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Experience Meets Experience:
Dewey's Theory and Preservice Music Teachers' Learning

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Abstract

This qualitative study, grounded in Dewey's theory of experience, explores what six recent graduates claimed to learn from a university music teacher education program's methods course, early field experiences, and student teaching. These teachers identified common elements of learning from the course, although they shaped and applied those principles in idiosyncratic ways. As Dewey's theory suggests, the course instructors could direct the preservice teachers' learning through structured experiences, but could not control what was learned; the teachers themselves gave meaning to their learning in the course, field experiences, and student teaching. Findings suggest that structured course experiences, along with opportunities for independent practice in authentic situations and easy access to mentors, facilitated reasonable correspondence between what the course instructors believed they taught and what the teachers learned.

Experience Meets Experience:

Dewey's Theory and Preservice Music Teachers' Learning

Teachers often claim that “experience is the best teacher” (Goodlad, 1984). Inservice music teachers rate actual teaching experience as the most valuable aspect of their teacher education programs (Bauer and Berg, 2001; Britzman, 1985; Conway, 2002). There is some empirical evidence to link specific types of experiences in teacher education with improved teaching skills (Butler, 2001; Paul et al., 2001). However, teaching experience alone does not guarantee the preparation of more expert teachers (Berliner, 1995); “everything depends upon the *quality* of the experience which is had” (Dewey, 1938/1963, p. 27).

Recognizing this “organic connection between education and personal experience,” Dewey (1938/1963, p. 25) grounded his educational philosophy in a theory of experience. He identified two principles that determine the quality of educational experiences: continuity and interaction. The principle of continuity means that every experience “both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after” (p. 25). The principle of interaction recognizes that an experience is always an “interplay” between the external environment, whether objects, people, or surroundings, and the individual’s internal state, including knowledge, skills, and attitudes shaped by prior experiences. Taken together, the principles of continuity and interaction mean that what individuals may learn from a given experience is influenced both by their prior experiences and by the physical and social settings of the current experience. Eisner (1991) similarly describes these two principles.

[Each experience] is mediated by prior experience. Our prior experience is shaped by culture, by language, by our needs, and by all of the ideas, practices, and events that make us human. It is also shaped by our genetic capacities, those particular aptitudes or dispositions that constitute our intellectual thumbprint and distinguish us from the rest of humanity. (pp. 47-48)

Dewey proposed that the principles of continuity and interaction be used to evaluate the quality of educational experiences (1938/1963). He identified those experiences that promote further growth as “educative,” those that impede continued learning as “miseducative,” and those that cause no change or leave no impact as “noneducative.” He decried the traditional education of his day, where students memorized “predigested materials” dealing with subjects in which they had no interest, so that many became physically truant or “engaged in the mental truancy of mind-wandering and finally built up an emotional revulsion against the subject” (1938/1963, p. 46). Dewey (1933) called this “collateral learning;” others have called it the “hidden curriculum” (Ginsburg, 1988; Krueger, 1985). Such learning appears to remain a constant factor in the process of education.

The basic issue is not that some students learn and others do not. We can assume that all students are learning something. The basic issue is that many students, for a variety of different reasons, do not appear to be learning what the teacher and the school claim to be teaching. (Erickson, 1986, p. 138)

The principles of continuity and interaction suggest that different individuals may learn different things from the same educational experiences, so that teachers cannot completely control what students learn (Fenstermacher, 1986). However, teachers can increase the likelihood of their students having educative experiences by the ways they manage the learning environment, particularly by presenting learning experiences relevant to students’ prior lived experiences. “Above all, [educators] should know how to utilize the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract from them all that they have to contribute” to learning (Dewey, 1938/1963, p. 40).

Summaries of research in both general teacher education (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981) and music teacher education (Leglar & Collay, 2004; Rideout & Feldman, 2004) have explored the ways that experiences in university methods

courses facilitate or hinder preservice teachers' learning. First, in an attempt to close the gap between educational theory and practice, many teacher education programs have added more and earlier field experiences, to help preservice teachers connect their in-school and course-based experiences. While "this apprenticeship model to teacher training is certainly highly valued by those who complete the program," there is little research to support this claim of effectiveness (Nierman, Zeichner, & Hobbel, 2004, p. 827). A second large body of research suggests preservice teachers bring to their teacher education experiences beliefs about teaching grounded in their own personal experiences with education. Such experience-based beliefs may be highly resistant to change, and may be more influential than methods course experiences in shaping their teaching approaches and practices (Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1994; Schmidt, 1998; Snyder, 1996). Third, both teachers and teacher educators appear to devalue the content of university-based methods courses by rating personal skills, such as "being able to motivate students" and "displaying confidence," as crucial attributes of effective teachers (Teachout, 1997; Weinstein, 1989; Wilson & Cameron, 1996). Such skills are seldom directly taught in courses; teachers and teacher educators seem to expect that they will be either be present intuitively or learned collaterally.

The purpose of this study was to examine relationships among the course- and field-based experiences of six newly certified teachers. In particular, I sought to understand how—or whether—experiences in their junior year Practicum course interacted with their university-mandated field experiences and student teaching. In addition, the six participants all had substantial experience teaching in community settings, so I also explored the continuity they created between the course, their required field experiences, and their self-arranged teaching experiences.

Method

All six student teachers in instrumental music at the university in the spring semester of 2005 participated in this study. Steve and Harout were traditional-age students, Cayce and Nathan were a few years older, having taken extra time to earn their college degrees, and Arloa and Lucile were completing their education after more than 20 years away to raise their families. Each was student teaching full time for fifteen weeks and, as music is a K-12 certification, each was assigned to work at elementary and secondary levels. Five worked with two different mentor teachers; Arloa stayed the entire time with one mentor teacher who taught both levels.¹ In addition, as a group the student teachers attended four 90-minute seminars during the semester, coordinated by my colleague. Seminars included time for each teacher to share successes and challenges experienced in the past few weeks. I attended the seminars as a contributing member of the group, and recorded and transcribed those discussions. I interviewed each of the participants at the conclusion of their student teaching semester to learn how they believed course experiences influenced their work as student teachers, and recorded and transcribed those interviews verbatim. During the year before student teaching, all six had been students in the Practicum class (described below). From their notebooks for that class, I collected their written self-assessments and instructor assessments, and other written assignments, such as short papers, essays, and in-class notes, to review each one's growth and to ascertain what they considered worth keeping for future reference.

