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Becoming Music Teachers in the Time of COVID-19: A Mixed-Method Investigation of Music Teachers' Professional Visions

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Abstract

Preservice music educators enter teacher education programs with visions of their future largely built on their own past experiences. What happens when these preservice music teachers encounter a present that may look drastically different from the one they expected? During the COVID-19 pandemic, music teachers are encountering disruption to their current practice and may be reconsidering their visions for and expectations about music in their communities, and their identities as musicians and music educators. As one subset of this group, individuals transitioning from preservice to in-service teaching offer distinctive perspectives on how COVID-19 is shaping music teacher visions and expectations.

The aim of this explanatory sequential mixed methods study was to investigate narratives and reflections of music educators engaged in student teaching, seeking their first positions, interviewing, and designing their own curriculum and pedagogy during the COVID-19 pandemic. We specifically attended to how these experiences shaped participants' professional visions, through Hammerness's (2003, 2006, 2015) four dimensions of focus, range, distance, and context. Participants answered survey questions related to demographic information, experiences and activities in which they have engaged, and their professional visions. We subsequently interviewed participants to focus on narratives that contextualized survey findings, selectively transcribed audio recordings, and used transcriptions and researcher notes to discuss and collaboratively identify themes in participants' responses.

Drawing on Cole and Knowles's (2008) conception of arts-informed research and Leavy's (2013, 2020) arts-based frameworks, we used qualitative findings and quantitative results to construct four composite characters as archetypes of preservice music teacher visions: the traditionalist, the u-shaped visionary, the explorer, and the radical progressive. We present a text in which these characters engage through in-person conversations, text/online messaging conversations, group discussions on the Zoom video platform, and social media posts. This text is built around Hammerness's conceptions of focus, range, distance, and context; we invite readers to join in constructing and extrapolating meanings to what might be the new "here and now" of music learning and teaching.

1. Introduction

Preservice music educators enter teacher education programs with visions of their future largely built on their own past experiences. Isbell (2020) surveyed preservice music teachers in the United States, who indicated that "large ensemble rehearsal" was most responsible for their musical development, and considered "learning songs from notation" the most important musical skill or understanding to overall musicianship development. It is logical, then, that a preservice music educator's vision may be focused on conducting a large ensemble in which learners read music from notation, replicating their previous

music education experiences. While numerous critiques and attempted reforms of these practices exist (for example, Allsup and Benedict, 2008; Schmidt and Smith, 2016/2017; Wall, 2018; Weidner, 2015, 2020), beyond compulsory elementary general music, the teacher/conductor/director-led large ensemble remains the dominant model in which United States preservice music teachers engage and aspire to lead following their graduation.

The coronavirus pandemic is troubling the certainty held by many preservice teachers, in-service music teachers, music teacher educators, and collegiate ensemble conductors that performance-based large ensemble models are the future for which prospective teachers should be preparing, and around which preservice music teacher education programs should be designing. While there have been discernible roles for music and musicians during this pandemic—including livestream performances, archival video, and new recordings—the roles of music educators and institutional music education amidst this disruption have been less clear.

Recent documents (for example, College Music Society, 2020; Incorporated Society of Musicians, 2020; National Association for Music Education, 2020) have outlined possibilities for continuing and resuming music instruction. Undoubtedly, ways in which teachers interact with students will also be influenced by government policies, and will be guided by emerging research related to musicking during COVID-19 (for example, Gregson, et al., 2020; He, Gao, Trifonov, and Hong, 2020). These regulations include limitations on numbers of students permitted in a classroom, restrictions on extra-curricular activities (among which music ensembles may be considered in some schools), cancellation of football seasons and marching band competitions, and instructional scenarios including hybrid (for example, students attending school two days per week) and fully online remote learning.

Regardless of how these details play out, the year—or years—ahead are unlikely to accommodate large numbers of students coming together to sing and play music in a large ensemble. This led us to wonder: what happens when preservice music teachers about to enter the field encounter a present drastically different from the one they expected, or that is a radical departure from the future that had been assumed for them in their curriculum? The COVID-19 pandemic appears to be disrupting what preservice teachers, and perhaps other stakeholders, may have expected or assumed about their future. While all music teachers are certainly encountering disturbances to their current practice, individuals transitioning from preservice teaching to in-service teaching can offer a distinctive perspective on how COVID-19 is shaping their visions for and expectations about music in their communities, and their identities as musicians and music educators.

1.2 Professional Vision: A Theoretical Lens

In this study, we employ Hammerness's (2003, 2006, 2015) conception of professional vision as a theoretical lens. Professional visions, Hammerness noted, are "substantial, vivid, and consistent over time" (2003: 3) and depict the practice and settings that teachers work toward. We use Hammerness's dimensions of professional vision—focus, range, distance, and context—in order to attend to the clarity and centeredness of participants' visions (i.e., *focus*), the breadth of foci (i.e., *range*), the proximity of one's vision to one's lived reality (i.e., *distance*), and the specificities of one's living conditions and the settings of one's vision (i.e., *context*).

While Hammerness suggests visions may be "consistent over time," they do grow and develop. This is evident in the face of impactful moments and meaningful experiences, such the cumulative impact of music teacher development and licensure programs (Ankney, 2015), engagement with video examples of in-service teaching (Hourigan, 2006), or experiences with informal musicking in community settings (Rathgeber, Hoyer, McNure, and Stringham, 2019). We consider the disruptive nature of the novel coronavirus pandemic of 2020-2021 to be a context that may impact one's individual professional vision (Hammerness, 2003, 2006, 2015) or their aspirational vision for an entire profession. Teacher development researchers have identified ways in which traumatic experiences shape pre- and in-service

teachers' conceptions of their current and future practice (i.e., their professional visions). Miller and Flint-Stipp (2019) found that preservice educators engaging with students' narratives of childhood trauma provided a context for preservice educators to prepare for meeting learners' often raw needs and for developing their own ability for self-care. Sondel, Baggett, and Dunn (2018) examined how teachers adapted to traumatic contexts such as those following the terror attacks of 9/11, finding teachers adopting socio-emotionally informed practices and driving toward education for critical consciousness. Noppe, Noppe, and Bartell (2007) also explored this specific context, reporting that teachers used a variety of methods in response to this public tragedy (for example, maintaining a sense of routine, focusing on moving forward, directing attention to current news). Context plays a powerful role in shaping one's professional vision. As such, in this study we consider the impact that the context of the COVID-19 pandemic might have on early-career music teachers' visions, attending to participants' experiences of student teaching, securing initial employment, and beginning their professional lives.

1.3 Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed methods study was to investigate narratives and reflections of music educators engaged in student teaching, seeking their first positions, interviewing, and designing their own curriculum and pedagogy during the COVID-19 pandemic. The following research questions guided our inquiry:

1. What are participants' experiences related to student teaching, seeking initial employment, interviewing, and designing their own curriculum and pedagogy amidst COVID-19?
2. How do participants' experiences illustrate dimensions of and/or changes in their professional vision?
3. What information can be gleaned from findings that could help music teacher education programs prepare preservice music educators for challenges that require flexibility, such as a pandemic?

