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**“Keeping My Head Above Water”: The Influence of Context
on the Concerns of a Novice Urban Music Teacher**

By

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Abstract

Although researchers have identified challenges of beginning music teachers, scholars have rarely considered the impact of the teaching context (e.g., suburban, rural, or urban) on the particular challenges and focus of attention of beginning music teachers. The purpose of this instrumental case study was to describe the challenges and concerns of a first-year general music teacher in an urban elementary school. While I identified some common beginning music teacher concerns, I found unique aspects of the mesosystem and exosystem. These included school structures such as diverse student needs, performance pressure, and district expectations for student growth expectations, which informed the teacher’s concerns and instructional focus.

Keywords: novice music teacher, urban, teacher concerns, beginning teacher challenges, ecological systems theory

The first years of teaching can be a very challenging and rewarding experience, a time when the novice teacher grows both personally and professionally. Though they experienced some teaching as a student teacher, during the first years, they transition from a student to a full-time teacher and take on additional responsibilities including planning, teaching, assessing, managing a classroom, and building a program.

Common challenges faced by novice music teachers such as classroom management, feelings of isolation, and trouble finding time for personal growth have been well-documented (Barnes, 2010; Conway, 2015; Delorenzo, 1992; Krueger, 2000). However, most studies have not considered the particular challenges, or the frequency of difficulties identified, based on the teaching context (e.g., suburban, rural, or urban). Miksza and Berg (2013) found that the context of the school can influence the focus of teachers' concerns. However, their research and others (Berg & Miksza, 2010; Burn, Hagger, Mutton, & Everton, 2000; Miksza & Berg, 2013) have considered pre-service rather than in-service teacher concerns. While the challenges of urban teaching, including teacher accountability, have been established, there appears to be no research on the impact of these factors on first-year music teacher challenges and concerns. A first-year teacher in an urban context faces unique challenges, including managing school and district demands for progress amidst the diverse needs of urban students. A better understanding of these context-specific challenges could help teacher educators better prepare pre-service teachers for positions in urban environments.

Teachers report that classroom management is a major concern for novice teachers, especially in urban schools, including issues related to discipline and classroom management such as excessive talking, defiance, and disrespect (Baker, 2012; Barnes, 2010; Fitzpatrick, 2011; Krueger, 2000). As isolation also tends to be a common concern for first-year music

teachers, support from colleagues and mentors has been very helpful in handling fears during the first year (Conway, 2001; Delorenzo, 1992).

Researchers (Delorenzo, 1992; Roulston, Legette, & Womack, 2005) have reported concerns related to determining curriculum and meeting school improvement goals as a result of state and federal mandates. Over the years legislation such as No Child Left Behind and those resulting from the Race to the Top initiative have added a variety of external demands placed on teachers (Elpus, 2011; Eslinger, 2014; West, 2012). In low performing schools and turnaround schools where the climate, culture, and staff undergo a dramatic change, teachers have reported feeling a lack of control over their environment and stress over assessments (Cucchiara, Rooney, & Robertson-Kraft, 2015; Hunt, 2009).

Especially in diverse urban schools, teachers commonly come from cultural backgrounds that are different from their students. Therefore, an understanding of the influence of one's personal culture in addition to students' culture will be useful in developing relationships (Emmanuel, 2005). Many teachers in urban environments have reported feeling unprepared to handle the diverse needs of urban students (Baker, 2012; Fiese & Decarbo, 1995). Studies have also revealed that an understanding of students' cultures and developing strong relationships with students is essential for success, especially in an urban context (Baker, 2012; Eslinger, 2014; Fitzpatrick-Harnish, 2015; Fitzpatrick, 2011; Lind & McKoy, 2016).

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) Ecological Systems Theory can be a useful tool for understanding how a teacher's context might influence their focus of attention. Bronfenbrenner proposed a series of contexts, a "nested arrangement of structures, each contained within the next" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Within Bronfenbrenner's theory, the microsystem includes the teacher's prior experience and their personal classroom goals. The mesosystem serves to connect

the inner circle of the classroom and personal goals with the climate, culture, and requirements of the school. The exosystem represents the school district demands and requirements as a result of the macro system related to societal pressure and governmental mandates.

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to describe the challenges and concerns of a first-year general music teacher in an urban elementary school. I addressed the following research questions:

1. What were the specific concerns of a first-year urban music teacher?
2. How did the urban school context influence the concerns of a first-year music teacher?
3. How did the school and district expectations influence the concerns of a first-year music teacher?