I analyzed the interview and seminar transcripts by reading for common categories. I then coded the transcripts using those categories, combining, dividing, or refining them in response to

¹ The inservice teachers who host preservice teachers for student teaching placements and early field experiences, often referred to in the literature as “cooperating teachers,” are called “mentor teachers” at the university.

the data, until themes emerged around which I present and discuss the data in this paper. I invited the participants to amend their interview transcripts and comment on this paper, to challenge my interpretations of their learning. I attempted to report this study from the participants' perspective—their own interpretations of what they learned—and did not attempt to compare their mentor teachers' or others' perceptions of what these teachers learned. The study is based in large part on their reflections upon graduation, so throughout, I refer to them as “teachers” or “participants,” even though much of the data were collected while they were still technically “preservice teachers.”

The Practicum Class

The Practicum class was team-taught by my colleague, a wind ensemble specialist, and myself, a string specialist. It met on campus twice a week, for three hours each time, for two semesters, with additional mandated field experience of four to six hours per week in local schools. The 20 preservice teachers in the course learned about teaching methods and materials for elementary through high school instrumental music. They reviewed and applied prior learning from conducting and secondary instrument courses as they taught short lessons to their peers a minimum of eight times per semester. They also had the opportunity to practice in class and then teach a 10- to 15-minute lesson to groups of children of different ages, on campus or in local schools, five times during the year. They completed written self-assessments of most of their teaching, based on video recordings, and always received in-class verbal or written feedback on their teaching from their peers and the instructors. We emphasized proactive classroom management, with structured procedures and well-paced teaching to keep students on-task and actively involved in learning. Each preservice teacher was required to compile a notebook at the end of each semester that was intended to become a reference for their future

teaching, including course notes, handouts, references, and completed course assignments. Some of them also included other materials, such as handouts from professional development workshops, journal articles, or resources from other classes or from their field placements.

Participants

Steve grew up in a northwestern state, and remembers that his “grades in high school were abysmal.” Although his parents “cared and had meetings with the principal,” they “never really pushed [him] to do anything.” Steve thought this upbringing had made him “completely self-motivated.” He “was never pushed to be in three bands or choir, but [he] *did* it, because [he] wanted to.” Steve vividly remembers the day in high school when, worried about his future, he looked at his band director during rehearsal and thought, “‘What about teaching music? I really don’t want to work in a symphony—that just doesn’t appeal to me. I could do *this*. Yeah!’ Ever since then, *ever* since then, that’s literally all I could think about.” He was a leader in his high school music program and, although a bassoon major in college, participated as a brass player in summer drum and bugle corps, rising quickly to leadership roles in those organizations. He continued throughout college to work with a top high school marching band program, as well as other drum and bugle corps, both in the summers and during the school year, seeking out experiences that would give him “the resumé [he needed] to get that sweet job” in a high school with the potential for him to develop an outstanding band program. Steve’s mother was a professional musician, but Steve’s father did not fully support his musical interests, concerned that he was choosing a profession that would not provide adequate income and prestige. However, when Steve’s father came for his college graduation, he saw Steve conduct the junior high band in his final student teaching performance. “He saw the line of parents coming up to shake [Steve’s] hand, and he was like, ‘OK. Alright. Good for you.’”

Harout began playing saxophone in elementary school and taking private lessons in junior high. He remembers being “one of the loud children” who “talked incessantly” at that age, even though he “still did [his] job” and “knew the teacher liked” him because he “knew what [he] was doing.” He was “scared” about making “the Wrong Choice” for a career, but he “mentioned something” about majoring in music to his private teacher around eighth grade, and got encouragement from then on. He was active in both marching and concert bands in high school, and worked as an assistant with one of two local high school marching bands each year during his four years at the University. He also participated in the University Wind Ensemble and an award-winning saxophone quartet. Harout’s father, who was foreign born, was less supportive of his interest in a music teaching career than his mother. He worried that Harout would become “like the guys on the subway, a starving artist, with a Bohemian lifestyle.” After his father heard a high school band play in a concert a march that Harout had written, he began to understand the Harout “*will* be getting a paycheck” from his musical skills upon graduation.

Cayce had taught under my supervision for six semesters in the University’s String Project, both private lessons and class instruction. His father worked in construction, and Cayce began working with him “in different amounts” from the age of 10. From his father, Cayce learned to “work *hard* at what you’re doing.” Building on that, and “a collection of other experiences,” Cayce developed a philosophy of “continuous self-improvement” which he carried over into his teaching: “Am I thinking about what I’m doing? And am I thinking about what I did before, and how I’m going to improve on everything?” Cayce had a “great” middle school orchestra teacher, and he began to get excited about music. He started private lessons in ninth grade, and soon after auditioned for a local youth orchestra program. The youth orchestra director was “by far the biggest influence” in Cayce’s life: “[He and his wife] have done so much

for *me*, in so many different ways that . . . I want to return whatever they've done for me, a thousand times over." The director "noticed right away" that Cayce wanted to work hard and, after Cayce graduated from high school, gave him two years of private lessons in violin, music theory, and music history, to prepare him for a successful audition as a music major at the university. During those years, Cayce also helped coach younger students in the youth orchestra program and at his former middle school, while taking classes at the local community college and working with his father and at other jobs. He attended the university for six semesters prior to student teaching.

Nathan took nine years from start to finish to earn his degree, attending the university off and on until the three years prior to this study, by which time the School of Music no longer felt so "overwhelming" and he became a full-time student. Nathan was the first in his family to graduate from college, and his younger brother plans to follow in his footsteps. His father had played football and clarinet in high school but despite this experience, when Nathan was younger, the family focused more on his older brother's football than on Nathan's participation in band as a tuba player. However, his elementary and junior high band directors, who were husband and wife, became "like parents, because [Nathan] spent so much time helping with the [junior high band] program." Nathan took pride in the responsibilities they gave him, such as setting up the stage, being a section leader in seventh grade, and drum major in eighth grade. That was when Nathan decided he "wanted to be a band director, and never changed," because he had "found [his] niche." In high school band, Nathan again was drum major and held other leadership positions. He was tubist in the area's top youth symphony, performed in Regional and All State bands, and spent a summer at Tanglewood, where he "really got turned on to chamber music." Nathan made a conscious choice "even when [he] was young, that [he was] never going

to *sit* there” as a tuba player; rather, he chose to “watch conductors, [pay] attention when they worked with other sections, watch other sections and the dynamics between them, and personality differences.” He continued as an observer of teachers throughout his education, and served as drum major of the University’s marching band. During his time off from college, Nathan taught low brass master classes at local schools, taught private lessons, and used his time to gain “all these other [teaching] experiences that [his] fellow graduates don’t have.” Despite his family’s concern that he was struggling in college, Nathan never wavered in his decision to complete his degree: “This is what *I’m* going to do, and this is what *I’m* good at, and you’re just going to have to deal with it.”

