first-year music teachers as parallel studies (Thomas, 2016). I studied these teachers simultaneously and analyzed each case on its own terms before examining the three cases through cross-case analysis.

The design of this study depended on an emergent framework. While the case is bounded by the experiences of first-year music teachers and their classrooms, the interactions and relationships that these teachers had with others in their place-bound settings constructed and informed the study. The fluid and socially constructed nature of these interactions and relationships necessitated an emergent approach. Through in-depth interviews and observations in the field, I was able to learn about these particular teachers and their sense of place

consciousness. Entry into the field and the interaction with these participants over the duration of this study allowed me to understand its emergent aspects.

### **Participant and Site Selection**

For the purpose of this study, I sought to locate first-year music teachers as research participants. Through expert nomination, I consulted music education colleagues at the university and K-12 levels to recommend potential participants in the state of Illinois. From their recommendations, I developed a list of ten potential participants who taught at schools within drivable distance from where I lived at the time of this study. I contacted all ten participants through email using a recruitment letter approved by the Institutional Review Board (see Appendix B). This letter outlined the scope of the study as well as the time commitment needed from each participant. Four teachers responded with interest to participate.

I conducted fifteen to thirty minute screening interviews with all four potential participants. This interview included questions about each participants' personal and professional background (see Appendix B). After these interviews, I selected three participants to continue based on how well they articulated answers, how reflective they were about their teaching practice, and how receptive they were to the study's focus. These three participants were emailed a formal invitation to participate in this study using a letter approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix B) and asked to return a consent form (see Appendix C). Schools and school districts were also contacted for permission since part of this study occurred within each participant's classroom while they were teaching (See Appendix C). My focus was on the teacher and did not rely on interactions with students. As a result, no consent or assent forms from students were necessary.

The first teacher was Alex Winfrey, who taught elementary general music at Beechwood Elementary School and band at Washington Elementary School in Williston, Illinois (see Chapter 4). The second teacher was Vanesa Reyes, who taught middle school band at Ascend Charter School in Voyageur, Illinois (see Chapter 5). The third teacher was Caroline Victrola, who taught high school choir and a music survey course at Park High School in DeMesne, Illinois (see Chapter 6). All names of participants, the people they mentioned, and the places they lived and taught are pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

### **Researcher's Role**

When recruiting potential participants, I made it clear that my role was not to evaluate or mentor their teaching. I knew one participant, Vanesa Reyes, before the start of this study, and consequently terminated my social media connections with her to ensure that personal aspects of either of our lives would not become entangled with my observations and her actions during the duration of the study. However, I inadvertently made contact through social media with another participant, Alex, due to a Facebook post she had made that was shared by many of our mutual connections. In addition, she posed a question in a music education forum in which we were both members without knowing the other was.

My role was that of an empathetic observer (Saldaña, 2015). I did not actively engage with the activities in the classroom such as tutoring, giving lessons, co-teaching, answering student questions, or aiding the teacher in pedagogical decision-making. However, I tried my best to understand and empathize with my participants to gain critical insight about their work. As an observer, I kept a researcher's journal to reflect on my thoughts about each participant. I did not want to view my participants through my own decision-making lens. Instead, I sought to understand how and why my participants make the decisions that did by asking myself what my

participants may be thinking and feeling and how their consciousness of place plays a role in these situations.

### Data Generation

The data for this study were generated according to my research questions as outlined in the following table (3.1), and described in more detail in the section that follows.

**Table 3.1**

*Data Planning Matrix (Maxwell, 2013)*

What do I need to know?	Why do I need to know this?	What kind of data will answer the questions?
<p>The purpose of this study was to explore first-year music teachers’ journeys of place consciousness within a new classroom, school, and community, and how they manifested this knowledge and understanding in their pedagogy.</p>	<p>To describe the various ways that beginning music teachers exhibit and develop an understanding about the places within they teach</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Semi-structured interviews</li> <li>• Voice memos</li> <li>• Observations and field notes of:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Human interactions</li> <li>○ Pedagogical decisions</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Guided tours through mapping</li> </ul>
<p>1. How do first-year music teachers develop place consciousness?</p>		

**Table 3.1, Continued**

What do I need to know?	Why do I need to know this?	What kind of data will answer the questions?
1. How do first-year music teachers enact their place consciousness in their pedagogical decisions?	To describe how place consciousness interacts with and influences each teacher’s curricular and instructional choices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Semi-structured interviews</li> <li>• Voice memos</li> <li>• Material culture               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Syllabi</li> <li>○ Handbooks</li> <li>○ Schedules</li> <li>○ Repertoire lists</li> <li>○ Social media</li> <li>○ Websites</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Observation and field notes               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Human interactions</li> <li>○ Pedagogical decisions</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Guided tours through mapping</li> </ul>

The naturalistic characteristic of qualitative research dictates a concern with the context of the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016). Actions are best understood in the settings in which they occur and in which they can be observed. When studying places and the people that inhabit them, the data generated should be approached with questions of when, where, why, how, and under which circumstances the data occurred. Bogdan and Biklen (2016) believe that divorcing actions, words, or gestures from their contexts diminishes their significance. As a result, the naturalistic and contextual character of this study dictated that I remained flexible in my protocols for data generation until participants and sites were secured. Once secured, protocols were developed and cemented. They are included with this document in Appendix D and E. The IRB at the University of Illinois approved all methods and protocols for data generation (see Appendix A).

### *Semi-Structured Interviews*

As shown in Table 3.1, interviews and observation comprised a considerable portion of data generation. I conducted five to six semi-structured interviews ranging from 15–135 minutes each in addition to a 15-30 minute screening interview with each participant (Roulston, 2010). Interview protocols related to the research questions generally guided questions for participants to discuss. These questions were developed in the protocols in Appendix D, but flexibility in the order that they were asked was maintained to respect contextual and personal factors of each participants. My observations of classroom teaching as well as probes or follow-up questions that were not specified in the protocols were used to help clarify and further elucidate answers as needed (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Each interview was audio-recorded, and notes were taken related to the participants' gestures, facial expressions, actions, and key ideas for further questioning.

### *Voice Memos*

As a way to remain in contact with participants during the study, I asked participants to record voice memos on their cellphones in response to prompts that were texted to them after significant events in their teaching. The use of voice memos allowed participants to construct their ideas quickly and preserve their natural voice (Stocker & Close, 2013). Participants were able to record their “gut feelings” (p. 2) about what was going on in their situated contexts. Three text prompts were sent to participants' cell phones (see Appendix E). Participants responded to these prompts using voice memos that were between five to ten minutes long. One participant, Alex, only responded to one text prompt. Each voice memo was transcribed for analysis, allowing me elaborate each teacher's journey of place consciousness.

### *Guided Tours Through Mapping*

Originally, each teacher was to be asked to give a guided tour of their classroom early within the progress of the study (Evans & Jones, 2011; Everett & Barrett, 2014). The music teacher was to lead me through the facilities that they have access to while describing their function, use, and meaning within the music program, if possible (Schaller, 2019).

Unfortunately, this data generation method had to be abandoned due to the closure of school buildings and social distancing measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, each teacher was asked to draw a map of their classroom and used this map to give a guided tour of their classroom space as described. Mapping is one way to uncover the stories that people hold about places (Greenwood, 2013). Each teacher depicted and described the physical layout of their classroom, where students gather to learn or socialize, and the resources that were available to them. I asked each teacher to describe the material culture found on the walls or shelves in the classroom. Each teacher's knowledge of the landmarks, which are objects that have significance in how the classroom is used, and monuments, which are objects that have historical significance to the classroom and commemorate a person, group, or event, was explored to uncover meaning for the participant and their developing relationship with their classroom, school, and community (Schaller, 2019). Future plans for the classroom were also explored. This guided tour provided a frame of reference for me as I conducted future interviews and classroom observation to understand how each teacher developed place consciousness.

### *Observations*

To examine each participant's development of place consciousness, I conducted site observations. Originally, teachers were to be observed three times teaching for approximately an hour each time. I also intended to observe any public performances such as school-wide

assemblies, programs, and concerts, if possible. I had the opportunity to visit each teacher's music classrooms at least once with the exception of Alex's classroom at Beechwood since my initial interviews were held at each teacher's schools. However due to the transition to virtual learning from in-person learning, I was only able to observe two participants, Alex and Caroline, teach within their classroom context and school. I observed Alex teach two classes of 40 minutes each, which included a fifth grade band rehearsal and a clarinet lesson. I observed Caroline teach two classes of 40 minutes each, which included a music survey class and a bass choir rehearsal, and I was also able to observe one performance, a Black History Month concert. I observed all three participants teach in a virtual context once for 45–60 minutes each. During these observations, I looked for the ways that each teacher interacted with their students and colleagues, and how they related their curricular decisions directly to the school and community. As an empathetic observer (Saldaña, 2015), I attempted to be as unobtrusive in the classroom during instruction as possible by choosing a seat near the back of the classroom where students were not readily distracted by my presence. However, I remained near enough the teacher to be able to observe their actions and hear their voice as clearly as possible. During virtual observations, my presence was more apparent due to the nature of video conferencing platforms. I kept my camera turned off and my microphone muted, which allowed my presence to fade into the background.

Using Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw's (2011) guidelines for the creation of fieldnotes, I took jottings or brief handwritten notes in a notebook. Soon after the observation, I transcribed these jottings into fieldnotes. The fieldnotes helped to construct the scene of the classroom and events that I observed and were used for data analysis and the construction of narrative vignettes in the presentation of my findings.

Site observations also allowed me to learn about the culture and environment that each participant was working within firsthand. These observations gave me a clearer picture of the classroom, school, and community context of each participant and gave me place markers as I interviewed my participants.

### *Material Culture and Social Media*

In addition to interviews and observations, I collected aspects of material culture that were created and distributed within the classroom. These included course descriptions and syllabi, course handbooks, handouts, schedules of performances and events, and other teacher-created material intended to clarify information about the music classroom to students and parents. Classroom displays such as bulletin boards and posters created by the teacher were photographed to be included as data. Social media posts that the teacher created under social media accounts affiliated with their classroom or music program through Facebook were also collected. I also visited school websites to gather information about school history, class offerings, and current school and district events. These instances of material culture were analyzed to examine how the teacher interacted with their students, classroom, school, and community over the course of the study.

### *Schedule of Data Generation*

Table 3.2 displays the schedule of interviews, voice memos, and observations for this study. On the afternoon of March 13, Illinois governor J. B. Pritzker ordered all Illinois schools to suspend in-person learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The transition to virtual learning began in Week 4 of data generation.

**Table 3.2***Interview and Observation Schedule*

	<b>Alex</b>	<b>Vanesa</b>	<b>Caroline</b>
Week 1	2/26 Screening interview	2/24 Screening interview	2/27 Screening interview
Week 2	3/06 Interview 1		3/04 Interview 1 3/05 Observation 1 – Concert
Week 3	3/12 Observation 1 3/12 Interview 2	3/11 Interview 1	3/10 Observation 2 3/13 Interview 2
Week 4	<i>In-person schooling suspended by order of the governor of Illinois</i>		
Week 5		3/29 Voice Memo 1	3/27 Voice Memo 1
Week 6		4/01 Interview 2	
Week 7	4/09 Interview 3	4/07 Voice memo 2	4/09 Voice Memo 2 4/10 Interview 3
Week 8			
Week 9	4/20 Voice Memo		
Week 10		4/27 Voice memo 3	4/26 Voice Memo
Week 11			5/07 Observation 3 – Virtual
Week 12	5/11 Observation 2 – Virtual		5/11 Interview 4
Week 13	5/18 Interview 4	5/20 Interview 3 5/24 Interview	
Week 14			
Week 15		6/05 Interview 4	6/03 Interview 5
Week 16		6/10 Observation 1 – Virtual	
Week 17	6/17 Interview 5	6/16 Interview 5 6/18 Interview 6	

**Data Analysis and Representation**

After each interview and observation, data were transcribed into data records. Interviews and voice memos were transcribed verbatim by a transcription service call Rev (<http://www.rev.com>). I checked these transcripts with their original recordings, making corrections as necessary, and annotated them with notes I took during the interview to best capture each participant’s authentic voice. Field jottings from observations were transcribed into

fieldnotes, including descriptions of gesture, facial expression, visible attitudes, and the setting. Fieldnotes were written using descriptive language with evaluative and personal asides that arose during the observation bracketed. Transcriptions of interviews were double spaced with large margins and printed to allow me to handwrite notes alongside the data. These forms of data were examined alongside the material culture that was collected. Using writing as inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), I constructed my thoughts and understandings about the patterns and themes that emerged from my data and continued to refine them as data analysis progressed.

Data were analyzed through the constant comparative method (Thomas, 2016). I organized data into “temporary constructs” (Thomas, 2016, p. 205), looking for recurring patterns among important ideas and subjects that were relevant to the research questions and Greenwood’s (2013; Gruenewald, 2003, 2008a, 2008b) theoretical framework of place consciousness (Roulston, 2010). I read through the data a second time checking the list of temporary constructs that I developed from my first reading. I eliminated temporary constructs that were not supported or reinforced by continual readings of the data. A list of these eliminated potential constructs was kept as potential counter-examples for the themes that emerged. From my second reading, I developed “second-order constructs” (Thomas, 2016, p. 206) that fit well with my data. I looked through my data again to refine my second-order constructs to capture the main substance of my data and label these as my final “themes” (p. 206).

I found emerging themes to be complex and sometimes ambiguous. Places are sites of power struggles and stories about them are often about contestation (Feld & Basso, 1996). “Stories are placed and in motion on a world map whose once black-lined borders and boundaries are increasingly smudged by vagueness, erased by chaos, or clouded by uncertainty” (Feld & Basso, p. 5). Studies that examine place “complicate the idea of socioecological context

with the observation that as socially-constructed contexts, places are fluid and contested terrain” (Greenwood, 2013, p. 94). Each first-year music teacher encountered moments of contestation, vagueness, and uncertainty, which sometimes manifested as praxis shock as they navigated their newly situated teaching experiences. Allsup (2017) asked for qualitative researchers to take in consideration complexity by “affording space for the multiplication of voices, as when themes merge with other themes, as when identities collide and fracture, grow new limbs and regenerate” (p. 16). I presented data a variety of forms, as I carefully considered these ideas, through interview excerpts; vignettes based on fieldnotes; and maps of the classrooms.

### **Trustworthiness**

I followed several procedures to ensure the trustworthiness of the data and its analysis (Creswell, 2009). Transcripts were checked against recordings for accuracy and to correct any errors or mistakes made during transcription. Temporary constructs were solidified into themes through the constant comparison method. Triangulation of data was used through the examination of phenomena and episodes from observations, interviews, voice memos, mapping, and material culture. I maintained a research journal of my own thinking and understanding of the study as it progressed that was kept separate from other data records. This journal was examined and edited as I continued to work through data analysis. Throughout this study, peer debriefing with my research advisor happened approximately every two weeks in the design and implementation phases and weekly during the analysis phase. These meetings provided an opportunity to ask questions about research processes as they pertained to this study, and ensured that this study might resonate with others. As member checking, each participant was sent a draft of their case to check for accuracy and invited to delete, expand, or add to its presentation. None of the three participants requested any changes to their portion of the data record.

## **Reflexivity**

I acknowledge that my writing is positioned from my own point of view. My writing is “a reflection of [my] own interpretation based on [my] cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics” (Creswell, 2007, p. 179) brought into my research. I identify as a White, middle class, cis-gender, gay and queer man. I grew up in a town of approximately 1,500 people in the woods and hills of northwestern Pennsylvania. My mother worked as an elementary public school teacher and my father as a middle and high school instrumental music teacher. As a result, I have been in schools and around educators my entire life.

I began formal instrument lessons on saxophone in fourth grade and participated in every choral and instrumental ensemble that my school district offered from fourth grade until my graduation. During my undergraduate studies I attended an evangelical Christian liberal arts college in the state of Indiana. I majored in music education specializing in saxophone as well as earning minors in voice and psychology. I taught middle school and high school instrumental music for eight years in another rural school district in western Pennsylvania. I was also assigned to teach elementary chorus and elementary instrumental lessons for several of those years.

While teaching, I worked towards earning a master’s degree from a private Catholic liberal arts institution in music education. During my studies, I became interested in researching rural music education. I perceived a lack of attention to rural contexts in music education and intended to pursue this line of research in my doctoral studies. During my coursework at the University of Illinois, I was introduced to the philosophy of place and place consciousness. I have had a continuing interest in maps, geography, and urban planning since receiving a globe for Christmas in first grade and have enjoyed playing computerized urban planning simulations such as SimCity and Cities: Skylines since late elementary school. The intersection of music,

geography, and education that I find in the study of place and music education has flowed naturally from my own interests and experiences. The study of place has ultimately led me to question how other music educators interact with their own teaching contexts since my own teaching experience has been limited to one school district in rural western Pennsylvania.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have outlined my reasoning for choosing a multiple case study to answer my research questions. I have described the recruitment of potential participants as well as clarified my intended relationship with these participants and my role within the study. I have described the methods I employed to generate data and provided the schedule. I presented my approach for data analysis, as well as the methods I practiced to ensure trustworthiness.

## CHAPTER 4: ALEX

### Waiting for the Tornado

*“Today is a hectic morning. We have a tornado drill,” Alex breathlessly told me as I entered their<sup>4</sup> large and spacious classroom at Washington Elementary School in Williston, Illinois. They turned away to prepare for their fifth grade beginning band class that met at 8:15 a.m., before the school day actually began. The SmartBoard at the front of the classroom marked the agenda for the day, “No Instruments. You need a pencil. Tornado Drill.” A clock counting down from 5 minutes was displayed on the board while the Mission: Impossible Theme played. At 8:15 a.m., the clock timer buzzed and Alex, now in their role as Mrs. Winfrey, stepped in front of approximately 50 fifth-grade students to quiet them down.*

*Mrs. Winfrey began by quickly reviewing the procedures for the Tornado Drill to be announced at any minute. They then transitioned into a rhythm counting worksheet activity about dotted quarter notes that was placed on each stand. Mrs. Winfrey posed questions to the students asking how a dot functioned in notation and led them through the arithmetic to figure out the dotted note’s duration. After drawing a series of eighth notes and quarter notes, Mrs. Winfrey asked everyone to count and clap the rhythm on the board. Using this same rhythmic figure, they added a tie to the notes and then proceeded through a sequence of counting, clapping, tapping feet, and listening to the rhythm compared to a dotted quarter note and eighth note. “Do you think this sounds the same or different?” Mrs. Winfrey inquired of the class.*

*The students loudly responded, “Same!”*

*The school public address system in the corner of the room came alive approximately ten minutes into the class, as the school principal greeted the school and then led everyone in a*

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<sup>4</sup> Alex Winfrey is a femme presenting gender neutral person who used they and them pronouns.

*collective moment of silent reflection followed by the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. As the principal continued with the morning announcements about school events, Mrs. Winfrey quickly took attendance by asking each instrument section if anyone was absent. They continued work on their rhythm worksheet, ignoring the remainder of the principal's announcements. After reaching a stopping point in the worksheet, Mrs. Winfrey had the students place their worksheets in their binders and then hurriedly proceeded through a series of classroom announcements about an instrument step-up event, a cheesecake fundraiser, and clarification on which piece they will be assessed after spring break. This particular day was "Career Day" at Washington, and many students were dressed in outfits portraying what they would like to be when they grow up. "On the count of three, I want to hear what you want to be!" Mrs. Winfrey yelled.*

*"1...2...3...!"*

*A chorus of answers rang out from the students. Mrs. Winfrey responded, "I didn't hear band director, so I guess my job is safe, right?"*

*Mrs. Winfrey reviewed the procedures for the tornado drill again. The students restlessly waited for the announcement to enter the hallway in silence and assume a kneeling position on the floor with their hands covering the back of their heads. At 8:36 a.m. the announcement finally came and by 8:40 a.m. the drill was over. The students returned to the band room to gather their belongings and lined up to wait for Mrs. Winfrey to escort them to their next class.*

### **Introducing Alex Winfrey**

Alex Winfrey's gender neutral identity conflicted with how they presented themselves at school. "With my friends, I identify as general neutral and use 'they' pronouns. But at my school I go by 'she' and I go by Mrs., which I'm not going to lie, it's pretty rough, but...I'm not comfortable asking students to call me something else. Maybe someday. Sexuality-wise, I've

always been out, very out as bisexual.” Alex married their husband before their first year of teaching.

Alex is White-passing and did not discover until the summer before their first year of teaching that their biological father was Puerto Rican. They did not grow up in the Puerto Rican culture, and said, “It feels weird being like, ‘Oh, I’m mixed.’” Alex emphasized, “I obviously have White privilege.”

Alex went to a large public university in Illinois where they majored in music education with a concentration in instrumental music education. “I really, really wanted to have middle school for sure,” Alex described their ideal position as a music teacher after graduation. “I pictured only doing band, and I pictured myself in a rural area.” Alex was part of the Golden Apple Scholars of Illinois program, which provides tuition assistance for students who wish to teach in Illinois schools-of-need. “I pictured myself going back to somewhere rural,” Alex explained. “I have a lot of friends in the program who went to teach in the inner city, and I did some time in some Chicago Public schools, and I did enjoy it, but I really wanted to get back to the rural community that I had gone through.”

### **Returning Home**

Alex is originally from Williston and attended the schools in the Williston Community School District. As a child, Alex joined band at Washington Elementary where they were now teaching.

I was just in band...I started playing the French horn when I was in fifth grade. Then by sixth grade, my band director, she said, “Oh, this is too easy for you. We’re going to add another one on.” And so starting when I was in sixth grade, I just kept learning instruments, and I really enjoyed it. Then when I got to high school, I did All-State. I really enjoyed marching band. And I enjoy doing the pit orchestras for the musical that we always did. I was the drum major of our marching band, and that was really what drove me to pursue a career in music education.

The Williston Community School District consisted of six schools and served 2,681 students in grades PK-12 during the 2019-2020 school year (Illinois State Board of Education, 2020). The Williston community is part of a larger micropolitan statistical area<sup>5</sup> that had an estimated population of approximately 60,000 in 2019 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Alex described Williston as a rural college town. Alex explained:

[Williston] is a poor district. It does qualify for the state as a school in need, both academically and economically. A lot of our students are on free or reduced lunch. Our state standards, our testing scores are a little bit down except for in science.

A state university is located in Williston, which influences the area economically and culturally.

The college laid off a lot of their staff. And the majority of people living in Williston are employed by [the university] in one way or another. A lot of people lost their jobs. And a lot of my students have financial issues. A lot of my students, their parents are divorced.

Williston advertised two music positions while Alex was in the last weeks of student teaching. One was advertised as an elementary instrumental position and the other as a middle and high school position. At their interview, Alex differentiated their answers between each position, but expressed preference for the elementary position because at the time the middle and high school position also included teaching Kindergarten general music. Alex desired to only teach band and not general music.

After Alex was hired, they began to reconnect with their past. Alex's principal at Washington Elementary had been their high school cross country coach. Other teachers brought up memories of Alex as a student. "We were at our Christmas party and my old fourth grade teacher was talking about when I was in fourth grade and I said, 'I don't remember any of that.

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<sup>5</sup> I chose to use micropolitan and metropolitan statistical areas for population for three reasons: 1) The population of each school district in this study was not easily found, 2) Each school district in this study served more than a single municipality, and 3) Using the micropolitan and metropolitan statistical area population estimate masked each location in this study while providing an accurate picture of its population.

But thank you for saying nice things about me.” Alex described their feelings about being in a school with their former teachers:

It was very odd. A lot of my past teachers are still here. Some of them still refer to me as Alex in the hallways in front of students...My very first day back, I felt very supported...It was an odd situation to feel like some of them still see me as a child. It doesn't help that I am a first year teacher and it definitely does not help that I went here.

Locations in Washington Elementary held special meaning to Alex.

Right outside the gym, there are plaques for – they do an award every year sponsored by the Rotary and it's a leadership award and I received it the first year they did it, so my name is just outside on a plaque. Just outside the gym. And the kids were like, 'Is that you?' 'Well, yes it is.'

Alex taught in the band room where they began their band journey.

Walking into this room as a teacher was just like – it almost brought me to tears, because this is where I started. I'm going to start crying right now. My band director was so incredibly supportive. She still is. I started going through cabinets and I found old things of hers that she had left behind and I realized how much she did.

Alex even found the old band sweaters which they wore for performances in sixth grade.

“Definitely this room was the biggest emotional place for me.”

Alex's schedule included teaching fifth and sixth grade band and group instrument lessons Monday through Thursday at Washington Elementary. On Fridays they were assigned to teach Kindergarten through fourth grade general music at Beechwood Elementary School, located approximately nine miles away from downtown Williston. At Beechwood, Alex taught one section of music class to each grade for 50 minutes every week.

Their return home meant that Alex had firsthand experience in the Williston music program. This knowledge and experience helped the middle and high school band director, named Mr. S., who was also in his first year of teaching.

He didn't have any records. He didn't have any inventory list, he had nothing about uniforms, he didn't even know some of the competitions that they had signed up for. He didn't know who wrote – there was just nothing. So a lot of my work at the beginning was also helping him because I'd gone through the program and I could go in the room. It

had been a few years, but I could say, “Okay, this is where these things were normally kept. Here’s the library. You might find this in this closet.”

Alex’s musical past in their classroom spaces was amplified through their continued conversations with their former music teachers. When they announced their return to Williston to their two former band directors, Alex received two contradictory reactions. Alex’s former high school band director’s response was startling to them. “She was actually not very happy that I took the job. She said, ‘I would tell you congratulations, but I wouldn’t wish that job on my worst enemy.’” Alex explained why their former teacher had such a negative perspective of her time at Williston:

She did not have a good last couple of years in the district and she had a lot of trouble with her colleagues and with administration...When talking to her, all of her experiences were extremely negative. And it did kind of worry me and I really did try to have as little preconceived notions about the school and about the students coming in, but it was always at the back of my mind.

On the other hand, Alex’s elementary band director who had worked at Washington Elementary was excited and supportive of their return to Williston. “My favorite thing about anything was being able to tell her that. She cried, I cried. It was great. We’re both very emotional people.”

Alex discovered remnants of their elementary band teacher’s past career throughout the Washington Elementary band room.

She kept everything, everything. I found programs from 1996...The [music] library that she ordered and she played while she was here, it is all marked with the date that they did it, how it went, what group she did it with, some little notes like, ‘Trombones will have a hard time with this.’

Alex felt as though their past mentor spoke to them through these notes.

I don’t know if she realized she was making those notes for someone who was going to be coming after her and trying to help her, or if she was doing it for herself. But if I know her, she was doing it for whoever was going to come in eventually.

Even though Alex had extensive familiarity with Williston and its music program, they hoped to erase their preconceived notions of this place and recognize the school and program as

changed from when they were a student. However, Alex's past experiences at Williston surfaced often as they progressed through their first year of teaching at Washington and Beechwood Elementary Schools.

I have divided Alex's first-year teaching experiences into three parts. First I present Alex's experiences as a band director at Washington Elementary School. Then I illustrate Alex's experiences as a general music teacher at Beechwood Elementary School. Last I elucidate Alex's self-development during their first year of teaching.

### **Alex as an Elementary Band Director at Washington Elementary School**

Washington Elementary School is situated in the gridded neighborhood streets of the city of Williston, Illinois. The original portion of the school was built in the 1920s with multiple additions and renovations occurring throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century resulting in a sprawling and labyrinthine building. The school served 687 students in grades 4-6. Fifty percent of these students were classified as low-income students and 1% are English Language Learners. The racial and ethnic diversity of the school in the 2019-2020 school year was as follows: 82.8% White, 5.8% Black, 3.9% Hispanic, 1.3% Asian, and 6.1% Two or More Races. Over the past five years, the racial and ethnic diversity of the school has not changed in any significant way.

A month before school began, Alex began to orient herself to their new classroom in Washington. Sarah, the elementary band director who had resigned the year before, had left a flash drive with information for Alex. Alex began sorting and organizing materials and information.

I was making a contract handbook for them. A letter to parents. I was working on recruitment. I was talking to the music shop about recruitment. I was talking to Sarah about logistic things. I was looking at dates for concerts and putting them in and communicating with the choir teacher on which concerts would be together and which concerts would not and what's expected of us. Then once I came in and I got the flash

drive, I squished together the handbook that she left and the handbook that I had because I had just a few things different.

They also became familiar with the music library and instrument inventory.

I chose music for the sixth grade because they had a really quick turnaround for their first performance and went through my library. I did a full inventory with all of my school instruments, assigned them a number, put them in my computer and tried them out to see how they played, and [for] the woodwind instruments, I looked at their pads and cork and everything.

Some of their time was spent decorating and cleaning a room that seemed to have been vacant for a long time.

Sarah, before she left, took all of the posters down, so I was trying to decorate a little bit. That was the fun part that I enjoyed doing. The not so fun part was finding spiders everywhere. I actually had a little drum stick that I would use to get all the spider webs out, because I'd sit at my desk and kick my feet out and just get spider webs all over my legs.

While preparing the band room for the school year Alex compared the room to their experiences as a student, "A lot of things seemed like they had not changed at all. Some things had changed a lot."

### *Custodian of Tradition*

Alex returned to a program that was steeped in tradition and community involvement. These traditions were most apparent in how Alex discussed the music booster group, a sixth-grade band night marching band performance, and the fifth graders' presentation of their first concert. In all three of these instances, Alex felt obligated to maintain and sustain these traditions even when they found this maintenance sometimes difficult.

**Community and Family Involvement.** Alex identified strong community and family involvement and support in the Williston band program.

We have a lot of second generation students in band. They're like, "Oh, here's a picture of my mom when she was in marching band, wearing the exact same uniform that I was going to wear." Or their older siblings were in band. I have a lot of students that come in

and they're like, "Well, I want to play trombone, because my cousin plays trombone in the high school band."

Community support was visible at concerts and tangible through donations.

All of our concerts are just packed, and it's really nice to see how many people in the audience aren't just parents. It's also community members that don't have any ties to the school anymore... We've been able to have a lot of donations from the community to be able to purchase like new equipment.

This community and family involvement had been formally organized into the Williston Music Boosters which supported the music program at all levels. This organization had not only historically funded new instruments and scholarships for students, but had also helped the music teachers at the school. In the past, the boosters have fought against cuts in music teacher staffing, as well as paid teacher salaries when cuts had been made.

There has been some pushback from administration trying to get rid of another position and cramping them in and reduce funding. The community has really rallied together to try to stop that. We have a really great music boosters that supports band, chorus, and general music. It's really great at our monthly meetings to see a lot of parents and community members there.

The booster group helped to supplement the \$200 yearly budget Alex received for their elementary band classes.

With that \$200 budget, it was really hard for me to be able to get new music, and to even purchase things like reeds. My music boosters was like, "Well, we'll give you \$200 right now to just buy some reeds and some books for your kids." So it helps a lot.

Within the boosters, parent volunteers became invaluable to Alex. "I had other parents that would volunteer to help me clean up after concerts, come by and ask me if I needed anything. I definitely had a group of parents that were just so helpful this year." One parent in particular was able to help Alex with instrument repairs.

I was complaining about the state of our saxophones because we have one in working condition... And we get a very limited, woodwind repair... I am not comfortable with replacing the parts and we don't have the money to get a consultation and get them repaired... We had four that weren't working, and he came and picked up all four of them

and then fixed them and brought them back two weeks later and he was like, “Here you go.”...I love him so much.

This same parent also helped Alex figure out a potential clarinet reed solution for a student who was blind and on the autism spectrum.

She tears [clarinet reeds] apart...She'll sit and tear them apart. I asked, “As a woodwind person, is there anything I can do for this?” Because the student was also using a school instrument, her family was far below the poverty line and I didn't want to say, “Sorry, I guess you just have to buy a box of reeds every week.”...I was like, “Is there anything that you can think of?” And he came back and he donated a box of plastic clarinet reeds that she couldn't tear apart...It was great, she was able to use it all year.

**Sixth Grade Band Night.** One annual tradition that Alex prioritized in importance during their first year of teaching was the 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Band Night, an evening where the sixth grade band students join the middle and high school band students for a marching band performance at a parade and football game. Mr. S., the middle school and high school band director, had proposed getting rid of this event.

He's not a marching band guy, which is fine. But we talked about it and I was like, “Marching band is a really big deal for the high schoolers and this is really the only time that my sixth graders get to see and interact with the middle schoolers and high schoolers and see their peers, some of their siblings. A lot of their siblings are in the program and get to see who they could be and, at the same time, play at the same level they're playing at.”

After discussions with Alex, they decided to keep the event but the middle school and high school director suggested that the elementary students should not have to memorize their music.

I was like, “Yeah, I understand why that might be more stressful, but I really want them to focus on the sound and not reading off of a piece of paper...They've memorized things for the past 40 years, they can keep doing it for one thing, once a year.”

However, Alex's insistence about this tradition caused several problems for them early in the year. The first was Alex's song choice, which was too difficult for the 6<sup>th</sup> grade students to play.

Usually we'll get the music at the end of the year and then they have the whole summer to work on it and some students won't work on it, but a lot of students will come in day

one having it memorized. The song was not chosen and they did not have it. So I came in, I had to choose a song without knowing how they played, without knowing my instrumentation and I did pick something that was a little bit too hard and after about three weeks of struggling to do measure by measure, I ended up just rewriting some of the parts.

After re-working the arrangement Alex noticed that the students had better success.

I know it was a hard song...They just were absolutely amazing. They really enjoyed learning it. I mean, I got a little bit of pushback from some of them, but not enough for them to want to quit band or anything. It was really awesome to see how hard they were willing to work for that.

Later in the process of preparing for this performance, Alex realized that they had to figure out how to get a group that is used to sitting down to perform while standing, walking, and playing.

I didn't realize how much work it was going to be. Not to toot my own horn, but a lot of things do come very naturally to me, but a lot of things I did not think about. It was pretty far into the first quarter [grading period] when I realized that I had a tuba player and we were going to be marching and I was like, "Oh."

One of the first purchases they made for the year was a new harness for tuba players to use for this event.

**First Concert.** One of Alex's favorite memories of the year was the fifth and sixth grade band concert in December. During this concert, the fifth and sixth grade students played the song "Jingle Bells" as a joint ensemble.

It got me a little teary, having them all play together. I was just really proud of my fifth graders for pulling it together, and proud of my sixth graders, too, because it was an easy song for them. They didn't complain about it...I got a little teary because I just thought it was just the most amazing thing.

Traditionally, this concert is the first time that the fifth grade students perform for an audience, also featuring a skit that they present to parents.

My beginners started out the concert, and that was really fun, because we did a little skit kind of thing. I had some of my sixth graders, they had speaking parts in there, say, "This is what they sounded like on the first day." And then I told my fifth grade students, "Play the worst note you could think of. Do whatever you can, like clarinets purposely squeak..." Then they said, "And this is what they sound like now," and then we played a nice chord, and it was a cute little skit.

Ultimately, Alex shared that the concert went great but there had been some stress and panic for Alex during the preparations. The original date for the concert had to be changed due to school cancellations for snow days. This change of date led to a miscommunication with the maintenance department to set up the for the concert, which resulted in Alex scrounging around the school for enough chairs for students to sit on for the concert.

**Changing Tradition.** Returning to a place where Alex was familiar with the traditions of the music program was helpful in some ways and frustrating in others. Alex began to identify aspects of the band program that they would like to change, while sometimes expressing hesitation to follow through with these changes as they might disrupt traditions.

Alex expressed that the community places a strong emphasis on performance.

I think wholeheartedly that the community does appreciate music and especially marching band. A lot of the community really supports the marching band. And somebody at some point suggested maybe making, or not having marching band or not doing marching band competitions. There was a riot at the music boosters meeting and we have a great music boosters...I obviously don't want to make assumptions, but to me it does feel like, [an] emphasis is placed heavily on performance and performance only.

Alex believed that a strong focus on performance may lead to a loss of other dimensions of music making experiences in band.

There is something to be said about learning through performance...but I feel sometimes there can be too much stress on the performance. We're so worried about just cranking out those really hard songs or these fun songs to just play for the concert that maybe some of these ideals about connecting with each other, through the music, or the emotion gets lost.

They recalled their own experiences with marching band competition in high school.

I remember when I was in high school, marching band, I was super stressed about – we had to get first place at a marching band competitions...I remember getting in fights with my friends, [that] I've been friends with for 10 years. I'd say, "That's not your dot<sup>6</sup>. You

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<sup>6</sup> A "dot" in marching band refers to the coordinates on the field that a marching band member is to be standing at during a specific moment in a marching band field show.

played that note a little flat.” We were so worried about performing to our highest standard...I don’t know, for me the whole purpose of being in band is being family.

Alex used this negative experience to try to influence their classroom environment. They explained, “I tell my students there’s room to help your friends, but there’s a line. You don’t want to cross that, band still needs to be fun.”

As a potential solution to the community emphasis on performance, Alex would like to have an “informance” instead of only concert performances.

It just didn’t happen this year. I tried to have instead of a performance, an informance where parents, community members if they wanted, and teachers came to one of our rehearsals instead and saw the song and listened to us before the song was over and got to see the students learning in real time [to] see they’re not perfect. See that it takes a lot of hard work and they put so much into it, and I wanted to see them interacting with each other and just not see that polished finished project. Take down that veil. It just didn’t happen this year. I’m hoping maybe next year.

In Alex’s approach to group instrument lessons, they expressed a tension toward skills and performance. Alex voiced uncertainty about the band method book that they used for instruction. They began to research other methods and talk with colleagues about their experiences using them.

Starting [students] without notation kind of came up because I was talking to somebody, and I asked, “So what method book do you like?” and he’s like, “I don’t use one.” I’m really, really interested in it, but I’m just so scared of doing it because what I know is the notation, but I know for them it can be really confusing and they’re reading a different language, and some of them still have a lot of trouble with it, and we just keep going back to it and keep saying, “Every Good Boy Does Fine” and “All Cows Eat Grass.”<sup>7</sup> That in itself can be really frustrating and especially in the bigger group lessons when I have two students that are really, really good and need to be challenged so they don’t get bored, and then I have one who’s struggling to get the right pitches and doesn’t know their fingerings.

Alex would like to try to incorporate rote musical activities and move beyond a method book, but Alex expressed, “I’m so scared that I’m going to mess them up.”

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<sup>7</sup> Mnemonic devices used to teach lines and spaces on a musical staff.

Alex identified potential barriers for students in joining the band program at Washington Elementary and had already begun to eliminate some of them. One of these barriers was the requirement that students must have two years of piano lessons before they were allowed to be a percussionist in the band. They explained, “I did not want to make that a stipulation because I know that a lot of students cannot afford piano lessons.” The elimination of this requirement allowed more students to learn percussion, but Alex still believed that keyboard percussion skills were important to the band curriculum. Alex found that this focus created a new set of problems.

I also didn’t think about the percussion equipment. Our bell sets are not in great shape, especially the one in the middle is just a piece of poopy. But we don’t really have any other options, except for the small bell sets. I’ve written grants to get a xylophone in. I’ve talked to my Boosters.

Alex had written grants to several institutions in Williston asking for money to fund a xylophone including the Excellence of Education Foundation in Williston, the Williston Chamber of Commerce, and a grant sponsored through the Williston Music Boosters. They also talked to the school district administration.

I said, “Well, my budget is only \$200, can I roll it over for five years so I can get a nice xylophone?” And they said, “Nope. Whatever you don’t spend at the end of the year will be added to a fund for big projects.” And I was like, “Well, can a xylophone be a big project?” And they said, “No, no, no, it’s more like desks and stuff.”

Alex was still hopeful at the end of the year that they would find some way to fund the purchase of new keyboard percussion equipment for the band.

Another tradition that Alex attempted to change was the perception that the Washington Elementary School Band was a feeder program for the high school.

Nothing makes me more angry than somebody saying, “Oh, you’re the feeder band for the high school, Williston High School, right?” I said, “No. My students are musicians, even if they’re just going to do it for a couple months.” We need to value them as musicians, and I tell my kids that. I have one right now, a sixth grader, who’s wanting to drop band next year. And I told her, “Yeah, I know band is not a priority for everybody. I’m not angry at you at all, and I want you to have a positive experience in band, and

have positive memories leaving here instead of thinking, ‘Oh, those last few months, I hated it, I wish I could have just dropped right then.’”

Alex believed that by re-orienting the priority of the elementary program to be musicians in the moment rather than developing skills for a future in the high school band that they were creating a welcoming and supportive environment for their students.

