Investigating Professional Development:
Early Childhood Music Teacher Learning in a Community of Practice

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my Mom and Dad, Jim and Clara, for your unwavering support and unconditional love throughout the years. To my sister Julie, who sang with me every night and initially inspired me to become a musician – your creativity and strength continue to inspire. And to my brother Jim, for watching over and taking care of everyone at home all these years.
Curriculum Vitae

Lisa Marie Gruenhagen was born in Rice Lake, Wisconsin on August 9, 1962. She attended the Lamont School of Music at the University of Denver from 1980 to 1984, and graduated with a Bachelor of Music in Flute Performance in 1984. After several years of freelancing and teaching in Colorado, she began graduate studies in Music Education at the Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester. She received a Master of Music degree in 1994. Lisa taught in the Rochester City School district during the last year of her Master’s program and then taught for several years in the Fairfax County Public Schools in northern Virginia. Lisa began her doctoral studies at the Eastman School of Music in the fall of 1999. She received the Kanable Scholarship in Music Education from 1999-2002, and was nominated for the Graduate Teaching Award in Music Education in 2001.

Lisa has taught at a number of universities and colleges, including the Eastman School of Music and Nazareth College in Rochester, NY and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She has been on the faculty of and was also coordinator for the early childhood music program of the Eastman Community Music School. Lisa has provided numerous workshops and presentations at local, state, and national conferences and symposia. She is currently a coach for online courses for WIDE World of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and is Assistant Professor of Music at Hartwick College in Oneonta, NY.
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Abstract

Professional development experiences for teachers have often been organized as in-service days, a workshop or class, and other such one-time events planned and organized by someone other than practitioners. Researchers advocate for professional development that by contrast is teacher-centered; is situated in practice; is an ongoing process; fosters collegiality, collaborative inquiry, and critical discourse; and is linked to improving student learning (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999a; Díaz-Maggioli, 2004; Nieto, 2003; Wilson & Berne, 1999). Several researchers illustrate the importance of focusing on teachers and teacher learning in the workplace (Shulman, 1997b; Guskey, 1995; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1999; Wilson & Berne, 1999).

The music education profession has long recognized the importance of teacher education. While researchers have placed a focus on preservice music teachers’ learning, they are only beginning to explore issues related to the development of inservice music teachers’ professional knowledge and practice. Research on group strategies such as communities of practice, collaborative action research, and lesson study for the professional development of music educators in schools is limited, and is almost non-existent for early childhood music and community music schools.

The intent of this study was to generate understanding about collaborative conversations among early childhood music teachers, and the extent to which such conversations can function as professional development for those teachers.
Meeting together provided a unique opportunity for those teachers, whose experience ranged from novice to veteran, as there was no professional development program in place for inservice faculty members at this community music school.

In addition to the conversations, individual interviews were a means of gathering teaching and professional development histories, and insights about individual growth; about the collective growth of the group; about changes in their practice and the impact on student learning.

A core group emerged and this reflective community of learners created their own powerful learning experiences as they examined stories about practice and musical children. Several broad themes emerged from the data: starting, and starting over; understanding understanding; zooming in/zooming out, and evolution of practice.

Recommendations for further research on collaborative professional development in early childhood music settings are made, along with implications for music teacher education, learning in communities of practice, and the design of professional development for teachers.
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Overview and Problem

The term professional development conjures up many images in the minds of teachers and researchers alike. In the past, professional development experiences for teachers have often been organized as in-service days, workshops or classes, and other such one-time events planned and organized by someone other than practitioners. Ball and Cohen (1999) contend these events are “often intellectually superficial, disconnected from deep issues of curriculum and learning, fragmented, and noncumulative” (p. 3). Often designed by outside experts not familiar with local contexts, “teachers are thought to need updating rather than opportunities for serious and sustained learning of curriculum, students, and learning” (p. 4). More recently, researchers have been advocating professional development that in contrast is teacher-centered; is situated in practice; is an ongoing process; fosters collegiality, collaborative inquiry, and critical discourse; and is linked to improving student learning (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Díaz-Maggioli, 2004; Nieto, 2003; Wilson & Berne, 1999). Several researchers illustrate the importance of focusing on teachers and teacher learning in the workplace and assisting in developing and expanding the knowledge base of teachers in meaningful ways so that they become well-educated professionals (Shulman, 1999; Guskey, 1995; Darling-
Hammond & McLaughlin, 1999; Wilson & Berne, 1999). Ball and Cohen (1999) state, “a practice-based curriculum” for teachers’ professional learning “could be compelling for teachers and would help them to improve students’ learning. If such teaching, and learning how to do it, became the object of continuing, thoughtful inquiry, much of teachers’ everyday work could become a source for constructive professional development” (p. 6).

Teacher Knowledge

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999a) acknowledge that, over the past two decades, teacher learning has become one of the most important concerns in education. The idea that “teachers who know more teach better” has driven efforts to improve educational “policy, research, and practice by focusing on what teachers know or need to know” (p. 249). The authors provide a framework for examining differing assumptions about teacher learning by outlining three major conceptions of teacher learning: knowledge-for-practice, knowledge-in-practice, and knowledge-of-practice. Cochran-Smith and Lytle suggest that these conceptions drive the majority of the teacher learning initiatives currently in place, although these conceptions “derive from differing ideas about knowledge and professional practice and how these elements are related to one another in teacher’s work” (p. 251).

Knowledge-for-practice, the first conception of teacher learning, assumes that there is a knowledge base teachers need to possess in order to create an effective practice. This knowledge to which the authors refer consists mostly of
“formal knowledge” and theory generated by university-based researchers, not by teachers themselves. Research that focuses on the characteristics of expert teachers feeds this knowledge base.

Knowledge-in-practice refers to practical knowledge, the knowledge that is rooted in practice and in the reflections of teachers on their practice. The assumption here is that teachers learn from inquiry that uncovers and makes explicit embedded knowledge in the practice of master teachers. In this second conception of teacher learning, opportunities that support teachers working together in various forms of collaborative groups through reflection around practice constitute the main contexts for teacher learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999a, p. 263).

Writing about knowledge-of-practice, Cochran-Smith and Lytle do not distinguish between formal and practical knowledge, nor do they distinguish between expert and novice teachers. They refer instead to knowledge gained through inquiry as teachers from all career stages together “generate local knowledge of practice” through their work in inquiry communities (1999a, p. 250). This perspective assumes that knowledge is socially constructed and that it draws upon the previous experience and prior knowledge of each participant. Turkanis, Bartlett, and Rogoff (2001) state that each member in a learning community has “valuable interests, ideas, and opinions” and that these differences can serve as resources that enhance learning opportunities (p. 232). Learning through active engagement in intentional inquiry about practice “entails
collaboratively reconsidering what is taken for granted, challenging school and classroom structures, deliberating about what it means to know and what is regarded as expert knowledge” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999a, p. 279). Goals of teachers’ work together in learning communities include “understanding, articulating, and ultimately altering practice and social relationships in order to bring about fundamental changes in classrooms, schools, districts, programs, and professional organizations” (p. 279). Cochran-Smith and Lytle contend “when teachers who see teaching as learning and learning as teaching work together in learning communities, they link what they learn about their own learning to new visions of what can happen in classrooms” (p. 281).

Generating Local Knowledge-of-practice

As Director of the Early Childhood and Elementary Music Program at the Leighton School of Music¹, I provided training, mentoring and professional development for early childhood music teachers. My goal was to better understand music teacher learning while at the same time providing support for this learning. Creating a professional development framework for a community of teachers whose background, training, and skills differed greatly and who were at varying stages of their careers was a complex undertaking.

One size does not fit all when it comes to professional development processes and structures, and according to Guskey (1995), “there will be a collection of answers, each specific to a context” (p. 117). Therefore, he

¹ All names have been changed for this dissertation.
advocates “finding the optimal mix – that assortment of professional development processes and technologies that work best in a particular setting” (p. 117). Equally important is to recognize that educational contexts are dynamic, and therefore “the optimal mix for a particular context evolves over time, changing as various aspects of the context change” (Guskey, 1995). In her study of teacher learning in a professional community, Faigenbaum (2003) addresses the issues of dynamic contexts and changing policies in professional development. She suggests that “professional development needs to be differentiated” – as teachers would differentiate learning for a classroom of students with differing knowledge and skills, so too should professional development experiences “be complex enough to meet different teacher needs” (p. 331).

To enhance teacher knowledge and improve practice, Ball and Cohen (1999) advocate changes made in useful and manageable small steps for teachers in the context of their daily work (p. 7). I began taking small steps to create meaningful professional development for the teachers in the Early Childhood and Elementary Music Program by building in time for learning new materials and for group discussion during our faculty meetings. Initially, I posed the following question to the faculty: what topics would you like to see addressed in future professional development experiences here at Leighton? While there were a variety of responses related to pedagogical issues and children’s musical development, having time to meet together to share and develop materials and to discuss issues related to their individual teaching contexts was the most requested
activity. One teacher wrote, “I’d gladly give up a Saturday for this!!” (Written communication, May 13, 2004). Indeed, Feiman-Nemser (2001) contends that teachers should take advantage of “local expertise and the collective wisdom that thoughtful teachers can generate by working together” (p. 1042).

Of particular relevance to my thinking about professional development for teachers in the Early Childhood and Elementary Music Program at Leighton was a study conducted by McCotter (2001) who examined teacher participation and conversation in collaborative groups (p. 685). Her research focused on the group, Literacy Education for a Democratic Society (LEADS), formed in response to Carole Edelsky’s (1994) challenge to educators to find “communities of colleagues who want to study and support each other and change together.” The purpose of McCotter’s study was to investigate “how and in what ways the LEADS group acted as professional development for its participants” (p. 686). Membership in this group provided the opportunity for a different kind of “personal, professional growth” not found in traditional staff development programs (p. 686). Teachers from all levels dedicated to exploring issues of social justice in the classroom, “sought colleagues with whom they could share and reflect on similar experiences” (p. 686). The group members valued the structure of the group and the content of the conversations. Of added value to me was McCotter’s discussion of her struggles and solutions in relation to her dual role as participant and researcher.
Teacher Education Research Utilizing Collaborative Conversations

Along with McCotter’s study, several other studies from the general education literature share a common thread of group conversations within a teacher professional community formed for the purpose of discussing ideas, issues, and problems related to teaching and learning. Those studies that share collaborative conversations as a framework for adult learning and support are grounded in theory suggesting that meaningful knowledge is socially constructed (Knowles, 1984; Brookfield, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978; Hollingsworth, 1992; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Perkins, 2003). While none of the studies are music-related, the conversations that are described could suit groups of teachers in any discipline who want to create a collegial environment and supportive structure that also serves as meaningful professional development.

Grossman, Wineburg and Woolworth (2000) participated in, and conducted research as members of a monthly book club they formed for a group of teachers. The group primarily included English and social studies teachers, but also included some ESL, special education, and student teachers. The teachers engaged with subject matter through group discussion and also selected the books to be read and discussed while creating a community of learners. The researchers collected data in the form of taped group conversations, individual participant interviews, field notes, written narratives, evaluations, and surveys.

Rust (1998), an experienced teacher and teacher educator, invited 15 participants that included first-year teachers (public and private school classroom
teachers) and preservice teachers (juniors and seniors from a local university; several who were student teaching in New York City schools) to join in a conversation group as part of the Sustainable Teacher Learning and Research Network Project (p. 369). The membership changed over the course of the year, growing to also include 2nd year inservice teachers. The discussion group met regularly to identify questions and issues related to teaching and to provide support to one another. The fundamental idea behind the overall project grew out of the research of Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1992) and others, and follows the premise that teachers “can create their own powerful” learning opportunities while working together as they problem find and problem solve around education related issues (p. 370).

Rust’s group met in the evenings over a light meal and in between group meetings, she visited the classrooms of some of the teachers and also communicated with them by e-mail or phone. The researcher took extensive written notes, but did not record the conversations during the first year of the project. After identifying topics and primary concerns from her notes of the conversation, she used “a system of grounded theory analysis” to analyze the notes looking for recurring themes in order to understand what works in teacher education programs and what support teachers need in the first years of teaching (p. 374).

Hollingsworth (1992) organized ongoing conversations for cohort teacher groups to discuss learning to teach literacy. The seven teachers and the researcher
met once a month for dinner and conversation. The teachers taught in diverse contexts in urban and suburban settings; two were doctoral students and research assistants (who shared with the researcher, the responsibility of documenting the groups’ process); the others were beginning teachers who taught in public school general classrooms and who had recently been students of the researcher as part of their teacher education program. Hollingsworth’s goal was to “better understand teachers’ learning while providing a supportive structure for its development” (p. 375). All conversations were audio taped and transcribed as a means of documentation and ongoing analysis. The researcher and two research assistants systematically reviewed the transcripts and identified common issues and processes thematically. The findings were summarized through the identification of relevant categories and the teachers then provided verification of the summaries. All transcripts and narratives were reviewed and corrected by the members of the group and accuracy was insured by comparing data from the conversations with classroom observations and individual interviews that were collected during the same time period.

Nieto (2003) met for one year with a group of eight high school veteran teachers from the Boston Public Schools to discuss the question: “What keeps teachers going – in spite of everything?” (p. 389) The teachers taught math, English, health, and African American studies, and were from diverse backgrounds (p. 389). Nieto met with the teachers once per month throughout the year at one of the schools where the teachers taught to talk about issues and books
they read, to write, and to reflect (p. 389-390). In between meetings, the group occasionally emailed each other and some of the teachers wrote letters to the researcher throughout the year (p. 390). Because Nieto did not want to dictate the agenda for every meeting, and because many of the teachers had questions they wanted to discuss, the group agreed that in addition to Nieto’s research question, they each would present an ongoing issue or problem and discuss their ideas at subsequent meetings (p. 390).

Relevant Research in Music Education

Although music education research offers no similar examples of collaborative conversations, the literature that discusses the importance of music learning for young children and the preparation of music teachers for these children helps to frame the current investigation. In 1967, participants at the Tanglewood Symposium examined the role of music in society and education (Mark & Gary, 1992). Music educators at Tanglewood declared the importance of music education for all ages, from preschool through adult education, and that teacher education programs be expanded and improved. In 1969, for the purpose of implementing the Tanglewood Symposium recommendations, the Music Educators National Conference (MENC) began the Goals and Objectives (GO) Project, developing four major goals: comprehensive music programs in all schools; music learning for all ages; quality preparation of all teachers; and the use of the most effective techniques and resources; and thirty-five specific
objectives (Mark & Gary, 1992, p. 313). Several objectives, important to early childhood music teaching and learning, were identified for immediate attention:

lead efforts to develop programs of music instruction challenging to all students, whatever their sociocultural condition in a pluralistic society; develop standards to ensure that all music instruction is provided by teachers well prepared in music; and assume leadership in the application of significant new developments in curriculum, teaching-learning patterns, evaluation, and related topics, to every area and level of music teaching. (Gary & Mark, 1992, p. 313-314)

Throughout the decades following the Tanglewood Symposium, music education researchers have examined how children learn and understand music; why music is important in early childhood; the kinds of experiences that should be available for young children; and curricular practices in early childhood and music classrooms (Jordan-DeCarbo & Nelson, 2002; Fox, 1993, 2000, 2003; Neelly, 2000; Gruenhagen, 1997, 1998, 2001, 2004; MENC, 2000; McCusker, 2001; Miranda, 2002; Kim, 2000; Sims, 1995). Curricular recommendations and models in early childhood music parallel those found in early childhood education and indeed Fox (2003) states that “our task to “set the sturdy stage” for a lifetime of musical learning can be informed by current research and thinking on child development” (p. 16). Music educators have also begun to address the needs of teachers who care for the large numbers of children in early childhood settings by identifying the knowledge and skills these teachers will need in order to be effective facilitators of children’s music learning (Fox, 1993; Neelly, 1998, 2001; Gruenhagen, 2004).
The National Association for Music Education (MENC) states that music is essential in early childhood and must be provided by teachers who have received training in early childhood music (1994). Because there are no formal certification requirements for early childhood music teaching, teachers can enter the profession with little or no training or experience in child development, children’s musical development, and they may have no degree or coursework in music education. Traditionally, early childhood music teacher training has not been available through formal degree programs, but many universities are now offering courses in early childhood music (Scott-Kassner, 1999). MENC has published standards for early childhood music learning, however, a corresponding set of expectations for the people who will teach these standards has not been established. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) has developed an Early and Middle Childhood Music Certificate for those who teach ages 3 through 18+, however this certificate was designed for experienced teachers and was not developed for the purpose of training new teachers.

While researchers in music education have placed a focus on preservice music teachers’ learning, they are only beginning to explore issues related to the development of inservice music teachers’ professional knowledge and practice. Several researchers have examined the personal and professional lives of music teachers, focusing on teacher experience, knowledge, and expertise and the impact of these characteristics on the nature of teaching; on developing descriptions of exemplary teachers; and on the importance of context (Hookey,
This body of research addresses music educators primarily from the elementary level through high school with limited focus on early childhood music teachers.

**Need for the Study**

Those involved in school reform efforts agree that ongoing professional development is necessary and that teacher learning in schools is as important as student learning. Feiman-Nemser (2001) contends that if more powerful learning is expected on the part of the students, teachers must be offered “more powerful learning opportunities” (p. 1014). Ball and Cohen (1999) state that teachers will unlikely be able to teach in the ways that researchers advocate unless they are afforded effective learning opportunities throughout the span of their careers. Research in adult education and in professional development strongly supports participation in collaborative context-based learning and inquiry opportunities with the guiding premise being that teachers “can create their own powerful” learning opportunities while working together as they problem find and problem solve around education related issues (Rust, 1998; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992; Neelly, 2000).

Although a large body of educational research suggests the need for ongoing investigation into active, collaborative, and context-based learning opportunities for inservice teachers, research on collaborative or group strategies such as teacher professional communities, coaching, collaborative action research, and mentoring for the professional development of music educators in schools
remains limited. Neelly (2000) contends “collaborative processes are essential to effective early childhood music teaching practices” and teachers must have opportunities for reflection and sharing with others, their successes and concerns about their practice (p. 233). She also states that teachers who transition from elementary music to early childhood music teaching must be enculturated into this area of practice, engaging in context-based learning experiences that are supported by an early childhood music mentor (p. 236). Neelly’s recommendations for further research in the area of early childhood music teacher professional development include the topics of: collaboration among adult learners in a community; teachers engaging in reflective processes; a focus on teachers’ issues and concerns found in the context of their daily practice; and viewing teachers as change agents “who have many opportunities for growth and who provide growth opportunities for others” (p. 239).

Purpose and Questions

The intent of this study was to generate understanding about collaborative conversations among early childhood music teachers, and the extent to which such conversations can function as professional development for those teachers. The grand tour question that guided this study was: What happens when a group of early childhood music teachers engage in collaborative professional development? Several subquestions served to narrow the focus of investigation:
What do the teachers want to know? Are these desires linked to particular contexts, skills, or materials?

How does the group choose to go about learning, particularly in terms of collaboration?

Do teachers believe that collaborative conversations change their music teaching practices, and if so, in what ways?

Do teachers believe that collaborative conversations change student learning, and if so, in what ways?

Qualitative Case Study

Qualitative inquiry is typically conducted in order to understand naturally occurring, situated phenomena. Many research methods, including participant observation, ethnography, case study, and grounded theory make those phenomena visible. Each method relies on multiple data sources, including researcher field notes, journals, surveys, interviews, artifacts, memos, video recordings and audio recordings, in the effort to provide rich, narrative description of the context, actions, and processes being studied. Qualitative researchers engage in inductive analysis, with theory emerging from “the bottom up,” grounded in the data, resulting in the construction of “a picture that takes shape” as the parts are collected and examined (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 7).

Although case study is not an essentially qualitative method, many studies draw on naturalistic, phenomenological and ethnographic methods to understand
the “particularity and complexity of a single case” (Stake, 1995, p. xi). Stake suggests that “the cases of interest in education and social service are people and programs,” and that case study researchers are genuinely interested in “learning how [actors] function in their ordinary pursuits and milieus” (p. 1). He defines an *intrinsic case study* as one that is undertaken not because we need to learn “about some general problem, but because we need to learn about that particular case.” In contrast, Stake defines an *instrumental case study* in terms of understanding something more general. “We feel we may get insight into the question by studying a particular case” (p. 3). Stake cautions that a single case is not representative of other cases, and that the researcher’s primary responsibility is to get the most information possible out of a case. “If we can, we need to pick cases which are easy to get to and hospitable to our inquiry. . .with actors willing to comment on certain draft materials” (p. 4).

**Defining this Case**

This research was an instrumental case study of collaborative conversations among early childhood music teachers who were employed at a large community music school in a metropolitan area. There was no formal professional development program for these teachers, but some of them agreed to work together with colleagues to plan instruction, learn new material, and discuss issues related to teaching and learning. The study documents eleven meetings
among the early childhood music teachers that took place over the course of one community music school year.

Setting and Participants

A large institution located in a metropolitan area, the Leighton School of Music has four campuses in both urban and suburban settings. At the time of this study, the school served approximately 4,000 students, and was accredited through the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM). The Early Childhood and Elementary Music Program consisted of a core program at each of the four campuses. The core programs provided sequential, developmentally appropriate music instruction for children 6 months though 7 years of age and had an enrollment of 433 children. In addition, seven Outreach programs were located throughout the metropolitan area in settings such as Head Start centers, a bilingual early childhood learning center and charter school, and a Montessori preschool program housed within a public school. The Outreach programs also provided sequential, developmentally appropriate music instruction and served an additional 386 children 1 year through 7 years of age. All Outreach programs were funded through individual or corporate grants. In addition to providing music instruction for the children, early childhood music teachers in the Outreach programs also provided ongoing learning opportunities to the classroom teachers by facilitating their participation with the children during music class, through teacher training workshops, and in program and curriculum planning meetings.
A group of early childhood music teachers met once a month for 2-3 hours throughout the academic year and during the summer session for the purpose of discussing issues related to music teaching and learning. Twelve teachers, whose experience ranged from novice to veteran, voluntarily took part in at least one conversation. Eleven conversations took place, and the group size ranged from 5-12 members, because not all teachers could attend each meeting. The meetings were held after school at the home of the researcher who also provided a light meal. The conversations were a means for the teachers to talk and problem-solve together, with the agenda for each meeting determined by the teachers themselves. I acted as facilitator when necessary and also participated in the group conversations.

Sources of Data

The eleven collaborative conversations served as the primary data for this study. I audiotaped and completely transcribed all sessions and took field notes during and immediately after each meeting. Conducting interviews at mid-year and at the end of the project provided me with opportunity to gather teachers’ personal histories, insights, and reflection upon individual growth and changes in their teaching practice.

Artifacts can “serve as sources of rich descriptions” of how the individual who created them “thinks about their world” and can provide insight into the person’s perceptions and assumptions around situations and the meanings they place on events and processes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The teachers
participating in this study did not uniformly submit these artifacts, but there were instances where teacher created charts, handouts, and other items were presented during discussions and interviews.

Data Analysis

The process of analysis began early during initial data gathering and continued as data were examined and reexamined. Guided by my research questions, data analysis consisted of a systematic search for and categorization of emerging patterns and themes. In order to generate initial categories and to propose relationships among these categories, I began with microanalysis, a detailed line-by-line analysis that combines both open and axial coding. In open coding, data are broken down, examined, and through constant comparison are grouped to form categories when conceptually similar or related in meaning (Strauss & Corbin, p. 102). Axial coding involves developing and relating categories to their subcategories in light of their properties and dimensions to add depth and structure. Selective coding is the next step in this type of data analysis and involves the process of integrating and refining the categories (p. 143). Integration occurs over time and involves organizing categories around a central concept “through explanatory statements of relationships” (p. 161). Strauss and Corbin suggest several techniques that will facilitate the integration process: writing the storyline, creating diagrams, and writing and sorting memos (p. 161).

Memos are specialized written records that vary in type and form across the coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998. p. 217). Their purpose is to be
analytical and conceptual, moving the researcher from merely “working with data to conceptualizing” and theorizing (p. 218). Diagrams are visual memos. Both memos and diagrams illustrate relationships among concepts, are important records of analysis, and evolve throughout the research process growing “in complexity, density, clarity, and accuracy” (p. 218). Memoing and diagramming are vital elements of data analysis that begin with initial analysis and continue throughout the entire process. Both procedures keep the research grounded and maintain “that awareness for the researcher” (p. 218).

In a continuing effort to answer my research questions about collaborative professional development, during the analysis process I periodically reviewed the literature that examined teacher learning and learning collaboratively in communities of practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999a; Shulman, 1997b; Nieto, 2003; Hollingsworth, 1992; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). Throughout this literature, researchers advocate for professional development opportunities that foster collegiality, collaborative inquiry and critical discourse; that focus on teacher learning in the workplace; and are linked to improving student learning. Throughout these studies, it is recognized that teachers’ previous and present experiences, prior knowledge, and professional development experiences impact their learning and construction of professional knowledge. In suggesting that teachers engage in collaborative inquiry and critical discourse in context, in the workplace, researchers acknowledge that teachers of all career stages gain knowledge through inquiry when together they “generate local knowledge of
practice” through their work in communities of practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999a, p. 250).

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999a) state that learning through active engagement in intentional inquiry about practice “entails collaboratively reconsidering what is taken for granted, challenging school and classroom structures, deliberating about what it means to know and what is regarded as expert knowledge” (p. 279). Goals of teachers’ work together in learning communities include “understanding, articulating, and ultimately altering practice and social relationships in order to bring about fundamental changes in classrooms, schools, districts, programs, and professional organizations” (p. 279). Moreover, Cochran-Smith and Lytle contend “when teachers who see teaching as learning and learning as teaching work together in learning communities, they link what they learn about their own learning to new visions of what can happen in classrooms” (p. 281).

As I reflected upon and accounted for these findings about teacher learning and collaborative inquiry during analysis of my data, patterns and themes emerged that supported my developing understanding about teacher learning and collaborative professional development. Table 1.1 illustrates the list of codes generated during initial analysis.

In subsequent readings of the data, and through further analysis, the initial list of codes merged, and often overlapped, becoming larger categories. Table 1.2 illustrates the list of categories generated through continuing analysis.
Table 1.1

**Codes Generated During Initial Data Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exploring collaborative practices</td>
<td>ExpCPD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of professional development</td>
<td>NaPD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of Group</td>
<td>PoG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What teachers want</td>
<td>WTW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What teachers need</td>
<td>WTN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>CTXT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing professional knowledge</td>
<td>ShPK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal stories</td>
<td>PerS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>SUP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>COM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor</td>
<td>HUM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective</td>
<td>PERSPEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating shared agenda</td>
<td>CrSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>LDRSHP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td>CHALL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s musical development</td>
<td>CMD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child development</td>
<td>CDEV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity/Culture</td>
<td>ETH/CUL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban teaching</td>
<td>UrT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogical content knowledge</td>
<td>PCK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmentally appropriate practice</td>
<td>DAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Education</td>
<td>PEd)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher as musician</td>
<td>TaM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passion</td>
<td>PASS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude and approach</td>
<td>A/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated practices</td>
<td>DifPRAC</td>
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</table>
Table 1.2

Categories Generated During Subsequent Data Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Codes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>COM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>COLLAB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>CTXT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiation</td>
<td>DIFF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction of knowledge</td>
<td>CONKNOW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared and developed understandings/expertise</td>
<td>ShDEVUE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>EMP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformation</td>
<td>TRANS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolution of practice</td>
<td>EoP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of musical children</td>
<td>DevMC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ensuring Trustworthiness

In qualitative case study research, credibility and methodological strength is ascertained through structural corroboration. In this study, I used different data collecting techniques such as observation, audiotaping, interviewing, field notes, and teacher artifacts resulting in multiple sources of evidence from multiple participants. Additionally, member checking confirmed the accuracy of transcriptions, working theories and tentative findings, and critical reflections on biases or preconceptions ensure researcher objectivity.
**Themes and Structure**

Ultimately, several broad themes emerged from the coding and analysis of the data:

1) **Starting, and starting over**
2) **Understanding understanding**
3) **Zooming in/zooming out**
4) **Evolution of practice**

The remainder of this document is structured around these themes. Chapter 2 is an introduction to the teachers who participated in this study and serves to answer the questions: (1) Who are the teachers that participated in the collaborative conversations; (2) How do they teach and why do they teach this way (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004); (3) What has been their previous experience with professional development? While attendance at our sessions varied, a core group of teachers participated consistently throughout the year; chapter 2 focuses on this group. Chapter 3, *Starting, and Starting Over*, illustrates how the conversations started and the ways in which they unfolded, through a somewhat recursive process and through a variety of means. As the group explored and examined music teaching and learning in early childhood, starting, and starting over with each new conversation and within each conversation, they also zoomed in and zoomed out as they explored new perspectives. Chapter 4, *Searching for Structure and Settling on a Framework*, illustrates the ongoing journey of the core group as they continue to search for structure and settle on a framework for the goals and
objectives project. Chapter 5, *Understanding Understanding*, illustrates the depth of reflection and discussion in which these teachers engaged as they moved to define understanding in the context of early childhood music teaching and learning. The fourth theme, *Evolution of Practice*, becomes Chapter 6, which synthesizes the journey of these teachers and revisits the research questions. This chapter illustrates the ways in which the teachers’ practice evolved leading to the development of musical children. The document closes with Chapter 7, a summary of the study and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 2

THE TEACHERS: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CORE GROUP

Who are the teachers that participated in the collaborative conversations? How do they teach and why do they teach this way (Díaz-Maggioli, 2004)? What has been their previous experience with professional development? Throughout the year, the number of teachers in attendance at each of the conversations varied, ranging from five to twelve. Nine teachers attended several times, three only once, and five participated throughout the entire year. This chapter focuses on the five teachers, who through their continuing participation became the core group. The core group of teachers ranged in age from 23 – 52 years. These teachers, all white, middle class individuals, whose experience ranged from novice to veteran, taught in both the core program held on the main campuses and in one or more of the Outreach programs. All are passionate about teaching music to young children, are deeply reflective, and are committed to lifelong learning and collaborative practices.

