"BECAUSE WE ARE IMPORTANT!": MUSIC EDUCATORS AND SPECIAL EDUCATION
PARAPROFESSIONALS IN A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

By

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ABSTRACT

"BECAUSE WE ARE IMPORTANT!": MUSIC EDUCATORS AND SPECIAL EDUCATION PARAPROFESSIONALS IN A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

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With the intent of developing an effective community of practice (CoP) that addresses the professional development, instructional, and collaborative needs of music educators and special education paraprofessionals (SEPs), the purpose of this study was to examine the instructional processes, perceptions, and practices of music educators and SEPs in regard to teaching music to students with disabilities. The "grand tour" question of this study was: How does a community of practice offer collaboration and instructional support for music educators and SEPs? Research questions were as follows: 1) How do music educators and SEPs interact within a community of practice? 2) Does a community of practice impact the instructional and collaborative practices of music teachers and SEPs, and if so, how does it manifest in the classroom? 3) How does a community of practice shift participants' pedagogical and philosophical beliefs concerning teaching students with disabilities? 4) How does a community of practice facilitate growth and collaborative planning in ways that the school structures cannot? What does this tell us about music educator and SEP needs? 5) What aspects of the community of practice were most difficult for the participants, the easiest, and what did they find most useful?

This was an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995, 2005; Merriam, 1988, 1998) of a group of music educators and special education paraprofessionals in a social learning community. As participants met, and relationships began to form, a community of practice emerged. Six participants, three music educators and three SEPs participated in this study which consisted of eight collaborative meetings that took place over the course of four months. I collected

throughout the study, beginning with initial interviews and ending with exit interviews. Participants engaged in five meetings in-person at a local library, and three online via Discord®, an online voice and text chat platform. I observed in their classrooms twice over the duration of the study.

Participants found the collaborative nature of the group to be the most beneficial. While instructional practices were only impacted moderately through participation in this community of practice, participant perceptions of their colleagues were changed. Participants stated they felt they understood more fully the perspective of their colleagues as well as how to more effectively collaborate with them.

This dissertation is dedicated to two amazing women:
First, to my great aunt Millie. Aunt Millie you taught me to love myself and create my own path rather than to follow the path of others. I miss your laughter, your wisdom, and your strength. Lastly, to my mother. For all the dreams you were never allowed, may they be realized in the dreams of your daughters, granddaughters, and all the women who come after.

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I wish to acknowledge and thank each individual who participated in this study. Ash, Dre, Noelle, Gloria, Sarah, and Maude, thank you for making this experience an enjoyable one. Thank you for the amount of time you gave to this study. Thank you, each of you, for sharing your experiences, insights, and passion with the group. I am grateful to have met each of you and to have been able to get to know you over this past year. Thank you for trusting me with your voices, I pray I did them justice.

To R.S., E.K., and S.J., thank you for being willing to assist with trustworthiness. To K.C., thank you for "all of the things."

A small acknowledgement to the baristas at Strange Matter. Since August 2019 I have spent a great deal of time in your shop reading for, writing, and editing this dissertation. Every time I enter your shop I am greeted with a smile and my name. Thank you for the free coffee and donuts that you gave me from time to time, and for all of the times you saw me so busy at work that you brought my coffee to me rather than call my name. I will miss my weekly, almost daily, cinnamon honey lattes with almond milk, but more so the familiar space and smiles.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Opening Vignette

As an undergraduate music education major, I was required to take a single course on

students with disabilities, which was offered outside of the school of music. This course focused

more on understanding acronyms, IEPs, and the evaluation process than it did on how to teach

students with disabilities. I do not remember talking about specific diagnoses, information that

would have been quite helpful upon entering the classroom. I do not recall any mention of

students with disabilities in my music methods courses, nor discussions on how to modify or

accommodate lessons for students with disabilities. My understanding of disability came from on

the job experience.

After my first two years of teaching, my husband's job moved us to the northern part of

the state in which we lived. I was fortunate in my first placement, after we moved, to work with

Mrs. Bird₁ a skillful paraprofessional. Mrs. Bird was placed with Sharon, a beautiful and vibrant

young child who was non-verbal, cognitively impaired, and whose mobility came through the use

of her wheelchair. Mrs. Bird was the first person to help me learn how to teach students with

disabilities. She taught me how to include Sharon and gently corrected me when I did not do

enough. Mrs. Bird made me aware of other students who had disabilities, as I was not given any

guidance on who had an IEPs or 504s.

After leaving that placement I spent the next 3 years in a school serving a privileged

community that also had a center for students with disabilities. Maggie, the lead special

education specialist at this placement, helped me understand the IEP process and how to make

sense of the accommodations and modifications as they applied to my instruction. I remember

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₁ All names following are pseudonyms.

discussing with Maggie the expectations for learning in music and my concern that I was not meeting the needs of those students with disabilities whom I taught. Maggie encouraged me to hold her students to the same expectations for learning as the general education students, but to remember that their pace and outcomes would be different.

I then spent the next 5 years at an elementary school where I was the sole music teacher for 850 elementary students. As a "specialist," I did not have the opportunity to plan with the special education team nor with the grade level teachers. Yet, this was the first placement in which I received a binder of IEPs and 504s, but I was still not given any information outside of those documents about how to meet the specific needs of these students in the music setting. I was grateful that Maggie had taught me how to understand those documents more fully, and I could, on my own, make accommodations and modifications as necessary.

The last 3 years of my career were fundamental in shaping my direction as a music teacher educator and researcher. Ingrid, the special education lead teacher, and Paula, an amazing paraprofessional who was a retired special education teacher, guided me as I examined my curriculum through the lens of my students' needs. Ingrid and Paula gave me the same directive as Maggie; hold all students to the same expectations for learning but remember that each students' pace, journey, and outcome would be different. Over those next 3 years, through the encouragement of the special education professionals with whom I worked and my amazing music colleague Lydia, I began leading workshops and conference sessions on inclusive music education. I also incorporated these inclusive instructional strategies into the professional development courses for the music educators I taught each summer.

My experiences in the classroom teaching students with disabilities and my journey in working with a variety of special education teams and administrators have provided the impetus

this study. What I have learned through my collaborative efforts with a few paraprofessionals

and special educators has influenced my appreciation for paraprofessionals and their

collaborative role in the music setting. It is with this passion and experience that I approach my

dissertation.

Introduction

Before the passing of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA - Public Law 94-142, 1975), more than one million children with disabilities were excluded from the education system, and others had limited access to educational opportunities (Blessings, 1967). Students with disabilities also lacked access to the music programs schools provided for their non-disabled peers. Since the passing of Public Law 94-142, now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1990/2004), any child with a disability is entitled to a free and appropriate public education.

With the implementation of PL 94-142, many administrators and special education professionals believed that art and music were the settings that would allow for the most success when mainstreaming students into the general education classroom (Adamek & Darrow, 2010; Causton-Theoharis & Burdick, 2008; Jellison, 2015). This may be due in part to a senate report regarding P.L. 94-142:

> The use of the arts as a teaching tool for [those with disabilities] has long been recognized as a viable, effective way not only of teaching special skills, but also of reaching youngsters who had otherwise been unteachable. The committee envisions that programs under this bill could well include an arts component and, indeed, urges that local educational agencies include arts in programs for [those with disabilities] funded under this act (Senate Report, 1977, p. 324 as cited in Hammel, 1999, p. 6).

When students with disabilities were first mainstreamed into classrooms, music educators were unprepared to teach them as those teachers lacked adequate resources such as paraprofessionals, professional development, or coursework on special education before entering the profession (Atterbury, 1990)

The number and diversity of students with special needs has increased since 1975 (EAHCA, 1975). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, more than 6.5 million students with disabilities are being served in public schools (NCES, 2019). As the population of students with disabilities increases, so too does the need for instructional supports for teachers, including professional development, material resources such as assistive technology, and paraprofessionals (also known as teaching assistants, teacher aides, or paraeducators) (Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2002; Giangreco & Broer, 2003). In the 45 years since PL 94-142 (EAHCA), a growing body of literature has developed related to teaching students with disabilities. Researchers have examined attitudes toward and perceptions of preparation to teach students with disabilities (Gfeller, Darrow, & Hedden, 1990; VanWeelden & Whipple, 2014a), the professional development needs of educators (Bowles, 2003; Conway, 2007) and teacher/student engagement with paraprofessionals in the classroom (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Webster, et al., 2010). This research spans both the general education and music education literature. Much of the literature demonstrates an overall lack of preparation to teach students with disabilities (Cramer, et al., 2015; Davila, 2013; Gfeller, Darrow, & Hedden, 1990; Grimsby, 2019; Hammel, 2001; Kahn & Lewis, 2014; Ruppar, Neeper, & Dalsen, 2016; Salvador, 2010; VanWeelden & Meehan, 2016; VanWeelden & Whipple, 2014a).

Paraprofessionals also have been the subject of studies examining attitudes and perceptions of preparation for working with students with disabilities. Researchers have

examined perceived needs of both the educator and paraprofessional (Causton-Theoharis & Burdick, 2008; Grimsby, 2019), communication between educators and paraprofessionals (Causton-Theoharis & Burdick, 2008; Grimsby, 2018, 2019; VanWeelden & Heath-Reynolds, 2018), and the misuse of paraprofessionals in the classroom (Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, & McFarland, 1997; Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Giangreco, Doyle, & Suter, 2012; Webster, et al., 2010). Most researchers called for professional development and collaborative planning time between educators and special education personnel, including paraprofessionals (Causton-Theoharis & Burdick, 2008; Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Giangreco, Doyle, & Suter, 2012, Grimsby, 2018, 2019; VanWeelden & Heath-Reynolds, 2018; Webster, et al., 2010).

In this chapter, I review the literature related to general educators' and music educators' perceptions of their own preparation to teach students with disabilities as well as the literature on incorporating paraprofessionals in the classroom. I then discuss professional development and how a learning community, such as a collaborative knowledge building community, may address the professional development needs expressed by music educators and paraprofessionals.

Preparation to Teach Students with Disabilities

General and Special Educator Preparation to Teach Students with Disabilities

Many teachers feel unprepared to teach students with disabilities. They consistently identify a lack of training at the undergraduate level and a desire for adequate professional development on how to teach students with disabilities. Researchers have mostly examined perceptions of preparedness to teach students with disabilities through survey studies.

Using a survey and interviews, Lazzaro (2015) collected data on teachers' preparation to teach students with disabilities from 35 elementary general educators in the state of New Jersey using a survey, as well as through individual interviews with participants. More than half

(57.1%) of participants (*N*= 35) stated that university course work did not prepare them to teach students with disabilities in an inclusive setting. The same number of participants also stated that they did not take course work that included preparation for how to teach students with disabilities. Participants (74.3%) felt that they did not have enough time to collaborate with their special education colleagues. Similarly, participants (62.9%) did not feel they had adequate professional development in working with students with disabilities. While most participants felt able to teach their students with disabilities, this ability developed through classroom teaching experience.

Researchers also have examined perceptions of preparation to teach students with disabilities in other content areas, such as science, physical, and art education. Kahn and Lewis (2014) conducted a national online survey examining K-12 science educators' perceptions of preparation for and attitudes toward inclusion. The survey included Likert-type and open-ended questions and resulted in a response rate of 76.8%. Although 70% of the participants indicated that they had received some preparation for teaching students with disabilities, only 42% stated that undergraduate coursework was a source of that preparation. Of those who took undergraduate coursework related to teaching students with disabilities, less than half had had coursework specific to understanding individualized education plans (IEPs), how to modify lessons for students with disabilities, or learning how to collaborate with special education personnel. Only 11% of participants received coursework concerning teaching students with disabilities that was content specific. Similar to those of Lazzaro (2015), most participants stated that "on the job training" was where they received the most preparation for teaching students with disabilities.

Coates (2012) surveyed 170 preservice teachers in physical education to examine their perceptions of preparation for teaching students with disabilities; no response rate was reported. While overall attitudes toward inclusion were positive, more than half of participants (84%) felt that their university training was ineffective in preparing them to teach students with disabilities. When asked what type of professional development they would find beneficial, 82% of participants stated that hands-on experience, such as field experience, would be the most beneficial.

Cramer, et al. (2015) had similar findings in their survey of 77 arts educators, with 63% of participants stating their university education was inadequate in preparing them to teach students with disabilities. Coates (2012), Cramer, et al. (2015) and Khan and Lewis (2014) offered similar findings. All researchers stated that universities should strive to offer content specific coursework that "apply notions of inclusivity to all areas of teacher training," rather than having coursework that is adjunct in nature (Coates, 2012, p. 360). Researchers also suggested collaboration at the university level between content teacher educators and special education teachers. Khan and Lewis (2014) asserted that in-service educators need "professional development programs that emphasize collaboration between [educators] and special educators" (p. 304).

Special education teachers also feel they lack preparation for teaching students with disabilities. Ruppar, Neeper, & Dalsen (2016) surveyed special education teachers. Participants felt "most prepared to complete IEPs and collaborate with other educational team members" (2016, p. 280). Participants felt least prepared to respond to students' instructional and physical needs. These findings indicate that "teacher education and professional development might affect teachers' perceptions of preparedness" (Ruppar, Neeper, & Dalsen, 2016, p. 282). The authors

suggested that future researchers examine what changes to preservice instructional practices would be most effective in preparing special educators to acquire the necessary competencies for teaching students with disabilities.

Music Educator Preparation to Teach Students with Disabilities

Concern about teacher preparation to teach students with disabilities also was evident in music education research. Findings and suggestions for practice are similar to those in the general education literature; however, the literature on preparation to teach students with disabilities within music education is sparse. A few researchers examined preparation within collegiate institutions (Colwell & Thompson, 2000; Heller, 1994; Salvador, 2010), and others examined inservice teacher perceptions of their preparation through surveys (Gfeller, Darrow, & Hedden, 1990; VanWeelden & Whipple, 2014) or through an examination of teaching competencies (Hammel, 2001b).

Colwell and Thompson (2000) examined course offerings for preservice music educators from a sample of 196 college and university microfiche and online course catalogues. They chose a Research Category 1 institution, a state-funded institution, and a private school from each state (N =196) and located data from 171 schools. Colwell and Thompson (2000) found that 127 institutions (74%) offered special education courses to music education majors, with at least one course being required at 86% of those schools. However, the vast majority of the required special education courses (89 %) were not music content specific and were taught by non-music faculty within education or special education departments.

Heller (1994) surveyed music teacher educators (MTEs) (N =333) teaching at National Association of Schools Music (NASM) accredited schools of music. MTEs returned 179 surveys with useable data, resulting in a response rate of 54%. While 62.4% of their 179 respondents had

experience teaching students with disabilities in a classroom setting prior to teaching at the university level, most had only worked with a specific learning disability (70%). Heller found that only 26.9% of professors had completed course work specific to teaching music to students with disabilities, and that most participants developed an understanding of teaching music to students with special needs through professional development (41.3%). Heller also asked participants to describe the required coursework for undergraduate music education majors at their institution. Of the 16% who answered this question, 40% identified that their students were required to take coursework specifically focused on teaching music to students with disabilities.

In another survey of NASM-accredited schools of music, Salvador (2010) found little had changed since Heller's (1994) study 16 years prior. Salvador sent the survey to 205 institutions. Of those 205 recipients, 109 surveys were returned resulting in a response rate of 53.2%. Salvador investigated whether universities required undergraduate music education majors to take courses pertaining to teaching students with disabilities, if they offered a music-specific course on teaching students with disabilities, and/or if special education content was integrated throughout music education coursework. Salvador's survey also asked respondents to list specific course details if a music-specific course was offered. Of the responding institutions, only 29.6% required music education majors to take a course in special education, and of those universities, only 38.9% offered a music-specific course. More than half of institutions (59.8%) stated that they integrated special education content throughout music education coursework. Salvador found that most courses about teaching students with disabilities were offered outside of the college/school/department of music. Several participants stated that interested undergraduates could enroll in a music therapy course in addition to their required course load, but Salvador stated that this is an unacceptable option, as the methods and goals of music therapy

differ from those of music education. Colwell & Thompson (2000), Heller (1994), and Salvador (2010) all suggested that universities reconfigure their preparation of preservice music educators by forming collaborative relationships with those in the field of special education, placing student teachers in rich field experiences that include students with disabilities, and requiring music content-specific coursework centered in teaching students with disabilities in order to provide the necessary experiences for preservice music educators.

Gfeller, Hedden, and Darrow (1990) surveyed music educators in Iowa and Kansas and examined attitudes towards inclusion, perceptions of preparation, and instructional support needs. Most respondents stated that they had little or no preparation at the university level for teaching music to students with disabilities. Instructional supports, such as assistance from paraprofessionals or consultation with special education teachers, were deemed inadequate by participants (27%). Participants (65%) believed that they were expected to mainstream all students with disabilities, yet only 1% were given extra planning time to prepare for teaching these students. Other studies have similar findings regarding lack of planning time to prepare for teaching students with disabilities or to collaborate with special educators (Grimsby, 2018, 2019; VanWeelden & Whipple, 2014a; VanWeelden & Heath-Reynolds, 2019).

VanWeelden and Whipple (2014a) developed a similar survey to that of Gfeller, Hedden, and Darrow (1990) and distributed it to music educators (N=5,000) across the United States. Music teachers (N= 1,128) responded for a response rate of 23%. VanWeelden and Whipple added demographic survey questions in order to compare survey data between groups of educators. Respondents represented rural, urban, and suburban settings and a wide range of years of experience and classes taught. The authors found no significant differences between groups in overall perceptions of preparation to teach students with disabilities. Of those surveyed, only

23% had an undergraduate course specific to music and special education, and only 39% participated in pre-service field experiences specific to teaching music to students with disabilities. Participants stated that opportunities for professional development related to working with students with disabilities were few or non-existent. Respondents (46%) indicated that they had no professional development in-services related to working with students with disabilities, 30% indicated that they had one to two, and 23% indicated that they had more than two (VanWeelden & Whipple, 2014a). Of those who stated that they attended special education workshops, only 17% stated that they were music specific. While overall perceptions of preparation were higher than those found by Gfeller, Hedden, and Darrow (1990), 62% of those surveyed by VanWeelden and Whipple (2014a) stated that their college course work did not prepare them to teach students with disabilities. Similar to those of Gfeller, Hedden, and Darrow (1990), participants in this survey stated that they had less than adequate planning time to prepare lessons for their students with disabilities or communicate with paraprofessionals and other special education personnel, nor did they have time to locate resources needed for instruction.

Gfeller, Hedden, and Darrow (1990) and VanWeelden and Whipple (2014a) offered similar suggestions for improving music educators preparation to teach student with disabilities. Even though 24 years passed between the two studies, VanWeelden and Whipple stated that, "despite strides to increase preparation over the past [24] years, additional method course activities and/or music education curricular course offerings in this area are needed to better prepare future music educators" (2014a, p. 41). The authors of both studies also suggested music specific professional development, and that music educators may wish to request in-service professional development that is specific to those students with disabilities whom they teach

(Gfeller, Hedden, & Darrow, 1990). VanWeelden and Whipple (2014a) suggested that

professional development attendance is linked to preservice preparation:

> Teachers attended more special education workshops and in-services when they had
>
> completed music-specific coursework in this area. Therefore, the results of this study may
>
> indicate that early teacher training (preservice coursework) promotes continued training
>
> (workshop attendance and/or in-service requests) to increase and update their knowledge
>
> of working with students with disabilities. (p. 42)

Gfeller, Hedden, & Darrow (1990) and VanWeelden and Whipple (2014a) also asserted the

importance of allocating time to collaborate with instructional supports such as paraprofessionals

and special education colleagues.

Grimsby (2019) examined perceptions of preparation to teach music to students with

disabilities through an instrumental case study of three elementary music educators. Each music

educator participated in a semi-structured interview, a video-elicited interview, and a focus group

interview. All three music educators stated that their undergraduate programs did not prepare

them to teach music to students with disabilities. Despite differences in years of experience (7 to

24 years), each educator desired allocated planning time with their special education teams and

paraprofessionals in order to communicate expectations and student-learning strategies clearly.

Participants also expressed a need for professional development centered on how to teach music

to students with disabilities.

Findings from the literature indicate that most music educators do not feel prepared to

teach students with disabilities. Also, music educators desire collaborative planning time with

paraprofessionals and professional development focused on teaching students with disabilities.

Despite these findings, little has changed in the field of music education to address these needs,

especially the need for collaboration between music educators and those individuals who work the closest to students with disabilities, paraprofessionals. The next section will address the research literature regarding paraprofessionals.

Engagement and Collaboration with Special Education Paraprofessionals

In the research literature, when discussing paraprofessionals, it is often assumed that these individuals work with students with disabilities. However, not all paraprofessionals have the same title or perform the same duties. Paraprofessionals may be known as teacher assistants, teacher aides, or paraeducators. While many paraprofessionals work with students with disabilities either in the inclusive or self-contained setting, some paraprofessionals do not. A paraprofessional may assist the school librarian by shelving books, or the physical education teacher, while others may provide coverage in the cafeteria or at recess. According to a national study, the Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education (Carlson, E. et al., 2002), paraprofessionals nationwide spent at least 10% of their time providing the following: instructional support in small groups, one-to-one instruction, modifying materials, implementing behavior management plans, monitoring hallways/study/etc., meeting with teachers, collecting data on students, and providing personal care assistance. What is unclear is if all paraprofessionals surveyed engaged with students with disabilities in an educational setting. Pickett et al. (2002) defined paraprofessionals (paraeducators) as individuals who are:

> . . .(1) supervised by teachers or licensed related services professionals who are responsible for identifying learner needs, designing and implementing programs to meet learner needs, assessing learner performance, and evaluating program effectiveness, and (2) assist teachers or related services practitioners with the delivery of instructional or other direct services to children and you, and/or their families. (p. 2)

This definition is not specific to individuals who work with students with disabilities. It may be more useful to delineate paraprofessionals by what they do within the school environment. The majority of the paraprofessional literature reviewed for this study and the paraprofessional participants in this study worked with and supported the learning needs of students with disabilities. Therefore, for this study I offer a specific term to represent the population that I am examining; special education paraprofessionals (SEPs). Special education paraprofessionals are individuals who provide instructional assistance, and related services, to students with disabilities in an educational environment under the supervision of a licensed educator.[2]

Before the passing of IDEA, researchers examined the use and effectiveness of teacher aides in the general education setting (Blessings, 1967; Cohen, 1976; Cruickshank and Haring, 1957). Paraprofessionals first were hired for the general education and special education classrooms to assist with non-instructional duties such as playground supervision, material preparation, and record keeping. After the passing of IDEA, the duties of paraprofessionals transitioned from clerical work to supporting lessons planned by the classroom teacher as well as acting as "liaisons between home and school. . .paraprofessionals provided instruction support to students and their parents" (Wallace, 2003, p. 7). (Boomer, 1982; Bowman & Klopf, 1967; Green & Barnes, 1989; French & Pickett, 1997; Pickett, 1999). During the 1970s the U.S. Department of Education funded voluntary programs (Career Opportunity Programs, COP) that provided teacher education preparation to paraprofessionals in the hopes that these individuals would be attracted to the role of paraprofessional in return for the chance to earn a teaching certificate (National Resource Center for Paraeducators, n.d.).

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[2] When citing a source, paraprofessional will remain in the quote. For each piece of literature reviewed I will delineate between either paraprofessional or special education paraprofessional (SEP). When discussing participants, SEP will be used.

With each new legislative action supporting the education of students with disabilities (IDEA, 1990) or amendments to older legislation (IDEA, 1997, 2004), federal law mandated that "paraprofessional be trained. . .[and] require(s) states to ensure that paraprofessional personnel have the necessary skills and knowledge" (French, 1998, p. 358). While federal legislation mandated that SEPs be trained, it did not specify how they are to be trained, the degree of education they must hold, nor the skills and knowledge they must have. Wall et al. (2005) found that SEPs were assigned to roles for which they were not prepared and suggested that special educators and administrators may benefit from professional development in how to employ SEPs most effectively. The authors suggested that professional development for SEPs should be similar to the professional development in which teachers engage, such as continuing education, active learning with direct connections to the classroom, collaborative learning among paraprofessionals, and linking professional development to SEP's "prior learning, current duties, and long-term goals" (Walls et al., 2005, p. 188).

With the passing of IDEA, a few state education agencies (SEA) began to develop their own credentialing procedures for paraprofessionals. However, as many of these were not mandatory, local education agencies (LEAs) were not required to train or employ individuals who met those regulations. Those SEAs that did not develop criteria for hiring paraprofessionals left it up to LEAs to set the standard for employing, training and supervising paraprofessionals (Pickett, 1999). According to Pickett (1999), "few SEAs and LEAs are working together to. . .create seamless career development models that include on-the-job coaching, inservice training and access to post-secondary education for paraeducators interested in becoming teachers" (p. 3).

Little has changed over the past two decades in federal legislation regarding the hiring and training of SEPs. The last amendment of IDEA (2004) and the most recent amendment

through Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, PL 114:95, 2015) still remain vague in regard to specific standards designed to direct SEAs and LEAs on the employment and education of SEPs. With a lack of federally funded education programs for SEPs and vague regulations for preparation of SEPs, it is not surprising that educator perceptions of SEPs predominantly are negative (Causton-Theoharis & Burdick, 2012; Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2001; Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; VanWeelden & Heath-Reynolds, 2018). Researchers, too, struggle with how to guide educators in how to engage and collaborate successfully with SEPs (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Giangreco, Doyle, & Suter, 2012).

SEPs' Perceptions of their Needs and Working Conditions

A few researchers have examined the perceptions of SEPs and their working conditions (Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Marks, Schrader, & Levine, 1999; Webster, et al., 2016). Hughes & Valle-Riestra (2008) examined SEP job satisfaction and preparation in a study of SEPs and educators in an early childhood setting. The authors sent parallel surveys to 115 preschool teachers and the paraprofessionals with whom they worked. Of those 115 surveys sent, 52 paraprofessionals and 59 early childhood educators responded for a response rate of 45% (paraprofessionals) and 51% (preschool educators). The survey consisted of two parts, 18 Likert-type questions regarding task frequency, preparedness, and task completion. The second part contained seven items "designed to elicit perceptions about the paraprofessional's role in the classroom" (Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008, p. 166). SEPs considered themselves to be prepared to teach their students with disabilities, whereas preschool educators rated the SEP with whom they worked as not prepared. SEPs were concerned with their insufficient salaries in the context of increases in their work responsibilities. "Many felt that they were expected to do similar activities to the teachers, but because they lacked a teaching

certificate they were not compensated at the same level" (Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008, p. 171).

SEPs were interested in furthering their education but were unable to do so as they received little

financial assistance from the school" (Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008). Survey data indicated that

SEPs overall were satisfied with their jobs and considered themselves co-educators with the

classroom teacher. These findings corroborate and conflict with other studies that have examined

SEPs perceptions of their work conditions. Other researchers have found that most SEPs, unlike

those surveyed in Hughes and Valle-Riestra (2008), are primary academic instructors, expected

to be the expert on the student/s, and are responsible for developing accommodations and

modifications to curriculum (Giangreco, Suter, Doyle, 2012; Mark, Schrader, & Levine, 1999;

Webster, et al., 2010). However, many SEPs lack education, receive less pay, and do not feel

respected or valued (Causton-Theoharis & Burdick, 2012; Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, 2001;

Mark, Schrader, Levine, 1999). Hughes and Valle-Riestra noted that their findings may be

influenced by the fact that the school district under study already had several components in

place (e.g., collaborative mentorship, professional development opportunities, and funding) that

enhanced the experiences of SEPs. Unfortunately, this may not be the case for all school-districts

and the SEPs working within those districts.

Researchers also have examined the responsibilities and job satisfaction of SEPs without

comparing their perceptions to those of the general educators with whom they work. Fisher &

Pleasants (2012) surveyed SEPs (paraeducators) in a large mid-western state to determine if SEP

perceptions were influenced by their placement type: one-to-one or small group. The authors

distributed the survey to 4,358 special education directors and received 1,742 completed

responses from SEPs. The survey was comprised of four parts. The first gathered demographic

information and information about current work experience, descriptions of a typical workday,

assignment descriptions, and team membership information, as well as the amount and type of

job preparation. In the second section, participants described their roles and responsibilities and

if they were the primary person responsible for those duties. In the third, paraeducators described

their level of concern regarding five key issues: lack of appreciation by others, turnover,

insufficient experience for the tasks required, less likely interaction of GEs (general educators)

with students who have IEPs when para is present, and para rather than GE viewed as primary

instructor for student with IEP (Fisher & Pleasants, 2012, p. 290 – 291). The findings indicated

that half of the paraeducators (53%) were primarily in charge of behavior and emotional support,

while 43% were responsible for implementing teacher-planned instruction. Respondents (40%)

stated that the general education teacher was less likely to interact with a student who has an IEP

when the paraeducator was present. The same percentage of respondents also stated that lack of

appreciation by others was a major concern. According to one SEP, "I feel that paraeducators are

not respected when it comes to their opinions and concerns. Paras are not part of IEP sessions

and are usually not given any of the instructions (IEP requirements) about the child" (Fisher &

Pleasants, 2012, p. 292). The authors stated that:

> A majority of these respondents expressed a clear interest in having more opportunities to
>
> participate as members of student planning teams and as members of the broader school
>
> community. They not only wanted to learn about teaming but also wanted to be part of
>
> the team, and nearly all indicated it was appropriate for paraeducators to attend planning
>
> meetings. (Fisher & Pleasants, 2012, p. 295)

Fischer and Pleasants (2012) suggested that administrators may play a key role in determining

the level of appreciation SEPs experience. The authors stated that administrators can "assume a

leadership role by valuing paraeducator voice through the assignment of paraeducators to

district-level planning teams and setting district expectations for paraeducator attendance at individual student planning meetings and faculty and staff meetings" (Fisher & Pleasants, 2012, p. 295).

Marks, Schraeder, and Levine (1999) interviewed 20 SEPs who worked for a "Non-public Agency" that contracted SEPs in the San Francisco area to provide support for local public schools. Overall participants in this study expressed feelings of frustration. SEPs felt obligated to keep the students engaged so as to not "bother" the educators with whom they worked. Participants also were frustrated with educators, as modifications to curriculum or instruction were left up to the SEP instead of being directed by the educator. Lack of respect and feelings of isolation also were common. SEPs felt that educators considered their student with disabilities from a deficit mindset and that those negative feelings transferred to how educators felt about them as well. Participants also expressed a desire for positive communication, time to communicate with the educators (e.g., joint planning time), and opportunities for education (e.g., professional development).

SEPs' perceptions of their work conditions also have been examined in the U.K.. Webster et al. (2010) conducted a 3-year study to examine the work requirements and working conditions of support staff (e.g., SEPs). Webster et al. conducted the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project across Wales and included both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (observational) data. Researchers grouped their findings into three categories: impact of SEP support on student learning, utilization of SEPs, and collaborative practice between educators and SEPs. SEP respondents lacked formal education and adequate professional development to prepare them for their job. Despite this lack of preparation, most SEPs were expected to give primary instruction to their students, which resulted in underperformance in academic subjects

by students with disabilities. Like Hughes & Valle-Riestra's (2008) study, Webster et al. (2010) found that SEP salaries were not commensurate to the responsibilities that they held.

Research findings regarding engagement and collaboration of SEPs were similar with the exception of Hughes & Valle-Riestra (2008), whose study was limited to one district with unusual levels of support for SEPs. The remaining research consistently indicated that SEPs are expected to maintain similar responsibilities to that of a licensed educator without the benefits of the higher pay scale, access to educational opportunities, or respect for their position. Feelings of frustration due to job responsibilities, and/or lack of respect, feelings of unpreparedness, and a lack of training were similar between studies.

SEPs in General Education Settings

In a review of the literature, Giangreco and Doyle (2002) sought to explain why there were drastic increases in the number of SEPs in classrooms. The authors found that increases in inclusive opportunities for students, teacher shortages, and increases in the number of students with severe disabilities may explain the increase in SEPs. However, according to Giangreco and Doyle (2002), the literature is not clear on how to incorporate SEPs effectively into instruction or how to educate them to engage with students with disabilities; "Nowhere does the literature present a strong conceptual or theoretical rationale that explains the practice of assigning the least qualified staff members to make crucial decisions and provide primary instruction for students with the most complex needs" (p. 3). Giangreco and Doyle (2002) posed five questions:

1. To what extent should paraprofessionals be teaching students with disabilities?

2. What impact does the proximity of paraprofessionals have on students with disabilities?

3. How does the utilization of paraprofessional support affect teacher engagement, and why should it matter?

4. How can authentic respect, appreciation, and acknowledgment of the important work of paraprofessionals be demonstrated?

5. What can be done to improve paraprofessional supports schoolwide? (p. 3)

I will focus on Giangreco and Doyle's response to the last three questions, as those questions relate directly to this study. The authors found that SEPs were assigned either as a one-on-one support for a student with disabilities (one SEP to one student for the entire day) or to a program/classroom. Giangreco and Doyle focused on specific studies to show that classroom teachers engaged students with disabilities more when SEPs were in a program/classroom assignment than if assigned one-on-one. They suggested that educators should seek clarification of their collaborative role when working with SEPs and students with disabilities and that an understanding of how to teach students with disabilities happens through, "collaboration with special educators, consultation, training, or structural changes (e.g., class size, ratios of students with and without disabilities)" (p. 7).

Giangreco and Doyle (2002) stated that SEPs experience a lack of respect, appreciation, or acknowledgement for their work. The authors suggested that the title given to a SEP may be reflective of how they are viewed (e.g., teacher aide as opposed to paraeducator or SEP). The authors also identified low wages and miscommunicated expectations as contributing factors to SEPs feeling unappreciated. Giangreco & Doyle (2002) asserted that, "part of respecting the work of paraprofessionals is to respect the nature of the job as it exists and to acknowledge that all the varied functions they serve have value" (p. 9). The authors also suggested treating SEPs as professionals by offering them their own workspace, placing their name on the door alongside

the classroom teacher, allowing them access to classroom materials, and clearly communicating

the expectations of collaborative work. Giangreco and Doyle (2002) stated that administrators

and educators should consider the following three approaches to improving SEP supports:

> [First] pursue role clarification [and] role alignment with paraprofessional skills,
> orientation, training and supervision. . . Second. . .do a better job in determining when
> paraprofessional supports are warranted and appropriate. . . Third. . .explore alternatives
> to our heavy reliance on paraprofessional supports, especially in inclusive classrooms.
> (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002, p. 11)

As such, Giangreco, Doyle, and Suter (2012) suggested an alternative framework for the

use and placement of SEPs, which may address perceptions of and collaboration with SEPs. The

authors stated that the use of SEPs has become more reactive than strategic because

administrators are asking the wrong questions when placing SEPs into the classroom. Giangreco,

Doyle, and Suter (2012) suggested that the myth of "capacity" or "justification models" for

hiring SEPs may be responsible for this reactionary hiring and/or placement. The authors also

suggested that, instead of reacting to the need for instructional supports, administrators should,

"explore a person-environment fit that considers the interactions between individual student

needs and environmental considerations that typically necessitates changes" (Giangreco, Doyle,

& Suter, 2012, p. 365). From here, the authors provided an alternative framework for making

decisions and providing support through a SEP, first at the school and district levels, and then

within classrooms and teams.

The school and/or district have many responsibilities through this alternative framework.

Giangreco, Doyle, and Suter (2012) suggested that schools and districts develop the following:

shared understanding of inclusive education and Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), guiding

principles on educational support services, clarified roles of all team members, a collection and understanding of service delivery data, a self-assessment of general and special education practices, and a service delivery model to account for a full range of student diversity. To clarify, the authors suggested that school officials define what inclusive education looks like in their district and to assure that all partners in the education of students with disabilities understand and act upon that definition. In addition, students with disabilities should be afforded access to the same quality instruction as those students without disabilities. "All students with disabilities deserve access to, and their primary instruction from, highly qualified teachers and special educators" (Giangreco, Doyle, & Suter, 2012, p. 366). In order for students with disabilities to have the same access to quality instruction as their peers without disabilities, the authors stated that schools should clarify the role that each professional play in the education of students with disabilities. The authors also recommended that classroom educators and teaching teams develop an inclusive environment that is not overly reliant on SEPs.

SEPs in Art Education Settings

A few researchers have examined the role of SEPs and their needs in specific content settings. The research literature within art education addresses preparing SEPs to work with students with disabilities. Causton-Theoharis and Burdick (2008) observed 18 SEPs working across grade levels in a central New York school district and found that SEPs could serve as "gate closers" or "gate openers" for students' with disabilities success in the art classroom. "Gate closers" were described as SEPs who interfered with student learning. Interfering encompassed three themes: physical access, interrupting authenticity, and altering production. This included doing the work for the students, providing alternative materials, restricting choice, purposefully missing instruction, changing the assignment without discussion with the art educator, and

lowering expectations for the student. "Gate-openers" were SEPs who promoted student learning. Promotion of learning also consisted of three themes: ensuring access, supporting authenticity, and honoring the art curriculum. This included being with students for the entirety of class, providing adequate space, working with all students in the class, encouragement of success, fading SEP support, and following curricular objectives. Causton-Theoharis and Burdick (2008) suggested that as art teachers are responsible for the curriculum, they should increase their interaction with students who have SEP support. The authors also suggested that art educators provide guidance for SEPs in how to successfully support all students in the classroom. Causton-Theoharis and Burdick (2008) stated that this take place through a "shift in their [the art educator] sense of authority" by viewing the SEP as a teaching partner and increasing communication between the art educator and SEP in order to clearly define expectations of SEP support and engagement (p. 179).

Increasing communication between educators and SEPs in order to create a supportive and collaborative teaching and learning environment may seem difficult. Causton-Theoharis and Burdick (2012) laid out recommendations based on their earlier study (Causton-Theoharis and Burdick, 2008). As previous researchers stated, SEPs often felt a lack of respect or value in their positions (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Mark, Schraeder, & Levine, 1999; Webster et al., 2010). Causton-Theoharis and Burdick (2012) offered that art educators can demonstrate respect to SEPs by addressing SEPs in the same manner as other educators and sharing tasks that "are routine and communicate authority" (p. 34). The authors suggested art teachers may demonstrate value through sharing skills with the SEP. SEPs may believe they are without the skills to guide students in art. As such art educators should, "empower [SEPs] with art knowledge and experience" (Causton-Theoharis & Burdick, 2012, p. 34). According to Causton-Theoharis and

Burdick (2012) schools should offer SEPs access to the same materials as the teacher: physical

space in which to assist students, visual access to demonstrations and models, access to

materials, and access to the curriculum through modifications that are developed collaboratively.

The authors also stated that setting aside time to communicate is a necessity, whether it be

planned or unplanned. The most effective art educator and SEP relationships were fostered by

those who collaborated on student expectations, instructional goals, support strategies, and

shared responsibilities (Causton-Theoharis & Burdick, 2012).

SEPs in Music Education Settings

Little empirical research has been published on the relationships between or the

collaborative needs of music educators and SEPs by researchers. What does exist are a few

practitioner articles and books that offer suggestions concerning how to include SEPs in music

settings (Adamek & Darrow, 2010; Bernstorff, 2001; Darrow, 2010; Hammel & Hourigan, 2017;

Jellison, 2015).

A few practitioner-focused articles offer suggestions for how music educators should

collaborate with SEPs. Bernstorf (2001) stated that many schools do not have formal policies on

how SEPs should engage in music classrooms and suggested that music teachers "be specific

about the help that the paraprofessional will provide. . .and include the paraprofessional in a

meaningful way" (2001, p. 38). Bernstorf's observations that LEAs do not have formal policies

corroborates Pickett's (2003) study on the lack of education given to teachers in how to guide

SEPs in student instruction. To include SEPs meaningfully, Bernstorf suggested music educators

should collaboratively communicate information with SEPs, ask SEPs for input on lessons,

suggest materials for students, integrate SEPs into lesson activities, carry-over information on

students between classes, and ask SEPs to interpret student information and to assist with

assistive technology. While these are excellent suggestions, some music educators lack the allocated planning time necessary to collaborate and include SEPs into their instruction (Grimsby, 2019; VanWeelden & Heath-Reynolds, 2018).

Darrow (2010) offered suggestions similar to those of Bernstorf (2001). Darrow also suggested that music educators use a student information form to pull essential information from an IEP or 504 plans. McCord & Watts (2006) also discussed ideas for collaborative practices between music educators and SEPs. They focused on the legislation behind inclusion, the purpose of IEPs, and the information generated from those meetings. McCord and Watts (2006) also offered resources for inclusive teaching practices, examples of Universal Design for Learning in instruction, and a form to be used by music educators asking special educators to list suggested accommodations for individual students. The authors also included a brief section discussing SEPs.

VanWeelden and Heath-Reynolds (2018) surveyed music educators ($N =120$) and the SEPs with whom they worked regarding collaborative practices. A response rate of 37% was calculated from valid responses ($N =44$). The authors found that the perceptions of allowed and/or expected professional behaviors of music educators and SEPs were different between music educators and SEPs and that these disconnects were due to miscommunications between music educators and SEPs. VanWeelden and Heath-Reynolds (2018) suggested that music educators and SEPs be allowed collaborative planning time to address instructional needs and expectations. Similar to VanWeelden and Heath-Reynolds (2018), Grimsby (2018) examined perceived needs of music educators and the SEPs with whom they worked through a survey. She also found that there were miscommunications between music educators and SEPs regarding expectations of instructional support. Both music educators and SEPs expressed the need for

better communication with each other, allocated planning time to collaborate on curriculum and instructional strategies, as well as professional development focused on teaching music to students with disabilities.

Summary

SEPs often are asked to perform tasks for which they are not trained for, feel a lack of respect from their colleagues, and are underpaid (Causton-Theoharis & Burdick, 2008; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2001; Giangreco, Doyle, & Suter, 2012; Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; Marks, Schrader, & Levine, 1999). Researchers have called for changes to school district policies on scheduling and instructional support, especially in regard to providing collaborative planning time between educators and SEPs (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Giangreco, Doyle, & Suter, 2012). Also, they have identified that teachers and SEPs are in need of professional development opportunities that will benefit their instructional practices and student outcomes (Brock, Seaman, & Downing, 2017; Causton-Theoharis & Burdick, 2008, 2016; Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Giangreco, Doyle, & Suter, 2012; Idol, 2006; Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; Marks, Schraeder, & Levine, 1999; Webster et al., 2016). SEAs and LEAs require professional development for all teachers, either as part of the teaching license renewal process and/or as connected to teacher evaluations (Barrett, 2006; Battersby & Verdi, 2015); however, professional development is not always available or required for SEPs (Pickett, 2003).

Even though these needs have been identified clearly through 45 years of research, the professional development needs of music educators and SEPs in regard to teaching students with disabilities remain unmet. Future research should examine the outcomes and effectiveness of professional development developed specifically for music educators and special education professionals, including SEPs, that focuses on teaching music to students with disabilities.

Professional Development

Professional development is necessary for the growth and sustainment of any educator. A former administrator told me, "when the big people are learning, the little people are learning" (Tom Fitzpatrick, personal communication, August 28, 2014). Professional development allows music educators to hone their teaching for the benefit of their practice and the benefit of their students. Professional development also allows music educators an opportunity to connect with others in their field. These opportunities for connection are important as music educators have expressed feelings of isolation (Barrett, 2006; Gruenhagen, 2008; Sindberg, 2016). Often school- or district-provided professional development is "one-size fits all" and does not address the specific needs of music educators (Barrett, 2006; Schmidt & Robbins, 2011).

Some of the general education literature on professional development criticized the "one and done" method that is all too often required of educators, general and music alike (Richardson, 2003; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). Richardson (2003) suggested an approach to professional development based on individual as well as group needs. While Richardson focused more on professional development for a school or district, her work also can be applied to smaller professional learning communities, such as individual educators with a common learning goal. According to Richardson (2003) the literature suggested that successful professional development contained the following characteristics:

> [is] long-term with follow-up, encourage[s] collegiality; foster[s] agreement among participants on goals and vision; ha[s] access to adequate funds for materials, [provides] outside speakers, substitute teachers, etc.; develops buy-in from participants; acknowledge participants' existing beliefs and practices; and makes use of an outside facilitator/staff developer. (p. 401)

Professional development, according to Richardson (2003), also should have an inquiry-based approach, allowing participants to "determine their individual and collective goals, experiment with practices, and engage in open and trusting dialogue about teaching and learning with colleagues and outside facilitators" (p. 401). Professional development that uses an inquiry-based approach should have the following characteristics:

> [teachers should] have considerable control over process and content; . . . critically discuss issues of school mission, curriculum, instruction or student learning; . . . draw on relevant data and research to inform deliberations; and . . . sustain a focus on a topic or problem and reach a collective decision. (Richardson, 2003, p. 405)

This inquiry-based approach is grounded in social constructivist principles that assert that learning ultimately is a social endeavor (Adams, 2006, Hein, 1991; Kim, 2012; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). Through this social constructivist approach to professional development, participants develop their own understandings through interactions with what they know and what they do not know. According to Richardson, "those who have worked with an inquiry approach in professional development have found that participants may change their practices and may even change their beliefs and understandings about teaching and learning" (2003, p. 404).

Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) also considered professional development that gives teachers agency in directing their professional development. Similar to Richardson (2003), Darling-Hammond and Richardson suggested that teachers engage in inquiry-based professional development (intensive learning program) about a specific program or new curriculum, that coaches be put in place to guide learning and observations throughout the year, and that teachers have weekly or monthly meetings in learning communities across the school year to assess the program, student progress, and teacher progress. According to Darling-Hammond & Richardson

(2009), "the most useful professional development emphasizes active teaching, assessment, observation, and reflection rather than abstract discussions" (p. 47). This type of professional development had more impact on student learning than summer intensives only, or a 1-day intensive workshop that did not offer follow up professional development.