Lucile had lived in the area her entire life, and had established a violin studio in her home. She had begun work towards a college degree 25 years earlier, but interrupted her education to marry and raise a family. Her five oldest children had left home, and some had married and provided Lucile and her husband with grandchildren. She shared Shinichi Suzuki’s philosophy that musical accomplishments “spill over into other areas in the child’s life” and help “happy children grow up to be happy, productive adults.” She viewed music education as an important “service to the community,” and was active in her church’s music program. Lucile’s grandparents and parents provided her with “a musically rich heritage.” Her maternal grandmother was a violinist, and her paternal grandmother was a pianist. Her grandmothers and both parents taught Lucile and her five siblings to sing, mostly by example. Lucile “in turn passed to [her] own six children” and her grandchildren the same type of singing “in the home, at church, in the car, for fun, when happy or sad, while working or playing, or just to pass the time.” She timed her return to college so that her own graduation would coincide with her youngest daughter’s high school graduation. For her degree recital, Lucile and her daughter

shared the program, each performing some solos and playing a violin duet together. Lucile was thrilled to be back in school and approached every opportunity to learn with enthusiasm.

Arloa grew up in the area. Although she enjoyed music in high school, she thought she might be an optometrist. Then she discovered that her private flute teacher “was doing a music education degree at the university,” and learned that “you could take classes” to learn how to teach. She had started the music education program at a nearby university approximately 20 years earlier. Marriage interrupted her education, and to “help fund” their new life, she began to teach “privately to teenagers and adults.” Her husband was in the military, and “every time [she] moved to another state, [she taught] young kids on piano and flute.” She also taught piano lessons to all four of her own children, and attended her three daughters’ Suzuki violin lessons every week. Because her father “played saxophone [and she] knew the fingering was the same as flute,” she helped her son learn to play saxophone. The family eventually returned to the area, and the children participated in their school music programs. Music has always been Arloa’s “favorite thing to do—at church, lead the choir or the congregation, play the organ” and “be chorister or play the piano” for the young children’s program. She held on to her dream to “be *certified* as a teacher,” resuming her education at the university “the year [her youngest] daughter started first grade.”

Learning from Practicum Class

All of these participants were students in the same Practicum class for a full year, except Arloa who took the class only in the fall semester of the following year. Nathan summed up the group’s dominant feeling that this was their most useful college course, saying that, unlike many of his classes, Practicum “directly applied to what [he] wanted to do.” Steve said he enjoyed it because “it’s the band director class. Show up, you get to learn how to teach.” Cayce found that

it confirmed his career choice, “because once I started doing Practicum . . . then I started thinking I could actually be a *good* teacher, then I started thinking about all the things I needed to be a teacher, and realizing how much went into it, and that’s really where I wanted to be.” Lucile also valued “the personal relationships that developed” through working together and becoming “really good friends” with others in the class. When I asked about the important things they had learned from the class, all six teachers focused most on planning lessons and sequencing instruction.

In Practicum, my colleague and I intended to emphasize instructional sequences grounded in Edwin Gordon’s (1993) Learning Theory, which promotes aural and kinesthetic experience with musical concepts before encountering those concepts notated in printed music. During the two-semester course, the preservice teachers practiced extending the Gordon principles to learning at all levels, through a series of peer teaching exercises. We promoted the idea that instruction sequenced in step-by-step increments, delivered using complete teaching cycles (Price, 1992), would help children to be successful in accomplishing the teacher’s learning goals.

Although Harout said that “that Gordon sequence is burnt into my brain” as a result of Practicum, it was clear that each teacher had moved beyond simply memorizing the steps to internalizing the general process of the sequence and applying it to all levels of instruction. Arloa directly applied her learning from Practicum class in her student teaching situation, initially relying on her course notebook and video tapes to help her know what to do.

My practicum notebook was like my bible, the first, probably five weeks [of student teaching]. I used that all the time. I would refer back to different lesson plans, and remembered certain things I had done. And our videos too, I would re-watch those, to see what the order [of the sequence] was. . . . So that helped *me*. Probably by about the eighth week, I didn’t need the book any more. And I was going *beyond* Practicum learning, I

think. I kind of rehearsed everything we did in Practicum in the first eight weeks, and then we moved on past that.

Cayce found Gordon's instructional sequence provided "an insight into *how* people learn music."

Learning all those steps really got it into our head how our students are going to be learning this music. And it's very different from how *I* would learn music at this point. So I think it makes us as teachers slow down and think about what they're going to do at every step, and *that's* what's important. And what you need to do, to make sure the students do what *you* want them to do.

Similarly, Steve found that he could easily apply the concepts in any teaching.

I enjoyed the *processes*. I'm much, much, much more process-oriented in how I teach and how I think about it, when I'm putting a plan together. And while I still stink about writing it down, I can put together a plan that *will* work, every single time. Without fail. And it's pretty cool. And if I run into a speed bump, then I know *enough* about the process that I can go, maybe in a different direction, and still get that result at the end. Because I know enough about how to just break *everything* down to its basic levels and build it up. And being process-oriented is much, much more efficient and faster. The kids might not think so. "Why do we have to clap and sing again? Why do we have to clap and count again?" But it'll get us there much, much faster.

As Steve's comment demonstrates, nearly all of these teachers made a distinction between what they had learned in Practicum about *teaching* step-by-step instruction and about *writing* step-by-step lesson plans. Harout expressed the strongest opinion about writing lesson plans.

All right, I have a huge beef with lesson plans. . . . I don't detail a lesson plan. I just crust it. I could never script it, just the way I had it organized. . . . I just find it mentally taxing because on the days I'd have to detail my plans, I would get the most nervous. Just because I'd have to think step by step what I'm going to do. And I'm like, "Can't I just do it?" [*He laughs.*] I would just over-think about it.

