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Ukulele in Music Class: Teachers' Perspectives

By

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Abstract

The use of the ukulele in classrooms and communities is growing, and, as a result, so is meaningful musical engagement from people of all ages. In this collective case study, I described the perspectives of three different music teachers and discussed how they implement the ukulele in diverse settings. Research questions were (a) what factors influence participants while creating ukulele groups or lessons, (b) how do participants use ukuleles in their classrooms, (c) what are participants' perceptions of the ukulele's value, and (d) what are participants' perceptions of students' interest in learning the ukulele?

Participants were three music teachers located in Western New York who used the ukulele in their school. One participant taught in a rural school, one in a suburban school, and one in an urban school. Data were pre-observation, post-observation, and summary interviews; field notes from observation of participants' teaching; and participants' digital and classroom materials that support learning ukulele. Several themes emerged from the analysis: learning through informal experiences, ease of use, flexibility, accessibility, extra-musical development, and student interest and success. Finally, I indicate suggestions for practical application and future research.

Keywords: ukulele, general music, music education

Music participation and learning are influenced by societal trends (Green, 2016; Madsen, 2000). The use of the ukulele in general music classrooms reflects one such trend. Though ukulele popularity has ebbed and flowed throughout history, Kruse (2013) suggested that the world is experiencing a "ukulele renaissance" (p. 154). Due to the current revival of the ukulele's popularity, implementation of the ukulele has increased in music classrooms (Giebelhausen & Kruse, 2018). Thibeault and Evoy (2011) suggested that ukulele play-along events and online resources allow for a wealth of opportunities for individuals to make and share music. They emphasized the value of these resources and advocated that such resources support participants in actively making music using the ukulele. The following literature review describes studies in which researchers explored concepts related to using the ukulele to engage all ages and types of learners in both community and classroom settings.

Review of the Literature

Ukulele in Community Music Contexts

Ukulele community groups provide opportunities for people to participate and engage in music-making. Using case study methodology, researchers have described how community ukulele groups affect members and leaders of the groups (Giebelhausen & Kruse, 2018; Kruse, 2013; Reese, 2019; Secoy, 2016). To investigate these experiences, researchers relied on interview data, observations of the groups, and artifacts such as photographs and lead sheets (Giebelhausen & Kruse, 2018; Kruse, 2013; Secoy, 2016).

Although these studies vary in detail, they share common central themes. Researchers found that ukulele community groups created a sense of relaxed enjoyment (Giebelhausen & Kruse, 2018; Kruse, 2013; Reese, 2019; Secoy, 2016). Additionally, Reese (2019) and Kruse (2013) described a sense of *communitas* or 'ohana,' which both suggest the theme of a

welcoming community. Similarly, Giebelhausen and Kruse (2018) suggested the ukulele groups in their study created a community of like-minded people. Although Secoy (2016) found similar themes, she also concluded that participants were extrinsically motivated to improve because of the skills demonstrated by others in the group. Researchers noted that group leaders selected music based on the preferences of group members (Giebelhausen & Kruse, 2018; Reese, 2019; Secoy, 2016). Additionally, participants suggested that ukulele groups celebrated learning, were a safe space to learn and make mistakes, and were positively influenced by other group members (Giebelhausen & Kruse, 2018; Reese, 2019; Secoy, 2016).

Ukulele for Students and Teachers

As in community music contexts, ukulele use has increased in school music contexts. However, although practitioner-based articles have recently increased for music educators teaching students ukulele in their classrooms (e.g., Bernard & Cayari, 2020; Giebelhausen, 2016; Greenberg, 1992), research focused on the use of ukulele in music classrooms is relatively lacking and considerably dated. Additionally, researchers who included the ukulele have used it as a tool to investigate other constructs such as self-esteem, engagement, preference, and play.

For example, Michel and Farrell (1973) investigated the effects of learning musical performance skills via ukulele on self-esteem. Participants were 14 boys in grades four through six described by their teachers and the county psychological services center as having learning and behavior challenges. Each boy completed a Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI), and their teachers completed a Behavior Rating Form (BRF) for each boy. Then, for 7.5 weeks, the boys participated in half-hour ukulele lessons twice a week (15 lessons total) focused on gaining musical skills. Additionally, the boys could trade tokens they earned for staying on-task for extra

private ukulele lesson time. They observed students for three weeks to determine if the lessons affected their on-task time in classes, and after completing 15 lessons, the boys again completed the SEI. Findings suggest musical skill development contributed to an increase in self-esteem for the boys and an increase in on-task time. The boys demonstrated a 10% increase in on-task time, which researchers attributed to motivation to earn tokens to trade for ukulele lessons.

