TEACHER COMMUNICATION IN TITLE I ELEMENTARY MUSIC CLASSROOMS:
PERCEPTIONS OF ELEMENTARY MUSIC CLASSROOM TEACHERS
Lindsey Lea Mason

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APPROVED:
Donna Emmanuel, Major Professor
Nathan Kruse, Committee Member
Warren Henry, Committee Member
Debbie Rohwer, Chair of the Division of
Music Education
James C. Scott, Dean of the College of
Music
Mark Wardell, Dean of the Toulouse
Graduate School

The increasing cultural diversity in the United States has brought not only richness, but also complex challenges, to various segments of American society, particularly with regard to public schools. As the student population continues to diversify while teacher population remains predominately White, female, and middle class, teacher awareness in the classroom might be an integral piece to assist students marginalized by stereotypes in feeling more empowered in the school community. Through qualitative data collection and analysis, and framed by Basil Bernstein's language code theory, this study explored teachers’ perceptions of how classroom interactions, in light of differences in communication, might impact students of different socio-economic backgrounds from the teacher.

The findings of this study indicated that the participants expressed a desire to connect with all of their students, regardless of their background. They also discussed challenges that made relationships difficult, such as feelings of disconnect from their Title I students and their families based on differences in home life and background. This dissonance was often difficult for the participants to reconcile due to pressures and difficulties in their teaching situations, such as the large number of students and the scheduling of classes, curricular pressures, and other district expectations such as after-school ensembles. Implications for practicing music teachers and teacher education include ways to understand students’ communities and rethinking ways of approaching relevant terminology in education.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................... iii

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................. 1
   Background of the Problem ................................................................................................... 3
   Statement of the Problem ...................................................................................................... 6
   Purpose of the Study .............................................................................................................. 7
   Need for the Study ................................................................................................................ 8
   Definition of Key Terms ....................................................................................................... 10
   Theoretical Framework ........................................................................................................ 14
   Assumptions and Limitations .............................................................................................. 15

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE .............................................................................. 17
   Communication in the Classroom ....................................................................................... 17
      Teacher Variables ............................................................................................................. 19
      Cultural Diversity ........................................................................................................... 22
      Teacher Perceptions and Beliefs .................................................................................... 26
      Impact on Students .......................................................................................................... 27
      Communication Summary .............................................................................................. 31
   Power Hierarchies ............................................................................................................... 32
      Power in the Workplace .................................................................................................. 34
      Power in Education ......................................................................................................... 36
      Power Summary .............................................................................................................. 39
   Basil Bernstein’s Code Theory .......................................................................................... 40
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public and Formal Language</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restricted and Elaborated Code</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empirical Studies Using Bernstein’s Theory</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication, Power, and Bernstein in Music Education</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paradigm</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenology</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Lens</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Method</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Particularistic Collective Case Study</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths and Limitations of Case Study Research</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of the Participants and Setting</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Review Board Approval</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Sources</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group Interviews</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Interviews</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journals</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection and Analysis</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. PARTICIPANT PROFILES</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiffany</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. FINDINGS................................................................................................................. 81
   Hidden Realities ...................................................................................................... 81
   Home Life .................................................................................................................. 82
   Teacher-Perceived Parent Characteristics .............................................................. 84
   Teacher-Perceived Student Characteristics ............................................................ 87
   Challenges .................................................................................................................. 91
   Summary .................................................................................................................... 93
   Encouraged Compliance .......................................................................................... 93
   Procedures .................................................................................................................. 94
   Expectations ............................................................................................................... 97
   Difficulties in Relationships ..................................................................................... 99
   Outside Influences ..................................................................................................... 100
   Summary .................................................................................................................... 103
   Word Play ................................................................................................................... 104
   Disconnect ................................................................................................................. 105
   Factors in Speech and Style Selection ..................................................................... 107
   Reciprocal Interaction ............................................................................................... 109
   Summary .................................................................................................................... 110
   Chapter Summary ...................................................................................................... 111

6. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS ........................................... 112
   Discussion .................................................................................................................. 113
   Research Question 1 ................................................................................................. 113
   Research Question 2 ................................................................................................. 118
   Research Question 3 ................................................................................................. 121
   Conclusions ............................................................................................................... 124
   Implications ............................................................................................................... 127
   For Practice ............................................................................................................... 128
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Two and a half second grade classes, a combined group which I had just taught by myself, were leaving my music room, meaning I had 40 seven-year-olds I was trying to get into two lines at the door. I had given stickers to the children who lined up quietly, mostly to the ones who lined up better than the day before. I had given out “best boy” and “best girl” in each class for the day’s behavior, and I had even given blow pops to children who were standing in line while waiting for their classroom teachers, inevitably several minutes late, to pick them up. There were two children misbehaving and refusing to do what I asked. I had tried, as suggested by the principal in a school-wide discipline initiative, employing positive reinforcement by saying, “I like the way Thomas is standing so quietly. Wow! Thomas, you pick your favorite one of these really cool bug stickers,” to which one of the out-of-control boys named Jason ran right up next to me and calmly, but loudly responded, “Thomas wears pantyhose,” while looking straight ahead and continuing to stand well out of line.

The increasing cultural diversity in the United States has brought not only richness, but also complex challenges, to various segments of American society, particularly with regard to public schools. As illustrated in the vignette above, one of these challenges involves communicative interaction among teachers and students, which is essential for effective teaching and learning. Given that interaction in schools often mirrors interaction in society at large (Bernstein, 1971/2003), sociologists continue to examine how differences in communicative exchange among teachers and students might impact teaching and learning. Communicative exchange refers not only to verbal language, but also to subtleties of instruction and environment that define the culture of a classroom. As researchers study the societal parallels of schooling (Hayward, 1999; Gutierrez & McLaren, 1995), they find that teacher/student interactions in schools often “function as political ‘sorting mechanisms,’ reproducing and legitimizing social hierarchies by helping produce, privilege, and naturalize dominant forms of knowledge and subjectivity” (Hayward, 1999, p. 332). If these assumptions are correct, one way to
challenge these hierarchies is for teachers to critically reflect on their classroom interactions toward a better understanding of student empowerment, accurate interpretation of behaviors, and effective teaching and learning practices.

Communication, referring to both language used and the ways the language is presented, can reinforce how students perceive their place in the hierarchy of the school community. Basil Bernstein (1924-2000), a British sociologist, examined how these hierarchies impacted student learning, focusing on how differences in socio-economic level affected the way students were able to interact in the classroom environment, which, therefore, impacted their ability to be an integral part of the classroom community. Bernstein based his work on code theory, which espoused that people from different socio-economic levels communicate in codes that tend to alienate those who are unable to navigate codes other than their own.

The power hierarchies inherent in classrooms in the United States (Banks & Banks, 1995; Delpit, 1988) often prevent socio-economically diverse students from participating in meaningful dialogue among teachers and peers. When students are given tools that empower them to ask questions rather than to rely only on what is told to them in the classroom, they function in what Banks and Banks (1995) called “equity pedagogy” (p. 152). These authors noted the importance of teacher awareness in “…helping students become reflective and active citizens of a democratic society” (p. 152). Delpit (1988), using slightly different terminology, described the existence of a “culture of power” explaining “the rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power” (p. 282). This culture of power might be explored by helping teachers become more cognizant of the impact their communication
methods might have on student empowerment. This study examined teacher awareness of communication in the elementary music classroom, and how the ways in which teachers interact could positively contribute to lessening social hierarchies, therefore potentially empowering socio-economically diverse students.

Background of the Problem

Teacher awareness in the classroom might be an integral piece to assist students marginalized by stereotypes in feeling more empowered in the school community. According to Sfard (2001), “since our very survival depends on our being part of a community, it is this need for communication that seems to be inscribed in humans” (p. 25). In day-to-day communication, actions and words are organized in ways to reflect what is deemed appropriate in a given situation. There are several factors that affect how individuals select not only ways of teaching, but the language they use, including grammar, social etiquette, culture, and the assumption that others’ perception of a situation is the same as the dominant culture (Edwards & Westgate, 1994). For example, a teacher believes that her students understand the use of positive reinforcement as motivation to correct a behavior, but the students’ perception might be that the teacher is showing favoritism toward one group of students. This misunderstanding between the teacher and student arises from both the literal language used, as well as the context of the language, which is situated in the intent to correct behavior. Assumptions like this often can lead to tension in daily interactions, and for those unaware of subtle cultural differences in communication, can result in misunderstanding between teachers and students.
Within the environment of a rich, culturally diverse classroom, a seemingly hidden agenda, guided by the dominant culture of the school, can sometimes exist. This agenda, which might include assumptions of appropriate interaction, often becomes the norm, and therefore may be undetected by many members of a school community. While this agenda often stems from teachers’ and administrators’ assumptions and biases, it is normally embedded within the context of communication.

One cultural characteristic that often influences communication is socio-economic status (SES). Some researchers have examined the impact one’s SES can have on interaction in the home (Baer, 1999; Callahan & Eyberg, 2010; Hoff, 2003), while others have looked at the impact SES can have on one’s ability to communicate outside of the home (Dorado & Saywitz, 2010; Tyler-Wood & Carri, 1993). These studies indicate the importance of awareness of differences in communication style of SES groups, and because of parallels between societies and schooling, they might provide insight into classroom communication. The disconnect that potentially occurs due to differences, specifically in SES, among students and teachers in the classroom might create confusion and alienation, and left unnoticed, could result in not only misinterpretation of student behavior by the teacher and other students, but also feelings of isolation for the student. While communication among diverse students and teachers occurs in classrooms, the elementary music classroom provides a unique setting to examine interactions, particularly in a Title I school.

The elementary music classroom is an ideal setting to examine interaction and power therein, as it reflects an array of benefits and challenges associated with socio-economically diverse student populations. In most elementary music programs, for
example, all students in the school attend music classes, including students from many
different backgrounds and with varying interests. Music teachers might have more
flexibility than teachers in other subject areas to adapt a curriculum that speaks to
different interests and learning styles among their students. Also, the nature of a music
curriculum affords students an opportunity to share and possibly affirm parts of their
own background, with opportunities for teachers to use different styles and genres in
their teaching. In contrast, music teachers often teach every student in the building,
frequently in situations that are less than ideal, such as teaching multiple classes per
meeting or seeing students only once per week. Because of these conditions, music
teachers might not have the opportunity to get to know students in the same way that a
general classroom teacher would get to know his or her one, self-contained class. The
elementary music classroom might be a productive place to examine communication
because of the benefits and challenges listed here, as well as the potential for creative
exploration.

Because music teaching and learning might afford creativity and personal
expression by both teachers and students, there might be unique opportunities to move
beyond mere acquisition of musical knowledge into issues of cultural understanding.
Music education research has focused largely on what is being taught, or the
curriculum, rather than how it is being taught, or the pedagogy, and to whom. Music
educators, like all teachers, send messages to students through not only the curriculum
they choose to include, but also the subtle ways they transmit the knowledge, such as
curricula continue to validate and recognize particular (white) bodies, to give passing
nods to a token few ‘others,’ and to invalidate many more through omission” (p. 134). Some students might be celebrated by the curriculum that the teacher selects, while others might be alienated (Green, 1999). Benedict (2006) posited that pedagogical choices could include stories that are “…enmeshed with the constant narrative of what it means to understand diverse musics and cultures, and consideration of whether we can ever fully understand cultures that differ from our own” (p. 10).

Because extant research in our field has focused primarily on what we teach, rather than how and whom we teach, further inquiry is necessary to determine how music is taught to varying student populations. A pedagogical approach with interaction that values cultural diversity and, specifically, socio-economic difference in the music classroom, might assist students in having experiences of inclusion, rather than isolation. Furthermore, because little music education research has been conducted that addresses communication used in the elementary music classroom, the current study serves as a foray to this important and timely conversation.

Statement of the Problem

With an increase in cultural diversity among students in public schools, and cultural diversity being much more than race and ethnicity, it is imperative that elementary music teachers are able to effectively communicate with all students. The majority of elementary teachers fit the profile of the typical teacher in the United States – that being White, middle class persons. According to the National Center for Education Information, as recently as 2011, 84% of public school teachers in the United States were female, and 84% were White, while 6% were Hispanic and 7% were Black
(Feistritzer, 2011). The statistics for the race/ethnicity of students, however, show the percentage of White school-age children in the United States has decreased from 74% in 1980 to 54% in 2010 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2011).

Because of the growing mismatch between teachers’ cultures and behaviors and those of their culturally diverse students, conflicts might occur among those of differing race, ethnicity, and socio-economic backgrounds. These conflicts might alienate students whose behaviors and beliefs are different from those of both the teacher and other students. Ultimately, teachers might believe they are open to differences in the classroom, but upon closer examination, they might unknowingly continue to perpetuate the divisions these conflicts can create among students, as well as between students and teachers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers’ perceptions of how classroom interactions, in light of differences in communication, might impact students of different cultures and backgrounds, and specifically socio-economic backgrounds, from the teacher. Well-intentioned teachers might believe they are purposefully acting in an inclusive way, only to learn the outcome is not what they were expecting.

These three research questions provide a framework for this study:

1. In what ways do elementary music teachers believe that their teaching choices reflect the student population in a Title I school?
2. How do teachers talk about their perceptions of possible differences between their own ways of communication and the ways of their students from Title I
3. What are elementary music teachers’ perceptions concerning the extent to which their own communication impacts their students from Title I schools?

Need for the Study

Culture is difficult to define (Sugai, Fallon, & O’Keefe, 2012), as there are many complexities that contribute to the make-up of one’s culture, as well as how others perceive it. While explicit characteristics of culture can include age, gender, race, and geographic location, other potentially subtle tendrils contribute to one’s culture as well, such as ethnicity, religion, family values, and geographic location. All of these characteristics, the explicit and the subtle ones, are deeply embedded in the way people interact with one another.

Because ethnicity and race often can be linked to socio-economic status, with the least percentage of poverty in the United States occurring among the White population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011), trends of race and ethnicity are examined in this section. Data from the 2010 United States Census documented an increase in racial and ethnic diversity, showing that over the past 10 years, there has been a rise of only 6% in the White population, while there has been an increase of 43% in the Hispanic or Latino population. Projections for future growth suggest this trend will continue (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). There has also been a recent growing divide between the lower and upper class, thus diminishing the middle class (Cowen, 2013). The National Center for Education Statistics reported in 2010, that 46% of public school students were Black, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native, or Asian/Pacific Islander; the remaining 54% of students were White (NCES, 2011). Conversely, teachers in public schools in 2011
were 84% White, while only 16% were Non-White (Feistritzer, 2011). The Center also reported a gradual yearly increase in the percentage of students of color, while the ethnicity of teachers held relatively constant from year to year.

The National School Lunch Program (free and reduced lunch program), typical of Title I schools, assists children from lower SES families. The free and reduced lunch program provides food to children whose families meet certain criteria determined by annual household income. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2001 the percentage of Kindergarten-12th grade students in the United States eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch was 38.3%. As of 2011, this percentage had increased to 48.1% (NCES, 2012). For the 2012-2013 school year, the income eligibility for free lunch for a family of 4 was $29,965 (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2012). Because the national average teacher pay for the 2011-2012 school year was $56,384 (NCES, 2012), it is likely that teachers on campuses with high rates of students on free/reduced lunch come from differing backgrounds than their students. These figures demonstrate the existing imbalance between teacher and student populations, which might lead to inaccurate assumptions and misinterpreted behaviors between students and teachers due to communication differences.

Additionally, there is a need for more qualitative investigation into the areas of communication and cultural diversity, particularly in the context of Bernstein’s code theory, which looked at communication differences based on SES. Code theory research primarily has been quantitative (Arntson, 1982; Greenberg & Formanek, 1971; Hasan, 2002; Thorlindsson, 1987) and philosophical (Edwards, 1987; Hasan, 2002; Maton, 2000; Power & Whitty, 2002) in nature, which might necessitate the exploration
of a “depth of understanding” (Patton, 2002, p. 14) that qualitative inquiry can bring. It is critical to explore in detail what practicing teachers perceive concerning communication among themselves and their culturally diverse students. Bernstein’s insights could be highly useful in exploring communication differences in current education practice in the United States.

Furthermore, additional research is needed in the field of music education, particularly at the elementary level, concerning effective communication, as current communication research in music education tends to focus on the secondary ensemble settings. As is outlined later, Bernstein’s code theory provides a lens through which to examine diversity of teaching and learning in the elementary music classroom, specifically with regard to elaborated code and restricted code. According to Green (1999), “musical delineations are not just heard, but they are adopted as symbols of social identity” (p. 167). The music classroom is a place where identity and culture can be explored. Given our culturally diverse student population and our typical teacher population, studying the messages music teachers send through ways of communicating in the classroom could provide new awareness and insights for elementary music education.

Definition of Key Terms

The following terms and operational definitions are provided for clarification, specifically with regard to Bernstein’s code theory, which is the basis for the current study.
Code refers to the principle that regulates the selection and organization of speech events (Nash, 2001). The way one selects and organizes the words he or she uses often depends on his or her background and culture.

Communication is “trying to make sense of and provide feedback to a speaker’s message” (Nilsson and Ryve, 2010, pp. 242-243). Because of the similarities in definitions, communication and interaction were used interchangeably in this study. As clarification for this study, communication refers to the interactive processes through which people might be impacted due to the varying factors that are part of teachers’ and students’ lives, including their home and family situations.

Cultural diversity encompasses the unique aspects of different cultures, including race/ethnicity, SES, religion, gender, family values, to name a few.

Culturally relevant teaching refers to a teacher’s ability to teach in a way that uses “student culture as the basis for helping students understand themselves and others, structure social interactions, and conceptualize knowledge” (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 314).

In elaborated code, the speaker is able to elaborate his or her own individual and unique experience (Bernstein, 1971/2003). Elaborated code is often associated with the middle-upper class, and in this study, it is argued that public school frequently is taught in an elaborated code, often excluding the lower socio-economic status. Compare restricted code.

For the purposes of this study, empower refers to using “teaching strategies and classroom environments that help students from diverse racial, ethnic, and
cultural groups attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively within, and help create and perpetuate, a just, humane, and democratic society” (Banks & Banks, 1995, p. 152).

*Formal language* is a term named by Basil Bernstein (1971/2003) to refer to language most often used by the middle class. Characteristics of formal language include: rich in personal, individual qualifications; requires logical inferences to be made from the way words and sentences are organized; child is required to verbalize relations with others (both relationships and objects); meaning of language is logically explicit; and in interaction between mother and child. For example, “the relationship to authority is mediated by a rationality” (Bernstein, 1971/2003, p. 45). Compare *public language*.

*Interaction* – See *communication*.

Bernstein defined *middle class* as people who have “an awareness of the importance of the relationships between means and ends ...” (Bernstein, 1971/2003, p. 25) and who value individual behaviors and thoughts. In the current study, middle class is defined as students not on free and reduced lunch. Compare *working class*.

*Public language* is a term named by Basil Bernstein (1971/2003) referring to the language most often used by the working class. Characteristics include short, grammatically simple, often unfinished sentences; frequent use of short commands and questions; reason and conclusion are often the same (i.e., because I said so); and limited use of adjectives and adverbs (Bernstein, 1971/2003). Compare *formal language*.
Restricted code, often associated with working class, generates a language of subordination (Nash, 2001). In restricted code, there is no need for elaboration because speech is common among like cultures, making it predictable. How and when things are said becomes more important than what is said (Bernstein, 1971/2003). Compare elaborated code.

Socio-economic status (SES), according to the American Psychological Association, is “the social standing or class of an individual or group” (http://www.apa.org/topics/socioeconomic-status/index.aspx)

Title I schools are those in which federal funding “provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards” (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Verbal expressions of meaning refers to words individuals use to communicate, and can be termed “mediate” or indirect expression (Bernstein, 1971/2003). Compare non-verbal expressions of meaning.

Bernstein defines working class as “all members of the semi-skilled and unskilled group except the type of family structure indicated as the base line for the middle-class and associative levels” (Bernstein, 1971/2003, p. 25). In the current study, working class is defined as low-socio economic students on free and reduced lunch.
Theoretical Framework

When determining a theoretical framework for the current study, Basil Bernstein’s code theory was deemed appropriate because of his exploration of the “relationship between the mode of cognitive expression and certain social classes” (Bernstein, 1971/2003, p. 24). He observed that students from lower social strata were more conflicted in the day-to-day routines of schooling than were students from higher social strata. In his book *Class, Codes and Control, Vol. I* (Bernstein, 1971/2003), Bernstein explained the differences between the working class child and the middle-upper class child, and how these differences affected children’s success in formal education settings. As Bernstein’s code theory serves as the framework for this study, it is crucial to examine his ideas concerning social class, communication, and teaching and learning. These particular tenets are discussed in detail in the following chapter.

Using Bernstein’s theory as the foundation for this research has influenced some of the decisions made in the current study. For example, as previously discussed, there have been multiple theoretical assertions regarding Bernstein’s code theory, as well as several quantitative studies examining interaction in the classroom (Greenberg & Formanek, 1971; Hasan, 2002; Thorlindsson, 1987). There have been limited studies, however, that have elucidated teacher perceptions of communication in the general education classroom, and no studies involving elementary music teachers. Communication is an especially important consideration because it is the initial contact between teachers and students in the classroom. The decision to begin this line of work through conversations with teachers, rather than examining interactions in the classroom, might help establish a new line of research in the future.
Assumptions and Limitations

There are several recognized assumptions in the design of this study. The first assumption is that Basil Bernstein’s code theory is relevant to education in America in the twenty-first century. This study also assumes that students in a Title I school not only function in a restricted code, but also might have difficulty functioning in an elaborated code. With regard to the teachers in the study, the assumption is that they are middle-class, and, therefore, able to function in both codes, but that discipline and teaching style mostly remain in an elaborated code.

In some research genres, namely quantitative approaches, one possible limitation of this study could include the small number of participants. There were three participants in this study because a phenomenological framework was used, so the depth of the individual data from each participant became more important than the number of participants (Patton, 2002). There is also the limitation of researcher bias, which, based on personal experience teaching in a Title I school, gave this researcher reason to believe that students from a low socio-economic background often have difficulty interacting with members of a higher socio-economic class. Additionally, there is a possible limitation in the assumption that while these difficulties can be subtle and can manifest in different ways, they often go unnoticed and can be misinterpreted by those of a higher SES community.

Finally, this study focused specifically on communication, even though Bernstein’s expansive work encompasses numerous, intertwined tendrils, including pedagogical style and socio-political forces, among others. While these issues play a collective role in the composite ideology of code theory, examining multiple threads of
Bernstein’s work is beyond the scope of the current study. Since communication serves as an initial contact point between students and teachers this study was limited to examining communication only, with the understanding that what is discovered here might contribute to the gestalt implications of code theory. Several of Bernstein’s principles are examined more closely in Chapter 2.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

As suggested in Chapter 1, growing socio-economic diversity among students in the United States might result in communication differences between teachers and their students from varying backgrounds. This chapter examines relevant literature from the study of classroom communication and power between students and teachers, framed by Basil Bernstein’s (1971/2003) language code theory. Section 1 examines communication in the classroom, particularly with regard to teacher variables and their possible impact on students, as well as teachers’ perceptions of communication. Section 2 reviews the literature on power hierarchies in the workplace and in education, which serves as an extension of communication, as communication and power often are inextricably linked (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Bernstein, 1971/2003). Section 3 explores the literature on Basil Bernstein’s language code theory, which is the theoretical framework of this study. Finally, section 4 examines code theory, power, and communication with regard to the music classroom.

Communication in the Classroom

Communication involves relaying information from one person, or group of people, to another. “Effective communication concerns the intrinsic interplay between intentions and interpretations of intentions [expectations]” (Nilsson & Ryve, 2010, p. 243). While there is a rich body of literature that addresses communication in business (Carletta, Garrod, & Fraser-Krauss, 1998; Darling & Dannels, 2003; Spillan, Mino, & Rowles, 2002) and healthcare (Markova & Broome, 2007; Suter, Arndt, Arthur,
Parboosingh, Taylor, & Deutschlander, 2009), the existing communication literature in education is limited, yet pertains to issues regarding both teachers and students.