Setting and Participant

I set the study at Sybil elementary school (a pseudonym) located in a large urban center in the Rocky Mountain region of the United States. The district has a predominant focus on accountability as demonstrated by their strategic plan with goals related to increasing achievement. The elementary school is a low-mid achievement school in a neighborhood with a population of over 85% of minority residents, and where 94% of the students receive free and reduced lunch. Approximately half of the students are English language learners. At the time of the study, the school was in its third year of a rigorous reform process to improve academic performance and close the achievement gap. Initiatives included an extended school day, iPads for every student, school uniforms, a Dean of Culture to oversee the school climate, and rigorous academic goals. In addition, there were weekly community meetings for all students and a strict approach to school-wide discipline.

I applied a criterion selection strategy, as described by Patton (1990) to identify a participant for this instrumental case study. I chose Johnny, a male elementary general music teacher in his mid-twenties. He is of medium height and a thin frame, short dark brown hair, and earrings. His demeanor is relaxed, open, and friendly. Originally from a nearby suburb, he attended neighborhood public schools in a large suburban school district before earning his degree in music education from a small urban university located in the same city where he currently teaches. When it came time to student teach, he chose an affluent suburban elementary school with an experienced general music teacher who applied the Orff process to their teaching. Johnny, like the cooperating teacher, “just made it so much fun, but... got so much done at the same time...” (I-1). I meet Johnny through the district music supervisor, and our first contact was via email. Johnny’s story as a first-year teacher informs the broader issue of challenges and demands experienced by a beginning music teacher in an urban context.

Method

Data collection occurred over a period of eight weeks during the first half of the school year. I conducted three semi-structured, one hour-long interviews, which allowed for open-ended questions and free exchange between myself and the participant (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013). In addition to the interviews, I observed Johnny’s teaching on two occasions. To ensure trustworthiness, I interviewed Johnny’s instructional coach at the school to corroborate details I saw in his teaching, and to discuss evaluations Johnny gave me to review. I was also interested in gaining information about the school’s innovation plan as it impacted Johnny’s work at the school. During our final interview, I asked Johnny to draw a picture of himself as a teacher. My goal was to assess the drawing to see how Johnny depicted his identity as a teacher (Dolloff, 1999).

To allow for reflection while generating new data, I analyzed data while simultaneously collecting it (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Following each interview or observation, I created a contact summary sheet to reflect and form additional questions. In addition to contact summaries, I wrote analytical memos in the form of a “field diary” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

My coding procedures involved two major stages: first cycle and second cycle coding (Saldana, 2013). To complete the first cycle, I reread all of the transcripts and expanded field notes, adding “descriptive”, “in vivo”, or “process” codes (Miles et al., 2014). I created second cycle, or pattern codes by grouping all of the first cycle codes into categories (Saldana, 2013). Then, I entered a final codebook with subcodes into the coding software program *Dedoose* and used these pattern coders to recode all data.

Credibility and dependability, as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings. I was able to triangulate the findings through interview transcripts, expanded field notes, and artifacts and the additional interview with the instructional coach. Fellow graduate students and my advisors also reviewed the findings (Miles et al., 2014). With Johnny and the instructional coach, I shared themes and the conceptual framework display (Miles et al., 2014). The external reviewers did not recommend any changes. I was also able to confirm some of the findings through a pair of drawings created by the participant depicting his perception of himself as a teacher (Dolloff, 1999). The drawings served a triangulation function through comparison with the interview responses.

Findings

Microsystem: Classroom Concerns

The microsystem refers to an individual's immediate environment such as home or classroom, including the influence of prior experience. Johnny's microsystem consisted of his music classroom and his concerns that impacted daily classroom teaching. Coming into his first teaching job, Johnny was excited to plan with the help of his cooperating teacher from student teaching. After student teaching with Peter (a pseudonym), Johnny felt confident that he could be successful as an elementary general music teacher. Most of his internal goals and expectations about teacher qualities and teaching approaches came from Peter. "That's the teacher I want to be!" (I-1). He tried to be fun but firm and worked hard to establish relationships with students. His primary daily concern became classroom management.

Classroom management. As a first-year teacher, Johnny experienced some challenges related to classroom management. During the first couple of weeks of school, he felt overwhelmed by students who would not settle down and listen. In Johnny's words,

They came in, and it was just a free for all like no one was listening, I had maybe half the class doing what they were supposed to be doing, and the other half were just like on their iPads. By the time I got this one or two or three students like settled and like doing what they're supposed to, and these two went off, and by the time I got these ones, it was just a, you know, just a cycle of getting kids to sit down. (I-2)

Since this incident, he has improved his management, "getting into the groove" of the school climate and building relationships with students.

