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Finding a Place in Music Education: The Lived Experiences of Music Educators with “Non-Traditional” Backgrounds

By

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Abstract

This study is a qualitative investigation of the perspectives of seven music educators with “non-traditional” backgrounds—individuals who play instruments that are not part of the traditional large ensemble, and/or those whose musical specialties lie in genres other than Western classical music—based on their lived experiences as preservice and in-service music educators. The three most robust themes from the interviews included: insecurities about previous training and background, striving for relevance, and flexibility. Coming to better understand the perspectives of music educators with “non-traditional” backgrounds contributes to two active streams in the current conversation in the field of music teacher education: the desire to update the curriculum of music teacher education programs to make them more relevant for preservice music educators and K-12 students of the 21st century as well as the growing interest in popular music and popular music pedagogy.

Keywords: music teacher education, popular music pedagogy, music teacher identity, non-traditional students

The majority of preservice music education programs in the U.S. are undergraduate programs that offer a bachelor's degree in music education and prepare students for state-granted licensure to teach music in the public schools. Students in these programs typically take private lessons on an instrument and participate in large ensembles. In university settings, studio faculty members from the school of music are usually involved in the audition portion of the admissions process because of the performance and ensemble requirements of the degree. These structural aspects of most preservice music education programs may influence the selection of students for these programs.

At the 2007 and 2009 meetings of the Society for Music Teacher Education, members of the Critical Examination of the Curriculum ASPA (including the author of this paper) discussed their concern that “non-traditional” students—individuals who play instruments that are not part of the traditional large ensemble program and people whose musical specialties lie in genres other than Western classical music—may be excluded from the profession (Critical Examination of the Curriculum ASPA, personal communication, September 14, 2007; September 10, 2009). This exclusion may take place simply because of the structure of most music teacher education programs and the ways they function within the context of institutions of higher education. Thinking deeply about this situation raises important questions for the profession—questions about the pathways to a career in music education, about the relationship between musical background and music teaching, and about effective ways to support preservice music educators in their professional growth. These questions have powerful implications for music teacher education as well as for music education in K-12 settings.

While most music teacher education programs in the U.S. are structured in the ways discussed above, a few programs accept and even welcome non-traditional students. Some of the

music teacher education programs where non-traditional students are enrolled are undergraduate programs in institutions that offer performance opportunities beyond the traditional ensembles. Others are master's degree programs that do not require student participation in performance ensembles. These programs have graduated students with traditional and non-traditional backgrounds who have gone on to teach music in the public schools.

Theoretical Framework

MacDonald, Hargreaves, and Miell (2002) put forth a two-pronged framework for conceptualizing musical identities. People can think of themselves in terms of the social and cultural roles within the field of music, which is termed "identities in music." Identities in music might include performer, teacher, composer, classical violinist, or Brazilian drummer. Additionally, people can think of themselves in terms of their "music in identities," which includes the ways music relates to other aspects of their identity such as their age, gender, or national identity. MacDonald et al. maintain that public school music education in the United Kingdom suffers from the mismatch between the musical identities of most music educators and the musical identities of most students. Most music educators' identities are steeped in the Western classical performance tradition and are predominantly white, female, and middle class, whereas the musical identities of most students, according to Hargreaves and Marshall's (2003) research project on student involvement in music, are dominated by popular music and by opportunities to create and play music independently. They argue that music education would be more effective if teachers' musical identities were more similar to students' musical identities (Purves, 2002). The same arguments could be made about public school music education in the United States. Many public school music educators in the U.S. have backgrounds in Western classical music and are unfamiliar with today's popular music. Their musical involvements, both

when they were younger and in their lives today, are quite different from those of their young students (Woody, 2007).

