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## Perspectives of International Music Teachers in the United States

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**PERSPECTIVES OF INTERNATIONAL MUSIC TEACHERS IN THE UNITED STATES**

A Thesis Presented

By

PEDRO GOMES LOBATO

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ABSTRACT

PERSPECTIVES OF INTERNATIONAL MUSIC TEACHERS IN THE UNITED

STATES

MAY 2022

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Today's world is vastly impacted by the effects of immigration and globalization. The cultural diversity in the student population in the United States continues to grow steadily along with the immigrant population. Although there is a large body of research that is concerned with culturally responsive teaching in music education, preservice teacher preparation to address and serve diverse communities, as well as issues of recruitment of diverse educators, there is a gap in the literature when it comes to the perspectives of international music educators in the United States. Researchers have provided information on diverse student populations and resources for music educators of non-diverse backgrounds, but the voices of international music teachers have not yet been heard. International music teachers could possess unique insights, and might be able to relate to students in a way that most music teachers cannot. They are also equipped with different experiences due to their own diverse backgrounds. In this study, interviews of international music teachers provide a conduit to gain understanding of their experiences, reflections and suggestions in order to provide an unexplored perspective for the field of music education.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
ABSTRACT .....	iv
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	1
Conceptual Framework.....	2
Purpose of Study .....	3
Definition of Terms .....	4
Research Questions .....	4
Significance of Study.....	5
Delimitations .....	5
Limitations .....	6
2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	8
Diversity Among Music Teachers in the United States .....	9
International Teachers in Other Contexts.....	10
Implications of Immigration on International Teachers .....	13
Cross-cultural Interactions and Benefits for the Classroom .....	17
Research Gaps and Study Aims .....	19
3. METHODOLOGY.....	20
Research Design .....	20

Participants.....	21
Data Collection Procedures.....	22
Data Analysis .....	23
Legitimation and Ethics in Data Collection.....	24
4. FINDINGS.....	26
Description of Participants.....	26
Emerging Themes.....	28
Expectations and Student Support .....	29
Music Education Accessibility .....	34
Fostering Diversity in Content .....	38
Building Relationships and Relating to Diverse Students’ Experiences ..	41
Developing Perceptions of Music Education .....	45
Growth Mindset .....	47
Challenges of International Music Teachers .....	49
Benefits of International Music Teachers .....	54
Perceived Strengths of School Music Education in the United States.....	56
Perceived Weaknesses of School Music Education in the United States .	59
Suggestions for Music Education Practice.....	62
Summary.....	65
5. DISCUSSION.....	67
Research Question 1 .....	67
Research Question 2 .....	68
Research Question 3 .....	69

Research Question 4 .....	70
Implications.....	72
Suggestions for Further Research.....	73
REFERENCES.....	75



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Statement of the Problem**

A considerable amount of research has been conducted in order to document the demographics of the music teacher population in the United States. Findings have shown that preservice music educator populations are predominantly native-born Whites and not representative of the student population, as well as that a lack of cultural representation in the classroom can result in negative experiences (Colombo, 2005; Elpus, 2015). This abundance of music educators with such similar traits may lead to a lack of different perspectives within the profession.

Despite this large presence of White native-born music teachers, there is a group of international music teachers in the United States whose voices have not been widely heard in research. This is a group of teachers who were born and raised in a country that is different from the one where they teach or have taught. Given the diversity in the backgrounds of these teachers and their cross-cultural experiences in music education, gaining an understanding of their perspectives and experiences could provide an insight not yet explored; one that could potentially enrich the profession. A limited body of research has considered the perspectives of educators with diverse backgrounds and educators teaching away from their own culture (Altun, 2015; Au & Blake, 2003; Bodycott & Walker, 2000; Bonneville, 2019; Books & De Villiers, 2011; Cook, 2000; Datta-Roy & Lavery, 2017; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004; Fortujin, 2002; Furuya et al., 2019; Hutchison, 2005, 2006; Hutchison & Bailey, 2007; Hutchison & Jazzar, 2007; Kennedy,

2000; Ling et al., 2006; Miller, 2018; Ospina & Medina, 2020; Serin, 2017; Startz, 2017). Although researchers have expanded efforts to gain a better understanding of different cultural perspectives and what Cain (2015) referred to as “the other,” there is still a gap when it comes to understanding and embracing what international music teachers may have to share. In this research, I explored the views of international music teachers in the United States by providing them with means to share their experiences, reflections, and suggestions for school music education practices in order to inform the profession. I hope this research will provide new insights for school music educators and inform practices.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The presence of teachers working in countries other than their own has been examined by a number of researchers and scholars in the field of education. Many studies had overlapping findings on commonly-faced challenges of international teachers, including issues of cultural adaptation, linguistics, and differences in teaching values (Datta-Roy & Lavery, 2017; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004; Hutchison & Bailey, 2007; Miller, 2018). There was also consistency across studies regarding the benefits of cross-cultural teaching experiences, including, but not limited to, greater exposure to different curricula and teaching methods, the ability to better relate to diverse student populations, challenging preconceived ideas, and exposing students to different cultures through cross-cultural interactions, among others (Altun, 2015; Au & Blake, 2003; Bonneville, 2019; Carson & Westvall, 2016; Fortuijn, 2002; Kennedy, 2000; Serin, 2017). Some researchers also provided perspectives of teachers who had experienced cross-cultural teaching and suggestions derived from their practice and reflections (Bodycott & Walker, 2000; Datta-Roy & Lavery, 2017; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004; Hutchison, 2006; Hutchison &

Bailey, 2007; Kennedy, 2000; Miller, 2018; Ospina & Medina, 2020; Serin, 2017).

Multiple researchers specifically addressed international teachers in the United States, particularly concerning issues of teacher shortages across the country and immigration policies (Books & De Villiers, 2011; Cook, 2000; Furuya et al., 2019; Hutchison, 2005, 2006; Hutchison & Bailey, 2007; Hutchison & Jazzar, 2007; Startz, 2017). In addition, Eros (2016) focused on exploring experiences of preservice teachers of linguistically-diverse backgrounds and pointed out the need for further studies on cultural diversity within music education as well as for recruitment of teachers of diverse backgrounds.

Findings from the studies mentioned in the previous paragraphs indicated that there is great value in cross-cultural teaching and that teachers from diverse backgrounds have a set of contributions and challenges that is different from that of White teachers. This research also suggested that examining the (a) lived experiences, (b) challenges, and (c) perspectives of teachers with cross-cultural experiences may be informing and enriching for the education profession and corresponding body of research. Such findings served as a foundation for the development of this study, in which I took a step toward including the perspectives of international music teachers. Similar to the previously-mentioned research, I incorporated a framework of examining the experiences, challenges, and perspectives of teachers with cross-cultural experiences, focusing on international music teachers in the music education context of the United States.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of international music teachers. More specifically, I aimed to gain a thorough understanding of their experiences, reflections, and suggestions for the practice of school music education in the

United States. By examining these three aspects of their journeys as international music teachers with diverse backgrounds, I hoped to better inform the field of music education in the United States through a perspective that is unlike that of the majority of music education practitioners.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms were used in this study, and are listed in alphabetical order:

- Cross-cultural: The term *cross-cultural* refers to “involving two or more different cultures and their ideas and customs” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). For the purpose of this study, this term is often used when referring to the interaction between students and teachers of different cultural backgrounds, as well as the experiences of teachers within cultures that are not their own.
- Cultural Diversity: The term *cultural diversity* refers to “the existence of a variety of cultural or ethnic groups within a society” (Oxford Languages, 2022).
- International Teacher: Terms such as *foreign teacher* and *OTT* (overseas-trained teachers) are often used in the literature that examines teachers working outside of their native country (Datta-Roy & Lavery, 2017; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004; Hutchison & Bailey, 2007; Miller, 2018). The term *foreign* may carry a negative connotation and the term *OTT* does not accurately describe the experiences of the participants in this study. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the term *international teacher* is used to refer to teachers who were born and raised in a country that is different from the one where they teach or have taught, crossing national borders.

### **Research Questions**

This research is guided by the following questions:

1-How have the experiences of international music teachers in their home country informed their teaching practices in the United States?

2-What are the challenges and benefits experienced by international music teachers in the United States?

3-How has teaching in the United States affected international music teachers' perspectives of school music education?

4-What do international music teachers perceive as strengths and weaknesses of school music education in the United States?

### **Significance of Study**

Through this study, I aimed to complement a body of research in music education that is concerned with expanding the cultural awareness (i.e., reducing the bias) of the profession in the United States. Music education research continues to reflect the needs of an increasingly diverse student population in a globalized world context. By exploring the views of music teachers who possess experiences both in and outside of the United States, I hoped to provide unprecedented insight into, and understanding of, this unique standpoint within the profession, potentially to better inform practice and guide future research.

### **Delimitations**

All participants in this study were born and raised outside of the United States. All spent a significant amount of time during their formative years in another country, including at least their first 15 years of life. All participants were between the ages of 22 and 66. At the time of data collection, they were all either currently teaching music in the

United States or had done so within the last five years. No participants were compensated for their participation.

### **Limitations**

Although I aimed for this research to be as informative as possible, there were limitations involved. The first potential limitation was the small sample size. Findings could be limited due to the small number of participants. The limited sample size also spoke to the limited diversity of cultural backgrounds examined in the study. Such a small number of participants cannot be reflective of the vast cultural diversity across the entire community of international music teachers in the United States. Teachers of different cultural backgrounds may provide widely different perspectives. The selection of such participants was also a potential limitation, as I used convenience sampling in order to recruit participants. Given the small sample size and limitations of convenience sampling, results are not expected to be generalizable to the entire international music teacher community. However, the possibility remains that findings could be comparable to other music teachers in similar contexts. The fact that participants' responses were based on the entirety of their experiences, not just those related to the phenomenon of being an international music teacher, was also a limitation. Participants' responses were potentially affected by other factors in their lives that were not connected to this particular experience.

Another limitation was researcher bias. Given the fact that I have experience as an international music teacher in the United States, it could be possible that my own preconceived ideas over the matter had an effect on the development of interview questions, data collection, and interpretation. In order to attempt to control any potential

bias, all interview questions were reviewed by the committee chair after having gone through multiple revisions of my own in order to make sure that they did not incline participants towards certain answers. Peer debriefing and identification of personal bias were used in order to support the honesty, objectivity, and validity of the data collection process.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

In this chapter, I examine the scholarly literature that is related to international music teachers in the United States, as well as closely-related topics such as international teachers in other contexts, implications of immigration, and cross-cultural interactions. This chapter is organized from broad to narrow, eventually leading to gaps in the literature and research aims. I begin with studies that address diversity among music teachers in the United States in an attempt to depict the current state of diversity within the profession. It is important to have a clear picture of such a state in order to better understand the role international teachers may play, as well as the context in which they teach and operate. Next, I move on to examine studies that address international teachers outside of the context of music education in the United States. Research in the field of education provides a number of studies on international teachers in different countries and subject areas. Understanding the experiences of such teachers gives a context that could provide parallels with the experiences of international music teachers in the United States, given the similarities between the two profiles of teachers and their lived experiences.

