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Novice Texas Band Directors' Perceptions of the Skills and Knowledge Necessary for Successful Teaching

The purpose of this study was to describe novice band directors' perceptions of (a) the importance of skills/knowledge competencies, (b) the difficulty of acquiring skills/knowledge competencies, (c) differences between teaching competency importance and acquisition ratings, (d) benefits of university coursework, and (e) potential improvements to coursework. Survey participants ($N = 85$) rated competency importance, competency acquisition difficulty, and answered two opened-ended questions regarding the role of university coursework in skills/knowledge acquisition. Participants rated the personal competency category as the most important, followed by the teaching and musical categories. Furthermore, participants rated the personal competency category as the easiest to acquire, followed by musical and teaching categories. There was a statistically significant difference between teaching importance and ease of acquisition, with the teaching importance category rated higher. Participants perceived secondary instrument instruction, teaching experiences, core music curriculum, and instruction regarding practical competencies as positive aspects of university coursework. Secondary instrument instruction, field experiences, non-instructional aspects of teaching, and music pedagogy were discussed as areas for improvement. Discussions about curricular content adjustment and future research are included.

Keywords: skills/knowledge importance, skills/knowledge acquisition, novice music teacher, music teacher education, novice band director

Introduction

Researchers have argued that music teaching consists of various skills and knowledge items, which are then combined by music educators to foster teaching and learning in their classrooms (Ballantyne & Packer, 2004; Teachout, 1997). Consensus about the skills/knowledge competencies that comprise impactful music instruction, however, has yet to be reached (Cole, 2014; Rohwer & Henry,

2004). I sought to investigate novice Texas band directors' perceptions of both the importance and acquisition of skills/knowledge competencies.

The desire of novice music teachers to understand the competencies, both musical and practical, necessary for successful integration into the profession has been well documented (Ballantyne, 2006, 2007; Ballantyne & Packer, 2004; Conway, 2002; Conway, Eros, Hourigan, & Stanley, 2007). Participants in Conway et al. (2007) preferred content focused on the fundamentals of teaching beginning instrumentalists to content discussing advanced performance techniques. Practical skills outside of the music curricula, moreover, have been found to surprise and overwhelm participants (Ballantyne, 2006; Ballantyne & Packer, 2004). Conway (2002) suggested that reorganizing coursework to place greater time and emphasis on musical teaching skills may be a way to improve the transition from student to teacher.

Teachout (1997) defined three categories of skills/knowledge components: teaching, personal, and musical skills and behaviors, each with individual competency items. For example, Teachout (1997) assigned items such as lesson planning skills and maximizing time on task to the teacher competency category, items such as professionalism and speaking to the personal competency category, and items like musical knowledge and ear training to the musical competency category. Subsequent studies on the importance of these competencies have employed similar categories (Miksza, Roeder, & Biggs, 2010).

Music educators have often rated teaching and personal competencies as more important than musical competencies (Ballantyne & Packer, 2004; Kelly, 2010; Miksza et al., 2010; Rohwer & Henry, 2004; Teachout, 1997). When asked to rank the three broad categories, participants rated teaching and personal categories nearly equally; however, both were rated higher than the musical category (Miksza et al., 2010). Researchers have suggested that participant appreciation for general musicianship over specific skills (Miksza et al., 2010) and extensive musical preparation during university coursework (Ballantyne & Packer, 2004) may be possible causes for the low importance ratings of musical competencies.

Although there has been general consistency in the overall category rankings, rankings of individual components inside each category have varied, with classroom management and the ability to motivate students being the most agreed upon items (Davis, 2006; Teachout, 1997). For example, MacLeod and Walter (2001) found that cooperating teachers viewed their student teachers as only moderately prepared to handle student behavior concerns. Other highly ranked teaching competencies have included lesson planning (Ballantyne & Packer, 2004; Millican, 2009), professionalism (Kelly, 2010), displaying confidence (Davis, 2006; Teachout, 1997), and organization (Davis, 2006; Millican, 2009).

Music educators have often rated personal competencies equal in importance to teaching skills, yet these behaviors may be more challenging to study (Johnson, 2014). For example, some personal skills or behaviors, particularly those that “make someone exciting” (Cole, 2014, p. 56), may be inherent, and therefore difficult to identify or cultivate. Despite difficulties in study, competencies, such as having an enthusiastic/energetic demeanor (Cole, 2014; Davis, 2006; Mills & Smith, 2003), building positive rapport with students (Ballantyne & Packer, 2004; MacLeod & Walter, 2011), and individual confidence (Rohwer, 2009; Rohwer & Henry, 2004; Teachout, 1997), have been rated highly by participants.