2. Methodology

We used an explanatory sequential mixed methods design (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018) in two interactive phases for this study. First, we collected and analyzed survey data from closed-ended and open-ended survey items. Participants responded to closed- and open-ended survey items soliciting demographic information and reflections on their past, present, and future careers as music teachers. At the conclusion of that survey, we invited participants to take part in semi-structured interviews to expand on their survey responses and reflect on their preservice music teacher education as preparation for becoming music teachers in a time of great uncertainty.

In the second phase of the study, we collected and analyzed qualitative interview data to expand on first-phase results. To analyze data collected in our first phase, we calculated descriptive statistics for closed-ended items. We coded open-ended items to analyze participants' articulated visions (a) at the start of their undergraduate degree, (b) at the start of their student teaching experience, (c) at the time of the study (Summer 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic), and (d) for their future careers. These results were used both to develop interview questions for our study's second phase and to develop composite narratives described below.

We selectively transcribed audio recordings from interviews, and we used these transcriptions along with researcher notes from each interview to discuss and collaboratively identify themes in participants' responses using Hammerness's professional vision framework (2003, 2006, 2015), identifying experiences connected to COVID-19 that appeared to color participants' conceptions of their visions. We combined these findings with quantitative results from our first phase to construct composite characters and related profiles, visions, and experiences in and around COVID-19. These composite characters came about through a process of axial coding (Saldaña, 2015) through which we constructed

four characters as archetypes of preservice music teacher visions along a spectrum: the traditionalist, the u-shaped visionary, the explorer, and the radical progressive.

To further analyze and (re)present data in nuanced and meaningful ways, we share our integrated analysis and interpretation by making use of narrative and arts-informed approaches. Cole and Knowles (2008) noted that arts-informed research provides a “holistic process and rendering that runs counter to more conventional research endeavors that tend to be more linear, sequential, compartmentalized, and distanced from researchers and participants” (67). We drew inspiration from Leavy (2013, 2020), who encouraged scholars to transform data into semi-fictional structures as a means of speaking directly to readers to communicate findings, analysis, and implications in a nuanced and evocative manner. As such, we constructed semi-fictional conversations among the four composite characters in order to render participants’ lived experiences and social realities “palpable” and “comprehensible” (Barone, 1992: 146) and to invite readers to join in the constructive meaning making process (Leavy, 2020). As such, we present data not only in paragraph narratives, but also in the form of text/online messaging conversations, in-person conversations, group discussions on the Zoom video conferencing platform, and social media posts. While we employed some fictional elements, specific events, discussions, and topics referenced within this article did occur.

To enhance trustworthiness, we invited a participant who completed a survey and engaged in a follow-up interview to complete a member check of our findings by reviewing a draft manuscript. Resonant with suggestions by Cole and Knowles (2008) and Leavy (2020), we share findings, analysis, and implications in a holistic manner through the form of “Findings-Analysis-Implications: A Constructed Narrative in Four Scenes.”

3. Findings-Analysis-Implications: A Constructed Narrative in Four Scenes

3.1 Prologue: Overview of Findings and Composite Characters

We invited 30 individuals to participate in our study; these persons were May 2020 graduates of a public university in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States who earned a bachelor of music degree in music education. This university shifted its operations in response to the coronavirus beginning on March 11, 2020, at which point these 30 preservice teachers had just switched to their second of two eight-week student teaching placements in public elementary, middle, and high schools. Twenty-two persons completed our survey, yielding a response rate of 73.3%. These participants represented both instrumental ($n = 14$) and vocal/choral ($n = 7$) degree concentrations. Fourteen participants provided their names and email addresses to indicate willingness to engage in an interview. We interviewed 11 participants. Demographic information for participants appears in Table 1.

We have embedded these demographics along with other data culled from this mixed-method study into composite characters below and throughout their narrative interactions. You find D. Paul Habbit, the traditionalist, longing for a return to band. You engage with Max Diamond, the u-shaped visionary, discussing the expanding and narrowing *range* of their vision. You encounter Cumthia Avion, the explorer, who eagerly finds new opportunities to help her expand her vision. Finally, you meet Paula Flores, the radical progressive, who has put school-based music teaching far behind her as she works to use music learning as a mechanism to generate a more equitable community for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals. We share their biographies below and then follow these characters through numerous scenes where they illustrate findings of this study in nuanced ways.

Table 1. *Participant demographics*

Academic Minor(s)*	None	Honours	Jazz Studies	Music & Human Services	
	18	1	2	2	
State Licensure	Instrumental	Vocal/Choral	Both	None Specified	
	7	5	6	3	
Disability Disclosure	Yes	No	Prefer Not To Say		
	1	19	1		
Race/Ethnicity	White	Black or African American	Hispanic	Asian	Multiple
	16	2	1	1	2
Gender Identity	Female	Male	Gender Variant/Non-Conforming		
	17	3	1		
Sexual Identity	Heterosexual	Bisexual	Queer	Prefer Not To Say	
	18	2	1	1	

*Note: One participant earned two minors, so while there were only 22 participants in our study, this row adds to 23.

D. Paul Habbit (he/him/his) plays the tuba. He grew up in a small rural community in the county that surrounds the university he attended. D. Paul is generally quiet and reserved, and he will typically speak and act in ways that “tow the company line”—although he is known to open up among close friends. D. Paul had a dedicated and beloved high school band director, who is his role model. D. Paul, like many other students in his small, tight-knit community, found a home in the band room. These experiences inspired D. Paul’s pursuits to study music education and become a band director. While D. Paul aspires to stand on a podium and conduct a band, to oversee fruit sales and other fundraising efforts, and to hear “D. Paul Habbit, director” over the public address system when he brings his future students to his alma mater’s annual marching band competition, he is open to teaching other music classes—given adequate

time to prepare—and plans to earn graduate degrees in performance or conducting before eventually teaching at the college level.

Max Diamond (they/them/theirs) is a classical guitarist who identifies as non-binary and comes from a suburban community within an hour’s drive of their university. Max played mellophone as a secondary instrument in their high school marching band, and continued in the university marching band for all four years of their undergraduate program. Many of Max’s social and pedagogical views are progressive; their experiences in this undergraduate music education program afforded them opportunities to engage with marginalized populations and experience how social justice interests might be applied to a career in education. They have been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, something they do not share widely, but which colors their experiences. Max has decided to begin their career teaching elementary general music, but eventually aspires to be a well-regarded high school band director—less because they are interested in teaching in that role, and more because they want their colleagues and students to have a respected non-binary band director as a role model in a field that they see as dominated by “white, hetero, cis-men with over-the-top egos”.

