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Connections and Disconnections: Music Cooperating Teachers' Perceptions of Working with Universities

The purpose of this study was to reveal how K-12 music teachers who mentor preservice music teachers during the student teaching internship (i.e., cooperating teachers) perceive their experiences of working with higher education institutions. The questions of the study are: 1) what are cooperating teachers' (CTs') experiences of working with universities; 2) what information helps CTs prepare to work with student teachers (STs) and university supervisors (USs); and 3) what university procedures, tools, and interactions do CTs perceive as supportive to their role? The seven participants were K-12 music teachers who had been CTs. Data consisted of individual, semi-structured interviews. Participants' experiences are summarized in three categories of interactions: The Ask (being asked to take STs); The Match (being matched with STs); and The Collaboration (working with USs). Three intersecting themes emerged among these interactions: Personal Connections, Vetting CTs, and Participants' Student Teaching Experiences. This study supports five suggestions for practice for music teacher educators, STs, and CTs: 1) taking time to evaluate K-12 music educators as potential ST placements; 2) explaining to CTs how they were vetted; 3) explaining how STs are matched with CTs; 4) communicating STs strengths/needs to CTs, and 5) using narrative as a tool for establishing relationships and evaluating prospective CTs.
Keywords: music education, cooperating teachers, student teaching, university supervisors, matching, vetting cooperating teachers.

Introduction

Researchers and teacher educators have long recognized student teaching, the culminating field experience or internship of a teacher licensure degree program, as one of the most important components of teacher education (Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen, 2014; Conway & Baugh, 2018; Draves, 2013; Zemek, 2008). It is vital to preservice teachers' social development as professionals, and it prepares them for

the realities of teaching school music (Burton & Greher, 2007; Conkling, 2004, 2007; Haston & Russell, 2011). Without cooperating teachers (CTs) welcoming student teachers (STs) into their classrooms, student teaching would not be possible, and researchers have found that cooperating teachers have enormous influence on the beliefs and practices of STs (Clark et al., 2014; Draves, 2008b, 2013; Zemek, 2008). Because CTs are so influential and play an integral role as teacher educators, examining their experiences of working with universities might provide valuable insight for music teacher education that could strengthen the student teaching internship experience for all parties involved. The purpose of the present study was to reveal how K-12 music teachers who mentor preservice music teachers during the student teaching internship (i.e., CTs) perceive their experiences of working with higher education institutions.

Several researchers have studied the interactions among cooperating teachers, student teachers, and universities. For example, Draves (2008b, 2013) demonstrated that CTs' ways of sharing power with STs strongly influences CTs' perspectives of working with universities and STs. Further, Draves defined a continuum of power-sharing structures between ST-CT, from student-teacher to collaborative partnership, and determined that open communication and collaboration promotes the development of positive relationships between CTs and STs. In another example, Valencia, Martin, Place, and Grossman (2009) found barriers to effective collaboration between CTs and STs that included discrepant goals for student teaching, strained interactions within the triad (CT-ST-US), tenuous ties between coursework and fieldwork, unclear criteria for field placements, and a lack of support for CTs. Russell (2011) found that incongruity between CTs' and STs' teaching identities affected the STs' ability to critically reflect on their teaching.

With regard to selecting cooperating teachers, Hellman, Bazan, Fraser, and Yukevich (2017) found that in music education, standard practice is to base CT selection on professional and personal relationships between collegiate and K-12 music educators. Palmer and Finger (2016) found that student teachers were most often recommended to cooperating teachers by music education professors, and Zemek (2008) found that universities relied on the opinions of collegiate music educators when selecting CTs and making ST placements, which was different from the selection process reported in general education literature. In general education, universities rely primarily on the opinions of school principals when selecting CTs (Clark et al., 2014; Zemek, 2008). Because of these differences between music teacher education and general teacher education, it may be important to study other aspects of the student teaching internship in music that also may differ from general teacher education.

Clarke et al. (2014) synthesized 185 research articles on cooperating teachers, and found 11 roles CTs play as participants in teacher education:

- Providers of Feedback
- Gatekeepers of the Profession
- Modelers of Practice
- Supporters of Reflection
- Gleaners of Knowledge
- Purveyors of Context
- Conveners of Relation
- Agents of Socialization
- Advocates of the Practical
- Abiders of Change
- Teachers of Children

Clark et al. surmised that both STs and CTs view the role of the CT as the most powerful component of learning to teach. Conway and Baugh (2018) used these roles as a theoretical framework to study music cooperating teachers' understandings of their role in the teacher education process, and found evidence that music CTs also play these roles in music teacher education. Denis (2017) examined evidence from general education and music teacher education research regarding personal relationships, expectations, reflective practice, and power structures inherent in the student-teaching experience. Denis noted a need for clear methods of communicating information to CTs, as well as a need for proper and supportive personal relationships with a defined power-sharing structure.

