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Journal of Research in Music Education 1999 47: 343

DOI: 10.2307/3345489

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[What is This?](#)

The purpose of this study was to develop teaching cases for instrumental music education methods courses through analysis of current teaching practice. A qualitative case study research design was used to document the daily interactions, decision-making skills, and use of pedagogical content knowledge of four experienced instrumental music teachers (one elementary, two middle school, and one high school teacher). Observation and interview data were analyzed and coded, categories were identified, and teaching cases were developed. The teaching case categories documented in this project include curricula and objectives, program administration, recruitment and balanced instrumentation, scheduling, choosing literature, classroom management in rehearsals, motivation, assessment and grading, musicianship, and rapport with students. Implications of this project for music teacher education and music education research are discussed.

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The Development of Teaching Cases for Instrumental Music Methods Courses

Music teacher educators have articulated that developing instructional techniques for teaching sound decision-making and fostering reflective thinking skills in undergraduate music education methods courses are important challenges for the profession (Atterbury, 1994; Barry, 1996; Gromko, 1995; Robbins, 1993; Wing, 1993, 1996). In exploring this issue specifically for instrumental music education, several researchers have studied instrumental music methods course curricula (Garrison, 1984; Henery, 1981; MENC, 1996; Raessler, 1970; Schmidt, 1989) and suggested that more descriptive research is needed to document K-12 instrumental music education practice. Other scholars have suggested that the use of teaching cases as an instructional technique in music methods courses may help to foster

This article is based on the author's doctoral dissertation, "The Development of a Casebook for Use in Instrumental Music Education Methods Courses," accepted in August 1997 by Teachers College, Columbia University, in New York. Colleen M. Conway is an assistant professor of music education in the School of Music, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824-1043. Copyright © 1999 by MENC—The National Association for Music Education.

reflective thinking and encourage sound decision-making (Abrahams & Head, 1998; Atterbury & Richardson, 1995; Richardson, 1997; Thaller, Finfrock, & Bononi, 1993).

In response to the call for more descriptive research to document practice and for the use of teaching cases in music teacher education, the purpose of the study described here was to develop teaching cases for instrumental music education methods courses through analysis of current teaching practice. L. Shulman (1992) defines teaching cases as "original accounts, case reports [first-person accounts] or case studies [third-person accounts] that have been written or edited for teaching purposes" (p. 19). In the present study, teaching cases were based on narrative descriptions of the daily interactions, decision-making skills, and use of pedagogical content knowledge (as defined by Shulman, 1986) of four experienced instrumental music teachers. For the purpose of this study, pedagogical content knowledge included an understanding of the problems associated with learning on musical instruments and the strategies connected to successful instrumental music teaching.

Theoretical Framework

Merriam (1988) discusses the theoretical orientation of the researcher as an important element in qualitative research. She suggests that "how the investigator views the world affects the entire research process—from conceptualizing a problem, to collecting and analyzing data, to interpreting the findings" (p. 53). Merriam reviews the many definitions of the word "theory" and suggests that since there is considerable debate about "theory" in educational research, and since most case study projects are designed to develop rather than support theory, the case study researcher must make his or her own world view and theoretical orientation known to the reader.

I maintain a post-positivist world view and have approached this particular study from a symbolic interactionist perspective. I believe that teacher knowledge and decision-making can only be understood in relation to a given context and the collective experience of the participants (teachers and students) in that context. Thus, teaching cases were developed based on the study of real-world situations as they naturally unfolded during observations.

According to Patton (1990), the symbolic interactionist asks: "What common set of symbols and understandings have emerged to give meaning to people's interactions?" (p. 88) Berg (1998) adds to this definition that "objects, people, situations, and events do not in themselves possess meaning. Meaning is conferred on these elements by and through human interaction" (pp. 9–10). I observed and analyzed the interactions between students and teachers in

instrumental music education classrooms for the purpose of exploring teacher decision-making and the use of pedagogical knowledge.

