

Chapter V: Discussion

When designing this study, I wanted to gain a better understanding of urban music teachers, and urban music education. Urban music education and the teachers who teach in those spaces are often misunderstood and misrepresented (Martignetti, et al., 2013). Many of the ideologies and discussions concerning urban music education are steeped in the notion of deficit and crisis (Doyle, 2009; Martinetti et al., 2013; Salvador & Kelly-McHale, 2017). The purpose of this study was to investigate the characteristics and experiences of teachers who have been successful in urban elementary music education. Because much of the discussion that centers urban music education advocates for improvement, it seems appropriate to have the experiences and opinions of successful urban elementary music educators to inform these improvements. This is what this study aimed to do, as I believe the field of music education at-large would benefit greatly from learning about the experience of successful urban music educators at the elementary level.

I decided to employ a hermeneutic phenomenology of eight elementary music educators who had been deemed successful. Data were collected through interviews (approximately 60 minutes each), which were analyzed through an open coding technique (Punch, 2009). I used a constant comparative method to examine the coded transcripts. Throughout the accounts, I provided rich description and vignettes of the participant's thoughtful responses and experiences in order to help locate the reader in the participant's narrative.

The eight eligible participants had been teaching general music to students in grades K-5, for three or more years in the same school that met my definition as urban. Five had been nominated and/or was a finalist for a Music Educator Award (through the Recording Academy and the GRAMMY Museum) or a Music Teachers of Excellence award (the Country Music

Award Foundation) within the past 5 years. This original criterion was expanded to include individuals that were specifically identified and referred by eligible participants or respected colleagues to increase the participant pool, resulting in three additional participants.

The elementary general music context was selected because of its inclusive nature, given that general music educators teach all the student in their school, as opposed to middle and high school contexts where music classes are typically an elective and/or enrollment is selective via auditions. For the purposes of this study, I defined urban schools as schools located in or around a metropolitan area and where the student populations bring significant diversity and richness of culture, race, language, and socio-economic status (SES) to the school setting. This was based on Fitzpatrick's (2008) definition, but extended to include schools having Title I status or high percentages of free and reduced lunch (<https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/>) to ensure diversity in SES.

There were two main research questions were as follows: (1) What are the lived experiences of urban music educators who have been successful in teaching music at the elementary level? (2) How do elementary music educators in urban contexts describe their curricular and pedagogical decisions? The main research questions were accompanied by two sub-questions: (1) What characterizes success in the elementary urban music classroom? (2) What are characteristics of these teachers (e.g., personal, educational, interpersonal)? The six main themes include (1) relationships are key; (2) understanding how music functions for students; (3) willingness to perform unofficial job duties; (4) concerns about urban teacher preparation; (5) curricular and pedagogical decisions; and (6) urban music teacher characteristics. Additionally, I summarized the participants' definitions of urban and of success, as well as their responses to a question about their preparation for teaching in an urban setting.

Definitions of urban

Urban music education can be defined a number of different ways (Eros, 2018). This was reflected in the participants' responses when asked how they defined urban, which were similar to each other but also had some differences. They all described urban as being "in a city", which fits the definition of urban as a "densely populated metropolitan area" (Fitzpatrick, 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). However, the nuanced differences amongst the participant's definitions indicate that further study of urban music education should continue.

The participants' differences in their definitions of urban indicate that there may be types of urban. Urban schools are sometimes associated with a lack of resources and funds (Abril, 2006; Doyle, 2012), yet this was not the case with the schools in which Amber, Bradley, and Daniel taught. Urban is sometimes code for *Black* and *poor* (Jacobs, 2015), yet Geneva commented that her school is only considered urban because of its location, as the only Title I school in her district, and her school sits on a "redlined" boundary. (Redlining was a practice of identifying locations as poor risks for financial investments such as mortgages, which was based on race or ethnicity. It was determined to be a discriminatory practice that became illegal as a result of Federal legislation in the 1960s and 1970s). This means that her student population is a mix of races and socioeconomic statuses. In fact, in his qualitative study, Jacobs' (2015) interviewed preservice teachers about their student teacher experiences in urban school, and they revealed that schools could not be good and urban; meaning if a school was "exceptional" then by definition it lost its *urbaness* (p. 30).

These examples emphasize that urban is a complex construct, ergo the concept of urban music education is similarly complex. Because of this complexity, Shaw (2018) suggested that

findings in studies of urban music education cannot be generalized to all urban music contexts, nor can success be pared down to one set of attributes, behaviors, and practices.