In order to form teacher learning communities in schools, Darling-Hammond & Richardson (2009) suggested "smaller school size and common planning time [are] key" (p. 50). However, they did not mention music educators and special education educators, and instead focused on general classroom teachers. The authors also identified peer observations as necessary for effective professional development. Peer observations mostly referred to in-classroom observations, although recorded observations also would be possible. Would a learning community that is created for music educators and paraprofessionals be effective if it employed the social constructivist strategies outlined by Richardson (2003) and Darling-Hammond & Richardson (2009), and if so, how might that learning community look? An examination of the research literature on professional development for paraprofessionals and music educators may offer insight.

Professional Development for SEPs

A few researchers have considered professional development for special education paraprofessionals (referred to as training in the literature) (Brock, Seaman, Downing, 2017; Giangreco et al., 2003; Wall, Davis, Crowley, & White, 2005). Brock, Seaman, and Downing (2017) examined the effects of SEP training on student behavior and learning outcomes. The authors studied one SEP working a one-to-one setting in an elementary classroom. Brock, Seaman, and Downing (2017) used video modeling and facilitator feedback to teach the SEP how to implement evidence-based practices into instruction. The SEP participated in video

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training and feedback, and one author taught the SEP how to implement these evidence-based strategies and collect data on the student with whom they worked. During the student's instruction another author stayed in the room and offered the SEP feedback and support, although this support faded over the course of the study. Brock, Seaman, and Downing (2017) found that video modeling alone improved the SEP's implementation of strategies, and that student outcomes improved once the paraprofessional received feedback on teaching performance. The SEP stated that the training and strategies were effective in developing her competence in working with her student as well as effective in increasing the learning outcomes of her student. Based on the findings from this study, the authors suggested that:

> paraprofessionals should only be asked to take on responsibilities for which they have been provided sufficient training [and that] teacher trainers [teacher educators] must prepare teachers to supervise paraprofessionals, and administrators must provide teachers with the time and support they need to effectively train paraprofessionals. (Brock, Seaman, & Downing, 2017, p. 222)

Giangreco et al. (2003) also examined the effect of training on SEP performance in an inclusive setting. Unlike Brock, Seaman, and Downing (2017), Giangreco et al. collected data from 318 SEPs who participated in one of two courses taught by 23 educators over 20 sections using a variety of means: "face-to-face, interactive TV, [and] an intensive summer institute" (2003, p. 17). Instructors collected data through multiple-choice quizzes, an evaluation of course content by the paraprofessionals using a Likert-type questionnaire, and a similar questionnaire completed by the instructor. SEPs who participated in the study stated that course content had "direct application in their work assisting in the provision of special education for students with disabilities" (Giangreco et al., 2003, p. 25). While the course work was effective, SEPs suggested

that much of the information also would benefit the special educators with whom they worked. While the authors stated that joint training is "desirable and effective, it also presents logistical challenges"; the authors further stated that pre-service special educators should be prepared to "train and direct the work of paraeducator" (Giangreco et al., 2003, p. 26).

Professional Development for Music Educators on Teaching Students with Disabilities

Most of the literature on professional development for music educators examines perceptions and policy related to professional development (Barrett, 2006; Bowles, 2003; Conway 2008; Schmidt & Robbins, 2011), professional development preferences and needs (Conway, Hibbard, Albert, & Hourigan, 2005; Conway, 2011; Hammel, 2007; Hesterman, 2011), and use of technology as professional development (Bauer, 1999; Bauer, 2007; Hammel & Gerrity, 2011). The professional development literature also examines professional learning communities (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Bell-Robertson, 2015; Gruenhagen, 2008; Kastner, 2012, 2014; Pellegrino, Sweet, Kastner, Russell, Reese, 2014; Pellegrino, Kastner, Reese, & Russell, 2018; Sindberg, 2016; Stanley, 2011, 2012). Yet, little of this research focused on professional development specifically targeted at teaching music to students with disabilities.

Most of the music education literature on preparing teachers to teach students with disabilities is centered on pre-service teacher education (Cassidy & Colwell, 2012; Hammel, 2001; Hourigan, 2007, 2009; VanWeelden & Whipple, 2005; VanWeelden & Whipple, 2012). Only one study has explored the effectiveness of professional development for inservice music educators regarding teaching music to students with disabilities (Hammel & Gerrity, 2011). The professional development in this study was provided through an online course focused on developing teacher competency in teaching music to students with disabilities. While the course discussed interactions with special education professionals, there was no learning component for

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both music educators and special educators or special education professionals. VanWeelden and Meehan (2016) examined if state conferences offered adequate professional development opportunities for music educators on topics related to students with disabilities. Although the authors did not designate a certain set number of sessions as adequate, there were several states that offered no professional development sessions on teaching music to students with disabilities. The researchers found that few states offered adequate numbers of sessions on students with disabilities and those that were offered were geared toward elementary music educators or devoted to students on the autism spectrum.

Summary

Music educators and SEPs desire time to collaborate and communicate expectations, develop instructional strategies, and participate in professional development focused on teaching music to students with disabilities. The professional development literature clearly indicates that educators are in need of professional development that is job specific, long term, allows for teacher agency in content learned, addresses collaborative and communicative needs among educators, and uses an inquiry approach centered on the principles of social constructivism. These professional development strategies, centered in a social constructivist approach, may hold the key to addressing the instructional and collaborative needs of music educators and the special education paraprofessionals with whom they work.

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Need for this Study

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Studies examining the instructional and collaborative needs between music educators and SEPs are rare; yet students with disabilities and educators in both general education and music education would benefit from such research. To my knowledge there are no studies that examine music educators and SEPs engaging in collaborative professional development regarding how to

teach music to students with disabilities. More research is necessary to expand and improve professional development for music educators and SEPs in the hopes to address their expressed desire for communication, collaborative planning time and professional development.

Therefore, this study explores a learning community, centered on the instructional and collaborative needs of music educators and SEPs. It is my hope that this study will open lines of new research that will affect music educators and SEPs positively and will finally begin to address their needs after more than 45 years of research calling for action. Perhaps an inquiry-based learning community between music educators and SEPs may address music educator and SEP perceptions (Grimsby, 2018; VanWeelden & Heath-Reynolds, 2018, VanWeelden & Whipple, 2014b) as well as address the instructional and collaborative needs of music educators and the SEPs with whom they work.

Purpose and Problems

With the intent of improving music instruction for students with disabilities, as well as to understand more fully the collaborative needs of music educators and SEPs, the purpose of this study was to engage music educators and SEPs in a professional development community that examined the instructional processes, perceptions, and practices needed to teach music to students with disabilities. The "grand tour" question of this study was: How did a community of practice offer collaboration and instructional support for music educators and SEPs? The following questions guided the study:

1. How did music educators and SEPs interact within a community of practice?
2. Does a community of practice impact the instructional and collaborative practices of music teachers and SEPs, and if so, how does it manifest in the classroom?

3. How does a community of practice shift participants' pedagogical and philosophical beliefs concerning teaching students with disabilities?

4. How does a community of practice facilitate growth and collaborative planning in ways that the school structures cannot? What does this tell us about music educator and SEP needs?

5. What aspects of the community of practice were most difficult for the participants, the easiest, and what did they find most useful?

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

In this study I examined a community of practice consisting of music educators and special education paraprofessionals seeking to understand the shared and disparate instructional and collaborative needs as they work toward learning from one another about teaching music to students with disabilities. In Chapter One I reviewed the literature on music educator and paraprofessional preparation to teach students with disabilities. I also reviewed literature on music educator and paraprofessional needs regarding collaborative planning time and professional development centered on how to teach students with disabilities. No study offered a clear understanding of the form that those collaborative experiences should take, nor did they offer examples of professional development that addressed the needs of both groups. In this chapter I will review the literature on professional development for music educators as well as the literature on teaching music educators to teach music to students with disabilities. I then will discuss possible social learning community frameworks that might be useful to music educators and paraprofessionals, including a review and summary of relevant literature surrounding each of the following frameworks: *Professional Learning Communities* (DuFour, 2004; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 2004), C*ollaborative Professionalism* (Hargreves & O'Connor, 2018), *Knowledge Building Communities* (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1989, 1993, 2003), and *Communities of Practice* (Wenger, 1998).

Music Education and Professional Development

Conway (2003, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2011) is an important voice in the research on professional development in music education. Although Conway's main research foci are beginning teacher mentorship and examining educational practices in music teacher education,

she has published, alone and in collaboration with others, several articles on professional development for music educators at various stages of their career. For example, in 2003 and 2008 she studied music educators' perceptions of professional development across experience and teaching level. In the 2008 study, she found that informal interactions were of utmost importance to music educators, and that the professional development needs of music educators were dependent on career experience. Conway et al. (2005) centered on policy practices for professional development for arts educators and called for continued research on professional development for music educators.

Other researchers also have examined the professional development needs of music educators. Many researchers examined professional development preferences through the use of surveys (Bernard, 2009; Bowles, 2003; Ferrara, 2009; Hesterman, 2011; Tarnowski & Murphy, 2003). Other researchers reviewed the literature on professional development and made suggestions for the field (Bauer, 2007; Hammel, 2007; Koner & Eros, 2019). Junda (1994) examined the impact of professional development with music educators, on student learning, through a graduate course.

Survey Studies

Professional development preferences of music educators have been examined by researchers through survey instruments (Bernard, 2009; Bowles, 2003; Ferrara, 2009; Hesterman, 2011, Tarnowski & Murphy, 2003). Respondents across all of the survey populations comprised a variety of teaching levels, subjects, and experience. Participants ($N = 456$) in Bowles' (2003) survey either taught elementary (51%), middle (48%), high school music (40%) or a combination of the three; only 8% taught at the university level. Most participants ($N = 167$) in Ferrara's (2009) study were instrumental teachers (42.69%) and taught grades 9 through 12

(42.91%). Hesterman's (2011) participants ($N = 456$) were mostly music educators with more than 15 years of experience (51.4%) who represented all levels of music education and taught a variety of genres (band, choir, elementary, strings, etc.). Bernard (2009) and Tarnowski & Murphy (2003) studied elementary music educators only.

Most researchers considered professional development preferences both in style of delivery and topic. Bowles (2003) listed 18 topics for participants to select as a topic of interest for professional development, allowing participants to select all that were applicable. The most frequently chosen topics were "technology (66%), assessment (57%), instrument/choral literature (53%), standards (45%), creativity (43%), and grant writing (38%)" (Bowles, 2003, p. 3). Bernard (2009) had similar findings to Bowles (2003) in preference of professional development topics; standards (70%), technology (63.3%), and assessment (58.7%) were three of the most frequently selected topics by participants ($N = 479$). Ferrara (2009) found that most participants (66.87%) stated that professional development opportunities were lacking in "musical and pedagogical content," and desired more musical content professional development; 31% desired more musical and pedagogical content in workshops, and 21% in conferences (p. 65). Hesterman (2011) found that technology (47.5%), choral music (45.8%), assessment (31.9%), and elementary general music methodology (31.5%) were preferred professional development topics. Tarnowski and Murphy (2003) found that elementary teacher participants ($N = 816$) preferred professional development situated around a particular methodology, with most respondents (57.29%) choosing professional development centered on the Orff approach. Respondents in Tarnowski and Murphy's (2003) study expressed interest in future professional development centered on the Orff approach (61.21%), technology (60.50%), assessment in music (55.88%), and standards-based teaching (50.33%).

Each researcher examined participant preference for professional development venue. Bowles (2003) found that 54% of respondents preferred continuing education through the university, while 37% preferred state and local workshops. Most respondents in Hesterman's study (2011) had participated in continuing education (90.3%), local district in-services (89.2%), or professional conferences (84.1%) as their most recently attended professional development. Preferences for future professional development, as stated by participants, were for continuing education (36.4%) and music conferences (42.5%), although it was unclear if the preference was for state music conferences, local workshops, or both. Ferrara (2009) also found that most respondents preferred workshops (22.79%) and professional conferences (19.94%), which were found to be the most beneficial (53.08%) according to those surveyed. While preferences for specific types of professional development were not a particular focus of Bernard's (2009) study, respondents identified the importance of planning time for implementing strategies learned from professional development workshops. Most respondents (89.1%) strongly agreed that planning time was necessary for implementing strategies learned from their professional development. Unfortunately, the survey did not investigate whether music educators received that planning time from administrators.

Bernard (2009), Bowles (2003), and Hesterman (2011) each discussed teachers' motivations for attending professional development. Bernard (2009) found that most respondents engaged in professional development to increase knowledge and skill, whereas Hesterman (2011) found that most participants engaged in continuing education to increase their salaries (67.9%). As with Bernard (2009), most participants in Bowles' study (2003) stated that increasing skill or knowledge base was the biggest motivator for attending a workshop (82%).

Although these survey studies had similar foci, a few studies offered different perspectives on the professional development needs or preferences of music educators. Bowles (2003) asked respondents about their willingness to travel for professional development and found that while most were willing to travel long distances, 63% of respondents were satisfied with their local or state professional development offerings. Ferrara (2009) found that a majority of respondents (52.10%), who were New Jersey music teachers, wanted to have more input into the content of their professional development opportunities. Teacher agency in professional development also was addressed in Bernard (2009), Ferrara (2009), and Hesterman (2011).

Literature Reviews

Three studies have examined professional development for music educators through a review of literature. Two were published in a special edition of Arts Education Policy Review in 2007 that centered on professional development for music educators. Bauer's (2007) review consisted primarily of studies of music teachers responding to surveys on their professional development needs. Hammel (2007) examined the general education literature on professional development and considered applications of that literature to professional development for music educators. The most recent, a study by Kroner & Eros (2019), focuses on professional development for the experienced music educator.

Bauer (2007) suggested that, while researchers have considered the professional development needs of novice teachers, few have considered the professional development needs of experienced music educators. The research studies included in Bauer's review focused on the effectiveness of professional development, perceptions of professional development opportunities, and experiences with professional development and its impact on teaching practices. Bauer found, across the literature, similar recommendations for creating effective

professional development, including the development of long-term professional learning

communities, master teacher or peer modeling for novice educators, and the creation of

professional development specifically designed for those in various stages of their career. Bauer

(2007) suggested that future research explore professional development opportunities that meet

the needs of music educators at varying stages of their careers and consider the development of

online professional development communities.

Bauer also addressed differing opinions about the value of belonging to the state or

national educator's associations. In one study, Price and Orman (2001) found that educational

sessions at state music conferences were decreasing while industry sessions were increasing.

This may explain those studies in which respondents stated that state music conference

professional development opportunities were lacking (Bernard, 2009; Bowles, 2003; Ferrara,

2009; Gfeller, Hedden, & Darrow, 1990; Hesterman, 2011; VanWeelden & Meehan, 2016).

Bauer concluded by suggesting a need for continued research on music educator professional

development. Bauer also pushed for researchers to consider the impact of professional

development on student learning, calling it essential as "the worth of any professional

development experience is dependent on the impact it has on teachers, and ultimately [their]

students" (Bauer, 2007, p. 14).

Hammel (2007) reviewed the literature on professional development in general

education, and then applied those findings to implications for the professional development

needs of music educators. Themes throughout the literature were issues of educator isolation,

need for communication, need for content-specific professional development, issues with one-

day professional development in-services, and a need for an increase in collaboration. Hammel

found that general educators' concerns are similar to those of music educators in regard to

professional development. Hammel stated that "[m]usic educators may agree with the respondents in the Moore Johnson (1990) study who commented on the perceived lack of power in [the] decision-making processes" (2007, p. 23). Both general educators and music educators, according to Hammel (2007), sought professional development that included prolonged engagement that was "more focused on individual interests and needs, and contain support structures for implementation of classroom strategies" (Hammel, 2007, p. 27). Music educators often engage in one-day intensive workshops or "one and done" educational experiences, despite the literature suggesting that prolonged engagement is more beneficial to teachers and students (Bell-Robertson, 2015; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Gruenhagen, 2008; Fitzpatrick, 2014; Kastner, 2014; Sindberg, 2016). Last, Hammel addressed teachers' desire for collaboration and collegiality through professional development.

Kroner and Eros (2019) analyzed literature on professional development of the experienced music educator spanning the years 2007-2017. The authors posited that effective and meaningful professional development for experienced educators should be centered in content knowledge and music making and also should offer opportunities for collaboration both within and outside of the professional development space. Kroner and Eros (2019), similar to Conway (2008), also suggested that the type and content of professional development should be dependent on the career cycle of a music educator: novice, experienced, or veteran. The authors concluded their review with similar findings to previous reviews of literature; professional development should be content specific, professional development needs change over the life-span of a music educator, informal interactions within professional development opportunities are an effective type of professional development, and future research may wish to further examine professional development for experienced and veteran music educators.

Graduate Course Work

Junda (1994) examined the effectiveness of graduate coursework as professional development. Junda and her colleagues developed coursework for practicing music educators at Montclair State College (now Montclair State University). The purpose of these courses was to develop the musicianship and instructional skills of music educators to see if teacher learning had an effect on student learning. Participants in Junda's study learned about the Kodály method and developed and implemented teaching strategies based on that method. Junda and colleagues observed each music educator enrolled in this course over two semesters and evaluated them on their instructional skills in sight reading and their elementary students' musical skill development. Participants shared video recording of their teaching and evaluated each other's teaching videos. Participants completed a survey at the end of the second semester to examine their perceptions of the course and its effectiveness. Junda (1994) found that "improvement of teachers' skills was directly related to the improvement of students' skills" (p. 16). Participants increased their own participation in other professional development activities, such as state and national conferences, and also developed collaborative relationships with their peers over the course of the year. Junda's study often has been cited to support arguments for music-making within music educator professional learning communities. Junda stated that "[t]hese results confirm [those] of previous studies that long-term, sequential programs that include the implementation of strategies in the schools and supervision by the instructor are effective in making substantial changes in teacher behavior in the classroom" (1994, p. 17).

Professional Development on Teaching Music to Students with Disabilities

VanWeelden and Meehan (2016) examined state music educator conferences and their professional development offerings related to teaching music to students with disabilities. They

examined ten years of state music educator association conference programs to determine the frequency and types of music and special education workshops offered at each conference. A total of 38 states participated, resulting in the examination of 226 conference programs from the years 2004 to 2013. VanWeelden and Meehan considered sessions with titles or descriptions that contained words such as "special learner," "special needs," "students with disabilities," "students with exceptionalities," or any language that pertained to IDEA or other disability categories. These sessions then were categorized into elementary, band, choir, orchestra, and then further categorized into disability categories, such as speech and language impairment, or autism. VanWeelden and Meehan (2016) examined the number of states that offered sessions on music and special education, the frequency of those workshops at each conference, and the frequency of workshops by category as described above. Of the 38 participating states, ten states did not offer any sessions on music and special education, and 23 states had one or more sessions at their conference within the ten-year span. New York, Ohio, Illinois, and Virginia provided the most sessions across the 10-year span. The sessions offered at these state conferences mostly were not specific to any one disability or category, and the most frequent sessions focused on the elementary level. VanWeelden and Meehan (2016) also examined if there was a significant difference in the frequency of sessions between states that did or did not have a special learners chair and/or committee as part of the music conference executive board. The authors found that states with a special learner chair and/or committee on their executive board had more sessions focused on teaching music to the special learner.

A few researchers have examined professional development for music educators centered on teaching music to students with disabilities. Hammel and Gerrity (2012) examined the effect of an online professional development course for inservice teachers in developing competency in

inclusive practices. The authors employed a pretest-posttest design. Participants ($n = 43$) took a brief, 14 Likert-item survey to examine their knowledge of teaching music to students with disabilities. Participants then took the same survey upon completion of the course. Participants in the course engaged in online discussions, took quizzes and exams, submitted a paper that explored the role of special education professionals in the music setting, conducted peer observations through video recorded instruction, communicated via email, and read research focusing on music and special education. While the participants expressed that they were competent before instruction, they felt more competent after taking the online course. Hammel and Gerrity's (2012) findings suggested that online professional development was beneficial and meaningful to participants. The authors asserted that online courses can generate "widespread accessibility [that] may exponentially increase the effect. . .on the greater music education community" (Hammel & Gerrity, 2012, p. 11).

Summary of Music Professional Development Literature

Music educators have specific preferences as to the content and location of professional development opportunities. Most researchers found that music educators were motivated to participate in professional development in order to increase their instructional skills and knowledge (Bowles, 2003; Ferrara, 2009), although Hesterman (2011) found that salary increase was a primary motivator. Music educators also expressed an interest in having input into their professional development (Bauer, 2007; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Ferrara, 2009; Hammel, 2007; Hesterman, 2011). Researchers suggested that career stage of the educator should be considered when designing professional development (Bauer, 2007; Hammel, 2007) and that professional development should focus on the interests of the music educator, involve long-term engagement, and offer support structures for implementing learned strategies in the

music classroom. Bauer (2007) and Hammel's (2007) recommendation for professional development that involves long-term engagement conflicts with data from survey studies which state that local workshops and state music conferences are the preferred type of professional development by music educators (Ferrara, 2009; Hesterman, 2011; Tarnowski & Murphy, 2003). Also, state music conferences were found to be inadequate in providing professional development to music educators on teaching music to students with disabilities (VanWeelden & Meehan, 2016). Hammel and Gerrity (2012) found that participants in their online course gained competency and increased their knowledge of how to teach students with disabilities and learned how to develop a more inclusive classroom.

Opportunities for professional development centered on teaching music to students with disabilities are lacking, as is research investigating which models of professional development are most useful. Recently, there has been a trend in music education research to study social learning communities that have been designed to support the professional development needs of music educators. Perhaps a social learning community may help satisfy the collaborative and instructional needs of music educators and paraprofessionals. An examination of the types of social learning communities such as *Professional Learning Communities* (Dufour, 2003; Dufour & Eaker, 1998), *Collaborative Professionalism* (Hargreves & O'Connor, 2018), *Knowledge Building Communities* (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 2003), and *Communities of Practice* (Wenger, 1998) and their applications within music education may offer insight into how music educators and paraprofessionals might engage in professional development to help them feel more successful in teaching students with disabilities.

Professional Learning Communities

Professional learning communities also are known as "knowledge communities" (Craig, 2009), professional development communities, and collaborative teacher study groups (Stanley 2009, 2011, 2012). How these communities are developed, implemented, and sustained varies. Barrett (2006) suggested that professional learning communities must grow from the "ground up just as [they are] often mandated from the top down" (p. 19), meaning that professional learning communities should be initiated by educators themselves rather than mandated by administrators. Other authors suggest that groups mandated by administrators or other top down personnel are not professional learning communities but rather forms of staff developments (Richardson & Hamilton, 1994).

Just as there are many names given to professional learning communities, there are many ways to define them. Dufour and Eaker (1998) defined professional learning communities as an environment "that fosters mutual cooperation, emotional support, and personal growth as they work together to achieve what they cannot accomplish alone" (p. xiii). Dufour (2004) suggested that there are three core principles to all professional learning communities: ensuring that students learn, developing a culture of collaboration, and having a focus on results. Liberman & Miller (2008) defined learning communities as, "ongoing groups who meet regularly for the purposes of increasing their own learning and that of their students" (p.16). Liberman and Miller (2011) also suggested that professional learning communities are situated in social constructivism, in that learning and meaning are developed through shared knowledge, negotiation, and social interaction. Hord (2004) drew upon organizational learning theory as she constructed five elements necessary for a professional learning community: supportive and shared leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application of learning,

supportive conditions, and shared practice. The similarities between those definitions above include an emphasis on honoring teacher knowledge, collaboration, inquiry, and shared practices.

The use of professional learning communities in music education have been examined in a variety of settings. PLCs have been implemented within higher education (Pellegrino et al., 2014, 2018) and instituted through online platforms only (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Bauer, 2007; Bell-Robertson, 2015). Professional learning communities also have been examined among early childhood, elementary, and secondary music educators (Gruenhagen, 2008; Kastner, 2012; Sindberg, 2016; Stanley, 2012).

Music Education and Professional Learning Communities

Higher education. A few researchers have studied professional learning communities in higher education. Pellegrino et al. (2014) examined the lived experiences of socialization through an online professional learning community of a group of women music educators who were either in a doctoral program or early-career teaching positions. Initially, these meetings were introductory meetings, and discussion was based on selected articles that all participants read. After the first three meetings, the learning community members decided that peer reviewing one another's work would be more beneficial, although each meeting still allowed for time to "check-in" (Pellegrino et al., 2014). Participants negotiated meaning within their group by sharing knowledge and developing a safe space in which to consider one another's work. Participants also considered the professional learning community (called a professional development community in their study) to be a "safe space," stating that the PDC was a place in which they could share feelings as well as negotiate the purpose and meaning of their community. Pellegrino et al. (2014) suggested examining professional learning communities of

"various combinations of gender, ethnicity or race, sexual orientation, specialty, and/or career cycle stage" (p. 475) for future research.

Pellegrino et al. (2018) examined the long-term effects of membership in a professional development community (PDC) centered on early-career music teacher educators in the United States also through an online professional learning community. Findings seemed to be a continuation from the first study by Pellegrino et al. (2014). Participants felt confident and empowered in their new identities and found that they were not alone in their experiences, although they felt isolated at their own institutions. Participants also appreciated the opportunity to learn from each, as each participant had a different perspective on research and teaching. The authors recommended that institutions encourage the development of PDCs and that music teacher educators (MTEs) seek relationships with peers, whether within or outside of their institutions, who are at various stages in their career. Pellegrino et al. (2018) also suggested that professors of doctoral students "encourage the development of PDCs and collaborative research opportunities for their students" (p. 157).

Technology and PLCs. A few researchers have examined the use of technology within professional learning communities. Bauer (2007) raised questions about professional development and/or professional learning communities for music educators and suggested the development of online learning communities. This suggestion is based on an earlier study by Bauer (1999), who found that music educators used the internet as both a communication tool and resource for guiding their teaching practices. He found that most teachers regarded the internet both as a resource for communication and as a means for professional development (Bauer, 1999).

Other researchers have incorporated online resources into their professional learning communities, developed online professional learning communities, or suggested the use of online professional learning communities (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Bell-Robertson, 2015). Bell-Robertson (2015) suggested that more states should consider the development of online learning communities to offer support for novice music educators, as online learning communities may be more logistically possible than in-person communities, because novice music teachers may serve multiple buildings and/or lack subject-specific colleagues in their school or districts. She also encouraged universities to consider online learning communities for recent graduates.

To address the inadequacy of professional development available to arts educators, Battersby & Verdi (2015) argued for computer-mediated communication (CMC) or online professional learning communities. CMCs may offer music educators the opportunity to participate in long-term engagement with other music educators within or across districts, providing an "appropriate combination of contextual conversation, pedagogy, population, and setting" (Battersby & Verdi, 2015, p. 25). To illuminate the possibilities of online professional learning communities Battersby & Verdi (2015) shared the success of one school district in Maryland and its development and use of an online professional learning community. This school district developed their own online professional learning community, FAST (Fine Arts Support Team) that allowed teachers across the district to participate within their busy schedules, to share resources such as lesson plans, and to teach the "same grade level, the same thing, at the same time" (Battersby & Verdi, 2015, p. 27). They believed that the level of engagement, support, and growth that these music educators experienced as a result of participating in the online community may offer a model for other districts.

PLCs and instructional practices. Several studies have used professional learning communities to further the acquisition and implementation of new instructional practices. Stanley (2012) formed a professional learning community to consider the practice of collaborative learning among students in music classrooms. However, Stanley uses the term collaborative teacher study groups (CTSG), a name derived from Murphy & Lick's (2004) whole-faculty study groups. Stanley (2012) studied the experiences of the participants within the collaborative study group to determine whether the focus on collaboration changed their teaching practices and made recommendations for how her findings might inform other music educators considering using collaborative practices in their own instruction. Participants gained a better understanding of how to recognize and support collaboration among their students and, with Stanley, developed three guiding principles for developing student collaborative practices in the music classroom:

> (1) Collaboration facilitates student self-expression and independence, (2) Students who are collaborating share goals. The teacher allows space for our guides students in creating productive student-student interactions, and (3) A teacher collaborating with her students facilitates their movement toward a shared goal. Teacher provides necessary background skills, creates student buy-in for the goal, and then fades away to allow students to take ownership. (Stanley, 2012, p. 65)

Gruenhagen (2008) examined the informal conversations of a group of early childhood music educators. Through her role as participant-observer, she found that these informal conversations evolved into a professional learning community for some of the music educators involved. This community, as it evolved, supported participant teachers' desire to share knowledge and develop shared practices among themselves. Gruenhagen (2008) initially had

wanted to guide participants to consider collaborative lesson planning. However, she found that participants had interests in other topics concerning their instructional practices and, therefore, she allowed the focus of the professional learning community to emerge and be designed by the teachers themselves. This led Gruenhagen (2008) to suggest that professional development should be designed by teachers working in similar contexts.

Sindberg (2016) studied seven music educators, teaching at various levels, within a single school district who desired to create a professional learning community to understand Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance (CMP) and incorporate it into their teaching practices. Comprehensive Musicianship is "a planning model in which music teachers select repertoire, plan outcomes, and create strategies that invite students to understand the music they are rehearsing and performing" (Sindberg, 2016, p. 204). Participants in Sindberg's study gained a better understanding of how to align instructional practices with CMP and saw value in sharing their knowledge while negotiating new meanings. Her participants, despite differences in teaching level and years of experience, developed into a community over the two years that outlasted the study. Participants became more reliant on each other and less reliant upon Sindberg, willingly shared each other's successes and failures, and found that their learning community served as an "antidote for the unique isolation" experienced by music teachers (Sindberg, 2016, p. 214).

Kastner (2012) explored the perceptions and practices of four music educators as they learned to implement informal music learning practices in their classrooms through a professional development community. The PDC (professional development community) met bi-weekly. Each meeting took place at Kastner's home and lasted approximately 2 hours. Meetings began in November and concluded in April. Although Kastner designed the professional learning

community around the predetermined topic of informal learning, participants had agency in guiding the selection of weekly readings and contributing data to meetings, such as video recordings of their lessons implementing informal learning. In addition, Kastner interviewed each participant twice (an initial and exit interview), as well as observed them to see how informal music learning practices manifested in their classroom instruction. Teachers in this study found community with each other and negotiated meaning as to what informal music practices were through bringing in their own knowledge and experiences. The PLC changed teacher practice, as participants sought to connect and balance formal and informal music practices within their own classrooms.

Summary of Literature on Professional Learning Communities in Music Education

Professional learning communities are different from mandated professional development that is designed by building or district supervisors, and professional learning communities do not fit within the professional development structures that most music educators regularly experience, such as "one and done" workshops or conference sessions (Barrett, 2006; Battersby-Verdi, 2015; Bell-Robertson, 2015; Conway, 2005, 2008; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Schmidt & Robbins, 2011). In the research literature, each professional learning community has been unique in its focus and protocol.

Most of the literature on professional learning communities takes place outside of a school system with participants who are from different school districts. Sindberg (2016) is the only researcher who sought music teachers from within the same district. Participants in this study also developed a collaborative culture and ultimately relied less on Sindberg for the facilitation of meetings and instruction.

Researchers have considered PLCs as a way to understand instructional practices such as informal music learning, collaborative learning groups, and comprehensive musicianship (Kastner, 2012, 2014; Sindberg, 2016; Stanley, 2009, 2012). In each of these studies, music educators not only broadened their knowledge base and honed their instructional practices but also developed shared meanings through social interactions that impacted student learning as well as their identities as music educators. In many of the studies, researchers directed the content of the professional development and/or graduate course (Junda, 1994; Kastner, 2012, 2014; Sindberg, 2016; Stanley, 2009, 2012). However, most researchers state that professional development should be designed and implemented by teachers themselves (Barrett, 2006, Bell-Robertson, 2015; Conway, 2003; Conway et al. 2005; Gruenhagen, 2008; Richardson, 2003; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Sindberg, 2016; Schmidt & Robbins, 2011). Only one study has fully allowed the focus of the professional development to emerge from within the group (Gruenhagen, 2008).

The studies also indicate that participation in a PLC addressed the emotional needs of music educators and lessened feelings of isolation. As music educators often are the only music educator in their building, isolation is a real concern that might be remedied by participation in a professional learning community (Conway, 2008; Gruenhagen, 2008; Pellegrino et al. 2014, 2017; Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005; Sindberg, 2016). Professional learning communities may allow a space for collaboration and informal conversations, as the most impactful element of professional learning communities is the informal conversation between participating music educators (Conway, 2008; Gruenhagen, 2008; Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005). Sindberg & Lipscomb (2005) found that feelings of isolation were dependent on years of experience, while Barrett (2006) asserted that music educators feel that some professional development

opportunities create a sense of isolation because they are not applicable to their discipline-specific needs. According to Barrett (2006), if a music educator is not actively pursuing professional development opportunities on their own, they may go without much needed professional development and collegial support. Gruenhagen (2008) also noted that teachers in her study, "longed for a place they could be themselves and be valued; a place that provided a sense of belonging, meaning, and an alternative to the feelings of isolation that so often consume teachers" (2008, p. 59). As Conway (2008) suggested, "music teachers need time with other music teachers in order to reflect on their practice" (p. 16).

Collaborative Professionalism and Knowledge Building Communities

Collaborative Professionalism

Collaborative Professionalism (Hargreves & O'Connor ,2018) developed out of the Professional Learning Communities framework (Dufour, 2003; Dufour & Eaker, 1998). According to Hargreves & O'Connor (2018):

> Collaborative professionalism is about how teachers and other educators transform teaching and learning together to work with all students to develop fulfilling lives of meaning, purpose, and success. It is organized in an evidence-informed, but not data-driven, way through rigorous planning, deep and sometimes demanding dialogue, candid but constructive feedback, and continuous collaborative inquiry. The joint work of collaborative professionalism is embedded in the culture and life of the school, where educators care for and have solidarity with each other as fellow professionals. . . (p. 4-5)

Collaborative professionalism is not centered on data, strategies, and outcomes based on student data, nor is it mandated through a "top-down" structure. In collaborative professionalism, everyone is involved. The school is a body of collaborative teams, rather than a single expert

leading teams of teachers. There are ten tenets that set collaborative professionalism apart from other professional learning communities. These tenets are: *Collective Autonomy, Collective Efficacy*, *Collaborative Inquiry*, *Collective Responsibility*, *Collective Initiative*, *Mutual Dialogue*, *Joint Work*, *Common Meaning and Purpose*, *Collaborating with Students*, *and Big Picture Thinking for All*. Administrators who wish to implement collaborative professionalism must consider the four B's in addition to the ten tenets. For collaborative professionalism to be successful it is necessary to consider what educators experienced *before*, what other collaborations and professional developments are already in place (*betwixt*), what ways educators are being supported *beside*[s] their in-school collaborative groups (district/state wide PD), and ways they can engage with communities *beyond* their own community. In examining the literature on collaborative professionalism, I found no studies in the music education literature that examined collaborative professionalism in the music setting.

Knowledge Building Communities

"Knowledge building" (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1989, 1993, 2003), as understood in the field of education, is a pedagogical idea that has been evolving since its inception in the late 1980s. According to Scardamalia and Bereiter (2003), knowledge building often is used synonymously with "constructivist learning," leading to a misunderstanding of what knowledge building truly is. While knowledge building communities (KBCs) are centered in social constructivist principles, the theory extends beyond the basic social principles of learning (e.g., peer discussions and project-based learning) and focuses on how ideas can be improved upon through the "social processes of evaluation, revision, and application" (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2003, p.2). KBCs "stress[sic] the idea that knowledge is an artifact of the community, a social

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product with participants taking collective responsibility for the state of public knowledge and continual idea improvement" (Cacciamani, Perrucci, & Khanlari, 2018, p. 1531).

KBCs mostly are situated in a K-12 learning environment, although adult learners and business organizations have used this model as well (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1993). Key characteristics of a KBC are, "supports for the formulation of knowledge problems, for preserving ideas and making them accessible as objects of inquiry, for dialogue that is democratic and favorable to idea diversity, for constructive criticism and analysis, for organizing ideas into larger wholes, and for dealing with recognized gaps and shortcomings of ideas" (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2003, p. 2). Participants in a KBC are given the responsibility to take a problem (or idea) and expound upon the possibilities for solving the problem (or better understanding the concept) through the shared resources of their prior knowledge and experiences. Specific to KBCs is how artifacts developed by participants are collected and/or catalogued. This cataloguing of objects is all maintained on an online platform accessible to all participants. Also specific to KBCs is the idea of participant agency. Scardamalia and Bereiter (1996) found that communication within the classroom community seemed to be a key factor in inhibiting participant agency, or what Scardamalia and Bereiter (2006) refer to as "epistemic agency." Scardamalia and Bereiter (1983) assert that the main hub of communication within the classroom community is the teacher, and, in order to give students more agency, they chose to change the pathways of communication. The educator, in a KBC becomes a "participator and co-learner, a more expert learner," a guide on the side rather than the sage on the stage (Westerlund, 2006, p. 122).

KBCs require some form of organized technology that allow individuals within the community to share and build upon ideas, and, as stated above, catalogue developed artifacts. In

1983 Scardamalia and Bereiter developed a software program that would allow students to develop and share ideas related to the focus of the KBC, Computer Supported Intentional Learning Environments (CSILE). This software was piloted at York University and was implemented in Canadian elementary schools by 1989. CSILE allowed information to flow more between students, rather than students and teacher, thus allowing for a shared space in which ideas could be discussed, new ideas could be developed, and learning could be transformed. Knowledge Forum® is the next generation of CSILE, providing students with an online knowledge building environment. The difference between CSILE and Knowledge Forum® is that students may work individually, rather than together, to engage with artifacts compiled in Knowledge Forum®. KBCs, through the use of technology, "turns high level agency to students and assumes that students should set their learning goals, engage in planning, and monitor and assess their work and idea coherence" (Cacciamani, Perrucci, & Khanlari, 2018, p. 1531).

There are 12 principles that demonstrate the necessity for a strong relationship between KBCs and technology. These 12 principles are discussed in terms of the group (socio-cognitive dynamics) and the function of technology (technological dynamics) (Scardamalia, 2002). The first four principles center on problems and ideas: *real ideas/authentic problems*, *improvable ideas*, *idea diversity*, and *rise above*. These principles encourage students to seek real problems that can be constantly improved upon, to explore how outside ideas can influence and change the current problem under study, and to move to higher planes of understanding when working on the chosen problem. *Epistemic agency* and *community knowledge/collective responsibility* are the next two principles, which center on student agency in learning and responsibility of members to value the contributions of their peers. The next five principles center on knowledge: *democratizing knowledge*, *symmetric knowledge advancement*, *pervasive knowledge building*,

constructive uses of authoritative sources, and *knowledge building discourse*. Students engaging in these principles acknowledge that all are contributors to knowledge in their community, knowledge should be shared within and between communities in their classroom, developing and sharing knowledge is not classroom specific, research is important, and that knowledge is to be shared. The final principle, *embedded and transformative assessment*, speaks to the ongoing reflective nature of participation in a KBC.

Only one article considers the use of KBCs within a music education setting. Westerlund (2006) advocated for what Scardamalia and Bereiter (2006) would consider "epistemological agency" among students and a new perspective of the "apprenticeship model" through the lens of *Communities of Practice* (Wenger, 1998) and *Knowledge Building Communities*. Through a discussion of KBCs, Westerlund argued for a praxial shift in music education, with the teacher becoming a facilitator of knowledge and more an "expert learner" than the "master teacher." Through a consideration of vernacular musicianship (i.e., Garage Rock Bands), Westerlund demonstrated how praxial shifts in the conservatory view (i.e., moving from the Western canon to a variety of forms of music, recruiting professors with different musical backgrounds) can be made through the use of KBCs at the collegiate level.

Communities of Practice

Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002) are based on the principles of social constructivism; knowledge is founded on sociocultural interactions within "cultural/historical practices that are mediated by cultural artifacts, tools, and signs" (McClellan, 2018, p.32). Communities of practice are most often informal but may be implemented through top-down organization within a business-like structure. Similar to the various learning communities already reviewed in this chapter,

communities of practice center on learning based in social constructivist principles while participants share knowledge and create knowledge artifacts. According to Wenger, et al. (2002) "communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (p. 4). Organized communities of practice serve a specific strategic purpose for the individuals within the community and for the organizing group. Other communities of practice develop informally due to a common need, interest, or problem.

Theoretical Understanding of a Community of Practice

Four elements foundational to Wenger's (1998) communities of practice (CoPs) are *meaning*, *practice*, *community*, and *identity*, with each situated in learning. *Meaning* is the sharing of lived experiences as a way to understand the world and to change it. *Practice* is a way of discussing historical and social resources as well as frameworks and perspectives that help sustain engagement within the community and spur action. *Community* is the social configurations in which one lives, and how participation within these social configurations results in the construction of knowledge and valuing of that knowledge. *Identity* is understanding how learning changes who we are, and how personal histories develop, over time, through "becoming" within the context of community (Wenger, 1998).

Meaning is negotiated between the interaction of participation and reification. For Wenger (1998), meaning is not defined by a dictionary but by the community who lives it. Lived experiences and new meaning are negotiated each time individuals participate in a community of practice. For educators participating in a community of practice, shared lesson plans, books, teaching strategies, and collected discussions may serve as reified objects. These reified objects help create the foundation of what becomes historical knowledge, which in turn encourages

action to develop new knowledge that is constructed socially from the individual histories and experiences each member brings with them into the community. *Practice* is "doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do. . .practice is always social practice" (Wenger, 1998, p. 38). Essentially, practice is engaging knowledge.

Community is more than brief moments of interaction within shared spaces. Wenger (1998) theorizes community as the interaction of mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. Mutual engagement involves "our [own] competence and the competence of others," which may result in productive disagreements between individuals with differing backgrounds (Wenger, 1998, p. 57). Joint enterprise is that which is pursued through mutual engagement and is defined by its members. It is not a stated goal but a process of making meaning of what is practiced. Shared repertoire are, "routines, [language], tools, ways of doing things, stories (historical and shared), gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence, and which have become part of its practice" (Wenger, 1998, p. 60-61). Educators build community through mutual engagement in a joint enterprise of gaining a better understanding of that which they do on a daily basis. Individuals make sense of their prior knowledge in relation to developing new knowledge within their informal community.

Identity is understanding who members are and how members develop over time, through "becoming" within the context of community. "Building an identity consists of negotiating the meaning of our experience [and] of our membership in social communities" (Wenger, 1998, p. 99). For Wenger, identity is understood in relation to both the individual and the social, rather than a dichotomy. Identity is developed in practice, participation, and belonging. Wenger (1998) warns against assuming that the individual and social identities are at odds with each other, or

that one is good and the other bad. Educators in a CoP develop and affirm each other's identities through practice of their knowledge individually and together, participation within their community, and by creating a space where each other belongs.

Communities: from Theory to Practice.

Drawing on the theoretical elements of CoPs, Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder (2002) developed a practical guide to creating CoPs. The four elements, as described in Wenger (1998), were altered to *domain*, *community*, and *practice* (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). The *domain* (meaning) is a set of problems, issues, or subject knowledge that bring individuals together. For example, a CoP situated in education may have a domain that is focused on implementing a new program of studies through the principles of Universal Design for Learning.

The *community* is the group of people who participate within the CoP. These individuals create the social fabric of learning. Communities foster "interactions and relationships based on mutual respect and trust" (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 28). These communities help each other solve problems and share individual knowledge in order to develop a group knowledge base to pass down to new members over time. Individuals within the community do not need to work in the same location or have the same job, nor do they need to interact on a daily basis. As long as CoPs periodically come together and engage in the process of sharing and developing knowledge, they are engaging in a CoP. For example, a small group of music educators and paraprofessionals who periodically come together to help each other solve problems, while sharing knowledge and developing strategies for student and individual growth may be considered a CoP. The elements of mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire are still evident, but have shifted to overlap with practice.

Community and *practice*, while not one in the same, are similar and each necessary for the other to exist. *Practice* is:

> . . .a set of frameworks, ideas, tools, information, styles, language, stories, and documents that community members share. Whereas the *domain* denotes the topic the community focuses on, the *practice* is the specific knowledge the community develops, shares, and, maintains" on the domain (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 29, emphasis mine).

For example, lesson plans designed as a team, observing other members' teaching, strategies developed for inclusive practices, and common language developed for teaching could be considered "practice" within a community of music educators and paraprofessionals.

In considering the theory (Wenger, 1998) behind the practical (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002), identity is not addressed within the practical application of communities of practice. Perhaps identity development is understood as an inherent outcome of *domain*, *community*, and *practice*; however, Cox (2005) asserts that identity has been removed completely from Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder (2002).

Types of Communities of Practice

There are four types of CoPs: helping, best-practices, knowledge-stewarding, and innovating. Helping communities focus primarily on problem solving and connecting individuals with similar problems and/or interests. These become "forums for people to connect across teams, geography, or business units and decide for themselves what knowledge to share" (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 76). Best practice communities focus on specific business or educational practices, dependent on the context of the community. These communities "focus on developing, validating, and disseminating specific practices" (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 76). Knowledge sharing is an element of all CoPs. However,

there are some communities whose primary focus is to steward knowledge. These communities "organize, upgrade, and distribute the knowledge their members use every day" (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 77). Innovative communities are designed to develop new knowledge and projects from the expertise that members bring. It could be argued that each CoP moves between the four categories offered by Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder (2002).

Each meeting of a community may look different. Wenger-Traynor & Wenger-Traynor (2018) state that CoPs can engage in problem solving, requests for information, seeking experience, reusing assets, coordination and strategy, building arguments, growing confidence in its members, discussing developments, documenting individual/group projects, visiting other members locations of work for observation and learning, and mapping knowledge and identifying gaps within that knowledge base. Some CoPs may form within large companies, whereas other CoPs are small and less formal. These smaller CoP can center around hobbies, shared beliefs, or education. Many CoPs meet only online, while others only meet face-to-face on a weekly or monthly basis.