Patton (1990) suggests that the post-positivist researcher "has direct contact with and gets close to the people, situation, and phenomenon under study. The researcher's personal experiences and insights are an important part of the inquiry and critical to understanding the phenomenon" (p. 40). I had previously established relationships with all the teacher participants in the study and thus, was able to "get close," as Patton suggests, immediately upon entering the situation. Strauss and Corbin (1990) refer to the importance of this type of theoretical sensitivity in data collection and analysis as well. I observed and interviewed instrumental music teachers in a public school setting. As a former practitioner who spent 8 years teaching instrumental music in a setting similar to those that were observed for this study, I brought an experienced perspective to all aspects of the study. This prior professional and personal experience in the field provided a strong base of theoretical sensitivity for the research.

Research Questions

Research questions were developed based on a review of the literature in several areas including instrumental music methods, pedagogical content knowledge, reflective thinking, and music teacher education. Questions were also developed based on my perceptions of the needs and interests of preservice teachers in undergraduate methods courses. These perceptions were derived from personal experience and conversations with other instrumental music education professionals.

The research questions included: (a) What types of decisions did the teachers make in their daily interactions? For example, what did a teacher do when a student reacted in a particular way, or how did he or she decide what materials, techniques, or teaching strategies to use and when? (b) Were there decision-making issues that were present for all four teachers? (c) Which of these issues does the researcher perceive would foster discussion and debate in an instrumental methods course? (d) What did these instrumental teachers need to know in order to be successful in their work? What is pedagogical content knowledge for these teachers? and (e) How could this information be organized to enhance the curriculum of preservice instrumental methods courses?

METHOD

A case study research design was chosen based on the articulated need in the profession for descriptive data documenting teacher

knowledge and exemplary practice (Bresler, 1995; Jordon, 1989). The intent of the study was not to generalize based on the experiences of the four teachers, but to develop teaching cases based on these contexts that would provide a basis for discussion.

Access to Teacher Participants and Site Selection

All qualitative studies involve issues regarding context for the research, access to that context, and ethical issues. In choosing the teachers and sites for this study, "model" instrumental music programs taught by experienced, well-respected teachers were intentionally chosen. "Model" programs were defined as programs that other music teachers in the state agreed (through telephone conversations with me) to be exemplary. Although all three sites used in this study were primarily upper middle class suburban communities, it was felt that preservice teachers might learn from these teachers and the decisions made in these settings. Although preservice teachers may not teach in sites similar to the ones described in this study, the sites provided a context for group discussion of issues that may transfer to other instrumental music settings.

Other issues in case teacher and site selection included: (a) site teacher willingness, (b) site access, and (c) teacher participant's previously established relationship with me. All four teachers were interested in and willing not only to have me in their classroom, but also to devote the extra time needed for interviews, review of transcripts, and review of teaching cases once they were developed. All three sites were accessible with minimal cost for travel and expenses. Two teachers were from Long Island, New York, and two were in upstate New York. I made no attempt to locate what might represent "typical" instrumental music education sites.

The elementary teacher had been teaching instrumental music for 17 years. Having been in two other school districts, one on Long Island, New York, and one in Ohio, she had now been teaching in three buildings in an elementary school district on Long Island for the past 13 years. She taught group lessons and conducted band rehearsals for 60 fourth-grade beginning band students and 100 fifth- and sixth-grade band students. Both of the middle school teachers taught in a fifth- through eighth-grade building in a large suburban district in upstate New York. One of the middle school teachers had been in this building for 4 years. He had previously taught instrumental music to fifth through twelfth graders for 5 years in a rural district in the Finger Lakes region of New York State. His weekly schedule included small-group lessons and concert and jazz band rehearsals for 150 seventh- and eighth-grade students.

The other middle school teacher in the study had been teaching

in his present position for three years. He had previously taught fourth- through eighth-grade instrumental music, including strings, in an urban school in upstate New York. His weekly schedule included small group lessons and band rehearsals for 140 fifth- and sixth-grade students. The high school teacher had been teaching in a large suburban school district on Long Island for 11 years. His weekly schedule included small-group lessons and band rehearsals for a 43-member auditioned wind ensemble, a 59-member concert band, and a 72-member ninth-grade band. All band members in this high school setting participated in the marching band.

All four teacher participants held undergraduate and master's degrees in music education from institutions throughout the northeast and midwestern states. In addition, the high school teacher held an Ed.D. in music education.

Data Collection and Triangulation

After permission to observe was obtained from school administrators, site teachers recommended observation dates based on student scheduling, building calendars, ensemble schedules, and instrumental lesson plans. Classroom observation and teacher interview protocols were developed based on the review of literature, pilot-tested in a school setting that was not part of the formal research project, revised based on the pilot test, and used as a guideline during the data collection process.