Cumthia Avion (she/her/hers) is a clarinetist from a somewhat affluent oceanfront region along the mid-East coast. Cumthia’s dad is Finnish and her mom is Chinese; she comes from an upper middle class family that combines her dad’s blue collar work ethic with privileged experiences (including six years of private clarinet lessons) afforded by her mother’s work as a consultant. Cumthia was a drum major in her high school marching band and entered undergraduate school hoping to replicate her ensemble performance-based school music education, while harboring a long-shot dream of teaching internationally.

Paula Flores (she/her/hers) is a trumpet player from an exurb area south of her university. Paula is white and identifies as bisexual. She is feisty and sarcastic, and while her background as a musician is similar to that of most of her peers (for example, several years of private classical trumpet lessons, attending a high school with a well-supported music department), Paula’s professional vision has moved entirely out of K-12 public school music education. In her words, “If I had to teach in a public school setting, I would be deeply unhappy.” She is forging a pathway outside of public education in the nonprofit space, providing music experiences to incarcerated persons.

3.2 Scene 1: At the Brewery, Sharing Visions and Identities (In-person dialogue)

At the university D. Paul, Max, Cumthia, and Paula attended, student teachers return for a day of workshops and assessments between their first and second eight-week student teaching placements. After a full day of workshops, we find these four friends hanging out at a local brewery. They unwind and share stories as they eat and drink under the stars on the brewery’s large patio.

- Paula** How do you all feel about your next placement?
- Max** I don’t know, I’ve had a dream of a first placement working with an imaginative music teacher and getting to make music with little ones. I couldn’t have asked for a better experience and it helped me know that I am certain I want to teach elementary general.
- Paula** I went to visit my second co-op during a teacher workday a couple of weeks ago. She’s close to retirement, and it feels like she’s just corralling kids rather than teaching them. She kinda makes fun of them too—they’re really nice kids from a small town and the way she treats them is off putting. What about you, Cumthia?
- Cumthia** I’m feeling a little leery. I’m placed with [experienced band director] and it just doesn’t seem like a good match. His ideas seem so focused on band, band, band.

- D. Paul** Really?!? He's well respected in [state band director association], kind of like my next cooperating teacher. He's one of those older band director types you see at [state music education conference] who just seems to know everything. And clearly he does—they're a 21-time [State] Honor Band.
- Paula** *Seems* seems like the important word there.
- D. Paul** What do you mean?
- Max** Well, those guys both seem like part of the "good ol' boys' club" that just plays poker in the conference hotel during [state music education conference] instead of going to any sessions. There must be *something* at the conference for even someone as experienced as them to learn. I'm not sure that a bunch of middle-aged straight white men really can know everything in a world that's changing so quickly.
- D. Paul** Okay, but don't you look up to them? I mean, when I came into college, I saw myself teaching public school band and becoming someone like them; I kind of still do . . .
- Max** Not me, although I'd love to be a well-known, well-respected, queer high school band director eventually even if just to be representation for people like me. There's pride and joy in being someone that breaks expectations of who can teach band, you know?
- Cumthia** That's really cool, Max. And yeah, Paul, those were the sort of people I looked up to when I started university, but—and nothing against them—being a conductor just doesn't excite me. Max, I think you'll be a great general music teacher, but how do you see yourself getting from there to distinguished band teacher?
- Max** I don't know, I guess, because I don't have anything really set in stone, you know? But who does? I mean, Cumthia, you were over in China last spring on that honors scholarship, and there have been some stories in the news about some sort of crazy virus over there. Everything's shut down. Weren't you expecting to teach in China next year?
- Cumthia** Yeah, that's been my dream for a long time.
- Paula** For how long? Like, did you come to college with that dream?
- Cumthia** I think it was something I always wanted to do, but I didn't necessarily know if it was a possibility. I have a second interview with a school over there in a couple of weeks. They're doing all of their meetings on Zoom because of coronavirus.
- Max** Wait, I feel like we almost need to get our MUED 102 maps out . . . you remember those?
- D. Paul** Yeah. Wasn't that class in the room where we wrote on the walls? The one where we didn't spend enough time talking about classroom management?
- Paula** [eye roll]. Is classroom management even really a thing? What about relationships and connecting? Anyway, I still have my map from that class.
- Max** Me too!
- Cumthia** Yep, but boy does it not match what my map would look like now.
- D. Paul** Really? Mine seems pretty accurate. How has yours changed?

- Max** I wasn't completely sure I wanted to teach music at first, I just was good at playing the guitar. After being in marching band, I was sure that I wanted to be a high school band director and I thought "I am here to learn to teach band." As I took classes and did all those experiences that some people see as "out there," I opened up to more possibilities because I realized I could do more than band. Going into student teaching made me sure that I wanted to teach general music and band, so I kind of returned to my vision, but with a little addition.
- Cumthia** Yeah, I'd say I opened up too. I definitely thought high school band was the road I was going down, but then I started leading ukulele jams and doing that songwriting project with formerly incarcerated men; I guess I just realized music ed could be much more than I ever thought . . .and that maybe teaching in China, or teaching secondary general music, wouldn't be too far-fetched.
- Paula** Well, if you and Max have changed lanes, then I've driven the car completely off the road I guess. I can't imagine what [applied teacher] and [band directors] must say about me. Well, I guess I know—they were never shy about telling me I was wasting my time chasing "unrealistic ideas." Pbbtt, unrealistic to whom? The 80% of kids who don't play in band or orchestra or sing in choir in high school? I'm the one who's starting my own business, designing websites, raising financial support to help facilitate music learning for not just "the other 80%" but also people who are marginalized from society. "Wasting your time" the [music department] folks say—and "How can we support your innovative work?" from just about everyone else.
- D. Paul** Are there jobs for music teachers outside of K-12 settings? Sure, we did those strange community projects, but those aren't real, right? I think I even heard one of our teachers say that projects like that look flashy, but when you dig a little deeper there's nothing there or that it isn't realistic.
- Paula** That teacher is wrong, period.
- Max** Well, if community music education isn't realistic, is a queer band director realistic? There aren't that many "models," but if we are just replicating models, how do we make meaningful change?
- D. Paul** What needs to be changed?
- Cumthia** Well, maybe nothing for you. You're a cis gender, straight male, and—like most students at [university]—you're white, from an upper middle class background, you speak English as your first language, and you don't have any disabilities that I'm aware of. But what about—like [faculty member] always said—the folks who don't have so many poker chips?
- Paula** What about the other 80%, or whatever the statistic is, and what about underserved populations? You don't have to want to teach them, but they might still want a teacher or educational opportunities.
- Max** Yeah—I don't know many people who aren't interested in engaging with music somehow. [University band director] says "kids just aren't into music anymore," and I don't buy that. It might just be that playing or singing in a large ensemble isn't what makes them excited. It might be producing music on their laptop or building their own guitar and writing songs with it.

D. Paul I guess we all just have different “maps.”

Cumthia Maybe different endpoints now, for sure. We all pretty much came in wanting to be band directors.

