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Living Contradictions: A Self-Study by an Instrumental Music Teacher Educator

In education, the term *living contradictions* refers to "holding educational values whilst at the same time negating them" in practice (Whitehead, 1993, p. 17), and self-study research often begins with a question surrounding such living contradictions. In this self-study, I implemented an instrumental case study design to explore my own ensemble rehearsal behaviors alongside those of preservice teachers enrolled in an upper-division band methods class. In comparing these behaviors, I aimed to determine the ways in which I enacted the teaching strategies I espoused when providing feedback to those preservice teachers in comparable field experience teaching scenarios. In other words, was I living the advice I provided preservice teachers? Or, was I embodying living contradictions in my work, and if so, in what ways? Data in the form of teaching videos, journals, and written feedback were collected and analyzed. Overall, feedback offered to students was more constructive in nature, while my self-analysis was more critical. Relatedly, my feedback to students suggested I perceived their emergent pedagogical skills as malleable, while my self-analysis reflected a more fixed perspective of personal strengths and challenges. The discussion centers on resultant living contradictions and considerations for music teacher educators, including how to embrace fluid conceptualizations of best practice.
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Music teachers cultivate and refine pedagogical skill sets through focused practice and intentional reflection. The dynamic relationship between practice and reflection can foster teachers' capacity to "recognize, develop, and articulate a knowledge about practice" (Loughran, 2002, p. 38). This deepened knowledge can empower teachers, at all career stages, to effectively identify opportunities for growth and select appropriate strategies to meet consequent goals. The inquiry process driving this approach to personalized professional development may take many forms, including action research and various self-study methods (Hookey, 2002).

Notably, reflectively examining one's practice may reveal what Whitehead (1998, 1993, 2000, 2009) refers to as *living contradictions*; that is, "holding educational values whilst at the same time negating them" in practice (1993, p. 71). Indeed, many teachers may find that some pedagogical choices and behaviors exhibited in the classroom are at odds with what they believe to be best practice (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009; Samaras, 2011). For instance, a classroom guitar teacher might value providing students with clear, music-specific feedback. However, upon examining a video of their teaching, they may notice the high incidence of generic feedback they provide.

To address the pervasive concern of living contradictions, Whitehead (1993) suggests prioritizing the question, "How do I live my values more fully in my practice?" (p. 17). Teacher educators across various disciplines have investigated this question within the context of their own classrooms, often in response to noticing inconsistencies between their practice, their values, and consequent expectations they established for their students (Alderton, 2008; Elgersma, 2012; Keast & Cooper, 2012). Loughran (2005) contends that in order to effectively live one's pedagogical values, teacher educators should be transparent about when and how these living contradictions surface in the classroom.

Certainly, such openness necessitates professional vulnerability, which some teacher educators may find uncomfortable. However, Loughran and Berry (2005) suggest that transparent, professional critique is an important step in both learning about teaching and uncovering meaningful opportunities for professional development. Such professional critique can be explored through self-study research. Indeed, Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009) assert that self-study is an opportune method for exploring such "spaces in our practice where there is a disjuncture between our belief and our action" (p. 14).

Review of the Literature

Self-Study

Self-study is a well-established approach in general teacher education (e.g., Brandenburg, 2008; Loughran, 2004, 2007; Russell, 2004; Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015), and the Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices special interest group of the American Educational Research Association was founded in 1992 to complement the growing interest in this area of investigative inquiry (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). Over the years, multiple methodological texts specific to self-study research in education have been published (Ezer, 2009; Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009; Samaras, 2011), and the journal *Studying Teacher Education* focuses

specifically on peer-reviewed self-study research in the field of education. Noting these developments, educators can feel secure in employing self-study as a credible research approach.

According to Loughran (2007), self-study in teacher education is "embedded in the desire of teacher educators to better align their teaching intents with their teaching actions" (p. 12). Educators employ self-study as a method of reflection and as a tool for improving teaching practices (Zeichner, 2005). There are several core characteristics of self-study, including: it is self-initiated and self-focused on improving one's practice, it emphasizes qualitative research methods, it is interactive and collaborative in nature, and its validity is rooted in trustworthiness (LaBoskey, 2004; Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009; Samaras, 2011; Vanassche & Keltchermans, 2015).