This examination of studies is followed by an overview of the implications of immigration on international teachers in the United States. International teachers may come to the United States through a number of different paths. In order to truly understand the experiences that some international teachers may undergo in order to teach in the United States, an overview of possible immigration paths as well as the current state of teacher immigration in the United States is necessary. Next, I examine



literature on cross-cultural interaction in the classroom and its benefits. Researchers have done a considerable amount of work both in the fields of music education and education in regards to the benefits of cross-cultural interaction. An examination of such studies is crucial when studying a population of teachers who live and provide such experiences between themselves, their peers, and their students on a daily basis. An understanding of this phenomenon could substantially add to the conceptualization of the perspectives of international music teachers. Finally, I close the chapter by identifying gaps in the literature, presenting the aims of this study, and suggesting how it may contribute to the existing body of literature.

### **Diversity Among Music Teachers in the United States**

There is a growing presence of diverse students in the United States. By 1997, ethnically-diverse students accounted for a majority of learners in schools in 25 of the 50 biggest districts in the United States (Banks, 1997). It was predicted that by 2050, nearly 57% of learners in schools will not self-identify as White (Howard, 2003; U.S. Department of Commerce, 1996). Projections remained similar as of 2014 when it was projected that by 2060, 64.4% of the United States population under age 18 would comprise minorities (Colby & Ortman, 2015).

The issue of teacher diversity has also been addressed in music education research. It is known that the profession remains predominantly White, and that this can be traced back to the demographics in music teacher education programs, as well as college music admissions. Elpus (2015) studied the demographics of license-seeking music educators between 2007 and 2012 and found that 86.02% of candidates were White and that such candidates achieved higher results than non-Whites on licensure

tests. In her philosophical essay, Koza (2008) discussed how this overrepresentation of White students in music teacher education programs could be a result of college admissions and audition procedures favoring a certain portion of the population. It is notable that music education programs continue to graduate cohorts of predominantly White music educators. Meanwhile, the demographics of students in the United States comprise students of color and diverse cultures (Legette, 2003).

In sum, researchers have shown that the music teacher population is widely unrepresentative of the student population (Colombo, 2005; Elpus, 2015; Sands, 1993). The United States continues to deal with the issue of providing an educational model within music education that mirrors its diversity (Ho, 2016). VanDeusen (2019) examined the beliefs of preservice music educators in regards to cultural differences and observed that, initially, music educators often have an awareness of cultural impact but not necessarily within the realm of the music classroom. In a time of increasing diversity among students, the lack of such diversity and representation among music teachers in the United States is alarming.

### **International Teachers in Other Contexts**

Multiple researchers in the field of education have examined international teachers in different contexts, including international teachers of non-music subject areas in the United States, international teachers in other countries, international faculty in higher education, and their experiences and challenges. The literature shows that international teachers commonly experience hardships with cultural adaptation, logistical factors in their lives, and misinformation (Datta-Roy & Lavery, 2017; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004; Hutchison & Bailey, 2007; Miller, 2018).

Elbaz-Luwisch (2004) examined the experiences of 12 international teachers in Israel who taught a variety of subjects, finding that teachers were often seen as cultural representatives. This was a difficult burden to be carried by teachers of different cultural backgrounds. Among her findings, she mentioned experiences common to international teachers such as moments when they unintentionally behaved inappropriately, being seen as a constant complainer, being critical of local educational systems, impostor syndrome-like feelings, and struggling to hold on to complex identities in challenging times. Challenges posed to international teachers went beyond teaching and affected aspects of life, such as their identity. These teachers often struggled with feelings of illegitimacy and similar internal conflicts. International teachers themselves may also *point out* criticisms of local school systems that may be unperceived by native teachers and administrators (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004). In studying international science teachers in the United States, Hutchison *and* Bailey (2007) found that such teachers often struggled with conflicting principles, methods, and relationship-building styles between themselves and their U.S. schools. These teachers were vocal about their need of being active learners, *adapting to different aspects of their environment and their students constantly*. In England, Miller (2018) studied the experiences of international teachers, describing their experiences as being in survival and coping mode due to the many difficulties faced. Language barriers often were shown to be a key challenge in the adaptation of international teachers as well (Bodycott & Walker, 2000; Datta-Roy & Lavery, 2017; Fortuijn, 2002; Hutchison, 2006; Kennedy, 2000; Ospina & Medina, 2020; Watts Pailliotet, 1997).

Kennedy (2000) depicted her own experience of teaching in Thailand, pointing out the relevance of student expectations and how they may differ from culture to culture. Her experience showed how a teacher must have an awareness of the expectations within a given culture to be effective. She also emphasized that teachers must have an equal understanding of their subject and their students in order to connect the two, which is considerably more difficult to accomplish when a teacher's cultural background differs vastly from that of their learners. Kennedy found that, when crossing cultural boundaries, perceptions of right and wrong may differ, making teaching more challenging.

The life of an international teacher is not always portrayed through a lens of challenges in the literature. Bonneville (2019) studied how culturally-diverse teachers used their cultural background in working with culturally-diverse students. Among other things, she found that such teachers were a major influence in diverse students' identity and feeling of having a place they belong. Ospina *and* Medina (2020) studied the experiences of international faculty members in the United States and reported that, in addition to commonly faced challenges, benefits such as greater self-understanding, expanded cultural awareness, affirmed values, and the development of positive attitudes were also identified. Benefits regarding professional development, greater appreciation of culture, better connection with diverse students, expansion of skills, and exposure to new materials were also similarly found in a number of studies (Altum, 2015; Bodycott & Walker, 2000; Burman et al., 2006; Colombo, 2005; Fortuijn, 2002; Kennedy, 2000; Startz, 2017). The research literature on international teachers shows clear patterns of difficulties faced, as well as of benefits gained from their experiences. This consistency is visible across different countries, educational levels, and subjects.

## **Implications of Immigration on International Teachers**

Immigration is an important topic of discussion when addressing the presence of international music teachers in the United States. Immigration policies, as well as the overwhelming teacher drought over the last decades, are commonly found topics in the literature regarding the presence of international teachers in the United States. The phenomenon of immigration is more and more common in today's world, with approximately three percent of the world population immigrating and an increasing number of immigrants making countries like the United States their destination (Kerr et al., 2016).

In recent decades, issues such as rapidly-growing student populations, thriving economic development, low teacher income, high volume of teachers leaving the profession, and expectations set by the No Child Left Behind policy have led the United States into a drastic teacher drought (Books & Villiers, 2011; Cook, 2000; Hutchison & Jazza, 2007). This, in turn, has led many school districts to search abroad for highly-qualified educators, especially school districts in major cities such as Chicago, New York, and Houston (Books & De Villiers, 2011; Cook, 2000). The U.S. Department of Education's *Teacher Shortage Areas Nationwide Listing* (2011) study found that in 2011, all states in the nation had a lack of teachers in some subject. The presence of international teachers has been shown to be a viable solution to the national shortage of teachers (Books & De Villiers, 2011; Cook, 2000; Hutchison & Jazza, 2007).

Historically speaking, the presence of international teachers has grown consistently since the mid-twentieth century. The international teacher presence in the United States is roughly representative of the legal immigrant population, though

considerably lower than that of the general immigrant population. Since the end of World War II, the presence of foreign-born educators in the United States has grown from four percent to eight percent (Startz, 2017).

International teachers have been historically and continuously faced with legal challenges of immigration policies (Furuya et al., 2019). Some common paths of immigration for teachers include visas such as the H1-B, J-1, EB-1, EB-2 and EB-3 (Books & De Villiers, 2011; Cook, 2000; Furuya et al., 2019, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, n.d.a). H1-B visas are employer-sponsored visas that allow employees to work for up to six years. Employees need to meet a number of professional requirements, such as holding a degree commonly required in the applicant's industry, among others. H-1B visas have an annual limit of 65,000 per year, chosen via a lottery that favors applicants with advanced degrees by providing an additional 20,000 visas for such applicants. The H-1B visa application process must be paid for exclusively by the employer; the applicant is not allowed to take on any expenses. In addition, the applicant's position must meet the criteria of prevailing wages according to industry and local standards (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, n.d.a). Employers that are classified as non-profit organizations or are associated with government organizations or higher education institutions are exempt from the annual limit on visas, meaning they do not have to adhere to the timeline of the visa lottery (Furuya et. al, 2019; United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, n.d.a). A teacher who seeks employment through H-1B would have to, among other things, be financially sponsored by the school district. This is something that may bring a disadvantage to their application for the teaching positions.

The J-1 visa is another common option for teachers. This is a non-immigrant visa allowing teachers who (a) are qualified to work in their home country, and (b) have prior teaching experience, to work in the United States for a limited amount of time. The J-1 visa is considered an exchange program visa and, unlike the H-1B, does not allow for status adjustment beyond its validity. (Furuya et.al, 2019; United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, n.d.b). This means that teachers on J-1 visas who wish to stay longer in the United States would have to acquire a different visa status eventually.

EB-1, EB-2, and EB-3 visas are pathway visas towards permanent residency, commonly referred to as becoming a green card holder. The numbers on the visa names refer to the level of preference, based on skill level and expertise. EB-1 are reserved for professionals with extraordinary ability, EB-2 for professionals holding advanced degrees, while EB-3 is for skilled workers. To be eligible to be sponsored for these visas, a labor certification must be issued, through which process it must be certified that there are no suitable U.S. qualified workers available for the position. Applicants pursuing EB-2 visas may qualify for a National Interest Waiver in order to waive such a requirement. This is provided to applicants whose work is deemed beneficial to the United States under certain criteria (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, n.d.b). H-1B holders may pursue such visas in order to adjust their status.

International students who come to the United States to complete a teacher training program are eligible for a one-year work authorization known as OPT (Optional Practical Training). This work authorization allows international graduates to work within their field of study. If their field of study qualifies as STEM-related, their OPT status may be extended for 24 months (Furuya et. al, 2019; United States Citizenship and

Immigration Services, n.d.a). Graduates who wish to continue in the United States beyond this point would need to seek other visa opportunities.

In addition to employer-sponsored immigration paths, there are other possible paths to immigration. Permanent residency may also be achieved through family by having a U.S. citizen as a spouse, parent, or in some cases, sibling (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, n.d.b). Music teachers who fit such criteria could attain residency without employer sponsorship. Music teachers who possess an exceptionally strong performing background may also qualify for the O-1 visa, commonly referred to as an artist visa. An O-1 visa is awarded to applicants with extraordinary abilities which must be supported in an extensive application process. It has a duration of three years with the possibility of extension (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, n.d.b). Unlike the H-1B visa, there is no annual limit on O-1 visas. A music teacher without a strong performing background or artistic presence in the entertainment industry may not qualify for such a visa.

Visa requirements may bring difficulties upon teachers who try to immigrate to the United States. Such difficulties could relate to policy requirements or financial burden upon themselves or their sponsoring employers. The need for sponsorship could also be unattractive to employers who could choose to employ a U.S. citizen without the burden of sponsorship expenses of varying amounts. A 2019 George Mason University study examined the state of international educators in the United States. Among many things, the researchers found that most international educators in the United States worked in higher education, largely due to the greater difficulty of attaining work authorization in non-postsecondary positions (Furuya et. al, 2019). Still, the researchers noted that a



majority of foreign-born educators had attained citizenship. The literature exposes many challenges of becoming an international teacher in the United States, as well as the growing needs and benefits of having them present in classrooms across the country.