Though not necessarily the main focus of previous research on cooperating teachers, some aspects of their perceptions of policies, procedures, and working relationships with higher education institutions have been revealed. For example, in a study by Busby and Mupinga (2007), CTs cited several challenges to their work, including varying university procedures, under-prepared student teachers, and lack of appreciation by the student teachers. Additionally, Busby and Mupinga noted CTs' concerns that placements should be made carefully, to ensure CTs will give STs sufficient feedback and consistent guidance. Hamel and Jaasko-Fisher (2011) examined a training program for CTs, finding that CTs needed clear parameters for working with STs in early field placements and clarity regarding roles for giving feedback. Liebhaber (2003) studied interactions among members of the music student teaching triad (CTs, STs, and USs), and determined that good music CTs are eager to learn from being a cooperating teacher and guiding a student teacher, and that university supervisors play a prominent role in nurturing a collaborative process of mentoring STs.

Zemek (2008) found that typical cooperating teacher preparation activities include handbooks, conferences between CTs and USs, and occasional classes or workshops. Researchers have revealed other aspects of CT's perceptions of working with universities, including that they desire better communication with universities and clear, structured, university-generated written guidelines regarding their responsibilities (Clarke et al., 2014; Portelance, Caron, & Martineau, 2016; Young & MacPhail, 2015, 2016). In addition, CTs need frequent and proactive communication from USs (Clarke et al., 2014; Hamel & Jaasko-Fisher, 2011; Sanchez, Goodwin, & Roegman, 2016; Young & MacPhail, 2015); and CTs need background information about STs prior to the beginning of student teaching (Clarke et al., 2014; Draves, 2008a).

Because cooperating teachers are so influential in the process of learning to teach, researchers continue to call for further research into all aspects of being a CT (e.g., Clark et al., 2014; Denis, 2017; Greene, 2015; Jones, Kelsey, & Brown, 2014). Researchers should continue to examine CTs' experiences and perceptions of their role in teacher education and their interactions with universities because these may affect whether or not K-12 teachers become CTs, whether they accept STs from specific universities, and how well they support ST learning in their role as CTs. In the present study, I sought to explore cooperating teachers' perceptions of working with higher education institutions. I include references to additional related literature throughout the discussion of findings.

The purpose of this study was to reveal how K-12 music teachers who mentor preservice music teachers during the student teaching internship (i.e., cooperating teachers) perceive their experiences of working with higher education institutions. The questions of the study are:

- What are cooperating teachers' experiences of working with universities,
- What information helps cooperating teachers prepare to work with student teachers and university supervisors, and
- What university procedures, tools, and interactions do cooperating teachers perceive as supportive to their role?

Method

Setting

The setting was an urban region of a Midwestern state. The region contained seven colleges and universities that offered a bachelor's degree in music education, a post-baccalaureate licensure program, and/or a master's degree with licensure.

Because of the number of music education programs in the region, there is great need for cooperating teachers, and many K-12 music teachers in the region have served as CTs for more than one higher education institution.

Sampling

Criterion sampling and convenience sampling were employed for this study (Patton, 2002). The criterion was K-12 music teachers who had served as a CT for at least one music ST. It was quickest and most convenient to generate a list of potential participants who met the criterion using the records of my institution, from which I identified 61 people who had mentored a ST during the previous 10 years. This method of convenience sampling might be considered limiting because some potential participants may have had negative experiences with my institution, or might be uncomfortable answering questions about working with me. I believe two factors balanced these limitations: (a) I had only been at the institution for two years, so only a few of the potential participants had worked directly with me, and (b) with seven colleges and universities in the region, it was likely that many potential participants had been a CT for more than one institution, and if that were true, they would represent information-rich cases that would actually strengthen the data. To accommodate those who might be uncomfortable talking with me about me or my institution, I recruited an alternate interviewer from a different region who was not affiliated with my institution, but who was an experienced K-12 music teacher and music teacher educator. Participants were able to choose to be interviewed by the alternate interviewer, me, or either of us.

I sent an e-mail invitation to participate to all 61 teachers. Five were returned due to undeliverable e-mail addresses. I sent a second e-mail invitation to those who did not respond to the first e-mail. Invitations included a link to an online response form. Questions on the form gathered informed consent, demographic information, respondent preferences for scheduling an interview (date, time, phone/internet call/in-person), and their preferences for being interviewed by the researcher or the alternate interviewer. Of the 56 music teachers with valid e-mail addresses who were invited to participate, eight completed the response form (response rate: 14.3%); seven completed interviews. Only one participant asked to be interviewed only by the alternate interviewer. All other participants indicated either interviewer was acceptable. The seven participants represented a wide range of experience (1-9 STs mentored), and four could be considered information-rich cases because they had mentored four or more STs for three or more universities.

Participants

Participants in this study were seven K-12 music teachers (two male, five female). Descriptive and demographic information for each participant is listed in Table 1. Age and years of teaching experience are reported as a range to aide anonymity. The age range for all participants was 25–55 years, and the number of years of teaching experience ranged from 5–30 years. Participants' specialty areas were elementary general (two), secondary choral (two), and secondary instrumental music (three). Each participant had mentored between one and nine STs, and five of the participants had mentored STs from more than one institution.

Table 1.