The present study also speaks to the construction of identity and the contexts in which identities evolve. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) write about identity as the ways that “people tell us who they are,” as well as the ways that “they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are” (p. 3). These scholars see identity in terms of self-understandings that continually under construction. In their words:

... identities are improvised – in the flow of activity within specific – social situations – from the cultural resources at hand. Thus persons... are caught in the tensions between past histories that have settled in them and the present discourses and images that attract them or somehow impinge upon them. In this continuous self-fashioning, identities are hard-won standpoints that, however dependent upon social support and however vulnerable to change, make at least a modicum of self-direction possible. (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998, p. 4)

This conception of identity as continually under construction, dynamic, and processual is the topic of extensive discussion in recent studies of the professional identities of music educators (Bernard, 2004, 2005; Brewer, 2009; Dolloff, 2006, 2007; Jorgensen, 2006, 2008; Olsen, 2008; Pellegrino, 2009, 2010). This line of research has explored the complexity of music educators’ professional identities as musicians and music educators through investigations that have been primarily qualitative in nature, focusing on the meanings that individuals make of who they are and what they do professionally. The music educators with non-traditional backgrounds who are the participants in the present study negotiate various tensions as they improvise their professional identities: the tension between their backgrounds as musicians and music students and the expectations of their professional lives as music educators. Playing musical instruments that are not part of the instrumentation of the typical large ensemble and/or specializing in

repertoire that is outside of the Western classical canon, these individuals come to the field of music education with experiences, interests, attitudes, and aptitudes that may differ from those of their colleagues, as well as from those that are expected of them by others in their communities.

The Researcher

My interest in this topic stems from my own “non-traditional” background. While I had studied voice and piano throughout middle school, high school, and college, and while I had participated in my public school choral and drama programs and had performed in musicals throughout college, my college major was Government. It was not until after graduation, while I worked as a paralegal and earned an Adult Education Certificate in Jazz Voice at a local conservatory, that I decided to devote my professional life to music. That decision was followed by a second bachelor’s degree in jazz voice performance, which led to my explorations of music education and eventually to my current career as a music teacher educator. Furthermore, the music that I specialize in as a performer is jazz and Jewish music in Yiddish and Hebrew. My background would certainly be considered “non-traditional” by the definition used in the present study.

I bring a two-pronged perspective to this research. First, I believe that, in order for a music educator to teach all students effectively, she must develop knowledge and experience in many types of music (Allsup, 2003, 2008; Bowman, 2004; Cutietta, 2007; Emmons, 2004; Green, 2008; Jones, 2008; Robinson, 2002). Music educators with non-traditional backgrounds may require additional support in order to learn about and work with Western classical music so that they can bring this repertoire to their teaching. At the same time, music educators with backgrounds in Western classical music will need to become well versed in non-Western music, popular music, and jazz in order for them to incorporate these forms of music into their teaching

(Allsup, 2003; Boespflug, 1999; Bowman, 2004; Clements, 2008; Folkestad, 2006; Heuser, 2008; Jorgensen, 2010; Leonhard, 1999). As the musical world of today becomes more and more wide ranging, and as music is being shared across national boundaries, music educators must understand and participate in a greater array of musical styles and traditions than ever before. Today's musical reality demands music educators who can support their students as they explore a varied repertoire—varied in terms of its historical context, musical style, and cultural origin (Jorgensen, 2003, 2008, 2010).

Second, I believe that individuals with non-traditional backgrounds, because they may not be tied to the way things have always been done in music education, may be able to think outside the box in terms of repertoire, musical activities, teaching strategies, and performance practices, bringing their unique musical experiences and perspectives to the ways that they structure their classroom practice (Abramo, 2008; Allsup, 2003; Boespflug, 1999; Folkestad, 2006; Green, 2001, 2008; Stalhammar, 2003). They may be able to incorporate different musical styles into their teaching—musical styles that may be more interesting and meaningful to their students. They may thereby be able to increase the relevance of the field of music education by forging stronger connections between the music that their students listen to outside of school and the music that their students encounter in music class or rehearsal (Allsup, 2008; Boespflug, 1999; Clements, 2008; Emmons, 2004; Green, 2001, 2008; Heuser, 2008).