### **Cross-cultural Interactions and Benefits for the Classroom**

Several researchers have exposed the benefits of cross-cultural interactions in the classroom. These interactions are a common aspect of U.S. classrooms given the vast diversity in student population (Banks, 1997; Colby & Ortman, 2015; Howard, 2003). These interactions may be crucial in teaching as they vastly shape an educator's sense of what good teaching is. A teacher's previous experiences and training drastically influence their view of what is good teaching within music education (Schmidt, 1998).

The presence of international teachers in U.S. classrooms provides a different dynamic, given that students not only experience other cultures among themselves and their peers, but also through their teachers. Instead of having the cross-cultural exchange be an experience where the students are the only ones with diverse backgrounds, teachers may also enrich the classroom with their own diverse backgrounds. Teachers with backgrounds similar to their diverse students are able to have a greater understanding of the student context. There is value to recruiting diverse teachers for this purpose (Au & Blake, 2003; Cochran-Smith, 1990; Eros, 2016; Haberman, 1996). Language also plays a role in the decision to recruit diverse teachers. Although issues of linguistics can often be a challenge for international teachers, their ability to relate to English-learning students due to the similarities between their experiences allows these teachers to have an insightful understanding of such students' experiences. International teachers are also

able to relate strongly to the overall experience of students in diverse communities (Eros, 2016).

Cross-cultural teaching experiences can also benefit teachers' professional development. Teachers become more creative by teaching cross-culturally, learning about new curricula, and collaborating in new ways (Altun, 2015). Teaching in different cultural settings allows for challenges in expectations and assumptions regarding common practices. In order to best engage students through curriculum content, teachers need a better understanding of both the content and the students, including their identities (Kennedy, 2000). Cross-cultural teaching and contact with people from other countries may benefit the process of embracing diversity and globalization (Fortuijn, 2002). Educators who teach away from their home country are allowed opportunities otherwise unattainable, which in turn allow them to provide a richer experience for their students (Serin, 2017).

In regards to the music classroom, music teachers in urban settings, which are often diverse, benefit from gaining an understanding of the diversity of their students (Baker, 2012). This is a commonly found context in urban school settings, where student diversity may inform teacher awareness of diversity and the musical richness that students may bring into class. Cultural affirmation of students' identities in diverse communities may lead to strong results in music programs (Dekaney & Robinson 2014). Such affirmations may come effectively from having international music teachers who are representative of students' identities, both culturally and musically.

The literature on cross-cultural interactions in the classroom exposes a variety of benefits for students and teachers alike. It ultimately allows a greater embrace of crossing

cultural boundaries and defiance of the concept of “other” in music education (Cain, 2015).

### **Research Gaps and Study Aims**

This review of literature indicates that researchers have identified and examined the state of diversity in U.S. schools, the contexts under which international teachers operate, as well as the benefits of cross-cultural experiences for both teachers and students in education and music education. However, there is a lack of research that explores the perspectives and experiences of international music educators in the United States. Eros (2016) explored the experiences of linguistically diverse student teacher music educators and clearly identified the need for further research on educators of diverse backgrounds. International music teachers are active practitioners in the field and their perspectives have not been widely examined in music education research. This study aims to complement the literature by providing an in-depth examination of the perspectives of international music teachers in the United States specifically, illuminating and amplifying the yet-unheard voices of such teachers and providing an opportunity for the profession to learn from their unique experiences and suggestions for practice within school music education.

**CHAPTER 3**  
**METHODOLOGY**

**Research Design**

This is a qualitative research study. Such studies gather data through interviews, observations, and other forms of non-numerical data in order to lead to detailed depictions of experiences through which trends may arise (Patton, 2015). Qualitative research is often used to document human experiences within society (Fossey et al., 2002; Saldaña, 2011). Within the greater scheme of qualitative studies, there are multiple genres of research, all of which serve different purposes (Saldaña, 2011).

In this study, I followed the line of research of two genres of qualitative study. The first genre was phenomenology, which is often used when studying human experiences, either individually or as groups (van Manen, 1997). Saldaña (2011) used the example of motherhood as a human experience that could be studied phenomenologically through interviews and observations of women who have had such an experience. In this study, participants shared the lived experience of being music teachers in the United States who came from a different culture. This shared phenomenon in their lives was the subject of research in this study and the commonalities within this experience were sources of informing data. As expected, the means through which such data were collected were interviews. Interview transcriptions were coded and analyzed in order to identify emerging themes.

In addition to phenomenology, I also utilized the research design of case study. Case studies look at separate units individually, such as a single person's experience documented in-depth (Saldaña, 2011). In the present study, each participant's experience

constituted an individual case study. This genre of research allowed for greater detail in the examination of each participant's experiences and also led to an in-depth cross-examination of cases. Having multiple cases also allows researchers greater access to information regarding common phenomena across cases (Patton, 2015). Such cross-examination provided valuable insights and further informed the research. This was also particularly useful since, even though all participants had a shared experience of being music teachers in the United States and away from their home countries, each individual case was filled with rich particularities illustrated through the participant's individual journey.

### **Participants**

Convenience sampling (Patton, 2015) is a sampling scheme through which participant selection is based on accessibility (Phillips, 2008). Using convenience sampling, I selected three participants for this study. I set inclusion criteria to determine the necessary characteristics that would qualify a person to be a participant in the study. These criteria were that all participants had to have been born outside of the United States, had spent at least the first 15 years of their lives in their home country, were between the ages of 21 and 69, and had experience teaching music in schools in the United States within the last five years. I was already familiar with all three participants before the study and knew that they met the inclusion criteria. The recruitment process occurred via email, where all participants received an informational flier about the study, agreed to participate as volunteers, and signed a consent form. Although this was not included in the selection criteria, all three participants were formally educated in the United States at some point in their lives. At the time of data collection, all were

employed as music educators in schools in the United States. Two participants were male and one was female. All three spoke a language other than English as their first language.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Once all participants had been recruited and agreed to participate in the study, each completed an individual interview process which I conducted. I scheduled the interviews according to the availability of the participants. Coordination of scheduling occurred over email and I conducted the interviews online via the Zoom cloud-based video communications application. Interviews were semi-structured (Patton, 2015) and included 20 researcher-designed questions and potential follow-up questions. Although I asked all participants the same initial 20 questions, not all participants were asked the same follow-up questions, given the differences in their experiences and the fact that some answers to these follow-up questions may have already been covered in previous responses. The interviews happened over a period of three days. Although all participants were informed that the interview could take approximately an hour to complete, and all were given equal opportunity to contribute as much as they liked, the length of interviews varied across participants, with the longest one lasting approximately one hour and the shortest one lasting 27 minutes. This was largely due to the amount of information each participant chose to share in each of their responses. Interviews were recorded via Zoom, which itself provided the initial transcripts for each interview. Transcripts were then reviewed and edited for accuracy alongside the video and audio recordings of each interview. Member checking (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was also used in order to assure the validity of the data and avoid bias. Within this process, only one participant chose to add content to their response to one of the questions, which was done via email.

## Data Analysis

I uploaded the interview transcripts to the *Delve* application used for coding, a process in which researchers classify data by looking for themes in the qualitative source of information (Saldaña, 2016). There are many different coding methods available for qualitative research. For the purpose of this study, I coded the data via three different methods. I used structural coding for the first cycle. Structural coding categorizes codes as topics of inquiry that are directly related to research questions (Saldaña, 2016). As such, four categories were deductively generated *a priori* in relation to each of the four research questions: “Experiences in Home Country,” “Challenges & Benefits,” “Teaching Experiences in the United States,” and “Strengths & Weaknesses of U.S. School Music Education.” A parent code was created in association with each of these categories, which were used for a first cycle of coding.

In the second cycle of coding, I utilized in vivo coding, a process in which codes are derived from the exact word used in the language of the transcript (Saldaña, 2016). This was a useful method for this study as it assisted in identifying terms that were commonly mentioned in participants’ actual speech. The in vivo codes served as reference after the third cycle of coding in and assisted with the verification of validity of emerging themes.

For the third cycle, I used descriptive coding. This involves summarizing the main idea of a passage in the transcript in a word or phrase that describes the content (Saldaña, 2016). This cycle was inductive and open-ended, meaning that as the transcripts were read, emerging themes were coded through descriptive coding, rather than starting with *a priori* or pre-determined codes. This open-ended step gave room for any additional

relevant themes to emerge, rather than focusing only on identifying data that supported predetermined themes. The in vivo codes from the second cycle assisted in identifying and validating such emerging themes.

Within each coding cycle, I gave codes clear descriptions and criteria to assist in determining what content would be suitable for being coded as such. The codes were then revised and re-analyzed to ensure that they were coherent and clear, and to assess if certain codes were similar enough that they could be combined into one. Through the three cycles of coding, I was able to identify emergent themes from the three interviews.

### **Legitimation and Ethics in Data Collection**

It was important to ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the study, as well as attempt to reduce bias. In order to maintain the legitimacy of the study, I utilized the identification of personal biases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I also made a conscious effort to remain focused on the purpose of the research and how it may contribute to the field of music education. The process of peer debriefing involved another researcher examining a small portion of the coded data (approximately 10% of it) in order to ensure the legitimacy of the analysis.

Additionally, all participants signed consent forms prior to the data collection process. I was the only data collector in this study. My research qualifications were based on the completion of graduate level statistics and music education research courses.

During the interview process, participants were not at any higher risk than in their daily lives. All files and data were password-protected and stored in a location only accessible to me. The chair of the thesis committee was the only other person with access to participant information. The researcher who took part in the peer debriefing process



did not have access to any identifying factors that would breach participant privacy. All files related to the study will be deleted after a period of six years.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

#### Description of Participants

Each participant was considered an individual case in this study. In addition to the three participants, I contributed as a participant observer. Patton (2015) highlighted this role as adding knowledge through interactions, also allowing the researcher to gain and provide useful insight into the phenomenon at hand, in this case the experience of being an international music teacher in the United States. Although I did not participate in the same capacity and did not take part as an interviewee, my own experiences as an international music teacher in the United States, which also met all of the inclusion criteria, aligned with the purpose of the study and contributed an enriching perspective. I came to the United States to pursue my undergraduate degree in music education, after which I worked as a high school music teacher at a public high school in Massachusetts prior to pursuing my graduate studies. I contributed to this study with comments and observations based on my own experience.

In order to protect the privacy of the participants, pseudonyms were assigned to each. All participants had an opportunity to choose their own pseudonym, though none of them chose to do so. All pseudonyms were chosen by me and intentionally do not originate from participants' own cultures in order to avoid identification via cultural association. In this chapter, I provide information on each individual participant.