One might think, at first glance, that these teachers are quite similar, as we learn about their shared philosophy, insights, and beliefs regarding early childhood music education. However, while all possess at least one degree in music, they do not all possess music education degrees, not all had training in early childhood music at the time they began their teaching position at Leighton, and their experiences in professional development vary widely and did not
necessarily relate to early childhood music teaching and learning. These variations produced a variety of stories from practice, resulting in deeply focused individual and collaborative reflection on musical children, on teaching and learning, and differing kinds of knowledge construction for each teacher.

In this chapter, I provide a portrait of each of the core group teachers and offer insight into the three questions posed at the outset of this chapter. Each portrait results from individual interviews conducted at the mid-year point, at the end of the school year, and also from the final conversation at which time the core group collaboratively reflected on their experiences throughout the school year. Because I was a full participant-observer in the conversations, I include a portrait of myself at the end of the chapter.

Bette

Bette was a veteran teacher who began teaching grades 2-6 in 1986 as an elementary Montessori classroom teacher. As is typical in Montessori schools, music was one of many subjects she taught while working with children 2 years through sixth grade. Bette also established a Kindermusik studio and for four years taught music classes for children 1 to 5 years of age. Additionally, she taught private piano lessons in her home, and she performed regularly in church and for the Montessori school’s holiday program and spring musical. Before obtaining her Montessori teaching diploma, Bette earned a Bachelor’s degree in music education.
Bette thought in silence for several seconds before responding to the question: “How do you teach and why do you teach this way?” She began by mentioning her preference for using sensorial materials, that she teaches with a lot of energy, and that her style is quiet “but in a way that I hope draws children towards what we are doing” (MYBH.116.32805). Bette stated that why she teaches this way is most likely because of her Montessori background. She described herself as being a “total fan of the Montessori philosophy:”

Children are shown certain things over and over with slight variations in how you present it. You’re not always aware of everything they’re taking in, but that the opportunity to be handling things like manipulatives on a 2-line staff, or making the rhythm patterns or whatever, it just really solidifies in their head what they know. (MYBH.133.32805)

Bette also discussed the 3-period lesson, which is experiential learning before labeling. She explained that in the Montessori setting children have the opportunity to manipulate, handle, and point out the object to the teacher before they attach a label to the object or language to describe what they are doing:

They fall right into that 3rd period. It just takes away all that frustration of asking children to tell you something before they’re ready to attach the language to it. (MYBH.155.32805)

During her Montessori training, Bette worked with an influential mentor who provided insight into how to approach teaching new ideas and how to introduce and establish procedures and routines. Bette was a master at sequencing a lesson and it was this strength that people sought to emulate upon observing her teaching.
What Bette likes best about herself as a teacher, is that she is able to establish a good rapport with the children:

There’s a sense of order to the class, but it’s still fun. I think I’m encouraging to them without being overly heavy with the praise, but that they know when I think they’ve just done a great job… I think that I can hold their attention pretty well; I think I am fairly energetic for an older person…[chuckling]. (MYBH.241.32805)

When asked if there was anything about her teaching that she would like to change, Bette responded that she would like to expand her repertoire and continue to try out new materials and resources in an effort to remain fresh and excited about her teaching. Bette mentioned several informal learning opportunities that grew out of conversations with other teachers in the early childhood music program. For example, she inquired about “hello songs,” lamenting that she had been using the same dozen songs for so many years and how she thought it would do her some good to make a change. She described how she would listen from outside one of the classrooms and hear an activity that she felt would work well with her students:

The day I happened to say to him [a teacher], “boy, I need a new song for the shakers” and he said, “well, so do I,” and so we kind of switched off what we were doing. (MYBH.284.32805)

After thinking for a few minutes about a favorite teaching experience, Bette told a story about preparing a group of children, ages 3 through 6, for a grandparent’s day program at the Montessori school:

We did “In The Mood” with egg shakers, rhythm sticks, guiro, triangle, and tambourine…we started practicing in February for an early May presentation, and I just broke it down into very small sections and each week we would add a little bit more to it…and
the children just did so well, coming in when they were supposed to, staying with me on the beat, stopping when they were supposed to. And they knew when it wasn’t their turn that they put the instrument down on the floor and their hands went back in their lap. All of those things, taking the time to establish all of those little logistical things just pay off hugely. (MYBH.310.32805)

She also recalled a teaching experience that was not so favorable, indicating that not having the attention of the children is quite uncomfortable for her. She described a group of children who came together from school to attend music class, but who were incredibly active upon arrival:

I have tried doing movement right after the “hello song” to see if that helps, and it helps to some degree, although they want to break loose so badly, it often deteriorates into silliness. And I stop it then because I cannot stand that feeling of things being so, out of control. (MYBH.372.32805)

Bette commented that she had to approach this class in such a different way than another class of the same age. It caused her to reflect on her practice and the differences in the ways in which children develop:

It’s just funny how that works out and they’re all the same age, but it’s two entirely different types of classes! I’ve learned that I just have to be patient and try to get as much across as I can. And again, when we have the manipulatives, those tend to draw them in. They love to meet the instrument. And I’ve always been impressed with their ability to tell me the parts of the instrument that we learned from the time before. And again, I have to rely on the fact that children are absorbing things even when it doesn’t outwardly seem so. (MYBH.398.32805)

Teaching in the Outreach program was a passion of Bette’s. She described how she educated the classroom teachers about music at this site:

Some of the books that we’ve sung from, they’ve asked could they keep that until the next week and they would do it in class...the teachers for the 2s, 3s, and 4s have often written down words or
they’ve asked me to write them down – they like the songs or they want to do them. So that has been just an amazing relationship of collaboration because I try to go along with their curriculum and they practice what I’ve been doing and that has been wonderful – probably the best thing about this year as far as the classes. (MYBH.502.32805)

The classroom teachers at this Outreach site were also very interested in knowing what why Bette taught music in the manner she did:

One teacher there has asked me a couple of times: why do I pitch my voice so high, because she’s more comfortable in the 2nd alto range. I’ve explained to her that so am I, but that for young children you need to pitch it for them, and she has been trying very hard to pitch her voice higher…the other teachers, in the 3 and 4-year old classroom can very comfortably do it; they sing along and fully participate. (MYBH.521.32805)

Her passion for children was evident as she described her connection to the children at this site:

The children are just lovely, I mean there’s nothing like walking into somewhere and feeling that those children are just so happy to see you…one little boy asked me very early in the year something about where was I going to go after I taught them. It was a Friday morning and he wondered where was I going, and I said, “Well I go back to Leighton.” “But then you’ll be coming back to us?” he asked. It made my heart just feel so good. (MYBH.592.32805)

During one of our monthly conversations, we watched a video of Bette teaching music to a group of five-year old children. The teachers were very supportive and asked many questions about sequencing and procedure. These questions caused Bette to reflect deeply on what she did in the lessons and why she taught them in this manner:

I am very comfortable taking quite awhile with different concepts, and I think after all these years I have a reasonable sense of when everybody has grasped it and when they’re ready for the next step.
But...I guess in relation to that question about “how do they know that it goes this way on the staff,” I thought, well gosh, we stayed on the ta ti-ti with the mittens, well apples in the fall...we were on that a very long time. By...the last few weeks of winter session, I could dictate a pattern and they could make it with actual notes because we had translated it into that by then. I think I spent the right amount of time on it because they all got it. It didn’t come at them too soon. (MYBH.889.32805)

As Bette shared her insights about her practice I wondered about her previous experiences with professional development. She told me that most of her professional development opportunities took place in relation to her initial Montessori training and with the exception of her Kindermusik training, opportunities for additional training related to music teaching and learning was quite limited. I asked Bette to elaborate on these experiences:

I mean it was always just extremely wonderful to hear Dr. Montessori’s theory especially there were certain people I felt who were just wonderful at making that come alive again, but when we would have the breakout sessions that were specific to one area or another, in small groups and we would have a presenter show certain lessons that they had done, that was really helpful. That was something that you could take right back into your classroom. (MYBH.643.32805)

Other positive professional development experiences included:

Parent meetings where one primary teacher and one elementary teacher would present, let’s say math, for example, all the way from what does a 2 year old do to...what does a 6th grader do...that was just always great fun to hear each other talk and see what was going on, and just remind ourselves, “oh yeah, I forgot about that part.” (MYBH.686.32805)

Bette hesitated when asked if she felt these experiences had an impact on her own learning or her students’ learning. She stated that she thought they probably had, but that they were so limited it was “hard to attach too much significance to
them.” She elaborated by describing an experience she considered to be most valuable in her education:

I think that I was just very, very fortunate in working for the last 6 years with somebody who I considered to be an absolute master teacher. I just learned so much from working day after day with this person. That’s why I have to put the biggest significance [here], she just has an amazing style and I wish that my years with her had come first because I feel like I would have been a much better elementary classroom teacher…so I would have to give more significance to that, than the professional development, just because it was so limited, as far as workshops and extra things like that. (MYBH.699.32805)

Listening to Bette describe this rich learning experience illustrated for me why she teaches the ways she does. It is somewhat curious to me that she didn’t consider this mentoring experience professional development. However, practice-based learning was not a focus of professional development at the time Bette began her education. Bette might have experienced professional development from the viewpoint that teachers needed to be “fixed,” to be trained by someone outside their local school environment.

Josh

Josh had been teaching early childhood music for 1 1/2 years at Leighton and prior to that he taught for 2 1/2 years in the early childhood music program at the university where he obtained his Bachelor’s degree in music performance and in music education. Additionally, Josh had taught private lessons and worked with members of the local New Horizons Band (senior adult learners) during his
degree program. His position at Leighton was his first full-time position and it included teaching music to children, ages 2-6, and administrative duties.

Josh learned to teach early childhood music by working closely with an internationally known early childhood music expert who is a professor in the music education department where he received his degree. He indicated how grateful he was for this learning experience where he spent a great deal of time observing and taking notes in the classrooms, assisting teachers, participating in a course on teaching early childhood music, and co-teaching an early childhood music class with his professor. Josh described the ongoing feedback and discussion he had experienced with his professor as invaluable. The bulk of his teaching experience was with 2-3 year old children, and it was clear that these classes were his favorite among the classes he taught at Leighton:

Yeah, I love it! I guess I think it’s great to see the parents with their kids…you know that you’re not just teaching them music class and giving it just to the child, you’re giving it to the whole family and I think what can grow out of that at home is really cool. I was chatting with [one of the mothers] and she was like “yeah, we sing all the time at home now and he’ll just belt stuff out.” (MYJH.189.33005)

He recognized and described his own growth as a teacher in relation to his experiences working with the children and their parents:

I know that I’m going to continue to grow for some time. I feel comfortable in a room with kids on my own now after doing it for just over a year. I know that where I was after a year of teaching on my own – a couple years later, it’s totally different just because you start noticing things: the pace at which you do things, the way you do things when the kids are on their own, that’s a different story. And ya know, I think I’ve grown with that and I know I have a lot of room to grow. (MYJH.224.33005)
In a part-time capacity, Josh worked in the office as the registrar of the early childhood music program. He discussed the different perspectives he gained from this administrative work:

When I was putting new kids in for this session, you can sit there and look, okay, what is it going to be like to add this kid of this age into the class. And I can think about the age of the children in my classes. In my SG class I have a kid who just turned two and then there are kids who just turned 3, and I know what that feels like, I know how that can be addressed, and it can work quite well. It’s not just looking at a piece of paper with stuff printed on it...I can feel what it’s like to be sitting on the floor with those different ages. (MYJH.255.33005)

Josh thought in silence for a few minutes after I asked him: “How do you teach and why do you teach this way?” Then he responded:

How do I teach? Well, I guess, ya know, acting as a guide. Knowing the path that I’ve taken and what the path of musical development is. I’ve gleaned from various teachers and things I’ve read over time, so charting your course, balancing myself as a musician and what I’ve learned about teaching. And guiding is not necessarily riding people or forcing them – if you’re taking someone down a path, they’re still looking through their own eyes and eventually, the goal is you’re not going to be there, and they’ll walk down that path on their own. And I think, that’s learning through doing. It’s talking about the music...it’s singing, and movement, and playing and, just, and creating, ya know? Creating a situation where the kids are going to...love it and in a way that it can be fun and play for them, but in a way that they’ll get something out of it. (MYJH.314.33005)

At the beginning of the year, Josh had begun teaching 1st graders in one of our Outreach programs that was located in a public school in an inner city neighborhood. I asked him if he felt he was able to transfer any of the strategies
and techniques learned during his early childhood music education to teaching 1st grade music. He enthusiastically replied:

Josh: Yes! I think one of the first things I figured out pretty quickly…was the value of having manipulatives; the value of things that will draw kids in…a variety – you just can’t sit on the floor. You can feel the energy going up and down, and you start feeling it, okay up, let’s move!

Lisa: Mmhmm, and you have twice as many kids in those classes.

Josh: Yeah, it’s a different dynamic. I feel more of a performer in a situation like that…it’s not as when you’re on the floor with 8 kids, that’s a much more personal thing. Still, you’re attending to the larger scale…I’ll look around the room, I always like to look every kid in the eye and make sure I’m…having an authentic connection with the kids.

(MYJH.342.33005)

Josh described what he would like to change or do differently in his practice:

One of my goals is still to…make sure that I’m always managing the classroom in a way that’s always very fun and organized, yet always keeping them engaged…I still consider my teaching a work in progress. I think about it every time I teach, “oh, how did I feel about that?” (MYJH.478.33005)

He also described the self-doubt he experiences when learners don’t react in the ways in which he might expect. Josh related a story about teaching a song he had been using for a couple years, one that was always a favorite with the children. He told me that when he taught this song in his new setting, to his surprise, the children and parents did not readily participate:

And at first that can kind of like be intimidating, but then...over time that one becomes familiar and you can feel it, ya know, the energy level is up because people are processing, they remember it. Grandma Moses and my recollection of it was that this is a song that kids just love, and I’m used to kids putting their arms up and
talking, making faces “grandma, grandma,” ya know? And the first [class], this was in the fall…it was like a dud, the first day!
(MYJH.494.33005)

Josh’s hopes for his own teaching were directly tied to how he hoped the music experience would manifest for his young students. It was evident he understood the dynamic and challenging, but rewarding, nature of teaching and working with young children and reflected upon his first month of full-time teaching and administrative work:

Oh my goodness…I learned SOOO much! It was like, “wow!” Kids are kids, ya know, you can’t, it’s not like an office, not that ours or any office environment is predictable, but you can go in and expect this and this, but kids are gonna’ cry, kids are gonna’ have great days, kids are gonna’ have bad days, you’re gonna’ have days when you’re just like “oh, I wanna’ go home” and you’re gonna’ have other days where it’s like, “I don’t wanna’ go home!” And you, I guess, learn working with those kids without the adults; you learn that the unexpected happens.
(MYJH.553.33005)

It was difficult for Josh to contain his excitement and passion for the children:

And they can just surprise you! The things that they’ll say…that they’ll notice. The kids that I’ve had, like Jamal, just looking at a xylophone and he just figured out the octave right there…I didn’t take any bars off, nothing had a sticker on it or anything like that, he just figured it out. And this is a kid who apparently in his normal classroom will like, throw things…and the other kids, they can start telling you things…the young 2’s and 3’s where they’re growing up, exploring around the room, starting to sing. I mean, what if you had all those kids who went to [the next class in the sequence] and they were singing off the bat! And what they would be noticing together! My 1st graders – they know their quarter notes, they know their sol-mi-do patterns, they’ve got their 8th notes, and they can notate the form of their pieces. And they can explain why what I put out in front of them is not right and how I should change it. And it’s like, well, in 1st grade they have 4 more years in this school. If they got to 5th grade, heck, ya know, they could be writing all sorts of things! (MYJH.602.33005)
For a novice teacher, Josh was very insightful as he wondered what his next few years would be like working with these young children. As we discussed planning, the National Music Standards came up and Josh described the way in which he approaches this framework when he plans lessons:

I guess I think about it as the way when music works: music is singing, it’s movement, it’s playing, it’s whatever, it’s what everyone…should be doing. And I spend a heck of a lot more time singing, than I do playing now and that’s not a question…for me it’s totally logical to do that and when I think about standards, the variety, I tend to think about the variety of activities and it’s that variety that helps to create an interesting class. The standards are kind of a part of lots of different reasons why we do things, cause as a musician you should be doing all those because it’s fun, and it’ll work on a particular concept in different ways, um, it’ll play to strengths of different kids. (MYJH.934.33005)

When asked to describe a favorite teaching experience, Josh immediately thought of two scenarios, both with children 5 years of age, and both set in the context of his Outreach teaching:

The first time we did the music box game, and just sitting back and watching, just listening to these kids improvise, like, it just comes out of them! Jamal’s improvisation on the xylophone was – it had rhythm, phrasing, it had direction! It was very interesting, ya know – it was just something that grew out of him and what he could do on his own. So just all of that already in him. And just giving him the opportunity to do that – and they loved it! Actually a girl in the class, one of the shy little girls in the class was moved enough to say, “that was really beautiful.” (MYJH.689.33005)

I loved this story. These were children whose lives were filled with uncertainty. Many, if not all, lived below the poverty level; their neighborhoods were dangerous places. Yet here was a 5-year old child simply listening to her classmate who had been given the opportunity to create his own music, who was
so moved that not even her shyness could contain her feelings and response to his music.

While there were a lot of wonderful things that transpired with the children in our Outreach programs, there were also times that were very trying. I asked Josh to describe a teaching experience that was not so favorable.

Last spring...when I was teaching 3s and 4s for the first time...the aide wasn’t there...I wasn’t too worried about that. It was going fine and then...Brittany, she just sometimes gets in a mood and she started not paying attention, wasn’t listening, started running...around the room and I was trying to talk to her, ya know? There’s other kids in the room too and that starts to transfer to the other kids...I’m like, “Brittany, I really need you to sit down and come to the circle and if you don’t want to, you can just have a seat on the side.” But she was intent on running around, and then she ran to the door, and ran into the hall. I had to go physically get her and bring her back in the room. Meanwhile, the other kids...they’ll be patient until a point, but then their attention is gone...and then...she had this little pink belt, I’ll never forget it, and put it around her own neck! And I mean...it was just so unsettling...and, ya know, what can you do? And then the most frightening thing is...that’s such a self-destructive behavior and that it scared me for her...you learn from the experience, you question – if I had done something differently, ya know? What factors are in my control; what factors are not in my control? I haven’t had anything like that since. We all have bad days, but nothing that has approached that.

(MYJH.783.33005)

Josh went on to describe how this event changed his approach in the classroom, how it forced him to consider what might be going on in other areas of this child’s life:

That’s when I started creating my pictures and manipulatives and playing with where I had my movement, where I had my sitting things, and how much stuff I did sitting, before I moved. I was definitely experimenting with seeing how those things played out...I definitely learned like how you communicate with a child who is off running and you just, it’s kind of a certain look – their
mind is off somewhere and you’re trying to calm the child down and then attend to the other nine or ten kids that are in the room too. It’s a balancing act. (MYJH.866.33005)

Josh had a wonderful collaborative relationship with the classroom teachers and aides in his Outreach setting. They almost always participated in music class with the children; were wonderful additions to the class; and were just as curious as the children. Josh described the ways in which he educated these adults about music teaching and learning:

They’re very observant. Just like the kids or any of us they learn through doing it. And it’s kind of fun to watch [them] when I’m introducing a new activity, I’ll see them watching, trying to figure out like where is this going, ya know? And they’ll ask questions occasionally, um, I can remember the first time I used Popsicle sticks, one of the aides, Ms. Wells, was just like “This is like teaching language and syllables.” And then I made a worksheet for the kids for some steady beat stuff on Sol and Mi and Ms. Caldor, one of the 1st grade teachers, was asking about it. I had my squares and I was doing these kinds of icons, and then it was kind of fun to explain to her where I was. She said, “What are they going to do by the end of the year?” She was very interested to hear where I was taking them. (MYJH.989.33005)

Josh indicated to me that he learned from the classroom teachers by observing them while they participated with the children in music class. He also visited their classrooms and noticed how different the music class structure is from the Montessori classrooms. Josh also described the different teaching styles he noticed among the teachers in the non-Montessori classrooms, such as in the 1st grade classrooms where his former Montessori Pre-K and Kindergartners now were. He thought some of the children behaved so differently in this environment:

Some of them are still, like Jermaine, still have something to do, and Myisha always has things to say, and Devon, it amazes me
how much stuck with him. I didn’t realize he was so attentive
[chuckling], ya know! He’s really quick about answering questions
– they’re used to thinking about music, they’ve been asked
questions, they’re used to considering those things. And I think
there’s a certain predisposition for kids who have taken it [music]
before, and I think it’s thinking about, being familiar with thinking
about music. (MYJH.1074.33005)

Josh told me that the classroom teachers were very generous when it came
to sharing materials. For instance, he taught at our school’s summer music camp
and needed non-music project ideas, so one of the teachers said, “Well I have lots
of resources like that, come on down!” This school, which had been turned into a
full-service community school, felt more welcoming than others; the atmosphere
was one that seemed to open people up to sharing, inquiry, and collaboration. Josh
told me that the Montessori teachers were fascinated with the metallophones as
they drew comparisons between the Montessori bell sets and our Orff barred
instruments. He indicated that sometimes the classroom teachers used music from
his classes in their own classrooms.

I asked Josh to describe the kinds of professional development experiences
in which he had participated prior to our monthly conversations:

A lot of it was just course work through school. When I taught in
the community education division, once a semester, different
faculty members would do presentations. During student teaching,
seminars. As far as performance goes and teaching privately, every
year I used to go to the euphonium association conference – you
can hear people talk about their different thoughts on teaching
privately. I guess I always had a lot of formal stuff. It’s been a lot
of mentoring, a lot of talking with the people I work with, listening
to what they have to say, seeing what they have to do.
(MYJH.1242.33005)
Without hesitation Josh described his least favorite kind of professional development experiences as “…being talked at; a row of chairs. You have to be there…” (MYJH.1297.33005) He also described the impact these professional development experiences had on his own learning and practice:

You certainly learn that you’re always learning, and that learning is not as formal a process as you’d like to think…um, like how it’s impacted my teaching – seeing things from different perspectives. I think I consider it from the students’ perspective more, from my perspective, the parents’ perspective…and if I can see it from that viewpoint, “well, what can I change?” When I thought about what was my need from the students’ perspective – I need some visually appealing things. If I’m a student, I want to be up and moving by now. I’ve been sitting, and from a students’ perspective, it’s like, well, sitting in a professional development lecture where someone says “this is how it is” [in a booming voice], and you’re like, “uh huh.” And it goes “whoosh” [making a sweeping motion over his head], ya know? Every person is different and every group of kids is different…you think you’ve figured it out one day and then with one group, “well this works, this is fail proof, we’ll try it again.” And in another group you’ll be like, “Huhhhhh? Nope! Okay!” (MYJH.1323.33/05)

Katie

Katie began her career as a classroom teacher in 2002 and had been teaching part-time for about 3 years when she took a position with Leighton. Previously, she had worked with students preschool through high school age in a small Christian school. She had also worked occasionally as a part-time substitute music teacher at all levels. Katie held a Bachelor’s degree in intercultural studies and was finishing a Master’s degree in ethnomusicology when she began teaching in the early childhood music program. She had no training or certification in
music education and “fell into” teaching younger children as her school attempted to expand her teaching hours.

When asked the question “how do you teach and why do you teach that way?” Katie indicated that she focuses on the children, thinking about where they are and what they need to know:

So I think the first thing is they need structure, cause they need to feel like they know what’s happening and what’s coming up next, so I incorporate a lot of structure in how I teach – I always start off and end up the same way. And also the sequencing is really important – to add one thing to another and to make sure they have one skill before you move on. And I use a lot of visual stuff with them because when children can put, I think people in general, when you can…use more than one sense to really learn something, then it just reinforces itself. (MYKM.201.42505)

Although Katie had a limited music education background, she offered insightful comments about teaching and learning. She spoke about the teaching methods and approaches that had been most influential to her thus far:

I haven’t really studied it enough to really feel like I have a good handle on all of it, but I’ve definitely pulled different ideas from different people…I think the Orff method is really good…because it actually puts the music in the hands of the children and a lot of other teaching methods don’t do that…and I like Kodály, the way he sequences. And…Feierabend – I really liked his resources because for somebody that was just coming in, for me I was starting to say okay what am I actually going to teach every week, what needs to be taught and how often do I need to do the songs. He really spells it out a lot and that made sense as far as my experience with children and how they learn. He said lots of repetition, and story songs and things like that. I really took a lot from how he structured his lessons. And then the stuff that you shared with us was really helpful too because just basic educational practices – having a goal and having what materials you need, setting up a lesson is really important. (MYKM.228.42505)
Katie utilized our library and began researching teaching methods, approaches, and resources as soon as she started in her position. She described what she liked best about herself as a teacher and about her teaching practice:

I feel that I can relate well to the children and to their needs musically, and also just socially. They’re so tender at that age you can really crush a child or you can really build them up. So I mean I think from as far as the most rewarding thing – I have a child who’s got selective mutism and we’re making sounds one day…and she just starts talking to us! She begins feeling free to do that…I’m like this is working, because the children are reacting well to it. (MYKM.266.42505)

As we discussed how children often “come alive” after a period of silence and observation in our music classes, Katie began talking about the things she would like to change or do differently in her teaching:

I think just with time, finding the things that really work and the things that don’t, and finding a good repertoire of songs that be used for more than one purpose…sometimes I just wish I had a better set repertoire of the things that I knew worked, ‘cause sometimes I feel like I just waste time working on things that are a dead end…I’d much rather find a couple of things that they really like. (MYKM.279.42505)

She connected strongly with special needs students, indicating how exciting it is when students “get it” as she described some of her favorite moments in teaching:

I had a couple of autistic children that really responded well to music and it was kind of their in to the world – that they could experience with other children in a safe environment. Another thing is when you walk through something with the children and you just know they get it. And I think there are always those really funny moments, but I think just that when you sequence something and it actually ends up working, it’s just a really cool thing…I think when they come up with something and they reach a kind of
a musical epiphany – those are the best moments. (MYKM.300.42505)

In regard to her least favorite teaching experience, Katie discussed issues related to classroom management:

The scariest thing and the worst thing both combined is when you feel like you’ve lost control in a classroom situation…you’ve lost the attention of the students…when it happens it’s usually because of one child that puts himself at the center of attention. And that’s been the biggest challenge for me…also in teaching in the preschools, not having the support of the teachers when you’re teaching 19 kids and the teacher is just off doing her own thing – that’s not good either. (MYKM.335.42505)

Unfortunately, Katie did not always have strong support from the classroom teachers in her Outreach settings. She indicated that she didn’t really spend any time educating them about music because “they are so overwhelmed:”

The only time I’ve ever had teachers ask [about music] is in a negative way, like “why are you doing rhythms with them and why don’t you just sing with them?” And in cases like that I try to explain it to them, but as far as like, actually getting to talk to them about it, they don’t seem very interested. They don’t have time to really focus on teaching them music cause they’re so busy just trying to get through the day with them. (MYKM.400.42505)

Katie also mentioned that some of the teachers, especially those who taught Kindergarten did sing with their children in the classroom, but most of the other teachers did not:

The younger ones, a lot of times just see it as, “oh gosh, thank the Lord I don’t have to be here being the main person right now.” And that’s how I felt when I was teaching preschool and we had a music person come in – it was just like “Oh! For a minute my kids are being entertained and contained in one spot and I can just sit with them and participate with them, but I don’t have to be a teacher right now.” (MYKM.400.42505)
Additionally, Katie did not receive much information from the classroom teachers about the children’s development or about what they were doing in their classrooms:

I’ve asked them: “if you have certain things you’re focusing on let me know and I’ll try to bring that into the music aspect of your classes.” I’ve had only one teacher who has ever taken me up on that to where she’ll be like, “we’re studying farm animals” or, “we’re going to the zoo tomorrow,” and then even that is just very last minute. As far as them telling me where their children are at, there’s just not time for it because it’s like they switch off to me and then I switch back off to them. I hardly even get to say hello and goodbye to the teachers. (MYKM.436.42505)

Katie thought that offering professional development workshops for these teachers such as we were doing in one of our other Outreach locations would be a terrific idea. She described how helpful she thought it would be for these classroom teachers to learn about the concepts and ways that we teach in regard to patterns, for instance, and also the ways in which we use vocal exploration and address literacy and language issues.