Participant Descriptive and Demographic Information

Name[a]	Gender	Age[b]	Teaching Experience[b]	Teaching Context[c]	# STs[d]	# Universities[e]	Interview Length[f]
Carri	Female	25-29	5-10	Elem. Gen.	1	1	18:31
Joyce	Female	45-49	15-20	Elem. Gen.	8	5	31:25
Amy	Female	25-29	5-10	Sec. Inst.	3	2	11:00
Ben	Male	35-39	15-20	Sec. Inst.	4	3	36:39
Tony	Male	50-55	25-30	Sec. Inst.	1	1	23:00
Mary	Female	35-39	15-20	Sec. Choral	4	3	40:00
Dina	Female	35-39	15-20	Sec. Choral	9	4	62:37

Notes. [a]All names are pseudonyms. [b]Reported in ranges to aid anonymity. [c]Context is the level (Elementary or Secondary) and type of music taught (General, Instrumental, Choral). [d]Number of student teachers the participant had mentored. [e]Number of universities for which the participant had mentored student teachers. [f]Units are minutes:seconds.

Data and Analysis

This is a basic qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) in which I examine participants' perceptions of their experiences of interacting with higher education institutions while serving as cooperating teachers for music student teachers. In a basic qualitative study, researchers are interested in how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Data analysis involves identifying patterns or themes that characterize the data, and these patterns and themes are the findings of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Researchers then interpret the data and present their understanding of how participants understood their experiences and interactions, providing support for their interpretations from the data.

Data for the present study were semi-structured, individual interviews. Using my experience as a university supervisor and field placement coordinator, I designed interview questions (included in the Appendix) to examine university

procedures such as initial contact or matching STs to CTs, and other topics such as interacting with university supervisors and recommendations from past and for future placements. I conducted four interviews and the alternate interviewer conducted three. The length of each interview is listed in Table 1 (*M* = 32 minutes).

Both interviewers took hand-written notes during interviews, and interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. I reviewed all transcripts and confirmed that both interviewers asked every participant every interview question. This review revealed that each interview also included at least one follow-up question that flowed from the conversation in the interview. There were two types of follow up questions: clarifications (asking for more specific information, e.g., "is that coming mostly from your experience as a ST yourself or from the STs you've mentored?"), or confirmations (restating a participant's answer, e.g., "So you are saying the best [US] that you've worked with was not the one in charge of the Student Teacher?"). The alternate interviewer and I used our handwritten notes to discuss our initial impressions of the data and establish initial codes for data analysis. Initial codes included both pre-determined codes based on interview questions (e.g., how contacted, knowing what is expected, matching ST and CT, interactions with USs, and advice for finding CTs), codes established in researcher conversations (e.g., the blind call, red flag reporter, personal connections, communication, good/bad matches), and codes that emerged during analysis (e.g., field experience observations, ST professionalism, collaborative support). I coded interview transcripts and handwritten notes, grouped codes into categories, and completed a cross-case analysis, identifying patterns and themes that characterized the data (Merriam & Tisdale, 2015). The alternate interviewer then reviewed the categories and cross-case analysis to ensure they represented the data.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established through analyst triangulation (multiple investigators), investigator expertise, and rich description (Patton, 2002). The alternate interviewer served as an additional investigator, helping to establish initial codes, and reviewing categories and themes later in the process. Both investigators were experienced K-12 music teachers (≥ 24 years teaching each), and both had extensive experience working with music student teachers (as a cooperating teacher, placement coordinator, course instructor, and university supervisor). Finally, I provide rich description of participants' perceptions of their experiences working with universities in the student teaching process, using participant quotes to support findings.

Findings: Cooperating Teachers' Experiences

I present the findings of this study relating to the first research question (What are cooperating teachers' experiences of working with higher education institutions?), in three categories of interactions between CTs and USs: The Ask (being asked to take STs), The Match (being matched with STs), and The Collaboration (working with USs). These categories represent recurring patterns of experience described by the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The Ask

The Ask refers to how participants came to be asked to take a student teacher. Interview Questions 4 and 9 (see Appendix) related to finding prospective cooperating teachers and inviting them to take a student teacher. Codes grouped into this category included: how contacted, advice for finding CTs, the blind call, and personal connections.

Six participants (Mary, Tony, Ben, Amy, Dina, and Joyce) had been asked to take a student teacher by music education professors they knew. In fact, the only reason Tony gave for taking a ST was because "I was asked by a colleague that I respect and I've worked with a long time." Ben said that he had "personal connections with all of [the university faculty members]" who had asked him to take STs, and went on to describe how he knew each faculty member from each university. Amy stated, "Personal e-mail is the only way that I've been contacted about student teaching." Dina described being asked to take a ST by a music education professor "who I really adore."

Joyce added that she also had experienced "the blind, they-don't-know-me-from-Fred" call to take a ST. Carri, who had only mentored one ST at the time of the study, also received a blind call to ask her to take a ST "at the last minute."

Joyce, an elementary general music teacher, stated that she is "very involved in. . . the [state] MEA, so I bump into people there. I also am really involved with the Orff and Kodály Chapters. . . so I've met the professors at those things." Joyce also believed that feedback methods course students gave their professors about working with her led to her being asked to take student teachers, which represents a personal connection of sorts through her reputation with methods students. She said, "when [the methods students go] back and they have to discuss what they've seen [in] different places, I think the professors are really listening to, 'Oh. That's a room I should send somebody to.'"