#### **Thomas**

Thomas was a music teacher at a public school in a major urban area in the Northeast region of the United States. At the time of data collection, he was in his eighth

year at this school and taught K-8 general music, ensembles, and music technology. He also held other positions outside of the K-12 setting related to music and music education. At the time of his interview, Thomas was in his mid-30s. He was from a European country, where he was born and raised. He also had experiences teaching music in his own country. Thomas came to the United States in 2010 to pursue an undergraduate degree, after having already earned degrees in his home country.

### **Sophie**

Sophie was a music teacher at a charter public school in a rural area in the Northeast region of the United States. She had been teaching at this school for two months, where she taught K-5 general music. Her school was an immersion school specializing in her first language, allowing her to teach in her first language. Sophie was hired for this job immediately after completing her undergraduate studies in music education and performance at a university in the Northeast region of the United States. At the time of her interview, Sophie was in her early 20s. She is from a country in eastern Asia, where she was born and raised. Her experiences teaching in her home country happened via virtual teaching, after having already moved to the United States. Sophie came to the United States at the age of 15. She initially came to the United States through an exchange program to attend a high school in the southern region of the United States for one year, where she lived with a host family. She enjoyed her time so much that she decided to continue her exchange experience at a high school in the Northeast region of the United States. After two years of experiencing high schools in the United States, Sophie decided to continue her post-secondary education in the United States.

### **Edward**

Edward was a music teacher at a public school in an urban area in the Northeast region of the United States. He had been teaching at this school for 21 years, where he taught Grades 7-12 orchestra and private lessons. In addition to this, he was an active performer, doing freelance work as well as being a member of several different ensembles across the region. He also conducted a youth ensemble outside of his school. At the time of his interview, Edward was in his mid-60s. He was from a country in the middle-eastern region of Asia, where he was born and raised. He also had experience in teaching music in his own country. He first came to the United States in the late 1980s to pursue a master's degree. Because of the difficulties of working and making money while on student status in the United States, Edward returned home after one year, leaving his master's degree unfinished. Back in his home country, he met his wife, a United States citizen and musician, and together they moved back to the United States where they had been living and working since then.

### **Emerging Themes**

The three interviews provided a wide range of perspectives and were rich in information about the participants' experiences. In addition to information directly related to the research questions, five themes emerged in the participants' responses: (1) expectations and student support, (2) music education accessibility, (3) fostering diversity in content, (4) building relationships and relating to diverse students' experiences, and (5) developing perceptions of music education and growth mindset. (6) Challenges and (7) benefits of their experiences also emerged. Each theme is further explored in their respective sections of this chapter. The implications of these themes and answers to the research questions are further discussed in Chapter 5.

## **Expectations and Student Support**

One of the many themes that emerged inductively in the interviews regarded expectations and student support. Although participants' specific views on these matters varied to some degree, all three participants brought up these concepts in their responses. This is something that has not been not deeply explored in the literature assessed in Chapter 2, with the exception of Kennedy (2000), who examined similar concepts of expectations in a cross-cultural teaching setting. Participants in this study identified a clear distinction in the standards of expectation in comparison to their home countries, as well as in the amount of support given to students. Thomas expressed his views on scaffolding and how in the United States, lessons are broken down into steps in order to support students:

Something that I noticed in the two systems is that here [in the United States], there is much more support for the student. Everything is scaffolded, breaking it down step by step, and in [his home country], there is no support, so the students are required to really troubleshoot, problem solve. Most of the time they are left on their own, which is not necessarily a good thing; however, the good thing about it is that the system for sure fosters problem solving and critical thinking, for sure, because you are forced to do it, otherwise you don't have a way out, you either fail or succeed, right? ... there is no way in between.

Thomas clearly outlined the benefits of a system in which students are required to practice their skills of critical thinking, problem solving, and troubleshooting. He emphasized that, in coming to the United States, he "had to lower [his] expectations a

lot.” In terms of offering student support, Thomas went on to make the following comment:

I ask my students, like, if you have any issues or if you need support on anything, please, you know, contact me or if you need anything, here is my email, this is my office hour ... I remember when I was [a student in his home country] when you had to go to the office hour, first of all, you need to say sorry for showing up. Second, you better show up with a question that wasn't covered in class or, you know, something that goes beyond because otherwise for the [instructor] it will be too much work repeating themselves, you know so it's extra work, right? ... [in the United States] the system is completely different; however, I don't think we are creating smarter students.

Although Thomas made it clear that the amount of support given to students in the United States is considerably greater than in his own country and that this is not necessarily beneficial, he also embraced the importance of student support and spoke about how he incorporated the best of both worlds into his teaching:

What I try to do in my teaching is combine both experiences. Yes, I scaffold my instructions and make sure that my students have everything they need. I'm there to support them; however, I ask a lot [of the students]. In fact, I call them musicians and I'm expecting them to meet certain standards that maybe in other music classes are not even considered. So, yes, I ask a lot of my students. I support them, but I also know that the higher the bar, the higher the results will be, so this, I think, is how my experience affected my teaching.

Thomas' experience in his home country shaped his pedagogical approach to student support and expectations. He adjusted his practice to maintain high standards and still incorporate the degree of scaffolding that he saw as common in music education in the United States. When speaking about how teaching in the United States shaped this pedagogical perspective, he added the following:

I had to learn that there is not always a consequence to a behavior, for example, which is not necessarily a bad thing. I've studied collaborative problem solving, and so I strongly believe that students do well if they can. If they cannot, it means there must be a reason or a lacking skill that needs to be analyzed by the instructor.

Thomas continued to use his experience in his home country to highlight the contrast in expectations of students and how it shaped his teaching:

I grew up in a very demanding system where teachers were there to judge more than to teach. Just to give an example, the amount of homework that I always had since elementary school is not even comparable to the amount of homework, if they get any, of the students here in the States. That is something that I struggle with, not because I don't believe in supporting the students, but I believe that the students should be asked more and just, the more we raise the bar, the higher the expectations are, the more the students will probably do, of course, with the support of good teaching.

Thomas' philosophy on expectation and support was clearly shaped by his experiences in both countries, resulting in an emphasis on high standards accompanied by student support. Edward had somewhat similar views on the United States' approach in

regards to expectations from students. Although Thomas and Edward came from very different backgrounds and taught different types of music classes in their schools, their views on expectations of students overlapped to some degree. Edward made the following comment regarding expectations of students:

Look, one of the things that I feel is that in the United States, kids sometimes are very spoiled. Especially if you [play] an instrument like the violin, you have to put in the work. ... kids here try to do a lot of things. They try to do a lot of sports and I don't know ... so many things, so music is just a part of it. Of course, my expectation is that music will be first but sometimes it doesn't work, but I think that's part of the American culture. They try to have a taste of everything. If you study a music instrument, especially violin or any string instrument, you really have to spend more time with the instrument so sometimes it's very frustrating because [the students] are not on the same page with me.

Edward, much like Thomas, had a very high standard for what was expected from his students. Although Edward and Thomas came at this concept through different lenses, there was a common desire to demand more from students. Edward emphasized his vision for his students, one that he believed was beneficial for the students' musical experience. Being trained in the classical music tradition and maintaining an active status as a performer in the classical music scene, his teaching reflected the values of his training. Edward came to the United States already as a trained violin instructor and with a clear set of expectations. As he mentioned, "when I came [to the United States], I already knew what were my expectations from students."



Sophie, much like Thomas, also brought up scaffolding as a focus point in music education in the United States. However, unlike Thomas, Sophie's views on the matter were more positive:

You know, we talk a lot about scaffolding in music education, where we're trying to have students go from square one to square two, to a level where they should be. I am a strong believer of growth mindset, so I feel like a lot of things we do in music education [in the United States] stay really close to the growth mindset.

Sophie was appreciative of the emphasis on scaffolding she perceived as commonly practiced in the United States. When comparing this to her experiences in her home country, she portrayed it as an increase in expectation and support. She made the following comment regarding her music education in her home country:

Well, I think back in [her home country] it's definitely still a developing stage. We did have music classes when I was young like at school, but that was more like, you know, it's not the most important class ... we don't do much in the music classroom, which is quite sad.

In Sophie's view, the common practice of scaffolded music instruction in schools in the United States was a major improvement in support and expectation in comparison to her past experiences. She also highlighted the increased standard in how music education was addressed in her interaction with parents:

The U.S. is doing a much better job, at least at the elementary level because, like, the parents also pay more attention to the musical aspect of things. We just had a parent-teacher conference and a lot of parents actually wanted to talk to me and

ask how the kids are doing, what my curriculum is like ... so in the States, I want to say that the kids do have a lot of exposure to music.

Sophie perceived this increase in support as a very positive aspect of music education in the United States. In comparison with her own experience in her home country, Sophie was clearly able to perceive herself as holding students to a higher standard and providing more support. As she says, “I want to give my kids the best.”

All three participants mentioned aspects of expectations and student support in their responses. However, they possessed different views on such issues, shaped by their individual experiences both in the United States and in their home countries. Although these differences were substantial, there was a clear common value for giving their best to students and receiving their best effort in return. As a participant-observer, I also perceived a much greater emphasis on scaffolding within music education in the United States. In my experience, I found this to be particularly helpful as a preservice educator, as it made it easier for me to understand what is expected in music classes in the United States. However, I echo Thomas’ views on how leaving students to figure themselves out can also bring benefits and believe that a combination of both may bring about a healthy balance.

### **Music Education Accessibility**

Accessibility to quality music education in schools was something that all three participants emphasized in their responses. All spoke to how far ahead they perceived the United States is in comparison with their home countries in terms of providing school music education to the public. Thomas made the following comment:

We're very, very, very behind compared to the States in terms of giving access to all the students to music education. [In his home country] There are some schools that are dedicated to music, but in the general schools, there is [*sic*] no music programs and if there are music programs, they are basically happening after school. Not necessarily during school time ... music education happens outside of school, not necessarily in a classroom setting.

Edward made a similar remark, complimenting the United States on providing strong programs to the public. He shared the following:

I think I am very impressed with what they do [in the United States], I think the level is higher. I mean, I see kids come in ... first of all, kids play. Here they play only because they are exposed to it in elementary school. Kids that I couldn't imagine playing violin if there was no [music] program in their elementary school ... I think it's very good the way they do music education here in elementary school. Also, I know they study recorder and ukulele, all of these things I didn't see in my country. I think it's very good. In the city where I teach, it's a very diverse city with people from different cultures, not everybody can afford taking private lessons outside [school] so it's very good that we provide it.

Edward's comments highlighted the value of providing public access to music education and his school's success in doing so. He mentioned how relevant this was particularly to the portion of society that could not afford private lessons. Thomas also described the importance of making resources available to students with fewer financial resources by giving an example of how this manifested in the setting in which he taught:

I teach an after-school program that is tuition-based; rather, the choir is free. Of course, the choir is a much more diverse group compared to the [tuition-based] ensemble. This was surprising to me, maybe I was naïve to a certain level, but it took me a little bit to understand why, you know, students of color didn't apply to the [tuition-based] ensemble ... it occurred to me that, of course, that something else was playing an important role, which is being able to have access to certain resources, or being able to pay tuition, or having private instruction on a particular instrument, right ... so these are beautiful things ... I'm trying to find ways to provide, you know, an equitable access to all students.