Paula Look at us now.

The conversation continues through to last call.

Cumthia What do you all think about a group chat to keep this conversation going?

Paula That sounds fantastic!

Max Yes!

D. Paul Sure.

The following week, Max is the first to find out that their student teaching—and the beginning of their career—is about to change.

3.3 Scene 2: COVID-19 Closings Begin (Text Messages)

Cumthia’s phone buzzes with a notification. It’s her group chat with D. Paul, Max, and Paula:

Max:

OMG, C, I just got an email from my co-op and they’re closing schools effective tomorrow wtf?

Paula:

What?!?

D. Paul:

I just got a message from my school too

I haven’t seen anything yet from my district. So what about our licensure?

D. Paul:

I just sent an email to college of ed to ask them what I should do.

A few days later:

Paula:

I went to school ... it was closed

So much for coop communication

Did you all see that email from the Education Support Center?

D. Paul:

Yeah, are we going to be able to teach in the fall

Paula:

idk...will you be able to play tuba with a mask on?

I don't know if anyone knows what the fall might look like, but there are a bunch of positions on the VBODA job board still, for those of you hoping to teach in the states.

D. Paul:

I have a spreadsheet of job openings--i've filled out 9 applications so far. i don't think i have a chance at some of them, but maybe they'll talk with me so i can get some interviewing experience

Max:

Wait, C, what does this all mean for you teaching in China???

I don't know. But, I'll figure out some plan, as long as I can stay healthy.

Paula:

Looks like lots of people might be teaching on Zoom. wanna try it out and chat soon?

The conversation goes dormant for a few days as infections in the states rise while conflicting stories from government officials suggest that COVID-19 will just disappear one day in April. These student teachers did not expect that it would be their student teaching that would disappear in April.

3.4 Scene 3: Changes in Situations, Changes in Visions (Text Messages)

Paula:

Hey, check this. did you know the US is one of the only countries that hasn't signed a treaty to protect children?

D. Paul:

That's random

Max:

Doesn't surprise me.

Where'd you find that, P?

Paula:

A harvard online course on child protection and rights i'm taking. Started off sort of as a way to kill time but turns out to be really relevant, like deciding if kids are gonna go back to school in person anytime soon.

Max:

That's awesome, paula. Leave it to you to be taking class at harvard on top of everything else. . i've been spending a lot of time reading and trying to be ready for job interviews.

D. Paul:

Same here. I've become a top fan on band directors talk shop and keep practicing my conducting in front of the mirror. When that arts supervisor came to campus last year he said part of their interview was to have candidates conduct star spangled banner without making any sounds

Sounds like you'll be ready then. My roommate and I have been giving each other projects to stay sharp. I just finished a project in Ableton.

Max:

Neat. could i get in on that?

Sure--we just use a Google doc to coordinate. I'll send you the link. It's been really good for both of us. I've hardly touched my clarinet. I've just been kinda jaded about practicing after 4 years of music school. I've been doing some listening to clarinet music but that's about it. Just the other day I heard something that I think I might like to learn to play, but not just yet. It's been sort of a slow healing process.

Paula:

I hear you. this pandemic stuff hasnt been fun but having time to do nothing has been a shocking space for release. My bf and i have just been jamming, playing video games, and trying to define what i want out of life (oh, and working once the restaurant opened up...gotta pay my rent)

A few days later . . .

Max:

Anyone else stressed af about jobs

So many applications ... i've applied to like every job around choir, general music, and orchestra and only a few bites

In my last Zoom interview--yuck--i was told that i might not be getting jobs because im "bad at interviewing." i thought id be a strong candidate with my dual instrumental and vocal/choral certification and time in [university marching band]

Paula:

Sounds pretty coded to me

D. Paul:

Coded for what?

Paula:

Coded for anti-queer bias, maybe? on a Zoom call, you can see each other and make judgements on people's appearance, you know?

I personally wouldn't say I'm too stressed, but I'm also not experiencing the same kind of bias that you might be experiencing, Max. Given the nature of applying overseas, I've had Zoom

interviews every month since January, but it was as if the admins were used to it. Maybe this mode of interviewing is bringing out people's biases?

I actually just got the message that I will be teaching in China in a general music-like setting starting next year ... that's up in the air due to the pandemic, I'm sure. Maybe I'll be teaching online from here, or maybe online from there?

Paula:

CONGRATS! 🎉🎉🎉

Max:

Congrats, C im excited for you.

I feel like it is getting late in the game now that summer is here and I

dont want to be homeless 🙄

D. Paul:

Congratulations, Cumthia

I guess I can share that I just got a job, too. 10th interview out of a spreadsheet of applications.

Max:

Way to go! What were the interviews like, paulie?

Congrats, D. Paul!

D. Paul:

I felt like my teaching was never in question since I have that [university] backing the admins seem to accept that I know what to

do.

I've had to conduct the SSB in silence and discuss working with beginners a lot

Lots of questions on classroom management in band, Paula.

Paula:



Max:

Okay then I'll just keep at it I guess

Paula:

If the school allows me to graduate with all the bs going on, im going to keep on with my non-profit working with incarcerated persons...if prisons and the like are even open and safe.

Luckily, all my students have been released to home for their safety

I'm happy for them but i can't teach without students and can't earn a living without teaching

It's tricky being an advocate for changing the criminal justice system while also benefiting from it as it stands ...

That's really thorny, Paula. It makes me think about the trickiness of juggling getting people to work during a pandemic with keeping people healthy.

Max:
and alive!

well who knows what next year will hold... will we be online? will we have jobs? will i?

3.5 Scene 4: Getting Back to Band or Not in the Age of COVID-19 (Text messages to Online dialogue)

D. Paul:
Okay, is anyone else just really wanting to get back to band?

Paula:
I mean, I'm just really wanting to make a living wage right now. But, I guess there's always TRADITION! tradition . . .

D. Paul:
Like it's a bad thing?

Before we get into this, why don't we move over to a Zoom call?

Max:
Yes please!!!!

Join our Cloud HD Video Meeting
us02web.zoom.us



One by one, they all join Cumthia's smiling face on Zoom.

D. Paul Before we get into it, listen, I don't think schools will go back to normal for a long time. It's not safe. Traditional ensembles may not happen this year; it's gonna be a challenge for everybody. If the US doesn't get the virus under control, it will stunt the growth of music education in America. So, it might just be a "blip" in our career if we teach for 30 years, but it's only one of these kids' four years of high school. They remember every single year, so, man, I just want to get back to band; for me and especially for the students.