Participants in this study were asked to take student teachers most often by music education faculty with whom they had a personal connection. Only one

participant, Mary, described being asked to take a ST by her principal, who had been contacted by a college field placement office through her district office. No participants in this study described being approached exclusively by non-music faculty members or education field placement offices. This finding aligns with Palmer and Finger's (2016) finding that STs were most often recommended to CTs by music education professors, and Hellman, Bazan, Fraser, and Yukevich's (2017) finding that in music education, standard practice is to base CT selection on professional and personal relationships between collegiate and K-12 music educators.

The Match

Interview Question 10 (see Appendix) directly related to matching student teachers and cooperating teachers; however, data regarding The Match came from responses to several interview questions. Codes grouped under this category include: matching ST & CT, personal connections, good/bad matches, and ST professionalism. Most participants did not know how they were matched with student teachers, but several described good or bad matches they had experienced.

Ben said, "there's never been any issues with any [of my STs]." He was very positive about one ST, saying, "That was a nail on the head. He and I are like two peas in a pod." Ben mentored another ST he had "known…since he was like five, so that kind of worked out, too." Mary described having a ST who was a good fit because they shared a similar personality, musical tastes, and had experience with the same teaching methodology. Conversely, one ST who was a bad fit had a "picture of teaching" that did not align with the way Mary taught.

Dina suspected that the matching process was "random." She had worked with the most student teachers (9) of all the participants and shared several specific examples. STs who were a poor fit for Dina had "very limited piano skills" and lacked "a strong, commanding personality." One ST "was very strange…opinionated and very cocky, but had no reason to be" and the ST's "personality did not fit with [Dina's personality]." She found these factors frustrating and thought they hindered the learning process. Sometimes, she had STs "that just [didn't] practice" or who "had every excuse in the book." Those who were a good fit for Dina were "able to take criticism" and showed interest in interacting with her students outside of teaching.

The findings in this category align with previous research pointing to the power of personal relationships between cooperating teachers and student teachers to make or break the student teaching experience. Draves (2013) concluded, "relationships between student teachers and their cooperating teachers have emerged

as a determinate force in the growth and success of the student teacher" (p. 56). Other researchers (Denis, 2017; Draves, 2008a, 2008b; Young & MacPhail, 2015, 2016) have also pointed to the crucial nature of a strong relationship between cooperating teacher and student teacher. Clarke et al. (2014) found that the relationship between the cooperating teacher and the student teacher enables ST learning (CT role of Convener of Relation), and that the socialization of the ST is dependent on a high level of congruence between ST and CT values (CT role of Agent of Socialization).

In general, this was true from the perspective of the participants in the current study. Their experiences revealed that student teachers' personal and professional characteristics affected the fit between participants and their STs. Participants perceived ST professionalism and work ethic as factors in good or bad matches, and thought it best when they and their STs had similar personalities, musical tastes, and preferences for methodology. A good match between the CT's and ST's pedagogical views might result in the ST approaching the pupils in a way the CT wants. Student teachers might then teach relatively well because the cooperating teacher's rules and routines fit with their view of teaching (Jaspers, Meijer, Prins, & Wubbels, 2014).

Cooperating teachers in this study also wanted information about the strengths and needs of student teachers they were being asked to take. They relied on the music education professors asking them to take STs to ensure this congruence, to inform them when STs' traits or values might not align with theirs, and to explain the reasoning behind the match. In Dina's words, she wished someone had given her "a heads up" about students who were shy, opinionated, or needed to work on piano skills, for example. Joyce gave the only specific example of how she was matched with a student teacher. The music education professor called her and said,

I have one for you. She's the one that says, "The book doesn't say to do it that way." I said "Oh my god. Do you want to give her to me?" Because I'm the queen of [switching] it up, depending on which class is in front of you. You still get to the same concept, but you're not traveling the same road. I said, "You do know who you're talking to, right?" [The professor] goes, "Yes. That's exactly why I want to place her with you." It drove the student teacher crazy when I was modeling, because every class was slightly different than the next. Then finally, when she started teaching and she tried to do the exact formula for every class and it wasn't working, it hit her like a brick in the head. It was pretty funny. She was like 'I get it now!'

Joyce questioned this placement request at first because of the mismatch in teaching style. Even though there was a lack of congruence between the values of Joyce and the student teacher, the information from the music education professor about the ST helped Joyce understand ahead of time what she would need to work on with the ST, and contributed to the success of the match.

The Collaboration

In the present study, interview Questions 6, 7, 8, and 11 (see Appendix) were related to participants' experiences working with university supervisors. Codes grouped under this category include: interactions with USs, personal connections, communication, and collaborative support. Participants' answers revealed characteristics and behaviors they perceived as supporting or undermining interactions between them and USs. Characteristics or behaviors of USs that supported positive, collaborative interactions were: good communication; a collaborative, respectful attitude; support for the CT; and matching specialty area. University supervisor characteristics or behaviors that undermined CT-US interactions were the opposite: a lack of communication, little interaction, a lack of respect for the CT, and having a different specialty area than the placement.