Thomas was critically aware that not all students had the same resources at home. He acknowledged the beauty of having choir be a free offering for students and continued to reflect on ways to increase accessibility even further.

Sophie also made comparisons with accessibility to music education in her home country. She reflected on her experience in both countries and highlighted the different offerings to which students in the United States had access. About her experience, she reported the following:

There are a lot of private lessons happening in [her home country]. A lot of parents like to send their kids to private piano lessons. You know, compared to what we have [in the United States], it's more like group activities which is something that is kind of lacking back in [her home country]. I think that is something different, there are not any [music] activities happening at school ... I did have some music experiences in [her home country], but all of them are only limited to, like, private lessons and stuff, so when I got here, I was

in the marching band and that was like a brand new experience for me ... I never played in a band before back in [her home country].

There was a common admiration for how accessible quality music education was in the United States. In all three participants' perspectives, their home countries remained behind the United States in terms of quality music offerings for students. As mentioned before, Thomas spoke of his efforts in making music education access equitable to all students. Sophie made a similar reflection regarding her home country:

I see a lack of good, experienced [music] teachers back in [her home country], so that kind of got me thinking, maybe I could, you know, ... maybe I could learn something studying some pedagogy here in the U.S... I don't know what my future plans are, but maybe one day I'll go back ... hopefully, to make some contributions and also just to share what I've learned in the States to help other music teachers ... especially places that are still developing, because it is really crucial for, like, mental development and social emotional, just to have that, you know ... play, having fun aspect. A lot of studies have proven that music education helps kids with their brain development and creativity, so yeah.

Sophie indicated that she had embraced the value that she saw placed in music education in the United States and expressed how she would like to bring this over to her home country in order to improve access to quality music education. Music education accessibility was addressed by all participants as something of value, as well as something that they saw present in the United States. In my own experience, the level of accessibility to music education in the United States was one of the factors that attracted me to study music education in this country. Personally, I found that the wide access to

music education, which similarly to other participants is not as present in my own country, benefits not only all students but also the profession, as it brings about more teaching opportunities for new music educators.

### **Fostering Diversity in Content**

Diversity in music education and in education in general was something that the literature assessed in Chapter 2 explored and placed great value in (Banks, 1997; Colombo, 2005; Elpus, 2015; Ho, 2016; Howard, 2003; Koza, 2008; Sands, 1993; VanDeusen, 2019). Fostering diversity in the music education content was something that all three participants mentioned, in different degrees of depth. Specifically, participants mentioned cultural diversity, as well the idea of decentering Whiteness, as discussed by Koza (2008).

Whiteness is present in music education in many forms, particularly in the focus on the Western classical music tradition (Koza, 2008). Edward's teaching was primarily rooted in classical music; however, he also mentioned that he tried to include other styles into the development of his students. As he stated,

I focus mostly on classical music, but sometimes I also do some stuff like ragtime, jazz, or something like that ...[I] try to choose the repertoire that kids like, what they listen to and my approach is I want them to listen to some things they are not exposed to, so that's the difference between me and American teachers, I want them to be exposed to other kinds [of music].

Although Edward's pedagogy was primarily focused on the Western classical tradition, he displayed an awareness of the need to expose his students to other styles of music, as well as the music his students listened to on their own, through culturally

responsive teaching. During his interview, Thomas emphasized his views on the manifestation of Whiteness in music education and the need to foster diversity in music education content:

We are still basing our approach to music education on three main methods that were designed by White Europeans that [have been] dead [since] a long time ago, right? ... so this is not acceptable. It's not acceptable just because, first of all ... I'm not saying that the approaches are not valuable. They are absolutely valuable, but it cannot be based on these methods, so I think we are ignoring huge cultural resources that the students bring in [to the] class and most of these resources have nothing to do with European Western classical music. Unfortunately, since many teachers are trained on European Western classical music, they do not necessarily know what's in the hearts, minds and ears of our students and what are [*sic*] the music played at home and they probably do not understand it ... valuing more what the students bring in class and what is the music that they are growing up with at home is definitely something that needs to be included in class. I don't think it's less valuable than or less important than Mozart, Beethoven, and Bach, I think it's probably more important because this music is relevant for our students. European Western classical music, it is not.

Thomas's comment indicated that he had a strong stance on the importance of diversifying the content presented in music class. His philosophy promoted culturally responsive teaching as a priority when developing content and repertoire. Sophie also highlighted the importance of diverse content, making a direct connection to how her background as a culturally diverse music teacher influenced her views on the matter:

A lot of [music] teachers are talking about social emotional learning and how to make the classroom more diverse to include more cultures, which is really good ... because I have a diverse background, I come from a different country, I have my culture in me, a lot of times during my teaching I can pull out some songs I learned when I was little, in [her first language] so again, I will incorporate it into my teaching and teach them to the kids ... a lot of songs in both [her first language] and English, but also in other languages, too, I just taught them a song in French and also in some African languages; it's really important to me. It's probably because of my background, I tend to think you know, inclusiveness and diversity. Just to create a welcoming space for kids to learn.

Sophie's background played a big role in the importance she placed on including diverse content in her lessons. She also advocated for more diversity in music education and offered her own assistance in helping to normalize music content that decentralized Whiteness and promoted cultural diversity. As she intimated,

I love to show more varieties of music into [*sic*] my teaching. I encourage music educators to, you know, teach kids songs from Asia or India ... not just music that focuses mainly on White male composers or, you know, people like that, so I'm really open to sharing how to teach songs in [her first language] or even just show song resources or something like a unit plan or a curriculum focusing on Asian culture that would be more fun. More and more teachers should consider adding that to their regular curriculum and having these conversations. The more they get exposed to things like this, the less biases they will have towards certain cultures



or certain groups of people, because I believe sometimes biases are born because people have limited knowledge of certain groups, countries, stuff like that.

All three participants had an awareness of the importance of exposure to diversity within music education, even though different participants applied this practice and emphasized diversity in different ways. The three participants made a conscious effort to promote cultural diversity and culturally responsive teaching, as well as displacing Whiteness within their content in different ways. My own experience was similar to that of the three participants. My experience as an international music teacher forced me to see the importance of diversity with different eyes, which has become a central aspect of my teaching. Culturally responsive teaching and providing a platform for diverse cultures to thrive on are aspects I think about in every lesson I plan.

### **Building Relationships & Relating to Diverse Students' Experiences**

Perhaps one of the clearest emerging themes in the interviews is that of the participants' views on their abilities to relate to the experiences of culturally diverse students. A number of studies assessed in Chapter 2 examined the impact of diverse teachers in their relationships with students, as well as issues of representation in the teacher population (Altun, 2015; Bonneville, 2019; Colombo, 2005; Elpus, 2015; Howard, 2003; Sands, 1993). The findings of this study align with previous findings in terms of the benefits of such teachers when it comes to relating to students in ways other teachers may not. Participants spoke vastly about how they related to diverse student populations.

Thomas approached this topic through a number of different angles. He began by addressing the experience of having been an English learner and how he related to

students in a similar situation: “When I have in class students that [*sic*] are learning English, I think I can share with these students some experiences, right? ... so I have a connection with these students, I feel.”

Edward also acknowledged the bond he shared with his English-learning students and how he could relate to the experiences they had:

Sometimes I even get along better with [English-learning] students, because English is not our first language, we have the same experience coming to this country, so I can identify with [their] struggles, I can see it sometimes and American teachers don't experience the same thing that they experience. I know what they go through.

Thomas and Edward both found a bond between themselves and their English-learning students through a shared experience. When asked if she felt that she was able to relate to diverse students, Sophie took the language connection a step further and spoke of relating to students who looked like her: “Yes, in a way, because [her first language] is my first language, I grew up speaking it and now I'm using it to teach the class, especially when I see some students that [*sic*] look like me.”

The use of language in bonding with students was explored further by Thomas. He spoke about how he used language on a day-to-day basis to build relationships with students:

I think they can relate with me, especially if they speak a different language at home. Because I greet them in my language, for example, I rarely greet them in English ... so I call them [the word for “friends” in his first language] rather than friends, I say [the word for “good morning” in his first language] rather than good

morning ... many students, actually especially students that speak [two specific languages], they will answer back in their language and this is the most beautiful thing. They probably say a few words to me in their language and I answer back in their language; not in mine, as much as I can of course. I think this is important, and I think they relate to me differently for sure I mean, at least at this level ... based on what I see in the hallways you know, they do not greet other teachers in the same way they greet me. They say a few words in their language that they know I understand and maybe other teachers don't. Not because they want to hide something from other teachers, but just to have a connection with me, that is something that I noticed and I'm sure they do it also with other teachers that [*sic*] speak different languages.

Thomas elaborated further about how his experience as an immigrant in the United States helped him relate to his students of similar experiences:

I am more aware of cultural differences, for the simple fact that I lived it in my skin ... looking back to my experience and to what happened to me, I think I don't want to make the mistakes that other people made with me, so I would like to, you know, be always careful with what I say, how I act and especially, I want to be able to see all my students in all of their differences. I think this is an experience that not necessarily every American educator has.

As supported by the literature mentioned in the beginning of this section, the international music teachers I interviewed did indeed indicate that they were able to build a deeper bond with diverse students through shared experiences. Thomas and Sophie also commented about how their presence in the classroom as international teachers may have

served as a role model and inspiration for diverse students. For example, Sophie stated the following:

It really does impact them, because I think before, the other music teachers except for one were from the United States. I don't want to say all of them were White, but that might be true so having a woman with Asian identity, a woman that is still having an international [student] status, not quite [having] citizenship, is definitely something new to the kids. So, yeah, because of that... but it's also good to show them what's possible, like what are the possibilities, that you could do things you want to ... so it's good to kind of expose them to a different figure.

Thomas echoed Sophie's sentiment when asked if he thought his presence as an international teacher affected his students. He made the following comment:

Yeah, yeah, absolutely yes, absolutely, one hundred percent. I think they see first of all that an international can get a job in the United States, and a job that, you know, is a respectable job. All jobs are respectful and important; however, teaching, from their perspective of course, a teacher is someone that they need to deal with, you know, since kindergarten and so maybe many of the students look up to a teacher as a role model. To see that you can make it right, even in a different country, and you can become the person that you want to be, with sacrifices, with studying of course ... but the fact that it's possible you know, the fact that I'm standing there, means that it's possible. They can make it and even if someone that just came from a different country and feels they don't belong, my presence is telling them that they do belong and actually they can have an important role in the society, you know. They can become teachers, they can

become doctors, they can do whatever they do. There is a place for them and there will always be a place for them.

These participants clearly felt that they shared a bond with students of similar experiences. Diverse students had a prominent place in the student population in the United States, and these participants felt that their presence in the classroom allowed them to not only build deeper relationships, but also inspired them. In my own personal experience, being the only international teacher at the school where I taught played a big role in developing relationships even with students who were not in my classes. I felt that my mere presence in the school provided students of different cultures a sense of security and validation.