The Stages of Growth within a Communities of Practice

CoPs experience five stages of development: *potential*, *coalescing*, *maturing*, *stewardship*, and *transformation* (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). Each community develops at its own pace, and some communities may spend longer within a stage of development than others. Within each phase, there is a shift in the *domain*, *community*, and *practice* of a community. The idea of "value," not included within the theoretical or practical descriptions of a CoP, is a core concept that runs through each stage of development. Members are driven by the value they receive from the community. If an individual's needs are not being met, or individuals feel that they are giving too much to the community in relation to what they

are gaining, then their perceived value of the community may lessen, resulting in the community regressing in terms of their stage of development.

In the first stage, *potential*, individuals come together based on a common need or shared interest. Whether these individuals come together on their own, or through a more formal formation process, members may step up and take on leadership or "coordinator" roles during this stage. The *domain* in this first stage is how the community defines its interests. *Community* is the processing of finding people with similar interests and bringing them into the group. *Practice* is identifying the knowledge needs of community members.

In the *coalescing* stage, members are networking with each other and participating in community events in order to develop relationships and trust between members. The community, in this stage, finds the balance between building relationships and demonstrating value of their new community. The *domain* in this stage is to "establish the value of sharing knowledge" (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 81). The *community* focus is on relationship building, and the *practice* is deciding what knowledge is shareable and how to share that knowledge.

Within the stage of *maturing*, the community begins to shift its focus from identifying common issues and knowledge, to identifying gaps within their current knowledge and developing plans of action to fill those gaps while re-examining community goals and processes. CoPs within *stewardship* seek to maintain the inherent value members find within the group's *domain*, while searching for ways to bring in new knowledge in the hopes that the community will not become stagnate. Members in this stage are also looking to expand their membership and maintain their shared knowledge while working on "cutting edge" ideas (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). During the final stage, *transformation*, a community may

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terminate or "return to an earlier incubation or growth stage" (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 109).

Communities of Practice in Music Education

CoPs are found throughout in the music education literature. Some researchers have considered communities focused on amateur music making (Bolden, 2012; Russel, 2002; Torres & Cardos, 2009) or learning of specific music styles within a community (Brashier, 2016). Other researchers have looked at composing through CoPs (Partti & Westerlund, 2013, Westerlund, 2006). Many researchers have examined online CoPs centered on music making or learning (Brewer & Rickels, 2014; Partti & Karlsen 2010; Partti & Westerlund, 2012; Partti, Westerlund, & Lebler 2014; Salavuo, 2008; Waldron, 2009, 2011). Froehlich (2009) analyzed the tenets of CoPs and theorized applications for music education. Sinclair, Watkins, & Jeanneret (2015) considered integrating music into general classrooms through developing a CoP. A few researchers have considered CoPs in secondary and university music education settings (Almqvis et al., 2017; Countryman, 2009; Hewitt, 2009; McClellan, 2018; Virkkula, 2016; Whitaker, 2016), while other researchers have focused on developing CoPs with pre-service and in-service music educators (Bell-Robertson, 2014; Blair, 2008; Fitzpatrick, 2014; Gruenhagen, 2008; Ilari, 2010; Shin, 2017).

Preservice and inservice music teacher programs. *Musicalização infantil* was developed in response to Brazilian universities not recognizing music education as a field of study separate from the arts. As music education was not a recognized field of study outside of the arts, practicum experiences for those wanting to become music educators were few. Ilari (2010) saw a need for student teachers to have practicum experience with early childhood and primary music education. *Musicalização infantil* gave student teachers opportunities for field

experience in early childhood and primary music education. When the program began, students taught under the supervision of Ilari and team taught with a peer. Over time, as the program grew, Ilari took more of a coordinator role (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002) as graduated students returned to serve as mentors for pre-service teachers. *Musicalização infantil* developed into a CoP from a shared domain: a need for early childhood practicum experiences. Members of *Musicalização infantil* had a shared interest in early childhood and primary music education (*domain*). Through mutual engagement in their joint enterprise of developing a community program, Ilari and her students brought meaning to music within the university community. Members brought meaning to the group through individual knowledge and experiences and demonstrated the concepts of *practice* and *community* by developing a shared repertoire that became a history of shared knowledge to be passed down to each incoming student teacher. Members in this community also developed a sense of *identity* in that they belonged to *Musicalização infantil* as they were also "becoming" music educators.

Shin (2017) examined a group of Korean inservice music educators who were enrolled in a graduate program to see if a CoP (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002) would evolve through their interactions in coursework, class discussions, and socializing. Shin observed those enrolled in the graduate program during lunches, took field notes of class discussions, and held unstructured face to face interviews. The classroom setting was designed to allow teachers and students to exchange ideas and see course content through one another's perspectives. An online component also developed through a Facebook page created by the students. This online forum allowed students to share concerns and receive help from their peers rather than their professors. It also offered a space to discuss their teaching needs, as well as a space where teachers could share their personal histories and experiences. Following data collection, Shin had those who

participated in the CoP interpret the data so that participants' life experiences would fully influence the analysis. Shin (2017) found that the real CoP formed not within the cohort as a whole, but rather through informal groupings of educators within the larger cohort. The principles of *domain* and *practice* were evident throughout the study. Participants engaged in shared meaning at each meeting (*domain*) while working to develop new practices from their shared knowledge. Participants interactions with their shared knowledge and discussions of implementing new knowledge demonstrate their engagement in *practice*. The CoP brought value to the professional development as music educators were able to "communicate about their teaching strategies, personal lives, and concerns, especially when they have difficulty in finding time to regularly meet and interact" (Shin, 2017, p. 123). Shin's findings support other researchers' findings (Gruenhagen, 2008; Sindberg, 2016; Stanley, 2012) that a CoP may remedy feelings of isolation, lack of support and content specific professional development.

Online CoPs. Music educators often are isolated in the building in which they teach, as many are the only music educator in their school (Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005; Sindberg, 2011). This isolation leaves many music educators without community and many novice music educators without mentorship. Bell-Robertson (2014) examined mentorship in 11 novice music teachers with 3 years of experience or less, by cultivating an online CoP. The community of educators established group norms, and Bell-Robertson encouraged them to engage with a dedicated wiki-page as they saw fit. Bell-Robertson, much like Ilari (2010), acted as a coordinator on the wiki-page (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). The researcher interviewed members three times over the year to gain a better understanding of their teaching experience and their experience engaging the online community. While Bell-Robertson did not make direct connections between the theoretical framework and the findings, there is evidence

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that a "helping" CoP was established (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). All participants

had a shared interest in bettering their teaching practice. Novice music educators mutually

engaged each other in their knowledge base and developed a shared repertoire through a

collection of wiki posts and common language. Members found value in the community more as

a "support system" than a "toolbox" for teaching (Bell-Robertson, 2014, p. 442).

Fitzpatrick (2014) also considered online CoPs by examining the use of an interactive

blog with undergraduate student teachers during their practicum experience. As education

literature (McLoughlin & Lee, 2010; Paulus & Scherff, 2008; Wopereis, Sloep, & Poortman,

2010) has recommended online components to student teaching practicums, Fitzpatrick designed

a case study to determine if a blog could develop a shared domain and a community, as well as

provide resources in regard to practice. She analyzed data from the study (blog posts, comments

made in seminar class, a descriptive survey, and a researcher journal) using characteristics of

Wenger (1998): *domain* (meaning), *community*, and *practice*. Fitzpatrick found that an

interactive blog could develop into a CoP. Participants in the study had a shared domain of

teaching music, engaged in practice through their student teaching experience and in blog

discussions, as well as developed a shared repertoire through collected blog posts. Fitzpatrick

(2014) suggested that, while CoP are important for student teachers, "it is still the responsibility

of the teacher educator to structure the learning environment in relevant and effective ways" (p.

103).

CoPs for mentoring novice elementary music educators. All novice music teachers

need mentoring (Benson, 2008; Campbell & Brummett, 2007; Conway, 2003; Conway, Krueger,

& Robinson, 2002; Schmidt, 2008). Blair (2008) states that, "teachers must intentionally seek out

colleagues with whom they can meet to support their own learning, which is harder for music

educators as they are typically the only music educator in their building" (p. 101). Blair (2008), examined mentoring through a professional development community. Three first year elementary music educators met twice a month for one school year, generating data through class discussions, journals, emails, personal logs, and an end of year focus group. The novice teachers suggested discussion topics, shared video of their teaching, provided encouragement and support, and, overtime, developed mutual trust and value in their time and in each other. These novice music teachers developed a CoP through the structure of the professional development. "The community was held together not only by their shared practice, but also by shared concerns and by their common passion for music education" (Blair, 2008, p. 109). Blair points out that shared domain and practice were evident from the beginning and throughout the year. The characteristic of community, and teachers' sense of "becoming" developed over time. Blair (2008) is the first to discuss the role a CoP has on identity development. As Wenger (1998) states, "participation shapes not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do" (p. 4).

Summary of Literature on Communities of Practice in Music Education

Many CoPs have been developed in non-traditional (Ilari, 2010) or higher education settings (Fitzpatrick, 2014; Shin, 2017). Only two of the studies reviewed considered CoPs among public-school music educators. Each researcher offered insight into how a CoP may be implemented. Ilari (2010), who conducted a longitudinal study, demonstrated how CoPs can evolve over time. Bell-Robertson (2015), Fitzpatrick (2014) and Shin (2017) explored the use of technology within a CoP, while Bell-Robertson (2015) and Blair (2018) demonstrated how a CoP may benefit music educators in a public-school setting.

Ilari (2010) presented an excellent example of the maturation (stages) of a CoP. Her findings indicated the importance of situated learning, how meaning is socially constructed and

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negotiated, how shared repertoire is developed over time, and highlights "becoming" (*identity*) both as an individual and within the community. As Wenger (1998) states, "communities of practice are an emergent structure. . .[and]are continually evolving" (p. 69). Mutual trust and inherent value also are important aspects of CoPs (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002), and these do not come without relationships of mutual support.

Bell-Robertson (2014) and Fitzpatrick (2014) offered strong evidence for the benefits of a digital component to a professional learning community, as did Shin (2017). Fitzpatrick's study was one of the few studies to consider all elements of a CoP; *domain*, *community*, and *practice*, while others focused only on *community* (Bell-Robertson, 2014; Blair 2008; Countryman, 2009; Ilari, 2010; Kenny, 2014; Virkkula, 2016). Both Fitzpatrick (2014) and Shin's (2017) CoPs were examples of a "best practices" community. As both worked with music educators, their findings may indicate that a "best practices" CoP is well suited to a group of music educators and paraprofessionals. Although Bell-Robertson (2014), too, worked with music educators, her findings were situated solely in *community* and did not quite align with one of the four types of CoP.

While Fitzpatrick (2014) considered all elements of a CoP, according to Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder (2002), Blair (2008) is the only researcher to discuss the impact community has on teacher *identity* development. Novice music teachers were not only able to engage in professional development to benefit their shared practice but also were able to gain a strong identity as capable music educators. Blair (2008), Fitzpatrick (2014), Ilari (2010), and Shin (2017) each discussed participant's value of the CoP and what it offered to their shared meanings and new knowledge. However, Bell-Robertson (2014) is the only researcher who

discussed, in depth, the emotional value and mutual trust between members within a CoP and its effect on music educators' shared practice (*domain*, *practice*).

Defining "Professional" and Problematizing the Use of a PLC as a Framework

For this study, music educators and special education paraprofessionals (SEPs) came together in a learning community. As such it is necessary to consider the term "professional" and its use in *professional learning community*. According to DuFour (1998); "A 'professional' is someone with expertise in a specialized field, an individual who has not only pursued advanced training to enter the field, but who is also expected to remain current in its evolving knowledge base" (p. xi). Freidson (2001), posits five characteristics of professionalism:

1) Doing good work, and the quality of that work, is placed ahead of the any economic gain or efficiency of that work [i.e., it is not about the money];

2) specialized work in the officially recognized economy that is believed to be grounded in a body of theoretically based, discretionary knowledge and skill and that is accordingly given special status in the labor force;

3) exclusive jurisdiction in a particular division of labor created and controlled by occupational negotiation;

4) a sheltered position in both external and internal labour markets that is based on qualifying credentials created by the occupation; and

5) a formal training program lying outside the labor market that produces the qualifying credentials, which is controlled by the occupation and associated with higher education.

A consideration of the Latin roots of the word "professional" indicates that a professional is simply one who publicly vows to perform their skill to the highest possible standard (Balthazard,

2015). In examining the term through the lens' of Dufour (1998), Friedson (2001), and Balthazard (2015) there seems to be some disagreement.

DuFour (1998) and Friedson (2001) are in agreement that a professional is one who has engaged in training for their specific field of practice, continues to engage in training, and is supported through organized unions or associations. By their definition a SEP would not be considered a "professional" as there is no universal training specific to becoming a SEP (i.e., no equivalent to a bachelor's in education).

In an ideal educational setting, a SEP would be at the side of the educator. Causton-Theoharis, Giangreco, Doyle, & Vadasy (2007) offer a compelling analogy of a sous-chef and an executive chef to describe the role of a SEP in relation to the role of the educator.

The sous-chef [SEP] and the executive chef [educator] work closely together to prepare gourmet cuisine. Although an untrained observer might have difficulty determining where one chef's role ends and the others begins, their respective roles in the kitchen are differentiated very clearly. Ultimately, the executive chef ensures that all of the dishes complement one another and are well-paired thematically – and creates and prepares delicious cuisine. The role of the sous-chef is to support the executive chef's goals in assigned ways. The French word "sous" means literally "under," and the sous-chef works under the direction of the executive chef. Sous-chefs are responsible for a variety of hands-on tasks for the production of certain parts of the meal. . .however, are not responsible for planning the meals, are not afforded the autonomy to adapt the recipes, and do not do the majority of the cooking. (Causton-Theoharis, Giangreco, Doyle, Vadasy, 2007, p. 56)

However, the reality is that many SEPs do more than serve as a "sous-chef" (French, 2003; Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; Marks, Schraeder, & Levine, 1999, Webster, et al., 2016). According to French (2003):

> [a]lthough the prefix "para" in conjunction with the word "educator" signified that someone works "alongside" an education professional, paraeducators work alongside special education teachers only in a figurative sense. Paraeducators frequently provide instructional services alongside the student rather than alongside the teacher" (p.1).

SEPs are seen by the National Education Association as professionals, as the world "professionals" appears in their job categorization with the organization, Educational Support Professionals, and they are welcomed as members of that professional organization. Educational Support Professionals were included first as members of the National Education Association (NEA) in 1967. At this time, only secretaries were offered this membership. In 1972 a membership category for Paraprofessionals (Auxiliary Personnel) was added and in 1980 the member status of secretaries and paraprofessionals were combined to create the membership title now known as Educational Support Professionals. Eight years later Educational Support Professionals received active membership status rather than being required to join in a "separate membership category" (nea.org, n.d., p. 1). SEPs also have the option to join the National Council for Education Support Professionals (NCESP), which advocates for their interests.

There are a few institutions that provide paraprofessional certification through an associate degree on campus or online (e.g. Harper College, Lansing Community College; Frontier Community College, Georgia Piedmont Technical College). These institutions require individuals to take courses in child development and psychology, and they even require field experiences. A major factor inhibiting some from considering SEPs to be "professional" is the

lack of established laws that license SEPs. While teachers have specific licensing requirements from state to state, there are no specific licensure requirements to work as a SEP. Some states, such as California and West Virginia, require SEPs to have an associate degree (California DOE, n.d.; West Virginia DOE, n.d.), while other states, such as Illinois and Michigan, require a minimum of a high-school diploma (Illinois DOE, n.d.; Michigan DOE, n.d.). IDEA mandates that those who serve as SEPs be adequately trained for the job, but there is no universal training mandated by IDEA. As French (2003) stated, the language regarding hiring and training of SEPs in this legislation is permissive.

While a professional learning community may be the appropriate setting in which to engage music educators and SEPs in collaborative learning, the use of the word "professional" in its title is potentially problematic, because SEPs do not meet some of the definitions of the word "professional." However, I disagree with the definition of professional as defined by Dufour (1998), Dufour & Eaker (1998), and Friedson (2001), which result in SEPs not being identified as professionals, in light of their importance to the success of students with disabilities. By not viewing SEPs as professionals, a hierarchy of "less than" is perpetuated. In using the term "professional learning community," issues of power and agency between music educator and SEP also are not addressed. Although music educators may experience isolation and lack of content specific professional development (Barrett, 2006; Pellegrino et al., 2014, 2017; Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005; Sindberg, 2017), SEPs are not offered the same respect of position, opportunities for professional development, or planning opportunities as teachers (Causton-Theoharis & Burdick, 2008; Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2001; Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; Marks, Schraeder, & Levine; 1999). As the issue of including SEPs in a PLC may be problematic, a group of music educators and SEPs could not be considered a PLC.

Differences between PLCs and CoPs

Many consider PLCs and CoPs to be similar, with the main distinction being that one is situated in education (PLC) and the other in business (CoP). However, Blankenship & Ruona (2007) compared PLCs and CoPs and state that they are "distinctly different." While the authors have outlined core differences, CoPs and PLCs also share several core principles, as shown in Figure 1. Newer publications on PLCs are beginning to draw from the principles of CoPs (Euade, 2018; Glenn, Roche, McDonagh, & Sullivan, 2017; Harris, Jones, & Huffman, 2017). These newer PLCs are less formal, more teacher focused, and their outcomes are based on meanings and practices developed by members within the community instead of directives from administrators.

Figure 1: Comparison of Professional Learning Communities and Communities of Practice.

PLC	CoP	Similarities
• Organized in learning theory. • Membership mandatory. • Small group, mixed grade levels, mixed disciplines. • Often lead by an administrator or a team lead is assigned. • Shared vision, can be data based, collaboration key. • Knowledge is public, discussion not as free, knowledge meant to benefit the students and school. Less focus on teacher needs, results focused.	• Organized in social constructivist theory. • Membership voluntary. • Groups may vary in size, usually from the same disicipline but is not required. • Leadership is mostly informal, can have a coordinator. • Vision and values developed through shared meaning, collaboration comes from building trust. • Knowledge is not necessarily public but can be shared, benefits the members of the community, socially constructed.	• Shared interests. • Work is collaborative. • Group size. • Can have similar outcomes, but not always.

For the purpose of this study I offer my own description of a social learning community that pulls from the many learning communities offered above as well as the principles of Wenger's (1998) *Communities of Practice*. A social learning community is an informal gathering of educators who seek to understand a shared interest more fully. In the case of this study, that shared interest is how to teach music to students with disabilities. Members learn through the principles of social constructivism in an environment that is supportive and open. Participants develop into a community of learners, over time, through continued social interactions and negotiation of knowledge, as each member works with others to develop shared meanings of those interests that are most important to the group. Members of a social learning community also develop new

identities as educators as a result of their shared practice.

Conclusion

Having reviewed, summarized, and critically considered each social learning community as a framework for this study, CoPs may be a useful framework for addressing the collaborative and instructional needs of music educators and SEPs. A CoP may develop between a group of music educators and SEPs if the tenets of *meaning* (domain), *practice*, *community*, and *identity* are met. Therefore, more research is needed to see if a CoP between music educators and SEPs can indeed form and if it would have similar outcomes that are similar to those of Blair (2008), Bell-Robertson (2015), Fitzpatrick (2014), Ilari (2010), and Shin (2017).

While there have been multiple studies focusing on music educators participating in PLCs and CoPs, there have been no studies examining music educators in a CoP centered on developing instructional strategies for teaching music to students with disabilities. Furthermore, there have been no studies examining music educators and SEPs engaging together in a CoP. A study examining music educators and SEPs in a CoP may be able to address the instructional and collaborative needs of both types of educators.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I will discuss the design of the study and the literature that informed its design. I will outline the process for participant selection and procedures of the community of practice (CoP). Then I will describe the theoretical frameworks. Finally, I will discuss data collection procedures, data analysis process, means of achieving trustworthiness, study limitations, and the lens through which I approached this study.

Design

This was an instrumental case study. The definition of an instrumental case study is multifaceted. Stake (1995) defined instrumental case study as a means to understanding a particular issue illuminated by the case rather than the case itself. For Stake (2005), "... the case is of secondary interest, it plays a supportive role, and it facilitates the understanding of something else" (p. 445). An instrumental case study seeks to understand issues that are "complex, situated, [and have] problematic relationships" (Stake, 2005, p. 448). For example, if a new assessment policy is implemented in music classrooms within a district, a single instrumental case study could evaluate the assessment policy (the issue) through the study of a teacher or group of teachers (the case). Rather than defining *instrumental* in conjunction with *case study*, Patton expanded on Stake's (2005) definition, suggesting that instrumental case studies go beyond the case by "selecting multiple cases of a phenomenon for the purpose of generating findings that can be used to inform changes in practices, programs, and policies" (2015, p. 295). That is, Patton used *instrumental* to inform how sampling (individual cases) should be employed for a multiple case study. According to Patton (2015), "the variety of approaches to defining a case study gives [one] the opportunity (and responsibility) to define what a case is within the context of [one's] own field and focus of inquiry" (p. 259).

Taking Patton's suggestion and for the purposes of this study, I offer my own definition

and description of an instrumental case study based on the writings of Creswell & Poth (2017),

Merriam (1988, 1998), Patton (2015), Stake (1995, 2005), Thomas (2011), and Yin (2018): An

instrumental case study is a qualitative study bounded by location and time. It centers an

individual, group, or institution to focus on a particular issue of interest. The study is situated in a

contemporary setting with the research design and analyses contextually based on findings from

the field. In an instrumental case study, the researcher, being the primary data collection

instrument, must be reflective, collecting multiple sources of data for triangulation in order to

bring understanding to the issue in consideration.

An instrumental case study, as defined above, is a useful design for examining the

emergence of a community of practice among a group of educators. Stake (1995) suggested that

"issues are not simple and clean, but intricately wired to political, social, historical and especially

personal contexts (p. 17). The issue under consideration is political in that music teachers and

special education paraprofessionals (SEPs) are not offered the same professional development

opportunities or collaborative planning opportunities as their general classroom colleagues

(Barrett, 2006; Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Giangreco, Edelman, &

Broer, 2001; Sindberg, 2016). The issue also is historical in that preparing educators to teach

students with disabilities has continued to be a topic of debate as legislation for students with

disabilities has evolved (Coates, 2012; French, 2003; Gfeller, Darrow, Hedden, 1990; Grimsby,

2018, 2019; Hammel & Gerrity, 2012; Hourigan, 2007; IDEA, 2004; VanWeelden & Heath-

Reynolds, 2018; VanWeelden & Meehan, 2016; VanWeelden & Whipple, 2014a; Wall, Davis,

Winkler-Crowley, & White, 2005). The study is situated within a CoP. As a CoP is centered in

the principles of social constructivist learning, the issue under examination also is social. A

consideration of music educators and SEPs in a CoP stems from my own lived experiences and from the reported experiences of music teachers and SEPs (Grimsby, 2018) and therefore is an etic issue of inquiry. According to Stake (1995), "etic issues are the researcher's issues, [and] sometimes the issues of a larger researcher community" (p. 20).

According to Yin's definition (2018), this instrumental case study is a single embedded case study. It is single, in that I focused on a single group of persons and embedded in that my data will be coming from multiple individuals within the group. The case was a group of music educators and SEPs in a CoP that met bi-monthly for approximately 5 months. The issues illustrated by the case were how to teach music to students with disabilities and the collaborative needs of music educators and SEPs. I examined these through the prior knowledge and lived experiences of each participant.

Participant Selection

Participants in this study included three music educators and three SEPs. I employed a mix of sampling strategies when selecting participants. Specifically, two sampling methods were used to select music educator participants: convenience sampling and purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015). Beginning with one sampling strategy, convenience, and then layering another strategy to "further focus the sample" is a type of combined purposeful sampling strategies (Patton, 2015, p. 272).

As participants would need to meet in person multiple times over the duration of the study it was important that they lived within a close proximity to the researcher. As I only considered music educators who worked in districts that were no more than an hour and twenty-minutes away from the university, convenience sampling was necessary. Upon receiving university human subjects research approval on May 24, 2019, I began to email potential

participants inviting them to participate in the study. Members of my dissertation committee directed me to certain individuals who might have an interest in participating. I contacted these suggested participants and other potential participants by email between June and August of 2019. The email explained the purpose of the study, the timeline, and the requirements of participation. I emailed potential participants three times, once each month, until I received a response.

Potential music educator participants also needed to meet specific criteria so that they could contribute meaningfully to a community of practice. Potential music educator participants needed to have five or more years of teaching experience, be situated in at least one of the major methodologies (Feierabend, Kodály, MLT, or Orff), and work with students with disabilities, preferably in a self-contained setting in addition to those included in the general education music classroom. In addition to having 5 years or more of experience, the participants needed to be elementary music educators. These criteria were important, as Gruenhagen (2008) posited that professional development should be designed by teachers working in similar contexts.

Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015) also was employed. Purposeful sampling, according to Patton (2015), is a type of group characteristics sampling. Selection was purposeful, as it was based on the criteria above. Also important in purposeful sampling is identifying cases that are "information rich" (Patton, 2015). For cases to be "information rich," I wanted to include music educators from a variety of school districts. If I had chosen to pull from the same district, it was possible that all teachers would adhere to similar pedagogical practices or have similar educational backgrounds. I hoped that, by including participants with a variety of backgrounds and knowledge, rich and meaningful conversations would result, leading to new negotiated meanings and shared practices (Wenger, 1998).

I emailed a total of 30 music educators in surrounding districts. Of the 30, only two

agreed to participate. Most potential participants declined due to the length of the study; others

declined due to the demands of participating in the study (in-person meetings, online meetings,

observations, and a participant journal), and a few participants declined due to their busy

schedules or life events. I found the third music educator participant via Facebook. While I

perused a popular music educator group page, an individual posted regarding their self-contained

class. I clicked to read the comments. One Facebook user stated they "wished they could observe

his classroom," and his reply made it clear that where he worked was within the radius in which I

was searching for participants. I quickly direct messaged this individual to share the criteria of

the study and ask if he would be interested in participating. He quickly responded with a yes.

Of the three music educator participants, two identified as female and one as male, and

all were White. Dre has taught 7 years, Noelle 6 years, and Maude 24 years. One music educator

practiced the Feierabend philosophy of music education, one was a practitioner of music learning

theory, and the other employed Orff methodology in instruction. Two had master's degree in

music education, and one had just begun a master's in music education. Each participant worked

with students with disabilities on a regular basis, and two taught students in a self-contained

setting. Music educator participants were not compensated for their participation; however, each

participant's administrator was contacted to inquire if they might receive professional

development credit for participation in this study.

Potential SEP participants also were selected through combined purposeful sampling

strategies. As SEPs, too, were required to meet multiple times in person over the course of the

study, proximity to the researcher was necessary. Unlike with the music educator participants, I

chose SEPs who worked within the district directly bordering the university. SEPs do not make a

living wage, and often work more than one job to make ends meet (Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2002). Traveling costs time and money that many SEPs do not have, so I chose SEPs who were nearby to mitigate the potential financial resources needed to participate. Second, the special education coordinator for that district is known for hiring and developing outstanding paraprofessionals, and for this study I needed SEPs who were passionate and experienced. I did not individually email potential SEPs. I first applied to do research within the school district in which they worked, and then I made contact with the special education coordinator. Once I was approved to conduct research within the district, the special education coordinator contacted potential SEPs who met the requirements for participation. Selection was convenient due to location, and purposeful as the special education director had specific SEPs in mind.

Potential SEPs were not bound by the same criteria as their music educator counterparts. It was difficult to require "years of experience" for SEPs as few SEPs stay in the profession for multiple years (Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2002). Potential SEP participants had to have at least 2 years of experience as a SEP and experience working with students in a music education setting, be it elementary general music or middle school music (choral, general, or instrumental). Potential SEP participants also had to work in a self-contained setting and be engaged actively in professional development.

The special education coordinator connected me with three potential participants, all of whom agreed to participate in the study. Two SEP participants identified as female, and one identified as a non-binary trans person, all were White. Ash had 2 years of experience, Gloria 8 years, and Sarah 15 years of experience. Each SEP worked in a self-contained setting, and all had experience working with students in the elementary general music setting. One SEP, while working in the same district as the other two, worked for an outside special education

organization that provides mainstreamed experiences for students with severe disabilities. The other two SEPs work in the same school and share students. All SEPs were passionate about their profession and actively sought professional development to enrich their instructional practices. SEPs were compensated monetarily for their participation in this study.

<p align="center">**Procedures and the Community of Practice**</p>

I secured all participants by September 29th, 2019. Participants reviewed and signed consent forms at their initial interviews, which were completed by October 4th, 2019 (see Appendix A for the interview protocols). CoP meetings, of which there were eight, began on October 20th, 2019 and ended on January 12, 2020. I observed each of the participants twice, first between the second and fourth CoP meetings, and then between the seventh and eighth CoP meetings. These observations took place in order to determine if the *meaning* and reified objects developed during CoP meetings were apparent in participants' *practice* outside of the community. I conducted exit interviews between January 13th and January 17th, 2020. Overall, I collected data for approximately 5 months, between September 2019 and January 2020.

The Community of Practice

CoP meetings took place on Sunday afternoons for approximately 2 hours, either at the library of a local middle school or in the comfort of our own homes when meetings were online. The meetings were to take place bi-monthly; however, due to illness and participants' schedules, some meetings were within a week of one another. Originally, we were to have four in-person meetings and four online meetings. During the fifth community meeting, participants expressed how much they enjoyed being together in-person, and the community decided that the last online meeting should instead be in-person. Therefore, we had three online meetings and five in-person

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meetings. The community met once in October, twice in November, three times in December, and twice in January. Participants chose all meeting dates through the use of Google Calendar.

Within each meeting, I acted as a participant-observer. As researcher I facilitated discussions and helped develop an environment in which participants could safely share life experiences, personal values, and, from time to time, opposing views safely (*mutual engagement/joint enterprise*). As a participant I engaged in discussions based on my experiences as a music educator and researcher. I situated my role as participant-observer based on previous research that examined collaborative teacher groups (Gruenhagen, 2008; Kastner, 2011; Pellegrino, et al. 2014, 2017; Stanley, 2009).

All meetings, with the exception of the first meeting, were influenced by participant concerns and analysis of collected data. After transcribing the recording of and reflecting on each CoP meeting, I would develop three to four guiding questions for the following meeting. The initial meeting was guided by questions drawn from and influenced by participant responses during initial interviews.

Each meeting began with food and check-ins; participants took turns sharing how they were doing and if they had any student or colleague concerns. I initiated "check-ins" similar to those used in Pellegrino, et al. (2014), as they established context and conversation for each meeting. After participants shared, I initiated discussions based on topics that had emerged from the data or specific concerns raised by participants. Discussions often spiraled from there, prompted by a participant comment, and then back to the original topic of discussion. I rarely had to bring us back to topic as participants did that on their own.

During initial interviews and in the first meeting, participants stated that they would like to have a better understanding of the IEP/504 process and the terminology that is used these

documents. As such, our second meeting focused heavily on breaking down the IEP/504 process, the eligibility categories according to the state's Department of Education guidelines, and on brainstorming what non-music accommodations and modifications might look like in a music setting. I shared my son's IEP in order for participants to apply meaning to an actual document. The remaining six meetings were less structured.

The fourth meeting diverted from the previous established flow of collaborative discussion and problem solving. I suggested that it might be beneficial to share video recordings of students as a springboard for discussing the instructional practices in place or brainstorming new ideas that may be useful in supporting students with disabilities. Four of the six participants willingly shared recordings of their teaching. One participant wanted to share video but was unable to capture useable video of their instruction due to their active role as a SEP. Another participant, a music educator, was uncomfortable sharing a teaching video. The fourth, fifth, and sixth meetings were centered heavily on discussing current instructional practices for their students with disabilities and developing new instructional practices based on the suggestions of community members, as stimulated by watching the videos. Other topics discussed in these meetings included lack of paid time off for SEPs when injured by a student, cost of insurance for SEPs, the different types of paraprofessional positions, collaborative opportunities between music educators and SEPs, student responses to instruction and interventions, and learning how to read behaviors of students with disabilities to allow both teachers and SEPs to meet student needs more fully.

In the final two meetings, conversations evolved from identifying common issues to identifying gaps within their own knowledge and developing plans of action to fill those gaps. During these meetings, open-ended discussions continued to take place, as did discussion of

topics raised by data analysis. We also watched video recordings of participants' teaching. The eighth and final meeting was an abbreviated version of above, with the last hour dedicated to discussing the experience of the CoP as well as themes from data analysis up to that point. Participants also set up times for their exit interviews and made plans to continue meeting on their own after the study finished.

Evolution of Theoretical Frameworks

This study is grounded in two theoretical frameworks; social constructivism and *Communities of Practice* (Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). The first framework guided the initial design of the study and types of data collected. It also informed the initial data analysis. Deciding on a social framework that would ground the learning community in this study was difficult. I examined a variety of options (see Chapter Two) and allowed the participants to grow and lead the group in the direction that fit their personalities and learning needs. As participants began to meet, and the group began to form, I realized that some frameworks initially investigated did not align with the emerging structure of the group. As such, it became evident that a *Community of Practice* was evolving between participants. Therefore, it was necessary to employ a second theoretical framework, *Communities of Practice*. The CoP emerged across the implementation of study protocols, through the interactions and engagement of participants, and was used to analyze all data and codes in the second round of coding.

Social Constructivism

Social constructivism suggests that knowledge and meaning are constructed through social interactions, interpretations, and understanding (Vygotsky, 1986). Knowledge also is constructed through participation in historical-cultural constructs such as family, school, and community (Vygotsky, 1978). Hein (1991) posits that "no knowledge is independent of the

meaning constructed by the learner, or community of learners" (p. 1), meaning that the reality of what one understands or assumes is not within the individual alone but is a social and cultural construct (Kim, 2012). In social constructivist learning, individuals and their perceptions of their environments are changed through interactions with their environments and those within those environments. Another aspect of social constructivism is that learners have the ability to make sense of their learning experiences, which is called meta-learning (Adams, 2006). Individuals learning within a social constructivist environment engage with what is presented as knowledge and apply it to their environmental constructs (school, family, culture).

Adams (2006) suggested that environments designed by social constructivism tend to include five principles: a focus on learning over performance, learners co-constructing meaning and knowledge, relationships being built on guidance not instruction, tasks having inherent values for those learning, and "assessment as an active process of uncovering and acknowledging shared understanding" (p. 247). While these principles are not a checklist of requirements to be met, they offer a structure on which to build a learning community. Social constructivists also believe that individuals engaged in learning are the agents of their own learning. As Adams (2006) stated, knowledge is not an objective, contextually devoid thing, but rather learning is a "contextually-driven intrapersonal creation" (p. 254).

Social constructivists argue that learning is a fluid exchange of experience and prior knowledge between student and teacher in order to form new understandings. In social constructivism, learners bring their prior knowledge and experience with them, and from their prior knowledge and experience they develop deeper understandings and shared meaning amongst their peers/colleagues. While there is still a hierarchy of teacher and student, the

hierarchy shifts the role of the teacher from instructor to facilitator or guide. The teacher, or facilitator in this instance is not always the more knowledgeable other (MKO) (Vygotsky, 1978).

As each participant in this study brought different social, historical, and cultural knowledge as well as prior knowledge and experience with students with disabilities, each shared the role of the more knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978). As knowledge, according to social constructivists, is constructed through social and historical context, it was important to examine carefully how knowledge was shared and meaning was constructed within this group of educators. When there was any friction among participants, I strove, as facilitator, to preserve participant agency while supporting healthy social interactions in order to promote learning. I accomplished this by ensuring that agency was shared among participants in order that all members had an active role in the development of group *meaning* and *reified objects* through *practice*. For example, if I noticed a participant had not yet joined the discussion, I would invite them with a guiding question or connect back to a statement previously made by them as if seeking clarity. As the community progressed over time, I also mentioned participants' classroom observations to increase mutual engagement in developing *meaning* and the *practice* of that *meaning*.

It was my job to facilitate each meeting by guiding interactions between participants as they navigated their environment and developed shared meaning through their individual social and historical constructs. Through initial interviews, before the start of the meetings, I gained an understanding of participants' prior knowledge, needs and interests which informed the development of conversation starters and activities for the community. Participant journal entries and coding of meeting transcriptions also informed the choice of topics for discussion.

Communities of Practice

As our group progressed, it became evident that a CoP was evolving between participants and that a *Communities of Practice* framework was appropriate for use in this study. Essential components to professional learning communities, collaborative professionalism, or other knowledge building communities were less apparent within this community. I did not mandate or assign readings, nor did I give weekly directives to participants to "try out" in their classroom between meetings. Rather, the participants guided the contents of each meeting. The influence of group discussion on praxis was solely up to the participant. Each meeting was guided by individual participant needs as they related to their shared lived experiences as music educators and paraprofessionals teaching music to students with disabilities. Participants did not examine data and consider student growth, have directives to participation, house all reified objectives digitally, or have idea diversity. As such, this was not a *Professional Learning Community*, *Collaborative Professionalism*, *Community*, or *Knowledge Building Community*, as those components mentioned above are part of at least one of those frameworks. As group discussions centered within a specific area of interest, new knowledge developed through mutual engagement, and that knowledge was valued by community members, it was clear that this community was in fact, a *Community of Practice*.

For the purpose of this study, my *Communities of Practice* lens was blend of Wenger (1998) and Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002). Wenger's (1998) theoretical design of CoPs includes four tenets; *meaning*, *community*, *practice*, and *identity*. Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) combined themes that formerly fell under *community* and *meaning* to create *domain* and maintained the tenets of *community* and *practice*.

This CoP had a specific *domain*. The specific set of problems, issues, and subject knowledge that brought these individuals together was their passion for students with disabilities, participant working conditions and needs, and a desire to develop new instructional strategies to ensure the success of all of those they teach. *Meaning* emerged when participants shared their lived experiences and prior knowledge and negotiated new meanings from a shared perspective. Through the development of *meaning*, reified objects were created. This CoP created several reified objects (an outcome of making *meaning*): letters to support staff, assistive teaching tools, recommended readings and edifying podcasts, instructional strategies, online discussions, and recommendations for the field of education in general. *Meaning* was developed by engaging in *practice*. Participants *practiced* by discussing historical and social resources as well as frameworks and perspectives that sustained their engagement within the community and spurred action in their classrooms. Through discussions of those they teach, problematizing professional relationships and the issues of their position within the system, sharing video of their teaching, receiving and giving feedback, and discussing old strategies and bringing new strategies back to their classrooms, these participants participated in *practice*.

Community was perhaps the most powerful tenet of a *Community of Practice* to evolve over this study. Coming together in a shared space is not enough to meet the requirements of *community*. In order for the tenet of *community* to be met, the interaction of mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire must take place. This group of participants demonstrated mutual engagement through difficult conversations situated in different perspectives, with disagreements helping to shape *meaning*. Their joint enterprise and shared repertoire were evident each meeting. Participants eagerly engaged in the topic of their students, their students' needs, their own needs, and ways in which to scaffold for the other's success. This *community*

did not remain within the physical space of the group but also lived outside due to the groups use of Discord®, an online platform that allowed members to share lessons, video, and dialogue about "in the moment" teaching needs or joys. Some participants also engaged with each other via text or Facebook.

In a CoP, *identity* represents how learning changes who we are and how individuals develop, over time, within the context of community. Identity can be affirmed or grown. Participants in this community of practice either had their *identities* affirmed or reshaped through *meaning*, *practice*, and *community*. Each participant also served a function within the community as either the "affirmer," the "comic relief," the "anchor," the "reflector," or "the more knowledgeable other," and, in true CoP fashion, these identities shifted between participants.

In order for a group of individuals who meet to discuss a common interest or topic to be considered a CoP, the four tenets of *meaning*, *community*, *practice* and *identity* must be evident. Over time it became clear that at each meeting participants were developing *meaning* within a specific domain of interest while engaging in *community* and *practice* of the developed *meaning*. Participants also began to *identify* within the context of how they functioned within the community. As such it was useful to use *Communities of Practice* as an additional theoretical framework.

<center>**Data Collection**</center>

Social constructivism (Adams, 2006; Hein, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978) influenced data collection choices. I sought data sources that would capture the individual participant's experience as well as the exchanges between participants both within and outside of the group meetings. Data sources included initial and exit interview transcriptions, CoP meeting transcriptions, participant journals, video recordings of CoP meetings, field notes from video

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observations of participants in their classroom, fieldnotes taken during CoP meetings, discussions on Discord®, my personal research journal, and text and email messages. Interview transcriptions, community meeting transcriptions, and research journals comprised of 502 pages of single-spaced data and 114 pages of hand-written data. Video observations served as evidence of how the community of practice shifted participant praxis over time, if it did so, and were used to support coding and emergent themes.

I conducted two semi-structured interviews with each participant (See Appendix A for interview protocols) and recorded them on my MacBook with the Garage Band app using an external Samsung Go-Mic. In addition, I recorded each interview on my iPhone as a backup in case one device did not record properly. Each interview took place at a time and place that was most convenient to the participant. Three participants chose to be interviewed at their schools, while the others preferred their local coffee shop. I initiated each interview with basic "day-to-day" life questions to establish a sense of ease and rapport with the participant. For the initial interview, I created a set of open-ended questions to gain a better understanding of the participants' backgrounds, knowledge of students with disabilities, professional development and collaborative experiences, and what they wished to gain from participation in the study. I conducted exit interviews in a similar fashion, with guiding questions centered on participants' experience in the CoP, what they gained from participating in the study, if anything, the impact, if any, on their teaching praxis and philosophy, and if there was a desire to continue the CoP past the frame of the study. Questions were the same for each participant; however, participants were encouraged to interpret questions as they perceived them and to take the conversation in the direction that was most meaningful to them. Open-ended questions allowed "members to use their own language and concepts in responding" while offering space for me to ask follow-up

questions or clarification (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011, p. 136). Open-ended questions also "accentuate the member's expertise and experience," not the researcher's (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011, p. 138). During each initial and exit interview, I took fieldnotes in my researcher journal. These fieldnotes allowed me to capture nuances in body language, highlight topics of interest to the interviewee, and other nuances not captured on an audio recording.

In-person meetings took place in the library of a local middle school. Online meetings were organized via Discord®, an online app designed initially for gamers that has been used recently in higher education as a way for professors and students to maintain classroom discussions as they engage in a social constructivist learning environment. I recorded online meetings with Garage Band on my MacBook using a Samsung Go-Mic. I recorded in-person meetings as video on my iPad, as audio on my MacBook with Garage Band using a Samsung Go-Mic, and I used my iPhone to create a backup recording. During each meeting I took fieldnotes in my researcher journal to capture the nuances of the conversation, participant body language, and note any topics or artifacts that may serve as reified objects of the community. After each CoP, I spent time reflecting on the interview, reviewing my anecdotal notes, writing up my thoughts on the meeting, watching clips of video, and preparing an outline of possible guiding questions for the next meeting. Following each meeting, I sent the recordings to an AI service, temi.com, for transcription. I received each transcription in less than 24 hours; then I immediately reviewed, edited, and coded the transcription. Video recordings supported the reflection and transcription process to decipher mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and identity development.

I observed each participant in their classroom working with their students. The purpose of these observations was two-fold. First, I wanted to see participant praxis and philosophy in

action. How did participants engage with their students with disabilities? Did what they say match what they did? Second, I wanted to see if participation in the CoP caused a shift in participant praxis and teaching philosophy. All but two participants were observed twice. I was only able to observe one music educator and one paraprofessional once due to life-circumstances of the individuals that caused the first observations to be cancelled, rescheduled, and cancelled again. The music educator participant was observed by recorded video due to circumstances outside of our control. Each observation lasted approximately 45 minutes to an hour, and I took fieldnotes during the observation. Directly after observations, I reflected on what I saw and developed questions for the participant based on my field notes and watching the video. Initially, I had wanted to conduct video-elicited interviews; however, due to the nature of specialist scheduling (back to back classes) and participants having multiple jobs for financial reasons, video-elicited interviews were not possible. To accommodate the busy schedules of the participants, I sent them video recordings of their teaching along with questions that I had regarding their instruction and engagement with their students. Participants responded via email, Discord®, or text and I coded those responses to compare with existing data.

My research journal served several purposes. First, I used the journal to capture my thoughts over the course of the study. This journal traveled with me to work, when I traveled to present at conferences, and any other time I was out of the house. As Miles et al. (2014) states, "when an idea strikes, *stop* whatever else you are doing and write the memo. . . include musings of all sorts, even the fuzzy and foggy ones" (p. 99, emphasis original). I also used the journal to collect field notes of interviews, observations, and CoP meetings, as well as to document my reflections of those interactions. Third, I used my researcher journal to write analytic memos while coding and used it as a place to store codes and possible themes as they emerged. This

allowed me to be more reflexive as I constantly compared data gathered to data collected

(Merriam, 1998).

The final points of data collection were the reified objects that emerged from within the

CoP. These objects were maintained via email and also via Discord®, our online meeting and

group chat platform. Discord®, while primarily a message platform, allows users to share video,

documents, and other media. These data artifacts will remain a part of this community forever

and are easily accessible to each member of the group. Instructional strategies also became

reified objects that were collected over the course of the study.