Joyce enjoyed "being able to have [the] kind of relationship" in which she could consult the US when issues with student teachers arose. In one instance, Joyce's ST was "getting hives because she was petrified in front of the children, but didn't realize it until she was teaching." So she called the US and said, "Okay, we're having anxiety attacks and breaking out in hives. I don't know how to fix this," and they were able to work together to support the ST. In contrast, Mary felt a lack of respect when she communicated concerns about one student teacher to the university supervisor, because the US did not take her seriously. She said the US "was flippant about my concerns," and told Mary, "Oh, you'll be fine!"

Carri felt supported by the university supervisor she worked with, saying, "I sensed that whatever messages [my student teacher was] getting from her supervisor [were] supportive . . . so you feel like all of the work you're doing is not in vain and being undermined by a different authority." Dina described one US who "never made me feel like there was a difference between college and high school. There was never a stuffiness."

While Dina did describe one positive experience with a university supervisor, she also stated, "Unfortunately, I don't think I've ever really had that much interaction [with USs]. I don't know if that's good or bad (probably more bad)." Amy described one US "that I think I saw maybe twice, and it was only when he came

in to do observations of the student teacher." She added that, when the US came to observe, "he kind of came in, sat in the back of the room, didn't really talk, did the observation and left . . . The student teacher looked at me after we got done with that and was like 'Well now what?'" She was dissatisfied that the US did not talk with her or her ST in person about how the ST was doing, and was confused as to why there was such a low level of interaction with the US.

Ben expressed his preference that the university supervisor should be "a band person . . . for a student teacher that's in a band program," adding, "the one issue that I did have [was when] an orchestra person [was] the [US] for a band person. I've never met an orchestra person [who could] give marching band advice, you know?" Mary described one bad match with a student teacher, who was an instrumentalist placed in her choir program. The placement ended up being successful, which Mary attributed to the support of the university supervisor, who was a choral specialist.

Ben stated that one of the roles of the university supervisor is to "step in" if the cooperating teacher "is not doing what they're supposed to" and say, "Look, you agreed to this. This is what we have to do." Ben also saw the US as a "counselor and mentor" to the ST if they are "having a bad time." Dina's statement that she had little interaction with university supervisors represents this idea of CT and US as separate entities; however, Dina, Mary, Joyce, and Ben all wished for more interaction with USs, and seemed less concerned with being alienated or offended by them. The experiences Ben, Dina, and Mary found alienating or offending were those in which university supervisors failed to communicate, failed to address their concerns about student teachers, and failed to be present.

Participants indicated a wish for a collaborative relationship with university supervisors to mutually support their student teachers. They viewed a collaborative relationship as one with frequent and clear communication, mutual support for the ST, a respectful attitude, and specific knowledge of CT's specialty areas. Researchers have found that CTs want collaborative relationships with USs (Denis, 2017; Liebhaber, 2003; Portelance et al., 2016; Valencia et al., 2009), but that there are barriers to successful collaboration. These barriers include: hierarchical tensions, a lack of knowledge of the role of the [CT and US], and failure to clarify each other's expectations (Escaliéa & Chaliès, 2016). Barriers noted by Valencia et al. (2009) included: discrepant goals for student teaching, tenuous ties between coursework and fieldwork, and unclear criteria for field placements that leave university supervisors and cooperating teachers operating as separate entities, having little interaction with each other.

Findings: Information, Procedures, Tools, and Interactions

In this section, I present three themes that speak to Questions 2 and 3 of this study (What information helps music CTs prepare for and work with STs and USs? and What university procedures, tools, and interactions do CTs perceive as supportive to their role?). The three themes intersect among participants' experiences in the three categories of interactions previously presented. The themes are: (a) Personal Connections, (b) Vetting Prospective Cooperating Teachers, and (c) Participants' Student Teaching Experiences.

Personal Connections

The theme of Personal Connections is about the relationships among the people involved in working with student teachers, including music education professors who select cooperating teachers and match them with student teachers, and the members of the student teaching triad (CT, ST, US). Researchers have demonstrated that the success of a student teaching placement, for both ST and CT, is highly dependent on the relationship between the ST and CT (Clarke et al., 2014; Denis, 2017; Draves, 2013; LaBoskey & Richert, 2002; Russell, 2011; Stanley & Greene, 2016; Young & MacPhail, 2016; Zemek, 2008). In the present study, this was certainly true (as discussed in the previous section on The Match), but other relationships were also influential for participants in this study, which is less reported in previous research on CT perceptions. Participants valued personal connections (relationships) with music education professors, and they expected music education professors to know student teachers well prior to making student teaching placements.

Some participants wanted university supervisors and student teachers to know each other prior to student teaching. They believed these connections would facilitate the best matches with regard to similar personality, musical tastes, and methodological preferences, and allow all parties to collaboratively support ST learning and development. Ben and Joyce thought the best-case scenario was for USs to be methods class instructors who have previously taught STs, which would mean they have established rapport and the US would be familiar with the university curriculum as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the ST. Ben stated this outright: "When you have an adjunct person [as a US], they need to know that student teacher before they go out." Joyce explained, "When [the US] is not the same person who taught their [general music methods] class, it's harder to have some discussions." Additionally, knowing each other ahead of time would help the student teacher understand the expectations of the university supervisor.