### **Developing Perceptions of Music Education**

The three participants had, to different degrees and in different ways, experienced teaching both in the United States and in their home country. When asked about how such an experience affected their perceptions of music education and their teaching values, participants provided a variety of answers. One commonality across all three participants' responses was that they placed increasing importance on their practice and profession. As Edward reflected,

[My perception of music education] didn't change. I still think the same, but I'm more and more convinced every year that this is something very important, especially these days ... we tend to think that kids [that] do music, they don't get in trouble so that's why music is very good.

Thomas spoke to how his perception of music education was ever-changing and continued to change as time went by. He also named contributing factors to this phenomenon:

Well, I think it's always changing year by year. I think that my vision of music education today is probably different from the vision that I had last year, and the more I teach, the more I learn. I'm more aware of changes, especially, you know, after a pandemic, of course I tell you that my vision is different, of course. It's not only that ... this country, politically, changed a lot ... and I think in many ways, music education was affected. We are now talking more about social justice education, in a way that ... I've been here for 12 years and I've never heard so much about social justice education than in the last two years, which is great, that's awesome. For sure this will keep changing the system, the approach and this is absolutely always a good thing when we talk about these issues ... my vision is definitely changing and will probably keep changing in the future.

Thomas saw the societal changes in the United States as a contributing factor, as well as an influence on the issues that became more commonly addressed within the profession. Sophie spoke about how her music education perspective was essentially developed in the United States. She described how being present and educated in the United States shaped her views of her practice:

[The United States] basically shaped my music education perspective. I taught me what it meant to be a teacher and it showed me some possibilities in music education ... everything I learned at [university in the United States at which she studied] helped me establish my music education foundation and because I'm

personally in the States right now, a lot of things I see, hear, research, you know ... pretty much every aspect of my teaching, I gained in the States. [Her perception of music education] becomes more and more important.

All three participants seemed to be affected by the trends of music education in the United States. Whether it was for the simple fact that students in the United States who studied music at school did not seem to get into as much trouble, as Edward described, or due to societal dynamics as mentioned by Thomas, or through studying in the United States as Sophie described, music education had grown in value for these three participants. My personal experiences were quite similar to Sophie's experience. Although I did not attend high school in the United States, I found that my music education values were rooted first in the education that I received at my undergraduate institution in the United States. Only later in my life did I refer back to my own culture and reviewed my music education attitudes. To this day, my experience in the music education profession continues to be the primary influencer on my views and values as a music educator.

### **Growth Mindset**

Growth mindset was an emerging theme mentioned, in some way, by all three participants. The mutual sense of becoming lifelong learners wanting to grow in the profession was easily identifiable in participants' interviews. This theme emerged throughout the interviews in different ways. Edward stated that he was "learning still, [he is] learning now what to do, every time [he finds] something new", highlighting that no matter how many years of experience he had, he continued to seek areas of growth. Sophie made the following statement regarding her views on growth mindset:

You know, we talk a lot about scaffolding in music education, where we're trying to have students go from square one to square two, to a level where they should be, and I am a strong believer of growth mindset.

Thomas' view also echoed the other participants' openness for growth, as evidenced in his comments about how teaching in the States changed his perspective about professional growth and his willingness to continue furthering his teaching skills:

Something that I also learned teaching here in the States is that you're never prepared enough to enter your classroom. As much as you can prepare, plan, study, you're never done and so that pushed me to continue my education and keep always an eye open for areas of growth. This is something that, in my country, it's not that common ... once someone gets a position, nothing can remove the teacher from that position and that is not a good thing because, of course, it's good to have some job security; however, it's good to be evaluated every time you know, to make sure that you're meeting the standards, and you're still a good teacher and still doing your work as you are supposed to.

Thomas' view on the importance of continuing to grow and develop his teaching was correlated with his experience teaching in the United States. For Sophie, music education practices in the United States aligned with her vision of the topic and motivated her to continue growing. Although Edward did not directly relate his openness to learn with his experience in the United States, he highlighted this important trait in his professional development.

Thomas' comments on the experiences of teachers in his home country were similar to my own views on the matter. I, too, came from a country where teachers did



not necessarily face the need to be constantly evaluated. My experience teaching in the United States allowed me to realize the importance of being constantly aware of my teaching and my purpose in the classroom.

### **Challenges of International Music Teachers**

This study approached the understanding of the perspectives of international music teachers through a number of lenses, one of them being the challenges they experienced. Some of the literature assessed in Chapter 2 provided information on challenges commonly faced by international teachers (Datta-Roy & Lavery, 2017; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004; Hutchison & Bailey, 2007; Kennedy, 2000; Miller, 2018; Ospina & Medina, 2020). The findings of this study also echoed previous findings. Each participant was asked to share any professional or personal challenges they faced in their personal journey. One of the first issues that was brought up was language barrier. Sophie spoke about her experience dealing with language barriers and how this played a role in her journey:

I won't say I was struggling with my English when I first got here, but I was not that fluent. ... sometimes language barrier [occurs] a little, now it's not quite a problem. Sometimes I feel like I'm not as confident because I don't feel like my speaking is good enough. I know a lot of people say "Oh, your English is fine" but still, I have this self-doubt inside of me.

Although Sophie has a strong command of the English language, her own perceptions of her fluency are a cause of insecurity. Thomas spoke of similar feelings towards issues of language and how they affected his experience:

The issues that I faced were mainly connected to language ... I've often felt underestimated because of my accent, because of the way I was talking and so that made me feel not valued ... if you think someone has struggled expressing what they want to say you know, it's easy to stereotype it and think that this person maybe doesn't know enough about [a given] topic or is not prepared enough, or is not confident enough, simply because maybe that person does not have the same skill as in their own native language. Of course, that was my personal challenge and maybe that could be transferred also at the professional level. When you see certain things and you want to express yourself in a certain way, a certain professional way, maybe the amount of vocabulary that you have available is much more limited compared to someone that [*sic*] is sitting next to you, maybe English is their first language, so that is something that happened often and maybe still happens at certain levels. I know that I can be much more proficient and I can express myself much better in my native language, rather than in my second language. Even if now, it has been many years that I'm in this country, I write papers and everything, it's never going to be my first language. ... it will take years to get at least closer, I wouldn't say at the same level, but closer to my first language in an efficient way. Probably this was the biggest challenge.

Sophie and Thomas were considerably affected by the challenges of language barriers in the act of coming to the United States. Although Edward did not elaborate on his experience with the English language, he did mention it when speaking of relating to other English-learning students:

English is not our first language, because we have the same experience coming to this country, so I can identify with [their] struggles, I can see it sometimes and American teachers don't experience the same thing that they experience. I know what they go through kind of.

Language barrier was a major challenge that participants experienced in coming to the United States. This issue was closely related to culture shock experienced by some of the participants. Thomas spoke about a small instance in which he experienced culture shock:

The culture shock ... so many cultural differences between my individual culture and the culture that I was in. I mean, many differences [ranging] from simply saying "Hi, how are you?" and walking away without waiting for the answer, simply a way to say hi, but in my country if you say, "How are you?" you mean it, so you expect an answer ... to more complicated things but, in general, I think many, many things.

Edward also remarked about his experience adapting to a new culture: "Look, it was a different culture, so I had to adapt to the new culture, but my wife is an American so this helps me also." Sophie spoke about how grateful she was to her first host family and how they helped her deal with culture shock:

Definitely a lot of personal challenges when I first came here because I was kind of young and I didn't know what to expect, but the good thing is that I had a host family ... they taught me a lot of things, kind of leading me into, you know, introducing me to American culture ... so that is like the personal side of the culture shock and, you know, learning new things.

Another aspect of cultural shock was microaggressions. Thomas shared about his experience with microaggressions and how they affected him:

Microaggressions, you know, some regarding accent or where I was from. I was called names because of you know, the country or region, many stereotypes and so on. Microaggressions are never nice. Over time, they're always effective somehow.

Thomas went on to speak about how he had suffered discrimination as well:

Being a White European man ... it's interesting, right, because of course it might lead my colleagues to an idea of, you know ... maybe someone that is not aware of cultural differences, of racism, and discrimination in general, but living as a foreigner in this country put me in a position where, to a certain level, I have experienced discrimination.

As mentioned before, the participants expressed a greater sense of being able to relate to students of diverse background. There is also an expressed difficulty in being able to relate to the experiences of students who did not share similar experiences or who may not have possessed as diverse of a background. Some participants spoke about having difficulty relating to the experiences of students who grew up here, and finding it difficult to connect with them. Sophie stated the following:

Because I don't have the experience of growing up here, I don't know a lot of ... I'm missing that culture aspect of things a little, especially when I try to blend with the kids. It's really hard for me to share my experiences if I want them to feel the same, you know. Just that aspect of it.

Thomas expressed similar feelings in this regard, speaking about the experience of teaching in a system that he did not experience himself:

Of course, you are teaching in a system that you didn't grow up in, and so you need to understand what is happening around you and, of course, everything is different from the system you grew up in. From how the language is taught to you know, what are the resources available, how the students are sitting in class, how they act in class, you know all these things, of course it's difficult to adjust to all these things at once.

In addition to all of the challenges that most music teachers have to face, the three participants experienced a number of other challenges based on their experience of leaving their native culture to come to the United States. The challenges they discussed echoed findings from previous studies, especially in terms of language barrier and cultural adaptation (Datta-Roy & Lavery, 2017; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004; Hutchison & Bailey, 2007; Kennedy, 2000; Miller, 2018; Ospina & Medina, 2020). In terms of challenges, my experiences differed greatly from those of the three participants. Although none of the participants spoke extensively about their immigration process, I personally found it to be perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of my identity as an international music teacher. As explored in Chapter 2, the paths towards being able to teach in the United States are complex (Furuya et al., 2019) and force some international teachers to face an entirely separate set of difficulties when looking for jobs. The dependency on employer sponsorship in order to teach in the United States beyond the period of OPT (for teachers who studied in the United States) has been perhaps one of my greatest challenges. I find that this challenge consumes my professional life in a major

way and perhaps even affects my own perspectives of myself as an international music teacher. To be separated from native music teachers as such has affected my own personal journey greatly.

### **Benefits of International Music Teachers**

Participants were also asked about their perceived benefits of being an international music teacher. Some of the studies reviewed in Chapter 2 identify benefits within the experiences of cross-cultural teaching (Altun, 2015; Au & Blake, 2003; Bonneville, 2019; Carson & Westvall, 2016; Fortuijn, 2002; Kennedy, 2000; Serin, 2017). Findings in this study align with previous findings, adding benefits that are music teacher-specific, which are further explored in this section.

As explored in previous sections of this chapter, some of the most relevant benefits that the participants experienced related to the ability to develop deeper relationships with students of diverse backgrounds through language and culture, as well as greater awareness of diversity and inclusiveness in the music classroom. Another closely related benefit was the aspect of representation. This is an issue that has been examined in multiple studies within music education (Altun, 2015; Banks, 1997; Bonneville, 2019; Colombo, 2005; Elpus, 2015; Howard, 2003; Koza, 2008; Sands, 1993). Previous sections of this chapter explored how participants felt their presence in the classroom showed students of diverse backgrounds that it was possible to “make it” in the United States. This role modeling and inspiration came as a result of representation of students who came from diverse backgrounds. Moreover, Thomas explored how he felt he had a greater perception and connection with certain minorities within his student body. As he shared,

Being someone that [*sic*] traveled and came here to the States, that puts me in a position where probably I feel more connection with certain minorities that often are not even seen or maybe are not considered by the system as minorities or as subgroups of the subgroups.