Although participants often rated teaching and personal competency categories higher in importance, researchers have found musical skills to be perceived as a meaningful part of instruction among preservice (Teachout, 1997), currently-employed (Miksza et al., 2010; Teachout, 1997), and university music educators (Rohwer & Henry, 2004). Participants have viewed maintaining high musical standards (Miksza et al., 2010; Teachout, 1997), being musically expressive (Rohwer & Henry, 2004), and demonstrating knowledge of the subject matter (Ballantyne & Packer, 2004; Teachout, 1997) as important in the music classroom. In contrast, piano skills appeared towards the bottom of the rankings in many studies (Cole, 2014; Kelly, 2010; MacLeod & Walter, 2011; Miksza et al., 2010; Teachout, 1997). Additionally, researchers have found transposition among choral and elementary teachers (Rohwer & Henry, 2004) and singing among band directors (MacLeod & Walter, 2011; Miksza et al., 2010) and band members (Rohwer, 2009) to be less valued than other musical skills.

In her recent review of research on novice music teachers, Conway (2015) identified two areas of focus pertinent to this study: challenges/problems of early career teachers and the views (particularly of preservice education) of novice teachers. Of the challenges novice music teachers face, classroom management struggles were the most commonly discussed in the literature (Barnes, 2010; Legette, 2013; Legette & McCord, 2014; Peterson, 2005; Roulston, Legette, & Womack, 2005). Participants in qualitative studies consistently discussed the difficulties of maintaining classroom order early in their careers (Barnes, 2010; Conway, 2003; Peterson, 2005; Yourn, 2000). Similarly, DeLorenzo (1992) found that participants rated maintaining a controlled classroom environment highly, and listed this item in the top five areas of concern. Researchers have also noted that unease regarding classroom management may be connected to either a real, or perceived, lack of management skills (Barnes, 2010; Blair, 2008) and a difficulty in implementing theory-based strategies in real time (Barnes, 2010; Roulston et al., 2005).

Other challenges, such as successfully navigating the context of a new school environment (Barnes, 2010; Peterson, 2005; Roulston et al., 2005), addressing non-music teaching responsibilities (Ballantyne, 2007; Legette, 2013; Roulston et al., 2005), and selecting music for students (Peterson, 2005), were all found among novice music teachers. Combined with classroom management, these challenges all marked competency areas that novice music teachers often struggled to acquire. For instance, entering one's first job has been found to elicit a feeling of "culture shock" (Roulston et al., 2005, p. 74) among novice teachers that may be made worse if past experiences of the novice, such as student teaching or personal experiences as a music student, conflict with the current school context in which the teacher works. In turn, this feeling of culture shock may affect perceptions of competency acquisition.

Novice teachers have also expressed mixed views about the value of preservice education (Ballantyne & Packer, 2004; Legette & McCord, 2014; Roulston et al., 2005). In Ballantyne and Packer's (2004) study, 29% of respondents were dissatisfied with their preservice preparation for teaching. Participants in Legette and McCord's (2014) study felt that their preservice coursework could do more to address: (a) classroom management, (b) teaching strategies for varying circumstances, (c) connecting course content to practice, and (d) facilitating the selection of relevant teaching materials. Additionally, hands-on experiences/activities, field experiences, instruction in lesson planning, and course availability/diversity were all areas participants perceived as well addressed in preservice teacher education. While Hamann and Ebie (2009) found that preservice teachers felt prepared by their coursework to teach outside of their specific area (band, choir, orchestra, etc.), participants also stated that they hoped for more instructional strategies, both in general and for each specific teaching area. Furthermore, novice music teachers have expressed both positive and negative views about the value of coursework (Roulston et al., 2005).

While much has been written about competency importance from the perspective of both preservice and experienced teachers, examining what music educators currently in the early stages of their careers think about the indispensable personal, teaching, and musical competencies involved in music education has largely been left untouched. Determining which competencies are most needed in the minds of novice band directors may serve as a meaningful contribution to music education programs, adding to what researchers have found in other populations, such as the perceived importance of classroom management skills among experienced band directors (Miksza et al., 2010; Teachout, 1997).