In a study investigating children's engagement with and preference for instruments, Geringer (1977) introduced 40 children (3–5 years old) to a variety of instruments (timpani, piano, bells, ukulele, metallophone, slide whistle, guiro, log drum, recorder, and hand drums). They provided 5 minutes for participants to play whatever instruments they desired. After each child played for 5 minutes, the researcher asked that child which instrument they liked best. Geringer found that the children highly preferred the ukulele. Furthermore, when compared to other instruments, the ukulele was the instrument with the most agreement between the number of children who verbally identified it as their favorite based on the total amount of time spent playing during the five-minute exploration time.

In a phenomenological study, Koops (2017) observed 12 children (4–7 years old) during music play and described their behaviors across 24 sessions. During the 45-minute-long sessions, Koops fostered a play-based musical environment that included singing, movement, listening, creating, and playing instruments (e.g., recorders, rhythm instruments, ukuleles, boomwhackers, harmonicas). Data were interviews with the children, researcher notes based on observations of participants, and video analysis. Koops found that children demonstrated enjoyment during musical play through active and physical engagement. These behaviors were most prominent when activities included a balance of familiarity and novelty. For example, children demonstrated enjoyment and success when transferring known vocal songs to the ukulele or

recorder. Engagement was also prominent when activities allowed for student control or choice (e.g., students showed enjoyment when conducting and composing their own songs) and when a safe and playful environment was established (e.g., when children were able to choose their level of participation and explored musical concepts without fear of failure).

Smith and Secoy (2019) investigated the evolution of elementary education majors' musical identity while learning to play the ukulele. Eighteen undergraduate participants met twice a week for 75 minutes in which a portion of their time was spent playing ukulele and learning how to use the ukulele in a classroom setting. Data were participants' music video-recorded class sessions, end-of-semester reflections, and video-recorded focus group interviews in which their musical identity perceptions were collected. Researchers found that life experiences informed their beginning-of-semester musical identity, but in-class experiences with ukulele led to increased musical competence, participation, and identity.

Purpose of the Study

Overall, these studies suggest that students and teachers enjoy using the ukulele and experience social and emotional benefits when teachers use ukulele in the classroom. However, research that focuses on the educational use of the ukulele for music learning is limited and dated, especially considering its recent surge in popularity in community and school contexts. Thus, although we have some evidence of students' and preservice classroom teachers' experiences learning ukulele, teachers' perceptions of ukulele use in K–12 music contexts are missing. Therefore, the purpose of this collective case study was to describe the perspectives of three different music teachers and discuss how they implement the ukulele in diverse settings. The research questions were (a) what factors influence participants while creating ukulele groups or lessons, (b) how do participants use ukuleles in their classrooms, (c) what are participants'

perceptions of the ukulele's value, and (d) what are participants' perceptions of students' interest in learning the ukulele?

Theoretical Framework

I used the theoretical framework of social cognitive career theory (SCCT) to examine music teacher's experiences using ukulele (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). This theory explains the processes through which one's career and academic interests evolve based on three mechanisms: self-efficacy, expectations for outcomes, and goals. SCCT evolved from Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory; however, Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) extended the theory to explore the formation of career-relevant interests, participants' choice of actions taken to employ their interests, and the performance of those choices.

Researcher Lens

I am an amateur ukulele player who earned a degree in music education (saxophone). I participated in community ukulele groups in the local and university community during my college years. These communities fostered an enjoyment of playing and learning music that I had not experienced during my formal K–12 music education. In addition, although I have taught the ukulele in private-lesson and small-group settings, I have not yet used or taught the ukulele in a K–12 school music setting. These factors sparked my interest in learning more about how teachers use ukulele in various school settings to engage diverse learners.