<p style="text-align:center">Data Analysis and Trustworthiness</p>

Data Analysis

Data analysis began immediately after the first initial interview. As Merriam (1998)

stated, "the right way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it *simultaneously* with data

collection" (p. 162, emphasis original). The overall coding process was multi-faceted due to

employing two theoretical frameworks. I could not analyze the initial data through the lens of

Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002), because these

communities must emerge over time. To have coded data through this lens at the beginning of

the study would have funneled my data and left any potential findings hollow. Therefore, I began

initial coding with the social constructivist framework in mind.

To analyze initial interviews, I used open coding, and compared each coded interview to

the last (Merriam, 1998). Open coding is done "without regard for how or whether ideas and

categories will ultimately be used, whether other relevant observations have been made, or how

they will fit together" (Emerson, Fretz, &. Shaw, 2011, p. 175). Initial codes were my

interpretation of the data based on "informed hunches, intuition, and serendipitous occurrences"

<p style="text-align:center">97</p>

(Janesick, 2011, p. 148 in Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 189). During the data collection process, I also kept "code memos" (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 2011, p. 173) in my researcher journal, which were essential to the coding process. In keeping code memos, I was able to see relationships and patterns emerge across the large body of data I had collected.

As stated above, I compared each set of newly coded data with previously coded data, thus employing a constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998). After three CoP meetings, I went through each coded interview and wrote every code on a large post-it note, using one color for each coded meeting. I then studied my researcher journal to see if relationships between codes and patterns began to emerge, and then went through the listed codes and color coded them according to those relationships. Next these codes were then grouped by color into emerging themes. I then repeated this process after CoP meetings six, and meeting eight.

I coded the initial interviews, first six CoP meetings, and first observations, as stated above, using open coding influenced by the lens of social constructivism. After the sixth meeting, it was evident that a CoP was emerging, and it was through that lens that I analyzed the remaining data. This is where the coding process became layered. To remain fluid in how the data were analyzed, I continued to use open coding and a social constructivist lens on data collected from the last two CoP meetings, second observations, and exit interviews. I also compared each new data collected to previously collected data with the assistance of my code memos to help with determining relationships between codes and to look for patterns. At the same time, I went back to the transcript of the earlier group meetings and began to do a second round of coding using *Communities of Practice* as a lens. In doing so, I was able to use the two theoretical frameworks almost as a microscopic lens. The social constructivist lens was used to see the larger picture of collaboration between participants, the needs and desires of participants,

and systemic issues as experienced by participants. The second framework, *Communities of Practice*, allowed me to focus on the more nuanced developments from within the group, such as *meaning*, *community*, *practice*, and *identity*.

I coded the first cycle entirely by hand. I did this to ensure that I remained within my data and became as familiar with it as possible. When I began to use the microscope of the two theoretical frameworks to assist with my code mapping and pattern coding, I used an online data program called Dedoose. This coding developed process resulted in 91 handwritten codes, 283 codes created in Dedoose®, with 50 codes overlapping between for a total of 324 codes and five emergent themes.

After the first round of coding, I began to use what Saldaña (2016) calls eclectic coding and code mapping. I reviewed codes through In Vivo, Descriptive, or Emotion coding. These were then, through the use of my researcher journal and code memos, mapped into possible emerging themes. I employed pattern coding (Saldaña, 2016) during the second cycle of coding. In using pattern coding, I was able to condense the many codes and code categories that had formed during the initial coding process and code mapping process into themes.

Figure 2: Visual of Coding Process.
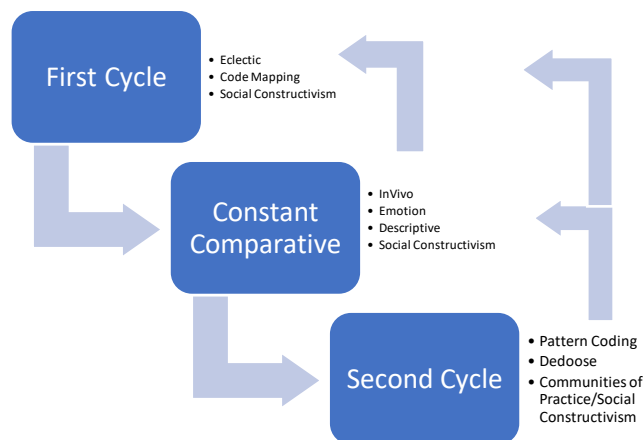
Throughout data analysis, I had to maintain a high degree of reflexivity (Patton, 2015). As the main data collection instrument, I needed to ensure that themes emerged from participants' experiences and not my own. As there were parallels in participants' experience and my own, employing reflexivity was of great importance. The need to employ reflexivity was compounded by my role of participant-researcher.

Trustworthiness

I collected multiple data sources as a means of triangulating. Merriam (1998) defined triangulation as "using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm emerging findings" (p. 204). According to Creswell & Poth (2018), there are nine strategies to establish trustworthiness, and they suggest that a researcher "engage in *at least two* of the validation strategies" (p. 259, emphasis original). Trustworthiness strategies that I employed were triangulation of data, prolonged engagement, clarifying researcher bias and engaging in reflexivity, member checks, and peer review by a knowledgeable other.

In addition to triangulating multiple data sources, I also demonstrated trustworthiness through prolonged engagement with participants. I decided on developing professional development that involved prolonged engagement based on the recommendations of previous research (Bauer, 2007; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Ferrara, 2009; Hammel, 2007; Hesterman, 2011). Over the five-month period of the study, I established a rapport with participants by seeking to understand their lived experiences, and, as a result, established relationships that will outlive the life of this study. I also employed member checks during the final meeting and exit interviews. I asked participants to look through the generated codes, categories, themes, interview transcripts, and read their participant portrayal in Chapter Four so that they could either confirm, change, or disagree with the analysis and/or portrayal.

Last, I put my data through two stages of peer review. During the coding process I critically examined my processes through conversations with the chair of my dissertation by showing codes, categories, and mapped codes to her. I also engaged an experienced music education researcher in a comprehensive review of my codes and themes by granting them access to data kept in Dedoose®. I then shared full chapters of my findings with two different music education researchers to compare my findings with the written description of my analysis. These steps all contributed to the trustworthiness of the data.

Limitations

As with all research, there were limitations to this study. The robustness of this data was impacted due to the fact that two of the SEP participants worked at the same school and therefore may have provided an overlapping perspective. These SEPs worked in a classroom that served students with moderate to severe autism and one SEP has a son with autism as do I. This may have funneled some shared strategies to be autism specific. Also, choosing exemplary SEPs who have a longevity in the field, which is not common among SEPs, may have influenced findings and may affect transferability. Third, my original design intended that participants would meet every two weeks. Due to participants' schedules and my own illness, our meetings in November and January were one rather than two weeks apart. This may have impacted discussion topics, the depth of those topics, and the overall shift in participant teaching practices. Also, my role as participant-researcher influenced my researcher's lens. While I employed reflexivity throughout the data analysis process, I had to remain aware that my participation in the study may have had an impact on data collection and analysis. Last, due to the small number of participants and design of the study, findings cannot be generalizable. However, these findings can "inform

changes in practices, programs, and policies" (Patton, 2015, p. 295) and may be transferrable to similar individuals and settings.

<p style="text-align:center;">My Role as Participant-Observer and My Researcher's Lens</p>

My researcher's lens, like my theoretical frameworks are dual. I come to this study with certain biases that must be acknowledged, and I also functioned as a participant-observer in the CoP. I will detail my role as participant-observer through the tenets of *Communities of Practice* and will then describe my researcher's lens.

Participant Observer

In a CoP, there is not necessarily a specific leader or directive. As stated previously, a group of people join together over a similar interest or topic of study (domain) in a CoP. I was the researcher, but also a participant in this CoP. I came to each meeting with guiding questions to initiate discussion if needed. However, more often than not those questions were unnecessary, as the participants mostly facilitated each discussion. When our meetings first began, I was unsure of how much to insert myself into the group. After the first meeting I journaled about my role within the community.

> *I do not think there will be a flow of discussion issue. Each person has so much to offer. I spoke so much today. Too much today. How can I be sure to remove myself more? While I am a "participant," I am also the researcher and it is not my voice that needs to be centered.* (researcher journal, October 20th)

I was a part of the *community* through my interest in how to teach music to students with disabilities. While each of us mutually engaged in joint enterprise, the other participants were not the only individuals who had their lived experiences supported or discussed. My lived experiences were supported and often served as the springboard for developing new knowledge

that situated themselves into the *meaning* our community was developing. I, too, assisted with the creation of shared repertoire and reified objects. The *identity* that I developed, in relation to other participants, was a mix of researcher/facilitator, "more knowledgeable other," and affirmer. My *identity* as researcher/facilitator was enacted most often at the beginning of each meeting, or during a discussion.

I also shared the role of "more knowledgeable other" with the other participants, although I actively stayed aware of and did my best to avoid engaging too much in that role during meetings. I wanted participants' voices to be at the center of this study. When I did engage as the "more knowledgeable other," it was to affirm or support what was already being discussed. As our community continued to meet, I eased more into my role as participant-observer and felt like a valued and contributing member to the CoP.

Researcher's Lens

In the opening vignette of Chapter One, I briefly detailed my experiences of preparation to teach music to students with disabilities, as well as the collaborative experiences with special education educators and SEPs. As a researcher, it is my personal experiences that form my lens. Through these experiences, my researcher lens has been fitted with certain biases that I must acknowledge. The first bias that must be addressed are the negative feelings that I have toward most administrators for not providing collaborative planning time for music educators and paraprofessionals. Despite the many studies that suggest that music educators need collaborative planning time with their special education colleagues (Burdick & Causton-Theoharis, 2012; Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Grimsby, 2018, 2019; VanWeelden & Heath-Reynolds, 2018), in my experience having collaborative planning time is the exception rather than the rule. I always gave my own time before, during (lunch), or after school to collaborate with SEPs and special

educator colleagues. This is not the reality of every music educator; however, it was my reality and therefore impacts how I interpret the interactions between music educators and SEPs, and any discussion regarding their placement.

Second, I have overheard or participated in many discussions regarding the effectiveness and engagement of SEPs in the music setting. The majority of these conversations have been negative. My initial response was always to jump to the defense of the SEP while offering my colleagues suggestions on how to collaborate with the SEP with whom they worked. Negative perceptions of SEPs are commonplace (Causton-Theoharis & Burdick, 2008, 2012; Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, 2002; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Grimsby, 2018, 2019; Marks, Schrader, & Levine, 1999; VanWeelden & Heath-Reynolds, 2018). These past conversations will impact how I interpret the conversations between myself and those participants who are music educators.

I also have a strong positive bias toward SEPs due to the many rich and meaningful exchanges I have had between myself and the SEPs with whom I have worked. Through these exchanges I have not only become a better music educator, but I also have gained a better understanding of the conditions in which they work. SEPs are often expected to work in positions for which they have no experience or training, despite government regulations that mandate that SEPs should be "appropriate[ly] trained and supervised" (IDEA, 2019). In some situations, SEPs are expected to teach the students with whom they work rather than having the primary instruction coming from the students' teacher. In other instances, SEPs are expected to act as a classroom teacher; yet they are given no classroom, no personal space in which to work, no planning or collaborative time with co-educators, and, in some cases are not expected, required, or even allowed to attend school-wide professional development. This lack of

professional development may occur despite a directive written by the United States Department of Education (1995b) stating that professional development be provided to "teachers [who] are central to student learning, yet includes all other members of the school community" (as cited in Dufour & Eaker, 1998, p. 259).

Last, I am a mother of a son with a disability. My son has Asperger's and Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder and it has been a 3-year struggle for him to receive the services he needs in school settings. He was not evaluated until kindergarten due to his intelligence and language development being above what was developmentally typical. After the first evaluation, our psychologist stated that our son had Asperger's and ADHD, but as the criteria of diagnosis had changed between the DSM-IV and DSM-V, she could no longer diagnose with that term. She stated that she would prefer to see him fall further behind socially and emotionally before placing him with the label of ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder). Without a diagnosis, kindergarten was a nightmare for my son, because he lacked the support structures that he needed. In the next 2 years, we worked to have our son re-evaluated as we had moved to another state. This time the psychologist stated that, while they agreed with the previous evaluation that our son has Asperger's and ADHD, he was indeed on the spectrum. Finally, he qualified for the diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and ADHD.

Although we had a diagnosis from a reputable psychologist attached to a large Midwestern university, getting services at his school was still a struggle. The special education laws and policies in the large Midwestern state in which we live are worded in such a way that local education agencies can determine whether a child needs services, despite a diagnosis from an outside institution. So, while our son is medically diagnosed with ASD, the school system decided that his autism was not "pervasive" enough, according to state developed special

education evaluation documentation, and only supplied him with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) addressing his ADHD. This has been detrimental to my son's success in school and has been an ongoing battle with the school system for the past 3 years.

As a parent fighting for the educational needs of my son, I have a unique perspective on teaching students with disabilities and the needs of those individual teachers with whom those students interact. I also am more familiar with special education terminology, the IEP process, and how implementation of an IEP should look. My experiences have culminated in the biases I have as a researcher examining the benefits of a CoP between music educators and special education paraprofessionals.

CHAPTER FOUR: PARTICIPANTS

As described in Chapter Three, I selected participants through convenience and purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2017; Patton, 2015). Each music educator participant worked in a different school district and did not know any of the other participants prior to the study. Two of the special education paraprofessional (SEP) participants worked in the same school, and therefore had an established relationship prior to the study. The third SEP worked at a different school in the same district but was employed by an outside agency that provides special education support for students outside of the school's boundaries. The music educator participants ranged in experience from 6 to 24 years, and the SEP participants ranged in experience from 2 to 16 years. During the course of the study, participants worked to ensure that each individual voice in the group was valued. As such, the hierarchy of professional roles that may be found in a school setting did not exist within this Community of Practice (CoP). Included in this chapter are the *identities* of each participant as they related to participant roles within the CoP. According Wenger (1998) *Identity*, in a CoP describes how a participant understands themselves in relation to other community members and how they "become" over time through mutual engagement of shared experiences with those within the context of the CoP. Participants in this CoP became the group anchor, affirmer, reflector, comic relief, and more knowledgeable other. In social constructivism, the more knowledgeable other (MKO) is the individual who has a higher understanding or more experience than those who are within the learning group.

Special Education Paraprofessional Participants

Each SEP participant came to their position in a different way. Sarah was offered a position directly out of high school due to a work-study program where she interned at a school specifically for students with disabilities. Gloria found her way into the role of SEP due to the impact these individuals had on her own children, and Ash worked as a SEP as an entry point

into becoming a general education teacher. These non-traditional experiences and knowledge are what allow them to excel at working with students with disabilities.

Ash Smith

Ash has lived across the United States but was raised in the Midwest and now calls it home. "I was raised in this very small town. My graduating class had like 47 people in it. It was a real hard place to be a weirdo" (initial interview). When questioned regarding the use of 'weirdo', Ash simply replied, "it's a term of endearment for me" (initial interview). Their journey to becoming a SEP was a roundabout one. Ash graduated with a bachelor's in anthropology, then worked at a pharmacy chain for 8 years, eventually becoming the manager. From that position, they moved to a managerial position for a health care company, and then to a long-term substitute position in a resource room that led to Ash becoming a SEP. When asked why they chose to become a SEP, Ash stated:

> *I want to get into education and . . . I felt like working in this ASD room, like nothing is going to be more challenging than this in the future. So, why not do the hardest thing first? And I just have really bonded with the autistic students.* (initial interview)

Of the three SEP participants, Ash has been a SEP the shortest amount of time. They spent a total of 2 years in the public schools with their current placement being in a center for students with autism at a local middle school. While their experiences in retail and healthcare were not centered in education, the knowledge they bring as a result of those experiences allows them to assist with managing schedules and students.

> *Ash: The principal and I were talking about what is required to become a teacher in special education when you're working with a team of paraprofessionals as there's some sort of adult management that really comes into play* [in that role]. *. .And so sometimes*

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I'm coming into conversations with people about the ways that things are being handled

and I realized that I have way more experienced than they do in these sort of "how to

manage people and how to manage challenging situations between different groups of

people". . .I think understanding your whole team and where they're coming from and

what their skill sets are and how one can kind tap into those skills would be beneficial.

(CoP, meeting three)

These managerial skills, gained through alternative experiences, have helped Ash in their

position as a SEP as well as those with whom they work. According to Ash:

My managerial skills pay off more in how I'm perceived by colleagues. I make a point of

giving colleagues genuine compliments to lift them up in times of stress. . .Currently I am

employing my skills as a trainer to help pass on my expertise to our newly hired

colleagues. (exit interview)

The school in which Ash works is the first environment in which they have felt

supported. In their previous setting, they have not been included in staff meetings or professional

development activities, nor had they been welcomed by the principal. It was in this setting that

Ash gained experience working with students with disabilities in an elementary music setting. At

the middle school in which Ash currently works, SEPs are invited to staff meetings and often are

included in staff professional developments, and, as a result, Ash feels valued by their principal

and lead teacher. While Ash is happy to be in a supportive community, they are still incredibly

vocal about the negative perception of their profession as a whole.

I think collectively there is a lack of respect for paraprofessionals in the ways and the

things that we do every single day [referring to previous placements]. *Especially when, in*

our position, we sometimes put our bodies on the line. Literally. I think generally

speaking that we are sort of looked at as like unskilled labor. We are a part of an

education team and oftentimes we're taking the lessons that the teacher has and

modifying them to so that our students can absorb the material at the level they're

capable of. We definitely are doing professional work and I'd like to see that [their

profession] *more professionalized.* (initial interview and CoP group two).

Ash expresses extreme joy in being a SEP and believes that their life experiences really

help them to understanding of those they teach. They describe a high level of comfort in teaching

students with disabilities.

I'm pretty good at just being present for people generally. . .and like being accepting of

them, just from my identity [Ash is a non-binary trans person]. *And I get a lot of joy of*

being that person for these kids. I like that I get to be a person that gives them the space

to do things, [at] *their own speed or* [in] *their own ways. . .because I think our society is*

not designed for people with autism. And in fact, society can be really traumatizing for

people with autism. I just try to give them a place that is not traumatic as much as I can.

(initial interview)

In observing Ash, I found them to be very responsive and patient with their students. Ash

encourages students to engage with their general education peers as independently as they can

and intervenes only when the student needs assistance with a class task or to self-regulate.

The passion that Ash has for their profession is matched by a strong intellect and sense of

justice for what they and their colleagues do. Ash actively seeks professional development to

help them understand and teach those students with whom they work. This eagerness to learn

stems from being excluded, in previous placements, from professional development activities

that were provided for teachers and a lack of being included on decisions regarding students.

This lack of opportunity within the schools in which they previously worked spurred Ash to

enroll in a 40-hour course that will certify them as a Registered Behavior Technician. This will

allow Ash to support their students and the lead special education teacher more fully.

      Identity within the CoP. Ash often took on the mantle of more knowledgeable other and

encouraged music educator participants to consider implementing a variety of instructional

strategies. For example, they suggested using task analysis to break down the complex task of

playing recorder to allow for student success.

> *If I'm working with a kid who is learning recorder, one way that I would sort of support*
>
> *them would be to like break down steps. First, I would* [have the student] *blow through*
>
> *the recorder while I do the fingerings for them. When they seem like they feel comfortable*
>
> *with that, then maybe have them put their fingers on top of my fingers while I do the*
>
> *fingerings and they blow. Then maybe, if it is possible move to them doing the fingering.*
>
> *So, I would sort of write that out in a visual schedule for them as well, like step one is*
>
> *that you're just going to blow and make a sound. . .Students that I work with really need*
>
> *some sort of unregulated time to just explore. That probably would be pretty disruptive to*
>
> *the other students, but it's definitely something that they need in order to process.* (CoP,
>
> meeting two)

Ash was direct and supportive. When participants used dated language or were trying to

understand student behaviors better, Ash was quick to redirect but always with kindness. "When

it comes to like autistic kids, I usually like to say that they require more support as opposed to

[being] "worse off" or "more severe" (CoP, meeting two). At other times, Ash would use humor:

> *Maude: but what do you say when they're, when they're swearing and screaming and*
>
> *biting and, and running out the building?*

Ash: I mean, they're saying they are not interested in music. [we all laugh] *Okay!* (CoP,

meeting four)

When discussing instructional strategies for students with disabilities, Ash was often first, along

with Sarah, to offer ideas and affirmation. They were eager to demonstrate value to the

community through participation and support.

Sarah Abraham

Of the three SEP participants, Sarah had the most experience and also was the youngest.

A Midwest native, Sarah experienced a class in high school that set her career as a SEP in

motion. During her senior year, Sarah participated in a work-study program in which students

went to the alternative school to assist students with disabilities in their life-skills classes. While

there, Sarah made a strong impression on the principal.

I had graduated from high school and the principal of [school name] *called me. He's like,*

I need you to work this summer. I said okay. So, they threw me into a classroom with nine

kids with disabilities. I subbed for a couple months during the regular school year and

they opened a position in this classroom. . .After I subbed in there a few months, I

interviewed, they hired me and 14 years later here we are, still together! (initial

interview)

Sarah was not employed by the local school district. Sarah worked for a Regional

Education Service Agency (RESA). The RESA provides services to families with students with

moderate to severe disabilities. Some special education teachers and SEPs hired by the RESA

work in the public schools in order to provide, as much as possible, a free and appropriate

education to these students. As such, her room is small and does not seem large enough to

accommodate the number of students with whom she works. However, Sarah, being employed

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by an organization specifically focused on providing support services to students with disabilities, is afforded working conditions that many SEPs may not have. She has worked with the same lead teacher her entire career and has only switched work sites twice. Sarah also is provided with content-specific professional development and is included in school-wide professional development, which is not always the case for SEPs employed by the local school district.

> Sarah has a genuine love for the students she teaches and is dedicated to the role of SEP. *It's always rewarding, but it can go from like awesome day to the worst day ever and back to awesome. It's like hills and valleys, hills and valleys* [as she gestures with her hands]*, but it's always rewarding. I mean, every time. And you're always making a difference. . .if someone wants to make a difference, be a paraprofessional!* (initial interview)

Her dedication to her profession also is evident in the amount of training she has completed. Beside the yearly professional development or renewal trainings, Sarah has taken Statewide Autism Resource Training (START), peer-to-peer, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), trauma training, crucial conversations, and CPI, to name a few. Sarah, with 15 years of experience as a SEP, has been able to be a leader in her profession despite lacking a 4-year degree in special education.

> *Six years ago, before I got pregnant, I was one of the trainers for the paraprofessional trainings RESA offers. It was a couple teachers, me, an ASD teacher consultant and a speech pathologist. We all did the trainings, two-day training for paraprofessionals in the area.* (initial interview)

While her experience may not be valued within the school environment, the RESA in which she works acknowledge and employs the experience that she has gained in her unusually long career as a SEP. When asked what she wished she could change about her job, Sarah stated:

If I could change anything, it would just be support. And not for my position, but other para-pros that I see in the building [those not a part of the RESA organization]. *They don't get the training that we get. They do their best, but they only have so many resources and they have so many kids. . .They need to be trained in behavior strategies and educational strategies and, crisis prevention, and stuff.* (initial interview)

In each interaction, Sarah's sense of compassion and her servant's heart were evident. Even her purposes for participating in the community were not wholly self-centered. She saw her participation in this study as a means to experience professional development that was specific to her needs, but also as a way to contribute to the needs of others.

I would like to get even more experience, more ideas for what I do, and then the opposite. I would like to get to [share] *my experience and let other people know about it too so that they can use it to help their kids and do something new. I've never done anything like this before and I'm excited.* (interview one)

Sarah also hoped to develop a deeper understanding of the IEP process and perspective of the music educator. "I want to know what they're thinking and what they want us to do better" (interview one).

Identity within the CoP. As a member of the community, Sarah brought empathy, compassion, and experience to the group. She was quick to connect to each member of the group through personal stories of her successes or failures in order to empathize with those sharing, which the others found valuable. Be it during group meetings, via Discord®, or in texts outside

of the meetings, Sarah was always available to share her ideas, rooted in her experience, to assist participants with the learning needs of those they taught. While Sarah did not often interject during difficult conversations, she was quick to affirm a participant as well as take on the role of more knowledgeable other.

> *Sarah: I like the video modeling Gloria suggested. We also have a prompting hierarchy that I can get and send it to everyone. It is just like a source, like full physical, mental, on down. Oh, I don't know it has so many steps for scaffolding behavior. And repetition is so important for our kids. I think I've said it before, they have to have to do something 12 or 15 times or see something that many times for it to um, click into their brain.* (CoP, Meeting Two)

In one meeting, I discussed concerns I had with my son's needs. During this conversation Sarah again, stepped into the role of more knowledgeable other.

> *Sarah: I was going to say something about your son or to help maybe help. We do not have weighted vests but compression vest. Has he ever tried one of those? It's like Neoprene and it gives that squeeze that you were talking about. We put it over our kid's clothes, but he could probably put it under his clothes. They also have like neoprene, like a tee shirt and shorts that give that compression to, and it that way he could wear them under his clothes, and you know, nobody would ever see that he's wearing them. They also have chewies that are little, when you come and observe me, I can give you one. It's like a little coil and he can just have one in his mouth and it looks like he's chewing gum, but it gives me more hard resistance maybe that would be helpful.* (CoP, Meeting Six)

Sarah also provided comic relief. When sharing stories about herself or those she teaches she would always do so with a heavy dose of humor.

Sarah: Well, when I'm in a big group, like the whole school, I feel like I kind of just sit

back. But in our little team meetings, I'm like, 'okay, Sarah, you gotta shut up!! [puts

hands over her mouth] Yeah, you're talking way too much!' We know the [laughter from

all of us] kids more than others. And I'm like, okay. I sometimes just got to be like, 'Just

be quiet! I don't have to comment on every. single. thing!!' (CoP, Meeting One)

While all participants were kind, supportive, and valued the contributions of each member, Sarah

was the only member to constantly anchor our group. Through her humor, knowledge, and

compassion, Sarah grounded each participant as they mutually engaged in the domain.

Gloria Greengold

Gloria, unlike her SEP colleagues, is not a Midwest native. Originally from the

southwest, where she worked as a massage therapist and taught meditation, Gloria is a strong,

intelligent, and self-sustaining individual. Upon moving to the Midwest, Gloria continued her

work as a massage therapist.

Gloria: I taught meditation classes, infant massage, and couples' massage.

Rachel: How do you bring that into your classroom? How do you bring the meditation

and the massage in for your students?

Gloria: It's really more bringing the insight that working in that field for all those years

gives you, you know. For instance, understanding how the body houses stress and trauma

and understanding the fight or flight response. That kind of thing makes a difference

when you apply that to working with kids with special needs. (initial interview)

For several years Gloria hosted foster children before adopting three siblings placed in

her care. As a foster mom, Gloria chose to attend several classes on trauma in order to

understand and support the children that she adopted as they transitioned from their previous expectancy of instability to stability and belonging.

> *I pursued a lot of those trainings on my own. The trauma training. I've worked one on one with a therapist that specialized in working with your adoptive children, their trauma histories and how to help encourage a healthier future for them, not to change them, but to give them the tools to deal with their trauma.* (initial interview)

As her children went through the school system, she became increasingly frustrated with the lack of support they received from their teachers. The experiences Gloria's children had in school are what motivated her to become a SEP. "They [SEPs] were instrumental in supporting my kids. That was a decision maker for me" (initial interview).

Gloria's time as a foster parent and her training in understanding trauma in children prepared her for the unspoken duties of her job and also have helped her support those students whom she teaches.

> *Maude: How do you feel when you get physically assaulted by a child?*
>
> *Gloria: I personally feel like I knew going into it that it was part of the job. So, when you're managing behaviors, your job is different and the chance of you getting hurt is much higher when you're managing behaviors rather than sitting at a desk or shelving books.* (CoP, meeting four)

When Gloria shared her experiences with the community, it was never through a lens of exhaustion or frustration. Gloria demonstrated an unconditional compassion and understanding for those she teaches, which was evident in her mantra, which later became our community mantra – "behavior is communication" (CoP meetings). She incorporated a sense of humor to lighten the atmosphere when tension arose. "My standard response [to a student's behavior] is

"because he's communicating." I don't know exactly what he's communicating, but clearly

something, by him biting my arm [makes gesture with hand to arm]. He's telling me something!

[laughter from all]" (CoP, meeting four).

Despite the challenges of the job, Gloria is deeply committed to her profession. When she

speaks about her job, it is with joy and dedication: joy for those with whom she works and

dedication to improving her profession.

Yeah, I do. I love it. I love it. I love the work I do, and at this stage I am trying to figure

out how to do it better [thinks to find the right phrase] *better for the people that choose to*

work in it. Because there's a perception that you can't really do anything else when

you're a para. You are not a teacher, you can't teach [meaningful glance between us as*

we both understands that she in fact teaches]. *People don't stay doing it for those reasons*

because it's not a job that pays at a ton [laughter from Gloria] *and it's not a job that*

comes with a lot of awesome every day. You experience a lot of non-wins before you have

a win. So that's my hope, is that in some way I can help raise the awareness and increase

understanding and help people appreciate and value paraprofessionals. (initial

interview)

This commitment to her profession is what led her to participate in the study. Gloria also

works with Ash at the same middle school and describes similar feelings of support and

acceptance by her colleagues, which too was different from her previous placements. Like Ash,

her experience in elementary general music came before her current placement.

Identity within the CoP. Gloria was thoughtful and intentional when sharing with the

CoP. When she shared her knowledge and experiences, it was either to affirm a community

member, to support new knowledge growth between community members, or to take on the

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mantle of more knowledgeable other. When Gloria became the "more knowledgeable other," she did so with such weight that one would think it 'gospel truth.'

> *Gloria:* [In response to a music teacher in a video not engaging with a student with disabilities.] *Often what happens in situations like that and this is my experience, is there is avoidance of the child because. . .there is some. . .unpredictability of the child. The child looks different and acts different so therefore I'm not going to get the same responses I will from the other kids* [describing the thinking of the music educator]. *But a lot of times I found that teachers will ask me, "do you think he'd like to play this instrument?" So, I respond with, "I don't know. Why don't you ask him? That is a great idea! I'll be right here. But I think it would be good for you to ask him if he'd like to play that, you know?" That happened a lot last year.* (CoP, Meeting Seven)

Gloria often sought to find the humor in each situation. Gloria's role as a SEP is not only her day job, but her second and third responsibilities as well. She supports students as an ABA practitioner, as well as supports her son with autism at home. Whether her use of humor was a coping mechanism for the stress of her jobs or a way to find joy in the job, Gloria, like Sarah, shared the role of providing comic relief.

> *Gloria: Oh! This happened. This is funny. So, we're at the play land at McDonald's. I'm stuck at the top of the play land. I'm stuck because the child that I'm with has decided that they've played so hard that they're going to take a nap.* [We all laugh.] *. . .And so, I climb up to the top and wake the child up and the child decided because I woke them up to do the head banging and the biting and all that behavior. So, they have decided that this is how we're going to communicate about not getting down. So, I waited it out about a half hour and then I was like, well we have to leave because I have to get you back to the*

center because you know, I'm going to get fired if I don't. So, I butt scooted a very heavy,

pretty heavy child who's about this tall behind me [holds her hands up to her chin]. *I sat*

by the child and butt scooted three flights of steps down in a play structure in

McDonald's. Meanwhile, people are like, we get down and there are people clapping. I'm

like, fantastic [a little eyeroll from Gloria].

Rachel: Clapping?!?!?!

Gloria: Yeah, the place was packed because it's Christmas break. And what do people do

when it's cold outside? They take their little kids to play places. So yeah, so they were

clapping because I, because she was screaming and head butting and thrashing and

whatever. The whole time I'm like, "we're okay, we're gonna get down, we're heading

down." And it's like, yeah, there goes the hair [gestures hair being pulled]. *There goes the*

earring [gestures to her ear] *and there goes the whatever. And it's like, that's pretty funny.*

So, that was my, that was one of the highlights of my, my break was, butt scooting three

flights of stairs. If I gain any more weight, I am not going to be able to do that. I

guarantee you my butt is not going to fit on those narrow stairs! [We all laugh.] (CoP,

meeting seven)

Gloria's shared role of more knowledgeable other and comic relief were valued by each member

of the community. She brought intention and laughter to each meeting.

Music Educator Participants

Similar to the SEP participants, music educators came to their positions in a variety of

ways. Maude graduated with an undergraduate degree in music education but pursued a career in

insurance claims before settling into the classroom. Noelle began working in non-public

education settings before moving into the public sector of education, and Dre first started as a performance major.

Dre Kramore

Dre is a native of the Midwest but moved around a lot as a child due to his father's job. He moved between five states before settling in a large Midwestern state, where he completed high school and attended college. Dre struggled with mental health issues as a teen and young adult and found comfort and healing in the music he made on his instrument, euphonium. The son of a special education teacher, Dre decided to attend college for music. At first, a performance degree was his goal.

> *I went to school for music and I said. . .you can get a performance job with an accounting degree. I might as well get an ed degree. And then while student teaching, I found that wait I actually liked this* [teaching music]!" (initial interview).

Dre spent a year teaching K-8 general and instrumental music in an inner-city charter school. Burned out by the lack of support, he left and returned to school for his master's degree in music education. Upon completing his master's, Dre moved to South Korea to teach in an international school where he met his wife. Upon marrying, they moved back to the Midwest where he currently teaches elementary music in two public schools.

Dre has taught for two years in his current position and seven in total. In his words, he is "livin' the dream" (CoP, meeting four). In Dre's current placement, he spends four days at one location and one day at a center for students with disabilities. He describes the school climates as full of support and joy. Dre has worked hard to develop a positive and supportive relationship with the special education team. He even set up coffee in his room for the paraprofessionals with

whom he works. "I have a Keurig machine and I tell the paras like, 'Hey, it's Friday. We all need coffee take some of mine'" (CoP, meeting three).

Dre's love for children and passion for teaching was evident after the first 10 minutes of our initial interview.

Rachel: So, you find a lot of joy in teaching children?

Dre: Oh, absolutely! My wife likes to joke that I'm the baby whisperer. We will walk into the grocery store and all the babies turn and look at me. And when I wasn't teaching for that little bit of time [after moving back from South Korea], *she said, "You're really annoying. You keep trying to teach me things!"* [laughter from us both] *So it's just apparently who I am. I can't turn it off.* (initial interview)

He spends his time during school, after school, and on the weekends preparing for his students. In his words, "I keep busy because I can't sit still" (CoP, meeting seven). During our second online meeting, Dre was eagerly cutting out Cricut letters for a display that would highlight student accomplishments. He also is extremely passionate about his students with disabilities. He actively seeks out any information about those he teaches and strongly values the special education colleagues with whom he works.

I read every single one [IEP/504]*, every word of every single one. Um, I kind of have to interpret some of them by going, okay, well that was written for math scores. What does that look like in the music classroom? I make a lot of use of the paraprofessionals because they see the tiny clues of what is going to happen* [with the students] *before I do. I will eat lunch with them* [SEPs] *and hang out with them. When we have thirsty Thursdays, I'll go out with them as well. I have conversations with them when they walk*

in the room and I make sure they feel welcome, not just the invisible person in the room

who's keeping them [the student] *from running out the door.* (initial interview)

Dre is extremely comfortable working with students with disabilities and was eager to participate

in this study, as professional development specific to his content area was lacking.

So, the union, um, the MEA, provides free online PD. It's mostly like classroom

management and things like that. But I did take a technology course over the summer that

included a whole section on technology and how to use it in special education. The

technology they shared to make classes inclusive was way out of date. So, I kind of had to

take the concepts and move on. (initial interview).

Identity within the CoP. As a member of the CoP, Dre brought joy and humor to the

group. One might describe him as sarcastic, but not in a mean way. For example, when asked

what he wanted his pseudonym to be he replied via Discord®: "Can I be Death Falcon?" which

was then followed by a meme from the movie *Stepbrothers.*

Figure 3: Meme Dre used in Discord®
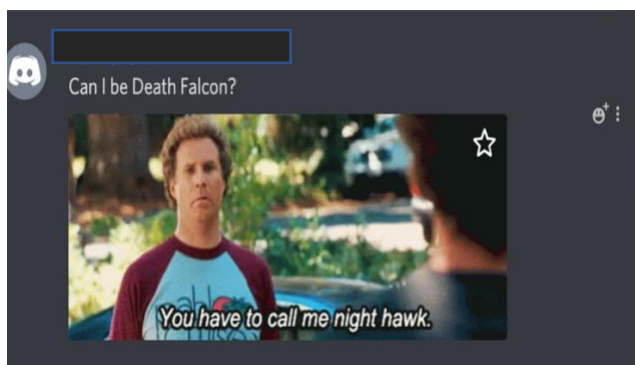
Animated and passionate, Dre too shared the role of comic relief with Sarah and Gloria. Dre

brought levity to most discussions, not because he did not take topics of conversation seriously,

but because he, like Gloria, sought to find the joy or humor in every situation.

Dre: He uses the iPad as a talker?

Rachel: He has the communication board.

Dre: We call it a talker at school.

Rachel: Right. It's super cool because they, so G--- can like arrange pictures to speak a sentence. I could have used that for several of my students. Then, we didn't have it.

Gloria: My son's speech therapist uses the talker for his learning.

Dre: Just a couple weeks ago I had one thrown at me. [Ash, Dre, and Gloria chuckle]

Gloria: That's a lovely thing.

Dre: So, it's a whacker and a talker [we all bust out laughing]. (CoP, meeting seven)

Dre also shared the role of more knowledgeable other. Dre was quick to share a strategy or idea when a participant presented the group with an issue.

> *Maude: I had this one kid who kept laying on the floor, so I asked him to sit on a stool. I want to figure out what stool is going to work for him because usually he just lies down. He cannot sit on the floor. He just has to lie down.*
>
> *Rachel: That could be a muscle tone thing.*
>
> *Dre: After lunch, like kindergarteners because all throughout the day, and they don't have like the muscle tone, the abs in the back. And I say, you have choices. You can lean forward, or you can go mountain style.* [Dre models mountain style as wrapping arms around his legs.]
>
> *Maude: Okay.*
>
> *Noelle: Oh, that's a good idea.*
>
> *Dre: Because it calms down these muscles* [points to mid-section] *so those are the choices. Otherwise they want to lay down.* (CoP, meeting eight)

Dre also was an advocate for the SEPs in the group. Whenever discussion turned to how SEPs were not valued in the system, he was the first to speak up. While Dre acknowledged that his school environment was different, he was eager to demonstrate that in some places, SEPs are highly regarded.

> *. . .in the past the parapros never actually got to introduce themselves to us. So, I went through the whole year* [last year*] knowing them as the face that helps out with that child. And I didn't know anybody's name. So,* [this year] *we had something that went around to all the staff as like an introduction from each of the parapros. Like, here's a picture, here's who I'm with, here is the teacher I'm with, here's my name, here's who I am, sort of thing. And just valuing them as people, not as a person who helps with another person, like they are a tool, is a big thing.* (CoP, meeting three)

Advocate, more knowledgeable other, and comic relief, Dre's *identity* was the most fluid of the music educator participants.

Noelle Davidson

Of the six participants, Noelle is the only one I knew prior to the start of this study. Noelle and I had met through a professional development certification course the past summer and had maintained contact through Facebook. Noelle graduated with her bachelor's in music education from the same large Midwestern university at which I was pursing my doctorate. As with Sarah, it was a unique experience in high school that led Noelle to consider music education.

> *. . . I was never one of those kids that was like, this is what I want to do when I grew up. I just didn't have any sort of plan. Um, but I took this class in high school, it was called human services exploration. . . And what they did was picked like 15 gen ed students and*

15, special ed students and we were like paired up. It was a class in how you teach and

relate to work with students with special needs. . . for the kids that were in the special ed

program, it was like a life skills class. So, the semester I was in it we did cooking. It was

like a kind of a home-ec class and it was our job to teach things to our buddies. . .I

thought it was coolest thing. (initial interview)

It was this experience that encouraged Noelle to consider becoming a music educator. She had

always been drawn to music and decided to put her passion for music and her newfound love for

teaching, thanks to the human services exploration class, together. After graduating with her

bachelor's degree, Noelle spent the next 6 years teaching in an urban district in the southern part

of the United States. The summer before the study, she had returned to the Midwest to begin her

summer master's program and was offered and accepted a position in a large inner-city school

district nearby. This was her first year at this placement, but the student population with which

she worked was similar to that of her previous placements. Her last setting was under resourced,

and her program was underfunded. In her new placement she was surprised with the amount of

support, both in resources and professional development.

> *The technology coordinator came into my classroom and asked, 'do you want an extra*
>
> *cart of Mac books?' And I was like, "Yes!"* [I had to keep thinking] *remain calm, remain*
>
> *calm. So, I have like, I have 30 MacBook's in my classroom now that are dedicated to*
>
> *music.* (initial interview)

Her new district also offers district-wide professional development for all teachers and

occasionally, content specific professional development which was not true in her previous

positions.

Noelle has a fervent passion for students in under resourced communities and finds the most joy in her job when students are engaged and learning 'clicks' for them. "That moment in a lesson when everything clicks and like the kids are just with you, and everybody's engaged and like everybody's on track and there's this synergy in learning, if that makes sense. I think that's my favorite part" (initial interview). With her passion for students in under resourced communities comes a strong sense of social justice.

> *I have to like tell people what it's really like working in urban public schools, specifically in the urban public schools in the south. . .Jim Crow is alive and well in the south. . .The fact remains that schools that are the majority attended by Black and Brown children are not given the same resources that students in majority white communities are.* (initial interview)

In her former placement Noelle did not have support when working with her students with disabilities. She is passionate about supporting all students and approaches her classroom with the mindset that all children can learn, regardless of their backgrounds or circumstances. While she is eager to support her students with disabilities, Noelle stated that she was unsure how to best support them and did not know how to best implement IEPs. "I get the IEPs, I read them. I don't feel like I know necessarily what a true implementation of an IEP in music looks like" (CoP, meeting one). While Noelle is supportive of the special education staff with whom she works, and often became friends with them, collaboration is always on *her* time. Similar to Dre, she was eager to participate in this study due to a lack of content-specific professional development and time to plan with colleagues. When asked what she wanted most from this study, Noelle said, "I'd love to develop stronger strategies for implementing IEPs in music classrooms, and honestly, just time to talk" (initial interview).

Identity within the CoP. As a member of the CoP, Noelle brought empathy, kindness, humor, and depth to each conversation. Most meetings she would approach questions with a bit of laughter or humor, as the time span of this study was been difficult for Noelle. Humor, for Noelle was a means of releasing stress. "I mean I'm looking at like $10,000 worth of work and I'm just like [Noelle laughs loud and long] . . . My life's a mess but it will be fine. (CoP, meeting four) Noelle often could be seen sitting crossed legged on the couch in the library where we met, intently listening to what other community members shared. Once Noelle decided to share, what she had to say always was meaningful and thought provoking. Ever reflective and supportive, Noelle was quick to agree with an affirming "Yeah" or "Right" to demonstrate value of the individual sharing. Quiet and reflective, Noelle's contributions to the group were not always apparent on the surface. More often than not, Noelle would listen rather than comment, and often would pass if invited into the conversation. While Noelle was quick to affirm, in this community of practice, Noelle's role was that of the reflector.

Maude Findlay

Maude was the veteran music educator in the CoP, but she had not always been a music educator. Maude earned her bachelor's in music education and, upon graduating, began to work in business. During the years Maude worked in business, she always maintained her skills in music through directing adult and children's choirs at her church. She moved to the Midwest with her husband when he pursued his doctoral degree. Maude completed her master's shortly after moving to the Midwest and began teaching in a school-district in the town where she lived. Maude has taught in the same district for 24 years and continues to direct children's and adult choirs at the church in which she works.

The school in which Maude works is situated in an established suburban community. Maude has in her current placement for 19 of the 24 years she has been in the district. While professional development is not content specific within her building, she is able to meet with the other music teachers in her district approximately once a month in a designated collaborative learning team.

Maude's passion for singing was evident in the amount of singing incorporated into her classroom. "Gorgeous vowels make me very happy, that and a beautiful head voice" (initial interview). Maude also had lots of energy. In her classroom, there was little down time as students constantly were transitioning between singing, moving, or playing instruments. This heightened energy stemmed from her desire to see those she teaches more often.

> *I'm pushing 500 kids every single day. I mean, they're in, they're gone. They're in, they're gone. And I'm loving them up for those 45 minutes, but I could have a better relationship with them if I had more than this stupid 45 minutes once a week.* (CoP, meeting five)

Maude never minced words when she felt strongly about a topic.

Of the six participants, Maude was the most straight-forward and vocal. She was never afraid to put herself out there, and she welcomed redirection if she used dated language. While she welcomed redirection and acknowledged that there was a lot that she needed to change, Maude often appeared to be overwhelmed at the scope of what she wanted to change, or what others were doing. "It just takes so much time to learn new music" (initial interview). "Oh, my G**!! I can't do that!" (CoP, meeting one). "So, you're going to do that for every flipping class you teach?!?! [referring to creating a visual schedule for those she teaches with disabilities]" (CoP, meeting four). Change was the hardest for Maude, despite her desire to try. She often

would repeat to herself, "Yup. I could do that (CoP, meeting four)." "That doesn't seem too hard (initial interview)." "Well, you've convinced me (CoP, meeting five)."

Despite being overwhelmed by the suggestions of the group and hesitant to change, Maude expressed joy in her profession. She loves those she teaches and simply wishes for them to have a meaningful music experience.

> *I want them to have, to feel like they have a safe space. A happy place. So, you know, in the end, isn't that good? And I have finally gotten to that point after all these years of teaching. Now I'm like, they need to be, they need to leave being happy and loving music.* (initial interview)

When asked about how she works with those she teaches with disabilities, Maude admits that she does not always know who has an IEP or 504.