When Katie described the methods and approaches that had influenced her teaching, she alluded to the fact that she did not have a background in music education and that her experiences in professional development were very limited:

Not a whole lot as far as what would apply to teaching. I’ve had musicology seminars and things like that, but you know I have never actually been to a teaching seminar. The only kind of development I’ve had has been through the communication I’ve had with other teachers, and what we’ve been doing this last year. And also, just with the resources that they left behind for me; just seeing what they’ve done. But there’s really nothing, like formal…it was always just kind of, do what you do, learn what you need to learn to do it, and then just do it. (MYKM.477.42505)
She felt strongly that teacher learning experiences should be related to what individual teachers need and described the kinds of professional development experiences that had been least helpful to her:

You need to always feel like it’s applying to what you need to learn. Like sometimes, and this isn’t about music, but professional development in general, sometimes you’ll be sitting through this talk and you’ll be like, “why am I here? This has nothing to do with what I need to know” – either you know all of it already, or you’re not there yet. So it needs to be applied to where you’re at, which is why I think it’s really good in a lot of these seminars where they have these break out sessions or workshops, because then it’s like you get to pick what you need to focus on. (MYKM.575.42505)

June

June was in her second year teaching part-time in the early childhood music program at Leighton and was also in her second year of teaching full-time general music in a large suburban public school district. At Leighton, she taught children 2 through 4 years old and in her public school position she taught children ages 3-5 years who attended the Head Start program, grades K-6, and chorus. June held a Bachelor’s degree in music education and prior to joining our faculty had not taught early childhood music classes. She is a pianist and regularly accompanies for student recitals and solo and ensemble festivals. At the time of our interview, I had been working with June for 3 years; she had been a student in one of my courses and I was also her college supervisor during her student teaching practicum.

Early on, June told me how much she loved being a music teacher:
I couldn’t imagine doing anything else with my life. I was just talking yesterday with my colleague at my school, the other music teacher – we were talking about how he had thought about going into performance, and I said I would miss it too much to not be with the students. (MYJD.76.42005)

She indicated that she became interested in teaching young children while she was taking an introduction to early childhood music course during her degree program. This course included music and non-music majors and June stated that, while some people in the class didn’t seem to enjoy it, she did, and she found the differing perspectives of preservice music teachers versus preservice preschool teachers to be quite interesting. There was no lab setting in conjunction with this course and when June accepted the position at Leighton, she trained on-the-job with me. She described how she felt on her first day of teaching:

When I think back to my first early childhood class, oh, I was so nervous! But I really just learned about what those kids are able to do and how much things like speech and movement are a part of that. Like when I teach in my school, when I ask for the students to do something I expect them to give a response right away because I know they’re capable of that. And with the younger ones, I had to learn – and it was so hard for me to learn this, that they may be picking up on it and I might not ever see the results in my class, that they might do it at home. Or that this year I’ve got…kids who have been with me the whole yearlong and they’re just now starting to sing in class! So it’s like seeing the delayed response versus the response that I’m used to. (MYJD.121.42005)

June thought carefully before responding to the question: “how do you teach and why do you teach this way?” (Díaz-Maggioli, 2004)

It’s child-centered, which you’d think would be of course…but I’ve seen lots of teachers where it’s certainly not – so everything is planned to meet the child’s needs. I really like, and also do a lot of Orff so, prepare, oh…this is a Kodàly thing. I guess prepare an idea through different songs and movement and instruments so
they’re experiences they don’t even know they’re getting. And then, present, what’s the 3rd P? Practice. And so I do that a lot...um, you have to have some prior knowledge, you have to have some experiences before you can learn about those experiences and build on them and so I think those are all three necessary things in order to have a successful learning experience. And there has to be meaning behind everything you do. Of course, I love Jerome Bruner! And iconic, symbolic – I’m always using him! (MYJD.296.42005)

She spoke extensively about learning theorists and was able to effectively link various theories to her music practice; I wondered if she had been influenced by any particular methods or approaches to teaching music:

I finished my level one Orff, and I went into that just because when I took your class we had an Orff, it was almost a sampler – I wish we could have done a semester long of that! I just liked having a sampler to see what is Orff about, what is Kodaly about...I kind of had a taste of it, but...I wanted some of the, meaning. So I took Level 1 and it seriously changed the way I teach! Just the importance of speech, and especially with these little ones, when they don’t have the singing voice to do the range, but they can do the speech, and they can say it rhythmically, and how that leads to other things – and movement, and it’s just been truly remarkable. Oh, I was going to say something about Kodaly too. Lois Choksy’s book: the Kodaly Method. I use that all the time in my teaching – just her song lists for when I want to prepare certain things she’s got all these traditional folk tunes, which I think is so important. (MYJD.326.42005)

June stated that she would like to complete the Kodaly certification some day as well, but that she first wanted to finish the Orff levels. I asked her if she subscribed to any particular theories about teaching and learning, knowing that she admires Jerome Bruner, but had some reservations about Piaget’s research (as she once stated in a conversation). She immediately referred to that conversation and discussed her thoughts upon reflection:
After that discussion I was like, maybe Lisa’s right so I went back and kind of looked through his stuff, and went okay, I see the point I see how it’s worthwhile. (MYJD.372.42005)

June was a reflective thinker, always questioning her own learning and practice. When she described what she liked best about herself as a teacher and about her teaching practice, it was evident that her passion for teaching music to young children inspired her:

I like that I have fun with my kids. That we can laugh together and that I can be a goofball and it doesn’t matter. That I can make silly voices and dance around, like a fluttery leaf...(MYJD.442.42005)

And she did not hesitate to discuss what she would like to change or do differently in her teaching:

Oh, so many things in my teaching that I want to improve…but I know it takes time. I know what 2nd graders are able to do, but I want to be better at preparing my 1st graders as they’re going into 2nd grade, so it’s more – that would be the vertical curriculum. So year-to-year the progression as you’re in a school for a long time. And that’s something I would really like to work on as well as developing my curriculum across the year – like what I teach at the beginning and what I want to see by the end of the year. It’s hard sometimes to have those long term goals, especially when you’re like “what am I teaching this week?” (MYJD.453.42005)

June’s favorite teaching experience included a story similar to Bette’s and Katie’s in which she described a situation about a quiet child who one day “came alive” in her classroom:

At my public school I have a 1st grade class, and…there’s this one girl named Melanie – I don’t think she said a word for half the year! I didn’t know what was going on, so I would have to point and she wouldn’t move, and then I would like kind of put my hand on her shoulder and like coax her over there…she didn’t have any sort of IEP or was identified as special needs or anything, except for ESOL ‘cause she’s bilingual. But I would treat her just as any
other student, trying to get her involved. Then about 2 weeks ago I was giving them a test, just as rhythm flashcards, having them do ta’s and ti-ti’s by themselves, ya know, read this card, and I was like, “okay Melanie,” and she was just like, “ta ta ti-ti ta.” And it just came out! And I was like “Melanie, I’m so proud of you, that was great!” I was just so thrilled that even if it doesn’t seem like she’s taking it in, she is like a little sponge and then it just came forth and she’s been doing a lot better – she’s very active in playing instruments, and she loves to dance!

She told me that the one thing she learned from this experience was that “every child is capable of some big success at some musical experience. It might take time, but don’t give up on anybody.” (MYJD.483.42005)

June chuckled as she thought about a negative teaching experience, and described how children will sometimes say whatever comes to mind. For instance, she related that they will make comments about how bad your new haircut looks or how they don’t like what you are wearing. Her advice is “not to take anything personally.” (MYJD.547.42005)

June always had wonderful teaching materials that were appealing to the children, so I asked her where she finds her resources:

Recently I’ve been using the Kodály Method and 100 Children’s Songs and Dances that corresponds with that book. [My district] has [curriculum books] which are designed for different grade levels – I use that sometimes; sometimes I write my own. Sometimes I use Kindermusik stuff – Orff Music for Children, all the Orff volumes, I use that a lot. Anywhere I can get it. I’m a resource thief. Sometimes I feel like I spend too much time looking for the perfect song, but I really want it to be the right experience. (MYJD.551.42005)
Although she didn’t elaborate, June indicated that she also uses the National Standards for Music in her planning, but because they are so broad, she divides them into more specific categories that better suit her students.

There is an extensive professional development program at the elementary school where June taught full-time so she described how the school district was encouraging professional development within the individual schools and that some schools had formed professional learning communities (PLCs). Her school had not yet formed a PLC, but it was an arts focus school with its own collaborative professional development component that was associated with an internationally known local arts institution. This program consisted of workshops that were designed more for teaching general educators how to integrate arts into general education, but specialists also attended these workshops. Afterwards, teachers meet together in their school to discuss how they might integrate their disciplines and to plan these lessons together.

As a first year teacher, June was also required to participate in her district’s mentoring program. She described the benefits:

When I had to be in the mentoring program, which I guess is not a PLC…but it was kind of in the sense that they showed us some lessons, then we had to create our own lessons. Having that time to be with other first year teachers, and [to be able to] say, “I don’t know what to do with my 6th graders,” and have it be okay – a forum where you knew it was okay to say that. (MYJD.251.42005)

At this early stage in her career, June had already participated in many rich and differentiated professional development experiences; she discussed those that had been most meaningful to her:
CETA [Changing Education Through the Arts] training; workshops; Orff Level I; meetings at your house – which have always been really helpful in making me re-think things I do here at Leighton. Interactive ones where it’s teachers – where we get to present lessons to each other, talk, and actually get up and do them – sing, act, dance, move, play instruments, and then talk about them, talk about why they’re successful, talk about what the objective is for the lesson. (MYJD.578.42005)

Her least favorite professional development experiences were those that did not connect to teachers’ lives or contexts; those that required teachers to sit in a lecture style workshop with a presenter from outside the local context who is not able to make the presentation relevant for the audience.

June felt strongly about the importance of professional development and described the impact of her previous experiences on her own learning:

I’ve grown so much because I [now] know of resources; I know of people to talk to; I’ve observed great teachers who have shared with me their great ideas. (MYJD.628.42005)

The majority of June’s previous professional development experiences had been collaborative, and she described how they had affected her personally, in ways not necessarily related to teaching and learning:

That’s part of the human experience, ya know, to collaborate with others, just to build your spirit. Well, the things I learn at these through collaboration – this reminds me, it’s like a constant reminder of why I’m doing this, because I can take a step back, and think about little Melanie and what an awesome experience that was; and it’s like reflection renewal, constant renewal.

Lisa

My career in music did not begin in education. I received a Bachelor’s degree in flute performance and for 8 years after graduation, freelanced in
chamber ensembles in Denver and throughout Colorado. During this time, I maintained a flute studio and began teaching music classes part-time at a Montessori school in Denver. It didn’t take long for me to figure out that if I were to continue teaching in the classroom, I would need to consider a music education degree. But I wanted to continue to play the flute and eventually moved to Chicago for one year to study with Walfrid Kujala, piccolo player in the Chicago Symphony. Shortly thereafter, I was accepted into the music education program at the Eastman School of Music. I declared my major as instrumental music education and in addition to the Master’s degree was pursuing initial teacher certification. What I didn’t know when I started at Eastman was that I would meet a professor, who with one suggestion, “you should consider going to one of the Saturday morning Orff workshops,” would change the course of my teaching career.

After attending a Saturday morning Orff workshop, I realized that what I really wanted to do was teach music to children. I would remain a flutist, but my eyes were opened to a new world of music education I had not known during my own elementary school years. I enrolled in the early childhood music course and began working with my professor in the early childhood music program, observing, then assisting and teaching alongside her, eventually teaching my own music classes, and later becoming the Coordinator of the program. The discussion, ongoing feedback, and opportunity to learn and teach in context allowed me to hone my teaching skills through direct contact with young children.
over time. I took the Orff Levels and during the last year of my degree program, I began teaching elementary music in the Rochester City School District.

After leaving Eastman, I taught early childhood and elementary music for another 5 years in northern Virginia and in the Boston area. During this time, I began conducting research in my classroom on children’s musical understanding and reflection in the classroom, and I took a course on leading teacher research groups in schools. The members of this course were from many disciplines and were conducting research in their classrooms. Being able to discuss the research process, ask questions, receive and give feedback, and meet with a group of critical friends over a long period of time proved to be a very powerful professional development experience.

For years I had been interested in Howard Gardner’s work on multiple intelligences and this interest ultimately led me to Project Zero (PZ) at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. I attended the PZ Summer Institute in 1997 as a participant, and in subsequent summers found myself back in Cambridge, first as an apprentice co-leading study groups, then as a member of the Institute faculty. Throughout these years, I worked on a variety of projects at PZ as researchers began to design websites dedicated to providing professional development for teachers and schools. I piloted tools that would help teachers plan lessons and curricula, I monitored a discussion forum, I wrote on the website about my experiences using the Teaching for Understanding framework, and I began coaching groups of educators and administrators online. Today, learners
from around the world participate, because the sites have expanded to become WIDE World (Wide-scale Interactive Development for Educators), a program that provides online and in-person professional development experiences for teachers and schools. 2007 marks my 10th year of involvement in this work – work that has included some of the most incredibly rich and rewarding collaborative professional development experiences in which I have participated.

During my doctoral residency I began to delve deeper into research, and my experience in this area includes a variety of projects that involved documenting the ways in which groups of people interact and work together. I served as an assistant on a research project that examined the experiences of teachers participating in Orff Level I training at the Eastman School of Music. In the year following their Orff training, these teachers met together to discuss this training and how it impacted their practice in the elementary music classroom. Additional research includes: a study on the New Horizons Band of Rochester, NY in which I investigated the culture of the organization and explored perspectives on the meaning of participation in a music ensemble in later life; a case study that explored how preservice teachers construct knowledge about teaching and learning; and an examination of the practice of a first year music teacher and the ways in which this teacher constructed professional knowledge in the early childhood music classroom and through a mentoring relationship.

Also during this time, I began teaching at the collegiate level and started down the path to becoming a teacher educator. I taught a variety of courses
including introduction to music education, elementary music methods, teaching special learners in music, student teaching seminar, and supervised student teachers. As I designed these courses, I drew upon the techniques and strategies I had learned through coursework and professional development experiences, incorporating them into my teaching. These strategies include: problem solving, active engagement, apprenticeship learning, projects, reflective practices, and collaboration.

Currently, I am Assistant Professor of Music at Hartwick College, where I teach a variety of courses including introduction to music education, elementary and secondary music methods, music in children’s lives, supervise student teachers, and during our Summer Music Festival, teach flute. Additionally, I am designing and implementing an early childhood music program that will serve as a lab, research, and professional development setting.

I would describe my teaching and classroom environment as one filled with problem solving experiences in a performance-based framework. Posing problems for students, no matter their age, to reflect upon and solve individually and collaboratively through active engagement allows them to develop and build deep understanding over time. I view my role as a guide and facilitator that supports learners as they actively engage with the tools of their discipline constructing understandings that build upon prior knowledge and skills. Through my own studies, professional development, and research I have become familiar with the work of Dewey, Bruner, Vygotsky, Schön, Lave and Wenger, Shulman,
Nieto, Gardner, Perkins, and others who have helped me to recognize that knowledge is constructed socially, informally and formally, through a variety of intelligences, through reflection, through discovery and spiral learning, and through active, situated, context-based learning. I have learned that teachers, and children, long for belonging and support and sometimes need to be taught how to be reflective learners. Participating in a community of practice has been recommended as a way to foster effective and enduring learning through the scaffolding and support of peers and colleagues. Through participation in several communities of practice, I have found this to be true.
CHAPTER THREE

STARTING, AND STARTING OVER

In this chapter, the conversations unfold as the teachers begin to routinely share stories, examining issues around musical children and pedagogical strategies that guide them in the creation of shared agendas. While these monthly agendas propelled the group into a pattern of starting, and starting over, they also provided a structure for the monthly meetings determined by the teachers through ongoing conversation and dialogue about local issues and ideas of importance.

The teachers who participated in the collaborative conversations were looking for a place to tell their stories. They longed for a place where 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; a place where they could focus on the routine everyday issues of teaching; a place where they could learn from each other.

Bette: I was new to the whole setting, and I felt like this is an opportunity to even more fall in with what Leighton is doing; what the early childhood music program is doing. An opportunity to get to know these other teachers because really, within the course of the day, except for those of us in the office, there’s not a whole lot of conversation time. Certainly for me to learn new things cause you could teach for 50 years and still have more to learn!
(MYBH.1441.3/28/05)

Cara: I assume that there are a number of people in our department like me, who aren’t full time that could use that collegiality. It’s important work. This is a great idea (DC1.323.111504)
Hollingsworth (1992) reported that the ongoing “social meetings” in her study provided a place “where questions could be posed and issues in learning to teach could be raised and investigated” (p. 375). But to Hollingsworth’s surprise, the teachers did not immediately want to discuss teaching reading as she had hoped. Instead, they wanted to discuss larger issues related to classroom practice; they wanted to tell their stories (p. 380).

Reading Hollingsworth’s research helped me realize that the music teachers would begin their conversations with sharing stories, stories that were not necessarily about music teaching and learning in early childhood, nor were they necessarily connected to the previous conversation. The teachers’ stories helped the group members get to know one another better, personally and professionally. Jalongo and Isenberg (1995) state, “stories are both mirrors of our own practice and windows on the practice of others” (p. 174). Indeed, our stories served as a connection to individual practice, diverse contexts, and the everyday happenings in teaching and learning in diverse early childhood music settings. Those stories also re-established the teachers’ connections to one another after several weeks apart. At the beginning of the third conversation, Katie began telling a story about an interaction with the mother of one of her students. This parent stated that in the previous class Katie had hurt her child’s feelings when she asked him to re-join the circle so that he could participate fully with the other children. Katie began to wonder about the impact teachers have on children:
Katie: He was fine, he came in, just running in, but I had really hurt his feelings last week. I don’t know, I wish that she had told me last week, the night when he came out, but I guess it took her awhile to figure out what was wrong with him or whatever, but when you have ten kids in a class it’s hard to remember that they’re all little individuals, even that young.

Bette: Isn’t it though?

Katie: It’s scary. (DC3.191.12705)

In the fifth conversation, Josh updated us with a happy ending to a difficult story he had previously told about a student in one of the Montessori classrooms in the Outreach setting. Josh indicated that this student was only four, but she was very disruptive and tended to bully the other children. One day in his music class, she suddenly took off her belt, placed it around her own neck and pulled. The classroom teachers determined that she needed a different kind of environment, and they moved her out of the Montessori classroom into a more structured preschool classroom within the same building. This student thrived in her new learning environment:

And, um, I just casually talk with the teacher who’s down there and I was like, “oh, I see Brittany’s in your class [now] and she seems really happy.” Like when she walks by [my classroom] …she’ll even say hi, and [the new teacher] is like “yeah, she’s great, she’s doing really, really well. That was probably the most frightening thing that happened to me that first year. It was just like she’s playing out what’s going on in her life, and then, when she made the transition…her demeanor just in general…has changed. (DC5.22.32805)
Another story told at the beginning of the sixth conversation illustrated the active involvement of the classroom teachers and aides in Josh’s music classes at this same Outreach location:

Josh: She [the classroom aide] always participates in class and so one day, uh, we were doing, Juba…Juba this and Juba that…and it’s three verses…finds the yellow cat and pets the yellow cat and loses the yellow cat, but then, um, [the aide] decided we needed another verse, and inserted a fourth one where she *washes* juba cat… and so that’s why juba runs away, so *she* added a verse to our song just for fun, which I thought was great…

Katie: This was the aide?

Josh: Yeah. And then she added a lunch room song based on “class is over it’s time to say good-bye”…there’s a whole thing about pushing their chairs in, and putting things away…I thought that was great that, ya know, that the aide just starts contributing, just kind of like, coming up with verses and changing the words around for song to fit the classroom needs and things like that. (DC6.65.41805)

While it was true that we always seemed to be starting, and starting over through these stories with each new conversation, I began to see patterns in what sometimes felt like chaos. Table 3.1 illustrates the range of story topics discussed throughout the year. More importantly, the teachers recognized the value of their storytelling:

Josh: It started getting more specific as time went on, but I think that the *time* to do that, we always started with the sharing of what was going on in our classrooms and in our heads – not all the things were related, but we just kind of *found* a balance of what we were interested in. (FIJH.179.72605).
Table 3.1

Range of Story Topics Discussed Throughout the Year

Teaching contexts
Dealing with parents and parent education
Classroom vignettes: musical children, classroom management, practice
Teaching materials, methods, approaches, learning theories, strategies
Others’ perceptions about young children and early childhood music teaching
Collaborative practices with classroom teachers and aides
Teachers as musicians
Children as musicians
Next steps: what will help us from here on out?

Setting an Agenda

With the goal of keeping the conversations flexible and dynamic, the year the teachers considered a variety of protocols that exist for teacher inquiry groups.

At the beginning of the year, several teachers wondered how the group should proceed from month to month:

Cara: [to Lisa] You started the last faculty meeting showing an example of something you can do in the classroom and you had a couple of [other] people who showed something. It didn’t take a lot of time; we all participated. I just wanna’ tell ya, I totally thought, “I think that’s great.” Because it’s something that I can take back, here’s something new. It also gave other people a chance to share something and maybe get some feedback from it.

June: It also…creates a sense of camaraderie with the other people you’re with.
Josh: …that was really interesting cause I own this [the song we did]. I’ve had this book for several years and then it wasn’t until I’d actually taken part in the activity and seen it in action; before it was [just] an activity…you have all these pages of songs and activities, and you’re like, “well, I don’t know, maybe,” but then this is something that at some point I had just glanced over it. But when I actually got into it, it was like, ya know, this is something I want to do…and it was actually something that I owned, but experiencing it—

Cara: And I thought that was a kick with the xylophones; you [to Lisa] made us take off everything except the D’s and the G’s, and we all had to play it exactly the way the kids did…I thought that was great, and, I mean it doesn’t have to take more than 5 minutes to teach one particular song or how you do it, but I think it’s a really nice thing that we can all walk away with. And then maybe somebody else leads these other topics or different people lead them. I think it’s great so everybody gets to learn and lead.

(DC1.670.111504)

Also at the beginning of the year, I shared a favorite quote written by teachers who were members of a critical development team – one of the group structures we discussed as a possible format for our conversations:

We saw the study group as a place where we could negotiate a shared agenda instead of having someone else’s agenda imposed on us. We know that our focus was on recognizing collaborative dialogue as a way of thinking through our issues and concerns, rather than relying on outside experts. For us, the study group signaled that we were the experts and best communicators of our professional growth (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004, p. 117)

There were nods of approval from the teachers and this response:

Cara: What I particularly like about [this] approach is it’s not at the crux of it…imposable…[it’s not being imposed upon us; you’re saying] here’s something you guys would be interested in, and is that what would you be interested in doing, and what are some of the topics, and then set up something…that we’ll all buy into.
June: We’ll have ownership.

Cara: We’ll have ownership of it because it’s coming out of what we want and what we need. (DC1.1118.111504)

As we reflected on the possibilities for creating ongoing professional development experiences, we shared thoughts and perspectives on the nature of traditional professional development:

Lisa: He [the researcher Thomas Guskey] talks about…not thinking of professional development as a one-time thing, and that it’s a collection. I mean you’re thinking about practice, but you’re also thinking about student learning, because professional development…the ultimate goal is to hopefully impact student learning in some way, because it changes who we are.

Cara: I don’t know how anybody could look at professional development as a one-time thing, I mean especially when you stop learning you die…well, why would anybody think that?

Josh: I think it’s funny that here it’s the field of education and we all philosophize…like about what’s the appropriate philosophy to use with our students, but it when it comes to our own thing we’re like, “yeah, I’m gonna’ take some papers to correct and go listen to this guy talk about blah, blah, blah”…my mother’s a teacher, and hearing about professional development, it was like, “okay, I’m gonna’ go to some workshop I don’t want to go to,” but that just doesn’t gel with my philosophy. (DC1.1103.111504)

In addition to exploring teaching and learning through the teachers’ stories shared at the beginning of each meeting, conversation prompts guided their thinking and discussion. Some of these conversation prompts were supplied by me, and some were supplied by the teachers.
Josh’s Video

Many of the teachers taught part-time in the early childhood music program, so they were not able to observe the other teachers. So that the cohort group could observe a peer and study music teaching and learning more closely, Josh agreed to share a videotape of one of his classes as a conversation prompt. The children in Josh’s video were from one of our Outreach sites in an inner city neighborhood. This was a Montessori preschool program housed within a public school that had been transformed into a full service community school. Community schools are unique in that they are supported by partnerships between the school and local community resources. These partnerships focus on academics, include health and social services, foster community engagement, and serve as a center for the community, open to everyone on weekdays, evenings, and weekends. Josh taught all the music classes for children age 3 through second grade at this school, and he shared a recording of a Kindergarten class. Kerri was intrigued by a song Josh used with the children, asking “What is the song? Can you sing the song?”2 (DC2.22.120604).

2 Josh’s version of this song is adapted from the original “Jungle Beat” which appears in Phyllis Weikart’s 1997 publication “Movement Plus Rhymes, Songs, & Singing Games” (Ypsilanti, MI: High Scope).
Josh sang the song and proceeded to explain the nature of this particular musical experience:

Josh: It’s changed a little bit so the children can choose whatever. I had claves in the middle, and um, the bell…I think they gravitate towards a particular instrument and I wanted to make sure that they were improvising and then working on the steady beat. Some of them kept a steady beat and some of them gravitated toward the rhythm. I’ve been doing that for a while so I figured that was okay if they gravitated towards the rhythm. And the end, at the “hey” they were focusing on a specific part with the instrument and I was amazed when they played “stop sign.” I never expected them to. Like when I demonstrated it, I just sang “stop sign” [sings in a non-syncopated rhythm], but they wanted to syncopate, “stop sign.” [Sings it with a syncopated rhythm]

Elly: That one little girl did it perfectly, ”bum bum” [sings and taps rhythm].

Josh: They did it on their own. When I demonstrated it I just went “stop sign” [sings and plays non-syncopated rhythm as before] and they added to it. (DC2.41.120604).

Several of the teachers in the group were not familiar with teaching at the Outreach sites so Elly’s next question took the group on an interesting, and for some, a somewhat uncomfortable, exploration of musical transmission and enculturation, ethnicity, and race:

Elly: I have a question for those of you who have done Outreach stuff, um, and I don’t mean this to sound in any way racist, we’re all Whites here, but do you find that working with
Black kids that there is a significant difference in the way they handle rhythm, or just an innate, in their ability to like, get it.

Josh: I remember singing the songs we used to sing, ya know, there’s a free dance section in a circle dance and they just started clapping and, we get down with our bad White selves and clap on 1 and 3, but they instinctively were like clapping on 2 and 4.

Elly: Yeah, I’m like getting to that sort of thing – that picking up that syncopation is just so, just like, innate.

Kerri: That’s really important.

Elly: But, more like church stuff, more like people do in more of a Baptist or a gospel, you know if you grow up with that, going to church, there’s so much more reacting or physical stuff that goes on…rather than just…

Kerri: I think that’s a really important point because actually, I think it’s not innate, genetically passed on, I think it’s a cultural…

Elly: Cultural, right, right, right.

Kerri: …it really shows that’s one strength that that community has that passes on, and what a difference that makes. Look at how it shines. (DC2.75.120604)

Because I had observed these musical children multiple times, I asked the group if they noticed anything about what the children were doing at the beginning of the song, in comparison to what they were doing by the end:

Kerri: …more body movement…it was wonderful how the arms went “bump bah” [sings syncopated rhythm as illustrated above] and almost every child who wasn’t playing an instrument, was playing it themselves: “bum bah” with the movement. And in a way, you know, you didn’t need the steady beat any more…the only reason you need the steady beat is that you can put the rhythm on top of it.
Josh: Absolutely!