**Summary.** Alex returned to the place that inspired them to pursue music education as a career. Prior music teachers and traditions reverberated through Alex’s teaching. They saw themselves as a person who would ensure that the important aspects of these traditions would continue. Alex was reticent to eliminate certain traditions, such as 6<sup>th</sup> grade band night, because of the meaning that they held for the students and community. On the other hand, Alex viewed other traditions, such as the band program’s focus on performance and competition, as problematic. They saw this focus stifling to developing their students’ musicianship and their ability to develop a closer classroom community, but they felt unable to do much to change this emphasis in the short term.

#### *Development of Place at Washington Elementary*

*One Thursday morning, two fifth grade clarinet students arrived and sat down in the front row of chairs for their weekly lesson. As the boy and girl waited for Mrs. Winfrey to begin, they assembled their clarinets and set their music on the music stands in front of them. Mrs. Winfrey walked toward them from their desk and began a short conversation about everyone’s day. Then Mrs. Winfrey asked the students to pull from their binders a piece called “New Orleans Strut,” which they would be tested on the next week. Mrs. Winfrey asked them to begin playing from the beginning of the piece. The clarinets were not scored to play immediately at the beginning, but instead of counting rests Mrs. Winfrey sang the melody and snapped their fingers on beats two and four. After several measures, the students raised their clarinets and began*

*playing their part. After a few moments, Mrs. Winfrey asked them to stop, reminded them to sit up straight, and told them they were able to play louder since they were playing the melody along with the saxophones during this section. They resumed playing through the piece.*

*Mrs. Winfrey noticed that the two students had some difficulty moving their fingers from the notes A to E. They borrowed one of the student's clarinets and demonstrated how to roll their pointer finger from the A key to the E key. Returning the clarinet, Mrs. Winfrey chanted, "A to E. Try it. A – to – E. A – to – E. Good! Let's try that section again." As Mrs. Winfrey sang and the students continued to play, they walked to their desk and took a trumpet from its case. Quickly returning to where the two students were sitting, Mrs. Winfrey stood behind the students and began to play along, asking students to identify note names and giving prompts to help them remember when they forgot. They asked the students about sharps and flats and how to finger an F sharp. Mrs. Winfrey helped with these small tasks and then asked the two students to play these notes in the whole measure and then with the surrounding measures.*

*As the students played Mrs. Winfrey continued to sing and mime fingerings with their hands. "Oh! Very good! Beautiful! Beautiful!" When they reach the end of the piece, Mrs. Winfrey asked, "Questions? Concerns?" When neither responded, Mrs. Winfrey asked another question, "What do you think is the hardest part of this song?"*

*The boy answered, "In this part, the trumpets are playing something different."*

*"They are so loud! SO loud!" the girl chimed in.*

*After introducing some new low notes from the method book, Mrs. Winfrey announced that their time together was over. They asked if the students had to take the Pacer test, a standardized test, today, as both put away their instruments. The boy answered that he had to*

*take it again while the girl responded that she got free time instead. Mrs. Winfrey dismissed them by saying, “Bye! Stay in school. Don’t do drugs. Make the world a better place!”*

*The boy turned around and replied, “I won’t!”*

*Mrs. Winfrey, shocked, dramatically clutched at their chest and inquired, “You won’t make the world a better place?” They all began to laugh as the two students walked out the door to return to their classrooms.*

In this lesson, I observed a cheerful and excited Mrs. Winfrey who welcomed, joked, and praised their students. Mrs. Winfrey, like many band directors in small group instrument lessons, rehearsed a piece in preparation for an upcoming performance and continued working from a method book to introduce new skills. Mrs. Winfrey moved through their classroom space with ease and tried their best to make a room designed for a large number of students comfortable for only two students learning to play the clarinet.

In this section, I will introduce how Alex acted as a place maker in the organization and development of their classroom environment. I will then show how they transitioned from a physical classroom space to a virtual one. Last, I will present Alex’s future ideas for their band classroom.

**Classroom Organization and Environment at Washington Elementary.** According to Alex, Washington Elementary is an “odd building the way it’s laid out.” They described the difficulty of finding the band room. “They added onto it and they added on to it more. I’m in the newest part of the building. But geographically, the building makes absolutely no sense. It’s a full four minute walk from my room to the main office.”

I asked Alex to draw a map of their classroom at Washington Elementary School (See Figure 4.1). Alex had spent a great deal of time before the year began organizing their classroom



I want to create a non-chaotic space, but oftentimes it is chaotic because of just the amount of stuff we have. And, I'll admit it, I'm not the best at keeping everything put away. I have a tendency to get stuff out and then leave it. I'm always losing something, and sometimes I'll bribe my kids to find it for me and I would just be like, "Hey, I'll give you a roll of Smarties if you find this score that I lost a week ago." So it is partially my fault, and hopefully that'll change next year as I get out of the first-year teacher chaos.

Alex's most precious object, obscured on the map, was located near their desk. "The most important thing in my room was obviously my coffee maker on my desk, and all my kids know that."

The previous teacher had taken down posters that were on the walls, so Alex spent time redecorating the walls of the room. At one point in the year, a student gave a painting to Alex, which they hung on the wall at the front of the room. This gesture led to more and more pictures being brought in by students and displayed.

One of the kids painted me Peppa Pig, and then, the dad pig in the show. Then they all started painting me cartoon characters. I hung them up on the wall behind the SmartBoard. They were really excited that I was hanging up their art... Kermit the Frog was my favorite, playing the saxophone. It was really cool.

Due to the large size of the band room, the classroom was often used to host school and community events, as well as school faculty meetings. Each week, a community jazz band, in which Alex also participated, rehearsed in the room. On early dismissal days, the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) often hosted an after school social hour, using the band room as a space to show movies.

During a fundraiser event sponsored by the PTA in February, music students from Washington Elementary performed a concert. Alex had to negotiate a tight schedule of events with the PTA as the band room and the gymnasium where the concert was held were being used as a fundraising space the evening before and after the concert.

It was scary coming back because after the concert was done, they had to use the gym for "Pie a Teacher" in there and a game of basketball. I had to get everything out of the gym, risers, percussion instruments, all of our chairs, all of our stands. They'd already started

bingo in here, so there were so many people in here. We were trying to be as quiet as we can. They had shoved cases everywhere.

The frequent use of the band classroom by others caused Alex some frustration, especially in regards to cleanliness and organization.

The floor gets pretty dirty. Our maintenance crew doesn't always come. I've never actually seen them come in to sweep or anything, and oftentimes my room is used because it's the biggest room in the school. It's used for afterschool socials and any kind of staff meetings. Actually, the staff will leave empty water bottles and wrappers everywhere, which is really annoying. During socials they have popcorn, and they get the popcorn all over the floor. Usually, I'll just sweep that up because I do know it is a hassle with all the stands and chairs to move it all out the way to sweep up.

At the beginning of the year, Alex acknowledged "I was not very good" at asking for help. As the year progressed, Alex began to ask their students to help, especially during situations when the room had been used by another group.

I started to set the room back up, how it was, but I always have kids coming in. And that day, I had some other things to do because it was a Monday and I said, "I'm going to do my work," and as the students were coming in I said, "Hey, can you help me put the stands back?" And so a lot of times I'll have kids that are very happy and very willing to help me set things up and it's just, I've learned to be less controlling, I think. "They have to be this way. Go faster!" And letting them help me with that.

Alex also began to reach out to parent and teacher volunteers as well as asking their husband to help for concerts and other events as they realized they were unable to do everything on their own.

**Virtual Teaching.** On Friday, March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the governor of Illinois ordered all schools to close due to the novel coronavirus outbreak. The Williston School District was scheduled to begin a week-long spring break on the following Monday. During this break, Alex had to make emergency preparations to shift into a virtual classroom format. Originally, Alex attempted to make the virtual format as close to in-person teaching as possible, but their frustration of realizing this intention was visible in their emails to me and in their voice. "I'm

surviving. I'm definitely doing way more work right now than I have before, and I didn't think I was slacking before."

I had the opportunity to observe Alex teaching one of their classes virtually:

*"Remember when we learned about dotted quarter notes right before we left forever?" Mrs. Winfrey asked the students in their fifth grade beginning band class that now met through the video conferencing application, Zoom. Now May, Mrs. Winfrey had begun to develop a rhythm to their virtual teaching. They could be seen sitting in their kitchen with a refrigerator behind them. Mrs. Winfrey turned around, dry-erase marker in hand, to draw a series of eighth notes using the white refrigerator as a whiteboard. Mrs. Winfrey connected some of these eighth notes together and asked the students to count and clap the rhythm. Unlike before, there was not a chorus of chanting and clapping. Mrs. Winfrey asked everyone to remain muted because of the sound delay with the Internet. Instead, the only audible voice was Mrs. Winfrey's.*

*While Mrs. Winfrey continued to review dotted quarter notes and eighth note rhythms, the students became active in the chat. One student typed, "Do you think chorus kids do this?" Several students typed responses in succession.*

*"Yes they do."*

*"They do"*

*"Maybe"*

*"O\_O"*

*":-)"*

*Mrs. Winfrey continued to ask students to count and clap various rhythms written on the refrigerator and asked for volunteers who would unmute to count and clap. Normally a class of approximately fifty students, today's class only had thirteen. Students began to change their*

*virtual backgrounds on camera or change their display names. Two boys switched their names with each other. The chat became unruly as one boy seemingly mashed all his fingers into his keyboard and produced a string of random characters, numbers, and letters. Mrs. Winfrey noticed the restlessness. Instead of scolding, they made a joke about the “messing around in the chat” and calmly brought everyone back to the lesson focus.*

*At the end of the class, Mrs. Winfrey unmuted everyone and asked if there were any questions and concerns. Hearing none, they stopped recording the class for the students who were absent, and left the space open for students to socialize with each other. Several students grabbed their pets to show everyone. One student began to broadcast a video game from their Nintendo Switch into their video feed, and another began playing music from their computer. One student even put on a Storm Trooper helmet from the movie Star Wars and began singing the “Imperial March.” Mrs. Winfrey laughed with their students in these moments of levity, but soon sent them on their way since class was now over and another was about to begin.*

Alex explained how they approached elementary band through virtual learning in the initial weeks of the transition from in-person classes:

Most of my days are responding to parent emails currently. My students have been sending me videos of them playing. I was able to get a free subscription to SmartMusic that they were giving out because school closings,...but two of the songs for sixth grade were not in their database. I hand put those, their parts, into SmartMusic, which took four days. Yeah. But I have been trying to be really good about keeping direct office hours only from eight to three, and getting off the computer at three, and going for a walk or something to just remove myself. I’m still thinking about it 24/7.

The original school closing order was not indefinite, with a possibility on the horizon that in-person instruction would resume. Alex still planned for a spring concert with the Washington Elementary bands and organized virtual instruction with this in mind, including scheduling individual online instrument lessons for each student.

I'm going to try doing online lessons, which will be interesting. I didn't really feel comfortable about doing group lessons with them, and trying to line up like, "Okay, let's play this all at the same [time]." They're one-on-one lessons, 20-minute lessons, that will just take up my entire day through Monday through Thursday, starting next week.

Alex attempted this schedule for a month.

I had a lot of students that would be late. A lot of students that were no call, no shows... Then the students that did show up it was really difficult to do it with them, and not be one-on-one [sic] with them, especially my clarinet players, because it was so hard to describe to them which pinky to play. I would say, "It's on the right side, your right side under it." It was really hard, whereas if we were in person, I could just touch and say, "It's this key."... Then [for] some students their audio wasn't great. They would have their instrument, right up close to the computer. It just wasn't working at all. I had a snare lesson, and I thought my ears were going to blow out.

Alex explained that the approach they took was unsustainable, "It was just really draining, especially since I could only do one at a time, instead of group lessons, because there's no way to sync it up. It was really difficult... I was dreading every day that I did it."

Alex changed how they approached their band class for the rest of the year and began to focus more on theory skills, social interaction, and talking about band for next year.

After I stopped doing lessons, I was meeting with them about once a week. We had a couple lessons. So we did the dotted quarter note lesson that you came and observed. My sixth graders – I very barely introduced to them the concept of 6/8. They'll at least have heard about it next year. And then for the most part, I just wanted it to be a space for them to just chill out. We talked about, "How's it going?" Towards the end, I said, "Here's what it's going to look like next year" for my beginning band students and then... if they wanted to play a song for us they could.

Alex had discovered that the virtual space of their band classroom changed how they taught and how their students learned. Continuing band and lessons as if they were in-person schooling proved to be a struggle for Alex, and as a result, they changed the environment and focus of their classroom in this virtual space. The band classroom had begun to transform into a place where students learned theory skills and shared what they were independently working on with their instruments rather than working on repertoire for their spring concert. The virtual classroom space enabled Alex to get to know their students in different ways as students were

free to chat and comment during instruction as well as given time for socialization at the end of each class.

**Future Ideations/Imaginings.** When looking toward their future at Washington Elementary School, Alex desired to move their focus away from performance toward the potential connection music could produce with an emphasis on musical growth. Alex explained, “I want music to bring us closer together... There is that connection and you can listen to a song and think of something that’s bigger than you and just be lost in the art.” They continued:

In my head, I would think, “It’s okay to make a mistake.” I don’t know if I ever actually – I said it to a couple individuals, I don’t know if I ever explicitly said it to the group. I definitely want to emphasize that we’re learning. We’re first and second year students. I don’t expect you to be perfect and that’s okay; we’re going to grow no matter what. We don’t have to play super intricate music to feel good about ourselves. That’s more of what I want to focus on next year for sure.

As an opportunity to foster this musical growth in their students, Alex named potentially collaborating with the local university music program in the coming years.

I have a couple students right now who take lessons from [their] students. I didn’t go to State obviously. But my coworker who is at the middle school high school did go to State. He’s very, very close with the professors. And he’s been able to have quite a few of clinics with their professors. Right now, well, not right now, but before everything<sup>8</sup>, I was trying to get a horn masterclass... We just weren’t able to find a time before we left. It’s very nice that he’s able to get people in to do masterclasses... The kids are able to see a new face, and get some new ideas, or hear the same ideas, and realize, “Hmm, maybe Mr. S. knows that he’s talking about.”

I asked Alex about their hopes and dreams for their classroom and the music program at Washington Elementary. In regards to the physical classroom, Alex described a discovery related to a summer job they had with the maintenance department at Williston School District painting classrooms.

You’ve seen my band room. It’s amazing, like physical space wise. I’m very lucky and I’m not going to lie about that. I was asking, “Oh, so when are we going to paint

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<sup>8</sup> “Before everything” is in reference to the closing of in-person classes due to COVID-19

Washington?” And they said, “Well, we’re not. We’ll be tearing it down soon.” I asked, “Would you care to elaborate on that?” I got no other information.

The uncertainty of the surrounding the fate of the building did not affect their outlook on their future as teacher or continuing to build and evolve the band program in the Williston Schools.

My hopes and dreams. I want it to look a little bit different and I want my program to grow and I want to have more students. In five years, I hope to have all my time dedicated to band or have all my time dedicated to one job...I would like to be more sure of what I’m doing in five years. I assume that will happen.

They also hoped to decorate the physical space of their classroom more.

I want to paint a mural outside of our hallway because there’s nothing there. It’s the ugliest spot in the school. There’s only the music classrooms down here and we’re very creative people. I really want to do a mural, a cheesy one about “Together we make a masterpiece” or whatever and just a big, very rainbow mural in our hallway for sure.

While describing their hopes and dreams, Alex also disclosed some fears, especially due to the continuance of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I’ll just say we’re probably going to hurt a lot next year. And I mean, I am a little bit worried about next year and how – I had a conversation with the high school director, especially after the Missouri Board of Education [sic]<sup>9</sup> released their suggested guidelines about opening up next year and suggesting no music, no PE, no library...I read it and I thought, “Oh, I just won’t have a job next year.”

Alex pivoted quickly to the financial hit that the students at Williston will be facing in the coming year.

I’m afraid that if there’s going to be some kind of financial hit and I’m scared of being the first on the chopping block, for sure. I’m thinking about recruitment and I’m thinking about how, if families are being hit hard and it’s a no-brainer if you have to choose between your student joining band and buying food for your family. I have school instruments, but I don’t have that many and I want everyone to do band if they want. I

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<sup>9</sup> This is in reference to a planning document released by the Missouri School Boards’ Association’s (MSBA) Center for Education Safety in May 2020 entitled, *Pandemic recovery considerations: Re-entry and reopening of schools*. The document was one of the earliest set of guidelines developed for the 2020–2021 school year. As a result, online news articles written about this report, such as *Learning to change: Missouri school boards’ association guidelines for reopening schools in a coronavirus world* (Boyink, 2020), were shared widely by music educators through social media causing some to wonder if these suggestions would be adopted nation-wide. The MSBA document was considered a “living document” and was updated frequently. At the time of writing, I was unable to locate the May 2020 edition and language.

understand that it won't be a priority for families, for sure, having to make those payments on instruments and seeing how expensive they are.

Alex identified how helpful the Boosters have been in the past with helping to offset student financial hardships, but the COVID-19 pandemic had disrupted the organization's ability to raise money, especially since their most lucrative spring fundraisers had been cancelled. Undoubtedly, this financial hit implicated Alex's own job security since the Booster group had previously funded teacher's salaries when the school district had cut a music position. While Alex struggled being hopeful for next year, they felt as though their perspective was valued by the school district.

So many things are up in the air right now that, I mean, it is a little hard to be optimistic, for sure...I'm glad I at least have a semblance of a voice and that the district has been emailing us, asking for our opinions and asking for our ideas. I'm grateful for that, but I'm glad I don't have to be the one that makes the final decision and put that all in my hands.

**Summary.** Alex attempted an orderly and organized physical space with well-marked spots for instruments, music, and other equipment. In their teaching, Alex used patience and a sense of humor to warm the spacious rehearsal room that existed at Washington Elementary. They struggled with the availability of financial resources from the school district but pursued other funding sources within the community. When Washington Elementary transitioned to virtual learning, Alex approached teaching band as closely to in-person instruction as they could but soon re-oriented their curricular focus to music theory skills and socialization. While their prior experience with band at Williston encouraged Alex that the program would continue despite its underfunding from the school district, the onset of the pandemic dampened their outlook on its future.

### *Summary and Analysis of Alex as a Band Director at Washington Elementary School*

During Alex's journey of place consciousness as an elementary band director, their prior experiences emerged as a central theme. Alex relied on their prior experience as a student at Washington Elementary and in the Williston schools to navigate through their first year of teaching at Washington. Their role in the program became that as a custodian of tradition rather than that of uncovering past traditions or creating new ones. Alex sought to create a curricular approach that continued what had existed before to engage and help students.

As Alex's place consciousness developed they began to acknowledge traditions that were to be preserved and others that needed to change. They had freedom to choose materials and approaches that were used in their classroom, but they continued to do what they knew to have worked in the past at Williston. Alex saw a benefit in the traditions of the performances in which their students participated, especially the Sixth Grade Band Night and the Fifth Grade First Concert. However, they desired to include musical experiences beyond performance and to include musical learning besides that which was presented in the method book.

A third theme of Alex's development of place consciousness as an elementary band teacher was Alex's hesitance to make curricular change even though they believed it was needed. They saw a need to focus on musical growth and building communitarian ideals within the band program. However, they were fearful of not preparing students for future musical success. They also felt pressure from the community, especially the band booster group, who supported the music program financially when the Williston School District would not.

### **Alex as an Elementary General Music Teacher at Beechwood Elementary**

Alex spent every Friday at Beechwood Elementary School, located in the small village of Beechwood approximately 8 miles from Williston. The school was built in the 1970s following

the trend of open classroom schools. During the 2019–2020 school year, the school served 104 students in grades Kindergarten through fourth grade. Forty-five percent of these students were classified as low-income students and 0% were English Language Learners. The racial and ethnic diversity of the school was as follows: 92.3% White, 5.8% Hispanic, and 1.9% Two or More Races. Over the past five years, the racial and ethnic diversity of the school has not changed in any significant way.

Unlike Washington Elementary, Alex had not been a student at Beechwood Elementary. Also unlike Washington, Alex could not identify any traditions in the music classes at Beechwood except that it traditionally received leftover resources. Alex remarked, “It’s very small. It’s oftentimes forgotten about.” Music classes were offered once a week for each grade level, meaning that the entire school could receive music instruction within one day. As a result, the district assigned music teachers at other schools who had leftover room in their teaching schedules to teach at this school. The music classroom was a multiple-purposed space. Alex described their classroom as a “closet” that was used for music, art, and as a storage area for the lunch room tables. Alex’s budget for music class was taken from the remaining balance after the other teachers had made their requests. Alex described their music equipment as “really old and a lot of it is breaking.” Many of the instruments and materials that were at Beechwood were labelled with the names of the other schools in the school district, signifying that those schools no longer wanted or needed them.

### *Teaching Elementary General Music*

Alex did not have any experience teaching elementary general music during their teacher preparation program, nor was Alex given a curriculum to guide planning. In this section I discuss how Alex developed their curriculum and what classroom activities they used at Beechwood.

**Researching Elementary General Music.** Alex spent time during the summer researching and developing a curriculum for their elementary general music classes. They created a word processing document and began brainstorming lesson plans by aligning them with Illinois Music Standards (Illinois State Board of Education, 2016). They quickly discovered that their knowledge of young children was deficient and began researching educational and developmental psychology. They were specifically interested in developmental milestones:

When should they be able to tie their shoe? When can they do jumping jacks or what kind of movement can they do? Because I was thinking, especially for dancing, what will some students be able to do, or should they be able to do this? I spent a lot of time on it, and I had a lot of information and it was just nothing like – I was not prepared for it at all, honestly. It was a big wake-up call I guess, that no matter how much you can study it's nothing compared to being in front of real kids, real students.

While Alex did not have prior experience with elementary general music, they did have connections with more experienced teachers who were able to help them, including their mentor teacher at another elementary school in Williston.

I reached out to a lot of my friends that I knew were general music teachers. I reached out to people they knew had taught general music. I have a mentor teacher here and she does general music at Jane Addams Elementary, which is [grades] 1-3, and she loaned me her books that she bought with her own money. She bought a curriculum just for that school.

Alex continued:

Then I have a friend who teaches down in Southern Illinois...She teaches general music and she's also a band person, so we share a lot of our [experiences], "Oh, I found this really, really worked," or "I found this didn't work."

At Washington Elementary, Alex shared an office with the general music teacher and was able to talk to him about general music.

We talk a lot, especially for fourth grade because that's the grade that we share...If we're thinking of changing things we talk to each other first. I kind of follow him more for the fourth grade because he does have more [students] and also next year those fourth graders I have will be in his fifth grade classes...I'm definitely trying to line up what he's teaching and what they need to know before they get to him.

**Classroom Activities.** Alex had freedom to develop their own activities for music classes since there was no curriculum already in place. Their mentor teacher at Jane Addams Elementary loaned Alex books related to the *GamePlan* music curriculum. *GamePlan: An Active Music Curriculum for Children* (Kriske & DeLelles, 2007) is a comprehensive curriculum for grades K–5 that provides lessons for a full year of teaching, including songs, games, and other musical activities. Alex described the helpfulness of these books:

I do use those a lot, especially for ideas, and that's where I get a lot of my songs...They do weeks, every week and every month...If I wanted to I could only use that, but I do it a little bit differently, so I can do more of what I want. I swap in a lot of things...It is very, very helpful and resourceful, but I didn't get that until the day before school started.

Alex described that they do a lot of dancing and singing in music class. One lesson they described was to help students differentiate between quarter notes and eighth notes by using the syllables “Ta” and “Ti-Ti” through a game about cat and mice.

Today, for the younger kids, we started out with Ta and Ti-Ti and reviewing those, and then we sang a little song about cat and mice and they had to match up – one verse the cats were sleeping, so was that a rest, a Ta, or a Ti-Ti? Then the next one the mice were crawling. Was that a Ta or a Ti-Ti? And they're running and that's a Ti-Ti. I was playing the xylophone while they sang to it and then they moved with it.

Later in this lesson Alex taught their students to sing a song using the solfège syllables of Sol and Mi to sing a minor third interval.

Then we were doing work with Sol and Mi...We had a little rhyme that went with it...Each kid had a line and they could do either high or low and they could do whatever order they wanted to and then we sang it. We do a lot of games and learning through play and a lot of just keeping the steady beat.

That same day they described what they did with the older students in third and fourth grade.

As of today, the fourth graders wrapped up recorders, and my third graders are just now starting ukuleles. We're really just doing open strings and rhythms. They're really, really reluctant to actually be reading notation, so I'm just baby feeding that to them. Most things are by rote and then I try to add some notation in it as well.

When I asked about their feeling about teaching recorder and ukulele by rote rather than notation they responded, “I don’t have a problem with doing it. My only thought is I’m trying to make my life easier when they come to me for band, if I’m being honest, [by teaching them notation].”

Alex’s favorite lessons were those that included their students interests as well as concepts that Alex believed to be important, too. Alex described this discovery:

It wasn’t important what I thought they needed to learn. It was important that they were learning. They just weren’t learning when I was trying to force things down that they didn’t want to do.

Their favorite lesson with each grade was writing a Blues song.

The Blues project was my favorite. We started that in February and they purposely timed it with Black History Month. And we had a conversation about Black History Month...A lot of the students did not know about Black History Month at all.

Alex led each class in a discussion about the Civil Rights movement, and students began to recall the names of past Black Civil Rights leaders. Alex introduced each class to the singer Lead Belly and they did a movement activity to the swung eighth-note rhythms to one of his songs. For the rest of the class, Alex helped each class compose an original Blues song.

First, we talked about what does the feeling blue mean... We made a whole list of topics of things that maybe make us a little bit sad. There were some really heavy subjects on there. There was especially for some of the older kids, they said, “Oh, my grandma died. That really made me sad.” “My pet died. My pet got ran over. That really made me sad.” Some of the other subjects were homework, chores, sister ate my last cookie or something. As a class, we voted on what subject we wanted to write our song about. With the younger kids, I had to lead them a little bit more with rhymes than everything. Third and fourth grade took it on their own. They needed a little help with some of the cadence of the lines... We sang it a couple of times through and I played on the guitar, the long short, long short, long Blues pattern and they got to sing along with it.

In a subsequent lesson, Alex organized a hip-hop project.

Our hip hop project looked really similar. I really wanted to do more especially the fourth graders, being able to do more sampling stuff. But we just didn’t have that technology... What we did instead was I had them get into groups... for the older kids at least they were able to get into groups. With the younger kids, we did it as a whole class. They wrote a poem about something and then I put on a generic beat on my computer and

then they would rap it together and perform it...I was really trying to emphasize performance etiquette. When somebody is performing, this is how we act and everything.

The third grade class became especially engaged in this project because of one student's interest in beatboxing.

Third grade was really fun because one of my third grade students is really passionate about beatboxing. He is always trying to do it when we're singing our normal songs. I mean honestly it was really annoying because he would do that instead of what he was supposed to be doing. So it was great because I was like, "Adam, we need you to beatbox." He was so excited to do it and he wanted to do it for every single person. So instead of having the computer track, they rapped over his beatboxing, which was really fun and really great.

**Summary.** Reflecting on their year teaching elementary general music, Alex remarked, "General music is way harder than I thought it would be." They explained:

I never thought that general music teachers were less intelligent or anything than ensemble teachers. But there was just so much that I wasn't thinking about. You see every single student in this school...Pretty much every student that I have in band students and that are in chorus really want to be there. There's a lot of students in music that do not want to be there. That was a big wake up call for me this year. Having those students that did not have the same appreciation of music that I did. But that helps me to find things that they really wanted to do and things that made music really fun for them. So they did not want to listen to band songs with me and they did not want to analyze the "Carnival of the Animals" or anything. We wrote our own rap songs. We wrote our own Blues song and performed it. It made me think about, I knew that these subjects existed and that we were going to do them anyway. We were going to learn about hip hop. We were going to learn about the Blues. But seeing how important it was to some students, it wasn't just a subject to them and even country music.

Alex discovered that what they thought was important for students to know and be able to do was not always engaging to their students. They discovered that music class became a musically rich place when their students' interests and voices were included in music making and learning.

Alex developed their curriculum by consulting the Illinois Music Standards and educational and developmental psychology to inform their planning of activities, as well as seeking advice from teaching colleagues. Alex sought to teach musical skills through games and play activities, relying on the *GamePlan* curriculum for much of musical repertoire they used.

Alex often implemented activities that developed traditional staff notation such as the rhythmic activity to discern between eighth and quarter notes and the use of notation to teach recorder and ukulele. They expressed that this would be beneficial for students if they were to join band in the future.

Alex hoped to broaden students' musical influences by explicitly introducing African-American musical genres such as hip-hop and Blues into the classroom during Black History Month. Not only did Alex have more interest in the creative activities of writing Blues and rap songs, but so did Alex's students. These activities explicitly incorporated student voices into the classroom.

#### *Development of Place at Beechwood Elementary School*

I did not have the opportunity to observe Alex teach at Beechwood Elementary School due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, I had to rely on the descriptions that Alex conveyed through interviews to understand Beechwood as a place and Alex as a place maker in their classroom. In this section, I describe Alex's classroom organization and environment. I will then show how they transitioned from a physical classroom space to a virtual one. Last, I will present Alex's future ideas for their general music classroom.

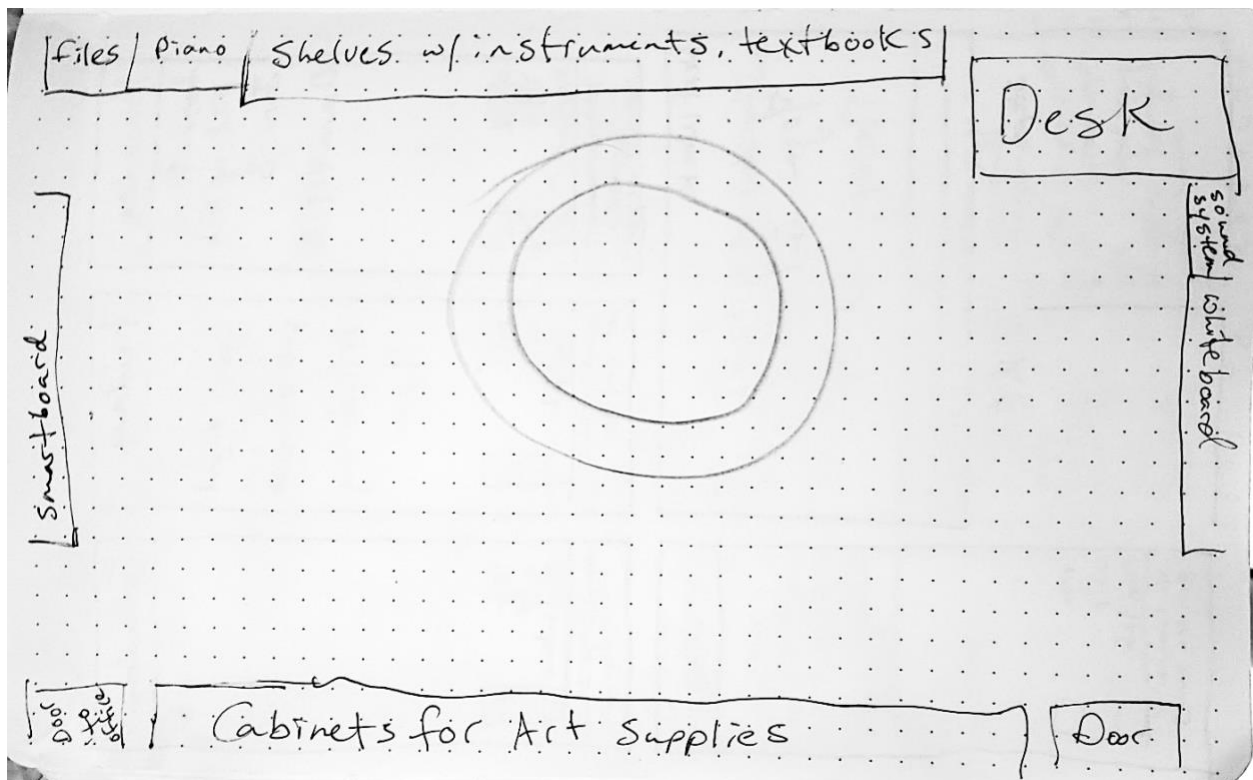
**Classroom Organization and Environment.** Beechwood Elementary School was constructed using an open floor plan. Most of the classrooms were not enclosed rooms and instead opened toward a computer lab in the center of the building. However, the Kindergarten rooms, the gymnasium, and the music/art room are self-contained classrooms. The music/art room became a storage room for lunch tables when no other classes were scheduled.

Alex drew a map of their classroom at Beechwood (Figure 4.2). The floor of the room is tiled with a painted blue circle in the center where students sit. There was no classroom rug or

carpet, nor were there tables and chairs. On one side of the room was storage for music equipment and on the opposite side was storage for art supplies. A SmartBoard was located on one wall and a whiteboard and sound system were located on the opposite wall near the shared teachers' desk.

**Figure 4.2**

*Map of Beechwood Elementary School Music Classroom Drawn by Alex*



Alex described the music equipment that they had at Beechwood:

What I do have is really old and a lot of it is breaking. I have just enough physical instruments for if we want to do a drum circle. We have four floor drums that are in pretty good shape actually, three bongos that are not in great shape, six tambourines whose heads are broken, a couple maracas, a couple guiros. We do have enough rhythm sticks and enough jingle bells for all students in a class to have one... Then we have one set of boomwhackers.

Alex had bought 30 ukuleles this year through a grant and received 30 five gallon buckets for bucket drumming. While Alex was excited for the potential musical activities that came with

these instruments, they were concerned with finding a place to store them in this small multi-purposed classroom.

**Teacher and Student Feelings.** Alex tried to change the classroom environment at Beechwood Elementary by not only trying to engage students through musical activities but also by attempting to persuade students to be more serious about music class. Alex used feelings as the focus of these attempts. They explained this change in the classroom atmosphere:

My students realized that I expected things of them. In years previous, they would watch a lot of movies and they didn't get to play the instruments as much, and none of them learned how to read music... They realized that I expected them to actually put some effort into learning how to read music and playing their instruments, instead of it being a free-for-all kind of thing, if there were instruments out.

For one lesson Alex had students complete a worksheet about rhythmic values and provided reference materials for the students to look up answers.

Half the tests I got back had symbols on them, they drew squiggles on them, they had zeros on them. Some of them were just really wrong, like 42, it was very odd. So I did the lesson again and I told them, "You're going to do this test again because a lot of you did not take it seriously..." And one of the third grade girls was like, "Are you serious? This is music." And that rubbed me the wrong way, and I said, "Hold on, music is a class. We need to talk about this because this isn't recess time, this is serious." And I was like, "I chose to become a music teacher because music is really important to me. And I think it's important for you to learn."

Alex continued with how they responded:

I talked to them, I leveled with them and I said, "Here's the thing, I don't like doing tests in music. I am like you, I want to be here and I want to have fun. And I want to play instruments all day long and not have to worry about the unfun parts like tests, but there's a thing called state standards. And all your teachers have to listen to them and all of your teachers to do certain things that the government tells us to do otherwise we're not allowed to teach anymore." And they're like, "Even music?" I'm like, "Yeah, it's a class, this isn't recess time." And the girl ended up apologizing to me because I was like, "So when you say things, I understand that music isn't everybody's favorite subject, but you don't need to tell me to my face that you hate music or that you don't think it's important because that really hurts my feelings and it's really rude."

Alex used state standards as a prompt for tests and activities that were necessary parts of their music class. To get students to comply with these "serious" moments in music, Alex used their

feelings as a management tactic. Alex's students did not want to upset Mrs. Winfrey and changed their behavior.

Another episode related to asking students what they wanted to do in music class. Alex described their experience for the first half of the year, "I didn't know what we were doing, they didn't know what we were doing. It was just crazy and I had problems with my second and third graders not listening and not being even quiet enough to hear instruction." After winter break, Alex asked for student input in each class:

I put up the SmartBoard and I just gave them post it notes. I said, "I want you to write down one thing that you really liked about music class and one thing that you want to do, one thing that we haven't done that you want to do in music class. "I collected them and I put them on two different sides of this smart board: things that we really like doing and things that we like want to do more of, or that we haven't done that you want to learn about...It was really helpful because then I could form my classes more to what they wanted. Because I found out that they hated singing, I was like, "Well, sorry, we're going to do a little bit of singing still, but we'll do a lot of other stuff."

Alex was not completely open to all the student input, especially when students did not want to participate in singing activities. However, Alex was willing to explore other topics students suggested.

Some kids wanted to learn about hip hop, some kids wanted to dance more. And so for those classes, we did do those and we did do more of that. And I think even just the act of me asking them what they wanted to do in class, they were like, "Oh, okay. I have ownership of my education. And this person really cares about this class and wants us to have a good time. And so I'm going to trust that person." So that was really nice to see in that classroom.

Some students shared that they did not want to come to music at all. Alex returned to the conversation of their feelings. Alex said, "And we had that conversation again of like, 'That's not very nice.'"

In another episode, a student challenged Alex's assessment activities. Alex was asking students to improvise on xylophones. Alex described this incident:

He was doing something ridiculous, playing it completely wrong. And then I said, “You need to be playing that correctly and how I showed you.” And he said, “I don’t know how to.”...I said, “I need you to actually try in this class. This is really hurting my feelings that you are doing this and it’s not okay. I know you are capable of doing this. You’re not stupid. Stop acting like it or we’re going to have a conversation with your teacher, with Mr. Len, with our principal, and with your mom.”

After this conversation, the student complied with the activity. “I was asking for volunteers to do it in front of everybody and he was volunteering for it. It was just an immediate switch after I had that conversation that day, which really, really made me happy. I thought, ‘Oh, I probably should have had this conversation a little bit earlier.’” Alex found that not only did the student begin to comply with instructions, they began to become an active participant in the class.

Alex believed that they needed to prepare the students at Beechwood for when they would be in a larger school context, especially the fourth grade students.

I wasn’t going to let them get away with what they’d been getting away with for four years. Beechwood is such a unique school because the class sizes are so small and the students get that one-on-one attention, then all of a sudden after fourth grade, they’re put back into Williston schools where they don’t know every single person in their class. Obviously I want smaller classes for sure, but it’s going to be a shock for them for sure next year.

As a result, Alex tried to provide a structure and taught music lessons that they believed would enable the students’ transition to another school and to another music teacher the next year.

**Virtual teaching.** When Beechwood switched to virtual teaching due to COVID-19, Alex adopted activities that were part of an online video curriculum that the district used called BrainPop.

The first two weeks, I gave them BrainPop. And then for each grade, I differentiated what exactly they were doing. Last week, I think kindergarten watched a video about Mozart, and then they drew a picture of what the song made them think of. And then fourth grade studied hip-hop. They watched a video on hip-hop, and then they did an activity where they pretended they were a rapper, and they made up a name, and what they would rap about or something.

These activities were short and fit the district directive to teach less than fifty minute classes.

Alex only had to do minimal planning, commenting, “It was really easy for me to just go in and select what I wanted them to do, and then just, I was able to assign it, so when they log in, it just shows up.” Alex eventually began to incorporate other activities beyond what was pre-determined through the BrainPop curriculum. Some of these activities including family member participation. In one activity Alex described:

They had to do a musical interview where they interview a family member, either someone they’re in their house with, or a phone call. And it was questions like, ‘Did you used to play an instrument? If you could learn any instrument, what would it be? Did you ever go see any concerts? What’s a happy memory you associate with music?’

Drawing from their experience as a student, Alex was cognizant of their students’ resources and ability to complete assignments.

When I had the bingo sheet for my Beechwood kids...I gave them options where they could do things without, if they don’t have instruments or they don’t have other resources. One of the options was to make a drum set out of things they found around the house. And then another song or another one was just to clap along with the beat to a song that they like. Because I understand, I remember being in that position and getting homework assigned to me and not being able to do it. I would go to a friend’s house to do it or trying to fake my way through it. Pretend like I did it.

Alex also began to meet with their students for music class rather than only assigning activities asynchronously.

I joined them in our classroom Zoom meetings and we would sing together and dance together, which is really hard over Zoom. We did the “Macarena,” we did the “Cha Cha Slide.” We sang a couple songs. We sang “How Far I’ll Go Together” from *Moana*.