Notably, Loughran (2004) contends that self-study simply references the focus of investigative inquiry. In other words, self-study is not a research methodology in itself; rather, self-study is a type of "personal, systematic inquiry" (Samaras, 2011, p. 10) that employs a specific methodology. For example, one could engage in a self-study through action research, case study, narrative inquiry, or autoethnography, considering data such as journaling, fieldnotes, interviews, and observations. Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009) note that, in self-study, "researchers use whatever methods will provide the needed evidence and context for understanding their practice" (p. 236).

In recent years, more scholars have explored self-study within music teacher education (Conway et al., 2010; Conway et al., 2014; Elgersma, 2012; Kastner et al., 2019; Pellegrino et al., 2019). These studies focus upon topics such as professional identity development, agency in the classroom, and communities of practice. Given the range of context-specific findings in these studies, it is important to note common threads across various methodological approaches. Indeed, each investigation reflected many of the core self-study characteristics outlined by researchers in general education, such as prioritizing qualitative research methods and emphasizing collaborative approaches (LaBoskey, 2004; Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009; Samaras, 2011; Vanassche & Keltchermans, 2015). Furthermore, journals and interviews were common data sources across each study. Ultimately, over the past two decades, self-study has emerged as an information-rich method of inquiry in music teacher education research.

Living Contradictions

Living contradictions are considered a common impetus for self-study in education (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009; Samaras, 2011). Several scholars in the fields

of general teacher education have explored the concept of living contradictions (Alderton, 2008; Buttler, 2020; Keast & Cooper, 2012). For example, in a 2020 self-study, Buttler noticed a disconnect between his teaching philosophy and his actual practice in the classroom. In particular, Buttler believed in constructivist principles but felt these were not strongly evident in his teaching. In examining his practices through self-study, Buttler uncovered nuances which illuminated inconsistences in his practice that contributed to this disconnect. Relatedly, Keast and Cooper (2012) explored contradictions regarding whether or not they were making their own pedagogical ideals and values explicit for science preservice teachers. The authors found that explaining their rationale for certain actions provided guided modeling for preservice teachers, while also inviting preservice teachers to similarly analyze their own teaching in-the-moment. In an earlier study, Alderton (2008) reported on her experiences as a mathematics teacher educator mentoring a student teacher. Through the mentorship experience, she discovered "the contradiction between [her] beliefs about how mathematics should be taught and [her] pedagogy of teacher education," asking herself, "Why do I not always live the values I profess?" (p. 96).

In music, Elgersma (2012) unpacked living contradictions, exploring her experiences as a first-year piano pedagogy professor, unraveling tensions she experienced when her own teaching did not reflect that which she asked of her students. She reflected:

> It was sobering to recognize this living contradiction within myself—that my own teaching of teachers might not be consistent with one of the most widely held principles of music education: In order to learn, people construct their own understanding of experiences; knowledge is not passed on or transferred. (p. 412)

To address concerns of living contradictions, Elgersma went on to recommend that teachers "ensure their own teaching style models the learning tactics espoused to students" (p. 417). Elgersma also noted the importance of giving students space to develop their own self-concept as future teachers.

Study Context and Purpose

Music teacher educators often conduct field observations of preservice music teachers engaged in various practicum placements. In providing undergraduate students with feedback specific to middle school band pedagogy, I noticed distinct patterns in their teaching behaviors which contradicted pedagogical strategies and values that we had discussed in class (e.g., delivering clear and music-specific feed-

back, limiting teacher talk time). Given the apparent incidence of these patterns, I began questioning not only how I addressed these concerns in our co-requisite band methods class, but also whether or not I followed my own recommendations – specifically, when taking the podium in a parallel context in front of middle school band students. I asked myself questions such as how do my perceived behaviors on the podium compare with the expectations I establish for preservice teachers? In what ways might examining my own ensemble teaching improve my capacity as a music teacher educator and inform how I guide preservice teachers' development? How might examining my practice in a transparent manner affect undergraduate students' own capacity for professional reflection?

