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Ethics and Leadership in Music Education

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Abstract

Teachers face moral and ethical dilemmas and decisions on a daily basis. Yet, they are expected to make difficult and sometimes uneducated decisions between competing ethical demands. This study aims to determine the quality of ethics education in undergraduate music education curriculum to determine how best to teach pre-service educators to be ethical and ultimately effective leaders. This study was conducted through use of a survey. The survey was sent to 467 current PCMEA members and 25 Music Education Coordinators. Survey responses indicated that ethics education varied drastically between programs, leaving some students unprepared to make ethical decisions within the profession of music education. Furthermore, there is a discrepancy between what Music Education Coordinators reported to be teaching and what students felt they had learned. As such, it is the author's contention that a reevaluation of ethics-related curriculum in pre-service music education programs takes place in order to produce ethical and prepared future music educators.

Purpose

The following research aimed to determine if current curriculum offered to pre-service music education majors prepares them to be ethical and prepared future music educators through 1) Analyzing current curriculums in undergraduate music education programs, 2) examining the relationship between pre-service educators' self-perceived ethical awareness in relation to their actual ethics education during their pre-service studies, and 3) determine whether Music Education coordinators feel as though they are preparing their students to be ethical in the classroom.

Professional Ethics

In its Preamble, the National Education Association (NEA) believes that the education profession "consists of one education workforce serving the needs of all students" and defines an ethical educator as an individual who "recognizes the supreme importance of the pursuit of truth, devotion to excellent, and the nurture of the democratic principles...the educator accepts the responsibility to adhere to the highest ethical standards (NEA, 1975)." The "highest ethical standards" are further defined throughout the NEA's Code of Ethics and are achieved through both a Commitment to the Student and a Commitment to the Profession. For the purposes of this study, "ethics education" was defined as any portion of a course that had focus on ethics, morality, or values in teaching.

Methods

The survey was sent to all 467 current PCMEA members. Of those, roughly 24% (111) members completed the survey. The survey was also sent to 25 Music Education coordinators and 15 completed the survey. The participation link for the survey was sent on 3 separate occasions over the course of one month. To collect data, a three-part, 46 item survey was created and housed on the online survey platform Qualtrics. The survey was designed for two participant groups: pre-service music education students who are currently enrolled in their undergraduate studies in music education at Pennsylvania universities and Music Education Coordinators from the same programs. The rationale for aiming the focus at such a group was to measure student understanding of ethical values through analyzing their program's curriculum. Parts One and Two of the survey were for students. Part Three was for Music Education Coordinators.

One of the aims of this study was to analyze the curriculums of statewide undergraduate Music Education programs. An important aspect of ethics education is the opportunity for students to enroll in an introductory-level Music Education course. Ideally, this course would outline the teaching profession, including professional expectations and ethics, as well as introduce the very basics of teaching, educational history, curriculum, etc. Data from the research demonstrates that such courses do exist. The majority the participants (94) indicated that they were either currently or have previously been enrolled in an introductory level Music Education course (see Figure 1). The remaining 12 participants either have not enrolled in such a course, or do not have the opportunity to enroll in such a course. This data suggests that there is a foundation for ethical education in the pre-service teacher education. However, follow up questions suggest that the curriculum does not always build upon this foundation.

Firstly, of the 94 respondents who indicated "yes," 39 completed or enrolled in the course in their first year. 40 indicated that this course took place later in their studies, meaning that they lost a year of potentially valuable ethics instruction. Furthermore, the courses that participants indicated as being "introductory" do not necessarily appear to involve significant ethics education. For example, while 80.23% completed a course with a title such as "Introduction to Music Education," roughly 20% of students considered courses such as Music History or Instrumental conducting to be their first glimpse at Music Education (see Figure 2).

While the research did not seek the specific curriculum of these individual classes, general trends in current curriculum make it possible to assume that these are not the types of courses that are laying the foundation for ethical awareness.

that some students are aware that their course curriculum isn't providing them with adequate ethics education (see Figure 3). While 59 participants Strongly Agree or Agree with the statement that their curriculum has allowed them to discuss, review, and/or receive assignments focused on ethical responsibilities, 21 students do not. While the survey was anonymous and therefore does not link participant responses, questions can be raised about whether students who disagree with the above statement are also the students who suggested that their introductory level Music Education courses were Music History or Conducting courses.

Figure 3. Graph representing students' responses to the question: "Within your music education curriculum, have you discussed, reviewed, and/or received assignments focused on the ethical responsibilities as a pre-service educator?" using a five-point Likert scale.

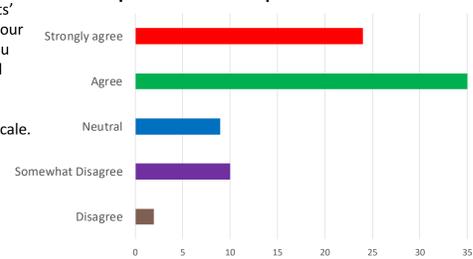


Figure 4. Graph representing responses to several ethical scenarios answered using a five-point Likert scale.