In general, participants wanted information about the strengths and needs of STs they were being asked to take, and professors and USs who know STs personally will be able to provide this information. Joyce's story about the student teacher who did not want to "switch it up" like she did, but who was successful in the end, points to the value of sharing information about STs with CTs ahead of time, as Draves (2008a) recommended.

Joyce and Ben acknowledged impediments to developing personal connections with prospective cooperating teachers, such as a lack of time or resources for music education professors, but believed universities should support professors in this endeavor. Joyce explained,

> It's really important that they carve out time for the [music education professors] to get into the classrooms so they really know where they're sending the student teacher. I know that's a matter of the university [wanting] everybody to be teaching [and] not [giving] that [as] part of their course load, but it should be. Good luck with that, [but] that's my ideal answer.

Martin, Snow, and Torrez (2011) found similar challenges in their work as hybrid teacher educators. Their workload comprised teaching university courses, supervising field placements, and acting as liaisons between their university and the K-12 schools with which the university partnered. One challenge they identified was a lack of sustained support from the university (e.g., course release) that would allow them enough time in the partner school to establish and maintain relationships with individuals (e.g., principals, cooperating teachers) and across groups of people (e.g., administrators, teachers, staff). Barriers to collaboration between university supervisors and cooperating teachers included a lack of time and lack of support for CTs and USs (Martin et al., 2011; Valencia et al., 2009). Given the value of the CT-ST relationship, and that personal connections between all parties in student teaching were important to participants in this study, the topic of building and sustaining personal connections among music education professors and K-12 music educators warrants further investigation.

Vetting Prospective Cooperating Teachers

The theme of Vetting Prospective Cooperating Teachers emerged in this study, especially in the categories The Ask and The Match. It also relates to the Personal Connections theme. The name of this theme emerged from Carri's description of how she was asked to be a cooperating teacher "at the last minute." She said, "nobody had, at that point . . . observed me teach . . . There was really a lack of vetting me, and we're all just lucky that I did well . . . It could have been a catastrophe."

Participants emphasized that higher education faculty making placements should ensure that student teachers are placed with high quality cooperating teachers. They suggested that the best way for music education professors to find high quality music CTs was to connect personally with in-service music teachers so they could judge the quality of their teaching and the reputations of their programs.

Previous research supports the idea that cooperating teachers want universities to ensure student teachers have excellent experiences by carefully selecting CTs (Clarke et al., 2014; Hamel & Jaasko-Fisher, 2011; Lesham, 2014; Portelance et al., 2016; Young & MacPhail, 2016; Zemek, 2008), and researchers have determined that experience and expertise as a K-12 teacher and a commitment to professional learning are essential characteristics of effective CTs (Clark et al., 2014). These characteristics, however, are typically judged by school district personnel (e.g., principals, curriculum coordinators), and indicated by objective measures of achievement (e.g., degrees earned, tenure, years of experience), and self-selection by volunteering to be a CT (Zemek, 2008). Additionally, knowing the characteristics of excellent cooperating teachers does not necessarily mean every student teacher will be placed with one (Clark et al., 2014). The idea proposed by participants in this study—that licensure program faculty should vet prospective cooperating teachers by observing their teaching and interviewing them—is unusual.

Participants in the present study described several ways music education professors could vet cooperating teachers. They suggested the reputation of the music teacher was a good starting point. Dina explained, "I think one [consideration], obviously, is program success." Tony suggested working "through the [State MEA]" to identify "successful band directors." Amy explained, "it's one thing to go online and look up the names of directors at different schools, but it's another thing to know personally the people that are in the area . . . and have a solid network that you can rely on." If music education professors did not know the music teacher personally, Amy suggested they "rely on people that know the potential cooperating teacher." Joyce advised, "If there's a colleague in the area that you respect, tap in and ask [them about the prospective CT]. It's like calling references for anything else you would want to know."

Participants recognized that these methods of finding cooperating teachers were insufficient; even though CTs are assumed to be proficient K-12 teachers, it cannot be assumed they understand how to mentor student teachers (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006; Sanchez et al., 2016; Young & MacPhail, 2016). Beyond the reputation of the program, participants in the present study thought music educa-

tion professors should vet prospective CTs by visiting them at school, observing them teach, and/or working with their ensembles. Ben suggested "[setting] up a time to meet with them during their planning period" and "[talking] with them and [getting] to know who they are" as a means to assess "who they are and how their rehearsal techniques are, [and] see if it's a good fit or not." Joyce thought music education professors "[should not be] afraid to say, 'I'm [from the] local university and I'm here to check out what you're doing.'" Mary wanted music education professors to be sure cooperating teachers have a good attitude and are not "burned out or jaded." Dina suggested asking "what they plan on providing for the student teacher." Ben suggested the university supervisor could play a role in vetting CTs, explaining that, if the US determined he was not "guiding the [ST] properly," his "name should get [crossed] off the list" of prospective CTs.

The two elementary teachers in the study, Joyce and Carri, suggested vetting a potential student teaching placement by talking with college students about their pre-student teaching field experiences (i.e., indirect observation). Joyce thought that professors "are really listening" to students when they report on field experiences. Carri said, "If [the students] are coming back like, 'Ugh! What a dud,' then don't send them there."