As such, in this self-study, I explored these questions along with other emergent concerns by analyzing my teaching practices through my role conducting a middle school outreach program at a large midwestern university. This non-auditioned band included students from rural, suburban, and urban school districts. The majority of students were white, and around 15% of students received a full scholarship to participate in the program due to financial need.

Several preservice teachers from my institution's upper-division band methods class sat alongside the middle school musicians in the outreach ensemble, creating a unique opportunity for me to model rehearsal strategies, assessment practices, and other teaching and learning concepts covered in class. At the time of the study, I otherwise had no responsibilities working with ensembles at the collegiate level; as such, the middle school outreach program represented my main outlet for showcasing these connections.

By examining my own teaching behaviors alongside feedback I provided preservice teachers, I aimed to identify and address potential living contradictions in my practice as a music teacher educator. The research questions guiding this self-study were:

1. What characterizes the feedback I provide both preservice instrumental music teachers and myself in the middle school band setting?
2. In what ways do I enact the advice and guidance I provide preservice instrumental music teachers?

At the time of this study, I was in my third year of teaching instrumental music education at the collegiate level. Prior to my career in academia, I taught middle school band and orchestra for approximately nine years. Once in academia, I remained regularly active as a guest conductor and clinician with middle school band students.

The ensemble involved in data collection for this study included 56 middle school students and 13 undergraduate students, and the group operated on a 10-

week concert rehearsal and performance cycle. Every week, the middle school musicians participated in both small group sectionals (led by undergraduate students) and full ensemble rehearsal (which I conducted and videotaped).

Because I videotaped my teaching with the intent of examining my practice with a critical eye, there was potential bias in how I might purposefully shape my teaching behaviors to match some "ideal." I worked to monitor these biases through authentic video diaries and journaling. I also ensured that my preparation for these teaching experiences authentically represented the time and effort I typically invested in preparing for a characteristic middle school band rehearsal. Furthermore, I refrained from formally analyzing feedback I provided my students until I finished taping my own teaching segments. Finally, regarding the nature, content, and process of this self-study, I was fully transparent with students enrolled in my upper-division band methods course, which is the class taken immediately prior to student teaching.

Method

As previously noted, self-study references the focus of an investigative inquiry. One approach to self-study, described by Ezer (2009) as *instructional situation case analysis*, involves applying case study methodology to specific instructional contexts. Given the research questions I developed and the context of the study setting, this inquiry reflects a single, instrumental case study approach. Stake (1995) describes instrumental case studies as an opportunity to develop understanding of a particular theory or phenomenon. He goes on to clarify the difference between intrinsic and instrumental case studies, stating, "For intrinsic case study, case is dominant; the case is of highest importance. For instrumental case study, issue is dominant; we start and end with issues dominant" (p. 16). In the context of this inquiry, the primary issue or phenomenon explored was living contradictions within music teacher education. In other words, was I enacting the teaching advice I provided preservice teachers, or was my own personal practice at odds with the pedagogical values I espoused?

According to Bullough and Pinnegar (2004), self-study involves "rigorous data gathering and analysis" from "stable and empirical" data sources (p. 340). Data for this study included: (a) personal field observation notes for undergraduate music education majors; (b) four video excerpts of myself leading ensemble rehearsals with middle school band students (15 minutes each); and (c) reflective journaling, including written and video reflections, capturing pre- and post-rehearsal wonderments. Finally, because self-study involves collaborative elements

(Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009; Samaras, 2011), I solicited feedback on my teaching from two undergraduate music education majors. These undergraduate students observed my teaching to provide additional feedback on my practice in the middle school band setting.

I began data analysis by evaluating feedback I provided preservice teachers. I examined written observation notes I gave to 13 preservice teachers enrolled in an instrumental methods course. I observed every student twice, each time for approximately 15-20 minutes. Following every observation, I provided students with written feedback about their teaching. I then coded and analyzed written feedback in two cycles. In the first cycle of coding, descriptive codes arose, yielding eight broad categories of teaching behaviors. The second cycle of analysis involved pattern coding within each teaching behavior category (Saldaña, 2021). I applied pattern codes to identify whether the feedback provided was an instance of (a) praise, (b) critique, or (c) suggestion. These pattern codes produced 24 subcategories. A final code, "Neutral Comment" (NC), was applied to feedback that simply noted environmental observations that were not related to specific teaching behaviors.