Teacher awareness of communication is critical, considering that interaction in a classroom can impact not only how a student learns, but also how a student views himself or herself. According to Sfard (2001), “thinking is subordinated to, and informed by, the demand of making communication effective” (p. 27). Because teacher communication might influence a student's ability to think and learn, it is necessary to examine the effectiveness of discourse in the classroom. Nilsson and Ryve (2010) examined effective communication from the perspective of the listener, saying that communication means trying to make sense of and provide feedback to a speaker’s message. A listener interprets and reacts to what is heard based on his or her frames of reference and on how he or she perceives the speaker and the speaker’s intentions. (pp. 242-243)

This particular notion is applicable to the behavior of students in a classroom, because the listener, or student, is interpreting what the speaker, or teacher, is saying based on the student's frame of reference.

Regarding communication, Sfard (2001) stated that it “will not be regarded as effective unless, at any given moment, all the participants seem to know what they are talking about and feel confident that all the parties involved refer to the same things when using the same words” (p. 34). “All the parties” in a classroom refers to all students and adults, including teachers, aids, and administrators. Effective communication in the classroom is more likely to occur if teachers are able to engage every student.

For the purposes of the current study, the communication section of this review includes relevant information related to how effective communication can empower
students. The following subsections examine (a) teacher variables that impact communication, (b) cultural diversity in communication, (c) teacher perceptions and beliefs about communication, and (d) how communication might impact students. Several studies on student-teacher interaction in the classroom also are included, and focus on the affects of specific teacher variables on communication (Brekelmans, Holvast, & Tartwijk, 1992; Greenberg, Woodside, & Brasil, 1994; O’Connor, Fish, & Yasik, 2004; Smith & Land, 1981; Wubbels & Creton, 1992).

Teacher Variables

Effective communication in the classroom is based on a number of teacher variables. These teacher variables impact not only how effectively teachers communicate, but how effectively students are able to learn as a result of the communication. According to the literature, the list of variables includes, but is not limited to, years of experience, training in effective communication techniques, and comfort with content.

Teacher experience is one factor that has been found to influence a teacher’s ability to communicate with students from different backgrounds. O’Connor, Fish, and Yasik (2004) conducted an observational study to determine how years of experience affected three dimensions of a teachers’ classroom: flexibility, or how teachers and students adapt to changes; cohesion, a sense of belonging and support; and communication, or the level of expression of thoughts, feelings, and ideas demonstrated by classroom members. For the study, the researchers utilized the Classroom Systems Observation Scale, or CSOS (Fish & Dane, 1995), which is “an instrument that
evaluates systemic dimensions of the classroom environment using an outside, objective observer” (O’Connor et al., 2004, p. 12). Based on systems theory, which “investigates the interaction of all members and how the various relationships influence that system” (O’Connor et al., 2004, p. 12), this study assessed how the number of years of teaching impacted the three CSOS dimensions, or flexibility, cohesion, and communication. The researchers found that years of experience affected flexibility and communication, but had no effect on cohesion. In other words, communication in a classroom of an experienced teacher was more flexible and more effective, but the sense of belonging among students was similar to that of a classroom with a less-experienced teacher.

In another study involving years of experience and communication style, Brekelmans, Holvast, and Tartwijk (1992) examined whether teacher communication styles changed throughout teachers’ professional careers, as well as the relationship between teacher experience and interpersonal teacher behavior. The study was conducted in the Netherlands and included 573 teachers and 25,000 students. Over a period of four years, the researchers collected survey data on a group of new teachers, once every year for their first four years. The research team focused on the first four years of teaching, because they expected this period would include the most noticeable changes in teaching behaviors (Brekelmans et al., 1992). The researchers used the Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction (QTI) to gather data on communication styles of teachers. In this questionnaire, eight different behavior aspects were described: leadership, helpful/friendly, understanding, student responsibility and freedom, uncertain, dissatisfied, admonishing and strict. The QTI was administered to both
teachers and students, and measured both groups’ perceptions of interpersonal behavior of the teacher. Brekelmans et al. found that both teachers and students perceived that teacher communication styles changed during teachers’ careers (1992). The teachers’ ability to communicate with their students increased during the first ten years of a teaching career, after which the behavior stabilized.

With regard to content, Carlsen (1992) found that teachers communicated differently when teaching familiar content as compared to unfamiliar content. In a constant comparative analysis, Carlsen discovered that when teaching unfamiliar content, teachers were “more likely to postpone instruction at the beginning of the lesson, go off on discursive tangents, resist student efforts to change the topic of instruction, evaluate student responses ambiguously, and follow the textbook closely” (p. 20). When teaching unfamiliar content, the teacher’s pace was slower, and also more fragmented, while when teaching familiar content, they were more flexible and able to have a meaningful exchange with their students.

As discussed above, the predominant teacher variables that have been shown to impact teachers’ ability to communicate effectively include years of teaching experience, the ability to change communication style, and familiarity of content. These findings inform the current study in that in an elementary music setting, there are many different age levels to address and a variety of concepts in the curriculum to teach, which leads to the possibility that a teacher might be teaching something outside of his or her comfort zone. Because teachers’ comfort levels with their content also might increase their ability to examine their methods of communication, awareness of interaction could be critical. Additionally, as Brekelmans et al. (1992) discovered, inexperience might
impede a teacher’s ability to remain flexible in communicating with their diverse students, while experience enhances this ability. Not only is it important to examine variables for effective teacher communication in general, but also teacher awareness of the potential rewards and challenges of cultural diversity among students in their classrooms. The next section examines literature surrounding teacher awareness of communication differences, specifically with regard to cultural diversity.

*Cultural Diversity*

Teacher awareness of and sensitivity to cultural diversity in the classroom can enhance effective communication. Although cultural diversity often can refer to race and ethnicity, there is a multitude of other types of diversity such as socio-economic status, gender, learning ability level, and religion, among others. Many researchers (Brown, 2003; Gay, 2002; McCarthey, 1997; McCarthey, 1999; Nickerson & Prawat, 1981; Osborne, 1996; Pratt-Johnson, 2006; Schramm, 1976; Skinner, Bryant, Coffman, & Campbell, 1998; Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003) conducted studies or analyses that examined ways in which teachers strived to better relate to their students from differing backgrounds.

One possible way for teachers to relate better to students is to focus on the pedagogical approach being used. Engaging in a culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), defined by Gay (2002) as “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p. 106), is one way that teachers can better communicate with their diverse students. Gay based this definition on the assumption that academic knowledge,
framed within the cultural, personal experiences of diverse students, might be more accessible to those students. Culturally responsive pedagogy can be empowering to students, and “empowerment translates into academic competence, personal confidence, courage, and the will to act” (Gay, 2002, p. 32). While Gay’s CRP generally refers to race and ethnicity, she explicitly stated that her pedagogical reforms are applicable to “such factors as ethnicity, culture, gender, social class, historical experiences, and linguistic capabilities” (Gay, 2002, p. xii). Gay (2002) specifically addressed communication as an important element to her CRP model, claiming that “culturally responsive teacher preparation programs teach how the communication styles of different ethnic groups reflect cultural values and shape learning behaviors and how to modify classroom interactions to better accommodate them” (p. 111).

In contrast, (Sleeter, 2012) discussed four ways that CRP is often implemented in ways that might limit and simplify this pedagogy, therefore marginalizing diverse populations. These ways included “cultural celebration, trivialization, essentializing culture, and substituting cultural for political analysis of inequalities” (p. 568). When implemented properly with these ideas in mind, CRP might inform this study because teacher cognizance of different socio-economic groups’ communication styles might contribute to the empowerment of students.

Bennett (2013) conducted a study to investigate preservice teachers’ understandings about CRP. In this study, eight preservice teachers tutored low-income students at a community center in conjunction with a university teaching writing course for elementary education majors. Through examining course documents, written field notes, journals, and individual and focus group interviews, Bennett (2013) found that
preservice teachers gained a deeper knowledge of their students through one-on-one student-teacher interaction and explicit instruction of how to use a culturally responsive pedagogy.

Several studies have examined how effectiveness of communication might enhance, or detract from, learning. Using an in-depth synthesis of more than 70 interpretive ethnographies of classrooms with culturally diverse students, Osborne (1996) found that, based on the studies regarding communication patterns (Au, 1980; Au & Jordan, 1981; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; Hudsmith, 1992; Philips, 1972; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1987), elementary students were more likely to participate in class when they were “allowed to use the communication patterns that they have acquired at home and/or in their local communities” (Osborne, 1996, p. 303). In other words, children tended to be more comfortable interacting in school when they were able to interact in the same way they did at home and in their community outside of the school.

As in the previous study, exploring connections between school and home is a vital component of effective teaching and learning in the context of cultural diversity. McCarthey (1997) examined participation structures and found that even the best-intentioned teachers tended to impart practices in their classrooms that resonated more with White middle-class students, like themselves, than with students of varying ethnicities and socio-economic levels. The participants in this ethnographic study included five elementary students from diverse backgrounds. The researchers used a variety of data sources, such as classroom observations, teacher interviews, student interviews, playground observations, student journal entries, interviews with at least one of the student’s family members, and demographic data about the students and their
backgrounds. Findings indicated middle-class students had an easier time making connections between home and school than did other students. This finding aligns with Bernstein’s code theory, which is discussed further later in this chapter.

McCarthey (1999) later identified three factors of classroom practices regarding home-school connections with culturally diverse students: exclusionary curriculum, non-inclusive participation structures, and the deficit view. As defined by McCarthey, an exclusionary curriculum was characterized by low expectations for student performance, as well as curricula that excluded diverse populations, particularly in literature, which featured primarily White, middle-class characters. Non-inclusive participation structures occurred when teachers unintentionally alienated culturally diverse students in the way they led their classes and through the curriculum they used. The third factor that McCarthey (1999) found, deficit view, referred to White middle-class teachers who failed to address cultural diversity in their classrooms, either by ignoring students’ problems, having negative stereotypes, or “implicitly [privileging] their own backgrounds over the students” (p.91). McCarthey’s findings indicated a possible need for further teacher communication awareness of these unintentional actions.

One researcher explored what teachers in urban areas were thinking regarding teaching students from different backgrounds. In interviews with thirteen first- through twelfth-grade urban teachers from around the United States, Brown (2003) found that teachers used different culturally responsive strategies, including “demonstrating care for students, acting with authority and assertiveness, and using congruent communication patterns to establish a productive learning environment for their diverse students” (p. 277). Regarding “congruent communication,” Brown concluded that urban
educators must be aware of communication differences among their students so they can understand and are better able to motivate students. As espoused in this body of research, effective teacher communication with students from diverse cultures is essential to ensure that all students are provided an opportunity to learn, as well as a platform to communicate effectively.

**Teacher Perception and Beliefs**

The perceptions and beliefs teachers bring into their classrooms are embedded in their own personal histories and life experiences, and, therefore, might influence the way they interact with their students. According to Richardson (2003), beliefs are “psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are felt to be true” (p. 2). Because these beliefs can be deep-seated and develop over time, they often are difficult to change (Calderhead, 1991; Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Holt-Reynolds, 1992). In educational settings, these beliefs can influence daily interaction concerning various aspects of the teaching and learning experience, including teachers’ beliefs about students.

Teachers unintentionally can make assumptions regarding students’ backgrounds, particularly their socio-economic level. A renowned scholar in this area, Ladson-Billings (2007) noted that claiming that low-income students come from a “culture of poverty,” implying that poor students are different, is troubling at best, as is her remark on the idea that some teachers believe that “the primary purpose of school is to bring order to their [poor students] lives” (p. 320). These perspectives might be common among educators and might indicate that some teachers automatically have
less optimistic expectations for low socio-economic students in spite of their abilities and gifts.

Not only might teachers make assumptions about students' abilities, but they also might make assumptions about how students will react in a particular situation. When a student does not respond in the way the teacher expects or assumes both teacher and student can be left with a sense of confusion. Chamberlain (2005) stated:

> When others violate our rules, our expectations, and our predictions for how they “should” act in various situations, we are often left confused, annoyed, or, in some instances, ignorant that the “other” had a different understanding of our communicative interaction than we did. (p. 200)

Because teachers might not be aware that students did not get their intended meanings, their beliefs about successful interaction in the classroom might not be accurate. In other words, they sometimes believe that the “others” have understood the intended meaning, when they really have not. The next section focuses on how interaction in the classroom might affect students.

**Impact on Students**

Student success in school can be guided by many different variables, including interaction in the classroom. Teacher communication can potentially influence students in a variety of ways, making it critical for teachers to be aware of how the words they use and the way they communicate those words might affect their students. Several studies in the communication literature explore how interaction in the classroom might affect students (Piasta, La Paro, Payne, Cox, & Bradley, 2002; Skinner, Bryant, Coffman, & Campbell, 1998). Classroom interactions that are different from interactions at home can impact not only students’ ability to learn, but also their behavior. Behavior
difficulties due to communication differences might ultimately lead to barriers in learning. “Ineffective communication may represent a common pathway through which variables traditionally associated with aggressive, antisocial conduct exercise their deleterious effect” (Dumas, Blechman, & Prinz, 1994, p. 356). While well-meaning teachers do not intend to isolate students, they might label some as “strange,” “incompetent,” or “not very bright” (Chamberlain, 2005, p. 200). It is possible that a teacher’s ability to communicate effectively in the classroom might have a lasting effect, positive or negative, on students’ behavior and depth of learning.

As discussed above, McCarthey (1999) found that students can be shaped by differences in interaction at home and at school. While McCarthey explored culturally diverse students in general, Hoff (2003) examined whether differences in SES specifically influenced parent-to-child speech, and if this affected children’s early language development. According to two observations of 63 mid- and high-SES parent/child dyads, SES contributed to an increase in the children’s vocabularies from one observation to the next (Hoff, 2003). In this study, the researcher recorded the mothers’ interactions with their 2 year-old children at home during mealtime, getting dressed and playing with toys that the researcher provided. Through this study, the researcher found that the prominent variable that led to differences in the children’s vocabulary was their mother’s speech.

In another study regarding home and school interaction, Osborne (1996) used a synthesis of over 70 interpretive ethnographies of intercultural classrooms to create nine assertions regarding teaching in cross-cultural classrooms. While the majority of these assertions are outside the scope of this review, one of Osborne’s claims was that
“particularly in early grades, culturally relevant teachers tend to use participation patterns similar to those used by students in their homes and communities” (p. 303). In other words, children might be more likely to participate in school if they are able to use language consistent with that used in their homes.

In a related longitudinal study (Skinner, Bryant, Coffman, & Campbell, 1998) of the Head Start Transition Demonstration Project, Skinner et al. found that teachers considered it essential for students to be able to follow the rules and routines set in place by teachers. They also concluded that teachers believed that a student’s inability to follow rules reflected directly on the student’s home life. After interviewing 21 students and their teachers, the authors discovered that students whose teachers engaged in communicative practices that included praise and gentle redirection were more likely to enjoy school and embrace learning, rather than resist it. These findings are applicable to the current study, because if teachers are aware that their students’ ability to function in the classroom might be determined by their home life practices, and if students are better able to respond in a classroom where they are given praise, then it might be important for teachers to be aware of both of these possibilities as they interact with their students.

Literature on student perception of teacher communication indicates that a student’s view does not always align with the teacher’s view. Levy, Wubbels, and Brekelmans (1992) studied the relationship between characteristics of students and teachers in relation to student perceptions of teacher communication style. The results of the study were: (a) there was a wide discrepancy between students’ and teachers’ perceptions of teacher communication style, (b) there was a wide discrepancy between
both students’ and teachers’ view of reality and teachers’ ideals, (c) students and teachers perceived teachers with few years of experience as less dominant than their more experienced colleagues, and (d) student and class characteristics didn’t affect their relationship to student perceptions of teacher communication style. In the researchers’ findings, the strongest noted result was the difference between students’ and teachers’ sense of teacher communication, in that teachers believed they were more clear than what students felt them to be (Levy, Wubbels, & Brekelmans, 1992).

In response to a progressive initiative to promote discussion-intensive math pedagogy, Lubienski (2004), acting as researcher and teacher, explored how 22 students viewed her math class, and what they believed they were learning. In her study, she used surveys, interviews, student work, teacher journal entries, and daily audio recordings. From these data, she selected a smaller group of 8 students, a low- and high-achieving male and female from each socio-economic group. With this group, she conducted more interviews throughout the year. She concluded that her lower socio-economic students faced challenges “with invisible pedagogies in which the authority of the teacher [was] downplayed, the official discourse of the classroom [was] not made explicit, and boundaries between everyday and school knowledge [were] diminished” (p. 119). These findings have compelling implications for the importance of teacher awareness of differences in communication, as these differences can influence student learning and sense of self.
**Communication Summary**

Most research in the area of communication in the classroom has examined specific variables of teacher communication and how these might affect students. These variables include years of experience, communication training, and familiarity with content. It would be beneficial to examine teacher awareness of the disparity in communication, both verbal and non-verbal, in order for teachers to be as effective as possible in the classroom. This might be particularly helpful considering the growing cultural diversity among students in our schools.

The communication literature regarding cultural diversity influences the importance of the current study. Because students might be more likely to participate in class when the communication style is relevant and familiar, teacher awareness of communication styles might be beneficial to encourage more student participation in the classroom. Also, the literature posits that while many teachers believe they cultivate an inclusive classroom, they might not. Through reflection, however, well-intentioned teachers might be able to recognize how they might inadvertently exclude some students and thereby change their perceptions of the communication occurring in their classrooms. Because there is a paucity of research concerning beliefs and perceptions in the elementary music classroom, the current study endeavors to begin this important conversation. In addition, the literature on communication in music education, which is discussed later in this chapter, primarily relates to the secondary ensemble classroom. Due to the large number of students involved in elementary music education programs, however, it is logical to begin exploring communication in that setting. Additional research has examined the roles of power in classrooms, power that is often maintained
by the teacher as a result of communication behaviors and techniques. Although power is not the focus of this study, its properties are akin to those found in communication. Thus, a brief explanation of power might help situate the notion of communication in its current context for use in this study. The next section examines the literature on power in society at large, including the workplace and in education.

Power Hierarchies

Communication in society plays a vital role in the distribution of power. Power is highlighted in this literature review because it is an underlying force in Bernstein’s code theory. “The power relationships created outside the school penetrate the organization, distribution and evaluation of knowledge through the social context of their transmission. The definition of educability is itself at any one time an attenuated consequence of these power relationships” (Bernstein, 1971/2003, p. 200). Power relationships are perpetuated by the communication, or transmission, used in social settings such as in the classroom. While power is not the sole focus of this study, it is important to examine it in this particular context because of its relationship to communication in the classroom. This section begins with examining power in general relationships, then moves into power in the workplace, and finally ends with power in education.

Power is an ever-present force driving all relationships and interaction. According to Russell (2004), power in the social sciences is as fundamental as energy is in physics. Of this comparison, Russell stated, “power, like energy, must be regarded as continually passing from any one of its forms into any other, and it should be the business of social science to seek the laws of such transformations” (p. 5). Wolf and
Fligstein (1979) defined power as “control over resources, people, and things” (p. 96). Because power is a relational concept, “the sense of power is anchored in relational experiences and is a psychological extension of the socio-cultural landscape” (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006, p. 514). Power has a fundamental significance in everyday interaction, and, therefore, much research has focused on the ways in which power manifests itself in a myriad of social settings (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Berdahl & Martorana, 2006; Brauer & Bourhis, 2006; Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2003; Mast, Hall, & Ickes, 2006). In this section, power is examined from several different perspectives: (a) behaviors due to perceived power, (b) how power translates into control over resources, and (c) motivation associated with power.

Berdahl and Martorana (2006) assigned 183 university students into 61 groups of three people. Based on the role of a die, one person in each group was assigned to be the leader, although the other participants believed the leaders were assigned due to experience and background. The assigned leaders were asked to facilitate a discussion on poverty in the United States with their group of three. The researchers also explained that there would be a $300 lottery at the conclusion of the experiment, and that the leader of the winning group would determine how to divide the money among the group members. The researchers found that those given higher power at the beginning expressed more positive emotion, while those lacking power expressed more negative emotion, specifically anger. They also found that the participants with a strong feeling of power displayed more assertive behavior, while those without displayed inhibited behavior.
Researchers also have examined the potential for those with less power to assert themselves. Martorana, Galinsky, and Rao (2005) speculated that because those with power have control over resources, or anything that those without power need, they are able to “strategically provide these resources as a way of controlling the emotional states of those without power” (p. 6). In other words, this suggests that people often can hold on to their power by controlling resources that those with less power value. A number of these precepts have been expressed in the workplace and in education.

**Power in the Workplace**

Several researchers have examined power hierarchies specifically within the workplace. Georgesen and Harris (2006) examined power related to position in the workplace and expectations of interactions among people of varying positions. Company participants working in pairs were randomly assigned to be either the boss or employee in an exercise under several randomly assigned conditions. The individuals who played the role of boss were randomly assigned as to whether their power position was being threatened, or whether they had positive or negative expectations of the employee. The researchers concluded that when a boss’ power was threatened, it increased his or her negative behavior toward employees, and in turn, impacted how the employees felt about themselves and about their boss.

Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, and Liljenquist (2003) found that “activating the concept of power in the minds of individuals can enable them to overcome the natural social pressures toward obedience and conformity” (p. 22). This particular study consisted of a series of experiments that all began with the same power
manipulation exercise, in which the 36 participants were assigned to either a high-power condition or a low-power condition. The participants were asked to recall either a situation in which they had power over someone, or in which they were controlled by someone else, depending on the condition assignment. The participants then completed a variety of role playing tasks and were assessed based on their assigned condition. A common conclusion drawn from this series of studies is that high-power participants showed more resistance to conformity.

In addition to exploring individual power in the workplace, team power and conflict has also been examined (Cohen & Bailey, 1997; Greer, Caruso, & Jehn, 2011; Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006). Greer et al. (2011) defined high power teams as management, or advisory personnel, while low power teams included entry-level employees who have less control. In general, they discovered that high power teams performed worse than low power teams, and that when team members had an accurate idea of the amount of power they held, they performed better. Understanding team conflict and power sharing might indicate the importance of deciphering relations among groups of people who work together, particularly when these people come from different backgrounds.

With regard to the classroom, the aforementioned findings could suggest that if individuals are given more power in their environments, they might be more likely to think critically. This is an important consideration for the current study, in that if teachers are aware of differences in the ways diverse populations communicate, and if communication is essential for power distribution, then diverse students might feel empowered to engage in the classroom community. This empowerment "can lessen
the sense of being a pawn, of being constrained by the will and whims of others” (Galinsky et al., 2003, p. 23). Because of the variety of cultural backgrounds of students and teachers in the classroom setting, it is logical to consider power relationships found in education, and how teachers might empower their students from different backgrounds.

**Power in Education**

Power issues in classrooms often are similar to those found in social settings, as described in the previous section. Frequently, the dominant culture of the school holds the social power, while students of “other” variables, such as class, race/ethnicity, or religion, try to function in this environment, where their belief system might not be valued by the dominant culture. Given the growing number of culturally diverse students in the United States, it is important to examine power issues within educational settings.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, each year there is an increase in culturally diverse students in public schools in America, as well as an increase in White middle class teachers of these students (NCES, 2011). These background differences might be evidenced through communication styles, leading to unintended cultural clashes between teachers and students. Students come to school accustomed to interacting with family and friends in one way, while teacher expectations often mandate other forms of communication. Because of these differences among teachers and the students they teach, there is the potential for hidden issues of power with both positive and negative ramifications.
As previously noted in Chapter 1, Hayward (1999) claimed that schools often “function as political ‘sorting mechanisms,’ reproducing and legitimizing social hierarchies by helping produce, privilege, and naturalize dominant forms of knowledge and subjectivity” (p. 332). If Hayward’s appraisal is accurate, one way to challenge the power hierarchies that exist in public education – hierarchies in which students viewed as “others” are marginalized – is to ensure that students are encouraged to be critical thinkers. When teachers do not explore the possibilities of teaching for critical thinking, they inadvertently reinforce existing hierarchies and maintain the division of power that typically exists. As Hayward asserted, “…teachers and other adults in particular schools make pedagogic choices that reproduce, rather than problematize and transform, social hierarchies” (p. 332). In other words, the hidden curriculum, or unintentional messages that school administrators, staff, and teachers send to students, their families, and other community members, replicates and perpetuates the existing hierarchies.