By the end of the school year, Alex heard less and less from students and they completed fewer assignments. After the school year finished, Alex remarked, “I heard from no students that last week, which was fine. My Beechwood kids, and I have over 100 of them, and only one of them did their assignment for that last week.”

**Future Ideations/Imaginings.** When Alex talked about their future classroom plans at Beechwood, they wanted to make music with whatever was available to them rather than wishing they had better instruments. Alex expressed:

I want to show them that we can make music no matter what. We're still going to be able to do it. We're a small school but we're still going to have fun with it, and we're going to do – I mean yeah we are limited, but we're going to think outside of the box.

Alex already began planning on how to use the ukuleles and five-gallon buckets for bucket drumming next year.

We started [ukuleles] a couple of weeks before spring break because they were super excited about them. But I'm going to start with ukuleles with my fourth graders next year, which is really nice because I'd rather the fourth graders play them than third grade. I feel like they're great. It's just a little bit too young. We'll start with ukuleles at the beginning of next year. Then that'll be nice because they'll get to play them for our winter concert because that's the only concert that they get during the year.

For some ideas, Alex felt constrained by the physical space of the music classroom at Beechwood. Alex wished to make the room more comfortable. "I would at least like a rug for us to sit on. There are some days where I would pull the chair and I'd be like, 'I'm sorry, I'm not sitting on the ground with you, my back is killing me I'm going to sit in this chair.'" Alex also wanted to do more dancing and movement activities, but felt that they were limited by space. They were inspired by a presentation given at the state music educators conference.

This presentation on folk dancing that just blew my mind. It was amazing...I loved it so much. I went back and I was like, we're going to do these folk dances and we had no room to do it. I wanted to do it in the gym and there is a reason they told me I needed to reserve the gym. I was like, "Who's going to come fight me for it?" And then I just never got around to it, which I'm really disappointed in myself for never following up on that.

While Alex had several ideas for their future at Beechwood, they ultimately wanted to be assigned as a full-time band director rather than splitting their time with elementary general music. Before the year began, the job assignment for the middle school and high school band director changed to no longer include Kindergarten. Alex confessed, "The job now, middle

school and high school, I would prefer to have if we're being honest. I do enjoy working with older students and I would prefer to be just doing band instead of band and general music." At the start of the year, a teacher was hired as a part-time music teacher and Alex tried to persuade the district to make this teacher full-time and be assigned at Beechwood.

I wrote a whole paper about it, a whole proposition [*sic*] about it. I did a whole bunch of research. I did data showing how both schools were suffering, because my Kindergartners had to have a block, a 50-minute time block of music once a week, which is not great for Kindergartners at all. My band students were losing a whole day of sectionals in band. I only had four days to teach sectionals, even though I want to grow my program as much as possible. I was just at my max this year, because of how many kids were in my sectionals...I turned that all in, and they [responded], "Okay, we'll think about it."

At the end of this process, Alex learned that the district decided to assign the new music teacher as part time music and part time library. Alex felt defeated. "I still, and will be, doing that job next year, even though I really fought for it. I got signatures on my proposition from the whole Music Department and everything, and they just threw it away."

**Summary.** Alex's inexperience with general music was amplified by the limited space and resources at Beechwood. The small classroom limited movement activities and well-used and degrading equipment limited opportunities for instrumental activities. As Alex tried to navigate their new teaching context, students began to express dissatisfaction with music. When music moved to the virtual space, Alex relied on commercially developed music lessons and supplemented these with other activities that students could complete independently. Many students stopped their participation with music completely. Next year, Alex desired to make the most of what was available to them at Beechwood, but ultimately, they hoped that they would no longer be assigned to teach elementary general music.

*Summary and Analysis of Alex as an Elementary General Music Teacher at Beechwood Elementary*

Alex's understanding of their classroom at Beechwood focused on its deficits. They reflected on the smallness of the school and classroom and the disrepair of their equipment. After Alex was hired and given this assignment, they simultaneously spent energy to develop a general music curriculum while also persuading their administration to hire someone else to teach general music classes. Alex initially underestimated the effort that was needed to teach elementary general music at Beechwood. At the end of the year, Alex seemed resigned to teaching elementary general music at Beechwood for another year, but their perspective had begun to change. They desired to make music no matter the situation.

Disorientation was a theme that emerged from Alex's journey of place consciousness as an elementary general music teacher at Beechwood Elementary School. In contrast with their experience at Washington, Alex had no previous history with Beechwood. They were given a classroom that had been designated for multiple uses, and as a result, the classroom did not look like other music classrooms Alex had seen. The school administration did not provide Alex with a curriculum, which was made even more problematic given their lack of prior experience teaching elementary general music. Alex exercised flexibility, though, to develop a general music curriculum at Beechwood with considerable freedom, but found teaching to be disorienting without a structure to guide their pedagogical decisions. Ultimately, they relied on *GamePlan* and the Illinois Music Standards for their curriculum.

A second theme that emerged was Alex's implementation of a placeless curriculum at Beechwood as they relied on published materials to structure their curricular and pedagogical choices. Their choice of curriculum ignored the students and the milieu of Beechwood. At times,

Alex expressed their own dissatisfaction with the activities they taught, especially assessments, but thought them to be necessary. Alex experienced praxis shock as their students began to act out and express dissent during class. To overcome their praxis shock, Alex did two things. First they asked their students what they liked about music and which activities they wanted to do, which could result in a curriculum that is no longer placeless. Second, they used their own hurt feelings as a way to convince students to do as they were told. The placelessness of Alex's elementary general music curriculum continued in their transition to virtual teaching. Alex used commercially available pre-recorded lessons on a platform that the school had purchased. They tried to supplement these activities with others they believed might be more meaningful to students, but Alex did not articulate a clear vision for what they wanted to do in music class after they went virtual. Subsequently, many students did not complete assignments.

A third theme that emerged in Alex's development of place consciousness was that they created their music classroom to be a preparation for other places. Alex remarked that they needed to prepare Beechwood students for when they transitioned to Washington Elementary and taught activities that would benefit students if they chose to join band. Alex's educational philosophy in their band classroom at Washington Elementary pushed against acting as a feeder for other band classrooms, but this approach was in direct conflict with Alex's educational philosophy of their general music class at Beechwood.

### **Alex as Alex**

Alex's journey as a first-year music teacher transcended their roles as an elementary band director and elementary general music teacher. These experiences were deeply enmeshed with their development as a person and as beginning teacher. In this section, I illustrate how Alex

made a place for activism in their teaching, navigated this year in isolation, and experienced stress as a first-year teacher. I conclude by exploring Alex's transitioning state of identity.

### *Making a Place for Activism*

Alex attempted to incorporate social justice activism into the music curriculum at both Washington and Beechwood Elementary Schools. When I asked Alex what they believed to be the most important things for their students to know about music, they responded:

I definitely think that learning about diversity and other cultures and tolerance is really important because there's really not that much diversity at the schools or in the community. I mean it's definitely getting more diverse than when I was there because of the college getting more students than it was and more students from other places. But I think that's really important to learn before they graduate. And so they can be tolerant of their classmates that don't look like them. There's only a handful of them.

After graduating college, Alex began to become increasingly involved in social justice activism especially Black and Trans\*+<sup>10</sup> Civil Rights movements. At the end of Alex's first year, the United States experienced a wave of mass protests in response to the deaths of George Floyd in Minneapolis and Breonna Taylor in Louisville. At the same time, the author J. K. Rowling began posting a series of transphobic statements on Twitter causing anger in the LGBTQ+ community. Alex was outraged by all these events. While I was not connected directly to Alex through social media during this study, Alex's social media presence had grown, and mutual friends and acquaintances had shared some of Alex's posts. I asked Alex about their public social media presence:

It's really important for me to share things in particular, to share resources, to share things with people who want to have educational conversations with people. I know that 99% of the time, I'm not going to change anyone's mind, but if there's somebody on the fence...one [idea] that sticks out in my mind is [saying] "I don't see color" or "We're one race, the human race." It seems like a really nice thing to say. It seems like a really good sentiment. I know your heart is in the right place when you say this, but can I help you understand why that erases a lot of what's happening? And just ignores what's happening

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<sup>10</sup> I use trans\*+ to bring attention to and "encompass the term's fluidity, inclusivity, and expansiveness" (Cayari, 2019, p. 119).

and ignores the systemic murder of Black people in our nation? For me, if it's just one person that hears that and it starts to just help them think a little bit differently and help them think on a side that is not the one that they have been raised on? Then it's worth it.

Alex was willing to jeopardize their career for these causes.

Growing up my mom always told me to pick my battles, and I have chosen to pick every battle for sure. Whenever she brings this up, because we have been talking about what's been happening and she tells me..."I'm worried that you might be fired for posting these things." Well, I should hope I wouldn't be fired for these things, and if I am, I wouldn't want to work in a place that doesn't believe that Black students should receive the same education as White students.

Alex's involvement with activism has been influenced by their experiences as a high school and college. During high school in Williston, Alex was bullied for their sexuality.

When I was growing up, there was really not anyone in the LGBT community at my school. We had a GSA, Gay Straight Alliance, but it was all straight allies. It was me and then a couple of my friends that were actually out in high school and I mean, I was bullied really bad. I wasn't allowed to change in the girl's locker room just because I liked girls. The PE teacher made me go to the bathrooms...I was really singled out. There were rumors started about me in high school. I just feel like that was one of those things that I just wish everybody had known about a little bit more. Since graduating, I've gotten a lot of apologies actually from some of my classmates. That's been nice, but I still would rather have not gone through that experience anyway.

After moving away to college, they became more conscious of racial and gender diversity.

Especially after I went to college and I got out of this small town and I met people who didn't look like me and I learned more and just having a growth mindset is important to me, just in all aspects of life, whether that be career wise, whether that be humanity wise, whatever.

Conversations in Alex's music education courses merged with their propensity toward activism as a major influence in their educational philosophy. Alex explained, "It was honestly a lot of talking to my professors...talking about programming and talking about minorities, who should have a chance." Alex continued by recalling a story about women being discriminated against for orchestra auditions because judges could hear the clicking of their high-heeled shoes. They concluded:

That was the first time I learned about unintentional bias, and it was a really big thing for me...I'm really, really grateful that college helped to open my eyes on this, and I don't know, I just feel like it's my personal duty to do this.

"My personal duty to do this" referenced Alex's inclusion of social justice topics in their classroom. Alex hoped to help their students be more tolerant of other people due to their past experiences being bullied as a student at Williston. Alex sought to use their White privilege to advocate for racial and gender diversity in the Williston schools.

I am going to use my privilege to speak to people who will listen to somebody who is White passing and somebody who is in their community...I found that in Williston, my role is more of using my privilege to be a voice, but I'm not perfect and I'm always educating myself and talking to my Black friends and listening to them and making sure that I can be a good advocate and a good ally for them.

**Combatting Stereotypes.** As a teacher in the Williston schools, Alex encountered racial stereotyping by community members, staff, and students. One such stereotype was through the coded phrases "Chicago kids" and "Black men from Chicago."

A lot of the people in Williston, grew up in Williston, went to State and stayed here. It is for sure something that goes way back, and it's definitely something that is getting better, but it's just something that has been passed on for generations. It is what they see happening at the college. We have more Students of Color coming to the college, namely Black males from the northern part of the State and the crime rates in Williston have gone up a little bit, and a lot of people are blowing it out of proportion and blaming it on people from Chicago. Some of it's just panic that doesn't need to happen and a lot of it is micro-aggressions that have come from assumptions that have been passed down. I know people that I grew up with that didn't meet a Person of Color until they went to college.

There were also blatant White supremacist symbols displayed in the community, even in the neighborhood where Washington Elementary was located.

If you walk down our street, you see Trump flags. Just the other day I saw a sign in somebody's yard that said "Pritzker<sup>11</sup> Sucks," and then it has a swastika on it...I know that maybe their parents are saying these things, their grandparents, their neighbors. And I want them to know that's not a good thing and that they can have their own opinions other than their parents and other than what they heard, and there is a world outside of Williston. Probably why those are the most important things for me.

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<sup>11</sup> Jay Robert "J. B." Pritzker – Governor of Illinois at the time of this study.

When Alex encountered this rhetoric with their colleagues, they were not as confident in combatting White supremacist stereotypes.

Sometimes, I will get a surprise of what comes out of my colleague's mouths. Specifically, one of the things that really surprised me. We were in the teacher's lounge eating lunch and our vice principal came in and our vice principal is one of the only People of Color in the district who is on our staff and he was talking to us...[After] he left the room, one of my colleagues said, "Now, I don't mean to be offensive," so you know it's going to be good when they start out with "I don't mean to be offensive." "But he is the Whitest Black man I've ever met." A lot of the other teachers were like, "Yeah, yeah." It was not a situation that I felt comfortable saying, "Okay, what do you mean by that? Let's talk through [why] it is offensive." So I just picked up and just left. Honestly that is one of my regrets is not saying something, but in the moment I was just so uncomfortable and I just left the situation.

A similar situation happened when Alex's colleagues began to talk about Mexican students, a conversation which led to Alex isolating themselves during their lunch for the rest of the year.

Some teachers [went] on a tangent about how we have Mexican students coming to school, and they were dirty. They were talking about how they need to stick up for the Mexican students because they don't have parents because obviously Mexican parents are always out of the picture or always negligent. At the time, I did not want to say anything and I was uncomfortable. I just got up and left without saying anything. I didn't eat lunch in the teacher's lounge for the rest of the year. I regretted that for a really long time. I regret not saying anything simply because I was outnumbered because there are five teachers, and they're all talking about it. I was the only one, not saying anything and not contributing to the conversation. I wish I would have said something.

Alex believed that they would be more capable of challenging racial stereotyping next year after an incident that happened during their summer job with the Williston schools.

For next year, I know that I am more comfortable with saying things. I know that already with the painting job that I had. The very first day, I was not picking fights, but somebody brought up all the looting and the violence<sup>12</sup>, they don't understand this and they don't understand that. And I spoke up immediately...I came off of break and I was [thinking], I'm not coming back tomorrow, this is awful. Everybody hates me. I can't be in this space. And then I ran into my boss in the hallway and he said, "I forgot your name, thank you so much for saying something. That really means a lot to me, I really support you. Thank you for going to the protests. Thank you for sticking up." And that one

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<sup>12</sup> This is in reference to the nation-wide protests of the killing of George Floyd.

interaction just made it – It really did just warm my heart, as cheesy as that sounds. And I stuck with it for sure.

After Alex received affirmation from their White boss, they now felt as though they would be able to fight White supremacist rhetoric with adults and colleagues in the same school spaces in which they had previously felt uncomfortable.

**Diversifying Repertoire.** One way that Alex sought to expose their students to a diverse and inclusive repertoire was by featuring a Composer of the Month. Alex explained:

I have a composer of the month and to be honest I haven't kept up with it very well this year. I've only had three actually. I had Florence Price and then before it was Scott Joplin and before that it was Soon Hee Newbold.

Alex led students through a discussion about these composers and listening to their works. At Washington Elementary, these composers were featured on a bulletin board at the front of the room, which was visible to the community groups that also used the band room.

A couple parents question why I do these people, and why I'm not doing Beethoven and why I'm not doing Mozart. I told them, I said, "They will learn so much about those people in their upcoming musical career. Everybody knows who Beethoven is, everyone knows at least one song." My excuse for the parents is kind of like, "Oh, I just like to get them exposed to broader music that they wouldn't normally hear," but I do try to go for female composers, composers of color, people they haven't heard of, just to shine some light on the people that we don't often hear about.

When the Washington Elementary band class moved to a virtual space, Alex took advantage of the situation and invited Jodie Blackshaw, an Australian composer and educator, to speak to their students.

We had a Zoom meeting with Jodie Blackshaw, which was just, I mean they didn't know who she was. I was freaking out. It was a question/answer thing. They had such good questions...It was really cool because normally she would not be able to visit us because she lives in Australia and there's a million hour time difference. But because we're doing the online learning, I was able to schedule a meeting. It was 6:00 p.m. our time and...8:00 or 9:00 a.m. her time. It was really nice that we were able to do that because I really wanted my students to see that composers are alive. Composers can be women...It was nice for them to see one...and be able to talk to one and talk to them about her composing process...I'm not to going say that made remote learning worth it, but it helped soften the blow a little bit.

While Alex was finding ways to have discussions about and with composers who were not “dead White men” as they phrased it, they struggled to incorporate a diverse and inclusive repertoire in the pieces the band played. Alex wanted to buy more pieces, including the piece “Whirlwind” by Jodie Blackshaw, but found expanding the music library cost prohibitive. Consequently, Alex was limited by what prior band directors had purchased in years past. Alex described their library:

If we look at my library, I have one female composer...Anne McGinty...The majority of my library is, like for the winter concert, is very specifically Christmas songs. I have a lot of hymns. I have a lot of patriotic music, which isn't bad, but that is probably 80% of my library right now.

Alex shared that it would be easier to perform only the music that is easily available with their students, but they would feel guilty doing this. “It’s my ethical duty to be able to bring other composers to light other than Robert W. Smith or whoever and get something else in their ear. Honestly, a lot of it is guilt.” They continued:

I don't want to be part of the problem, I guess, part of the problem of only choosing White male composers. We are a smaller district. If we did, I don't think anybody would come knocking on my door and be like, “Hey, why aren't you doing this?”

This guilt was also influenced by a misstep Alex made when choosing music for the winter concert

For the winter concert we did play one [called] “Holiday Chips and Salsa” and the chips and salsa part of it was just like they added a shaker and a cow bell or maracas and a cow bell, and it was not really a culturally sensitive song. It was based on “Here We Come A-Wassailing.”...I do take responsibility for that. I was trying to do a different piece and it was just too hard for them and this was like two weeks before the concert and I thought, “This one is easy. It has quarter notes, we're going to do it,” for my sixth grade bands.

To make up for this misstep, Alex purchased a piece called “Española” by Victor Lopez to play next year.

I want to have a conversation about culturally relevant music and be like, “Look this guy, this is somebody who is Latino. He wrote a Latino song. Here are the specific things in

our music that makes it – that he wrote to remind us of the Spanish folk songs.” So that will at least be one of the conversations I’ll have next year.

**Making Music Accessible.** Alex recognized barriers for their students to participate in band as well as in music. They named music as “an extremely elite subject” with a lot of financial costs associated with it. Alex drew on their own experiences as a music student to illustrate:

I mean, you have to pay for the equipment. You pay for private lessons. You have the time to take those private lessons and the time to practice... When I was in high school I had to get a part time job, but that was, I mean, it was part time, but it was 30 hours a week after school and all during the weekend. And there wasn’t a lot of time for me to practice. I didn’t take private lessons until I got to college. I mean, it definitely put me at a disadvantage... To be able to go see concerts, again having that time and having that money to be able to pay for concert tickets.

This financial barrier caused Alex to question certain idealistic sayings such as “music connects us” and “music is a universal language,” often repeated in music education.

Recognizing the financial barrier to participate in band, Alex took students and their families at their word when they needed to borrow school instruments.

I remember when students were trying out instruments and choosing their instruments for beginning band. I had a lot of families tell me they couldn’t afford instruments... The teacher that had been there for over 30 years was helping me said, “Those families are taking advantage of you. They’re probably not as poor as they say they are.” I was like, “Well, we have these instruments, they’re there for them to use. Maybe they’re not so far under the poverty level that they can’t eat dinner tonight, but if they’re asking and that’s going to be a factor of them joining band or not, I’m going to allow them to borrow an instrument.”

Alex sought other ways to alleviate financial barriers such as eliminating piano lessons as a requirement to study percussion, using booster money to purchase reeds and oils, and inviting clinicians from State University to work with students.

Alex encouraged their students to take advantage of the free concerts and performances that were available online.

I do appreciate that during the quarantine, a lot of symphonies have been doing live concerts for free. I really like that. I sent those links to my kids. I found a jazz blog that was also some jazz band where combos were doing live streaming as well. So I sent those out and that's been honestly really nice with the quarantine. You can just watch them in your PJ's and you don't have to get all dressed up and go and buy \$100 tickets to go see them.

**Summary.** Alex considered themselves to be an activist, something that had been a part of their identity from a young age. From Alex's own experiences growing up in Williston, they deemed tolerance to be an essential curricular goal. They saw diversifying the music that was presented in their classes as a moral and ethical duty as a teacher. Alex tried to alleviate financial barriers for participation in band by asking for financial aid from the music boosters for supplies and not casting doubt on families who asked to borrow a school instrument. They also shared as many performances that were being streamed for free online with their students, so students they could have more opportunities to listen to professional-level musicians.

### *In Isolation*

Alex experienced geographic and social isolation during their first year of teaching. Their classroom was in an isolated part of Washington Elementary and they were only at Beechwood one day a week. Alex explained:

I'm for sure isolated on this side of the building. There's some days when I don't venture [out], except for taking my kids back to their classes. A lot of my communication is by email, so here's some days where I don't really see other teachers. I am a very introverted person...so sometimes I'll just eat lunch at my desk and just take some quiet time for me.

Socially, some of this isolation was also due to living an hour away from Williston.

The teachers, most of it is a very professional relationship and I haven't hung out with them outside of school. Part of that is because I do live in Chase City. Except for the other band director, we've gone for coffee a few times and talked about stuff.

Some of this isolation was intentional, especially after hearing the racist conversations in the teachers' lounge. Alex explained that keeping to themselves was a normal part of their life.

It's kind of how I've always lived my life to be honest. Not to say that I don't enjoy talking to them, because I really do. I always strike up a conversation with them if I see them in the hallway and I do enjoy talking to them. In particular, there are a few para-professionals that I have lunch with. Some days, the art teacher I really, really enjoy talking to. She's also a band mom, so that helps. I really enjoy speaking with my principals, but a lot of it is, I don't want to necessarily go out with them or something...But honestly, it doesn't really bother me.

Due to this isolation, Alex did not have regular interactions with staff about students and school-wide matters, or develop connections with those who live in the community beyond those they already had from when they were a student.

### *Stressed and Stressor*

As Alex conversed about their first year of teaching, they would often refer to feeling stressed. According to Alex, feelings of stress started at the beginning of the year:

I got here, and I definitely for a while felt like I was just trying to keep head above water, but I heard from a lot of people that's just a first year thing, just trying to keep your head above water. I try not to take it too – try not to tell myself I'm a bad teacher.

Alex would use their hour commute home to Chase City as a an opportunity to work through this stress.

I actually do enjoy the hour of quiet time and I have my little coffee on the drive there and then on the drive back sometimes I'll scream a little bit on the way home, just get any of the tension out.

Alex named that the causes of stress were “situational.” Sometimes the cause would be their schedule that day, a group of students they had in lessons, or thinking that their students were not prepared to become sixth or seventh grade band students.

Alex identified focusing too much on musical performance as something that would stress them and their students.

I did put a little bit too much emphasis on the performance. I could feel myself getting more stressed a couple of weeks before the concert and the counting down, this is how many rehearsals we have. Telling my students this is how many rehearsals we have until your concert. I want you guys to think about this. And I stressed myself out, I stressed them out.

Alex discussed feeling stressed about assessing their students, especially when students would not come to their scheduled lessons.

They've only had a handful the whole year and they do not like that because they didn't have any last year. The sixth graders are really pushing back, but something they have is every weekend are playing assessments and they're really simple and it's just one thing... My fifth graders are pretty much used to it...It's very stressful because grades are due on Monday and I have three students who...did not come to any of their sectionals all year, despite me talking to them, despite me calling home. I don't know what to do because I have two students that don't have any, they don't have any of their assessments done and if I put them in as zeros they will fail.

An assessment for general music was included as part of their teaching evaluation. One student scored worse on the post-test from the pre-test. Alex explained, "I am convinced that he failed it on purpose." They continued:

He just decimated my data because I only had 15 kids in that class. We had to get 86% of students or whatever passing, meeting or exceeding their test...I was under that 86 percentile or something. I was so mad...I talked to my principal. I said, "Here's what happened...Here's his first test. Here's his second test. I have reason to believe he did this on purpose." And my principal was like, "Yeah, that's fine. Just take it out of the data."

Alex took the advice of their principal and erased this student's score, but they confessed that they felt as though they were "cheating."

Alex sometimes noticed that their students were also stressed in classes. For instance Alex referred to their sixth grade students becoming increasingly "snippy" with each other during the band classes leading to spring break. Another interaction with a student made Alex realize that they were not the only one who was stressed in their classroom.

I have one that's consistently late [to band]...I talked to him and I was like, and it broke my heart...He broke down, Mom and Dad have been going through a divorce. Dad is having trouble, they have six kids, Dad's having trouble getting them all to school on the correct time. I felt really bad about that...But it is frustrating.

Even in a moment when a student shared their own stressors, Alex response had been that they felt bad and were empathetic, but still labelled the student's attendance challenge as "frustrating" to their classroom goals.

### *A Shifting Identity*

While some stress in Alex's life may have originated from things that they may have been able to control, Alex's multidimensional identity had begun to shift and crystallize which undoubtedly caused Alex frustration as they navigated through their first year of teaching. First, Alex had begun to shift perspective on their role as a teacher.

When I came in, I thought, "Everything is sunshine and rainbows and I'm going to love every single student, every single student's going to love me. And we're going to have a great time and I'm never ever going to write them a pink slip, like a discipline thing."... When I was a student, I was like, "If anyone talks to me in not an extremely loving and supportive way then my life is over and I'm going to cry immediately." Some of my students, I have learned that they hate that, they hate it so much. They think it's super condescending...I had students that told me, "I need some tough love." I had students tell me, "You need to be meaner." So that was a wake-up call. I was very uncomfortable with getting a little bit more stern with them, for sure. But they always responded to what I was putting down.

They began to realize that students and parents had taken advantage of their pedagogical approach:

I definitely learned that I need to be stricter with the rules that I set in place at the beginning of the year. I found that I'm a little bit of a pushover. I've always had rose-colored glasses point of view that as long as I have mutual trust with everybody—no one would ever take advantage of somebody because that's just not nice. Then I found a lot of students and a lot of parents were taking advantage of me at the beginning of the year. I thought of...better boundaries to put in place next year.

Secondly, Alex experienced internal tension about their gender identity as they presented as the woman Mrs. Winfrey, with she/her/hers pronouns with students, families, and colleagues, but outside of that public role, Alex identified as gender neutral with they/them/their pronouns.

Alex shared:

To be perfectly candid, it was really awful this past year to hear students and colleagues call me Mrs. Winfrey and to hear them refer to me as she. I mean I never came out to any of them, but it was like every time it's just like, I was just like could feel it. I don't want to have another year of that.

This tension with their gender identity appeared to become intolerable by the end of this study. In a LGBTQ+ Facebook group that Alex and I were both members without realizing each other's presence, they had begun to reach out to others about coming out as gender non-conforming in the classroom. Alex had already shared their gender identity with me, so their post was not a surprise or a circumstance of Alex unintentionally outing themselves to me. However, in our final interview, Alex revealed they were now transitioning to become a man.

I have been coming out to people in my life and then one of the things that's coming up is how to approach it in the school place, especially since I'm not on any hormone treatment, any testosterone. I've already been at the school a year and I have students who know me as Mrs. Winfrey. It's a small school; it's a small community. There's never been any openly gay teachers, let alone trans teachers...It would be a lot easier to just leave the school and just go to a different school and start the year as Mr. Winfrey and not have to worry about it.

At the end of this study, Alex was still debating how they would approach this transition, especially since many clothing stores and hair stylists were shut down because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though Alex had begun to use he/him/his pronouns in some situations, they asked me to continue to use they/them/theirs when writing about them.

It's odd for me right now, especially being in quarantine, not being able to go to the doctor, not being able to get my hair cut, not being able to have access to new clothes that I have this idea in my head, which I know is incorrect, but I have this idea in my head that if I'm more passing than people will take me more seriously. And that was something that I was thinking about before and I thought, "You know what? It's fine. I'll just deal with it, it'll be fine."

Alex had begun to formulate how they would approach their gender identity professionally, but they were fearful.

My kind of plan of action would be to talk to my principal first for sure. And I haven't decided, I don't know if I went to automatically have a union representative there. I would hope I wouldn't have to, and I really like my principal. I hope that would not be

something that would need to happen... Tell him that I want to be known as Mr. Winfrey and that's how students and colleagues would refer to me, and at one of our first meetings before school starts with the staff, making an announcement there and ask my colleagues who I know some would be extremely supportive, absolutely. And ask them to if they hear someone else referring to me as incorrect pronouns or referring to me as with the incorrect title to try to correct that. And then once I have students talking to my students and having my principal in there for that discussion, but letting them ask any questions they feel like they need to ask.

Alex's perspective of self was changing and still emerging throughout their first year of teaching. As they looked toward the future, they saw coming out as trans\*+ at school as inevitable next year and were fearful about student and colleague reactions and receptions.

### *Summary and Analysis of Alex as Alex*

Alex's journey of self is an important part of their journey of place consciousness. This journey of self included many paths such as their propensity toward activism, feelings of isolation, increased stressed levels, and tensions between their teaching and gender identities.

Alex's propensity for activism grew through their developing sociological understanding of Williston and its community members. Alex used their political power as a teacher to inject aspects of activism into their curriculum to create a classroom that was inclusive and worked against a White and male dominated music education tradition. Alex mis-stepped in their preparation for their winter concert and programmed a piece that was culturally inauthentic and appropriated. Alex hoped to rectify this cultural insensitivity by programming a Latin-American piece by a Latino composer. In spite of Alex's intentions, Alex tokenized Latin-American music and a Latin-American composer through their decision to purchase Victor Lopez's "Española." While Victor Lopez is Latino, he is Cuban-American (Victor Lopez, n.d.). His piece *Española* according to its program notes is inspired by the town of Española in New Mexico which was established by the Spanish Conquistadors as new colonial capital of Spain (Española, n.d.). The piece is written in the style of a Spanish military march and is not based on any Hispanic or

Latin-American folksongs, contrary to Alex's claim. The piece's contrived historical context has no connection to Lopez's heritage nor to the Miami, Florida band ensemble and director to whom it was dedicated.

Alex's place consciousness of their school and community contexts relied on their own perspective with little influence from others. They began to isolate themselves from colleagues and community members who did not share their views. Alex did not share with me any developing or deepening connections with their colleagues beyond the relationships that had been formed during their time as a student. Alex's own geographic displacement from Williston, living an hour away in Chase City, only exacerbated their disconnection to Williston's inhabitants.

Alex created a stressful classroom environment for themselves and their students through the enacting of their ideological beliefs about music education. Alex created a curriculum that they believed to be important and made efforts for their students to meet their curricular goals. Alex began to notice their students' stress levels rising, and some of this increase was due to the pressure Alex put on them. Students struggled with meeting Alex's expectations, which in turn caused Alex to become stressed about their teaching abilities, creating a vicious cycle.

Alex's shifting identity dominated Alex's journey of place consciousness. Alex was in the beginning stages of moving away from their own perception of Williston, their school, and their classroom and starting to gain understanding that their understanding and experience of these places was not universal for everyone. However, Alex still was arriving to the realization of who they were as a person and not just as a teacher. As Alex became more confident in their gender non-conforming identity they experienced increased tension with their teaching identity as Mrs. Winfrey.

## **Conclusion: Alex's Journey of Place Consciousness**

Alex's journey of place consciousness during their first year of teaching music in the Williston School District was dominated by their prior experiences as a student in the Williston schools. Their prior experiences influenced their pedagogical decision making and their classroom place making. At Washington Elementary, they relied on and sustained traditions that were present in the band program. However, their lack of prior experience teaching elementary general music and having never been a student at Beechwood Elementary school initially disoriented their place consciousness and their pedagogical decision making in that context. Near the end of their first year of teaching, Alex began to realize that their understanding of Williston was not the same as everyone's. Alex had begun to move away from relying on their own perceptions of Williston to influence their place consciousness, but they had spent much of the year isolated from their teaching colleagues or community members who may have helped in the process.

Alex encountered several tensions during their journey of place consciousness. Alex displayed tension between their insider knowledge as a former student within the Williston schools and their return to the community. They struggled to see Williston from a refreshed perspective which was exacerbated by their isolation from colleagues and living elsewhere. Alex continued to juggle their role as a band teacher and a general music teacher. They attempted to find ways to no longer be a general music teacher; however at the end of the year, they appeared to view their position at Beechwood more positively. They experienced a tension between their role as an activist within music education and their role as a custodian of tradition within in the Williston band program especially as they represented it to a new middle and high school band teacher. Alex's internal tension between their teaching identity and their gender identity

complicated their journey of place consciousness. Some of these tensions resolved, but others remained in fluctuation past the end of their first year of teaching.

## CHAPTER 5: VANESA

### The Final Day Of Class

*On the final day of school year at Ascend Charter School, Vanesa Reyes logged into Google Hangouts to meet with one of her seventh grade band classes. Now June, Ms. Reyes had not seen any of her students since March due to the suspension of in-person schooling. On this final day, she hoped to meet with all of her students and ask for their feedback about their experiences in band.*

*As Ms. Reyes settled the three students who had joined the virtual video chat, a student interrupted, “It’s so great to see you!”*

*Ms. Reyes excitedly replied, “It’s so great to see you, too.” She began by asking everyone about their progress with the final project – an original composition using the web-based digital audio workstation, SoundTrap. Students discussed struggling with the program, and all three had issues developing their ideas. Ms. Reyes encouraged them to play a song on their instrument, sing, or rap. She reminded them that she wanted to see them expressing themselves through music. She conceded that if they had too much trouble with SoundTrap, they could video themselves instead.*

*After there were no more questions, Ms. Reyes redirected everyone’s attention to reflect on their experiences in her classes. She first asked about the SoundTrap project. “If I was to do this project next year, would you like to do it?”*

*A student quickly answered, “Yeah, I would, if it was in person. In front of me.”*

*Another interjected, “Are you going to be here next year?”*

*Ms. Reyes reassured them that she would be returning the following year. The three students began to talk amongst themselves about possibilities of moving and transferring to*

*different schools. One student in particular was doubtful they would be back at Ascend in the Fall.*

*Ms. Reyes asked her second question, “What did you think about music online? Was it too easy, too hard, too awkward?”*

*A student answered, “It was weird.”*

*Ms. Reyes asked, “What was weird?”*

*She responded, “I just didn’t like it.”*

*A second student took over, “After you stopped meeting, it was harder because I had to email instead of asking. I don’t like this. I like in person. This was kind of a hot mess for a lot of reasons, but we made it.”*

*Ms. Reyes wondered, “What about music class before we went on quarantine?”*

*One answered, “OK. I felt like it was a good class.”*

*A second student chimed in, “I really liked music before quarantine, and I got the notes and was able to play.”*

*The third student remarked, “I got to play different sounds on my flute.”*

*The first student continued again, “I liked sitting in in that classroom, looking at you and all my classmates.”*

*For her final question, Ms. Reyes inquired “Will you do music next year?”*

*Two nodded, but the third answered, “If I come to Ascend next year.”*

*Ms. Reyes began to finish up their time together by expressing, “I guess I want to say thank you for doing music, even to try it out. Some like art. Some like music. You guys are really talented and I enjoyed getting to know you. I won’t see you this summer or maybe next year, which makes me sad, but I wanted to thank you. Any last words?”*

*A girl replied, "I really appreciated you this year, and I learned a lot of music."*

*Another added, "For your first year, you did really good."*

### **Introducing Vanesa Reyes**

Vanesa Reyes is a young Hispanic woman of Guatemalan and Puerto Rican descent. She grew up in the suburbs of Chicago in an upper middle class, White neighborhood. She identified herself as being one of the few non-White students that attended her school. While in school, she played clarinet in the band. Vanesa shared:

I picked up the clarinet as a little fifth grader because all of my family members had played clarinet. We had a family clarinet, all my cousins played it. My aunt played it. My uncle played it. My mom played it. Eventually when I got to fifth grade, it was done for me. I played clarinet, and I was super into it. When I got to middle school, I had a really, really fun band director that really pushed me, because he knew that I could do great musical things...I was picking up new instruments. I taught myself saxophone, and then I taught myself flute...I was pushed again by my awesome high school directors, and made it to the top ensemble eventually. Then I decided music is what I do for the rest of my life. It was a very helpful, supportive environment, and I loved it a lot.

After high school, Vanesa attended a large public university in the state of Illinois where she majored in instrumental music education.

### *The Job Search*

After graduation, Vanesa applied in earnest to job openings throughout the state of Illinois. She hoped to secure a job teaching middle school band.

I was applying to any music-related job, which was mostly band because that's what I wanted to do...I was applying to Catholic schools, a place I knew I wouldn't really fit in but I thought, "I'm going to apply anyway." I applied at some high schools and some elementary schools which, again, weren't really my top priority but I was like, "If I have to do high school for a year, that's fine."

One of the places Vanesa interviewed was at a charter school in Voyageur, Illinois.

I just felt like it was a good connection and I thought, "I could live in Voyageur." I like the job and I know that I can sustain myself financially. That was really the big thing when it came down to picking this job or this job, A and B. I thought, "I liked this one. I also like the other one but where can I sustain myself?" because I'm going to be living on my own. My family doesn't live around here.

The principal of the school interviewed Vanesa and added to her good feelings about the school. Vanesa explained, “She’s a really tough lady so I was a little nervous, but, despite being nervous, I felt like this was just a good match. I don’t know what it was but it felt really good.” When I asked her about why she had a good feeling, Vanesa had difficulty explaining.

I can’t describe it. I don’t know. My family asked me the same thing and I said, “It was just a gut feeling.” You just know when something is the right fit because I did so many interviews and I was like, “Yeah.” Some of those were just like I just didn’t feel it...There was a good vibe...It was all just based on feeling. Everything was just based on feeling.

Vanesa rejected other job offers before deciding to accept the job teaching middle school music at Ascend Charter School in Voyageur, Illinois.

### **Ascend Charter School in Voyageur, Illinois**

Voyageur is a small city in Illinois and part of a larger metropolitan area of the same name with an estimated population of approximately 400,500 in 2019 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Vanesa recalled knowing “nothing” about Voyageur when she applied to Ascend except some school statistics that she addressed in her application. After teaching and living in Voyageur for several months, Vanesa shrugged, “It’s just another town to live in.” She continued, “Voyageur gets a bad rap because there’s definitely really bad places. There’s a lot of shootings that go around, but I’ve personally never had any issues. Knock on wood, but it just feels like another normal town.” Vanesa described the diversity of people that lived in Voyageur.

Racially, it’s very diverse. Socioeconomically, it’s very diverse...A lot of the families are low income, so our school thankfully has free lunch and breakfast for the kids because most of the families can’t afford that. We provide a lot for the kids because a lot of them come from low income families.

Vanesa believed that Voyageur was also a very artistic community. She explained, “There’s a lot of after school programs, there’s a lot of non-profits, clubs, whatever. There’s so many arts related things in Voyageur, so I feel like the community already knows that art is

important.” Early in the school year, arts education teachers from the area participated in a professional development day at an arts center in downtown Voyageur. Arts groups and businesses from around the city participated by sharing what their organizations do as outreach aimed toward school-aged children. Vanesa found the Voyageur Symphony Orchestra to be the most relevant to her students and hoped to participate in some of their educational programs later in the year.

When Ascend was no longer offering in-person classes due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring, Vanesa helped deliver meals to students’ homes. To deliver these meals, Vanesa and other teachers rode a school bus that travelled its student pick-up and drop-off route through Voyageur. As a result, Vanesa was able to see where her students lived across the entire city. She recalled, “We went all over...[We went] to parts of Voyageur I’ve never been to and realized that some of the kids lived really far away and some of the kids lived down the street.” She described some of the neighborhoods through which they travelled.

[I saw] a normal middle class neighborhood which didn’t really throw me off. It was by the shopping center, 15 minutes down from where I live...And then we go closer to the school, we go to some neighborhoods that have pretty run-down houses...I felt like I saw it all.

She also recalled that most students lived in houses and only a few stops were at apartment buildings.

Ascend Charter School’s middle school campus is located in a residential neighborhood approximately two miles from downtown Voyageur. The school is a public charter school that was associated with Voyageur Public School District. Ascend Charter School is divided into two school buildings – a middle school and high school – serving 528 students in grades 5-12 during the 2019-2020 school year (Illinois State Board of Education, 2020). The middle school campus was located in a former school building of the Voyageur Public Schools. It consisted of grades 5-

8 with 270 students in the 2019-2020 school year. Of these students, 80.1% were classified as low-income students and 3% were English Language Learners. The racial and ethnic diversity of the school in the 2019-2020 school year was as follows: 70.1% Black, 12.3% Hispanic, 8.9% Two or More Races, 8% White, and 0.4% American Indian, 0.2% Asian, and 0.2% Pacific Islander. Over the past five years, the percentage of White students has decreased from 14% to 8% and the percentage of Hispanic students has increased from 7% to 13%. Students listed in other racial and ethnic categories have remained constant.