Definitions of Success

One of the sub-questions asked, “What characterizes success in the elementary urban music classroom?” Although each of the participants provided a different answer as to what characterized success to them, all responses involved students at some level. Abril’s (2006) study of experienced urban music educators revealed that their success was in their ability to identify and respond to their students’ emotional and educational needs. This aligns with the idea of being student centered: one cannot be student centered and not respond to students’ needs. To that point, being student centered means *every* student. Teaching to every student means that regardless of a student’s interest, talent, ability, or behavior, they must be included in teaching and instruction. Additional effective teacher characteristics identified by Baker (2012) included embracing diversity, having flexibility, managing student behavior successfully, and planning detailed lessons. While participants did not speak to these directly in response to this specific question, it is clear that these are part of their identify as an urban music educators because they identified to these items verbatim when asked to describe characteristics of urban music educators.

The majority of the participants’ definitions of success were more subjective or personal than traditional definitions of success. To these teachers, success can mean ensuring student have a connection to music, or it can mean providing meaningful experiences for their students; success can also mean cultivating positive, long-lasting relationships with students. As Christine stated, success is “personal.” Based on the varied descriptions of success, I believe that if we expand our meaning of success, more teachers would “qualify” as successful. Conventional

models of school-based music teaching tend to be based on causal logic, where success is contingent upon generating a narrow set of possible activities and outcomes; such models do not always work in uncertain, resource-constrained teaching contexts that are in urban schools (Hanson, 2020).

This study was about urban elementary music teachers that met an a priori definition of success. However, what about the urban music educators who do not meet this specified definition? Research is needed to investigate the experiences of unsuccessful or struggling music teachers in urban elementary schools. The findings of that study could be compared to the results and findings of this current study. The results of that comparison could produce strategies of how to move from unsuccessful to successful, but also might shift the field's conceptualization of success.

Key findings

The research questions of this study were broad, and took a wholistic approach to capturing the lived experiences of successful urban music educators. Through the narratives of the participants, themes emerged that explain their experiences. The six main themes include (1) relationships are key; (2) understanding how music functions for students; (3) willingness to perform unofficial job duties; (4) concerns about urban teacher preparation; (5) curricular and pedagogical decisions; and (6) urban music teacher characteristics. Each theme addressed either a research question or a subquestion, which is indicated in the heading.

Relationships are key (RQ 1.1)

The participants all stated that relationships with stakeholders were imperative to success. These stake holders included students, families of students, and administration. I believe it can be assumed that these relationships must be positive in order to be successful. Eberly (2014)

found that music teachers placed high value on the importance of building relationships, and that they found great rewards in doing so. It seemed fitting that all participants centered the majority of their responses about their students and their relationships with them. The teachers used the information gleaned from these relationships to inform their teaching. My findings are similar to Shaw's (2018) conclusion that through building rapport and relationships, the teachers were willing to alter their instruction and repertoire selections to be more relevant to their population; they were willing to do extra work and use their creativity to educate the students and their families.

Relationships and rapport have been identified as an integral part of classroom management (Nagro, Hirsch, & Kennedy, 2020) and overall success in the classroom. Several of the participants shared that having a relationship with students or knowing their students provided insights on how to effectively promote positive behavior and mitigate misbehavior during instruction. I interpreted this to mean that success in their classrooms was considered to be a direct result of building relationships with the students.

While building relationships with students is immensely important, building relationships with the parents and guardians of those students is also important. My findings suggested that relationships with students' families are fostered when the parents and/guardians believe the teacher has their child or children's best interest in mind, but also when the teacher includes them in the student's musical experiences.

Scholarship on urban music education indicated that one of the major problems is related to parental support, specifically with them being either uninvolved or unsupportive (Baker, 2012; Eberly, 2014; Smith, 2006). However, both Amber and Daniel countered these notions. They stated that it is not that parents do not want to be there for their students, is that they cannot

physically be there. It is possible for both the findings in the literature and these participants' perspectives to be true. This supports the idea that findings regarding urban music education are contextual and cannot necessarily be generalized.

The participants shared that their relationship with their administration heavily impacted their job success and enjoyment. According to the teachers in this study, principals and district officials had the most impact. They also shared that when administration had a close relationship to the school and surrounding community, the teachers' relationship with administrators was generally positive.