Giving students tools to empower them to be able to ask questions might help to challenge power hierarchies. Teachers who empower others “strive to identify and remove factors that promote feelings of powerlessness in their students” (Frymier, Shulman, & Houser, 1996, p. 183). As discussed earlier, because some students might come to school with differences in communication, this detail might prove important in their ability to participate fully in the life of the school. Banks and Banks (1995) deemed this type of empowerment as “equity pedagogy,” which they defined as “teaching strategies and classroom environments that help students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function
effectively within, and help create and perpetuate, a just, humane, and democratic society.” They went on to express that “…helping students become reflective and active citizens of a democratic society is at the essence of our conception of equity pedagogy” (p. 152). A possible way to disrupt these marginalizing power hierarchies might be for teachers to give students tools to question and reflect so they are able to analyze critically.

If these hierarchies are disrupted, educators might then be cognizant of the power they hold, and the significance and impact this power might have on students within a formal schooling environment. This pedagogy might not be accessible without an understanding of the learner, and how the learner is interpreting the communication. If teachers evaluate where their students’ perspective is, they might be able to create an environment where the students are not just on-task, but engaged and feeling that “school is for me” (McFadden & Munns, 2002, p. 359). In other words, through teacher awareness of these differences, as well as through the pedagogical approach teachers take, students might have more of a sense of belonging in the classroom.

If communication between teachers and students can impact student learning, then it is necessary to examine how teachers work to improve the classroom interactions among culturally diverse students. As Bernstein (1970) warned, “If the culture of the teacher is to become part of the consciousness of the child, then the culture of the child must first be in the consciousness of the teacher” (p. 345). This statement refers directly to a necessity for the teacher to reflect and consider the world through the eyes of the students, and to make appropriate pedagogical choices in reaction to this reflection.
Research has shown that when looking at the schooling of students from different cultural backgrounds, there are often severe inequalities in the environments that are fostered at school. In a study of five elementary schools of varying socio-economic backgrounds, Anyon (1980) found several salient points in the differences between each school’s approaches. The schools observed consisted of two working-class, one middle-class, one affluent professional, and one executive elite school. During data analysis, the daily school work of the higher socio-economic status schools required much more thought and critical analysis than did the working class school, as most of the students’ work involved following simple steps, with little thought to analysis of why or how the work was being done. Anyon discovered that the students from different socio-economic backgrounds were being groomed for different kinds of jobs in the future. Consequently, Anyon concluded that the content of instruction held implications regarding the worth and potential of each child, and that perhaps education needs a pedagogical framework…which is sensitive to cultural issues and difference, and recognizes the capacity of students to engage in decisions about their own learning, can provide students with empowering educational experiences and allow them to construct a positive self-image as a learner. Implied here is a sense of power over the process of education. (McFadden & Munns, 1985, p. 364)

Power Summary

Issues of power can create divisions among people in many settings and situations. Because a teacher-student relationship creates a natural power hierarchy with the teacher in the dominant position, it might be necessary for teachers to be aware of ways they might unintentionally exclude some students. As a result, those students
could feel even less powerful and therefore learn less. Literature on workplace power has shown that powerful persons can feel more assertive and willing to take risks. When factoring communication into the complexities of a classroom, it becomes evident that students who communicate easily with the teacher might feel power over those who do not communicate as easily. This isolation might alienate students who are already sensing isolation, exacerbating their inability to feel a part of the community. In the current study, elementary music teachers were invited to discuss their own perceptions of how communicating with students and establishing rules and procedures in their classrooms may or may not empower students disproportionally. For examining the hierarchies that communication differences could render, Bernstein’s code theory was used as a framework in the study. The next section looks at how code theory informed the current study.

Basil Bernstein’s Code Theory

As mentioned in Chapter 1, many complexities can contribute to the make-up of one’s culture, including characteristics that are both explicit and implicit. These characteristics are often embedded within one another, making it difficult to examine one aspect without considering the whole picture. Because Basil Bernstein’s code theory focuses on socio-economic differences specifically, this study focused mostly on socio-economic differences, while discussing other aspects of culture as they arise.

When considering a theoretical framework to examine teacher perceptions of classroom interaction and communication, Basil Bernstein’s language code theory affords the necessary exploration of interaction based on socio-economic differences.
As suggested in Chapter 1, Bernstein’s theory “[takes] into account the actual relay of pedagogic communication” (Cause, 2010, p. 3). Bernstein’s (1971/2003) work examined how teacher-student interaction can reinforce hierarchies in the classroom. Power relations, according to Bernstein (1971/2003), work to create, legitimize, and reproduce boundaries between different groups according to gender, class, and race. With the diverse population in a public school setting, teachers’ cognizance of their influence on power relations might be critical for student success. Although this theory is complex and multi-layered, the scope of this dissertation focused on two key elements of the theory that encompass communication: (a) public and formal language, and (b) elaborated and restricted codes. This focus is merely an empirical entry point for this topic, as much of the existing work on Bernstein’s code theory has been philosophical in nature. In order to balance philosophical inquiry with practical application, it is important to consider the pedagogical possibilities that might emerge from such a theory; therefore, collecting teachers’ perspectives might be one logical place to begin.

Public and Formal Language

Bernstein (1971/2003) suggested there are subtle, underlying conflicts of codes, or principles that regulate the selection and organization of speech (Nash, 2001), throughout many aspects of people’s social relations. These codes can run quite deep and can have many intricate layers, which is why they are often difficult to determine and address. The top, or most obvious layer, however, is most recognizable and identifiable. This top layer consists of what Bernstein (1971/2003) called public language and formal language, which were expressed differently in working-class
families and middle-class families, respectively. Public language was defined as language that uses many short commands, is grammatically simple, uses unfinished sentences, has simple and repetitive use conjunctions, and emphasizes emotive rather than logical content (Bernstein, 1971/2003). Formal language, on the other hand, was defined as language that consists of personal, individual qualities; volume, tone and other non-verbal means of expression take second place to the actual words used. Of the two languages, working-class children typically respond to public language only, while middle-class children can typically respond to either language. Additionally, working-class children can sometimes translate formal language into public language, but then have difficulty making it personally meaningful. Because most middle-class students are able to shift easily between public and formal languages, they can speak appropriately with not only peers from any background, but with teachers as well. For example, students who understand that when a teacher says, “I like the way Megan is sitting so quietly,” they should sit quietly, too, understand formal language; in contrast, students who do not understand that they should also sit quietly do not understand formal language in this instance. Students who are able to make connections beyond the literal words spoken tend to operate in a formal language, whereas students who understand the literal words operate in a public language.

**Restricted and Elaborated Code**

Bernstein (1971/2003) further examined the differences between public and formal language, as he recognized that every time a child spoke or listened, his or her social structure was reinforced. Students who could function in formal language were
empowered, while the students who only understood public language were not. Bernstein labeled these codes of language restricted code and elaborated code. The restricted code is used predominately by the working class, while the elaborated code is used primarily by the middle-upper class. According to Bernstein (1971/2003), speakers using an elaborated code select from a wide range of alternatives, meaning it is difficult to predict the speech they will use. Alternatively, speakers using a restricted code select a limited range of alternatives, which are much easier to predict.

Bernstein (1971/2003) provided several situations that exemplified how these codes can appear in society. For example, speaking in a restricted code could be compared to language used in a religious service or a cocktail party. In these instances, the roles of individuals are predictable, as are the words they use. In the case of the cocktail party, the conversation is often trite small talk, and therefore less important, and individuals become much more aware of non-verbal gesture, such as expression, body language, and proximity. The restricted code limits the speakers to the prearranged conversation, allowing little room for individual difference. Bernstein (1971/2003) stressed the idea that the restricted code is not limited to the working class, as all people function in this code periodically. In the elaborated code, however, there is an inherent pressure placed on the speaker to properly arrange verbal content to fit a specific listener, while in restricted code, the verbal content is the same regardless of the audience. An example of understanding an elaborated code would be in the case of a parent explaining to a young person why they should not talk back to an adult, rather than just forcefully telling the child not to talk back.
Bernstein (1971/2003) devised several salient points with regard to codes, the first one being that for a child raised in an elaborated code, school is an experience of “symbolic and social development” (p. 136), while for a child raised in a restricted code, school is an experience of “symbolic and social change” (p. 136). Ultimately, Bernstein suggested that by naming and discussing these codes, this was not an argument “for the preservation of a pseudo-folk culture” (p. 136) but “for increased sensitivity on the part of teachers towards both the cultural and cognitive requirements of the formal educational relationship” (pp. 136-7). He also indicated that a restricted code should not be “disvalued” (p. 152), as it is representative of a communal culture. According to Bernstein (1971/2003), however, it is essential for teachers to understand the culture from which lower class students come.

Because of these important assertions and distinctions, the premise of this study was to examine teacher awareness of their interaction with students, possibly leading to the “increased sensitivity” (p. 137) Bernstein acknowledged. With increasing diversity in the public schools, it might be critical for teachers to explore how they interact with their diverse students. This exploration might bring understanding in relation to how diverse students’ behavior and learning could be influenced by interaction in the classroom.

Studies have examined practical applications, as well as theoretical analyses, of Bernstein’s code theory.

**Empirical Studies Using Bernstein’s Theory**

Empirical studies have both supported (Greenberg & Formanek, 1971; Hasan, 2002) and refuted (Arnston, 1982; Thorlindsson, 1987) Bernstein’s theory. Greenberg
and Formanek (1971) analyzed the discourse of fifty middle-class and fifty lower-class mother-child pairs in a doctor’s waiting room, and found that “a lower overall verbal productiveness” (p. 8) was typical of the lower-class pairs. The researchers’ findings in their language analysis of lower class and middle class confirmed Bernstein’s language code in that the middle class mothers and children were more likely to communicate in ways that were similar to Bernstein’s formal language, while the lower class families they observed were more likely to use short commands like in a public language. In fact, the researchers assumed that the behaviors reported in their study could be generalized to other situations.

Hasan (2002) also examined interactions between 24 mothers from varying socio-economic backgrounds, and their young children (mean age – three years, 8 months), only this time in their homes, and offered further support for Bernstein’s code theory. In this study, Hasan recorded interactions of several different events in the household, including the parent giving care to the child, such as feeding or bathing, doing a cooperative activity with the child, and engaging in a household chore while the child was nearby. After data analysis, Hasan (2002) reached several conclusions: (a) that the differences in interactions among different pairs were systematic, (b) that Bernstein’s code theory is necessary to interpret these differences, and (c) that the differences can only be accounted for in relation to their social positioning.

Bernstein’s theoretical assertions of how interactions take place in classrooms have come under great scrutiny over the past several decades, particularly that lower socio-economic populations have a language deficit. One critic, Michael Huspek (1994), found several flaws in Bernstein’s code theory. He suggested that Bernstein
was claiming a deficit theory in asserting that the working-class lacked qualities that the middle-class possessed. Huspek (1994) also concluded that Bernstein’s theory looked at each societal class in isolation, rather than in relation to one another, thereby treating the class system as a stratified order.

Arnston (1982) suggested that what is missing from Bernstein’s work is the necessary proof to accept or reject his theories. In his correlation study of 107 kindergarten children from varying backgrounds, he asked children to respond to different stimuli, including story cards and narrating an episode from their favorite television show, and recorded their speech. Arnston’s findings were not practically significant, and he attributed this to the possibility that interviews or stimuli situations did not generate authentic situations that portrayed how these children communicated at home. Thus, Arnston (1982) believed that the speech samples in his study refuted Bernstein’s theory of elaborated and restricted code. Hasan (2002) also cited questionable methods in Bernstein’s early empirical research, as he used interviews and questionnaires that did not represent naturally occurring language in everyday life, thus rendering some of the linguistic evidence invalid.

Thorlindsson (1987) conducted an elaborate correlation study examining the relationships among each of the major variables of Bernstein’s model, including social class, family interaction, linguistic elaboration, IQ, and school performance. Social class was measured by a 6-point scale, while family interaction was measured by a questionnaire constructed by the researcher. For linguistic elaboration, 338 fifteen-year olds wrote a response to a photograph, and IQ and school performances were measured through a standard IQ test and teacher-evaluated student performance. The
results suggested that linguistic elaboration was neither significantly correlated with any of the major variables, nor played the predicted role, and, therefore, did not support Bernstein’s code theory. Thorlindsson did note, however, that the study was conducted in Iceland, which might have played an important role in the findings, as most of the work being done based on Bernstein’s work at that time was conducted in England or elsewhere in Europe.

Edwards (1987) criticized Bernstein’s claim that formal education is taught in an elaborated code, stating this implies that students have the opportunity to “[disturb] a body of received knowledge” (p. 237). In other words, Edwards proposed that it is rare for students to actually have an opportunity to challenge the predetermined body of knowledge that a teacher determines relevant. Bernstein (1994) responded to this criticism by suggesting that even when a teacher has a set body of knowledge, his or her line of interrogating involves “sequences of questions [which] ‘pilot’ the student towards a pre-determined outcome known to the teacher” (p. 178), therefore using an elaborate code. Bernstein emphatically reminded readers that codes do not refer to speech alone, but also to the subtle way the information is transmitted to the students.

Despite the criticism ascribed to Bernstein’s theory, his work might offer an explicit way to examine teacher-student interactions in the classroom. As Cause (2010) noted, “For the purpose of many educational research projects that explore teaching, learning, or curriculum issues, his theory has the potential to provide a language in which to describe the ways in which teachers relay information in the classroom” (p. 4). The language that Bernstein provides can inform the current study as it looks to understand how teachers perceive the way they communicate in the music classroom.
These notions serve as a reminder that the premise of Bernstein’s work was not to identify the correct or incorrect way to communicate with students, but rather, to make teachers aware of how cultural differences might affect the ways in which they interact with students in the classroom. The studies reviewed here confirm that school interactions are complex, and that teacher responsiveness to these complexities might help diverse students feel included in the culture of the classroom and be empowered as learners and important contributors to the class.

Communication, Power, and Bernstein in Music Education

While Bernstein’s theory has been explored philosophically and empirically with regard to interactions between teachers and students, little attention has been given to elementary music classrooms and the extent to which music teachers are aware of how their language and teaching might impact students. Music education research has uncovered, however, particular strands such as communication in secondary ensemble rehearsals, teacher preparation toward working with diverse students, and social justice and democracy in the music classroom. There have also been several survey studies on teacher perception of challenges in urban schools, as well as schools in general. Thus, elementary music might be a critical area in which to examine communication specifically because of the nature of the subject and how interaction can potentially reinforce the classroom culture.

Previous research has explored communication in the music classroom (Dickey, 1991; Goolsby, 1997; Kindall-Smith, McKoy, & Mills, 2011; MacLeod, 2010; Sang, 1998; Whitaker, 2011), often under the larger umbrella of examining instructional techniques
in general, with verbal communication as only one technique among many. The majority of these studies, however, have focused on secondary ensemble settings. For example, MacLeod (2010) conducted a comparison of instructional strategies of band and orchestra directors. From these findings, the researcher identified and defined twelve behaviors, and analyzed teaching videos of 20 experienced band directors and 20 experienced orchestra directors in order to determine the number of times these behaviors occurred. While only one of the behaviors involved interaction between teachers and students, QA (Question and Answer) “Teacher asked the students questions regarding the song or performance of the song” (p. 54), all of the behaviors dealt with how ensemble directors communicated with their ensembles.

In contrast, Doyle (2012) examined music teacher perceptions of issues and problems in urban elementary schools. In this survey study, the researcher created the Doyle questionnaire to ascertain teachers’ attitudes toward teaching urban students, perceptions of student-teacher differences, expectations of urban students, and the levels of preparation and support they had received. All elementary music teachers (N=229) in Title I schools in two districts in a large city were invited to participate, with a 31% return rate (n=71). Findings showed that most of the teachers surveyed valued diversity in their classroom, and were rewarded by providing a safe environment for their students. The concerns that the teachers reported included “lack of materials, lack of funds, scheduling/overscheduling issues, behavior management concerns, and state-test tutoring interfering with their students contact time” (Doyle, 2012, p. 46). Doyle also asserted that teachers suggested “more practical and hands-on experience in public urban schools during undergraduate preparation, as well as coursework in effective
classroom management techniques” (Doyle, 2012, p. 46) might aid with the issues they faced.

In another survey study, Allen (2011) also assessed teachers’ perceptions of challenges in the classroom. In this dissertation study, Allen (2011) selected 90 music (all level) teachers and 90 administrators from randomly selected schools across all 50 states. Some of the challenges that emerged from her study were teacher’s inability to work with students of various abilities, including those with special needs and those who lacked prerequisite music skills. Participants also mentioned lack of parental support and lack of resources as challenges they faced in their teaching careers.

Music education literature also examines how music teacher preparation programs can better facilitate teachers’ ability to teach diverse students in their classrooms. In a study of urban music teachers regarding teacher preparation, Fiese and DeCarbo (1995) found that their respondents believed that prospective teachers would be better prepared if education programs focused more on school students from different backgrounds than the practicing teachers themselves. Several themes emerged from their findings, one of which was the need for music programs in public school to communicate with the outside community. Another theme was course content, and the researchers found the importance for music education programs to teach about interacting with diverse students, rather than focus solely on the content to be taught. This finding also reflects a possible need for music education teacher preparation programs to examine preservice teacher preparation for diverse classrooms.
In another study relating to music teacher preparation, Emmanuel (2006) facilitated an undergraduate-level immersion internship that was offered as a university course for credit. The internship had two components: one week of orientation, where “participants examined their own beliefs and attitudes concerning teaching in a culturally diverse setting” (p. 16), and two weeks of immersion internship in urban Detroit, MI. According to Emmanuel, “successful teaching in culturally challenging settings requires that we begin by examining our own sets of assumptions, beliefs, and attitudes about people who are somehow different from us” (p. 24).

Another successful program in place for music education students to increase familiarity with diverse students was a collaborative endeavor between University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and the Milwaukee Public Schools. In this synergetic partnership led by Kindall-Smith (2004), four objectives drove the collaboration. These objectives were affirming and empowering urban professionals in the Milwaukee Public School system, recruiting and placing student teachers, mentoring beginning teachers, and offering professional development for music teachers. In the program, the university required music education students to spend fifty hours of observation at diverse schools. Kindall-Smith specified that the hours of observation were only one part of this important exercise. It was also necessary for the “opportunity for university students to discuss their observations with professors who have knowledge about and experience in urban settings” (p. 44).

Borek (2012) used Bernstein’s concepts of classification, framing, and code to examine the explicit, implicit, and null curricula of music teacher preparation programs in Massachusetts, and examined how the curricula were determined and the
consequences of the curricular decisions. Borek analyzed degree requirements and course descriptions across the state, faculty survey findings from music preparation programs, and interviews with faculty from five institutions. From these data, Borek found that the explicit curriculum included many topics, such as multiculturalism, teaching special populations, classroom management, and budget development, to name a few. The implicit curriculum revealed that Western art music was valued more than non-Western art music and that training as a musician was deemed a pre-requisite to training as a music teacher. While Bernstein’s concepts of classification and framing are outside the scope of this dissertation, Borek’s study serves as an example of how the elements of Bernstein’s theories are embedded in one another, and how the focus of the current study on communication might lead to future research.

Preparing teachers in music education to be more aware of cultural differences might enable them to be more democratic in their classrooms. Some music education scholars (Wright & Froehlich, 2012; Swanwick, 1989; Wright, 2010) have framed the idea of a more democratic music classroom using Bernstein’s later work (Bernstein, 2000). Wright (2010) “[devised] a framework relating Bernstein’s democratic rights to music education,” in which she suggested that music teachers’ “actions need to be underpinned by values and commitment to furthering democracy” (p. 276). While it is important to examine elements of a music classroom, such as curriculum selection, critical thinking skills, and power for a democratic classroom, it is possible that to promote a democratic environment, it might be necessary to explore teacher perception of interaction in the classroom.
In a theoretical assertion based on stories from Froehlich and Johnson (2008), Wright and Froehlich (2012) examined Bernstein’s theory of pedagogic device as applicable to the music classroom. The pedagogic device consists of “rules which regulate the pedagogic communication” (Bernstein, 1996, p. 41), and while it is related to language code theory in that the language used in the classroom contributes to the pedagogic device, a deeper examination of this is outside the scope of this study. The researchers referred to the pedagogic device as Bernstein’s framework, and proposed that the “main function of education [is] the reproduction, rather than a change, of society” (p. 214), suggesting that “Bernstein asserted that language is never neutral. Rather, language possesses internal rules that regulate the communication at the same time that it makes the communication possible” (p. 215). As applied to the music classroom, they asserted that “neither specific knowledge nor acquired skills are ever neutral; they always carry hidden values and cultural preferences” (Wright & Froehlich, 2012, p. 219). It is only through considering these philosophical assertions of hidden values and weighing them against the practical application in the classroom (Brown, 2003; Lubienski, 2004; McCarthey, 1999) that we might begin to understand the potential to create rewarding opportunities for students.

There are valuable elements of Bernstein’s theories that are applicable to music education, and this study examined teacher perceptions regarding communication as a stepping-stone to these other important and more complex layers of interaction in the elementary music classroom. Because it is difficult to quantify interactions, as they are often subtle, this study examined teacher perception only as an entry point into what will hopefully become a viable line of research. While much of the aforementioned research
has been philosophical in nature, it is important to address pedagogical needs, beginning with teachers’ perspectives. In order to bridge theory and practice, conversations with elementary music teachers might be a way to begin to explore what music teachers are thinking about their interaction in the classroom.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In Chapter 1, the notions of communication in the elementary music classroom were discussed, particularly with regard to teachers and their socio-economically diverse students. That discussion served as the basis for the current study, which sought to ascertain teacher perceptions of differences in communication among varying socio-economic groups in the elementary music classroom. Chapter 2 focused on communication, power, and Basil Bernstein’s language code theory as a way to frame the study, and serves as an initial foray into teacher perception of communication differences in the elementary music classroom. The current chapter outlines the research methodology and procedures that were employed in this study, and includes information specific to data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

The purpose of the current study was to explore teachers’ perceptions of how classroom interactions, in light of differences in communication, might impact students in Title I schools. It is possible these perceptions of differences might be interpreted by the reader as evidence of deficiencies within Title I schools. This could possibly reinforce the stereotype that schools that have predominantly low SES students are defective in some way. To clarify, it was not the intent of this study to focus on the negative aspects of these schools, as there are often innovative practices that occur there. The intent of this study was to explore the perceptions of teachers concerning the possible differences in communication use and their awareness of those differences. Phenomenology can be considered an appropriate methodology for exploring these differences in communication, because, as Patton described, phenomenology explores “how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into
consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning” (Patton, 2002, p. 104). The underlying phenomenological idea of people making sense of and creating meaning from their experiences is particularly relevant to this study, because Bernstein’s code theory addresses how children are affected by the way they communicate based on the interaction taking place around them, or the meaning they create from interactive experiences.

Research Paradigm

Phenomenology

Phenomenology, thought to be founded by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), often is cited as the “lived experience” of people, but is actually more complex than this general definition suggests. Hein and Austin (2001) wrote that Husserl “saw it [phenomenology] as a foundational science underlying all of the sciences and sought to clarify, through the use of critical reflection (i.e. rationality) and description, the foundation and constitution of knowledge consciousness” (p. 4). Phenomenological research primarily is based on the assumption that there is an essence or essences to shared experience. These essences are the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced. The experiences of different people are bracketed, analyzed, and compared to identify the essences of the phenomenon, for example, the essence of being a participant in a particular program. The assumption of essence, like the ethnographer’s assumption that culture exists and is important, becomes the defining characteristic of a purely phenomenological study. (Patton, 2002, p. 106, emphasis original)

According to Hein and Austin (2001), phenomenology is “the systematic study of experience or human meaning” (p. 4). Because there is no single correct way to conduct phenomenological research, and because some researchers assume that all
qualitative research is phenomenological (Merriam, 2009), the term phenomenology has become mistakenly commonplace (Patton, 2002). One strength of phenomenology, however, is a focus on unbiased appearances (Moustakas, 1994) of an experience, as the researcher must make explicit his or her bias.

Phenomenology has other strengths, as well. Van der Mescht (2004) suggests a focus of phenomenology helps elucidate the “meanings human beings make of their experience” (p. 2), which creates a strong lens for teacher perceptions of communication. Because phenomenological inquiry situates the participants' in cultural, political, and historical contexts (Van der Mescht, 2004), it is appropriate to use to examine teacher perceptions of interaction with diverse students. Additionally, Van der Mescht recognizes that phenomenological research concentrates on the description, while leaving judgment out of the analysis.