According to the school's website, the school originated in 2010 from community concern that the Voyageur Public School District was not adequately preparing students for the local workforce in math, science, and technology, and was suffering from a decrease in enrollment, failing standardized test scores, and increasing student dropout rates. In 2010, the Voyageur Public School District Board of Education signed a charter agreement to create the Voyageur Charter School Initiative. The steering committee created a strategic plan for the school and hired a charter management organization located in Chicago that managed other charter schools throughout the midwestern United States. Through this charter management organization, "students receive a rigorous college preparatory curriculum with an emphasis on Math, Science, and Technology" (Ascend Charter School Website). In the fall of 2010, Ascend Charter School enrolled its first students in fifth, sixth, and seventh grades. Each subsequent year, a grade was added until the school reached its current configuration of grades 5-12 in the 2015-2016 school year. The charter was renewed in 2015 for five more years by the Voyageur Public School District. At this time, Ascend also ended their contract with their charter management organization and began to operate independently with their own Executive Director.

In the 2019-2020 school year, during Vanesa's first year of teaching, the Voyageur Public School District rejected a five-year charter renewal and in May 2020 approved a conditional two-year renewal for Ascend Charter School. The Voyageur Public School District was concerned that the school had failed to meet requirements of employee certification and providing adequate special education services<sup>13</sup>. The district found that less than half of the staff at Ascend were certified to teach in their subject area and the school had low teacher retention. In the 2018-2019 school year, teacher retention was 30% (Illinois State Board of Education, 2020). For the past two years, no certified special education teachers were on staff in the middle school. Student turnover was also cited as a concern for charter renewal.

The school described itself as a STEAM school (Ascend Charter School Website), suggesting a focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math. Both the middle school and high school levels claimed to emphasize these subjects in their curriculum. However, during this study the only courses in the Arts that were available to middle school students were a visual arts class and a music class in the form of band taught by Vanesa. I could not find any information that indicated the Arts were integrated into other classroom subjects.

### **(Re)Starting a Band Program**

When Vanesa interviewed for the music job at Ascend Charter School, the school administration told her that the school wished to develop a band program at the middle school level. The administration also had expressed interest in a choir, too, if Vanesa was able to begin one. Vanesa had hoped for a middle school band program and was eager to build and develop one at Ascend.

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<sup>13</sup> This information came from two online news sources, but providing the URL would compromise Vanesa's anonymity.

### *What Should We Do?*

At Ascend, all students in grades 5-8 choose between taking a visual art class or a music class during their advisory period. At the beginning of the school year, Vanesa met with every student in the school during their advisory periods to recruit for her class.

At the beginning of the year, [the administration said], “Okay, just see everyone. They’ll all go to music and then another day they’ll all go to art and just feel out the situation...” I told them to draw their favorite song, tell me their favorite artist, their favorite instruments... Then once they decided, “Yeah, I want to do music,” or, “Yeah, I want to do art,” then we obviously sectioned it off.

During this introductory phase of seeing every student, Vanesa also gauged student interest in how they might want to spend their time in music class if they chose her class. Vanesa recalled asking, “Tell me if you want to do music or art but then also on the music side let me know if you prefer band or choir.” She explained:

I was just really curious. I thought, “What if all these kids actually want to sing instead of play instruments?” I would just have to go by what the numbers say and I was okay with that but the majority of kids responded, “Yeah, I want to be in music to play an instrument.” There was a couple kids that were like, “I want to be in choir.” I said, “Okay. If so many kids chose band, if you chose music, that’s what you’re going to do. We’re not going to sing. We’re going to play instruments.” I told them so if they needed to switch to art, that was fine.

Vanesa had mixed feelings about the school requiring students to choose between art and music. On one hand, she believed that students “know where they want to be or know where they fit.” She elaborated:

Some kids were just like, “I feel like I want to try music,” or most of the kids that were musicians prior signed up for music. I’m pretty sure I have all the prior musicians, so that was nice. So those kids knew, but going forward, I have some kids that are like, “I’m not taking your class next year. I just know that I can’t, music isn’t for me.” I don’t fight with them, whether they say, “I want to be in your class,” or, “I don’t want to be in your class.” I think the kids know. I don’t say anything about it. I think the kids just know where they feel comfortable and where they belong.

On the other hand, some students were torn between choosing a music class and an art class.

There's a lot of kids that they know that they're both [artists and musicians], that they know they love both. So that's a challenge, because you can only pick one and you have to be in that class for the entire year. Some kids struggled with that.

Vanesa and the art teacher started after school clubs to allow students to be able to participate in both types of classes.

I had choir and he had art club, so if you pick one during the day, you could do the other one after school because maybe you'll get a little bit of both, but I feel like that's the biggest issue. Some kids were really torn and obviously me being a first year teacher, some of the kids were like, "I don't know if I want to risk it with a new teacher."...So that sucks that they don't get both music and art.

Vanesa tried to find out what music class had been like at Ascend in previous years, but had to rely on secondhand accounts from her teaching colleagues. Vanesa had expected students to be more interested in band given her interview with the school and her understanding that the music teacher last year had also tried to start a band program. At the high school level, there was also a band teacher and a band program, but Vanesa was not sure how long he had been there or if he would continue in the position next year. She discovered that students in the middle school were not previously given a choice between music and art, but instead took both classes for the entire year. Vanesa relayed what she had heard from others about the year before:

When I was interviewing, I had talked to the principal and then eventually I talked to the director of the whole school about what it was like last year a little bit, and they didn't go too in-depth to talk about it. But I got the gist that the man before me had really big class sizes, the kids didn't get to pick between art and music so you saw that whole class whether they wanted to [be] there or not, you had them...If you're putting 30 kids in that tiny room, it just doesn't work. Eventually he just gave up and didn't teach them at some point.

Two years prior to that, another teacher had taken a general music approach rather than focus on instrumental music.

I don't really know exactly, but she taught more general music and it's very clear because she had recorders in her classroom, she had ukuleles, she had all these magazines about general music, but I don't know how her class structure worked. I think it was similar where she saw a whole class and not just bits and pieces...She saw all of them [students] from my understanding. And I don't really know much about her or why she left.

Vanesa began her first year of teaching in a music program that had many changes in schedule, approaches, and teachers. It was now her turn to develop a music program at Ascend.

### *Schedule*

Vanesa recounted to me what a typical day for her at Ascend Charter School was like.

First thing, we get there at 7:30, meetings start at 7:40. We almost always have some sort of meeting in the morning... Sometimes depending on the day, they'll break it up. New staff is on Thursday and then we do committee meetings on Fridays. But generally it's full staff meetings in the mornings just to go over a few things. We do that and then there's a bit of downtime between the end of the meetings and the beginning of first period, and I'm usually hanging around my room or in a different teacher's room, and kids will just come up and say hi and talk to me. I don't really do anything for that time other than say hello to people and clean instruments if a kid had borrowed an instrument the night before and they're bringing it back, I'll sanitize roughly at that time.<sup>14</sup>

Then all these kids have a mentoring period, first period, and that's considered my prep because I don't have a class. What I do in that time is really hit or miss. Depends on what we've got going on. I'm either cleaning instruments, I'm printing off music, or I'm giving a private lesson. Most of the time, I'm just sitting there and just preparing for the day mentally...

Starting at 9:38, whether it's an A or B day, that's when my first class starts and then it's just routine from there on out. I see four classes, well two classes, a 12 minute break, two more classes, lunch and then the same thing at the end of the day... [For lunch] I am always in the teacher's lounge because I like to socialize with the other teachers... At the end of the day I stand outside my door either blocking the entrance with my body or I just close it and stand outside next to it because the kids like to hang out in my room before and after school... We all want to get the kids out as fast as possible because some buses leave sooner than others... I'll let them come in if they ask to borrow an instrument and take it home for the night... And then obviously just say[ing] goodbye to all the kids that are passing by because they love to say goodbye...

[After students leave, it's] cleaning up, organizing things before I go home, usually standing around and chatting with the other teachers that are in the hallway and then I leave... We are allowed to leave at 4:00 because the buses leave around 3:45-ish so that gives us 15 minutes to hang out, do some work if we need to, clean up.

Vanesa's daily schedule is divided between A and B days and she sees small groups of students playing unlike instruments in grades 5-8 for 35-minute periods. She described her schedule:

I only teach band... All I teach is band every single period, every day... I'll see them by their advisory periods. The sixth grade class is cut into four different advisories. I'll see

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<sup>14</sup> Vanesa's reasons for instrument sanitization is discussed later in this chapter.

four different sections of sixth grade...I do that for every single grade...I see eight classes on one day. Then on the other day I see six classes...I'll see the kids every other day.

She had varied class sizes due to how students are divided by grade level and who selected music instead of art. Vanesa shared that her smallest class had six students while her largest had seventeen students.

For a portion of the year, Vanesa led an after-school choir club for interested students.

I just had a couple kids, maybe 10 at the most, of all different ages come after school. I would teach them really simple vocal techniques, so if they were really big into singing, "This is how you can warm up in the car, in the shower, in your room. If you want to sing something, here's a little vocal technique that you can do." Then at some point, we picked a song to sing, some pop song, and we were practicing it to perform.

The club had limited interest, and students began to have after-school conflicts, as did Vanesa.

Eventually, the choir club ended.

It was really good for a little bit, but it got too inconsistent. The kids stopped showing up, or they were like, "Oh, I don't have a ride," or, "Oh, I forgot today was Tuesday. I can't go." At some point I thought, "I've got two kids here that want to learn. That's just fine," but we had planned a song. We had planned out everything and I can't do that with just two kids, so at some point I said, "Yeah, we need to take a break until we can start back up, commit to it, and then start back up."

Vanesa hoped that the club could start again in the future.

I would like to try it again. I know some kids were really dedicated, so I feel bad that I stopped it just because the majority of kids weren't there. I think I should really try to persevere, even if two kids show up, because if those two kids really want to do it, then I can work with them and they can perform somewhere. I can make it happen, so I think next year I should try harder, give everyone and myself a chance to do it.

While Vanesa struggled to make choir club work during her first year of teaching, she tried her best to persevere with the band classes she taught during the day.

### *Rolling With the Punches*

Due to Ascend's master schedule, Vanesa only met with small groups of students during the day and never as a large ensemble. In addition to constraints in scheduling, instrument

availability was limited. Most students did not rent or purchase their own instruments and instead relied on school-owned instruments. However, the school did not own enough instruments for every student, and most students had to share. While this situation was not ideal or certainly was not how Vanesa imagined teaching middle school, she commented, “I can roll with the punches pretty well. I’m fine with it.” Vanesa said proudly, “I have the honor of building up the band program.” While band instruction was attempted the year prior, Vanesa discovered that not much progress had been made and many students needed to start at the beginning. She explained:

Every single kid in the school, fifth through eighth grade, was a very beginner. What I had to do at the beginning of the year was test instruments and get these kids acquainted with what band even is and what we even do. It’s just really fundamental the entire year.

For the month of September, Vanesa taught her band classes without instruments. She struggled trying to secure instruments for her students through the school. She recalled the activities they did at the beginning of the year.

For a while, let’s do this worksheet and talk about how to read a musical staff because maybe most of us don’t know how to do that. Doing really basic things, then at some point, I thought, well we should play instruments or do something. I found the recorders in the room, so I had a week of recorders. There’s these drums on my shelves, let’s do the drum circle. Let’s just do something to play because these kids are dying to have their instruments and I said, “I don’t know what to tell you. I’ve been trying to get the instruments but no one’s listening so we just have to wait and we’re going to do something else.”

Eventually the school reached a rent-to-buy agreement with a local music store to provide instruments to the school.

We eventually had an instrument petting zoo type thing where one of the shop representatives came in and helped me test all the kids...I did that with all 14 sections that I have...One of my biggest is 16. I have enough instruments to cover what every kid wanted to play in my biggest class. That means there’s leftovers for other classes that didn’t want as many trombones or don’t have as many flutes. What I have can cover my biggest class.

Vanesa spent two months negotiating with the music store to make sure she had the instruments they needed, but she found the process frustrating since every decision or change had to be approved through the school's administration.

**Sharing Instruments.** As Vanesa secured enough instruments so that each student could play one during their scheduled class time, there still was far fewer available than the approximately 150 students who were signed up for band. As a result, students had to share their instrument with the students in other periods. Vanesa pronounced this as the biggest struggle this year. "We just need more money...to get every single kid an instrument." While not every student had their own instrument, Vanesa was able to secure funding for reeds for each woodwind student. She acknowledged her students' feelings about sharing instruments:

They hate it, but that's all I can do. To calm their nerves, I tell them...I clean the instruments every time they play and they know that. The routine is they grab all their stuff, all their books and their instruments. Their reeds are in a separate container over there, and then we have the sanitary spray to spray mouthpieces after we're done playing and they like to spray it before because they're super cautious but it's worked for us.

Students still expressed concern.

They get nervous because they're like, "Oh, this is gross. Someone played this," and I reply, "I'm spraying them with a sanitary spray. You can smell it. It smells minty."...Now that the Coronavirus is going around, I think, "Let's just spray the whole instrument," so I'm spraying all the keys and all the buttons and stuff but they're still paranoid. I tell them, "If you don't want to borrow this instrument, go buy your own if you talk to your parents," and some of them have. Maybe two of them but still.

Even though students shared instruments, Vanesa allowed interested students to take an instrument home to practice when they wanted. "They love to and I do encourage them to do it," she shared. Originally, she developed a rotating calendar to establish when each student could sign out an instrument. Eventually, she discovered that keeping track of this schedule was too much work and not every student was interested in taking an instrument home. Instead, students only had to ask. Students needed to make sure to bring back the instrument the next day,

otherwise other students would not be able to participate in class. When students forgot their instruments, Vanesa asked them to call home and ask someone to bring the instrument to school. Overall, she was happy when students asked to take home an instrument: “At least they want to take it home and like to practice.” One student in particular stood out to her:

I have this cute little fifth-grader, he’s a drummer and lately he’s been asking me almost every single day... That’s really nice and then he keeps asking for music because we work in the book and I’m like, “Oh yeah, I’ll print off the book pages for you,” or I have extra fun music that I started putting out. “You can take these things home to practice,” and he’s always really excited... It’s kind of exciting.

**Repertoire.** For each class, Vanesa relied on the structure of a beginning band method book that she purchased at the beginning of the year to help introduce students to their instruments.

We just follow the structure of the book. We start from number one, and we learned our notes, we learned quarter notes. We learned how to finger our notes and basic stuff like that. Now we’re a couple of pages in, and we’re just learning that way. Because the kids get bored, they don’t want to be playing for so long, their attention spans are so short. I’ll like try to integrate other random things. I just started actually putting them on MusicTheory.com. I do the note name game to practice our note names further, because we’re still writing in our books... I’ll do something I call the Word Of The Week. If there’s a new musical term that they haven’t heard of, we’ll dissect that term and give it a definition. We’ll draw it in picture form. We’ll give examples.

Vanesa believed that learning the fundamentals of musical notation was the most important thing for her students to learn in their first year. She explained that this would allow her students to be able to play more interesting music.

It’s really focusing on the fundamentals and just being able to give them the skills to be good musicians because I don’t want to shove being classically trained down their throats. A lot of them I know want to play their favorite rap songs or their favorite pop songs on their instruments, which is cool. That’s what I used to do, and I know that that’s really fun and if that keeps them in music, then I want that to be the case. So let me just give you the skills to get there. Let me show you how to read music, how to figure out a note, what it should sound like, all those little basic things to get you to where some kids really want to be.

She shared that establishing this foundation is taking time and students are gaining the ability to play their favorite songs in different phases.

Some kids are really, really advanced. I have some kids that are already there. Some kids in fifth grade are there. Some kids in eighth grade are there. It's really sprinkled within each grade level. Generally, I feel like they're all pretty solid. Most of them could get there in maybe another half a year.

Vanesa expressed a desire to incorporate more hip-hop and other popular music styles into the repertoire, but still felt as though students did not have the skills to be able to play these types of music.

The biggest barrier is that these kids, they're still beginners. I have kids who say, "Oh, I want to learn this rap song or I want to learn this song." I support it and then I try to find – either I'll transpose it for them [to] something super simple. Or if it's something I've never heard of or something that sounds more complicated, then I'll try to find the sheet music. But the issue is that they don't know these notes, they don't know these rhythms, they don't know these things to be able to play those songs. I want to incorporate these things because I know that it would be fun. Some kids can do it, so I'll let them do that. But generally, they need a little bit more expertise.

Sometimes, students would learn one of their favorite songs without Vanesa helping them.

There was this song called Roxanne<sup>15</sup>. It was on the radio. It's a pop song. The melody from the chorus is simple enough that I found the sheet music online...But then I had to transpose it to saxophone and then I taught some saxophones in the class. Because when I was transposing it, it was in a key where when it was transposed to alto, they knew all those notes...Then I had the clarinets and trumpets that said, "Oh, I want to learn this too..."The whole thing was notes that they didn't know yet, which was frustrating. Then I had a seventh grade girl, she learned it, but it was in a different key. She was able to do it, I think, in the key of C, and it sounded really good. She did that all by herself. Then she taught the clarinets how to do that...They had heard that, they said, "Oh, that's Roxanne. I want to play that. I want to know." That is all they need to know, and they were really excited about that.

In her fifth grade band classes students were more interested in learning to play the song "Baby Shark." Again, some students learned to play the song without Vanesa's help. She remembered,

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<sup>15</sup> Roxanne by Arizona Zervas

“One fifth grade class, I had to transpose it. Then in a different fifth grade class, one of the fifth graders learned it outside of school and then he taught the rest of the saxophones.”

Vanessa tried her best to “roll with the punches” as she worked to secure instruments for all her students and provide them a musical foundation. Students had to share instruments with students in other sections, but Vanessa tried her best to make them safe to be shared. She sought to build a skills-based foundation for her students, so that they might one day play some of their favorite songs. Vanessa attempted to provide notated transcriptions of these songs for her students, but found that they were often too difficult. When Vanessa was unable to provide the resources for her students to learn these songs, her students learned them on their own and taught their fellow classmates.

### *Miscommunication*

While Vanessa restarted a middle school band program at Ascend Charter School, she shared moments of frustration that stemmed from miscommunication with her administration. Often, she was unsure about what the administration wanted her to do as a music teacher. This uncertainty began soon after she was hired.

The beginning of the school year was really rough actually because it was me trying to email admin constantly about, “Do you have a curriculum set up? Is there something specific that you want me to follow? What instruments do we have? What resources do I have?” Little things like that, and I didn’t get most of those answers. I just didn’t get most of those answers until we started school, and I figured it out...It was a really big mess in the beginning of the year, so the first month or two was very stressful.

From her perspective, she felt as though the school was disorganized.

I didn’t have instruments for the kids for a really long time...That was so strange to me. Nothing seemed prepared. It was like everything they were doing was to catch up rather than be prepared for what they knew should have been going on. You hired me, and I wanted to be proactive and get these things done, but it’s like we were playing catch up in the middle of September. Class has been going for months now.

Later in the year, Vanesa began to discover that her intentions with the band program did not always align with the school's. She described her first band concert in December as a "mess" because the administration changed its format.

Me and all of the Fine Arts team, so middle school and high school band and art, had been planning a Christmas event where the Arts people were going to have an ornament painting night while the music students played music for said ornament painting. That was our idea for a month or two prior to the event, and it was awesome. Then at some point, trying to finish more details, we learned that admin had kind of hijacked the whole plan and made it their thing, and so they added a dinner. They added other performers.

The event was moved from the school to an arts center in downtown Voyageur and Ascend's administration invited other groups to participate. Vanesa elaborated:

Literally performers that did not go to the school... There was a Voyageur-wide choir that had performed at our school at one point, which was cool, but they were kids from other high schools... There was a random dance group that came... They're high school kids but those aren't our high schoolers... Why are these kids coming to perform at our school's Christmas event?

This change in format affected the logistics for the portion of the program that involved Vanesa's students. She continued:

That led for less time for my kids to perform and that's why it was a hot mess, because I was given maybe an hour and if I have 14 small groups, I made seven bigger groups. I had an hour to get seven groups filtered out. It was just a train wreck... We had just one tiny stage to work off of and there wasn't even a backstage. There was basically a stairwell that was backstage. Just putting all the instruments in place was a hot mess and nothing about it really went correctly other than the fact that the kids handled it really well.

Vanesa observed that the event had been set up beautifully for a dinner and ornament painting but not for a middle school band concert.

I had been telling the kids, "We have a concert. We're going to show off our skills." That's not how it went, so they were confused. They didn't have places to put their coats. They didn't know where to put the instruments because I didn't know where to put the instruments either. We didn't even have chairs. No one gave us chairs so the kids had to stand and play their instruments for the concert. That really stressed them out, having to spray all the instruments as we're switching out was a lot.

One administrator became frustrated with Vanesa and her students taking too much time even before the first group performed. She encouraged her students as best as she could and “smiled through the pain.” She asserted afterward:

The admin had made it about them and what we had planned was my kids performing while people painted ornaments. When you add all these other performances in there, you take time away from my kids. That’s why you’re rushing me, because you think that these other people should get their performance time and, yeah, they should but this is our event. This is what we had planned it to be.

Vanesa’s administrators never acknowledged the awkward position in which they had put Vanesa and her students.

At the end of the school year, Vanesa experienced another miscommunication with her administrators about grading procedures which would prompt sending students to summer school. When the school had transitioned to virtual instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Vanesa experienced a large drop in students who turned in assignments for her classes. She complained:

I had been in contact with a lot of students and posted endless things on Google Classroom and was hoping that would get the point across like, “There’s so many things that you should be turning in.” I said, “I’m here to help you turn things in.” I can’t make kids turn things in.

She remained strict with her grading procedures and failed students who did not turn in their assignments. Originally, Vanesa was under the impression that if students failed a specials class such as art or music, they would not have to attend summer school. She believed that the school would be even more relaxed with their grading policies due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, after she turned in her final grades, she received a phone call from the dean of students and the principal, who were angry about the number of students Vanesa had failed. She relayed their conversation:

I'm getting yelled at, saying that this is unacceptable. "If you were a parent, how would you feel hearing that your kid has to go to summer school tomorrow just because they failed music, but didn't hear about it during the semester?"

Vanesa admitted to the dean and principal that she could have contacted parents directly and accepted their chastisement, but was surprised that these students would now be required to go to summer school. In the moment, Vanesa did not feel comfortable confronting her administrators about the assumption that specials' class grades did not count toward summer school. Instead she conferred with the art teacher who had a similar experience, and both of them began adjusting their grades. She elaborated:

Giving kids partial credit for their assignments if they started it. Giving them credit for other missing things that are weighted way less than their final project. Giving kids credit for showing up two times out of 10 live sessions we've had. I'm giving them all this tiny little bit of credit to give them a D just so it looks like they're passing, and that doesn't sit well with me and it really is getting under my skin...I just think that we're lying to everyone, and that really bothers me.

Vanesa felt as though she was "faking" her grade book. She trimmed her failing students list to 10 students and made a phone call home to each of these student as requested by the administration.

From her own experiences as a student and in preservice teacher education, Vanesa had formed expectations of what it would be like to be a middle school band director. These expectations included a concert that would highlight her students and display the instrumental skills they had learned. She also believed that she would have autonomy over her grading procedures and making decisions about who passed and failed her class. Instead, she experienced an administration who co-opted her band concert to use it as a fundraiser and portray their school arts programs differently than what actually existed, and who from Vanesa's perspective, wanted her to reduce the number of students who were not meeting classroom standards.

## *Looking for Direction*

Unlike many other first-year teachers, Vanesa could not draw upon many of her past music classroom experiences to guide her at Ascend Charter School. She remarked:

I grew up in the suburbs of Chicago, [a suburb] literally the complete opposite of Voyager...I grew up in a very high middle class, White neighborhood, and my school was very rich, very White...My band program was so privileged. We got to go on big trips, and we had all these cool instruments, and all this stuff. Then coming here, these kids don't even know what a saxophone is. We are renting our instruments because we don't have enough money to purchase for a one-to-one ratio. It's definitely super different than what I'm used to.

Vanesa was unsure who to reach out to for guidance.

Everyone says the first year is always the hardest just because you're on your own. You can't ask your co-director, "How do you do this?" You can't ask the person before you, "How did you do this?" because I don't know who the person before me was. I was just nervous that what if I fail these kids? What if I just don't do what I'm supposed to?

As mentioned earlier, Vanesa struggled to discover the intentions for the music program from her administration. Her teaching evaluations did not illuminate any direction either.

I only had two formal observations, and they were just easy...I got observed by my assistant principal one time, and my principal another time...I had put in a pre-observation form, classroom management is the one thing that if you were going to critique me, I would love to hear the critique on that. But the forms that I got were just like, "You're doing great, you're doing great, you're doing great, you're doing great."

She felt as though her friends who were band teachers could not help her and neither could most professional development offerings for teachers.

I feel like my experiences are super different compared to what my friends are going through. I know that for sure, because I'm talking to my friends, and the way that I'm doing things and the situations that I've been put in are a little bit different than what my friends have gone through, or are going through currently.

Vanesa went to the state music educators convention and also a beginning teachers' conference, but felt as though traditional band resources were irrelevant. She explained, "Part of it is because I feel like my situation is a little different, so I don't think that I would benefit...seeking out knowledge from traditional band sources." She also did not feel as though she fit in with "band

people.” Vanesa expressed a wish that sometimes she could find “just one person to relate to what I’m going through.”

### *Summary and Analysis of (Re)Starting a Band Program*

Disorientation appeared as a theme in Vanesa’s journey of place consciousness as she developed a band program at Ascend Charter School. Vanesa tried to learn about her place and her role as a music teacher at Ascend from her administration and her colleagues, but she could rely only on secondhand stories to piece together a loose history of the school’s music program. With frequent turnover of staff, no lasting music curriculum at Ascend had been established. There was no perceivable tradition of a comprehensive music program at Ascend, let alone a band program that had a history of success in prior years. Vanesa received conflicting messages from her environmental surroundings at Ascend. The school’s mission claimed to focus on the arts but instead presented a narrow vision of a music classroom. Vanesa had to forge a pathway forward for a band program and a potential choir program that was requested by the administration upon her hiring, even though there was little financial support, a shortage of equipment, and a fragmented school schedule that prevented large ensembles from forming. Vanesa’s aims for the program at times misaligned with her administration’s political aims causing moments of tension and praxis shock for Vanesa.

Vanesa developed contextual understandings of *Voyageur* from professional development directed toward arts educators as well as an opportunity to travel through the neighborhoods served by Ascend. Yet, without clear direction from her administration or knowledge of how to incorporate her contextual understanding into her pedagogy, she did not develop a clear picture of how her place consciousness of *Voyageur*, Ascend, and her students could blend with her vision of what band is or could be. Instead, Vanesa enacted her ideological

understanding of her music classroom as a place and pursued traditional approaches to beginning band in her pedagogical decisions, relying on her prior experiences as a student and preservice teacher. Her students expressed interest in performing pop and hip-hop songs, but she thought her students did not yet have the ability to perform these songs. As a result, Vanesa maintained a role of a gatekeeper for students' musical knowledge; but in spite of this role, her students independently found other sources to learn to play these songs and taught their friends.

A second theme that arose in Vanesa's journey of place consciousness was her resourcefulness. Amidst Vanesa's disorientation, she discovered pathways forward for a music and band program. Vanesa's pedagogical decisions were constrained by how the school scheduled students into her classes and the availability of equipment. She "rolled with the punches" to begin a band program at Ascend by negotiating through the school with a local music shop to provide just enough instruments that every student would be able to use one. As a result, students had to share instruments with students in other classes. In a resourceful and inclusive action, she started an after school choir club which allowed students to participate in music and art at school, as well as interact with a different form of music-making compared to the instrument lessons during the school day.

### **Development of Place**

Through our conversations together and my observations of her teaching, Vanesa demonstrated how she acted as a place-maker in her classroom. In this section, I describe Vanesa's classroom organization and environment, illustrate how she developed connections with her students and colleagues, and show how she transitioned from a physical classroom space to a virtual one. Last, I present Vanesa's future ideas for her band classroom and program.

### *Classroom organization and environment*

During a week of professional development before school started in August, Vanesa had her first opportunity to visit and prepare her new classroom.

One of those days, I went to go see my classroom... There was a little tiny bit of disappointment just to see how tiny my room was and kind of dig around and be like, "There's a lot of things here I need to do..." I thought, "This is exciting. I have my own classroom."

She began to re-organize her classroom to suit her needs. She disposed of extra tables and began to decorate her classrooms with posters she found in the one of the classroom's closets. She collected storage solutions and equipment from around the school.

It was just like finding things to make this classroom a classroom. These shelves weren't even here when I got here. I had to get all the shelving. The only thing that was really here was the piano. The instruments were just on the table and on the floor so I had to organize that and some of these posters were here, too, but I had to dig them out from the closet.

Vanesa received the shelving in her classroom as donations.

This big black shelf was donated to the school a month or so ago, so that's really new. The other shelves that the instruments are on my uncle gave me. He said, "I have them in my garage. I use them for something else but if you need space in your classroom, you should take them," and I did. All these other things were just floating around.

**Vanesa's Classroom Tour.** I asked Vanesa to draw a map of her classroom at Ascend (Figure 5.1). In one of her voice memos, she described how she organized her classroom.

It's a really tiny room but we make do... When you walk in the room, I have my desk directly to the left of the door, and on my desk, there're usually just like a couple of papers... Usually try not to keep that too cluttered, even though I don't really use my desk that often because I'm always up doing things, and I don't often have lots of papers to grade. Behind me is a white board that I don't use really...

[The] board is actually filled with pictures that the kids have drawn me, things that they've created that I just want to display in my room because I think it's really cute. A lot of the kids also do art, so a lot of them do like to draw. They'll give me their sketches, sometimes they'll paint me things. Especially for my birthday, they made me a lot of stuff. That's all taped up to my whiteboard as well. The kids can all see it. It's kind of one of my favorite parts of the room. I think it's really cute.

To the right of the door, when you walk in, is a wall and there's three closets... What's behind them is kind of what was left over from the previous music

teacher...One is filled with old ukuleles and recorders. The other two, I've filled with pieces of stands, whether they're broken or just don't have the other parts to them. Other random things like posters I found. There's Boomwhackers in there as well...

Most of my room is open. We keep it an open-concept type of classroom. So after every single class, I make the kids put the music stands and the chairs away. The chairs are leaning up on those three little closets that I was just describing. The music stands are to the left of my desk, just in the corner of the room, next to all of the shelves that hold all the instruments, for organization. I guess that's the other half of my classroom. Parallel to those closets, are all of those shelves that have all of the instruments...

Next to the shelves, I have one big table and on that table is the music books, every single book that I've got, and then all of the boxes for the reeds. The way that I do the reed organization, I don't let the kids keep their reeds, or I encourage them not to so they don't forget it for class. All of the reeds are in a bag based on their homeroom...

Then next to that table, in a different corner of the room, are all these other shelves that are again, just filled with random things that the past music teachers have left. One has got a bunch of tiny xylophones in it, some drumsticks, things like that. The other one is filled with old music magazines. Some are beginning recorder books, just a bunch of very random things.

Then of course, my Smart Board and my computer... and the piano are all at the front of the room, along with my stand and my book that has the master copy of Essential Elements, where I have all of the music for all of the kids. I like to keep it very clean. The kids know that they should be cleaning up after every single period...

I try to make the room very helpful for them and generally comfortable. So I do have a couple of music posters on the wall that have very beginning concepts on them. Like how to find the note names on a staff, or what the definition of rhythm is. Really easy posters like that. I always keep those up. Even when we have tests and things, I usually don't cover them because I'm like, "Well, these are things that are always there to aid you, whether we're practicing, whether I'm trying to quiz you, you know, whatever the case may be..."

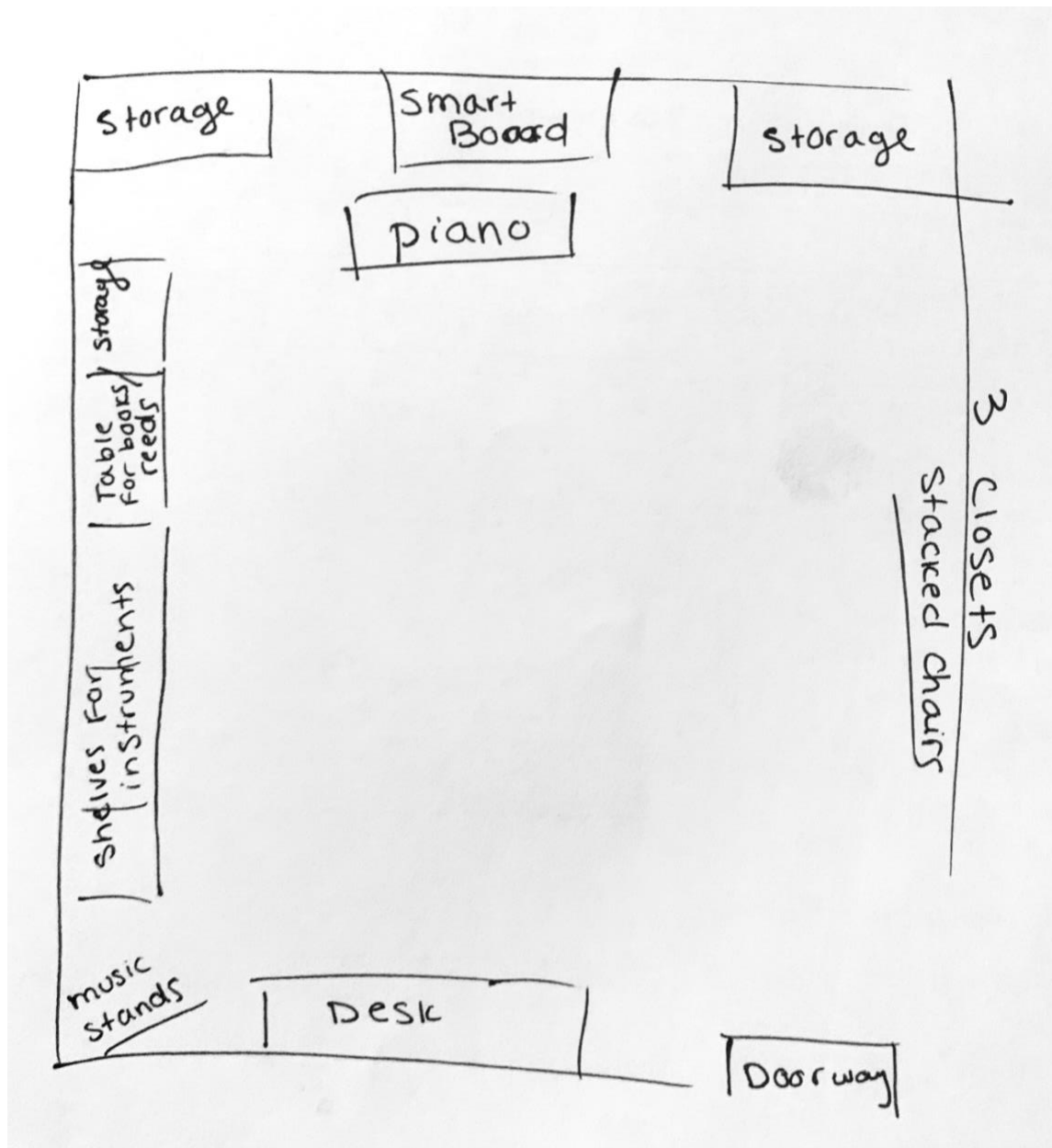
In terms of other decorative things though, I like for the kids to really make the room their own. So of course, like I said, my whiteboard is covered with pictures that all of the kids have made me, if they've drawn me or painted me anything. The three closets are all covered with their favorite instruments and artists...I took all of those [projects from the beginning of the year] and taped them onto the wall, so that every kid in the school was represented in my classroom. Even if they're not in music, I still put their stuff up. I thought it was nice and decorative. The kids still like to look at it to this day.

For first semester, I had this poster board. It was a guessing game of facts about me...to get to know me. After first semester, the kids had memorized those answers. So I decided to change up that board, do something new. The kids like to do a funny thing where, because I leave my phone on the piano and I know the kids don't do anything bad on it, but sometimes I notice that they'll take selfies of themselves or they'll ask to take a picture with me. At first, I didn't do anything with those photos. I thought it was a pretty funny joke. One day, I decided to print out all of the photos that I had, and I taped them on the wall without telling all the kids about it. They think it's really funny and really cute. So now they're always like, "Oh, put me on the wall." So I told them I want all of my music kids to be represented on that wall in a photograph, whether it's them by

themselves, them playing their instrument, them with their friends or taking a picture with me. All of those photos just go on that wall, so the kids feel like this is like a family, like they're represented in this class and that I care about them... That's one of my favorite parts of the classroom as well.

**Figure 5.1**

*Map of Ascend Charter School Middle School Music Classroom Drawn by Vanesa*



Vanesa described her classroom as place of positivity and encouragement.

I don't get upset or say anything bad if they play a wrong note, or it just doesn't sound right. Nothing but positive comments come out of my mouth. Even if it is a little rough for whatever reason, I always find something really good to pick out and I'll be a little extra in my excited-ness. I'll be like, really, really, really excited just to get them feeling confident.

She expressed that her teaching style was "laid back." She said she is "just relaxed and supportive because I'm not [claps hands for emphasis] "We need to learn this. You need to have this perfect in five minutes." Vanesa continued, "We all have different experiences. We're all going to learn at our own paces. We all have different instruments that have different quirks...It's generally relaxed." She believed that this teaching style aligned well with her personality and the middle school students at Ascend. Vanesa explained, "I just feel like it works really well with kids of this age anyway, like my personality just kind of fits with your average middle school kid. It's very goofy, it's fun, I just feel like it works."

**Vanesa's Tour of a Band Class.** Because I was unable to observe Vanesa teaching in person at Ascend, I asked her to describe the proceedings of a typical band class. She recounted:

With every single class, they come in and they know their seats and they know to grab their instrument, their reeds if they need reeds, their books and their music stands...What we do is on the board. I have a SmartBoard that I just project...exactly what number that that class is on in the book. Then, I go around the room and...check in with every single kid and ask them how they're doing. Are you on this number? Are you behind? Are you ahead? Do you feel comfortable? Do you have questions? And then I'll ask them to play at least some of it even if they're struggling. I will say, "Just try it. Let's see how it goes"...I do that in a circle with every single kid. Stopping for longer if the kid needs a lot of help, that's fine or sometimes I'll bounce out of the circle if some kid is like, "I'm ready now. I'm really confident." "Okay, that's fine." And then once everyone or almost everyone is ready with the song that we're playing in class, we'll do it together. I have these two sticks and then I just keep time and then I count off and then the class plays it together and then I'll fix things from there...

Sometimes I say, "Work with a partner." If someone's struggling and I obviously can't get to every single kid I [tell them], "Oh, you have these people around you. I'm sitting these people next to you for a reason. Ask them if you need help." And sometimes they're really insistent that I help them so they just have to wait. So, they practice by themselves. Honestly, it's hard for them to get focused so they'll take breaks and they'll talk. They'll take breaks and they'll stand up and wander across the room which bothers me, but they know that, so I just have to redirect them, "Go back to your seat, you need to keep trying."...

We'll play the song as many times as I want. So, sometimes it's good on the first go and then I'm either like, "Great, start on the next song in the book." Or if it's the end of class, I'll say, "Great, you sounded awesome, clean up for the next class." If it doesn't go well, I'll ask them how they thought it went...or if it's something specific that everyone's missing, I'll say "Oh, don't forget that half notes are this many beats..."

[At the end of class] I'm usually spraying the mouth pieces just because I trust myself a little bit more than them. I make them put away their books, their music stands, their instruments, their reeds. The least that I can do is make sure everyone's instrument is sprayed, and then I wipe it down and then put your mouthpiece in the case and then they do the rest. I usually have to organize the chairs because every single class has a different structure and number of students so I'm usually fixing chairs because they don't know the class that is after them.