> *Rachel: Do you see the IEPs and 504s?*
>
> *Maude: Not really, maybe sometimes.*
>
> *Rachel: Does a special educator go over them with you?*
>
> *Maude: They don't, and I've got so many*. (initial interview)

Despite her lack of information, Maude strives to support those she teaches as well as the SEPs who accompany them. "A lot of times what I just want to do is make them socially happy with their class and give their paras a rest" (initial interview). Maude believes that the SEPs with whom she works are often too "hands on" and encourages them to intervene only when necessary.

> *Sometimes the child is followed around all the time* [by the SEP] *and the kids know it and it's just like, you know what? Leave them alone. Sometimes a kid just wants to sit and watch and then do it on his own.* (initial interview)

Maude desires that all those she teaches become independent music makers.

Identity with the CoP. As a member of the community, Maude brought humor, an attitude of affirmation for others, and often a desire for affirmation of her own teaching practices. Most meetings Maude came with an attitude of joy and playfulness. Maude's main, self-prescribed role was that of an affirmer. She often would affirm others by repeating what they said, agreeing with their point of view, or offering words of encouragement. In her affirmation of others, it seemed sometimes that she also was seeking affirmation for herself. "Agreed. I like what you said about mimicking the paras because they're the experts on the children. And I think I find myself doing that too" (CoP, meeting two). Maude was very quick to agree with things the other participants said.

> Ash: There might be somebody that's on your team that doesn't necessarily have as quote unquote a high as a degree as you do, but they might be able to bring something to the table that you have no skill set at and help you with it.
>
> Maude: Can I just say something? I have to totally agree with that. Nothing is more important than experience. I don't care what degree our parapros have, they are the first responders. And if we have to lose somebody at a school, I would way rather lose a teacher or something than lose any of our paraprofessionals. . .the kids can't go from one place to another, they can't have easy transitions without parapros at their side. Parapros bring all kinds of experience to each child and to our teaching staff as a whole. And you're absolutely right. Nothing really trumps experience because, I don't care what degrees you have, like you said in marketing - you know, you bring so many different aspects to your profession and that's, I think that's amazing. . .parapros have my total admiration. . . (Community of Practice, Meeting Three)

In addition to Maude's giving affirmation, she sought affirmation as well. Below is an example that summarizes many of Maude's exchanges. She was quick to state that she too did the same thing as another participant, which affirmed her own practice.

> *Noelle: The* [student] *is just there, sort of absorbing, which I think is just as valuable and just as important. I videoed him or I videoed his class and it was just funny cause you just kind of see him walking in and out of the frame and sort of in between some other kids. But like when I move, he's like investigating what I'm doing, Which I think is, it's just really funny.*
>
> *Maude: So that's exactly what I do too. I give the kids a lot of space. Cause' so much during the day people are on them and I try to give the paraprofessionals space to give* [the students] *space because a lot of times the Paras are sitting with them and they'd take their hands and make them do everything. You know, that's valuable for sometimes, but I just think let the kid just come to his own time. And I think absorption at any time is a valuable thing.* (CoP, meeting five)

In each meeting Maude was eager to connect to the other participants by making connections from their classroom to hers. These connections were not always evident in observations. "There is no evidence between the first observation and the second observation of what she states she does in her classes" (researcher journal, January 10th). Although Maude did not contribute new ideas to the community as much as other members, she was a constant source of affirmation for those who actively contributed each week, thus adding a necessary component to the community of practice – value.

Chapter Summary

The variety in the backgrounds and experiences of participants were key in developing this CoP. Music educator participants had 7 to 24 years of experience in the classroom. SEP participants had 2 to 15 years of experience in the classroom. The members of the community also represented experience teaching in a variety of educational backgrounds including private and charter schools, as well as privileged and under resourced public schools. All but one community member had a bachelor's degree or higher. Sarah was the only community member who did not hold a degree from an institution of higher education; however, Sarah had more experience, professional development, and also has led more professional development activities than the other community members. Dre and Maude had completed their master's in music education, while Noelle was just starting hers. While the music educators had degrees in music education, Ash and Gloria, the SEPs who held degrees, earned them in subjects outside of education.

Each community member connected in meaningful ways and shared experiences that helped shape their *identity*. The roles (*identity*) participants held were anchor, affirmer, reflector, comic relief, and more knowledgeable other. Community members bonded in the similarities between their professions, which allowed for ease of conversation and almost immediate feelings of collegiality. While all participants did not work in the same school or school district, and each had a unique pathway that led them into their profession, each member demonstrated passion for their students and a desire to understand the learning needs of those whom they teach.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE EMERGENCE OF A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

A community of practice (CoP) is not something that can be assigned or mandated from the top down, as might a professional learning community or staff development training. A CoP emerges, develops, and evolves over time among a group of individuals who share a common goal or interest. According to Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner (2015), "[c]ommunities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (p. 1). As discussed in Chapter Two, in order to be considered a CoP the four fundamental tenets – *community*, *practice*, *meaning*, and *identity*, must be met. *Community* is the social configurations in which community members live, and how participation within these social configurations constructs knowledge and member value of that knowledge. *Practice* is a way of discussing historical and social constructs, frameworks, and resources that help sustain engagement within the community and spurs action among members. *Meaning* is the sharing of lived experiences in order to understand the world and to change it. *Identity* is understanding how learning changes who we are, and how personal histories develop, over time, through "becoming" within the context of community (Wenger, 1998). In this Chapter, I will discuss how a CoP evolved between music educators and special education paraprofessionals (SEPs) over a 4-month period through each of the four tenets; *community*, *practice*, *meaning*, and participant *identity* within the group. I also will offer interpretation of the data.

Setting the Stage

Community meetings took place either in-person or through video chat using Discord®, an online group chat platform. The five in-person meetings were held at a local middle school. Before outlining how the CoP developed, I will describe the setting of each type of CoP meeting, in person and online.

The parking lot was small for a school as large as the one in which we met. It was made smaller by all of the little snow piles packed into the corners and medians of the lot. It was fifteen until two, and Gloria still had not arrived yet. The rest of our group stayed in our cars as it was too cold to stand outside and talk. At about five until two Gloria arrived bounding out of her car. "I'm so sorry! We were taking the Christmas tree down and P---- did not want the tree down so, he kept trying to bring it back into the house. He's having a hard time letting go of Christmas." P----, like my son, is on the spectrum and change is hard for them both. As she walked up to my car so did the others. Similar to our previous in-person meetings, everyone was quick to help grab and bring in any of the food items I had brought, leaving me with nothing but my bookbag and a grateful heart.

Before we could enter the building, Gloria had to call the principle to disarm the alarm for us. Paraprofessionals, while provided keycards, do not have the same access as classroom teachers to the building outside of school hours. "This is ridiculous!" stated Ash. "We are trusted to educate the neediest of students, yet a keycard with access is out of the question!" With an eyeroll they opened the door to allow the rest of us in. We made our way through the office and up the stairs to the library which was on the second floor. Ash and Dre promptly began to set up the food I had brought while I began moving the couches located at the center of the library. Each of the three couches were a different color. When I arranged them, they made a circle, which is where we sat when we met. I plugged in my computer, set up my microphone, and opened Garageband. As I set up my iPad across from the couch to record, Maude, Noelle, and Sarah sat down on the couches with their plates and began to chat about how they had been doing since our last meeting, which was online. I quickly moved to the food table and considered what I had brought. Cheese, salami, spinach and artichoke dip, mini-naan, and donuts from my

favorite coffee shop. Every meeting I brought the same food; you can never go wrong with cheese and donuts. As I piled cheese and salami onto my plate Ash, Dre, and Gloria moved to the couch and began their own conversation.

We are never short of topics for conversation, I thought to myself as I poured Diet Coke into my red solo cup. During our last in-person meeting we went down a long rabbit-hole that began with our initial "check-ins." Fortunately, each rabbit-hole we descended down was centered on our profession, those we taught, and the educational issues with which we were so desperately frustrated. There was never much redirection needed, and each individual appreciated a space to chat. "I have been looking forward to this all week!" said Sarah. "The past two weeks have been ridiculously stressful. We had two paras quit and we cannot find a sub." And with Sarah's declaration of frustration our meeting began.

Online community of practice meetings were never as fluid as those we had in person. While Discord® was a wonderful platform for keeping up with one another during the weeks we were not meeting, and also allowed us to share teaching videos and documents, wi-fi did not always function well, and a seven-person group chat often was difficult to manage.

I sat in my office with my microphone plugged in and ready to go. Garageband was up as was Discord®. "Greg!! I see three people on, how do I get us all in a chat again?" My husband, the techie of our family, quickly came into my office and reminded me how to set up a group video chat. Pulling each person in to one group chat was always difficult. Someone inevitably lost connection or could not navigate the group chat platform on their phone. As he stepped out Ash, Dre, and Maude had already joined the video. "How are each of you doing?" I asked as I invited Gloria and Sarah. Noelle could not join us today due to a family emergency. Ash, Dre, Maude, and I chatted for another 5 minutes until Gloria and Sarah were able to join.

"beeeeeeeeeep!" As there were six of us today the microphones on each of our devices were

competing with each other. "Can everyone mute their microphone if they are not talking?

Unfortunately, today we are having some feedback issues," I said. This was the one thing that

always happened at every meeting; once more than three of us had joined the group video chat,

there were serious feedback issues. I also couldn't see everyone during the meeting, which made

deciphering discussion difficult. Some of the members did not like having their video share on, so

we only saw their still picture as they chatted. While it never impacted our conversation, it at

times impacted interpretation of what was being said.

"Let's share how our week has been. Ash, you went last at our last meeting, why don't

you start today." I quietly waited for Ash to respond. Instead Maude answered, "Is someone

talking? I can't hear anything!" Noticing my microphone was on mute, I unmuted and replied,

"Oh, that's my fault, I had my microphone on mute. Let me try again, Ash, how have you been

since our last meeting?" "Not bad, all things considered. One of our students had a rough week

and I wound up getting injured during one of our classes while working with them. Luckily, it's

nothing serious, but I still had to take time off of work to go have my arm looked at where I was

bit." With that being said all microphones were unmuted, and everyone jumped in to ask if Ash

was okay. As Ash's check-in centered on their injury, the topic of conversation for this meeting

was mainly focused on how to anticipate and be proactive regarding students escalating to

behaviors such as biting and proactive strategies for avoidance and de-escalation.

Developing Community

As discussed in Chapter Two, *community* is more than individuals coming together in a

shared space and interacting briefly. A community of practice is something that emerges from a

group of individuals who come together and bond over a shared interest or problem (domain).

According to Wenger-Traynor & Wenger-Traynor (2015), a true *community* pursues interest in "their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other; they care about their standing with each other" (p. 2). Within a CoP, *community* is developed when the three elements of mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire are present.

Emerging Stages and Type of CoP

While this group of individuals was convened formally for this study, a CoP began to emerge between participants in the fourth meeting. As explained in Chapter Two, CoPs move through five stages of development: *potential*, *coalescing*, *maturing*, *stewardship*, and *transformation* (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). At each stage members are driven by the value they receive from the community. This value begins in building relationships and then through member contributions to the domain. Our first few CoP meetings began at the *potential* stage. During these meetings the community defined their interests (domain) and began to learn that they shared common bonds such as frustration with their working conditions and a desire to have collaborative time with their colleagues. The fourth and fifth CoP meetings participants began to shift to the *coalescing* stage, and it was during the fourth meeting where I saw that a CoP was, in fact, emerging. During this stage participants began to develop trust between one another and relationships that went outside of community meetings. Participants established value in the knowledge shared by each member and worked to decide how to "share," or rather bring that knowledge back to their classrooms. We built relationships through mutual engagement in stimulating discussions, which resulted in joint enterprise and shared repertoire between participants.

At first, teaching music to students with disabilities was the focus of the group; however, the more the group met, it became clear that the domain of the group was not only how to teach music to students with disabilities but also to support and understand the needs of group members more fully. This led the community into the its final stage. The final CoP meetings demonstrated the communities' growth to the *maturing* stage. During these final meetings, discussions moved from identifying common issues and knowledge, such as lack of planning time and poor pay and benefits, to identifying gaps within their current knowledge. Furthermore, participants also developed plans of action to fill those gaps.

In Chapter Two, I described four types of CoPs that can emerge: helping, best-practices, knowledge-stewarding, and innovating. Helping communities focus primarily on problem solving and connecting individuals with similar problems and/or interests. Best practice communities focus on specific business or educational practices, dependent on the context of the community. Some communities primary focus is to steward knowledge, and innovative communities are designed to develop new knowledge and projects from the expertise that members bring. As I stated earlier, it could be argued that CoPs move between the four types. Participants in this CoP focused on educational practices as they related to their collaborative roles. Community members also discussed instructional strategies that were new to some participants and were based on the expertise that each individual member brought to the CoP and then acted upon by most participants who brought them back to their classrooms. As such this community of practice would be classified as a "best practice/innovative" CoP.

Norms for Discussion and Building Relationships

The first two meetings were spent developing norms for discussion, developing comfort with one another, and learning how to share the space.

Rachel: I want to make sure. . . that everyone is heard and has input. So how do we ensure that? That everyone leaves here feeling heard and not hurt?

Gloria: Let's assume good intent.

Maude: I guess I already assumed that. I mean that we're all here to learn from each other. And I, I don't take things personally. I mean, it is personal, but I don't feel like anyone's here to hurt. If you disagreed with me or set me straight, I would be thinking you were here to help me.

Gloria: Be respectful.

Rachel: Okay. So, I heard we should assume good intent and give respect to the individual. Is that what you meant, Gloria or did I misconstrue what you said?

Noelle: Well, I think, just showing up here in the first place to me is a good intention. And I would say that there are probably a lot of people that would not spend their Sunday here. And I have a lot of respect for all y'all for showing up!

Sarah: I think with only six or seven [people] we won't have too many issues with people not being heard. But yeah, I think, like good intentions, everyone's here to help everyone and the kids and that we are all here to make everyone better and the kids better and for everyone to be successful. So, I think even if it might hurt you or you don't agree that they don't, no one really means to do that.

Dre: Something we've done pretty well so far is avoiding crosstalk.

Noelle: Yeah.

Dre: I mean it's, it's bound to happen, but we do kind of need some time to think cause' we are processing deep stuff. (CoP, meeting one).

The group agreed that, at each meeting we should assume good intent on part of the individual and avoid crosstalk. We also agreed that we should allow time to process, use a respectful tone when talking, invite each other into the conversation, and encourage participation. These norms allowed space for *community* to develop between participants across the duration of the study.

Meetings began with small talk, allowing participants to ease themselves into the deeper discussions that were to follow. The exchange below, during an online meeting, is an example of how most meetings typically began, joyful and playful.

Noelle: I was going to say you can do that on Google hangouts as well, just so that you know.

Rachel: Yeah. But does Google Hangouts have a cool name? Like Discord®, or have dancing jifs? [we laugh together]

Noelle: No, I'm just saying if Discord doesn't work. . . [Dre interjects].

Dre: Jifs? did you just say jifs?!?!?! I'm offended! [this is in jest because I mispronounced Gif]

Rachel: Dre, are you making fun of me?

Dre: Yeah. [laughter from me and Noelle.] (CoP, meeting three)

Once each participant had arrived at our in-person meeting or had logged onto Discord®, we would "check-in" with one another. Through practicing "check-ins," participants began to learn more about one another, and relationships developed as a result. Empathy, understanding and trust too were developed as were the topics of discussion that propelled our meetings.

Ash: Man! It was a legit accident. I was chasing after my kid and like running under the basketball hoop and some kid went to make a shot and missed and 'boop' and it hit me in

the side of the head. So, I was in the ER for four hours. I didn't have a concussion, which

is good, but it sucked.

All of us: What? Are you okay?

Rachel: Scary.

Gloria: I'm with you. Between the accidental things in our job, the accidental and

behavioral, hazard pay would be a real thing. (CoP, meeting four)

A good portion of that meeting (CoP four) centered on SEP working conditions and responses to

student behavior as a result of that "check-in."

On a few occasions, participants were open enough during "check-ins" to share

frustration with co-workers outside of the community who shared the same role as a community

member.

Rachel: Okay. Did you have any concerns for this week or things that came up that might

relate to our study?

Noelle: Well, not particularly. I, so I work with one paraprofessional, with one specific

student once a week. And I will say. . . [long pause as if considering whether or not to

share] *she is consistently like showing up late to my class; it's frustrating, and I'm sure*

that there's a really good reason for it. But I don't have enough time in my day to seek her

out and find her and figure out a plan. (CoP, meeting two)

Noelle's decision to share her frustration, while acknowledging that the issue lay within the

school environment and not the person, demonstrates a level of trust among the group but also a

developed sense of empathy for those within the group and those with whom she works.

The *community* also became a space in which individuals could share their personal

struggles, knowing they would receive support and affirmation from the group.

Ash: My personal life feels like it's kinda getting into a better place than it was, and my house is situated and, I feel like I have more like emotional and intellectual energy to take to work, which has been nice.

Maude: You gotta take care of yourself first. We forget that, you know, because if we're not in a good place, it's hard to be strong for the kids. (CoP, meeting four)

Several participants actively navigating the balance between expectations of their job and personal life. Gloria expressed the loss of her ex, and the toll it was taking on her mentally and physically.

Gloria: Well, I missed last week because my body tanked. Things have been, I have not had any time off over break. I work another job. I worked pretty much a lot of full time shifts over the break. And also, when I wasn't at work, my ex passed away and, my children . . .it became theirs to do, to sort through and empty the house. . .when I'm not at work, I've been there hours and hours packing and sorting. . .I had two days off, Christmas Eve and Christmas, and that was great. (CoP, meeting seven)

By the end of the study it was clear that strong relationships had developed. The exchange below, from Discord®, demonstrates how the relationships between participants began to extend past the timeline of the study.

Figure 4: Discord® conversation after CoP meetings had ended.

A CoP, such as the one that emerged over the course of this study, offered participants a space of

understanding and support not necessarily offered in their school environments. These

relationships alleviated the feelings of isolation that many music educators and SEPs experience

(Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, 2001; Giangreco, Broer, Edelman, 2002; Marks, Schrader, Levine,

1999; Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005; Sindberg, 2011)

Mutual Engagement, Joint Enterprise, and Shared Repertoire

The development of a professional relationship and/or friendship enables learning to occur between community members and value of members' contributions to develop within a CoP. Through food, small talk, and check-ins, participants were able to build relationships necessary to establish a foundation for *community*. As such, each participant worked to understand where they fit within the group as participants discussed typical teacher topics of planning time, lack of time to teach, and those they taught.

Mutual engagement in joint enterprise. As the group continued to mutually engage in joint enterprise, deeper, more meaningful conversations took place. When participants mutually engage in joint enterprise, which is the repeated and practiced exchange of individual backgrounds and knowledge, conflict can occur. In our first meeting Gloria mentioned frustration with her son's music teacher over not allowing him to perform during festivals due to his disability.

> *Gloria: With my own son, he was in a situation where he was in band and, with even with his autism, it was phenomenal. He excelled and he was so happy in music. He loved music classes and then there was a school district change. Anyway, they did not have the ability to have him in the classroom for any kind of music education because the staff was not capable of handling it and didn't know what to do with him. So, he didn't get to be a band. It was just awful. Then they finally put them in choir.... He's got perfect pitch, he is amazing. But he's got emerging verbal stuff. And so, . . . he was trying to sing in the choir. The person there was frustrated because he was not really singing the words and you know, they were working on concerts and they were competing and I was like, what about music education? How about that?*

Maude: the choir has to work toward that goal of a number one when you are competing. It's not educational or safe for kids who can't move with the, with the whole group.

[Gloria's eyes went a little wide, and Dre stepped in almost immediately.]

Dre: [During] *the judging* [speaking about his work with marching band]*, we made a point of saying if an instrument is lacking, if a part is lacking, if we get this note from the director, we won't consider it. It's just a part that we'll skip over. And they're* [the students] *are still eligible to compete."* (CoP, meeting one)

Engagement in joint enterprise does not always mean mutual agreement in conversations. Conflict, such as the one described above, often can lead to rich discussions, and the development of new *meaning* and reified objects. In this exchange Gloria was seeking to understand why competition was of more importance than the education of the student in the music classroom. While Maude and Dre addressed how an ensemble may approach competition, they did not address Gloria's concern of music competition over music education and how that can isolate students with disabilities. As the CoP continued to meet these issues were discussed more fully.

Mutual engagement in joint enterprise does not always result in conflict. Support of a colleague's ideas or experiences also may be considered joint enterprise.

Ash: It's just about that person who seems like they care about you as a person. It totally transforms the way that you are engaged in your work. I definitely like engaging with that person [the P.E. teacher] *as a human being, as colleague as opposed to like me being a serf or something like that. It totally transforms the parapro's experience because they feel like, these are the teachers, these are the people that care about me. . .When you*

engage with them [paraprofessionals] *as a person and you treat them like a colleague, that's totally transforming for a paraprofessional.*

Dre: So, I'm seeing a theme of the absolutely astounding reality that people are humans and we need to treat them with respect!

 Ash: Yeah. [Laughter from Ash, deep laughter.] *Exactly.*

Gloria: There's an idea! (Cop, meeting three)

By participating in joint enterprise through mutual engagement, participants were able to continue to delve deeper into the domain of the group: how to better understand the needs of their colleagues and how to teach music to students with disabilities. Participants also were able to engage in exchanges about historical and social issues, as well as make connections between their personal experiences. (Historical and social issues will be discussed in the context of their coinciding emergent themes in Chapter Seven).

Shared repertoire. Shared repertoire, according to Wenger (1998), are procedures, techniques, gestures, language, symbols, actions, or concepts that a community has developed or adopted during their practice. Routine procedures that establish comfort can be considered shared repertoire. "Breaking bread," or sharing food, is a symbol of trust and community. The first shared repertoire that developed was the routine of beginning with food at our in-person meetings. At each in-person meeting I brought food, and four two-liter bottles of soda. Gathering around to help set up the food, filling a plate with food, and engaging in initial conversations propelled each meeting and the lack of that initial conversation booster was evident when we met online. Most in-person meetings started like this:

Gloria: I have to lean today [she leans back against the couch]. *I'm just tired. We took the tree down and it upset my son with autism. He has significant issues.*

Noelle: Oh yeah.

[Sounds in the background of people talking and laughing over Noelle and Gloria as the others, myself included, make a plate of food.]

Gloria: So, you know what we're going to do, right? We're supposed to just go get another tree! Cut down another pine tree because you know [shakes her head], *it was. . . holy hell. Change is hard. Very hard.*

Noelle: It is very hard. (CoP, meeting seven)

Beginning each meeting with food was a common procedure (shared repertoire) that helped participants, in the initial meetings, break the ice almost immediately. In later meetings food allowed participants to engage socially in personal conversations, which were essential to building the foundational relationships needed for *community*.

The way in which we sat during our in-person meeting is another example of shared repertoire. Rather than sit at a table, we chose to sit on the couches that were at the center of the library. We arranged the couches into a circle with two to three people per couch. This arrangement symbolized an abolishment of the hierarchy that many music educators and SEPs experience within their school culture.

Gloria: I have participated in collaborative groups. This was different because the hierarchy that I work in and that we all work in, in education and so, this is different [our group] *because of this collaboration. I'm trying to find a way to say it. I don't want to say like the slaves got to eat with the people, but you know what I mean, like it was. . .*

Rachel: The hierarchy was gone?

Gloria: Yes, the hierarchy was gone and, where Sarah and my voice or other paraprofessional voices have not been welcomed at the table, they were welcome here.

[The conversation continues about starting a group of her own at her school.]

There would have to be some educating of people about sitting at a round table where no

one is at the head. (Gloria, exit interview)

It was not until Gloria's exit interview that I considered the configuration in which we sat as

shared repertoire. We, as a community, set out to understand the role each of us has to play in the

education of students with disabilities. In doing so we not only abolished the hierarchy through

building relationships with one another, but we also unknowingly represented that in the way in

which we shared physical space with one another.

Language also can become shared repertoire, in a community of practice. Gloria came to

the community of practice with the mantra, "behavior is communication."

[P]*eople aren't aware of that* [student behaviors*] because they* [the student] *feels stress*

and anxiety or because they're afraid or because of previous negative experiences.

Whatever is going on that they're trying to get out, that's part of the behavior piece.

Behavior is communication. (CoP, meeting one)

Her mantra quickly became the community's mantra. In one meeting, Gloria shared that her

student's behavior was communicating a dislike of the preferred task by repeated and

gregariously flicking the 'no' visual on her lanyard. Most discussions centering on student

behavior were full of hilarity, others more serious, but through these conversations participants

came to the understanding that student behavior is communication.

Ash: So we were at the movie theater and he was yelling in the theater. We were telling

him, 'you got to have a zero voice.' And he's yelling: 'ZERO VOICE!' [we all chuckle] *I*

took him out of the theater and he was sitting in the lobby and then at one point he just

like got up and ran over to the counter [where] *they had all the different popcorn*

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seasonings and he just like [Ash gestures] *arms sweeps the whole thing and* [everything] *goes flying. And I'm just like "go. sit. down." The little one sits and then screams "THIS IS WHY WE CAN'T HAVE NICE THINGS!"* [We all erupt into laughter.] (CoP, meeting four)

Participants understood that the student was overwhelmed with the opportunity to be out of school and excited to be at the theatre and that this student was communicating through his behavior. They understood that, while the child's behavior was unexpected, it was an example of what may happen when a student with a disability, in this case a student with autism, is unable to communicate their feelings or needs. "Behavior is communication" cycled back regularly in discussions and carried with it a mutually understood meaning.

Community of practice members also grew to understand through sharing their experiences that behaviors from students also may demonstrate processing of a traumatic or negative experience. These experiences are re-lived by students when they are engaged in a social interaction or are trying to process the social interactions of those around them. Gloria shared one experience with a student where she and Ash work at the middle school. Sarah engaged with their shared experience, as she had taught the student at the elementary school.

Gloria: Did he just call you mean, or did he ask you a question?

Sarah: No, just mean. Every time I would walk in the room he'd start screaming and I would have to, I would have to leave.

Gloria: Well he's growing cause now he says, 'you mean why you mean why you mean?'. [The student previously vocalized to communicate and now they have words to use to communicate.]

Ash: He always says 'dad, why you mean dad?'.

Maude: Oh no, he calls everyone dad?

Ash: It's not that he's calling you dad, it's like he's resurrecting old experiences. Yeah, like referencing them to make sense of what is happening now.

Gloria: So, if something happened, the most impact is I think with his dad. Maybe his dad raises his voice or something. So, there's like a definite connection between anybody getting redirected and his dad's name. It has such an impact on him for a long time.

(CoP, meeting seven)

Through mutually engaging in the domain, CoP members came to the collective realization that unexpected behaviors may be an example of students reliving past experiences to make sense of what they are experiencing in the present. Shared repertoire is an outcome of mutual engagement in lived experiences that center in the domain.

Developing Meaning through Shared Experiences

The topic of interest within a CoP is the *domain*, and *meaning* is brought to the *domain* through the sharing of lived experiences. When participants share their lived experiences, it allows them to understand the spaces in which they live and to work to actively make changes within those spaces. *Meaning* is defined by the group and through the development of meaning reified objects are developed. Reification is "the process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal experience into thingness" (Wenger, 1998, p. 58). These reified objects are developed during discussions and help create the foundation of what becomes the historical knowledge of the group which in turn encourages action to develop new knowledge that is constructed socially from the individual histories and experiences each member brings with them into the community. These objects can be physical or founded in the discourse

between participants. Objects shared by the community that sparked engagement in discourse between participants also become reified.

Developing Domain and Meaning through Shared Experience

The *domain* the community first focused on was how to teach music to students with disabilities, and the community shared experiences in working with students with disabilities throughout the entire study. During initial meetings instructional strategies for students with disabilities emerged from these discussions and became reified objects. As the community continued to meet, it was clear that, while learning about teaching students with disabilities was an outcome of discussions, the domain encompassed a broader idea of what it meant to be a music educator and paraprofessional and how the roles and needs are similar. *Meaning* was developed by participants as they discussed the domain through their lived/shared experiences.

Video recordings of teacher instruction. Viewing the video recordings of participant classroom instruction was a means of sharing lived experiences that related to student behavior. These videos allowed for rich conversations that developed new knowledge. During the following conversation, we were watching a video of Sarah assisting a student with whom she works in the music classroom. The music teacher is doing an instrument "play and share" activity.

> *Rachel: G--- is the last kid to get a turn.*
>
> *Noelle and Ash: Oh no. That's so hard.*
>
> *. . .*
>
> *Rachel: It's kind of hard to see what G--- is doing. . .he's self-active, like actively self-working on what he needs to do to stay calm* [G--- was pacing and walking around until he found the bookshelf that helped him settle as he waited his turn].

Noelle: He seems under engaged in what's going on. . . So, if he's in this class for the

social aspects and he's sitting in the back with headphones on, reading a book and not

interacting with his peers. I question if that goal is being met.

Ash: Sometimes it's the best you can do. (CoP, meeting seven)

From this conversation came strategies for CoP members to use when assisting a child with

disabilities to be more engaged in the classroom environment. The discussion below took place

after participants watched Sarah's video.

Gloria: . . .it also has to do with the teacher as well as with the classroom environment.

You can't force a teacher to encourage or interact.

Rachel: G--- could be brought closer to the front, not just for proximity but for social

interactions.

Ash: The teacher also could have asked the student if he wanted a turn instead of passing

the drum to Sarah.

Noelle: I would have modeled the drum or pull a volunteer [peer modeling]. (CoP,

meeting seven)

These discussions, based on shared video recordings, allowed participants to participate in

practice through offering suggestions for instructional practices or support for student learning.

From these discussions, reified objects developed and were put into *practice* in their own

classrooms. I will discuss examples of reified objects including preferential seating, peer models,

visuals for assigned tasks, and other developed strategies later.

Understanding roles, expertise, and communication. Through sharing lived

experiences, participants began to develop new meaning for their shared roles in the classroom

and the collaborative expectations that they had for one another. These conversations allowed

participants to share individual expertise, which allowed for the development of new meaning and reified objects. We continued to watch Sarah's video:

> *Noelle: I don't think the music teacher knows how to interact with G--- and so she's just opting not to.*
>
> *Gloria: Agreed she's taking the safe path.*
>
> [video playing]
>
> *Noelle: Y'all aren't here to do our jobs. Like we still need to teach the kids and I just, it makes me sad to see the music teaching onus is being put on Sarah in a lot of ways. Does that make sense?*
>
> *Gloria: hmmmm.* [Gloria nods her head.]
>
> (CoP, meeting seven)

Many music educators do not feel prepared to teach music to students with disabilities (Gfeller, Heeden, & Darrow, 1999; Grimsby, 2019; VanWeelden & Whipple, 2014b). The music educator in the video may not know how to fully engage the student with disabilities in the music classroom and therefore, is over relying on Sarah, the SEP. As Noelle observed, "I don't think the music teacher knows how to interact with G--- and so she's just opting not to" (CoP, meeting seven). SEPs bring expertise on the students with whom they work into the music classroom; however, SEPs are not licensed educators. SEPs are there to assist with instruction and support student learning. When educators do not know how to fully engage students with disabilities into their classrooms, SEPs often take on tasks/roles that they are not trained to do (Giangreco, Suter, Doyle, 2012; Marks, Schrader, & Levine, 1999; Wall et al., 2005). The two conversations, seen above, led the music educators to consider deeply how they engaged with the SEPs with whom they work and how to better engage with the students with disabilities more successfully in their

own classrooms. These understandings and changes in perspective will explored more in Chapter Six.

Often, when examples of teaching praxis were shared, other members of the community felt challenged in their own praxis. Through community exchanges of shared experience, in this instance shared praxis, the possibility for individual participant growth and new *meaning* was developed for the individual and community. In one of our earliest meetings, participants specifically discussed instructional strategies in the self-contained classroom and how they might apply to the music classroom. The SEPs had suggested that picture schedules be used to assist with lesson flow. Having observed Dre the week before and noticing his incorporation of those strategies with some of his own teaching strategies, I encouraged him to share with the group.

> *Rachel: So, Dre, can you show your visual schedule, cause' I think that's something that could easily be done by us.*
>
> *Noelle: Yeah.*
>
> *Dre:* [Opening his computer] *This book, victories in education thing* [victories-n-autism, a website I had shared with him] *helped me design this. So, we always do the same activity just with different music sort of thing. So, here we do sirens. Some pictures of hands up* [moving in pitch exploration]*, a rolling ball for each school. . .*

Figure 5: Dre's visual schedule. This also is an example of a reified object.

> *Noelle: Um, can you say more on that?*

Dre: Oh, so for the tonal and rhythmic LSAs, since you're an MLT[3] person, I rolled the ball and I give them the cue while the ball is rolling so they can't just go right away. And when they have the ball, they sing it and roll it back. The ball assists with audiation.

Maude: And this is just for one particular day? [Maude's voice rises a little in pitch.]

Dre: . . .And then the drum always stays the same so that's a picture of the Tubano I have, and then a scarf activity. We're practicing the Move It to Fur Elise. So, I made a story about some snow and they really liked it. What does the Fox Say [YouTube]*, that's a choice activity* [preferred activity] *they get at the end.*

Maude: So, you're going to do that for every flipping class you teach?!?!?! [Maude's voice has raised more in pitch, overwhelmed at the prospect of what it would take to do this in her classroom.]

Dre: Well, I mean this is what I came from [shows his old non-visual schedule, same as the picture above only without pictures].

Noelle: Yeah, I do that but without pictures. I should use pictures!

Rachel: I mean how long does it take you to do that? [Asking Dre for Maude's sake.]

Dre: No time at all. Realistically, that's the same [pointing to a picture on the schedule]. *That's the one that changes right there* [pointing to one activity on his visual schedule on his computer]. *I'm going to start changing this too* [points to another].

. . .

Maude: Our autism rooms at central Montessori, on their door, they're beautiful, there are these Velcro pictures of what they're doing. It's in a line and the teacher will always

---

[3] Music Learning Theory (MLT) is a theory of music learning developed by Dr. Edwin Gordon based on building music vocabulary and skills as one would build language vocabulary and skills. Learning sequence activities (LSAs) often include tonal or rhythm pattern instruction, sometimes through listening, audiating, and echoing.

say, "okay, now we're already down to music" and the kids know to line up and there's,

you know, them pushing in their chairs. I mean it's beautiful and it's. . .I've never even

thought of really doing it in the music room. (CoP, meeting four).

This exchange challenged Maude and Noelle to reconsider their own praxis as it pertained to

posting visual schedules in their classrooms.

The concept of value was common in community exchanges. Understanding the value of

one another's position offered new meaning to collaboration and how that could influence

professional exchanges and instruction.

> *Dre: I always meet the kids at the door and like say hello to everyone as they come in, but*
>
> *it's also for the paras. I feel like that's like my time to communicate with them and like*
>
> *make it clear that it's their time* [the paraprofessional] *to share anything I need to know*
>
> *with me. Like I don't care if I start a minute late cause I'm talking to someone else. I don't*
>
> *care if I don't finish the lesson, it's not cancer. I'm not curing a disease.*
>
> *Gloria: But that's a good point. The communication. . .Being able to be willing to check*
>
> *in, you know, because we are important.*
>
> *Dre: Also, providing a space for that to happen. Cause' it goes both ways.*
>
> *Gloria: Yeah. How's your day go? How's it going so far? Well the last three hours were*
>
> *hell. Hopefully this class will be better. Okay. Good to know. . .*
>
> *Dre:* [interjecting] *Subtext!*
>
> *Gloria: Well we've had a really rough day, but you know hopefully music is going to be*
>
> *better! You know? That kind of thing.*

Noelle: Well and that helps me too cause' that changes how I'm going to approach a

child's behaviors cause' having that backstory is so helpful. The last thing I want to do is

unintentionally make something worse or harder. (CoP, meeting six)

In sharing lived experiences centered in valuing the individual, participants developed an

understanding of their colleague's perspective and developed new meaning for what it meant to

be a collaborative professional.

Planning. Through sharing experiences about their work environment, participants

learned that their working conditions were more similar than they had realized. Time was lacking

to plan, both individually and collaboratively.

Noelle: They actually, they completely redid the master schedule at my school, effective

Wednesday [It was the week before winter break]. *So, I'm prepping for our winter sing*

along, and I lost seven of my sections on the new schedule. So, I've had to schedule those

seven sections on my planning time in order to make sure that they're ready for the sing

along. So, my life is a hot mess. It's fine, but it's a hot mess and we just are living for

winter break right now, [we all laugh together] *come hell or high water. I'm going to get*

there. (CoP, meeting four)

Time also was an issue for SEPs.

Sarah: We don't even get a break; we get a lunch. Do you guys [referring to Ash and

Gloria] *get a break?*

Gloria: Yeah. We have a 15-minute break now. But we probably don't take it. . .it's either

you take it, depending on your schedule, you can get it with your lunch or separate. But

most of them, most of the time I don't. I mean our lead teacher tries very hard to get us

our lunches. She's like, I don't care if the ceiling is coming down. I'll call an

administrator and have to come and help, you need to go. (CoP, meeting six)

A lack of planning time was not the only similarity between SEPs. It is used here as another

example of shared experience. I will explore similarities in the working conditions of music

educators and SEPs in Chapter Seven.

Reified Objects

An important aspect of developing meaning in a community of practice are the reified

objects that emerge from shared experience. As stated earlier, reification is the process of

"producing objects that congeal experience into thingness" (Wenger, 1998, p. 58). Reification

also can include discourse between CoP members. Reification covers 'a wide range of processes

that include making, designing, representing, naming, encoding, and describing, as well as

perceiving, interpreting, using, reusing, decoding, and recasting" (Wenger, 1998, p. 59). How to

talk to paraprofessionals, strategies for including students with disabilities in the music

classroom, Discord® exchanges, letters to colleagues, and visual schedules are examples of the

reified objects developed by this community of practice.

One of the first reified objects that emerged from this community was our discourse on

IEPs, 504s and the stigma of special education. The exchange below came from a request of

participants to have the IEP process and diagnostic categories explained.

Figure 6: Discourse and sharing of what became a reified object.

Dre: Does the early childhood developmental delays and like speech and language match up in some way or are they something completely different?

Rachel: Well, that's where the process gets fuzzy. . . So, if you have a child who has a language impairment or communication delay, they might be able to be found eligible under the ECDD, early childhood development delay, or they might be able to be found eligible only under specific language impairment, SLI. It depends on how well the child meets eligibility criteria.

. . .

Dre: I had to fill out a couple of the little surveys that a doctor sends to help diagnose

ADHD. I don't know what their thought process is. I can describe exactly what this

student does, but the way that the student has to "fit into the box" sometimes makes it

difficult.

Ash: I see a lot of push back from the school system with this. . .this kid has a medical

diagnosis of autism, but they are not approved as autistic in the school setting.

. . .

Noelle: There are a lot of kids out there that would really benefit from services, but

because the definition of pervasiveness isn't an all-encompassing definition, and they're

really not getting the help and support that they need. I'm hoping that at some point we

can redefine what it means to need an IEP.

(CoP, meeting two)

Through discourse, similar to that above, about abstract terminology placed within

Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and descriptions of disabilities as given by the state,

participants developed concrete understandings that brought meaning to group discussions. Other

reified objects were physical objects that were shared between participants. Below are several

pictures highlighting either Discord® exchanges that became shared reified objects, or actual

pictures of shared materials that became reified objects. The Discord ® exchange above (figure.

6) inspired Dre to share an example of a collaborative strategy he used, a letter to the

paraprofessionals with whom he worked. Dre's sharing inspired other participant members to use

it within their own school environment, thus making it a reified object in the community of

practice. Below is a visual schedule and communication tool that was shared and adapted for the

music classroom, which also served as a reified object for this CoP.

Figure 7: Example of a visual schedule and communication tool.
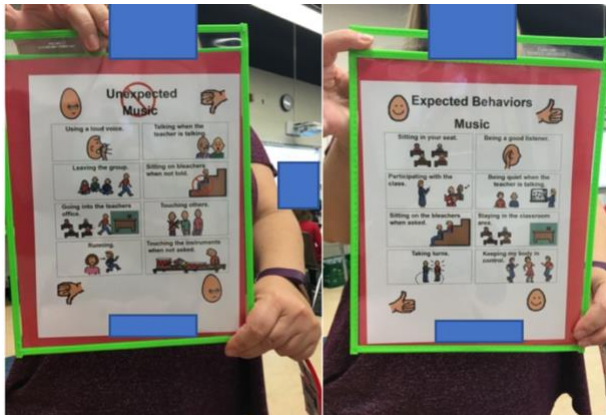
More reified objects, and their explanations, can be found in Chapter Six.

The Action of Practice in a CoP

According to Wenger (1998) *practice* is the "doing" in a historical and social context while negotiating meaning of individual shared experience. *Practice* means that participants actively engage with the knowledge and reified objects developed either within or outside of the CoP. Within group meetings, *practice* is the act of sharing lived experiences, engaging in this knowledge and then developing *meaning*. Outside of the community, practice is actively engaging with, sharing, or implementing *meaning*.

Discussions centered in social and historical context are necessary within a CoP. This could be the social/historical context of a participant or period of time. For this CoP most issues were historical (that which has and is still happening) and were focused on the working conditions of participants. Discussing issues is an action of *practice* and through it, *community* is built and new *meaning* created. Historically, SEPs have always been considered non-essential personnel (Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, 2001; Giangreco, Broer, Edelman, 2002)

> *Gloria: I think that some of that comes from how we're seen in the educational system*
>
> *further bottom of the totem pole. Yeah. I think it was like you're the, these are the*
>
> *babysitters that come and to keep the kids in check so I can teach.*

Noelle: Music teachers deal with that same thing though too. [cross talking and laughter from everyone].

Gloria: We talked about that in our interview [gesturing to me]. *That was one of the parallels I observed. Because in the last building that I was in that I felt like this music teacher was really good and she was really trying. But I felt like she was only like one step above us* [paraprofessionals]. *Like compared to the way the whole rest of the building was. . .it was hard to see that.*

Sarah: They don't invite us to IEPS, any of us. . . I get to go to IEP on Tuesday, everyone, like my first one in 15 years. [We all get excited for her.] *And then it's only because we have a half day of school. That's why. And I don't have to work the afternoon. . .and it's the same with you guys in music. I mean, we rarely get invited to IEP meetings.* (CoP, meeting one)

SEPs were not the only individuals who felt they were on the low rung of the ladder.

Maude: The physical education teacher who had been teaching for 35 years told me that we are just "PPP"-planning period providers. . .and the teachers want common planning time. That's all they care about. They don't care where they're going, as long as all the kids go at the same time. . .they just think of us as babysitters or planning period providers. It's, it's kinda disheartening. (CoP, meeting three)

Other issues with historical context discussed by the group included SEP pay and feelings of not being valued. These issues came up throughout the period of time the community met and will be discussed more fully in Chapter Seven.

Gloria: I think the bigger piece stems from the contracts and all those things. I think that's a huge piece of it. But I also think that the management ability, the temperament,

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[and] *personality of the building administration also makes an impact on the culture of the building. . .there are a lot of similarities in what we were talking about, about certain groups like music teachers and paras not being as respected. . .There's also this kind of culture of, you know, each building has a culture of whether or not they're kinda clique-ish and a major group sees paras and special teachers as less than or, or if the general consensus/the culture of the group is that we are all equals and we come in and we are about children every day and education. I think that makes a difference.* (CoP, meeting three)

SEP pay often came up during meetings due to conversations regarding injuries sustained during the weeks between meetings. The following exchange is an example of *practice* of shared experience situated in a historical context.

Ash: . . .the system is not going to change in a way that's going to like help me long-term. But it feels like there should be some kind of like change in the ways that like the system views this position. There are people that are like, have the constitution to do it [the job of a paraprofessional] *in like a high level way and those people are not, there's no way for them to be rewarded or be able to like have like a living wage or like even, you know, if I wanted to like pay for like my kid's health insurance through this building, it costs more than I make.*

Group: [Long pause from all of us.]

Ash: That's ridiculous, you know! . . .I was reflecting on that a lot. Is there a solution to that? Does anybody even give a shit? I don't know. [pause from group] *I have had jobs where I made close to $70,000 a year and I would get up in the morning and be like, I don't want to go to work. And I never feel like that here* [as a paraprofessional]. *Never.*

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I'm always like, ah, it's really early in the morning but okay, it's going to be fun. Um,

there might be some stress but like it's cool and it's sad to me that I'm not going to be

able to do this long-term just cause' the finances are not going to work out. (CoP,

meeting eight)

These findings, rooted in the historical context of SEP work conditions, will be discussed in

depth in Chapter Seven.

In addition to *practice* existing within, it also must exist outside of the community of

practice. Discord® was an opportunity for members to continue to *practice meaning* when not in

the group setting. In the Discord® exchange below, Dre is seeking help with a student with

disabilities he teaches. Sarah responds, leaving both Dre and Sarah *practicing* the domain of the

group.