To verify codes, an external evaluator analyzed a random sample of four observation feedback examples for preservice teachers, applying the descriptive and pattern codes I previously established (Saldaña, 2021). In comparing the external evaluator's analysis to my own, some issues of code ambiguity and code overlap became evident. To address this, the codebook was revised and reduced to five descriptive codes with 15 embedded patterns plus the code for neutral comments, resulting in 16 total codes. Ultimately, inter-coder agreement was satisfactory (75%) (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This coding scheme included five distinct categories of commentary: (a) classroom engagement/management, (b) instructional delivery/pacing, (c) planning/pedagogy, (d) modeling/conducting, and (e) feedback/assessment.

To examine my own teaching, I analyzed personal rehearsal excerpts comparable in length to the observations I conducted with the preservice teachers. I extracted a 15-minute sample from each of the four 75-minute rehearsal videos. I determined these video samples should be 15 minutes to represent a commensurate time span when compared with my observations of preservice students. Next, I watched and analyzed each of these four 15-minute video samples, taking notes and providing feedback in the same manner in which I provided feedback to preservice teachers.

To address recommendations for collaborative practice in self-study (LaBoskey, 2004; Vanassche & Keltchermans, 2015), two undergraduate students (both of whom were enrolled in the upper-division band methods course, as well as par-

ticipants in the outreach program) also provided written feedback on my teaching episode excerpts. These two students were selected due to their mature teaching intuition and their willingness to question/push back during class discussions. I had regularly worked with each of them over several semesters, so we had an established rapport characterized by respectful, critical dialogue. I met with each student to openly discuss the intent of the study and invited their honest, objective feedback. I then provided them a thumb drive of the videos and instructions. The undergraduate students' feedback was structured in a manner similar to my own, including comments such as, "Your cues could be a little more convincing." Finally, I analyzed my own teaching feedback and the feedback provided by the undergraduate students by applying the established codebook to the comments provided for each of the four video excerpts.

In addition to the data described, I also examined and analyzed journal entries and video diaries, each recorded in conjunction with my outreach teaching responsibilities. Each teaching episode was preceded and followed with either a written journal entry or a video diary, recorded within one hour before or after the rehearsal. The prompt for pre-teaching reflections centered on my plans for the evening, including a list of goals, a rationale, and associated worries and wonderments. The prompt for post-teaching considerations simply reflected my gut reaction to "how things went" that evening. This process resulted in three handwritten journal entries (approximately two pages each) and five video diaries, ranging in length from four to eight minutes. All video diaries were transcribed. Video diary transcriptions and written journal entries were similarly analyzed and coded, using descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2021). These data centered on themes of (a) self-criticism, (b) self-compassion, (c) wonderments surrounding best practice, and (d) concerns about false comparisons.

Findings

The first research question centered on examining (a) the feedback that I provided undergraduate students in their work with middle school band students, and (b) the reflective feedback I provided myself in a similar teaching context. I first examined the feedback I provided the undergraduate students. Overall, I provided praise and practical suggestions more often than specific, constructive critiques across all categories. This approach reflected my value of embracing gentleness and exploration in the learning process. Constructive critiques were subsumed within practical suggestions; however, the core pedagogical concerns were not always made clear or explicit when I approached feedback in this manner. For

example, for one preservice teacher, I wrote, "Consider how you might involve the percussion in a more meaningful way." This suggestion did not explicitly state the percussionists were without a task, nor did it clearly address related pacing and student engagement issues. Only occasionally did I provide undergraduate students with direct comments, such as "There is one student consistently playing an F natural. Fix it now! That's what sectionals are for."

Across nearly all areas, I was more praiseworthy than critical of undergraduate students' teaching behaviors, frequently starting feedback with phrases such as "I appreciate how…" and "I like that you…". I also began feedback as exploratory offerings, beginning with phrases like, "Have you considered…" and "You might think about…". These feedback statements in particular reflected how I value possibility and growth when working with preservice teachers. In all, with the undergraduate students, I addressed several categories relatively infrequently (e.g., modeling/conducting, feedback/assessment), instead offering more comments in areas such as delivery/pacing and planning/pedagogy.

