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Male Teachers in Elementary General Music

Scott Victor Greger
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

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MALE TEACHERS IN ELEMENTARY GENERAL MUSIC

by

Scott V. Greger

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ABSTRACT
MALE TEACHERS IN ELEMENTARY GENERAL MUSIC

by

Scott V. Greger

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Under the Supervision of Associate Professor Sheila Feay-Shaw

Male elementary general music teachers are rare, and little research exists about them. The men who teach music at the elementary level often face challenges that they must overcome through their own experimentation. One such challenge is the octave difference in singing voice between teacher and student. This study reviewed the existing literature on male elementary teachers and investigated five male elementary general music teachers at various stages in their careers. Eighteen structured interview questions were used, and the answers audio recorded and transcribed. The teacher responses were analyzed and compared to the author’s own experience as a male elementary general music teacher. The knowledge gained outlined pedagogical decisions and new educational approaches for male elementary general music teachers in particular but also techniques which can benefit teachers in general. Contrary to existing research, these men did not find gender stereotypes contributed to their professional challenges. The octave difference in singing voice between adult males and elementary students was the sole challenge related to gender, and several pedagogical solutions were identified. Personal stories and experiences are presented to give practical advice to all male music educators considering or currently teaching elementary general music.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ 2012 survey, 1.9% of preschool and kindergarten teachers are male. That number increases to 18.6% in elementary and middle school, and 42.7% in high school (Bureau, 2012). P. Sargent (2001), a sociologist at San Diego State University completed a study of male elementary classroom teachers that found large disparities between the numbers of males and females teaching at this level. The information Sargent received from the local Office of Education concerning statistical data on the number of males teaching elementary school revealed that of 146 schools, 30% had male principals; out of 3,444 K-6 teachers, 9% were male; and of 2,002 K-3 teachers, only 3% were male. Sargent (2001) stated:

The same gendered societal division of labor that finds women facing resistance and, at times, hostility when they attempt to enter traditionally men’s spheres also produces obstacles to men crossing into the activities normally associated with women, especially activities involving contact with children…Correcting men’s dramatic underrepresentation in elementary education is not a simple question of inducing or compelling men to cross over. It is a matter of allowing and assisting them to do so. (p. 181)

When I first began teaching music, I was placed at the secondary level, as most male music teachers are. Moving into a new position, I was surprised to find out that elementary general music classes had been added to my schedule. I had little experience with this age group, and I knew that I would face several challenges when a female colleague asked, “How are you going to teach them to sing?” I had no a clear answer for her question.

Existing research regarding male teachers in elementary education is often conducted investigating stereotypes of male elementary teachers, how to better connect
with male students, or ways to increase the number of male teachers in elementary education. The small collection of research related to male elementary music teachers focuses on one or two male elementary teachers, or a pre-service music education student. None of these studies address what leads males to teach at this level, practical ways men approach teaching elementary music students, or why they choose to continue to teach at this level. One specific challenge faced by these men teaching elementary students to sing is how to address the octave difference in vocal range. The following study will explore how male music educators are teaching elementary students to become strong musicians through a variety of general music experiences.

**Review of Literature**

Several studies have focused on male elementary school teachers in general including the small number of men teaching in elementary schools, male college students in teacher preparation programs, and possible reasons for improving the low numbers of male teachers at this level (Benton DeCorse & Vogtle, 1997; Biedenkapp & Goering, 1971; Cushman, 2005; Cushman, 2010; Hansen & Mulholland, 2005; Hébert, 2000; Johnson et al., 2010; Martino, 2008a; Martino 2008b; Mills et al., 2004; Penny, 1999; Piburn, 2010; Sanatullova-Allison, 2010; Sargent, 2001; Sternod, 2011; Spilt, et al., 2011). Four studies focus specifically on elementary male music educators. Price et al. (1994) is a quantitative study of whether the male timbre, falsetto, or sine wave models provide the best method for teaching young singers to match pitch. Roulston and Misawa (2011) interviewed one male and five female music teachers about the teachers’ descriptions of gender in relation to elementary music education. They found that:

(1) teachers’ conceptualization of the relevance of gender in thinking about music teaching varied considerably; (2) the role of the male teacher in the elementary
school was described in significantly different ways to that of the role of female teacher; and (3) teachers commonly referenced teaching strategies that reinforce gender stereotypes. (p. 3)

Shouldice (2013) constructed a profile of one male music education student’s decision to change his major from instrumental to general music. Her research:

Revealed four emergent themes in his decision to teach elementary general music: (a) the influence of undergraduate coursework, (b) the participant’s tendency to be student-centered, (c) the need for broadening students’ musical skills and understanding, and (d) dissatisfaction with the current band culture. (p. 41)

Roulston and Mills (2000) drew data from two studies in music education from the male teachers’ perspective. They specifically focused on working with male students and the role of a male music teacher. Roulston and Mills (2000):

Argue that calls for increasing the number of male teachers in feminized areas of schooling need also to be informed by open discussion of the underlying assumptions about masculinity which teachers themselves bring to their work. (p. 221)

I find that the limited studies on male elementary general music teachers matches the fact that, “Male music teachers in elementary school are even rarer,” (Roulston and Misawa, 2011, p.5).