Within the context of his school environment, Johnny realized that student behavior and classroom management became a significant focus. He strived to place his emphasis on student achievement and meeting the music standards but felt that at times classroom management drew his attention away from those things. "A lot more focus goes into behavior management, as opposed to the actual content and like getting things done...it doesn't always happen" (I-2).

Mesosystem: School Expectations

Concerns such as planning, pacing, modeling, and routines fall primarily within the mesosystem, or school expectations layer for Johnny. Since starting at Sybil, he adapted his teaching style and classroom routines to fit the school's structure and climate. As a first-year teacher, he felt like he was "finding his groove" within his current teaching context. "I don't think I've ever found a style that was consistent like I think I've just had to adapt and I don't feel like I ever found like a fingerprint" (I-3). At the time of this study, he was starting to "figure out" what works in his classroom for his students. He is still working on adapting to his current teaching context.

School discipline. Along with their keen sense of community, the school administration was committed to rigorous academic standards and a strict behavior plan. All students were referred to as "scholars" and held to high expectations. The school's behavior system had consistent vocabulary, including reminding students to "track" the speaker and "checks" for misbehavior. Johnny was not sure he agreed with everything about the discipline plan but agreed that many of the students benefit from the strict, consistent discipline, contributing to his neutral feeling toward the established routines. This system for monitoring behavior has become a regular part of Johnny's teaching, and he often carries around the green, yellow, and red colored yardstick with clips for every student.

Observations. Sybil Elementary also had a few teachers who were in a "differentiated role," which means that they taught half time and functioned as an instructional coach half time. This meant that every teacher in the school was observed once per week by their assigned instructional coach. The Physical Education teacher, a third-year teacher, observed Johnny every week. She felt that this was very important for continued growth, especially for a novice teacher. When asked how Johnny felt about this he reflected about both the negative and positive aspects

of being observed so frequently he replied, “I think it’s more of a good thing because I’m getting this coaching that I really need and it’s always very helpful. I have a debrief meeting after an observation and I have a lot of realizations of like what I could be doing better, so like overall it’s very helpful” (I-3). As a first-year teacher, he also found it comforting to have someone else in the room. He had a comfortable relationship with his coach, and he felt like even though she was not a music teacher, she understood some of the differences in content areas.

At times, he also found the process nerve-wracking, feeling the pressure of being observed. “I think in some ways it’s kind of hindered me from doing more of what I want” (I-3). Overall, he felt like he benefitted from the coaching and the reflection process, but it was another added element of stress related to the nervousness of an observation. He felt pressure associated with displaying the elements that she was looking for such as using the school’s lesson plan format and other teaching concerns related to pacing, modeling, giving clear directions, and classroom management.

School lesson plan. Not only were there consistent school-wide routines and discipline strategies, but there was also an expected lesson plan format across all content areas and grade levels. This was another area that gave Johnny mixed feelings. For the most part, Johnny felt like his ideas fit this mold reasonably well and felt successful using the template. At first, he saw the benefit of having a consistent lesson plan format throughout the school. Over time, he struggled with it, finding instances where his plans and goals do not fit with the expected lesson plan. He had conversations with his coach about this matter because he felt like they needed individual practice time on classroom instruments before they performed together as a group and she advised that this deviates from the expected lesson plan sequence. As a result, she urged him to follow her lead, or his teacher evaluation would suffer.

Performances. An additional concern for Johnny came from the pressure to perform. As the school was located near an exclusive arts-focused middle/high school, Sybil administrators have expressed an expectation for their students to audition and be accepted there. As a result, they have an ongoing partnership through the after-school enrichment program, and Johnny was expected to plan and execute two school-wide performances each year. Especially near the end of data collection for this project, when the winter performance was growing nearer, Johnny was feeling the pressure of the upcoming event. It was a standing school tradition planned jointly by the music teacher and the dance teacher and it is important to the parents. Though he was excited to perform with his students, he felt the stress of being able to prepare them for the performance and still be able to meet his own curricular goals and state standards. Therefore, the pressure of an upcoming performance became a negative influence on Johnny's personal goals. "There's so much pressure on this performance that I feel like I am not getting a lot of my standards in where I need to be getting them in" (I-3).

