

## **Music Student Teachers' Perceptions of their Seminar Experience: A Pilot Study Exploration through Focus Groups**

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**“I honestly thought it was just gonna be another ‘class’ class, and it’s not. It something more.”**  
**(Music Student Teacher, 2016)**

In most colleges and universities across the country, the student teaching seminar is understood to align and support the practicum aspects of student teaching. Zeichner and Liston (1987) proposed that the purpose of the student teaching seminar is “to help students broaden their perspectives on teaching, consider the rationales underlying alternative possibilities for classrooms and pedagogy, and assess their own developing perspectives toward teaching” (p.32). Although researchers have recently reported seminar instructors’ perceptions of the purpose, structure, and content of music student teaching seminars (Baumgartner, 2014; Baumgartner & Councill, 2017; Councill, 2013), there is no known research that examines these contexts from the perspective of current student teachers. The purpose of this study was to examine music student teachers’ perceptions of the student teaching seminar, specifically regarding the structure and content of the course.

According to Litoselliti (2003), focus groups are utilized to “obtain multiple views and attitudes, and often require complex negotiations of the on-going interaction processes among participants” (p.2). Student teachers immersed in their student teaching practicum and the accompanying seminar served as the focus group participants in our research. The selected research sites for this project included three NASM-accredited, 4-year degree granting, state universities in the Midwest where the music department was charged with leading the student teaching seminar. We participated in two of the seminars in-person and one virtually (a regular practice for this seminar), utilizing a researcher-developed predetermined questioning route. Thirteen prompts were used in all three focus groups. Following informational/demographic prompts (name, area of music study, internship placement type), questions focused on interns’ perceptions of seminar structure, seminar content, methods in which they were assessed in the course, experiences with other student teachers, and their perceived purpose of the seminar. Follow-up questions were asked if more information was needed. Interviews were approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes in length, and were recorded, transcribed, coded, and combined into themes for ease of displaying data (Creswell, 2007).

Findings suggest that music student teachers overwhelmingly perceived the seminar as a professional learning community (PLC)—a place for learning and problem-solving (Bausmith & Marry, 2011)—as well as a “safe place,” where they felt comfortable sharing both successes and challenges from the internship with peers who were embarking on the same experience. Participants continually reinforced the importance of reflective practice toward their personal growth as teachers. High-stakes assessments appeared to be the focus of seminar content; formal assessments (i.e., state-mandated portfolio or Teacher Work Sample) was required for licensure at two universities. While some interns felt more time per seminar was needed, others expressed difficulty in focusing after a full day of teaching.

Music teacher educators who lead the student teaching seminar should consider the importance of creating a community among interns. We suggest time at each seminar be set aside for student teachers to share and “vent,” supporting the perceived importance of “therapy time” described by participants in this study. While formal state-mandated assessments may take up a vast amount of time (both in and out of seminar meetings), we recommend incorporating other activities (e.g., lesson planning, special needs instruction, reinforcement of music education methods, administrative tasks) that support continued pedagogical growth and socialization into the profession; such topics previously were mentioned as infrequently covered seminar topics, but are suggested as important for continued study by both music education researchers (Baumgartner & Councill, 2017; Conway & Hodgman, 2006) and music student teachers from the present study. Our future research will compare the seminar perceptions of music student teachers at various points throughout the internship. Additionally, we will compare interns’ experiences from seminars of various structure—seminars led by instructors in music education, general education, and a combination of the two.

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