**Vanesa's Students.** Vanesa described her students as being "very vocal" and "very physical." Sometimes Vanesa welcomed these traits in her classroom, specifically when they were uplifting to each other, but other times they would degenerate into teasing or potential bullying of students.

I love almost every single one of my classes because...the kids are funny and they're goofy, and so I don't really have any complaints about most of them...Sometimes when you mix some of them, things can get crazy because they're friends or they don't like each other, whatever the case may be...They're very vocal with each other whether that's "I love you so much," "You're my best friend," to "I hate you," "Don't talk to me," and saying all these mean things.

Vanesa also shared:

These kids are very physical, as in they like to hug each other, which is nice but when they're not super happy, they will hit each other...They'll pick on each other...The words that they say to each other sometimes when they're not happy are really mean, really aggressive, just not nice to listen to.

To de-escalate extremes in her students' behavior, Vanesa adjusted her seating arrangement. She originally had students seated in rows, but then set students into an arc facing the SmartBoard to allow her to be able to reach every student easily and prevent them from picking on each other as much.

They would bother each other. So if they sit back to back, you know someone's going to bother them from behind them. But whether it's a trombone hitting someone or they just couldn't handle it. I don't know why they couldn't handle it, but they just couldn't sit in rows like that. I think everyone gets more space.

Vanesa struggled to determine when her students were only joking with each other or were being malicious. She would witness students being friendly with each other in the hallway, but a few minutes later they would be aggressive toward each other.

Some of the things they say are just so mean, I think, “I would never say that to a person,” or “I never said that when I was in middle school,” or “I wouldn’t want someone to say that to me.” When they are playing with each other, it sounds very personal...It’s not like a joke. They’ll really dig at the way you look, your grades, your family. They’ll really dig at things that sound offensive but they claim “We’re just joking.”

Often students would reciprocate this teasing which would prompt Vanesa to intervene.

Vanesa’s positive and relaxed approach to her teaching was at odds in these situations which made her feel as though she needed to improve her classroom management.

I don’t yell, and I’m not generally a scary or a threatening person in my personality. They know that I’m pretty relaxed. I mean, I’ll put on a serious face and a serious voice, but the thing I struggle with, I feel like, is classroom management because it’s hard for me to be serious because I’m a goofy person...If they see me in the hallway, I’m all smiles and like, “Hey, how are you?” Then I’ll give them hugs and stuff...It’s just hard for me to shut it down because it makes me uncomfortable.

Sometimes, Vanesa would become overwhelmed in these moments of confrontation and become emotional.

I have some sort of issue that I have not figured out why but I get too emotional...It really gets in the way because then I can’t be serious or convey what I want to in a strong tone because I’m getting too emotional about it...I’ll just get overwhelmed and I’ll tear up.

Her students have noticed Vanesa in these moments and have provided support.

I have cried in the classroom multiple times. If they ever see me do that, they’re a mix of defensive and supportive. They’ll be like, “Oh, are you okay?” They’ll come up and hug me. They’ll say, “What do you need? I’m sorry if this person did something to you.” They’ll say sorry even if they didn’t do anything. Or there’s kids that are like, “Who did this to you? I’ll go talk to them. I’ll make sure that they don’t do this ever again.” They’re just caring and then that makes me feel good then I cry more and I’ll say, “You guys were fine.” But those are really good moments.

Vanesa recounted the first time she cried while teaching.

The first time, these two eighth graders were bickering in class. One kid had not taken his ADHD medicines, so he was just kind of off. The other kid...that's kind of what he does. He kind of just tries to get under people's skin. On that day they were just really passive aggressive... They were sitting kind of close to each other and they got up and they were in each other's faces. I was just so overwhelmed because I had never seen a fight about to start...I had a kid go get the Dean, and I stepped out. I had just had lost it because I was just so overwhelmed at what was about to happen. Which they didn't hit each other or anything, but it was enough. Because they're both big boys...and I thought, "That's too much."

In another incident, Vanesa was overwhelmed by multiple student actions happening at once.

The class was one of her largest with eleven sixth grade students.

That class has a lot of really intense personalities. They're a lot to handle and a lot of other teachers agree...This one kid gets very angry, and if he gets really angry, he'll yell and scream and throw things...He was starting to get angry at this other kid. Then I've got these other kids that are like, "Oh, I need help." This other kid is like, "Oh, I have this fun fact about something that's not even related to music." Just all of those things at once, I had to stop and I said, "I can't do this." I had to leave five minutes into class because I was like, "There's too many things going on. I cannot control every single thing." It was just rough.

Vanesa asked a staff member who assisted with student discipline and monitored the hallway to cover her class as she went to the teacher's lounge to regain her composure.

While Vanesa's students vocal and physical behaviors were sometimes overwhelming, she embraced their willingness to share their feelings about class. In the opening vignette to this chapter, Vanesa asked students to share their opinions about their year in her classes. Her students shared openly and freely. She indicated that this was a regular component in her teaching and classroom environment.

In class, if there's a moment in time where I need their opinion on something, I ask them that. "Is there something that I could do better? Am I doing something wrong? Is there something that you think you could do better? Can I help you with that?" Stuff like that. I'm not afraid to ask those questions...If they have something to say to me, I let them say it. Because nothing they say is ever that bad...They're never harsh critics. They never say anything super critical.

Vanesa believed that she had positive relationships with all her students and this could be attested to by how they treated her.

They love me. I can't not say that because it's true. They love me and all the teachers say, "I can see how much the kids love you," because every single morning they try to flood in here and hang out with me and hug me and ask me how I am and at the end of the day, too, they'll do the same thing, and they'll come down and they'll hug me goodbye.

**Summary.** Vanesa sought to create a positive learning environment for her students.

Vanesa kept her classroom clean and organized. She was open with her students and allowed them to ask questions about her life outside of school. She also found ways to portray each of her students in her classroom through artwork and photographs, which were displayed in the room and included work done by students who are not even enrolled in her classes. During her classes, she spent time to check in with her students and gauge their progress with classroom activities. She admitted to using excessive praise when evaluating her students' progress because she believed that developing their confidence in playing their instrument was crucial at the beginning stages of their learning. To help her understand how she could better reach her students, she took advantage of their willingness to share their opinions and welcomed their feedback. Students expressed their feelings freely to their peers in both affirming and negative ways. Vanesa struggled to discern when these feelings were malicious, sometimes reacting emotionally when she was overwhelmed by her students' actions. This response caused Vanesa to believe that she struggled with classroom management, specifically controlling her students' behavior to remain positive while in her classroom.

### *Relationships With Colleagues*

During her first year of teaching, Vanesa began to form both professional and personal relationships with her colleagues. Professionally, Vanesa began interacting with her colleagues at daily school-wide meetings in the morning and weekly departmental meetings with the other specials teachers. She described getting to know her colleagues:

I feel like I warmed up to them very, very, very slowly, and they warmed up to me very, very slowly. I think it was like, after the Christmas party in December, things were good

because it's, I guess, our first chance to really bond, and really kind of cut loose...After that, interactions with staff have always been more positive and just more friendly and just more open.

Vanessa also identified the staff Christmas party as the turning point in her personal relationships with staff.

I wasn't dating anyone at the time...I know that all of the younger teachers all have someone that they're dating or married to...I went by myself, walked in super nervous, but then the table of all the younger teachers had some spots open, so they let me sit with them, and then ever since that moment, we were all really close, and we started to hang out outside of school on weekends, long weekends, had group chats and stuff, and that was the takeoff point for our friendship.

Vanessa also frequented the teachers' lounge.

I am always in the teacher's lounge because I like to socialize with the other teachers...I'm just friendly to all the other teachers that are in the lunch room. I like them all. They're really nice and we make good conversation.

As Vanessa began to get to know her colleagues better, she began to reach out to them to collaborate or to gather more information about the school and her students. "The art teacher and I...we're always working on stuff together but there's other teachers in this building that I feel super comfortable with talking about any issue or just in general." She discovered more about some of her students' home lives.

They'll tell me about different cases that they've had to report and about kids that I also have...One of the kids...he and his sister don't live with mom and dad, they live with the neighbor because things are going badly at home. Other kids have parents that are mentally ill and just really can't take care of them. Some of these kids have to babysit their siblings, mom and dad aren't even home; things like that.

Vanessa's professional and personal connections enabled her to learn more about Voyageur, Ascend, and her students.

## *Virtual teaching*

When Ascend Charter School suspended in-person teaching on March 13<sup>th</sup>, the school moved forward the start of their spring break to the following Monday and stayed on break until April 8<sup>th</sup>. Vanesa relayed how the school approached the start of virtual learning:

It was kind of chaos just because no one has prepared anyone for something like this. So, working out the logistics of how you're going to teach plus the logistics of the schedule for each kid and how you're going to get them Internet and computers. Even how the teachers are going to work Google because some of us don't really know what we're doing. Some of us aren't very tech savvy, me included. So, now we have to learn how to do that which is kind of a lot. It just felt very overwhelming.

Ascend's administrators decided that students would attend classes through the video-conferencing platform Google Meets. Each class would meet for 20 minutes and be lecture-based. Vanesa recalled the activities that she did with her students.

The first week was just getting everyone situated, so really just like going over rules, seeing how everyone was doing because I haven't seen anyone in so long...I did a week of note names because we had done a note name game prior to quarantine happening. Then I did a week or two on rhythm review, and then now, ever since the month of May has started, we've been working on a project in SoundTrap.

Vanesa had been planning to do a composition project using SoundTrap with her students at the end of the year, but changed her approach when they transitioned to virtual learning. She adapted a project that she had taught in a field experience in her undergraduate music education classes.

I said, "You're going to make your own song"...It should be a minute in length...Then I wanted at least three separate tracks of all different things. I wanted not all three tracks to be MP3s from YouTube...I wanted them to at least have at least one layer of their own...I said, "You could use all of the loops that are on the website. You can play the keyboard or use the synths to make a trumpet sound or the flute sound if you want to recreate your own instrument. Or you could sing, you could talk, you can rap." I told them to try and gave them ideas of what they could do...I think they did pretty well with it.

However, Vanesa found facilitating this activity to be challenging in a virtual environment and gradually began to be less strict with its guidelines.

It's a tough project to teach to someone online. It's really hard for them to read instructions or watch a video of me trying to do it. A lot of kids struggled because I'm not there to physically show them or physically help them...I kind of lowered my criteria. I said, "Oh, if it's not a full minute long, that's fine. Or if you only have two tracks instead of three tracks, that's fine. If maybe things don't line up..."As long as the kids were happy and they turned in something that they were proud of.

Vanesa collected these projects and created a slideshow presentation. For each student, she created a separate slide that featured the student's picture, the title and description of their composition, and their project's recording. She shared this with her students and the other teachers at the school.

Vanesa hoped to include this project again next year and saw the benefit of a creative project like this for her students.

At some point I thought, "I kind of want to do something fun at the end of the year."...As I learned about the kids more and more, that is something that's more applicable to their lives and what they actually listen to and what they actually enjoy. They talk all the time about being able to make really good beats compared to this other kid or they'll make beats on their pencils. Or the percussionists were like, "Oh, check out this beat I just made." I realized that that was relevant in their lives. If I had a project that was basically making your own beat, I thought that they would think that that was really fun. It just seemed relevant to them.

She added:

They listen to a lot of rap music and that's just the culture and just the way that they grew up. That's more familiar, probably more enjoyable than learning a classical instrument and learning "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" and "Hot Cross Buns" and all those things.

In early March, Vanesa was in a car crash and suffered a concussion. In the midst of virtual learning, Vanesa continued to experience concussion symptoms and received permission to move to an asynchronous format with her classes.

E-learning has actually been a blast. I'm having a lot of fun with it, but that's because I did have to change up the structure of my classroom...I still have a concussion...I was teaching for a couple hours, staring at my computer, doing all of these live lessons, and at the end of every single day, I just felt horrible. Just absolutely disgusting, huge headaches, really dizzy, nauseous, not doing well at all. I had to talk with my principal. We decided that it's okay if I record my lessons and then post those instead of doing live lessons. (Voice Memo)

Vanesa began filming and editing videos for each day's classes and found it to be a fun way to present information. She asked students to complete an "exit ticket" or a series of questions that students had to answer about the concepts that were covered in the video which she would use to keep track of their attendance and class progress.

While Vanesa had a "blast" teaching virtually, many of her students appeared to not enjoy the experience and did not complete required assignments.

It's a big struggle to get kids to turn in anything...I had two things due in the month of April and then our SoundTrap project was the entire month of May...I still have kids turning in all of those random things. Things from two months ago and just it's really frustrating, but I have a lot of kids that haven't even bothered to turn things in. But that's kind of widespread across the board for most classes. The technology teacher, his name is Carter, and I had told Carter, "...Just looking at my grade book, I do have a lot of failing kids." He was saying, across the board, that's what we're seeing. I mean, all you can do is reach out, contact them, families. I mean just try to get them to turn it in.

This pattern led to Vanesa failing students in her classes because they did not complete assignments, subsequently triggering the conflict with administrators about summer school.

Virtual teaching provided an opportunity for Vanesa to review music theory concepts such as note names and rhythm counting with her students. She found the required 20-minute lecture as an ideal format to present that type of information. She implemented a composition project with her students that she believed was more relevant to her students' interests compared to the music repertoire that was presented in the band method book. Unfortunately she had difficulty teaching students composition using software new to them in a virtual setting and adjusted her expectations. At the end of the project, she pieced together a presentation that she shared with others at the school. Due to her concussion symptoms she moved to an asynchronous teaching format which led to her only communicating with her students through email and Google Classroom until the final day of school. This change in format resulted in many of her students no longer participating in her class.

### *Future Ideations/Imaginations*

Vanesa had difficulty articulating a broad vision for her classroom and the band program at Ascend Charter School. Instability, an uncertain future for the school, and a change in scheduling prevented Vanesa from envisioning her teaching context much further beyond the current year.

Ascend Charter School had a low teacher retention rate, which led students to ask Vanesa if she would be returning to teach next year.

I know that that's something that really is apparent in their minds, not only for my class, but just in general. They wonder if any of their teachers are coming back, because that's just what they're used to. They're used to a new batch of teachers every year, basically.

Vanesa confessed this instability in teachers influenced her decision to return for a second year.

In terms of music, if I'm thinking about the eighth grade class, and they've been there for four years, I think I'm their third music teacher... You don't have anything to build off of if you're starting over every year, and so what I wanted to do is I really did see myself being there for at least five years, partially for selfish reasons like loan forgiveness, but also because this first year went pretty well.

Vanesa hoped to stay an extended period of time and build the band program and see the musical growth of her students over several years. However, after her experience at the end of the year where she had to adjust student grades she began to question her loyalty to the school.

That's what I wanted to do. That was my whole goal. After all this drama, I'm starting to question it a little bit, just for my own sanity and my own happiness. But in an ideal world, I want to be there and have something stable enough for the time that I do eventually leave, the new person coming in has something to work with and continue to build up from.

Even though Vanesa had begun to think about building the program at Ascend, the school's two-year charter renewal was a barrier that kept her from getting her hopes set on grander ideas. The truncated renewal period jeopardized her intention to remain at Ascend for the next five years. Vanesa explained, "I would like to, if things were less stressful. That was my original goal, but we will take it a year at a time. I have no idea."

At the end of the year, Vanesa was asked to submit her curricular plans for the following year. She submitted a proposal that was similar to the schedule she taught this year – band during the day and choir as an after school club. Initially, Vanesa’s principal found this plan to be acceptable. During the last week of school, Vanesa received a phone call.

I get a call saying that that plan is no longer an option. There’s no funding for kids to ride the bus home. We’re not even paying for the school buses to take them. Choir needs to be a class during the day, and I have to figure out how I’m going to do that. Am I going to have the sixth graders do it, am I going to have half of each grade be a choir and half of each grade be a band? I don’t know. They said, “Figure it out, because you’re going to be asked to do that by the Director.”

Vanesa was again left with little direction on how to implement this curricular change to teach both types of music classes in the same schedule as she had this year.

In addition to offering choir next year, Vanesa anticipated teaching multiple levels of instrument instruction within each class period, especially since she had encountered several students who planned to switch from art to music.

I’m going to assume that the schedule is not going to change. So that means I’m going to see homeroom by homeroom, but now that there’s kids that have a first year under their belt, the gap is going to be so big in almost every single classroom that I see, minus the fifth graders because they’re all new...I’m not looking forward to doing that for probably every single class period.

I asked Vanesa about her vision for her teaching and classroom at Ascend. She first expressed:

I hope that we can maybe get a couple more instruments. I hope we can have more successful concerts, more than one, and have it be very successful and have it be planned just by me, so I know exactly what’s going on. I know the kids are going to grow, but just make sure that they keep growing as musicians...I feel like the next few years are just building. Just getting things stable in terms of instruments, being stable in the routine, being able to actually hold performances. The goals of any band program.

I asked her to describe an idealistic vision for her classroom after her reserved initial response.

If I could control the schedule, I would not have music based on homerooms, I would have it based on skill level/experience, to make it easier. I would have a fifth grade band, and then I would probably have two bands after that, maybe like a non-auditioned band

and then an auditioned band, so I'd have different groups, and the kids are all roughly on the same level. That would just make my life so much easier, because first of all, that's what I'm used to, and also that just makes sense. But I can't control that, so—

She began to bring herself back down to Earth to the circumstances at Ascend.

Realistically, we still wouldn't have as many instruments as we need, but I'm hoping that over time, students and families would be able to buy their own instruments, so it wouldn't be that big of a deficit. But we would still be down on instruments. I would hope that I have maybe a couple more kids that join music. I feel like it would just look very similar to the way that it does now, just function more smoothly, and the kids would be at a level that they should be for their age... That doesn't seem too out of sight.

Vanessa hoped that someday they would have a different classroom space and the band would begin to look like any other program.

I would have a bigger room, or maybe a different room. Just space. Then I would have the three levels or four levels of bands that I want, that would be effective for their learning. That's ideal. Just like any band program that you probably see in any of the other schools you've been to, I want that for us. It's just, I don't know if we can obtain that.

She also desired to be a conductor

At some point, I need to move away from being their metronome, I need to show them what it's like to have a conductor in front of them and have them learn that... Next year, that's something big that I want to change. They need to learn that. But that's going to take time... I'll continue to be that metronome, and I'll go one on one, "How are you doing, how are you doing?" But then eventually I need to just lead them as a large group and have them get used to that.

Vanessa's vision for her classroom and teaching was clouded by the instability of the school context. She desired to teach a middle school band program that was like most other band programs, where students owned their own instruments, were divided into multiple large ensembles, met in a large rehearsal hall, and she could be a conductor. She found that desire to be unrealistic in current circumstances, as she had to continue to navigate the realities of her situation and meet the demands of her administration.

### *Summary and Analysis of Vanesa's Development of Place*

Vanesa's development of place consciousness at Ascend Charter School was one that was teeming with connections. Vanesa's classroom environment opened a space for students to develop connections with each other and with Vanesa. Vanesa was able to encourage students and appreciate their presence in her classroom. She approached her teaching style through a laid back and humorous personality. She was receptive to student feedback because she considered their opinions to be helpful with her teaching. Vanesa's colleagues would remark about how much her students loved her. She found her students to sometimes be a negative presence in her classroom and would quickly find herself becoming overwhelmed emotionally when having to confront students. In these moments, Vanesa was able to find support from school staff, but more notably from her students. When Vanesa transitioned to asynchronous virtual teaching, she experienced a loss of connection with her students. Students began to drift away from Vanesa's learning activities and many were in danger of failing her classes.

In addition to student connections, Vanesa developed strong connections with other teachers and staff at Ascend Charter School. She interacted with teachers regularly in school meetings and in her personal time in various places throughout Voyageur. Through her relationships with her colleagues, she developed an understanding of certain historical aspects of Ascend and gained other perspectives of her students. In effect, Vanesa deepened her understanding of Voyageur, Ascend Charter School, and the students in her classroom.

Vanesa's development of place at Ascend was marked by caution. She desired to create a band program that was similar to many others she had seen, but felt like that was not possible without many changes at Ascend. The administrative directives to include choir during the school day, a rigid school schedule, shared instruments, and increasing differences in student

abilities caused Vanesa to think pragmatically. She focused on small goals such as finances for more instruments rather than grandiose visions of a band program that was large with multiple sections to showcase student abilities. However, she struggled to plan how she would even accomplish her small goals for her classroom as she reflected on many of the constraints she was given by administration and experienced at the school.

### **Conclusion: Vanesa's Journey of Place Consciousness**

Vanesa's journey of place conscious at Ascend Charter School in Voyageur, Illinois during her first year of teaching was one of disorientation. When considering Stauffer's (2012) definition of a place as a nexus of time, space, and experience, the extended experiences of time are unstable at Ascend. The lack of traditions at Ascend and its short history, as well as its uncertain future, created ambiguity in the school as a place. Vanesa could only focus on the present state of Ascend rather than build on past tradition or think too distantly into the future. Vanesa's disorientation and Ascend's historical and future instability as a place prevented Vanesa from being able to ask critical questions of place consciousness such as "What happened here?" or develop an informed answer of "What should happen here?" She was often only able to consider, "What is happening here?" and even then that shifted markedly during the pandemic. Vanesa's imagination of what her classroom could become was constrained. Vanesa moved incrementally in her place making. Her future imaginings for her classroom were always couched in caveats and with secondary plans.

The instability of Ascend as a place, especially through the ambiguous vision of the administrators for its music program, caused Vanesa to rely on her own experiences with band and implement the approaches that had worked in her past classroom experiences to her present classroom context. This approach did not align with Vanesa's sociological understanding of her

classroom as a place. She recognized that rap and hip-hop music was more relevant to the musical culture of her students and wanted to find ways to incorporate this music into the band classroom. However Vanesa felt that her students had to first learn foundational technique through traditional band emphases on musical notation.

Vanesa attempted to find connection to her school as a place through the relationships she built with her colleagues and her students. Vanesa interacted with her teaching colleagues regularly and frequently. From these interactions she was able to develop personal level relationships with many teachers and learn more about Voyageur, Ascend, and her students. Vanesa and the students in her classes openly shared their feelings, emotions, and thinking. Vanesa's colleagues would remark about how much her students loved her. I was able to see this firsthand as her students said goodbye to her on the final day of class when a student made sure to tell Vanesa, "You did so good for a first year teacher!"

## CHAPTER 6: CAROLINE

### Walking into Park High School

*I pulled into the parking lot of Park High School not knowing what to expect. In my experience, every school seems to approach choir concerts differently. Tonight's concert was in celebration of Black History Month, which added another layer of unpredictability. As a White instrumental music teacher whose teaching experience has been primarily in schools and classrooms that were predominantly White spaces, I was entering into a musical soundscape with which I was unfamiliar.*

*The lights from Park High School's football stadium flooded the darkened parking lot as I walked from my car to the school's front doors. On the sidewalk outside the entryway, a half dozen high school girls dressed in black were practicing a choreographed step routine. One of these students opened the front door for me, and I climbed up the stairs to the school lobby. The lobby was quiet and empty except for a few people who also were making their way to the auditorium and an occasional student who greeted a friend.*

*The door to the choir room was located directly off the right side of the lobby. A drawing of a Black woman wearing a colorful hair wrap on yellow butcher paper covered the door. Musical notes surrounded her face and photographs of students in the choirs clothed her body. The words "Lift Every Voice And Sing" were arched above her to welcome students as they entered the choir room.*

*I continued toward the far end of the lobby that led to the auditorium entrance, which featured another decoration of a Black woman on butcher paper. This portrait was decorated with black paper curls that leapt from the woman's head as voluminous hair. Quotes from famous Black people decorated the walls: "You can't make decisions based on fear and the*

*possibility of what might happen,” by Michelle Obama and “You never know how or when you’ll have an impact, on how important your impact can be to someone” by Denzel Washington. On the opposite wall, a poster of red butcher paper was hung with the handwritten message, “Friendly Reminder! My race is permanent and not a joke. #SJS \* Social Justice Seminar.” Next to this poster was a display of student artwork depicting portraits of Black musicians, athletes, and celebrities in a style reminiscent of the artist Kehinde Wiley.*

*After browsing the artwork, I opened a door into the auditorium and looked for a seat in the back where I could watch both the concert and the audience. I saw groups of adults scattered throughout the auditorium. The seats were far from full. There was a group of choir students, dressed in black, sitting in the front rows. I found a seat in a back corner of the auditorium and sat down.*

### **Park High School in DeMesne, Illinois**

Park High School is located on the edge of the city of DeMesne, Illinois. The school was built in the 1960s as the second high school for the city school district and was situated next to a park area that lies where the gridded neighborhood streets end and large farms and newer housing developments begin. DeMesne is part of a larger metropolitan area of the same name that had an estimated population of 226,000 in 2019 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). The DeMesne City School District consists of eighteen schools and served 10,157 students in grades PK-12 in the 2019-2020 school year (Illinois State Board of Education, 2020). Park High School served 1,309 students in grades 9-12. Fifty-five percent of these students were classified as low-income students and 7% are English Language Learners. The racial and ethnic diversity of the school in the 2019-2020 school year was as follows: 39.3% Black, 34.2% White, 11.6% Asian, 8.7% Hispanic, 5.8% Two or More Races, and 0.4% American Indian. Over the past five years, the

percentage of White students has decreased from 45% to 35% with students in other racial and ethnic categories increasing.

At the time of this study, the school was currently undergoing an extensive renovation. According to the school's website, a \$183.4 million referendum was passed in 2016 by the school district allowing for a renovation project that would modernize classrooms, the auditorium, cafeteria; construct career and technical education spaces; and refurbish athletic fields. Renovations of the performing arts wing and classrooms began during the last several weeks of the school year while I was conducting this study.

### **Caroline Victrola's Prelude to Her First Year of Teaching**

Caroline Victrola experienced an extraordinary progression of induction into the community and the DeMesne schools before she was hired for her first year of teaching at Park High School. In this section, I describe noteworthy events and experiences of Caroline's preceding her first year of teaching.

Caroline was a White, cisgender, heterosexual woman. She was originally from a small city in a neighboring state. "My family was a member of a church community. A lot of what I know of Coatesville is from that church community," Caroline began as she described her hometown:

It's very small townish where there are kids who live on farms and there are kids whose parents have to travel for work or have to work from home because it's not quite close enough to any big cities or anything like that. I think it's about 10,000 people.

She attended a private Christian school affiliated with her family's church for grades K–12. Her school offered band, choir, and orchestra. By the time she graduated, she had participated in all three ensembles.

After high school, Caroline attended a state university near her hometown where she majored in music education, and certified to teach instrumental, choral, and general music.

Caroline's husband enrolled in a master's program at a university located in DeMesne. She asked to student teach in or near DeMesne so they could be together. Caroline student taught instrumental and vocal music at DeMesne Central High School. When I asked her what her ideal job was after graduation or the type of job she was looking for, she responded:

My ideal job is both band and choir in a district where I'm not the only one teaching it. The program's growing, they don't quite have enough hours to fill one or the other with one person, so they're going to hire an assistant who's going to do both. That's me. I want to do that. I want to be working with other music educators, but I don't want to just be doing one thing.

Jon: Had you seen examples of that growing up or while you were in college?

Caroline: No. No, I think I knew that my job coming out of college could be just about anything. I was open to that, but my dream job so to speak is one where I'm doing a little bit of everything.

Caroline saw herself as a musician and educator who wanted to be part of every aspect of the music program wherever she was a student or a teacher.

#### *Caroline Hired Twice at Park High School*

During student teaching, Caroline had become familiar with DeMesne schools and some of the music educators throughout the district, paving the way so that the semester after student teaching, she was hired as an accompanist at Park High School. The accompanist opening came unexpectedly as a woman named Sandra, who held that position, passed away from cancer.

“When that happened, Linda [Park's choir director] actually reached out to me and said, ‘Hey, if you're thinking you want a job down here, you should come in and see about being our accompanist for the spring semester.’” Caroline was hired and started this position soon after her graduation.

When Caroline arrived at Park High School, she described feeling as an “outsider” to a strong school and classroom community that was grieving.

I definitely felt like an outsider for a couple of weeks, just because I was new and they had just lost their accompanist who they had a really deep emotional connection with. They didn't know me, and I was this new face that could be anything... The former director was really trying to get me involved in things because she knew that I was wanting to be doing the choir job next year.

Linda, the former director, found ways for Caroline to become more involved in the program including finding funding for her to participate in the choir trip to Chicago.

It definitely took a while for the kids to start trusting me. I spent a lot of days having lunch here and just chatting with kids who were here for lunch and doing sectionals and asking kids questions and things like that. Then they did a trip to Chicago in February, and Linda was able to...raise enough money for my husband and me to go with them to that trip... That was the time when I got to know a lot of the older kids.

Linda also decided not to do the spring musical, and instead asked Caroline to be the musical director since she was only working part time as the accompanist. This gave Caroline an opportunity to teach.

She decided not to do the musical in the spring and said, "Why don't you do it?" I was working four hours a day and not really all that busy. That was a really good opportunity to keep getting to know [the students] and be teaching them.

Caroline acknowledged that Linda's efforts inducted her into the Park High School choir community, especially after experiencing the tragic loss of Sandra. "How are they possibly going to accept me in this short amount of time?" Caroline shared. "But they really did and I mean a lot of that was that Linda was really insistent that I was part of the community now."

Linda was in her final year of teaching and saw Caroline as a potential replacement. Linda shared much of the classroom planning and organization with Caroline to help her understand the program better.

Linda really had her hands in everything while she was working here, and part of that was that she was really, really open and honest with our principal about what he needed to be looking for in whoever was going to be filling her position. I know that she had conversations with a lot of people on the interview panel about me, about wanting me to get the job and things like that.

When Caroline was asked to interview for the position at Park, she felt confident and prepared due to the advocacy and induction efforts that Linda had made:

[The interview panel] was a lot of people who I already knew and then a couple people who I didn't know, so it was very, "You guys already know me."...It was definitely a situation where I was fine with being honest about things...There was one point where they asked me a question and I [responded], "You know, I don't know the answer to that, but I have this resource and this resource and this resource in the community, and I will find out."

Her cooperating teachers, Chris and Amy, coached her for this moment in her interview, "When I was preparing for my interview, that was one of the things that Chris and Amy [recommended], 'You have to make sure you say this about something. Just that you're willing to dig for resources.'" She already knew who she could turn to for information, especially in regard to her music survey class:

I think I was really honest in my interview saying, "I don't know anything about this content, and so I'm going to have to do a lot of digging to find out what I need to do to serve the students well." But I knew I was going to be talking with Jason [a professor at the local university]. I knew I was going to be talking with Dan [the choir director at DeMesne Central]. I had people in mind who I would contact.

Unlike many first-year teachers interviewing for teaching positions, Caroline had already established connections with persons in the DeMesne schools and community who she believed would help her be successful as a future choir director and music educator at Park High School.

Once hired in the spring, Caroline depended on her classroom role as an accompanist to recruit students for next year to guarantee a full-time choir teacher at Park High School.

I got the job and saw all the numbers and then spent the next two weeks having one-on-one conversations with every single student that I saw every day who was not signed up on that list. Saying, "No, go talk to your counselor." And I sent the counselors a list of kids, and so we got the numbers back up. So that was the first thing I did was make sure that that was where we needed it to be...I was a nervous wreck for two weeks because I was waiting to find out if I had the job. I was waiting to find out if we'd have the numbers for this year.

The administration at the school considered making the choral position part time due to the drop in enrollment.

When students signed up for classes they didn't know who was going to be teaching choir next year. That was such a big deal for them that they said, "It makes a difference who's teaching." And a lot of them said, "If Mrs. Victrola is not the teacher, I'm not doing choir."

Through Caroline's recruiting efforts and Linda's advocacy for the position, they convinced the school district to support the choral position, giving Caroline a chance to work within the already existing program.

### *Placing Herself in DeMesne and Park High School*

When Caroline described DeMesne, she acknowledged that she did not yet have a complete understanding of the city. She explained:

I feel like [DeMesne's] got like several different segments of different types of people like all over the city. I mean, my experience is pretty limited because since I've been here, I have only been teaching. I know the schools really well, but I don't know the community outside the schools super well.

Caroline admitted to her limited knowledge of DeMesne even though she lived in the community for a year prior to beginning her teaching position. She perceived the community of DeMesne to be influenced by the local university, healthcare industry, and other office jobs, but also saw a portion of the population that was economically disadvantaged. "I don't know too much about how well those different pockets of people work together and benefit each other," Caroline remarked.

According to Caroline, the schools in DeMesne were "propelled" by the university to be forward and progressively thinking, especially in regard to equity in education. She believed this to be a positive asset of the DeMesne schools.

It seems like [DeMesne] schools are a little bit more on the front edge of educational philosophy than I thought they would be or that I haven't experienced in other schools in [my home state]...I think a lot of our administrators are leading the force in equity and

education, and really trying to push us to seek that in our classrooms and then also just in the teachers that are working in the schools. I see a lot more progressive thinking teachers either personally or in education or both...and I think that's a testament to having that presence in the community of this institution that is pushing a lot of those things in their students and then of course, a lot of those students are ending up working in the schools here.

When Caroline was hired at Park, she "felt like it was a good challenge." Her first-hand knowledge of the program solidified her impression. "I was confident that this was a good place for me to be teaching, because I knew the students, and I knew the people I was going to be working with and the administration." She entered the music program already knowing which of its aspects she would like to develop.

Not that it's perfect, but there are a lot of things that I really appreciate about this program and this school. But, along with that, there were also some things that I knew that were going to be culture shifts that I wanted to make within the program. There's a little bit of heaviness because I know that that stuff is going to be really hard. Part of that is just waiting it out as classes graduate and as choirs become more and more [mine, and they] know just me as their director.

She witnessed an over-reliance on memorization and rote learning and a lack of attention to music literacy which she hoped to improve as a teacher. Caroline explained, "The culture before was very much, 'I'm going to memorize these notes and once I know the notes, I'm not going to sing because I know the notes already, and so I'm ready for the concert.'" She realized, "I need to be better about making sure that these kids...are actually learning things and...not just learning the music for the concerts." She stated her goal, "I want them to be more actively engaged in the process of making music."

### *Summary and Analysis of Caroline's Prelude to Her First Year of Teaching*

Caroline's journey of place consciousness at Park High School and in DeMesne began the year before her first year of full-time teaching. First she was a student teacher in the DeMesne School District, then she was hired as a staff accompanist at Park High School, and

finally, after being hired, she set about recruiting and planning for her first year as a music teacher at Park even before it began.

In Caroline's prelude to her first year of teaching, the theme of apprenticeship arose. Her apprenticeship into the soon-to-be-vacant choral teaching position at Park influenced her understandings of her classroom, school, and community surroundings. As a student teacher, she was mentored by the music teachers at DeMesne Central High School and began to learn about the school district and the community through this experience. Due to unfortunate circumstances, the accompanist position at Park High School became vacant, and Caroline was asked to apply after her college graduation. Upon being hired, Linda, the choir director at Park, began to involve Caroline in the classroom community by allowing her to teach sectionals, funding her trip with the program to Chicago, and passing music director responsibilities to Caroline for the spring musical. Through this involvement, she gained knowledge about the students who were in the program as well as its history. Due to her upcoming retirement, Linda was transparent about the choirs and included Caroline in her classroom planning and procedures in hopes that she would be hired as the new choir teacher. Through her increasing understanding and knowledge of Park and its music program, Caroline began to formulate goals that she hoped to put in practice during her first year. After realizing that the choral teaching position at Park was in danger of being cut to a part-time position, and noticing the support from students as they hoped that she would be hired as the next choir teacher, Caroline was hired as the choir teacher, and immediately began a serious recruiting effort to ensure numbers in each choir ensemble would necessitate her to teach full-time.

## **A Musical Interlude - Park High School's Black History Month Concert**

*At 7 p.m. sharp the students at the front of the auditorium began to cheer loudly and enthusiastically as the Bass Choir entered. They filed on stage and took their places on the risers which had been configured into a semi-circle around a grand piano. The stage was backlit with red and green lights on a white scrim.*

*Mrs. Victrola appeared and walked to the microphone placed in center stage. She welcomed the audience and introduced the Bass Choir, which began to sing an arrangement of the Stevie Wonder song, "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing." The students in the audience immediately began to clap along with the choir's performance. This opening was followed by the Ghanaian folk song "Pete, Pete!" The Bass Choir concluded their portion of the concert with an arrangement of the song "Panini" by Lil Nas X. The choir sang the hook and chorus of the song accompanied by a pre-recorded instrumental track. The verses of the song were sung by one student and rapped by another. Again, the students in the audience cheered for these singers and raised their hands and sang along.*

*The Bass Choir exited the stage as the Treble Choir climbed the stairs from their seats to the stage. During this transition, Mrs. Victrola explained the process they used to rehearse for this concert. She clarified, "Normally we read music to learn a song, but we listened first for this concert." The Treble Choir formed a half circle in front of the risers instead of standing on them. Both Mrs. Victrola and the choir's accompanist entered the semi-circle alongside their students. Together with the students they began the song "What Happens When a Woman" by the Artemisia Trio. As they voiced their first note, the entire choir lifted a foot and stomped on the floor. "What happens when a woman takes power?" they exclaimed while only accompanied by their stepping and body percussion. They finished singing and proudly beamed at one other with*

*smiles and fist pumps. The Treble Choir continued with a piece entitled “Mother to Son” based on a poem by Langston Hughes. Their final piece was Michael Jackson’s “Man in the Mirror.” Two adults, one a student teacher from DeMesne Central High School and the other the assistant band director at Park High School, entered the stage to accompany the choir on bass and drumset respectively. As the Treble Choir sang this song about making change in the world through our own actions, the students in the audience took out their cellphones and turned on the flashlight setting to sway their arms to the song. Students on stage began to dance as they sang. As a student began to sing a solo, another from the audience shouted “You got this, Liz!”*

*The Intermediate Choir took their places on stage. Some of these students were wearing all black like the students in the other choirs, but most were wearing t-shirts rather than dress shirts and blouses. These t-shirts were plain black or proclaimed “Black Lives Matter” or “Brown/Black Lives Matter.” Black students were not the only ones wearing these shirts. One student wore a t-shirt with a portrait of the rapper Tupac. The choir began by singing the African-American spiritual “Wade in the Water.” Their second and final piece was another setting of a Langston Hughes poem entitled “I Dream a World” by Andre Thomas.*

*As the Intermediate Choir exited and the Advanced Choir entered, Mrs. Victrola announced to the audience that the students picked the music for this concert. She explained that she usually chose the music and then tries to convince the students of the music’s worth. This time, the students picked the music and said, “Mrs. Victrola, you need to learn to like this.”*

*The Advanced Choir performed the African-American spiritual, “Bound for Canaan Lan’,” the song “MLK” by U2, and “Optimistic” by Sounds of Blackness. I looked across the auditorium and saw parents and other adult audience members recording the group with cell phones and other personal devices. During “Optimistic,” Mrs. Victrola stepped away from her*

*podium and again joined the choir to sing alongside her students. They swayed and snapped their fingers as they sang.*

*The choir remained on stage after they finished, as a woman from the audience was invited to come forward to speak. She explained that donations from this concert were being given to the community organization ELEVATE, dedicated to empowering middle school girls of color in the DeMesne community. The speaker, Miss Evesha, referred to the song “What Happens When a Woman?” sung earlier, sounding as though she was giving a homily in the midst of a church worship service as she passionately described ELEVATE and its intentions to change young women’s lives. She explained that they planned to use money from tonight’s performance to present an African dance workshop for the students involved in the program.*

*After Miss Evesha spoke, the other choirs were invited back to the stage for two final numbers. The first was from the Justice Choir Songbook (Justice Choir, 2020) entitled “Be the Change” based on the words of Gandhi. The song began with a soloist who seemed to be nervous and sang with a quaver. Mrs. Victrola stopped the song. She approached the soloist, whispered in her ear, and restarted the song.*

*The final song of the evening was “Lift Every Voice and Sing.” The audience was invited to sing the third verse with the choirs following the lyrics, which were written in the program. Several Black student soloists were included in the first two verses of the song. By the time the third verse began, the students of the choir were arm in arm. Audience members, who had stood in respect, were then invited by Mrs. Victrola to join their voices with the choir. Emotions seemed to pierce through the choir and the audience during this climactic moment of the concert. After the last note, everyone gathered their things and left the auditorium. The lobby was filled*

*with adults greeting their children, and students saying goodbye to each other. Mrs. Victrola was standing in the lobby next to a donation jar, beaming with pride.*

During Caroline Victrola's first year of teaching, she took full advantage of her head start as a staff accompanist at Park High School to deepen her connections with an established network of colleagues and create new relationships with those who could guide her teaching in ways beneficial to her students' learning. She implemented curricula oriented toward student needs and choices. Lastly, she developed her classroom in ways to enhance her pedagogy and her students' learning opportunities.