In analyzing the feedback I provided myself on my own teaching, I only seemed to apply soft language on occasion. Instead, I leaned into more direct statements, including "Why are you not using a baton?" and "You should work to have the group cut off with you more quickly. They play several bars past your cutoff." Another example of a direct statement was "You ask if folks can hear the trombones. You give some directives on what to change, but you don't specify it's because you want to hear the trombones more, which could be helpful." These more direct statements highlighted my tendency to offer myself a higher proportion of critique than when I worked with the undergraduate students. Indeed, in a video diary, I shared, "[Offering myself] the same amount of compassion I try to give my students feels unfamiliar." This disconnect reflected a living contradiction: I showed comparatively little gentleness or patience for my own work on the podium.

In terms of praise, when looking at my own teaching, I attributed the most praise to planning and pedagogy. I credited my fluency with these skills to knowing the repertoire well. However, in written comments on one of the video clips, some critiques surfaced in the area of planning:

> *You kind of seem to be playing whack-a-mole here. I know there's lots to focus on early in the concert cycle when there's so much to fix, but there doesn't seem to be a super clear, singular lesson objective as you work through the march.*

This critique was difficult to admit, as it reflected a common critique I offered preservice teachers. In written feedback to undergraduate students, I included related comments such as "not sure of your focus here" and "address one thing at a

time." Similarly, in the area of pedagogy, some critiques of my own practice also arose:

> *You say, "I can't tell any notes are accents! More!" Give them a tool for how to produce the accent you want, besides just saying that you want "more." More what? More how? With developing musicians, you need to explain not just the what, but the how.*

Again, when reading this critique of my own teaching, it felt as if this comment were lifted directly from feedback I often provided preservice teachers. Comments soliciting feedback specificity arose more often with the undergraduate students, but it was still notable to experience myself living similar behaviors.

Relatedly, I did not provide many explicit suggestions for how to improve my own practice in my personal teaching comments; instead, my comments largely inferred next steps. For example, I noted, "When the group got soft, did you notice they lost time? This warrants addressing." I had a good idea for how I might address such an issue in future rehearsals, so making such strategies explicit was not as necessary as if I had offered the same feedback to an undergraduate student.

I seemed most critical of my modeling and conducting, as this area showcased the highest incidence of critique. I echoed this concern in a video diary, where I reflected, "I worry [about] messing up conducting still. I mean I know the pieces, but I don't know. I'm uniquely self-conscious on the podium. I always have been. But I'm not hypercritical. I think I'm adequately critical." These critiques of my modeling and conducting suggested that I did not live my value of possibility and growth when considering my own practice; I saw a decided deficit in these skills. Such reflections highlighted a persistent concern with being perceived as weak or vulnerable in front of my students and the ensemble. Collaborative feedback from one of the undergraduate students affirmed that conducting was an area of potential growth for me, encouraging me to "Use your whole face to cue, and cue to the percussion. If your expression and movement can only be seen by the flute players, there's no way the percussion will see it." My attention to classroom/engagement received the fewest critiques from both myself and the preservice teachers, and in reviewing journal entries, I regularly seemed confident with my ability to engage the ensemble. These comments were often sprinkled with exclamation points and smiley faces.

Ultimately, I provided fewer comments overall, and fewer specific suggestions for improvement in particular, for my own teaching when compared with the feedback I provided to the undergraduate students. From these data, I initially inferred that I largely implemented behaviors I emphasized with the undergraduate students. In other words, generally speaking, I "practiced what I preached." These

data also made me consider, however, perceptions I had regarding the fixed nature of my own teaching skills versus the malleable manner in which I see my students' emergent pedagogy. Did I offer myself fewer comments and suggestions because I saw less of a need for change, or because I saw less of a possibility for change in my practice? Did I perceive my practice as a middle school band director as a skill frozen in time?