A phenomenological approach demands several strengths from the researcher. According to Bresler (1996), phenomenology “requires the skill of listening attentively, probing, and facilitating the articulation of nonverbal experiences into linguistic constructs” (p. 12). This approach also requires the researcher to set aside his or her views and beliefs, which is to bracket (Hein & Austin, 2001) biases and assumptions. By making “efforts to set aside or bracket assumptions about the phenomenon, the researcher aims at being as open and receptive as possible to participants’ descriptions of their experience of the phenomenon” (Hein & Austin, 2001, p. 6). It is important, then, for researchers to acknowledge the reflection process involved in bracketing. Laverty (2003) suggested the purpose of reflective bracketing is “to become aware of one’s biases and assumptions in order to bracket them, or set them aside, in order to
engage the experience without preconceived notions about what will be found in the investigation" (p. 17).

The feasibility of bracketing, however, is widely disputed in phenomenology. The ability to bracket completely is next to impossible, because, as Husserl believed, "all judgments about the external world must be suspended" (Paley, 1997, p. 188, emphasis original). Paley (1997) also acknowledged, however, that it is impossible to be in the world and to suspend all judgment. Because the researcher is embedded in his or her own beliefs and experiences, it is difficult to put them aside completely. Phenomenological researchers might claim using bracketing as a research technique, yet it might function more as a philosophical device that aims to cancel the natural attitude (Paley, 1997). Similarly, Ashworth (1996) suggested that one of the main difficulties in bracketing involves the need for the researcher to introduce the topic to the participants at the beginning of an interview. Consequently, it is important to employ this technique in a way that does not influence the participants.

This [difficulty] is shown concretely, for example, in the fact that the research interviews have to be introduced to the interviewee as being "about" something, and this in itself will provide a shared focus which carries cultural meanings. If we tried to bracket thoroughly such presuppositions, the conversations would be directionless (Ashworth, 1996, p. 14).

In spite of the difficulties associated with bracketing, a phenomenological lens could be a relevant and viable paradigm for teacher perceptions of interaction in the classroom, because it allows the researcher to discover the essence of the phenomenon.

By examining how teachers think about their interactions with students, the existence of power structures might be revealed, resulting in greater potential for highly effective teaching and learning to occur. It is vital then that research is conducted that
explores teachers’ perceptions about their interaction with culturally diverse students. Such a trajectory might serve as an initial examination of this phenomenon and could provide a platform for future studies that focus on teacher and student perceptions. Thus, this type of research lends itself to a phenomenological paradigm due to the examination of a collective essence that was used in this study, as well as in future research.

Researcher Lens

My interest in this particular phenomenon arose from my own experience teaching in a Title I school for three years prior to beginning my doctoral work. The school in which I taught was in a suburb of Dallas, TX. Over the course of my three-year tenure, my attention was drawn to the rapid increase of students on free and reduced lunch at my school. This type of change, as I learned, was not unusual, as trends common to urban areas, such as transient population due to government housing, often trickle out into the suburbs. The result can be that teachers who are unaccustomed to differences in, for example, communication, are suddenly in a situation where they are trying to navigate interaction with students from a different background. In reflecting on my experience in this school, I can remember students who seemed unreachable, and teachers like myself who did not seem to know, or sometimes even care, how to reach them. The underlying culture of the school was that the best way to approach students from different backgrounds was to “force” them to interact in the way that the rest of the school did, because we would be giving them what they needed in order to be prepared to function in society. I operated under this
notion because I was a product of the public schools and was a middle class student who aligned easily with the given culture. As a teacher, though, I wondered about the school-wide discipline initiatives that seemed to engage some of the students, but certainly not all members of our student population.

Consequently, as I reflect on my initial years of teaching elementary general music in that Title I school, I recall times when the words I used did not seem to have the same meaning to all students. Some students seemed to respond to my directions and ways of interacting, while others simply did not seem to be affected by my communication at all. Part of my struggle certainly was being a first-year teacher in the less than ideal conditions that elementary music teachers often face in the public schools. My schedule was such that I saw my students (K-6) twice a week, but for many of the grade levels, I would have at least double-sized classes, if not two and a half classes at once. Often, on Wednesdays, half of my class would have already come that week, while the other half was coming for the first time. According to other elementary music colleagues, trying to teach in less than ideal conditions, including large class sizes, difficult scheduling, and sub-standard materials and facilities, was typical.

As I entered my doctoral coursework and was introduced to Basil Bernstein’s code theory, I began to make connections to my teaching experience. I realized that the students who often seemed non-responsive to the school-wide discipline initiatives in my classroom were students from backgrounds that were possibly quite different from mine. The discipline initiatives made perfect sense to me but might not have had any meaning or consequence to the students who did not respond to them. I am assuming
these students sensed the difference, yet were not aware of why or how they responded
differently from others around them. I do recall that, in general, the kindergartners’
difference in response seemed different, almost like an innocence, whereas with the
older students, it manifested in acting out and seeking negative attention. This led me
to believe that as students progressed in age, they became confused, and eventually
turned to misbehavior and rebellion. Yet, there was one additional layer that
accentuated these differences for me: a school-wide initiative.

Positive reinforcement was encouraged by a school-wide discipline plan, but
some students did not respond to this with the same intended outcome as other
students. When I would say, “I like the way Jennifer is sitting so quietly,” intending for
that to make the other students imitate what Jennifer was doing, I found that some
students would instead misbehave more, sometimes making fun of Jennifer. I felt the
positive reinforcement approach I was using, as suggested by my school, was
somehow not reaching the majority of my students. When I think back to the interaction
in the school as a whole, it appeared that many teachers, myself included, were only
able to interact effectively with students in one way, leaving some students with very
little conflict in day-to-day interaction, and leaving others to struggle greatly, which
sometimes led to inappropriate behavior. I found that the marginalization of different
groups – while usually unintentional – was ever-present.

As included in the introduction to Chapter 1, I had a large number of students I
was trying to line up at the door at the end of class. I had a student, Jason, running all
around the room, and I was trying to motivate him to get in line by praising another
student, Thomas, for doing what I was asking him to do. Rather than be motivated to
cooperate, Jason ended up saying something ugly about Thomas, that he wore pantyhose. While some might claim that Jason simply was being silly and was just “being a kid,” this was typical behavior for him, and it struck me how ineffective I was at connecting with students like Jason, who was low SES. When I learned about Bernstein’s language code theory, it dawned on me that this might be a possible reason for the confusion I so often felt from students at this school, and perhaps they felt from me.

After being a full-time doctoral student for several years, I returned to the elementary classroom for a short time. My coursework had certainly informed who I was as a teacher, and I had entered the elementary teaching world looking through a new lens. This most recent context was very different from my initial teaching assignment, as I was in a much more affluent school this time, but with a more ethnically diverse population. While I might not have encountered communication differences due to socio-economic level, I certainly did recognize instances when I made assumptions based on my background, but not thinking about that of the children. It also indicated to me that the conflict I felt with some students at my Title I school might have been Bernstein’s code theory at play. These feelings at the more affluent school were not as noticeable as the ones at the Title I school, although I was aware of the challenges of communication differences when faced with the challenges of teaching in a music classroom. Perhaps the most important discovery I made was that even the most well-intentioned teachers, such as myself, might not be aware of the literal and unspoken messages they send through the way they interact with students.
Research Method

*Particularistic Collective Case Study*

Based on the framework of Basil Bernstein’s code theory, this study was designed to explore to what extent practicing music teachers are aware of communication differences between themselves and their students from differing backgrounds. Case study research is “empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (Yin, 1984, p. 23). Furthermore, a particularistic case study focuses “on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon” (Merriam, 2009, p. 43). Particularistic case studies can examine practical problems, and, while not fully generalizable, can provide practical solutions to others in similar situations (Merriam, 2009). A collective case study design was used to not only glean rich data from each individual case, but to compare across the cases, looking for similarities and differences.

The effectiveness of a collective case study is determined by several characteristics, the most important of which is the case, or unit of analysis (Merriam, 2009). The unit of analysis should be a “bounded system” (Merriam, 2009, p. 40); for example, one specific classroom of learners or one particular program. In the context of the current study, the units of analysis, or cases, were elementary music teachers in Title I schools.
Strengths and Limitations of Case Study Research

There are several prominent strengths of case study research, such as rich, thick description, and the ability to investigate several complex variables so as to understand the phenomenon under investigation. Because these variables are found in real-life situations, case studies can result “in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon” (Merriam, 2009, pp. 50-51). Case study research can inform educational practices because of a power to “present convincing portraits of ‘reality’, rather than glib generalizations. They [case studies] can ring with authenticity, so that readers recognize themselves and their working contexts” (Van der Mescht, 2004, p. 12). The insights generated by a case study also can initiate future research, thereby contributing to the knowledge base on the topic.

There are, however, some limitations to case study research. The small number of participants might act as both a strength and limitation. While a reader can experience a nearly first-hand, in-depth reality of a phenomenon from the thick data of several cases, the very nature of the data makes generalizability to other settings difficult. Also in case study research, the researcher functions as the only data collection instrument, which, again, can act as both a strength and weakness. Because there is only one instrument, the instrument is reliant on proper training, and, therefore, is “left to rely on his or her own instincts and abilities throughout most of this research effort” (Merriam, 2009, p. 52). Case studies also are thought to take a long time to construct and yield extremely lengthy reports, which can be difficult for researchers to manage and for readers to pinpoint useful information. Despite these possible
limitations, case study research affords strengths that lend themselves to the purposes of this study.

Selection of the Participants and Setting

Three participants were selected by purposeful sampling, which yielded several “information-rich case(s)…, which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry” (Patton, 2002, p. 230). Participants were selected who fit the following criterion: a full-time middle-upper class music teacher in a Title I elementary school. Participants were limited to Title I school environments because of the comparison between low socio-economic students and higher socio-economic teachers, and according to the United States Department of Education, Title I is a federally funded program intended to distribute funds to schools with a high-percentage of students from low socio-economic families (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). A school is deemed Title I if 40% or more of the student population in the school is eligible for free and reduced lunch, which is available only to low socio-economic families. The assumption was made, then, that because in the 2012-2013 school year, the income eligibility for free lunch for a family of four was $29,965 (USDA, 2012), and because the national average teacher pay for the 2011-2012 school year was $56,384 (NCES, 2012), teachers and students at campuses with high rates of free and reduced lunch children come from differing socio-economic backgrounds. Based on Bernstein’s language code theory regarding differing backgrounds, the assumption was also made that the teachers’ ways of communicating were different than some of their students.
The three participants were recruited through personal connections, as well as through recommendations from colleagues in the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area. Following Institutional Review Board approval and an initial conversation with the potential participants, either by e-mail or phone, the participants met for an informational meeting immediately prior to the focus group interview, where the study was explained in more detail, including specific components of the study.

**Institutional Review Board Approval**

An IRB application, consent form, focus group protocol, and list of area counselors all were submitted to the University of North Texas IRB office. The application was approved, and the participants were selected. After the participants were selected, they were given an IRB (Institutional Review Board) consent form that explained the risks of the study, which were minimal. The main risk of the study was that there might have been discomfort in speaking about the topic, or that it could conjure up feelings of uneasiness during the interview process. After an explanation of the study and an opportunity to ask any questions, the participants signed the consent form.

**Data Sources**

Data were collected from three sources: focus group interviews, individual interviews, and participant journals. These data sources yielded a deeper understanding of the topic and strengthened the research design through the triangulation of multiple data sources. Although triangulation of methods does not
always result in the same outcome, the purpose is “to study and understand when and why these differences appear” (Patton, 2002, p. 560).

**Focus Group Interviews**

The data collection phase of the study began with a focus group interview with the three participants. Morgan (1997) suggests, “the basic idea is to use one or two exploratory focus groups to reveal the range of the future informants’ thoughts and experiences prior to the first individual interview” (p. 22). It is for this reason that a focus group was held prior to the individual interviews.

There were several advantages to conducting focus group interviews, including the researcher’s ability to focus the content that the group discusses to his or her interests. In a focus group, the researcher has the opportunity to gather data on a precise topic (Morgan, 1997). In this study, the focus group honed in on music teacher perceptions of communication in the classroom, focusing on teacher awareness of differences in communication, and how teachers might empower diverse students through communication. In the focus group, there is potential for sub-topics to emerge from the interaction among participants that would not be revealed through individual interviews alone (Morgan, 1997). As participants discuss their perceptions of interaction, it is possible they might hear a different perspective in a focus group setting that could then be explored in their individual interviews. The researcher’s reliance on interaction among participants, however, could be a limiting factor in focus groups, depending on the personality and chemistry of the participants (Morgan, 1997). Another limitation could be the researcher’s role as moderator. While having several
participants at once discussing the researcher’s topic of interest can be advantageous, it also can be challenging for the researcher to direct the conversation while remaining unbiased.

A strong focus group design should include a location where participants are comfortable and where it is possible to record the group session (Morgan, 1997); therefore, the setting for the focus groups was a public library meeting room, which was a neutral location. Moreover, this setting was chosen purposefully to ensure reasonable proximity for all participants. In the focus group, participants responded to questions regarding their perceptions of how they interact with students in the classroom, their awareness of communication differences among students, and their perception of how they empower students in the classroom. The focus group interview was audio and video recorded with both the voice memo function on an iPhone 4S and a Kodak Zi8 Pocket Video Camera.

**Individual Interviews**

There were two individual interviews held with each participant. Individual interviews were both open-ended and focused in nature (Yin, 2003). According to Yin (2003), case study interviews should achieve two objectives: to meet the needs of the line of inquiry, and to be friendly and conversational. The interviews for this study were open-ended in that they had a conversational tone, and the respondent “propose[d] his or her own insights into certain occurrences” (Yin, 2003, p. 90). The questions for both interviews were unstructured in nature, and emerged from the focus group data and participants’ journal entries. The interviews went through intentional linked stages for
strength in data, including rapport building at the beginning, more difficult questions in the middle, and rapport maintaining in the closure of the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

As with the focus group interview, individual interviews were conducted in the same location as the focus group, to ensure the participants were as comfortable as possible. The appropriate location was at the discretion of each participant. Individual interviews were audio and video recorded with both the voice memo function on an iPhone 4S and a Kodak Zi8 Pocket Video Camera.

Journals

The participants were asked to submit weekly journals via e-mail at the conclusion of each teaching week for a determined four-week period. This coincided with the focus group interview and individual interviews, meaning the study was conducted during a four-week period that school was in session. In these journal entries, the participants were asked to reflect on any discoveries they made regarding their interaction with students that week, and to reflect on any assumptions that were either made or suspended. They responded each week to the same two questions: (a) What assumptions did I make about interactions with students? and (b) Were there interactions with students that did not go the way I thought they were going to?

Journals, or “private records” (Berg, 2004), are an important third data source because “the subjects’ own definitions of the situation emerge in their private records, along with the ways they make sense of their daily living routines” (pp. 220-221). Two of the three
participants submitted their four journal entries, which yielded a lower number than expected.

Because one participant did not return any journal entries, and only one story emerged from the others, the benefit of using journal entries might have been lost. This might be attributed to the participants’ busy schedules, as well as the pressures the participants felt in trying to meet daily demands of their jobs. The participants were reminded to submit journals, and appeared to not have the time for authentic reflection that journaling can yield. Format and inclusion of journal entries in future studies will be reviewed for effectiveness as well as the perceived value of journaling.

Collection and Analysis

The next phase of the study included careful and purposeful collection and analysis, because, according to Seidman (1998), “the researcher has to transform…spoken words into a written text to study” (p. 97). Because interviewers who transcribe their own sessions are able to know their data better (Seidman, 1998), the data was transcribed verbatim by carefully listening to the recordings on a Toshiba laptop computer, while using Sony Digital Voice Editor.

To analyze the data, I began by coding, or “developing some manageable classification or coding scheme” (Patton, 2002, p. 463), within the written data. According to Ryan and Bernard (2000), “coding forces the researcher to make judgments about the meanings of contiguous blocks of text” (p. 780). I analyzed the data as I collected it, but began with within-case analysis (Merriam, 2009), where each case was treated as “a comprehensive case in and of itself” (p. 204). In the data
analysis, I highlighted data and organized it in a visual display (Wolcott, 1994), while looking for patterns in the focus group and interviews. As these commonalities emerged, they were grouped into themes in a cross-case analysis, which sought to build abstractions across cases (Merriam, 2009, p. 204). The commonalities were summarized into three major themes, each with several sub-categories. The major themes were hidden realities, or perception of students; encouraged compliance, or perception of school community and classroom; and word play, or perception of communication.

Trustworthiness

Reliability and validity refer to consistency, transferability, credibility, and authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) of a study. Because determining reliability and validity in qualitative research can be more difficult than in quantitative research, several strategies were employed in this study to ensure that trustworthiness was addressed. Some of the strategies used included triangulation, member checks, an audit trail, and peer review. Through these methods, I endeavored to make the data collection and analysis process as transparent as possible, thereby increasing the credibility of the study.

According to Merriam (2009), triangulation of data means “comparing and cross-checking data collected through observations at different times or in different places, or interview data collected from people with different perspectives or from follow-up interviews with the same people” (p. 216). As previously outlined, the data collection methods in this study included focus group interviews, individual interviews, and
participant journals, which allowed for triangulation of data, as well as methodological triangulation, or “the use of multiple methods to study a single problem” (Janesick, 2000, p. 391).

Through member checks sent to the participants via e-mail, they were given the opportunity to verify whether they were being represented appropriately in the data that had been collected, and had the opportunity to clarify what they believed was misinterpreted (Merriam, 2009). No changes were made following member checks. Not only were member checks implemented, but also peer review from colleagues, including two music education doctoral students and one music education professor, all with experience in coding qualitative data and conducting qualitative research. Peer review is paramount in corroborating the meaning of codes, themes, and inferences that are derived from the data. As a result of this process, one sub-theme was changed slightly based on the reviewers’ suggestions. Also, by acknowledging and explaining researcher bias, which is defined as “understanding how a particular researcher’s values influence the conduct and conclusions of the study” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 91), the reader was given full disclosure regarding the lens through which the topic was being examined. This was done in response to the bracketing techniques of bias also was mitigated through the member check and peer review process, so that a responsible portrayal of the participants’ experiences was presented. Finally, to ensure and protect the participants’ anonymity, pseudonyms were used in place of proper names, and all other identifying information was altered throughout the study.
CHAPTER 4
PARTICIPANT PROFILES

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers’ awareness of how classroom interactions, in light of differences in communication, might impact students of different socio-economic backgrounds from the teacher. The three participant-teachers were purposefully selected from elementary music teachers in Title I schools in the researcher’s geographic area. They were all female and had been teaching for more than five years. Each of the participants grew up in a middle-upper-class home, and, coincidentally, was completing her first year in a new teaching assignment at the time of the study. This chapter provides the participants’ background information, including their own childhood contexts as well as their insight into their current teaching situation, so as to better understand their perspectives on the possible experiences and communication styles of their Title I students.

Setting

All of the interviews took place in the basement of the same multi-level public library. The focus group interview was on a Saturday morning in May, and was my first introduction to these three participants. Christine, Ellen, and Tiffany gradually filtered into the focus group interview, allowing for casual rapport building. None of the participants knew each other prior to the study, but Ellen was currently teaching at the school that Tiffany had been teaching at for 10 years prior to this year.

The individual interviews took place over the next 3 weeks. All but one of the interviews took place in the same small, rectangular study room off of the basement of the library. The room had gray painted walls with gray carpet, and a whiteboard
covering most of one of the shorter walls. There were four chairs around a table, with a video camera set up in one corner on a tripod. The slight hum of indistinguishable conversation of a man and a woman trickled in from the study room next door.

Christine’s first individual interview was the only one not in the study room mentioned above, but instead was out on a table in the middle of the basement, as the study rooms were first come, first served, and there was not one available at the beginning of the interview. There were some slight distractions during this interview, such as a family with a small baby crawling around near us, as well as library workers wheeling a thundering book cart by our table several times. I confirmed with Christine whether she was comfortable sitting out in the open room, and checked on this again several times with the given distractions. She assured me that she was not bothered, and the distractions did not appear to interrupt the interview.

Christine

As Christine began each interview, I could imagine her persona in front of her elementary music students. She had a very matter-of-fact, pleasant disposition, and was thoughtful with every answer she gave. At the time of this study, Christine was 33 years old and had been teaching elementary music for 8 years, always at a Title I school in the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area. She left the teaching field for several years to obtain a graduate degree full-time in another state, but at the completion of her degree 3 years ago, she returned to teaching and has been at her current location ever since. Christine casually began the interview by telling me of her formative years, which
began in a middle-class environment and then shifted to a more affluent situation during her high school years.

Christine recalled that her family moved from the house in which she was born to a town about 20 miles away during her kindergarten year. The house they moved into at that time was twice the size of the one they had lived in before, and she remained in that middle-class home throughout the rest of her elementary and secondary education. The elementary school that she attended included a diverse mix of students with regard to socio-economic level, as some of Christine’s lower income peers lived in “old homes that people couldn’t sell, so they were renting to whoever would rent them,” (Christine, Interview #2, May 18, 2013), while other higher income peers lived in newer, nicer homes.

With a reminiscent twinkle in her eye, Christine remembered her elementary school teachers as being patient and calm. “I remember my teachers, no matter who it was, being extremely positive all the time. They were nice even when [a] kid was being mean or naughty” (Christine, Interview #2, May 18, 2013). When speaking of her teachers interacting with a classmate who often got into trouble, she said “He would have to stay in [from recess] and no matter what he did, my teachers were never like [yells and points her finger in a disciplining way] ‘Ruh ruh ruh’. You know, it was, ‘We’re very sorry,’ but it was all very calm.” (Christine, Interview #2, May 18, 2013). Christine attributed this across-the-board teacher calmness to the stable environment of the school.

In reflecting on her elementary years, Christine recognized that there were students with differences. Some examples of difference she noted were two students
with blindness, a girl who was outcast for being overweight and physically developing earlier than her peers, and the previously mentioned boy who chronically got in trouble. Christine said candidly, “I noticed their differences, but I didn’t single them out for it. I was still nice to them. When a new kid would come in, I was the one that was picked to show them around the school and befriend them. I was just kinda nice to everybody” (Christine, Interview #2, May 18, 2013).

Christine grew up with that same cadre of students through eighth grade, when the boundary lines in her district were redrawn, which resulted in her automatic matriculation to the other, considerably more affluent high school in the district for ninth – twelfth grades. She felt like an outsider at that point, noticing differences such as the extremely affluent students who did not have a strong parent presence. She laughingly spoke of “hanging out with all those people [more affluent students] and thinking where are you parents? Why don’t they care that you are out on a school night drinking? I have to go home now” [laughing] (Christine, Interview #2, May 18, 2013).

Ellen

Ellen, who was 38 years old at the time of this study, was extremely enthusiastic and engaging. She seemed interested in giving thoughtful responses, wrestling with how she could better reach her students. When speaking about them, Ellen’s whole face would illuminate. Her confidence was evident, as was her passion for children and teaching. She had been teaching for 7 years in a variety of situations. During the first 4 years of her teaching career, Ellen taught in a general education classroom at an affluent private elementary school. After taking 5 years off for her family, Ellen re-
entered the workforce by teaching elementary general music in public, Title I schools. The two years prior, she was in a “really rough” school, and she was just finishing her first year at her current school.

Growing up in an especially affluent area of her district, Ellen reflected on the lack of socio-economic and racial diversity among students who attended her elementary school. There were only three racially diverse students who she remembered, and they were socio-economically similar to her, as one boy who was African American lived on her same street, and one girl from Taiwan was her best friend.

When she was entering seventh grade (junior high), the district closed a low-performing junior high in another part of her district and re-zoned some of those students to go to her junior high. This was the first time Ellen attended school with students from backgrounds different from her own. She spoke quite animatedly about her transition to junior high:

When I went to [name of] junior high, that was a really big deal because all of a sudden there were African Americans [from a lower socio-economic background], and I thought you know what, I’m just going to treat them like I treat myself, like I would treat anybody else because I’m not a racist….Someone told me, “Ellen, you cannot treat them the way you would treat yourself. You cannot talk to a black girl like that”. I was like, “Oh, you can’t?” You know if someone was sassy I would just sass right back. (Ellen, Interview #1, May 11, 2013)

With her expressive eyes, framed by trendy small glasses, Ellen told of a situation with someone she assumed was low-income whom she had “sassed” back. Her enthusiastic smile and exaggerated hand gestures made the story come to life.