- Max** I get it, I originally just wanted to do band once I chose music ed, but I realized I kinda had tunnel vision with only seeking band and ensembles. I've been thinking more and more, "do I want to teach an ensemble or do I want to teach music?" So, maybe I want to get back to music, in whatever form it is gonna take right now.
- Paula** Exactly!!! That's what I was sayin' before, y'all. Let's teach music!
- D. Paul** I get it, I could pretty much do anything teaching music-wise. I have the capability to do anything I want, but would want time to prepare. I could figure stuff out; an elementary gig, for example, is just a different type of music. In my high school student teaching placement, I had to teach choir. I mean, it was fun, but also, like, "Oh, god, how is this going to go?" I got through it, but I wasn't prepared—and I hate feeling unprepared.
- Also, I don't have a wife, a pet, or all the tons of worries I had taking over 20 credits in college. It is just me and the job right now, I feel like I can do more—and have a degree at least claiming that I know what I'm doing. But there is still a part of me that wants to get back to band. A big part. Back to something normal. Back to working with kids teaching the thing I've done all my life.
- Paula** What about the things *they've* done all *their* lives?
- Cumthia** Because we're comfortable thinking outside the box, we're comfortable doing whatever we need to do for students to be successful; well, more comfortable now than like four years ago, right?
- In the situation we've been given, tradition is out the door, in my opinion.
- Paula** Can we just leave it outside the door from now on?
- Cumthia** Well, maybe this is a chance to open the door to students as the driving factor of curriculum rather than tradition. I know I thought more seriously about teaching general music because of *my* experiences as a student in a tradition that didn't serve me very well. There was always this narrative about our band experiences making us better people, but it seems like so many of those traditions were more about making us better musicians *for the next performance*. I remember how [college band director] used to ask us what we wanted to play, but then he'd just keep programming what he wanted to program and thought we needed to play to [air quote fingers] "develop as musicians." Same idea in music history classes—they had a prescribed canon that they thought we needed to know. But what about what *I wanted* to know? Or how *I wanted* to develop as a musician? I guess I see my job as an opportunity to give my students what I didn't have.
- Max** Yeah...I remember that nobody really liked that we spent so much time talking about teaching—not practicing doing it—in our first intro to music ed course. We didn't see the point, but I think [faculty] were just forcing us to think outside the box. They'd probably be laughing right now if they could be on this call seeing us *talking* about teaching and thinking outside the box. But those conversations were all about students, and communities, and responsiveness, and flexibility. . .and, well, here we are.
- Paula** Yeah, just trying to be relevant to students *and* trying not to die: that last thing's important too. Oh, and trying to not be responsible for anyone else's illness or death. That would be a load to carry at any stage, especially as a first year teacher.
- Cumthia** Yeah, and I'm sure I'll be teaching kids in Wuhan who have family members—maybe even

parents—who have passed away. This is all just unprecedented; there's so much more than music to talk about, and such an opportunity to rebuild everything that was broken.

- D. Paul** Right, and that's part of my desire to get back to band. Where I got this job, the community is all about band. The school website says, "Come see the band!" There's not much else going on there. I don't really know what I'm getting myself into, but I think now more than ever it's important to keep the students positive and assure them that things are going to be fine. That's a lot harder to do on the screen.
- Paula** I get the importance of what the community wants and needs, D. Paul, and I can appreciate your dedication here.
- Max** Yeah, me too. And I think, Paula, you're coming from a similar place, but it looks really different. I guess where the band tradition is challenging for me is how much it's about norms and conformity and sameness. It works really well if you're—no offense, D. Paul—a white guy who plays the tuba, but what if you're not? I want to come back to band someday and challenge that traditional notion of who a band director is. But, in the meantime, I'm excited that being an elementary general music teacher will bring me into contact with *all* of the students in my school—even if it's only on Canvas, or Moodle, or Blackboard, or Google Classrooms . . . blah, blah, blah . . . to start.
- Cumthia** Well, this certainly brings up the issue of how all of our teaching is going to be shaped by technology, too. It's interesting that as soon as I graduated, music tech stuff is coming into play. Why has my education under-prepared me when this change was coming along?
- D. Paul** Well, we had a class on music technology in our first year. Remember? We made a resource list with a bunch of tools we could use.
- Paula** Yeah . . . a class.
- Max** We had two classes each on teaching brass instruments, woodwind instruments, string instruments, and percussion instruments—and a semester on teaching choir. But how is someone supposed to teach flicking on a bassoon over distance if they can barely understand how to start a Zoom meeting, let alone craft a meaningful, engaging, and creative experience for kiddos to learn brass through, right? Not that I have to worry about that right now, but still.
- Paula** But hang on, I mean, we were introduced to a bunch of things that were technology-based. And I remember developing a recorded lesson for online teaching in elementary general music methods.
- D. Paul** But I didn't take elementary general music methods. And I didn't do any extra minors like you did.
- Paula** Well, that was your choice. You didn't have to do seven semesters playing in the same three ensembles with the same two professors. And yeah, my Jazz Studies and Music and Human Services minors were super valuable in helping me be a more flexible musician and a more responsive teacher. I don't regret that extra work at all. But even in our required foundations sequence and in beginning instrumental methods we were doing stuff with technology. Remember our Bandhub project? Or that time we had to peer teach an instrumental ensemble that had iPads and someone playing LittleBits? And we all made those portfolios—I have some bones to pick with online portfolios, but we did learn about how to do basic internet stuff, have a website, things like that.

- Max** Maybe the point is that we did experience that stuff, but it might not have made sense because it didn't fit in with our vision of what music teaching—of being a band director—was and could be. We didn't have the context to make sense out of it, despite what some of our professors said.
- Paula** And despite what some of our *other* professors said was not realistic [air quote fingers] “if you dig a little deeper” [eye roll].
- Cumthia** Well, we're all learning now . . . Wait, I have an idea, a challenge for us all. What if we all think about what this next year will look like and what our profession will look like in the future. Maybe write or share something and then get some more people to chat with us.
- Paula** I smell a research project . . .
- Cumthia** Maybe, but also, this could be a really interesting way to start a dialogue, to get others into the conversation. Everyone could share however they want, but we could create a hashtag?
- Paula** #burnitdownmusiced?
- Cumthia** No, maybe not so militant.
- Max** #bringbackband?
- D. Paul** [eye roll] I guess I should reactivate that Twitter account I had to create for music technology class.
- Max** #imissbandanditeachgeneralmusic
- Cumthia** How about something broader? What do you think about #covidmusiclearning? Share your stuff on whatever platform you want and use that hashtag; I'll find some kind of aggregator so I can grab your posts off of different social media platforms.