The Study

The present study is a qualitative investigation of the perspectives of seven music educators with non-traditional backgrounds on their experiences during and after attending a preservice music teacher education program in the Northeastern U.S. For the purpose of the present study, a “non-traditional student” is an individual who plays instruments that are not part

of the traditional large ensemble program and a person whose musical specialty lies in genres other than Western classical music.

The research was guided by the following questions:

1. How do music educators with non-traditional backgrounds describe their experiences as students in their music teacher education program?
2. How do music educators with non-traditional backgrounds describe their experiences working as music educators after having completed their music teacher education program?

Research Procedures

Seven music educators with non-traditional backgrounds who graduated from the music teacher education program were interviewed in semi-structured interviews. The researcher interviewed each music educator twice in sessions that lasted approximately one hour and took place over a three-month time period. The researcher tape-recorded and transcribed interview sessions and used the same series of open-ended questions for all of the interviews. In addition, the interview protocol allowed for flexibility in order to go into greater depth in any area of discussion that appeared to be important to the participant.

Employing analytical methods by hand, the researcher created and analyzed code lists, marginal remarks, concept maps, and data matrices (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researcher read the transcripts multiple times and jotted down possible codes for various topics that the participants discussed. After keeping a running list of the codes, the researcher reviewed the list and clustered related codes into larger codes and categories. The researcher noted tentative thoughts about themes that emerged from the data in the margins of the transcripts, and then clustered the themes into categories. The creation of several diagrams

and drawings served to illustrate the ways that codes and themes related to one another within and across the participants' transcripts. The researcher then transferred the most robust categories of codes and themes to a table that displayed each category alongside portions of quotes from the transcripts that served as exemplars for the category.

The data analysis process proceeded through the following stages, in this order: open coding, axial coding, selective coding, memo writing, and validity checks with an interpretive community and with the study's participants. During the open coding stage, the researcher read the transcripts multiple times and identified concepts and explored their dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Axial coding took place as the researcher drew relationships between categories and subcategories in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researcher integrated and refined theory in the process of selective coding, which involved developing general explanations for what appeared to be going on in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In the memo writing stage, the researcher constructed a "record of analysis, thoughts, interpretations, questions, and directions for further data collection" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 110). Some of these records were brief, as in a page or two in length, while others were more extended, 15 to 20 page documents. Validity checks were the researcher's opportunities to present her interpretations to other people for their reactions and comments. The researcher conducted validity checks with a writing group, who read and commented on each of the memos. They pointed out places where the researcher's thoughts and interpretations made sense, as well as areas where they were unclear or less convincing. The researcher also shared the memos with the study's participants, who highlighted points that required clarification and provided their reactions to the researcher's interpretations.

Participants

The researcher selected participants from the list of recent alumni from the music teacher education program. Selection was based on the participants' musical and educational backgrounds, as well as on their current positions in the field of music education. All of the recent alumni that fit the selection criteria received email contact to recruit them for the study. The seven music educators who participated in the study represent all of the positive responses to the recruitment email message.

Name (pseudonym)	Instrument(s)	Musical Style(s)
Yvette	Voice and guitar, also music theory expertise	Rock, Jazz, Bulgarian folk music, other world music styles
Christopher	Guitar, fretless guitar, banjo	American folk music, Jazz, Microtonal music
Jeremy	Saxophone, composer/arranger	Jazz
Owen	Saxophone, Guitar, Tabla	Jazz, Rock, Folk, Indian music
Evan	African drums and percussion	African music and dance
Alejandro	Guitar	Rock, folk, jazz
Marcus	Composer, film scoring	Contemporary composition, Rock

Limitations of the Present Study

While the present study sheds light on the perspectives of music educators with non-traditional backgrounds on their training and their work, there are some important limitations to this research that must be acknowledged. First, the study focuses on a small group of music educators, all of whom received their music teacher education in the same graduate program in

the Northeastern U.S. Future investigations should engage larger samples of music educators with non-traditional backgrounds from across the country, who have trained in various music teacher education programs.