It should be noted that although the findings of this current research are based on the urban music education experience, this theme of relationships is relevant to any teaching context and any discipline. Building relationships as an educator is a simply good teaching practice (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Understanding how music functions for Students (RQ 1)

When one considers the functions of music, a potential first thought is from a psychological perspective; for example, how music makes one feel. Another perspective is from a biological perspective, for instance, how one responds to music. Another perspective is from a communication perspective, as music is a way to express one's emotions. However, in this study, the participants saw music from a purpose perspective, meaning what purpose can music serve to their students.

The participants witnessed the impacts music had on their students. As Amber shared, music "was a savior" for her and her students. Music allowed her a way to either escape the harsh realities of life or to bask in the glorious moments. Daniel and Francis shared how music was a positive outlet for their students, that could potentially provide life options and

opportunities if students continued to be involved in music. For example, college scholarships or employment are some of those potential outcomes. Bradley, Christine, and Francis were all recipients of music scholarships to attend college, an opportunity that they implied may not have been available without financial assistance. Even in college Bradley, Daniel, and Francis were able to supplement their income by teaching private lessons or gigging during their free time.

This finding that these teachers understand how music can function in the lives of their students should cause all teachers to be more mindful about what they teach and how they teach. Teachers should be very intentional about how students can potentially benefit from music instruction in meaningful ways, given that music can have such a significant impact on a student's life. The stakes may be even higher in the ways music functions for urban students when compared to suburban students. Daniel and Francis described how suburban students may have more and easier access to opportunities for musical involvement such as private lessons or attending a concert, while those same opportunities may be scarce for urban students.

Willingness to perform unofficial job duties (RQ 1)

Teaching elementary music can be challenging and teaching elementary music in an urban school can be more challenging. Research has found that various factors that can make urban teaching difficult include transient populations, lack of administrative support, uninvolved parents, undesirable teaching spaces, lack of instructional budget and supplies, classroom management issues, cultural tensions, and students' limited musical training and exposure (Baker, 2012; Smith, 2006). One might say these circumstances are daunting. If teaching music under these conditions is so difficult, why do teachers stay? What motivates them to continue this work? The answer is love: a love for the job, and a love for students (Thompson-Gray, 2019).

Every participant demonstrated a very deep love for their students. A great deal of interview time was spent with teachers sharing about their student and their interactions with them.. As the findings suggested, teachers advocated for the students and their families, in many ways far outside the contractual agreement of the job. I posit that the love of the job and of students is a necessity in order to work in an urban school, more so if one wishes to be successful in an urban music program. Even when asked, the participants did not share many frustrations about the job itself. This is not to give the illusion of utopian experience, but the participants felt that rewards of teaching music in an urban school outweigh the challenges

Concerns about urban teacher preparation (RQ 1)

The successful urban elementary music educators of this study expressed concern for how they did not feel adequately prepared to teach in an urban classroom. As they reflected, they conveyed concern for how current preservice music teachers are being prepared for urban classrooms. Preservice teachers' feelings of being unprepared by their teacher education programs for positions in culturally diverse urban environments is well documented (Delpit, 2006; Fiese & DeCarbo, 1995; Frierson-Campbell, 2006; Shaw, 2015). On one end of the spectrum, preservice teachers feel teacher education programs do not provide enough exposure to the urban experience. On the other end of the spectrum, teacher education programs may be attempting to overprepare preservice teachers. Shaw (2015) suggested that rather than attempting to prepare preservice teachers for every possible urban scenario, teacher education programs might do better to equip candidates with skills and dispositions necessary to cultivate their own contextual knowledge.

Several of these successful urban music educator participants expressed the belief that nothing really can prepare someone for teaching in an urban school, they just have to do it. As

Elijah stated, one learns how to teach in an urban school by teaching in an urban school. These participants have been “tried by fire” given that they have successfully navigated the urban musical landscape. While they shared that their life experiences, and even their non-music education related jobs, were beneficial to them in their classroom, they all still felt generally that they had been generally unprepared for the urban music classroom.

There some misconceptions I would like to address that emerged from the findings as it relates to music teacher education programs. There is a misconception that teacher education programs are filled with professors with no public school teaching experiences. This attitude was expressed by four participants, as illustrated by Christine’s statement that:

But most of the time, professors or the people who are teaching in college, they have not taught in public school. They're teaching off of whatever they learned in college, but they never experienced teaching in those schools. So how can they teach us if they've never gone through teaching a kindergartener or an eighth grader? They prepared me I think musically but they didn't prepare me for the other side of it.