So I remember someone was sassy and I was like, “Uh-uh” and sassy right back and then the next week they said, “Can I borrow your Swatch watch?” – remember Swatches? - and I was like “OK, sure”. I lent her my Swatch watch. She had it for a week and then she gave it back to me and it was all drawn on
and scratched and I was like “OK”. I had never even thought…nobody would ever do that. (Ellen, Interview #1, May 11, 2013)

While telling this account, Ellen’s voice contained a sense of disbelief, and her face reenacted the story of a young girl who entered a situation quite trustingly, and then learned something that she would take with her through her life. This was Ellen’s first real encounter with disconnect in communication between people from differing backgrounds.

Tiffany

At the time of this study, Tiffany was 34 years old and had taught elementary music for 12 years; all but the first year in a Title I school. She was at the same Title I school for 10 years, and currently was finishing up her first year at a new Title I school. This new school had two full-time music teachers, giving her the unique opportunity to work full-time with a close music colleague. She mentioned how grateful she was to be working with the support of her friend right across the hall whenever she felt as though she needed her. Like Christine and Ellen, Tiffany was thoughtful with her responses, and her compassionate narratives showed she had an affinity for her students and her music.

Tiffany mentioned she grew up in a middle class family with a long line of teachers and ministers.

My mom was a stay-at-home mom, and I went to school just down the street. My dad worked at the church. We were at church every time the doors were open. My grandmother taught first grade forever and my grandparents were missionaries in Peru, so my mom was homeschooled while they were on the mission field. [There are] lots of teachers in my family. Everybody’s either a teacher or a minister or a musician of some sort. (Tiffany, Interview # 2, May 22, 2013)
Tiffany remembered that her school friends were middle-upper class, and from two-parent homes with a stay-at-home mom. She smiled, thinking of entering an apartment for the first time when she was in junior high, as she had only known people who lived in houses up to this point in her young life. She sheepishly recalled her shock over a friend who lived in an apartment, believing that living in an apartment meant you were poor, simply because she had no frame of reference for any other kind of residence than a house.

Tiffany had a gentle, calming demeanor, with a confident teacher air when she spoke. She described her school age self as “the goody-goody and rule follower, straight-A-student kind of kid” (Tiffany, Interview #2, May 22, 2013) and shared an incident from fourth grade. During independent work time, the teacher reprimanded a group of students Tiffany was working independently from, but standing near. Her teacher sternly asked the group to sit down, including Tiffany, and she was embarrassed to have been called out with that group. She laughed as she explained going up to the teacher after the incident to explain that she was not really a part of the misbehavior, and admitted she can spot those “perfectionist” students in her class now who are like she was as a student.

Tiffany’s eyes turned pensive when she voiced that now, as a teacher, while she relates to her students who strive for perfection and are exceptionally conscientious, she cannot understand the students who do not have any regard for authority and do not seem to care about school. She recollected that she always knew that if she got in trouble at school, her consequence would be much worse at home. She believed this was different from her students, who might live in situations where there is little to no
punishment at home for inappropriate or disrespectful behavior, so they might have less motivation to respect authority at school.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers’ perceptions of how classroom interactions, in light of differences in communication, might impact students of different socio-economic backgrounds from the teacher. Well-intentioned teachers often believe they are purposefully acting in an inclusive way, only to learn the outcome is not what they were expecting. This chapter presents an analysis of the data gathered from the focus group, individual interviews, and journal entries provided by the participants. As discussed in Chapter 3, I coded and analyzed data (Merriam, 2009; Wolcott, 1994), then highlighted and organized it into a visual display, which revealed patterns of meaning. I was able to identify and group the data into three primary themes: Hidden Realities, Encouraged Compliance, and Word Play. From each of these themes emerged several sub-categories, which afforded a viable framework for reporting the data. The themes and sub-categories are reported here, and reveal the participants’ perceptions concerning how interactions are impacted by cultural differences.

Hidden Realities

We should start knowing that the social experience the child already possesses is valid and significant, and that this social experience should be reflected back to him as being valid and significant. (Bernstein, 1971/2003, pp. 199-200)

Students enter formal schooling with a mode of interacting and behaving already in place (Bernstein, 1971/2003). This way of interacting is influenced by their surroundings and experiences outside of school. It is possible students might feel more included and valued if teachers were aware of students’ social experiences, home life, and backgrounds, which they bring with them to school. This section focuses on
participants’ perceptions of their students, including their thoughts concerning possible characteristics of their students’ backgrounds. The sub-categories that emerged within this theme include home life, teacher-perceived parent characteristics, teacher-perceived student characteristics, and challenges.

Home Life

Each participant seemed to be aware of her own assumptions concerning what her students’ lives might be like at home. They spoke candidly of their students’ experiences being notably different from their own. Christine recalled that one of her fifth grade students could not stay awake in her music class. Concerned, Christine asked her about it, with the student revealing she was sharing a room with her older sister, who was around age 18, and had just had a baby. The newborn was keeping the fifth grader awake at night.

She can't get any sleep. She can't get her homework done, and I just think, ‘This family with six kids, half of whom are adult age and are still living at home with children of their own, are all crammed in one of these houses that’s 1,000 square feet. There are three girls sharing a bedroom and a baby in there, too. How are they supposed to pass these [state-mandated] tests? How can I ask them to be creative when they can barely stay awake?’ (Christine, Interview #1, May 6, 2013)

Christine, having grown up in a large home typical of middle-class income, found it difficult to imagine being able to motivate a student to be successful and creative when the student’s home environment did not provide her with adequate sleep.

Ellen also speculated about her students’ home lives, assuming that it might be a source of stress. Being a mother, it was easy for her to assume how much more
difficult it must be for the parents of her students compared to her own experiences.

She talked about this, placing value on personal interaction.

I’m busy with my own kids. I barely have time to listen to them talk and make their lunches and get to soccer practice. What would it be like if I were their mom and I had six kids, all from different dads, I was on welfare, worked a part time job at CVS with a baby, had to make lunches, do laundry, and pay all the bills. I am stressed out already and I just think how stressful their life must be. When they get home, they don’t get to lay down with their mommy and stroke her hair and mommy’s not all relaxed at the end of the day, ready to “Tell me about your day, honey.” (Ellen, Focus Group, May 6, 2013)

She also assumed her students’ parents might experience stress because of lack of money or resources. “I think there’s a lot of stress going on because they may be working a job and a half, or they’re broke. I know when I’m really broke I’m more stressed out.” (Ellen, Interview #2, May 22, 2013)

Other participant comments concerning the home life of their students centered around behavior and values. The participants often wondered how much of the behavior they saw was modeled from behaviors and values students saw at home. Christine expressed her concerns that if schooling and music education were not valued at home, it would possibly impact students’ desire to learn, influencing their engagement in the classroom.

Whether [or not] their parents care what they’re doing at school; whether [or not] their parents like music; whether [or not] their parents understand. If they go home and say, “Oh, I know that rhythm because we talked about that ‘cause you can hear it, see, you can hear it,” and their mom or dad is like, [in a negative tone of voice] “Whatever,” they think well, maybe this isn’t important for me to know because my parents don’t even care to watch me or listen to me. (Christine, Interview #2, May 18, 2013)

Christine suggested that this support from a family member or caregiver might be less about socio-economic difference, and more about personal values. She expressed her belief that if someone close to a student showed an interest in what he or she was
doing, such as music, she suspected it would be easier for that student to be invested in the activity.

Tiffany also wondered if what her students experience at home might impact their ability to function at school. She spoke passionately of a kindergarten student, expressing concern for the anger he exhibited at such a young age.

You are five [years old]. What has happened in your life that this is how you live, how you react to everything every day? You're so angry. I mean clenched fist, every single day, and I expect that intensity of anger from an older child who has more baggage, possibly a little bit more life lived. But I see it sometimes in even the littlest ones, and I have to think that so much of that is just what they see. When we talked about how we model correct behaviors, the model that they get every day from the environment they're in is defensive. It’s angry. It’s physical, and it’s just kind of a cycle. (Tiffany, Focus Group, May 4, 2013)

Tiffany believed the anger she saw must be from behavior modeled at home, not necessarily because these very young children might be having experiences that actually result in their being angry. This was another indicator of the differences in personal experiences between these participants and their students, as Tiffany came from a middle-class family, full of ministers, teachers, and musicians, where respect and support were privileged. In addition to expressing their perceptions regarding their students’ home lives, these participants also talked about their perceptions and assumptions concerning their students’ parents.

Teacher-Perceived Parent Characteristics

The participants also revealed perceptions they held regarding their students’ parents. Only one of the participants, Ellen, is a parent herself, which informed her perceptions. She expressed concerns that parents were not necessarily interested in
their children enjoying their childhood, but rather tended to rush their children through this period of their life.

Some of the parents are just like, “Be independent. Grow up. Do it yourself,” and there’s no embracing the wonder of childhood. Maybe they didn’t have much of a childhood and they don’t know. Maybe that’s it – they didn’t have the greatest childhood, but how could childhood not be great? It’s naturally great even if you’re not in a great situation. (Ellen, Interview #2, May 22, 2013)

Ellen wrestled with how parents could be in a hurry for their children to grow up, wondering if this could be attributed to the parents’ lack of a pleasant childhood. This was another example of the impact of upbringing and experience on perceptions and communication. Coming from a more affluent background with little diversity around her in her childhood meant that Ellen made assumptions about the universal greatness of childhood, as she seemed to have a difficult time understanding how one’s childhood could not be great.

While discussing other struggles due to a lack of understanding of the parents of her students, Ellen seemed highly concerned as she spoke of her perceptions of parents’ lack of concern for where their students were during the day and what they were doing, again comparing them to her own situation as a mother.

How are you okay just letting your kid get on a bus as a kindergartner and get dropped off? You’ve never even stepped foot in this school. You don’t even know where your kid is all day? You can’t sit in your office and envision your kid. I sit and think about what my kid is doing. I stop and go “I wonder what they’re doing now. Kids are at lunch.” I look forward to picking them up and I walk in and I say “hello” to the teachers. (Ellen, Interview #2, May 22, 2013)

Another parent disconnect that Ellen cited stemmed from her experience in attempting to contact her students’ parents. When the students told her that their parents would not answer her call because they knew it was the school calling, Ellen expressed disbelief. “How would [she] not want to answer the call? ‘Because she [the
student’s mother] knows I’m in trouble.’ I don’t understand that. If your kid’s school is calling, you answer the phone. It is a big deal” (Ellen, Interview #2, May 22, 2013). The dissonance for Ellen here is highly evident, as she shows frustration with her difference as a parent from her students’ parents regarding the importance of being contacted by the school.

In contrast, Christine struggled with not wanting to bother parents, making possible assumptions about the lack of importance, or even nuisance of a phone call from her. These assumptions were based on other perceptions concerning the value placed on music class and what she perceived to be appropriate behaviors.

[I’m] thinking, well, this kid hasn’t been to choir in a few weeks, but I don’t have time to call their parents and ask. I don’t have time, and at the same time, I don’t want to bother them because if they wanted to be here, they would. (Christine, Interview #2, May 18, 2013)

She also expressed her own fears that contacting parents might give them an opportunity to complain about her teaching, interaction, or music program.

You don’t want to bother the parent. If the parent has found a problem with you or the kid has found a problem with you, I personally don’t like calling and finding out, “Well, she’s not coming anymore because you said blah blah blah”. (Christine, Interview #2, May 18, 2013)

Tiffany felt perplexed with her student’s parents based on her perception of her own experience growing up, which was also evident with the other participants. She always knew that her father would be quite unhappy if she got in trouble at school, so this often kept her from misbehaving at school. She noted what she perceived to be different concerning parental behaviors in her teaching setting:

I know for a lot of our students, the consequence at school is way worse than what they get at home. They don’t have consequences at home; whereas for me growing up, it was completely the opposite. Whatever consequence I was going
to get at home was way worse than putting my name on the board at school or whatever. (Tiffany, Interview #1, May 15, 2013)

It is possible this would impact the way Tiffany interacted with her students concerning disciplinary issues.

While most of the assumptions and perceptions of these participants might fall along the lines of stereotypical thinking, two of the participants mentioned they had encountered supportive parents from all socio-economic backgrounds, suggesting these participants had an awareness that stereotypes should not be taken as blind truth. Christine noted that some low SES students she has encountered who “push past it [low SES]…may not have a lot at home, but their parents are very supportive of getting an education and are really good about making them study and do their homework.” (Christine, Interview #1, May 6, 2013) Ellen also suggested that, while income was a factor in parental involvement, she also had witnessed parents who contradicted the trends for low SES families.

I know income has a lot to do with it [parent involvement]. There are good parents, though, that are [on a different] socio-economic different plane than I am, and they love their kids and they do what they can to help, but those are few and far between. I don’t see as many of those. (Ellen, Interview #2, May 22, 2013)

Overall, the perceptions participants expressed concerning students’ parents indicated disconnect occurred because of difference in upbringing due to socio-economic status, resulting in certain behavioral expectations and values.

**Teacher-Perceived Student Characteristics**

The participants spoke openly about characteristics and trends they noticed in their students’ behaviors and interactions, as well as assumptions they made
concerning those characteristics. One assumption made by all three participants was the perception their students lacked a desire to persevere to accomplish a challenging task. Christine attributed this to the “worksheet and test prep culture” in current public school settings rather than necessarily pertaining to the backgrounds of the students. She spoke of students not wanting to try to make things better in her class, but rather being satisfied with their initial effort.

I’ve had a lot of that this year. It’s, “Well, I didn’t get it the first try.” Or “Well, I kind of did it”, you know? We’re playing recorder and they miss the last measure. They mixed it up, and it’s just that one part and they don’t want to go and give that extra 10% to get all the way through the song and do it right. They don’t understand that they have to keep practicing to make it right because they don’t get a second chance on the [standardized] test. They don’t get a second chance on that worksheet. They did what they did and they get a grade. And so they think, ‘If I get up to a 50, ‘cause that’s where I always end up, that’s good enough. I got half of it.’ (Christine, Focus Group, May 6, 2013)

Tiffany also expressed a similar conflict with getting her students to strive to make something better, and attributed it to the differences between the music learning process and the learning process in other classes, based on the emphasis on standardized testing.

I’ve just had the conversation with them: “I know you guys have been testing a lot and it’s right or wrong. Please know that’s not how this works. OK? Let’s play it and do the best that you can. We’ve been working on it a lot. I’m gonna give you some practice time. It’s OK if you mess it up. We’ll just do it again. It’s OK. That’s what we do.” So, just revisit and literally say with my words as a reminder helps kind of set up how the rest of the class continues. I hope. [Laughter] (Tiffany, Focus Group, May 4, 2013)

Ellen suggested that the students who lack the motivation to persevere, but who instead give up and do not work to make things better, might be responding to previous experiences of having negative outcomes. “They don’t try. I’ve seen that time and again – kids that have never experienced positive success, so when something’s
difficult they just give up and they’re angry. Then they completely unravel the whole room” (Ellen, Focus Group, May 4, 2013).

The participants commented on their perceptions that their students exhibited a defensive nature, not only when they struggled, but as a common characteristic. Ellen noticed that several of her students would automatically feel they had done something wrong if she called out their name, that it was meant to reprimand them, when that was not always her intent. Tiffany also noticed this behavior.

There are so many kids who automatically get defensive or they don’t feel okay making a mistake and in their other subject areas, it’s such a beat down all the time. They’re not very successful. They’re always struggling and so they have a hard time figuring out how to be OK with not getting it the first time. That we make mistakes, and we’re gonna practice it, and I’m gonna help you. Every single day they come to school and that’s what they feel and that’s what they get and so then you translate to music. We practice all the time and it’s practice, practice, practice. It’s, “OK, I’m gonna give you your own practice time. Work on the part that you need to work on.” But I have those kids that give up. They get so angry and frustrated in a heartbeat. (Tiffany, Focus Group, May 4, 2013)

Tiffany attributed this lack of motivation and perseverance to several possible reasons. She assumed her students might have frustrations from other parts of their day, and they might have a hard time understanding the need to practice something until they get it right. Many components of the music curriculum require practicing and working on something as it evolves into a finished product.

To attempt to connect more with her students who appeared disengaged, Ellen would endeavor to identify with them by including popular music in the classroom, therefore appealing to her diverse students through elements of their world outside of her classroom. She mentioned that several girls seemed to soften toward her during their talent show auditions as they shared some of the music that was important to them.
So some of these girls I’ve had a hard time with auditioned for their talent show, but they got really sensitive and soft-hearted toward me when they were presenting their song and wanted to talk about their song afterward. I found myself wanting to pay attention and give them some credibility [sic] for the things that interested them. (Ellen, Interview #1, May 11, 2013)

She also expressed that while her administrators encouraged her to show little emotion and give her culturally diverse students solid and consistent choices about their behavior, she did not always find this to be effective.

I think the best way to speak [to students is by using] my Love and Logic background - giving choices and not having emotion. I feel like that’s the best. But some of my kids that are really low income and come from bad backgrounds, they don’t like the "computer teacher." They wanna see me making little comments or showing preference to them. They really want that. (Ellen, Interview #1, May 11, 2013)

All three participants expressed how they struggled to understand and motivate their students that demonstrated a lack of perseverance. That all three commented on this particular perceived characteristic might imply this is a common conflict in settings such as theirs. This was another example of how differences in socio-economic backgrounds impact not only perceptions, but also methods of communication between teacher and students.

While the participants spoke of similar characteristics in their low-income students, a contradiction to this was the noted assumption that there was no common behavior or characteristic that would identify a student as from a low socio-economic background, as the participants were sometimes surprised to learn of their students’ backgrounds. Tiffany spoke of her realization of differences among low SES students in her new school setting, and the importance of being careful not to make assumptions about them.
It’s interesting to be at a school where you think you know which kids those are [low SES] by how they look, and then maybe someday you realize, oh, so-and-so is dealing with that as well and I didn’t even know it. You forget that those kids have those issues, too, sometimes, and just that different children deal with those things differently. (Tiffany, Interview #1, May 15, 2013)

Tiffany seemed to feel strongly that it was important to remember that, from her experience, some students tend to be overt about their low-income background, while students from other ethnic cultures might respond differently, hiding their socio-economic background. “I also need to take care of those kids and remember to ask them how they are, instead of waiting for them to tell me what’s going on. They just kind of hide it all” (Tiffany, Interview #1, May 15, 2013).

*

**Challenges**

The participants expressed their perceptions concerning the challenges they were faced with when interacting with students from low-income backgrounds whose characteristics and behaviors might not fit with their expectations. Ellen expressed difficulty in knowing how to handle students when her desired outcome is simply that they are not disrupting the rest of the class. She said this just ‘making do’ creates feelings of frustration for her because she would rather figure out how to engage the troubled students, but instead is just doing the best she can. She spoke of her perceptions of one particular student.

He does pretty well for me. In fact, a couple of other teachers say, “How do you handle Kevin [African American boy]?” I said, “Well, I just only try to praise him or ignore him.” That’s the only way I can, and he’s never directly disrespectful or directly disobedient to me. He just doesn’t really participate and I’m thinking well, for the good of the whole that’s probably better than me [saying] “Kevin, I told you this is your third warning.” He definitely doesn’t do well with that. I can just tell that he would sit over in the corner and then find something to break or something to tap that would be loud. So at least he doesn’t do that. So that’s a
frustration to me...on many levels. Number 1, he’s disrupting my class, and Number 2, I want to help this kid learn music. (Ellen, Interview #1, May 11, 2013)

One challenge of low-income students the participants perceived is behavior that is different than their peers. The data showed that these behaviors could stem from a variety of sources, such as different home lives and values. For example, Tiffany speculated about the challenges stemming from students in her music class who had been forced to mature earlier than others.

The low SES kids lose their childhood earlier and, like fifth and sixth graders, get the teenage attitude earlier. I don’t know if it’s [because] they’re around other kids, maybe older siblings, and they learn that behavior where they have to be grown up because they’re taking care of themselves, but I have noticed that difference before, too. (Tiffany, Interview #1, May 15, 2013)

Tiffany also remembered her experience with lower income children as a counselor at summer camp, where this maturity was also evident.

I’ve been a camp counselor for our church and we have a partnership with an inner-city church, so we have scholarships for those kids to also come to camp. They’re there for 5 days and it takes about 3 days for some of those kids to learn how to be kids and to relax and play. It takes half the week for them to play. (Tiffany, Focus Group, May 4, 2013)

Tiffany expressed her perceived challenges of teaching students who might have heavy responsibilities caring for themselves outside the school day. This conflict in roles these students experience presents challenges for themselves as well as the other students.

I also think of the kids who take care of themselves. Momma’s not home. The third grader’s taking care of doing all of those other responsibilities and making dinner for everybody else. I think they are responsible for their own lives outside of this building, but then they come to school and they have all these adults telling them what to do and that this is how to do it. I’m sure lots of them are like, “Who are you to tell me what to do? I take care of myself all the rest of the time,” you know...that’s not their world to have an adult figure that they have to do what they say, or follow directions. They’re in charge everywhere else. Outside of that building, they’re in charge of themselves. (Tiffany, Focus Group, May 4, 2013)
Summary

As the participants reflected on their experiences with students from Title I schools, they focused on student home life, characteristics of parents, characteristics of students, and the perceived challenges of student behavior. These four topics are embedded in one another, as characteristics of the home life often contribute to or are results of characteristics of both students and parents, which all create perceived challenges for the teachers who are from varying backgrounds. All three participants’ perceptions of their students’ home lives were that it must often be stressful, and that students modeled behaviors and values at school that they learned from their home life. Furthermore, the participants expressed several prominent student characteristics, focusing on their students’ defensive behavior and resistance to practicing a musical task repeatedly in order to improve it. Some of the perceived challenges with their students included knowing how to communicate to motivate them while keeping the rest of the class engaged and differences in lower income students from their same age peers.

Encouraged Compliance

Much of the contexts of our schools are unwittingly drawn from aspects of the symbolic world of the middle class, and so when the child steps into school he is stepping into a symbolic system which does not provide for him a linkage with his life outside. (Bernstein, 1971/2003, p. 199)

Educational stakeholders often are challenged to consider the context of school communities and classrooms with regard to how children from lower socio-economic backgrounds might feel isolated from a community different than the one to which they are accustomed. This section focuses on the participants’ descriptions of their
pedagogical approach as well as the day-to-day routine of their school communities and classrooms, particularly as these approaches and routines pertained to perceived interaction with their diverse students. As the teachers discussed their school communities and classrooms, the ideas of procedures, expectations, difficulties in relationships, and outside influences emerged as prominent themes.

**Procedures**

Establishing classroom procedures and expectations at the beginning of a new school year is a responsibility that every teacher faces. The participants all mentioned the importance of putting procedures in place at the beginning of the year to try to make the classroom environment as predictable as possible. Christine outlined the ways she typically organizes her music classroom to provide consistency for her students. Considerations included the physical nature of the room, child safety, and the logistics of positioning classroom equipment.

It’s mostly procedures at the beginning. How to come in. How to sit down. I have my room set up with the instruments already out, so it doesn’t take as much time to go through and pull everything out. I try to set my room up so that there are pathways to get to the different places - to get to the moving space or the instrument space. The instruments set up on the shelf that I have now with labels and pictures, so you can see what’s in the box and you know what you’re looking for and games, to start everybody out, but also visually setting up the rooms so that the places that they’re going to be looking most often are the places where you have references for them. (Christine, Focus Group, May 4, 2013)

Similar to Christine’s response about setting up procedures, Tiffany spoke of the methodical way she presented her classroom routine to her students.

Procedures, procedures, procedures. So, always talking a little bit at the beginning of every class. Let’s review that there are rules and expectations before we begin. Any kind of procedure, [like] “This is how we’re gonna line up every day and let’s practice it”, particularly with the little kids. “OK. That was
great. Let’s do it again”. Modeling lots of things. How to get the books out and put them back in the right place, or just all of those procedural things that have to do with how things are going to run smoothly in the future. “So let’s practice how we’re gonna get the instruments out and where they’re gonna go. Now let’s practice how we’re gonna put them back.” So everything’s a little more methodical and repeated, so that later on, everything’s already set up so we can just go! (Tiffany, Focus Group, May 4, 2013)

Tiffany proposed that being meticulous with procedures at the beginning would allow things to “run smoothly” (Tiffany, Focus Group, May 4, 2013) later in the year. These participant reflections demonstrated the assumptions they made concerning how students might benefit from order and an established routine and procedures in their classroom.