Vetting prospective cooperating teachers by observing them and talking with them about teaching would also help ensure alignment between CTs' teaching practices and those espoused by the music education program of the student teacher. Research has shown this alignment to be vital for ST learning (Zemek, 2008), and it emerged as important for several participants in this study. For example, Ben explained that he no longer accepted STs from one local university because he believed they did not "properly prepare band students" with specific repertoire and "proper rehearsing techniques for strictly band." Carri believed that everything with her ST "sort of [fell] in place, as far as what I expect[ed] of the student teacher and what [the university supervisor] expect[ed] of the student teacher" because their teaching philosophy and methodology aligned.

Inherent in participants' wish that music education professors should vet prospective cooperating teachers seemed to be a willingness to be scrutinized (e.g., Ben's comment about getting crossed off the list of prospective CTs, and Joyce's advice to call references for prospective CTs). Perhaps participants' willingness to be vetted is related to their dual identity as musicians and teachers. Music teachers exist with one foot in performance and one foot in education (Pellegrino, 2009), and as performers, musicians are asked to "prove" their achievement in performances, competitions, and auditions at every stage of development, from novice to professional. It makes sense, then, that music teachers expect to have

to demonstrate musical and teaching excellence to be able to serve as a music cooperating teacher. Participants' preference that music education faculty visit and observe them, and solicit feedback from college students who observed them, suggest that they would prefer to be vetted by other musician-teachers rather than being recommended by their principals. Zemek's (2008) finding that music education faculty placed higher value on the recommendations of other musicians (e.g., music department colleagues, preservice music educators, other in-service music educators) than on the recommendations of school district personnel (principals, curriculum coordinators) supports the idea that vetting is expected by music cooperating teachers.

While researchers have examined the musician-teacher identity among preservice and in-service music teachers (e.g., McClellan, 2014; Pellegrino, 2009), the topic of musician-teacher identity specifically among music cooperating teachers is lacking, and I found no mention in current research of vetting individual music CTs as it relates to proving oneself as a musician.

Participants' Student Teaching Experiences

Most participants (Carri, Amy, Tony, Ben, Mary, Dina) drew on their own student teaching experiences to understand their role as a cooperating teacher. Participants' student teaching experiences shaped their understanding of being cooperating teachers as much as information received from institutions or their other experiences working with preservice teachers. For example, Tony contrasted the requirements of being a CT to his experience as a ST "almost 30 years" earlier, noting that student teachers today "have a lot more paperwork and standards type of things to document and work through" than he did. He recalled,

> *I was put in the classroom with my cooperating teacher and shown the ropes for a couple of days and then pretty much left on my own...Now it's a totally different story...you're at least in the classroom, or if not right in the classroom, in the doorway, to try and get out of sight of the students when the student teacher is trying to take over the class...but still have the student teacher in sight and earshot all the time.*

The success or failure of the match between participants (as student teacher) and their cooperating teachers contributed to their reasons for becoming a CT, and their recollections of their experiences as STs helped them envision how to mentor STs. Like preservice teachers who strive to be the kind of high school music teacher they had themselves (Bergee, Coffman, Demorest, Humphreys, &

Thornton, 2001; Rickels et al., 2010), Dina, Mary, and Carri had positive student teaching experiences they referenced when working with their own student teachers. Mary stated that her cooperating teachers were the reason she was still teaching. Carri described her CT as "this Orff master goddess" who "just opened a million doors" for her that she would not have gotten if she had "landed with somebody else." Dina had a negative experience with her first CT, who "played solitaire in her office" and gave Dina "free reign" to "do stuff," but gave her no feedback. In contrast, she had a positive experience with her second CT, describing the experience as "outstanding." Wanting to provide her student teachers with an outstanding experience, like her second cooperating teacher did for her, was a large part of her reasons for taking student teachers. Dina also believed she gave students more feedback than most CTs, perhaps in reaction to her first CT, who gave her no feedback. As in the present study, participants in Draves' (2008a) study either wanted to emulate their cooperating teachers and replicate their own positive experiences, or provide a better experience for their student teachers than they had.

Participants also referenced their experiences as student teachers when offering advice for finding cooperating teachers and matching them with STs. For example, Carri described how she was mainly excited about her student teaching placement because it was "only 20 minutes away" from where she lived. She felt lucky that it turned out so well, but contrasted her experience with that of a friend who "got placed with somebody she really disagreed with." Her friends' unsuccessful match with a cooperating teacher caused her friend to "not value the advice" of the CT. Carri believed the negative experience was so strong that it caused her friend to leave teaching, saying, "she's going to get her master's in something else now." Ben described a negative experience from his student teaching: his university supervisor "showed up once, at the end, and it was not a very good experience, because I had no idea who this person was. If this guy was in a line-up, I could never pick him out for my adjunct." Ben added that he "really wasn't sure what [the US] wanted. I didn't know any forms to fill out, or anything like that." As a result, Ben wanted to be sure that university supervisors were present and supportive of his student teachers.