Second, while researchers may assume that they know what the experiences of music educators with traditional backgrounds are like, because they themselves may have traditional backgrounds, it would be valuable to augment this research with a similar, comparative study of the experiences of music educators with traditional backgrounds. A companion study of this sort would illuminate the similarities and differences between the perspectives of the two groups of music educators, and would help music teacher educators to better serve both populations in their classrooms. For example, it may be the case that, like their non-traditional colleagues, music educators with traditional backgrounds may feel insecure about their knowledge of music theory. In addition, it is quite possible that music educators with traditional backgrounds may also be well versed in a broad range of musics that they can employ in their teaching. We must be careful not to make assumptions about music educators because of their backgrounds—whether those backgrounds be traditional or non-traditional.

Emergent Themes

While several themes emerged from the interview data, this paper focuses on the three most robust themes, the ones that resonated across the transcripts of the interviews with all of the participants in the present study: insecurities about previous training and background, striving for relevance, and flexibility.

Insecurities about Previous Training and Background

All seven participants spoke about the many ways they felt insecure about the training and background they brought to their studies in the music teacher education program, to the job

application process, and to their positions as music educators. Specifically, they identified sight-reading and the areas of classical music history, theory, and repertoire as particular weaknesses that they perceived in their backgrounds, as the following interview excerpts demonstrate:

[When I was a student in the graduate program, my weaknesses were] anything music theory related, you know, um, harmony classes, anything that got into, you know, the knitty gritty of analysis, composition. That was the stuff that I missed out on, and those were the places where, I mean, even in the remedial classes, felt really worried that I was going to look like an idiot.

- Owen

I wish I had more background in classical composition, so I could better explain things to my students.

- Marcus

I think just mostly the ear training and sight singing, stuff like that, those were probably the hardest classes given my background.

- Alejandro

Sometimes individuals with non-traditional backgrounds feel as though other people make assumptions about them based solely on their backgrounds. For example, Jeremy recalled a time during his graduate studies in the Music Education program when a classmate with a Bachelor's degree in music performance made him feel insecure about his undergraduate liberal arts education. This classmate told him that he was less dedicated to his music than his colleagues, whose undergraduate majors were in performance.

It was a conversation I was having with some of my classmates that had all gone to conservatories for their undergrad. One of whom was having a lot of trouble adjusting to the rigorous class schedule in that it was taking time away from their practicing. It was very difficult for them psychologically and emotionally to be unable to be practicing as much as they would like. I think it was a group conversation. I was part of this conversation and I guess this person was thinking of leaving the program. I responded to this person by saying, "It's a short period of time, yes it's

concentrated and very difficult, but if we just stick our noses to the grindstone, we can get through it. It's only another year." This person told me that I wouldn't understand, because I didn't come from a performance background, and I wouldn't know what it was like to be dedicated to their music as they are. They tried to say it as nicely and sensitively as possible, not trying to be hurtful, but it still came out. There was no amount of practice or effort or dedication that I could put to my conducting, practicing, that could ever prove to them that I was a legitimate musician because I didn't have a piece of paper saying I am a musician.

Jeremy's use of the phrase "legitimate musician" in the conclusion of the excerpt above is striking. He spoke about being made to feel that no action he takes today could ever help him to overcome his non-traditional background. Because he was not an undergraduate performance major, he would never be considered a respectable musician.

One of the music educators in this study takes a positive perspective on the value of a non-traditional background for music educators by framing it through the lens of being a well-rounded person. Owen saw his non-traditional background as an advantage: a broad experience base that provided him with wisdom from which he could draw in his work with students.