To examine these and other questions more deeply, I looked to my video diaries and journals. Across these data sources, several criticisms seemed evident, particularly regarding the quality of my modeling on the podium, and whether or not my teaching behaviors reflected pedagogical ideals I espoused with preservice teachers. I wondered whether the unique teaching context of the outreach ensemble afforded the most ideal type of teaching opportunities. Namely, the accelerated timeline of the ensemble's concert cycle created a distinct demand for rehearsal efficiency over pedagogical ideals. Relatedly, I raised concerns about best practice. Was I embodying living contradictions by employing pedagogical "short cuts" that I would not otherwise support in a more typical teaching or rehearsal environment? In one video diary, I reflected:

> *I've been thinking about this concert cycle, and it kind of functions in the same way that maybe an honor band might, in the sense that we effectively only have about 12 hours of rehearsal time from the point that students are sight reading to the point where we are expected to give a performance. And I was thinking about that, with regard to how I approach teaching and the kinds of lesson plans I'm creating and so forth, and I was wondering…well, is it complementary to what I'm asking my students to do? I feel like when directors are in the position of preparing something for an honor band, for example…I don't want to say we use short cuts…but maybe we do? We certainly do. I don't know if my best teaching happens when I'm under the gun like that. It's a different kind of experience on some level. How much is it supposed to parallel an authentic classroom learning experience, as if you were working that piece over the course of 2–3 weeks, putting in twice, three times the amount of rehearsal time?*

In a related journal entry, I expressed concerns about "letting things slide" that I would otherwise address if the context and concert cycle timeline allowed. In that instance, was I demonstrating a living contradiction by failing to hold the ensemble to my desired performance standard, due to the teaching and learning context being uniquely condensed? Or was I simply effectively adapting to the demands of the environment? In considering this, I journaled about how living contradictions may be "destined to arise" if a specific teaching and learning context is not conducive to realizing one's ideals or expectations. I later reflected more

deeply upon the context of teaching and how significantly context dictates one's approach, sharing:

> *There's no specific formula for excellent teaching, per se. There are elements we want to see surface, sure, but there's no formula. The feedback I provide my students, and myself, reflects MY perspective of appropriate teaching and learning – which is certainly informed by best practice – but best practice for whom?*

These thoughts also suggested that a singular "ideal" in the classroom might very well be a pedagogical unicorn; instead, classroom ideals vary with context.

As a more experienced educator, I was able to reasonably adapt to context-specific demands as they arose. In one instance, I provided the middle school students with directions that were clearly misunderstood based upon their performance response, and I was able to quickly adjust my instructional language for improved clarity. Considering this realization alongside the needs of the preservice teachers, in one video I asked, "But how do I teach adaptivity? How do I teach responsiveness?" I realized my approach to mentoring preservice teachers did not always invite these moments of resilience. For example, in working with the preservice teachers, I placed notable emphasis on internalizing a detailed lesson plan. Certainly, having a well-internalized plan with explicit tools to reach defined goals can be core to a successful lesson, particularly for emergent teachers working to cultivate fundamental pedagogical skill sets. The plans I created myself were comparatively broad and flexible in nature, allowing ample opportunities to practice adaptivity and responsiveness.

Discussion

Through this self-study, I compared my own teaching behaviors with those of preservice teachers enrolled in an upper-division band methods class. In comparing these behaviors, I ultimately aimed to determine the extent to which I enacted the teaching principles I espoused when providing feedback to those preservice teachers in comparable classroom scenarios. This instrumental case study was therefore intended to explore the phenomenon of living contradictions between my own practice and the pedagogical principles I centralized in an upper-division band methods class for preservice music educators.

