

## **Beginning Music Teacher Induction and the Attainment of Micropolitical Literacy**

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Numerous studies in music education have documented problems and concerns of beginning music teachers (Barnes, 2012; Conway, 2001, 2012; Conway & Christensen, 2006; Conway, Micheel-Mays, & Micheel-Mays, 2005; Conway & Zerman, 2004; DeLorenzo, 1992; Jones, 1978; Krueger, 1996; Roulston, Legette, & Womak, 2005; Schmidt & Canser, 2006). Some of these researchers state that they are studying “induction.” Feiman-Nemser, Schwille, Carver and Yusko (1999) suggest there are varied definitions of the term induction. One definition they suggest is as a label for the stage or phase of teacher development that occurs during the first years of teaching. Feiman-Nemser et. al suggest that researchers working within this definition of induction “tend to emphasize the self-defined problems and concerns of beginning teachers rather than the central tasks of learning to teach” (p. 4). The music education research has primarily emphasized these self-defined issues. It may be, as Feiman-Nemser et. al suggests, that even with this solid body of research on music teacher challenges, that music educators still know very little about the “central tasks of learning to teach.”

Critical examination of the music education studies suggest there are many unanswered questions about why beginning music teachers have the experiences they do. For example, the purpose of Conway, Micheel-Mays, and Micheel-Mays (2005) was to compare perceptions about teaching and the teaching lives of both a student teacher (Lindsey) and a first year teacher (Cory)

working in two different music classroom settings. The report included just those issues and struggles that emerged as common for both the student teacher and the first year teacher. One of the key themes was described as “silencing” of the beginning teacher. Collectively, Conway, Micheel-Mays and Micheel-Mays reported on feeling “silenced” by a co-operating teacher, by other teachers in the school building, by other music teachers, by administrators and by parents. After our recent consideration of the micropolitics literature described below, we began to wonder about the interaction of micropolitics and beginning teacher experiences such as these.

In the most recent study of music teacher induction (Conway, 2012), experienced teachers reflect back on their beginning teaching experiences. A key theme in the study was that participant teachers (in their 11<sup>th</sup> year of teaching) felt as if they “understood schools” better now than they did as beginning teachers (p. 71). In examining what it was that they “understood” it appears as if they now understood that schools are complex places and the music program is not and cannot always be the first concern for administrators and other stakeholders (communities, parents, etc.).

Our study of beginning teachers and their navigation of the political and contextual environment of their schools is in direct response to this finding from Conway (2012). We were curious to uncover more details regarding this “understanding schools” notion so that we might better be able to infer how that relates to the “central tasks of learning to teach” (Feiman-Nemser et. al, 1999) as discussed above.

### **Micro-Political Literacy**

Iannaccone (1975) was the earliest scholar to apply the idea of micropolitics to public schools referring to it as: “... the interaction and political ideologies of social systems of teachers, administrators and pupils within the school buildings” (p. 43). Since that time several other

researchers have further developed the concepts of micropolitics (Ball, 1987; Blasé, 1991). Blasé (1991) suggests:

Micropolitics refers to the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organizations. In large part, political actions result from perceived differences between individuals and groups, coupled with the motivation to use power to influence and/or protect. Although such actions are consciously motivated, any action, consciously or unconsciously motivated, may have political “significance” in a given situation. Both cooperative and conflictive actions and processes are part of the realm of micropolitics. Moreover, macro- and micropolitical factors frequently interact (p. 11).

Researchers who study beginning teachers discuss micropolitical literacy (Curry, Jaxon, Russell, Callahan, & Bicals, 2008; Ginsberg, 1995; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a/b). Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002 a/b) define micro-political literacy as the “capacity to understand, navigate and influence the micro-political realities of schools” (p.?). Micropolitic realities include the challenges associated with engaging “proactively with colleagues, administrators, parents as well as the wider community (Curry et. al, p. 661). Curry, et. al (2008) suggest that micropolitical literacy is “necessary in order for beginning teachers to effectively contribute to school reform or advance transformative, critical visions of education” (p. 660). Achinstein (2006) uses the terms micropolitical literacy and political literacy interchangeably. She suggests: Micropolitics, as highlighted in the research, refers to the political negotiations within the day-to-day life of schools – the intraorganizational processes (Achinstein, 2002; Ball, 1987; Blasé, 1991). Since some of the micropolitics of mentors’ and new teachers’ experiences interact with macropolitical contexts (such as educational policies at the district, state, or even federal level) I use the more inclusive term political literacy for this chapter (pp. 149-150).