Methods

The goal of this study was to describe the perspectives of teachers using ukulele in diverse settings. Therefore, I chose a collective case study design. A case study explores one or more cases within a bounded system; each teacher and their classroom served as a bounded system (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 2005). The collective case study approach increases variation

among cases and increases the meaning of interpretation (Merriam, 1998). Although each case is of interest, comparisons between cases strengthen the validity and stability of the findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Thus, I included in this collective case study the perspectives of teachers from three different types of districts.

Recruitment

To recruit general music teachers from three districts (one rural, one suburban, and one urban), I contacted three county music teacher associations in the New York State School Music Association Zone 1 (Western New York). I invited teachers who used the ukulele to participate. Interested teachers completed a short online questionnaire about the demographics of their school, the number of years teaching ukulele, the grades in which they taught ukulele, and if the ukulele is taught in curricular or non-curricular contexts. I used purposeful sampling to choose participants who represented contrasting school demographics. Using these contrasting demographics, I was able to choose participants in various teaching contexts (see Table 1 for descriptions of each participant and their teaching contexts).

Procedures

Once I obtained consent from participants, I scheduled three semi-structured individual interviews. Based on Seidman's (1998) three-interview series, the first interview pertained to school demographics, participant background and education, personal interest in the ukulele, and factors that influenced the creation of a ukulele group or unit. Next, I observed the participant using the ukulele with students in their music class and collected field notes and audio recordings. The second interview immediately followed the observation and focused on pedagogy and the use of the ukulele in the classroom. Finally, the third interview pertained to the perceived value of the ukulele in their classroom and curriculum. Data were transcripts from

interviews, transcripts from and field notes collected during observations, and artifacts (e.g., classroom handouts, slideshow presentations) participants shared related to teaching and learning ukulele.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

After transcribing each interview, I shared the transcript with the participant for member checking: a process during which the participant can revise, omit, or add to their interview transcript (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Member checks are one strategy to support the trustworthiness of the analysis and results. Analysis began as soon as each participant completed member checks of the first interview and was a recursive and reiterative multi-step process to examine each participant's experience as an individual case.

As I collected transcripts, field notes, and artifacts, I uploaded them to Dedoose (an online qualitative analysis program) for analysis. I used open coding during the first round of analysis for each document. I reviewed the text and created codes that emerged from the initial reading (Travers, 2001). During the second round of analysis, I reread the document, selected meaningful excerpts, and applied initial codes or a new code that emerged during this round. I maintained researcher memos regarding possible themes emerging from the process and interpretations relevant to the next step of analysis (cross-case analysis). After completing the previous rounds of analysis for each document, I began a final round of open and selective coding with the perspective of cross-case analysis to examine similarities and differences across cases (Creswell, 2007). During this process, I focused on themes that connected across cases and themes that were unique to individual cases. Data were triangulated across sources (interviews, observations, and artifacts) to determine consistent themes across cases. The code co-occurrence function aided this process in Dedoose. After completing all analysis, I used Dedoose to

determine intra-coder reliability. Dedoose compared two rounds of coding and determined Cohen's kappa was more significant than .80 across all documents (Cohen, 1960). Lastly, I used an additional round of member checks to ensure that the resulting themes were accurate to participants' experiences.

Findings

Several themes emerged from the analysis: learning through informal experiences, ease of use, flexibility, accessibility, extra-musical development, and student interest and success. The first two themes, learning through informal experiences and ease of use, pertain to research question one (i.e., factors influencing participants while creating ukulele groups or lessons). Flexibility refers to research question two (i.e., how participants use ukuleles in their classrooms), as participants demonstrated numerous ways to teach the ukulele. The last three themes, accessibility, extra-musical development, and student interest and success, pertain to research questions three and four. During analysis, it became clear that research questions three and four (i.e., participants' perceptions of the ukulele's value and participants' perceptions of students' interest in learning the ukulele) could be combined into one idea. Participants expressed that part of the value of teaching ukulele was students' interest in and success with the ukulele. Accessibility, extra-musical development, and student interest and success positively impacted participants' decision to continue playing and teaching ukulele in their general music classrooms beyond their first year trying it.