There's a paradigm out there that to be a music teacher you need to be an excellent musician, but I would say to be a good teacher, you need to be a well-rounded person, but if you're music has been so focused that you have done nothing else but practice it's a reminder that a good teacher must be more well-rounded than that. The more life-experience you can rack up, the more wisdom you gain the more you can relate that to your students.

Striving for Relevance

The participants shared a passion for introducing new repertoire and performance settings (i.e., specialized ensembles, performance practices, etc.) into public school music education. In Evan's words

The kids I'm dealing with, the kids aren't all interested in learning traditional classical music. It's a lot easier getting 25 kids drumming than 25 kids playing the saxophone. If you know what you're doing, you can get them playing together and sounding good relatively quickly.

Yvette, who hails from Bulgaria, is looking forward to introducing her students to world music, particularly the music from her childhood: "I'm starting a world music unit with my students next month, and I am really excited about expanding their musical horizons and sharing the music that I loved as a child with my students. "

Additionally, participants expressed the belief that they were well qualified to make music education more meaningful to their students because they knew the music that their students listened to and enjoyed. According to Marcus,

If we're reaching out to students, we need people to understand where they're coming from, who can relate to what they listen to. They listen to techno, styles that are not classical music.

Something that they are listening to, and I can help them learn to make this music on the computer. My background in music technology and popular music is really important in reaching out to the kids.

Alejandro echoed these sentiments and spoke to the larger issue of the relevance of music education.

I'm pretty well versed in what's current. I think that what a teacher's job is to understand and know what the kids are listening to. I think there's often a disconnect between what the teachers teach and what the kids listen to when they leave the classroom, and I try to connect that.

Flexibility

The music educators spoke at great length about the ways that the flexibility that they had developed as (often improvising) musicians contributed to their flexibility as learners and teachers. Christopher spoke about the ways that his facility with playing by ear, improvisation, and playing the guitar contributed to his teaching:

I think if you can use your ear, if you can play by ear, if you can improvise, those are really great skills to have with kids. The fact that I'm a guitarist, one thing that's so traditional in schools is that the music teacher plays piano. Some people expect you to play piano, but I can move around, dance, sing while playing the guitar, the kids love it. There's so much focus now in public school, in jazz and multicultural that if anyone from a non-traditional background can bring those things in, I think that's a real plus. If you have the flexibility of being a person who can improvise, respond in the moment to kids, that's a huge plus.

In the excerpt below, Jeremy discussed the ways that his background in improvisation, as well as in various musical styles and instruments, influenced his learning in the Music Education program by making him a more flexible student.

Another way that I felt like it was an advantage to have a non-traditional background it seems that those with a non-traditional background had experience in more types of music: popular, jazz, computer music, composition, conducting, or on several different instruments. As for myself, as a saxophonist, I had improvised. They had experienced music in several different environments or as directors, or composers as opposed to being highly skilled in one area. It seemed to make me feel more comfortable in all those scenarios. That included using music software, *Finale*, *GarageBand*, music sequencing software. And being able to function in different genres. Learning how to program hip-hop beats, etc. We'd been having fun doing this stuff for years. And it all played into our skill set, as opposed to something that was completely brand new.

Jeremy also commented on the fact that having come from a non-traditional background meant that he had experienced what it was like to be a beginner in multiple musical contexts. As he saw it, knowing what it is like to be a beginner helps music educators better understand their young students.

As someone with a non-traditional background, I had been in many scenarios where I was the beginner in my life. At one point I was a beginning saxophonist, clarinetist, had become a beginning conductor in high school when I was conducting, beginning flutist, beginning at computers, instead of this experience of being a beginner when I was second, third, or maybe

fourth grade, and focusing on becoming proficient and more skilled. The more one appreciates what it means to be a beginner in a situation, it makes you more appreciative of what adolescents are going through. They're being challenged every day to be better, to learn something new. Those experiences are being tossed aside in our society more and more. For me, I was always getting somewhere and then exposed to something new, and then tried something else and felt awkward, but got better at it, but I felt I was very well-rounded musically. It seemed in the program those experiences prepared me, or it was a comfortable place for me to be because I had those experiences, that background.