Furthermore, research regarding competency acquisition difficulty is similarly lacking in music education. While education researchers in other disciplines have

found competencies such as managing work finances/developing a budget (Burriss & Keller, 2008; Mizoue & Inoue, 1993) and communication with parents (Burriss & Keller, 2008) to be difficult for novice teachers to acquire, more investigation into competency acquisition among music educators is needed. Youn (2000) suggested that preservice music teacher education programs consider the concerns and struggles of beginning music teachers. By continuing to investigate and address these concerns, Youn argued that teacher educators might be able to reduce anxiety related to the transition from student to teacher.

The purpose of this study was to describe novice band directors' perceptions of: (a) skills/knowledge competency importance, (b) skills/knowledge competency acquisition difficulty, (c) differences between teaching competency importance and acquisition ratings, (d) benefits of university coursework, and (e) potential improvements to coursework. The guiding research questions for this study were: (a) What was the relative perceived importance of various competency categories among novice band directors in Texas; (b) What were novice band directors' perceptions of competency category acquisition difficulty; (c) Were there differences between perceived importance of teaching competencies and perceived difficulty of teaching competency acquisition among novice band directors; (d) In what ways did university coursework help novice teachers to acquire the necessary competencies for successful teaching; and (e) What changes in preservice education do novice band directors feel would help prepare future preservice teachers to acquire the necessary competencies for successful teaching?

Method

Participants

Survey respondents ($N = 85$) were 50 males (58.82%), 27 females (31.76%), and 8 who chose to withhold gender identification (9.41%), whose ages ranged from 22 to 42 ($M = 25.91$, $SD = 3.69$). Respondents' ethnicities consisted of Caucasian ($n = 58$), Latinx ($n = 17$), African-American ($n = 1$), preferred not to say ($n = 1$), and no answer ($n = 9$). First year public school teachers made up 37.65% of the sample ($n = 32$ out of 85), while second year teachers represented 62.35% of the sample ($n = 53$ out of 85). Respondents held bachelor's degrees (67.40%), some graduate coursework (9.30%), master's degrees (10.50%), some doctoral coursework (1.20%), or left the item blank (11.60%). I recruited participants using the Texas Music Educators Association (TMEA) membership directory and snowball sampling.

I used three different approaches to recruit participants from the target population of novice band directors. For this study, I selected the term *novice band director* to emphasize a general lack of experience and include those in their first and second years of band directing. Once Institutional Review Board approval was obtained, respondents were contacted via emails obtained from a TMEA provided-list ($N = 170$). Upon examination, the TMEA list contained several errors. Accordingly, I used school websites, emails, and phone calls to verify employment, teaching area, and years of service for individuals from the TMEA list before removing any names who were ineligible for this study ($n = 47$). This brought the total number of novice band directors on the TMEA list to 123.

Furthermore, 97 TMEA band directors declined to provide the year they began teaching and were not identified in the initial examination of the TMEA list. Therefore, in order to reach any potentially absent novice band directors, I employed snowball sampling by contacting an instrumental music education professor at every National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) accredited music program in Texas and asking that he/she forward the initial recruitment email to any recent graduates working in the state. In addition, I used Facebook postings and messages to disseminate invitations to participate. To ensure participant eligibility, the questionnaire contained items that addressed employment location and years of experience. Due to the snowball sampling procedures, a total population number was impossible to determine.

Measurement Instrument

I developed the questionnaire for this study, and the final version contained 70 Likert skills/knowledge competency items separated into two sections regarding importance and acquisition, each with three subsections for personal (10 items), teaching (14 items), and musical (11 items) competencies. On items asking for importance ratings, I asked the participants to select how important they felt each skills/knowledge competency was for successful teaching on a 5-point scale (ranging from 1—barely important to 5—extremely important). Similarly, I asked participants to rate the ease in acquiring each competency on a 5-point scale (ranging from 1—hardly easy to 5—extremely easy). Inside each subsection, individual participants received a different order of items presented randomly to decrease item order effects.

Additionally, two opened-ended items were included that asked: (a) “In what ways did your university coursework help you to acquire the teaching skills/knowledge for successful teaching” and (b) “Looking back at your university coursework, what would you change to help future band directors be able to acquire the neces-

sary teaching skills/knowledge?” Finally, I included nine items regarding participant demographics, eligibility, and informed consent. All data gathered through this questionnaire was self-report data.