Kerri: They’re ready to put more than the rhythm on top of it.

Lisa: And they’re five! (DC2.130.120604)

The group focused once again on Josh’s video and children’s musical understanding:

Elly: One of the kids…the one in the purple jersey…he’s kind of doing some other stuff, he wasn’t necessarily just doing a steady beat.

Lisa: These kids do that a lot – even at the very beginning last year…right when Josh started, they were improvising layers on top of what he was doing and on top of what each other was doing – so they had all these different layers going on…

Elly: Just purely impromptu?

Lisa: Yes.

Kerri: It reminds me of the whole stash of playground games – they even use some of those motions with the hands going back…you expect them to go like that any moment or some other configuration…very social – they’re all really zoomed in on each other visually.

Josh: One thing I remember being fascinated by was the “stop sign ch ch ch” [sings in syncopated scat singing style]. I just thought of a jazz drummer – like at the drum set, filling out at the end, ya know?

Kerri: It’s so interesting – the kids that I work with, with autism – some of the first things that they get is the signal that something is ending and to do that tremolo at the end [like Josh’s students did in the video]. (DC2.453.120604)

In an exchange that would later emerge as an important turning point in Josh’s teaching practice, Kerri asked him about the children’s singing skills:
Kerri: You know I was wondering then about the difference, the *striking* difference, that they’re so good rhythmically, but melodically, what’s going on there?

Josh: Absolutely. That’s one thing – I just got a keyboard so I can set up tonality, like in first grade. Like every day they have the school song which they sing every morning on the intercom and I could not even tell you what the melody is, because it’s like, it just becomes sort of a spoken thing so, just like this past week I’ve started doing tonal patterns, that’s one of the things I need to work on with them…

Kerri: But why are you doing it with a keyboard?

Josh: I’m establishing tonality.

June: Could you explain what you’re doing, I’m not quite sure.

Josh: Oh, okay, Kerri was talking about there’s this strength in rhythm but you know the pitch thing could absolutely be better…

Kerri: Because, I almost said it sounded like some really interesting – contemporary, or 14th century, you know what I mean, it had that tritone harmony thing going on.

Josh: Yeah, that’s one thing I’m starting to give them, creating a context, *tonal context*. And I think it’s important; that’s something that I’ve realized in my teaching that I need to be providing these children more and more. Because there’s that spoken word kind of thing, I think it’s kind of a semi-cultural thing too. That it’s more the *inflection*, the *rhythm* of it, so I’m interested in experimenting with making sure that I set up the key for everything so that when we start, we don’t just start singing the song but you provide them…

Elly: Are you giving them just plain chords, or what?

Josh: Yeah, just at the beginning you know [hums I-V-I], we’re just kind of setting, tonal landscape, that’s something that I think they need.
Kerri: You know, I wonder, Josh, whether it would be an interesting experiment to sort of take them back, you know Gordon has all these stages of singing that infants go through, and in a way when you’re trying to do remedial, which this is in terms of the pitch, that you might want to go back to those very early, sort of almost like baby levels, of melodic intonation and patterns. Like really look at that Gordon stuff and maybe you could bring that in, somehow make it more interesting for them. (DC2.589.120604)

Exchanges such as the one above were prevalent throughout the conversations, serving as feedback and at the same time, an opportunity to construct professional knowledge about children’s musical development and about pedagogical strategies.

Bette’s Video

Like Josh, Bette volunteered to allow the group to view a video of her classes. While Josh’s video showed music classes taught in an inner city public school, Bette’s video showed classes that took place at one of Leighton’s main campuses – a recently opened multi-million dollar arts center in an upper middle class suburban neighborhood. The teachers viewed the video intently, watching Bette teach a music class for 5-year olds. Afterwards, there was silence. I invited the teachers to share any thoughts they might have or to ask questions – they erupted with a multitude of questions for Bette. And rather than discussing how children come to be musical through cultural influences as had happened after watching Josh’s video, the teachers asked very detailed questions related to pedagogy, sequencing, and planning. On the videotape, Bette was teaching the
children rhythm patterns using small and large mitten icons related to a song they had been singing. Cara jumped in first with questions related to sequencing:

   Cara: What number class was this from when you introduced the mittens the first time?

   Bette: Well the mittens we started in January, but I had done some with apples in the fall…

   Cara: And did you do a similar thing with apples?

   Bette: It was a similar thing, yeah.

   Cara: But did you add the sticks with apples at that point?

   Bette: No, I didn’t do the sticks until…

   Cara: Just ti-ti ta’s?

   Bette: That’s right, just the differentiation between the large and the small, for quite awhile. (DC4.559.22105)

Cara went on to ask Bette what the connection was between the apple and mitten icons, and others joined in with additional questions about the sequencing of teaching these musical concepts:

   Cara: What was your thinking about doing it sort of with apples in fall and then going to mittens now?

   Bette: Just because it was seasonal, that’s all.

   Cara: Just seasonal, okay.

   Bette: Yeah just seasonal, but it still had the same relationship of size.

   Elly: Did you teach the Mitten Weather song when you didn’t use the mittens?

   Bette: No.
June: When you started with the apples did you introduce the ta’s and the ti-ti’s, or just the language of it?

Bette: That’s right, yeah.

Cara: And how much time did you spend with apples back then, do you remember how many weeks you did?

Bette: Um, at least half the session. I don’t remember exactly because it took a little while for me just to get acquainted with the kids, but yeah, we had done it for a while so they’d be really comfortable with it and all.

Elly: Yeah, and what do you have as a next step after this, or what did you teach this weekend? (DC4.616.22105)

Bette fielded very detailed questions about her next steps, the percentage of time she spent on each individual activity, her explanations of terminology, descriptions of the manipulatives she used, and her reasoning behind each activity. Her explanations illustrated once again the importance of attention to context:

Bette: This group of 5 year olds I find to be very mature…my Thursday 5- year olds, um, my segments have to be much shorter than that. Now I think they are equally understanding it, but their ability to sit still because it’s the end of the school day, they all come from the same school, they all know each other, they’ve all come directly from school – and now we’re at Stratton and they don’t have the playground. They come directly into the building so I almost always start with movement first in that class. So my focus segments like that with them are about half as long as I can do on Saturday. (DC4.705.22105)

Bette’s video turned out to be a valuable conversation prompt in regard to defining musical goals and objectives appropriate for young children.

Interestingly, the questions that the teachers asked validated many of my own
concerns, such as developmentally appropriate sequencing of musical concepts and skills, and the kind of support and professional development necessary for these early childhood music teachers:

Elly: How have you introduced the three years olds to that?

Bette: Not yet, no we’re still on…

Mina: So your goal for the 5-year olds is to introduce to them the quarter note and eighth note rhythm? And then the 2-line staff?

Bette: Right.

Mina: So by the end they should pretty much know those two kinds of notes and the 2-line staff?

Bette: Right, yeah.

Mina: Okay. (DC4.740.22105)

Mina was referring above to an additional segment on the video in which Bette was teaching a 3 and 4-year old class. During this class, she was using owl icons related to a story she read to the children to begin teaching the difference between higher and lower pitches. Bette used an enlarged 2-line staff only so that the children had a point of reference on which to place their owls, either on a line or in the space.

Elly: Oh, it was sol mi?

Bette: [hums sol-mi, then sings the song] “I’m looking for an owl friend who are you?”

/ / / / / / / / / / I’m look-ing for an owl friend, who are you? 
Mi Sol Sol Mi Mi Sol Mi Sol Mi
Elly: It didn’t matter in that it just was the difference between two.

Bette: Yeah, it was just kind of a visual experience, the visual image of some owls on the higher line and… I didn’t describe that because that was their initial presentation to the 2-line staff.

June: I really like that because… when I introduced the 2-line staff, I mean they got it but I didn’t take as much as time with it as you took to really explain, [to] say “here’s the 2-line staff”… to have them make a correlation themselves and actually put it on there. I really like that they have that time to explore themselves with the lines and the spaces. I like that a lot.

Bette: I think that a lot of that is my Montessori background, with lots of handling of the materials, hands on, and sensorial, absolutely, without a lot of language being attached at the beginning, ya know… that comes later. (DC4.778.22105)

Bette’s video prompted many of the teachers to reflect deeply on the ways in which they teach and how that impacts children’s learning. Stories about practice were shared, both problems and successes, more questions were asked, and problems were solved ‘in action’ through reflective dialogue:

Elly: I was going to tell you, when I first did something with my 5-year olds, where I had them – it was using Lisa’s Mitten Weather song, and then putting it on a 2-line staff. But I realized I introduced it and they didn’t, we put the mittens down on it, but I had to basically show them that it went in a direction because they had no concept of, ya know, that it goes this way – you can’t pile the notes on vertically or anything like that, do you know what I’m saying? So it was difficult for them to understand that. That was complex, I think now they get it because we’ve been doing it a long time.
Cara: Does anyone ever try do pitch work starting it without the lines, showing something higher and lower?

Katie: I do it with their hands.

Cara: Before you ever put it on lines? Well, whether it’s their bodies or owls or apples or something, before you put it on the lines, yeah, that’s what I do.

Elly: A question with that -- what’s a good way of introducing that, you know that these are the lines…but that it has to go in this direction.

June: A lot of times when I start something like that I put a star and I always tell them that we start at the star and then…

Elly: Sometimes I tell them that music goes like you read a book, it goes in this way, but it’s still difficult for them to get.

Cara: Sometimes it’s repetition week after week after week. Some kids are going to get that faster than others…one of the things that I’m noticing, particularly with the 5’s cause it’s a different focus level…you will start to notice a more serious differentiation in development…I have a couple of kids…they’re just not going to catch on to some of the things you’re talking about as quickly. You just keep going. You just keep putting it in the right place.

Elly: Normally that’s what I had to do. I had to just put it down and show them a model…it goes this way and, um, it’s funny how…until you’ve done it, you don’t know. You think, “Oh, well this is easy.” I mean, it’s something that you think is very simple and then you realize, gosh, you never thought about it in those terms ‘cause it’s so second nature to us. (DC4.835.22105)

Many of the conversations throughout the year consisted of reflection and problem-solving exchanges. As teachers shared the details of their practices it prompted others to relate similar vignettes, to ask further questions, or to offer feedback.
Whether novice or veteran, the teachers came to realize they shared some common ground – similar stories emerged, regardless of educational background, experience, or teaching context. There were occasions when a more experienced teacher took an element or event from a novice teacher’s story that was similar to an experience of their own, and through a progression from start to finish, illustrated the ways in which they dealt with this particular issue. For the novice teachers, this experience resulted in validation and affirmation as they discovered they were not alone, or that they had taken similar actions in a related situation, causing them to realize that they too are insightful, knowledgeable teachers.

Katie: And I think too that’s really important about collaboration, and too that’s why I like it so much because you can talk to somebody like Bette who has been teaching for years and years and just say, “how do you feel about this?” And she can say well, “ya know, according to my experience…” Or if somebody’s had the same kind of special needs child as you’ve had then just how do you relate to them. Or talking to Josh about the urban settings and the things that we run into together with those kids, ya know? It’s just really great because then you don’t have to work through it all by yourself…I think it’s very validating just in general…I think people need to feel that they have something special, ya know, that other people might not have…I think that probably what I personally have drawn from it even though this is my 1st year of teaching, that people actually consider me a valid teacher. (MYKM.825.42505)

For the more experienced teachers, these actions not only validated their own practice, but took their practice to a new level, affording them the opportunity to share their knowledge with others, as experts, to teach what they had come to know and understand about young children and music teaching, with many of the stories coming from within the shared contexts of our program.
Conflicting roles

My dual roles as director and participant-observer found me at times providing resources that were prompted by what the teachers were questioning, discussing, or requesting, and at other times responding to their resources as a colleague who was learning from their practice. I began to consider whether these roles were in conflict and were adding to a pattern of what felt like starting, and starting over. I revisited McCotter’s (2001) discussion of her struggles with similar dual roles. In her report, she discusses the necessity of separating her “sense of belonging from the need to observe analytically, if not objectively;” describes her concern about validity and integrity (p. 687); and discusses how she dealt with these concerns by recording her thoughts in a reflective journal throughout the research process and by referring to the literature for support.

As the year went on, I began to wonder about representing the group members with integrity especially as I had known some of them prior to the study and in different contexts and roles. McCotter’s study was a reminder to continually question my interpretations of the conversations and to look critically at each situation. I kept a journal recording my thoughts and feelings, and my memos, revisiting it throughout the study. It was for me, at times, uncomfortable trying to decide how much to say, and at other times, it was completely natural for me to participate as a full participant of the group.

I came to realize that in order to best find possible answers to my research questions it was necessary for me to let the conversations unfold as naturally as
possible. If I truly believed in teacher-centered professional development and the idea that teachers, if given the opportunity, are capable of creating their own powerful learning experiences (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Rust, 1998; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992), then as a program director, it was necessary for me to provide and support the opportunity for meeting together and to provide resources as appropriate.

Nine Focusing Questions and the Shadow Case of Elly

On the evening of the fourth conversation, Bette arrived early and we had a private conversation. I wondered if it would be helpful for the group to focus more deeply on individual practice. I suggested the “Nine Focusing Questions for Critical Development Teams” (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004, p. 122), shown in Figure 3.1, as a possible conversation prompt. Bette and I agreed that the nine questions could focus teachers’ attention around significant topics, and we became curious and excited about how our colleagues might respond to them. At the same time, we realized that these were hard questions about practice, and we were concerned about whether some group members might feel unsure about answering them. We were delighted when June arrived, read through them, and exclaimed, “Well I love these questions!” (DC4.372.22105)
Nine Focusing Questions for Critical Development Teams

1) How do your students learn? Why do they learn this way?
2) How do you teach? Why do you teach this way?
3) Is your teaching consistent with research on learning and teaching?
4) Is your teaching based on specific theories about learning and teaching? If so, which ones?
5) Are there alternative models of teaching that might better serve your students?
6) What learning experiences must your students have in order to succeed? How can you best provide these learning experiences?
7) What are some stumbling blocks in your teaching? Which of these do you want to explore?
8) How can your colleagues help you overcome your stumbling blocks?
9) How can your team best communicate its collective research?

Figure 3.1 Nine Focusing Questions for Critical Development Teams (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004)

June jump-started the conversation by focusing on question #4, discussing how she connects theory to practice:

The way you teach depends on what you believe, I think, how you believe you should teach. And, um, I’m a big fan of Jerome Bruner whose iconic and, enactive and symbolic phases – so a person wants to be able to do it first and then you have to be able to do something that resembles the symbol. Like the mittens would be examples of iconic. And then symbolic is transferring it to the actual notation. And so, like with the younger kids essentially, I mean it’s all doing because they’re not at the reading stage yet, you know, like the [older] classes and then [the 3-4 year old classes] you get them a little into the iconic. And then with the [5 year old classes] you can start to get more. But they’re all based off of the enactive. And then also, um, you’ve got Lev Vygotsky, and his um, zone of proximal development…gosh, I can’t believe I
remember these! But, a sort of scaffolding, um, how you provide a framework for them and let them discover it. Which I think – I mean that’s just good teaching, if you give them the tools and let them do it! (DC4.1097.22105)

Several minutes of silence passed as the teachers continued to look down at the questions. June responded, “Sorry, I sounded really, like, pompous or something… I’m sorry… [she chuckles]. (DC4.1117.22105) The group immediately responded with a hearty “no!” Wanting to offer support to June, and the others who I sensed might be feeling some unease around the questions, I explained that my reasoning for sharing the questions was that we had discussed planning lessons together and I felt that these focusing questions might be helpful in generating conversation about individual teaching practice. Our discussion would help to inform us as to how to best proceed with outlining goals and objectives for the students in our various contexts. I indicated my belief was that ideas and strategies need not only come from theory, but also can also be generated from practice. June started into a further explanation of theory and practice, but then Elly jumped in to share details about her background as a teacher:

June: When I give those two, um, theories as…how do I teach, I guess that’s because, ya know, I’m reflecting on my experiences. Those are the ones that make the most sense to me… in terms of how children learn and how I can best teach them and so….

Elly: Do you have a music ed. degree?

June: Mmhmm.
Elly: I don’t. I come from a performing background, so I’m not familiar with, um, a lot of the theoretical, ya know, the names… I’d like to be, actually. I’d like to get ideas from all of you, but, um, I just sort of fell into music teaching back in California because my niece and nephew needed a music teacher at their school. And my sister-in-law called the house and said do you want to do it, and I thought, well, I guess I could do that. And I literally started not knowing any songs. I hadn’t done any workshops, nothing! Except for my Master’s in voice.

June: Mmm!

Elly: I knew nothing. Um, and it was incredible, it was like sink or swim, ya know – a classroom with 25 kids, and it was really something. But after that I started to take workshops, and do the whole Orff thing, but um, I feel like I sort of came into it from like a back door that way.

June: Mhmmm.

Elly: But um, I think that when I read that question, how do you teach… I think of it from a different perspective. I guess I try to have as much fun as possible, um, and I guess my number one thing is, somehow I try and relate to them as not only as a teacher – you have to be a teacher or you’re asking for chaos, but as a peer as well – how can I relate on their level, and speak their language and have a good time. And I manage to… I know I have a silly kind of childish side of me, but the more I kind of tap into that and be playful with that, the more I get them…

Katie: Or when you can make it like Bette, like make it a story, make it a game like the owls.

Elly: But to have that combination of playfulness, you see it in the very beginning even though you were very methodical about what you were doing there’s, ya know, a playful quality that comes out, a childlike quality.

(DC4.1165.22105)

Elly admired Bette’s teaching as a model for quality early childhood music teaching, but she continued sharing her experience:
Elly: I noticed also, Bette, there’s a quality to your voice, it’s very soothing and calm. And I think that they respond to…I had this classroom of Kindergarten, first and second graders – and a whole classroom of them, and I had no clue, and they would just get crazy. Usually there was a teacher in the room, but often the teacher would just sort of leave me and, it was terrifying. I found I would lose my voice all the time because I was raising it. I started going to workshops, and I started observing some other teachers in the community…I watched this one teacher with a classroom of kids. I think she was teaching, like 3- and 4-year-olds, and she had this way. I was so impressed – she brings her voice down to practically a whisper, and talks with these kids, and they were just like, ya know, glued. She had them, completely wrapped. It was really, um, educational for me to watch her, and to see how, oh gosh, I guess I don’t need to be yelling at these kids to get them to do what I want them to do. And you [to Bette] have that quality, that calm. (DC4.1246.22105)

One of the teachers avoided the questions altogether. As her comments became more negative and focused on a calendar change that had been implemented by the school’s administration, some of the teachers fell back into silence while others tried to offer positive solutions. I felt a need to redirect the conversation away from issues that we could not control. I acknowledged and supported the teachers’ ideas, but suggested that we instead try to find ways in which we might focus on our teaching and practice so that within this limiting schedule structure, our students would still receive quality music instruction.

Several of the teachers offered suggestions, but it was Elly who drew our collective attention back to the nine focusing questions, particularly question 7, “what are some of the stumbling blocks in your teaching?” She shared some of her frustrations, identifying the issues that arise in her teaching:
Elly: As far as stumbling blocks go, one thing that came to my mind was, no matter what, I have problems planning my lessons, and making my plans correspond to, like real time – how much time it takes me to get through something, and what I’m actually going to get through. And it doesn’t like…ya know, every year it’s like I still, you’d think that I’d learn! It frustrates me, because I feel like I should learn…how much time this is really going to take…and what I’m really gonna’ need, and how much stuff I really can do in a lesson…so like I tend to over plan lessons, which is better than under planning, but um…as a result, my lesson plans, I mean I’m constantly having to re-vice them….I feel like I’m always having to write new ones. Um, ya know, I thought I was gonna’ get to this, this, and this…and then I have to re-think the whole thing. And then I have to put that in and then…does anybody else experience this?!

Katie: Yeah, because you don’t realize how much time, or how little time, it’s gonna’ take. It might take 15 minutes with one group, and then the next group might plow through it in 5 minutes…

Elly: Well, and the other thing too that’s popping into my mind…is that when I’m teaching something, I won’t have anticipated that…when I’m in the classroom teaching it, something happens in my head, and all the sudden I make a connection to something else that they’ve done. And then…I’m perhaps on a tangent with this thing, but there is a connection, ya know, as we’re doing it, and so then before I know it 20 minutes have gone by and I’ve only gotten through, ya know, this item on my lesson plan…and then I’m like “oh my God, I jumped over this”…and that happens to me all the time. I’m always like, I never know what’s going to happen in a lesson, you’ve got it outlined, but you have to be prepared to…uh…be spontaneous.

(DC4.1608.22105)

Elly wove details of her educational background into her initial story, illustrating why she encountered problems in her classroom, and she told the group about her desire for more formal training in music education. Later, she
revealed her continuing struggles with planning and sequencing, and asked for help. I was struck by her openness, and surmised that she felt safe within this community of teachers, even though she had not been regularly attending our meetings. Although Elly was not acquainted with formal developmental theory, her experiences, including her stumbling, led her toward powerful theorizing. As she outlined specific stumbling blocks in her teaching, she gained an enormous amount of support from the group, prompting others to share similar stories that paralleled some of Elly’s own experiences.

McCotter (2001) characterized the group she studied as a “sacred space” or “connected-knowing group” meaning that members feel “safe” throughout their entire growth process; that they feel connected; that they are passionate and believe they can evoke change; and that they deeply appreciate access to this kind of space (p. 690). She states: “the support and collegiality of the group demonstrates how such relationships can enable continuous professional growth.” McCotter found that the content of the group conversation was indeed important for growth, but so too were “the ways in which the members talked with each other” enabling them to “construct a “sacred space” in which growth was nurtured and promoted” (p. 685).

Our Goals and Objectives Project

One of the outcomes this group desired was a framework for planning and sequencing their teaching. By this point in the conversations, all of the group
members felt sympathetic toward new early childhood music teachers, so they also hoped that this framework could serve as an educational tool and support for teachers who would join our faculty in the future. Cara and June exchanged thoughts aligning such a framework with the school calendar:

Cara: …would be very helpful to me to know what the expectations are…by the end of the year. This is what we want to see, at the end of each semester…it might take some classes, ya, know, only 8 sessions to get it done, some classes it might take longer, but ya know, ideally if you break it up, here’s how we see the 3’s sessions going…but by the end of the year, this is what we want to have achieved, that would be in every class. That would be extremely helpful to me…

June: Oh, me too…

Cara: Um, especially being where I am, there’s nobody else teaching the day I’m teaching….

June: Mmhmm…me too.

Cara: …other than tonight, I have no contact with anyone to know what anyone else is doing – this kind of an evening is great for me.

June: And for myself…when I think about um, objectives and long-term goals, and then translating that into the goals for a session, and then translating that into goals for a lesson, I’ll be honest, it’s a little overwhelming for me sometimes. Because it’s thinking on so many different levels at once, um, so I think if we would do that…I would love it…(DC4.1831.22105)

Elly: When I started teaching here, I didn’t have…any of that…[I was told] you’re teaching this age, and that was about it, ya know?

Cara: Go for it!
Elly: Yeah, go for it – here’s all your resources, and feel free to use them, ya know? (DC4.1884.22105)

It was evident that the teachers wanted some kind of framework that outlined goals and objectives for each level of the program. Our classes were categorized by age and many of the teachers taught multiple levels in multiple contexts. Cara and June brought up interesting and opposing perspectives on how they approach the planning of goals and objectives for their classes:

Cara: For me anyway, I want to have the goals. If I have the goals, and I know where I’m going, I’m in a better position to answer these [focusing questions]. Otherwise, I’m teaching ‘cause this is how I feel that I’m teaching; it’s not based on a direction or anything.

June: But I kind of feel like the reverse though is true too, because…um, just because your objectives are defined in some ways by how you teach. You have to – teaching is so complex! [laughing] (DC4.2008.22105)

Cara: Whatever the process that you choose is good, but for me…just knowing 3s and 4s, or 5s, here’s what expectations are for the children at the end of the year. If I can have that, ideally broken down into semesters…I just need some concrete goals. (DC4.2143.22105)

Cara made it clear that she preferred to have someone give her a set of goals and objectives for each of the levels; she did not seem interested in taking part in the process of outlining them. June, however, was curious about the way in which we were going to approach our planning:

Are we going to be thinking…well this would just be my preference: could we think horizontally as well as vertically? In terms of horizontally, looking at the 3s and 4s across the year, but then looking at the 3s and 4s in relation to what they’ve learned in [the previous level], assuming they’ve had [it], or, ya know, that
they’re going to learn it in um, in [the next level].
(DC4.2171.22105)

No one really had an answer for June, but her idea led the core group into further
discussions about goals and objectives, teacher knowledge, Pre-Kindergarten
music standards, and musical understanding.
When I began this study, my belief was that when teachers work together, they are capable of creating their own powerful learning experiences. The fourth conversation became a turning point, as the discussions became powerful learning experiences that contributed to the development of professional knowledge while at the same time providing collegial support for each individual.

At the end of the previous chapter, I discussed the group’s desire for a framework for planning and sequencing their teaching. In this chapter, the core group has emerged and begins working in earnest on the goals and objectives project. This group will stay together for the remainder of the year as they continue zooming in and zooming out, building on prior knowledge, and collaboratively constructing new knowledge situated in local context.

**What Teachers Need To Know and Be Able To Do**

In order to plan sequenced goals and objectives for children, the core group decided it would be best to first broadly identify what early childhood music teachers should know and be able to do. Figure 4.1 illustrates the brainstorming chart: What teachers need to know and be able to do.

Starting from the bottom and working their way up, the teachers described their process in creating the chart:
June: Josh started with *where* are children musically and developmentally and where can teachers turn to find that information…

Josh: My initial thing was “where are they at?” And then I was like well, what if someone doesn’t *know* where they are at, and where can they get that?

June: And then, along with that, teacher resources and materials, um, and then I said: what attracts and what motivates children to participate or create music – hook ‘em in…and then Bette said, how to develop an individual lesson plan and then have a series of individual plans form a cohesive unit – foreshadowing what we’re going to do later.

Josh: And after Bette, I said: where are the children going musically…

June: Yeah, and then…it’s pretty obvious you need to be able to have classroom structure, and sequences of events. And um, classroom management – then we decided that the two first things *lead* to good classroom management. (DC5.326.32805)

As the group discussed the professional knowledge and skills that teachers need, we couldn’t help but connect it all to context:

June: And then Bette brought up the sensitivity to each class’s dynamics, and teaching specifically to that class, so…

Lisa: Yeah, so think about even if you were just teaching in *one* place how different all your classes are. But think about what is going on in *this* program – we’re not only teaching multiple age levels, but in multiple *contexts*, in multiple kinds of *schools*…

Josh: It’s amazing…it’s like, Naylor – there are 3 different 1st grade classrooms and each of those classes have their own dynamic. And same with the Montessori – three Montessori classrooms with their own different dynamic. And, just in *that* spectrum, I mean there can be differences in the classes, in the kids – and that’s just from the same neighborhood and the same school. And then we pull, ahhh, for our classes here – kids from *all over*, ya know?
Brainstorming Chart: What Teachers Need To Know and Be Able To Do

- Sing, play, move, have fun, communicate joy of music, SMILE!
- Be the energy source.
- Test your repertoire of songs/activities to keep it interesting for the students and the teacher.
- What attracts and/or motivates children to participate or create music?
- Classroom structure/sequence of events (timing and pacing)/classroom management.
- Where are children musically/developmentally, where are the children going musically, where can teachers turn to find that information?
- Sensitivity to each class’s dynamics and teaching specifically to that class (e.g., maintaining interest, allotting enough time to reach concept).
- How to develop an individual lesson plan and then have a series of individual plans form a cohesive unit.
- Familiarity with teacher resources and materials.

Figure 4.1 Brainstorming Chart: What Teachers Need To Know and Be Able To Do
Lisa: That’s right.

Josh: All over, and they don’t even have that common…I guess I was going to say community, necessarily. (DC5.424.32805)

Josh made an important point about how these young children are able to come together from different schools and backgrounds and form a cohesive music class that develops into a learning community of its own. It prompted the group to also reflect on how the dynamic of a class shifts – how the experience shifts for the youngest children when the adult with whom they are participating changes from class to class:

Josh: I have a boy Teddy, uh, in my class...he came with one nanny and she was having a heck of a time – he would scream and cry in the fall, and then, he came another day, with a different nanny and was like way different. And now, he participates! I mean, I think it was his first group experience...but just a different nanny on a different day, she just had a different way about her, and, ya know, he was, I guess, more [comfortable], he felt more sure, and maybe he saw that nanny more often.