Cayce said that "writing lesson plans over and over and over was really helpful" because it would "come in handy some day" when an administrator came to observe his teaching. Like Harout, Cayce preferred to be less structured in his day-to-day teaching.

Yeah, it doesn't [work when I write a plan and try to stick to it]. [*He laughs.*] It really doesn't. . . . I think I feel a little bit better when I go in and I know what *I* want them to accomplish, and I use the tricks that I've used in String Project, and when I was a student in [my youth orchestra] the things that they did with me, and as a coach in [the youth

orchestra program], and Practicum here, when I'd pick things—little exercises for them to do to help me fix a certain thing, like a tool, like you said, to fix one little part. I have a better time pulling one up out of nowhere than writing it down and sticking to it.

In contrast, both Arloa and Lucile found comfort in having a written plan, and both conscientiously prepared for peer teaching and student teaching. Arloa described the process she used to prepare and practice her lessons.

Writing lesson plans word for word, and then being able to write an outline, was great for me. Because I am a word for word person, but you can't take the time to read it when you're teaching. And so you need to just have an outline. And the repetitiveness of it was helpful to me too, because then I knew *exactly* what the next step of my lesson plan was, and what procedure to do next. So I wasn't fumbling.

Although as a student teacher, Lucile disagreed with a requirement that she use the same planning form as one of her mentor teachers, she tried it, thinking, "Maybe this will be good for me to have another way to do it." Finding that system still not useful for her, Lucile was relieved to discover that her planning style fit better with her second mentor teacher's approach.

She has everything on the board, all outlined and ready to go. But *I* need more detail than that, because I'm just a beginner. And I *always* wrote it out. And I didn't generally type it up like I do when you were coming in. But I wrote it out, you know, I had an outline. But I didn't use full sentences, I'd just do one word. But I *did* have an outline, so I wouldn't forget to cover things that I thought of. When you're on your feet, you don't think of them.

Despite all Nathan's previous teaching experience, the concept of planning a lesson was completely new to him in Practicum. He focused on planning throughout the course and, in retrospect, he could chart his own growth in planning skills throughout the Practicum year and into student teaching. Initially, he found the notion of writing lesson plans, as presented in Practicum, "eye opening."

Some of the concepts from Practicum were new [to me], you know, how to write a lesson plan. That's—believe it or not—nothing that we'd covered in any of our classes. Other than "Do it, and here's a basic format. Plug in your information." But in that class we talked about *why* and *how* and different ways to do it. It's not just fill in the blank. And you can't just write down stuff, you have to have a logical sequence.

The course final—preparing and peer teaching a set of four lessons before teaching one of the lessons to a high school band or orchestra—was important to Nathan.

Towards the end, where we did the series of lessons where they had to build from each other, we were preparing a final piece—that was great, because it tied everything together. You know, you were incorporating standards, you were incorporating sequence, you were incorporating all this stuff, and rehearsal techniques—everything from moving around the classroom to don't forget to conduct correctly, you don't just wave a stick. And you know, just the way it tied everything together, it's like, "OK, now I feel like I have a package. Let's go student teach."

Nathan found that, "because [he]'d already done it on a small scale with one piece," the process of planning and leading a rehearsal was a bit easier when he became a student teacher. Still, he found that he "had some weaknesses in how [he] approached planning." Although he had plenty of practice "getting in front of a group and making it through a rehearsal," he found that preparing music for a concert, "pacing that rehearsal and making it a three-month-long affair" was different.

[My mentor teacher at the high school] allowed me to just *take* a band, and it became my band, for half the time I was there. I set the rehearsal tone. When I was going to miss a day, I made sure the *he* knew what my plans were, you know, what I wanted to see happen. And that was *invaluable*, to have that "it's-my-band" experience.

Learning from Other Teaching Experiences

Although there were clearly common elements in what these teachers learned from the Practicum course about planning and sequencing lessons, they brought different teaching experiences into the course that influenced what they took from it. Practicum included a state-mandated requirement to complete a field experience concurrent with the course, a first-semester placement in an elementary school and a second-semester placement in a secondary school. In addition, all preservice teachers were required to complete a third semester of field experience, either before or after the year of the Practicum course. Therefore, each of the participants had completed three different field placements of 72 contact hours each (four to six hours per week),

one each at an elementary, junior high or middle school, and high school level. Each was given a list of specific tasks to arrange in their placements; however, university-based supervision was not provided. From time to time, discussions in Practicum focused on what the preservice teachers were experiencing in these field placements. I first discuss these placements, in which they observed or assisted as the teacher requested, often working with individuals or small groups of students. Second, I present the substantial teaching experience each one had accumulated working with children in settings they arranged on their own.

Learning from university-mandated field experiences

All the preservice teachers found that the field experiences gave them a taste of working with different age levels. As Arloa said, it “helps you choose what [age] you really think is best for yourself.” Harout explained,

All [three field experiences] I did required me to do something, like either direct [the ensemble] or work with kids one on one, or large group sectionals. So there was never really down time, I never sat in the back and wrote notes. And should I not have had that, I would have been totally eaten alive by those junior high kids in the first week [of student teaching]. Just because I wouldn’t be tough enough to just put down like the Iron-Fist-of-Justice. [*He laughs.*] I think [student teaching] was easier because I had all that—not *all* the experience—but enough to get me by. Even like a crust of something, some kind of general knowledge of my own, just picking up little things here and there. It did help.

Most often, the mentor teachers for these placements would assign teaching duties when the preservice teachers arrived, just before class began. Arloa was the most proactive in learning from her field experiences. She asked frequent questions in her early field experiences to learn more about schools and teachers.

[Field experience] helped you understand how a school is run. I really enjoyed talking with the principal. And I met with one of the counselors, and learned kind of what their job is. And how you can *rely* on these people, you don’t have to do everything by yourself. Oh, and then being with the teacher and the other duties that they have—cafeteria, recess, and just seeing what other activities there are that you might be involved in. . . . [My mentor teacher] would get there very early—I want to say, at least 6:30 or 7:00

in the morning. And I don't think school started till 9. So one week I asked, "Could I just *come*? See what you do, and how you get prepared?" . . . And then in the afternoon, what she did after school—because she would stay there at least an hour after school. And the things she would do to get ready for the next day. She was very prepared. She'd been there 30 years, and she was *still* making sure every lesson plan was right. I really liked her. (Arloa)

In contrast to Arloa's experiences, Lucile and Nathan found that, despite placements with teachers who gave them some limited teaching opportunities, their field experiences "could have been more beneficial" (Nathan). Lucile did find her elementary school placement "helpful" because her mentor teacher "let [her] teach." However, her other placements were "more just watching," and she believed she had already done a good deal of that.