I used a multi-step process to identify potential skills/knowledge components for the questionnaire. Initially, I determined the top five items in musical, teaching, and personal categories from both preservice and experienced teachers featured in Teachout (1997). I then identified five additional skills for each category from various quantitative skills/knowledge research (Ballantyne & Packer, 2004; Blocher, Greenwood, & Shellahamer, 1997; Cole, 2014; Davis, 2006; Kelly, 2010; Leong, 1996; Miksza et al., 2010; Millican, 2009; Rohwer, 2009; Rohwer & Henry, 2004; Taebel, 1990), for a total of 10 items per category.

Next, I examined various qualitative studies regarding the challenges of novice music teachers (Blair, 2008; Conway, 2002, 2003, 2012, 2015; Conway & Christensen, 2006; Conway et al., 2007; Conway, Hansen, Schulz, Stimson, & Wozniak-Reese, 2004; Fredrickson & Hackworth, 2005; Fredrickson & Neill, 2004; Pembroke & Fredrickson, 2000/2001; Roulston et al., 2005; Schmidt, 2008; Schmidt & Canser, 2006) and compiled a list of 22 skills/knowledge components and the frequency with which they appeared in the literature. I then selected identified items through comparison of the quantitative analysis with the qualitative analysis (using both frequency and importance) to arrive at 12 musical, 10 teaching, and 10 personal skills/knowledge components for use in the questionnaire.

Subsequently, I selected open-ended items addressing the teaching competency category to provide context and greater understanding to the quantitative results. I based this decision on the perceived meaningfulness of teaching skills/knowledge competencies to overall music teaching success among various groups (Ballantyne & Packer, 2004; Miksza et al., 2010; Teachout, 1997). Additionally, Kelly (2010) implied that personal skills/knowledge are less likely to be impacted through “traditional academic means,” (p. 31), such as coursework, than those competencies that fall under musical or teaching categories.

I sent the questionnaire to three content validity panelists, selected for their research expertise and familiarity with the topic. Adjustments were made based on panel recommendations, such as adding components and revising wording, and I conducted a brief field test for clarity with two preservice music teachers.

Following validity recommendations, I assessed reliability through a pilot test. Of the 83 potential items, one was removed from both the music importance and music acquisition subcategories for reliability concerns, making the total number of items 81. With the deletion of the component “possess excellent singing skills”, the internal consistency for musical acquisition improved ($\alpha = .67$), yet was still short of the desired reliability cutoffs. Cho and Kim (2015) and Raykov (2008)

noted that artificially attempting to increase alpha may lead to unreasonable sacrifices of validity. As such, I chose to keep the remaining items in the musical ease of acquisition subgroup. The component was also removed from the musical importance subcategory, however the reliability coefficient remained unchanged ($\alpha = .78$). This balancing process was undertaken to maintain equal items between subgroups and avoid participant confusion. Due to the decision to retain items in the music importance/acquisition subcategories despite lower alphas, I reexamined reliability after the completion of the main study. All subcategories were found to be reliable ($\alpha > .80$).

Procedures

This was a descriptive survey study. The initial recruitment email contained: (a) a brief description of the study and purpose, (b) a code for \$2 credit at Redbox, and (c) information about a raffle for one \$50 Amazon gift card code. I included the Redbox code in order to capitalize on what Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2014) termed token cash incentives in order to increase survey response. The email also contained a link to the questionnaire, hosted on the online survey site *Survey Monkey*.

All participants responded through the link provided, which led them to the informed consent form and web questionnaire. I initiated follow-up procedures in the second week, after initial respondents were counted ($n = 33$). These procedures yielded 40 further respondents from both the list ($n = 11$) and through either professor emails or Facebook ($n = 29$). Next, I contacted non-respondents from the TMEA list ($n = 80$) via phone and offered the opportunity to complete the questionnaire, with 12 (15%) responding.