Individual Assessment. There was continuous pressure from the district and school benchmarks to assess all of his students regularly, but he struggled with how to manage performance assessments. "There needs to be assessments for every single student ...working that in has been kind of a struggle for me especially the formal performance assessments for individual students" (I-2). He talked to his coach about this, but he thought that her suggestions would work better in a gym, as opposed to a music room, due to space and noise level. He also struggled with how to make time in his class to assess when he is focused on teaching standards and preparing them for a performance. Some of the pressure for assessment came from his school, but some of it was related to the district requirements for teachers, connected with the teacher evaluation system.

Support from Colleagues. One of the aspects of his job that he felt the most positive about is the support of his specials team. Not only does he have the PE teacher as his instructional coach, but he also felt like he can turn to the art teacher for advice and support. They have “taken him under their wing” and help to keep him on track. “Just knowing that I have an amazing team right now, like there’s nowhere else that I’d rather be than where I’m at” (I-3).

School Culture. Coming into his position at Sybil, Johnny did not feel fully prepared for the diverse community he was becoming a part of. “I think the demographics, that’s something that I think I anticipated going into it, but not really understanding the effects...I guess I just didn’t really understand...how it was gonna be until I got there” (I-3). Johnny felt like building relationships with individual students is his biggest strength. This is how he tries to connect with and relate to students who come from very different demographics and cultural background from his own. He is new to the community, so he does not know much about their individual stories, but knows that many of them have a challenging home life.

So that’s just been kind of another struggle <pause> a lot of it’s just like kind of understanding where these kids come from, like 95, I think it’s like over 90% of the kids are on free or reduced lunch, so you know very low income, <pause> just like home life is probably not ideal and they probably get to do a lot more at home that they don’t get to do here and like parent support, so just like trying to build those relationships.... (I-2)

As Sybil’s student population was approximately 50% Hispanic, the language was also a concern for Johnny. After student teaching in a homogeneous suburban elementary school, he did not feel fully prepared for this culture clash. Therefore, the urban context of Sybil had a mixed impact on Johnny’s mesosystem. While he was unprepared for the reality of the urban school, he made progress by connecting individually with his students.

Exosystem: District Expectations

With the help of his Cooperating Teacher from student teaching, Johnny spent the summer months planning for the first four weeks of school. Then he attended the district orientation and began to doubt his plan and goals for implementing the Orff approach within the curriculum. "... you know I came into this like 'Oh I can't wait to do this,' but you know, my window's gotten very narrow as far as what I want to do with them, because of what other outside elements want me to do" (I-1).

Teacher evaluation. The district operated under a very extensive teacher evaluation program that was aligned to a merit-pay system. Each teacher's score was based on classroom observations, professionalism, student perception surveys, and assessments showing student growth. His instructional coach observed Johnny weekly, and when the observation counted for his evaluation score, she used an extensive rubric to evaluate his teaching. She was also the one who evaluated his professionalism and was the one who ultimately determined his final score. Though he felt the pressure of this system and indicated that it is on his mind all the time, he felt positive about the idea behind the system. "I love the idea and I think it's amazing ... our principal has described it as 'this new thing where we're building the plane as it's taking off', and I think it's going really well, you know as far as what I see as a first-year teacher" (I-1). As he had little control over the evaluation system, and he has not yet been formally evaluated, his overall feelings toward it are neutral.

Student Learning Objectives. According to state legislation, 50% of a teacher's evaluation must be based on multiple measures of student growth (Colorado Department of Education, 2014). Under the district's evaluation system, one of those measures was Student Learning Objectives (SLO) determined by the individual teacher. Others include state and district measures as well as other school measures. To prove growth, the teachers had to show

three data points for each SLO during the course of the school year. For Johnny, this meant considerable testing for his first-grade classes. “It was just kind of rough my first couple weeks because all I was doing with my first graders was like assessing, assessing, assessing, and they’re just like I hate music class cause all we do is take tests” (I-1). Since then he has been able to accelerate the process of assessments by using tablets, but he still felt the pressure and struggles to have enough time to meet objectives, resulting in the negative impact on his individual goals. “I think, coming into this I didn’t really anticipate all the other hoops and other elements that I have to do, such as like the SLO’s” (I-1).

“Tying it all together”

Throughout the school year, Johnny continued to work on connecting all of the different expectations, including his personal goals, curriculum, school expectations, and the district demands. He wanted to have a music program grounded in the Orff process, where all children were able to play instruments together. He wanted to be a caring and fun teacher while maintaining positive behavior and discipline. He also wanted to be able to make all of this fit within the school and district expectations. Over time, he became anxious that he was not becoming the teacher that he wanted to be, causing his own teacher identity to be a concern. “So it’s hard to put it all together. For next year I want to work on integrating everything like standards and teacher evaluation and SLO’s with what the school wants” (I-1).