Well, I've already been in the classroom with [my own children]. I mean, I've already observed a long time, and helped, and been the go-fer, especially in the music classes, because that's what I was always willing to volunteer to do. But even in just regular classes, I was in the classroom a lot with my own kids, grading papers and [helping out].

Nathan also felt ready for more responsibility than he was given in his field experiences.

I had three teachers who put me in front of the ensemble. But it's not the same, you know, when you're only there for 70 some odd hours for the semester, which isn't that much. Going up there for ten minutes isn't that big of a deal. It's just kind of like, putting your foot in the water, that's all it is. Just testing it. (Nathan)

Learning from self-arranged teaching experiences

All six of these teachers arranged teaching opportunities beyond the required field experiences. Lucile and Arloa taught private lessons on a regular basis for most of their adult lives, and both also worked with children at their churches. Lucile felt that her Suzuki class teaching and her work in her children's schools had prepared her well for what to expect. In contrast, Arloa was surprised to discover that it was so different to teach a larger group of children.

Being in the big group, that was intimidating, but also awesome. All the sound coming back at you, and then telling them what to do, and then they would do it. While if you have one private student, you tell them, and they do it, but it's not as big of a sound as you get with a band, of course.

Each semester for three years, Cayce taught individual private lessons to ten to fifteen students. With a partner, he also led twice-weekly 45-minute classes for ten to twenty children in the university's String Project. Although he found his field experiences of some value, he found that his work in the String Project really enhanced his work in Practicum.

I think absolutely the most valuable was the String Project, because—from the first day I was here almost—it was practical experience. It was getting in front of kids. And I got a chance every step of the way, when I learned something new in Practicum or saw something new in one of the methods courses, anything that I saw there I could immediately put into action—if I chose to. Which a lot of times I did, I think.

Cayce thought that his String Project experience was more “valuable” because he had three years of experience helping with groups in his home town. He described himself as “a *bad* teacher” at that point, and thought that his teaching during those years did not grow “*nearly* as much, because [he] didn't have the other part, the [university] classes,” along with it.

Harout also found it valuable to try ideas from Practicum in the high school marching band he was co-directing at the time.

Every time I would learn something in Practicum I would take it down to [the high school]. Like when we learned sequencing. We did it [with those kids] one day, and I was like, “This moves a *whole* lot better.” [*He laughs.*] They know what they're talking about at [the university]! I always told the [other music teachers at the high school], “If anything you guys have seen me morph from regular [marching band] tech[nical assistant] to teacher.” Because at the time I was taking Practicum, and skills that I had were reinforced, and skills I did not have were starting. So it was like, as soon as I learned something, I could practice, come back to Practicum, learn something new, practice, come back to Practicum. So it was a like a *huge* benefit, because it was like my own set of guinea pigs.

Steve recognized the role all his marching band teaching experiences played in his growth.

If I had not taken those years of waking up before dawn to go and do that, if I had not taken and made *all* those mistakes at West High, *all* those mistakes at Central High School and Washington High, and just gotten them out of the way—to have someone like [the band teacher] go, “What are you doing?” [*We laugh.*] “If you're going to be on my staff, you need to do this.” Actually, come to think of it, he really didn't do much of that. *But* when he did, it was really helpful.

Discussion: Relationships Between Experiences and Learning

I examined relationships among the participants' learning in the Practicum course and their teaching experiences beyond the course to explore the impact of the course on their teaching beliefs and practices. Dewey's theory of experience, with its two principles of continuity and interaction, helps illuminate these relationships. I first discuss what the participants claimed to learn in the course about lesson planning and being part of a learning community. Next, I discuss how they themselves created continuity between their experiences in Practicum and in classroom settings. Finally, I explore the meanings these teachers attached to their learning experiences, as they interacted with them.

Learning from Practicum

Lesson planning. In my post-student teaching interviews with these teachers, all six of them, without prompting, referenced first and foremost lesson-planning skills and the music teaching sequence as the most important things they learned in Practicum. They each identified ways they had applied those skills in real classrooms on a daily basis, and ways they had adapted what they had learned to suit their own teaching style. In student teaching, as in Practicum, Cayce, Harout, and Steve claimed that writing lesson plans restricted their ability to respond to students in their teaching. However, they credited the course for their regular use of the "process" (Steve) and the "insight into *how* people learn music" (Cayce) in their teaching. Nathan thought his teaching was more effective with a plan, even though he could manage without one. Arloa and Lucile followed the planning procedure we taught in Practicum, preferring to carefully outline or script their plans throughout their student teaching semester, so that they "wouldn't forget to cover things that [they] thought of" (Lucile).

All six teachers claimed that the planning and sequencing skills they had developed in the class helped them feel prepared for and be successful in their student teaching experience. In their Practicum notebooks, they kept written self-assessments of their peer-teaching lessons which included comments indicating they were aware of learning about other aspects of teaching, such as speaking loudly, giving clearly worded instructions, or improving their eye contact or conducting technique or instrumental skills. Similarly, their assessments from the instructors and teaching assistants referenced other teaching strategies, along with a fairly consistent emphasis on pacing and sequencing skills. They discussed a variety of specific teaching strategies with both their mentor teachers and with us, their university supervisors, during student teaching; yet, in their interviews with me, these were not the skills they identified as the most important learning. It is possible that, in talking with me as part of this research project, they were telling me (as one of their course instructors) what they thought I wanted to hear. However, the consistency with which they mentioned lesson planning and sequencing as important aspects of their learning, as well as the consistency and enthusiasm with which they applied these skills in their teaching in several venues, indicates that one of the major instructional goals we hoped to communicate in the course was likely received and interpreted by these teachers more or less in the way we intended it.

Even more important, their interviews show that they were able to think of planning and sequencing skills, not as the prescriptive steps we asked them to follow in their first semester peer teaching experiences, but as broader principles they could transfer to any learning situation. This demonstrates a marked contrast to the ways younger music education majors at this same university thought about lesson planning (Schmidt, 2005), and helps confirm that the course did have an effect on these participants' teaching beliefs and behaviors.