Bette: Yeah, I’ve had a couple in my toddler class who usually come with a nanny, and participate beautifully with the nanny. And then when the mother comes, um, kind of want to cling to the mom and, ya know, probably they don’t get to spend a lot of time with the mother, and so it’s a special event. But yeah, they certainly change.

June: That’s interesting because in my classes, it’s on Saturdays, and I have this group of great dads! And I don’t know, I kind of wonder. I haven’t asked, but I think maybe the dads work a lot and don’t see the kids as much during the week. And maybe the moms stay at home so this is their bonding time, with the kids, and so, it’s really neat to see them, participating in such a loving way with their kids. (DC5.481.32805)
Josh indicated that it was reassuring to hear those stories about dads participating with their children because he felt that culturally, when it comes to young children, “it’s so often times just the woman’s domain.” (DC5.574.32806)

Josh: Ya know, to see these fathers...just coming to having fun with their kids, and like they can sing, ya know, about a favorite animal, or color, and they can go ahead and do it with them. And that’s just, think about it, I mean we’re giving them this musical gift that just in this child’s development, like, where they might find some other experience, but perhaps they wouldn’t have found any experience that would bring them so close to their child. I think music has a way of getting rid of people’s inhibitions about it, uh, I think maybe that hurdles a lot of cultural things about being a guy, and being, ya know, being with a little kid, and just being, silly, and having fun with them. (DC5.596.3/28/06)

The comments of the teachers reminded me of the ways in which children learn – “through social interaction with peers and adults” (Fox, 2003). We know that it’s important for children to participate in group activities in addition to the solitary musical play in which they often engage “because of the social nature of learning at this age” (p. 17). It is essential for early childhood music educators to be aware of learning theories, and to also communicate these ideas to the parents, reminding them of the importance of their role as a model for children’s participation, learning, and music making.

The group continued on with their discussion of the chart, prompting a discussion about how teachers’ energy levels can affect classroom dynamics.

Josh: I just thought one of the interesting things [one of my professors] used to say – that the reason people get bored with teaching is that they’re not, ya know, actively engaged in playing and doing things like that. And I think part of the motivating factor is to be engaged...when you’re aware...of what the kids are doing, and
how the parents are reacting, and all these little details. It’s part of what you can get back.

June: Which leads to, ya know, having to being able to think on so many different levels at once, I mean, teachers, I think, are the ultimate multi-taskers because I mean you have to be aware of what you are doing and how you’re modeling and presenting information. You have to be aware of how the children are doing and what they need, and what they’re going to need. And, be aware of, you know, your time [laughing], and uh, where the instruments are, and where you put that prop…(DC5.755.32805)

Satisfied with the teacher knowledge chart for the time being, the group was ready to begin working on the goals and objectives project. Focus would be directed to the 3 and 4-year olds because each teacher taught that age level. I suggested the group might consider using the Pre-K Music Standards as a framework for our goals and objectives discussions. Those of us in the core group were familiar with the standards, but we knew that teachers without a background in music education might not be familiar with them. Table 4.1 illustrates the Pre-Kindergarten Music Standards.

Table 4.1
The Pre-Kindergarten Music Standards: Ages 2-4 years (MENC, 1994)

1. Singing and Playing Instruments
2. Creating Music
3. Responding to Music
4. Understanding Music
Bette had adapted some of the children’s developmental charts from the textbook,

*Music in Childhood: From Preschool Through The Elementary Grades*

(Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2006), for the group to use as a supplement to the
Pre-Kindergarten music standards. Figure 4.2 illustrates the developmental skills
chart.

The group continued to search for a framework for the goals and
objectives project. We wondered about planning an individual session or if we
should tackle overarching goals for the whole year. Josh stated that we should
provide suggested activities along with each of the goals and objectives:

Josh: Ya know, based upon the standards these are the types of activities
that we’re gonna’ hope the kids – if we can provide, some sort of
ideas, what sort of songs come together and the kind of, like a
framework and structure your classroom, sequence of events. Kind
of what sort of types of things are gonna’ help facilitate that?

June: Well, I think, hmm…I just went to this workshop on backwards
curriculum design and, um, starting with the *objectives* and what
you want to have first, and then, choosing assessments that you
wanna’ have, um, now granted that’s for older kids more, although
we can, I mean we can definitely assess in what we’re doing.

Lisa: It has to be ongoing.

June: Right, it’s ongoing assessment…and *then* choosing activities as the
final thing. And so maybe that’s what we’re looking more at – I
mean I’m always looking for new ideas or activities to *do*, it’s easy
to fall in that trap of just finding some *activities*, but, making sure
that they’re *conceptually grounded*, um, and that there’s definitely
a point to them…that’s what I would like to see, so maybe that’s
what people want when they’re saying – I would hope that they
wouldn’t want every lesson just written out for them for the whole
ten weeks.
### Developmental Skills Chart

#### Children’s Rhythmic Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Developmental Skill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sings spontaneous songs with some feeling for meter and with regularly recurring rhythmic patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Imitates short rhythmic patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 to 5</td>
<td>Taps in time to a regular set pulse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Begins to develop rhythmic clapping and patting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Children’s Melodic Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Percept and Concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>Able to recognize familiar phrases and songs based on contour and rhythm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased ability to replicate familiar material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More attention to absolute value of pitches than to relative value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sensitivity to phrase, shown through movement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Children’s Vocal Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Developmental Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Invents spontaneous songs with discrete pitches and recurring rhythmic and melodic patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reproduces nursery rhymes and childhood chants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>Discovers differences between speaking and singing voice</td>
</tr>
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*Figure 4.2 Developmental Skills Chart*
Lisa: No, I think they want lists of, you’re going to teach this, this, this, and this, by the end of the year...

June: Like activities, or…

Lisa: Musical concepts.

Bette: Concepts, yeah.

Josh: It’s interesting when you think of concepts or elements, that the concepts keep going for years and years and years and you’re teaching different parts of the concepts…

Bette: I was just gonna’ say, well aren’t these lists? I mean I would find that helpful under 3: “imitates short rhythmic patterns,” um, and then 4-5: “replicates short rhythmic patterns on instruments,” 6-7: “can perform, read and write quarter, eighth, and half note rhythms.” I think that’s pretty good, if they had that for all of these various things.

Lisa: So maybe it’s a matter of compiling, having the four content standards in an easy format, and adapting it to fit our….

June: Yeah. And even the way they’ve written them on here: “taps in time to a regular set pulse,” I mean that comes before develop rhythmic clapping and patting, and that comes before they play instruments, and so…

Lisa: Yes, and then we could take it even further and say, here are some songs that work for this, or activities that work for this… (DC5.1190.32805)

In his final interview, Josh reflected on the process the core group went through in searching for structure, and for a framework:

I think it takes a while to get into the mode of thought, thinking about teaching. At the beginning we were all thinking, but I think we were all trying to figure [out] at the beginning about teaching. But at the same time we were all trying to figure out how we think and trying to put it in the new process with all of us. I think we got better at it as time went on. I think we became more clear in what we were trying to get across to one another because we would take the time to think about it, we were thinking about how to say it right. (FIJH.159.72605)
What Teachers Need To Know and Be Able To Do #2

As we gathered together and got settled in for the seventh conversation, I mentioned to the group that, after reflecting on the first teacher knowledge chart, it was impressive to think about how much we do as teachers, and how much we do know. June responded: “what if, like, I just thought of 4 more things…to add to that…is that okay? (DC7.494.51605). Figure 4.3 illustrates the brainstorming chart: What teachers need to know and be able to do #2.

June: …one thing I had thought was, I’m going to put down the instruments – know how to play classroom…another thing I thought would be, um, like how to set up your classrooms, where should the instruments be, where should the students be, where should you be.

Josh: I would say off of that…the development of a routine. You have to implement that from the beginning of the year…so that there’s set expectations.

June: Mmhmm, that was actually my other one. Or ya know, how it affects the students. Because…that special student that I have – he has made so much progress, but this past Saturday, he was 10 minutes late and they had missed the opening song, and all of our beginning things that we do, and he came in and we had already moved on to this activity, this new activity and he was just, he couldn’t handle it, he just stood by the door. And I finally said: “Mom, he’s sad, he’s not happy today, maybe he should just go.”

As a 1st year early childhood music teacher, Katie often raised questions and ideas about teaching methods and approaches, and specifically about sequencing the teaching of musical concepts and skills:

Katie: I think there can be different ways to learn…like rather than just different methods of teaching, but different orders, that you can come around to gaining a concept…like it doesn’t always have to be the same sequence…
Brainstorming Chart: What Teachers Need To Know and Be Able To Do #2

What Do Early Childhood Music Teachers Need To Know and Be Able To Do: #2?

- Location (set-up) of students and resources.
- Pitch range of students' singing.
- Know how to play classroom instruments.
- Parent interaction and feedback and communication.
- Differentiated instruction for special learners.
- Types of assessment.
- How to assess: performance, verbal, movement, written.
- How to teach a concept in multiple ways through a variety of experiences.
- How to make materials for the children to use/handle to enhance their learning.
- How to collaborate with teachers of other subjects to create of sense of interrelatedness.

Figure 4.3 Brainstorming Chart: What Teachers Need To Know and Be Able To Do #2
June: Mmhmm…

Katie: You pick up, maybe a more higher concept first, and then maybe go back down to the low ones. Like even with my kids, man, the things that they know how to do…they might not necessarily, should not know how to do yet, and they don’t know why they know….

Lisa: So then that’s where somebody might say, “do they really understand it?”

Katie: Right, but there are different…ways of understanding too, because they’re understanding it experientially…but they don’t understand the theory behind it necessarily, so like they don’t um, they might sing it and like do things with their bodies that I didn’t ask them to so like, [she sings] “mi-re-do” with their hands, and ya know, they might have seen me do it, but I’ve never taught them to do that…so after they start doing it you can go back and say, “now why are you moving your hands down” ya know? (DC7.1186.51605).

Katie’s ideas prompted a discussion around experiential learning versus learning through memorization and games that do not include a musical context. Questions were raised as to what levels of understanding are reached through these various methods and approaches and if, when, and how transfer will occur. We discussed Katie’s point about learners coming to understanding in different ways, and as a group of teachers teaching in multiple and diverse contexts, we agreed that one of the most important characteristics we could include on the teacher knowledge chart was “teaching concepts in multiple ways and differentiating instruction for all learners:”

June: So maybe…to relate it to our question would be to say this is, um, how to teach a concept through a variety of experiences.

Lisa: Mmhmm…that’s really important, and that goes back to the modalities and…
June: Mmhmm!

Lisa: Bruner and all of those, but...that’s just a really important thing because...teaching a concept in multiple ways is going to ensure that more of your students...get to the understanding point...if you choose to do that, you are thinking deeply about how you are teaching. You’re thinking about your practice – all of this stuff that you have to know and be able to do. And then, how do you, how do you apply that. But you can’t just teach it – you also have to assess.

June: We should probably add something about assessment too.

Lisa: Mmhmm, we really should because, it’s a tricky thing, it can look a lot of different ways, but you know, you might think your kids understand what quarter notes and eighth notes are...but if you go to the next step to add something else, you might find out that they don’t have those more basic concepts learned completely, so they’re not going to get the next one.

June: Yeah. I found that last year, um...as I think I tried to...jump with my 3 and 4s into the melodic things...first before solidifying the rhythm things, um, and so it was a struggle, of course, it’s hard to do pitch and rhythm at the same time, um...so by cutting off that whole melodic thing, my kids were really, successful on rhythm this year. And I can tell and it shows. And that’s a good feeling, ya know...seeing that they’re able to read those iconic notations (DC7.1342.51605).

We continued to discuss and illustrate our ideas with stories from practice about how children come to musical understanding, especially through constructivist learning experiences that are performance-based:

Lisa: …writing with Popsicle sticks, each one of those is a performance, an understanding performance...they’re showing you they know...they can do what you’re doing...um, for examples, they might learn how to write, platypus, koala, wombat, wombat...

/ / / / / / / / Plat-y-pus Ko-a-la Wom-bat Wom-bat
…we’re doing Australia – but can they then write kangaroo, another three syllable word? And that’s when you know they understand it…they can take other words, and that’s what my kids did this week. One of the kids, when I was showing them that Kookaburra can be the 16th notes, the group of four – we were doing quarter notes, and eighth notes, but we were not calling them that yet, they’re not quite there yet, they can do it, but…he said “oh, so you can take two of these” – we had eighth notes written, and we wrote them out with our words, platypus, cassowary, etc., and then, I showed them that you could do, Kookaburra like this, and showed them the actual notation…and so TJ said “I get it” – this was after a couple of weeks doing this of course, he said, “so you could take two of these and put them in there and hook ‘em together!”

June:  Wow!

Lisa:  Which is a huge concept…for a 1st grader to be doing…and, he explained it….

June:  That’s cool!

Lisa:  It was really neat. So it’s by going through all these different steps, that everything – even him telling me that, counts as a performance, because he’s explaining it (DC7.1469.51605).

As we discussed other kinds of performances in which children could show their musical understanding, June stated that performances could also be thought of in terms of assessment, “not only how to assess, but types of assessment:”

Lisa:  Mhmm…and the kids might come up with things, ya know, especially the older kids. The younger kids, you might be having them create a movement for Shoo Fly. They create a different movement for [the middle section] “I feel, I feel, I feel.” Then [you ask] “what are you going to do when Shoo Fly comes back?” Well, hopefully they’re going to say, “I’m going to do the same movement as I did the first time.” (DC7.1472.51605).
As previously cited, Bette’s experience as a Montessori teacher was a real benefit to the group as she often illustrated topics of discussion through yet another lens:

Bette: I have to say the genius of Maria Montessori is without question that her materials allow a child to stay in the concrete stage until they are ready to abstract it. And it might mean that one child stays with…three or four different kinds of materials for addition before they abstract it. And it might mean another child only takes two. But each material is a little different so you know no child ever feels like they’re stuck at an early level or anything. But I think that idea…being allowed to stay with the concrete until you are absolutely ready to abstract it – that’s so important that early work we do with the icons…before we…have it with notes or ta’s or ti-ti’s or anything, you know? It’s so helpful to a child…to spend plenty of time there…before you ask them to abstract it…(DC7.1547.51605).

Bette’s illustration of the Montessori method prompted a discussion on the merits of learning through discovery and problem-solving approaches that allow children to use manipulatives in active and interactive learning experiences. The group championed approaches that allow for experiencing, practicing, and internalizing before labeling of concepts. As we thought about best practices in teaching, we reflected on our own learning experiences as children – the facts we had to memorize and the concepts we didn’t feel we learned well enough at the time to fully understand:

Bette: Yeah, I finally understood geometry when I did the Montessori training [chuckling], because of getting to work with certain little pieces and all.

Josh: I think it’s cool that…walking into my Montessori kids’ classrooms, I mean like, Lisa you talked about fractions, I think of like learning fractions, or something like that, as someone on the
board filling in the pie chart, or whatever – there they are with their little things that they’re moving around…

Bette: Uh huh.

Josh: …and, ya know, it’s very different learning, it’s fitting that we have all the manipulative stuff in our program (DC7.1624.51605).

Having viewed Josh and Bette’s teaching videos earlier in the year, afforded this group a shared experienced allowing us to discuss specific teaching strategies and examples of children’s musical development as we engaged in discussion about curriculum planning frameworks. For example, as the group discussed a particular framework for planning lessons or curricula, we worked through individual elements of that framework by discussing specific examples from our contexts and practice. This activity helped us to identify best practices for planning, teaching, and learning that were situated in context.

As the core group continued to evolve, the value of the conversations became more evident – they were serving as a form of collaborative professional development that was enhancing professional knowledge and individual practice:

Josh: It’s interesting…I was like, ya know, here I am; I’ve been teaching for a couple of years. And then, but it’s really cool that, ya know, here you guys talk about stuff you’ve been doing for years and years and years and…ya know, I know exactly what you mean when you get done. I feel like “Gee!” Ya know, it’s like…sometimes it can be overwhelming when you think about all the things that you’re attending to…I guess a little comfort voice in my head was like, “ya know, over time…”

June: Right…It’s a, it’s very much like a spurring on, like it spurs me to,…um, ya know, try this, or think about it…when I’m planning my lessons…to think about them this way. Like the next unit I plan, I’m sure that I’m gonna think about, ya know, what are overarching goals, or like this summer, my colleagues at my school
were planning on writing a curriculum for our school, for what our kids needs are for the whole year...like...what we’re gonna start with and what we’re gonna end with...I’m just thinking...we have to do these overarching goals for the whole year...and really make sure that that’s a part of what we’re thinking...and so, it’s a good thing!

Lisa: Yeah!

June: It’s just, ya know, it’s always that little bit of doubt: “oh, I should have been doing this before”...but, you know you can change that though, and say, “oh, I can take this and use it from now on.” (DC7.2137.51605).

Josh explained that lessons he created for his first graders grew out of the feedback he received after the teachers viewed the videotape of his classes. As he described what the children accomplished, he revealed his own growth as a teacher:

Josh: …[for my] 1st graders, setting up pitch made all the difference in the world. Like my middle class especially. It's kind of like, a lesson that grew out of here...[my] kids aren’t really singing...okay, well let's try something! (DC7.2746.51605)

At the close of this conversation, the core group was ready to move forward. We planned to begin working on one age level and the corresponding goals, objectives, and lessons for a series of fall session classes. Having explored several planning frameworks and templates, the group settled on the Teaching for Understanding (TfU) brainstorming chart (Blythe & Associates, 1998) because everyone was familiar with it; we felt it best represented our shared teaching philosophy; and would best support our project. The framework consists of several components: overarching understanding goals, throughlines; generative topics; unit-long understanding goals; performances of understanding, and
ongoing assessment. Overarching goals are the things that a teacher wants her students to understand at the end of a year or a course; generative topics are “central to one or more disciplines; interesting to students and teachers; accessible to students; and provide opportunities for multiple connections;” unit-long understanding goals are “statements or questions that express what is most important for students to understand;” performances of understanding are “activities that both develop and demonstrate students’ understanding of the understanding goals by requiring them to use what they know in new ways;” and ongoing assessment is “the process by which students get continual feedback about their performances of understanding in order to improve them” (Blythe & Associates, 1998, p. 19). The TfU framework provides for flexibility allowing the teacher to begin with any one of these components.

June voiced her excitement and satisfaction about the decision about using this framework and about collaborative lesson planning, foreshadowing what was to come as these teachers moved toward deeper understanding:

And you know what’s going to be great? Not only are we going to, like, have this great lesson, or unit together, but we’re also going to have the same understanding of how to use that framework, which we’ll all be able to apply. Which I think is awesome! (DC7.3142.51605).
CHAPTER 5
UNDERSTANDING UNDERSTANDING

What are the stages of children’s musical development? What does it mean for a young child to show her understanding? What does this understanding look like? During the final three conversations, the core group took a closer look at what children are able to do musically, what they understand, and what that understanding might look like. This chapter illustrates the reflective discussion in which the core group engaged as they worked to re-state and outline broad program goals based on the Pre-Kindergarten music standards and to define understanding in the context of early childhood music teaching and learning.

Zooming In/Zooming Out: Standards, Goals, Objectives, and Tools

With a focus on future collaborative lesson planning, the core group, Bette, June, Katie, Josh, and I, made the decision to outline broad program goals modeled after the Pre-Kindergarten music standards (MENC, 1994). This decision was based on conversations throughout the year and a suggestion that originally came from Katie. She indicated that for her, a first year early childhood music teacher, having broad goals and objectives for each age group would be very helpful in her planning. Because she did not have a background in child development, nor did she have a music education degree, it was difficult for her to plan classes for multiple age groups and feel comfortable that she was making appropriate musical and pedagogical decisions. The group decided that because
each of us taught classes for 3-4 year olds in multiple settings, beginning on
common ground with this age group would support us as a diverse group of
teacher learners giving us the opportunity to consider children’s musical
development in a variety of contexts. As subcategories for each of these goals, we
planned to outline sequential musical concepts and skills that were
developmentally appropriate for each age group, modeling them after the
achievement standards listed for each content standard. Figure 5.1 illustrates the
Pre-Kindergarten music standards.

Lisa: I’m looking at the four standards and they’ve got the things
underneath that would fall in that category. And then we’ve got the
developmental skills…so if we’re going to define overarching
goals like “students will understand”…that would probably (pause)

Josh: Be a standard.

Lisa: Yeah, that’s what I thought…it would be a standard. And then, the
topics underneath

Josh: Would be a specific skill.

Lisa: Would be more of a specific skill. Although some of these, like
singing spontaneous songs with or without music…some
skills…might be either…well, it could fall in different categories.
It depends on how you look at it…(DC8.27.6305)

We could not have predicted the amount of time we would devote to discussing,
debating, and ultimately restating the standards. Our effort was focused on
making sense of the standards in relation to the contexts and children in our
program and on presenting the material in a way that would make sense and
would support current and future faculty. Eisner (2002) states that standards can
be beneficial in planning if:
Pre-Kindergarten Music Standards (Age 2-4)

1. Content Standard: Singing and playing instruments/Achievement Standard: Children
   a. use their voices expressively as they speak, chant, and sing
   b. sing a variety of simple songs in various keys, meters, and genres, alone and
      with a group, becoming increasingly accurate in rhythm and pitch
   c. experiment with a variety of instruments and other sound sources
   d. play simple melodies and accompaniments on instruments

2. Content Standard: Creating music/Achievement Standard: Children
   a. improvise songs to accompany their play activities
   b. improvise instrumental accompaniments to songs, recorded selections, stories,
      and poems
   c. create short pieces of music, using voices, instruments, and other sound sources
   d. invent and use original graphic or symbolic systems to represent vocal and
      instrumental sounds and musical ideas

3. Content Standard: Responding to music/Achievement Standard: Children
   a. identify the sources of a wide variety of sounds
   b. respond through movement to music of various tempos, meters, dynamics,
      modes, genres, and styles to express what they hear and feel in works of music
   c. participate freely in music activities

4. Content Standard: Understanding music/Achievement Standard: Children
   a. use their own vocabulary and standard music vocabulary to describe voices,
      instruments, music notation, and music of various genres, styles, and periods from
      diverse cultures
   b. sing, play instruments, move, or verbalize to demonstrate awareness of the
      elements of music and changes in their usage
   c. demonstrate an awareness of music as a part of daily life

Figure 5.1 Pre-Kindergarten Music Standards (Age 2-4), MENC, 1994

They represent in a meaningful and non-rigid way the values we embrace and the general goals we seek to attain, if they provide those who plan curricula with an opportunity to discuss and debate what is considered important to teach and learn, and if they suggest criteria that can be used to make judgments about our effectiveness. Standards should be viewed as aids, heuristics for debate and for planning. They should not be regarded as contracts or prescriptions that override local judgments. My argument is an argument not for mindlessness but for a recognition of the virtues of diversity and of the need for curriculum planners and teachers to be sensitive to local circumstances and individual efforts. (p. 173)

We contemplated the layers of our proposed model, wondering how to make it the most meaningful, effective, and flexible, while keeping it situated in context. The Teaching for Understanding brainstorming chart proved to be a useful document in supporting the group’s work and the need to zoom in and zoom out as we checked our own understanding. The 3s and 4s were assigned as our generative topic, and the elements of music, along with broad musical concepts and skills appropriate for this age, became additional layers of long and short-term goals:

Josh: So 3s and 4s are the generative topic...so the unit long goals might be [he sings] MRD and then the specific ways that you go about teaching them the songs…

Lisa: Right, the songs, and then the sequence of how you’re going to [do] that, maybe by using...whatever song you’re using to teach the MRD pattern…so we could actually chart this on many different levels, we could go from…very broad to very specific…that was a good idea, Josh. What you said made me think that if we did that on a very broad level…if it was 3s and 4s, MRD…then we could have one sheet that [listed] all the songs that have a MRD pattern that are perfect for teaching 3s and 4s. Then people would have a choice of materials – they might like one song better than the other…

June/Josh: Mmhmm!
Lisa: …and then we…go even more specific, and you’re going to use *Mitten Weather* to teach MRD so here’s a sequence you could use, here’s all the stuff you would need…so, we might want to make a broad sheet that has the materials…and then, like each element…or each concept…we’d have lots of different pages if we go from broad to specific, then, that might make more sense, wouldn’t it? It would be more in depth for the teacher no matter what level they’re at….

Josh: …kind of like a zoom document…with a moveable lens.  
(DC8.73.6305)

Josh’s comment about zooming in and out with a moveable lens resonated on many levels with the group. The teachers had been zooming in and zooming out all year – looking in on practice through the teacher’s stories and zooming back out to discuss broad pedagogical and philosophical issues; looking in on individual contexts and zooming back out to consider them as part of the whole program; looking in on children’s understanding and zooming back out to check our own understanding. Recognizing the complexity of creating such a document and the variables that would influence interpretation of its components, we wondered if it was even appropriate to identify goals and objectives for each age group. The decision was made to very broadly identify developmentally appropriate musical goals for each age group, and to offer more details at the subsequent levels that dealt with musical concepts, skills, and pedagogical issues.

The group concluded that providing concrete and well-developed examples would be beneficial for those using the model. By analyzing our own classes, we could identify musical concepts, skills, and materials appropriate for each age group and context; then sequence these concepts and skills according to
level of complexity. Once that was accomplished, the group planned to create a suggested sequential teaching process for each concept and skill. This decision was based on conversations throughout the year in which several teachers revealed stumbling blocks in their planning, including appropriate sequencing of musical concepts and skills and knowing how to develop a sequential teaching process.

Upon completion of the suggested teaching processes, the group planned to embark on our goal of collaborative lesson planning. Teachers could then choose from these lesson examples or use them as templates for creating lessons more appropriately situated in their individual practice and contexts. An important goal for the core group was to be clear that the songs and materials we chose to develop were representative of the many possibilities. We wanted users of the model to understand that, although we put forth specific examples and materials, we were very aware that teachers should have choices, and we expected them to analyze and use their own favorite materials and resources.

As the group discussed specific musical concepts, contemplating how and where they would fit, it was necessary to continually zoom back out, thinking broadly and connecting back to the Pre-Kindergarten music standards:

June: … I would want them to understand MRD. And I would, um…want it to be something that would go through the course of the year, but…when I think overarching…I mean, MRD is so specific…It’s almost like I would rather have that overarching idea be that music can have…descending lines, or…descending contours…
Lisa: Right! And we might want to make sure that we match that up to...the Pre-K standards...

June: *Mmmmm, right!*

Lisa: …understanding music…so maybe, it’s content standard #4? Maybe we could start with the standards and map those out? (DC8.215.6305)

Bette wondered about interpreting the standards: what was too broad or too narrow for a given goal? She viewed the content standards and accompanying achievement standards as a whole, acknowledging that this left room for broad interpretation.

Bette: So for the overarching, would 1B – 1B contains *quite* a variety – is that *too* broad for overarching? Would you get it down just to...a variety of simple songs, becoming increasingly accurate in rhythm and pitch? Or would – 1B is too broad. Right? It has too many things in it?

Lisa: You probably – you want to be broad.

Bette: …increasingly accurate in rhythm and pitch…it seems to me to be the one that pertains to getting at specifically, MRD…

Lisa: I’m wondering if they [overarching goals] could even be just the content standards?

June: *Mmhmm.*

Lisa: Singing and playing, creating music, responding to music…and *then* your generative topics become more specific like, I’m going to sing songs in these *meters*. And then your shorter goals would be even more specific than that. Maybe…*then* that becomes, MRD, or whatever…I think I might attack it that way. And [then] we just pick – we’re doing this for 3s *and* 4s because that’s how our classes are set up. It says that these standards are intended for age 4, but with ours together [3s and 4s], we do *these* things…(DC8.259.6305)
June suggested the first standard be divided into two separate goals, one for singing and one for playing instruments and with everyone in agreement, the remainder of the conversation was spent discussing the wording of each. It was important they were stated succinctly so that others would understand the nature of each goal:

Lisa: …I’m trying to think how we would say that…students will understand that there are different ways to use their voice…

June: …that they can…use their voices to make music through singing…speaking…chanting? I don’t know, something like that? I mean that's…broad.

Katie: Mmhmm…how to sing? How to play instruments, how to create music?

Josh: Students will understand how to use their voices in a variety of ways…

Lisa: …their voices for singing, or in a variety of ways? Maybe we should say through singing?

Josh: Mmhmm!

Lisa: …and then speaking and chanting can go along with that.

June: Right.

Lisa: Does that make sense?

June: Mmhmm, sure!

Lisa: So what did we say then? Students will…

[Several seconds of silence]

June: Will understand how to use their voices…through singing…

Katie: Mmhmm! (DC8.467.6305)
This type of exchange became routine for this group. In restating each standard it was necessary to make sure everyone was interpreting them similarly. The group was careful to present the goals in a way that was true to the original statement, but also so that they were appropriate for our multiple teaching contexts. The goals needed to allow for flexibility in planning while serving as a developmentally appropriate framework that assisted teachers in supporting and developing children’s musical understanding.