Learning Through Informal Experiences

Participants expressed that they primarily used informal sources of information regarding ukulele playing and pedagogy. Participants had no formal learning experiences with the ukulele as a preservice teacher. Rebecca (a pseudonym) attributed her lack of college experience with the

ukulele because she was in college before the resurgence of the ukulele's popularity. Although this may be accurate, the other participants (more recent graduates) also lacked ukulele training in their college programs. Participants described attending workshops at local conferences about playing and teaching ukulele, but none attended more than two workshops. These workshops focused on the technique of playing the ukulele and included some pedagogical applications. At workshops, participants engaged in conversations with other teachers about how they used the ukulele. Lilly (a pseudonym) described, "I saw several teachers just use it as a teaching tool for yourself. So that was useful to show what I could do in addition to how I can teach students" (personal communication, February 18, 2020). An additional informal learning context included local community ukulele jams. Lilly and Rebecca described gaining technical proficiency and observing different pedagogical techniques at such community jams. A final source of informal learning for the teachers was the internet. Many of the materials participants used were online resources such as the website Ukutabs (<https://ukutabs.com/>) or play-along videos on YouTube.

Based on these informal experiences, participants created their ukulele curriculum. When they began teaching ukulele to their students, they all expressed the idea of "winging it" or continuing to learn the ukulele as they went. As they gained more experience, they established higher goals for their students. Rebecca commented, "the longer you teach, the better you can anticipate what [students are] going to struggle with, but ukulele was kind of new for me. I was still learning how to do it" (personal communication, March 12, 2020).

Additionally, Lilly commented, "this year is the first year I've gotten them to play melody, chords, and basslines. I haven't gotten to that before. A little bit more tab reading. I'm able to cover more content in the same amount of time. I'm getting more efficient" (personal

communication, March 10, 2020). As the teachers' abilities evolved, so did their expectations for their students.

Ease of Use

Participants perceived the ukulele as easy to use and easy to learn. They compared their experience with the ukulele to their previous experience with the guitar. Rebecca and Lilly indicated they had formal experience with a guitar class in college. Based on her college experience, Rebecca initially decided to teach guitar to her sixth, eighth, and high school students before she included the ukulele into her curriculum. Unlike Rebecca and Lilly, Laura (a pseudonym) did not have a guitar class in college, but she recalled experience using guitars during her student teaching placement. Both Rebecca and Laura expressed discomfort playing guitar because of having small hands.

Compared to their experiences with guitar, participants found the ukulele enjoyable. Laura said, "I wasn't great at the guitar, and I just kind of felt that the ukulele was a simpler but effective accompaniment instrument that I could play along and sing to" (personal communication, March 6, 2020). She believed that the ukulele was easier to use than the guitar and that it provided a valuable experience for playing and singing. Rebecca also commented on the ease of playing the ukulele after purchasing one for herself. "Within the first 20 minutes, I could play three- or four-chord songs, and I'd never been able to do that on guitar. So, I thought, if I find this more accessible, then I bet my students would too" (personal communication, February 19, 2020).

Flexibility

The theme "flexibility" refers to how participants used the ukulele and taught students to play the ukulele in their classrooms. Although all participants described flexibility, meaningful,

unique characteristics based on differences in participants' teaching contexts emerged during cross-case analysis. Therefore, descriptions of this theme begin with a summary of how each teacher used the ukulele in her setting and then concluded with a comparison of cases.

Rebecca

Rebecca taught in a rural district. Unlike other participants, she previously taught guitar before discovering the ukulele. However, after playing the ukulele for fun and finding quick success, she decided to include it in her classroom curriculum. She introduced the ukulele in her sixth-grade classes. Over time, she found that sixth-graders were interested in playing melodies rather than chords. Therefore, her focus with sixth-graders changed to using the ukuleles as melodic rather than harmonic instruments. These students learned to read traditional notation and tablature. She commented that her younger students did not seem interested in singing and that melodic playing was more accessible. However, she noted a shift in interest as students get older.

Once they get to eighth grade, they seem to want to play a lot more with music that they hear on the radio. ... In eighth grade, I make [the ukulele] much more of a harmonizing instrument to play along with music that they sing on the radio. I've shifted [my curriculum] based on where I see them using music in their daily lives. (personal communication, March 3, 2020)

She also mentioned that students could switch to the guitar in eighth grade, but most students chose to continue to play the ukulele. Her classes met every day for ten weeks, and students played ukulele two to three times a week. She taught the ukulele throughout the semester because, when she previously taught it as one concise unit, she noticed that students forgot the skills they learned by the end of the ten weeks.