Overall, 85 completed questionnaires were collected, which included 45.52% of the TMEA list. Once I had completed data collection, I entered quantitative items into SPSS and coded qualitative items. Afterwards, I compared early, late, and non-respondent demographic means to identify potential non-response biases in age, $F(2, 72) = .89, p = .42$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$, gender identity, $F(2, 74) = .05, p = .96$, partial $\eta^2 < .01$, ethnicity, $F(2, 74) = .06, p = .94$, partial $\eta^2 < .01$, and education level, $F(2, 73) = .17, p = .84$, partial $\eta^2 < .01$. No significant differences were present.

Prior to addressing missing data, I conducted Little's (1988) test ($p = .89$) for missing completely at random (MCAR). To address missing data, I used listwise deletion when respondents failed to complete the majority of items in a category, and excluded those respondents from analysis. In cases where missing data were limited to a small number of items, I used hot deck imputation to generate

placeholder values (Andridge & Little, 2010; McKnight, McKnight, Sidani, & Figueredo, 2007).

Data Analysis

Following missing data procedures, I calculated means and standard deviations for the summed *a priori* personal, teaching, and musical competency categories regarding both importance and ease of acquisition. I then placed competency categories into rank orders for both importance and acquisition using mean scores. Next, I conducted a repeated-measures ANOVA to measure differences across importance and difficulty ratings in the teaching competency item subcategories.

Using the 6-step process outlined by Creswell (2013, 2014), I coded qualitative data for themes using *Dedoose*, an online qualitative data management platform. Of note, while I used code counts as one potential indication of participant interest, the development of themes was not solely reliant on code counts. This was to allow for different weighting of statements, in accordance with Creswell (2013).

Both codes and themes were subjected to peer debriefing to check for trustworthiness in the pilot and main study. Scholars have defined peer debriefing as an unconnected review by an external individual to examine the procedures, context, and conclusions of a qualitative study (Creswell, 2013, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creswell (2013) suggested that peer debriefing was “much in the same spirit as interrater reliability in quantitative research” (p. 251). Likewise, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued “since there can be no validity without reliability (and thus no credibility without dependability), a demonstration of the former is sufficient to establish the latter” (p. 316).

Results

Regarding research question one, “What was the relative perceived importance of various competency categories among novice band directors in Texas”, means and standard deviations were calculated. For competency importance ratings, personal competencies showed the highest mean scores, followed by teaching competencies and musical competencies, as can be seen in Table 1. For research question two regarding perceived ease of competency acquisition, means indicated that participants rated personal competencies as the easiest to acquire, followed by musical competencies, and teaching competencies. These results can be found in Table 2.

Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics for Competency Importance

Subcategory	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Personal Skills/Knowledge Importance	3.40	5.00	4.64	.37
Teaching Skills/Knowledge Importance	3.71	5.00	4.60	.35
Musical Skills/Knowledge Importance	3.17	5.00	4.29	.43

Note. *N* = 85

Table 2.

Descriptive Statistics for Component Acquisition

Subcategory	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Personal Skills/Knowledge Importance	2.10	5.00	3.57	.71
Musical Skills/Knowledge Importance	1.09	4.91	3.14	.76
Teaching Skills/Knowledge Importance	1.00	4.46	3.09	.72

Note. *N* = 85

In order to address research question three, a one-way within-subjects ANOVA was calculated to examine differences between the teaching importance ($M = 4.60$; $SD = .35$) and teaching acquisition ($M = 3.09$; $SD = .72$) subcategories. Skewness and kurtosis were calculated for teaching importance (skewness = $-.77$; kurtosis = $-.36$) and teaching acquisition (skewness = $-.31$; kurtosis = $-.16$) and fell within the -1 to $+1$ range of acceptability described by Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010). Furthermore, repeated measures ANOVAs have been found to be robust to deviations from normality, both when sample sizes are moderate or large (Norman & Streiner, 2008) and when sample sizes are equal (Hair et al., 2010; Huck, 2012).

Results of the ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference between importance and acquisition, $F(1, 84) = 297.89$, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .78$ with participants' teaching importance ratings being higher than teaching acquisition ratings.

I included qualitative items to answer research questions four and five. These questions served to provide greater context to interpretations of competency importance and acquisition. In answer to research question four, "In what ways did university coursework help novice teachers to acquire the necessary competencies for successful teaching," I identified four themes. For theme 1 (secondary instrument instruction), several participants ($n = 25$) remarked that instruction on secondary instruments held great practical importance. One respondent declared that "By learning about secondary instrument [sic] in hands-on methods classes, I was able to apply those skills in the classroom when a student exhibits a certain playing error to help correct that and create success for that student."