In a study by Sims, Jeffs & Barrow (2010) of music education job descriptions, the authors found that “Precollegiate teaching experience was specified as a requirement by 93 (83.0 %) of the institutions” (p. 71). Hunt (1984) and Cutietta (1987) did separate analyses on music education job descriptions, revealing that a large majority of assistant professor job notices included public school teaching as an expectation. The issue may not necessarily be that college professors are incapable of preparing preservice music teachers because they have no public school teaching experience, it may be the interval of time between their public school teaching and collegiate teaching, or it may be a perception of the professor’s lack of keeping current with respect to relevant current issues and topics.

There is another misconception about teacher preparation programs and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). There is a notion that HBCU can potentially better

prepare student to teach in urban schools. This assumption is based on the idea that because majority of the attendees and professors at HBCUs are Black and Brown, and because most HBCUs are located within proximity to urban areas. As an HBCU graduate, I have heard this notion and many of my colleagues who also graduated from an HBCU have as well. Christine and Elijah both attended HBCUs and expressed that did not feel prepared for the classroom. Their feelings about a lack of preparation is similar to the other participants, who had attended Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). It is my conclusion that HBCUs do not necessarily better prepare preservice teachers than PWIs. In my experience as a HBCU graduate, I did student teach in two schools that would be defined as urban, but I did not feel any more prepared than other preservice teachers who were my peers, or with whom I have interacted since then; many of my colleagues in my network at other HBCUs would agree.

According to some of the participants, the best solution to better prepare preservice music teachers for urban classroom is to provide more experiences in front of actual students in urban schools. Elijah advocated for this as he described the common role-play teaching strategy that is often utilized in teaching methods courses. This is where preservice teachers teach mock lessons to their peers during class. While much can be learned during these teaching episodes, working with real students in the real context is the best teaching tool.

The desire to alter music education programs to better prepare music teachers for urban classrooms is not a new idea (McKoy, 2013; Robinson, 2017). While the participants all stated that none of them received any formal training to prepare them for teaching in an urban elementary school, I believe that exposure can alleviate many obstacles and help teachers navigate potentially difficult situations more successfully. Being fully cognizant of the contextual nature of urban schools (Abril, 2006; Fitzpatrick, 2011; Lehmberg, 2008; Robinson,

2006; Shaw, 2020), I still credit potential success of preservice music teachers on being exposed to multiple contexts and environments. Elijah explained how he would have benefited from seeing all aspects of teaching, not just the utopian, perfect scenarios:

So I think as a preservice teacher, I would have appreciated it seeing the good, bad, and ugly. And I think I think as a preservice teacher, you need to see that: you don't need to see just a good, I mean you do, you need to see the good, because you need to know what can be but you often need to know what sometimes reality is.

I agree with the research and the finding that teacher preparation programs should make a concerted effort to expose preservice teachers to a variety of teaching contexts. I believe that if preservice teachers are exposed to the “good, bad, and ugly,” they are more likely to respond successfully when they encounter those circumstances. Denson and Anderson (2015) indicated that preservice music education students will be at an advantage by having firsthand, real-world, and accurate experiences in a variety of urban classroom settings. Some collegiate music programs attempt to provide these experiential learning elements that allow preservice teachers to work extensively with urban students (Abril, 2006; Kindall-Smith, 2004). However, other music programs use traditional, outdated pedagogical methods and tend to gloss over or completely ignore the issues that urban educators and urban music educators face (Kindall-Smith, 2004).

I suggest that a solution to better preparing preservice music educators is for urban elementary teachers to form mentorships with preservice music teachers. To accomplish this, partnerships with local colleges' and universities' music education faculty should be established with local urban schools. Successful urban elementary teachers could be guest speakers during courses, or could open their classrooms to pre-service students for observations and provide lab opportunities for university students to connect their coursework to practice. This initiative provides preservice teachers access to more authentic context learning (ACL) experiences, such

as situated learning, fieldwork, peer-teaching, service learning, practicum, and student teaching (Forrester, 2019). However, Kelly (2003) cautioned, "...despite curricular experiences through college diversity courses students' personal experiences through their own cultural background may be a factor in where students will seek teaching positions" (p. 47). This resolve is problematic given the racial and ethnic diversity of students in the urban schools juxtaposed with the ethnic homogeneity of preservice music teachers in the United States (Elpus & Abril, 2011; Fitzpatrick, 2011; McKoy, 2013).