We used both terms in interviewing our participants as well.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to examine how four beginning music teachers attain micropolitical literacy. Research questions included: (a) How do the participant music teachers describe their first year of music teaching in relation to the political and contextual environment of their school(s)?; b) How do the participants describe their strategies used to navigate the political and contextual environment?; and (c) How do building-level administrators perceive the beginning teacher's process in striving for micropolitical literacy?

### **Method**

#### **Phenomenological Interview Design**

Seidman (2012) suggests that: "Interviewing, then, is a basic mode of inquiry" (p. 8). He goes on to discuss that for researchers in education interviewing can be a "method":

The primary way a researcher can investigate an educational organization, institution, or process is through the experience of the individual people, the "others" who make up the organization or carry out the process...So much research is done on schooling in the United States, yet so little of it is based on studies involving the perspective of the students, teachers, administrators, counselors, special subject teachers, nurses, psychologists, cafeteria workers, secretaries, school crossing guards, bus drivers, parents, and school committee members, whose individual and collective experience constitutes schooling. (p. 9)

Our study examines the micropolitics of the school workplace and in order to understand the experiences of the beginning music teachers in these workplace settings we viewed interview as the primary source of data.

Seidman suggests that interview research supports four phenomenological themes (Van Manen, 1990). We present these four themes and then relate them to our design. Theme one is the “Temporal and Transitory Nature of Human Experience” (p. 16). We were interested in documenting the experiences of beginning music teachers regarding the micropolitical environment of their schools and we wanted to focus on the meanings that these four teachers made from that experience. Next, Seidman suggests that phenomenological interviewing focuses on subjective understanding. We asked our participants to reconstruct their experiences in the schools and we worked to honor their voice and point of view in the documentation of the story and experience.

The third element of phenomenological interviewing is the focus on the “lived experience.” The three interview series described below helps the research to capture the experiences of participants across time. Finally, the last element addresses understanding meaning in context. As will be discussed in the sampling section, our previous associations and rapport with participants helped us to put their first year teaching experiences in a larger context for better understanding.

**Three-interview series.** Seidman has developed a model for phenomenological interviews that fit our study purpose. He suggests a series of three interviews over the time of data collection. Since we were particularly interested in what we are calling the “attainment” of micro-political literacy, or, how beginning teachers learn to navigate their contexts over the first year, we felt that the Seidman three-stage phenomenological interview design was a natural fit for our questions. The details of each interview are presented in the procedures sections below. An interview protocol appears in Appendix A.

## **Sampling**

The four participants were purposefully chosen to represent different music teaching contexts. Another consideration was to find teachers with an already established rapport with the research Institution and/or the researchers. It could be considered sensitive to speak with researchers about challenges faced in the early years so we purposely chose participants who were familiar with at least one of the researchers so that an element of trust and rapport was already present in the interviewer-interviewee relationship.

Eric was in his first year of teaching 6th-8<sup>th</sup> grade band. Details of the schools sites for each participant appear in Appendix B. Marie was in her first year teaching K-5 general music. Nick was teaching high school band and orchestra and although he was in his second year of teaching, this was his first year in this position at this school. Finally, Trevor was teaching high school band as paraprofessional (staff contract and not a teacher contract).

### **Procedures and Data Collection**

The Seidman first interview (focused life history) was modified for this study and some of that information was collected via email in January 2013<sup>1</sup>. The email interview sent to participants appears in Appendix A. In February 2013, Jared observed each of the four teachers in their schools and conducted a 30-minute interview at the end of the observation (see Appendix C for protocol). Her recorded field notes for the observation. The February interview focused on what Seidman refers to as the “Details of the Experience” (p. 21). A final individual interview was held in May 2013 and a focus group interview with all four teachers was held in June (see Appendix D). These data collections points offered what Seidman refers to as the “reflection on the meaning” (p. 22).

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During the May 2013 individual interview Jared interviewed a building level administrator in each of the four schools (see Appendix ?? for protocol). An additional secondary data set included researcher logs (two separate logs, one for each researcher) of all communication with the participants including phone, email, and informal meeting interactions.