Educative community. As instructors, we recognize that we have the potential to shape, through collateral learning, not only preservice teachers' skills, but their attitudes towards teaching. To that end, we made a conscious effort to promote an "educative community" (Bullough & Gitlin, 1989) in our classroom. We encouraged the preservice teachers to critique each others' teaching with supportive comments and specific suggestions for improvement, and we pointed out our own efforts to critique and improve our own teaching. Arloa described her experience in the class.

Well, you *feel* as you're conducting in front of your peers, that they're critiquing you. But, at the end of Practicum, you just come to realize that they're working as hard as you are. And so everybody's just really nice to each other. I think we had a *great* class in Practicum, a *beautiful* class. Everybody was helpful and not judgmental.

However, these participants experienced a tension between wanting to be observed so they could get ideas for improving their teaching, and being nervous when being watched. Cayce's description represented this tension well.

I'm really excited about teaching on my own [after graduation]. Because I'm not scared of failing. And I know that I'll be left alone for the majority of time. So there's not going to be someone sitting in the back of the room who I think is second-guessing every move I make, which really throws my game off the worst. Because that's what's going through my head when [my mentor teachers] are watching me teach is, "Oh, they think I'm *so* bad. They think that was the worst—that wasn't very good. I know that they didn't think that was good. Oh, I must've missed some intonation there. They probably are thinking I'm an idiot." [*We laugh.*] So that's going through my head. And that's taking away from my concentration, of actually *listening* to hear if someone is in tune or not.

Teaching on their own in authentic teaching situations, with readily available support systems, appeared to be important to these teachers' development of instructional skills, confidence, and understanding of children's behavior and musical level. Although they found it difficult to acknowledge "you made the error happen" and then deal with the "sudden chaos that ensues" (Harout), these teachers seemed to need the experience of teaching on their own as part of their learning process. However, they also appeared to need opportunities for discussion with

others, to make sense of their experiences and to get new ideas to try in subsequent classes. Most of them found comfort in situations where they had “someone always watching [them] over [their] shoulder, to point out the errors, . . . to pick up the pieces, to cushion, soften the blow” (Harout). And all of them had made use of available informal mentors in the teaching situations they arranged for themselves. Harout, Steve, and Nathan led sectionals and helped prepare for marching band performances and competitions, usually working with more experienced teachers who gave them teaching assignments, but did not tell them how to teach. Cayce’s work in the String Project gave him the opportunity to observe experienced teachers and other preservice teachers, and to discuss his teaching with them. Even in their teaching of private lessons, most of these participants sought advice from others, and then “kind of made it [their] own” (Nathan).

This study’s data suggest that the fact that these participants consistently and actively sought advice from and exchanged ideas with others may be important collateral learning from the Practicum course. In contrast to a well-established view of teachers as isolated in their own classrooms (Lortie, 1975), most of these teachers appeared to be predisposed before the course to view other teachers as resources. They each reported other music teachers as significant mentors in their decisions to become teachers, and had had numerous positive experiences exchanging ideas with others in a variety of teaching situations. In the course, we promoted the notion that learning to teach is a lifelong process, and we encouraged informal discussions of teaching with peers as well as attendance at professional development workshops. The participants in this study all entered the course with a demonstrated record of such activities, and it is likely that their experiences in Practicum either did not contradict, or actively encouraged and reinforced, those behaviors.

Creating continuity from Practicum to teaching experiences

In this section, I discuss how these teachers created continuity in their learning experiences. Educators frequently bemoan the fragmented nature of discrete course-work experienced by post-secondary students (Goodlad, 1990; Nierman et al., 2004). As the Practicum instructors, we are fortunate to have a year-long course that meets six hours each week, with additional required field experiences, where we can encourage preservice teachers to make connections to learning from their other courses. Although we still feel that there is never enough time to provide them with all the learning opportunities we would like, we recognize that this course structure provides teaching and learning opportunities not available to many other teacher educators and the preservice teachers in their courses. Because we also supervise our own student teachers, we are able to structure learning experiences that connect and build on each other, and to have multiple opportunities to assess and attempt to remediate the preservice teachers' learning. These structural features of the course may have contributed to the connections these teachers made between Practicum and their teaching.

Preservice teachers often use their own student experiences as a guide when evaluating ideas presented in university programs (Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1991; Snyder, 1996). In Practicum, we could return frequently to the Gordon pedagogical sequence in many guises throughout the year, allowing these teachers to experienced it as students as well as peer teachers. This may have helped convince them of its usefulness, even though most had not experienced similar music learning in their own pre-college ensembles (Holt-Reynolds, 1991; Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1991). In their self-arranged teaching settings, they could continue to experiment with the ideas however they saw fit, in contrast to their field placements, where they had to do what the mentor teacher asked. Having their "own set of guinea pigs" on which to

“practice, come back to Practicum, learn something new,” and then return to the “guinea pigs” appeared to validate through their own experience ideas presented in Practicum, and to contribute to these teachers incorporating them into their own teaching beliefs and practice.

Although Steve took ideas to his high school marching band “every time [he] would learn something in Practicum,” such connections did not always occur automatically for any of these teachers. Steve’s mentor teacher at the junior high took a seven-week maternity leave, and the substitute teacher provided little feedback to him about his teaching. Steve found it difficult to “teach in a vacuum, when there was no one there to just keep things in perspective.” He “fell into some old habits” from his prior teaching experiences, and when his university supervisor pointed them out several weeks later, he “was like, ‘Oh, I should know better,’ and fixed a lot of those things.”

Steve was disappointed with himself for forgetting things he “should have” known from having learned them before, yet this apparent forgetting of what was presented in class, and remembering upon being reminded, also seems to be a normal part of the development of high-level skills, particularly skills as complex as playing an instrument or teaching (Berliner, 1995; Duke, 2005; Paul, 1994). In particular, it is virtually impossible in a course-based setting to practice the skills needed to respond to children’s behaviors or musical responses. During their Practicum year, these teachers had many opportunities to practice pedagogical skills in class and to work with children in authentic settings. However, the demands of student teaching were at a much higher level than anything they had experienced before, with larger classes, longer hours, a greater variety of students, and more extended contact with those students, so it is not surprising that they “forgot” some of what they had learned. Reminders from their mentor teachers or university supervisors may have allowed them to apply and refine with relatively few reminders

some skills they appeared to “forget” to use. Although they each interpreted and applied them in their own way, it appears that, in this study, the Practicum course did provide a foundation of learning that carried over into student teaching. However, as instructors, we could only facilitate, not mandate, how each teacher created continuity among the course activities, student teaching, and other instructional settings.