Learning more about urban music education not only benefits preservice teachers, but in-service teachers as well. I suggest having more professional development sessions that address issues centering urban schools that feature or are facilitated by successful urban music teachers. Bradley, Daniel and Heather discussed how conferences and professional development do not speak to authentic urban experiences. Bradley shared in particular that there are individuals who desire to make changes in urban music who are not involved in urban music. He specified that people who have never been in poverty do not have the leverage to make recommendations on how children in poverty should be educated. In general, I also advocate for having more people engaged in urban music education making decision about urban music education.

More sessions, presentations, and scholarship at music education conferences that center urban music education from urban music educators should be offered. Daniel spoke to only being familiar with one large Midwestern conference for band having a handful of sessions on their "Title I Track." In my experience, I, too, have noticed a scarcity of sessions and workshops geared specifically to urban music educators. The field needs to hear more about urban schools from the teachers that teach in them; this is what "survival, success, and reform" should look like (Frierson-Campbell, 2006). Professional events and publications are meant to provide educators

with tangible solutions and strategies for problem solving that can be used in their classrooms and push the profession forward.

Curricular and Pedagogical Decisions (RQ 2)

Teaching music in an urban school requires a specific skill set, different from that used by suburban teachers (Fitzpatrick, 2008). The participants of this study shared what some of these specific skills look like in the classroom. From changing the repertoire selections for lesson activities, to being student-centered rather than teacher-centered in the classroom, these teachers have mastered the balance of being relevant and being effective. Karvelis (2017) suggested providing multiple opportunities to co-teach with the students, with the class operating as a healthy, democratic community. One thing I noticed about the participant's curricular or pedagogical decisions is that while there was a departure from the conventional or established methods or strategies used in general music classrooms, there was never an abandonment of them. The participants seem to align with Allsup's (2015) *both/and* approach which is rooted in Jorgensen's (2003) *this with that* approach. When the participants found what worked for them and their student, this was in addition to the traditional approaches to teaching music. They used a mixture of old and new, with the ultimate goals of students mastering the adequate skills.

The curricular or pedagogical decisions that these teachers made were made in part to prepare their students for life outside the classroom. One of the sub-themes of curricular or pedagogical decisions identified was *continuity of instruction*. I believe that making changes to the learning activities to be more engaging results in making continuity of instruction easier; moreover, continuity of instruction will result in continuity of engagement. If students are provided a quality and enjoyable music experience from K-12, they would be more like to be

engaged in music and musical activity after high school. This may include joining an ensemble in college or at a local church, maybe even a community ensemble.

The second sub-theme of curricular or pedagogical decisions was *content is secondary*. This is not to give the connotation that music content and skills are not important, because that was not the case. Daniel and Geneva discussed how centering the student instead of centering the musical skill when teaching made music making much easier. However, this finding triggered me to ask myself: Why do I teach music? Many of the participants felt that teaching music was not just about teaching music. I, personally, feel that my purpose in teaching was not solely attempting to achieve a flawless performance. Yes, music teachers desire to make music, and yes, skills are needed to make music, but process is much more important and complex than the product.

Characteristics of urban music teachers (RQ 1.2)

Describing characteristics of urban music teachers attends to sub-question two: What are characteristics of these teachers (e.g., personal, educational, interpersonal)? I wanted to know if there were any similarities across the different urban contexts of my participants. As a long reaching implication, if there were common characteristics, they could be cultivated during preservice teachers' coursework.

One similarity among three participants was that they had attended urban elementary and secondary school themselves. According to the literature, having attended an urban school is a common trait of successful urban educators (Abril, 2006; Baker, 2012; Smith, 2006). As the profession attempts to improve urban teacher education, a suggestion would be to select potential music educators from urban areas. As the Center for Sustainable Systems (2020) estimates that

by 2050, 89% of the U.S. population will live in urban areas, this suggestion may be the direction urban music education needs to follow.

Abril (2006) and Baker (2012) identified additional characteristics of successful urban music educators, including individuals who embraced diversity, had flexibility, managed student behavior successfully, wrote grants successfully, planned detailed lessons, created approaches to work with English-language learners, and supplemented school budget with outside funding sources. Multiple participants provided evidence of all of these characteristics in their responses and agreed that they were involved in their success in the classroom.