One of the most meaningful things about the discussions around each goal was that they allowed us to examine practice in relation to specific contexts. In addition to the Pre-Kindergarten music standards, the group was careful to also consider the guidelines outlined in Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs (Bredekamp, 1997), published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The document has undergone several revisions since its original publication date in 1987, and it includes the position statement of the NAEYC, findings in child development, issues related to curriculum and assessment, information on cultural differences, and guidelines for implementation of age specific applications. The original document outlined five fundamental guidelines for practice that remain in the most current revision:

The following guidelines address five interrelated dimensions of early childhood professional practice: creating a caring community of learners, teaching to enhance development and learning, constructing appropriate curriculum, assessing children’s development and learning, and establishing reciprocal relationships with families. (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 16)
Through sustained dialogue, we explored best practices in early childhood music teaching, sharing individual stories situated in context. The stories reflected the complexities of life in the classroom, revealing differences and similarities, struggles and triumphs, shared philosophies, and portraits of children as learners and musicians influenced by the choices teachers make. These conversations allowed the group to link practice with children’s musical development, enhancing understanding about early childhood music teaching and learning.

Katie: Yeah, that’s what I was thinking…cause if we’re going to say beginning to understand singing, I mean little ones understand…ya know, expressing themselves through singing…they’re not really beginning it at this point…they’re continuing, ya know…um, they’re like, maybe you’ll be developing it more cognitively…if we could find a way to kind of say that…I don’t think it’s beginning…

Lisa: …it depends on how you define beginning, and of course…how to define understanding…

Josh: I just think understanding is age-appropriate…this is like…from our perspective. What is understanding at each of those…ages? (DC8.759.6305)

Through participation in these conversations Katie realized that defining goals and objectives for her own classes was beneficial in her planning, also informing her students’ parents, helping them understand what is age-appropriate. Katie shared a goals and objectives chart she had designed to give to the parents of her 3- and 4-year old students (Figure 5.2).
Katie’s Goals and Objectives Chart for Parents

What are they learning…
These are the goals and objectives I have for your child’s class:

3/4 years

Pitch:
~ Exploration exercises
~ Some emphasis on pitch matching
~ Develop an understanding of “High” and “Low”

Scale:
~ Be able to sing the scale
~ Be able to play the scale on the Orff instruments

Singing:
~ Participation highly encouraged
~ Isolate certain melodies to develop a sense of pitch in singing (MRD)
~ Develop an understanding of loud and soft extremes

Movement:
~ Both free and steady beat movement with an emphasis on free movement
~ Develop an understanding of fast and slow extremes

Composition:
~ Be able to create words for a new song using a previously existing melody
~ Gain the ability to improvise freely on Orff instruments

Rhythm:
~ Develop a sense of “steady beat”
~ Learn the difference between a long and short note
~ Be able to echo simple rhythms verbally and by clapping

Notation
~ Be able to physically notate a three note melodic phrase and its movement
~ Be able to notate ABA form using iconic representation

Figure 5.2 Katie’s Goals and Objectives Chart for Parents
Katie: …let me show you what I’m talking about…this is what I did for parents…I took, like, different sections of my class…like when I did my hello song…I didn’t really write anything about that, because it’s pretty obvious you’re just doing greeting stuff and name games and things like that…but then, I have like a section in my lesson plan for pitch…and then I have another section for scale, and another section for singing, and music composition, rhythm, and notation. And then so I took those…topics, and then did my goals for like…ya know, under each topic, what I wanted to do.

Lisa: Right!

Katie: And that’s what I mean by like an outline, like what made sense, like as far as how I think about it. But after you do this, you could take this and kind of put it into like you were saying, like give them that, and also give them like a more broken down list for each, for like the different parts and how you can develop pitch, and how you can develop notation, ya know, like what Bette did with her, um, manipulatives, with her owls, or whatever…and really make it interesting as a teacher…(DC8.1045.6305)

The group wondered about the wording of the goals and debated whether to use the phrase “begin to develop understanding” or “will develop understanding.” The choice was important because we wanted the document itself to be developmentally appropriate for both teachers and their students, all who would be at different stages of development and understanding.

As she had suggested for the first, June thought the fourth Pre-Kindergarten standard, “Understanding music,” should be divided into two separate goals. It was her impression that “Understanding music” implied notation and vocabulary. Katie suggested we disperse it under the goals we had just written, and Josh and I had other ideas as we reflected on the related achievement standards:
Josh: …using vocabulary…they are, by using those terms, it shows their understanding.

Lisa: Right, which means we could say: students will develop understanding about how to use the tools…of musicians…

June: Mmmm!

Katie: Yeah!

Lisa: Because those are all tools that musicians use.

June: Right.

Lisa: Vocabulary, instruments, notation…

Katie: Would that be a separate topic or would that just be part of, say, singing…like would you have singing vocabulary, or playing instruments vocabulary…like mallets, what are mallets, how to use mallets…

June: I think they’re kind of different though because, like, in this category I put learning to read notation, and yes, they can play notation but…reading notation I feel, is something separate…

Lisa: And it’s as if this is more of a synthesis…they’re understanding how to put the parts together to write, to play it…(DC8.1568.6305)

The group continued in a very lengthy discussion about the tools musicians use.

We talked about tools, how the tools are used, and by whom. We discussed which musicians use which tools, and what tools child musicians use, and how they use them. Bette presented a different perspective about the fourth standard: that it was more of an arrival point when a student has abstracted meaning after having experienced and explored concepts in a sensorial manner:

Bette: All this other stuff has more a sensory experience because, for example, under #2D, you have “invent and use original graphic or symbolic system.” So I think of that as the icons and stuff that we use when they’re experiencing certain stuff, but then the specific
musical vocabulary…is when they have *abstracted* that…and don’t need all of the manipulative stuff quite so much any more…that’s how it strikes me.

Lisa: That’s when it starts to really crystallize…so…how do we say that? I think it *is* abstract and that they’re using those tools…to start to put things together.

Katie: What about abstract musical…

Josh: Connect to, connecting their experiences….

June: Students will develop understanding about…

Katie: About thinking about music?!

Bette: Well *that’s* what the difference, when you’re abstracting it…ya know, you’re…it’s in your head…

Lisa: I still think it’s more about starting to develop an understanding about how to put how to use the tools of music to create…to show their understanding about it…it really is getting to the point, they’re starting by the end of age 4, to understand how to put those parts together…

Bette: Because they’ve experienced it all year long, but now there’s this abstract understanding somehow, but it’s hard to put into words…

Katie: Are we talking about any other aspects other than *visual*?

Lisa: Yeah, I think we *are*. I think there’s more than just visual. I think it’s an internal…starting to *understand* how the parts go together.

Katie: Right…like a processing capability?

Lisa: *Yeah*.

Josh: *Relating* those…relating experiences of…sentence to words to pictures…to…something abstract. And doing something removed from the actual experience…the actual thing.

Lisa: Is there more transfer…going on, because they’re putting, they start putting things…
Katie: Synthesis?

Lisa: Yeah, it’s more of a synthesis I think, as the parts…but not quite, not completely…in the way that 5 year olds can…but they’re starting to develop an understanding about…

Katie: Using music as tools in…like…

Josh: Instead of relationships…

Lisa: Yeah, those are all tools of musicians, because they’re starting to understand…piano means soft and forte means loud, those are tools that musicians use…they’re tools that a composer uses.

Illustrating her point regarding abstraction and understanding with a story from Montessori practice, Bette described how students come to understanding over time through exploration and practice:

Bette: They own the knowledge…there’s been this whole long experiential, sensorial stage and now they own the knowledge at that age-appropriate level.

Katie: But they’re not just owning, they’re putting it into practice and creating or naming it, or they’re taking knowledge that they own and they’re transferring it…

Lisa: They’re acting as musicians, they’re using…the real thing.

Bette: Yeah. I guess I’m thinking of the word understanding back to that original argument. If you know that understanding is a point of arrival, a point of! You get there after a long time, a long process.

Bette’s stories from Montessori practice illustrated that understanding happens over time by using, and knowing how to use, the appropriate tools.

Fairbanks and LaGrone (2006), in a study that examined teachers learning together in a teacher research group, identified eleven categories of talk including
“telling stories about practice: using narratives to illustrate a point or to suggest another way of seeing the topic at hand” (p. 12).

Lisa: Understanding is that you can, you learn something, and you take it and show it multiple, or different, ways.

Katie: But not necessarily talk about it?

Bette/Lisa [together]: Oh yeah!

Lisa: You talk about it and you show it…and you can use it, apply it to new situations.

Bette: Just one example…that comes to my head…if you’ll forgive my always talking about this, it's just a little Montessori thing, but if the children were working with addition, and there are a number of different materials to do addition – so they’ve worked with unit stamps, ten stamps, 100 stamps, 1000 stamps, and they manipulate them over and over and then…they go onto a bead frame which is like an abacus type thing…and they’re adding these processes down the line…and then the abstraction is when, and all the time they’re writing the answers…for a long time they’re writing the answers based upon looking at how many units or tens or whatever are left on the bead frame…now, all the sudden, all they have are the numbers…and they can write the answer. To me, that’s understanding, they’ve abstracted it now without the…

Katie: But is the understanding for them to be able to use the bead frame?

Bette: Well that, there is that, understanding how to use the bead frame, however, that’s not abstraction of addition or subtraction. What I’m talking about is the abstraction of addition after you’ve manipulated all this stuff, experienced it sensorially, over and over, and then all the sudden you know…how to do it. (DC8.1918.6305)

We experimented with several different ways to state “Understanding music” as a broad goal, settling on: “students will develop understanding about using the tools of musicians.” The group wondered how the authors of the standards decided on the wording for number four:
Josh: I think it’s really fascinating that we can talk about this at such great length. I think it’s great!

June: I think it is great!

Lisa: I wonder if the people who defined or created that “Understanding music” one – what their discussion was like? What made them decide on that?

June: And if you really look at 1, 2 and 3, yes, these are things that, on a surface level…on a deep level, we are teaching specific concepts, related to these things, but as soon as they begin singing and playing instruments, that’s something that children can experience outside of the music classroom as well as inside the music classroom. But #4, they’re not going to come to an understanding of music, I mean very well, without some sort of structured learning. Which is just kind of the unique part of #4, I think. (DC8.2262.6305)

As this conversation drew to a close, Katie asked if we could define the term “tools.” That prompted the decision to add an appendix to the document that defined terminology and outlined our shared philosophy for teaching early childhood music. We couldn’t seem to let go of this conversation and at the last minute the group decided we should categorize the tools. June suggested that for the next conversation we think about what tools teachers need to have, instead of what teachers should have, as this would more clearly illustrate the nature of children’s musical development and understanding.

Understanding “Understanding Music” in Context

The camaraderie that had developed within this group was evident at the beginning of the ninth conversation. With Katie absent, Josh, June, Bette, and I continued the discussion about the fourth Pre-Kindergarten standard, Understanding music. We reflected on several definitions of the word
understanding; June remarked on the complexity of trying to define it. As we discussed musical understanding in relation to young children and the use of musicians’ tools, it became evident that we needed to consider them both with the idea of developmentally appropriate practice in mind.

Josh: …if we had a toolbox…

June: I mean, I understand that, like, some of the tools we use…are simplified to be appropriate for 3 and 4 year olds…like symbolic, or, iconic notation, or something, but…it still comes back to being a tool of notation…it’s still notation…just on a simple level….

[Several seconds of silence]

Lisa: But not…maybe simple…you know what I mean?

June: Right, right, yes! Yeah, yeah…not simple, but age appropriate level…

Josh: …I think it’s interesting to kind of try and think of those, fit those terms, the tools, into the context of the 3s and 4s, isn’t it? (DC9.272.61305)

As we continued to discuss tools in the context of the 3’s and 4’s, June indicated that she had started a list of possible categories:

June: …instruments, of course, notation and symbols, um, I wrote other physical elements and I was thinking about things like, um, the physical space that you’re in, or the, the stereo or CD player, um, visual aides, like books or pictures…and then the elements of music, like melody, harmony, rhythm…(DC9.372.61305)

The group agreed that June’s categories were valid and the conversation took an interesting turn when Josh presented his ideas about tools:

Josh: This comes under…like melody, I had direction…

June: Yeah, they can be broken down in so many ways…
Josh: MRD…

June: But are those more getting into concepts or are they still tools?

Lisa: That’s a really good question…are they concepts or are they tools…interesting. Depends on who you are, doesn’t it? ‘Cause if you’re a composer…those are tools.

Josh: Those are certainly tools!

June: Mmhmmm…yeah. Yeah! That’s so interesting…that’s awesome!

Josh told the group that the discussions about developmentally appropriate tools had caused him to be more “specific about being aware” of children’s musical understanding, indicating that these conversations were contributing to his own growth as a teacher, because he had begun to think much more deeply about practice and sequencing:

Josh: Ya know, we read the list of tools and…when does a 3 and 4-year-old approach melody as the direction? Or is it MRD…and that kind of, to me that is saying age appropriate.

June: Do you think we have to…present it as a concept before it can be used as a tool? Or, is there some sort of…I don’t know…natural understanding that can be developed…that enables them to be able to use it as a tool?

Josh: I think you have to be able to use it before they can tell the conceptual understanding, but, as a concept…

June: Oh, so you think…if they can use it as a tool then they will have, they will go to understanding as a concept?

Josh: Yeah.

June: Yeah, see I was thinking of it in the reverse way…I mean…they might be able to do it, but they might not be able to understand what it is as a tool…
Lisa: They might be able to play MRD, but can they use it, can they tell you what it is? Can they transfer it? Can they identify it in another song or piece of music?

June: And so is it not a tool until they have that understanding? Is there a...conception point...for it being a tool...or is it just a tool because it is a part of music...

Lisa: Yeah, you could look at it that way or...

Josh: Yes! Because if you if you’re using a shovel and you don’t know what a shovel is, it’s still a tool!

June: This is true. (DC9.451.61305)

Perspective became as important as context when thinking about tools and children’s musical understanding. The group considered interpretation, experience and practice, and schema theory, as we discussed the ways in which a child finds meaning and how each of these things influence learning and understanding:

Josh: I guess the reason I said that you can use it [a tool], before developing that understanding is because...if you learn about how it fits into things and you talk about it -- I think everything has to be grounded, and actual, in a true experience or there’s something not pure about your understanding of it or your concept. Because how can you, I mean, you can appreciate it to a certain extent...if you learn how it fits in, but...if you don’t discover it for yourself, I’m not sure it’s going to be, as strong...

[Several seconds of silence]

June: But through...I guess cause I’ve seen...1st and 2nd graders...and I’ll play something on the piano, I’ll play a scale going up...and I’ll say, “can you show me with your body...what’s going on?” And you know in 1st and 2nd grade they still can’t do that, um, that’s not a skill that they’ve acquired, and so, for them, it’s not a tool cause they don’t have that...I don’t know....

Lisa: Mmmm...the aural skills are not there...
June: Mmhmm…so do you have to have skills to use the tool?

Josh: You have to use it properly, yeah…I guess I was just thinking about it in the sense that they still wouldn’t be able to respond to it. When I was thinking of it as if they could act it out, but maybe not transfer elsewhere…so I guess what I was seeing it as was three different points…there’s the…the point where they can’t…

June: They can’t…do it…they have to discover it…

Josh: Yeah, and I guess I’m seeing at the point where, they can do it, but…they can’t move it on to put it into a different context. And then that’s where you would start to see the you could do it anywhere. (DC9.587.61305)

Through stories and discussion of children’s learning and musical development, the group carefully linked theory with practice. In response to Josh’s comments above, June mentioned Kodály’s three stages of lesson planning: preparation, presentation, and practice, while I was thinking about Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development (ZPD) and different levels of understanding ranging from naïve to master. Vygotsky (1978) contends children learn socially from those around them, including their peers and adults.

Throughout the learning process, children are supported by adults, teachers, or peers, until they reach a point when they have developed sufficient understanding to proceed without assistance. The zone of proximal development represents the gap between the current developmental level, at which the child still needs’ support, and the next developmental level, at which the child is able to function without adult guidance. Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development resides in the theory of social constructivism. The zone of proximal development suggests that
children develop through social interaction and collaborative problem solving, and indeed they move from one level to the next by engaging in independent and collaborative problem solving.

As we discussed the range of developmentally different levels possible within the same age group, and the fact that this requires perspective on the teacher’s part, Josh again mentioned the idea of “zooming in and out:”

Lisa: …and you start to think about naïve, novice, apprentice, and master, and how, where do you have all four of these within each age level? Or does it work through all the stages? Like…up through the 5s and construction…

June: Right.

Josh: Or is it like so you can zoom in and out?

Lisa: Exactly!

Josh: You have to kind of select a certain…you definitely have to set, make a statement that says this is like the zoom level. This is how we’re going to interpret that. Otherwise, it keeps cycling around. (DC9.695.61305)

Focusing on the list of tool categories and our restated fourth standard, Josh indicated that he believed the developmental skills were our musical tools:

Josh: I mean if you go through here…and it’s divided up into the tools of rhythm, melody, and vocal, movement…you could probably get more specific.

Lisa: I’m thinking about new teachers – do we want to say students will develop understanding by using the tools of mus….

June: Yeah, and how literal will new teachers take that? Will they take it as a purely physical thing? We’ve been, in our discussions, we’ve been talking about things that aren’t just physical.

Josh: Mmhmm…we discussed a lot about what a tool is….
Lisa: Mmhmm…so it’s really hard to put that “understanding music” into a…

June: It is…

Lisa: They’re describing, demonstrating awareness…of elements of music, demonstrating awareness of music as part of their lives. So they’re describing, demonstrating…the uses of music and the things that you use to…make music.

[Several minutes of silence]

June: Maybe we should think about rephrasing that one again.

(BETTE PIGGYBACKED ON A DEFINITION OF UNDERSTANDING PRESENTED EARLIER IN THE CONVERSATION WITH SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW WE MIGHT REPHRASE THE LAST GOAL:

Bette: I liked the “taking knowledge and using it in a new way.” So I would say something like students will be able to take the knowledge they have and use it to…make music…or use it in relation to music. ‘Cause that’s the way I understand the word understand…in that context…that the standard says “understand music”…um…and so whatever knowledge it is they have, which would include whatever…tools they’ve used without having to define what they are…how does that sound?

June: Can you say it again?

Bette: Well, I’ll try…students will be able to…take the knowledge they have…and…use it to…create music, or…make music…

June: I really…like this, how you put it. The only thing that’s coming to my mind…is that…because it’s early childhood and these kids are so young…sometimes I feel like they don’t have that knowledge yet…that we have to give them those experiences first, they don’t have that prior knowledge coming into it…and…that we’re providing that…prior knowledge and experiences.

Bette: Right, well I was thinking of this as a culminating…thing…and so that whatever…that knowledge is…’cause the knowledge certainly is going to be…limited…not in a negative way…
June: No, no...age appropriate.

Bette: But somehow they have some knowledge that we’ve given them. ‘Cause I just think of #4 as being, ya know, the point of arrival.

Lisa: At the end of age 4, it says that here…and that you’re using an exploratory approach, providing a rich base from which conceptual understanding can evolve…

June: Okay, yeah, that works for me…

Lisa: …over later years, as a result of their experiences with music, 4-year olds should initiate both independent and collaborative play with musical materials, and they should demonstrate correctly, so...the skills of young children develop along a continuum, and developmentally appropriate activities should be used as early as possible. So, they are showing some level of understanding, hopefully, about what we are doing at that particular point in time.

Bette: Yeah, yeah, I think that’s exactly what I’m thinking there!

Lisa: I’m thinking, students are...demonstrating...a developmentally appropriate level of understanding...(DC9.857.61305)

Figure 5.3 illustrates the Pre-Kindergarten music standards stated as broad program goals as we saw appropriate for our program and teaching contexts.

At various points in our conversations throughout the year we stopped to reflect upon the growth of our collective thinking, analyzing the ways in which we had arrived at our decisions and how these experiences had contributed to our own growth and expanded perspectives. Josh considered how we had arrived at shared meanings through the telling of our stories about practice and children’s learning, and through the actual experience of restating the standards into goals appropriate for our program:

Josh: I was just thinking how interesting, like...first when we had those 3 [goals]...we were talking about the experience of being able to
conceptualize and talk about things...or being able to just do them...and I was also thinking, okay, a beginning teacher taking a look at these statements...there might be someone who comes to it and says “oh, ya know, I get it and #5 is just amazing!” And they might not think about all we went through, but because of all the different concepts, contexts, ya know, it might make sense to someone, but another person might not find it as rich. I’m thinking about, we had all these experiences talking about this concept and we’ve put our heads to it and it has all this meaning to us...it’s interesting, ya know, looking at the adult level...

June:  Zooming out!

Josh:  Ya know...how much more are we able to abstract from a statement like that without, going through the experience of having something not work, or work...I mean, it’s interesting that...as you get older, it can guide you more. I had a statement, the statement that’s like oh, you can’t find meaning unless you go through it, but when you’re older, I suppose it does, it’s really interesting...but, and then it poses the question well, how deep is that meaning even at the adult level?

The Pre-Kindergarten Music Standards Stated as Broad Program Goals

1) **Singing**: Students will develop understanding about using their voices through singing.
2) **Playing Instruments**: Students will develop understanding about playing a variety of classroom instruments.
3) **Creating Music**: Students will develop understanding about creating music.
4) **Responding to Music**: Students will develop understanding about the ways in which one can respond to music.
5) **Understanding Music**: Students will be able to demonstrate a developmentally appropriate level of musical understanding.

Figure 5.3 The Pre-Kindergarten Music Standards Stated as Broad Program Goals
Lisa: Yeah, because it depends on where you’re at, what your experiences are…what your experiences in life have been…because you attach…

Josh: Yeah!

Lisa: …meaning to all those things…

Josh: It’s fascinating that we’re looking at these from two vantage points, ya know? The perspective of the child who’s learning the music, a child who’s 3 or 4…and then, adults…ya know? (DC9.1102.61305)

Fairbanks and LaGrone (2006) investigated teacher talk in a teacher research group employing discourse analysis to examine the ways in which “teachers constructed knowledge through talk about theory and practice” (p. 8). Drawing on the work of Edwards and Mercer (1987), the authors discuss how the concepts of context and continuity “help illustrate how members of a community construct shared notions of context through references to spoken and written texts, prior history, artifacts, and shared vocabulary” (p. 9). Fairbanks and LaGrone explain:

At any moment in time, speakers evoke topics and ideas for which their audience has a general understanding. Within the specific conversation, however, these topics or ideas take on “situational reference” that particularize their meanings to the time, place, and circumstances of the current conversation. Over time, situational references become a resource of prior meanings to which members of the group can refer and by which they assume shared understanding of their utterances. These prior meanings, along with the specific discourses practices established concomitantly in shared activity, establish a community as a community. (p. 10)

Analyzing the standards and restating them as broad goals was, for the group, a rich learning experience that allowed us to construct shared meanings as we
identified musician’s tools, developmentally appropriate music practice, and even more importantly, what was developmentally appropriate music practice for the children in our program. Perspective and context were two very important themes that emerged continuously throughout the year. I remarked how interesting this particular conversation had been; how it moved our thinking forward. June exclaimed as she was leaving: “That was great! I don’t think I’ve had a conversation like that since college! (DC9.1616.61/05)

Developmentally Appropriate Understanding

At the beginning of the tenth, and final working conversation, we began designing session-long goals that mapped to each of the broad goals:

June: Vocal exploration, I mean you can divide that into lots of, I mean we’re talking about speaking voices, and singing voices, and going up into your head voice…and all those kinds of things…maybe if we could break even vocal exploration into different things…that’s a pretty large category. (DC10.242.62705)

I surprised the group with some of John Feierabend’s vocal exploration resources they had requested earlier in the year. When I opened the large pitch exploration cards, they immediately began trying out the suggested sound effects as I displayed the pictures and read the stories. Josh started singing accompanying songs, and everyone joined in. Katie exclaimed: “I love these!” (DC10.300.6/27/05) As we continued to outline session-long goals, the pitch exploration cards inspired our thinking around sequencing and skills:

June: …or just switch from high voice to low voice?

Katie: Can you do that with 3 and 4s? I mean…in the fall?
Lisa: It’s tricky, isn’t it?

June: Well, by the *end* of fall?

Josh: It gets them to get out of their speaking voices and to find the upper part of their voice…

Bette: Their head voice.

Josh: Discover that there are even different parts of the voice…

Lisa: We’re still really looking for higher and lower voices…it’s hard to get some children to do that even later…when they’re older.

Katie: I think the best way to do that is like with a siren or roller coaster type thing where it’s a continual movement…because that way they don’t really have to think about the fact that they’re switching…then you can always stop it at a point and have them stay high or stay low. (DC10.379.62705)

Because of our own careful consideration of the standards and through our ongoing conversations we were aware that the goals and skills we identified were not necessarily end results. While students were grouped by age for our classes, we understood that they were at different developmental levels. In presenting this document, it was important to us that readers be aware that the goals and skills were broad expectations for the *end* of a given session or year; that developmental understandings emerge over time with guidance and practice:

Lisa: It’s interesting because I think that whatever form this goes to it needs to be prefaced with: you’re not [necessarily] getting to an end result. It’s a process and you keep building on top of all of these things…

June: Right.

Lisa: By the end of fall session doesn’t mean they’re going to…know exactly what the difference between speaking and singing voices…
June: And that different people are at different levels and…

Lisa: Yeah…and it’s the teacher’s role to not look at this as: this is what I have to accomplish to by then…

Katie: Well they should think of it as accomplishing that they’re exposing them to it.

June: …they’re getting practice….

Katie: And that’s an accomplishment! (DC10.542.62705)

As part of the document, we planned to include teaching tools that would support children’s musical development and teacher understanding about developmentally appropriate practice. Our discussion about what to include prompted sharing of stories about our own experiences and personal development toward understanding children in the music setting:

June: …when I started teaching…I would become frustrated…especially when…the students weren’t singing right away. And I was surprised – I had never taught that age before and, of course, I had to keep reminding them to sing.

Lisa: We probably should write something that describes experiences that we’ve had with children that age – maybe like, you can’t force them to sing, they might not sing all year long when all of the sudden they’ll just do something spontaneous. So it might be that we do a…

Katie: Preface.

Josh: That is an interesting thing about that age because it’s probably like the only age where I think if you just sat down in the class and asked them to sing something and all of the sudden there’s silence…because like in the 2s and 3s, the parents are always gonna’ say something and usually at 5 most of your kids are gonna be right there with ya…but I remember the first time I did that, and you’re kind of like, what am I doing wrong? But then you’re going: that’s part of that…age group.
Lisa: …you have to *remind* them to sing…

Katie: Yeah, it’s like a call and response song where they know they have a part…it’s the only time where like you don’t have to be like, okay “sing with me” ya know? Because if they feel like…the song’s gonna’ fall apart without them…

June: I was going to say even sometimes when they’re totally engaged…it’s just they forgot to sing it! [Laughing]

In response to June’s comment, Josh made an important point about early childhood music teaching and learning – that even though a child may be quietly observing and not actively participating in every activity, she may still be absorbing and understanding the information:

Josh: I’m thinking of one of my students that was quiet…for the 1st two sessions and then was really silly. The beginning was like, I wonder what this kid’s getting out of class, *before* she would be quiet and then, that *last* session – she was a totally different student! She really *was* excited about matching the pitches and stuff, and even though you sometimes wonder if they’re paying attention, even if they’re not giving that response to you – I think the main reason she got there was because she *was* taking it all in the beginning even if she was…*quiet*. (DC10.914.62705)

I reiterated that we might want to consider writing up cases, or vignettes that illustrate our experiences in the classroom. This was, in fact, the way in which the group had been learning on so many levels throughout this year. The stories teachers told richly illustrated important aspects of children’s musical development and understanding that informed our practice and enhanced professional knowledge. Particularly powerful was that, while the stories were situated in early childhood music practice, they took place in multiple contexts. Often teachers indicated that they had a similar experience with children of the
same age, but because each teacher taught in multiple settings, the stories were not always situated in the same type of context. This gave us a much richer understanding of children’s musical development and illustrated the need for differentiated instruction. It also illustrated the need for differentiated professional development opportunities for early childhood music teachers who often teach multiple ages in multiple contexts; who have come to the profession from diverse backgrounds, and quite possibly, have little or no experience in child development or music education.