This notion of flexibility came up in the interviews in several ways. The music educators with non-traditional backgrounds spoke about the flexibility that they had developed as musicians, the flexibility that they brought to their teaching, and their flexibility as learners. In addition, they talked about the flexibility and lack of flexibility exhibited by their colleagues when they learned about the participants' non-traditional backgrounds.

Implications for Research and Practice

As viewed through the lens of the theoretical framework for this study, the interview data and emergent themes pointed to implications of the present study for research and practice in music education and music teacher education.

Musical Identities/Striving for Relevance

The musical identities of music educators with non-traditional backgrounds are more likely to be congruent with the musical identities of their students (Hargreaves & Marshall, 2003). This may make it possible for these educators to create and facilitate relevant and meaningful musical experiences for their young students. The participants in this study underscored their ability to make their teaching more relevant to their young students because of their musical backgrounds. They spoke about the ways that their experiences with popular music, world music, and improvisational music made it possible for them to connect with their

students—both musically and through their pedagogy—in ways that might not have been available to their colleagues with more traditional backgrounds. It might be that music educators with non-traditional backgrounds can introduce repertoire and/or performance practices from other musical traditions into the classroom. Perhaps their experiences as improvisers provide them with flexibility and in-the-moment thinking that opens up their approach to teaching. Maybe it is simply a matter of having a well-developed knowledge of the music that their students engage with outside of school. The words of the participants in this study supported the argument that music educators with non-traditional backgrounds may have musical identities similar to those of their students, which makes their teaching more effective, whatever form the expression of their musical identity may take.

If music teacher education programs could provide significant training for all of their students in the repertoire, performance practices, and pedagogy of popular music and non-Western music, it may be possible to develop and expand the musical identities of all of our preservice music educators so that they might effectively incorporate these musical genres into their teaching in valuable and authentic ways. Of course, this presents the field with another challenge: the musical identities of music teacher educators and the resources currently available at many music teacher education programs stem mostly from the Western classical performance tradition. This may present gaps between the musical identities of higher education faculty and those of two important constituencies—young public school students and preservice music educators with non-traditional backgrounds. It may not be possible for a single institution to provide this sort of training. Rather, multiple higher education institutions may be required to form partnerships in order to share their expertise in various musical traditions. For example, a university with a very strong Western classical music program that does not offer coursework in

non-Western music might create a relationship with a higher education institution that boasts a fine ethnomusicology department so that students may avail themselves of the musical resources of both institutions. In today's increasingly complex musical and educational environment, it simply may not be possible for a single institution to provide every aspect of music teacher education. Cooperation between institutions would be a promising avenue to explore as the field of music teacher education looks to the future.

Issues in popular music and music education have received a great deal of attention in recent years, as evidenced by the increasing numbers of publications, symposia, and conferences devoted to scholarship in this area. Many music educators argue that the field can benefit from a greater understanding of popular music, more inclusion of popular music in the K-12 music curriculum, and thoughtful incorporation of the learning and performance practices of popular musicians into K-12 music education pedagogy (Abramo, 2008; Allsup, 2003, 2004, 2008; Boespflug, 1999; Bowman, 2004; Clements, 2008; Emmons, 2004; Folkestad, 2006; Green, 2001, 2008; Heuser, 2008; Jones, 2008; Jorgensen, 2003, 2010; Leonhard, 1999; Rodriguez, 2004; Stalhammar, 2003, Stuessy, 1994). The implications of these discussions for the training of future music educators may be significant. Music teacher educators would have the opportunity to broaden their course offerings to assist music educators whose backgrounds are traditional as they learn the repertoire and practices of popular music (Allsup, 2008; Bowman, 2004; Davis & Blair, 2011; Emmons, 2004; Morrison, 2007). At the same time, another opportunity presents itself: the opportunity to support preservice music education students with non-traditional backgrounds so that they can enroll in music teacher education programs and receive the additional musical and classroom experiences that they need in order to succeed in the more traditional course offerings (Jones, 2008; Heuser, 2008).