However, Ellen expressed a noted difference in the need for procedures in her Title I school compared to the private school in which she previously taught. This is meaningful because she spoke of how she felt very connected to the families and students at the private school, while sensing resistance from her students in the Title I school. She recognized that, as a new teacher to Title I schools, she was learning each year about more procedures that she needed to incorporate.

Being in a Title I school my first year was really rough as I discovered that we did need a lot of procedures, and every year I think I add more procedures. How to even get up and get a Kleenex. That’s just foreign to some kids, that they would sneeze and not know what to do if they had something coming out of their nose. They’re looking at me like, “what do I do?” [laughter] “OK, well, go get a Kleenex.” I think [we need] a lot of procedures, [like] how to line up and how to ask a question, whether to go to the bathroom or not, do we let them go to the bathroom during specials. (Ellen, Focus Group, May 4, 2013)

Ellen also emphasized the importance of being balanced at the beginning of the year between putting procedures in place and still “generating an excitement for music” (Ellen, Focus Group, May 4, 2013).
Some schools have school-wide discipline procedures in place, while other schools allow individual classrooms to create their own, self-contained discipline plan. All three participants seemed to be in situations where they were using school-wide discipline initiatives, or at least were familiar with such a system from a previous situation. A school-wide discipline initiative is one in which a student’s behavior follows them throughout the building each day. When students enter a class, they are taking with them previous actions from that day. Christine and Ellen both suggested the school-wide discipline plan potentially created some resistance in the music classroom.

Christine: It’s all one thing, all day, school wide. So if they come into my room and they’re already on the fourth level down, and I move their clip [method of marking where they are in the hierarchy of the behavior plan], there’s only one level down. For me it’s only a minor infraction, but in the grand scheme of their life…

Ellen: That’s a big deal.

Christine: It’s 10:30 and they’re on red [meaning they’ve already had several offenses in other classes] –

Ellen: – and you’ve just taken away their recess

Christine: I’ve taken away their recess and they’re technically supposed to go to the office and this is just a minor infraction [in my room] (Christine & Ellen, Focus Group, May 4, 2013)

Christine proposed that even though the school-wide discipline plan was creating problems in her classroom, she had found that modeling appropriate behavior helped her students better adapt to the procedures she had set in place.

So my room hasn’t been the most positive place this year because I’m just trying to establish my procedures and because those procedures are following them all over the building it’s made it really hard; so I’ve done a lot of me modeling to try to get them to model the same thing and get on track with where I want them to be. (Christine, Focus Group, May 4, 2013)
Like Christine, Tiffany’s new teaching position was at a school that used a school-wide discipline plan, but she was having success with the plan and believed that it was helpful to have consistent expectations throughout the building.

I’ve really enjoyed it [school-wide discipline system] from the standpoint of consistency. I think it’s really good that it doesn’t matter whose classroom you’re in. It is the same for everybody every year and I think that is beneficial. (Tiffany, Focus Group, May 4, 2013)

Tiffany explained how she approached students who were having a bad day already, in light of the school-wide plan. “I try my best to say, ‘OK, well, I’m so sorry you had a bad day. Let’s come in here and try to enjoy [music]. Leave that outside in the hallway and let’s just have music right now’” (Tiffany, Focus Group, May 4, 2013).

**Expectations**

In addition to procedures, teachers often are encouraged to make classroom expectations explicit to students. Some of the expectations that arose from the interviews were those that were made explicit in the classroom, while other expectations seemed to be based on assumptions of proper behaviors that the participants hoped their students possessed. Tiffany articulated her desire to let students know that she would be fair and consistent so as to create stability in her classroom environment.

I think the best way that I know how to [earn students’ trust] is just being fair and consistent and not throwing them any surprises. So this is how I am and this is how things are gonna be in my class. This is what I expect for everybody and these are the consequences if it doesn’t work out that way. (Tiffany, Interview #2, May 22, 2013)

Ellen and Tiffany both mentioned the role that good manners play in their classroom community. Ellen stressed not remembering being taught manners directly, but feeling it was an important concept to teach her students.
That’s just manners, right? And I don’t even remember ever being taught that those are manners directly, but, when someone goes out of their way to help you, you nod and smile and say, “Thank you”, whether you wanted it or not. Thank you. So, I try and teach them that. I don’t know if they’ll get it. (Ellen, Interview #2, May 22, 2013)

Tiffany also suggested that not only were manners important to her, but that she, in general, did not feel like her students were taught what she considered to be good manners at home.

Tiffany: I think that they [students from lower SES backgrounds] miss out on that manners piece a lot, because there’s not somebody around to teach it to them, or whoever is around, the grownup in their life, they don’t know them either. It’s just that whole cycle of everybody working as hard as they can to make the money they can. Maybe they’re not always around, and the older siblings take care of the younger siblings.

LM [researcher]: Do you feel like they buy into it?

Tiffany: Into the manners part?

LM: Yes.

Tiffany: Eventually I feel like most of them do because I feel like I’m pretty good at being consistent and making sure that the kids know that that’s just the standard in my room. That’s just how we’re gonna treat each other, but obviously it’s gonna be easier for some kids than not. (Tiffany, Interview #1, May 15, 2013)

Tiffany asserted that she could tell which kids were accustomed to using manners that she considered appropriate, and attributed differences in manners to socio-economic level. “You can tell the kids who have been spoken to like that before and have had someone shake their hand before, and I do think that has to do with SES differences, for sure” (Tiffany, Interview #1, May 15, 2013).

The assumptions participants made about what was expected and appropriate concerning the daily operations in their classrooms can be clearly connected to their own backgrounds and experiences.
Difficulties in Relationships

While trying to establish procedures and expectations in their classroom communities, two participants raised concerns with attempting to build relationships among students as well as between themselves and the students. Christine outlined the challenges involved with getting to know a new group of students at a new school, as she pointed out that negative talk and behavior seemed to migrate from student to student.

My kids kind of feed off each other as far as their behavior is concerned and the way they talk to each other. If one starts talking about something, then they will kind of migrate to the next one, and their behavior kind of migrates the same way, too. What makes them positively communicate versus negatively communicate [is] based on what we're doing in the classroom. (Christine, Focus Group, May 4, 2013)

She had a difficult time getting to know the students at her new school and learning what they were comfortable doing musically in the classroom. She also found it challenging to get this particular school community to work in groups.

My goal is that they're interacting with each other as they're making music so it's not just their own thing. I feel like they have a lot of that in class [general education] and it's been really hard to get them out of that. ‘I am my own person. This is my work. I shouldn't look at anybody else’s work. I shouldn't work with anybody else.’ (Christine, Interview #1, May 6, 2013)

Ellen expressed concern over the difficulties she faced having little in common with her students in a Title I school. As mentioned earlier, she was the only participant who had previously taught in an affluent private school, having switched disciplines during her teaching career.

[I am not sure] how to talk to them with such different kids in the room. Just different levels and different cultures, and we have one culture in common- the school culture, and that's why I guess procedures are important 'cause we have the school culture, but then they come from different cultures. (Ellen, Interview #1, May 11, 2013)
While aware of her struggle to maintain control in the classroom, Ellen tried to give her students some freedom, as well.

I get too loose with my rules and then something happens where I feel taken advantage of and I have to tighten up and I realized the tightening up process is never fun and I think it’s because I’ve created it. If I had just stayed tight all year, that’s just not my style. (Ellen, Interview #2, May 22, 2013)

Each participant, in her own way, indicated familiarity with trying to loosen the boundaries to cultivate relationships with students, only to find that the students get carried away and need to be reigned back in, often defeating the original intent of relationship building.

Outside Influences

Teachers often are guided in the way their classroom operates by pressures from outside forces, such as state or district mandates, school administrators, and parents and other teachers from the school community. Logistical factors, such as class size and rotation schedule, also can affect how a music program operates. As the participants shared their stories, many of the aforementioned pressures seemed to influence their perception of their school community.

Christine, for example, expressed that her teaching style was considerably different from the music teacher who had been there for the previous five years, and she was frustrated by her students’ weakness in many of the skills that she was required to teach, such as singing and folk dancing.

Coming in and realizing how far behind they were on so many skills [was challenging]. They didn’t know how to be on stage and it’s taken me a year to realize they didn’t know how to sing. So many things that I would do in every lesson, just a little bit so there’s always that experience, were just completely
apparently left out. I felt a lot of pressure to do that [catch them up]. (Christine, Interview #2, May 18, 2013)

Christine also mentioned that, unlike her previous districts that did not have a district-wide curriculum per se, “there was a lot more curriculum pressure for me to stay with what we were doing, so I have shut down most side talk [conversation outside of literal instruction] all year long” (Christine, Interview #2, May 18, 2013). Christine further discussed the tension she felt from a lack of time due to the hectic schedule of her day. She expressed that, in realizing how much her students needed to catch up on in class, as well as a lack of time throughout the rest of her day, there was no time left to build personal connections through visiting with her students outside of class. Christine felt that the challenges she encountered on a daily basis kept her from making relationships with her low-income students.

There were additional factors the participants believed kept them from relating to their diverse students. Ellen expressed uncertainty of her role in her students’ lives, in light of how infrequently she saw them as a music teacher, and how many students she saw each day. “What’s our role as teachers? It’s hard because we’ve got all these numbers in our classes” (Ellen, Interview #1, May 11, 2013). Tiffany and Christine also mentioned the number of students they saw each day often made it difficult to have more than superficial connections.

Ellen also felt obligated, due to district mandates, to schedule evening performances with her after school choir. She admitted that she had been warned by other teachers in the building that student attendance at these performances was not good, but she still was disappointed when there were many students absent, and, therefore, they were unable to show what the group was capable of doing. She felt
pressure from her district, however, to continue to produce a certain caliber of
performance, even though her population was different from other schools with students
from higher income backgrounds.

Ellen’s choir attendance had dwindled over the spring semester after a very
successful fall semester, which concluded with a holiday concert at a popular mall in the
area. She recognized the need to have a “hook” for the spring semester in the future,
but for this year, the choir was down to 13 students, and although she had stressed the
importance of each member’s attendance for the performance, she only had eight
present for the evening concert. She recalled one student, whom she “thought she
knew” (Ellen, Interview #2, May 22, 2013), assuming she would be there, but who did
not come to the program as promised. When Ellen asked her why, she said they had
run out of gas.

They don’t live that far. I mean, it’s an elementary school service area [everyone
who attends there lives relatively close to the school] and I have them get there
thirty minutes before the concert started, so, “If you know you ran out of gas, then
start walking. You probably would have made it by the time the concert started.”
“Well, we don’t walk.” “Well, why not? This is important.” (Ellen, Interview #2,
May 22, 2013)

Ellen exuded frustration in her eyes and voice as she told of a conversation with another
student who had missed the concert due to volleyball practice.

“I had volleyball practice because the next night is the beginning of my
tournament.” “But it’s not your tournament?” “Well, we’re getting ready for the
tournament.” I was like, “Well, this is our tournament. This is our final program.
This is a big deal. I really want you here. I need you.” So [she said], “OK, I’ll try”, and then the next day, “I’m sorry I couldn’t make it.” (Ellen, Interview #2, May
22, 2013)

As Ellen made sense out of this episode, she exposed a noted disparity between the
importance she felt for the evening program and what her students felt.
Tiffany expressed similar stresses to the other two participants. She mentioned that a shortage of time in her day, with many students coming in, created difficulties in following up on critical discipline issues outside of the music class.

I had a third grader lie to me yesterday and third grade left and first grade and I thought even today, I never told the classroom teacher about it. I didn’t get to. [It happens] all the time. Yeah. [laughs] (Tiffany, Interview #1, May 15, 2013)

She also referred to the strain of having a variety of individual needs in the classroom and “just dealing with everybody on as individual basis as you can when you have 30 kids you have to teach [at one time]” [laughter] (Tiffany, Interview #2, May 22, 2013).

Summary

Each participant spoke to the importance of having procedures in place at the beginning of the school year, particularly in their Title I teaching situations. Some of the procedures they named were ways to enter and exit the room, ways to move around the room, and how students should interact with each other, as well as with the teacher.

Ellen expressed a notable difference between the needs of students in her classroom in a Title I school compared to her previous experience in an affluent private school, while Ellen and Tiffany expressed their expectations for proper manners in the classroom. While these findings might be perceived to be issues present in many school settings, the communication challenges that can be present because of differing backgrounds make navigating these differences much more difficult in Title I schools.

The teacher-participants also conveyed the challenges that accompany their Title I teaching communities, such as difficulties in building relationships and maintaining expectations. Reasons for these difficulties included differences in background from
their students and trouble balancing between work and play in the classroom. Finally, relationships with students and the greater community were difficult to establish due to pressures in the school community such as time restraints, number of students, and differences in valuing certain components of the program.

These perceptions of the participants are indicative of the ways in which many aspects of communication are impacted by multiple influences. From perceived expectations, to procedures that are appropriate and value each student, to challenges in building relationships, it is evident by the words of these participants that they recognize how their perceptions and interactions are impacted by these influences.

Word Play

If the culture of the teacher is to become part of the consciousness of the child, then the culture of the child must first be in the consciousness of the teacher. (Bernstein, 1971/2003, p. 199)

The first sections of this chapter have explored participants’ perceptions of the backgrounds and behaviors of their Title I students, as well as their perceptions of how their Title I school communities and classrooms relate to their students. This section chronicles participants’ perceptions of communication used in their classrooms to interact with their Title I students, placing special emphasis on disconnect, factors in speech and style selection, and building relationships. A possible universal assumption of school communities might be a desire for mutual culture and connection among teachers and students, and communication is an undeniable part of school consciousness.
**Disconnect**

Over the course of the study, there were several instances of narratives that illustrated disconnect that the participants felt when communicating with students from diverse backgrounds. In relaying one such story, Ellen recognized the confusion her low-income students experienced when she used reprimanding words, but with a nice and positive demeanor.

I’m always trying to smile and say it nicely, and they interpret it as permissiveness. I’m granting them permission to keep continuing just because I’m smiling, but they don’t interpret the words because what I said was, “Please stop”, but you know, it was done “Please stop. Please stop. Please stop again. OK, go over there. OK, you’re over there, now please stop.” (Ellen, Interview #2, May 22, 2013)

She went on to describe what occurred next, which involved taking these two students to the principal’s office for continuing to disrupt the class. This was followed by the confusion that both she and the students felt over how the situation had escalated, ending up in an extreme situation in the principal’s office.

We walked out and it got to the point where I said, “OK, we’re gonna have to go to the principal’s office and you and you are gonna come with me and [other teacher] is gonna take over the class. Let’s go.” [Now in principal’s office] “Come in. Sit down. We had a problem in music class with being disruptive.” So I never raised my voice, but it’s almost like they got in the principal’s office, like “How did we get here?” After like the 50 millionth time I said “Please stop.” (Ellen, Interview #2, May 22, 2013)

In Ellen’s narrative, there was a rift between the intended communication and the perceived communication. Ellen initially believed that she was being clear by repeating her instructions; however, upon reflection, she recognized that her students misinterpreted her words, mostly due to her tone of voice and facial expression.

Ellen also discussed at length her standpoint on giving her diverse students standardized vocabulary to use, showing she recognized that some students had not
acquired the words Ellen deemed appropriate for interacting with others. She noticed often that her students would respond with anger, which prompted her to show them ways to communicate with kind words instead of through angry responses that she believed her students were accustomed to using.

> I can see if someone wrongs them, more times than not, the immediate response, even if it was an accident, like if someone backed up and didn’t see them behind them so they were stepped on, I mean, like lightning is “Hey!” [loud and angry] It’s anger. And very angry, so I’ve been role-playing and practicing as we line up, “I’m not trying to hurt you. It was an accident.” If you hurt somebody and you don’t know you hurt somebody, instead of pushing back, let’s say ‘Hey, you hurt me.’ Let’s use your words.” (Ellen, Focus Group, May 4, 2013)

Ellen had compassion for her students, and expressed a desire to give them words, literally and figuratively, wondering if any other adult in their lives had ever done that before, at least in that way. She adopted an approach in the classroom through which she modeled the language and behavior she believed would help her students be most successful in interacting with one another, and with her.

Like Ellen, Christine seemed to find a need to help her students with the language they used. As she noted, “I’ve noticed they don’t have very many positive comments to say. They can’t find the positive in the situation” (Christine, Interview #2, May 18, 2013). She also explained that she had found herself correcting students with alternative language they could use, rather than simply saying something was rude or negative.

Ellen and Tiffany both commented on how they often think the way they need to speak with the students from lower socio-economic backgrounds is not in their nature. Ellen recognized that “the kids that were probably raised the way I raise my own kids know my positive lingo, but the negative sometimes is the only way I can communicate
with those kids that have only ever been communicated with negatively” (Ellen, Focus Group, May 4, 2013).

Tiffany expressed feeling bad because “it’s not my nature to speak to anybody like that [more direct and forceful], but I’ve found over time that it didn’t make sense for them [unless I tried to make it more like what they’re used to]”. Tiffany likened using unfamiliar language patterns with students to speaking a different language completely.

They don’t know what it feels like to get positive [feedback], so they don’t know how to give it back. You can only give what you’ve felt before and what you’re familiar with. If you’re not familiar with what that is or what that sounds like, it’s foreign. It’s literally foreign. Kind of like a foreign language I would suppose. You don’t know all those words to say or how to react or anything like that. (Tiffany, Interview #1, May 15, 2013)

Factors in Speech and Style Selection

The teacher-participants indicated that selecting how they were going to speak to students in a certain situation was instinctual, and often based on the mood of their students, or themselves, rather than a conscious choice they made. Christine suggested that her communication style was often determined by the mood she sensed from her students upon entering the classroom.

If they are kind of skulking in and finding their seats and they sit down and look tired or like they’ve just been yelled at, I will be more somber and talk lower. Get right down to business. If they come in and they’re “Hi! How you doing?” then I’m more upbeat and the words I use are a little different. Inflection is different, but I really don’t start every class the same way. I kind of fall into their mood. (Christine, Interview #2, May 18, 2013)

Similar to Christine, Tiffany expressed that her ways of interaction with students were not conscious decisions, but that how she proceeded with a given class was influenced by the personality of the class. She talked of how in one of her classes, she has to “put
on [her] strict teacher hat, and the class right after them, I always end up taking a deep
breath and I’m smiling because I’m so relieved that class is over, and [now] I have this
class and I know we’re gonna have fun” (Tiffany, Interview #2, May 22, 2013).

Ellen also acknowledged her awareness of her own change in demeanor while
teaching, which was based on either the behavior of her students, the kind of day she
was having, or how her students seem to respond.

During those times where we’re being casual, I’m not insisting that they stop
blurting or that they sit in their assigned spot exactly where it is, but if I’m having
a bad day because I’ve had other classes where I had a student that had to go to
the office or something like that, the next class period I’m worn out and I don’t
have the energy to let them come in all laissez-faire and so I say at the door,
“Hey, it’s so great to see you. I’m so glad you’re here. I’m really looking forward
to us making music together. Please come in and sit down exactly on your
assigned spot.” They kind of look at me like, “What? Last time we didn’t have to
do that.” (Ellen, Interview #2, May 22, 2013)

Ellen indicated that some of her classes required an extraordinary amount of energy,
particularly when there were specific students who needed extra attention, which
sapped her energy from other students in classes later in the day.

Part of the nature of many music curricula is sharing student’s creations with the
class. This often can push students out of their comfort zone. Christine noted that in her
daily interaction with her students, she would mention what they had done correctly
before she would mention something that they needed to correct, hoping to ease the
discomfort of them sharing, or not getting something right the first time.

I also don’t worry about that [correcting them in front of their peers] even with
kids that, you know, are gonna go, “Aw, man, I didn’t do it right and she called
me out in front of the whole class.” I’m like, “It’s OK. Look this was right. This
was right. This was right. You just need to fix this.” So trying to point out what
they did that was good before you point out what they need to fix. (Christine,
Interview #2, May 18, 2013)
Christine also indicated that she maintains a level of positive honesty in her classroom, while she does not really “pare back” (Christine, Interview #2, May 18, 2013) for the students who are less confident, but rather gives them a positive statement before constructive criticism. She has found with her Title I students that this has alleviated some of the discomfort and defensiveness discussed previously in this chapter.

Reciprocal Interaction

The participants expressed how interacting with their students helped them to open up and want to reciprocate, leading to stronger relationships between the participants and their students. Christine, for example, shared a need for personal interaction with her students to build relationships and create mutual respect.

When the kids communicate with me, I’m more relaxed with them, so they listen more because they think I’m listening to them so they’ll listen to me. And then those kids that I’ve never had those interactions with, it’s a lot harder to get them to listen to me and to do what I want because they don’t feel like I’m listening to them. If they don’t feel like I’m listening to them, they shut down. So if I can organize the lesson to make them feel like I’m listening they tend to reciprocate more and the whole class is more successful. (Christine, Interview #2, May 18, 2013)

Christine suggested that when she had opportunities to interact with her students the students were then more likely to reciprocate, and therefore participate in class.

In reflecting on her perceptions of interactions with students in her first year at a new school, Tiffany expressed the importance of connections made outside of instruction time.

It’s pretty amazing to realize how much I can say I know about my students, and while some of those are things I learned during classroom instruction, a lot of what I know about my kids on a more personal level comes from how I chose to interact with them in places around the building that were outside of my
classroom time. Those interactions are so crucial and invaluable. (Tiffany, Journal Entry #4, submitted June 2, 2013)

She also suggested that it is through these relationships that she has developed trust and respect with her students.

…when you start to do that with kids as they get older and start to mature, you also earn their respect in a different way. You can talk with them and I've been thinking about this, just kind of cultural differences. There aren't as many…like I loved my African American students at [former school], just liked their attitude and we could kind of talk with each other and the way like the language and body language I would use with them was different. There aren't that many students where I am now that are like that. (Tiffany, Interview #1, May 15, 2013)

Summary

The perceptions expressed by the participants concerning communication with their low socio-economic students was compelling in that they seemed to be aware of the need to examine their own personal styles of communication as well, and how those might be different from their students. They spoke not only of the importance of building relationships with these students through interaction outside of instruction time, but connecting during instruction time as well, although there were perceived challenges in trying to do so. Some of these challenges included confusion from a difference in demeanor and tone of voice during reprimanding, as well as participants feeling as though they needed to give their students the proper words to use through modeling. All three participants also expressed that their mode of communication and speech was instinctive, and not often a conscious decision.
Chapter Summary

This chapter reported the findings in the analysis of the data for this study, which included a focus group interview, individual interviews with the three participants, and journal entries from two of the three participants. The data were organized into three main themes, which were hidden realities, encouraged compliance, and word play. Within these three themes, the participants’ findings showed awareness of perceptions they held regarding students, their school community, and the communication they used in the classroom. The participants expressed feelings of disconnect from their Title I students and their families based on differences in home life and background. These feelings were often difficult for the participants to reconcile due to pressures and difficulties in their teaching situations, such as the large number of students and the scheduling of classes, curricular pressures, and other district expectations such as after-school ensembles. Their awareness of the perceived differences in communication styles between themselves and their students and the potential conflicts those differences created were not necessarily assuaged considering the multiple challenges the participants felt they faced. This awareness, however, is critical in becoming more effective with diverse student populations. The next chapter presents a discussion of these findings, situating them first in the research questions, and then weaving the data back into Basil Bernstein’s language code theory, which served as the theoretical framework for this dissertation. Finally, implications for practice are discussed, both in the elementary setting and the university level, followed with implications for future research.
CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers’ perceptions of how classroom interaction, in light of differences in communication, might impact students of different cultures and backgrounds from the teacher. The following research questions are addressed:

1. In what ways do elementary music teachers believe that their teaching choices reflect the student population in a Title I school?
2. How do teachers talk about their perceptions of possible differences between their own ways of communication and the ways of their students from Title I schools?
3. What are elementary music teachers’ perceptions concerning the extent to which their own communication impacts their students from Title I schools?

In this study, three participants shared their perceptions of communication and interaction with their elementary music students from differing backgrounds in their Title I schools. The data were collected and reported by theme in Chapter 5. The themes included hidden realities, encouraged compliance, and word play. Categories emerged within each theme that demonstrated the participants’ perceptions within each. This chapter includes a discussion of the findings situated in the three research questions, followed by conclusions that tie into Bernstein’s language code theory. The chapter closes with implications for music education and future research.
Discussion

Research Question 1

In what ways do elementary music teachers believe that their teaching choices reflect the student population in a Title I school?