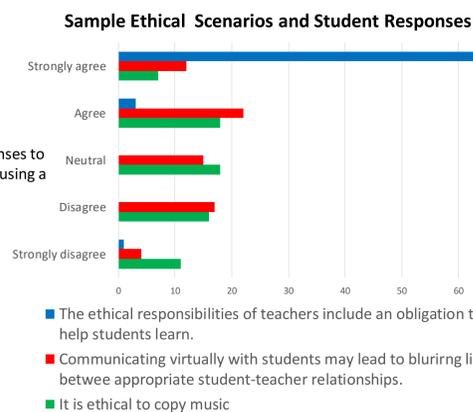


Figure 1. Number of students who have taken or are enrolled in an introductory level Music Education Course

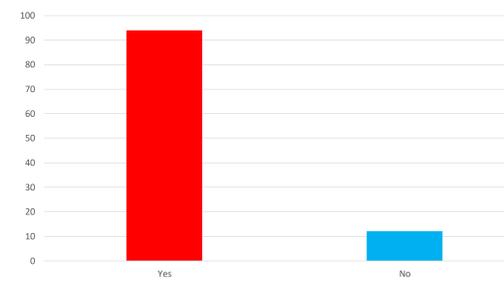


Figure 2. Frequency of types of courses considered as introductory-level music education courses

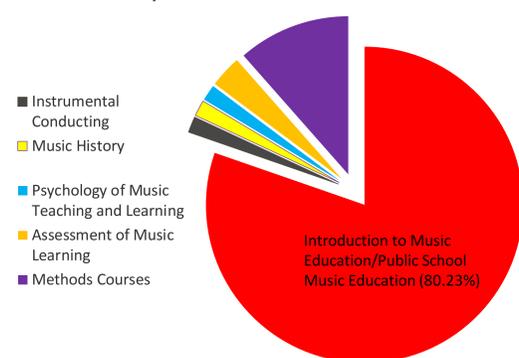


Figure 3. Graph representing students' responses to the question: "Within your music education curriculum, have you discussed, reviewed, and/or received assignments focused on the ethical responsibilities as a pre-service educator?" using a five-point Likert scale.

Figure 4. Graph representing responses to several ethical scenarios answered using a five-point Likert scale.

An additional component of the research featured a section of the survey that prompted students with scenarios requiring each individual to make ethical decisions by answering using a five-point Likert scale. Figure 4 represents three of those questions, all of which produced responses that piqued the authors attention. The first question represented asked whether participants thought that "The ethical responsibilities of teachers include an obligation to help students learn." While a significant group of participants selected Strongly Agree or Agree, one student did not. This raised an additional question – If not teachers, then who is responsible for student learning?

The second question asked whether "Communicating virtually with students may lead to blurring lines between appropriate student-teacher relationships." The results were skewed across the scale. New factors such as virtual teaching and social media have undoubtedly created new challenges and have forced teachers to make uninformed decisions. This question alone demonstrates that teachers are unsure of new rules prompted by the technological shift and suggests that curriculums must ensure they addressing potential decisions and outcomes related to these issues.

The third question pertains directly to the profession of music by asking "Is it ethical to copy music?" Answers to this particular question demonstrated uncertainty in the pre-service participant group. Only 7 students agreed with this statement. While copyright law can be difficult to understand, it is important for students to be educated about it. As NAFME highlights from the fair use provision of the Copyright Act, "one copy per student of up to 10 percent of a musical work for class study as long as that 10 percent does not constitute a single performable unit." Ultimately, copying is acceptable so long as it is a small enough amount of the whole work that it would not affect the potential sale of the work. In other words, copying of music is morally and ethically acceptable so long as the appropriate guidelines are followed. Future music educators must be educated about this very important aspect of their profession.

Finally, In a separate part of the survey, music education coordinators were asked questions that pertained directly to the courses and curriculum that they teach. The data revealed that these individuals feel as though they have discussed, reviewed, and/or assigned work focused on ethical responsibilities of professionals to their students. When asked what topics they covered in their classes, all 15 participants said that student-teacher relationships and teacher expectations/professionalism were included in their teaching. Most of the participants covered the copying of music, social media usage, equality, and concert programming with their pre-service students. However, as we saw in Figure 4, there was still much uncertainty about copying music and social media usage, despite these responses. This demonstrates a discrepancy between curriculum and student comprehension.

Conclusions

As previously discussed, teaching is often considered a moral and ethical profession. Teachers face moral and ethical dilemmas and decisions on a daily basis. However, previous studies have shown that teachers are not always aware of how to be ethical (Husu and Tirri, 2007). Our studies have demonstrated earlier research to be true – many teacher education programs do not offer required or elective ethics courses that benefit music educators to enter the field being well-informed professionals able to make appropriate ethical decisions. Our research has demonstrated, however, that it is not necessarily only the lack of a required ethics course, but a discrepancy between curriculum and student comprehension. Music Education coordinators are assigning content based on important documents, yet students still appear to be unclear about certain ethical standards and decisions. While additional research is required, it is the author's contention that a reevaluation of the ethics-related curriculum in pre-service music education programs takes place in order to produce ethical and prepared future music educators.

Future Research

Future research is needed to study the broader scope of Ethics in Music Education across the United States. Future research should broaden the sample pool to reach multiple states -- and could be achieved by working with NAFME and/or individual state Music Education Association (MEA) organizations. In addition, several aspects of the research could be enhanced by additional studies. One such example would be following participants through their student teaching to see how their opinions and understanding of ethical decision-making has changed following their student teaching experience. This is especially relevant as only 11 students in our sample pool had already completed student teaching by the time this study took place. Finally, following potential curriculum changes by presenting this survey following curriculum changes would inform the Music Education community of the importance (or lack thereof) of such changes.

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