### **Analysis**

The two co-authors as well as an assistant from the University's Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program examined the initial email survey and each made suggestions for follow-up topics in the interviews. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Jared did the first coding of the first interview and then he and I were involved in joint coding and discussion. The same process was followed for the second interview and focus group interview transcripts. After all data had been coded another researcher who was studying micropolitics in a different context was used as an external auditor who examined and verified the data and the findings.

### **Trustworthiness**

Both researchers were experienced music teachers who had carefully studied the micropolitical literature previous to data collection. This past experience gave us the necessary investigator expertise (Merriam, 2009) to be credible data collection and analysis tools for this investigation. In addition this past experience gave Jared the rapport skills needed to be successful in data collection. Findings were shared with participants as a version of member check. Triangulation occurred between the initial survey, individual interviews one and two, the observation and the focus group data. The external auditor that was used provided an additional source of trustworthiness.

### **Preliminary Findings**

#### **Emerging themes of Beginning Instrumental Music Teachers:**

1. Feel silenced in school or program policy decision-making.

Trevor: “Yeah, I mean I’ve silenced myself, I’ve pre silenced myself as much as she has [choir director] silenced me. Yeah I’m going to pick my battles.”

2. Value administrator support with related to community relations.

Eric: “She [the administrator] is really supportive; she likes what I am doing. She is happy to see the changes in the band room compared to previous years.”

3. Described various issues with professional development.

Nick: “...there were times where all the other core classes would go off and have departmental developmental days and then we would be told to go to the music area and talk about our curriculum, which basically consisted of us talking to each other about whatever.”

4. Describe perceptions of positive collegial interactions being important to success in teaching.

Eric: “We have lunch everyday because she [orchestra director] had this job, she has been logistically a huge help and even with some repertoire suggestions... we get along, very honestly, genuinely is the word.”

### **Intersection of micropolitical literacy and Beginning Instrumental Music Teachers**

An intersection has been revealed to exist between Beginning Instrumental Music Teachers and:

- administrators; fine arts coordinators
- instrumental music and other music teacher colleagues
- building-and district-level teachers
- students, parents, and community stakeholders

## Appendix A

### **Email Interview – Collected in January**

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. How long have you taught in this school?
3. Describe your teaching schedule.
4. Where did you do undergrad. and/or masters and in what (i.e. music education, performance, primary instrument is what?)
5. What do you consider to be your biggest sources of pride in your music program?
6. What are some of the biggest challenges you feel you face in your music program?
7. What are you currently working on in your own teaching practice?
8. What are some of the facilitating and inhibiting factors in improving what you are working on?

Appendix B

Participant School Sites

	S	N	CC	H
# of Students in School	1209	1929	464	1120
Free Lunch Eligible	85	136	437	78
Reduced-Price Lunch Eligible	8	35	8	22

	S	N	D	M
Population in 2011	20,108	55,238	711,700	24,740
+/- since 2000	+4.2%	+16.6%	-25.2%	
Median Resident age	41.1	39.1	34.8	41.9
Median Household Income in 2009	\$93,992	\$71,796	\$26,098	\$71,861
+/-since 2000	+13,131	-\$122	-\$3,431	
Median house/condo value in 2009	\$338,434	\$231,454	\$67,000	\$214,439
+/-since 2000		+\$16,854	+\$4,200	
Predominant Races	90.7% White	75% White 15.9% Asian, 8.1% Black 3.0% Hispanic	82.2% Black 7.8% White 6.8% Hispanic	85.6% White 3.9% Black 2.3% Hispanic
Population over 25 years of age	97% - HSD 67.1% - BAD	94% - HSD 49.1% - BAD 2.2% - Unemp	69.6% - HSD 11.0% - BAD 13.8% - Unemp	NR
Crime Index	116.1	112.9	1026.0	245

**State of Michigan Averages:**

Median age of 45.5 years for the MI resident  
 Median household income in MI is \$45,255  
 MI's estimated median house/condo value was \$132,200  
 U.S. average crime index = 319.1 (higher means more crime)

**State of Ohio Averages:**

Median age of 38.6 years of age for the OH  
 Median household income in OH is \$46,563  
 OH's est. median house/condo \$136,700

Appendix C

**February Interview (The Details of Experience)**

**May/June Interview (Reflection on the Meaning)**

**Focus Group Interview (Reflection on the Meaning)**

Principal Interview Protocol

Appendix D

Focus Group Interview

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