Figure 8: Discord® exchange and example of practice.
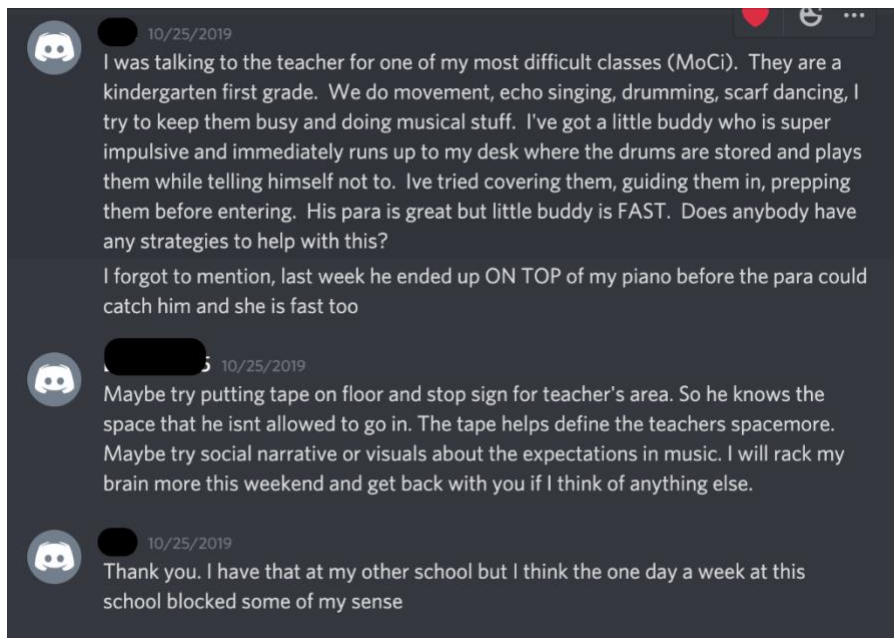
Participants also shared their wisdom with individuals who were outside of the community of practice. Below is an example of Dre participating in *practice* by sharing *meaning* developed by the group with an individual outside of the community

Figure 9: Discord® exchange and example of practice.
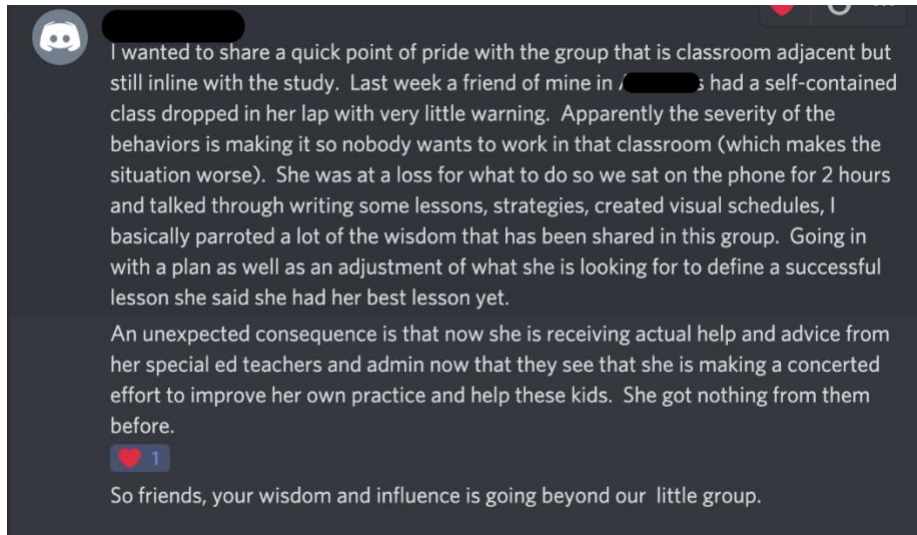
In a CoP, taking what is learned through sharing lived experiences also should be enacted within the CoP members' work. In many meetings participants shared how they were practicing developed *meaning* in their classrooms.

> *Maude: Guys, I wanted to tell you, I, from our last conversation, I had this one child*
>
> *come in and... he just went through each box and took out an instrument and tried it and I*
>
> *just was at another part of the room and saying. "Oh wow, that's a cool instrument. Try it*
>
> *this way." And I let him explore all the instruments and I was like, gee, I'm really not*
>
> *earning my pay here cause I'm really not doing anything. He's just looking. But then I*
>
> *thought, wait a minute. In Rachel's group we were saying that they* [the students with
>
> disabilities] *need more time to explore, so I'm going to give it to them. So, you guys, I*
>
> *have to thank you for that idea. I felt OK that, that my teaching didn't totally suck that*
>
> *day because I was letting him explore and you guys said it was OK.* (CoP, meeting three)

Another example of *practice* was shared earlier in the section: understanding roles, expertise, and communication. Dre shared his visual schedule with the group. While Dre had always had a written schedule for each class, he did not start using visual schedules until participants engaged in a discussion centered on ways to encourage more engagement from students with disabilities. "The community of practice has had some influence on Dre. I saw the use of a visual schedule and repetition which were discussed in the previous community of practice" (researcher journal, November 26th). The engagement of participants in *practice* not only builds a *community* of individuals spurred to action, *practice*, *community*, and *meaning* also influence the development of participant *identity* within a community of practice.

Identity of Individuals within a Community of Practice

Identity within a CoP is an outcome of *community*, *practice*, and *meaning*. In a community of practice *identity* is understanding one's self and who we are in relation to others in the community. Individuals in a CoP develop their *identity* over time; they "become" through the context of the community. Participants in this community moved into specific roles over the course of the study. Some individuals were affirmers, one a reflector, a few the comic relief, and all took the mantle of more knowledgeable other. *Identity*, in a CoP, may be fluid amongst participants. Most participant teacher identities were either affirmed or a small shift in praxis was observed as an outcome of the community. Participant *identities* were described in detail in Chapter Four and therefore will only be briefly summarized below.

SEP participants experienced the biggest shifts to their *identities*. This was a result of SEP participants finding their voices due to having their knowledge and experience valued by music educator participants. SEPs shared many roles within the community. The largest role paraprofessionals held was that of the "more knowledgeable other." The more knowledgeable

other gives meaning to what is shared and guides those around them in understanding through their expertise. While music educators were the experts in music education, SEPs were the experts in working with students with disabilities. Sometimes this centered on instructional strategies, and other times their conversations helped other participants more fully understand the students whom they teach. Ash was the most vocal in sharing their beliefs or in wanting to assist group members with developing and/or adapting instructional strategies. Sarah, the most soft-spoken of the SEPs, anchored the group through her compassion, empathy, and wealth of knowledge. Gloria was intentional and thoughtful in her contributions to the group. Overall, SEP participants were fluid in sharing the role of more knowledgeable other, and Gloria and Sarah that of the comic relief. Sarah was the only participant to demonstrate the identity of "anchor."

Music educator identity within the group was not as fluid as that of the SEPs. While the SEPs in the community shared many roles, Maude and Noelle developed a specific *identity* that remained constant over the course of the study. Maude was a self-described affirmer, and Noelle was the reflector. Dre was the exception, as he moved between the role of comic relief and more knowledgeable other. While each music educator participant did share their expertise and, therefore, identified as the more knowledgeable other, that mantle was mostly shared between Dre and the SEPs.

The *identity* that each participant developed within the CoP was defined in relation to those within the group. Music educators were eager to learn from the SEPs and the SEPs were eager to have their knowledge and expertise valued. All participants needed a place to vocalize their frustrations and concerns but in a space that viewed these discussions as venting and problematizing rather than complaining. Due to *identities* such as affirmer, reflector, comic relief, and more knowledgeable other, that space was realized, and *meaning* and *practice* were

developed. Participants also needed a space where they felt seen and valued. Through

participation in a CoP, participants were able to take on roles and receive the value and

validation not available to them within their school environment.

Chapter Summary

In this Chapter, I have outlined how a CoP emerged between participants by reviewing

the four tenets of a CoP. Participants engaged in *community* by pursuing the common interest

(domain) of teaching students with disabilities. Through weekly check-ins and use of Discord®

participants began to build relationships with one another and as an extension, began to value the

contributions of individual group members. Shared repertoire also was developed as a result of

community. Participants sitting in a circular formation symbolized an abolishment of the

hierarchy community members found themselves to be in where they worked. Sharing food at

each in-person meeting and the community mantra, "behavior is communication," also are

examples of the shared repertoire developed by participants.

Meaning was developed through the mutual engagement of shared experiences. As a

result, participants more fully understood the students with disabilities whom they taught as well

as their collaborative roles. As participants created new *meaning* through community discourse

reified objects resulted. These reified objects, such as visual schedules, communication charts,

paraprofessional communication letters, community discourse, etc., were shared within the

community and outside either through Discord® or with colleagues in the schools in which they

worked. Participating in *practice* not only allowed for the development of new *meaning*, but

offered participants support structures and validation in ways that the school environment could

not provide. Finally, through *community*, developed *meaning*, and *practice*, participants

"became" in relation to community members and their shared lived experiences. As such,

participants shared roles (*identity*) within the CoP.

CHAPTER SIX: "YOU'RE THE EXPERT IN THE CHILD, I'M THE EXPERT IN THE DRUM!" THE IMPACT OF A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE ON COLLABORATION AND PERCEPTIONS

A community of practice (CoP) emerges when individuals come together over a shared interest or problem. Within these communities, individuals mutually engage in joint enterprise by sharing lived experiences in order to develop new *meaning* towards understanding their shared interests more fully. As a result of these exchanges, reified objects are developed and individuals practice *meaning* outside of, as well as within, the community. Individuals also experience shifts in their *identity* as they relate to other community members and what they have learned through the social exchange of knowledge. Participants in this CoP developed a large body of reified objects that were practiced within and outside of the community. Participants also experienced shifts in their *identity* as they actively collaborated in meaningful ways not available to them within their school environments. Three themes emerged that related to the effect of participating in the community: *Learning to Value Other's Perspectives*, *Collaboration Increases Communication with Colleagues*, and *Development of Instructional Strategies*. In this chapter, I will discuss each theme and offer interpretation of findings through support of the literature reviewed.

Learning to Value Other's Perspectives and Feeling Valued

In initial interviews, music educator participants expressed a desire to understand more fully their special education paraprofessional (SEPs) colleagues, and SEP participants hoped to understand more fully the instructional decisions made by music educators. During exit interviews all participants stated that the biggest impact of participating in the community of practice was a change in their own perceptions of their colleagues, and, for some, their students. The CoP facilitated a space where these individuals could feel valued in a way not made available in participant school environments.

Perceptions of Paraprofessionals

Ash, Gloria, and Sarah all have worked in an elementary music classroom; however, they lacked opportunities to learn what it is their music colleagues do or how to help them. SEP participants lacked planning time with their music educator colleagues and often had to adjust "on the fly" (Ash, initial interview) for the students they teach. Each SEP desired to understand the music educators with whom they work and the reasons behind their instructional decisions. Ash wanted to know what influenced the how and why of what they teach.

> *Ash: I guess I wish I knew more about like their philosophy of teaching music to kids.*
> *Like how curriculum is developed and why is this where you are at with first graders or*
> *second? Why do you choose what to teach?* (initial interview)

Sarah was more interested in what music educators were thinking in regard to her role in the classroom.

> *Sarah: I want to know what they're* [music educators] *thinking and what they want us to*
> *do better because we don't have the time to talk with them as much as we should. So, it'd*
> *be nice to talk to other music teachers and find out like what they're thinking.* (initial
> interview)

Gloria also wanted to know more about what music educators do.

> *Gloria: I think I would like to better understand the teacher's perspective on paras in the*
> *classroom with these kids. Understanding their* [music educators] *perspective and how*
> *they see us and maybe. . .understanding* [what] *big questions that they have about that*
> *population* [students with disabilities] *and having that population in their classroom.*
> (initial interview)

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Throughout participation in the CoP, SEPs began to understand what it is music educators do and found a sense of acceptance that lessened their frustration with feeling like they were at the bottom of the hierarchy within their school environments.

SEP participants expressed a change in their perceptions of the music educators with whom they worked as a result of their participation in the CoP.

> *Sarah: But it was nice to see* [the video and music teachers] *and talk through what they were doing. . .so that I can kind of be like, "okay, I bet when she's doing this* [the music teacher she works with], *she's wants the kids to do this." I have a little more knowledge about being a music teacher.* (exit interview)

Gloria spoke to a specific incidence during which she felt her perception had changed in understanding how some music educators may view students with disabilities.

> *Gloria: I really very much appreciated one of the teachers. . .talking about what it's like when you're preparing for musical events. I was sharing about our student not being able to participate in choir because it was a very serious choir teacher, not in our district, in another district that wouldn't allow the special needs kid or preferred the special needs kid not be in there. . .when they were preparing for all of these competitions. That was really helpful for me to understand why a music educator might feel that way. Right, wrong, or indifferent, but to understand where that comes from because the perception is a bias and a judgment against a child who's in the world a little differently. And that might be there* [the bias], *but there's also potentially pressures that that person* [music educator] *feels and they end up not knowing how to incorporate a child with special needs into something like that* [festival]. (exit interview)

Gloria expanded, noting that deepening her understanding of music educators forced her to consider her own biases.

> *Gloria: . . .I started looking at things differently, seeing if I had any bias. Sometimes you get locked in your way of thinking or just pattern of doing things you know? And pausing to realize that maybe they* [the teacher] *are not able to or maybe they are able but just don't have the insight to know how to work with those I teach. I also think I started paying more attention to the way some of the educators received my students, and I tried to use some of the insight from the music educators in our group to see if I could understand them better.* (exit interview)

Ash's shift in perception was more related to what they needed to do as a SEP in a music setting.

> *Ash: I do feel like I have upped my game in terms of* [pauses] *conscious awareness on a daily basis in the classroom since we started this* [study]. *. . there's this perception that paraprofessionals don't really give a crap and they're just on their phone all the time. I tend to be the kind of person that's like, 'Oh Whoa, I'll show you! . . . hearing that there are people that have this perception of. . .*[paraprofessionals] *that they're not engaged has like kind of made me be as engaged as possible in the music classroom.* (exit interview)

Ash hoped to change the negative perceptions of SEPs by being the best SEP they could be.

Abolishing the hierarchy. Overwhelmingly, SEP participants felt as if they were equals within the CoP. During each exit interview, SEPs expressed joy about the level of acceptance they experienced from the music educators within the CoP, which was central to establishing the feeling of community and changing the perceptions participants had of one another. Gloria expressed her appreciation of how music educators engaged in the community. "There was no pretense. What was shared was heartfelt genuine experiences and insights. There was no

bravado. . .everybody was just very real and humble" (exit interview). Ash felt that music educators respected the SEP participants and treated them as equals.

> Ash: There are teachers that sort of ignore paras, teachers that look down to paras. Teachers are nice to them, but there's not a lot [of teachers] that are like, 'Oh, we're all equal'. You know what I mean? And I definitely felt that our community was a meeting of equals rather than like I'm subordinate to somebody because I don't have the exact same degree as them. (exit interview)

Sarah felt seen as more than "just a para," which is how she views herself in her school environment.

> Sarah: I feel like we were pretty equal, but we were all different. . .I didn't feel like, I sometimes do, "I'm just a parapro." I didn't feel like that. . .I felt like I was respected. . . .
> I felt like I was equal to everybody and you guys respected me. (exit interview)

SEP participants felt valued, knowledgeable, and were able to more fully understand the music educator and their role in the music classroom as a result of participating in the CoP.

SEPs' understanding the perceptions of the music educators with whom they work was complicated. When Gloria shared that she understood why the music educator did not allow her student to participate in festival, she was not stating that she agreed that students with disabilities should not participate in these activities. Gloria was sharing that whether the music teacher was right or wrong to exclude the student, there may have been outside pressures on them for high student achievement of which she was unaware. Previous to this study, due to the hierarchy that she felt she was in, Gloria did not feel comfortable speaking to teachers regarding her students. Participation in this study provided Gloria with an understanding that the music educator may

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not have known how to include the student in a meaningful way and may have increased Gloria's confidence that she had expertise to share.

Perceptions of Music Educators

Similarly, music educators did not have time at their school to collaborate with the SEPs with whom they work. As such, music educator participants desired to understand how SEPs do their jobs and to learn from the knowledge SEPs have as a result of working regularly with students with disabilities. Maude came into the study with an appreciation of the patience demonstrated by many SEPs and recognized the influence SEPs have. "Sometimes they can get kids to do stuff that I can't. I just don't know how they do that, and I want to" (initial interview). Dre was more direct in stating what he wanted to understand. "I want to know what they do. . . because it's not necessarily a degreed program to get that job" (initial interview).

By the end of the study, most music educator participants expressed a change in perceptions of their SEP colleagues as a result of participating in the CoP. During exit interviews, music educators were asked if they felt their instructional practices changed as a result of engaging in the community. Dre and Noelle stated that, while instructional practices were influenced by the CoP, it was their perceptions of SEPs that were impacted the most.

> *Noelle: I feel like my teacher self was more enriched than my instructional practice. Does that make sense?*
>
> *Rachel: Can you tell me more about that?*
>
> *Noelle: I feel like mostly, that there's a sense of adding to my educational empathy, if that makes sense.* [For example] *I was really frustrated with the paraprofessional that I work with because she would sit there and text on her phone and it drove me nuts because D---- would just be all over the classroom, which you've seen. . .I very much felt like she*

wasn't doing her job. But in talking with the paraprofessionals in this group, what I'm

realizing is that she probably has a plan and that there is a method to the madness and I

need to more so trust the process and let it go and trust that she is doing what's ultimately

best for D---- because she spends all day with him. As annoying as it is to have him

running around my classroom, I know that that's part of his learning process. And I know

that her not engaging with him is also part of the learning process. Again, I have more of

an educational empathy towards that and more trust in the [SEP] *process.* (exit

interview)

Dre had a similar experience to Noelle.

Dre: The biggest thing that came out of it [the community] *was an adjustment of mindset.*

. .In talking to Gloria, Ash, and Sarah, "Oh this is, this is what you were looking for, for

that child? I can bring that in here! Oh, you use these visuals for a reason, not just so I

don't have to yell." It was really helpful to get that from them [the SEPs] *. . .It's also*

more of an understanding of what the paras are doing throughout the day and

understanding where they're coming from. They have a lot of knowledge and

understanding what their job really is. . .like I said in the community meetings: they know

the kid and I know the drum. (exit interview)

The CoP shifted Dre's perspective, not in how he viewed SEPs but in how he valued their

contributions to his classroom. When SEPs would offer advice, Dre stated that sometimes his

response "*came out sounding like a jerk*" (exit interview). Dre shifted from seeing SEP input as

"not [from] a degreed program," (initial interview) to recognizing SEP input as being seeped in

"knowledge and experienced" (exit interview). In addition to experiencing a change in his

perception of SEP contributions, Dre's mindset towards his students also changed.

Dre: . . .viewing them [students] *from their* [SEP] *perspective. . . it's made me aware of a lot of things. I have no diagnosis, but I have sensory issues as well. . .I am an introvert and I have this synesthesia issue that bugs me. This group has helped me see that every kid brings something with them to the classroom and that variability is more common than anticipated.* (exit interview)

Noelle expressed something similar when she mentioned her "educational empathy."

It's been cool to get the perspective of paraprofessionals because I don't necessarily sit down and talk about teaching with paraprofessionals on a daily basis. They bring a completely different perspective, to the kids. Which I think is really helpful. (exit interview)

It was unclear if Maude's perception of SEPs changed due to participating in the CoP. When asked if participation in the CoP helped her interact with SEPs, she responded:

Maude: Maybe some. I want to say yes. . .It just made me more aware. I try to connect a little more with the paras when they come in. I don't really want to use them. I don't really need them because I want to give them a break. . .I deal with the kids, it's my job. But our paraprofessionals [in the CoP] *they talked about wanting more communication. I want to try to do that. I talk to my paraprofessionals all the time, but it's usually not about kids. I try to talk about personal stuff or when they come in or how's it going or just whatever.* (exit interview)

I rephrased the question and asked if the community helped her understand SEPs more fully.

Maude: I think it just brought to light more that they really struggle. They really struggle feeling part of the class and part of the community. They struggle feeling part of the staff

because I think if they have one or two teachers that look down on them, then that kind of

wrecks it for all. (exit interview)

Music educators' understanding of the perceptions of the SEPs with whom they work also was complicated. Noelle initially struggled with understanding why the SEP with whom she worked allowed their student to roam while they engaged with their phone. Noelle's stating that she now trusted the SEP with whom she worked was not an acceptance of the SEP remaining on the phone the entire class. Rather, Noelle developed an "educational empathy" toward her colleague through participating in conversations with SEP participants. Noelle realized that her SEP colleague may receive no break during their day. As such, she trusts that, if the SEP is on their phone, their student does not need support at the moment and that the SEP will jump in to support instruction when their student needs it. As Ash stated, "If the student is engaged, I may take a moment or two to check my phone for a mental break" (observation two).

Maude struggled with how to implement the knowledge gained from the CoP. Maude, knowing SEPs did not receive a break during the day, wanted to support them by not using them in the music setting. At the same time Maude recognized that the SEPs were the experts in those students with disabilities and that their knowledge could inform her instructional practices. In the end, it seemed that Maude erred on the side of providing SEPs with a break during music rather than inviting them to engage during class. Through participation in the CoP, music educator participants gained insight into the SEP experience. This insight allowed music educators to appreciate more fully the role SEPs play in the music classroom.

Collaboration and Communication

As outlined in previous chapters, participation in the CoP allowed participants a space to engage in *practice* in ways that were not available to them within their school environments. SEP

and music educator participants were able to collaborate for the benefit of their instructional practice, and through the sharing of lived experiences, gained a deeper understanding of one another. Participants also felt that the meaningful relationships they developed with community members enhanced how they viewed themselves and their value outside of the community.

A remedy for isolation. Music educator participants felt the CoP alleviated their feelings of professional isolation. Dre and Noelle described the importance of the CoP in giving them a space to feel seen. In their exit interviews I asked what they found the most enjoyable about the CoP. Noelle described her appreciation for having a space to simply sit and chat.

> *Noelle: My job as a music educator is very isolating. . .There's just* [this] *sort of a latent misunderstanding of what a music educator does on a daily basis… And so, to just sort of sit and chat and share experiences, there's something deeply human about that and that's something that pulls you out of that isolation of being the only person that does what you do and understands what you do.* (exit interview)

Dre also described feeling isolated and appreciated being in a space with individuals who appreciated his level of "nerdiness."

> *Dre: . . . I like that I get to actually communicate with other people who do the same thing that I do. You get to do the same thing and I get to be the nerdy person who I really am. I got to be that nerdy person who I am and share with other people who are also nerdy peoples.* (exit interview)

Maude also expressed that she "love[d] meeting the people" (exit interview).

Valuing knowledge and experience increases self-esteem. In the initial interviews, SEP participants shared they wished to be seen as knowledgeable and valuable members of their educational communities. In her initial interview Gloria stated, "my hope is that in some way I

can. . .increase understanding. . .help people appreciate the value of paraprofessionals" (initial interview). Sarah has always wanted her career experience valued by others, saying "I would like to share my experience. . .so that they can use it to help their kids" (initial interview). Ash felt similarly, "[I] want to be seen as someone who is capable of providing, wisdom and knowledge. Cause I think sometimes the assumption is that we aren't capable of providing that" (initial interview).

SEP participants shared that, through participation in the CoP, they found a confidence in their position that they had not previously had. Their sense of value and purpose, as SEPs, were renewed. Ash expressed a newfound self-esteem within their role as a SEP.

> *Ash: It* [the community of practice] *has given me a much deeper sense of my value in the classroom. . . I just feel like I have more like confidence. . . But now I'm like, 'Oh, actually I do know what I'm doing' and there's no reason for me to like sort of like hide in corners or be invisible or like sort of like placate to other people.* (exit interview)

As a result of participating in this study, Gloria felt her own purpose renewed and valued within this profession.

> *Gloria: This group has been amazingly helpful. It really has. . . being reminded that there are teachers out there that actually get it and care and are interested in bridging and respecting each other. . .it's refreshing for me. . .Thank you for having me be a part of this project.* (CoP, meeting seven)

Gloria also shared that this study gave her the confidence to speak up for her role with other educators in the building in which she worked. "I was able to have a conversation about things that I don't know that I would have without the study. . .[conversations] centered around. . .students' ability to engage and it not looking like every other students' engagement (exit

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interview). In her exit interview Sarah stated she began to feel that her experience was valued. "I liked putting my experience [out there], you know, helping other people. It felt great" (exit interview). SEP participants felt they could speak more openly to the teachers with whom they worked in order to advocate for the needs of their students. Through participation in the CoP, SEP participants also found a confidence in their position that they had not previously had due to their knowledge and experiences being valued. (Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer 2001; Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Marks, Schrader, & Levine, 1999).

Music educators did not express feeling undervalued in their initial interviews but rather they articulated a lack of confidence in teaching the students with disabilities in their classes. "Strategies are a big thing for me with the population I have, those are the difficulties, I need something that work[s]" (Dre, initial interview). Noelle too, wanted strategies. "I'd love to like just develop stronger strategies for implementing IEPs in music classrooms" (initial interview). Maude did not express a need for strategies but rather a desire to, "meet the other teachers, and see what I can learn" (initial interview).

Dre felt that participation in the CoP gave him a sense of confidence in his teaching that he had not had.

> *Dre: It was helpful* [because] *I had a bit of an imposter syndrome in the special education classroom before. That has gone away a bit because it seemed like, okay, this is what I think, these are strategies the paras are sharing and, oh! I'm doing some of those! Or, I can easily apply those in my classroom. I'm to the point where I'm kind of seen, by some friends, as more of an expert in that area* [teaching music to students with disabilities].
> (exit interview)

While not all music educator participants stated that the community instilled in them a sense of renewed value or confidence in their teaching, it did offer Maude a space for affirmation. "Just the sharing of ideas and the heart. Each of those people had such heart for what they did. And I just like[d] listening to their stories because it gave me some affirmation for what I do" (Maude, exit interview).

For Noelle, she felt she received what she came for, "I just feel like I have more colors [strategies] in my crayon box, if that makes sense" (exit interview). Having more confidence in working with students with disabilities as well as the impact that the CoP had on most participants manifested in the observations that took place across the duration of the study.

Increased Communication

I observed music educator and SEP participants in their classrooms across the duration of the study. I expected that I would see specific outcomes from the CoP employed in the instruction of participants. While most participants did employ instructional strategies, the CoP did not impact participant instructional practices as much as I anticipated. What was most impacted were the collaborative practices of participants, which was made evident in classroom observations and supported by data from exit interviews.

At the beginning of the study, Noelle mentioned frustration with the SEP with whom she worked, allowing one of the students to run around the room while she taught. Noelle did not understand why the SEP was not engaging the student and expressed her frustration in our second group meeting (see Chapter Five). Noelle's observation took place after the last group meeting. During the observation, the same student she mentioned in the meetings continued to move around the room during her instruction. However, Noelle was not visibly frustrated, nor did she engage with the student as she stated that she had previously. Noelle shared, "I'm trying

to trust that the para knows what is best for D---- and include that in my instruction" (exit interview). I observed that the SEP was more engaged with the student than previously described by Noelle. While the student was still given space to move, the SEP was not on their phone as much and more active in helping the student move in a way that did not inhibit his or others' learning. When I later asked Noelle if she had a conversation with the SEP she stated, "Not super formal, just in friendly conversation" (text communication, March 9th).

In Dre's first observation, the SEPs, while included in the room, did not interact with Dre during instruction. "Met the students at the door but SEPs were not engaged in the lesson" (Dre, observation one, November 25th). Dre stated that he has always worked to have a positive relationship with the SEPs with whom he works. As Dre stated earlier, "I tried to have coffee time with the para-pros and the lead special ed teacher or team lead" (CoP, meeting three). Yet, across the duration of the study, Dre stated that he was working to include SEPs more in classroom conversation as a result of the study.

> [before the study] *a para tried to offer me a suggestion, she wasn't there when I gave the direction to the kids. . .She said, well what if we did this.* [I thought] *how do I phrase this and not seem like a jerk? It came out sounding like a jerk. Cause I went* [Dre gestures/makes a face]. *And so, understanding where* [SEPs] *are coming from, like they have a lot of knowledge and understanding and that is important.* (exit interview)

This shift in understanding was apparent in his second observation. "K---- comes in late. Other students work in small groups as Dre speaks to paraprofessional who brought K----. K---- is given a recorder and preferred friend group per para suggestion" (Dre, observation two, January 9th). As Dre said in an email, following his exit interview, "I think that the paraprofessional's

expertise and perspectives were jumping off points for the majority of the strategies that I personally developed and implemented during and after the study" (email, March 3rd).

Maude was the only music educator for whom I did not observe changes in her collaborative practices. In both observations, Maude did not engage with the SEPs in the room. In the first observation, I observed SEPs trying to assist. "The para goes over to help the student hold the tambourine as he plays. This was not initiated by Maude" (Maude, observation one, December 3rd). In her second observation the SEPs did not engage in the lesson at all. "Maude goes to each child showing them how to twist the cabasa, she does not ask the paraprofessionals to assist with this and none get up to try" (observation two, January 9th). As stated earlier, Maude not engaging with the SEPs with whom she works may be the result of SEP participants stating that they received no break during their workday. By not engaging with the SEPs, Maude could be offering what she sees as a well-deserved rest. As Maude stated earlier, "I try to connect a little more with the paras when they come in. I don't really want to use them" (exit interview).

SEPs also demonstrated changes in their collaborative relationships. During initial interviews SEPs wanted to communicate more with the music educators with whom they work. As stated earlier, SEP participants felt their participation in this study increased their self-esteem to reach out to these professionals in ways they had not before. This manifested in the observations I did with them. In the first observation of Sarah, the music educator did not engage with the student Sarah brought to the music room.

> *The teacher is walking around with a cut-out snowflake asking students to echo her pattern. I wonder if G--- will get a turn? Sarah engages with another student who is not following directions and returns to G--- but does not engage with the teacher. The*

snowflake activity is over. The student directly next to G--- received a turn and G--- did

not. (Sarah, observation one, November 26th)

During Sarah's second observation, she engaged more with the music teacher and encouraged the music teacher to engage more with the student she teaches. "X----- stands with the class as they are singing patterns. Sarah stands with him. X----- begins vocalizing. Sarah motions to the teacher. After a few more students the teacher hands X----- the microphone where he vocalizes his 'pattern'" (Sarah, observation two, January 10th). In the first observation Sarah was not a part of the classroom instruction, she was solely engaged with the student with whom she works; however, by the end of the study Sarah showed a willingness to engage with the music educator during instruction to advocate for the students with whom she works.

Ash was observed in two different settings because their students were not enrolled in music until the second semester. The first observation was in P.E. and, while the teacher engaged with Ash, she did not engage with the student Ash brought to the gym; however, Ash already had an established relationship with the P.E. teacher. "The gym teacher is super cool to me and we have nice side conversations even about stuff not school related" (CoP, meeting three). The second observation was in the art room "A--- has a real sort of contentious relationship with the art teacher" (Ash, CoP, meeting five).

The art teacher goes to A--- and tries to engage with him. A--- is twirling his paper clip,

ignoring her. The art teacher sits for a moment beside another student. Ash talks to the

art teacher. She talks to Ash, then A---, then she walks away. Just a quick engagement

with A---. (observation two, January 15th)

The teacher's engagement was small and initiated by Ash. I asked Gloria, who was also in the art room working with a separate student, if the art teacher usually interacts with A---. She

answered, "We have been talking more to her. Today is the first time she has interacted with A---" (observation two, January 15th). While the collaboration was not reciprocal, Ash did initiate with the art teacher as a result of conversations between community members: "If we model the behavior we want to be given, maybe they will reciprocate" (Sarah, CoP, meeting three).

Changes in collaborative practices were a result of participation in the CoP. Participants found value in community members and their shared experiences. As such, shifts in *identity* and perceptions of participant roles within the CoP impacted those with whom they work outside of the community, as will be further demonstrated in the following.

Development of Instructional Strategies

Participation in *practice* within the community resulted in the development of instructional strategies and materials for the music classroom. These strategies and materials, discussed in or physically brought to meetings, became the reified objects of the CoP. Most music educator participants brought these strategies and materials into their instructional practices. SEP participants either shared them with the music educators with whom they worked or adapted them for other classes (e.g., art). Instructional strategies fell into a few categories: assistive devices, social emotional learning, and visual schedules and modeling.

Assistive devices. Manipulatives or assistive materials to support student learning were an important point of discussion among participants. These included suggestions for instrumental activities, adapting instruction for specific students, and materials that could be beneficial for all student learning. For some students with disabilities, manipulating an instrument such as a recorder can be difficult without invasive assistance. Participants in this community suggested two assistive devices that could prove beneficial to participants. In this discussion Ash shared

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what another student created and shared in the music class in which they worked in a previous placement.

> *Ash: So last year, the music teacher's son used one of those things called a Makey Makey. So, he made this little like sort of. . .like a keyboard basically, but it had all these different colored buttons and then he recorded, he made little recordings of himself playing the ukulele. Then we made like a color coded, like musical notation for the kids. All they had to* [was] *see that color and then push the colored button to make the notes. So that was pretty cool.* (CoP, meeting five)

While no music teachers have used this yet in their classrooms, Noelle was intrigued by the idea of it, "Oh that is cool!" (CoP, meeting five). A Makey-Makey is a device that hooks into a computer and can be attached to various objects that when tapped can create sound. In the picture below, a student has coded each color wire to play a note that corresponds to that on the piano on the computer. In this instance, a student who does not possess the fine motor skills or finger strength necessary to push down on piano keys need only to tap the banana with that color wire in order to produce the desired sound.

Figure 10: A picture of a Makey-Makey.
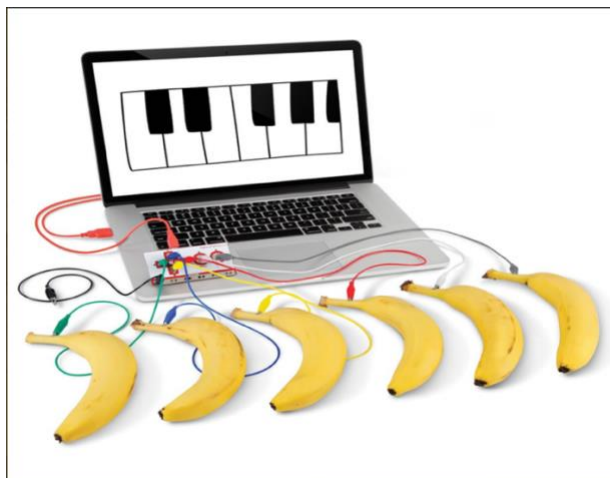
The second assistive device suggested was brought up by Noelle in response to a video recording of mine that she had watched on Facebook. I had recently posted a video of a device called Specdrum® on a music educator page as a way for teachers to allow students to respond to imitation, decoding, or creating patterns. When Ash had mentioned the Makey-Makey, as detailed above, I responded:

Rachel: Hmm. Makey-Makey sounds super awesome! I have not interfaced with them yet. I have used the Specdrum though.

Noelle: I went and watched that video you made about Specdrum®!

Rachel: Oh yeah?

Ash: What is Specdrum®?

Rachel: Specdrum® are two little Bluetooth sensory things that can go on fingers or on drumsticks or it could clip to a nose if that's all a child had or toes. And you coordinate the color on the pad with a device an iPhone, iPad and it can be any sound. . .And the child just associates the pitch with the color and can play. So, a child who maybe doesn't have the muscle control or dexterity but can play by tapping can use this. They're still, you know, playing the recorder. . .it's like $99, and adaptive technology is usually ridiculously expensive, like hundreds of dollars. One big Mac switch, for one pitch is like $80. Whereas this could have multiple notes, multiple recordings, you can even do voice. So, I can sing and record for each color. So, a student who is selective mute or only aural verbal could press to sing and respond. (CoP, meeting five)

Figure 11: The device Specdrum® may be seen below.

In the photo above there are two Bluetooth rings. These rings connect to the phone and the corresponding colors in the app can be programed to create any instrument or vocal sound.

Sarah suggested using another assistive device that has been around for years, a label maker. She has a student who is unable to write but knows their letters and can type. Dre mentioned that he had a student who was struggling with writing rhythm syllables and she shared how she uses the label maker.

> *Rachel: Can you explain the using a label maker?*
>
> *Sarah: We have a P-touch* [that's] *the brand name. We have students, it's easier for younger because their worksheets are like one-word answers or that kind of thing. But they* [the students] *type because they can't. . .write anything legible that anybody can read but maybe us.*
>
> *Rachel: But they know their letters, so they type it in the label maker?*
>
> *Sarah: Yeah. And then they print it and then stick it [on the worksheet]*
>
> *Noelle: Oh, I love that. That so cool!*
>
> *Sarah: For kids that can't write. . .what's the objective? Is it to get the answers right or to write? It is not really to write unless it's writing.* (CoP, meeting eight)

Using a label maker, or something similar allows students to respond to written activities in music in a way that meets their needs and allows a different means of representing what they know. Dre took Sarah's suggestion to the next level.

> *I made wooden cubes with vinyl quarter notes and eighth notes in duple and triple groupings.* [This way] *kids can organize the blocks to create original notational patterns, decode familiar patterns, and decode unfamiliar patterns. I've had kids use them for rote writing activities too.* (exit interview)

Dre shared that he was teaching a ukulele unit and noticed that several of those he teaches were struggling with finger positioning. Dre was seeking funds to purchase 30 chord buddies for those he teaches, but at the time he was unable to find funds for them. Below is a picture of the device that Dre wanted for those he teaches.

Figure 12: An example of a chord buddy for ukulele.

> *Dre:* [the SEP] *was saying he struggles to do this* [play ukulele] *because of his seizures and some brain damage. . .and then she was like, this kid has other motor issues too. . .I could also use that* [chord buddy] *for the kids who just really struggle with that*

processing, who aren't necessarily in that program but who could benefit from that

intermediate step of 'when it says F I push F. (CoP, meeting six)

Using the chord buddy, as shown in the picture, would allow all students access to an instrument that without assistance requires a significant about of muscle strength and finger dexterity.

Although participants discussed these assistive devices as a result of a student with disabilities whom they teach, participants also made the connection that these devices could support the learning of any student. "A lot of what we talked about is just best practices. It does have a transference to all populations" (Noelle, exit interview). After the study ended, Dre was inspired to continue to seek funding for the chord buddy.

We had some leftover funding from a bond that I was able to snag! I was originally going

to put it to the "student lighthouse committee" to do a fundraiser, but they were booked

for the year. (Dre, text communication, March 7th)

Currently the other assistive devices are not being employed in classrooms of the participants, as they are in need of funding to bring these reified objects into the classroom. However, Ash stated that they are using Garageband in place of Makey-Makey for one of the students' they support in the music classroom. "He disrupted the choir class wanting to play piano and I was thinking of the Makey-Makey. I recently discovered his "talker" has Garageband, so I suggested that" (Ash, text communication, March 4th)

Social emotional learning strategies. At times students can become overwhelmed in new situations or when engaging in social situations. As requested by participants, I brought my knowledge of IEPs to a meeting to inform the discussion on how to interpret IEPs in the music setting. In this context, I shared my son's IEP with the community to use it as a springboard for discussion. One of the strategies listed in my son's IEP was social stories to help with transitions

or unexpected social situations. Within the community discussion, Dre made the suggestion of using social stories for classroom management and participatory behaviors.

> *Dre: The biggest difficulty that I have with students would be turn-taking and feeling slighted. If someone ends up slighted or. . .they ended up in the back of the line instead of the front of the line. I like that idea* [using social stories]. *I think it's an interesting point to bring up because I hadn't thought about. . .using social stories* [to help with behaviors].

> *Noelle: Yeah, I think we need to teach emotional management just as rigorously as we teach content. I think all of our kids would benefit from the teacher modeling "If I don't get picked, what are some things that I can do? How can I manage my emotions? How can I still be a productive member of the classroom?" What do those strategies look like? . . . it takes 30 seconds as you're giving instructions for the activity to drop that in* [the social story] *you would be in compliance with the IEP but also help the* [other] *kids out who need that support. I would imagine. . .it's not just one kid that's going to need support in being participatory and managing that emotion of not getting picked first or not getting a turn or being able to wait until it is my turn.* (CoP, meeting two)

Noelle believed that what worked for a student with disabilities also could work for any student in the classroom. As she earlier stated, "It [an instructional strategy] does have a transference to all populations" (Noelle, exit interview).

Visuals, modeling, and repetition. The largest contribution to instructional strategies came from the SEPs and their suggestion of using visuals for those students with disabilities. Many reified objects came out of the visual tools shared with the community by SEPs. Below is

an example of a visual schedule shared by the SEPs. The green shows what there is to do, and

tasks are moved from the green to the red when they are completed.

Figure 13: Example of a visual schedule shared by paraprofessional participants.
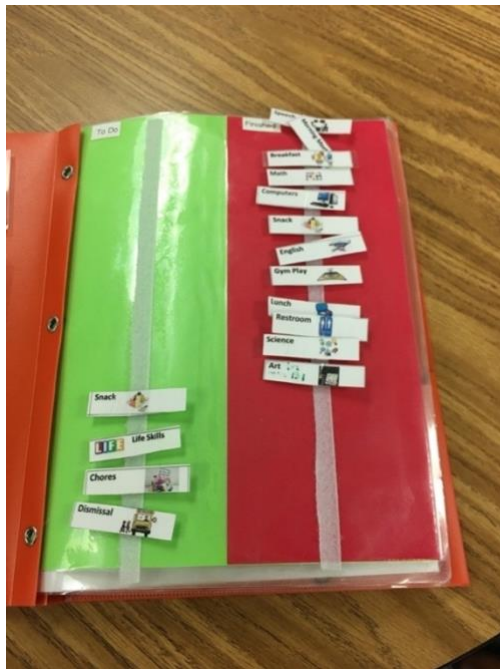
"I tend to put up a large schedule on the overhead slide. I'm going to start incorporating more

visuals into that, based on this conversation" (Dre, CoP, meeting three). Gloria also suggested a

visual schedule to help students break down each task (i.e., dancing, movement, instruments).

> *Gloria: Within your music class you do five different activities, right? But the one activity*
>
> *has three parts, then you could break it down and have like a mini schedule* [of your
>
> schedule]. *So, you'd have the visuals for what's happening, if you've got five things*
>
> *happening, but let's say. . .they have to get out instruments, they have to wait for*
>
> *direction, then they play, and then they clean up or something. Then you could create*
>
> *visuals for that as well.* (CoP, meeting three)

Figure 14: An example of a mini schedule as described by Gloria.

Dre responded to Gloria's suggestion, "I could go into sequence and add individuals because that is such a controlled/regular approach [referring to the eight-part workout in First Steps.]" (CoP, meeting three). First Steps in Music is an eight-part musical "workout" developed by Dr. John Feierabend and is designed to be used with Pre-K to second grade students. This "workout" provides activities and games for children to develop their ability to think, hear, and sing in tune, feel the beat and understand beat divisions, as well as develop the ability to express music through movement, all of which is learned through play. Sarah followed up with why these visuals can support more than instruction:

> . . .if you're really having trouble. . .use visuals when you say, "we are going to sit, we're going to have our eyes on teacher, [and] hands to self." Sometimes the kids don't know what your expectations are, or they just need to be reminded. (CoP, meeting three)

I added to Gloria's suggestion of a mini-schedule by suggesting using visuals of songs as a way for students who are selective mute or only aural-verbal to participate in echo singing or solo singing.

> *Rachel: Dre, . . .I know that you said you have some* [students] *who are "aural-verbal" or minimally verbal children. I still encourage you to give them the opportunity to echo sing and fragment sing, and* [even do a] *simple song. . .something that I would do is have a visual of say "Charlie Over the Ocean" or a visual of "Frog in the Meadow" and they would tap the picture and follow along as I sang. And if it was time for them to sing a solo, they would tap the corresponding picture. And even though there may not have been any singing from them, they were definitely thinking the song in their head because they were pointing sequentially to the pictures.* (CoP, meeting three)

Figure 15: My visual for "Charlie Over the Ocean".
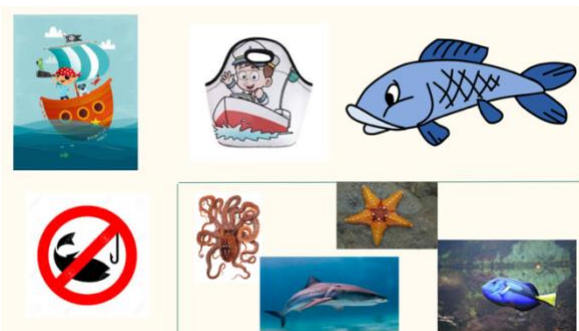
As a result of sharing visual strategies, some music educators began to use visual schedules/visuals for their lessons. As Noelle stated earlier, "I feel like I need to do that [incorporate visual schedules] cause' it would just help everybody" (CoP, meeting four).

In addition to using visuals, SEPs suggested the use of peer and video modeling. Sarah suggested that, in addition to visuals, she has used peer modeling to assist those she teaches with their behaviors. "Another idea I had was to bring in general education peer models into the classroom, maybe two or three, four, even if they're older [students]. . .behavior models [have]

helped us in the past" (CoP, meeting four). To support Sarah's suggestion, Gloria mentioned research she had found in developing the peer to peer program where she works.

> *Gloria: There's a study about the importance of a para on the playground* [Kretzmann, Shih, & Kasari, 2015] *facilitating, not playing with the child. . .but engaging the child with other children and supporting that. How vital that is for kids on the spectrum over time. That shows that social development, social emotional development piece, but it also showed that it increased positive behavior and decreased negative behavior in the classroom. . .because those connections are being made on the playground. So, when you're sitting next to the kid who is going "AH"* [modeling vocalizations] *and your peer says, "hey! shh!" that has way more weight research has shown* [Ledford & Wolrey, 2013] *that has far more value than the para or the teacher saying, be quiet. . .the connection is so important. . . if a peer says, "don't pick your nose!", you're going to stop picking your nose. Even if it's only for a couple of minutes, but if your para does it, you're going to do, this is what you're going to do.* [Gloria models moving a hand back and forth to constantly block the student that is reaching up to pick their nose. Noelle chuckles.]
> (CoP, meeting seven)

In watching Noelle's classroom video, it would seem this advice impacted how she interacted with her student, but this is an assumption made through observation. She allowed the students to redirect the student with a disability, if need be, rather than her always intervening.