When asked to draw a picture of himself as a music teacher, Johnny’s image revealed his feelings related to all of the expectations related to his current job. He drew each of the things that are at the forefront of his mind, such as school and district expectations, planning and reflecting, and family and friends in separate thought bubbles. His facial expression revealed his anxious feelings, along with the "water line" right at his face, indicating that he is "keeping his

head above water." The image also mirrored the concerns that he described during interviews. He also expressed that ideally, he would like to be able to connect all of his concerns make them more manageable.

Despite all of the external demands for his time and the pressure of the performance and assessments, Johnny remained very positive about his job and his success. He also believed that the district was meeting its goal to improve academic performance. "I'm very lucky I got this job cause I know a lot of people applied for it and I'm just super stoked, my team's awesome and I'm just very happy!" (I-1).

Discussion

"I'm still kind of finding my groove of my first year..." (I-3). As a first-year music teacher in an urban elementary school, Johnny described a variety of concerns as he tries to find his teaching personality and identity. In response to research question 1 regarding the concerns of a first-year urban music teacher, Johnny faced many common novice teacher concerns such as classroom management, planning, and meeting standards (Barnes, 2010; Conway, 2015; Delorenzo, 1992; Krueger, 2000). Addressing research questions 2 and 3, related to the influence of teaching context, Johnny experienced additional concerns such as meeting the needs of a diverse student population, pressure for performances, and meeting the expectations of the school and the district.

Using Bronfenbrenner's (1977) theory, one can begin to understand how Johnny's environment influenced his classroom and ongoing concerns. While Johnny felt supported by his

colleagues in his school, including his instructional coach, he had mixed feelings about the weekly observations and the building-wide lesson plan structure.

Microsystem

Classroom management. One of Johnny's most significant concerns was classroom management. This is consistent with many first-year teachers (Barnes, 2010; Conway, 2015; Krueger, 2000) and also common in urban environments (Baker, 2012; Barnes, 2010; Fitzpatrick, 2011). These concerns exist at the microsystem level and are related to Johnny's expectations of himself as a teacher. He realized that it could be worse, and it is not every student who is a behavior challenge, but rather just a few in each class. Some are more challenging than others, with defiant, angry responses. Findings here are similar to a study by Barnes (2010) who reported a teacher in a high needs urban school experiencing defiance and disrespect from students. Additionally, Johnny experienced the challenge of developing his own teacher identity, at times, feeling like he was not becoming the teacher he wanted to be.

Johnny's vision of managing his classroom involved building strong relationships with individual students and being kind, but strict when necessary. Researchers have found this to be important in urban schools (Baker, 2012; Eslinger, 2014; Fitzpatrick-Harnish, 2015; Fitzpatrick, 2011), and is the model he learned from his cooperating teacher during student teaching. At times his approach conflicted with the strict school-wide discipline approach used by the school. He described it as a "no-nonsense nurturing approach." His way of managing this disconnection was by adapting his management approaches to the school's expectations and trying to build relationships with individual students. Thus, Johnny felt a neutral connection with the schoolwide routines, having accepted them into his daily routine as was expected of him, but not committing to them.

Demographics. Compared with the white, affluent suburb where Johnny student taught and the suburban district where he grew up, Sybil felt like a culture shock. He knew when he took the job that the student population would be different from his own experience, but he did not realize what this meant. He was unprepared for this setting. Other researchers (Baker, 2012) have also reported this finding. Fiese and DeCarbo (1995) reported that urban music teachers felt “woefully unprepared to teach in the urban setting” (p 27). Johnny did not anticipate what the impact would be of demographics and culture in his classroom. Teaching in a dual language environment and not speaking Spanish himself, Johnny had to make adjustments in his teaching to understand and to meet the needs of his students. Even though the undergraduate program he attended was urban, all of his field experiences were in the suburbs. Johnny expected to gain training in the context from the school district. Though he was engaged in district training, he did not feel like the training connected to his needs in his classroom. Miksza and Berg (2013) reported a shift when student teachers moved to a new school.