Given the enormous influence of student teaching and cooperating teachers on preservice teachers, it is not surprising that several participants in this study referenced their own CTs and student teaching experiences when figuring out their role as CTs and the role of the university supervisor. The understanding that CTs are influenced by their own student teaching experience is not new in research literature. Draves (2008a) determined that CTs' own student teaching experiences were "the most influential experience[s] for approaching the role of cooperating teacher" (p. 221). Valencia et al. (2009) found that both CTs and USs

had perspectives on and personal experiences with student teaching that informed their construction of goals, roles, and responsibilities, and mediated their interactions with others. The approaches to mentoring student teachers taken by most of the cooperating teachers in Valencia et al. (2009) closely resembled their own histories as student teachers. Denis (2017) also noted research demonstrating CTs may structure their beliefs about student teaching and their approach to being a CT in reaction to their own time spent as STs. How the influence of cooperating teachers' experiences as student teachers operates, and what can be done about it, remains largely unexplored.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to reveal how K-12 music teachers who mentor preservice music teachers during the student teaching internship (i.e., cooperating teachers) perceive their experiences of working with higher education institutions. The questions of the study were:

- What are cooperating teachers' experiences of working with higher education institutions,
- What information helps cooperating teachers prepare for and work with student teachers and university supervisors, and
- What university procedures, tools, and interactions do cooperating teachers perceive as supportive to their role?

The findings of this study center on three categories of interactions with higher education institutions (The Ask, The Match, and The Collaboration) and three intersecting themes that emerged throughout these interactions (Personal Connections, Participants' Student Teaching Experiences, and Vetting Prospective Cooperating Teachers). Findings in the three categories of interactions included the following.

- For the most part, cooperating teachers described being asked to take a student teacher by a music education professor whom they knew personally. When CTs were asked to take a ST by someone they did not know, they questioned the process and wondered why they were asked.
- Strong relationships between cooperating teachers and student teachers in this study included a high level of congruence between the values of the CT and ST, and CTs relied on the music education professors asking them to take STs to ensure this congruence or inform them when they might not be congruent.

- Cooperating teachers in this study enjoyed collaborating with university supervisors when USs displayed a respectful attitude toward CTs. Cooperating teachers also expressed a desire for more frequent communication from USs.

The first interconnecting theme is Personal Connections. The findings both support previous research and provide new information that deepens the profession's understanding of how personal connections facilitate good CT-ST matches. Personal connections not only between cooperating teachers and student teachers, but between all parties involved in selecting CTs, placing STs, and supporting ST learning. One valuable new finding is that, in the absence of congruence between CT and ST values and teaching practices, providing cooperating teachers information about the incongruence may support the success of the student teaching placement. I believe research into these ideas with more music CTs is warranted.

Another informative theme that lends additional voices of cooperating teachers to the literature is the influence of cooperating teachers' own experiences of student teaching. Several participants in this study had strong ideas about being a CT, and the role of the university supervisor, that developed in reaction to their own student teaching experiences. Follow up studies might explore this topic more specifically, including how to incorporate these experiences into cooperating teacher preparation. Some researchers have suggested that narrative may be a useful tool for training cooperating teachers and matching them with student teachers (Abramo & Campbell, 2016; Albert, 2018; Draves, 2008a; Greene, 2015; Russell, 2011), because having prospective CTs tell stories about their student teaching experiences may bring their ideas about being a CT into their awareness. It could also help universities better define the expectations of university supervisors if, like in Ben's story, the US plays an influential role in the cooperating teacher's recalled experiences.

Finally, the theme that music cooperating teachers want to be vetted before being asked to take a student teacher, and that they want to be vetted through personal connections with music education professors and/or music education students who visit their classrooms and observe them teach, is an extension of previous understandings that CTs want universities to ensure good placements for STs. Vetting in this way may be related to cooperating teachers' musician-teacher identities and performance orientation, but further research is needed to determine if other prospective music CTs are as willing to be scrutinized as the participants in this study. Researchers have examined the musician-teacher identity among preservice and in-service music teachers (e.g., McClellan, 2014; Pellegrino, 2009), but the topic of musician-teacher identity specifically among

music cooperating teachers is lacking, as is research regarding vetting individual music CTs as it relates to proving oneself as a musician.

The present study lends support for several suggestions for practice in music teacher education that can aid music teacher educators, preservice teachers, and cooperating teachers during the student teaching process. Music education faculty should consider: (a) taking the time to observe and evaluate K-12 music educators and their programs to vet potential student teaching placements, (b) explaining to cooperating teachers how they were vetted or why they were selected, (c) explaining how student teachers are matched with cooperating teachers, and (d) communicating student teachers' strengths and needs to cooperating teachers.

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Appendix
Interview Questions

• From how many colleges or universities have you had student teachers?

• How have colleges or universities asked you to be a cooperating teacher?

• Describe what was expected of you as a cooperating teacher.

• Tell me about an excellent supervisor you have worked with.

• Tell me about a supervisor you disliked working with, or that you were uncomfortable with, or that you thought should have done things differently.

•What would you say the role of the supervisor is?

• If you worked for a college or university how would you go about finding cooperating teachers?

• What would you do to make sure there is a good fit between the student teacher and cooperating teacher?

• If you were a university supervisor, how would you work with cooperating teachers?

• What would you like to tell colleges/universities about working with cooperating teachers?