As mentioned previously, participants felt a greater degree of connection with certain groups of students and, as a consequence, were representatives of their experience within the teacher body. In addition to having a positive impact on their students, participants also believed that the presence of internationals in the United States could be beneficial for colleagues as well. Thomas emphasized the following about his impact on coworkers:

I think they learn a lot, and I think they are still learning many things. For example, not to assume things, not to think that the way they approach is always correct because there might be someone else that grew up in a different system, they might have a different approach that might work as well, maybe it can work better. I think it's good, I mean, I think that we should have more international teachers in classes. It benefits everyone. The community, the parents, the students, the administration and colleagues. When you have someone that [*sic*] comes from a different place or someone that [*sic*] has a different culture from yours, I think it's inevitable that you ask yourself some questions ... when you compare your identity to someone else's identity, of course, you ask yourself questions. Maybe, certain things that for you were ... maybe you are sure about certain things, and then, when you compare to someone else. Maybe that thing or that idea can be changed, right? ... I would love to see more research on international teachers ...

it's important to grow the number of international teachers in schools, as they might benefit the system for sure.

Thomas spoke about how the presence of someone different could encourage an individual to reflect upon their own perspectives and how this added value to the presence of international teachers in schools. Sophie also mentioned the importance of having conversations with other teachers about cultural diversity in order to undo biases, and how in music education specifically, the authentic knowledge of multicultural music can be powerful. She shared how she used her own international friends as a resource for this as well:

Because I also have a lot of international friends, from Japan, Thailand... a lot of times I can use them as a resource as well, especially when I want to do a lesson in this specific language, I can actually ask for clarification and etc. [Her students] are more exposed to more variety on some things ... The more they get exposed to things like this, the less biases they will have towards certain cultures or certain groups of people because I believe sometimes biases are born because people have limited knowledge of certain groups, countries, stuff like that.

Participants believed that their presence and ability to spread awareness of cultural diversity was a tool for fighting cultural bias. They also spoke about the importance of representation, connecting with diverse students, and having an awareness of diversity and inclusiveness in the classroom. These are all participants' perceived benefits of the experience and presence of international music teachers.

### **Perceived Strengths of School Music Education in the United States**



Part of examining the perspectives of international music teachers in the United States is looking at their perceptions of the state of music education in the United States. Participants were asked multiple questions regarding their views on music education in the United States. As has been explored in previous sections of this chapter, some of the strengths mentioned by participants included wide accessibility to music education in schools, student centeredness through strong student support, and a strong musical foundation at a young age. In addition to this, participants also brought up a positive focus on group work and a holistic exploration of music content, as well as a high level of content and performance.

Sophie spoke highly of the structure and methodologies provided to elementary music students in the United States in comparison to her home country:

I know a lot of teachers back in [her home country] who also start to learn and apply the Orff method and the Kodály method, and [having] training certificate programs they set up to help elementary students to learn. I still think it's in the developing stage, whereas in the U.S., everything falls into place nicely. There's like a system, there are like some procedures and you know what to do, it's just more well rounded here.

Edward praised the music offerings for students at all ages in the United States. He believed the holistic music approach played a role in the development of music students:

I think it's very good the way they do music education here in elementary school. Also, I know they study recorders and ukulele, all of these things I didn't see in my country ... I think it's very good, very high level. Also, we have AP classes,

so kids can even study harmonies. It's very rare in high school for kids to study harmony [in his home country] so you're exposed to all of these things in music theory, it's very good and these things complete one another as well, because if we study, for example, the circle of fifths. The kids have to play all of these scales so this is a part of the puzzle. I'm very impressed by what's going on in my school.

Edward praised the amount and diversity of music offerings available for students in the United States and mentioned that programs could have a high level. Thomas echoed Edward's feelings by saying that his country was "very behind" the United States in terms of high level offerings in school.

Although approached from different lenses, Sophie and Edward also mentioned how group work was a beneficial common practice in music education in the United States. Edward shared an example from the orchestral setting, while Sophie spoke of general music in the elementary setting. As Edward commented,

In [his home country] it's more individual. Everybody is like trying to play a concerto, and here they try to blend as a group, so I learned that. I learned a lot from this as the things they do here is work on excerpts, orchestral excerpts as a group, which in [his home country] is not so important, but this group work can actually improve your technique.

About group activities, Sophie reported, "Here [in the United States] it's more like group activities, which is something that is kind of lacking back in [her home country]. I think that that is something different, not any activities happening at school, yes."

Sophie and Edward also shared a perceived admiration for the level of performance at schools in the United States. Sophie described her experiences as a high school student in a music program in the United States, while Edward spoke of his own teaching experience. According to Sophie,

I actually got to tour with [her school band] and do some competitions, which was, like, brand new for me, I never had that before and I was also playing with a lot of, like, really great players ... this is where I got inspired and motivated to go to different festivals. It definitely makes my life a lot more colorful, it expands my view so I learned to be confident, how important is teamwork, a lot of important social skills through music.

Edward described the level of performance of his ensembles in the United States, stating that, “We are [at a] very high level, with very good players. I really feel that since coming to the United States.”

Participants identified multiple points of strength in music education in the United States, focusing primarily on wide accessibility to music education in schools, student centeredness through strong student support, a strong musical foundation at a young age, a holistic approach to music education, emphasis on group work, and maintaining a high level of performance. My personal views on the strengths of music education in the United States align with those of the three participants. I find that accessibility, student support, and a holistic approach to music education are perhaps the most valuable assets of music education in my experience in the United States.

### **Perceived Weaknesses of School Music Education in the United States**

Just as this study examines participants' perceived strengths of music education in the United States, it also examines participants' perceived weaknesses of school music education in the United States. Some of the aspects for improvement brought up in participants' responses have been explored in previous sections of this chapter, such as students being held to a low standard of expectation in class and having a focus on Whiteness in content. In addition to this, participants explored topics such as a lack of certain types of content in the curriculum, a lack of support from administration, a short amount of class time, and a lack of music-specific professional development. About music curriculum, Thomas commented,

I was surprised at the fact that music technology is still far away, or at least far behind compared to other approaches such as instrumental music, for example. This is something that today, I think that, from the United States, I was expecting something different. I think something must be done. The fact that still, in 2022, after a pandemic, there is still a lot of resistance towards including music technology in the core standards is something that I don't think is acceptable and still surprises me. I can't wrap my head around it.

Thomas expressed his frustration about the United States not including content such as music technology in the core curriculum for music education, given the resources available for it. However, Edward's main frustration was related to how music education was perceived by administrators at his school. He commented that,

I would like to see the administration take what we do more seriously. Sometimes they look at it as like, occupational therapy. As long as the kids are busy playing, it's okay. It doesn't matter what they do. I want to accomplish something. It's not

enough that they play an instrument and that's it. I feel, at least in our school, the system focused on [standardized exams]. If there is a [standardized exam] taking place, there is no rehearsal or nothing so they're not so involved and I'm not sure they are totally aware of the benefits of kids doing art. A lot of the time, I feel that the administration doesn't really understand what we do and they don't understand our problems.

Sophie shared a similar sentiment. She advocated that more time class time would be beneficial and compared the amount of class time she got in the United States with what other countries provided:

Can we have more than one session each week for kids? Up in Canada, I just heard this today from someone in the Toronto area, saying that they have music class twice if not three times every week for 30 minutes, so they have 90 minutes of music whereas here, we only get 45 minutes so yeah. If we can increase that, I think a lot of kids would benefit.

After Sophie's interview was completed and she reviewed her transcripts, she made the request to add two more comments, which referred to her wish to see increased budgets for music education, as well as more music-specific professional development. Thomas also mentioned a lack of professional development for music teachers, especially in terms of culturally responsive teaching, stating the following:

[We need] more music selected by the students and more professional development for teachers, so they can appreciate and learn the values carried inside that music.

The feedback provided by participants in terms of the strengths and weaknesses of school music education in the United States was informed not only by their experiences in the United States, but also by their experiences in their home country. Such findings were not evident in the literature and may provide useful reflection points for the profession and practitioners of the field. In my personal experience, the focus on Whiteness in content is perhaps the most concerning issue in music education for me. A large portion of my teaching aims to decentralize Whiteness in order to address this issue. Reading participant's responses, I was not surprised to discover the next emerging theme.

### **Suggestions for Music Education Practice**

Participants were asked if they would like to share any suggestions for the improvement of school music education practice in the United States. Their suggestions related to the decentering of Whiteness in music education, increasing awareness of diversity, increasing the role of performance in music education practice, and advocating for the benefits of music education. Thomas's statement regarding suggestions for the practice of music education was largely shaped by his previously-examined comments on diversity. As he advised,

Oh, my goodness, many [changes he would like to see in music education]. Well, where do we start ... there are many and it's difficult to say what is the most important ... I can say that what I would love to see is everyone, teachers, students, administrators, families, politicians ... value and appreciate more the other. The other means the person that [*sic*] is next to you, that [*sic*] is always different from you. Learning to appreciate more and see differences, values in being different and being unique. I'd love to see classes where you walk in and

everyone is represented, no one has to align to a certain thinking or a certain code, everyone can be who they want to be, who they are. I would love to live in an environment where everyone is more aware of other cultures and they appreciate more these values that are carried in the cultures that are represented in the class.

Thomas' vision for music education refers to "the other" as discussed by Cain (2015). He advocated for greater awareness and appreciation of diversity which, as previously explored in the chapter, was something he suffered from the lack of and made a conscious effort to ensure that his students were not negatively impacted by similar attitudes. He went on to suggest using more oral traditions as a method of displacing Whiteness and traditional Western classical European methods:

Much more oral tradition in this system would absolutely benefit. ... valuing more what the students bring in class and what is the music that they are growing up with at home is definitely something that needs to be included in class ... This needs to change, so we need to start teaching music from the music that they listen to and pointing out the things that are in the music that they listen to that can be then transferred among different genres and then can be taught. Always starting from what the students know because they bring the knowledge, not the teacher. It's an absolutely outdated approach. How many students are exposed to music in the United States and how many students are exposed to music, for example, in my country, right? We probably have the same percentage of musicians coming out. Maybe in my country, there are a little bit more simply because they love it. They don't do it because they have to. They do it because they love it. ... The musicians were not forced to study through such methods,

that doesn't exist. They just sit around the table and play. They're treated as musicians. This is something we are not doing in our classes and definitely should be done more, so more oral tradition coming from the students.

Sophie also expressed a desire to see more awareness of diversity in the practice of music educators. As explored previously, she believed that exposing students to a greater variety of music could help to decenter Whiteness and avoid biases. As she counseled,

I love to show more varieties of music into my teaching. I encourage music educators to, you know, teach kids songs from Asia or India... not just music that focuses mainly on White male composers or you know, people like that so I'm really open to sharing how to teach songs in [her first language] or even just show song resources or something like a unite plan or a curriculum focusing on Asian culture that would be more fun. More and more teachers should consider adding that to their regular curriculum and having these conversations. The more they get exposed to things like this, the less biases they will have towards certain cultures or certain groups of people because I believe sometimes biases are born because people have limited knowledge of certain groups, countries, stuff like that.