Positive attitude toward students and their learning. All participants in this study gave responses indicating that an important characteristic of an urban music educator was being student centered. I found that each participant centered their responses about their students and their interactions with them. As a central theme of this study was that relationships are key, and successful teachers use their relationships with students in guide how they teach. Through building rapport and relationships, the teachers were willing to alter repertoire selections to be more relevant to their population (Shaw, 2018); they were willing to do extra work and use their own creativity to educate the student and the families. These pedagogical shifts are a direct result of building relationships with the students.

A student-centered approach to teaching honors students' prior experiences and knowledge (Forrester, 2018). The deficit perspective discussed in the literature review that is often attributed to urban students does not grant credit to students and the prior experiences and knowledge they possess. Francis expressed a counternarrative as she believed that her "kids have so much to offer the world." Geneva explained that even our education system's current attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion does not always value urban students and what they bring to

the classroom. They represent a wealth of knowledge, potential, and uniqueness, regardless of their socioeconomic status. Once urban students are “seen as humans” (Daniel) and not being compared to other students in other places, then their abilities are at the forefront. Urban students can be seen as the capable musicians that they are.

Historically, music education’s approach to urban education, although well meaning, used language that indicted a deficit perspective. Dating back to 1967, music educators who wrote the Tanglewood Declaration demonstrated this in two of their declaration statements. In particular, the seventh declaration stated that the music education profession must focus its efforts on addressing societal issues, especially to those in the "inner city" or other places with “culturally deprived individuals.” The eighth declaration stated that music teacher education programs must be expanded to prepare preservice teachers specifically for working “with the very young, with adults, with the disadvantaged, and with the emotionally disturbed.” In our current society of 2021, those word choices may be problematic and politically incorrect. However, the sentiments still ring true. This is a call to action for music programs to teach every student, regardless of their social identifiers. As Amber stated, “We need as a profession to make sure that we're providing that for every student: not just the students that sing well, not the students that play instruments well, but every student”—because children deserve music, every child.

Being open to new classroom approaches. The participants in this study also all stated that being open and flexible was an essential characteristic. This means being flexible in ways of thinking, or as Elijah stated not being “stuck in your ways.” In urban music education, teachers must be open to new ideas, new ways of doing things, and to learning from their students. Teachers should be committed to being lifelong learners, as well as developing lifelong learning

in the students. Teachers can learn from students by being open to using different genres of music in class, being open to student creations and compositions, being open to different cultural norms from their own, and being open to having conversations with students and what they want to share.

Being open and flexible promotes the teacher learning alongside their students. This notion can be demonstrated through culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billing, 1995), intercultural sensitivity (Deardorff, 2015), or cultural competence which is defined as “understanding of and respect for student’s culture(s) of origin,” and “sociopolitical consciousness,” which refers to student’s ability to “ask larger sociopolitical questions about how schools and the society work to expose ongoing inequity and social injustice” (Ladson-Billings, 2002, p. 111). It should be noted that using these methods is not necessarily a departure from traditional content, but merely another way to teach content in a way that is meaningful to the students (traditional content is referring to music and musical skills that center the western classical canon and traditional notation). To facilitate cultural competency, music teacher educators must create ongoing opportunities for discourse and situated learning (Forrester, 2019). Villegas and Lucas (2002) outlined a vision for teacher education supporting educators’ development of six characteristics of culturally responsive teachers. Such educators:

(a) are socio-culturally conscious, (b) have affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds, (c) see themselves as responsible for and capable of bringing about change to make schools more equitable, (d) understand how learners construct knowledge and are capable of promoting knowledge construction, (e) know about the lives of their students, and (f) design instruction that builds on what their students already know while stretching them beyond the familiar (p. 20).

Lind and McKoy (2016) described culturally responsive teaching as more than an approach, more than repertoire choices: but as a disposition. Teachers with a culturally responsive disposition are intentional about understanding how culture informs learning,

recognizing their own cultural conditioning, getting to know their students and community, making culturally informed decisions about pedagogy and curricula, and creating inclusive classroom environments. As Daniel articulated so perfectly in his interview, “I am a student of the culture: I’m a student of the people, the kids, the families;” teacher education programs must prepare preservice teachers to continue learning. Not just learning content from scholarship, professional development, and conferences but from the students and the surrounding community. Although the participants may not have articulated these words specifically, their instruction most definitely personified these approaches to music education. For example, Elijah’s example of using more diverse videos in his classroom examples is a model example of culturally relevant pedagogy.

