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### Editorial

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## EDITORIAL

By

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The articles housed in this 31<sup>st</sup> volume of *Visions of Research in Music Education* include various research methodologies and feature participants of all ages. Common threads that run through these manuscripts are facets of musical creativity and connections between people; in some cases, these threads are tantamount. As readers of this volume will see, creativity can be associated with both musical and non-musical tasks, the administration of music programs, and recognizing unimagined realities. Similarly, connections can be made between a variety of contexts, including small schools, online and offline settings, and diverse urban environments.

Elissa Johnson-Green presents a qualitative study that focused on an immersive music composition curriculum for kindergarten students. Guided by design thinking and the incorporation of STEAM (science, technology, engineering, visual art, and math) skills, students constructed individual musical pieces at a keyboard and used Lego bricks as an architectural metaphor for composition. Observation notes, videos of children reading and playing their pieces, children's written scores, and interviews with children were analyzed and examined for trends. Johnson-Green found benefits in immersive learning experiences, including accelerated development of musical thinking and explicit applications of STEAM skills during the composition process. The author created compelling implications based on these findings, namely the importance of designing a music curriculum that reflects a more connected educational experience for students, which, in turn, could allow teachers to evaluate how their students are thinking musically.

The ways in which people of all ages think musically and imaginatively has been an ongoing interest in music teaching and learning. Alden Snell and David Stringham approach this particular phenomenon from the perspective of in-service music teachers. The purpose of their study was to document instrumental music teachers' experiences in prioritizing creativity, repertoire, and outcomes in instrumental ensembles. Using a researcher-designed instructional model, Snell and Stringham examined six in-service music teachers' perceptions of their ability to teach improvisation and composition, and the extent to which the researcher-designed instructional model helped these teachers to improve their own musicianship. Overall, the participants shared the rewards and challenges of being teachers and musicians, as well as their insecurities in being improvisers and composers. In response, the authors question the degree to which teachers consider and prioritize space for musical creativity in the classroom, and recommend further examination of teaching models and support for creative applications in music curricula.

Context is a powerful component in relaying "where" music teaching and learning occurs. Scott Edgar, Kimberly Councill, Richard Edwards, Edward Hoffman, and Amy Spears present a phenomenological narrative study that explored their own lived

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experiences as music teacher educators at small liberal arts universities. Coded themes from authors' narratives helped to depict the realities associated with being a singular faculty member who is charged with leading and administrating a music teacher preparation program. Overarching themes included the augmented responsibilities associated with small programs, the role of recruitment, issues surrounding small class sizes, limited resources, the potential for serving as agents of change on campus, and contradictory evaluation processes for tenure and promotion. While the authors noted that the act of sharing their narratives with one another reduced a sense of isolation, they encouraged new music teacher educators to appreciate the independence that comes from being a music professor at a small liberal arts school. Edgar et al. provide valuable recommendations for establishing mentoring practices in doctoral programs that prepare future music teacher educators.

Many universities endeavor to create meaningful and educative connections for members of the surrounding community. Susan Davis highlights the contextual underpinnings of The University of South Carolina String Project (USCSP), a long-standing community-university partnership. Over the course of 14 months, Davis examined the level of perceived engagement by USCSP stakeholders, gathering multidimensional experiences from preservice teachers, faculty and institution members, and community members. Predominant themes centered on access and affordability, the learning experience, and enjoyment and challenge. Overall, the USCSP has cultivated intergenerational community engagement opportunities that have helped to promote social, emotional, and intellectual stimulation, which, in turn, have reinforced the strong community of practice that has been integral to the USCSP since its inception in 1974. Davis notes that an interesting contrast would be to examine inequities among string partnership sites in an effort to determine how culture, race, gender, and socioeconomic status can affect a program's success.

As a way to investigate choral conductor identity development, Leila Heil designed and implemented an action research project with students in her choral literature class. An underlying premise of this project was to foster professional communication. Over the span of 15 weeks, she collected and analyzed students' online responses to posted choral performance recordings. At the end of the project, Heil distributed a questionnaire and conducted a live, in-person group discussion. Heil's analysis revealed that students' online discussions tended to be based on personal preference and largely were focused on musical expressivity, rather than on musical technique or objective observations. However, students were adept at using resources to advance conversations related to class readings, peer comments, and selected recordings. Students reported that they gained a greater understanding of professional communication, a heightened ability to formulate and articulate ideas, and an expanded awareness of the differences between formal online discourse and informal communication through social media platforms.

The final article in this 31<sup>st</sup> volume of *Visions of Research in Music Education* is written by Michael Palmer, who presents the teaching profile of Victoria Miller, an African-American urban music educator in Detroit. Employing social constructivism and Black feminism as theoretical frameworks, Palmer endeavored to capture the essence of Miller's teaching, and the ways in which her identity as an African-American woman shaped her career. Analysis of field notes, interviews, and artifacts provided insight to religious influences, care for others, and music as a tool of empowerment. Palmer's work

points to the importance of documenting success stories associated with urban music educators as well as celebrating how teachers' cultural and racial identities can inspire students to learn and grow. Discussions like this could help to illuminate a variety of possibilities in music teaching and learning, and in the profession's quest to diversify the teaching force and the students it serves.

The process of sorting, connecting, and making meaning from the (often) unexamined is an ongoing enterprise in our field. Readers may be inspired to devise their own creative connections based on the ideas contained in this volume. Thank you to these scholars for contributing their work to *Visions of Research in Music Education*.

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