Repetition and video modeling also were instructional strategies suggested by community members. Sarah had attended a professional development session and shared with us what she had learned about the importance of repetition in learning, especially for students with autism.

I did a training. . .a parapro training. I think it's either 12 or 15 times, but the ASD

student has to be, and I'm sure it has to do with all kinds of special needs, but [that

student] has to be exposed to something 12 to 15 times for it to really sink in. . .and for

them to really be able to learn something. (CoP, meeting three)

Gloria also suggested that video modeling also is useful for students with disabilities.

Gloria: . . .video modeling, it is a really important piece because of the way that they

learn visually and being able to see things before [they do them] also reduces anxiety. .

.an example that Temple Grandin uses is that you say the word mailbox, you and I pull

up a picture of a mailbox. . .[a student with autism] they pull up every mailbox they have

ever seen in their entire life and they're filtering through, trying to get context. So much is

lost in time and space and processing when they're trying to find this thing you're talking

about. So, visuals are very helpful. With video modeling, they have the opportunity to

practice. I see this working for kids on the spectrum as well as kids not on the spectrum. .

.if you're teaching a specific dance, you show the video. . .one of the things that video

modeling does is it reduces anxiety and stress, because before they're being required to

do anything, they're actually getting to see it. A version of it played out in real life. And

then there's a picture in their head, they can reference it. (CoP, meeting four)

In all of the instructional strategies shared and developed, most participants realized that

they would be beneficial not only for those students with disabilities whom they teach, but for all

students. "There is a saying that things that work for all kids, may not work for kids with ASD,

but things that work for ASD [students] work for most all of the students" (Gloria, CoP, meeting

three). Noelle summed it up nicely, "What we're talking about doesn't just apply to our students

with disabilities. It applies to everyone" (CoP, meeting seven).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed how the CoP served as a remedy for music teacher isolation (Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005; Sindberg, 2011) and provided SEPs the value and acceptance they lack in their work environments (Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2002; Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2001; Marks, Schrader, & Levine, 1999). I also have described the instructional strategies that music educator and SEPs developed as an outcome of participation in the CoP.

Participants' perceptions of their colleagues were heavily impacted by participation in this CoP. Initially, participants had less than positive perceptions of those with whom they work. For instance, in the second CoP meeting Noelle expressed a great deal of frustration with her SEP not consistently redirecting a student with disabilities. Through participation in this community, Noelle realized that she needed to trust the knowledge and expertise that the SEP brought to her classroom. SEP participants expressed throughout the study that they wished their knowledge and experiences would be valued. As a result of participation in this study, SEP participants felt music educator participants valued their knowledge and experiences. This valuing enabled SEPs to gain the confidence necessary to engage more with the music teacher and other educators with whom they work. Music educator participants felt that participation within the CoP alleviated feelings of isolation as well as increased their confidence in how to teach music to students with disabilities.

Finally, participants also developed a large assortment of reified objects to assist one another in teaching students with disabilities. Most of the reified objects developed were situated in SEP knowledge, from which music educators adapted them for use in their classrooms. Visual

schedules, assistive devices, and how to incorporate social emotional learning into the music

classroom are examples of the developed reified objects.

CHAPTER SEVEN: "IF THE PAY WASN'T SHIT, I COULD EASILY DO THIS JOB FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE!": WORKING CONDITIONS AND NEEDS OF MUSIC EDUCATORS AND SEPS DUE TO SYSTEMIC CONCERNS

In this community of practice (CoP), participants had the space to engage mutually in the discussion of their lived experiences. Through this joint enterprise, they brought new meaning and new understandings to the social and historical issues pertaining to music educators and special education paraprofessionals (SEPs). CoP meetings allowed music educators and SEPs time to discuss instructional strategies and to understand their collaborative roles more fully, as discussed in Chapter Six. The CoP provided collaborative time for music educators and SEPs that was not typically provided to them during the school day. It also provided time for participants to commiserate over their similar working conditions and professional needs. Two themes emerged from the data as they pertain to music educator and SEP needs: *Poor Working Conditions* and *Systemic Concerns in Education*. In this chapter, I will discuss each theme and explore what findings tell us about the needs of music educators and paraprofessionals. I then will demonstrate how findings are supported by literature reviewed, offer interpretation of findings, and discuss how a CoP may impact the collaborative needs of SEPs and music educators.

Poor Working Conditions

The professional needs and working conditions of the participants were more similar between music educators and SEPs than previously has been identified. Music educator and SEP participants both struggled with a lack of time to plan and collaborate. Both groups of participants also were not included in conversations regarding the learning needs and goals of the students with disabilities whom they teach. Professional development that was specific to participants needs also was lacking. As such, music educator and SEP participants often felt that they did not experience the same respect or value associated with being a professional.

Participants, through mutually engaging in shared experiences, came to understand that it was the school culture (working conditions), created from the top down, that influenced and created these needs and poor working conditions.

Time, Communication, and Collaboration

The SEPs and music educators in this CoP reported a lack of time to plan collaboratively with colleagues. Participants expressed a desire to have this time to communicate and collaborate. SEP participants received no planning during their day. They received a 30-minute lunch, and, in one school the SEPs were given an additional 15-minute break. They rarely took this break, however, as they were needed to assist with behaviors in their classroom as they were short-staffed.

> *Ash: Almost all of our time is spent with the students. We are on all. of. the. time. . . Even if the teacher is actively teaching, I am still right next to the child trying to redirect or do hand over hand helping them. We are on all day and receive zero planning time.* (initial interview)

> . . .

> *Sarah: I would LOVE planning time. I think it would make me better at what I do if I had, um, at least, I mean the teachers usually get like an hour a day; but if I had like 20 minutes that would be cool. Just to be better prepared because it's always a rush. I could get a lot done in 20 minutes.* (initial interview)

Receiving no time, other than a lunch break, prevented SEPs from collaborating with their music educator colleagues. In the initial interviews, SEPs were unanimous about wanting time to communicate with their music colleagues, and the first two community of practice meetings were focused heavily on the need for time to plan collaboratively.

I hope to learn the music side cause I, don't get, our music teacher is wonderful, but we don't get the collaboration time ever. We don't get collaboration time period unless we're eating lunch with them or seeing them in the hallway. (Sarah, CoP, meeting one)

When I inquired about how they prepare their students for music Ash replied, "just on the fly. Maybe in passing in the hallway or while they are teaching. We don't get the time to preplan" (initial interview).

Music educators, unlike SEPs, are given planning time; however, their planning time is not collaborative and not always guaranteed. They often are asked to do things other than plan during their planning time, or their planning time is so broken up that they did not have enough time to do more than use the bathroom or set up for their next class.

Noelle: My school district has a huge shortage of subs. What ends up happening is they pull us on our planning time to cover classes. I am constantly being pulled to go work with, you know, other classrooms. It's been actually something that I've really been like working on. Like "Hey, I need to be in the classroom teaching music because you hired me to teach music, you know, and not for third grade math." (CoP, meeting two)

. . .

Maude: I also have 15-10 minutes in between classes [in addition to her lunch and one 20-minute planning]. *But that's just set up. That's not planning. I'm going from second grade to third, to fourth, to K or to first. So those are for setups or the bathroom.* (exit interview)

Dre is the only one who felt he had adequate planning time. When asked about his planning, he said he received five planning periods a week, which was three more than what he received last year. Dre also planned a lot on his own time, "I get to school before 8:00 am,

because I just can't not get here early" (initial interview). I asked Dre to send me his schedule, and I found that he over-reported his planning time in the interview.

Figure 16: Dre's Instructional Schedule.

Monday																			
9:00-9:15	9:15-9:30	9:30-9:45	9:45-10:00	10:00-1:15	10:15-1:30	10:30-1:45	10:45-1:00	11:00-1:15	11:15-1:30	11:30-1:45	11:45-12:00	12:05-12:5	1:00-1:15	1:15-1:30	1:30-1:45	1:45-2:00	2:00-2:15	2:15-2:30	2:30-3:00	3:00-3
4th Grade (1)			First Grade (1)			3rd Grade (1)			2nd Grade (1)			Lunch	1,2,3 Self-Contained Special Ed			K (1)			Recess	Planning

Tuesday (times are different than other days)																		
8:00-8:15	8:15-8:30	8:30-8:45	8:45-9:00	9:00-9:15	9:15-9:30	9:45-10:00	10:00:15	10:15-0:30	10:30-0:45	10:45-11:00	11:00-11:15	11:15-1:30	11:30-1:45	11:45-2:00	12:05-1:50	1:00-1:15	1:15-1:30	1:30-1:45	1:45-2:00	2:00-2:15
1/2 Split (1)		1/2 Split (2)		K/1 Self-Contained Class (MOCI)		Lunch				1/2 Split (3)			MOCI Self-Contained Class		Moci Self-Contained Class		Planning

Wednesday																			
			9:45-10:00	10:00-1:15	10:15-0:30	10:30-0:45	10:45-1:00	11:00-1:15	11:15-1:30	11:30-1:45	11:45-12:00	12:05-12:5	1:00-1:15	1:15-1:30	1:30-1:45	1:45-2:00	2:00-2:15	2:15-2:30	2:30-3:00	3:00-3:15	3:15-3:30	3:30-3:45
Planning			3rd (2)			4th Grade (2)			K Self-Contained Special Ed			Lunch	2nd Grade (2)			K (2)			Recess	1st Grade (2)

Thursday																		
9:00-9:15	9:15-9:30	9:30-9:45	9:45-10:00	10:00-1:15	10:15-1:30	10:30-1:45	10:45-1:00	11:00-1:15	11:15-1:30	11:30-1:45	11:45-12:00	12:05-12:5				1:45-2:00	2:00-2:15	2:15-2:30	2:30-3:00	3:00-3:15	3:15-3:30
4th Grade (3)			3rd Grade (3)			2nd Grade (3)			2,3,4 Self-Contained Special Ed			Lunch	Planning			K (3)			Recess (duty)	Planning

Friday																		
9:00-9:15	9:15-9:30	9:30-9:45	9:45-10:00	10:00-1:15	10:15-1:30	10:30-1:45	10:45-1:00	11:00-1:15	11:15-1:30	11:30-1:45	11:45-12:00		1:00-1:15	1:15-1:30	1:30-1:45	1:45-2:00	2:00-2:15	2:15-2:30	2:30-3:00	3:00-3:15	3:15-3:30	3:30-3:45
3rd Grade (4)			4th Grade (4)			1,2 Self-Contained Special Ed			2nd Grade (4)			Lunch	1st Grade (3)			K (4)			Recess	1st Grade (4)

Two of his planning periods are after his recess duty which almost always runs over. "It's consistently 10 minutes. Planning starts at 3:00 pm, but recess is not over until 3:10 pm" (Text communication, March 26th, 2020). However, of all the participants, Dre has the most time.

Despite having some planning time in their individual schedules, no music educators were specifically assigned collaborative planning time with their special education or general education colleagues. SEPs had no planning time. Music educators and SEPs both desired of time to communicate and collaborate for the benefit of their instructional practices and student learning. Participants wanted this time so that they could understand what was expected of them in their shared music setting.

Dre: I'll have conversations with paraprofessionals as they walk in the door and in

between activities to make sure they feel welcomed but to also check in on the students.

Expectations are communicated "in medias res." Any more time has to be on my time.

(Dre, initial interview)

. . .

Gloria: The music teacher doesn't have time to create something like that [a visual

notebook]. *She did a ton of things but that would require more time. We* [SEPs] *walk in*

and are trying to work backwards to figure things out. Having the time to collaborate

[communicate expectations] *would strengthen the field and bridge the delivering and*

assisting of the curriculum. (Gloria, initial interview)

While participants lamented their lack of collaborative time with colleagues, the community of

practice provided this time for participants to discuss students and instruction. Participants were

able to connect with colleagues over work-related stressors, as well as collaborate on how to best

meet the learning needs of those whom they teach.

An outcome of participants discussing collaborative time was recommendations on how

to remedy their lack of this time. In the meetings, participants often made suggestions about how

to create spaces for collaborative discussions, despite the lack of time to communicate and

collaborate with their colleagues. Dre suggested that music educators and SEPs could create a

Facebook group to share student learning goals. This was inspired by what his administration

does to promote a positive school climate.

We have a little Facebook group which is only for the paras, teachers, principals, and

specialist teachers. Most of it's just sharing positive memes and quotes and things like

that, but also, we share child successes. I think that helps with the culture a lot as well

and gets everyone involved, not just as the professional aspect of things, but also thinking

about the person. (CoP, meeting three)

Ash suggested that music educators email lesson schedules/plans ahead of time so that they may support the individual students whom they teach.

I would say that, you know, most of the time when we go into a specialist class, the

teacher already has like a schedule of what will be taught. If they could provide the

schedule to the parapro in advance, then I can come up with some visual indicators for

that [lesson] *where the teacher wouldn't necessarily have to do it.* (CoP, meeting two)

Using Discord® also was suggested as a possible solution. The use of Discord® will be discussed further in Chapter Eight, as will the impact of the CoP on the collaborative needs of participants.

The need for planning time is pervasive in the research literature (Barry, 2004; Raschdorf, 2015; Shaw, 2017; Shelfo, 2007). A desire to have collaborative planning time with colleagues, too, is pervasive in the literature (Gfeller, Darrow, & Hedden, 1990; Grimsby, 2018, 2019; Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; VanWeelden & Heath-Reynolds, 2018). Music educator and SEP participants, in this CoP, were not asking for more planning time than their general education colleagues. Allowing music educators and SEPs collaborative planning could promote a positive change to school culture and positively impact student progress (Burnstein et al., 2004; Carter, Prater, Jackson, & Marchant, 2009), which is something all participants desired.

Access to Information and Inclusion in the Process

Participants desired access to information, especially IEPs and 504s. Music educator and SEP participants stated that they did not have access to those documents. Without access to these

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documents, participants felt they could not meet the needs of those they teach nor understand their collaborative role.

> *Sarah: Most of our music teachers that we've had, none of them ever, ever, ever, ever have seen an IEP from our students. . .As parapros we really don't see it either. We'll see the goals but that's about it. It keeps us and them from knowing what our students need.* (CoP, meeting two)

Dre, as a music educator, experienced similar concerns.

> *Dre: All I really get is pretty much like five pages per student. It's the goals and the, and the data. I read through them all but also, they come to me and it's just a big pile of unsorted notes. It does not tell me what classes they are coming with or anything. That information would be useful.* (CoP, meeting two)

In Dre's initial interview, he believed these papers to be the actual IEP. When we began to explore my son's IEP in our second meeting, he realized he was not given all the information he should have. Noelle also received only goal sheets, and Maude received no documentation.

Music educator and SEP participants also wanted to be included in conversations regarding those students with disabilities whom they teach. ". . .it's an opportunity to be reflective and just share and then try out new things as well" (Dre, CoP, meeting one). Ash and Gloria argued that inclusion in IEP meetings should be based on who spends the majority of the time with the student and what is necessary for student success.

> *Ash: Well, I think first and foremost that every teacher who teaches a kid with an IEP needs to have read the IEP or have access at least to the IEP. I need to be able to see what, what it is I'm supposed to be doing here.* (CoP, meeting five) *I think that when paraprofessionals are assigned to one kid all day long or like two people are assigned to*

the same kid half day/half day, those people should be involved in the IEP conversation.

That should be a no brainer. (CoP, meeting three)

. . .

Gloria: You know, behavior plans and IEPs get implemented, get carried out. I [have]
strong feelings. . .why the parapros and teachers of music and art and gym. . .should be
included because when you implement a behavior plan, it's the success of the child at stake.
And the success of managing those behaviors is dependent upon all adults behaving the
same way. If certain teachers are not given access to that and the paras are not given
access to that, it's really hard to help the child work through and have positive behavior
change. (CoP, meeting three)

Gloria also believed that inclusion in these meetings was based on how SEPs and music
educators were perceived by administrators and shared that the music educator she worked with
last year, in the elementary setting, was impacted negatively by not being included.

Gloria: It depends on the teacher and it depends on the principal. How we are viewed
impacts our access to information. (initial interview) *Like last year, if this one teacher*
would have been included, I really think she could have helped these kids so much more.
She was so invested in wanting to know: "how do I do this? I don't know how to teach
this to them, but you people [SEPs] *know how they learn!" But she wasn't included.*
(CoP, one)

. . .

Gloria: We are not included in the IEP meetings. We are not included in parent teacher
conferences. It makes it hard because you [the SEP] *have so much information and*
decisions are made without it. The "team" comes back and have implemented things and

I've been like, "Okay," because this is my job, I'm going to do what I'm told, but that's

not going to work, and of course things blow up. And I'm like, "If you had just talked to

me, I could have told you that freight train was coming!" (initial interview)

SEPs were unable to attend these meetings due to their contract stipulations. Both music

educator and SEP participants were not able to go to these meetings because schools would need

to secure a substitute for them during the meeting time, which costs money. Not being included

in these meetings or having limited or no access to student information is common for music

educators and SEPs (Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Gfeller, Darrow, & Hedden, 1990; Giangreco,

Edelman, & Broer, 2001; Grimsby, 2018, 2019; Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; Marks, Schrader,

& Levine, 1999; VanWeelden & Heath-Reynolds, 2018), and the participants in this study felt

strongly that this lack of access compromised their abilities to do their jobs.

Access to Professional Development

Music educators and SEPs need and desire specific professional development to improve

instructional practices and student outcomes. Music educator participants, while provided

professional development through their district, did not feel that what was provided met their

needs; it was not content-specific and there was little to no professional development centered on

to how to teach students with disabilities. If participants sought out other forms of professional

development, more often than not they paid out of their own pocket for that professional

development.

Noelle: In the smaller schools I've worked in their professional development is in house

and as the only music teacher on staff, um, there's no content specific PD for me. . . And

when I do seek out PD it is on my own terms. Like no one has ever paid for me to go to

[state music conference] *I'm not getting any, you know, kick back from grad school. All of the workshops that I go to are not paid for.* (initial interview)

During Dre's initial interview, I inquired if he was provided professional development. Dre stated that the district provided four 1-hour Collaborative Learning Time (CLT) Skype sessions each year. I then asked if any professional development was specific to teaching music to students with disabilities.

> *Dre: Not specific to music, but, tomorrow, because we do have two students so far in the IEP goals that I've read, who are getting iPads for communication. So, we're having a training tomorrow for the school, like all the specialist teachers as well as all the center class teachers who are doing training on that* [the iPads] *all morning.* (initial interviews)

This supports what is found in the literature, which consistently finds that professional development centered on teaching music to students with disabilities is lacking (Grimsby, 2018; VanWeelden & Meehan, 2016; VanWeelden & Whipple, 2018).

Similarly, SEP participants had access to professional development, but it did not pertain to teaching students with disabilities in the music setting. Professional development was dependent on whether the SEP was hired by the RESA (Reginal Education Service Agency) or by the local school district. Most participants sought out their own professional development on their own time, which is remarkable, given how little SEPs are paid.

> *Sarah: The other para-pros that I see like in the building that are not ISD staff, but are hired by* [community school district]*, the training is not there. They don't get the training that we get. And it's hard because the district is in need of paraprofessionals and they don't get* [local school district SEPs] *the training that we do at ISD. And it's hard because*

they, they do their best, but they only have so many resources and they have so. many.

kids.

Rachel: Has any of your professional development, um, regarded teaching music to

students with disabilities?

Sarah: No, I don't think so. I don't think I've ever had anything about music. There is a

music therapist at [school name], *but I've never been to anything about music period.*

(initial interview)

As stated in Chapter Four, Sarah worked through the RESA, a larger public education agency

that provides services to students with moderate to severe disabilities within the local school

districts. Due to her position, many of her professional developments were either free or paid for

by RESA. Gloria and Ash, whose positions were housed in a specific school, did not have those

professional development options, unless they were directed to free online courses through

RESA or provided by the school.

Rachel: What types of professional development are available to you?

Ash: Right now, I'm currently taking an online course. [SPED director] *offered it to us*

last year and I started in the summer. Um, so it's like a 40-hour online course to become

certified to be an RBT [registered behavior technician] *. . .This year at the middle school*

we were included in the wider professional development for the teachers, which is really

awesome.

Rachel: Wow!! That's rare.

Ash: Yeah, it's great. It really feels like the principal really thinks of us as part of the staff

in a way that I haven't experienced before. (initial interview)

Ash and Gloria were in a rare space in which SEPs are included in staff-wide professional development; however, participation in content-specific professional development during school hours is contingent on administrative approval.

> *Rachel: Sarah mentioned that you both are through ISD* [RESA] *or are you through* [local school district]*?*
>
> *Gloria: We are through* [local school district].
>
> *Rachel: But you actively seek out the free training through ISD?*
>
> *Gloria: We have the option that ISD provides these trainings. As long as you can get your building principal and the teacher to agree to you having the day off. Because per our contract, I can't take a sick day to take a training at the ISD.* (initial interview)

The desire for content specific professional development is a common finding in the literature (Barrett, 2006; Grimsby, 2018, 2019; Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; Marks, Schrader, & Levine, 1999; VanWeelden & Heath-Reynolds, 2018). SEP need for professional development, as expressed in this study, too were similar to those in the literature. While professional development was provided, access varied depending on the school culture and was not always content specific. It should be noted that SEPs in this study were provided access to professional development in a way that is uncommon for most SEPs, but even so, they wanted more access to and support for professional development (Bertolero, 2017; Boudreau, 2012; Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2001; Grimsby, 2018; Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008). Music educators and SEPs need and request specific professional development to improve their instructional practices and outcomes for students with disabilities. Being provided professional development specific to their needs may allow music educators and SEPS to feel more fully

prepared to work with students with disabilities (Gfeller, Darrow, & Hedden, 1990; Grimsby, 2019; VanWeelden & Heath-Reynolds, 2018; VanWeelden & Meehan, 2016).

Feeling Less Than: A Lack of Respect and Inclusion within the Workplace

The music educators and SEP participants in this study did not feel appreciated or respected in the schools in which they teach. While Ash and Gloria felt supported by their administration in their new school setting, they did not feel that the respect traveled down to all those with whom they worked, nor had they experienced this sense of "value" in the past in other positions. Participants in this study did not feel that their colleagues saw them as professionals and felt that, as a result, they were not included in essential discussions regarding the students they teach. As such, participants were placed in situations that made them feel less than their colleagues, or felt they had to take on extra work to be seen as professional.

> *Maude: Every teacher I know is a professional musician in some way. We all have some*
>
> *outside professional musical gig and that, I feel is what we have to do to be seen as*
>
> *professionals. When they* [gen ed teachers] *look at us, they can't just say, you know,*
>
> *there's some old lady music teacher here to keep our kids* [babysit]. *I mean, they did*
>
> *have, they did have respect for us, but as the years have gone by and we have lost more*
>
> *time with the kids, the classes are getting bigger; all the teachers want is common*
>
> *planning time. . .* (CoP, meeting three)

Ash described a situation, in a previous placement, in which their lead teacher restricted who they were allowed to talk to.

> *Ash: I've had an experience where a room teacher that I worked under actively*
>
> *discouraged parapros from talking to parents in any capacity and would get very upset if*
>
> *we had conversations with parents. I had a conversation with the parent of a student*

because I knew they loved music and the musical artist also was autistic. So, I thought,

"Hey you know, he might be interested to hear about this artist that I was really hyped

about." The teacher got really pissed that I had this conversation with parents even

though it had nothing to do with the student. (CoP, meeting three)

While it is the special education lead teacher who is expected to communicate concerns, updates, and academic progress to parents, some parents value and appreciate the communication from paraprofessionals, who can provide "connections between parents, the community, and the school" (French & Chopra, 1999, p. 270). Being isolated from education stakeholders and not being invited to be part of the conversation is common for SEPs (Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2001; Giangreco, Broer, Edelman, 2002; Giangreco & Doyle, 2002).

Music educator and SEP participants all expressed similar feelings of frustration about not being included in conversations regarding their students. Participants felt that not being included in these conversations was detrimental to their instruction and to student learning.

Dre: I've got one little buddy who's, uh, minimally verbal and is having a rough week.

He's losing his para next week. They're moving the para to a new school where there is

apparently "more need." So, he's having a rough week. We'll see how next week goes as

well cause' he's been kind of on a downward trend.

Rachel: Dre, the student who is losing their para, they're being transferred to another

school?

Dre: Well the student is staying, and the para is transferring. So, he doesn't have a one to

one parapro anymore. He "essentially" gets one [a SEP] *because of need in the*

classroom and especially in my classroom where there is overstimulation and stuff, but

it's not one to one.

Rachel: How was that decision made? Was this paraprofessional given any prior warning that they were being moved to another school? Was this their desire?

Dre: No, and apparently it was just Monday that I found out and next Monday they're leaving. (CoP, meeting three)

Not being included in conversations with other education stakeholders may be detrimental to SEPs and music educators.

Sarah: Yeah. Every once in a while, you have the teacher that has no compassion. They don't want to learn [about you or your student]. *They don't want to. They don't want anything to do with them and they kick you out of their classroom.* (CoP, meeting one)

While Sarah felt a lack of respect from these individual teachers, her recommendation on how to address the negative perceptions of music educators and SEPs was priceless: "I think we should just not show up for a week. [Laughter from all of us.] Then maybe they would appreciate us!" (CoP, meeting three).

Each CoP meeting involved a discussion of participants' work environment. Participants did not feel that their current school culture and climate was necessarily negative; however, despite a seemingly supportive culture and positive climate, participants still felt their roles were not as valued. Participants felt this lack of value contributed to not being included in decisions regarding those students with disabilities whom they taught.

Ash: Paraprofessionals are just sort of generally treated as disposable in a lot of ways. Just recently, at our school, they hired a person that I think they're calling a success coach. They're essentially like a really glorified hall monitor but they're paying this person $20 an hour to 'work with students' [air quotes] *and they're paying us like $13.* (CoP, meeting six).

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Gloria made a striking observation during one of our meetings regarding whose role it is to cultivate a supportive and positive school culture and climate.

> *Gloria: I do think it is a building level thing and I think this is a district wide thing. I think, you know, the tone* [of inclusion and respect] *is often set from the top down. Depending on the principal's energy around investing in their staff and getting to know each other, I think that can impact how we* [music educators and SEPs] *are viewed. I know what you're saying* [referring to Dre] *about the bargaining thing* [contracts]. *I know that's a big thing. I've been told in the past, "you can't attend X, Y, and Z because it's outside hours of your contract and that would be considered volunteering and we're not going to pay you for it." But yet what happens is like major decisions are made about building policy and how to handle behaviors within a building with zero communication to us. And then we come to work, you know, the next day or on Monday or whatever, and it's basically a storm. We're trying to figure out which direction it's coming from and how to adjust accordingly. The management ability, the temperament, and personality of the building administration makes an impact on the culture of the building.* (CoP, meeting three)

Dre was the one participant whose administration seemed to do the best job of creating a culture of inclusion and equity among their staff.

> *Dre:* [In response to Ash's statement regarding SEPs not being recognized.] *I was given the affirmation book once. We have this little thing that goes around every three, every three days. Like you receive the book from a staff member who writes, "I appreciate you for this, blah blah blah." And then you have three days to send it along to someone else. I*

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got it from a first-grade teacher and then I sent it along to one of our head parapros.

(CoP, meeting four)

Once a month, Dre's administration also awards a student, teacher, or paraprofessional with a

B.E.S.T. award. which stands for "Be safe, Expect responsible behavior, Show respect, and

Teamwork." The administration also designed a letter that goes around to each teacher

introducing the SEPs and those they teach. This positive work environment, developed by his

administrator, contributed to Dre's consistent positivity and joy when describing those he works

with and his job.

<center>**Systemic Concerns in Education**</center>

During CoP meetings participants identified connections between their working

conditions and systemic issues within the education system. Music educator and SEPs articulated

some similar issues with the education system, although some issues were specific to SEPs.

Systemic concerns, as described by participants are as follows: lack of support

structures/resources offered to educators to teach certain populations, poor hierarchical

positioning, physical injury, and inequitable pay.

Concerns of Music Educators

Material resources. The material resources needed to support student learning were

either not made available to music teachers or those educators did not know that those supports

were available. Material resources, such as assistive technologies, may not always be provided

by the school to music educators. In the instance of Dre, he did know of an assistive technology

to help students with their ukuleles, but at the time lacked the funding to purchase them.

Dre: It's called a cord buddy. You push the C button it plays the C chord. Push the F

button it fingers an F chord for you. I could also use that for the kids who. . .just really

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struggle with that processing, um, who aren't necessarily in that [self-contained]

program, who could benefit from that intermediate step of that that says F I push F. I'm

trying to get some of those, but money's a thing to just to get enough. I would need about

$300. So, I'm trying to find the money. They're $30 each. (CoP, meeting six)

In other instances, technologies were provided by the school; however, they were specific

to the student and SEP, and not shared with the music teacher. During a CoP meeting, we

watched Sarah's observation video. The student with whom she works came in with an iPad. The

student used an app that used pictures to create sentences that could be "played" for their teacher

or peers.

She [the music teacher] *was trying to use visuals* [8x10 papers with visuals of movement

instructions] *but* [the music teacher] *went like this* [modeled whipping them around the

room quickly] *and then* [she] *walked away. The music teacher just clung to them like this*

[modeled motion again, emphasizing holding the visuals with two closed fisted hands]

and didn't even show them to G---. (Ash, CoP, meeting seven)

As the music educator did not have a device made available to her and did not know how to use

the device the student brought, this student in particular was excluded from the class

conversation. Music educators often lack the educational and material resources needed to

support teaching music to students with disabilities (Gfeller, Darrow, & Hedden, 1990; Grimsby,

2018, 2019; Hammel, 2001a/b; VanWeelden & Whipple, 2014a; VanWeelden & Heath-

Reynolds, 2018).

Isolation. Music educator participants also struggled with feelings of isolation. Each

music educator participant was the sole music educator in their building. While Maude and Dre's

schools were relatively smaller, Noelle had more students than she could fit into her already

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loaded schedule. Dre only received four 1-hour Skype sessions during the school year to connect with his music colleagues. Maude received one half-day a month.

> *Noelle: I'm the only one in my building that does what I do. And I'm the only one in my building that has an understanding of what I do. There's a certain level of isolation in that because there are all of these things that I do and think about on a daily basis. People aren't aware of and people don't think of what we do. I talk to people* [music educator colleagues] *outside of the building all the time, but not really in my daily teaching. I need that time.* (Noelle, exit interview)

Maude also craved time to be with other educators. "I'm a team player. I don't do well alone" (Maude, initial interview). Dre appreciated the social component of the CoPs. "I really enjoyed the in-person meetings the most. . .social interaction. . . I get to actually communicate with other people who do the same thing that I do" (exit interview). Music educator feelings of isolation are consistent with the literature (Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005; Sindberg, 2016).

Shared Concerns: A Low Placement in the Educational Hierarchy

Music educators and SEPs both expressed feeling "less than" their general education colleagues. SEPs participants stated that some colleagues saw them as classroom aides rather than the essential support professionals they were. SEPs felt this may be due to their non-traditional educational backgrounds. Music educators felt "less than" as their space was not appreciated by their administrators. All participants felt as if their colleagues saw them as "babysitters."

Not all SEPs have a four-year degree or more than a high-school diploma. For many states, to work as a SEP all that is needed is a high school diploma (Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2002; Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2001; Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; Marks,

Schrader, & Levine, 1999). Many SEPs come to their positions with knowledge and experiences outside of a four-year degree that enable them to perform their jobs well. SEP participants in this study were no different. Ash and Gloria both held bachelor's degrees, although not in special education, and Sarah was the only one who had not attended college as she became a SEP directly out of high school. SEP participants felt that their knowledge and experiences were not valued because their path to becoming a SEP was not one that included a traditional 4-year degree in special education.

> *Ash: There are. . . a lot of people that have a lot of different kinds of experiences, but it doesn't necessarily equal - "I got my master's degree in special education." I have a bachelor's degree and I have all this other experience and all those things led me to the place that I am* [a paraprofessional]. *But in some people's eyes that stuff doesn't have clout. . . There might be somebody that's on your team that doesn't necessarily have as quote unquote a high as a degree as you do, but they might be able to bring something to the table that you have no skill set at and help you with it.* (CoP, meeting three)

Sarah felt this devaluation the most, as she was the youngest SEP and did not have a 4-year degree.

> *People look at me and they're like, you're 23 years old* [she's not, she is 34]. *But I've been doing this a really long time. I've done START trainings, peer-to-peer, PBIS, crisis prevention interventions, CPI trainings which are every 18 months, and trauma trainings. . .but a lot of us don't get the respect and I feel like, okay, I need to go back to school to do something more.* (initial interview)

This idea of "value" based on experience was a consistent theme across the duration of the study for SEPs. Ash and Gloria especially commented on the need to value experiences and knowledge gained outside of education that SEPs brought with them into the classroom.

SEPs also felt "less than," due to being assigned menial tasks that were not a part of their job description.

> *Gloria: I've experienced where I'll be in class and the teacher will say "you know if you want to go ahead and get those papers together, if you would like to put those in a bin or if you would like to do this or that." Well it depends on the kids you're with, right? Some kids are super independent so sure, while they're working independently or working with a peer, I could help you. Sometimes when we are quietly supporting a child with hawk eye vision, it looks like we're not doing anything. And I think that's when teachers are more inclined to give us more to do because they figure we're getting paid to just sit around and watch. . .I can't be sleeping. Sleeping or sorting* [she chuckles]. *When I have a kid whose behaviors, when they're good, they're good, but when they're off its throwing chairs and you know, very disruptive. I can't. I can't be at the front of the room stapling because you have a job* [for me].
>
> *Noelle:* [laughing as she speaks] *Your job is SO not stapling!!*
>
> *Gloria: But it looks like if I'm just sitting next to him and I'm not doing something. . .it looks like I'm just getting paid to sit. And I think that's where we see sometimes like with that art teacher, they want people want paras to do something because they're not really doing anything when they're in the classroom, but in reality we are watching those we teach so that we can be quick to respond.* (CoP, meeting seven)

A negative perception of SEPs is evident in the literature as are SEPs feeling a lack of respect (Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2002; Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; Marks, Schrader, & Levine, 1999). The reality is that SEPs, at least the SEP participants in this study, do more than "just sit."

The perception of "what we do" being less than that of a general education teacher also was experienced by the music educator participants.

> *Noelle: And uh, so the assistant principal likes to like store stuff in my room, like temporarily. So, they got this big shipment of textbooks and needed a place to put them and put them in the back of my classroom. Fine. Then they decided that like fifth period, right after lunch, that they were going to go sort through the textbooks while I was teaching kindergarten.* (CoP, meeting eight)

An overwhelming sentiment, felt by all participants, was that they were perceived as babysitters and not educators. As was stated earlier:

> *Gloria: I think that some of that comes from how we're seen in the educational system further bottom of the totem pole. Yeah. I think it was like you are the babysitters that come and to keep the kids in check so I can teach.*
>
> *Noelle: Music teachers deal with that same thing though too. Yeah. So, you know* [cross talking and laughter from everyone]. (CoP, meeting one)

Feeling more like a "babysitter" and less than an educator was experienced by more than this group of music educators. Other researchers have found that SEPs and music educators feel that other educators view them as "babysitters" rather than professionals (Grimsby, 2018, 2019; VanWeelden & Whipple, 2018; Walls et al., 2005).

Concerns of Paraprofessionals

      Sustaining injury. The SEP participants shared that their jobs involved physical risk on a regular basis. SEPs, unlike their music educator colleagues, are assigned a student or group of students to work with each day. For some SEPs, they stay with that student, or small group of students for the entire day, each day of the school year. Due to the amount of time SEPs spend with these students, they learn to understand what is communicated by those they teach through students' body language, and vocalizations, and sometimes physical engagements. These physical engagements may be as small as pushing hands away to as severe as biting and grabbing which can result in serious injury to the SEP.

      Each of the SEP participants in this study understand the behaviors and needs of those they teach. Gloria is especially good with those students with autism. Yet, in her work with students who have more severe needs, she has been injured multiple times in her role as a SEP.

      Gloria: So, we've all been supporting this kid. Oh, this kiddo [she shakes her head and smiles]. *Thursday and Friday, he spent the day just being very physical. . .And so, if you give anyone a directive so much as like 'sit down, open your snack, whatever. He just starts yelling. He's like: "Hey you stop it! Shut up!! He gets on these tangents, and so by Friday, I don't think the two of us* [referring to her and Ash] *could keep a straight face. It was like, Oh, my God, you got to be kidding me?!?! And he's bigger and so he will get, he's kinda got these nice little* [fists] *when he hits ya. But he also will grab, like when he does this floor protest. I walked by and he'll like* [makes snatching grab with her hands] *to get you. . .Friday he had a hold of my leg. He had like handprints, I literally have a bruise of his fingers on my leg. But he had a hold on my calf, and he was waiting for me*

to react. And so, I just stood there [she pulls up her leg to mimic it being held by the

student] *and he's calling me. I said, "I'll wait," as calm as I could.* (CoP, meeting eight)

This was only one incidence described by Gloria. Gloria has had her badge yanked, hair pulled,

and earrings ripped out. Gloria also has been bit so hard by one of the students she teaches that

she sustained permanent tendon damage to her arm. When asked by another participant how she

felt about the physical aspect of her job, Gloria responded with these words:

> *I think that we get training and most of the time you can avoid those things because of the*
>
> *way you're trained in how you interact with the kids when they are escalating, right?*
>
> *However, there are times when it comes out of the blue or you're just in proximity of the*
>
> *child. You can't move fast enough. . .I personally feel like I knew going into it, it was part*
>
> *of the job and so I knew that that would be part of it.* (CoP, meeting four)

Sarah has the most experience of the three SEPs, as this was her fifteenth year as a SEP.

In her career, she has experienced many job-related injuries as a result of student emotional or

behavioral needs. However, of all the SEP participants in this group, Sarah had the most

harrowing job-related injury.

> *Sarah: I was pregnant and almost died* [We all gasp] *because I got hit at work, I had my*
>
> *daughter two months early.* [At this point we are all wide mouthed just staring at Sarah.]
>
> *Yeah, I got hit in the back. It was like the most, cause' I was seven months. . .* [Sarah
>
> pauses, either to remember or to filter the emotions coming through her voice.] *Yeah. A*
>
> *student came and I turned, cause I'm like,* [mimics protecting her belly]*, you know, don't*
>
> *hit me. They hit me in just the right spot in the back. I almost bled to death and had to*
>
> *have an emergency C section. The baby was three pounds, five ounces.* [We all are
>
> gasping throughout this entire talk. Again, wide mouthed, still, and leaning in as Sarah

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speaks.] *We never told the parents. I was like, 'Do. not. tell the mother. It's not the kid's*

fault, you know what I mean? Like them knowing. . .they don't need to know.' (CoP,

meeting eight)

Ash, Gloria, and Sarah are not exceptions to those who work as SEPs. These stories highlight the

daily reality of what it is like for most SEPs who work with students with disabilities. When

students with disabilities, who require the most support (i.e. moderate to severe disabilities),

express a physical or emotional need or want, they more often than not become physically

engaged with their SEP (Barresi, 1992; Etscheidt, 2005).

Feeling disposable. Unlike music educator participants, SEP participants, due to their

school environments, felt disposable. SEPs in this study felt like a disposable commodity due to

the high turnover rate in their job.

Ash: So, it was challenging week. We were short a person most of the week, again, and

now we've lost someone in a room and that's the second person, in like what, three

months or something like that, that we've burned through. I feel like, sort of collectively

or like globally, systematically like paraprofessionals are sort of seen as like disposable

or interchangeable.

Sarah: And a lot of people don't want this job. We'd have people, they come in for two

months. They come in, they come in for a week. They're like, "Oh no, no, no, not doing

that. Y'all are nuts!" (CoP, meeting eight)

Other researchers also have identified high turnover for SEPs as a concern. As job requirements

for SEPs vary from state to state and even district to district, it is difficult to hire and maintain

qualified SEPs (Ghere & York-Barr, 2007; Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2002; Giangreco,

Suter, & Doyle, 2010). SEPs also lack training opportunities to prepare them to work with the

students they will teach, which may help in SEPs having longevity in their careers (Bertolero, 2017; Boudreau, 2011; Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman; 2002; Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Giangreco, et.al, 2003).

SEP pay and benefits. Injuries, a lack of a living wage, and a lack of affordable health care packages resulted in one SEP participant needing to seek additional work in order to survive and caused two participants to consider leaving the profession. (In fact, one has left her job in the three months since completing the data collection for this study.) In one meeting Gloria jokingly stated that SEPs who work with students who need extensive behavioral support should have combat pay. In reality, the SEP participants in this study did not receive a living wage. Whereas music educator participants were provided with sick leave, paid time off, and medical benefits such as health care insurance, SEP participants received an hourly salary, sick leave, and the option of purchasing an expensive health care package for their families. The SEP participants' contract offered health care; however, this package only offers individual coverage, with SEPs having to pay for family coverage. All SEP participants have families and found the 20% premium too expensive to pay. According to Ash:

> *I can't afford the insurance the school offers therefore, we are on Medicaid. . .I think I mentioned before that if I wanted to put my kids on the school plan, it would actually be more than I make. There are paras that literally cut a check every two weeks to the district.* (Text communication, March 26th, 2020).

Working in an environment in which injuries are the norm, these SEPs must take sick leave or unpaid time off of work to see a doctor or attend to physical therapy appointments due to injuries sustained on the job.

Gloria: We should be given affordable health care or something that offsets it a bit. I think honestly, that our pay grade [SEPs] *should be different because* [agreement from all of us] *we* [gesturing to the SEPs in the room] *have a different job than sitting at a desk with a child doing work in the classroom, or shelving library books. . .I think that if your job is different and the chance of you getting hurt is much higher and you're working with like Asperger's or higher functioning spectrum disorders, then maybe you're at one pay grade or whatever. But if you are, if you're on the floor and managing behavior and you're having your hair pulled on a regular basis. And mine is short and let me just tell you it is pulled a lot!!! I think that there should be some kind of difference in how you're paid. Like last year, for example I got bit and it did tendon damage and everything. Every appointment that I had that was during work hours I had to take out of my sick time.* [gasps from all of us]. *So, because the way that our contracts are written, we don't have anything that says it's a work-related injury.* (CoP, meeting four)

Sarah, when injured during her pregnancy was able to file for workman's compensation; however, she had to pay part of that back.

Sarah: I got workman's comp, then had to pay it back. . .

Rachel: You had to pay workman's comp back?

Sarah: It was crazy. They're like "since you didn't die and, and your baby ended up being fine" . . .

Ash: How could they make you pay for that?

Sarah: I don't know. They just pulled it out of my check. What they paid for me for the workman's comp. They later pulled some of the money out [of my paycheck].

Gloria: I don't know what the deal is, but I had heard there's a couple of cases like that.

(CoP, meeting eight)

What Sarah was paying back, per her contract, was the additional days of leave she took that she did not have. As Ash stated, "If the pay wasn't shit, I could easily do this job for the rest of my life and be fulfilled; but the pay is terrible, and I can't pay my bills on it" (CoP, meeting eight). Issues of poor compensation and benefits are common for SEPs and has been identified as a cause for high turnover in the profession (Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2002; Giangreco, Suter, & Doyle, 2010; Tillery, Wert, Roar, & Harris, 2003).

Chapter Summary

Participants in this study lacked the material and educational resources needed to meet the needs of those they taught. Planning time was non-existent for SEPs, as was collaborative planning time for music educators. SEP and music educator participants felt unprepared to teach students with disabilities, as they were not given access to the necessary information needed to teach these students nor adequate professional development. Participants also desired to be a part of the IEP process. Music educator and SEP participants felt their knowledge and experiences were not valued. Due to these conditions, participants felt undervalued by their school communities and considered these reasons to be why they were not given access to student information or included in discussions regarding students (IEP meetings). Music educators felt isolated due to being the only music educator in the building. SEP participants felt disposable due to the high turnover rates and inadequate pay and health benefits. All participants felt that the school culture, and thus how they were valued, was dependent on the environment established by the administration.

Participant needs and desires, as they relate to their work environments, are consistent with the literature. In the SEP literature many researchers point out the issues within the education system as they relate to SEP working conditions (Causton-Theoharis & Burdick, 2012; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, 2001; Mark, Schrader, Levine, 1999). In music education literature few researchers consider all facets of the working conditions music educators face as they relate to teaching students with disabilities. The planning needs of music educators and their feelings of isolation have been examined by researchers (Barry, 2004; Raschdorf, 2015; Shaw, 2017; Shelfo, 2007; Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005; Sindberg, 2011). However, most music education literature centered in teaching students with disabilities, focuses on preparation to teach music to students with disabilities (Gfeller, Darrow, & Hedden, 1990; Grimsby, 2019; Hammel, 2001 a; Hourigan, 2007; VanWeelden & Whipple, 2014a). This leaves the collaborative needs of music educators and SEPs, as well as their access to information and resources, relatively unexamined (Grimsby, 2018, 2019; VanWeelden & Heath-Reynolds, 2018).

CHAPTER EIGHT: CREATING COMMUNITY IN ALTERNATIVE SPACES:
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FIELD

In this chapter, I summarize the purpose and method of this study. Then, I will review how the community of practice (CoP) emerged among participants. I will then summarize emergent themes that were detailed in Chapters Six and Seven. Then, I will discuss the implications that this study has for the field of music education as they relate to theory, policy, and practice. Finally, I will make recommendations for future research.