The participants discussed how awareness or being more aware was a factor in their success. They shared how they had to be aware of their societal privilege, but also needed to be aware of the culture and community of their students. Based on the literature about cultural backgrounds of preservice teachers (Ausmann, 1991; Doyle, 2014; Shaw, 2015), it is possible that preservice teachers suffer from what Vaugeois (2013) terms “terminal naivety,” a lack of awareness of power relations, larger systemic dynamics, and a more individualistic focus on one’s outlook. A teacher who demonstrates “terminal naivety” may stay unaware or even disinterested in world events and the systems that shape society and other people’s lives (Hess, 2017). This means that in addition to content, new teachers must also be learning about cultural awareness. This is especially necessary as new teachers may not be familiar with the various types of cultural diversity that is present in urban schools (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). When there are cultural differences between teachers and students, it can potentially present barriers to successful urban teaching (Benedict, 2006; Robinson, 2006).

Understanding racial difference. Because of the current racial climate in the United States, it is aptly important to have an awareness of race and racial issues; this is especially true for teacher who work in urban schools because of the racially diverse population often found in urban communities. In this study, there were two Black females, one Latinx female, two white females, and three white males. I believed they would present different understandings of race and racism, and they did. I also believe that race and racism can influence instruction and interactions, subconsciously or not.

Some of the participants explained how they do not discuss issues of race and racism with students. I am aware that discussions of race and racism at the K-12 level is currently a highly debated topic (e.g. recent legislation that bans teaching Critical Race Theory). I believe that having discussions about race and racism is not inherently bad: they are just structures in our society. As a matter of fact, not discussing race and racism can be problematic and unproductive (Kohli, Pizarro, & Nevárez, 2017). Larson and Ovando (2001) asserted that “educators are often not aware of the biased constructions that frame their perceptions and interactions with others [because of a] pervasive acceptance of difference blindness” (p. 64). This failure to recognize differences oftentimes leads to “attempts to understand and solve problems using objective and value-free methods” (Young, 2003, p. 281). As it pertains to race, most music education research has focused on solutions rather than a systematic inquiry about the nature of the problem itself (DeLorenzo & Silverman, 2016). Freeman (1977) asserted that “researchers unfamiliar with the historical and structural difference of cultures continue to define the problems and develop solutions based on models that are applicable to the majority population” (p. 548). Using these methods can be of a detriment to the students as it negates and trivializes the nuances of their culture and community.

Many authors have described the fear of race talk (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Bradley, 2006; Morrison, 1992). Morrison (1992) continued it is a “graceful, liberal gesture” that strives to avoid any mention of race, but more pointedly, avoids acknowledging the complicity of Whites in past and ongoing racial oppression. The liberal gesture born of cultural Whiteness results in coding race as politics. As Lewis (2019) stated, educators try their best to avoid the “P-word”.

It is important to be mindful of race as it can dictate everyday interactions with students, their families, and the school community. In my experience, when I was teaching public school, I knew there was a level of privilege and unearned trust that I possessed as a Black man teaching mostly Black students. The way that I could approach my students and their families was different than my white counterparts. Daniel shared how his success was contingent upon building trust with his students and their families. Building trust provided him with leverage to successfully build his music program:

I think the biggest most important thing in doing my job, and even the job I had before this was always approaching it as like I am a student of the culture: I’m a student of the people, the kids, the families. And that's the only reason I’ve been able to last, and in my school, the only reason I’ve been able to last in urban education and the only reason I’ve been able to build a decent program where I’ve build trust with the families and the kids and all type of stuff.

Daniel not only credits his success with cultivating trust with his students and the families, but he also approaches his interaction with his student and families with an openness to learn about them.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) would be an ideal path for interrogating and exploring race and racism in the urban music classroom. CRT originated in 1989 as a legal movement employed by individuals who identified as feminists who focused on changing relationships in society among racism and power (Bell, 1992; Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). It is a framework or a set of basic insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogy, that seeks to identify,

analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects society that maintain the marginal position and the subordination of people of color (Tierney 1991, 1993; Solorzano & Villalpando, 1998). When CRT is applied to education, it is used as a way of confronting and challenging traditional views of education (Hall, 2007) in the areas of meritocracy, claims of color-blind objectivity, and equal opportunity (Crenshaw, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Yosso, 2005; Villalpando, 2003). Culturally relevant pedagogy and critical race theory frameworks support each other (Singleton, 2020). Culturally relevant pedagogy finds the media and the methods that best connect with the students in the room, while CRP helps teachers accept and affirm their students' cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenges inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Critical Race Theory can also be a place for future research, as it is a fairly new subject to music education.