4. Considerations

We constructed the preceding narrative to illustrate participants' experiences student teaching and job seeking during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Spring 2020. It may be surprising, in context of this pandemic, that participants' specific health and anxiety concerns appear minimized in the narrative. While participants discussed anxiety, much of that anxiety was specifically related to finishing college and seeking employment. With very few exceptions, participants did not share profound concerns over their health and wellness. Instead, they discussed “free time” not usually afforded them during the courses of an overly-packed semester of music performance courses and music teacher education requirements. For some participants, this provided space to find a sense of one's self or chances to (re)construct one's self in relation to music learning and teaching. In addition, participants described how their music teacher education coursework—and, particularly, the backdrop of a global pandemic—shaped, more or less, their professional visions. Below, we draw on Hammerness's (2003, 2015, 2016) notion of professional vision as an analytic heuristic to make meaning out of what it was for participants to be in the process of student teaching and obtaining a first position as a music teacher during COVID-19. We tease out embedded themes of meaning from the narrative and consider to what extent, if any, living, learning, and teaching during this pandemic has impacted their *focus* (i.e., “the distinctness or clarity of vision”; Hammerness, 2003: 45), *range* (i.e., “scope or extent of focus”; Hammerness, 2003: 45), *distance* (i.e., proximity of current practice to personal vision), and *context* (i.e., milieu in which one's vision plays out; Hammerness, 2015). While narratives presented above address our research

questions, we explicitly frame our discussion through each of these research questions in the following sections below:

1. What are participants' experiences related to student teaching, seeking initial employment, interviewing, and designing their own curriculum and pedagogy amidst COVID-19? (*Considering Experiences*)
2. How do participants' experiences illustrate dimensions of and/or changes in their professional vision? (*Considering Visions*)
3. What information can be gleaned from findings that could help music teacher education programs prepare preservice music educators for the challenges that require flexibility, such as a pandemic? (*Considering Implications*)

Through composite narratives above, we have attempted to illustrate not only how participants experienced the onset of the COVID19 pandemic, but also ways in which their experiences may have shaped their professional visions. We presented these narratives from professional (i.e., their career now, and what it might be in the long term) and aspirational (i.e., what the profession can and should be, now and in the future) visions. Below, we discuss ways that COVID-19 and pandemic experiences touched each composite character's professional visions through *focus*, *range*, *distance*, and *context*.

4.1 Considering Experiences

In many ways, participants' experiences in student teaching, seeking initial employment, interviewing, and designing curriculum and pedagogy were not atypical. Participants experienced varying levels of connection and philosophical agreement with cooperating teachers, and some sought very specific positions in geographical areas, grade levels, and music specializations. Some were hired quickly, while others struggled with interviewing; some had enjoyed consistent communication with colleagues and administrators, while others felt in the dark. While our composite characters' experiences were different, they did not seem to us—based on our own experiences as preservice teachers, in-service teachers, and music teacher educators—to be abnormal.

Yet, these common experiences were situated in a quite unusual *context* of a pandemic. Preservice teachers typically complete their student teaching amidst evening and weekend commitments to ensemble contests and assessment events, continued engagement with activities on their university campus, vacations, summer travel, and social opportunities. Instead, these participants were student teaching virtually—if their cooperating teacher remained engaged with them—and navigating travel cancellations, emergency teaching licensure directives from the state education department, and a lot of extra time. How participants used this unexpected time differed among them may be reflective of their visions discussed above. Cumthia used some time to recover from being “jaded about practicing after four years of music school” and “stay sharp” by completing projects with a roommate (for example, developing advanced DAW skills). Paula enrolled in an online course on child welfare, which she initially described as “an attempt to kill time,” and reported engaging in other activities which may reflect not only the *range* of her vision as a music teacher but also her broad interests (for example, jamming, video games). D. Paul's reported activities (i.e., practicing conducting and engaging heavily with band director groups on social media) aligns with his *focus* on teaching in the specific *context* of wind and percussion ensembles.

4.2 Considering Visions

Now that we have outlined some of the key types of experiences participants had, we can tease out how these experiences may or may not have impacted participants'—in the form of the composite characters—visions. It is important to note that, as with any individual factor, it is nearly impossible to pinpoint the extent to which participants' pandemic experiences have solely or primarily impacted their professional visions. These educators have been building and altering their visions since well before they

entered a music teacher education and licensure program, and we acknowledge that there is always far more at play than can be accounted for when considering professional vision development. Within our composite characters' narratives, we find four distinct visions and vision development pathways.

For D. Paul Habbit, the traditionalist, we see what might be considered more “traditional” visions rooted in what Stauffer (2016) identified as the core narrative of music education for the general public, inextricably tied to large ensemble performance. D. Paul's vision has changed little from when he entered university, with the same primary *focus* on teaching band; he even makes it clear that he longs to “get back to band” as soon as possible. The clarity and relative stability of this *focus* might be seen as a triumph of an enculturation-based teacher education in which preservice educators learn tools, practices, and language of the field as commonly practiced in schools. Beyond enculturation, however, the *range* of D. Paul's vision appears to have been expanded by his music teacher education program as he noted confidence in teaching beyond band (for example, choir) more than before. And with regard to *distance*, he was very close to enacting his vision upon securing a position as a band director in a public school. We might suggest that COVID-19 has had little impact on D. Paul's professional vision and, perhaps, the *context* of not being able to take part in and teach band—as the *focus* of his vision—may strengthen his resolve as he looks forward to his professional life as a band teacher post-COVID-19.

Max Diamond, the u-shaped visionary, presents two tiers of vision, separated by *distance*. First, Max presents a vision of being a broad music educator who can and does teach generally in any professional *context* within which they find themselves; this vision had limited *distance*, though this *distance* grew as interviews came and passed without securing a position. Second, Max shared a long term vision of returning to teaching band, as they initially envisioned when they decided to pursue music education as a field, in order to counter the common view of band directors as being, as one participant noted, “all white, hetero, cis-men” and to become a representative of band directors—specifically looked-up-to high school directors—who was a queer, non-binary person. Overall, Max's visions demonstrate a broad *range* of what it might mean for them to be a music educator and ability to see themselves enacting their vision in numerous *contexts*. Interestingly, their vision development is almost diamond-shaped in that they came into their undergraduate program with a well-defined, narrowly-situated vision of being a band director. This vision opened up to other options and settings throughout their time in courses but then narrowed back down, specifically with regard for their personal vision, as they sought employment. The pandemic, perhaps, has had some impact as they encountered difficulties securing a desired job due to online interviews, which may not have allowed them to present their authentic self as well as they would have hoped. In addition, as they came into shorter *distance* from teaching, their visions may have narrowed as a means of facing the uncertainty of the moment. Rather than facing the uncertainty of a blurry, broad-ranged vision, while also in an uncertain time for teaching—and living more generally—Max may have moved to diminish uncertainty as a survival mechanism.

Cumthia Avoin's professional vision is highly tied to her aspirational vision for the field of music education. She, as an explorer, sought to work with broad populations focusing on creative aspects of music learning and making, specifically working with a population that she identifies as being in need of such opportunities and which resonates with her personal identity and ethnic heritage. The *focus* of her vision has been relatively developed and stable for much of her undergraduate music teacher education, perhaps solidified through a summer experience enacting and refining her vision as a general music educator in China focused on songwriting, identity, and storytelling. While her vision is rather specific, she demonstrates a broad *range* of what she could do in the future. Yet, the *distance* of her vision coming to fruition after the long process of securing a job overseas may obscure this breadth. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the *context* of the pandemic has caused Cumthia a fair deal of stress and, as some participants noted, near existential dread toward what their visions and lived realities might be. From a development perspective, Cumthia's vision has been broadened, overall, specifically as she has put considerable research and thought into what she would not only want for her personal teaching career, but also for the field of music as a whole.