The curriculum of the collegiate music teacher education program has changed very little in the last 150 years (Campbell, 2007; Cutietta, 2007; Emmon, 2004; Jones, 2005, 2007; Kratus, 2009; Myers, 2009; Robinson, 2002). Recent discussion in the 2007 and 2009 meetings of the Society for Music Teacher Education centered on ways to make the curriculum of music teacher education programs a more effective means for training and supporting well rounded music educators who can create relevant, meaningful music programs that will reach their public school students (Critical Examination of the Curriculum ASPA, personal communication, September 14, 2007; September 10, 2009).

Music educators with non-traditional backgrounds may be uniquely situated to create public school music classes and ensembles that are connected to the rich musical lives of today's young students (Heuser, 2008; Jones, 2008; Stalhammar, 2003; Woody, 2007). Coming to better understand the experiences and perspectives of these music educators may move the field of music teacher education forward by broadening the conception of who can be a music educator (Clements, 2008). This could result in changes to the music teacher education curriculum, as programs may develop coursework in popular music pedagogy, as well as remedial courses and support systems for students with non-traditional backgrounds (Bowman, 2004; Clements, 2008; Heuser, 2008; Jones, 2008, Tagg, 1982). Studying the experiences of music educators with non-traditional backgrounds may enable music teacher educators to better equip their programs for a more diverse population of preservice music teachers who can increase the range and relevancy of music education. In this way, the field can strive for a better match between the musical identities of music educators and their students in the public schools.

Identity Construction/Insecurities about Previous Training and Background/Flexibility

The music educators with non-traditional backgrounds who participated in the present study found themselves caught in tensions between their histories as musicians whose expertise and experience differed greatly from that of their colleagues and the discourses and images of public school music education. They reported that these tensions led to their feeling insecure about whether they possessed the training and background necessary to succeed as music educators. Many of them described instances when they were in graduate school and aspects of their backgrounds made them feel less knowledgeable or, to use Jeremy's word, less legitimate than their classmates whose backgrounds were more traditional. Quite a few of them referred to specific subject areas and courses in their graduate program that they found challenging—ear training, sight singing, harmony, and music history.

Of the participants in this study, Jeremy was the most articulate about the tension between his history as a jazz saxophonist and composer with a liberal arts undergraduate education and the discourses and images of musicians, as well as of public school music educators. The stories that he related addressed his insecurities and frustration about the assumptions that people made about him as a musician and as a music educator because of his non-traditional background. In the group conversation with his graduate school colleagues that Jeremy described, he recalled being made to feel that he was doomed to others considering him a lesser musician because he did not major in music performance as an undergraduate. He felt that his colleague believed that his background would trump any musical involvement or expertise that he has in the present. How he performs as a musician today is of no matter; rather, he was made to feel that his legitimacy as a musician would always be in question because of his choice of undergraduate major.

As they negotiated the tensions in their professional identities, several of the participants in the present study highlighted the advantages of their non-traditional backgrounds. Owen found that being a well-rounded person made him a more effective educator who had greater knowledge to share with his students. Jeremy agreed and highlighted the wide range of his musical experiences as expanding his skill set as a graduate student and as a public school music teacher. Christopher likened the flexibility that it takes to respond effectively to his students in the moment to the flexibility that he had developed as an improvising musician. Jeremy spoke about the ways that being a beginner in many forms of music making allowed him to relate to his adolescent students.