Interaction with teaching experiences

Like the inservice music teachers studied by Bauer and Berg (2001) and Conway (2002), this study’s participants identified actual teaching experience as a critical element of their preparation for teaching. Yet, not all experiences are equally valuable; “everything depends upon the *quality* of the experience” (Dewey, 1938/1963, p. 27). In this section, I discuss ways these teachers interacted with their teaching experiences to attach greater meaning to some experiences than others.

All these participants except Arloa found their self-arranged teaching experiences to be much more valuable for learning about teaching than their university-mandated early field experiences. In their interviews, they claimed that the university-mandated field placements provided only “a crust” (Harout) of value, and were “just testing the water” (Nathan). What puzzled me was that, for example, Lucile enthusiastically described how, in one of her placements, she “got to conduct the orchestra once or twice, . . . got along really great with the kids, and ran a lot of sectionals,” yet she told me that field experience was “just watching.” Similarly, the other participants reported working somewhat regularly with individual students and small lesson groups, but claimed that their field experience was not “real teaching.” In contrast, they viewed their self-arranged teaching (of about the same number of hours per week) as important situations for learning.

Several factors may have contributed to these feelings. Most of these teachers were paid for their self-arranged experiences, which could have lent a sense of “real” teaching to their work. In addition, as course instructors, we had not made time for many opportunities, beyond occasional brief in-class discussions, to process their teaching or field experiences in any depth. Lucile was justified in her view that the field experiences, although a concurrent course requirement, were “not coordinated with” Practicum in a consistent way. Consequently, perhaps she could remember few specific connections between her field experiences and Practicum, “except for just [a casual comment], ‘If you’re in your [field placement], you might try this.’”

Perhaps these teachers viewed their other experiences as more valuable because they actually did provide more opportunities for “hands-on” experimentation and practice. Even if, like Steve, Harout, Cayce, and Nathan, they were working under the supervision of more experienced teachers in their self-arranged experiences, they probably had greater contact time with students and more autonomy for making decisions. This may have given them the time and opportunity to experiment with the skills they were learning in Practicum and to see the effects of their own teaching.

One other possibility is these participants’ prior teaching experiences. They had all accumulated substantially more teaching experience than many junior-year preservice teachers. Arloa had been actively involved in her own children’s education, but she found the field experiences opened her eyes to “understand how a school is run,” however, Nathan and Lucile believed that they did not learn much from the field experiences. Nathan felt at the time that he was ready for more teaching responsibilities. In “talking with other people” he realized, once he returned as an older full-time student, that he was approaching the Practicum course differently than other students. He thought he “was *understanding* more stuff, or applying it a different way,

than they were,” and attributed that to his greater range of prior teaching experiences, recognizing that “it’s what you *bring* to [the course] that makes the difference.” Lucile felt similarly: “Coming from my station in life, I think I would have been fine with student teaching without those field experiences.” Frederickson and Pembroke (2002) found that field experience students “were frustrated . . . when they only observed *after* having taught in previous situations” (p. 10, italics mine).

While the other five teachers remained open to new perspectives, however, Lucile was more “opinionated” about teaching. Her frustration may have been, in part, because her extensive experience teaching other people’s children and observing in her children’s classrooms created the illusion that she already “knew” enough (Lortie, 1975), and that “just watching” was not a good use of her time. This may have actually prevented her from approaching her field experiences as opportunities for learning new things about schools (Hollingsworth, 1989; Holt-Reynolds, 1991). Lucile often brought ideas from prior teaching experiences to her peer teaching in Practicum but, unlike the others, appeared not to do the reverse.

Another possible explanation is the sense of community these teachers felt in different settings. In their field experiences, they often arrived just as a class was beginning or had to leave in the middle of a class, offering little opportunity to establish a relationship or discuss anything with the mentor teacher. The experiences they themselves arranged, like student teaching, provided a more authentic and contextualized teaching situation. Through the opportunities for interacting with other teachers and their involvement over a longer period of time, they probably felt a greater sense of personal investment and belonging to a “community” of learners. In contrast, they probably felt less personal investment in their field experiences (and perhaps less continuity), and consequently viewed them as less valuable. To support this

assertion, I noticed that, while some complained in the interviews about how little “real” teaching and how much observing they did in their field placements, none claimed to have had to do too much observing in their student teaching settings, despite the fact that they all watched or assisted at least several hours per day while their mentors taught classes.

Summary: Continuity, Interaction, and Learning from Experience

Dewey’s (1938/1963) principle of continuity proposes that experiences build on each other, while the principle of interaction suggests that individuals make their own meaning from each experience in a given environment. Harout’s experiences provide one example of how interaction and continuity functioned. He found that the “*living Practicum*” of the high school marching bands he worked with on a sustained basis “helped drastically” to make the course-based learning more real. He carried learning from each different high school band experience into the others. The first high school band he co-taught with a newly certified teacher kept him from being “totally shell-shocked” when, in his second semester field experience, he worked with a top high school concert band program. In his second season with the marching band, he and the other teacher were able to use their prior year’s experience to make improvements, because he “knew more of the kids, . . . and a lot of the teaching headaches were gone.” In the semester preceding student teaching, when Harout was working with yet a different high school marching band, he was able to alert the parents’ committee to potential problems with their plan for band camp. Harout said that the parents were amazed at the appropriateness of his suggestion. “That’s what [the other school] kind of trained me for. It was cool because whatever skill I had then was kind of reinforced.” And, as Harout finished his student teaching, he used the knowledge he had gained working with these high school bands and with junior high ensembles

as a student teacher, to determine that, although he still hoped to teach high school in the future, he would prefer a junior high position for his first job.