### **Development of Connections**

Caroline's established connections with her colleagues at Park High School, her students and their families, music teacher colleagues within the District, and community organizations within the greater DeMesne community. Through these connections Caroline was able to learn more about her students, the high school, and the greater community.

#### *Connections Within Park High School*

Within Park High School, Caroline developed positive connections with her colleagues and administrators, the students, and their families. These connections helped her navigate her position as a first-year teacher within the school community and aided her in developing her pedagogy and establishing a successful classroom environment.

**Administration and Colleagues.** Caroline discussed her administrators when she shared plans for the ongoing school renovation and her teaching observation experiences. She felt that her interactions with her administrators had been positive and explained, "I just kind of this year was there to learn and was there to kind of go with what needed to happen and follow the rules and not stir up any trouble." Caroline hoped to learn how things worked within Park High School

before she initiated any changes. Caroline cautiously approached her administrators to find out the upcoming plans for the renovation. “When I realized, ‘Oh, this is going to happen and I need to find out what it’s going to look so that I can change things now rather than later.’” She elaborated:

In the last month or so, we’ve been looking at more details about the renovations and things, and I’m learning that whoever planned the furniture and stuff that they were purchasing either didn’t look at our inventory of what we actually have already or didn’t know that we – I don’t know...I was anticipating some conflict with that kind of stuff...I was really transparent about here’s what we already have and we don’t really need what we have ordered. Here’s something that is comparable that would be great for us to have.

Her administrators agreed with her, showing their willingness to make changes to the renovation plans.

Caroline had positive experiences interacting with her supervisor when he evaluated her teaching throughout the year. She was observed four times by one of her assistant principals who was also named as her supervisor. She expressed:

I appreciated having the same person there...We did meetings throughout the school year to talk about just like what was going on. He was able to say to me, ‘Hey, I remember you saying you were struggling with this and it looks like you figured it out a little bit, that’s really cool.’

She found that her supervisor let her lead their discussions about her teaching. “There were questions [such as], ‘I’m curious, why did you do this? Can you give me more context?’ then we talk about it.” Accordingly, she did not disagree with anything her supervisor recommended because of this approach. As a result, Caroline was able to focus on aspects of her teaching she wished to improve upon and her supervisor was able to help her in these areas.

Caroline rarely mentioned any teachers outside of the performing arts department when I talked to her. She stated that the school district assigned her an official mentor, a math teacher, but added that they rarely met or talked. “Our problem that we ran into this year was that we are almost on opposite sides of the building so we just physically never see each other and so we

didn't talk very much." Instead Caroline relied more on the drama director and the assistant band director for mentoring advice, both teachers located next to her room.

She mentioned some negative written interactions with her teaching colleagues. She recalled, "A couple of times I got some nasty emails from colleagues about taking kids on field trips...Or not even emails to me directly, but people would complain to our department head that I was doing things." In one instance, the faculty were notified that students were being excused from classes for a performance of the school musical, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, for the middle schools.

The day that we did performances of *Hunchback* for students, we brought middle schoolers in to see the whole show top to bottom, and I put out permission slips for my students who were interested because they would be missing [classes]...But I said, this is a little bit late notice and you need to be passing the classes that you'll be missing and you need to get permission from your teachers saying, "Yes, it's okay if they miss this class, here's the work they're going to be missing." If they need to make up a test, I'm okay with that, all that stuff. And yet, I still got backlash from that for some reason. That was uncomfortable just because it felt like I had done my due diligence in communicating about it, and people still were not understanding what was going on.

She received a negative response from one teacher in particular with whom she had not had any prior contact and was unsure how to respond. Caroline shared:

There was a teacher who emailed me really angry that her student was missing a class or something, and I was like, "I don't know what you want me to do about it." I don't know. That seems to not be my thing to handle...I feel like I deleted those emails because they were taking up negative space for me.

Caroline did eventually respond after seeking out advice from the drama teacher.

[The drama director] said, "That's pretty on character for that person. Just respond back that you did what you could and leave it."...But I thought, "Oh, you've never met me in person before and you're getting angry at me over email."

Caroline felt that she was put in an impossible situation since this performance was approved by the school administration.

Caroline developed close working relationships with her performing arts colleagues at Park and mentioned these individuals as her closest allies. However, she perceived that the music department was not very collaborative when she began at the high school, which contradicted her prior experiences and expectations.

I've always learned and been told that we're all in this together, we have to do these things together, and then when I would do, put forth effort to reach out to people, it was met with a little bit of, "Oh, you're doing that," and it was never hostile. It was never, "I don't want your help or I don't want you to do this" but it was, "Oh, I'm surprised that you're willing to do that."

This surprise became apparent when she attended a band concert early in the school year.

Caroline recalled, "The head band director was like, 'Oh, I've never had a choir director come to my band concert before,' and I said, 'Really? That's what we do.'" She mentioned that the orchestra teacher was also a first-year teacher, and the assistant band director was in his first few years of teaching. Consequently, they began to rely on each other and seek each other out for collaborative opportunities. "We all [agreed]— 'Of course we're going to go to each other's concerts.' It has been the three of us will go and support each other." She explained that even the drama director has become involved in their support system.

Even our drama director is awesome about – now that we've all shown her we want to work with you, we want to collaborate on things, she's totally into it, and that environment wasn't that way before.

Caroline developed a support system with a group of teachers who desired to work with each other in a collaborative manner and who she could easily approach for advice due to their close proximity in the building and shared specialization as performing arts teachers.

**Students and Their Families.** Caroline's prior school experiences had been in tight-knit communities, but she discovered that Park was a large building with a large student body and staff. She commented that she knew little about the students and school activities that existed outside of the music and performing arts wing. On the other hand, Caroline focused on

developing the student community within her classroom. Some classroom moments that stuck out to her the most were not necessarily times they were making music in class. She said, “They’re those times when we were being together.” Caroline related, “The days that we weren’t even singing together, but people were playing their music over the speakers and we were coloring are some really great memories.” She reminisced about her Treble Choir students:

The Treble Choir has some really great days of just community building while they were trying to figure out their music. They were the ones that did our door decoration and figured that all out. They really loved doing that.

Through these activities together, Caroline’s students helped enhance their classroom community as well as the physical space of their classroom.

One musical moment that she recounted included the Black History Concert.

I would say the biggest thing was the last concert we had just because it felt such a great space to be in. While we were at the concert, everybody was so encouraging of each other...While we were singing “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” I realized how loud it was, and how much was going on, and how much work we had all put into it. I started crying on stage in front of everybody. That whole concert is a really great memory for me.

By the end of her first year, Caroline had not yet developed any deep connections with students’ families, although the interactions she had were mostly positive. She noted:

I had a lot of really, really supportive parents. Parents who knew that music was important to their students. They also knew that I was somebody that their student trusted, so they would just reach out and say thanks. I really never had parents complaining to me about things. A lot of them would say, “Thank you for creating a space for my kid to feel safe,” and things like that.

Caroline recalled two specific instances when her connections with parents went beyond a simple greeting or remark. The first instance was with the parent of a student who approached Caroline to reveal that she was pregnant even before she told her mother. Caroline counseled her:

“You need to tell your mom because your mom will care. Your mom will not disown you. She will take care of you, and help you, and things like that.” She told her mom and her mom called me, “Oh my gosh. I don’t know what to do.” I said, “Just be there for her. You do know what to do. Your instincts are correct. Don’t second guess yourself,” and

things like that. She was happy that I was there when her daughter needed somebody to talk to.

Caroline, who is not a mother herself, not only played a supportive role during this time for her student but also for the student's mother. The student and her mother thanked Caroline for the comforting words and listening ear that she was able to provide for them.

Caroline recalled a negative experience she had with a parent. Several teachers in the building attended a group conference with a student's mother.

She [the student] would talk back and she would refuse to follow direction, and things like that. Because she's an ESL [English as a Second Language] student, her mom was called in to have a meeting with a mediator who was a translator. They invited any of her teachers who wanted to come to show up to that meeting. I went to that meeting because I was also having problems. In the midst of us presenting information to the mom, the mom and the daughter got in a fight, arguing. Then the daughter stood up to try to leave after she had said to us, "This is why I need to leave the room because I don't want it to escalate any farther." They kept arguing. She stood up to leave, and mom met her on the other side of the table and started hitting her.

The mother's response to this incident put the student's safety into question, so each teacher was obligated to call Child Protective Services.

After describing these incidents, Caroline reiterated that most of her interactions had been with parents who were thankful for the space she has created for their children. "My interactions with parents have been really, really positive. Most of them are just there to help and are really thankful that their student just has a place to be making music and to be feeling safe during the school day and outside of school."

#### *Connections with DeMesne School District Music Colleagues*

During her first year of teaching, Caroline maintained close connections with her former cooperating teachers, Amy, Chris, and Dan, who had subsequently become her music faculty colleagues within the school district. She sought out their advice as she navigated policies and procedures established by district administration. As an example, Caroline tried to audition

students for her top choir as part of her duties at the end of the year, but because of the suspension of in-person instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic, she was disappointed when only fourteen students submitted an audition. Her band colleagues decided not to hold auditions due to these circumstances. Her colleagues were able to provide her with potential solutions nonetheless, such as recommending students to each ensemble without an audition, which helped Caroline address the situation with students and the guidance counselors.

Caroline's close relationship with Dan at DeMesne Central resulted in a collaborative effort in December. Together, they put together a choral retreat for their students.

We field tripped the kids out of class for the first half of the day and we rehearsed in the auditorium together and we had a snack time and a game time and things like that. It was really fun. I think Dan had fun doing it too, so I hope that they keep doing it here.

The following week, the choirs got together again after school for a dress rehearsal, performing a joint holiday concert. Caroline believed that not only did this retreat help connect the two high school programs, but it also connected students within her own high school community. "I think a lot of my students got a chance to meet people from other classes. As a result, they would say, 'Hi,' to each other. So many kids were always in my room when class wasn't going on and so they all would meet each other through that." Caroline saw this collaborative experience as beneficial to the students and the choirs at both schools, and hoped that this partnership would continue.

Caroline also developed connections with the middle school general music and choral teachers. Choir had not been offered as a curricular option at the middle school level in the district for decades, but was slowly being introduced again. Caroline excitedly explained, "This year is sixth grade curricular choir; next year will be sixth and seventh grade curricular choir; the year after that will be sixth, seventh, eighth. In three years, my freshman are going to have been in choir before." The general music teachers at the three district elementary schools had been

coordinating this effort as well as collaborating with each for their approach to general music.

Caroline met with these teachers about their curricular emphases in choir and general music and adopted some of them into her own classroom to align her curriculum with theirs. These teachers approached instruction from a student-led model of instruction:

A lot of what they're doing is that flipping the classroom idea of the teacher teaches them how to do things, and then they [the students] lead the rehearsal. I love that model. I think it's really, really important that students know how to find the answers.

This student-led approach to rehearsals aligned with Caroline's student-choice approach to choral rehearsals, as I elaborate later in this chapter. She also adopted a program to teach sight-singing that the middle school music teachers used and recommended to her.

Caroline borrowed materials and pedagogical ideas related to creative activities from these general music courses, which she implemented in composition units in her music survey course. In the fall, Caroline had tried to use the curriculum that had been left by Linda, but found that she ran out of material for the semester. She met with two of the middle school teachers who helped her adapt some of their materials to the high school level.

They do a beat making project that goes to the [state music conference], their contest. So, I literally used their slide show for that unit . . . changing a couple of things... That was their final project.

Caroline cared about what her colleagues were teaching and doing in their classrooms, especially with students who might eventually pass into her classroom in the future. Caroline perceived these middle school teachers as knowledgeable others who could help her adjust her curriculum to better align with her students' musical interests while also seeing them as helpful collaborators in a shared goal of aligning the choral and the secondary music curriculum during middle and high school years.

### *Connections with the DeMesne Community*

Within the community, Caroline sought out specific organizations for collaboration. One in particular was the local university. Once hired, she sought advice from a music education professor, Jason, who specialized in popular music and music technology to explore potential pathways for her music survey course.

I basically emailed him right away in the spring...asking, "Can we set up a time in the fall to meet?" Fall music survey was a dumpster fire, because I was trying to just do what Linda had done and that didn't work.

Jason helped Caroline expand the Soundtrap composition work and incorporate more popular music making.

At the beginning of March, right before the start of this study, the university's Collegiate National Association for Music Education (CNAfME) chapter helped Caroline organize and file choral octavos in Park's music library as a service project. This project helped Caroline to prepare for the upcoming move and renovation of the choral classroom.

In the fall, a few local high school choirs teamed together with a choir at the local community college to participate in a fundraiser for St. Jude's Children's Hospital. Caroline was impressed by a remark that the college director made.

He said something at that concert, I don't remember exactly what it was...it was something like, "Music is powerful in your life. I know that because you're here." Something like that. And he said, "But we can be more powerful if we use it as a vehicle for activism for change or for whatever cause we decide is worth it." And I was really struck by that because that's so true. Yes, music is powerful for the people that experience it, but what about the people that don't get to be there, or don't get to experience it in the way that we do. . . either by being in music in our school or by experiencing it from an audience perspective?

Instead of taking donations at choral concerts to support the high school choral program, Caroline chose to take donations for specific community organizations. She believed that the budget the choir department received from the district was more than enough to support their

activities so they did not need program donations at concerts. For the December concert the choir gathered monetary donations for Warm-A-Kid, a winter clothing drive that the school district sponsors, resulting in a significant contribution.

For the Black History Month Concert, Caroline wanted to find an organization that empowered Black students or Black people in the community. At this concert, they collected donations for ELEVATE, a community organization for middle school African-American and Black girls. Caroline invited a representative from the organization to speak about their mission during the concert.

### *Summary and Analysis of Caroline's Development of Connections*

Caroline developed her place consciousness of DeMesne, Park High School, and her music classroom through purposeful and collaborative connections within varied realms of the community and school. Through these connections, she was able to develop understandings of her classroom, school, and community contexts which enhanced her pedagogical decisions. As Caroline described her relationships, a theme of purposeful connection emerged. She sought out people who could help her navigate challenges that she experienced within her classroom as well as help her create a student-oriented music curriculum. In her classroom, she developed collaborative connections with her students as they helped her understand their needs, musical preferences, and personalities.

### **Curricular Decisions**

*The bell rang and a young student walked into Mrs. Victrola's music classroom. Mrs. Victrola greeted him and asked, "Forget something?" as she handed him a notebook that he left in the classroom the previous day. The student thanked her and excitedly added that he had a list of songs in the notebook as suggestions for the Bass Choir to sing. Mrs. Victrola responded that*

*he was in luck because today they would spend the class period looking for music for their next concert.*

*More students filtered through the door and took a seat. Mrs. Victrola announced that they would be spending the class period looking for potential repertoire for their next concert. She remarked that she would like them all to make decisions as soon as possible to get new music ordered quickly. Mrs. Victrola explained to the Bass Choir, "Usually this choir does three pieces plus whatever we do all together a mass choir. I would like to keep that number. We need a big long list to choose from." Mrs. Victrola asked everyone to use their ChromeBooks to search for music or be ready to search through her filing cabinets where music was kept.*

*Knowing that searching for repertoire was something that was new to many of her students, Mrs. Victrola broadcast her computer screen to her SmartBoard to show them how to search for music that the choir might be able to sing. "This is how I look for music. I go to JWPepper.com. I search for keywords. I then click 'choral,' and I can narrow my results further by clicking 'TB' or 'Tenor/Bass.' I can look at what the music looks like and listen to it." She typed "Bruno Mars" into the search bar on the website and found an arrangement of his song "I Don't Feel Like Doing Anything." Mrs. Victrola clicked the play button to allow the students to hear the arrangement, and several students immediately began to sing along. She mentioned that the students could look through filing cabinets in the classroom's back corner, J.W. Pepper, or YouTube for music, but she recommended J.W. Pepper because it was the easiest place to order music. Finally, Mrs. Victrola put a spreadsheet document on the Bass Choir's Google Classroom page entitled, "Song Requests" for students to edit. She asked everyone to include the name of the song and the link to where they found the song in the spreadsheet. She added, "If you have*

*no interest in what we sing in this class, I also have things for you to do. We can keep packing for the renovation. Tomorrow we will talk through the list.”*

*Most students immediately began searching websites for music. Two students huddled together looking at a phone and became excited. “What is so exciting back here?” Mrs. Victrola asked as she approached the two young men. One showed her a picture he had edited using his phone’s software. She complimented him, “That’s sweet! You ever think about taking yearbook?” The student shook his head. Mrs. Victrola shrugged, “Well can you help me pack some things?” The two students followed her to the music library where she had boxes that needed to be moved.*

*A student who had been busy looking for music interjected, “Is there a theme?”*

*Mrs. Victrola commented, “We will choose a theme after the music is chosen.”*

*Most students continued to search for music, but one put his ChromeBook away and rested his head on his chest. Mrs. Victrola slowly walked toward him and then kneeled down next to him. She calmly reiterated the objectives for the day’s class, but added, “I’m thinking of doing a Congolese songs with all the choirs. Do you have any ideas of what we could do? If you do, please let me know.” The student, finding new purpose, re-opened his ChromeBook, and began to search through YouTube for musical performances.*

*“How are we doing?” Mrs. Victrola queried the class. Several students answered that they were struggling to find choral arrangements. Mrs. Victrola smiled and reassured them, “That’s OK. I have ways!” They all returned to their searches and continued to add to the growing list of potential repertoire.*

Caroline’s teaching schedule included a music survey course, which was an arts elective open to any student; Treble and Bass Choirs, which were aimed toward freshman or first year

singers; Intermediate Choir; and Advanced Choir. Her schedule continued into many evenings as she was involved with two musicals a year—one planned in conjunction with DeMesne Central High School and the other presented only by Park. Caroline was working with the school administration to offer music survey only in the spring which would allow her to assist with the curricular marching band class in the fall.

Caroline created room in her curriculum for student choice through an emerging emphasis on culturally responsive practice and pedagogy, which aligned with student-centered music-making processes. In an impassioned speech “on a soapbox,” Caroline expressed her role in the classroom as *a* resource rather than the *only* resource.

Part of the reason that I wanted to go into music education was that I wanted to be a good resource for my students because I had a lot of outside experiences in choir. I did a lot of festivals. I was in a barbershop group. I did voice lessons all through constantly. And I was in band and orchestra and those teachers were really, really awesome...So I went to college, I want to learn as much as I can about what else is out there and what’s going to work for me.

Caroline then passionately described releasing control of her classroom:

I also talked to a lot of people who talked about the ego that comes with being a teacher of anything, and how a lot of teachers can get in that rut of thinking, “I know what I’m doing. I’m really good at this because I’m a master and I’ve been doing this. And this is an art and this is a craft.” We tend to get really egotistical about my process and my classroom and all that kind of stuff. I’m not like that as a person. I’m very much, “Let’s share everything. Let’s all be friends. Let’s hear your input.”

Caroline viewed her role as supportive rather than being in the spotlight.

And so I think that carries over into my teaching where I don’t want it all to be about me. Because it’s not, it’s school. It’s for the kids. No parent wants to come to a concert and see the choir director jumping up and down and doing back flips. It’s not why they’re there. That’s not why the government is funding our schools. They’re funding the schools for the students and so I’m more about them having control over the experience. Because they don’t get that in a lot of other places. And if this can be a safe place for them to do that I’m going to let them do it...That’s my soapbox.

Caroline’s “soapbox” moment enlightened me about her teaching philosophy and illuminated why she brought student choice to the forefront.

### *Culturally Responsive Choices*

Early in our interviews, Caroline referred often to student choices and student culture, leading me to ask about her familiarity with Culturally Responsive Pedagogy or Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy. She lit up and nodded her head:

Oh, absolutely. I don't know if you've read *Teaching with Respect*. It's a book by Stephen Sieck...And he wrote this awesome book...on just the traditions that we have in choir music and how they're problematic. And how we can move forward from them. So it talks about culturally responsive pedagogy and about transgender students and about handling gender roles within music and things like that. That book was huge for me.

Acknowledging that her knowledge about her students' identities and cultures was not comprehensive, she continued, "That's my MO [Modus Operandi], I'm going to tell you when I don't know something because it's better for you to think that I'm ignorant than for you to think that I'm arrogant." Caroline elaborated:

I'm of the belief that we should respect people and their beliefs and their values and their backgrounds. Everybody's got different experiences, and I can't know what you experienced and what you perceive from what I do. I should just do my best to be transparent about what I know and what I don't know, and then I learn from people.

Caroline revised her music survey course in the spring to better address student musical interests.

A lot of that class is about who's in the class, what are they interested in. Last semester, almost every student was really, really into hip-hop. So, we did a lot of stuff with hip-hop in their Soundtrap stuff. This semester, it's more of a mixed bag, so I'm trying to create things such as, "You can do this with rock music. You can do this with K-pop. You can do this with hip-hop." I have a student who listens to only exclusively reggae. You can do this with whatever music you like. The first unit was about, "Why are we here, why do we do music, why is it important, what is my musical identity?"

Caroline developed a concert cycle specifically aimed at Black history and culture for the annually scheduled February or March concert. For this concert, Caroline incorporated pieces by African-American composers or lyricists or poets and pieces that represented a variety of

African-American and Black-American music genres such as spirituals, gospel, hip-hop, R&B, and other popular music genres.

I have gone through my music career knowing that there are a lot of really great Black composers out there and that they don't always get recognized like they should. And so part of what made me excited to work here is that there is such a large population of Black students, and they really appreciate when we do music by Black people, whether it's Beyoncé or Rosephanye Powell.

This concert was also prompted by a DeMesne School District initiative to empower Black students in the classroom.

The other thing that spurred this was that our district is doing a Learner Empowered Action Plan (LEAP) that is supposed to be geared toward getting Black students involved more equitably in the classroom. This was one of the things that I put on my LEAP, but I was going to do it anyway. I just wanted to celebrate Black musicians and the students that have that background.

In preparation for the Black History Month Concert, Caroline did not always rely on notated music. For some pieces, she and her students learned the music by rote and imitation.

Each choir, except for [the Intermediate Choir], had a piece that was a pop song, a piece that was something they learned by rote, literally from the YouTube video, and a piece that was more traditional choral singing. The discussion we had was when I said I want to be able to balance this program, how can we do that? One of their ideas was we should just not use music to learn something, we should learn it just from listening to it. And I responded, "You're right. That's a great idea."

She found that this process of trusting her students' musical knowledge and understanding rather than relying on a piece of notated sheet music led her to better appreciate their intelligence.

It was really eye opening because, of course I know that they're intelligent but I don't always see that every day because they're still teenagers. To have them be engaged in those discussions – and then when we actually started learning the music, they were more invested because they had chosen it. They were excited to sing it.

Park had a growing Congolese population, and Caroline sought out ways to incorporate their musical cultures in her choir classrooms. Many of these students spoke French or Lingala and were in the process of learning English. "I have a few in every class." Caroline explained.

It's different for everybody because it depends on how long they've been here. If they're brand new to the country, they come in and...they're silent. They just stare at you. That taller kid that you saw me talking to, I've been trying to pull him out of his shell all semester because he's new. He's brand new. He moved here in January. And then there's another student in that class who was new in August, and he's been getting a lot more comfortable in this room.

She sought out music in French or Lingala that her Congolese students were familiar with to include in the next concert.

I've got students in every single class who are Congolese or from that region. And so that was one of the reasons that I wanted to do a song [from Congo] in French or Lingala or something, to honor their experience. Because every time I've brought it up they've gotten really excited. I don't know what it'll be yet.

Her Congolese students took initiative to find songs for their ensembles by drawing on their knowledge of Congolese and American culture as well as their musical experiences at Park High School.

Some of the older students who have been here for a long time, but also have a good memory of what it was like there, are doing some searching for me. Because they have a better idea of, oh, this'll be harder for Americans to learn, or this'll be easier for the rest to learn. This one has less Lingala and more French and so it'll be a little bit easier. Just things like that.

Caroline relied on and trusted her students to guide them to a positive musical experience.

#### *Student choice and independence*

*Four folding tables were placed at the front of Mrs. Victrola's classroom. Mrs. Victrola walked by each table, placing keyboard MIDI controllers for each student who would be entering in a matter of minutes for Music Survey. When the bell rang she announced to everyone who had found seats around the room, "You will need good headphones. Get them from the drawer if you need to. You will need ChromeBooks, and you will need to sit at a table."*

*Once students had settled at the tables, Mrs. Victrola asked the approximately dozen students to open SoundTrap on their ChromeBooks and unpack the MIDI controllers from their storage boxes. Today was the first time that they had used Akai MPK Mini MIDI controllers with*

*SoundTrap. She explained, “I am almost as new to these as you are. We are going to experiment with them today. Look on YouTube for tutorial videos or read the manual.” She broadcasted her computer screen to her SmartBoard as students began to plug the controllers into their ChromeBooks. She searched, “How to connect Akai MPK Minis” through Google and asked, “See if you can figure it out while I’m trying to figure it out.” Together they were able to figure out how to connect the controllers and shared with one another.*

*Mrs. Victrola explained some basic functions of the keyboard controller. She showed the class higher and lower pitches using a visualization on the SmartBoard and then showed them how to adjust the octave that pitches sounded. “I want you to create a new track on SoundTrap and to play around with the settings to see what you can do. I will do the same,” she challenged.*

*Everyone put their headphones on and began pushing buttons and moving sliders on the controllers while clicking different settings in SoundTrap. Mrs. Victrola circulated through the room and whispered with each student to see what types of things they were discovering. The room was eerily silent except for the soft tapping sounds from MIDI controllers and Chromebooks as everyone was consumed with their own projects.*

*After approximately ten minutes of independent work, Mrs. Victrola asked everyone to take off their headphones. “I would like you to experiment with making harmonies. Harmony is playing multiple notes at once. I want you to experiment and try to find what sounds good together. I would like you to record four bars of a project by the end of class.”*

*Mrs. Victrola continued her rounds and approached a student who was improvising melodies over a drum track he had made. She then checked in with another student who was bobbing his head up and down as he adjusted settings. “So when you make music do you make your own keyboard sounds?” she asked knowing that he produced his own tracks at home.*

*“We have ten minutes left, but we need to clean up all this stuff. Headphones go in the filing cabinet or bin in the front of the room. Keyboards back in their boxes and placed in the bins at the front of the room!” Mrs. Victrola announced to everyone. She pulled up a music playlist on her computer and began playing rock music as everyone began reorganizing the classroom for the upcoming choir classes.*

In her classroom, Caroline sought opportunities for student choice and independence in both her music survey and choir classes. In music survey, students were given assignments and class activities that allowed them to experience music on a personal level rather than as a group. Caroline gave students choices to develop projects as independent musicians. For example, in the above vignette students were asked to experiment and discover the functions that the software and hardware could potentially inspire in their composition projects. In our discussions, she described the prior musical experiences her students brought to her music survey class, “One plays piano and is in a band, so he plays rock piano and guitar. One plays bass in a band. One is really into producing his own music, like rapping and stuff like that. And then one has a brother who does producing.” Student choice became even more prominent as her classes shifted from in-person to online learning. Caroline developed a series of projects that students could choose from to meet course criteria. I discuss her reasoning for these projects later in this chapter in the section, “Virtual Teaching.”

In her choir classes, she experimented with allowing students to pick out music for the Black History Concert. Her students took initiative in this process, and began pleading, “Mrs. Victrola, you need to learn to like this.” She elaborated that the Black History Month concert “was really, really influenced by students’ choices of music.” After an initial period for her students to brainstorm potential repertoire for their next concert, she explained:

I came to them with a giant list of things, and they helped me pick what we were going to perform on the concert. It's actually a really well rounded concert, and I guided them through that and said, "Here's why we're doing these things. Here's why it's important that we have variety." They really have taken ownership of the music because they care about it. Because they were able to choose what they were going to do, they decided that they liked it...But also I can hold it over their heads and say, "You picked this. You got to work at it."

The songs students chose did not guarantee positive experiences for all the choirs. The Intermediate Choir struggled with their choices and had to revise their repertoire. Caroline said, "It was this whole thing." She elaborated:

We've had a rough semester in there...part of it...is just focus on their part and on my part. It's the end of the day, seventh hour for us, so it's after lunch for a lot of us and they all come in and they're really burnt out. And there are several students with really bad ADHD [Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder] in that class and I don't know how to manage that well. They don't know how to manage it well, and everybody else then gets frustrated...I have one section ready to go and then another section is off task. I'm still figuring out how to teach them.

She was frustrated with herself and her students in their inability to focus, especially in a rehearsal process that was new to all of them.

And then you put on top of that, they pick some things that we ordered and printed and started practicing, did sectionals, and then they said, "We don't want to do this song anymore." We ended up with two songs that they were lukewarm about, and they left this concert a little bit frustrated with themselves and me because we didn't work well together this quarter.

Caroline struggled with finding momentum in this process, as did the students in this choir, whereas her other ensembles seemed to thrive.

Even though there were struggles, Caroline was pleased with the results of student chosen repertoire and had students choose the repertoire again for their spring concert. Caroline elaborated:

I think that that is going to be big going forward, is having them more involved in the choosing music process...They expressed a lot to me in the first semester that they wanted to do more modern music. They wanted to choose more stuff and things like that. I'm responding a lot to what they are telling me, and I'm like, "Okay, let's do it. Let's do it your way. Let's find out what happens." Because I know what I'm doing, but I don't

know what I'm doing, and so I'm fine with trying things and seeing how their ideas go. We also trust each other that if something goes wrong, I have a plan, I have a backup. If this thing that we're learning from a YouTube video is not going to work, I have a backup. I have something figured out that if they feel like they're drowning we can save it.

Later when I talked to Caroline, she elaborated how her process for student selection and programming of repertoire would continue:

We'll spend some time reading things and then we'll do a vote on what we want to do. And then, again, we'll talk about how we balance the program. What are we getting out of each of these? Do we have a good mix of upbeat songs and sorrowful sounding songs, and what's the message that you're trying to get across? What connects these things together, and yeah. My goal is that in five years, [the Advanced Choir] is programming their own concert completely.

Caroline also began to decenter her own voice and authority in preparation for the Black History Concert. While the Intermediate Choir struggled with their repertoire and rehearsals, they were excited about the concert theme and focus.

I love the students in that class because they're so vocal about what they care about. That was the class that was so excited that we were going to be doing a Black History Month concert and so excited to be celebrating that. When I was talking about concert dress with them they were the ones that [asked], "If we have a T-shirt that says Black Lives Matter on it or something like that, can we wear that?" And I [said], "Yeah, why not?"

While other choirs were invited to dress similarly, this particular ensemble was the only group to do so. Caroline elaborated, "A lot of them are really active in the school's organization that do [social justice initiatives] and in their lives. And so I just dispersed that word to other choirs, but they were the ones that were like, 'Yeah, we really love this idea.'"

During portions of the concert, Caroline would step into the ensemble and sing with her students as part of the choir instead of conducting. This was most noticeable during the piece "What Happens When a Woman" when Caroline as well as the accompanist joined the Treble Choir and participated in not only singing but also moving with the step choreography. Caroline elaborated on her reasoning to move away from the podium:

If they don't need you, why be waving your hands and being a distraction? Now, that was something that my directors in college really taught me. Just that there is such a thing as over managing, micro-managing, when you're conducting. And I took a lot of conducting classes because I had to do both band and choir. They all [emphasized],... "If they don't need you, you're doing your job right." That was my goal for a lot of those things... I don't need to be showing them one, two, three, four on "Panini" [one of the pieces the choirs performed]. You don't need it.

### *Summary and Analysis of Curricular Decisions*

Caroline sought to include the voices of the students who inhabited her classroom space into her curricular decision making. She began to learn about their culture, find ways to include it authentically, and allowed students to guide some aspects of their musical learning. Her students became a primary source of information as she developed her place consciousness and enacted this knowledge in her pedagogy.

During Caroline's first year of teaching, cultural responsive and democratic teaching practices began to emerge in her pedagogy and curriculum. Recognizing her own inexperience as a music teacher and the diversity of experiences that her students brought into the classroom, she looked for ways to honor their cultural experiences in classroom music making. She began to allow students to have a say in the projects and repertoire they chose, and she began to decenter herself from directing all music learning. In performances and rehearsals, Caroline began to decenter herself as a conductor. Instead of remaining on the podium to lead the singing of every piece, she sometimes entered into the ensemble and sang alongside her students. She believed that her students were capable of performing without her conducting gestures and had the ability to express their musicality without her explicit direction.

### **Development of Place**

Caroline was thoughtful in the organization of her classroom. She sought a physical layout that would enhance the classroom environment and be perceived as welcoming to all her

students. These intentions could be observed through her approach to both in-person and virtual learning and her future visions for the classroom and program.

### *Classroom Organization*

In a voice memo, Caroline described how she attempted to meet her students' needs and her own pedagogical needs as follows:

I was trying to create more of an atmosphere than focusing on the physical space and the way that it served [my students]. Then for myself, I was trying to help the physical space serve my daily routines and patterns. The atmosphere that I aimed for was welcoming and calming, and something that students could take ownership of, and hopefully had a little bit of flexibility as much as it could.

Caroline drew a map (see Figure 6.1) of her classroom and described its layout and function. She was attentive in the overall arrangement to what she termed “open spaces” for singing and moving, and spaces where she or her students could have designated area to work.

She explained:

So you can kind of see those on the map that I made. The chairs in the room are obviously very mobile. And then the piano was pretty stationary most of the time, but could move around on that front area. And then I had several desks<sup>16</sup> around the room that I used either for myself or for students as workspaces.

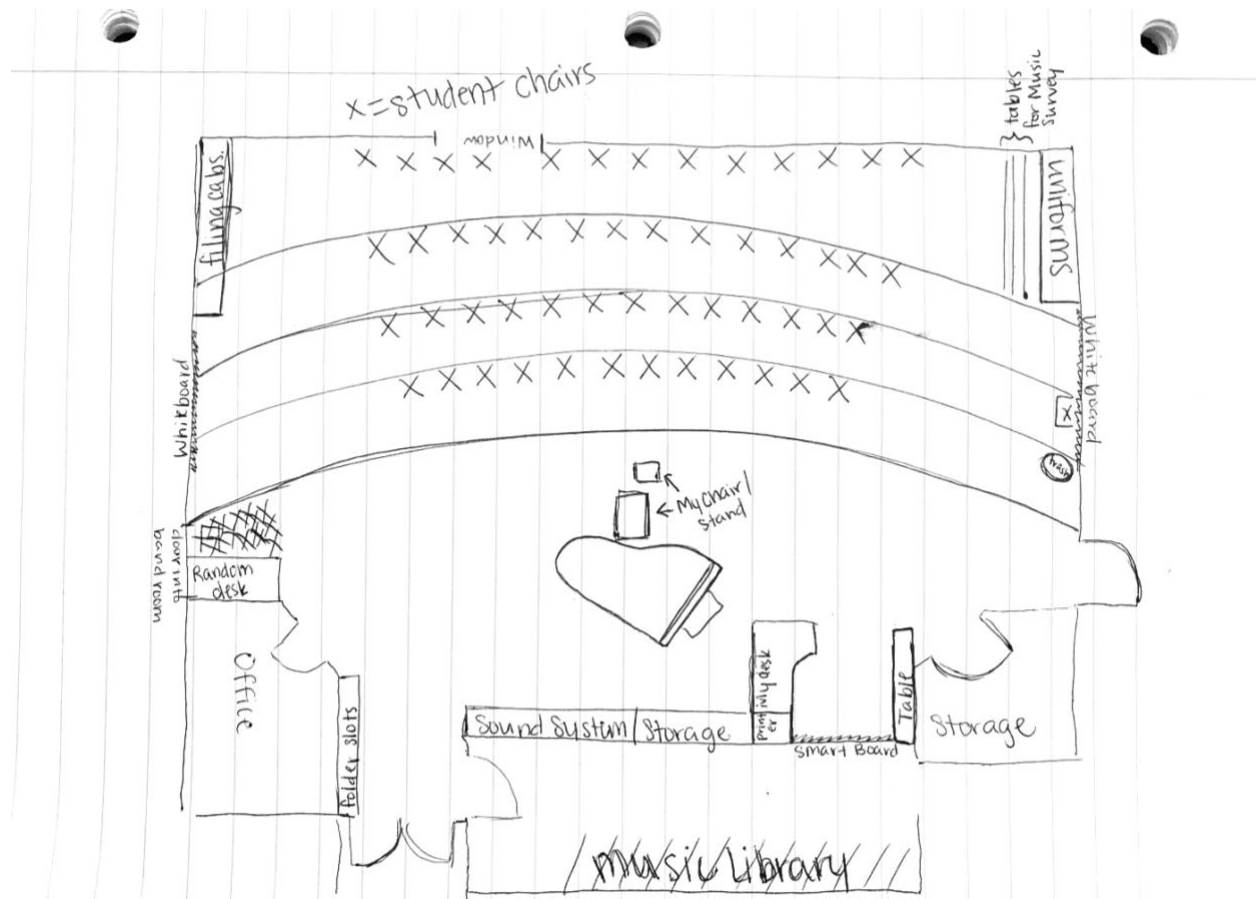
While she delineated specific areas of her classroom for particular purposes, she recognized that the mobility of her furniture allowed flexibility in her classroom layout.

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<sup>16</sup> There are only two desks labelled on Caroline's map – “My desk” and “Random desk.” Students also used the table next to the Storage area and Smart Board as a workspace as well as the folded tables located in the back corner for additional workspaces.

**Figure 6.1**

*Map of Park High School Choral Room Drawn by Caroline*



Due to the school renovation, Caroline had to pack the equipment and materials in her classroom to be stored and moved. This sense of upheaval was a conscious part of her planning as well as the organization of her classroom.

We currently have music storage all over the room. There's a music library space in that hallway behind the smart board, that you can see in the map. And then also the filing cabinets in the back of the room have music storage, and that storage space next to the smart board has some music stored there. I'm working on organizing that and hopefully all that extra furniture that's housing music right now will not be there next year. That'll be a nice, more open space for us.

As Caroline packed the classroom, she re-organized her storage spaces as well as culled unneeded equipment and materials in hopes of freeing additional storage space and disposing of extraneous storage furniture.

The classroom walls were adorned with decorations that Caroline put up herself. She hung solfège syllable posters at the front of her room as well as some music theory posters, and a few posters with inspirational sayings in the back of the room. Over the cabinet that stored students' music folders, she hung a whiteboard with an annual calendar on it. Written on this calendar were the year's concerts and other events, but she also had written in each student's birthday.

I just bought a calendar from Office Depot. I bought two of them. So one of them was an event calendar and one of them was...I put everybody's birthday on it...We would sing for them and they would get to take a piece of candy and just a little fun thing.

As a result, each student's birthday became a classroom event that was acknowledged in visible and audible ways.

Caroline understood that sound and the absence of sound played a pivotal role in her musical classroom environment, but sometimes these sounds were beyond her control. While observing in the room, the sounds of two clarinetists practicing etudes and band repertoire were noticeable while her music survey class worked quietly on exploring the functionality of Soundtrap and using MIDI controllers. Caroline found this to be a regularly occurring issue.

There's a door with a big window in it on the left side of the room, the south side of the room that goes straight into the band room and the band plays into that wall. The band is essentially playing straight into our room. For first, second, and third hours, that was a huge issue with sound bleed and things like that. One of the big things that I'm excited about for this construction project is that that wall will be soundproofed, and the band will be facing the other way. Hopefully, we will have a lot less or no sound bleed coming from there, which is really exciting.

Caroline was attentive to sensory elements that helped students to "feel at home" as she created her classroom space. She adjusted the lighting within the classroom. She hung a string of

colored lights that she could control with a remote from her desk and a desk lamp at the front of the room that provided muted light instead of using the overhead fluorescent lighting. She only turned on the overhead lighting when needed.

To keep us calm and keep us mindful of the space we were in and help us feel at home, I avoided using the classroom lights in the ceiling. I would usually use one or two at a time, but I also had other alternate sources of light. So having the shades up on the windows as much as possible, and I have some twinkly lights that I had on the front and back walls. Some of them change colors, some of them just were white and that kind of helped keep the environment calm.