Edward's suggestions indicated that school music education would benefit greatly from more advocacy for the benefits of the subject towards administrators, as well as an increased effort from teachers to be active performers outside of the classroom. As he had previously mentioned:

I would like to see the administration take what we do more seriously. Sometimes they look at it as like, occupational therapy. As long as the kids are busy playing,



it's ok. It doesn't matter what they do. I want to accomplish something. It's not enough that they play an instrument and that's it ... they're not so involved and I'm not sure they are totally aware of the benefits of kinds doing art. A lot of the time, I feel that the administration doesn't really understand what we do and they don't understand our problems ... Also, as a music teacher, it helps that I play. I feel a lot of music teachers, they only teach all the time. They are not connected to the music world and the fact that I play, I'm on stage at least every two weeks playing, I bring this freshness to the classroom. Let's face it, sometimes when you teach for many years, you can wear out. You can be exhausted and students feel it. Students need a teacher with a spark in their eyes, who is excited about what they teach and I feel the effect [of the fact that] I'm playing brings to this to them.

The participants brought a variety of practice suggestions for the consideration of music educators. These suggestions are directly related to their personal experiences. They, too, may be useful points of reflection and consideration for the field as these findings are not reflected in previous research findings.

### **Summary**

This chapter has explored the findings and emerging themes of the examination of perspectives of three international music teachers in the United States. The emerging themes that were explored were expectations and student support, music education accessibility, fostering diversity in content, building relationships & relating to diverse students' experiences, developing perceptions of music education, growth mindset, challenges and benefits, perceived strengths and weaknesses of school music education in the United States, as well as suggestions for the practice of music education. Participants

often differed in their opinions within the emergent themes, and they all explored such topics via the lens of their personal experiences. There were common threads through their experiences of being international music teachers in the United States and considerable overlap in values and perspectives. Perhaps the most important aspect of these results is that participants brought in a vast amount of ideas and concepts developed through their cross-cultural experiences, all of which were unique to their experience in two countries. Their responses may provide valuable insights into a perspective that is unattainable by music educators who have not experienced the same phenomenon.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I address how the information discussed in the previous chapter relates to the four research questions of this study. I also explore the implications of this study for schools, the profession of music education, and international music teachers. I close by offering suggestions for further research.

#### **Research Question 1**

Research Question 1 asked *how have the experiences of international music teachers in their home country informed their practices in the United States?* The way in which the experiences of the three participants in their home country affected their practices varied greatly. The previous chapter examined participants' responses, indicating that common themes within this research question include having certain expectations from students and the amount of support provided, being aware of decentralizing Whiteness within music education, being more aware of cultural diversity and inclusiveness, and making use of their own cross-cultural experience in order to develop relationships with students and peers.

Sophie spoke about how her own culture “shaped who [she is]. It influences [her] more on [her] personality than [her] pedagogy.” Through her responses explored in the previous chapter, it is evident that her culture provided her with tools and experiences that brought her personality and cultural identity into her teaching. Thomas emphasized the same by saying that his cultural identity “is never covered, it will never be covered. That is who [he is] and if someone is not with it, there’s nothing [he] can do, they will learn to be ok with it because [he] can’t change [his] identity.” Beyond these themes,

participants' experiences in their home country defined who they were as people, inevitably shaping who they were as teachers and having an impact on all of the students in their classrooms. Some of these findings align with literature discussed in Chapter 2, such as issues related cultural adaptation, language barriers, benefits of cross-cultural interactions, among others (Altun, 2015; Au & Blake, 2003; Bonneville, 2019; Carson & Westvall, 2016; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004; Fortuijn, 2002; Kennedy, 2000; Serin, 2017).

### **Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 queried *what are the challenges and benefits experienced by international music teachers in the United States?* All three participants shared their experiences in regards to challenges they faced and benefits they experienced. The major challenges emerging from the data were language barriers, cultural shock, microaggressions, discrimination, difficulty in relating to the experiences of native students, and working in a system that they did not experience themselves. Many of these findings aligned with studies assessed in Chapter 2 (Datta-Roy & Lavery, 2017; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004; Hutchison & Bailey, 2007; Kennedy, 2000; Miller, 2018; Ospina & Medina, 2020). The participants experienced major benefits that included the ability to develop deeper relationships with students of diverse backgrounds, greater awareness of diversity and inclusiveness, representation, access to a wider variety of musical resources from other cultures and creating reflection for peers. Some similarity to these benefits can be found in the literature assessed in Chapter 2 (Altun, 2015; Bonneville, 2019; Colombo, 2005; Elpus, 2015; Eros, 2016; Howard, 2003; Sands, 1993), while findings such as creating reflections for peers and access to a wider variety of musical resources came as an addition.

It became clear through this examination that the three participants underwent very particular journeys of their own, though sharing a great deal of commonalities in the obstacles faced and rewards from the journey. These challenges and benefits shaped their teaching, as well as their lives. Their identities as international music teachers provided them an insightful, unique perspective inside the classroom that was difficult to replicate without having similar experiences. As Edward put it in clear and simple terms, “For me as an outsider, I can see things differently than a music teacher that [*sic*] grew up here.”

### **Research Question 3**

Research Question 3 inquired *how has teaching in the United States affected international music teachers’ perspectives of school music education?* Although the three participants shared the common experience of being music teachers from other cultures, their experiences were vastly different. As expected, the influence that teaching in the United States had on their perspectives was vastly different. The major themes that arose in relation to this question were the development of teaching values, awareness of new issues, a changing perspective on student support and expectations, the development and fostering of growth mindset, and a greater importance placed on music education in schools.

As explored in the previous chapter, Thomas spoke about how not only did his own lived experiences in coming to this country and understanding what it is like to be othered shape his perspectives, but also the ever-changing dynamics in the country itself, as well as within the profession. He described how the political scene affected the field of music education in the United States and, in turn, how it affected his views. He also mentioned his newly-developed embrace of professional growth mindset.

Sophie made it clear that her perspective of music education was fully developed in the United States, given her experience as a student in this country. As previously examined, her musical experiences in the United States were major motivations in her career and defined her views of the profession. Unlike the other two participants, Sophie came to the United States during her teen years and did not experience music education outside of the United States quite as much as Thomas and Edward did.

Although Edward claimed that his teaching values did not change in coming to the United States, he spoke of his observations of how music education was practiced in the United States and how he saw many positive trends in the field. He added that he saw music education as more and more important nowadays. His responses also indicated his value of growth mindset. The findings in regards to this research question are new additions to the body of research on international music teachers.

#### **Research Question 4**

Research Question 4 asked *what do international music teachers perceive as strengths and weaknesses of school music education in the United States?* All three participants mentioned aspects of strengths and weaknesses in school music education in the United States. As explored in the previous chapter, participants' perceived strengths of music education in the United States were accessibility to school music education, strong student support, strong musical foundation from a young age, emphasis on group activities, holistic exploration of music content through different class offerings, and a high level of performance. Each participant highlighted particular strengths that influenced their work in particular, but accessibility and student support were commonly addressed topics. In terms of weaknesses, participants' perceptions focused on low

standards of expectation from students, Whiteness-centered curriculum and content, resistance to music technology in the core standards, lack of administrative support, short amounts of class time, and lack of music-specific professional development. Similar to the perceived strengths, these perceived weaknesses affected each participant to varying degrees; however, each participant emphasized the importance of addressing such issues and how this could directly benefit their students.

In my own personal experience as an international music teacher in the United States, I strongly agree with the strengths and weaknesses explored by the three participants. I found that the position of music teacher can be quite isolating in itself when compared to other school subjects, and the identity of being an international teacher can often add another layer of isolation to it. Perhaps further administrative support and mentoring could help address such frustration. On the other hand, I find that the wide accessibility to music education enhances the ability to reach students of diverse backgrounds, which is not only beneficial for the education of such students, but it is also beneficial to have such students interacting with international music teachers and building deep connections through shared experiences, as has been explored in the previous chapter.

The perspective of these participants came from a wide range of experiences both as students and teachers in multiple countries. The richness of their experiences added to the validity of their concerns, as they had substantial experiences in other countries either as students or professionals of music. Additionally, the participants made observations in terms of the state of music education in the United States which may be valuable for

consideration in the profession, as they possessed a unique insight and similar perspectives do not yet seem to be shared through research in music education.

### **Implications**

The findings of this study may be of value in multiple settings within music education, as well as for different parties involved in the profession. The study poses implications for schools, particularly public schools and their administrations serving diverse populations. The participants' responses in relation to their experiences and perspectives show the powerful impact that international music teachers can have on students of diverse backgrounds, as well as on their colleagues. Schools that serve growing diverse populations may consider such findings, as well as the potential that international teachers may have in better serving their diverse students. Findings suggest that international music teachers, through their unique experiences and cultural identities, may be able to have a distinct positive impact on diverse students. Administrators may also benefit from re-evaluating the importance of music programs in their schools and how they benefit student learning.

The findings also provide implications for music educators. The experiences of the participants differed greatly from those of most music educators, given participants' distinct journeys towards becoming music educators in the United States. As this exploration demonstrated, such differences provided experiences that allowed these participants to have an insight into content, student relations, and professional values that may be enriching to all music educators. The values, reflections, and suggestions for practice made by the participants could enrich all music educators' perspectives and perhaps enhance their teaching and the experiences of their students.



This study is, as far as can be determined, the first of its kind given its specific focus on international music teachers in the United States. Naturally, this provides implications for international music teachers themselves. Speaking from my own experience as an international music teacher, it can be a lonely identity to hold, with little to no consideration given to this specific profile of music educator. This study may bring more attention to the experience of these teachers, and hopefully help develop research to further explore their experiences. The findings show that there is room for international music teachers in the profession, and that they, too, make strong contributions in the classroom. The development of research in this area may also be of assistance to future international music teachers who may be in preservice stages, or even international college applicants who consider this field. Perhaps this study may be a valuable resource for such individuals.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

As aforementioned, this study contributes to the literature by taking into consideration an experience that, as far as can be determined, has not yet been deeply explored in music education research. There are many aspects of the international music teacher experience to be explored further. By allowing the phenomenon of international music teachers teaching in the United States to remain unexplored, the profession is not only missing potentially valuable insights, but also neglecting the experience of these teachers. International music teachers go through experiences that are vastly contrasting with those of native music teachers, and international music teachers' perspectives, as shown in the findings of this study, come from a rich breadth of cross-cultural experiences. Further research on international music teachers from specific cultures and

in specific school settings may illuminate a clearer picture of the impact that these teachers have on students and on the profession. In addition, further research on the immigration processes of music teachers would also allow the profession to gain a clearer understanding of the challenges that international music teachers face, and how the profession and schools alike may benefit from better understanding of immigration processes. Further development of such understandings could certainly increase the inclusion of international music teachers in the profession.

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