Paula Flores, the radical progressive, more than the other composite characters, shares a vision that is solely personal, as she seeks to leave school-based music education behind in order to be an activist-entrepreneur-teacher. Her vision is fairly blurry from a personal level, but finely developed from an aspirational perspective: she wishes to challenge the criminal justice system and policies of incarceration through a very Frierean type of critical pedagogy-based music education. The only definition of her personal vision is rooted in what she had been doing up until the point when she was stopped from teaching due to changes in incarceration policies amidst the pandemic: policies that impacted her livelihood, but that she saw as beneficial for the learners with whom she worked. Aspirationally, though, her vision is well defined within a mission to be a positive change agent for marginalized persons in and through making and creating music. The *distance* between Paula's personal vision and her enactment of that vision was only measurable in what might happen next, given that she was already seeing her vision play out. The *context* of COVID-19 has pushed her to think more aspirationally about what music teaching and learning should look like in prisons and detention centers, and perhaps in other places. Paula's vision development was perhaps most impacted by her music teacher education coursework and, specifically, her field experiences with marginalized populations as she moved from a narrow vision of being a specific kind of band director—replicating the model of her own high school experiences—toward a “#burnitdown and start again” vision in which an ethic of social justice is perhaps the most defining feature, rather than any set *focus*. She appeared to have welcomed the opportunity to rest and be with herself in her thoughts that the *context* of COVID-19 closures brought, even if the pandemic put her livelihood on hold and extended the *distance* between her vision and her lived reality.

4.3 Considering Implications

In figures 1 – 4, we share implications for practice in the form of an asynchronous conversation between envisioned “journal” entries from the composite characters shared via their social media discussion using #covidmusiclearning and our editorial voices as scholar-teachers. While we do share seemingly “new” data in this concluding section—a research manuscript sin, for sure—we do so to summarize and catalyze ideas from the participants and embedded within the constructed narrative above. In doing so, we playfully trouble the certainty of expected research norms (for example, Clandinin, 2009; Leavy, 2020) and encourage readers to become part of the extended discussion as active meaning makers.

5. Epilogue

The composite characters have shared their reflections above and, through each, make suggestions about their practices, much of which music teacher educators ought to closely consider as implications for music teacher education practice. Buried within these posts you will find directly and indirectly the following broad implications, many of which resonate with the suggestions of Noppe, et al. (2007):

- Additional and meaningful work using technology for music creation, instruction, and general connection;
- Time and space to think and find oneself, time not filled with assignments or practicing;
- Experiences finding and saving resources tied specifically to different contexts;
- Exercises considering and using different practices and tools with different populations and in different contexts, including for teaching online;
- Curricular opportunities to develop musical and pedagogical flexibility beyond conservatory-based skills, knowledges, and roles;
- Addressing students' burnout from and/or frustrations with applied music elements of their degree program and engaging in advocacy work on their behalf; and
- Developing pathways to acknowledge and support students whose visions have *focus* and/or *range* outside of nominal concentration tracks (e.g., instrumental, vocal/choral) and advocating that state education departments broaden certification categories.

Figure 1. D. Paul Habitt's Facebook post.