She was also mindful about how her room smelled and how the air felt. “I had a wax burner and some room air fresheners to keep a good smell in the air...I eventually acquired a humidifier that helped the room stay nice and humid. Moist, I guess.”

Some walls in Caroline’s classroom showcased student artwork. “I had some space on the walls, and on the front shelves for student art. If they gave me anything that they were really proud of, I could display it there for them.” Caroline saw this display as an opportunity for students to take ownership of the classroom space and enhance a positive learning environment. Her students took great pride, according to Caroline, in drawing a woman in a hair wrap clothed in pictures of the various members of the choir to decorate the choir room doorway that opened to the main lobby of the school (see Figure 6.2). She hoped that after the renovation more space would be available for her students for this purpose. “I’m hoping that a lot of our wall space will be freed, so that we can do more with having students take ownership of the room, because I think that’s really important to having a good classroom environment.”

**Figure 6.2**

*Caroline's Classroom Door*



Students also showcased their musical preferences in the classroom soundscape. Her music survey class created a classroom playlist as an assignment.

Their first assignment, which I did last semester, too, is make a list of ten songs that you like and send it to me, and then I put all that music from each of them on one playlist and when they have work times and things like that we listen to that. It's just background music.

These songs were compiled in the application Spotify on a playlist that she would play through the classroom sound system while students worked independently and before and after classes.

This playlist was playing when I observed her music survey class as they put away equipment and tables and re-organized the classroom for the choir rehearsals that would take place the rest of the day.

Midway through the school year, Caroline became more attentive to her seating arrangement and how it potentially worked against student needs. She attended a clinic at the state music educators conference that inspired her to arrange the room to reflect how her students used the space.

[The presenter] talked about this concept called a desire path, where rather than forcing the user to adhere to whatever set up is already there, you allow the user to decide where things make sense to go. I had a little bit of a struggle with that until I realized that that's what was happening. Where every day I would go through and set up the chairs in neat rows, and have them in windows and make sure all the numbers were right. That was – I mean, part of that was a calming ritual for me in the morning. But then it just – it turned into a really, really big waste of energy for me...It became a big frustration for me. Going to that session, I realized, "If I have time, I can put things in order the way I want them, but if students move them, maybe it's because it works better for them."

Caroline realized that her desires for the classroom space differed from her students and that she needed to be more attentive to how her students were using the space rather than only how she perceived the classroom needed to be arranged for a class or rehearsal.

### *Classroom Environment*

In our talks together, Caroline believed that one of the strengths of the choral program at Park High School was the community that her students built. She observed:

The students are in it for the community more than anything else and that just means that they're building really, really awesome relationships with each other...I tried to be intentional about fostering [those relationships] because I think that's something that drew me to the program, that made me really want to work there. Because they care about each other, they then work really hard together, which is really awesome to see.

One way that she encouraged the development of community was through her efforts for her classroom to become an encouraging social space. Students had been displaced from the cafeteria due to renovations and many choir students came to the choir room to eat their lunch

even though Caroline was also on her lunch break. I observed students walking into her classroom before the school day to say hello to Caroline and their friends. Some would store their coats and bookbags in a storage closet at the front of the room or grab a cereal bar to eat that Caroline had available for students who wanted them.

Caroline's students created an encouraging environment for each other. During the Black History Month Concert, I saw students loudly cheering for each performance group. Students would shout out names of soloists, exclaiming, "You got this!" They raised hands and swayed as groups sang, bringing the audience into the performance and showing their peers that their music-making had an effect. Caroline acknowledged this, "Yeah. They're loud." She continued:

I know that [the former director] encouraged them to encourage each other, and they know that if people in Treble and Bass Choir feel appreciated and feel like they're doing a great job, they'll keep doing choir and then it'll keep growing. That's something that at our dress rehearsals and all of our stuff, when people get up and do solos I turn around and clap and things like that.

Caroline and her students saw encouragement as a way to sustain the health of their choir program. This supportive environment had begun before Caroline arrived, but she decided to continue to nurture its inclusion in her classroom, especially at the start of the year in her Advanced Choir. She continued a practice of creating "families" in the choir. Caroline explained:

We do a thing where we put them into families and that's a [former director] thing that we've adapted and kept going forward. We put them into families where there's two parents, two people who have been in the choir before and we do a little draft where they choose their children who are new into [the Advanced Choir]...A lot of the first couple of weeks was just group activities. Not a ton of singing, a little bit of singing.

In addition to a social space, students began to use Caroline's classroom as a space where they could escape from stressors they encountered in other places. She identified a very fresh instance where a student needed to come to her classroom:

I see it happening. Literally yesterday a student lost his uncle [and was] in a different class and said, "I need to go talk to Mrs. Victrola." One of the AP's [assistant principals] came to me while I was teaching music survey, and she said, "This student wants to come

be in your room. Is that okay? What do you want me to tell him?" I said, "Yeah, that's fine. He can come hang out in here." I'm glad that this, not even so much that I can be that person for them, but that this can be that space for them, I think is more that's how that's shifted for me. I'm glad I can be that person.

While Caroline always wanted to be an adult who students could come to, she acknowledged that her classroom community was bigger than her.

It's more about the space, because the space will be here long after I'm gone. The fact that there's still alums who come back to this space...even though I'm the teacher now, they come back and they say, "Oh, so many great things happened here. I feel so great about being here."

As the year progressed, Caroline found that she had to change the classroom environment for each of her classes rather than approaching all classes in the same manner.

With both Bass and Treble Choir, I came into them with the same mindset of, "I'm going to be a really good teacher for them, because they're at the beginning of the day. They're going to get all my energy. They are my beginner choir. I want them to have a really good foundation going into the next thing...It was almost every day, the first month or so of school, where Bass Choir would come in and follow directions, and we'd get through things so fast...Treble Choir, I would try to teach them the same way that I did Bass Choir, and it was just met with a lot of resistance, and it would take us a long time to get through things. By the time we got to actually singing music for the [first] concert, they were so over it, and they didn't want to talk to me and they were upset with me. I had spent time building relationships, but not enough time to understand that, "Oh, I have to teach you differently."

Caroline realized that her students were different in each class even if they were similarly aged and had similar choral experience. Her Bass Choir included several students enrolled in functional life skills classes, some of whom communicated nonverbally. She had other students who struggled with attention or did not come to her class consistently. Even with these students, she still found that she could work through Bass Choir rehearsals at a quicker speed than her Treble Choir, which had fewer students with diagnosed learning differences.

It took me a solid month, month and a half at the beginning of the school year to realize, "Okay, this specific Treble Choir needs a little bit of time to decompress at the beginning of a class." Now, I try to have music playing when they're coming in, give a little bit of time for them to catch up with each other. If they are hungry, try to give them a little time to eat a snack or get water or whatever it needs to be, because I found that the days where

we start class five, ten minutes after the bell, are the days when we're more productive after that.

She described when she did not give them this time:

Oh, gosh. It was like pulling teeth and herding cats. One of them would be in with me doing stuff, or ready to do stuff, and I would be trying to wrangle the others, and then the one would be like, "I'm over this. I'm out. I'm not going to get my folder, I'm not going to look up, I'm not going to put my phone away." I made a rule for myself at the beginning of the year. I was not going to write DR's [disciplinary referrals] or call home or anything for the first couple weeks, because I was still figuring stuff out. I was honest with them about that. I said, "I'm figuring this out. I'm learning how to do this still, and so let's do this together." They responded pretty well to that, but it was still, "I don't want to sing. I'm not good at singing." A lot of it was not that they were being aggressively disobedient, it just was that they were timid and they didn't feel safe yet. I had to give them the chance to tell me that, or show me that.

### *Beginning Musicians*

Caroline observed that the music department at Park High School created a space for students to be beginning musicians in band, orchestra, and choir.

We're trying to provide opportunities for people who haven't been in [music] before, whereas I think a lot of other schools' programs, you get to high school and you're expected to have a certain level of skill... There's a space for people to be beginners, and that's, I think, really special.

Caroline explained that this space for beginners has helped the music programs at Park High School grow and allowed students to have access to musical opportunities no matter their experience.

I have two choirs that are literally beginning choir, and a big reason for that is that we don't have middle school feeder programs, but even going into the next few years, having those feeder programs starting to emerge, I've had conversations with our principal about we're going to need another choir to have beginning choir so that people can still learn to do that, because it's important and it's valuable. Having those inlets for students to get plugged in at any point is so important and it's so much a part of program growth and making sure that we in a fine arts department stay relevant and keep growing and then also like allowing equal access to what we have, and then the band also has the same type of thing where they have a beginning band class that students can join.

Caroline believed that having a space for beginners was an opportunity for music education to have potential relevance to more students at Park High School rather than only those with prior experience.

### *Virtual Teaching*

When Caroline transitioned to virtual teaching due to the COVID-19 pandemic, she struggled. She believed she was starting to develop a routine as a first-year teacher. She said:

It felt like first, second, third quarter we're figuring out things out. By the end of third quarter we were – oh, things were starting to click. We were starting to...get into routines and figure out what was working for us. We weren't able to use any of those "aha" moments in fourth quarter because it didn't happen. That was really mentally straining for me, to feel like I had a lot of solutions and not be able to try them.

Instead, she found herself again experimenting and trying to teach in new ways.

Originally, Caroline hoped to do a virtual choir based on the repertoire that her students had selected before the school had suspended in-person learning.

I think originally I was planning to kind of move forward with a similar process of choosing music and starting to learn music and then wanting to put together, I had this whole vision of we're going to do a whole choir concert virtually and now I'm thinking, "Okay, for my sake, for the student's sake, we're going to simplify it."

One way she simplified her virtual teaching was that she adjusted her curriculum to be the same for all of her classes.

Our district has a policy, and I think most schools are doing this too, where we are not allowed to assign new material for grades...I got the idea from a friend...It's just like a resource hub of like different activities that they can do and I kind of adjusted it for what I know my students enjoy, and so it's got just like a ton of different ideas of things that they can do, and I'm hoping that they'll submit one a week or at least progress on one every week.

Caroline was able to spend a relatively short amount of time planning for these activities.

It has put me at a little bit more at peace because it means that I have a lot less than I need to do to keep up with things because that's just like here's a month's worth of projects all in one little thing that I made, spent three days on, and now it's out there and you get to do with it whatever want, and so now all I have to do is go in and give feedback to whatever they respond with. Then the other goal with that was that students who don't

normally engage in the classroom the way that I expect them to have a chance to do something that they're comfortable with, so there's even coloring activities in there or make a TikTok or post a song that you like.

While students had choices in how they progressed through the virtual versions of choir and music survey, Caroline found that not all students engaged in the virtual format.

I'm also starting to track who's actually engaging in this stuff that I'm posting. That was also part of the reason that I backed off from the virtual choir idea was that I was seeing that I didn't have total engagement from everybody, and so I thought I'm not going to put a ton of time and effort into this and expect everybody else to put time and effort in it. Not everybody's going to be doing it, and I can't expect them all to do it either. I would rather they do what they're comfortable with than be stressed about it.

Caroline decided to prioritize social interactions in her virtual classroom over musical content. She began to offer office hours through the virtual meeting platform Zoom each week to allow students to come to her and ask questions in a video-conferencing format rather than through email. These office hours became popular with students who had no other way to socialize with friends and classmates during quarantine. Caroline developed a series of scheduled social events including game nights and a movie night.

Actually one of those unstructured meetings evolved into us playing games. There's a game called song association where you sing a song and then somebody has to hop on and piggyback off a word that you saying and sing a new song. They said, "We should do more games."...I put out a Google poll [asking], "What do you want to do? We can play this game or this game or watch a movie or whatever." We got pretty much equal votes for game time and movie time.

During one movie night, I joined Caroline as she showed Disney's *Into the Woods*. Caroline had not seen many of her students since the transition to virtual teaching so she excitedly began to catch up with those who joined. Caroline streamed the movie through the screen-sharing function in Zoom and allowed students to remain unmuted to talk or to use the chat feature in the application if they wanted. Students watched the movie in their pajamas and ate snacks. As the evening progressed, more students joined to socialize with each other.

### *Future Ideations/Imaginings*

As Caroline expressed visions for her future at Park High School, she identified aspects of her pedagogy, classroom, and career that she wished to change. In regards to her pedagogy, Caroline wanted to improve her students' music literacy and use music to develop empathy for others. She identified music literacy as a weakness of her students as well as a weakness of her pedagogy. Caroline believed that this weakness partially arose from the lack of continuity of music education through middle school and high school.

I think a weakness kind of lies in the fact that we don't have continuous music for a lot of them all the way through their school career...so many of them have a general music class in fifth grade and then don't do anything music related in middle school. Or, they are that music kid that is doing everything in middle school and then they come to high school and either they are really great at reading music or they struggle. I think that's the biggest gap in our current program is that our students just aren't where they should be technically literacy wise.

She wanted her students to be better at reading notated music and better sight-singers. She also wanted her students to understand others through music and gain empathy for other people and cultures. She continued:

One of the most important things is music is cathartic and it's a way for us to express or it's a way for us to understand each other. I think another thing that I hope that they can take away is that we can learn about the world through music, not just other humans and building relationships, but historical events and other cultures and the way that other people do things can be learned through music. It's a place where you should feel safe and not a place where you should feel less than or like you're not enough or you have to compete with anything. It's just a place where you can come and be your best and be in a safe space.

Caroline hoped that her instruction would be relevant to students' needs. She wanted to incorporate more student choice in her curriculum and her classroom to continue as a social space. She imagined what her classroom would look like in five years:

I hope that the classrooms that I teach in are still centered on community and acceptance and helping students find their voice literally and metaphorically. I, in five years, will be continuing to explore different music that I'm not familiar with so that my students are learning things that are relevant to them or relevant to things that they should know

about. It will be a place where people gather, whether they're in class or not. That's something that I love about the space that I have been in this year.

Caroline also hoped that she would also be better equipped to respond to student behavior and attitudes. She shared that she felt as though she took more "bullshit" from her students than she should have. She mentioned, "I think they felt like they could walk all over me at the beginning of the year because I'm young, and they told me that so that made me mad. I hope that stops."

Caroline's picture of a future classroom environment included space for her to be a teacher who has mutual respect with her students.

The physical space of Caroline's classroom was changing before the next school year due to the ongoing renovation. She had spent time to seek out her administrators and architects to discuss what actually was needed in the classroom rather than what they had assumed. She wanted a classroom with more flexibility in seating arrangements and made this a priority in her discussions with decision-makers.

Some of the issues that I've had this year that will be resolved for next year is the risers in the floor will be gone. That'll give us a lot more flexibility with seating arrangements and having space to move, and work, and things like that. We're going to have a separate room for music survey that we'll have tables and things like that, so that we don't have to set those up and take them down whenever we need them.

The renovation would also include a new classroom space for her music survey class, which would allow less classroom time devoted to set up and tear down as well as allow continual student access to that equipment throughout the day.

At the end of this study, Caroline confessed that she had resigned from her position at Park High School to take a choral teaching position in her home state. Caroline lamented:

It all feels very weird. I haven't told my kids yet that I'm leaving because I'm waiting for the contract and things like that. It just was obviously not what I expected back in August, or even January. It's been weird to come to terms with the fact that the school year is actually over, and we're actually not going to see each other in person anymore.

Caroline grappled with not being able have closure with her students with whom she had grown so close since starting at Park High School. Her attachment remained so strong to Park that she blurred her future at her new position with her time at Park in our last interview. In that interview, our conversation shifted after she told me about leaving at the end of the year to her finalizing her grades for her classes. She found that she was failing multiple students because they had not shown up for a concert, and felt that this was not fair to her students.

I feel like a big reason we put such a heavy weight on concert grades, and a big reason I did, is to intimidate kids into showing up. Until I have a system figured out where they feel accountable enough to do that on their own, I'm just not really sure what else I can do. I'm sure there's a lot of community building and things like that that can happen. That's something that I need to figure out and facilitate.

Caroline reflected on her concert policy and concluded that she needed "to figure out and facilitate" more community building for her classroom. However, which classroom was she referring to? It appeared that her future plans at her new position were already being influenced by her knowledge and experiences at Park High School.

#### *Summary and Analysis of Caroline's Development of Place*

As Caroline developed her classroom as a place she created a classroom that considered student comfort. She dedicated space to allow students to have work areas as well as developed a flexible seating arrangement. She paid attention to sources of light and its intensity in her classroom. She even considered humidity levels and classroom scents in her classroom organization. Beyond their comfort, she included her students in her in-person and virtual classroom place making, which centered student socialization. Caroline perceived the music classroom to be a place that was bigger than any particular teacher because of the role that students played in the classroom environment. Caroline and her students welcomed beginning musicians in their classroom, and students developed a sense of community with each other through social gatherings and encouragement.

In her future visions of her classroom, Caroline desired to continue the community-oriented and student-centered trajectory that she had experienced in her classroom during her first year of teaching, but she also wanted to include more music literacy. However, at the conclusion of her first year of teaching, Caroline admitted that some of her approaches to her classroom environment and pedagogy were not beneficial to her or her students. She hoped to create an environment of mutual respect and desired to create policies that would benefit her students rather than penalize them.

### **Conclusion: Caroline's Journey of Place Consciousness**

Caroline's journey of place consciousness during her first year of teaching at Park High School was one that took advantage of resourceful connections and relied on student voices and knowledge. She developed connections within the DeMesne School District and community that benefitted her professional development before and throughout her first year of teaching. Due to her experience as an accompanist and her involvement in the Park High School music program, Caroline entered into her first year having knowledge of the history and the present state of the choral ensembles and music survey courses. As a result, she developed goals for her classroom soon after being hired that she immediately began to pursue. To help her work toward her goals for her classroom, she drew upon connections within the community and school district who would be able to help.

Caroline recognized that as a first year teacher who did not attend the DeMesne schools as a child that she did not know much about the school, the community, or its inhabitants. She relied on students' knowledge and perspectives to influence her pedagogical and curricular decisions. She began to incorporate student choice into the musical activities that were presented in class and asked students to choose potential repertoire to be performed in the choirs. By

including student voices in the decision-making processes of her classroom, Caroline acknowledged that she was not the only inhabitant of the classroom space. Caroline and her students together shaped and developed the classroom as a place. The choir room functioned as a social space where students strengthened their sense of community. She believed that her classroom was bigger than any particular teacher and that she needed to nurture this phenomenon. Ultimately, Caroline resigned from Park High School, leaving her students to continue their classroom community traditions without her.

## CHAPTER 7: CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

But the places themselves seem like people, rare and wonderful people.

—Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time: Swann's Way*

### Cross-Case Analysis

In this study, I sought to explore first-year music teachers' journeys of place consciousness within a new classroom, school, and community, and how they manifested this knowledge and understanding in their pedagogy. Using Greenwood's framework of critical place-conscious education (Greenwood, 2013; Gruenewald, 2003, 2008a, 2008b), I sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do first-year music teachers develop place consciousness?
2. How do first-year music teachers enact place consciousness in their pedagogical decisions?

Through this project, I developed three cases of first-year music teachers by generating data through observations, interviews, mapping, and photographs. I answered the above research questions through the compilation, analysis, and interpretation of these data. In this section I present findings in relation to each to each research question.

#### *Research Question 1*

**How do first year music teachers develop place consciousness?** First year music teachers developed place consciousness in several ways. First, the first-year music teachers in this study developed understandings of their classrooms as places through the material resources and organization of their classrooms. Each teacher remarked about the equipment, resources, and inventory that remained in their classrooms from prior music teachers and previous years. Each teacher made assumptions about the history of their music classrooms through discoveries of the contents of closets, filing cabinets, and other storage areas. They were also began to construct an

understanding of how their school and communities valued music through this uncovering of materials. For instance, Alex discovered broken and well-used instruments with other school names on them in their classroom at Beechwood, which gave them the impression that this music classroom was an after-thought and underfunded.

Second, students informed the teachers' understandings of classroom, school, and community as places. Students enlightened teachers about recent history of the music program, and what they desired to be able to do in music classes. When asked, students shared with teachers about their communities and home cultures. Both Vanesa and Caroline formed close relationships with their students. Through these relationships they were able to gain knowledge about the past and present state of the classroom, school, and community as well as develop their sociological understandings of these contexts. Alex, on the other hand, did not discuss forming relationships with their students. Their interactions with students were brief and related to classroom events. Midway through the year, Alex began to ask for student input in their general music classes at Beechwood which led to them beginning to learn about the musical lives of their students.

First-year teachers developed their place consciousness by initiating relationships and connections with their colleagues and administrators. These relationships informed teacher's sociological understandings of the school as a place, as well as help the first year teachers piece together historical aspects of their classrooms, schools, and communities. Caroline and Vanesa were able to learn about their students, their schools, and their communities through their relationships with colleagues. However through her conversations with other teachers and her administrators, Vanesa was only able to construct a vague history of the music program at Ascend rather than develop a comprehensive understanding. Caroline sought collaborative and

supportive relationships with her performing arts colleagues within Park High School and the other schools throughout the DeMesne School District. Alex did not identify their colleagues as a source of information about their classroom, school, and district contexts. Alex described only brief interactions with their colleagues.

First-year music teachers' place consciousness was sharpened through the perspectives of previous music teachers who had taught in the same contexts. Alex and Caroline relied on information provided by prior music teachers in their schools to inform their understandings of their teaching situations. Vanesa at Ascend and Alex in their role as a general music teacher at Beechwood did not or could not rely on previous teachers to inform their understandings of context in these particular teaching situations. Vanesa did not know her predecessor and could not draw on their knowledge to develop her understanding of the music program at Ascend. While Alex had contact with their predecessor and other former music teachers in the Williston Schools, they did not mention consulting the previous teacher at Beechwood Elementary to inform their understanding of their teaching context.

Parent and community organizations enlightened first year music teachers' place consciousness. Alex sought the support of their elementary band classroom from the Williston Music Boosters, which was able to provide financial support and volunteers for performances. Vanesa attended a district-wide professional development day which aided her in developing an understanding of arts programs throughout the city of Voyageur. Caroline approached the local university for advice in the development of her curriculum, and found community organizations for which the choirs could collect donations.

Finally, time and experience cultivated each teachers' place consciousness. As each teacher participated in traditions and rituals within their classrooms and schools, they developed

more in depth understandings of their teaching contexts. For Alex and Caroline, this participation began before their first year of teaching in an extended introduction to their schools—Alex from being a student, and Caroline from accompanying and working with the school musical. Through their participation in these traditions and rituals, each teacher was able to develop their sense of belonging to their teaching settings. Caroline and Alex described the influence concert preparation and performance had on their understanding of their students and classrooms. Caroline felt like an outsider until she was able to join students on a class trip. On the other hand, Vanesa’s experienced a lack of tradition and ritual within her classroom. Her first year of teaching was spent creating the traditions and rituals that would structure the program. Further, as each teacher’s first year of teaching progressed and they collected experiences, their developing place consciousness began to bring them comfort as they were able to prepare and predict for potentialities within their surroundings. When each teacher was forced to transition to virtual classroom and school spaces, they felt disorientation and confusion. Each expressed having to begin again in learning about their teaching contexts. Those who attempted to treat their virtual spaces in the same manner as their in-person teaching spaces encountered frustration and discovered their teaching practices unsustainable. They had to reinvent their virtual spaces as a learning community with little transfer from the classroom spaces they had experienced previously.

### *Research Question 2*

**How do first-year music teachers enact place consciousness in their pedagogical decisions?** The first-year teachers in this study enacted their place consciousness in their pedagogical decisions by performing specific roles within their teaching contexts. They began to center students in their classroom organization, environment, and curricula. They pursued

communitarian aims within their classrooms. They developed and maintained classroom rituals and traditions, but sought to change those they found to misalign with their understanding of place. When pedagogical decisions were made prior to developing place consciousness, teachers struggled with disorientation.

The first-year music teachers performed roles that emerged and were expressed mostly within the classroom context rather than at a school or community level. Alex acted as an expert on program traditions and musical knowledge in their classrooms and across the music department. Vanesa acted as a cheerleader for her students' music progress and personal achievement, but also perceived her role to be a gate-keeper for many of their instrumental music experiences. Her gregarious nature led her to becoming a beloved presence to the students and staff throughout the school. Caroline expressed that her role was a facilitator of musical experiences within the classroom and acted as a support for her students' musical experiences outside of her classroom. At the school level, Caroline initiated mutually supportive relationships with her colleagues within the performing arts faculty.

Within their classrooms, each first-year teacher considered comfort and student engagement in the organization of their classrooms. Alex and Vanesa spent considerable time before the start of the school year cleaning their classrooms and inventorying resources and instruments. Caroline adjusted lighting, humidity, and scent of her classroom. Each teacher incorporated student artwork on their classroom walls and believed it gave ownership of the space to students. Each teacher also expressed a desire to add more student artwork in the future to their classroom spaces. Vanesa and Caroline thoughtfully considered how to arrange student seating for their classes to find a balance between students working together on activities and individually focusing on their own musical work. Caroline started using student "desire paths"

by allowing her students to re-arrange the classroom furniture to suit their social and musical needs.

The teachers in this study shifted attention from their own needs as teachers to the needs of their students as they developed their place consciousness. They began to center students in their choices of classroom activities. Caroline accepted that her students were a central part to her classroom as a place and began to consult them in classroom decision making and place making. She began to show a propensity toward cultural responsive and democratic teaching practices, which both center on student voices and knowledge. Both Caroline and Vanesa recognized the importance that community played in the development of their classroom spaces and included community building and socialization as a part of their teaching approaches. Alex acknowledged that they ignored the aspect of community in their teaching during their first year and wished to find ways to incorporate it in the future.

Each teacher continued traditions and rituals that existed within their classroom previously. Alex held program traditions with importance and acted as an executor to others when they were unaware of their existence. Caroline witnessed the benefits that traditions held within the Park High School program and recognized that her classroom as a place was bigger than her. Vanesa had little knowledge of prior program and classroom traditions and rituals. Of those that she was able to access, she chose to not follow since they had had little success in previous years. Instead, Vanesa developed rituals with her approach to teaching that could perhaps evolve into traditions if she chose them to continue.

Each teacher recognized traditions that existed within their classrooms that they wished to change as they developed their place consciousness. Some of these changes were enacted immediately, but others were negotiated carefully as they considered their classrooms as places.

Caroline was able to begin the year with curricular change due to her prior year of experiences. She began to incorporate more student choice in activities and musical repertoire compared to the previous year. Alex drew on their experiences as a student in Williston to determine that a more diverse and inclusive approach to music education was needed at Washington and Beechwood. They injected aspects of social justice into their pedagogical choices immediately. However, they were hesitant to quickly move away from a performance oriented curriculum in their band classroom due to long-standing program traditions. Vanesa approached potential change in her pedagogy for the upcoming year incrementally since she continued to experience constraints from and tensions with her school's administration.

Alex and Vanesa implemented curricula from published and commercially available sources without taking into consideration the sociological dimensions of their classrooms. Consequentially, they both experienced disorientation. At Washington, traditional band approaches using published materials appeared to work for Alex because this approach had existed for years within the Williston band program. However, Alex's students at Beechwood communicated displeasure with the use of these materials in the class, struggling to find their relevance. As a result, Alex began to readjust their pedagogical approaches and incorporate more student interests into lessons rather than relying only on written materials. Like Alex, Vanesa approached band instruction using traditional approaches. Vanesa acknowledged differences between her enacted curriculum and her students' musical lives, but felt that her students did not have the technical capabilities to bridge that difference. Regardless of her curricular choices, she had developed close relationships with her students.

When instruction transitioned to online and virtual learning spaces from physical schools and classrooms, each teacher experienced disorientation and praxis shock at heightened levels.

Each teacher unsuccessfully attempted to maintain their classroom environment and curriculum with as few alterations as possible. Each teacher found their approaches to pedagogy, curriculum, and classroom culture had to be modified as their original conceptions were unsustainable in their virtual classrooms. All three struggled with the changes to the virtual modality and expressed trying to “get through” until the end of the year.

## **Discussion**

### *Praxis Shock During the First Year of Music Teaching*

Due to their emerging place consciousness, the first-year music teachers in this study did not always have sufficient knowledge of their teaching contexts before implementing pedagogical decisions. The literature suggests that in these instances of misalignment, the teachers in this study would experience praxis shock (Ballantyne, 2007a, 2007b; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). While I identified multiple moments of tension between each teacher’s pedagogical choices and their experienced environment, I did not find many moments of praxis shock which “shattered” these first-year teachers’ perspectives and caused them to focus on their survival within their classrooms (Ballantyne, 2007a, p. 181). Instead, the first-year teachers in this study relayed stories of episodes that appeared more like “firecrackers,” and each were resourceful as they found ways to overcome these moments of pedagogical tension. Often, they found ways to thrive within their teaching. The extraordinary exception to this finding was when each teacher transitioned into virtual teaching. This moment was truly a moment of shock to each teacher’s practice, and each teacher, in their own way, entered into varied degrees of survival.

Carlsen (1999) noted the “edge effect” that beginning teachers have as they transition from students to teachers as they move from one educational context to another (p. 141). He stated that this period would be interesting to study how beginning teachers develop their

contextual understandings as they meld their prior and current teaching and learning experiences and manifest their teaching knowledge in different ways in different places. Because of when this research study occurred during the first year of teaching, each teacher looked back on moments of difficulty or success and were able to share the results of their decision making. Perhaps if this study had occurred at the beginning of the school year, the teachers in this study may have shared more uncertainty in their classroom situations, and praxis shock may have been more prominent.

With the exception of the period of virtual teaching, the beginning music teachers in this study displayed characteristics that would align better with an assets-based approach rather than one that focused on their inexperience and potential deficits. Kelchtermans (2019) proposed that early career teachers may act as empowered agents, networkers, and assets in their teaching contexts. Beginning teachers arrive to their new teaching contexts with beliefs about good education and the teachers they want to be from their prior teaching experiences and preservice education. They begin to make sense of their teaching contexts through social interactions. They will demonstrate preferences with whom they will develop closer relationships and from whom they will seek information, as they act like a networker in their teaching contexts,. Lastly, beginning teachers can make valuable contributions to the school and to the community. They bring knowledge of contemporary educational teaching theory and practice given their recent preservice teacher education experiences. They may bring with them a new perspective that can question or critically examine their classroom and school contexts. The teachers in this study displayed dimensions of this framework in their first year of teaching as they enacted curricular change, sought resourceful connections, and offered skills and knowledge that could better their classrooms, schools, and communities.

### *Development of Teacher Knowledge and Place Consciousness*

In the cases of Alex and Vanesa, the context of the fields of band and music education, named as the “macro level” context by Bresler (1998), sometimes overpowered their classroom, school, and community contexts. Similar to Bresler’s findings, even though Alex and Vanesa had the autonomy to make their own curricular decisions to align with their specific teaching circumstances, they relied on broad traditions within the field of band and music education to inform their curriculum and pedagogical approaches. Their reliance on subject matter knowledge (Grossman, 1990; Shulman, 1987) overshadowed other forms of teacher knowledge, especially as they continued to teach lessons focused on notation, specifically rhythmic notation. Vanesa, especially, had the freedom within their teaching context to approach instrumental music education in a manner that diverged from traditional approaches to be tailored to her student needs, but instead continued to pursue a form of band with which they were already familiar. Caroline expressed that she needed to focus in the future more on musical literacy, specifically to develop sight singing skills, demonstrating that she was also influenced by the traditional approaches in the context of the field of music education.

Alex and Caroline discussed developing their curricula for their general music classes and music survey class respectively. Schwab (1973) identified four commonplaces that serve as heuristics for looking in on classrooms: the milieu, the learner, the teacher, and the subject matter. Alex pursued resources from educational psychology, the state music standards, and consulted colleagues to develop activities for their general music curriculum. Missing from their research and development were the learners and the milieu, especially as they adopted published curricular materials. When the learners and the milieu were taken into consideration for music activities, Alex found more success in their teaching and more participation from their students.

Caroline, on the other hand, shaped her music survey curriculum around student interests and sought resources in the community to help her develop a more student-centered curriculum. As a result, she expressed finding more success in engaging the students in her classroom.

Alex and Caroline consulted colleagues within the field as they developed their curricula. Carlsen (1999) noted a likelihood that teachers' conceptions of subject matter "will be subordinated to the conception of more powerful experts" (p. 139). According to Carlsen, who the teachers in this study consulted and looked toward for information within the field was more important than the subject matter itself since these people will inform their conception of teacher knowledge. Alex consulted past teachers at Washington Elementary school as she developed her band curriculum, but relied on sources outside of the Beechwood community for her general music classes. Caroline consulted colleagues at the middle school level, the sibling high school, and the university as she pieced together her curricula. Vanesa felt as though she had no one to consult and relied on her prior knowledge and past band experiences.

Each model of teacher knowledge, Shulman (1987), Grossman (1990), and Carlsen (1999), placed subject matter knowledge beside or within the domains of teaching context. However, in the cases of each teacher in the study, the context of the field of music education and its traditions rose above other contextual understandings and shaped each teachers' understandings of place and their place making. Campbell, Thompson, and Barrett (2021) presented a model of schooling that embedded the music classroom within the school culture which in turn is embedded within music education a profession and then society at large. This embedded circles model aligns with Carlsen's model of teaching knowledge but demonstrates the influence that subject matter or disciplinary knowledge has on the development of contextual knowledge and place consciousness.

Apprenticeship in education is usually attributed to Lortie's (1975) apprenticeship of observation when beginning teachers mimic pedagogy they encountered as a student without understanding their former teachers' decision making. Caroline, in an unusual situation, was able to experience an apprenticeship of teaching, student teaching within the district in which she would be employed and then working alongside the teacher she would replace. Lortie expressed that an apprentice model would promote a conservative approach to teaching practice. While Caroline originally replicated similar approaches that her predecessor used, she enacted change as soon as she found them to be ineffective for her particular classroom and program goals. She demonstrated an openness to her classroom and school contexts that Field and Latta (2001) and Powell (2019) encouraged. Alex relied on their past experiences as a student as they enacted pedagogical decisions at Washington and Beechwood. They were conservative in their teaching practice as they sought to uphold program traditions. Their approach to their classrooms aligned with Grossman's (1990) statement that beginning teachers who rely on apprenticeships of observation may draw on memories of themselves as students in shaping expectations for their students. In the second half of the year, Alex began to realize that their students were not all like when they were a student and began to adjust their teaching.

#### *Place, Critical Place-Conscious Education, and Music Education*

Alex was the only teacher to use a geographic or demographic label, such as rural, suburban, or urban, to describe their teaching context. Neither Vanesa or Caroline labelled their contexts as urban even though they both taught in cities according the U.S. Census and NCES. Each teacher, including Alex, described the particulars of their teaching contexts rather than generalizing them in comparison to others. These teachers focused on their classrooms, schools, and communities as places. In this study, I defined place using Stauffer's (2012) definition, "a

nexus – a synthesis – of time, space, and experience” (p. 436). I translated this definition to suggest that a place emerges through a person’s collective experience of a defined space through and across time. The first-year teachers’ experiences within their classrooms, schools, and communities were central to this study as I explored how they developed their place consciousness. By conducting this study at the end of the school year, each teacher was able to reflect back on several months of teaching and discuss their increasing understanding of place (Tuan, 1977); teachers were also able to demonstrate “rootedness” (Relph, 1976, p. 37) to their teaching situations. This rootedness developed through each teacher’s development of relationships to others in their teaching contexts and to the physical environment of their classrooms, schools, and communities. Further, rootedness could also be interpreted as “belonging,” as each teacher was included as a central authority and decision maker in their classroom.

Greenwood blended the cultural functions of place with its ecological features in his framework of critical place-conscious education (Gruenewald, 2003). He forwarded five dimensions of place that shape teachers’ and students’ understandings of place: perceptual, sociological, ideological, political, and ecological. These dimensions aided in the interpretation of data, as I sought to explore how each teacher developed their understandings of place. However, not all dimensions were present in the findings and not all teachers appeared to approach their understandings of these dimensions critically. All teaching is contextually driven but the critical approach to the teaching context distinguishes critical place-conscious education from other educational approaches. The criticality in each teachers’ place consciousness may have been missing due to the inaugural experiences each teacher was having with their teaching contexts or perhaps my interview protocols did not adequately probe deep enough to discover

their critical thinking. Sociological dimensions of place appeared frequently in each teacher's journeys of place consciousness, especially as they discussed their students and their musical interests. Ideological and political dimensions of place were present, but were more difficult to parse because of the limited time that each teacher had been active within their schools and communities. These dimensions were most present in Alex's first year of teaching since they had historical ties with their community and music program. They were able to identify how local thought and politics shaped their understandings of place and place making. Perceptual understandings of place were uncommon due to the cognitive nature of perception and the limitations of this study. However, Caroline put into practice her perceptual understandings of place as she attempted to make her classroom comfortable for her and her students. Perceptual understandings beyond the classroom did not appear in the data. Noticeably absent in the data was the ecological dimension of place. Instead, data from each case showed relationships with the built environment, such as their classrooms and schools. The built environment was absent from Greenwood's conception of the five dimensions of place but was included in his broader descriptions of the influences of place. Perhaps if the study had continued for a longer period of time, ecological dimension of place would have emerged in each teachers' place consciousness, especially since music education scholars have begun to identify and suggest ways that ecology and the natural environment may influence music teaching and learning (Bates, Shevock & Prest, 2021; Shevock, 2017; Shevock & Bates, 2019).

Greenwood's framework of critical place-conscious education attempts to balance the cultural aspect of places with the environmental. He proposed that a critical pedagogy of place is both culturally and place-responsive education (Gruenewald, 2008b). As a result, the appearance of emerging practices reminiscent of pedagogical paradigms related to cultural difference, such

as culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014) and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002, 2010; Lind & McKoy, 2016) would be expected when teachers practice place consciousness. Caroline named culturally responsive pedagogy and demonstrated an emerging form of it in her practice. She began to address student needs within her specific teaching context aligning with Bannerman's (2016) and Shaw's (2015) recommendations of contextually responsive and culturally responsive pedagogy. However, Vanesa had yet to discover how to incorporate student interests and needs into her curricula, and Alex had only accomplished this in a limited manner. Shevock (2016) and Stauffer (2012) discussed the potential uprooting or placelessness of music education when cultural and environmental understandings are ignored. Alex and Vanesa implemented placeless curricula as they ignored sociological and cultural dimensions of their teaching contexts. They also enacted a "place-bound" curricula by holding to traditions of music and band education through their narrow vision of what band education is or could be (Stauffer, 2012).

As place-conscious music teachers address cultural and environmental aspects of place within their curriculum and pedagogy, they begin to acknowledge and incorporate local musicians and localized forms of music making (Ball & Lai, 2006; Bates, 2011; Matsunobu, 2018). None of the teachers in this study had begun to incorporate local music making and musicians into their classrooms. However, Caroline had begun to reach out to community organizations such as ELEVATE that her students could support, and Vanesa had participated in a professional development day that connected her to local arts organizations. Their knowledge of local arts and community organizations could potentially lead to the inclusion of localized music practices in the future. Caroline acknowledged the potential that the music taught in her classroom to teach empathy and appreciation for other peoples and cultures. The music

classroom can act as “beginning point” (Somerville 2010, p. 331) to inform, or spiral outward, discussion about broader and more global musical perspectives, and in turn spiral inward global knowledge to inform local experiences (Bates, 2014; Greenwood, 2013; Gruenewald, 2003).

As the teachers in this study began to build relationships with their students and others, they began to ask questions of “who” and “where” in their pedagogy and curricula. These questions align with Stauffer’s transference of critical place-conscious education to music education (2009, 2012, 2016). However, the teachers in this study did not always reflect *critically* on questions of “who” and “where,” especially in regards to the traditions that they chose to continue. The teachers in this study were reflective about their teaching and experiences in their first year, but they may have been still processing and making sense of their first year. As a result, they may have been unable to reflect critically on their experiences and teaching contexts. Alex and Caroline both chose to continue the *status quo* in their classrooms. While they recognized that certain pedagogical and classrooms traditions, especially Alex in their band classroom, may marginalize their students, none acknowledged the hegemonic potential of the traditions they upheld. For instance, by upholding the 6th Grade Band Night, Alex prioritized marching band over other types of instrumental music making. By critically reflecting on “who” and “where,” teachers address the needs of their students and their sociocultural environment (Stauffer, 2009, 2012). Stauffer stated, “A critical pedagogy of place for music, then, might be grounded in consideration of *socio-musical* places” (p. 443, emphasis added). Caroline began to cultivate her classroom as a socio-musical place through her attention to student musical interests. She found that her students became more engaged with the music making in their classroom as they identified relevance to their lives. This finding aligns with Dahle Huff (2015), who found a similar student response when a teacher incorporated students’ lived experiences in

an English classroom. Alex and Vanesa demonstrated few attempts to incorporate student musical interests and culture into their classrooms.