Rebecca used a combination of modeling, videos, and handouts to support students. She created a handout with chord diagrams and photos of each chord, lyric sheets, and fill-in-the-blank questions about parts of the ukulele, reading notes, tablature, and music theory concepts. She gave students a copy of this handout and projected it on the board as she taught. She modeled for her students while teaching the concepts from the handout. When students began to learn chords, Rebecca used ukulele play-along videos from YouTube. Aside from the YouTube play-along, Rebecca created her original resources because she had not yet found a method book or curriculum that was "worth following."

Lilly

Lilly taught in a suburban district. Before being hired in her current position, Lilly worked in two long-term substitute positions where she taught the ukulele. When she was hired in her current position, she continued to use them within her fifth-grade classes. Uniquely, Lilly's predecessor used the ukulele in the curriculum before Lilly. Lilly used the ukulele (in addition to piano) to accompany singing with all grades in her current position. She found that using the ukulele as accompaniment led to more freedom than when she was "stuck" behind a piano. Lilly's fifth-grade students met once a week throughout the school year and had a 16-week ukulele unit. After completing the unit, Lilly included the ukulele approximately once a month as one of many instruments for students to choose to play in class.

When Lilly first taught the ukulele, she focused on playing the instrument rather than reaching musical concepts. However, she described that her goals changed. "The goal is not just to perform a chord progression or a melody," but rather to deepen musical understanding (personal communication, February 21, 2020). In her class, fifth-grade students used the ukulele to perform melodies, read tablature, perform basslines, perform accompaniments, and read from

chord charts. Before playing the ukulele, students in Lilly's class must sing using solfège syllables and understand certain music concepts that they transfer to the ukulele. After learning basic techniques and reading chord diagrams and tablature, Lilly delved deeper into musical concepts such as form, style, rhythm, chord progressions, audiation of meter and tonality, and lyrical analysis.

To present information about the ukulele, Lilly used a combination of technology and modeling to support students. The slideshow she used for instruction included play-along videos, examples of professional ukulele players, visuals relating to the ukulele parts, performance technique, and reading chord diagrams and tablature. She modeled more extensively at the beginning of the unit and decreased modeling as students gained competence.

Laura

Laura taught the ukulele in an urban district in curricular and non-curricular contexts. Laura's non-curricular group was a jam-session-based group in which fifth- through eighth-grade students performed with YouTube play-along videos. Curricularly, she used ukulele with students in sixth through eighth grades. Her classes met daily for 13 weeks, and one week was dedicated to ukulele playing. She taught fundamentals by having a "crash course" at the beginning of the week. She described,

The crash course on ukulele takes one day. Everybody gets an instrument. I talk about the different parts; we go over the head, the neck, the fingerboard, what the frets are, and why they're essential. I talk about how to hold it, care for it, what the tuning knobs do, and what it's supposed to sound like. (personal communication, March 13, 2020)

As part of the crash course, she also taught students how to play one-finger chords on the ukulele (i.e., C, easy F, and A minor). After the crash course, the class was split into two sections: One

section played keyboard for a week while the other played the ukulele. After the first week, the students switched instruments. Students in the ukulele section were given the option to work in small groups or as individuals. First, students chose a song they would like to learn from a folder of Laura's songs. Next, they got a lyric sheet with the chord names on it. By the end of the week, they used their iPads to make a video recording of themselves performing that song on the ukulele.

Laura used modeling to support students. For example, if a student needed to learn a new chord for their song, Laura modeled the chord for them and used hand-over-hand techniques to ensure success. She commented that she had looked at ukulele method books and curricula, but her content choices came from her students' interests and techniques that have been previously successful for her.

Similarities and Differences

Participants demonstrated that the ukulele allows for flexibility in pedagogy, content, and goals for student learning. Additionally, Laura described the ukulele's general flexibility.

You could teach a whole step, half step, scales ... you could do all that stuff on [the ukulele]. But I feel like the kids just want to play. I teach them three chords, and they can play 40 songs. ... But the world is open for whatever you want to do. If you want to teach note reading, and scales, and all that stuff, then you can. (personal communication, March 19, 2020)

Laura and Rebecca were interested in students' participatory music-making, whereas Lilly focused on using the ukulele as a tool to teach other musical concepts. Rebecca shared that she taught the same musical concepts from year to year but varied the repertoire to suit the interests of her students.