There are many factors that potentially impact the choices teachers make within the classroom. Among the many choices and decisions teachers make are the material they use, their tone of voice, their body language, pacing, and all aspects of interaction with their students. McCarthey (1997) suggested that well-intentioned teachers of low-income students often select ways of teaching and communicating that align with their own background rather than that of their students. The participants in this study indicated while they perceived they were aware of the needs of their low-income students, they recognized and talked about multiple forces that might influence the way they organized their classrooms, the expectations they had concerning their students, the disconnects they perceived and the language they used.

Several of the choices the participants discussed were impacted by their perceived need to change students’ behaviors, such as motivating them to persevere, to enjoy music as part of their “great” childhood experience, to help them become less defensive, to teach them good manners, to help them change their negative vocabulary, and help them learn to work together, among others. While the participants also perceived necessary changes in their own behaviors and choices, it was compelling that they expressed this desire/urge to better their students’ lives, implying they felt the students’ current lives were somehow lacking. This was an issue indicated in previous research concerning the need to “bring order” (Ladson-Billings, 2007, p. 320) to the
lives of their students by teaching behaviors that are deemed appropriate by the middle class teachers.

Some of the ways in which this impacted their teaching choices included adding popular music that was hopefully more meaningful to the students, ignoring the directions of the administration to avoid a “computer teacher” persona, role playing to learn how to temper angry reactions, and correcting rude or negative language. One example of teaching choice reflecting the student population was that of attempting to overcome the perceived satisfaction with being just “okay,” rather than striving for success. The participants included practice time in the classroom, trying to show their students that the more they worked on a piece of music, the better they would get. It was important to the participants that they give positive feedback to these students before saying what improvements were needed. This was a result of the participants observing that their low-income students tended to be defensive and quick to anger when they did not get something right the first time, which mirrors one of Bernstein’s (1971/2003) descriptors of lower socio-economic populations. The participant-teachers expressed that this particular trait of their students sometimes created concern because of the repetitive nature of the music curriculum, as students often had a difficult time persisting to make something better. Much of a music curriculum is based on practice and improvement. The desire to keep their students engaged and hold their interest affected the choices the participants made in their teaching.

Teachers also have choices in the way they approach discipline in their classrooms. These participants seemed to recognize their low income students’ perceived desire for consistency and predictability in discipline; however, Christine and
Ellen suggested that having a school-wide discipline initiative such as those many Title I schools possess could impede motivation with their low income students rather than contribute to it. Some of the discipline plans that follow students throughout the school day, according to Christine, made it more difficult for them to feel successful in music class. For example, if a student entering Christine’s class had already received the maximum number of warnings for the day, there would be no reason for that student to attempt to follow the discipline model because there was no possibility for improvement. Previous research discussed the perceptions teachers of culturally diverse students had concerning the importance of following rules. Skinner, Bryant, Coffman, and Campbell (1998), of the Head Start Transition Demonstration Project, found that teachers considered it essential for students to be able to follow the rules and routines set in place by teachers. They also concluded that teachers believed that a student’s inability to follow rules reflected directly on the student’s home life. That some of these participants became aware of the conflict that might occur when imposing unfamiliar rules on their students indicated they were possibly becoming more flexible concerning their own beliefs about classroom management.

While these participants recognized their teaching choices impacted the students in their classrooms, and they reflected on how to adapt to make teaching and learning as effective as possible, all three noted the obstacles and challenges in place that made this difficult, if not impossible. Because of a variety of perceived pressures, they felt they were unable to make some of the choices they felt would be valuable. They expressed wanting to be more conversational in order to build better relationships, to feel free to customize the curriculum based on student needs, and to make connections with their
students outside of class time, but they felt they were prevented from making these choices.

Scheduling issues and discipline often kept these teachers from feeling like they had agency over choosing the way they taught or interacted with their diverse students. While this is similar to the findings of Doyle (2012), other findings from the current study contradicted Allen (2011) and Doyle (2012), in that none of the participants in the current study mentioned experiencing stress from a lack of materials and resources. This might be attributed to each participant being in a Title I school in a comparatively wealthy district, perhaps resulting in more resources than a poorer district. Being in a wealthier district overall also might have contributed to the participants mentioning strain often placed on them by curricular and district mandates as well.

Other challenges the participants mentioned included basic logistical details that an overwhelming majority of elementary music teachers face, such as a rigorous schedule throughout the day and large numbers of students, which were both mentioned by all three participants. Also, Christine felt a great deal of pressure from curricular mandates by the district. There is often an implicit, or even explicit, pressure to maintain certain district requirements, such as after-school choirs and evening programs. Another struggle for Christine and Ellen came from issues surrounding being in a new school and having to follow the previous music teacher. Christine’s dilemma involved students’ musical abilities being at a lower level than she anticipated, while Ellen’s predicament stemmed from students comparing her to the teacher from the year before.
While the challenges mentioned above might be typical for music teachers, they are sometimes amplified in Title I schools. These participants mentioned ways they believed some of these pressures could be alleviated, which are essential for teachers in Title I schools. The participants all asserted, like Bennett (2013), that making connections outside of instruction time was critical to connecting with students in Title I schools. Each of the participants expressed frustration toward these challenging circumstances that made it more difficult to cultivate these personal relationships with their low-income students.

The findings of this study showed that teachers used different culturally responsive strategies. For example, Christine spoke of realizing that when she set her students up with a positive comment before correcting them, they were more likely to engage in learning. This is similar to Brown (2003), who proposed that teachers used different culturally responsive strategies, such as “demonstrating care for students, acting with authority and assertiveness, and using congruent communication patterns to establish a productive learning environment for their diverse students” (p. 277). Furthermore, the findings revealed that all three participants chose to speak with more authority and assertiveness by realizing that students responded better to direct statements, congruous with Bernstein’s (1971/2003) characteristics of the restricted code, with which lower socio-economic students tend to resonate. It was clear from the data that these participants felt strongly about doing whatever they could to ensure their students were successful not only in music, but in life, giving them tools to help them in interactions with others. What continues to be challenging for teachers who work with students from low socio-economic groups is that, as past research has indicated
(Ladson-Billings, 2007; McCarthey, 1999; Sleeter, 2012), sometimes their best intentions are not the most effective given differences in backgrounds, values, and assumptions, resulting in the disconnect these teachers often feel.

Research Question 2

_How do teachers talk about their perceptions of possible differences between their own ways of communication and the ways of their students from Title I schools?_

Communication involves more than just the spoken words, as it also can refer to “interplay between intentions and interpretations of intentions” (Nilsson & Ryve, 2010, p. 243). This study focused on the messages teachers convey with their words, as well as the way they construct the interaction and teaching that takes place in their classroom.

In reflecting on possible differences in communication with their low-income students, participant-teachers discussed several perceived disconnects, including differences in home life, student characteristics, and potential conflict in students’ role at home and school.

One of the most compelling findings that emerged from the data was the teachers’ perception of differences between the home lives and communication styles of their low-income students and their own. The participants in this study recognized the importance of acknowledging differences in communication among different socio-economic groups, which is consistent with previous research (Baer, 1999; Callahan & Eyberg, 2010; Dorado & Saywitz, 2010; Hoff, 2003; Tyler-Wood & Carri, 1993). They expressed that the environment in which they were brought up, as well as the way they interacted at home now as adults, might effect communication in their classrooms.
Tiffany, for example, admitted that because she was a rule follower when she was young and in school, she currently has an extremely difficult time connecting with students who are not like she was when she was growing up. She suggested that being in a low-income school could account for the large number of students she found were difficult to motivate and engage in the classroom. The study showed that overall, participants believed that students were less likely to be concerned with the possible consequences for misbehavior at home, giving less magnitude to potential reprimands at school.

Each of the participants expressed the belief that students’ models at home influenced the ways they communicated both at home and at school. This aligns with Bernstein’s view of different socio-economic levels functioning in different codes of language. They each suggested the possibility that parents experience stress in their home life due to pressures from being in a low-income situation, such as lack of money, lack of resources, and lack of time to spend with family due to work schedules and other duties. Because of these stressors, the participants believed that the students’ home lives might be more negative. For example, Christine and Tiffany both surmised that the different kinds of behavior and ways of communicating that their students exhibited in the classroom, such as anger and defensiveness, were a reflection of the behavior they saw at home. The suppositions the participants made about their low-income students’ home lives might need closer examination in further research, as Ladson-Billings (2007) warned of defining a “culture of poverty” (p. 320), which might marginalize children from low-income backgrounds.
Often, the communication used can leave the student, teacher, or both with a feeling of confusion. This idea of confusion was illustrated in the findings of the current study, and was particularly evident in Ellen’s anecdote about believing she was being clear in reprimanding two boys for being disruptive. She expressed the confusion that all three of them experienced when they realized this dispute had escalated and had landed them in the principal’s office. This is similar to Chamberlain (2005), who suggested:

When others violate our rules, our expectations, and our predictions for how they “should” act in various situations, we are often left confused, annoyed, or, in some instances, ignorant that the “other” had a different understanding of our communicative interaction than we did. (p. 200)

This also aligned with Levy, Wubbels, and Brekelmans’ (1992) finding that there was a wide discrepancy between students’ and teachers’ perceptions of teacher communication style in that teachers believed they were more clear than students felt them to be.

Another potential difference came from a possible role conflict that students from Title I schools might sense between home and school. As outlined in Chapter 5, Tiffany noted that some of her students were fully in charge of themselves most of the time at home, yet were expected to relinquish their power to adults when they were at school. The anger and defensiveness that appeared to be characteristic of these low-income students might be attributed to their change of role between home and school. This aligns with Berdahl and Martorana (2006), who suggested that those lacking power expressed more negative emotion, specifically anger. This role conflict for the participants’ students might contribute to their demeanor in the classroom, as well as to the teacher-participants’ interpretation of the communication they use. The participants
also indicated a desire to help “students become reflective and active citizens” (Banks and Banks, 1995, p. 152), although this is difficult because they might often be angry and independent, perhaps making it difficult for the students to be receptive to the teachers.

In contrast to their power at home, students might also feel confusion with their apprehension of a lack of security when there is a break from school, such as summer vacation. As Tiffany shared:

There are some students who exhibit a more extreme form of misbehavior that [is] more [than] just being ready for school to end. Some of our disadvantaged students start to regress in their behavior because they can sense that the end of school means the end of many daily securities. When there is not school for them to come to every day, they don’t know if they will be able to eat breakfast or lunch on a daily basis. Those students on free and reduced lunch have been eating two meals a day at school without question, and soon that certainty will be gone. (Tiffany, Journal Entry #2, May 28, 2013)

Research Question 3

What are elementary music teachers’ perceptions concerning the extent to which their own communication impacts their students from Title I schools?

The way people communicate with one another can have a profound impact on those around them (Sfard, 2001). As discussed in Chapter 2, power relationships are perpetuated by communication (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Berdahl & Martorana, 2006; Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2003; Mast, Hall, & Ickes, 2006). Because of this interplay between power and communication, the third research question examined the participants’ perceptions of how their communication style might impact their students from Title I schools. Overall, the findings revealed that participants believed that their methods of communication did influence their students.
These ideas are discussed here, focusing specifically on disconnect, instinctual teaching approaches, and building relationships.

As discussed in the opening literature review, interactions that are different from the way students are used to communicating at home can not only affect students’ ability to learn, but also their behavior (Pianta, Paro, Payne, Cox, & Bradley, 2002; Skinner, Bryant, Coffman, & Campbell, 1998). Participants in this study showed a profound awareness of this impact on their students, aligning with Osborne’s finding that children are more likely to participate in classroom interaction when they are “allowed to use the communication patterns that they have acquired at home and/or in their local communities” (Osborne, 1996, p. 303). For example, Tiffany referred to using communication styles that are unfamiliar to students as “literally foreign. Like a foreign language” (Tiffany, Interview #1, May 15, 2013), which might indicate that she recognized the influence this extreme difference could have on her students. This also illuminates Bernstein’s (1971/2003) ideas of public language and formal language, in that if some students are not accustomed to interacting in a formal language, or elaborated code, the interaction might seem foreign to them. Other literature addressed the idea that ineffective communication might lead to “aggressive, antisocial” (Dumas, Blechman, & Prinz, 1994, p. 356) behavior, which gave some insight into the angry and defensive behavior the participants noticed in some of their students.

The participants also discussed their perceptions of the instinctive way they interacted with their students. Christine conveyed that she often communicated with her students based on how they entered her room; if they seemed to be down, her demeanor would be calmer and more matter-of-fact. Tiffany and Ellen discussed being
adaptable to the students’ moods, as well as changing their tone of voice and the words they used depending on the age of students. This could reflect sensitivity on the part of the participants, as well as an awareness that, according to Nilsson and Ryve (2010), communication means trying to make sense of and provide feedback to a speaker’s message. A listener interprets and reacts to what is heard based on his or her frames of reference and on how he or she perceives the speaker and the speaker’s intentions. (pp. 242-243)

These findings may indicate these teachers-participants were instinctively trying to match the behaviors and moods of their students. Additionally, Ellen suggested a desire to give students words to use, as she modeled language and behavior she felt would help her students to best interact in the classroom. This aligns with Banks and Banks (1995), as they proposed modeling to “help students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively within” (p. 152). This contradicts, however, the participants’ awareness of a need to communicate in ways familiar to their students, as discussed above, indicative of the conflicts teachers might face in communicating with students from different socio-economic backgrounds.

Another way to consider this intuitive, instinctual interaction might be that it was not so much conscious or intentional, but was reliant on the previous experiences of the teachers. If this were the case, then miscommunications might occur because of the mismatch between teacher and students. That these participants were aware of the sometimes-perceived instinctual nature of their interactions is a step toward awareness of differences, enabling movement toward more effective communication.

Regardless, it was the expressed intention and desire of the participants to build better relationships with their diverse students. If, as suggested above, building
relationships can empower students, then when teachers try to cultivate these relationships, they “strive to identify and remove factors that promote feelings of powerlessness in their students” (Frymier, Shulman, & Houser, 1996, p. 183). Each participant in this study indicated a need for personal relationships to connect with their students from low-income backgrounds. Tiffany discussed that with older students in particular, the way she interacted with them could create feelings of trust, which would engage students in her classroom. She also surmised that interaction outside of daily instruction is “critical” (Tiffany, Interview #2, May 22) for creating these personal relationships that help teachers communicate with their low-income students. Ellen suggested what she wanted her students to gain from building a relationship with them. “I’m a person and you can trust me. I want to take care of you, protect you, and give you safety and security” (Ellen, Focus Group, May 4). Because these participants wanted to find the best communication strategies and gain trust with their diverse students, it is evident they are aware that the nature of their communication and interaction impacts their students.

Conclusions

As discussed in Chapter 3, Basil Bernstein’s (1971/2003) language code theory was selected as the framework for this study. Bernstein proposed that the words people choose to use, and more importantly, the manner in which people speak, can vary among different socio-economic classes. He also suggested that, because of the way interaction is situated in formal schooling, “the lower the social strata [SES] the greater the resistance to formal education and learning…” (p. 24), calling for an
“increased sensitivity” by teachers to these potential differences in interaction. The exploration of possible “increased sensitivity” for this study was based on teacher perceptions of whether these differences even existed in their own contexts, as the purpose of this study was to explore teacher awareness of how classroom interaction, in light of differences in communication, might impact students of a different socio-economic background from the teacher.

The “resistance to formal education” (Bernstein, 1971/2003, p. 24) that might be displayed by the lower-SES students was illustrated in all three participants’ stories. Each of these teachers indicated a desire to connect with all of their students, no matter what their background. They did acknowledge, however, that it was easier to make these connections and build relationships with certain students than with others.

Studies that addressed practical applications of Bernstein’s language code theory and their applicability to low-SES classrooms were discussed in Chapter 2, although several of these studies reported conflicting results (Arnston, 1982; Cause, 2010; Edwards, 1987; Hasan, 2002).

A similar conflict was found in the current study, which presents a dichotomy that must be made explicit. The participants reasoned that low-income students were able to engage better when personal connections were made between them and their teacher; however, there was inconsistent data regarding the style of communication that low-income students responded to best during instruction. Ellen had difficulty when trying to reprimand students in a polite yet firm tone, possibly illuminating the difference between Bernstein’s (1971/2003) elaborated and restricted codes. The participants all felt, at one time or another, that they needed to speak more abruptly to
their students, to the point that they felt as though they were being rude, and therefore, unable to connect with them on a personal level, even though they felt these personal connections were necessary to engage their students. While this aligns with Lubienski’s (2004) findings, that lower-SES students might feel challenged by situations where the authority of the teacher is downplayed, it does create a paradoxical conundrum as teachers try to balance making personal connections with students and interacting in the more direct way that lower-SES students might resonate with. Because teachers are typically from a higher-SES than their low-income students, they often are unaccustomed to interacting in the same ways as their students, and, therefore, can struggle with making meaningful connections with them. Further research is needed in this area, as this dichotomy confirms the complexities of school interactions.

The stresses of teaching elementary general music in a Title I school permeated the narratives of each participant, as well. They recounted several ways that these tensions kept them from fully engaging their Title I students in ways that could cultivate personal relationships with their students. While some of this dissonance might be related to issues pertinent to teaching elementary general music in any school setting, such as time constraints, large class sizes, and scheduling, to name a few, other struggles directly related to the characteristics unique to a Title I school. These included teachers’ disconnect from parents and difficulty in communicating because of differences in culture. Not only did these music teachers face the pressures present in almost every elementary school setting, but they also had to navigate the challenges presented by socioeconomic mismatch. This made their experiences considerably
different from those of teachers on higher socio-economic campuses where the mismatch is not as distinct. Throughout the study, participants emphasized a desire for additional opportunities to make personal connections with these stakeholders. This perceived disconnect aligned with Bernstein’s (1971/2003) view that

…the meaning structure of the school is explained to the parents and imposed upon, rather than integrated within, the form and content of their world. A wedge is progressively driven between the child as a member of a family and community, and the child as a member of a school. (p. 192)

If we assume that we exist in a democracy and that public schooling is for every child, and if we assume that the role of the teacher is to give every child the education he or she deserves, then those teachers need to be as effective as possible with each and every child. This study focused on teachers’ perceived differences in communication, and therefore the findings and analysis focused on the disparities in the data, while intentionally not discussing the positive ideas that emerged. Teacher awareness that these differences even exist might be one step toward effectively communicating with all students in the elementary music classroom.

Implications

The findings discussed in the previous sections might offer insight into how the three teacher-participants perceived their communication and teaching experience in relation to their Title I school populations. Perhaps more importantly, this knowledge could offer implications for practicing teachers, as well as teacher education programs, in preparing their students to be aware of possible differences among their socio-economically diverse students. While the generalizability of these findings is limited at
best, the transferability of these ideas to other settings must be applied sensibly.

Implications for practice and future research are listed and discussed below.

For Practice

1. Create ways for practicing teachers to build personal connections with diverse students and their families.

As backgrounds of teachers and students are becoming more diverse in public schools, cultivating relationships with their students is essential for teachers. Increased district and statewide mandates, as well as challenges from teaching in a Title I school, often make it difficult to form these connections with students during traditional instruction time. It might be necessary to explore other avenues for teachers to possibly create authentic relationships with low-income students and their families.

While the teacher-participants in this study expressed an explicit desire to make personal connections with their students, they also recognized the time constraints and daily demands that often kept this from happening. To afford teachers the opportunity to get to know their families at the beginning of the school year, practicing teachers and administrators might put programs into place that help the school community engage socio-economically diverse students and their families. This could include incorporating extra-curricular district programs with after-school ensembles that target low-income students. Music teachers also might look for others with whom to collaborate, both on campus and in the community. For example, Title I campuses often have full-time faculty members who serve as a liaison between the low-income student population and
the rest of the school community, as well as the community at large. These liaisons could be important resources for music teachers to gain insight of best practices for programming, travel considerations, and cultural sensitivities to assist in engaging with their diverse community. Additionally, music teachers might join with other specials teachers, such as art and PE, to create unique programs that involve opportunities for families to interact outside of instruction time. While extra time in music teachers’ schedules is limited, there might be ways to creatively collaborate with the community for time commitments that are already in the schedule, such as PTA programming, or other required community events.

As school administrators begin making connections with their diverse community, they might find explicit ways to weave the music program into these events. For example, if there is a back-to-school campus-wide function, an administrator might give the music teacher an opportunity to participate and connect with families by offering authentic musical experiences for all family members to share. Some examples of these experiences might include having students introduce parents to something they learned in music class the previous year, or having parents and students collaborate on an activity during the evening session. Offering these experiences might afford relationships between the music teacher and the students and their families that could be beneficial to instruction throughout the year. The entire school community could look for ways to pool resources and create collaborative experiences that engage and welcome diverse students and their families.
2. Generate a greater awareness of the growing chasm between the upper and lower classes, and of the potentially dwindling middle class, so that teachers can recognize potential differences in their students.

In light of recent economic downturns, socio-economic status of students might be less predictable than it once was (Cowen, 2013). The participants in this study often were surprised to discover that students they admittedly assumed were not lower-income because of their skin color, or the way they behaved, were indeed from low-SES homes. This phenomenon has implications for further research, which is discussed below, and can inform practice as well. Because this change in socio-economic status may be evolving quickly (Cowen, 2013), teachers might need to be more aware of what students are going through, and how this is affecting students’ behavior and interaction in the classroom.

Gaining an awareness of students’ current situations at home through community engagement, as well as partnering with other faculty in the school, could be an essential step in effectively interacting with students. Keeping track of information about the large number of students in their classes was a challenge for the participants in this study. Practicing teachers might find ways to make this more manageable, such as setting up a system at the beginning of the year to collaborate through email and discussion with classroom teachers and other support personnel in the building. These discussions might include background information of students, and any changes in a students’ home situation that might be affecting their performance in class.
Furthermore, the school community, led by administrators, might find ways to make information readily available when practicing teachers need resources and advice from other Title I teachers. This could be done through a file accessible to teachers, or an efficient method of disseminating this information on a weekly basis. Additionally, because of changes in socio-economic populations, professional development opportunities with the most current research and implications might be essential for staying current with the best practices for engaging diverse students. If music teachers are more aware of these changes in their students, they might be better able to help them through a difficult transition while effectively interacting with them in the music classroom.

3. Examine preexisting assumptions about “others,” so as to approach teaching in ways that make preconceived notions explicit.

Because the characteristics of those living in poverty have changed in recent years, it might be critical for teachers to acknowledge their own assumptions about “others”. As mentioned above, the participants in this study were surprised when their beliefs about students’ socio-economic background were incorrect. Journaling and discussion among other teachers might be ways to help teachers become more aware of their biases; however, as was shown in the journal portion of the data collection, it is often difficult to find time in demanding schedules for extra tasks such as these. Discussions might be more appealing, although difficult to find time for, as well. Administrators might think of creative ways to incorporate discussion into inservice
meetings for teachers to have an opportunity to explore their beliefs about, for example, ways diverse students interact. Some questions that might help teachers examine their assumptions include “When has a student responded in a way that surprised me?”, “What kinds of interactions in the classroom do I find confusing?”, and “How do I know that I am communicating effectively with students?”

Administrators, such as principals and district fine arts administrators, could encourage and invite teachers of low SES students to participate in professional development programs that focus on practical ways to incorporate these kinds of reflective activities into regular routines. In addition, as mentioned above, administrators might find ways to implement these discussions regularly on campuses to help teachers recognize their beliefs about teaching and learning.

In the music room specifically, teachers might give students opportunities to work together to learn about each other, which in turn might help teachers get to know students as well. For example, students might have an ongoing dialogue with student partners regarding aspects of their home life. This dialogue could take a few minutes at the beginning or end of the lesson. Topics for discussion could include music-related themes, such as family music practices and preferences, but could also organically evolve into other areas of students’ lives. This sharing time might help with community building in both the classroom and the school community, as students are getting to know one another better, and also help the teacher learn more about their diverse students.
4. Reconsider the definitions typically associated with student behavior in schools.

As the background of the population in the United States continues to diversify, teachers also continue to encounter more diverse students in their classrooms. Thus, the terminology used in education to describe student behavior—specifically student “misbehavior”—might need thoughtful analysis so as to reflect the contemporary American landscape. The actions among students in classrooms can indicate interplay that is complex and worthy of closer scrutiny. Student behavior that at one time in history might have been a clear representation of a student needing to be reprimanded, might now need a different kind of approach.