In contrast to preservice teachers who find methods courses have little to do with the real world of teaching (Snyder, 1996), these participants valued the Practicum course. Data from this study suggest that these participants created opportunities to relate their course experiences to real world teaching experiences, and vice versa. The sequential “baby steps” (Arloa) in peer teaching course assignments gave them sufficient opportunities to practice and refine teaching skills to convince them through their own experience to adopt some of the attitudes and specific instructional techniques that we hoped they would learn. We all agreed that Practicum was not identical with “real world” experience; however, the course allowed them to practice and refine pedagogical skills, focusing on specific aspects of teaching, one at a time and then in combination, that they could then try in authentic teaching situations. This helped create a continuity of learning that could be shaped, but not controlled, but the course instructors.

Dewey’s (1938/1963) principles of continuity and interaction illuminate these teachers’ perspectives on their own learning. Although the value of the university-mandated early field experiences remains unclear, for most of them, their self-arranged teaching settings might have been less productive experiences without concurrent experiences in Practicum. Similarly, Practicum probably would have been less meaningful without concurrent experiences working with children. These six teachers all entered the Practicum course as highly motivated to improve their teaching skills. They also benefited from opportunities to analyze and discuss their teaching within a community of other learners; if one setting did not provide that support, these six teachers seemed to actively seek out that support. They intentionally interacted with their learning environments, and I give them a great deal of credit for their eagerness to learn,

especially for their thoughtful approaches to teaching and for their willingness to experiment with different types of instruction.

The in-class experiences provided a common vocabulary for these teachers' own analysis of their teaching outside of class that could continue into discussions about their student teaching experiences. They developed principles, understandings, observation skills, and an attitude toward learning that should allow them to continue to grow as they begin their first jobs. The confidence that these beginning teachers felt upon completion of their degree program, and the teaching skills they had developed, both in class and through teaching experience, appeared to result from the *continuity* of their experiences, most of which were inherently educative or were made educative through the *interaction* of their own interpretation and analysis (Dewey, 1938/1963), scaffolded by various colleagues and mentors.

Implications for Research and Practice

The hidden curriculum (Eisner, 1994; Krueger, 1985) of many teacher education programs is based on a tacit assumption which has supported teacher education for at least a hundred years: that “common experiences, identically sequenced, [should be required] for all students enrolled in teacher education programs” (Meske, 1982). This study's findings support others that document the improbability that preservice teachers will “learn” identical things in any program (Erickson, 1986; Fenstermacher, 1986; Schmidt, 1998; Snyder, 1996). My findings similarly demonstrate that, while there were common elements in what these six teachers claimed to have learned from the Practicum class, in this case about lesson planning and teaching in community, there were also both subtle and major differences in the ways they shaped and applied their knowledge and viewed their experiences.

Dewey's (1938/1963) philosophy of experience, with its learning principles of continuity and interaction, helps shed light on the extent of, and reasons for, such differences. These teachers themselves created continuity among their experiences. As instructors, we could structure experiences that, to us, seemed to promote continuity. However, we could not control how these teachers created continuity, in part because their out-of-class experiences were so diverse, and in part because the principle of interaction suggests that they themselves selected aspects of their experiences to create what they considered meaningful learning. More research is needed to understand how this study's participants developed that drive to improve their teaching, and how or whether the course supported it.

For these teachers, extended teaching experiences with children appeared to be a crucial factor in the effectiveness of their course-based learning. The data suggest that these teachers valued the interaction between experiences in school settings and experiences in Practicum; neither alone seemed adequate for their learning. In addition, the considerable time dedicated to the course (six hours per week for two semesters) probably facilitated the relationships between what we thought we taught and what these teachers claimed to have learned. The data suggest that their teaching experiences over time, both before, during, and following the course, helped them view the Practicum course as applicable and meaningful, providing limited documentation to support the practice of "incorporating more and earlier field experiences" in teacher education programs (Nierman et al., 2004). However, the data also suggest that the *quality* of the field experience mattered; these participants found less value in situations where they had limited autonomy and contextual knowledge. Further study is needed to clarify differences in the value placed on different types of experiences by these teachers. In particular, why did these teachers view their university-mandated field experiences as of such limited value? What qualities of their

other teaching experiences made them seem so much more useful? Did the preservice teachers feel that way at the time, or did those feelings develop in hindsight, as they went through the student teaching semester? Would it have been different if we as instructors have made more of an effort to help them connect their field experiences to the course? Would preservice teachers with less “real world” teaching experience have viewed these field placements differently?

Additional studies might also explore factors that help create a better correspondence between what teacher educators teach and what preservice teachers learn, both explicitly and collaterally. The two teachers in this study with years of experience as parents of children in schools viewed their experiences in different ways, one to limit the new ideas she would adopt, and one to open her eyes to all there was to learn and understand. What course-based experiences might have helped us as instructors tap into the continuity of our students’ experiences? How can we learn about and capitalize on the interactions among their many physical and social environments and the ways they interpret and make sense of those environments? Other researchers have explored the usefulness of tools such as journaling (Bolin, 1988; Robbins, 1993), methods of lesson planning (Harwood & Wiggins, 2001; Robbins, 1999), or various approaches to reflection (Dewey, 1933; Richert, 1990; Schön, 1987), as ways to illuminate preservice teachers’ interactive thinking about prior and contemporary experiences.

For purposes of researching these issues, the content and philosophical approach of the particular program may be less important than the correspondence between program goals and preservice teachers’ learning. Based on this exploration, it is quite possible that a similar consistency among large program principles, with individual interpretive variations, could exist in a teacher education curriculum with a completely different approach or schedule than our Practicum course and sequence of field experiences. Such studies might examine whether factors

identified as effective by this study, such as extended time in Practicum for practice, revision, and extension of skills and understanding, combined with authentic and contextualized experiences with children, produce similarly strong relationships between course instructors' goals and preservice teachers' learning.

Although I have attempted to suggest the most salient questions here, this study also raises many others. Qualitative methodologies allow teacher educators to pursue explorations of many of these questions in the context of their assigned teaching duties, with available preservice teachers in their courses.

It is not enough that certain materials and methods have proved effective with other individuals at other times. There must be a reason for thinking that they will function in generating an experience that has educative quality with particular individuals at a particular time. (Dewey, 1938/1963, p. 44)

Studies of the unique functioning of the principles of interaction and continuity in individual preservice teachers' experiences may ultimately suggest some guiding principles for those charged with designing teacher education curricula in varied settings. Better understanding of why "good and poor teachers seem to exit from the same curriculum" (Colwell, 1985/2003, p. 21) may assist teacher educators and preservice teachers in their mutual quest for better prepared beginning teachers.

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