Several types of data from these four instrumental music sites were gathered during visits; these included researcher observations of instrumental lessons, researcher observations of instrumental students in large and small ensemble settings, and structured and unstructured teacher interviews.

The use of nonparticipant and participant observations of large and small groups plus the use of structured and unstructured interviews represents data triangulation in this study. (Triangulation is the viewing of a phenomenon through multiple lenses.) In addition to the importance of triangulation to address issues of validity, Stake (1995) discusses the use of member checks in qualitative research. Member checks are used to verify information with research participants. After each classroom observation, I would often paraphrase something from the field notes regarding a teacher decision to check with that teacher to see if my perception of that decision was correct. In addition, all interview transcripts were sent to teacher participants for their comments or changes before formal analysis began. Completed teaching cases were also presented to teacher participants as a form of member check.

All three school sites were visited for 3 consecutive days. The 9 days

included 54 hours of classroom observations, documentation of 565 teacher decisions, and 20 hours of interviews. Each teacher was followed through daily teaching activities, meetings, and rehearsals. During observations of instrumental lessons, I took detailed field notes and did not interact with the classroom lesson. Observation data included 15 small-group lessons with beginning instrumentalists, 12 small-group lessons with fifth- and sixth-grade instrumentalists, an elementary chamber music rehearsal, two elementary music assemblies, 18 small-group lessons with seventh- and eighth-grade instrumentalists, a seventh- and eighth-grade jazz band rehearsal, a middle school music department meeting, three middle school chamber music rehearsals, 12 sectional rehearsals with high school instrumentalists, and a high school chamber music rehearsal.

To provide the additional perspective of a participant observer, I documented the teacher interactions during ensemble rehearsals with an audiotape recorder while participating in the ensemble. Participant observer data included a beginning band rehearsal, five fifth- and sixth-grade band rehearsals, six seventh- and eighth-grade band rehearsals, and three high school band rehearsals.

Teacher interviews in all sites took place throughout the day, in between lesson groups, at lunch, and after school. All interviews were recorded on audiotape. Although the basic format for interviewing was based on an interview protocol developed during the pilot study, most of the interview data came from unstructured conversational interviews with the four site teachers held throughout the day. At the end of each day, observation notes were reviewed, interview tapes were listened to, and interview questions were prepared for the next day. Thus, additional interview questions emerged from the data. Teachers were asked to explain or discuss issues that had previously been observed or discussed.

I found it important to type and organize the field notes and transcribe interview tapes completely from one site before beginning data collection at the next site. It was purposely arranged for site visits to be several days apart so there would be time to complete the field notes and tape transcriptions before collecting data at a new site. All data collection was completed in January and February 1997. It was felt that this time of year represented the most natural time to observe instruction in that holiday concerts were completed, marching season was over, and spring festivals were still a few months away.

RESULTS

Analysis

Observation and interview data were analyzed according to case study research analysis procedures outlined by Merriam (1988) and

Yin (1994). The analysis of teaching cases developed by Grossman (1990) and Thaller, Finfrock, and Bononi (1993) were also used as models for case analyses. As all of these researchers suggest, analysis of qualitative data does not occur at the end of a research study but is integrated into all phases of the research process. In the study described here, I often made notes regarding what an observation or interview may become a case of (see Doyle, 1990 for complete discussion of this issue in teaching case development) in the final presentation of teaching cases. These notes were made during observations and interviews and while listening to and transcribing the interview tapes. Several categories began to emerge at this time, and these preliminary analysis notes were helpful in the formal analysis phase of the project.

Formal analysis included the identification of categories that emerged from single and cross-teacher-participant analysis. The stories told by the teachers on the interview tapes and the narrative observations made by the researcher were studied and analyzed to answer the questions "What do these teachers have to know to do what they do?" and "How can the stories of their work be formatted to prepare preservice instrumental music teachers?" In the first analysis phase, the stated research questions were used as a framework, and elements common to all teachers in the study were located and coded. The codes common to all four teachers included schedule logistics, classroom management, rehearsal pacing, basic musicianship, curriculum decisions, choice of literature, motivation, grading, program organization, and group lesson procedures. Interesting elements common to only one or a few of the teachers were coded as well. These codes included student selection, the itinerant teacher, beginning lessons, teacher mistakes, switching instruments, student dropout, communication, and shared responsibility.