As mentioned in the findings, the feedback I provided preservice teachers did not always include specific constructive critiques; instead, these critiques were embedded within practical, more generalized suggestions that encouraged students to "read between the lines." This approach was intentional, hoping such language choice would build preservice teachers' sense of teaching efficacy through posi-

tively-oriented comments and verbal persuasion (Regier, 2021). However, it can be problematic to offer a broad strokes pedagogical "solution" without first clarifying what teaching behavior was worth noting, and why. Although preservice music teachers can find written feedback helpful in their development (Chaffin & Manfredo, 2010), feedback that is explicit and includes specific guidance can be more helpful in preservice teacher development (Dowden et al., 2013). Ironically, I also often critiqued preservice teachers for offering their own students ambiguous feedback in the ensemble setting. In this manner, I uncovered a living contradiction in my practice as a teacher educator. Providing more direct, explicit feedback can enhance preservice teachers' capacity to unpack the essence of their practice. In the context of methods coursework and co-requisite field experiences, one could model this approach by examining videos of teaching together, creating a collaborative experience (Powell, 2016; Snyder, 2011). In such reviews, it can be beneficial to pause the feed to interject in the moment (Keast & Cooper, 2012), so as to zero in on specific opportunities for growth. In doing so, music teacher educators must balance specific feedback in a manner that also allows preservice teachers opportunities to cultivate and enact their own strategic thinking. However, music teacher educators can also do this for their own practice, considering their work with both preservice teachers and with students in the PreK-12 setting (when those opportunities arise). This intentional, reflective practice may be especially important when unpacking instances of living contradictions.

With regard to the feedback I provided myself, I offered far fewer constructive suggestions for improvement when compared with my students. Given that self-study in teacher education is commonly aimed at improving one's practice (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009; Samaras, 2011; Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015), this was puzzling. After some thought, I realized I intuited next steps for development without needing explicit written directives – a process that seemed logical given my comparative experience on the podium (Snow, 2011). However, I also realized I often saw my own skills on the podium as more fixed, whereas I perceived undergraduate students' skills as more malleable. Indeed, my concerns about conducting – the area in which I was most self-critical in my written feedback – were affirmed in my reflections. If I embraced my students' capacity for growth and evolution on the podium, should I not see the same potential within myself in similar contexts? Noticing this, I sensed an opportunity to "live my values more fully in my practice" (Whitehead, 1993, p. 17). It is worth noting, however, my self-perceptions in my role as a music teacher educator appeared quite malleable and growth-mindset-oriented throughout the study, which stood in contrast to my more fixed, limited self-perceptions in my role a middle school ensemble director in the outreach program.

As mentioned earlier, certain differences in feedback seemed justified given that I was in a more advanced career stage than my students, and as such, differences in feedback were not always reflective of living contradictions. For example, typical of experienced teachers, my looser approach to rehearsal structure and instruction reflected comfort in the context and allowed for more flexibility in the moment (Goolsby, 1997; Shaw, 2017; Snow, 2011). In contrast, I expected undergraduate students to be more prescribed in their approach when teaching. Such differences do not necessarily reflect a "do as I say, not as I do" contradiction; instead, they reflect a reasonable distinction between the practices of experienced versus novice teachers (Goolsby, 1997; Snow, 2011). Still, overly-structured conceptualizations of the teaching and learning process may deter novice teachers from playing in the sandbox of flexibility and adaptivity.

As mentioned earlier, in my comments on my own teaching, I found that I offered myself far less compassion when compared to that which I offered preservice teachers. This contradiction revealed self-esteem issues echoed by music teacher educators in a study by Kastner et al. (2019), where one participant shared, "There's no one telling us that it's okay to still be learning about how to teach music, or music teachers" (p. 162). This sentiment reminded me to hold grace for myself, in both as a middle school band teacher and as a music teacher educator.

In all, living contradictions surfaced in several ways throughout this study. Some contradictions centered on specific practices in the context of teaching middle school band. For example, while I valued providing middle school students specific feedback and encouraged preservice teachers to live this practice, I did not always do so myself. Still, the more striking contradictions arose in the expectations I held for myself versus those I held for the preservice teachers in our respective journeys toward improving our skills as teachers. Findings suggested I perceived preservice teachers' skills as malleable, and I offered them compassion and grace in the learning process; I did not approach my own growth and development with the same values. Owning this contradiction triggered change in my practice.