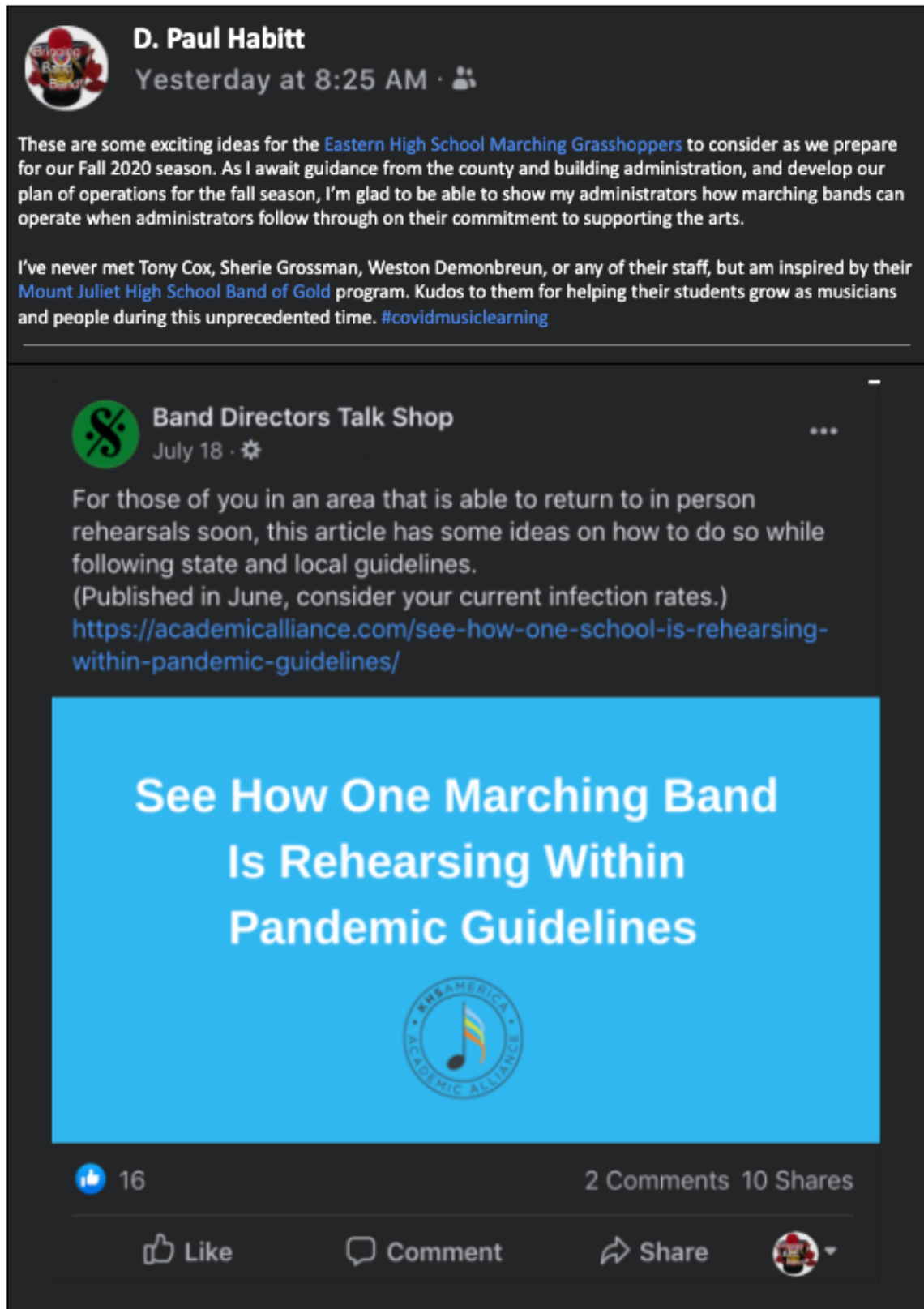


Figure 2. *Max Diamond's Tweet.*



Figure 3. *Paula's Instagram post.*

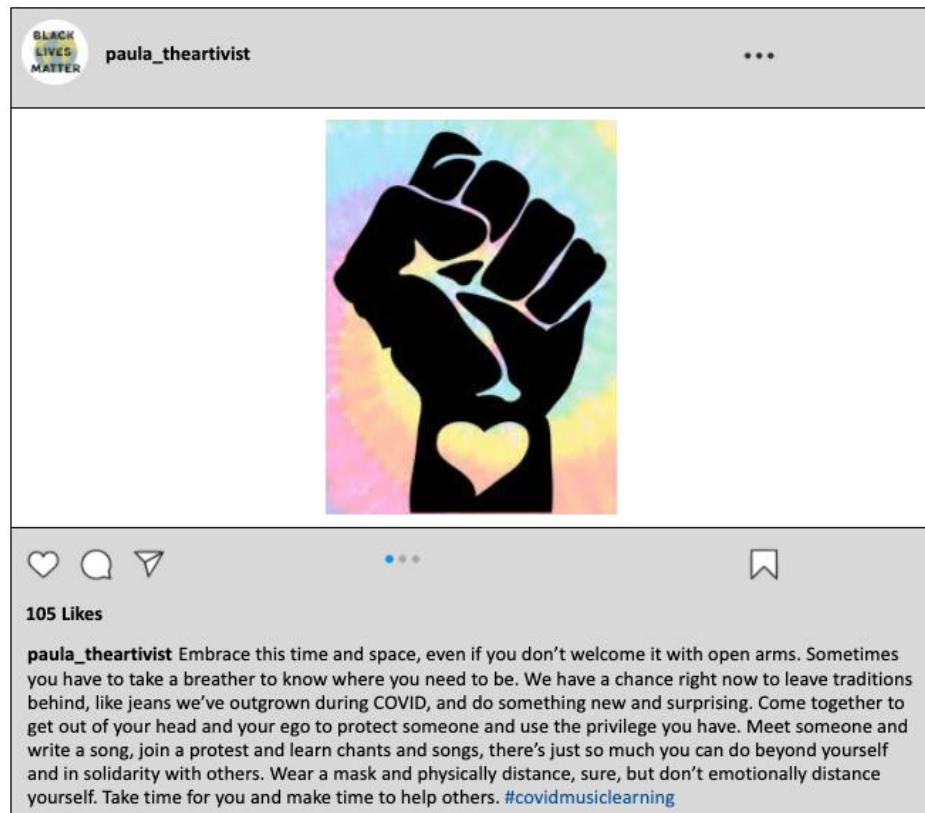


Figure 4. *Cumthia's blog post.*

Wednesday, July 17, 2020

#covidmusiclearning

By Cumthia Avion

Ni Hao,

I've been writing more lyrics now since I have the time. Here's something I've been working on that gets to my experiences right now:

I've wanted to give up
But there's nowhere else to go
I've wanted to fly away
But no plane will take me where I want to go

I've wanted to find myself
But I was already sitting here waiting for me
I've wanted to find find you
But you were already waiting out there for me

Here's my latest update! As you could probably tell from my lyrics, I've been a little bit melancholic with all that is going on. I've always been someone that is laser focused on my goals, even if those goals shift or expand overtime. From being a band director, to being a general music teacher, to being a general music teacher in China, whatever I set my mind to, I was headed straight toward that goal. All seemed to be set for me to work fully toward my most recent goal: one online interview after another (online because of time difference since the pandemic wasn't really a pandemic in January 2020, I guess). Then, their school is closed down, then our school is shut down, and then we are here—sitting in a pandemic, on hold.

It all got me down, but then I found challenges to give myself (and a few friends), I found causes to serve, and I found a little space to think about my future. I stopped comparing myself to others, which is something that's been core to my personality. I gave myself permission to do nothing, just sit, do what I want to do. I remembered that my family is healthy, I'm healthy (although worrying about our health has taken a toll on my mental state), my parents have jobs, and I have a job . . . well, I will when I can fly again safely. So, I'm finding time to find me.

Along with this, I've felt a need to educate myself about George Floyd, Bryonna Tylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and Black Lives Matter. There is a sense of urgency to learn, to listen, to stand up, and to find ways to make life—especially education broadly and music education specifically—a more equitable, inclusive, and empathetic world. So, no small task. I guess this is something new to focus on right now.

Well, I'll close out by saying that even though everything is really dark right now, I feel blessed to be here to grow and serve. Thank you, dear God, for all you do. All of those who can serve are blessed to be present to meet *this* challenge in *this* context.

I'll leave you with the hook I wrote for the song at the top. I hope you enjoy it and God bless:

Come and go
The seasons come and go.
Rest and slow
We find time to come and go

Love,
Cumthia

#covidmusiclearning

As we noted earlier, none of the participants dwelled on issues of health and wellness, as we certainly expected given the *context* of COVID-19. Further, none of the participants felt at a loss for how they could progress as a musician, learner, and teacher through adaptation to the *context*. The Traditionalist, D. Paul, said that he could be flexible in his practice (i.e., teach choir with an opportunity to prepare) during a time of great uncertainty. Perhaps this was due, in part, to the fact that the degree program in which he and the other participants developed was full of forced opportunities to deal with the unexpected, times when they were dumped in the deep end in a pursuit to meet the university's prioritization of community and civic engagement. Due to this preparation, perhaps COVID-19 was just another new adventure for them, or perhaps they felt capable to confront the pandemic in this way, even while their lives were seemingly on hold and challenged by shifting *contexts*. Perhaps just as preservice

music teachers' visions were impacted by specific curricular experiences and the cumulative nature of preservice music teacher preparation (for example, Ankney, 2015; Hourigan, 2006; Rathgeber, et al., 2019) and how the practices and beings of teachers were shaped by the trauma of post-9/11 (for example, Sondel, et al., 2018), COVID-19 will be another important factor in shaping long-term visions of student teachers and early-career music educators, whose full implications, much like "Becoming Music Teachers: Four Scenes," are still on the horizon beyond the culmination of this pandemic.

As we conclude this article, we turn our research questions around to you, the reader. What are your experiences with COVID-19? How is COVID-19 impacting your professional vision? What implications might your answers to these questions have for music teacher education and, broadly, music education, during this time of disruption? We invite you to join the conversation on your preferred social media platform using #covidmusiclearning.

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