In the second phase of analysis, these codes were analyzed and developed into categories that provided the outline for the teaching cases. The writing of the teaching cases was based on several models of teaching cases found in the teacher education literature (Greenwood & Parkay, 1989; Kowalski, Weaver, & Henson, 1990; Shulman & Colbert, 1987, 1988; Shulman & Mesa-Bains, 1993) and included the creation of questions for discussion for each case. Each completed teaching case and its accompanying questions were reviewed by the teacher who was the main character in that case. In addition, revisions to teaching cases and questions for discussion were made based on case reviews provided by undergraduate music students, instrumental music teachers, and instrumental methods course professors from institutions throughout the Eastern United States.

Space will not allow for the teaching cases (each case is 5–10

pages) developed through the process to be published here. However, descriptions of all categories developed from the analyses and selected case material (extracts) are presented below. Full teaching cases may be obtained from my dissertation (Conway, 1997).

TEACHING CASE CATEGORIES

Curricula and Objectives

All four teachers who were the lead characters in the teaching cases made decisions regarding curricula. The four narratives in this category describe various curricular viewpoints seen in teacher interactions with students during small-groups lessons. Here is an excerpt from one of the narratives:

Both trombone students and the teacher sing through the assignment from the method book using solfège. After they have sung the exercise, the teacher establishes tonality and the students then play it.

Program Administration

Three narratives in this category are examples of various tactics used by instrumental teachers to organize their programs in a way in which sequential instruction in instrumental music is best facilitated. In addition, a fourth story in this category describes the weekly schedule and some of the logistical challenges faced by an itinerant teacher.

Recruitment and Balanced Instrumentation

One narrative in this category describes the elementary teacher's struggle to make choices regarding who should be in the band since she can only accept a limited number of students. This category also includes an interview held with three middle school students who had switched from a popular woodwind instrument to a low brass instrument in order to help the band have a balanced instrumentation. This narration includes the following:

The students take the IMMA [Gordon, E. E. (1982). *Intermediate Measures of Music Audiation*. Chicago: GIA Publications] in third grade. I look at those scores, take the top 40%, and then talk to the general music teacher and classroom teachers about those students.

Scheduling

The four stories in this category describe instrumental teachers dealing with the inevitable conflict caused by rehearsal scheduling

and pullout lesson program designs. One of the four teachers commented:

It seems like there is something difficult every week. The schedule is really wild. You really have to understand the politics of the building and the teachers in order to survive. You need to know who you can do what with.

Choosing Literature

This category includes three interview transcripts from teachers regarding their thoughts on choosing literature. One teacher explained:

I start with a formula that on any concert I like to have a march, a transcription-type heavier classical piece, a concert band piece, and a fun piece.

Classroom Management in Rehearsals

The two narratives in this category describe the procedures used by the elementary teacher in her effort to create a productive and fun environment for elementary band rehearsals. The first story describes a beginning band rehearsal where students are just learning the procedures and expectations for band. The second story describes a rehearsal with fifth- and sixth-grade students who have been well-trained in the procedures for band. Most of the classroom management techniques used in these contexts may be useful for ensembles of any age.

Motivation

This category includes three descriptions of motivational tactics used by instrumental teachers. It also includes two descriptions of a middle school teacher's interactions with students who want to quit. Here is part of one description:

There is still time to prepare to try-out for jazz band if you'd like to. Please bring in a cassette tape if you have not done so already so I can make a tape for you to practice with. [*Elementary teacher to fifth-grade band*]

Assessment and Grading

This category includes descriptions of the variety of procedures used by these instrumental teachers to accomplish the task of grading. One teacher commented:

A lot of grading in my mind is what is the relationship between a student's potential and what they are doing? I try and look at each case individually. Part of the issue, of course, is I don't know actual aptitudes. So I have to judge by what I think.

Musicianship

The four narratives in this category describe the musicianship skills of the four instrumental music teachers including aural skills, piano skills, conducting, basic skills on all band instruments, improvisation skills, and advanced skills on their major instruments. One teacher said:

When I play along with the kids on my flute I guess I am playing by ear on the easier pieces; but, on the more complicated ones, I'm transposing. I think that is just a basic musicianship skill.