While all of the participants defined racism, only some of them felt like it informed their instruction. Some participants attacked it head on, providing space for students to discuss their feelings in what I would describe as a brave space (Arao & Clemens, 2013); some participants stated that racism is an adult problem and teachers should not put that burden on their students, allowing student to experience the bliss of ignorance. However, I am of the opinion that if students are old enough to experience racism, they are old enough to learn about it. I believe these types of critical conversations should be happening in elementary school or perhaps even earlier. In my experience and the experiences of my colleagues, having these conversations garners pushback as people may feel the content of those conversations are too mature for younger audiences. I would challenge this by referencing Jerome Bruner's process of education. According to Bruner (as cited in Smith, 2002), children can learn anything at any age, if the material is presented in an age-appropriate manner.

Implications

The teachers of this study have revealed that successful urban elementary music teachers are important and unique. What can be learned from them, and more importantly, how can the profession produce more like them?

According to this study, in order to be a successful urban music educator, the prime directive is to be focused on the students and their success. One must not only acknowledge urban students' knowledge and experiences, but also to include them in components of their own instruction. There is so much value in what students bring to the classroom, and a successful urban music educator understands how use this to their advantage. The best and only way to be student centered is to get to know the actual students. This is done through having conversations with the students, going to and supporting their extra-curricular activities, and allowing the students to see the teacher outside of their role as a music educator. Building relationships and rapport with students also provides opportunities for the teacher to become more culturally aware and hear perspectives that may be unlike their own.

Another implication is that successful music educators must demonstrate that music is not a rigid, exclusionary activity, as the findings suggested that successful urban music educators are open and flexible in their classroom approaches. This is accomplished by using a variety of musical style and genres in class. Even more targeted, asking students to share what music they enjoy and infuse that into the instruction. In elementary school, one of the goals should be to establish and maintain the attitude that music is fun and enjoyable. One reason is because elementary school musical experiences could have a significant impact on the children's musical trajectory. If a student does not enjoy music at the elementary level, why would they desire to be involved in middle school or high school, or beyond?

This phenomenological research study provides the music education profession with a collective of experiences of successful urban elementary music educators. The findings contribute to creating an authentic picture of what it means to be a successful urban music educator. Although the specific findings are context specific and should not be generalized, they can be used as a starting place to increase understanding of and conversations about urban music education and potentially improve the field's approach to it.

Future Research

There are several suggestions for future research relative to the findings of this study that have been included in previous sections of this chapter. Many of these recommendations are to expand on this current research by interrogating the experiences of different target populations of urban music educators.

I would like to suggest that more people of color should be doing research about children of color; pointedly, more Black people doing research about Black students. Qualitative researchers bring their experiences, identities, and understandings to their research. Because of this, Black scholars would make a valuable contribution to research about communities they may belong to, and specific to this study, urban communities. By no means does this trivialize or discredit the work of non-Black scholars doing work on Black students. Yet, having Black people do research about Black communities brings a level of authenticity that may otherwise be inaccessible to the field.

While Black scholars may bring authenticity, non-Black scholars often have more access in terms of freedom in scholarship and research. Hess (2017) shared that teachers who possess more privilege have the ability to pursue conversations and issues more freely than teachers without that privilege. Collaboration between Black and non-Black scholars in scholarship and

research about urban education is encouraged in order to make an equitable contribution to the field and continue moving it forward. I truly believe that progress in the profession will happen when the privilege and access of non-Black scholars is used to uplift the authenticity of Black scholar's experiences.

Final Thoughts

Based on the findings of this study, as well as that of scholars in music education, it may be concluded that being a successful elementary urban music educator is the result of a complex set of skills, and that urban music educators are sometimes misunderstood and misrepresented. Each participant shed light on the reality of urban music education: the creativity of curricular and pedagogical decisions, a complex knowledge and understanding of students, their families, and their community, and a deep affection for what they do and whom they serve. Successful urban music educators, like these participants, can serve as valuable resources to provide understanding and offer suggestions for improving urban music education, including ways to nurture and develop the next wave of music educators.