For theme 2 (teaching experiences), respondents stressed the impact of various teaching experiences in acquiring teaching competencies, and many such experiences were gained away from the university classroom. One respondent stated:

The majority of skills and knowledge that I have learned and have found successful in my teaching I have acquired outside of the University setting; teaching lessons, working at high schools and middle schools, etc. where there is more hands on practical application of the teaching idiom and skills.

Some comments related to this theme focused on observations ($n = 8$), field teaching ($n = 7$), and student teaching ($n = 4$).

For theme 3 (core music curriculum), several participants expressed an appreciation for much of the instruction they received in their university coursework. Core subjects, such as music theory and music history, were viewed as sufficiently covered by participants. One respondent stated that “I was VERY prepared for theory and aural skills parts of my job as well.” Additionally, respondents felt well prepared musically. For example, a respondent commented, “Our ensemble directors, studio professors, history professors, and theory professors all held us to high playing standards.”

For theme 4 (practical skills/knowledge), practical competencies included in coursework were often cited as meaningful whenever they were addressed. Respondents cited conducting ($n = 12$), lesson planning ($n = 8$), error detection ($n = 6$), score study ($n = 4$), specialty ensembles ($n = 4$), rehearsal skills ($n = 4$), classroom management ($n = 3$), and communication ($n = 2$) as practical competencies that participants believed were addressed at some level by their graduating institutions. Participants greatly appreciated discussion of such practical topics, due to the inherent applicability to their careers. For example, one respondent highlighted specific rehearsal skills, such as “fine tuning and intonation, adjusting, chord building/theory, balance and blend, [and] pace” as subjects that were well addressed in their coursework.

In answer to research question five, “What changes in preservice education do novice band directors feel would help prepare future preservice teachers to acquire the necessary skills/knowledge for successful teaching,” I also identified 4 themes. For theme 1 (secondary instrument instruction), several respondents ($n = 28$) also expressed a desire for more time and depth of instruction in their secondary instrument classes. One respondent commented:

I would prefer not to be taught everything one needs to know in order to be a successful wind player. Show me the things that I will encounter the most, and walk me through ways in which I can solve it or help in some way.

Similar comments were common and brought to light participant concerns about instrumental pedagogy.

For theme 2 (field experiences), respondents saw field experiences as an important aspect of teaching competency acquisition and expressed a desire for more opportunities to get hands on experience. Participants frequently suggested that there be increased opportunities for on-site time prior to student teaching ($n = 7$), as well as more opportunities for longer student teaching ($n = 7$), and more observations ($n = 4$). For instance, one respondent suggested, “The first time you’re teaching a band shouldn’t be in student teaching.”

For theme 3 (non-instructional aspects of teaching), participants discussed feeling unprepared for the non-instructional duties and situations common in the workforce. General comments, such as a respondent’s statement that “If anything, its [sic] the non-teaching skills/knowledge that takes time to understand and execute (the administrative, behind-the-scenes tasks)” were prevalent. Likewise, another respondent stated, “I wish I understood more about the logistics and organization about what all goes into being a band director.”

In addition to general comments about non-instructional duties, many participants described specific areas that were perceived as lacking in preservice education, such as classroom management ($n = 9$), instrument repair ($n = 7$), communication ($n = 6$), and finance ($n = 5$). Competencies in these areas were believed to be difficult and time intensive to acquire.

For theme 4 (music pedagogy), participants commented on several aspects of music teaching they would like to see explored in greater depth, with a focus on teaching. One respondent suggested “more of an emphasis on HOW to deliver information in addition to what information to deliver.” Another respondent emphasized the content and pedagogy by expressing a desire for more “error detection on [sic] ensembles PAIRED with discussions about how to solve such errors.”

Discussion

In this study, I examined novice Texas band directors’ perceptions of competency importance, competency acquisition difficulty, differences between perceptions of teaching competency importance and difficulty, and the role university coursework played in the acquisition of skills/knowledge for successful teaching. Concerning research question one, findings indicated that Texas novice band directors viewed personal, teaching, and musical competency categories as important. Participants rated personal and teaching competencies similarly, which aligned with prior literature (Miksza et al., 2010; Teachout, 1997). Correspondingly, participants also rated musical competencies least important, in agreement

with previous studies (Ballantyne & Packer, 2004; Kelly, 2010; Miksza et al., 2010; Rohwer & Henry, 2004; Teachout, 1997).