Another similarity was in descriptions of flexible resources. Although all participants had a classroom set of ukuleles that allowed students access to their instruments, curricular resources and learning supports were lacking. All participants described creating resources on their own. Participants expressed that they did not feel there was a curriculum or common space to find resources for the ukulele. Laura commented,

I've looked into ukulele curriculums and stuff like that, but I've not found anything that has inspired me. I might have drawn from it, but I haven't found anything that's like "I have to follow this curriculum to get them here" (thinking of recorder karate as a particular regimented curriculum to follow). I haven't found that with the ukulele.
(personal communication, March 6, 2020)

They expressed that a space, where resources can be shared, would be beneficial.

All participants included a cumulative grade for each student pertaining to the ukulele, but the skills and content included in the assessment were flexible. Although they prioritized different skills and concepts for assessment (some more based on technique while others based on musical concepts), they all ended their ukulele units with a graded performance. Some of these performances were live (Rebecca and Lilly), and some were recorded (Laura).

Finally, the general structure of instruction and modifications to support a variety of learning needs was also flexible. Each participant included a formal learning day that focused on technique followed by informal or independent learning days. However, the structure of informal and independent learning varied based on the teacher. For example, Laura included the most days for independent working during which students could decide what song they wanted to learn and with whom they wanted to work. For Lilly, independence emerged due to the variety of instruments students were playing simultaneously in her class. The whole class's attention was

not focused on any one instrument, thus resulting in independence from her students. Rebecca occasionally included independent work for half the period, so students could practice before being graded.

Additionally, all participants had a system for accommodating different ability levels and different types of learners. For example, more advanced ukulele players performed more complicated strumming patterns, while students who struggled strummed a chord once before shifting to the next chord. Additionally, participants described using open tuning or picking open strings for students with dexterity challenges.

Accessibility

The theme "accessibility" applies to the cost of the instrument, the relevance of the repertoire that teachers used, and the students' ability to access learning materials on the Internet. Participants commented that the ukulele was affordable, which allowed it to be more accessible to students. Some students or guardians sought information about buying ukuleles for recreational use. Rebecca stated, "I see the value of ukulele in my school in particular because my students don't often have access to the same things as students from more affluent districts. The guitar doesn't work quite as well in that aspect" (personal communication, March 12, 2020).

Participants also suggested that popular music and music available via the Internet for ukulele instruction made the instrument seem more accessible to the students. Laura commented on the accessibility of popular music rather than classical music. She said, "I also think, leaning into pop music versus leaning into classical music, it's just going to be more approachable for a lifelong musical experience. It's more accessible" (personal communication, March 6, 2020). Lilly also indicated that playing along to popular music on YouTube allowed the ukulele to be accessible. She stated, "I think it's very approachable. ... The songs you can find fairly easily on

YouTube, and you can teach entirely from YouTube if you wanted to" (personal communication, March 10, 2020). Participants suggested that play-along and tutorial videos on YouTube allowed students (and teachers) to find valuable resources to support ukulele playing regardless of budget.

Extra-musical Development

Participants suggested that students developed extra-musical qualities such as motivation, confidence, independence, and a sense of community through playing the ukulele. They perceived students' extra-musical development about the ukulele as a testament to the value of teaching and learning the instrument. For example, Laura observed an increase in confidence in her students. She said, "I feel like [I'm] giving them that tool or that skill to allow them to feel confident in themselves ... and [they learn] that it's not impossible to play an instrument" (personal communication, March 6, 2020). She indicated that the increased confidence was motivating for students and led to more interest and success. Rebecca suggested that the increased motivation and interest she observed in her class led to increased retention rates in her program. She remarked, "I've seen an uptick in our high school music electives in the number of people who are signing up for them since we started introducing ukulele into our middle school music curriculum" (personal communication, March 3, 2020).