Finally, the present study highlights a need for increased flexibility in the field of music education so that individuals with non-traditional backgrounds can find their place in preservice music education programs and as working music educators in the field (Bjornberg, 1993; Cutietta, 1991). Music teacher education programs would need to develop various mechanisms such as remedial coursework, peer support systems, and mentoring that can help their students with non-traditional backgrounds address any gaps in their experiences and training. These programs would also need to design performance ensemble opportunities beyond the traditional collegiate ensembles so students with non-traditional backgrounds could participate in performance opportunities on campus. Additionally, there is a need for administrators and educators in public schools to develop increased flexibility in terms of their definitions or understandings of who can be an effective music teacher, as well as the sorts of experiences and backgrounds that music teachers bring to their work. This increased flexibility may make it possible for more music educators with non-traditional backgrounds to find their place in music education and secure positions teaching in the public schools (Woody, 2007).

Appendix A – Interview Questions

- Describe your musical background.
- Tell me about your current job.
- How do you describe yourself and your work?
- How did you present your background in job interviews?
- Due to your background, what strengths do you bring to your job?
- How has your music teaching job compared to your expectations?
- Now that you are teaching, do you feel there are any skills or knowledge that you are lacking to be an effective music teacher?
- How do your colleagues at work view your background?
- Were there any classes in the Music Education Program that were more challenging due to your background? If so, which classes and why were they challenging?
- Did you feel prepared to teach music after completing the Music Education Program?
- What topics or skills would you like to focus on to further your professional development?
- What advice would you give to other students with non-traditional music backgrounds thinking of pursuing a degree in music education?
- What else would you like to add that you have not discussed today?

Appendix B – The Most Robust Themes and Sample Participant Responses

Note: The table presents sample responses from the participants and is not an exhaustive presentation of all of the participants' responses that relate to the three most robust themes from the interview data.

Theme	Participant	Response Excerpt(s)
<i>Insecurities about Previous Training and Background</i>	Owen	<p>“[When I was a student in the graduate program, my weaknesses were] anything music theory related...”</p> <p>“There’s a paradigm out there that to be a music teacher you need to be an excellent musician, but I would say to be a good teacher, you need to be a well-rounded person...”</p>
	Marcus	“I wish I had more background in classical composition, so I could better explain things to my students.”
	Alejandro	“I think just mostly the ear training and sight singing, stuff like that, those were probably the hardest classes given my background.”
	Jeremy	“... There was no amount of practice or effort or dedication that I could put to my conducting, practicing, that could ever prove to them that I was a legitimate musician because I didn’t have a piece of paper saying I am a musician.”
	Yvette	“I thought I understood music theory pretty well, but I couldn’t translate what I knew to the classes I was taking.”
	Christopher	<p>“I had studied jazz theory and ear training, but that didn’t help me much in graduate school.”</p> <p>“The other students had more experience with Western classical music, so Music History was a tough class for me.”</p>
	Evan	“I know that I learned some of this stuff a while ago, but I hadn’t used it...”

Appendix B (continued)

<i>Striving for Relevance</i>	Evan	"...It's a lot easier getting 25 kids drumming than 25 kids playing the saxophone..."
	Yvette	"I'm starting a world music unit with my students next month..."
	Marcus	"If we're reaching out to students, we need people to understand where they're coming from, who can relate to what they listen to..."
	Alejandro	"...I think there's often a disconnect between what the teachers teach and what the kids listen to when they leave the classroom, and I try to connect that..." "I can relate to them on a musical level. No other teacher in the building can do that the same way..."
	Jeremy	"I make a point of asking my students what music they listen to so that I can find it on iTunes and listen to it myself..."
<i>Flexibility</i>	Christopher	"I think if you can use your ear, if you can play by ear, if you can improvise, those are really great skills to have with kids..."
	Jeremy	"Another way that I felt like it was an advantage to have a non-traditional background it seems that those with a non-traditional background had experience in more types of music..." "As someone with a non-traditional background, I had been in many scenarios where I was the beginner in my life..."
	Yvette	"I think that many classical players can sometimes get overly dependent on the score. Like teachers being too tied to the lesson plan..."
	Marcus	"When I play out, I have to be ready for whatever happens..." "I have to know how to turn on a dime in my classroom..."

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