Results concerning research question two, competency acquisition difficulty, indicated that novice Texas band directors also found personal competencies to be the easiest to acquire, followed by musical and teaching competencies. Participants often evaluated skills/knowledge components that were well addressed in their university coursework as easy to acquire, such as professionalism, assessment, and musicianship. In the open-ended responses, participants described the competencies that were acquired less easily, including staying organized, being knowledgeable about secondary instruments, and implementing classroom management strategies. Qualitative comments further expanded on the positive impact of coursework and the areas that respondents felt were open for improvement.

Continuing to address those competencies viewed by novice music teachers as important may improve novice Texas band directors' transition into the workforce and perceptions towards preservice teacher education efficacy. Although participants viewed many different competency areas as important overall, prioritizing instruction to incorporate competency importance ratings may be meaningful for competency acquisition. Many institutions may already base their coursework on similar results; however, qualitative comments in this study may indicate that room for improvement still exists.

In answer to research question three, I found a statistically significant difference between teaching importance and teaching acquisition, with the teaching skills/knowledge importance category rated higher by participants than teaching skills/knowledge ease of acquisition. The differences in the means showed that novice Texas band directors found teaching skills important, but difficult to acquire. This may further inform university preparations, particularly in Texas.

In answer to research question four, I developed four themes: (a) secondary instrument instruction, (b) teaching experiences, (c) core music curriculum, and (d) practical skills/knowledge. Secondary instrument instruction was by far the most lauded facet of preservice education. Such emphasis is in alignment with previous qualitative (Conway et al., 2007) and quantitative skills/knowledge research. Participants also valued the positive contextualization and practice provided by teaching experiences, felt prepared in core music content, and appreciated any practical competencies addressed in their preservice teacher education. University faculty may desire to continue incorporating factors such as field/peer teaching experiences into their curricula (Miksza et al., 2010; Teachout, 1997).

In answer to research question five, I developed four themes: (a) secondary instrument instruction, (b) field experiences, (c) non-instructional aspects of teaching, and (d) music pedagogy. Many respondents stressed the importance of

approaching secondary instrument instruction from a pedagogical perspective, with comments addressing methods for teaching the instruments prevalent in participant responses. Additionally, respondents called for more field experience opportunities, greater coverage of non-instructional aspects of band directing, a desire for more pedagogical information, instruction regarding specific competencies, and approaches to successfully conveying music content to students. Each theme identified may serve to inform curricular decision-making at the university level, either through reworking of whole courses or through the incorporation of varying competencies into pre-existing coursework.

Many of the proposed suggestions stemming from this study regard reevaluating university preservice teacher education. Various external factors, however, may limit changes to the curriculum. State and federal financial aid restrictions, institutional degree plans, access to field placements, and the desire to educate well-rounded musicians may all be limiting factors in curriculum adjustment. Additionally, some non-instructional aspects of teaching, such as communication with difficult parents, may be nearly impossible to address in preservice music education. Finally, this study only sampled novice Texas band directors, and the implications may therefore be limited to preservice teacher education programs in Texas.

Despite efforts to develop generalizability, certain limitations remained. The voluntary nature of participation in the study may have led to non-response error. Similarly, participants who chose to withhold their novice band director status from TMEA may differ significantly from those who added their starting year. Although I employed snowball sampling to address errors, there was no way to double-dip members of the population that had failed to provide necessary information. Additionally, population members who were not included in the TMEA membership directory, either due to lack of information or not being members of TMEA, may differ significantly from the participants in this study. Therefore, generalizability may be limited.

While researchers have frequently studied competency importance, competency acquisition may have room for future investigation in music education. Further research regarding competency acquisition may provide meaningful insight into how preservice and novice teachers gain the necessary competencies to be successful. Future studies may examine competency acquisition of music educators from different teaching areas. Similarly, expanding the population studied to include various levels of experience may also give greater insight into competency acquisition.

In conclusion, participants in this study viewed competency importance similarly to previous research and specifically viewed teaching competencies as important, but challenging to acquire. Furthermore, results from this study reflected

novice Texas band directors' desire for assistance in acquiring the necessary skills/knowledge competencies for success in their chosen profession.

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