Traditionally, misbehavior has been characterized as disruptive shouting out, not following directions, not paying attention to the teacher, bothering classmates, and speaking with disrespect to the teacher and other peers, to name a few examples. It may have been the case that children displaying these behaviors were seeking attention, or simply testing their boundaries, and the behavior was corrected with a note home to their parents, as the backgrounds of the students were predominately the same as the teacher. With such a change in student population over the past few decades, however, “misbehavior” now might be more complex, with students coming from varying backgrounds and displaying actions that might be misinterpreted by teachers as disrespectful, when that might not the students’ intent. Students’ lack of understanding regarding communication during instruction might contribute to what teachers construe as misbehavior. Without an acknowledgement of how behavior might be read, teachers could continue to experience incidents in their classrooms that inadvertently perpetuate
disconnect between themselves and their diverse students. Furthermore, because terminology in education frequently is reexamined and adjusted so that it reflects current societal norms (i.e., students with special needs, disenfranchised students, students of international origin), it is logical to consider that terminology used in other sectors of education, like that of student misbehavior, also might warrant reconsideration.

Practicing teachers could benefit from more opportunities to talk about their experiences with others who are currently in similar teaching situations. Administrators might create more mentor relationships between teachers in the same building and among music teachers across the district. Because music teachers often feel isolated being the only teacher of that discipline in the building, administrators could make certain these low-SES music teachers have other low-SES music teachers to collaborate with from differing campuses or districts if necessary, as well as a teacher of a different discipline on the same campus.

While mentoring programs have been in place in school districts for many years, perhaps because of these changes in the populations of schools, mentoring programs are in need of reform. Because such programs are difficult to sustain, careful scrutiny might pinpoint the challenges of such programs and work to make them more current, and, therefore, more successful. While new teachers undoubtedly have a vast amount of knowledge to learn from experienced teachers, perhaps formal and informal mentoring practices could provide opportunities for exchanging knowledge, with seasoned teachers having a chance to reflect on their own practice with new ideas from teachers coming into the profession.
Music teachers on Title I campuses might also benefit from a specialized association for elementary music teachers in Title I schools. This organization could include a website with an online chat and blog space that might allow teachers in similar situations to interact and share what has worked well, and to seek advice for any challenges in their specific setting, as well as resources to help teachers make connections in their classrooms. Additionally, a conference could give these Title I teachers specific time to share ideas face to face, and have these conversations with other Title I music teachers in a conference environment.

5. Infuse music teacher preparation programs with field-based experiences and other contextual-relevant episodes in Title I schools and low-SES settings.

Because student populations continue to diversify, it is essential for teachers to enter the workforce with a set of tools that empower them to work with all students. Individual time to truly understand diverse populations might be as critical to student learning and success as classroom practices and traditional teaching education. Recent research (Bennett, 2013) has shown that preservice teachers are more successful with teaching diverse students when they have had opportunities to practice doing so. A variety of practical experiences for preservice teachers might allow them to more easily navigate situations that arise in their teaching, as well as connect to their students.

Opportunities for experiencing Title I and low-SES settings, for example, can come from methods classes in undergraduate programs. Components of methods
classes that could offer various experiences include partnering with Title I schools for observing, discussing, and practice teaching, tutoring at either schools or community centers, and requiring volunteer hours with an organization for low-income families. While this might seem to be another component of already packed methods classes, helping preservice teachers learn to make these connections with students might benefit many other areas of their teacher education as well. Partnerships with low SES schools also might require reexamination of how observations and practice teaching are accomplished, as these schools might not afford the most straight-forward and “textbook” lessons, but could give preservice teachers rich opportunities for discussion and real-world experiences.

Furthermore, because previous literature and the findings from the current study suggest that lack of time is a concern among public school teachers, giving them a solid foundation of best practices in introductory music education classes for engaging students and their families might give them ideas of how to begin engaging families when they enter the workforce. Preservice teachers also might look for opportunities on their own time to connect with families from different backgrounds. This could be done through a community center, after-school organization, or local church, as these places might offer opportunities for relationships that could assist teachers in making connections with diverse communities as they begin their teaching careers.

Additionally, teacher education programs might challenge students to make their assumptions explicit in coursework they take in both undergraduate and graduate classes to inform who they are as teachers. During music education coursework, they might have discussions with peers to potentially start getting accustomed to speaking
about their beliefs with their colleagues. An example of this might include discussion of scenarios that demonstrate how teachers’ interactions with diverse students in the classroom can reinforce stereotypes, as well as dispel them. Students also might have opportunities to role-play in ways that enable them to become aware of how their diverse students might be affirmed in the classroom. If preservice teachers are given ways to recognize their own biases of others while they are evolving as teachers, they might be better informed when they begin teaching to make decisions that engage students from all backgrounds. While these implications have been relevant in music education for many years, we need to continue to look for ways to make them work in an evolving public school setting, as these issues of disconnect in engaging all students in the classroom are still very real.

For Future Research

This study was an initial foray into qualitative research that looked for rich understanding of potential communication differences in the elementary music classroom. Exploring interaction in the classroom through the lens of Bernstein’s code theory might be one way for researchers to approach confusion in the classroom due to differences among students. While this particular study looked only at teacher perception, there are many aspects of communication in general that can be examined more closely in the future.

Looking ahead, there are many layers of socio-economic distinction that might be explored. For example, while this study did not examine differences among low socio-economic groups of students, this variable is worthy of closer examination. Difficulties
in making connections to low socio-economic communities in a predominately African American school might need to be approached differently than a predominately Latino school community. The current study stressed the need for awareness of difference in low SES populations in general, but looking more specifically at other contexts might be beneficial in the future.

Future research also might examine what similarities in communication difficulties exist between teachers and their students from Title I schools in contrast to wealthy schools. It might be that middle-class teachers would have similar issues communicating with low socio-economic students as they would in communicating with extreme upper-class students, as both of these scenarios involve students with differing SES backgrounds from the teacher.

Another perspective might be to follow these three participants in a longitudinal study to explore if their awareness changes, either due to being involved in this study or with years of experience. Also, explorations of a teacher who has become particularly successful at bridging the gap between socio-economic levels in a Title I school could glean insight into how to help others make these connections to their students from low-income backgrounds.

Because of the nature of the music curriculum, there is potential for reaching students from Title I schools by using music and materials that give them connections that make them feel a part of the community. Additionally, exploration of the unique components of a music curriculum, such as creating, practicing, and reflecting, might be an additional approach to consider in future research devoted to this topic. Delving into what practices in the music classroom often engage students from low SES
backgrounds might inform music teachers of the ways they can empower their students to feel comfortable participating.

As suggested above, future research might address a new low SES group that is emerging in light of current economic trends (Cowen, 2013). This poses many new questions, including implications for teaching students who were once middle-upper class but who now are lower socio-economic. In what ways does this shift affect students? What characteristics do they display, and how do those characteristics align with those of children raised in low SES families?

Along this line, future research might examine whether Bernstein’s language code theory is a viable framework for examining communication in American schools. Bernstein specifically focused on socio-economic difference in British schools, and others (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2007) have examined culture differences such as ethnicity and race with other aspects, such as socio-economic difference. While SES differences are often embedded in race and ethnicity, Bernstein is only one avenue toward understanding SES. Future research could explore other, more contemporary frameworks that examine the holistic aspects of cultural diversity.

Regarding methodology, a similar study in the future might benefit from more diverse participants, which could yield richer, more varied data. As the participants in the current study were from similar upper-middle class backgrounds, and the population at their current school varied only slightly, they seemed to have similar stories about their students and the way their students interacted with them. Future studies might consider exploring how participants from different backgrounds perceive their interaction. This study privileged only input from the teachers, and intentionally did not
include classroom observations so interaction could be explored. Future research might add data from classroom observations to further enrich the findings.

Additionally, the viability of collecting journal entries as data sources might be of special consideration in future research. Although a rich finding unexpectedly emerged from the journal entries in this study, the response rate was lower than expected. Careful consideration might be taken in future studies regarding the frequency of journal entries and the reality of participants’ schedules.

This study has presented preliminary evidence toward supporting music teachers in relating to their students from differing backgrounds. Each of the participants expressed a desire to know their students better, and the assumption is that this is a common desire among teachers. Future research could examine the most effective ways of informing teachers about these differences, so they have a more practical awareness of difference in their classroom, and are therefore able to interact on a more even plane with their students.

Finally, this study has been only one step toward understanding the complex nature of interaction based on the socio-economic differences among teachers and students. While these are difficult concepts to quantify and qualify, it might be beneficial to use philosophical and theoretical assertions regarding communication and interaction to explore their applicability to the elementary music classroom. This exploration might allow school communities to continue to move toward celebrating the richness that diversity can bring.
Epilogue

This experience has been extremely rewarding for me, and, as is often the case with qualitative inquiry, I am left with more questions than answers. During this process of talking with these participants, transcribing their data, analyzing it, and then weaving it into this dissertation, I found myself reliving experiences from my own elementary teaching experience.

As I listened to the participants telling their stories of daily life in an elementary music classroom in a Title I school, I recalled the incredible ups, paired with the puzzling downs that teaching brought to me. I can still remember the feeling when my last class had left for the day, and I sat at my desk, wondering why I had “butted heads” with so many students throughout the day, even though I felt like I was doing everything that my administrators and mentors were suggesting.

I still remember a very unique group of sixth graders my very first year of teaching, representative of what I encountered throughout the school day. In my district, sixth grade was included on elementary campuses, and this was the year they would begin to try an ensemble, if they chose to do so. If there were enough sixth grade students who signed up, the school would offer a general music class. Signing up for this class, however, meant that these students were electing to not be in band, choir, or orchestra. I began that first year with about 10 students in the general music class, which was the required number for the class to “make”. They met the last period of the day, which meant they brought their backpacks to my classroom and were dismissed from there to go home. I do remember that each of these students was low
socio-economic, and many of them lived in the government housing that was in my elementary attendance zone.

I struggled every day, trying to think of activities that would engage these young people, and often felt frustrated that I had not been able to connect with them in any way on any given day. I also remember the excitement I felt on days when I would connect with them, usually days I was beginning a new concept that engaged them on the first day, but then would leave them disinterested soon after. I remember the confusion I felt at why I was so unsuccessful, or at least this was my perception, at interacting with these young people through my music class, as I tried a new approach – both curricular and discipline – just about every week. The ways I tried to discipline them did not work, and I got more frustrated as the year progressed because I felt that my music class was an avenue for these students to experience joy in their day, so I felt that when that did not happen, I had failed them somehow.

The three women in this study were very typical to my elementary music colleagues in the Dallas/Fort Worth area, in that they were thoughtful, reflective, and wanting to know more. Each of them, at different times, expressed a desire to learn more about their students, as well as to know how the study turned out so they could be better informed in teaching their diverse students. This demonstrated that they were aware that their approach and ways of interacting in the classroom might be contributing to the detachment students might feel from the school community, as well as the participants desire to learn as much as possible to counter that disconnect.

I have been intrigued by, when describing my study, or Basil Bernstein’s code theory, the number of colleagues and people in my community who comment that the
actions of the diverse children are simply “misbehavior”. Learning of Bernstein’s code theory in my graduate work was pivotal to me as a teacher. I had many questions about my experience in teaching in a Title I school, and why treating these instances simply as misbehavior did not seem to change the dissonance in the classroom. Learning about Bernstein’s code theory gave me one way to approach the discomfort I often felt.

During the year long course of this dissertation project, the economic situation in the United States has been changing rapidly, resulting in a more noticeable divide between the upper and lower class. I feel strongly that the potential dissonance due to socio-economic difference among school community members is a timely and relevant issue for educators and researchers to explore. As I heard my participants asking for “the answers at the completion of the study,” it reminded me of my feeling as an elementary music classroom teacher, that I wanted so much to make those connections, but felt unable to approach the cause and the solutions. It is through these continued conversations that we can promote progress toward understanding our diverse students, and creating a true community.
APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD LETTER
April 5, 2013

Supervising Investigator: Dr. Nathan Kruse
Student Investigator: Lindsey Mason
Department of Music Education
University of North Texas

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB)
RE: Human Subject Application #13129

Dear Dr. Kruse,

The UNT IRB has received your request to modify the study now titled “Teacher Communication in Title I Elementary Music Classrooms: perceptions of Elementary Music Classroom Teachers.” As required by federal law and regulations governing the use of human subjects in research projects, the UNT IRB has examined the request to change the title as noted above and to revise the research questions used in this study. The modifications to this study are hereby approved for the use of human subjects. **Federal Policy 45 CFR 46.109(e) stipulates that IRB approval is for one year only, March 21, 2013 to March 20, 2014.**

The IRB must review this project prior to any other modifications.

Please contact Shelia Bourns, Research Compliance Analyst, at (940) 565-3940 if you wish to make changes or need additional information.

Sincerely,

Patricia L. Kaminski, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Chair, Institutional Review Board

PK/sb
APPENDIX B

IRB INFORMED CONSENT SAMPLE
University of North Texas Institutional Review Board
Informed Consent Form for Participants

Before agreeing to participation in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the purpose and benefits of the study and how it will be conducted.

Title of Study: Teacher Communication in Title I Elementary Music Classrooms: Perceptions of Elementary Music Classroom Teachers

Student Investigator: Lindsey Mason, University of North Texas (UNT) Department of Music Education. Supervising Investigator: Dr. Nathan Kruse

Purpose of the Study: You are being asked to participate in a dissertation study that is designed to explore elementary music teachers’ perceptions of how classroom interaction, in light of differences in communication, might impact students of a different socioeconomic level from the teacher.

Study Procedures: You will be asked to participate in one 90 minute focus group in a meeting room of the Richardson Public Library, to participate in two 60 minute individual interviews, and to submit four journal entries. This will take approximately five total hours of your time.

Foreseeable Risks: Because most of the data will be collected through non-invasive measures such as a focus group interview and individual interviews, the risk of potential danger is extremely low. However, you might experience minimal psychological reactions related to data collection, including feelings of excitement, embarrassment, elation, worry, or other common emotions associated with the reflective process. Should any unfavorable events occur following the study, you are encouraged to contact Lindsey Mason at (972) 742-7227 so an appropriate referral for counsel may be provided. You will receive a referral list that reflects counseling services in their respective area. These counseling services will not be covered by the study, and UNT will not pay for counseling services.

Benefits to the Subjects or Others: You might find that reflecting on interaction in the music classroom clarifies how to effectively establish positive communication for culturally diverse students. Music educators might be able to draw from the lived experience of the participants to examine how they interact with diverse students in their own classrooms, and findings from this study might begin an important line of research on communication in the elementary music classroom.

Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records: You will be assigned a pseudonym in this study to protect your anonymity. Additionally, focus group interview transcripts, individual interview transcripts, and journal entries will be separated out and will be kept in a locked cabinet in the Supervising Investigator’s office on campus. No other persons will see personally identifiable data. Data will be retained
for 3 years after the completion of this study, and audio recordings of interviews will be destroyed or erased at that time. The confidentiality of your individual information will be maintained in any publications or presentations regarding this study.

Questions about the Study: If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Lindsey Mason at [email] cell, or Dr. Nathan Kruse at (940) 565-3713.

Review for the Protection of Participants: This research study has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB). The UNT IRB can be contacted at (940) 565-3940 with any questions regarding the rights of research subjects.

Research Participants’ Rights:

Your participation in the survey confirms that you have read all of the above and that you agree to all of the following:

- Lindsey Mason explained the study to you and you have had an opportunity to contact her with any questions about the study. You have been informed of the possible benefits and the potential risks of the study.
- You understand that you do not have to take part in this study, and your refusal to participate or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits. The study personnel may choose to stop your participation at any time.
- You understand why the study is being conducted and how it will be performed.
- You understand your rights as a research participant and you voluntarily consent to participate in this study.
- You understand you may print a copy of this form for your records.

Printed Name of Participant

[Signature]

Date

For the Student Investigator

I certify that I have reviewed the contents of this form with the participant. I have explained the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study. It is my opinion that the participant understood the explanation.

Signature of Student Investigator

Date
APPENDIX C

SEMI-STRUCTURED FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL
1. Describe your music class over the first couple of weeks each year as you are setting up procedures and routines for the year.

2. Describe instances when you had a hard time communicating with a student.
   Why do you think this was? How did it make you feel?

3. What patterns (if any) of communication have you noticed among students of different backgrounds (socio-economic level, ethnicity, gender, etc.)

4. In what ways (if any) do you have students help you to make curricular decisions? If you do use their input, do you accept most of their decisions, or do you often find it necessary to gloss over their suggestion and do something else? How do you handle this situation?

5. How do you feel when a student brings up something related to what you are talking about, but a bit off track, or not necessarily what you would include in the lesson because the information is more detailed than you are planning to include that day. How do you respond to this situation?

6. What if a student brings in one of his or her CDs to share with the class? How do you handle that?

7. How would you describe your teaching approach?
APPENDIX D

SEMI-STRUCTURED INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW #1
Mason Dissertation Study: Semi-structured Individual Interview #1

*Semi-structured interviews will be based on the focus group interview, other individual interview, and journals, but will also include the following questions:

1. Describe instances when a student’s behavior (or language) was completely incomprehensible to you. Talk about this experience. Do you have any ideas of what the student may have been trying to express?

2. What do you feel is the correct way of speaking/behaving/interacting in your music class?

3. How do you respond to students wanting to share/perform music with the class?

4. What kinds of teaching approaches do you use throughout the grade levels?
APPENDIX E

SEMI-STRUCTURED INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW #2
Mason Dissertation Study: Semi-structured Individual Interview #2

*Semi-structured interviews will be based on the focus group interview, other individual interview, and journals, but will also include the following questions:

1. Describe a time when you reflected on a reaction you had to student behavior, only to realize that the student was actually acting in a way that you had previously encouraged?

2. How do you go about selecting how you will communicate with any given group?

3. How do you determine whether or not your communication with students has been successful?
Mason Dissertation Study: Journal Prompts

The following questions will guide participants’ journal entries each week:

1. Reflect on any unique interactions that occurred between you and any of your students this week. What was interesting, and how were issues broached and/or resolved? What was your role in this process? What was the student's/students' role?

2. How, if at all, have your perceptions of teacher-student interaction changed since participating in this study? What new questions do you have about how students and teachers communicate with each other?

3. Describe any classroom interactions with students this week that have evolved (strengthened) or have declined (become strained). What was your role in this process? What was the student's/students' role?
APPENDIX G

PRELIMINARY LIST OF CODES AND THEMES
Preliminary List of Codes and Themes

Awareness/Sympathy
- Home circumstances can affect school performance
- Power struggle with African American students
- Opportunities to share personal music = change in demeanor
- Stress at home
- Not all Lower SES looks the same
- Breaks (Summer, etc.) might mean end of security
- Want kids to have music as coping tool
- Supportive parents come from all backgrounds
- Teach instinctively

Culture
- Immersion-bilingual
- Home-school connection
- Negative home environment
- Higher SES → More parental support
- Only culture in common – culture of school

Disconnect (teacher from student)
- None of my business
- Difference in musical interest/taste
- Confusion when nonverbal cues don’t match verbal
- Unfathomable parent behavior
- Student behavior unfamiliar to teacher (defiance)

Expectations
- Attention during instruction
- Look like they’re participating
- Manners-teaching kindness
- Consistency

Interaction
- Prefer interacting with whole class instead of individuals
- Feed off students’ moods
- Reciprocal
- Positive before negative
- Appropriate communication → effective performance of objectives
- Desire to communicate effectively with students from all backgrounds
- Communication style can seem “literally foreign” if no experience
- Earn respect through way of communicating
- Adaptability
- Interaction outside of instruction is critical
• Tone of voice different depending on age and other variables—instinctive

**Perception of self**
- Balance in classroom
- Don’t want to bother parents
- Make assumptions followed by guilt for being judgmental
- Constant loosening/tightening of rules
- Desire to be a good teacher to all kids/equal attention to every kid
- So much energy on one kid
- Feels like you failed/self-doubt
- Want to do the right thing

**Perception of students**
- Behavior migrates
- Defensive
- Scared to make mistake
- Uncomfortable with nature of music curriculum—to practice and evolve
- More comfortable with one shot test culture—right/wrong
- Defensive/angry
- Outside of school, in charge of selves → shift of power
- Physical/nonverbal communication
- Inexperience with positive/success
- Home model—defensive/angry/physical—cycle
- Stressed out caregivers/home life
- Home vs. school role conflict
- Low-income kids have trouble playing—“being kids”—forced to grow up
- Lack of self-confidence
- Doubt abilities
- Give up easily/when things don’t work
- Difficulty working in a group
- Model parents
- If parents’ don’t care, kid is less invested
- Happy positive sibling/parents = same for kid
- Student unaware of inappropriate behavior
- Low SES get few breaks
- Unmet physical needs → difficulty learning
- Seem to prefer emotion to robot teacher
- Respond to responsibility in classroom
- Stress at home (financial, etc.)
- Model is negative attention
- Instant gratification
- Lose childhood earlier
- Consequence at school worse than at home
- Shuts down when doesn’t “get it”
- Have to earn their respect → not automatic
- Modeling home behavior
- Older children aware of SES difference
- Street smarts

**Procedures**
- Methodical
- Modeling
- Reinforcing behavior
- Consistent

**Pressures**
- Following different teaching styles
- District-wide curricular mandates
- TIME → Takes time to catch up when students’ lack skills
- TIME → no time for rapport building
- TIME → No time to reach out to parents
- TIME → Too much going on to remember to follow through with discipline, etc.
- Large numbers in classes
- Too focused on curricular pressures – forgot to have fun
- Low morale from administration
- Pressure for extra-curricular activities with unreliable students
- All about classroom discipline

**Relationships/Responsibility**
- Building
- Protector
- Creating
- Refuge
- Complete whole person
- Think creatively/outside the box
- Teach interpersonal skills
- Be joy bringer
- Make it beautiful
- Students need to feel preference
- Want to be a helper
- Feel emotionally connected/responsible
- Interaction leads to personal relationships

**Trust**
- Earning trust through consistency
- Mutual respect
- Cultural awareness/respect → difference in demeanor
- Building relationships to earn trust
APPENDIX H

FINAL LIST OF CODES AND THEMES
Final List of Codes and Themes

Hidden Realities
Home Life
- Stress
- Difference in low SES
- Lack of security
- Supportive parents come from all backgrounds

Student Characteristics
- Crave personal attention
- Defensive
- Uncomfortable with nature of music curriculum
- Give up easily
- Scared to make mistake
- Lack of self-confidence
- Get few ‘breaks’
- Shut down when doesn’t ‘get it’
- Craves personal connection
- Craves special jobs
- Street smart

Challenges
- Unfamiliar with behavior
- Acting older than same-age peers
- Possible unmet physical needs
- Home vs. school role conflict
- Disconnect with parent behavior

Model
- Home
- Parents
- Siblings
- Negative attention

Encouraged Compliance
Awareness
- Home circumstances
- Not all “low SES” looks the same
- Breaks (ie summer) might mean end of security

Expectations
- Attention
- Participation
- Balance
• Respect

**Difficulties**
• Behavior migrates
• Difficulty working in groups
• Classroom discipline
• Loosening/tightening of rules
• Low morale in admin.
• Power struggles
• Exhausting
• Equitable attention for all
• Have to earn student’s respect

**Self as Teacher**
• Don’t want to meddle
• Self-doubt
• Failure
• Emotionally connected/responsible
• Teach music to ALL
• Good teacher to ALL
• Do the right thing
• Be helper/joy bringer
• Teach instinctively
• Complete whole person
• Responsibility to build relationships

**Pressures**
• District-wide curricular mandates
• Lack of time
• Student numbers
• Unreliable students
• Difference in teaching style
• Extra-curricular ensembles, etc.

**Procedures**
• Methodical
• Modeling
• Reinforcing behavior
• Consistent
**Word Play**

**Disconnect**
- Confusion
- Effective communication
- Physical communication
- Mismatch in verbal vs. nonverbal
- Misinterpretation

**Factors in speech and style selection**
- Student moods
- Positive before negative
- Change in tone of voice

**Relationships**
- Earn respect
- Outside interaction critical
- Personal relationships
- Give students words
- Reciprocal
REFERENCES