Mesosystem/Exosystem

While Johnny enjoyed a close working relationship with his coach and benefited from the ongoing reflection on his practice, he also experienced nervousness about being observed and videotaped weekly. A close relationship with colleagues and mentors is significant for the success of a first-year teacher, especially in an urban environment (Delorenzo, 1992; Eslinger, 2014; Hunt, 2009; Roulston et al., 2005). His relationship with his instructional coach, his former cooperating teacher, and his colleagues teaching visual art and physical education became a team that was significant to him. This relationship made weekly observations feel valuable. Despite the positive aspects of being observed, such as the comfort of having help and the ability to

reflect upon his practice, the frequent observations are also a personification of all of the external demands from the school and district.

In addition to the characteristics of the urban school culture, Johnny faced a variety of challenges related to the external demands placed on him by the large urban district and the school's climate and academic rigor. Some of the pressure for academic rigor and assessment within the school came as a result of district initiatives related to Student Learning Objectives and the rigorous teacher evaluation system linked to the merit-pay system. Similar to the findings of Cucchiara, Rooney, and Robertson-Kraft (2015), Johnny felt a lack of control over their environment due to external demands for accountability. Much of the pressure for accountability, especially in large, diverse urban school districts was a result of federal and state legislation regarding teacher effectiveness and student performance (Elpus, 2011; Eslinger, 2014; West, 2012). Unlike West's (2012) participants, Johnny had not been pressured to teach other subject areas, but he felt the stress of finding time to assess his students and show student growth within his music class. This feeling of stress is similar to Hunt (2009), who found that urban teachers felt stress due to time spent on assessments. These assessments will determine his teacher evaluation score and in part, his salary. My recommendation as the researcher in this study is that we need more research in this area. I concur with West (2012), who suggested that music educators need to be flexible in meeting the needs of diverse students within the current culture of accountability.

I delimited the scope of this study to one novice teacher in one urban school district. This limitation made it difficult to generalize the results beyond this scope and merits further research in other schools and other parts of the country. It was also limited to a first-year teacher. However, anecdotally, many of Johnny's concerns regarding frequent observations, assessments,

and accountability applied to all teachers in his school. Throughout this study, Johnny often referred to his concerns and how he felt about it “as a first-year teacher.” This reference indicates a need for additional research with teachers of other experience levels.

Implications and Conclusion

At times Johnny worried that he could not be the teacher that he strived to be because of the lack of fit with his school context and the demands placed on him by the school and district. He was beginning to develop strategies for more effectively meeting the demands of the school, such as student assessment. Though the focus of this study was not on Johnny’s teacher identity development, future research may address the influence of school context on the identity development of novice music teachers.

The lack of preparation for the urban context has implications for music teacher preparation programs. While Johnny thought that this responsibility should lie with the school district, his training with the district focused more on student learning objectives and assessments. Conway (2012) studied in-service music teachers who suggested that pre-service music teachers should have field experience in varied school contexts, including urban, suburban, and rural. Others have suggested that teachers should examine their own cultural backgrounds and biases to develop a deeper understanding of cultural issues in the classroom (Emmanuel, 2005; Hunt, 2009). As many urban centers are culturally diverse, an urban teacher should be prepared to teach students from varying backgrounds. Music teacher preparation programs, as well as research related to urban music teaching, would serve their students well to focus their curricula on cultural awareness.

While I focused this study on a first-year teacher, experienced teachers may also face similar concerns when shifting to a new teaching context. Further research is needed related to

experienced teachers adapting to different school contexts throughout their career. Conway and Hibbard (2018) studied experienced teachers navigation of the micropolitical climate of their school. They found that they used purposeful tools, including soliciting community and administrator support, building relationships, and acting as “agents of change.” As a novice teacher, Johnny struggled with how to navigate the school culture. This struggle has implications for mentoring of novice teachers. Perhaps more experienced teachers can guide novice teachers through the micropolitical landscape of the school, including power structures and school culture.

For Johnny, his primary first-year teacher concern involved adapting his goals to the school context. He attempted to make sense of the various demands for his time in addition to his personal desire to achieve musical goals by applying the Orff-Schulwerk process. He prided himself on being "open-minded" and being able to "adapt" to his new context. Even after his first year of teaching, Johnny is still in the process of adapting and making everything fit together. As evidenced by more experienced teachers navigating school culture by using purposeful tools developed over time (Conway & Hibbard, 2018), Johnny may develop more adaptive tools. For Johnny, his first year of teaching was a mixture of positive and challenging experiences, along with frustration, nervousness, and excitement. Even while feeling overwhelmed at times, he loves what he is doing and continues to keep his “head above water.”

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