In this chapter I presented the work of the core group as they explored understanding in relation to children’s musical development, practice, and context. Through these final conversations, the group engaged in deep reflection and thinking about the stages of children’s musical development, what it means for a young child to show understanding, and what that understanding looks like. Through the telling of stories about practice and musical children – zooming in to examine the details, and zooming out to obtain a broader perspective, the group was able to outline broad program goals modeled on the Pre-Kindergarten music standards in an effort to define understanding in the context of early childhood music teaching and learning. These experiences allowed the group to build shared meaning that enhanced understanding about sequencing, practice, context, and children’s musical development.
Although the group did not finish the model by the end of the year, the ongoing experience of meeting together and engaging in sustained dialogue over time moved us from talk to action as we evolved from a community of learners to a community of practice.
CHAPTER 6
EVOLUTION OF PRACTICE

In the previous two chapters, I discussed three of the four broad themes that emerged during my analysis of the conversations: starting, and starting over; zooming in/zooming out; and understanding understanding. In this chapter, I will discuss the fourth theme: evolution of practice. Evolution of practice as it relates to this group of teacher learners can be analyzed on two levels: (1) evolution of individual teacher practice, and (2) evolution of the collective group from a community of learners to a community of practice. In both cases, changes resulted from teacher learning through sustained participation in the collaborative conversations.

Nieto (2003), recognizing that most teachers have few opportunities within their schools to work together with colleagues, notes that there are some teachers who will still find a way to carve out time in their busy schedules to create such opportunities for themselves. Even though teachers’ choices may take many forms such as attending conferences, co-leading workshops, or joining a teacher inquiry group, Nieto states actions such as these “demonstrate collegiality is essential for good teaching” (p. 58). She found in her work with teachers that often “their greatest inspiration comes from other teachers, not from outside ‘experts,’ certainly not from staff meetings, not even from books” (p. 58). While teachers may certainly learn and draw inspiration from these experiences, “it’s puzzling out the day-to-day problems with colleagues that tends to be most
helpful” (p. 58). Indeed, Josh acknowledged the value he found in this kind of collaborative “puzzling out:”

…when you’re in the classroom you don’t necessarily attend to all that stuff individually because you’re attending to everything all at once. You just kind of make it happen. And then to be able to step back and break it down, I think it provides a place for that while you’re teaching because you’re noticing different things. We talked about pacing, energy levels…different parts about teaching. It’s a good reminder – when you’re teaching in the heat of the moment, you do your thing…this is a chance to step back and think about it and then talk about it. And then chances are you find out that other people are doing and thinking the same thing. (FIJH.41.72605)

Nieto explains that for teachers who do not have such support, teaching may seem an overwhelming task. And “for those who do, teaching is made a little easier, a little more manageable” (p. 59). In her mid-year interview, Bette expressed the relief she felt regarding her practice after a discussion the core group engaged in about one of her classes for 3 and 4-year olds:

Then at the end when we talked about it again, [you said], “well sometimes you just get classes like that,” and it just took a burden off of me. Somehow that I had certain responsibilities to do this, that, and the other to encourage them in every way possible to sing, but that sometimes they’re just not going to do it and that’s okay. It’s just how it is and they may go home, like I know for a fact that one little boy in that class sings all the way home in the car what we learned, but to get him to sing anything in that class, he puts his head down and pulls his car out of his pocket or whatever. But just the relief of having somebody else say: “I’ve had classes like that too.” You don’t feel, “gosh I’m failing at this, or whatever.” (MYBH.1150.3/28/05)
Evolution of Individual Teacher Practice

Learning from experience is nearly impossible without the scaffolding of others, their alternative views, their complementary perspectives, their roles as active listeners and critical friends (Shulman, 1988).

Research in adult education and in professional development strongly supports participation in collaborative context-based learning and inquiry opportunities. This research shares a common guiding premise that states teachers “can create their own powerful” learning opportunities working together as they problem-find and problem-solve around education related issues (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Rust, 1998; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992; Shulman, 1997b).

The teachers in the early childhood music program at Leighton created their own powerful learning experiences as they gathered together and began to tell their stories of practice. Clandinin and Connelly (1995) explain that while the privacy and safe place that classrooms offer for teachers to “live the stories of practice,” these stories essentially remain secret stories, with the classroom becoming “a place of endless, repetitive, living out of stories without possibility for awakenings and transformations” (p. 13). Teachers need other teachers. They need active listeners and critical friends who will listen to their stories, share their own stories, and talk, think, and analyze these stories in ways that will help them to build and develop deeper and shared understandings of teaching, learning, and practice that are situated in local context.

It is through the stories of practice that we begin to understand the uncertainty, unpredictability, and complexity of life in a classroom. We also begin
to understand the cognitive demands placed upon teachers who must respond to and act within this dynamic system. Borko, Liston, and Whitcomb (2007) describe teaching as “a series of many choices – some predictable, some pivotal” (p. 266). They contend that teachers must be prepared “to perceive and interpret the wide variation that typifies teaching and learning situations and to manage the dilemmas that arise” (p. 266). In the third conversation, Katie offered a suggestion for helping teachers manage the complexities:

I think you have to figure out a way to teach people how to think, instead of teaching them what to do…it’s that whole thing like don’t give a man a fish, teach ’em how to fish kind of thing. (DC3.952.12705)

Shulman (1997b), in an essay on school reform, examined three questions: “What makes teaching so difficult? How do teachers learn to manage, cope with, and eventually master those difficulties? What forms of school reform can contribute to creating the conditions for teacher learning?” (p. 505) Building upon a set of four principles for “student learning in a community of learners,” originally outlined by Bruner (1994), Shulman proposed a set of “five principles of effective and enduring learning” (p. 513). Table 6.1 illustrates these principles.

The collaborative conversations can be viewed as a framework for effective and enduring learning that supported teacher learners in developing understanding together with colleagues situated in practice and context. What did the teachers learn about early childhood music teaching and learning? Do they believe that collaboration changes their teaching practice, and if so, in what ways? Do they believe that collaboration changes student learning, and if so, in what
ways? By analyzing the conversations of the core group through the lens of Shulman’s five principles of effective and enduring learning, a deeper understanding of teacher learning emerged.

Table 6.1
Shulman’s Five Principles of Effective and Enduring Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Activity</td>
<td>Authentic and enduring learning occurs when the teacher is an active agent in the process – not passive, not an audience, not a client or a collector. Teacher learning becomes more active through experimentation and inquiry, as well as through writing, dialogue, and questioning. (p. 514)</td>
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<td>2. Reflection</td>
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<td>3. Collaboration</td>
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<td>4. Passion</td>
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<td>5. Community or Culture</td>
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*Principle 1: Activity*

Shulman suggests that schools must provide teachers with “opportunities and support for becoming active investigators of their own teaching” (p. 514). Ball and Cohen (1999) suggest that “a practice-based curriculum” for teachers’ professional learning “could be compelling for teachers and would help them to improve students’ learning. If such teaching, and learning how to do it, became the object of continuing, thoughtful inquiry, much of teachers’ everyday work could become a source for constructive professional development” (p. 6).
Through ongoing participation in the conversations, Josh, by taking an active sustained inquiry stance, was prompted to make changes in his practice:

I changed my practice after hearing comments of other teachers. That was something that could have never been planned, unless I went to a specific workshop on setting up tonality. And here are some colleagues, that, ya know, I work with. Just a specific comment they said. No one told me I had to do this or that, it was after hearing the comment, then I was like – it was able to provide a different perspective on things. (FIJH.19.72605)

During his final interview, Josh and I reflected on the many complex layers found in teaching at any level, concluding that in early childhood there seemed to be so many more layers to which teachers must attend; teachers who may not have the necessary background or support to figure things out on their own. Josh stated:

There’s…an honesty about it, a certain honesty. You have to do it right otherwise, they’re not going to just sit there with their hands folded. You have to present it; you have to be able to break it apart. Working with that age, you have to make it work. You gravitate towards those little building blocks. I think you have to find the building blocks you’re most interested in and talk about them. The thing I like about it is that you get out of it what you need to get out of it. You don’t have to figure out that, this is what we’re going to talk about it, this is how we’re going to do it this way. You’ll find that on your own and that’s what makes it so meaningful because you found it on your own. (FIJH.221.72605)

**Principle 2: Reflection**

Reflection is at the heart of learning and understanding. Activity alone will not result in learning, therefore, learners must continuously engage in thinking about what they are doing and why; they must engage in metacognition. Teachers need opportunities that support individual and collaborative reflection about their work. June recalled how she felt after leaving the first conversation:
I remember feeling really bad after the 1st one, well, not in bad way, in a good way. I felt bad because I think I felt intimidated a little bit. And I also felt, challenged I think, as a teacher, because people would give these great ideas, and I’d be like “oh, man, I’m not doing that in my classroom,” or, “oh, I wish I was doing that” and, ya know, I felt bad in that kind of a way, but it was in a good way because it made me think. (DC11.55.71105)

Recognizing and responding to the difficult questions about practice requires individual reflection, honesty, flexibility, and courage to make one’s practice public. But these questions are necessary if early childhood music teachers are going to develop and improve their practice and determine how to better support and develop children’s musical understanding. Nieto (2003) states:

If teachers are to develop as intellectuals, having to engage in what may be disquieting dialogue is a part of the price to be paid. In the end, this kind of dialogue (what Cochran-Smith describes as “hard talk”) is a prerequisite both for developing the intellectual community that is desperately needed in schools and for imagining different possibilities for teachers and their students.” (p. 79)

Katie recognized the importance of just being able to talk with other teachers about what she was doing in her own teaching practice; the value in asking questions about how others handle certain situations; and the “kind of play off each other” that happens when colleagues discuss the everyday issues and concerns that they share (FIKM.10.73005).

But I think being reflective is a really important part of teaching, and even just small moments of reflection like even in the middle of a classroom, like, “okay that didn’t go so well” and you just make note of that on your paper and just not include that in the next lesson. (MYKM.785.42505)

Bette also highlighted this interplay between group members as an important aspect of her own learning:
I know at one point I had to take time out from listening to exactly what the rest were saying to think in my own head how I was perceiving that word and how I wanted to describe it to them. And we didn’t get tense, or, I mean, it was just so enjoyable. To me it was like the feeling you get after an exercise session... where you feel physically good. This was like a mentally good equivalent. We take so much time that children are learning things and that we’re doing it in a right way that sometimes our own learning maybe gets put on the back burner. It’s been a long time since I was a thinker like that. (FIBH.98.90905)

It was evident that June had reflected deeply throughout the year, putting into practice the ideas she had gleaned and developed from the conversations. She spoke about the value of collaborative reflection:

Anytime you’re forced to voice your views, well not forced, but you have an opportunity to voice your views, um, in front of others it causes you to actually define what they are, what your views are. And when you work with others, your experience is so enriched, it’s so enriched because everybody’s different backgrounds and everybody’s different experiences and everybody’s different situations – room size [chuckling], what instruments they have, they bring that to the table and it, what the group produces is deeper than what you could have produced on your own, I think. (FIJD.203.22306)

Josh appreciated the thinking time that the conversations supported and described the experience as a true “meeting of minds:”

I don’t know there’s a certain part of me that needs that intellectual thinking about teaching part to be satisfied. There’s something, I mean it’s important to have that, it makes it more than just singing children’s songs all day long. And it’s important to really think about what’s going on. It makes me feel good about teaching and trying to figure stuff out. (FIJH.207.72605)

The setting of the conversations provided sustained opportunity to reflect on teaching and learning; to figure out how we could incorporate new ideas into individual practice; to discuss what this time together meant to us, and the ways in which it was important to our individual and collective growth.
Principle 3: Collaboration

Shulman defines collaboration as “a marriage of insufficiencies, not exclusively “cooperation” in a particular form of social interaction. There are difficult intellectual and professional challenges that are nearly impossible to accomplish alone but are readily addressed in the company of others” (1997b, p. 515). Collaboration supports active and reflective learning: teachers “can work together in ways that scaffold and support each other’s learning, and in ways that supplement each other’s knowledge” (p. 515).

June: [to Bette] I took your staff thing...from the owls last time...I used that a lot, how you explained the staff...and I’m like, ya know, I never like just said “look at this” and talked about the lines and the spaces. Now I use that in my elementary school too...and I just talk to them, instead of just being like, of course, this is easy! No, I don’t do that, but take it that step back...to say okay...what are they seeing... (DC11.423.71105)

Katie described the value of multiple perspectives when problem solving around issues related to teaching and learning:

…when you talk to other people about it you might get 5 or 6 [perspectives] and it might be exactly the point that you need to be going from, and you would never have known that if you hadn’t been open to listening to somebody else’s point of view. And the same thing, they might be having a question about something and totally have never thought about it in the way that is so obvious to you – your knowledge base has just increased by like 100% when you just talk to one other person. It’s just like you’re working with two brains instead of one! (MYKM.652.4/25/05)

It changes you whenever you hear somebody else looking at something a different way and then you go back to a situation and you start thinking about it your way and then say, “wait, here’s another way of looking at it that so and so brought to my attention. And it just changes the way that you teach and it also just expands the things that you have access to as far as making learning a good experience for those children.
Josh also indicated that the diverse perspectives presented in the conversations were valuable for him in his planning and teaching:

Yeah, well it’s from all the various topics to knowing that people are thinking about their pacing and you get to hear about the different situations that may arise: those particular children with a need, or, perspectives of people who have had different experiences teaching for different lengths of time or different ages, and there are a lot of different takes on things. (MYJH.1445.33005)

I asked him if he had changed anything in his practice based on an event that might have happened or ideas that had been discussed during the conversations.

Yeah, I did think about setting up the key with my kids. Watching that videotape was like, “yeah, I need to get these kids to sing and sing better with the pitch.” It makes you think about, tune into something, you know that I didn’t necessarily think about when I looked at that, when I was looking at that activity. I was thinking more about the improvisational nature of things, where someone else would think about the singing aspect of it. And I was attending to a particular part of it, and it was like, yeah, I can incorporate, I can work on another mode of music making with improvisation and the singing part and let’s see if we can’t get that. (MYJH.1454.33005)

**Principle 4: Passion**

Shulman acknowledges the “significant emotional and affective component” found in this type of work, indicating that authentic and enduring learning occurs when there is a shared passion for the material, when those involved are “committed to the ideas, processes, and activities,” and when they view the work in connection with “present and future goals” (p. 515). June recognized and appreciated shared feelings among the group members:

I just learned that some of things that I struggle with or that I desire, things about like, wanting a curriculum and wanting things to be sequential
across the year, that those are important to other people too.
(FIJD.39.22306)

She described how enjoyable the first conversation was as she met several of her colleagues for the first time. Because June taught part-time in our program, the group conversations would be the only time she would spend with these colleagues. She enjoyed the diverse perspectives in the large groups, but also appreciated the intimacy of the smaller core group:

It was interesting to hear of people’s different backgrounds and different places, but then as it tailored down to the people who came more regularly, I think I liked that more because over time you build a relationship and you feel comfortable. If you say “I tried this with my students and it totally bombed,” it’s okay! (FIJD.19.22306)

Bette remarked on the commitment of other group members: “I remember June saying, the one time she decided she wasn’t able to come, she regretted it so much” (MYBH.182.090905). And Josh described what this collaborative professional development experience meant to him:

Sharing of ideas, sharing of experiences…it works two ways, from the sharer’s perspective; you can talk about it, and you start thinking about things while you’re verbalizing it and then you can get feedback. And then conversely when it’s your turn, or the other person is listening, you can get things – you learn by listening. Sharing of ideas and experiences, the sharing of teaching…in a classroom space, you’re sharing a moment and an experience, not just the idea, and so it’s more than words. I think that a lot comes out when you share in the planning of something, it’s kind of fun too…it’s like when you’re doing something on your own oftentimes you’re not aware, why or how. I think understanding that all teachers are doing this because they’re interested in it, they want to succeed everyday. And doing it in this way that is positively supporting, that is the best way. (MYJH.1392.33005)
Principle 5: Community or Culture

In a community, learning processes such as “activity, reflection, emotion, and collaboration,” are supported, legitimated, nurtured, and valued (Shulman, 1997b, p. 515). Communities that embrace these principles create structures “that reduce the labor-intensity of the activities needed to engage in the most daunting practices that lead to teaching and learning” (p. 515). June valued what she had learned from our group conversations, feeling more connected:

Being somebody who is only at Leighton one day a week, one of the best things I’ve learned is learning more about the climate of the school from the teachers. Because I think if you understand the school’s climate and understand the student population then it’s easier to be able to meet their needs. And talking with those other teachers and things that they experience and things that they struggle with and like, feeling that it’s okay if I feel those things too, like being able to admit that. That helped me learn a lot. And just some of the perspectives they have about what kids can be able to do or how they act with the kids – they’re goofy or whether they’re just more calm, or like watching Bette’s video – she’s just so mellow, and you’re just like, it’s like getting a massage while listening to her voice, ya know? And, or Josh’s lesson and seeing that all of his students, and how he was laughing with them and really encouraging them in such a positive way, I just loved it!

Creating shared agendas was a natural routine for the core group. During the final conversation, I asked the others how they felt about the way the conversations had been structured throughout the year, recalling that in the first conversation we had discussed the ways in which various types of teacher groups might function. Josh remarked on the ways in which our shared agendas developed:

Josh: It’s funny how we kind of generated our themes from by what interested us, by just what started to come up, and the things we started to think about. Because it was very much we always started
talking about what was on our minds…and I think that tends to be kind of similar, developed a vein of what was on our minds.

Lisa: It really did, and things kept coming back. There were certain things that came back…

Josh: And I think some of it we wanted to come back…it all came back for a reason. (DC11.487.71105)

We often talked about possibilities for meeting the following year. I indicated that I would like to continue with the same philosophy: that the group’s agendas and direction would grow and evolve from the teachers’ perspectives, needs, and desires:

Josh: I really like the opportunity to be able to discuss what’s been going on [since we last met]…I think regardless of format or anything…that’s a really nice component and that’s a great way to start it off no matter what...

Lisa: We had talked a great deal about learning something new each time, like a song or something; and then we never ever did that because we jumped right into other things that were going on…but there are little things like that to think about…would we want to build in something like that where each week [we’re] learning something, whether it’s a song or an activity or a chant or whatever, or movement…an activity that we could take away and do…and then talk about all the other stuff. Or would that…change the nature of the discussion, the nature of the group?

June: Uh huh, well, I know this isn’t what you meant about when you said take away, like something I can use, but I feel like I have learned something new…every time, and I do take away, I mean it’s not a song, but…and I do like the idea of doing a song together…I think it, or an activity, I think because it does build community…I also, ya know, you can easily find those kinds of resources. I don’t know. I think it’s good.

Josh: I think that the sharing is the one thing you can’t get elsewhere…you can find a song or something like that but you can’t share all these other ideas and thoughts...(DC11.563.71105)
The Core Group as a Learning Community

Shulman contends: “classrooms and schools that are characterized by activity, reflection, and collaboration in learning communities are inherently uncertain, complex, and demanding. Both learning and teaching in such settings entail high levels of risk and unpredictability for the participants” (p. 515). It poses a daunting task to create and sustain communities such as these. According to Brown, Ash, Rutherford, Nakagawa, Gordon, and Campione (1993), effective learning communities share several key attributes. Table 6.2 illustrates the key attributes of effective learning communities. The core group came to embody those attributes through sustained conversation and dialogue, moving them from a community of learners to a community of practice. Having analyzed the data through the lens of these key attributes, I will illustrate the growth of the core group through participation in the collaborative conversations.

Table 6.2

Key Attributes of Effective Learning Communities

1. Distributed Expertise
2. Sharing of Expertise
3. Respect and Trust
4. The Ability to Move From Talk to Action
**Attribute 1: Distributed Expertise**

A characteristic of distributed expertise is that individuals in the group “must have something significant to offer one another; the basis for interdependence within a community is that its members represent an array of characteristics including different talents, understandings, skills, and dispositions” (p. 516). Distributed expertise is necessary in learning communities and is present either because an effort was made to include diverse individuals or “because the community encourages a division of labor in which different members invest in developing their individual expertise for the sake of the larger group” (p. 516).

Bette’s experience as a veteran teacher allowed her to effectively identify the ways in which learners come to understanding – both young students and novice teachers. Throughout the year she shared stories about her own education and development as a classroom teacher and as a music teacher, illustrating how she came to understand about teaching and about children’s learning. These stories served as a form of mentoring for the novice teachers participating in our conversations, and provided Bette with the opportunity to be a teacher leader.

Mentoring has become widely used in induction programs for first-year teachers and many organizations use mentors in their professional development programs (Díaz-Maggioli, 2004). Tomlinson (1998) outlined several basic functions of mentoring including: “acquisition of awareness and strategies relevant to teaching; engagement in teaching activity which deploys such strategies and awareness; and adapting strategy and awareness in the light of
reflection on such feedback” (p. 20). Bette aptly modeled each of these strategies through her actions during our conversations, often reflecting on the dedication and perseverance of the younger teachers. In fact, even though Katie was at a beginning stage in her teaching career, Bette immediately recognized the importance of her perspectives:

I certainly learned from everybody who was there, even though you know as far as just number of years put in, they were significantly less than I, of the core people who came all the time. But I thought it was just wonderful how they take so seriously the idea of how are we going to approach this. As Katie said: teaching people how to think about it. And, they were all such quick studies, those three particular young teachers. (FIBH.223.90905)

During her final interview, June discussed her perceptions about the collective growth of the group:

She [Katie] just didn’t have as much experience. I just remember some of the questions she would ask, and they were great questions, which would lead into wonderful discussions for the rest of us. Um, I can really see how she grew over the course of the year in terms of how she viewed her classes and her goals for her classes, and, going from activity minded to more sequential learning. I could see that in her teaching and then for somebody like Bette who has taught for a really long time and just has this wealth of knowledge, I can see how even like Katie’s questions would really cause her to reflect about her own practice. And, or there’ll be things that you do that are good, that you don’t even know that you’re doing and that they’re good, and having those brought to light. Being aware of them just makes you a better teacher because you can capitalize on those ideas then. (FIJD.223.22306)

Attribute 2: Sharing of Expertise

This attribute requires that members share their expertise, engaging “in the kinds of dialogue, peer instruction, conversations, and collaborative work that allow knowledge to be transmitted and shared among the group members” (p.
June described how her observation of Bette’s video in the fourth conversation, prompted her to begin using visuals in her teaching to better support her students’ learning:

Since I teach full-time with an elementary school, we don’t use as many visuals – sometimes with Kindergarten, but I guess I was never very good at that or thought about using it. And then I saw how effective it was with Bette’s teaching, and then just in the talking of everybody else, I started using a lot more visuals in my teaching. And with the younger students I just saw how having a picture or having an actual thing to hold onto gave them something to grasp onto, or gave them something to sing about, or gave them an understanding. They might not know what squirrel looks like, we take that for granted, or what a snail looks like, and how a snail moves – and try getting a 3 year old to move like a snail [chuckling]. It’s hard if they don’t know what a snail is! (FIJD.82.22306)

**Attribute 3: Respect and Trust**

The third attribute, respect and trust, allows for “authentic interdependence” to develop when members of the community engage each other with “civility, patience and regard” (p. 516). During his final interview, Josh reflected on the structure of the conversations, and the way in which they unfolded:

It started getting more specific as time went on, but I think that the time to do that, we always started with the sharing of what was going on in our classrooms and in our heads – not all the things were related but we just kind of found a balance of what we were interested in. (FIJH.179.72605)

In her final interview, Bette remarked on the commitment of the younger teachers in the core group, illustrating her respect for them:

Even if it didn’t always take the same direction each time, um, as opposed to somebody always being in charge and dictating how we were going to do it. And the fact that the kind of final five of us stayed together the whole time was really very nice. It showed a commitment of those three
young teachers that they really wanted to grow in their teaching, whereas you and I had a lot more years in that. (FIBH.8.90905)

During Josh’s mid-year interview, we talked briefly about some of the positive aspects of collaborative work; he stated that just having the right mindset for this kind of work could be considered a collaborative act – creating and maintaining a safe environment where teachers can feel safe to participate without being judged.

You learn a lot in thinking about these things – other people think that as well, it’s reassuring and it’s kind of fun to talk about that. Different people will think about things differently. There are different styles, but ultimately we’re all connected by the fact that we want to do it well, and let’s find out what people are thinking. (MYJH.1437.33005)

**Attribute 4: Moving From Talk to Action**

Shulman states that this final attribute involves moving “from deliberation to the joint pursuit of tasks that are publicly visible and whose outcomes hold real consequences for all of the group members.” Action is what moves a community of learners to a “community of practice” (p. 516).

During Bette’s final interview, I mentioned that I perceived a kind of slowing down in our conversations as the year progressed; the group began to discuss fewer topics over longer periods of time, and in more depth. Bette agreed that this slowing down became quite gratifying as she described her perceptions on the collective growth of the group:

It was really nice to see that it didn’t turn into just a social event. Because I could see how with certain groups that might happen. That you talk a little bit about the teaching, or whatever, you just use it as a social event. We certainly had a lovely time together and we had our meals and, um,
time to catch up with each other, but we all pretty much wanted it to be focused and accomplish something. (FIBH.293.90905)

*To a Community of Practice*

Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) define communities of practice as “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). They indicate that people in communities of practice do not necessarily work with each other everyday, but find value in meeting together. Over time they begin to “share information, insight, and advice” and reflect on “common issues, explore ideas, and act as sounding boards” (p. 5). Together they may create tangibles such as “tools, standards, manuals, or other documents,” but the group may also be content with conversations that merely lead to shared understandings (p. 5). The authors indicate that members of communities of practice “become informally bound by the value that they find in learning together” which supports their work and provides “personal satisfaction of knowing colleagues who understand each other’s perspectives” (p. 5). June’s perception about her membership in our community reflects the authors’ findings:

I’m really excited about it because, I mean, working in a public school – and I do get collaboration with other elementary school teachers, but trying to relate some of those ideas to early childhood is so hard because they don’t know the things that I see and how different developmentally they are and stuff. So I’m really excited to be able to bounce ideas back with people who understand where I’m coming from. (DC1.116.111504)

Additionally, Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder suggest that over time, the group develops “a unique perspective on their topic as well as a body of common
knowledge, practices, and approaches” (p. 5). After observing Bette’s teaching video, June described how she took one of the activities and adapted it for her own context. She indicates that changes she made in her practice led to enhanced student learning:

Another thing was Bette had a 2-line staff that she would put the owls on, and I didn’t do the owls, but I used the 2-line staff and uh, their concept of high vs. low – I could see that…it was so much easier for them to sing high and sing low and to recognize the difference. If I would try and have them, comparing high and low notes, playing like a kind of high and low game, and they were quicker at it, um, after seeing it. That was one way where I saw my students improve. (FIJD.118.22306)

June also stated that her students were now better able to transfer the understanding of the concept of high and low to subsequent experiences. She added:

…and after that I don’t remember actually a specific class, but their pitch accuracy and their understanding of that this is a high note – cause kids often confuse loud and soft with high and low, and so after they saw on the page something high and then low, but they were the same things, that nothing was louder or softer, they were like, they understood it better. (FIJD.165.22306)

Feiman-Nemser (2001) explains that while teachers do need access to outside knowledgeable sources, “professional development should also tap local expertise and the collective wisdom that thoughtful teachers can generate by working together” (p 1042).

Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder describe the knowledge of experts as an “accumulation of experience – a kind of “residue” of their actions, thinking, and conversations – that remains a dynamic part of their ongoing experience” (p. 9). They refer to this type of knowledge as a “living process” as opposed to “a static
body of information” (p. 9). To illustrate the ways in which an expert might engage their expertise, the authors illustrate how a surgeon prepares for an operation:

When surgeons operate on a patient, they do not blindly apply knowledge they have gleaned from books or procedures they have stored in their heads. They consider the patient’s medical history, monitor vital signs, look at tissues, make incisions, draw conclusions, and possibly revise the plan to make sure that the procedure is constantly responsive to the evolving situation. Engaging their expertise in this way is an active, inventive process that is just as critical as their store of knowledge itself. (p. 9)

Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder suggest that in order “to develop such expertise, practitioners need opportunities to engage with others who face similar situations” (p. 9). They indicate that communities of practice make such knowledge an “integral part of their activities and interactions” (p. 9). During our final conversation, Josh started off an exchange that illustrates the importance of engaging with colleagues through collaborative work, and in particular, through talk:

Josh: …in learning how to think about your teaching, it’s interesting, I mean you can learn through your psychology classes, all these philosophies, and then you get in a group like this. You start thinking about – you can sit around the table and you hear like four, five different ideas about how someone else is actually thinking about it – you kind of learn that it’s not just a theory. When you’re learning about [it], people learn this theory and this is very set in stone, and then, when you sit around the table and talk with people, you understand the different variations on how people see things. And you can, just by talking with someone, you can – like when we were chatting the last time, it took us awhile to arrive at an understanding, but eventually we did. It was very cool, and that just happened by talking…
June: Yes, that was one of my favorite moments from all of these discussions because it made me think so much, and it kind of changed the way I think about kids, and how they learn.