Additionally, participants suggested that students become more independent musicians through playing the ukulele. Laura said,

When they can be in those smaller groups collaborating with just a peer or two, they're not teacher-driven, so there's not that structure, but they still find the structure within themselves, and they still complete their assignment and project. ... The lack of teacher-

led instruction makes it a more organic experience, I suppose. They're learning for themselves versus being taught. (personal communication, March 19, 2020)

She believed that allowing students to explore in-class created a more realistic or relevant experience for her students to transfer to out-of-school settings. Similarly, Lilly said,

My goal is for kids to see themselves as musical, realize that music is something that all people do, and give them the skills to go home and figure it out on their own. ... They are more independent. I think in that way, I met the goal. (personal communication, February 21, 2020)

She observed that students became more independent learners and music makers when she included the ukulele curriculum.

Participants also indicated that the ukulele helped them create a safe learning environment or a community in which students could play together. They suggested that playing the ukulele in a group gave students who are not in large ensembles the opportunity to experience participatory music-making or music-making in an ensemble setting. Rebecca proposed,

If the kids aren't in chorus and kids aren't in the band, the way I set up my piano assessment, we don't all play piano at the same time, but we'll play all together with the ukulele so that we're all experiencing music together. (personal communication, March 12, 2020)

Laura described the ukulele as "non-threatening." Lilly remarked, "Who could be intimidated by a ukulele?" (personal communication, March 10, 2020). All of the participants agreed that the ukulele promoted a safe environment to make mistakes. They also observed that some students began assuming leadership roles by helping their peers learn. Lilly noted, "It just makes my job

so much easier when they're teaching each other. We have a lot of really musically advanced students, so why not let them take some leadership? I think it helps build a classroom community too" (personal communication, February 21, 2020). When describing her non-curricular ukulele group, Laura said,

It's just kind of a social thing. I look forward to the ukulele club because it's laid back.

There's no pressure. The kids are here because they enjoy playing, and I'm glad that some of them have realized that. It's a community that they might not have otherwise found.

(personal communication, March 6, 2020)

The social environment present during ukulele lessons created a positive place for students to play and learn.

Student Interest and Success

Participants suggested they were able to engage students and lead students to find success by using the ukulele. Participants described a sense of ease when they learned the ukulele and suggested their students experienced similar ease. Lilly commented, "it's very efficient ... [students] could put in a little bit of work and get a sound that already sounds good as long as your instrument is in tune" (personal communication, February 18, 2020), and Laura noted, "it's simple, it's pretty straightforward, and it's pretty practical teaching chords" (personal communication, March 19, 2020). Additionally, Laura valued experiential learning, and she commented about the ukulele as a facilitator of that learning. "I feel like you just learn chords you can just start playing" (personal communication, March 6, 2020). After learning a few basic chords, her students found pretty instant success. This success led students to want to learn more. Laura commented,

Some kids will hunker down and just practice chord progressions and practice their song. I set them up with the ukulele play-along videos quite often, so you'll see them replaying one section or practicing it over and over and being diligent about practicing. (personal communication, March 19, 2020)

Additionally, Laura said, "they're enjoying it. I think that they are excited about being able to play [ukulele] and being able to be successful and play something that they hear on the radio" (personal connection, March 19, 2020). Participants noted that students' success has led to increased interest.

Discussion and Suggestions for Future Research

This collective case study described the perspectives of teachers using the ukulele in diverse contexts. Although limited to three teachers in Western New York school districts, this study provides depth regarding various experiences while also exploring the commonalities. As a result, the findings may not be generalizable, but they are transferable to similar contexts.

Several prominent themes in studies of community ukulele groups also emerged in this study of the ukulele in general music classrooms. Such themes include a community in which people feel safe to learn and play, autonomy including control or choice over repertoire, and joy or fun (Giebelhausen & Kruse, 2018; Kruse, 2013; Reese, 2019; Secoy 2016). The research about community ukulele groups includes perspectives of adult participants and facilitators. However, the current study is of music teachers' perceptions of experiences with students. The commonalities among findings suggest that these themes transcend age and context. Because this study focused on teachers' perceptions of students, the students' voices are still missing. It would be paramount for future researchers to consider this critical perspective. Additionally, future

researchers might consider studying if ukulele playing in school leads to lifelong music learning in ukulele community groups or other contexts.