Another component of critical place-conscious education is seeking answers to the questions, “What is happening here? What happened here? What should happen here?” (Gruenewald, 2008b, p. 318). Alex and Caroline were able to find answers to the historical aspect of their programs which better informed their current experiences of place and their decision making for its future. However, Vanesa did not have access to the historical dimension of place and was uncertain about its future resulting in her only being able to concentrate on the present state of place. These teachers drew on many different sources to help them to answer these questions. An article I wrote (Schaller 2019) recommended that teachers map their surroundings to answer Greenwood’s critical questions of place consciousness stated above. In this framework, teachers map the physical environs, the experiential components that exist within and outside of their classrooms, and the historical and future dimensions of their classrooms. While the teachers in this study were only asked to map the physical space of their classrooms, other parts of this framework appeared. The teachers developed connections within their classroom as they gained perspectives from their students and became a part of the classroom culture. They also developed connections outside of their classrooms that included community members and colleagues. Each teacher also demonstrated historical knowledge about their classrooms and could articulate visions for the future.

#### *Place Making and Music Education*

When teachers answer and act upon the question “what should happen here?” they become place-makers. They decide how a place is developed, used, and what and who is in place and out of place (Gruenewald, 2003). Out of necessity, the music teachers in this study made

place making decisions before the first day of school and with varying levels of place consciousness. Alex and Vanesa were tasked with developing curricula before they had met their students. They spent time organizing the classroom space and inventorying instruments and equipment. They decorated their rooms to create a learning environment suited to the assumed needs of their instruction and students. Unlike many first year teachers, Caroline began making many place-making decisions at Park High School the year before and before the previous teacher had retired. Caroline also began to make place-making decisions for her future position when she discussed her approach to grading concerts at Park. Her place-making decisions became fuzzy as she began to simultaneously talk about re-orienting her grading policies for Park High School and at her new position, indicating that her experiences at Park would influence her place-making at her new position.

A finding of this study was that place making, or the decisions and actions made in response to their contextual knowledge, was more significant than the teachers' actual place consciousness. In some situations, the place-making decisions that teachers made conflicted with their place consciousness. For instance, Vanesa developed close relational knowledge of her students and her teaching context, but instead of tailoring pedagogical and curricular decisions in response to this knowledge of place, she chose to pursue aims that were aligned with a traditional approach to band education.

Part of place making is creating and maintaining cultural significance for communities of people (Greenwood, 2013; Gruenewald, 2003). Spring (2014) labeled this as the communitarian role of music teachers. Caroline recognized the centrality that community-building activities held in her classroom and sought to encourage their continuance through her pedagogical decisions. Vanesa created a classroom space that encouraged students to share positive emotions with her

and each other. Alex recognized that they had avoided building a community in their classroom and hoped that they would reorient their classroom toward community-building in the future.

When the teachers in this study became conscious of their role as place-makers, they also became aware of their power to create and shape the meaning and experiences that their students have with places (Allsup, 2003; Gruenewald, 2003; Woodford, 2005). This power can become hegemonic or shared with their students through democratic ideals (Gruenewald, 2003). Caroline included her students in classroom place-making decisions as she began to decenter her role as a conductor, allowing students to choose classroom activities and repertoire. Similar to the science students in Schindel-Dimick's (2016) study, Caroline's students cared about the past, present, and future aspects of their surroundings and desired to improve them for the better. Vanesa used her power to decide how musical instruments were to be learned and chose the repertoire, especially as she believed what students would like to play was too difficult. However, when her students learned their favorite music and brought their knowledge into the music classroom to teach others, they joined Vanesa in place-making decisions for their classroom, but not in a collaborative manner. Alex initially aligned her classroom activities and decision making to a pre-published curriculum that they and their students did not always enjoy. They also used their power as a place-maker to attempt to rudimentarily inject social justice activism into their teaching, which is reminiscent of Hess' (2019) work with activist music educators. Recognizing the power between music educators and places, Hess wrote about how music educators can make changes in their communities through critical pedagogy and activism.

The central purpose of music educators is to create places with and through music in cooperation with their students (Matsunobu, 2018; Stauffer, 2012). The music educator has a distinct power to connect students, families, school faculty and staff, community members,

performers, audience members, and others to places through meaningful music-making (Matsunobu, 2018; Thomson et al., 2015). I was only able to witness one event where these various stakeholders in the music program were brought together during this study and it was during the Black History Month concert at Park High School. When Caroline asked the audience to stand and sing “Lift Every Voice and Sing” with the Park High School choirs at their concert, she experienced overwhelming emotion as she felt the connection that this music making experience created at that particular moment and place.

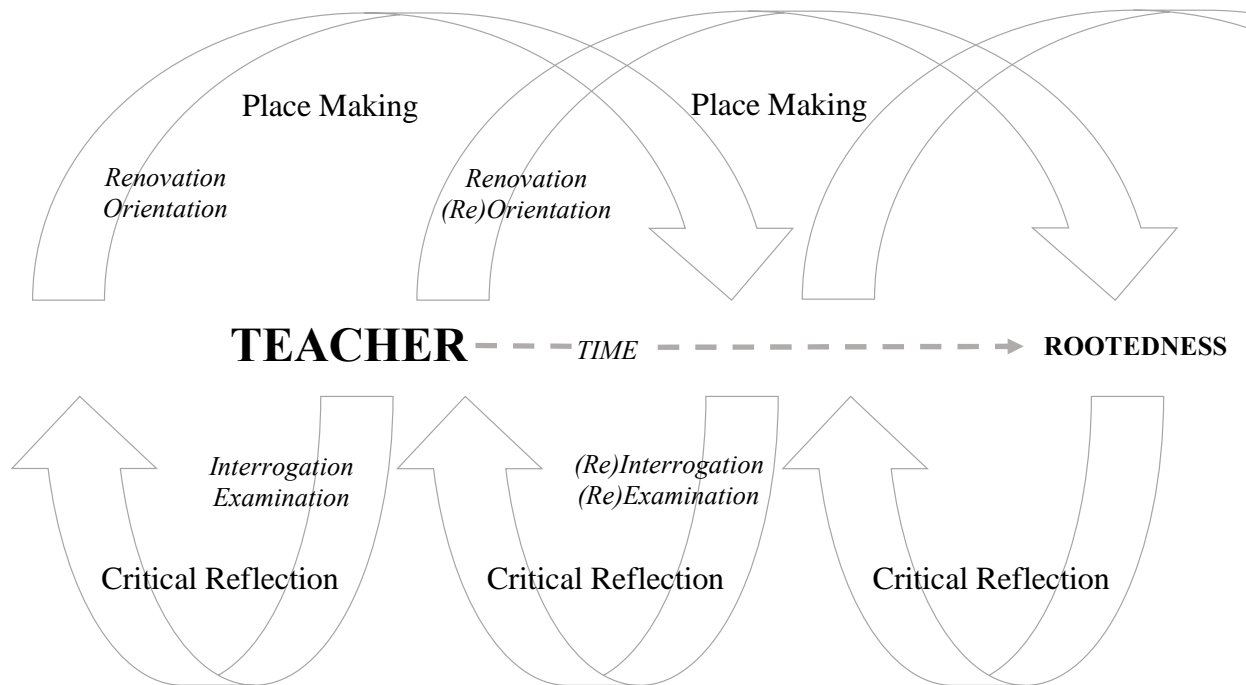
*Critical Place Making: A Descriptive Model to Address Criticisms of Critical Place-Conscious Education*

Through this study, I discovered that while place consciousness can aid teachers in developing a stronger and relevant curriculum and pedagogy for their students and communities, it is the enaction rather than the identification (see Figure 2.1) of teachers’ understandings of place which creates and holds the most pedagogical potential. Greenwood (2013; Gruenewald 2008b) used the terms “decolonization” and “reinhabitation” as the action-oriented portion of critical place-conscious education. I found these terms problematic as I generated and analyzed my data, especially since I could not identify any colonizer/settler relationships nor were indigenous knowledge or people included. Further, Greenwood’s model was intended for all classroom situations and not necessarily music classrooms. His model does not adequately address the longitudinal aspect of a music program, the prolonged contact music teachers have with specific groups of students, or its potential cultural value to a community. The teachers in this study participated in place-making activities as soon as they were hired for their teaching positions, and they immediately had to make evaluative choices on the traditions and rituals that had been put in place by their predecessors and the expectations of their schools and

communities. As they continued through their first-year of teaching, their place-making decisions became more reflective and thoughtful. Drawing on these criticisms, the experiences of the teachers in this study, and the generated data, I developed the following descriptive model of “critical place making” (See Figure 7.1).

**Figure 7.1**

*A Descriptive Model of Critical Place Making*



This model conveys the place-making potential of teachers, even teachers with little experience, as agents of change and influence within their classrooms, schools, and communities. Starting at the present state of their “place,” teachers might practice reflection of their surroundings using Greenwood’s (2013; Gruenewald, 2008b) critical questions of place by interrogating and examining its present state and history including its political, ideological, and sociological dimensions. The level to which a teacher conducts this reflection critically informs

their place consciousness. Then, they identify aspects of their places that should be preserved, conserved, sustained, changed, and created. Teachers enact their understandings of place through place making by orienting their decisions to better align with their understandings of the cultural and environmental dimensions of their classroom, school, and community contexts. As teachers continue to develop their place consciousness over time and develop rootedness in their teaching environment, they might continue a recursive cycle of critical reflection and place making by re-interrogating and re-examining the relationship of their curricula and pedagogy with their contextual understandings and enacting change through re-orientation and renovation rather than maintaining the *status quo*. This recursive process addresses the evolving state of places and the need to adapt to the changing needs and assets of its inhabitants, especially students.

In certain situations, the teachers in this study can be observed working within this model. When Caroline was an accompanist at Park High School, she examined and began interrogating practices. She noticed that the choral students would look at their music only a few times and then ignore it in future rehearsals claiming that they were already prepared for a performance. She reflected on this situation and determined that pedagogical practices should be renovated and re-oriented to engage students in their musical learning. She decided to include student input and suggestions in the selection of repertoire. She found success with most of her ensembles but not all, so she re-examined her approach to this process for the next concert cycle and began enacting changes to her pedagogy and the classroom environment as needed.

Sometimes this model can be enacted in a potentially problematic manner. Early in the year, Alex regretfully chose a piece for their band to perform that they later deemed to inappropriately perpetuate Latin-American music stereotypes. They reflected on this choice and decided that they should program a Latin-American piece by a Latin-American composer for the

following year. However, they did not critically interrogate their choice to determine if it was an authentic Latin-American piece of music, and instead assumed its authenticity and appropriateness because the composer was Latin-American.

A counter example to this model was the choice of Vanesa to enact traditional approaches to band education in her teaching context despite their place consciousness. While she developed close relationships to her students and displayed knowledge of their musical interests, she did not critically examine or interrogate her approach to teaching band or music education. Instead, she made place-making decisions that pursued traditional aims of band education such as technical skills and performance. The availability of equipment, resources, space, and scheduling made pursuing these aims more difficult than if she had decided to critically interrogate traditional approaches to band education and enacted place-making decisions that were better aligned with her teaching context. Her choices made the development of a sense of place or rootedness through music more difficult for her and her students.

## **Implications**

In this study, each first-year teacher's journey of place consciousness illuminated how they developed understandings of their classroom, school, and community contexts as well as how they implemented their place consciousness into their pedagogical decisions. Based on the data, extant literature, my experiences with each teacher, and my experiences in music education and music teacher education, I propose implications for music education practice, music teacher educators, and music education researchers.

### *Implications for Practice*

Music teachers who enter into new teaching contexts need to recognize the multi-dimensional aspects of place and that their role is one that is collaborative with others in their

classrooms, schools, and communities. Similar to Caroline's philosophical positioning and Noah in VanDeusen's (2016) study, teachers should approach the places where they teach with humility and acknowledge that others may have differing or deeper knowledge of the places they inhabit. Drawing on the experiences of the teachers in this study and my own as a teacher, I recognize that the development of place consciousness is an ongoing process and not something that is ever fully attained, contrary to how Greenwood's (2013; Gruenewald, 2003) framework of place consciousness might be interpreted. Knowledge of place occurs over time; teachers will grow more rooted in their surroundings the longer they remain in their teaching contexts (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977). Teachers will develop a more nuanced version of place consciousness as they build relationships with students and their families and colleagues. This nuanced version of place aligns with Fitzpatrick's (2008) portrayal of distinct teaching contexts even within the same city. Instead of relying on the generalized conceptions of rural, suburban, and urban, teachers need to ask their students and colleagues questions about their surroundings and seek information about the history of their classrooms, programs, schools, and communities. The answers they receive will develop a multi-dimensional perspective of their teaching contexts and aid in their future curricular and pedagogical decision making.

Beginning music teachers must also move beyond the four walls of their music classroom and engage with teachers and staff in other parts of the building. For some music teachers, mingling with others and moving beyond their classroom environs may need to be an intentional and purposeful action rather something that occurs naturally. Often music rooms are located at extreme ends of the school building such as Alex's classroom at Washington which was a four-minute walk from the school's main office or within departmental wings such as Caroline's classroom at Park. Students' educational lives do not exist in disciplinary silos, but come

together in an interdisciplinary manner (Barrett, in preparation). Consequently, the music classroom should not exist as an isolated entity in the school building. Teachers should collaborate with one another in the education of students. In addition to collaboration, the perspectives of non-music colleagues throughout the building can inform teachers about how their music classroom is perceived by others, as well as how others experience and perceive the school and community as places (Schaller, 2019).

Often generic approaches to music education are presented by music teacher educators as “best practices” to music teachers and can be interpreted as suitable for any teaching context. These generic approaches to music education can prevent music teachers from appropriately responding to their knowledge of place and enacting critical place conscious pedagogical decisions. Music teachers must adapt the teacher knowledge that they develop in their course work, field work, and professional development and adapt it to their particular context. Successes with one particular group of students in one music classroom, school and community may not be equally successful or successful at all with another. Drawing on the descriptive model of Critical Place Making above, music teachers should critically reflect on the pedagogical practices they wish to use within their teaching contexts by examining and interrogating their pedagogy and curricula before they enact place making decisions. Teachers cannot remain stagnant in their approaches. They need to continually examine the places where they are teaching as students change and communities evolve and critically reflect on existing traditions and practices before they enact place making decisions.

Music teachers, alongside their students, have the ability as place makers to benefit the continuing evolving cultural and musical practices and traditions of their communities. Like the community-minded teachers in Spring’s (2014) study, music teachers in their roles as facilitators

of cultural experiences need to move beyond the walls of the school and into their students' communities where they can build relationships with community artists. As noted by Bates (2011) and Kruse (2014), music teachers need to search for and include in their classrooms forms of music making that exist within their students' communities. Likewise, music teachers and their students should explore the historical manner in which music has been created, performed, and shared within their communities to recover and acknowledge potentially lost but valuable musical knowledge such as that of the historical and indigenous inhabitants.

Music teachers, especially beginning music teachers, should embrace the agency they have as place makers within their classrooms, schools, and communities (Kelchtermans, 2019). Even with only the teaching experience from their preservice teacher education, music teachers have the ability to enact positive change for their students and their families, colleagues, and the community through musical experiences. While positive experiences can be accomplished through music curricula that focuses on skills and performance, opportunities for meaningful interactions with other dimensions of music making and their relationship to place would be lost. Teachers should seek to center students interests and their cultures into curricula and pedagogy (Shaw, 2015). By doing so, music teachers will be able to enact change in a potentially mutually beneficial manner. By including students interests and voices in place-making decisions, music teachers may help students learn more about themselves and their surroundings, in turn, helping them to develop their sense of place and their roles within it.

#### *Implications for Music Teacher Education*

Scholars have previously mentioned the need for teachers to become culturally and contextually responsive to their teaching environment (Bannerman, 2016; Shaw, 2015; Spring, 2014). I echo their sentiment but recognize the challenge that brings to music teacher education.

Music teacher educators cannot possibly prepare students for every and any potential teaching situation though they may try through broad conceptions of rural, urban, and suburban. Instead, music teacher educators might encourage a disposition or orientation toward the development of place consciousness in preservice teacher education programs. Similar to how culturally responsive pedagogical practices are presented (Lind & McKoy, 2016; Shaw 2015), music teacher educators can help future teachers see place-conscious teaching in practice by locating teachers who exemplify its practice. Case studies of music teaching, such as those in this study, could be used and examined through a lens of developing place consciousness. Music teacher educators can also assist develop teachers in cultural asset mapping techniques to locate local musicians and sites of music making that could aid in the development of place-conscious curricula (Beaulieu, 2002; Schaller, 2019)

Music teacher educators can help empower future music educators by helping them realize that they will have agency within their future teaching contexts rather than victimized by them (Campbell, Thompson, & Barrett, 2021; Kelchtermans, 2019). Survival narratives of the beginning years of teaching are often passed on to future teachers rather than stories of success. The teachers in this study encountered struggles in their first year of teaching, but they all did much more than survive. In some ways, they actually thrived. By helping future music teachers recognize their power as change agents and place makers, music teacher educators can also help future music educators to utilize their power with respect, restraint, and humility. I recall my own experience as a first year music teacher who was excited to begin my career and enter my classroom independent from daily close oversight. My pride and enthusiasm sometimes overshadowed the needs of my students and community. However, like the teachers in this study, I was able to enact positive change for my students in spite of my hubris. The teachers in this

study did not often share their negative teaching experiences, but I suspect more occurred than they shared. I recognize and have witnessed teachers, including in my own teaching experience, who have enacted negative and harmful change because of their arrogance. The cautionary tale that music teacher educators share should be one of pride rather than struggle.

A tension arose between subject matter knowledge and contextual knowledge in the findings of this study (Carlsen, 1999; Grossman, 1990; Shulman, 1977). This tension was most apparent in the case of Vanesa as she could not reconcile her understanding of her students' musical needs and interests with her understanding of music education and band. Music teacher educators should continue to encourage preservice teachers to view music education as a flexible and evolving medium, a "living tradition" (Allsup, 2016; Hansen, 2001), and avoid one-size-fits-all approaches or "best practices." This living tradition can be especially be observed as virtual modalities and spaces are increasingly being used for music education, especially as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Music teacher educators should encourage music teachers to critically reflect on the places where they teach as described above in the Critical Place Making model and enact place making decisions that align with the critical questions of place. Places are particularistic and diverse just like the people within them. The music education that occurs within these places should be just as particularistic and diverse. While music teacher educators can provide guidelines or structure for practice, they should encourage beginning music teachers to remain open and flexible to possibilities and be inventive to what music making could exist in their teaching contexts (Allsup, 2016). As I observed, the teachers in this study fell back on what they knew and had experienced in their own music education. Often they relied on lessons prioritizing reading staff notation and rhythms. To accomplish an aim of openness and possibility, music teacher educators need to seek to include vernacular and informal music

practices along with *imaginative* approaches to traditional Western art music practices in their teaching methods courses.

### *Implications for Music Education Research*

This study sought to answer questions about how first year music teacher educators developed place consciousness and how it manifested in their pedagogy. As this study progressed, further questions arose alongside implications for future research. Due to the particularity of place, further studies of place consciousness as a phenomena are warranted in music education. The teachers in this study taught in three school districts within central Illinois, but a study that examined teaching experiences in other geographic locations would help to illuminate the multi-faceted and multi-dimensional aspects of place and its relationship to music teaching and learning. Further research into place and place consciousness in music education would help illuminate when and where “place” might be a better approach to educational thought rather than the geographic and demographic labels of rural, suburban, and urban.

Critical place-conscious education has only been used as a lens to interpret data in studies, including this one, and has not been studied in practice. Studies of how critical place-conscious education is intentionally put into practice by teachers in various subject areas and disciplines, not just music education, are needed. I believe there are valuable insights to be gained from place-conscious educational approaches, but empirical research is needed to collect and examine them.

Place consciousness develops through time (Tuan, 1977). Observing and studying the “edge effect” (Carlsen, 1999) that beginning music teachers have specifically as they transition from student teaching to their first position would provide a different portrayal of first-year music teachers’ development of place consciousness and place making. It would also be

appropriate to conduct longitudinal or ethnographic case studies to understand how teachers continue to develop their place consciousness over multiple years. The teachers in this study had a limited time to learn about their surroundings, and even at that, they were disrupted by a change of teaching modality. As a result, their understandings of certain dimensions of place were not as developed. These teachers may have also not had enough time to make sense of their first year of teaching. Missing from these teachers stories were feelings of regret and desires to do things differently that so many experienced teachers have about their first years of teaching. Studies exploring the development of place consciousness at various points of teaching lifespan, such as the five-year, mid-career, and late-career, would show how time and experience influence music teachers' understandings of place.

Sociological and cultural dimensions of place emerged and rose to the forefront in each teacher's case in this study. As a result, more research into how teachers' understandings of these dimensions of place are developed and acted upon are justified. With the close relationship that culturally responsive pedagogy has with place (Gruenewald, 2008b), studies examining contextualized and emplaced culturally responsive teaching practices would benefit understanding of both culturally responsive pedagogy and place-conscious education.

Missing from this study was how the geographic and ecological aspects of place influenced teachers' place consciousness. The teachers in this study had developed a spatial awareness of their classrooms, but they admitted to having a limited knowledge of their communities outside of their schools. Theoretical and philosophical work has been done on ecology and music education, but empirical studies do not exist (Bates, Shevock & Prest, 2021; Shevock, 2017; Shevock & Bates, 2019). Exploring how music educators interact with their

environmental surroundings, both the built and natural, would help others cross the barrier between the music classroom and the outside world.

Alex's case of shifting identity raises questions about the relationship of teacher identity to place. Studies examining teachers' and students' sense of place exist (Spring, 2014), but further research is needed to examine the influence of identity, belonging, and place. Further, Alex's identity influenced their pedagogical decisions and in effect their place-making decisions. Scholars such as Carlsen (1999) and Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) have recognized the influence of a teacher's ideology and politics on their pedagogy, but further study on its influence on place making is needed.

In the development of this study, I hypothesized and assumed that the teachers I studied would experience a multitude of struggles. Instead, I encountered teachers who seemed level-headed and able to navigate fairly well through their first year of teaching, even given some unusual challenges, such as teaching during the pandemic. As a result, more research is needed on how beginning teachers display agency rather than their deficits within their classrooms, schools, and communities (Kelchtermans, 2019). When considering place in this regard, more studies are needed about how beginning music teachers act as place makers or perhaps place destroyers. Caroline and Vanesa began to develop respectful relationships with their students and Caroline began including her students in place-making decisions. Further research in how teachers and students collaboratively work together as place makers is recommended.

## **Conclusion**

Places are diverse, varied, and multi-dimensional. They have particularities and distinctions from one another. The epigraphs by Melville and Proust at the beginning of Chapter One and at the beginning of this chapter, speak toward the notable, complex, and experiential

natures of places. Unsurprisingly, the three first-year teachers' journeys of place consciousness portrayed in this multiple case study are as different from one another as the places within they occurred. One teacher returned to their hometown to carry on tradition. Another began a band program in an unstable charter school. The third was apprenticed into a classroom and saw the potential her students had in sustaining its music program. While each teacher encountered typical first-year struggles, they looked for ways to learn about their surroundings and used that knowledge to inform their teaching in ways they believed would benefit their students. They demonstrated reflective thinking and agency in their decision making.

Instead of generalizing school contexts by geographic and demographic characteristics, such as rural suburban, and urban, addressing place individualistically allows teachers and students to view the potential assets that exist within classroom, school, and community contexts. I think back to the opening vignette in Chapter One of Vicky who desired to work in Compton, California. Did she want to work in this community because of its potential assets? Did she envision herself able to meaningfully facilitate music-making experiences appropriate to that place? This study allowed the agency of each teacher to be demonstrated in their place making rather than confirming deficit narratives of socio-demographic contexts and beginning teaching. The music classrooms that each teacher cultivated emerged in contradistinction with one another due to each teacher's experiences and understandings of place. If music teachers embrace the contrasts and assets of their classrooms, schools, and communities as places rather than attempt to assimilate to generalized expectations, then the music making that they facilitate has the possibility for increased purpose for everyone. Classroom music making experiences would not only develop the teachers' and students' rootedness to their surroundings but also create a cultural trajectory into a more meaningful musical future.

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## APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL



### OFFICE OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR FOR RESEARCH & INNOVATION

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects  
805 W. Pennsylvania Ave., MC-095  
Urbana, IL 61801-4822

#### Notice of Exempt Determination

February 17, 2020

<b>Principal Investigator</b>	Janet Barrett
<b>CC</b>	Jonathan Schaller
<b>Protocol Title</b>	<i>First-Year Music Teachers' Journeys Toward Place Consciousness</i>
<b>Protocol Number</b>	20607
<b>Funding Source</b>	Unfunded
<b>Review Category</b>	Exempt 1
<b>Determination Date</b>	February 17, 2020
<b>Closure Date</b>	February 16, 2025

This letter authorizes the use of human subjects in the above protocol. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) has reviewed your application and determined the criteria for exemption have been met.

The Principal Investigator of this study is responsible for:

- Conducting research in a manner consistent with the requirements of the University and federal regulations found at 45 CFR 46.
- Requesting approval from the IRB prior to implementing major modifications.
- Notifying OPRS of any problems involving human subjects, including unanticipated events, participant complaints, or protocol deviations.
- Notifying OPRS of the completion of the study.

Changes to an **exempt** protocol are only required if substantive modifications are requested and/or the changes requested may affect the exempt status.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

IORG0000014 • FWA #00008584  
217.333.2670 • irb@illinois.edu • oprs.research.illinois.edu

## APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT LETTERS

### Initial Contact Email

Dear [TEACHER'S NAME],

I am a doctoral candidate in Music Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Under the supervision of my academic advisor, Prof. Janet R. Barrett, I would like to potentially include you as part of a research study about the first-year teaching music in a new school and community.

I would like to schedule a thirty minute phone interview to discuss your personal and professional background. I will record these interviews for reference to decide who may be asked to participate in the larger study. I will keep the audio recordings of the interviews on a password-protected laptop computer and on a secure cloud-based server maintained by the University of Illinois.

If you are selected to participate in this study, please note that any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you or your school will remain confidential. Faculty, staff, students, and others with permission or authority to see your study information will maintain its confidentiality to the extent permitted and required by laws and university policies. The names or personal identifiers of participants will not be published or presented. You are free to discontinue participating in the study at any time and request that any information regarding your teaching be excluded from the study. We expect no risks to you beyond those that exist in your normal school-related activities.

This project has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Illinois (#20607). The IRB is the campus office that works to protect the rights of human subjects in research conducted through the University of Illinois. For more information, please feel free to call the IRB Office at (217) 333-2670 or by email at [irb@illinois.edu](mailto:irb@illinois.edu).

I think that this research will be enjoyable for those who participate, and I hope that the knowledge generated from this study will inform music teachers as they begin their first years of teaching.

Thank you for considering this request; I look forward to hearing from you by **Monday, February, 24, 2020**.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Schaller (Additional Investigator) Phone: (724) 762-4588  
Email: [jgs2@illinois.edu](mailto:jgs2@illinois.edu)

Janet R. Barrett (Principal Investigator) Phone: (217) 244-6310  
Email: [janetbar@illinois.edu](mailto:janetbar@illinois.edu)

## **Formal Invitation Letter Emailed to Participants**

Dear [TEACHER'S NAME],

I am a doctoral candidate in Music Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Under the supervision of my academic advisor, Prof. Janet R. Barrett, I would like to observe and interview you as part of a research study about the first-year teaching music in a new school and community. This letter is to formally request your permission to conduct this study.

If permission is granted, I would observe you teach three classes for a period of twelve weeks during the spring semester of the 2020 school year. The classes would be chosen by you with the aim of observing those in which give a clear picture of your approach to developing pedagogy and curricula during your first year. The twelve-week time frame is preferred so I may be able to see you working with the same classes over an extended time period. We will keep the observation notes on a password-protected laptop computer and on a secure cloud-based server maintained by the University of Illinois.

I also request that you allow me to formally interview you on five occasions. The first interview will be conducted before observations begin, and it will focus on gaining information about your musical, educational, and teaching background. The second interview will take place after I complete the first observation. It will focus on gaining further insight and clarification regarding your teaching practice. The third and fourth interviews will take place after the second observation and the final interview will take place at the completion of the twelve-week period. Like the observation notes, we will keep the audio recordings of the interviews on a password-protected laptop computer and on a secure cloud-based server maintained by the University of Illinois.

Please note that any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you or your school will remain confidential. Faculty, staff, students, and others with permission or authority to see your study information will maintain its confidentiality to the extent permitted and required by laws and university policies. The names or personal identifiers of participants will not be published or presented. You are free to discontinue participating in the study at any time and request that any information regarding your teaching be excluded from the study. We expect no risks to you beyond those that exist in your normal school-related activities.

Also, I wish to emphasize that this study will be focused on your pedagogy. It will not be focused on students. During the study, when students say or do something related to the your actions, we may describe what the child said or did in that context. This will be described in a general way; but no descriptors, such as names or physical characteristics, will be described.

I know schools/districts may have their own distinctive application procedures to grant permission to conduct research. Please let me know of any that pertain to your school/district (e.g., online application, additional documentation, or interview request), and I will complete the necessary steps as soon as possible.

This project has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Illinois (#20607). The IRB is the campus office that works to protect the rights of human subjects in research conducted through the University of Illinois. For more information, please feel free to call the IRB Office at (217) 333-2670 or by email at [irb@illinois.edu](mailto:irb@illinois.edu). If you do so, please identify yourself as a school administrator.

I think that this research will be enjoyable for those who participate, and I hope that the knowledge generated from this study will inform music teachers as they begin their first years of teaching.

Thank you for considering this request; I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Schaller (Additional Investigator) Phone: (724) 762-4588

Email: [jgs2@illinois.edu](mailto:jgs2@illinois.edu)

Janet R. Barrett (Principal Investigator) Phone: (217) 244-6310

Email: [janetbar@illinois.edu](mailto:janetbar@illinois.edu)

## **Email Sent to Participant's School Administrators Asking for Permission to Conduct Study**

Dear [SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR],

I am a doctoral candidate in Music Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Under the supervision of my academic advisor, Prof. Janet R. Barrett, I would like to observe and interview [TEACHER'S NAME] at [SCHOOL NAME] School as part of a research study about the first-year of teaching music in a new school and community. I have been given your contact information in order to formally request permission to conduct this study.

If permission is granted, I would observe [TEACHER'S NAME] teach three classes during a period of twelve weeks during the spring semester of the 2020 school year. The classes would be chosen by [TEACHER'S NAME] with the aim of observing those in which they would give a clear picture of their approach to developing their pedagogy and curricula during this first year. The twelve-week time frame is preferred so I may be able to see them working with the same classes over an extended time period. We will keep the observation notes on a password-protected laptop computer and on a secure cloud-based server maintained by the University of Illinois.

I also request that you allow me to formally interview [TEACHER'S NAME] on five occasions. The first interview will be conducted before observations begin, and it will focus on gaining information about their musical, educational, and teaching background. The second interview will take place after I complete the first observation. It will focus on gaining further insight and clarification regarding their teaching practice. The third and fourth interviews will take place after the second observation and the final interview will take place at the completion of the twelve-week period. Like the observation notes, we will keep the audio recordings of the interviews on a password-protected laptop computer and on a secure cloud-based server maintained by the University of Illinois.

Please note that any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with XXX, you, or your school will remain confidential. Faculty, staff, students, and others with permission or authority to see your study information will maintain its confidentiality to the extent permitted and required by laws and university policies. The names or personal identifiers of participants will not be published or presented. [TEACHER'S NAME] is free to discontinue participating in the study at any time and request that any information regarding their teaching be excluded from the study. We expect no risks to you beyond those that exist in your normal school-related activities.

Also, I wish to emphasize that this study will be focused on [TEACHER'S NAME]'s pedagogy. It will not be focused on students. During the study, when students say or do something related to the XXXX's actions, we may describe what the child said or did in that context. This will be described in a general way; but no descriptors, such as names or physical characteristics, will be described. I have prepared an information letter for parents who may be curious about the study; however, their consent is not necessary since the focus is not on the students.

I know schools/districts may have their own distinctive application procedures to grant permission to conduct research. Please let me know of any that pertain to your school/district (e.g., online application, additional documentation, or interview request), and I will complete the necessary steps as soon as possible. Also, please know that I have already communicated with [TEACHER'S NAME], and they indicated that, if you approve, they are willing to participate in this study.

This project has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Illinois (#20607). The IRB is the campus office that works to protect the rights of human subjects in research conducted through the University of Illinois. For more information, please feel free to call the IRB Office at (217) 333-2670 or by email at [irb@illinois.edu](mailto:irb@illinois.edu). If you do so, please identify yourself as a school administrator.

I think that this research will be enjoyable for those who participate, and I hope that the knowledge generated from this study will inform music teachers as they begin their first years of teaching. Thank you for considering this request; I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Schaller (Additional Investigator) Phone: (724) 762-4588  
Email: [jgs2@illinois.edu](mailto:jgs2@illinois.edu)

Janet R. Barrett (Principal Investigator) Phone: (217) 244-6310  
Email: [janetbar@illinois.edu](mailto:janetbar@illinois.edu)

## APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORMS



# Social Behavioral Research Consent Form

### First-Year Music Teachers' Journeys Toward Place Consciousness

You are being asked to participate in a voluntary research study. The purpose of this study is to explore how first-year music teachers journey toward place consciousness and manifest this knowledge and understanding in their pedagogy. Participating in this study will involve six interviews, three classroom observations and weekly contact through text message and your participation will last 12 weeks. Risks related to this research include are no more than what you would encounter in everyday life and teaching. Benefits related to this research include the opportunity to routinely reflect with a more experienced educator allowing you to consider your students and their community in your teaching decisions.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Janet R. Barrett, Professor  
Department and Institution: Music Education, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
Contact Information: [janetbar@illinois.edu](mailto:janetbar@illinois.edu); (217) 244-6310

Additional Investigator: Mr. Jonathan G. Schaller, Doctoral candidate  
Department and Institution: Music Education, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
Contact Information: [jgs2@illinois.edu](mailto:jgs2@illinois.edu); (724) 7624588

#### Why am I being asked?

You are being asked to be a participant in a research study about first-year music teachers in a new school and community. The purpose of this research is to explore how first-year music teachers journey toward place consciousness and manifest this knowledge and understanding in their pedagogy. You have been asked to participate in this research because you have been referred to us by University of Illinois music education professors and/or central Illinois music teachers as first-year music teacher. Approximately 10 participants will be involved in this research at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future dealings with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

#### What procedures are involved?

The study procedures include one thirty-minute screening interview. After this screening interview, three participants will be asked to continue with the study. These participants will be asked to participate in five semi-structured interviews that will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes each. One of these interviews will take place in the teacher's classroom and school after hours with no students present in the form of a guided tour. Another of these interviews will be in the form of a guided tour of the community where the teacher's school serves and conducted on foot or by car. Jon Schaller will ask to observe each participant teaching three times in their classroom. The class chosen will be based in consultation with each participant in order to choose a class that the teacher is comfortable being observed. He will not initiate any interactions with the teachers or students in any manner during class

sessions. Each week, the participants will be asked to respond to a question or reflective prompt through text message based on observations or school events.

The study will last approximate 12 weeks.

**What are the potential risks and discomforts?**

No more risk than that encountered in everyday life.

**Are there benefits to participating in the research?**

Participants will benefit from this study through the opportunity to routinely reflect with a more experienced educator on their teaching pedagogy during their first year of teaching. This reflection will prompt them to better consider their students and their community in their teaching decisions and increase their place-consciousness.

**What other options are there?**

You have the option to not participate in this study.

**Will my study-related information be kept confidential?**

We will use all reasonable efforts to keep your personal information confidential, but we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. When this research is discussed or published, no one will know that you were in the study. But, when required by law or university policy, identifying information (including your signed consent form) may be seen or copied by: a) The Institutional Review Board that approves research studies; b) The Office for Protection of Research Subjects and other university departments that oversee human subjects research; c) University and state auditors responsible for oversight of research.

**Will I be reimbursed for any expenses or paid for my participation in this research?**

You will not be offered payment for being in this study.

**Can I withdraw or be removed from the study?**

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time. The researchers also have the right to stop your participation in this study without your consent if they believe it is in your best interests, you were to object to any future changes that may be made in the study plan.

**Will data collected from me be used for any other research?**

Your information will not be used or distributed for future use, even if identifiers are removed.

**Who should I contact if I have questions?**

Contact the researchers Dr. Janet R. Barrett, Professor of Music Education at [janetbar@illinois.edu](mailto:janetbar@illinois.edu) or (217) 244-6310 or Mr. Jonathan Schaller, Doctoral Candidate in Music Education at [jgs2@illinois.edu](mailto:jgs2@illinois.edu) or (724) 762-4588 if you have any questions about this study or your part in it, or if you have concerns or complaints about the research.

**What are my rights as a research subject?**

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at 217-333-2670 or [irb@illinois.edu](mailto:irb@illinois.edu).

I have read the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research. I will be given a copy of this signed and dated form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date (must be same as subject's)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

## APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

### Background questions:

1. Describe the community you grew up in.
2. Describe the music program and your involvement.
3. What made the community and the music program special to you?
4. What made the music program special to the community and school?

### Expectations transitioning to teaching:

1. Describe what you wanted as your first job?
2. Did this change as you looked for positions?
3. Describe the interview process and how you felt during that time?
4. How did you feel being hired to this current position, especially as it compared to your preferences?
5. What did you know about this job, school, and community before you were hired?
6. On the day that you graduated from college, what did you imagine your first year of teaching would be like?

### First days of school:

1. How did you prepare for the school year after you were hired?
2. Describe entering the school for the first time.
3. Describe entering your classroom for the first time.
4. Describe meeting your students for the first time.
5. Who has helped you “settle” into your role as a teacher?
6. Who have you become closest to in your school as you began your job?

### Discovering information:

1. Have you sought out any information about the music program from past years?
2. Who have you found out things about the music program from?
3. Describe the types of information that they have shared with you.

### Current ideas:

1. What types of things have surprised you about this school, community, and music program?
2. What types of things have surprised you about your classes?
3. How have things changed in your classroom and school since you started this position?
4. Are there any aspects of this classroom, school, and community that set it apart from others in your opinion?
5. Do you perceive any strengths or weaknesses about your music program and can you describe them?
6. What do you believe are the most important things for your students to know about music?
7. What do you believe your community and school would like students to know about music and be able to do?

### Looking toward the future:

1. Do you have a picture of an “ideal” music classroom in mind as you work toward goals?  
Can you describe this to me?
2. How do you plan on working toward these goals?
3. In five years, what would look the same and what would look different if I came to visit?

## APPENDIX E: TEXT PROMPTS

### **Text Prompt #1**

*Sent March 27, 2020*

Hi [PARTICIPANT'S NAME]. This is Jon Schaller, and I wanted to touch base with you! I was wondering if you could take five minutes and respond with a voice memo about how you are coping with your school closure and your teaching. Have you been in contact with your students at all? What are your plans in this uncertain time? Thanks!

### **Text Prompt #2**

*Sent April 5, 2020<sup>17</sup>*

Hello! Just another weekly check in. I am hoping that you could take five minutes and respond with a voice memo about the physical space of your classroom. What kind of atmosphere did you try to create for your students and yourself? Also, would you be willing to draw a map of what your classroom looks like, labelling all the important parts of it? I'd love to discuss this the next time we talk!

### **Text Prompt #3**

*Sent April 26, 2020*

Hello, another check in. I wanted to give you some space after the governor's announcement closing school for the rest of the year. Now that you have had a week to process this announcement, I was hoping that you could create a voice memo talking about your emotions when you heard the announcement. How did you discover the news, and how have you coped with it over the past week? Thank you.

---

<sup>17</sup> On this date, I texted a message to make sure things were alright since my prior texts to them had remained unanswered. I sent Text Prompt #2 to Alex on April 9, 2020.