Rapport with Students

The four stories in this category describe teacher interactions with students with specific information regarding how, as a teacher, to deal with not knowing the answer to a student question or concern. Here is an example:

The students and teacher discuss how to finger a pitch. The teacher says "I think it's this, but I'm not sure. Let's check it."

DISCUSSION

The case study research design used in this study allowed for the qualitative documentation and description of, as Jordon (1989) calls it, "the soul of classroom experience" (p. 58) in music education. In the same study, Jordon suggests that case studies in music education should "begin to document the wisdom of practice" (p. 58) and "begin to document and codify the practical pedagogical wisdom of experienced teachers" (p. 58). The instrumental music education teaching cases developed in this study represent a beginning of this documentation for instrumental music in the contexts studied. The categories presented in the results section of this paper document some of the instrumental music topic areas that preservice teachers must study and reflect on in their undergraduate preparation. It is hoped that use of the full cases developed through this research or others like them in an instrumental music education methods course

may foster reflective thinking and encourage sound decision-making for students using the cases.

Limitations of this study include the specific socioeconomic status and geographic location of the research sites, the specific time of year in which sites were studied, and the short amount of time spent in each site. Due to these limitations, there may be important issues in instrumental music teaching that were not addressed in these cases (e.g., ethnic diversity and lack of resources). However, it is hoped that through study of the decision-making and problem-solving skills used by the teachers in these cases, methods course students will learn to address issues not present in the cases with sound decision-making and careful reflection when they encounter them in their future teaching situations. The cases are not meant to represent typical teaching scenarios nor are they meant to represent a complete picture of everything a music teacher must know. The teaching cases are meant to provide a context for discussion.

Recommendations for Research

Case studies as a central thesis design in music education programs. Jordon (1989) says that "case studies should become the central educational design in both undergraduate and graduate music education programs. Such a procedure would then begin to provide each institution and the emerging profession at large with a knowledge base for teaching others how to teach" (p. 58). After experiencing case study development through this project, I would support Jordon. Observing instrumental music classrooms, playing along with the band as a participant observer, and interviewing instrumental music teachers about their practice is a valuable way to gain insight to the world of the instrumental music teacher.

In many undergraduate music education programs, in-depth experience with a teacher in the field, such as is described in these cases, may happen during a preservice internship or field experience. The writing of a case based on these observations might heighten and bring more meaning to the observation experience, in addition to providing documentation of that observation for fellow students to read and discuss. At the graduate level, case development projects as theses or dissertations may provide valuable classroom research experience for the student as well as a useful product for the music education profession.

It may be valuable to develop teaching cases that are specific to certain instrumental music populations (e.g., "Cases for Instrumental Music Teachers in Urban Schools," "Cases for String Educators," "Marching Band Cases," or "Working with the Young Jazz Ensemble"). A more detailed study of one age-group may offer more

in-depth learning and a useful resource for different types of methods courses. For example, "Cases for Elementary Instrumental Music" may be useful for the profession.

Single case study research. Case study research that looks at one instrumental music setting or one instrumental music teacher in a more in depth inquiry may continue to add to the knowledge base regarding what instrumental music teachers need to know to be successful. A single case study may provide valuable information for the expansion of the definition of pedagogical content knowledge in instrumental music education.

Differing perspectives. A replication of the design used in this study that added the perspectives of administrators and parents might be useful for the documentation of good instrumental teaching.

Development of teaching cases based on survey data. Several educational casebooks have been created based on survey data (Broudy, 1990; Greenwood & Parkay, 1989; Kowalski, Weaver, & Henson, 1990). An experienced music educator, writer, and researcher may be able to create useful cases based on survey data collected from large groups of instrumental music teachers. This type of design would allow for greater generalizability of pedagogical content knowledge and help teacher educators determine which decision-making skills are most needed in a large number of instrumental music settings.

The music teacher education profession should explore some of the recommendations for teacher education practice and further research derived from this teaching case development project. For this study, the development of cases to document core curricula for instrumental music education proved valuable for me and the teacher participants, and it is hoped that preservice teachers who use the cases in undergraduate methods courses will benefit from this work as well.

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Submitted February 18, 1998; accepted July 19, 1999.