Summary of Study

The purpose of this study was to engage music educators and special education paraprofessionals (SEPs) in professional development in order to examine instructional processes, perceptions, and practices needed in order to improve instruction for students with disabilities and understand more fully the professional development needs of participants. The "grand tour" question of this study was: How does a community of practice offer collaboration and instructional support for music educators and SEPs? In addition, the following questions guided the study:

1. How do music educators and SEPs interact within a community of practice?

2. Does a community of practice impact the instructional and collaborative practices of music teachers and SEPs, and if so, how does it manifest in the classroom?

3. How does a community of practice shift participants' pedagogical and philosophical beliefs concerning teaching students with disabilities?

4. How does a community of practice facilitate growth and collaborative planning in ways that the school structures cannot? What does this tell us about music educator and paraprofessional needs?

5. What aspects of the community of practice were most difficult for the participants, the easiest, and what did they find most useful?

The design of this study was an instrumental case study (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995) of music educators and SEPs in a CoP centered on teaching music to students with disabilities. The issue examined was political, social, and historical. Political in that SEPs and music educators are not offered the same professional development or collaborative planning opportunities as their general education colleagues (Barrett, 2006; Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2001; Sindberg, 2016), historical in that preparing educators to teach students with disabilities has continued to be a topic of debate as legislation for students with disabilities has evolved (Coates, 2012; French, 2003; Gfeller, Darrow, Hedden, 1990; Grimsby, 2018, 2019; Hammel & Gerrity, 2012; Hourigan, 2007; VanWeelden & Heath-Reynolds, 2018; VanWeelden & Meehan (2016); VanWeelden & Whipple (2014a); Wall, Davis, Winkler-Crowley, & White (2005), and social as the study was situated within a community of practice.

I selected three music educator and three SEP participants using purposeful sampling and convenience sampling (Patton, 2005). Each music educator had six or more years of teaching experience, situated their teaching in one of the major methodologies (Feierabend, Kodály, MLT, or Orff), and worked with students with disabilities either in the inclusive setting, self-contained setting, or both. SEP participants had two or more years of experience, had experience working with students in a music education setting, and actively sought professional development. Initial interviews were completed by October 4, 2020 and CoP meetings were held between October 20, 2019 and January 12, 2020. The community met once in October, twice in November, three times in December, and twice in January. Five of the eight meetings were held at a local middle

school, the remaining three were conducted online through the social platform, Discord®. The first two meetings were centered on understanding more fully the IEP/504 process and terminology used in the special education field. Remaining meetings were less structured and centered on the sharing of participants' lived experiences and developing new *meaning* through those conversations. During the duration of the study, I observed each participant twice, with exception of two participants, first between the second and fourth community of practice meetings, and then between the seventh and eighth community of practice meetings. I then conducted exit interviews between January 13 and January 16, 2020.

Data included initial and exit interview transcriptions, CoP meeting transcriptions, participant journals, video recordings of CoP meetings, video observations of participants in their classroom, fieldnotes taken during CoP meetings and classroom observations, discussions on Discord®, my personal research journal, and text and email messages.

Communities of Practice

I gathered participants together in this study to participate in a social learning community. A social learning community is an informal gathering of educators who seek to understand a shared interest more fully. Members learn through the principles of social constructivism presented in an environment that is supportive and open. Participants developed into a CoP, over time, through continued social interactions and negotiation of knowledge, as each member works with others to develop shared meanings of those interests that are most important to the group. Members of a social learning community also develop new identities as educators as a result of their shared practice.

There are five stages to a community of practice. This CoP developed to the *maturing* stage by the study's end. Within this stage of *maturing*, participants in this community began to

shift their focus from discussing common issues and knowledge, to identifying gaps within their current knowledge and developed plans of action to fill those gaps such as instructional strategies and collaborative discussions via Discord®. During these meetings participants also re-examined their goals and processes through discussion of how they were implementing *practice* outside of the community.

As participants continued to gather, it was apparent that this was more than a "social learning community." The role of more knowledgeable other shifted among participants easily, and shared experiences were valued and discussed such that each meeting initiated the development of new knowledge. Participants began to take this knowledge and practice it within the community as well as outside of the learning community in their professional lives. As meetings continued, participants began to take on certain roles within the community, and, by the end of the study identities had shifted due to the practice of community. The four tenets necessary to constitute a CoP *meaning*, *practice*, *identity*, and *community* were employed consistently in each meeting, thus the social learning community became a CoP.

Theoretical Frameworks and Summary of Results

I employed two theoretical frameworks to analyze the data, social constructivism (Adams, 2006; Hein, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986) and *Communities of Practice* (Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). I used a *Communities of Practice* theoretical lens when analyzing the data and employed the lens of social constructivism to look deeper through the data to examine what emerged from the *community*, *practice*, and developed *meaning*, and *identity* of participants. Through the lens of social constructivism, five themes emerged: *Poor Working Conditions*, *Systemic Concerns in Education*, *Learning to Value Other's Perspectives*,

Collaboration Increases Communication with Colleagues, and *Development of Instructional Strategies*. I will briefly review each theme.

The themes *Poor working Conditions* and *Systemic Concerns in Education* connected with the findings in previous research. Consistent with the literature, music educator and SEP participants felt they lacked planning time and collaborative time with the special education colleagues with whom they worked (Barry, 2004; Grimsby, 2018, 2019; Raschdorf, 2015; Shaw, 2017; Shelfo, 2007; VanWeelden & Heath-Reynolds, 2018). Participants also stated that they felt isolated as they were not included in decisions or discussions regarding the students with disabilities whom they teach (Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2001; Giangreco, Broer, Edelman, 2002; Grimsby, 2018, 2019; VanWeelden & Heath-Reynolds, 2018). A lack of value and respect for their profession also was experienced by participants. SEPs experienced injuries due to their working conditions (Barresi, 1992; Etscheidt, 2005) and felt as if they were disposable to administrators due to high turnover (Ghere & York-Barr, 2007; Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2002; Giangreco, Suter, & Doyle, 2010).

Music educators and SEPs expressed a desire to have the time to communicate and collaborate with colleagues, knowing it would benefit their instruction (Burnstein et al., 2004; Carter, Prater, Jackson, & Marchant, 2009). Participants also desired access to information in order to better understand students' needs. They also desired professional development that is specific to the students they teach (Barret, 2006; Grimsby, 2018, 2019; Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; Marks, Schrader, & Levine, 1999; VanWeelden & Heath-Reynolds, 2018). Systemic concerns within the education system, as expressed by participants, also were connected to participant working conditions and were consistent with the literature. This theme points to the political nature of the study, supporting the use of an instrumental case study design. Participants

felt they lacked access to educational resources needed to teach students with disabilities (Gfeller, Darrow, & Hedden, 1990; Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Giangreco, et al., 2003; Grimsby, 2018, 2019; Hammel, 2001a/b; VanWeelden & Heath-Reynolds, 2018). The participants reported that they felt that they were at the bottom of the workplace hierarchy, which is common among SEPs and music educators (Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2002; Grimsby, 2018, 2019; Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; VanWeelden & Whipple, 2018). As has been identified by other researchers, poor pay and a lack of benefits were described as an issue with the system by SEPs and something that impacted their career longevity (Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, 2001; Giangreco, Broer, Edelman, 2002).

SEPs felt their knowledge and experience were not valued within their school environments, as their knowledge was not gained in a traditional manner (i.e., 4-year degree in special education/education). SEPs shared how their experiences prior to becoming a SEP and their years of experience as a SEP, gave them expertise that benefitted the students with disabilities whom they taught; however, those experiences too were not valued by their colleagues. Through participation in a CoP, SEPs felt their knowledge and experiences were valued by music educator participants.

Several themes emerged that were centered specifically on the *meaning* developed by the participants in the community (e.g., reified objects) and how their perceptions of their own and community members' *identities* shifted through practicing *community*. The themes were *Learning to Value Other's Perspectives*, *Collaboration Increases Communication with Colleagues*, and *Development of Instructional Strategies*. The largest influence the CoP had on participants was in how participants perceived each other and their collaborative roles. These changes in perception not only improved the collaborative relationships of the individuals in

their schools, but also brought about a development of "educational empathy" in most participants. Collaborating in a CoP also had a positive influence on participant feelings of isolation and value. Music educator feelings of isolation (Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005; Sindberg, 2011) and SEPs feeling a lack of value (Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2001; Marks, Schrader, & Levine, 1999) were consistent with the literature. While music educators did not feel undervalued, they did express a new sense of confidence in teaching music to students with disabilities. This sense of confidence, after participating in professional development centered in teaching music to students with disabilities, is consistent with other researcher findings (Hammel & Gerrity, 2012). Participation in and learning from the CoP manifested itself in most participant classrooms. The reified objects that were developed by the community included assistive devices and technology, tools to support social emotional learning, and visuals to support anxiety, time, and behavioral management as well as student learning.

Conclusions

In this study, I sought to find if engaging in professional development through participation in a learning community would address the instructional and collaborative needs of music educators and SEPs. During the study, it was clear that a CoP rather than a professional learning community was emerging. This CoP provided participants the time and space to discuss issues within their workspaces, as well as collaborate on student and instructional needs. Initially, music educator participants expressed a desire to understand the students with disabilities who they teach more fully, as well as a desire to develop instructional strategies to use for them in the classroom. SEPs desired a space where their knowledge and experience would be valued.

Over the duration of this study, members of the CoP benefitted from the collaborative time to engage in conversations about students with disabilities. This CoP helped to address the needs earlier expressed by participants: the need for collaborative time (Grimsby, 2019; VanWeelden & Whipple, 2014a), access to information (Grimsby, 2019; Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; VanWeelden & Heath-Reynolds, 2018), feelings of isolation (Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005; Sindberg, 2011) and a desire for their experiences and knowledge to be valued (Causton-Theoharis & Burdick, 2012; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2001; Marks, Schrader, & Levine, 1999). During each meeting participants were able to share their lived experiences in a space where their knowledge was not only valued but positively impacted how individuals within the community perceived those with whom they work. The community also positively influenced how music educators perceived their students with disabilities. SEPs provided music educators with a wealth of knowledge on students with disabilities in regard to their behavioral and learning needs. As such, this information benefited music educator participants, impacted their collaborative practices within the schools where they work and may have benefited their students as well. As music educators valued the knowledge shared by SEPs, SEP participants felt valued as a result.

Members of the CoP also developed instructional strategies. Discussions centered in instruction and student needs facilitated the development of reified objects which benefited all members. All participants expressed a boost to their self-esteem and confidence as a result of participation in the CoP. These findings have demonstrated that a CoP can meet the needs for connection and community that have been expressed by music educators and SEPs in the literature (Gfeller, Darrow, & Hedden, 1990; Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2001; Giangreco, et al., 2003; Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2002; Giangreco, Edelman,

& Broer, 2001; Grimsby, 2018, 2019; Hammel, 2001a/b; Marks, Schrader, & Levine, 1999; Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005; Sindberg, 2011; VanWeelden & Heath-Reynolds, 2018).

Implications for Theory, Policy, and Practice

The findings of this study have multiple implications for music education, as well as for the field of education in general. Several of my recommendations have been made by previous researchers. It is my hope that this study will amplify those voices as well as add my own in order to propel forward several much-needed changes in our profession. Implications for this study fell into three categories: music education theory, policy changes, and practical needs of music educators and SEPs.

Music Education Theory

The mantra of our community of practice was "behavior is communication." SEP participants described student behaviors and responses in order to assist music educator participants to more fully understand the needs of their students with disabilities whom they taught. As Gloria stated in CoP, meeting six, "People are afraid of our kids." Often, the behaviors of students with disabilities can frighten teachers, leaving them unsure of how to engage with the students with disabilities whom they teach. In our final meeting, Sara stated, "teachers are afraid of our children because they do not know what to do with them and because of that they [students with disabilities] are often ignored" (CoP, meeting eight). When teachers are not prepared to teach music to students with disabilities, the music classroom can become an environment that further disables children. Music educators are not fully prepared to teach students with disabilities (Gfeller, Hedden, & Darrow, 1990; Grimsby, 2019; Salvador, 2010; VanWeelden & Whipple, 2014a), nor are they provided with adequate content-specific professional development to teach students with disabilities (Grimsby, 2019; VanWeelden &

Meehan, 2016). As such teachers do not understand how their instruction and classroom space may further disable a child.

Disability is a social construct (Hunt, 1966; Oliver, 1990; Shakespeare, 1994; Snyder & Mitchell, 2006; Waldschmidt, 2017, 2018). While an individual may have an impairment (physical, cognitive, emotional, behavioral) one becomes disabled once they leave their home or community. As a result, when a child with a disability comes to school, accommodations and modifications are not always provided because those educating the child are not adequately prepared (Ruppar, Neeper, & Dalsen, 2016). Or, accommodations and modifications are provided, as in the case of these music educator participants; however, many music educators do not know how to effectively implement those accommodations and modifications. As a result, the learning environments and physical spaces become disabling for students with physical, cognitive, emotional, or behavioral needs.

Music educator participants in this study felt they did not know enough to meet the needs of the students with disabilities whom they taught. In coming to this study each music educator participant wanted to learn more about students with disabilities, learn how their IEPs/504s applied to music, as well as learn instructional strategies that would benefit those students' learning needs. Teaching music educators to examine their classroom spaces and curriculum through a disability lens may prove beneficial. If music educators were provided professional development that guided them in a consideration of their curriculum, through a theoretical lens situated in disability, they may be able to expand their curriculum and deliver instructional content in a way that does not further disable these populations. Furthermore, as music educators work and gain more experience teaching these populations, perhaps they will feel compelled to share their expertise and develop professional development that is content-specific and situated

in disability. A theoretical understanding of disability also may benefit how administrators and individuals in charge of policy view the need for collaborative planning time between education stakeholders such as music educators and SEPs.

Across the duration of the study, music educator and SEP participants stated that strategies that work for those with disabilities could work for all students. "What we are talking about doesn't just apply to our students with disabilities. It applies to everyone" (Noelle, CoP meeting eight). Using strategies that benefit one population for the benefit of all students is a tenet of a pedagogical framework known was as Universal Design for Learning. A consideration of the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) also would prove beneficial. UDL considers how the classroom environment and curriculum may be disabling to a student rather than focus on the impairment of a student. UDL also posits that variability is the norm not the exception, meaning that all students engage in learning and their environments differently. As such, UDL asks educators to consider that students learn in multiple ways and need more than the typical direct instruction that occurs in many music settings. The three principles of UDL are: multiple means of engagement, multiple means of representation, and multiple means of expression. Not all students are motivated to learn by the same strategies and therefore an educator should employ multiple means to motivate their students to engage in learning. Students also need a variety of ways to engage in content to understand what they are being taught. UDL asks the educator to represent their course content in multiple ways; aural, visual, kinesthetic, to name a few. Lastly, UDL asks the educator to allow students multiple ways to show what they know. This means that if the end project is a composition, then students need to be provided multiple paths to create that composition. Some students may succeed with paper/pencil, others may need to use pictures, and yet other students may need to use assistive technology to

complete their composition. Engaging music educators in an understanding of the principles of Universal Design for Learning would allow them to view their classrooms and curriculums from the perspective of the student, and their learning needs. Employing UDL as a lens to examine classroom environments and curricula would allow educators the tools needed to ensure their music setting is enabling rather than disabling.

Implications for Policy Changes

The findings from this study lead to several policy implications. Suggestions for policy include incorporating SEPs in school wide professional development, providing learning communities for SEPs and music educators, providing music teachers and SEPs access to student information, and providing planning time for both SEPs and music educators. Also, I make recommendations for higher pay for SEPs and affordable health care.

Professional development. During initial interviews, music educator participants shared that school wide professional development was not content specific. SEP participants stated that, in previous placements they were not included in school wide professional development. Local education agencies (LEAs) should provide content specific professional development for their music educators, for example, professional development situated in teaching music to students to disabilities. Providing content-specific professional development to music educators will provide these educators the support they need to more fully understand students with disabilities as well as improve their instructional practices (Hammel & Gerrity, 2012). State education agencies (SEAs) and LEAs also should reconsider SEP contracts and organize them in such a way that these individuals are allowed to, and paid to, attend school wide professional development. Allowing SEPs to participate in school wide professional development will alleviate feelings of being undervalued (Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; Marks, Schrader, & Levine, 1999) as well as

provide them access to policies and practices being implemented school wide. SEP participants

in this study were allowed access to their school wide professional development and as a result

stated that they felt more valued by administrators than in previous placements. According

IDEA, statute 20 U.S.C. §1463, funding received under this section should be used to:

> . . .provide training for both regular education teachers and special education teachers to
>
> address the needs of students with different learning styles. . .improve services provided
>
> under this chapter, including the practices of professionals and others involved in
>
> providing such services to children with disabilities, that promote academic achievement
>
> and improve results for children with disabilities. . .enabling professionals. . .and other
>
> persons to learn about, and implement, the findings of scientifically based research, and
>
> successful practices. . . (IDEA, 2004)

Although music educators and SEPs are not "regular education teachers" or "special

education teachers" they spend a great deal of time with students with disabilities; as such, these

laws and funding for these laws should apply to them as well. When provided professional

development centered in how to teach music to students with disabilities, be it formal or

informal, music educator and paraprofessionals benefit. As demonstrated in this study, music

educators' confidence in their abilities to teach these populations increased, as did feelings of

value and respect among participants

In addition, LEAs also should consider providing music educator and SEPs the time and

space to develop a professional learning community. Providing professional development, as

outlined above, could alleviate feelings of being undervalued and provide the much-needed

knowledge to teach students with disabilities. Providing time and space for a learning community

also would allow for these things to occur. SEPs in this CoP felt that their knowledge and

experiences were valued by music educator participants. Music educator participants stated that they benefitted from the knowledge and experience shared by SEPs, providing for them an understanding of how to teach students with disabilities that they did not have prior to this study. Specific to participation in a learning community, as a form of professional development, is the influence on participant perceptions. Through participating in a learning community, in this case a CoP, participants in this study understood more fully their collaborative roles and began to trust the expertise of their colleagues within the schools in which they worked.

      Access to information. Music educator and SEP participants expressed that they lacked access to information and were not included in discussions that related to students with disabilities whom they teach. Participants in this CoP either were not given IEPs/504s or were only allowed access to pages that share the accommodations and modifications given to support students' learning needs. This is not uncommon for music educators and SEPs (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Grimsby 2018, 2019; McCord & Watts, 2006; VanWeelden & Heath-Reynolds, 2018). Without access to the necessary information on students with disabilities, music educators and SEPs may be creating environments that further disable students. According to IDEA statute 20 U.S.C. §1423 (d), "each participating agency must maintain, for public inspection, a current listing of the names and positions of those employees within the agency who may have access to personally identifiable information" (IDEA, 2004). This implies that any individual on this list may have access to student information. Music educators and SEPs who work with students with disabilities in a consistent manner should have access to this information as long as it is documented by the LEA (local education agency). Participants in this study were not given access to these documents, which inhibited their ability to meet the needs of those students with

disabilities whom they teach. SEAs (state education agencies) should support the LEA in providing all stakeholders, this includes music educators and SEPs, in the IEP process.

Music educator and SEP participants in this study were not allowed to participate in Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings. With the number of students that most music educators teach, it would be impossible for them to attend every IEP meeting for each student they teach who has an IEP plan. However, SEPs who work with music educators could provide insight to the IEP team as to which students with disabilities might benefit the most from music instruction so that the music educators may participate in those specific IEP meetings. SEAs also should provide more funding to LEAs to secure substitutes or to provide coverage in alternative ways to enable music educators and SEPs to attend and give input into IEP meetings.

Providing planning time. Music educator and SEP participants consistently expressed the need for collaborative planning time with their special education colleagues. The need for planning time (collaborative or not) is not an issue new to the field of music education or SEPs (Barrett, 2006; Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Giangreco, Broer, Edelman, 2002; Sindberg, 2016; Shaw, 2017). A few researchers have demonstrated the positive impact collaborative planning may have on students and educators as related to teaching students with disabilities (Burstein et al., 2004; Carter, Prater, Jackson, & Marchant, 2009). Despite research on the need for planning time and research that demonstrates the positive benefits of collaborative planning time between education stakeholders, music educators and SEPs are still without this time.

When PL 94-142 (Education for All Handicapped Education Act, 1975) passed, mainstreaming first took place in music and art classrooms (Hammel, 1999; Jellison, 2015). As stated earlier, music educators were unprepared to include students with disabilities in their

instruction. As 45 years have passed and special education law has evolved, music educators still feel unprepared to teach students with disabilities (Grimsby, 2018, 2019; VanWeelden & Heath-Reynolds, 2018). In-service music educators may feel better prepared to teach music to students with disabilities if given time to collaborate with the paraprofessionals with whom they work.

Administrators should consider examining how they schedule instruction and teacher planning time in order to provide the necessary collaborative spaces for music educators and SEPs. Grade level educators are provided time to plan with their grade level colleagues, as such they and their students benefit from the weekly engagement where educators may discuss their students, curriculums, and collaborate with one another to assist in troubleshooting student needs (Fabrocini, 2011; Kimmel, 2012). SEPs and music educators are not allocated that same time within their workday. Most collaboration between SEPs and music educators takes place on their own time, before, after, or during (lunch) the school day (Grimsby, 2018, 2019; McCord & Watts, 2006). Music instruction of students with disabilities would benefit from music educators and SEPs receiving time to collaborate weekly to discuss the students whom they teach. SEP collaborative planning has been demonstrated to be beneficial in the literature (Causton-Theoharis & Burdick, 2012; Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2003).

Higher pay and affordable health care. SEP participants in this study received less than a living wage and also were not offered affordable health care. A lack of a living wage and affordable health care may be a leading cause as to why there is such high turnover with SEPs (Ghere & York-Barr, 2007; Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, 2002; Tillery, Werts, Roark, & Harris, 2003). Both Gloria and Ash worked multiple jobs in order to make ends meet. Sarah was the only SEP who did not need to work multiple jobs due to her husband's income. As stated earlier, SEPs are paid hourly and per their contract are capped once they meet a certain hourly wage, as

Gloria stated, "the cap is 16 or 17 an hour" (CoP, meeting eight). SEAs should consider the importance of SEPs in how they support educators' instruction by supporting students with disabilities (Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, 2003; French, 1998) and in return pay them accordingly. SEAs also should consider a pay scale specific to the role a SEP performs.

> *[our] pay grade should be different because we have a different job than sitting at a desk with a child doing work in the classroom. When you're managing behaviors. . .your job is different and the chance of you getting hurt is much higher.* (Gloria, CoP, meeting four)

As Gloria also stated, "paraprofessionals are not created equal" (CoP, meeting four).

In addition to higher pay, SEPs should be provided affordable health care. SEP participants in this study worked with students who demonstrated higher needs and therefore more severe behaviors. As a result, these SEPs sustained multiple injuries. When injured, SEP participants often had to use sick leave or take leave without pay in order to attend doctor's appointments or physical therapy. This negatively impacted participant take-home pay and their sense of value to the school community.

Ash is considering leaving the field due to needing affordable health care for their children, and Gloria is no longer a SEP (personal text, February 27th, 2020). Perhaps if SEPs were provided higher pay and affordable health care, they would feel more valued (Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, 2001; Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; Marks, Schrader, & Levine, 1999). Furthermore, higher pay and affordable health care might also alleviate high turnover rates for SEPs, thus allowing SEPs to continue in their careers. If SEPs were in their position for several years, they may very well develop into the highly knowledgeable and experienced SEPs that participated in this study.

Practical Needs of Music Educators and SEPs

Music educators in this study benefitted greatly by having the opportunity to interact with SEPs, who work with students with disabilities on a daily basis. In the CoP, the SEPs consistently served as the "more knowledgeable other," and the music educators were eager to hear what they had to say. Perhaps preservice music educators should interact with SEPs and special education teachers so that they feel more prepared to teach students with disabilities. The following suggestions for practice center on specific field placements for undergraduate music educators, preservice music educator education, and the use of an online platform to increase communication and collaboration between music educators and the SEPs with whom they work.

Undergraduate field placement. During our CoP meetings, I shared how much I had learned in observing the SEPs, and Sarah suggested that, "students should shadow a paraprofessional, or at least come into the classroom a couple of times" (CoP, meeting eight). The need for field placements for preservice teachers is not a new suggestion (Hammel, 2001a; Hourigan, 2007, 2009; Salvador, 2010; VanWeelden & Whipple, 2005). Field experience situated in working with students with disabilities for preservice music educators is a necessity. However, these experiences are not enough and do not give the preservice music educator a broad enough understanding of what it means to work with students with disabilities, nor do they result in an understanding of the perspective of all stakeholders who work with students with disabilities. The need for field experience situated in special education is not a new implication for the field of education (Coates, 2012; Cramer, et al., 2015; Khan & Lewis, 2014).

Adding requirements to a preservice music education degree may seem daunting. Researchers have bemoaned the excessive credit requirements within music teacher preparation programs (Hourigan, 2007, 2009; Salvador, 2010; VanWeelden & Whipple, 2005). It is not

logical for these field experiences with disabilities to take place during introductory coursework. Preservice music educators need a foundation in music education principles as well as experience in working with neuro-typical populations before gaining experience teaching music to students with disabilities. Perhaps these field experiences could take place during the student teaching experience. Music teacher educators, when working to place preservice music educators with their cooperating teacher, could choose schools that have special education programs that employ SEPs. The first several weeks of a student teachers' placement is often filled with observations and one-to-one or small group work. This is the ideal time for preservice music educators to spend time working with the SEPs and special education teachers in that location. This additional student teaching requirement would add no additional pressures to credit requirements and would be provided when it is most beneficial to a preservice music educator. Preservice music educator placements that offer the student a chance to shadow a paraprofessional would allow students to understand more fully how to teach students with disabilities, as well as the importance of forming collaborative relationships with these individuals.

Another option would be for universities to allow for space within degree requirements for a course specifically situated in teaching music to students with disabilities. While this study did not focus on music educator participants perceptions of their preparation, music educator participants did state a lack of knowledge in how to teach students with disabilities. An undergraduate course situated in music and disability could address this. The course should be available only to those preservice music educators who have completed coursework in the foundations of music education. Part of the requirements for this course could be a field placement, not only in a music classroom, but also with a SEP. Providing preservice music

educators with experience focusing on collaborating with SEPs and teaching students with disabilities in their student teaching placements or within a specific course situated in teaching music to students with disabilities would offer invaluable experiences to these future music educators. These experiences would not only help prepare preservice music educators to work with special populations, but it also would teach preservice music educators the value of collaboration and to value the knowledge and experiences of those SEPs with whom they work.

Online platforms. Participants in this study felt a boost in their morale and career purpose as a result of participating in the CoP. Having the space and time to meet in person remedies feelings of isolation and lack of value (Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2001; Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005; Sindberg, 2016). Also, collaborative time between SEPs and music educators, as demonstrated in this study, may allow for instructional strategies to be developed that will benefit the musical learning of students with disabilities. Providing collaborative time for music educators and SEPs also will allow these education stakeholders time to clearly communicate the expectations they have for student learning and co-teaching (Burnstein et al., 2004; Carter, Prater, Jackson, & Marchant, 2009; VanWeelden & Heath-Reynolds, 2018). Despite the benefit of collaborative planning time, the reality is that music educators and SEPs are not given this time (Grimsby, 2018, 2019; McCord & Watts, 2005; VanWeelden & Heath-Reynolds, 2018).

I am not advocating for online platforms to replace the need for in-person collaborative planning time. As I stated earlier, in-person collaborative planning between music educators and SEPs is a must. I also am not advocating that online platforms be the only option given to music educators and SEPs. However, until policy changes, an online solution may temporarily meet the collaborative needs of music educators and SEPs.

Researchers have examined the use of online platforms as a way to provide professional development to music educators (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Bell-Robertson, 2015). For participants in this CoP, an online platform was necessary in order to accommodate the schedules of each participant. While it was not ideal, and participants preferred to meet in-person, the online platform provided participants a space to collaborate as well as a space to share teaching materials such as lessons and manipulatives. An online platform, such as Discord®, may provide music educators and SEPs the "space" to collaborate until the much-needed policy changes can occur.

In order for an online platform to be beneficial for music educators and SEPs, these individuals first must have access to the technologies needed in order to use them. Many SEPs do not have access to computers or their email during the day. The use of personal devices also may be prohibited for some individuals within their schools. SEPs and music educators should be permitted the use of their personal devices during the day in order to collaborate on instruction. By allowing the use of personal devices during the day, an online platform such as Discord® could be employed. Many platforms allow users to communicate in real time and upload documents, including video. By using those platforms, SEPs can inform music educators when their shared students are demonstrating communicative behaviors that may impede their learning in music class. Music educators also could use online platforms to quickly communicate lesson plans and lesson schedules allowing SEPs to prepare their students for music class. An online platform also can offer space for music teachers and SEPs to problematize certain classroom activities or concepts taught in order to develop instructional strategies to support student learning. Ideally, collaborative planning for music educators and SEPs should take place

in-person, as is afforded to regular and special education teachers. Until that time, an online platform may be a useful, temporary, solution.

<div align="center">**Recommendations for Future Research**</div>

The time frame for this study was limited. At the end of the study, although there were some changes in classroom practice, those changes were just beginning to take place. It would be beneficial to replicate this study over a longer duration of time, perhaps a year or even more, as participants expressed, they wished they could have spent more time applying IEP terminology and goals to their curricula and instruction. SEPs wanted to spend more time with music educators engaging them in their curriculum. Music educators wished they could have had more time to dive deeper into the instructional strategies developed. If the study were to be replicated, it would be interesting to see what impact the role of participant-observer may have on the CoP. While content was driven by participants, I also shared my experiences and knowledge. I wonder how the outcomes of this study would have been different had I not been a participant-observer. As such, if the study were to be replicated, the individual conducting the study should not be a participant-observer, but rather only the researcher.

I also recommend a follow up study to see if engaging in this CoP affected music teacher and SEP practice and perception in a sustained way. CoP members stated how beneficial they found their community. Participants in this CoP continue to be connected via text, email, Discord®, and for some, Facebook. It would be interesting to see if participants in this CoP maintained their community over time and, if they did not maintain contact with this specific CoP, whether they developed a CoP within the schools in which they work.

Policy makers should examine education policy as it relates to music education and teaching students with disabilities. Music education researchers should examine federal and state

special education law as it applies, or does not apply, to music education. This might encourage music teachers and SEPs who work in music settings to push for their rights to professional development and access to information. An examination of special education policy as it does or does not apply to music education may create changes to policy that would provide music educators the resources they need in order to create a more inclusive music environment and curricula.

Of the participants in this study, Dre seemed to be in an environment where administrators actively strived to support all personnel in their school, as a result, Dre felt valued. Dre spoke of several initiatives that his administrators employed to develop a positive and supportive work environment for all educational stakeholders. An examination of Dre's school might give insight to other administrators in how to cultivate a similar climate in their own schools.

Many instructional strategies were developed as an outcome of the community of practice. This study was not designed to determine whether instructional strategies had an impact on the learning of participants' students. A study examining the impact of instructional strategies developed within a CoP could have meaningful outcomes that may improve the instructional practices of music educators by providing insight into what strategies help students with disabilities engage most successfully with musical learning.

A study is needed examining the long-term impact of field experiences in settings including students with disabilities for preservice music educators. A longitudinal study of the impact of these field experiences from preservice to inservice music educators may provide insight into the design of field experiences for the preservice music educator. In addition to an examination of preservice student teacher placements, music teacher educators should examine

the impact of undergraduate coursework situated in music and disability. If this course centered on music teacher educators guiding preservice teachers in how to employ a theoretical lens situated in disability to examine their future teaching spaces and/or curricula, preservice teachers may feel more prepared to teach music to students with disabilities. Examining instructional spaces and materials through the lens of disability considers disability from the interactions, perspectives, and intersections of both those with and without impairments. A study that examines the impact of an undergraduate course situated in music and disability may offer insight into how we teach music teaching to preservice teachers. A longitudinal study on the impact of such an undergraduate course also should be considered, preservice to inservice music educator, as it too may provide insight into the impact of such a course on inservice music educator preparedness to teach music to, and attitudes towards, students with disabilities

I suggested that the use of an online platform may provide music educators and SEPs an alternative space for collaborative planning. As demonstrated in this study, in-person contact is difficult. In-person contact may be difficult due to collaborative spaces not being offered in places of work or that these education stake holders may have multiple jobs to make ends meet. A study examining an online only CoP would be advantageous to see if it would positively impact collaborative practices and student learning.

Finally, researchers should continually examine the professional development needs of the novice, experienced, and veteran music educator as they relate to teaching music to students with disabilities. Dufour (2004) stated that professional development should ensure that students learn, develop a culture of collaboration, and have a focus on results. This CoP provided not only a collaborative space, but an alternative to the professional development participants felt they were lacking. Continuing to examine the professional development needs of music educators

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would allow professional development to be designed that is not only content specific but meets the specific needs of music educators during the varying stages of their careers.

Advocating for Change

For over 40 years researchers have examined the needs of music educators and SEPs, and only recently the collaborative needs of both. Despite decades worth of research, little has changed in our profession. Many preservice music educators still are underprepared to teach music to students with disabilities, and many inservice music educators lack access to information and are not provided professional development needed to teach music to students with disabilities successfully. Inservice music educators and SEPs also are not given the time needed to learn from and work with one another. While it is impossible for one study to bring about great changes within a singular profession, it is my hope that this study will add to the multitude of voices that have come before. Perhaps, if we continue to add voices that advocate for students with disabilities and their music teachers and SEPs, the much-needed changes our profession needs will take place. Stella Young stated, "my disability exists not because I use a wheelchair, but because the broader environment isn't accessible." If we continue to ignore research advocating for changes in the preparation and support of those who teach music to students with disabilities, we will continue to make music a space that is inaccessible and disabling to those who are differently abled.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

<div align="center">

Informed Consent for Participation in a Research Study
[for the music educator participants]

</div>

***Title of the Project*:** Developing a Professional Learning Community Between Music Educators and Paraprofessionals

Purpose of the Project: With the intent of improving music instruction for students with disabilities, the purpose of this research is to engage music educators and the paraprofessionals with whom they work in professional development that examines the instructional processes, perceptions, and practices needed to teach music to students with disabilities.

What you will do: You will participate in a PLC lasting approximately five months. During this time, you will also participate in semi-structured interviews (both before the PLC meetings begin, and once they are finished), will keep a journal of your participation in the PLC, will be observed working with students in your classroom, will watch the video of the observation with the researcher for a video protocol analysis interview, and will email the researcher during this period with any questions or concerns you may have.

Your rights to participate: Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You have the right to say no. You may change your mind at any time and withdraw. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time. Whether you choose to participate will have no effect on the relationship between you and the researcher(s). Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Costs and Compensation: There is no cost or compensation offered to be in this research study.

Confidentiality: Your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. Your private data will not be used in any publications or reports obtained from this interview; your confidentiality as a participant in this research study will remain secure. The data collected for this research study will be protected on a password-protected computer or in a locked file cabinet on the campus of Michigan State University for a minimum of three years after the close of the project. Only the researchers and the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) will have access to the research data. All recordings will be destroyed no later than May 2021.

Risks for the participant: The majority of the questions asked in each interview will be about your teaching experiences, so the risk of serious psychological harm is extremely small. During PLC meetings the conversations will center on participants' professional development needs as well sharing instructional strategies, so the risk of serious psychological harm is extremely small. There is no physical risk involved in participation. As all data will remain confidential, therefore no social, legal, and economic risk is involved.

Benefits for the participant: An examination of the instructional processes, perceptions, and practices needed to teach music to students with disabilities could help clarify or illuminate personal and collegial strengths or insights you had not previously considered.

Contact information: If you have questions or concerns about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the researcher: Cynthia Taggart, Principal Investigator (517) 432-9678 or taggartc@msu.edu, or the Secondary Investigator: Rachel Grimsby (703) 403-7042 or grimsbyr@msu.edu

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

You may keep a copy of this consent form for your records.

Informed Consent for Participation in a Research Study
[for the paraprofessional participants]

***Title of the Project*:** Developing a Professional Learning Community Between Music Educators and Paraprofessionals

Purpose of the Project: With the intent of improving music instruction for students with disabilities, the purpose of this research is to engage music educators and the special education professionals with whom they work in professional development that examines the instructional processes, perceptions, and practices needed to teach music to students with disabilities.

What you will do: You will participate in a PLC lasting approximately five months. During this time, you will also participate in semi-structured interviews (both before the PLC meetings begin, and once they are finished), will keep a journal of your participation in the PLC, will be observed working with students in your classroom, will watch the video of the observation with the researcher for a video protocol analysis interview, and will email the researcher during this period with any questions or concerns you may have.

Your rights to participate: Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You have the right to say no. You may change your mind at any time and withdraw. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time. Whether you choose to participate will have no effect on the relationship between you and the researcher(s). Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Costs and Compensation: There is no cost to be in this research study. As a paraprofessional you will be paid $10 per hour of participation in the professional learning community. Payment will be given upon completion of the study.

Confidentiality: Your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. Your private data will not be used in any publications or reports obtained from this interview; your confidentiality as a participant in this research study will remain secure. The data collected for this research study will be protected on a password-protected computer or in a locked file cabinet on the campus of Michigan State University for a minimum of three years after the close of the project. Only the researchers and the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) will have access to the research data. All recordings will be destroyed no later than May 2021.
Risks for the participant: The majority of the questions asked in each interview will be about your teaching experiences, so the risk of serious psychological harm is extremely small. During PLC meetings the conversations will center on participants' professional development needs as well sharing instructional strategies, so the risk of serious psychological harm is extremely small. There is no physical risk involved in participation. As all data will remain confidential, therefore no social, legal, and economic risk is involved.

Benefits for the participant: An examination of the instructional processes, perceptions, and practices needed to teach music to students with disabilities could help clarify or illuminate personal and collegial strengths or insights you had not previously considered.

Contact information: If you have questions or concerns about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the researcher: Cynthia Taggart, Principal Investigator (517) 432-9678 or taggartc@msu.edu, or the Secondary Investigator: Rachel Grimsby (703) 403-7042 or grimsbyr@msu.edu

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

You may keep a copy of this consent form for your records.

APPENDIX B

INITIAL AND EXIT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

MUSIC EDUCATOR INITIAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Music Educator Interview Protocol

The location for interviews has yet to be determined as potential participants have not been contacted per IRB regulations. These semi-structured interviews will be audio recorded either using garage band or an audio recording device that I am considering purchasing from Apple. While these questions seem short or direct, I am choosing basic questions that may open the door for more meaningful conversations. Questions that will guide the interview are below:

Get to know you, questions:
1. Where did you go to school?
2. What made you decide to become an educator?
3. How long have you been teaching and where?
4. Have you always been in Michigan?
5. What are some things that bring you joy in your job?
6. What are some things you'd like to change about your job?

Teaching Questions
1. How do you interpret and implement IEPs or 504s into your classroom?
2. How comfortable do you feel engaging students with disabilities in your instruction?
3. How do you plan for your students with disabilities?

Professional Development/Collaboration
1. What types of professional development are available to you?
2. What types of professional development have you had regarding teaching music (or teaching in general) to students with disabilities?
3. What are your interactions like with your special education colleagues?
4. How much time are you given to collaborate with your special education colleagues?

PLC Questions
1. What are you hoping to gain from participating in this study?
2. Are there specific gaps in your knowledge that you would like this PLC to address?
3. What types of activities do you feel would benefit you the most in a PLC?
4. What do you wish paraprofessionals knew about teaching music?
5. What do you wish to learn from paraprofessionals?

PARAPROFESSIONAL INITIAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The location for interviews has yet to be determined as potential participants have not been contacted per IRB regulations. These semi-structured interviews will be audio recorded either using garage band or an audio recording device that I am considering purchasing from Apple. While these questions seem short or direct, I am choosing basic questions that may open the door for more meaningful conversations. Questions that will guide the interview are below:

Get to know you, questions:
7. Where did you go to school?
8. What made you decide to become a paraprofessional?
9. How long have you been teaching and where?
10. Have you always been in Michigan?
11. What are some things that bring you joy in your job?
12. What are some things you'd like to change about your job?

Teaching Questions
4. How do you interpret and implement IEPs or 504s into your instruction?
5. How comfortable do you feel engaging students with disabilities in your instruction?
6. How do you plan for your students with disabilities?
7. How much time do you spend with your students during the day?

Professional Development/Collaboration
5. What types of professional development are available to you?
6. What types of professional development have you had regarding teaching music (or teaching in general) to students with disabilities?
7. What are your interactions like with your music education colleagues?
8. Is there a difference in access/time given between music teachers and generalist teachers?
9. How much time are you given to collaborate with your music teacher colleagues?

PLC Questions
6. What are you hoping to gain from participating in this study?
7. Are there specific gaps in your knowledge that you would like this PLC to address?
8. What types of activities do you feel would benefit you the most in a PLC?
9. What do you wish music educators knew about being a paraprofessional?
10. What do you wish to know about music education and teaching music to children?

EXIT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS

1. Tell me about your experience participating in the community of practice?
2. Was there anything that was really enjoyable or overly difficult in participating in the community of practice?
3. What was the most useful aspect of this community?
4. Did the group discussions encourage you to critically examine your teaching practices? If so, how? If not, why?
5. Do you feel anything changed in your instructional practices as a result of this group?
6. Did the participation in the group affect how you interact with colleagues in your own building, if so how?
7. How was this group different from other collaborative groups?
8. How did this study impact your understanding of your colleague's role?

APPENDIX C

REIFIED OBJECTS DEVELOPED BY THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Reified Objects Developed by the Community of Practice

Instructional Strategies Discussed in Meetings

1. The use of social stories to manage behaviors and emotions.
2. Use social stories to teach social-emotional learning.
3. Be flexible with instructional strategy based on the population of the classroom.
4. Visual schedules of lesson.
5. Micro schedules for students who need each activity broken up.
6. Inform para early – allow them to create lesson schedule/visuals.
7. Pictures to allow students to communicate needs effectively.
8. Breaking activities into step by step instruction (explore, create, decode, write – Dre's book example, also see Figure 15, p. 233).
9. The use of peer modeling.
10. The use of an online community, such as Facebook to promote positive relationships and share student successes.
11. Develop the ability to adjust "on the fly."
12. Understanding "behavior is communication."
13. Using familiar activities that are successful more often.
14. Changing familiar activity with the use of a different manipulative (RT activity) or instrument (beat activity), for example.
15. Knowing preferred and non-preferred activities and how to structure the lesson to ensure student stamina.
16. Visual schedules for behaviors as well instruction.
17. Self-contained – same lesson for a month for consistency, gradually introduce new content over the month in preparation for the next month.
18. Lots of repetition – 12-15 times without change.
19. Encouragement of small successes.
20. Using props.
21. Modeling for all students, "life size visual" – verbal, visual, with teacher, student pair, small group, whole class.
22. Prompting hierarchy – modeling, with a visual, while speaking, while doing hand over hand, and eventually taking things away one at a time.
23. Folk dancing from a chair with everyone to help with left/right before trying in free space.
24. Video modeling helps reduce anxiety/stress in learning. It allows students to "practice" in their head before participating.
25. Anchor points in the lesson/lesson structure that are the same (type of activity) each lesson.
26. http://www.victoriesnautism.com/ The website mentioned in CoP, meeting four, where free visual tools are provided.
27. https://youtu.be/plPNhooUUuc https://images.app.goo.gl/EEK8cx7jSSGqEkMP8 Video shared by Sarah which provides insight into how a student with autism may perceive their world.
28. Dre Kramore's Paraprofessional Letter (see below).
29. All figures listed within this dissertation document.

Dear Paras,

Thank you so much for all that you do. Your work really makes what I do in music possible. I want you to know that you are appreciated and how you can help me. I try to design my lessons with research in music educational best practices in mind. I would like to share some of the ways that you can help me with music. You might read this and think "that is a lot that I DON'T have to do" and you would be right. Help them stay safe and somewhat engaged and we will be great.

1) "Any response in the right response":

    a. A huge part of developing musical thought is the skill of audiation. Audiation is the ability to hold and create new musical ideas in the mind's ear. Every person develops audation at different speeds and our ACT 18 kids might need extra time to build audiation skills. For this reason, allowing the student's to process and provide any response back is perfect. They are processing. So please, do not correct the response unless the student gives the wrong response in order to get a reaction from their peers.

    b. No matter what we see externally, kids' brains are taking in the music that is going on around them. So, with the exception of unsafe/unacceptable behavior you should not feel the need to intervene with a student during instruction unless I've asked you to do so. The exception is when there is an immediate physical/medical emergency.

2) "Allow the child to find their own beat":

    a. Just like with audiation, beat keeping ability is formed over time as students learn to coordinate their muscle movements with an auditory beat. During the drumming activities I will adjust to the student's speed and if they don't give me anything, I will choose the best speed for their stage of development. Sometimes allowing the kids to just rest their hands on the drum and feel the vibration as I drum is right for the child. They have to move their muscles themselves.

3) "Leave space for audiation":

    a. When we get lost while driving, it is natural that we turn down the radio to let our inner monologue take the lead. Extra sound interferes with students' aural processing, making it more difficult for them to take in what I want them to hear.

4) "Sing for the kids, not with the kids"

    a. It has also been shown that a child will learn the most effectively when they sing alone. When we sing at the same time as children, they will instantaneously copy us and not form a musical thought (audiate). This is why I roll the ball to the children in the "copy me activity." If it takes the child a minute to produce the pattern, we can wait. And remember, any response is the right response!

    b. Please also leave the singing of the patterns to me, I'm not perfect but I am trying to keep the patterns in relation to a central idea (tonicization) and too many differing inputs will throw off the students' developing audiation. Instead of copying me to get a child to respond, try saying something along the lines of "Can you sing what Mr. K sang?"

    I really do appreciate your presence in my class and will bow to your knowledge of each of these children. If we all follow through with the 4 bullet points above, we can help our students succeed in their musical growth.

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