As in other studies, these teachers suggested that their students preferred the ukulele to other instruments and experienced positive outcomes from playing the ukulele. Students demonstrated a preference for the ukulele over the guitar in Rebecca's school, which is consistent with the findings of Geringer (1977). Previous studies described the positive impacts of ukulele instruction on self-esteem and engagement (Michel & Farrell, 1973; Smith & Secoy, 2019). Participants in the current study suggest they observed increases in the confidence and motivation of students who found success playing the ukulele. Future researchers might consider an experimental study to determine if teachers' perceptions of increases in students' confidence and motivation due to the ukulele use are consistent with objective measurements of confidence, motivation, and other constructs, including musician identity. A phenomenological study of students' lived experiences learning the ukulele might also shed light on its impact on confidence, motivation, and musician identity.

Other themes emerged in this study that were not apparent in previous ukulele studies. Specifically, themes about the factors that contributed to teachers' processes for learning to play and to teach the ukulele, including resources, methods of instruction, and modifications or accommodations. Though these findings are unique to the teachers in this study, community ukulele facilitators may have also had similar informal experiences learning to play and teach ukulele. However, researchers have not yet described how community ukulele group leaders arrived at the ukulele as a mode of community music engagement or how they learned how to play and teach ukulele. Additionally, future researchers should investigate how different methods of instruction affect learners' achievement with the ukulele and the effectiveness of different

accommodations for various learners. Further, future researchers may consider studying how teaching methods and content differ for teachers who learned the ukulele in their college curriculum compared to those who did not or those who learned formally and those who learned informally. Additionally, they might also investigate differences between teachers who had personal ukulele proficiency before undergraduate experiences, those introduced to the ukulele during their undergraduate degree, and those introduced to the ukulele post-graduation.

Practical Suggestions and Conclusions

These findings imply that the ukulele is a viable tool to use in music classrooms. Ukuleles promote flexibility for teachers to use them in a way that best suits their students, situation, and goals, and they help students develop extra-musical skills. Additionally, when music teachers include ukulele in their curriculum, they provide a musical outlet that is accessible for students.

Music teacher educators would be well-served to address the lack of formal training on the ukulele for preservice teachers. More than ever, teachers are using the ukulele in their general music classes but are relegated to "winging it" or learning as they go. Suppose music teacher educators integrated experience with ukuleles into the curriculum? In that case, teachers might be more effective in their use of the ukulele in the classroom and in their ability to teach students to use the ukulele for music-making and understanding. When teachers have the skill and pedagogical knowledge they need to teach the ukulele, they are more likely to set reasonable goals for their students and avoid feeling like they are just "one step ahead."

Additionally, teachers need access to adequate resources to teach the ukulele. Teachers need the opportunity to share with others the resources they have created. Participants in this study used very similar materials with their students, but each created these materials from

scratch. The only standard tool used by all participants was YouTube play-along videos. Perhaps all three participants used this resource because they knew where to find it or because the videos were accessible and easy to access. Professional organizations such as the National Association for Music Education should consider creating or expanding clearinghouses of open-source content teachers could use to teach the ukulele. When provided such a service, teachers would not have to start from scratch and could use their time and energy more effectively and efficiently.

The ukulele is not just a societal trend or fad with little value. Instead, it is a powerful tool that teachers can use in the general music classroom to introduce students to a variety of musical concepts and to help students develop as independent, autonomous, and confident musicians. The ukulele promotes music learning and self-expression for which the benefits transcend setting or circumstance.

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Table 1*Participant Descriptions and Teaching Contexts*

Name (pseudonym)	Rebecca	Lilly	Laura
School demographic	Rural	Suburban	Urban
Number of years teaching in their district	16 years	2 years	6 years
Number of years teaching ukulele	5 years	2 years	3 years
Grade levels they teach ukulele	6th grade, 8th grade, and high school	5th grade	6th grade, 7th grade, and 8th grade
Class meeting frequency	Five times a week for 10 weeks	Once a week for the entire school year	Five times a week for 13 weeks
Ukulele instruction structure and frequency	Twice a week for 10 weeks	Once a week for 16 weeks, then once a month it is used as an option among instruments to play	One formal teaching day and one week of informal learning
Curricular focus with ukuleles	Melodies in sixth grade, chords in eighth grade and high school	Melodies, chords and singing, and bass lines	Chords and singing
Extracurricular ukulele opportunities and focus	N/A	N/A	Occasional after-school meetings focused on chords and singing

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