Evolving My Practice

Since completing this study, I have noticed several changes in my practice on the podium in the outreach ensemble. These changes emerged from an effort to more transparently live my value of growth mindset as an ensemble director and music teacher educator. In rehearsing the middle school outreach ensemble, I now embrace opportunities for think-alouds and re-teaches, "making my thinking observable through verbalizations, gestures, and demonstrations" (Roesler, 2016, p. 31). This practice reflects a version of what Keast and Cooper (2012) referred

to as "interjecting in the moment" (p. 77). For example, it is now common for me to narrate how and why I change a directive I give the ensemble; or, as stated by Loughran (2005), I "make the problematic observable" (p. 9). Parsing out the steps of my teaching process is useful not just for the preservice teachers in the group that are observing my teaching, but also for the developing middle school musicians who then better understand my rationale for instructional choices. Re-teaches also provide both preservice teachers and middle school musicians additional tools or approaches for addressing musical issues. Relatedly, interjecting in the moment also models small-cycle reflective practice for preservice teachers, which can be useful as they continue to refine their skills.

Beyond narrated re-teaches, I now also verbally acknowledge my needs on the podium. For instance, I often struggle with audiating specific tempos; therefore, I regularly reference a metronome while in front of the group, and I am transparent about why I do this, particularly for the undergraduate students that are also sitting in the outreach ensemble. Ultimately, these approaches illuminate my vulnerability, which Loughran and Berry (2005) note is an important step in effective professional development. This change has helped me celebrate the gentleness and patience I value in the learning process, sharing that value with my students. Soliciting feedback from my students on my teaching also captured transparency and vulnerability, and reading my students' comments was both humbling and enlightening, not just with regard to my own practice, but with regard to what my students noticed about music teaching and learning in that context.

Conclusion

Curricular demands of music teacher preparation programs necessitate certain efficiency; there is a finite amount of time and resources to establish fundamental skills and plant strategic seeds for future professional growth. However, be it among preservice teachers, practicing music educators, or music teacher educators, static or narrow conceptions of best practice are bound to be met with contradictory behaviors because unique teaching and learning contexts create the need for adaptivity and resilience. In contrast, fluid conceptions of best practice may better complement the specific needs of a given teaching and learning scenario. Such an approach leans into constructivist ideals of best practice in music teaching and learning (Wiggins, 2007). With this in mind, music teacher educators might also apply critical pedagogy, considering what characterizes "ideal" teaching behaviors in the classroom, why those behaviors serve as a perceived standard, and indeed, whose ideals do those behaviors reflect?

Through this self-study, I was largely able to model what I felt were effective and appropriate rehearsal strategies given the classroom scenario, but just as teachers' skills are malleable, so may be what works in the classroom. If music teacher educators emphasize the notion that feedback or suggestions are *a* way – rather than *the* way – to address certain concerns, preservice teachers may become empowered to find their own voice, style, and passion in the classroom. Moreover, this approach may improve preservice or early career music teachers' capacity for engaging with teaching and learning contexts that may not initially seem conducive to realizing one's ideals or expectations, rather than resisting such situations or internalizing resultant conflict as a sign to reconsider the profession. Music teacher educators might also encourage developing teachers to unpack their own conceptions of best practice, both to explore how they live their own values through practice and as a strategy to consider alternate perspectives (Wiggins, 2007). Emphasizing such a culture of reflective practice is key to cultivating adaptive, responsive music educators, and it is critical for teachers to construct their own understandings of what is experienced (Elgersma, 2012; Wiggins, 2007).

Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) assert that the goal of self-study is to "provoke, challenge, and illuminate, rather than confirm and settle" (p. 20). Indeed, through this self-study experience, I valued the discrete, detailed task of reexamining my perspectives of best practice in the middle school band setting. Perhaps more salient, however, was how this inquiry illuminated the living contradiction that the expectations I hold for others do not match those I hold for myself. Seeing my skills on the podium as a somewhat fixed, rather than a malleable, entity presented a unique opportunity to address areas for professional growth on a transparent platform, growing alongside and with the support of the preservice teachers. Moreover, it was humbling to uncover how the notion of fixed versus malleable skills, together with the ideals of compassion and softness, also bled into the struggles I had with cultivating adaptivity and resilience within preservice music educators. Given this experience, music teacher educators might similarly "provoke, challenge, and illuminate" (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 20), be it through self-study or other methods of inquiry, to uncover possibilities for professional vulnerability and growth.

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