Lisa: …we were talking, Bette, about something similar to that earlier, about thinking differently when we’re here, or having the opportunity to just think with other people.

Josh: …definitely a time to, more of a focused time. I mean I think we all think when we’re teaching, but we’re all…

Bette: …mmhmm…this is much more reflective, where we have the time to actually let it play around in our brains a little bit…

June: It’s not a time where we’re thinking, “oh, but what am I gonna’ teach next week,” but how can I best learn from other people, and how can I grow from these other experiences. (DC11.371.71105)

Answering the Research Questions

Earlier cited research suggests that teachers be afforded opportunities for learning together in the context of their daily work and that they should take advantage of “local expertise and the collective wisdom” (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1042) that they can generate together through reflection, inquiry, and collaboration (Ball & Cohen, 1999).

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999a) provide a framework for examining differing assumptions about teacher learning by outlining three major conceptions of teacher learning: knowledge-for-practice, knowledge-in-practice, and knowledge-of-practice. Knowledge-for-practice, assumes that there is a knowledge base teachers need to possess in order to create an effective practice. Knowledge-in-practice refers to practical knowledge, the knowledge that is rooted
in practice and in the reflections of teachers on their practice. The assumption here is that teachers learn from inquiry that uncovers and makes explicit embedded knowledge in the practice of master teachers. Writing about knowledge-of-practice, Cochran-Smith and Lytle refer to knowledge gained through inquiry as teachers from all career stages together “generate local knowledge of practice” through their work in inquiry communities (1999a, p. 250). This perspective assumes that knowledge is socially constructed and that it draws upon the previous experience and prior knowledge of each participant. Turkanis, Bartlett, and Rogoff (2001) state that each member in a learning community has “valuable interests, ideas, and opinions” and that these differences can serve as resources that enhance learning opportunities (p. 232). Goals of teachers’ work together in learning communities include “understanding, articulating, and ultimately altering practice and social relationships in order to bring about fundamental changes in classrooms, schools, districts, programs, and professional organizations” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, p. 279). Cochran-Smith and Lytle contend “when teachers who see teaching as learning and learning as teaching work together in learning communities, they link what they learn about their own learning to new visions of what can happen in classrooms” (p. 281).

The early childhood music teachers at Leighton came to their positions from diverse backgrounds and with widely varying degrees of experience and knowledge about teaching and learning in early childhood music. Despite this, each teacher contributed richly to the conversations and did learn about children’s
musical development, early childhood music lesson planning, sequencing, and
teaching, and about sustaining and developing individual practice. Each teacher
brought to the conversations, varying degrees of knowledge-for-practice and
knowledge-in-practice, and together through ongoing conversation, dialogue, and
inquiry developed knowledge-of-practice situated in local context.

What The Teachers Wanted to Know

The teachers in this study began their year of conversations by exploring,
through dialogue and reflection, the nature of musical children. They wanted to
know how children came to be musical; what factors influenced children’s
musical development; and the ways in which culture, home life, and context
might impact the development of musical children. These early childhood music
teachers also wanted to know what musical concepts and skills should be taught
to young children and at what age and stage of development such concepts and
skills can be introduced. Additionally, once it has been determined what is
developmentally appropriate to teach, these teachers wanted to know how to then
sequence the teaching of these musical concepts and skills.

How The Group Chose To Go About Learning

During the first monthly conversation, the teachers shared stories about
past experiences with collaborative staff development and discussed possible
ways groups of teachers might engage collaboratively in inquiry about teaching
and practice. As the months progressed, sharing stories from individual teaching
practice became routine for these teachers, who chose to begin each monthly
conversation in this manner. In addition to ongoing dialogue, the teachers viewed the videos from Josh and Bette’s classrooms that sparked reflection and discussion about culture, ethnicity, and musical children. Subsequently, these conversations spawned dialogue that focused on individual teaching practice, on what musical concepts and skills should be taught to young children and at what age and stage of development such concepts and skills can be introduced, and how to sequence the teaching of these musical concepts and skills in a developmentally appropriate way.

After the core group formed, discussions became more focused on outlining musical goals and objectives, choosing a lesson-planning framework, and creating a model with accompanying resources and materials that would support teachers, as well as educate them, about developmentally appropriate early childhood music practice. The early stages in creating such a model found the core group brainstorming and webbing around what teachers need to know and be able to do, resulting in two charts to which they could refer when outlining musical goals and objectives. For future collaborative lesson planning, the teachers decided upon the Teaching for Understanding framework (TfU), utilizing the TfU brainstorming chart (Blythe & Associates, 1998) as a guide in their remaining discussions, while considering the possibility of also using the accompanying online planning tools in the future. In subsequent meetings, the core group discussed and debated the four Pre-Kindergarten Music Standards, re-working and re-stating them as overarching goals in a way that they felt would
best fit the program’s diverse teaching contexts. While a plan was in place to continue with the creation of the model and its supporting documents, including engaging in lesson study that would allow the teachers to collaboratively design lessons for diverse contexts and multiple age groups, the core group of teachers was not able to complete this project prior to the end of the study.

*Changing Music Teaching Practice Through Collaborative Conversations*

The teachers indicated they do believe the collaborative conversations changed their music teaching practices. Josh stated that after viewing his teaching video, listening to the comments of the other teachers, and fielding their questions, he realized that he needed to help his children improve their singing. He requested a keyboard for his classroom and began setting up tonality each time the children sang in music class so that they would have an aural context for the music.

Josh also indicated that he particularly benefited from the final few conversations when the discussion focused intensely around re-stating the Pre-Kindergarten Music Standards. Specifically, he referred to the dialogue and debate about what understanding music means in an early childhood music context. Through those conversations, Josh believed he gained a much better understanding of children’s musical development and how to support children in their music learning. He had come to realize that even though it may appear that a young child is not paying attention to what is being taught, this does not mean the child doesn’t understand. Josh also felt that what he was learning about teaching
the youngest children, for example, using manipulatives, could also be applied in his teaching of 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} grade children, thereby supporting their music learning in a more developmentally appropriate way. He stated that the conversations broadened his perspective, allowing him to consider each child individually and through what he felt a child’s perspective might be in regard to how they approach and understand music.

Through participation in the collaborative conversations, Josh believed he became more directed in his planning, attempting to more closely meet the children where they are at musically and developmentally, indicating that he now focuses more on the concepts he will teach, rather than just on the materials and resources he needs to obtain. He described how valuable it was to sit and talk with other teachers and break down the components of teaching. He believes that his classes flow better because of the conversations about sequencing, pacing, and strategies shared by other teachers about how to work with different ages and diverse groups of children in multiple contexts. Josh indicated that through the conversations and the telling of stories from practice, he had learned how to “think differently about things,” and he now felt better equipped to plan his lessons because he could draw from the multiple perspectives presented by his colleagues (FIJH.72605).

June believes that participating in the collaborative conversations caused her to think more thoroughly through her plans and to more carefully consider what her goals are for her students. She indicated that she reflected on the goals
and objectives the other teachers revealed through the discussions, incorporating some of their goals into her own practice. June described how she began to use more visuals and manipulatives in her teaching and also how she began to engage in meaningful discussion with her students. She asked them more open-ended questions allowing them to describe in detail the particular visual she may be using, thereby creating a more child-centered, constructivist learning environment. June explained that while she obtained many new materials and resources through the conversations, she also realized the impact teacher demeanor has on young children’s learning. After viewing Josh and Bette’s videos, June indicated that she began to reflect on the ways in which she carries herself in her classroom, and stated that she began to incorporate some of the strategies she learned in regard to teaching approach and modeling behavior. June indicated that participating in the conversations was for her a reminder “about why she teaches” and that each conversation was “like reflection renewal, constant renewal” that encouraged her to voice her views, to define her views, and to continually evaluate what she was doing, and why (MYJD.965.42005).

Bette valued the ways in which the conversations challenged her thinking and caused her to reflect more deeply on her practice. She explained that the questions the teachers asked after viewing the videotape from her classroom caused her to reflect on her teaching practice with new perspectives. Answering those questions required Bette to describe her teaching procedures in detail and succinctly explain her choices and reasons for making them. Bette indicated that
engaging in the discussions with the other teachers caused her to focus more closely on her own yearlong goals, lesson plans, and the amount of time she spent on each activity within her lessons. She indicated that although she had always planned long-term goals, she was now more aware of the end goals and focused even more closely on planning developmentally appropriate steps and procedures within her lessons.

Bette indicated that in dialoguing with the other teachers, she learned they were open to new ideas, that early childhood music teachers often face similar challenges, and that each teacher has a variety of ways of dealing with those challenges. She admired the dedication and perseverance of the other teachers, valuing their perspectives and feeling re-energized through the ongoing conversations with them. Bette believed that the biggest impact on her teaching practice was obtaining new materials and resources, indicating that although she had built a substantial collection throughout the years, there is always the need for renewal and new ideas.

Katie indicated that she learned a great deal about music teaching and learning through participation in the collaborative conversations, particularly in regard to hearing the differing perspectives the other teachers held. She believed that the conversations provided a valuable opportunity to meet outside the work environment in a setting that supported “a different way of relating to people” (FIKM.73005). Katie appreciated the opportunity to talk and “bounce ideas” around as this contributed to her understanding about how the other teachers dealt
with some of the same issues she faced (MYKM.490.42505). She valued the solutions and support she received from the group and applied many of their ideas in her own teaching practice, including strategies for teaching special learners, ideas for teaching in urban settings, and strategies about teaching different age groups and how to plan for them. Additionally, Katie became familiar with learning theorists and how their theories translate to music practice, with various approaches and methods for teaching music to young children, and she obtained many new materials and resources that she incorporated into her teaching practice.

Although Katie recognized the value, and appreciated the sharing of broad ideas during the conversations, she believed the final conversations, in which the core group worked specifically on outlining goals and objectives were most meaningful to her. Because she was a first year music teacher, Katie indicated that everything in her teaching practice routinely changed over the course of the year, making it difficult for her to separate her learning experiences. For her, every conversation wove together as she continually constructed new knowledge about early childhood music teaching and learning.

*Changing Student Learning Through Collaborative Conversations*

As the teachers described how they changed their practice because of their participation in the conversations, their stories often included a description of how these changes resulted in changes in student learning. For example, June described how she focused on using more visuals in her teaching, specifically
referring to the observation of Bette’s video and what June felt was an effective use of manipulatives with her young students. June explained that using the visuals in her teaching gave her students “something to grasp onto,” the visuals provided them with more understanding about the activity in which they were engaged (FIJD.82.22306). She indicated that it’s easy for teachers to take for granted that a child knows what a snail looks like, for example, or how a squirrel moves, but a 3-year old child may not have this information, and therefore, would not be able to fully participate in the lesson. A visual provides support, showing children what a snail actually looks like, for example, and when a series of pictures are presented, those pictures provide scaffolding that supports sequencing, ordering, and patterning whether the students are learning a new song or creating movement to accompany their music or a story.

June also explained that she had adapted another idea from Bette’s teaching video that utilized the oversized 2-line staff for teaching the concept of high versus low. She believes that, in addition to the activities of singing, moving, and instrument playing, adding a visual of the staff and having a discussion with the children about its function, helped the children to sing and recognize the difference between high and low pitches. June also believes that her students were better able to transfer the understanding of the concept of high and low to subsequent activities because they had the opportunity to engage in differentiated learning experiences that focused on learning and understanding this one concept.
When asked about his own individual growth, Josh explained that his students’ singing improved as a result of the changes he made to his teaching practice. He described how he began to look at his teaching from different perspectives in response to the observations and questions raised by the other teachers after viewing the video of his music teaching. Josh stated that after he purchased the equipment he needed and began to set up tonality, his students “found the pitch!” (FIJH.72605)
CHAPTER 7
SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study set out to examine collaborative conversations among early childhood music teachers, and the extent to which such conversations can function as professional development for those teachers. As a full participant-observer I attended, participated, and facilitated monthly group meetings of those teachers. I also conducted mid-year and end-of-year interviews with the four teachers who became the core group, kept a researcher’s journal, transcribed the data, and wrote memos throughout the year as a record of my ongoing analysis. Through observation and analysis of the monthly meetings, both sets of interviews, and documents created by the teachers, I studied teacher learning, teacher practice, and perceived student learning as I attempted to uncover answers about collaborative professional development that might assist in developing and supporting meaningful learning experiences for inservice early childhood music teachers.

My Hopes And Expectations As Researcher and Program Director

My goal from the outset was to learn about what happens when early childhood music teachers engage in collaborative professional development. Guided by the premise that teachers can create powerful learning experiences through collaborative inquiry about teaching and learning, I hoped to uncover what this group of teachers wanted to know about early childhood music teaching
and learning and what these teachers learned through participation in collaborative conversations. I also hoped to find out what the teachers perceived about changes in student learning in relation to changes they made in their teaching practices.

I also functioned as the director of the early childhood music program at Leighton, and in that role, I wanted to support the teachers’ desire to meet together to share materials and resources and discuss early childhood music teaching and learning. Because many of the teachers taught part time, I wanted them to have the opportunity to meet on a regular basis. I hoped they would begin to experience a sense of collegiality and that some of their feelings of isolation might be alleviated. By providing a professional development program that was teacher-centered and focused on collaboration, I hoped to foster more stability in the program, and that early childhood music teachers might stay at Leighton because they felt supported in their work.

When the collaborative conversations began, my original expectation was that the teachers would immediately begin discussing early childhood music teaching and learning, that after viewing Josh’s and Bette’s teaching videos the teachers would focus their attention on the children in the videos, what they were doing musically, and what the teachers were doing to foster musicianship. This isn’t what happened at first. The teachers wanted to know about each other; they revealed themselves and their backgrounds; they talked about their families and their own children and how music fits into their lives. They questioned the ways
in which young children learn about music, they wondered about the influence of culture, ethnicity, and family.

Although the teachers told stories from practice, at the beginning of the study they didn’t talk about their music teaching practice. They told stories about the places, the contexts, the children, the classroom teachers, the aides, and the parents. About halfway through the year, at the time the group viewed Josh and Bette’s teaching videos and the nine focusing questions were introduced into the conversation, several teachers did begin to discuss details of their teaching practices, reflecting on joys and successes, revealing their teaching philosophies, revealing problems, and asking for advice and ideas from the members of the group.

Some teachers, including those who I felt most needed professional development, became silent, avoided the questions, or attempted to refocus the conversation. Although many of these teachers were originally enthusiastic about the opportunity to meet together, reflecting upon and discussing difficult questions and details about their teaching practices seemed not to be what they had hoped for, and ultimately, these teachers stopped coming to the monthly conversations. Despite these changes in attendance, each month until the project ended, I continued to invite through e-mail and in person, all early childhood music teachers to attend the conversations. In addition, the participating teachers emailed their first teacher knowledge chart to the rest of the early childhood
faculty, providing them the opportunity to be involved in the project even though they were not able or chose not to attend the conversations.

The core group that eventually emerged included those teachers who were already comfortable discussing their teaching practices openly. They felt safe and supported and were eager to settle on a collaborative project. Choosing a focus project took much longer than I had originally anticipated. One of the teachers had suggested early in the year that the group engage in collaborative lesson planning (lesson study) and I had hoped this activity would become a focus of the monthly conversations. Because collaborative lesson planning would have afforded the group the opportunity to design lessons, teach the lessons in multiple contexts, reflect and compare what happened in each context, revise the lessons, teach the lessons again, and come back to the conversations to begin the process anew, I believe a wealth of information about music teaching and learning and children’s musical development could have been gleaned. Although I often suggested we begin collaborative lesson planning, the core group remained focused on the goals and objectives project that led to the lengthy discussions about the Pre-K music standards, and ultimately, simply ran out of time. I believe those teachers needed to define and re-word the Pre-K music standards as overarching goals that would be appropriate for their teaching contexts so that they were ready to engage in the collaborative lesson planning. Those conversations allowed them to establish common ground, moving their thinking forward as they came to embody the characteristics of a community of practice.
My intent from the start of this study was to let the teachers set the agenda for the conversations, for them to have the opportunity to guide their experience and create professional development that was relevant to them and situated in their contexts. I believe the core group teachers experienced meaningful individual and collective growth through the collaborative conversations. They no longer felt isolated, and the autonomy they experienced in guiding their own professional development resulted in transformation and empowerment.

Implications for Practice

In the introduction to this study, I stated that one size does not fit all when it comes to professional development processes and structures, citing Guskey (1995) who contends: “there will be a collection of answers, each specific to a context” (p. 117). He advocates “finding the optimal mix – that assortment of professional development processes and technologies that work best in a particular setting” (p. 117). Equally important is to recognize that educational contexts are dynamic, and therefore “the optimal mix for a particular context evolves over time, changing as various aspects of the context change” (Guskey, 1995). Earlier cited research also included Faigenbaum (2000), who suggests that “professional development needs to be differentiated” – as teachers would differentiate learning for a classroom of students with differing knowledge and skills, so too should professional development experiences “be complex enough to meet different teacher needs” (p. 331).
The recommendations of Guskey and Faigenbaum take on particular meaning in regard to the setting of this study: an early childhood music program in a large community music school with multiple campuses and Outreach sites in diverse locations. Traditionally, early childhood music teacher training has not been available through formal degree programs. MENC has published standards for early childhood music learning, however, a corresponding set of expectations for the people who will teach these standards has not been established. As previously noted, the early childhood music teachers in this study did indeed come to their positions with diverse backgrounds and experience and often found themselves teaching multiple ages and in multiple contexts. Because the school had no professional development program in place for inservice faculty members, these teachers did not have opportunities to further develop professional knowledge or engage with colleagues. The collaborative conversations allowed the teachers to share in creating monthly agendas relevant to their needs and contexts and served as one form of meaningful professional development.

Who Should Design Professional Development?

Professional development should be conceived and planned by teachers working together in context. It is appropriate for experienced educators to lead and provide workshops specifically designed for local practice and context. In addition to providing support for teachers to meet together in collaborative groups, providing opportunities for teachers to learn to lead in their local context
would allow them to share their expertise with each other through additional roles such as peer coach, mentor, or critical friend.

**What Should Professional Development Look Like?**

Professional development for teachers needs to be differentiated, allow for collaboration, and should include a variety of experiences that are job-embedded. More specifically, collaboration, reflection, and ongoing conversation and dialogue contributes to teacher learning and can prompt teachers to make changes in practice that could lead to changes in student learning.

It would be ideal for professional development experiences to be flexible and dynamic, continually evolving along with the learners and the context, and to afford teachers the opportunity to meet together in collaborative inquiry groups and learning communities. Teachers would benefit when administrators create and support opportunities for collaboration for teachers from all career stages and disciplines to work and learn together. This time together should include the telling of stories from practice so that teachers may learn from each other, sharing and developing localized expertise. Empowering teachers by giving them autonomy to lead within their learning communities would support teacher learners in developing professional and pedagogical knowledge grounded in local context. Opportunities include teachers creating a shared agenda that emerges from their conversations, practices, and contexts and evolves along with the interests and needs of the group; determining what roles and structures might be
needed to assist the group in running smoothly; and sharing responsibilities that are distributed evenly among group members.

Differentiated experiences are as important for teacher learning as they are for student learning. It would benefit teachers if they were afforded the opportunity to make choices as to what kind of projects or experiences might best serve them, their teaching practices, and their students. Teacher choice is an important issue in professional development and I believe lack of choice could be a contributing factor for not participating in professional development opportunities, may contribute to why teachers stop attending, and may contribute to the development of negative views about professional development. It would also benefit teachers to choose experiences that take them outside their local group, either individually or in smaller sub-groups, including attendance at conferences, taking classes, presenting workshops, or belonging to a teacher research group or a network of learners. Sharing of these outside experiences within the local community could result in additional layers of rich learning opportunities that might not have occurred otherwise. These new ideas can then be further developed and adapted for use in local contexts.

Additionally, questions arose from this study that need to be considered when designing professional development for early childhood music teachers. What can we measure and know about musical children and how they come to be musical? While viewing Josh and Bette’s teaching videos, I had expected the teachers to objectively describe what these two sets of children are able to do
musically. It was my hope that the teachers would look at both groups of children equally when considering their musical development and understanding, and that the teachers would recognize what might be very similar among the children themselves. Through these videos, I had hoped to broaden the views of these teachers in regard to what young children can do musically. In response, the teachers posed questions about children’s race and whether that impacted musical behaviors. They discussed the different ways in which music is transmitted in various cultures, comparing the differences between growing up in a culture where music is embedded in everyday life, and growing up in a culture that practices music apart from everyday life, a culture that may have even created a separate body of music specifically for children. The teachers wondered about the impact of these experiences on children’s musical development, about their own feelings with these issues, and about what they need to know in order to teach diverse groups of children. If we are to serve all children fairly, I believe this topic needs to be included in discussions that take place as part of teacher education programs for pre-service teachers and in professional development programs for in-service teachers. Questions need to be raised about ethnic and racial differentiation in our pedagogy. How do we accommodate children from homes and backgrounds that may have different musical models? What questions do we need to ask ourselves about our own beliefs and biases, and how these may manifest in our teaching practices? What do we need to change in our teaching practices in order to teach these diverse groups of children?
As discussed earlier, I hoped as director of the early childhood program, that the teachers who most needed professional development would participate regularly and find value in the conversations. This turned out not to be the case in this study, and a question that needs to be considered by those planning professional development experiences is: how can we help those teachers who need it the most? How can we encourage those teachers who have not before experienced publicly shared feedback to participate in inquiry groups with colleagues? What constitutes a safe environment for those teachers and how do we get them to stay?

Implications for Research

This study could be replicated in other early childhood music programs. Building on the ideas of Borko, Liston, and Whitcomb (2007), the researcher could examine the thought processes, work contexts, and preparation of other groups of early childhood music teachers who choose, or have the opportunity, to work together. What access do the teachers have to professional development? Do they regularly choose to participate in professional development opportunities, and why? What influences teachers to stop participating in inquiry groups? Why do some teachers choose to never participate? Do early childhood music teachers in community music schools have different professional development needs than teachers in public or independent schools? Are there similar needs? Is professional development more effective when diverse groups of teachers meet together in inquiry groups, or should there be opportunities for first-year teachers
to meet together, or for veteran teachers to meet together? What are the differences in their needs? What are the similarities? What can diverse groups of teachers learn from each other? If the study design was altered and the monthly conversations followed the protocols of a teacher research group or a lesson study group, what would teacher learning look like? Would the conversations change teacher practice? Would teacher learning in these groups impact student learning? Findings could provide additional data on how and why teachers choose to work together, the ways they structure their time together, the kinds of support they receive for their work, and the impact of this work on practice and student learning. A study of this nature could also provide needed portraits of teachers, practice, contexts, and musical children.

In the current study, there were several teachers in the early stages of their careers, including Katie, who was a first-year early childhood music teacher. While she had a rich musical background, Katie did not have a background in music education. An in-depth case study on an individual first-year early childhood music teacher, or several teachers, could reveal how a beginning teacher sustains and develops her practice. What questions about music teaching and learning do first-year teachers have? With what issues do they struggle? What are their successes? What do they know about music teaching and learning, what do they want to know, and what are their misconceptions? What kind of professional development experiences might best serve a first-year early childhood music teacher who comes to the profession without a background in
music education? What makes them stay? Why do they leave? Rich portraits of early childhood music teachers, practice, and context are needed to further inform our understanding about music teaching and learning in the lives of young children.

Replicating this study with preservice teachers could reveal the ways in which they learn, what they know and understand about music teaching and learning, what their misconceptions might be, and what kinds of learning experiences would be most beneficial at this stage. What questions do preservice teachers have about music teaching and learning? What are their misconceptions about teaching and about teaching music? How can teacher education programs support preservice teachers in adopting an inquiry stance? How do we teach preservice teachers to be reflective? How might participating in action research during teacher education programs impact preservice teachers’ understanding about music teaching and learning and about children’s musical development? What level of understanding about music teaching and learning do preservice teachers take to their first teaching position? The findings from this type of study would not only provide a rich portrait of preservice teacher learning, but could also inform schools and districts in regard to the structuring of mentoring and induction programs. If preservice teachers also had the opportunity to engage in collaborative conversations with in-service teachers, the data would be even richer.
The early childhood music profession could benefit from reflecting together upon the existing Pre-Kindergarten music standards determining what is the corresponding set of expectations for teachers who will teach them. Questions might include: As currently worded, are the Pre-Kindergarten music standards sufficient in providing a clear framework for early childhood music teachers? Should we identify standards for working with children younger than two years? What would a formal certification program for early childhood music educators look like?

As a full participant-observer, I found one of my roles to be that of facilitator. While teachers do benefit from creating shared agendas and designing their own professional development experiences, it does seem necessary for someone to offer some level of guidance and logistical support to keep the group moving forward. I suggest that researchers, teacher educators, and planners of professional development examine the role of facilitator in collaborative inquiry groups. Questions to consider include: What kind of experience does the facilitator need? What kind of training does the facilitator need? Who would provide this training and what would the training look like? Would it be advantageous for the facilitator position to be shared by members of the group?

Closing Remarks

Professional development must be teacher-centered, growing organically from local context with teachers leading and taking responsibility for learning opportunities. Early childhood music teachers know and are able to do many
things; they understand the complexity of their work. Reflective early childhood
music teachers who work together in learning communities would be empowered
if schools, administrators, and the music education profession validated their
expertise; their insights; their understanding about human development, music
teaching, and musical children; and their ability to create their own powerful
learning experiences. Listening to teachers’ stories about practice, about their own
learning and their students’ learning, and about their thinking processes would
provide teacher educators, designers of professional development, and researchers
with rich portraits of contextualized learning that could greatly inform the
profession.

I leave this study with a much richer understanding of this group of
teachers – what matters to them, what they worry about and what they celebrate,
and what they and their students have learned. As I continue to seek ways in
which to create a seamless stream of professional development that begins with
pre-service teachers and extends through the final career stages, my next phase of
research will investigate preservice teacher learning in collaborative settings. Not
surprisingly, I also leave with more questions. These questions are not a burden,
however, but an inspiration and a reminder of my work and what I have learned
from these thoughtful teachers and their young students.
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APPENDIX A

RSRB Letter of Exemption
RSRB Letter of Exemption
APPENDIX B

Interview Questions: Mid-year and Final
Interview Questions: Mid-year

Teaching History/Experience
1) How long have you been teaching music?
   a. In what kinds of school settings have you taught? (Public, private, Head Start programs, daycare centers, etc.)
   b. How long have you been teaching Early Childhood Music?
   c. How did you become interested in teaching Early Childhood Music and why did you choose to work with this age level?
2) What is your educational background?
   a. Have you taken coursework or had training specifically in Early Childhood Music?

Teaching Practice
2) What do you like best about yourself as a teacher? About your teaching practice?
3) Describe a favorite teaching experience that you’ve had with a child or group of children in any one of your teaching contexts.
4) Describe a negative teaching experience that you’ve had with a child or group of children in any one of your teaching contexts.
5) If classroom teachers participate in your music classes, in what ways do you educate them about music teaching and learning?

Professional Development
1) In what kinds of professional development experiences have you participated?
2) What kinds of professional development experiences are most meaningful or valuable to you? What is your least favorite?
3) Who do you think should design professional development experiences for teachers?
4) What have you learned from participating in our conversations?
5) In what ways do you think working collaboratively with teacher colleagues can be valuable to teacher learning? To teaching practice?
6) In addition to our conversations, in what other kinds of collaborative practices would you like most to participate?
   a. What impact do you think participation in a variety of collaborative practices (as opposed to just one type) would have on your learning in regard to music teaching and learning? On your teaching practice?
Interview Questions: Final

1) Let’s start with your insights upon reflection of the entire year. Talk about your individual growth -- some of the things you learned from being in this group.

2) Are there any other things, perhaps not related to teaching and learning that you have learned from being in this group?

3) Can you think of any specific changes that you’ve made in your practice?

4) Are there any changes that you saw in your students? If you think about the whole year – did you see any changes in your students that you would relate to what we discussed in our conversations or what you experienced during these conversations?

5) Do you think it’s advantageous to reflect on teaching and learning with a group?

6) Do you think there was any collective growth of the group?

7) What are your thoughts in general about teachers learning in communities and about collaborative experiences? Are there other collaborative experiences that you think would be good to introduce in professional development experiences?
APPENDIX C

Examples of Coded Transcripts:
Conversation Transcript, Mid-Year Interview, Final Interview
Example of Coded Conversation Transcript
Example of Coded Mid-Year Interview Transcript
Example of Coded Final Interview
APPENDIX D

Brainstorming Chart: What Teachers Need To Know and Be Able To Do
Brainstorming Chart: What Teachers Need To Know and Be Able To Do
APPENDIX E

Brainstorming Chart: What Teachers Need To Know and Be Able To Do #2