Male Presence in Education

Gender studies in education are often presented from the perspective of feminist views and the challenges to education. Weaver-Hightower (2003) stated, “This is as it should be, for in every society women as a group relative to men are disadvantaged socially, culturally, politically, and economically” (p. 471). He explored turning the tide from a feminist focus centered on women, to a gender focus on males in education, which he terms the “boy turn” (p. 471). There has been a shift towards focus on males both as students and as teachers over the last decade. Much of this new focus stems from a
perceived need for more male teachers at the elementary level in order to help struggling male students (Johnson, 2010; Mills et al., 2004; Martino, 2008a; Sternod, 2011; Weaver-Hightower, 2003). The “boy crisis” and gender achievement gaps between male and female students have caused alarm in school systems around the world (Piburn, 2010; Roulston & Misawa, 2011), and increasing the number of male teachers seems to be the prevailing stream of thought to make an impact on the issue. Sanatullova-Allison (2010) found that:

Today, of the almost 1.8 million U.S. elementary public school teachers, a scant 9% are men…and most of them are found in the upper grades, where the status is higher and social acceptability greater. In fact, the percentage of male teachers in elementary schools has fallen regularly since 1981 – when it reached an all-time high of 18%. (p. 28)

In order to increase the number of men teaching in elementary education, it is important to understand why men avoid entering teaching, and what can be done to draw more men to the field of elementary and early childhood education. According to Cleaver (2010), men avoid teaching due to low salary, the need to adapt to a female-dominated environment, and negative perceptions of males who take an interest in young children. Roulston and Misawa (2011) cite the following as challenges facing male educators: “isolation, suspicions surrounding their motivations to work with children, anxiety surrounding child-touch, and pressure to perform in stereotypically masculine roles” (p. 5). The issue of adapting to a field dominated by females can be a strong deterrent.

Perceptions exist that men who choose to teach in elementary education are less masculine (Cleaver, 2010; Eisenhauer, 2010; Martino, 2008a; Mills et al, 2004; Roulston and Mills, 2000; Werhan, 2010). One teacher mentioned that, “he had been called “Miss” on so many occasions that after some time, he stopped correcting his students and
responded to the female reference” (Cushman, 2010, p. 1214). The topic of masculinity and teaching is an important one, which will be addressed further in this review.

An additional issue preventing more men from teaching is negative perceptions of men in this field. Popular media coverage of teachers who have abused their students has tainted the image of many teachers, especially males (Bradley, 2010). Middleton, an early childhood teacher, mentioned that some parents removed their child from his class specifically because of his gender (Johnson et al., 2010). The authors summarized the impact of more men in early childhood education while also identifying obstacles in the way:

Increasing the number of men in early childhood education can make a difference in society’s overall attitudes toward gender, but I am unconvinced that more men will join the early childhood community until changes are made in the areas of compensation and status, which would benefit all early childhood teachers. (Johnson et al., 2010, p. 22)

Male Teachers and Student Interactions

When the topic of men in education is researched, focus is often given to how gender impacts student and teacher interactions. Several studies have been conducted on how gender influences the type and number of interactions between students and teachers (Dee, 2005; Hansen and Mulholland, 2005; Jones and Dindia, 2004; Split et al., 2011). Throughout the studies available, many results point to a clear gender bias when considering how teachers interact with students of the opposite sex.

Jones and Dindia (2004) examined thirty-two different studies on teacher initiated interactions. Through their work, it was found that, “male students were disproportionately more likely than female students to respond to and initiate interaction in male taught classes” (p. 448). When females were teaching a class, no such difference
was found. Based on their research, it was found that gender does appear to influence interactions between students and teachers. When the nature of these interactions was split into positive and negative, it was found that male and female students are praised the same; however, males were given much more negative comments than females. This study illustrated that teacher gender can impact how teachers interact with students. As much as teachers try to be gender neutral, personal gender bias does seem to play a role in how teachers interact with students.

Split et al. (2011) studied how teacher gender impacted student-teacher relationships. They asked the question, “Are boys better off with male and girls with female teachers?” (p. 363) The study concluded:

Both male and female teachers reported more conflictual relationships with boys than with girls, and female teachers also reported less close relationships with boys. Furthermore, female teachers tended to have overall better relationships with their students than male teachers. The current findings do not dispute the need for male teachers in primary education but further challenge the idea that simply increasing the number of male teachers can resolve or attenuate “boys' problems” in schooling. (p. 376)

Dee (2005) also wondered if teacher gender had an impact on the chosen approach to teaching. He analyzed the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 and found that, “a student was perceived as inattentive or disruptive…at least 19-37 percent higher when the teacher is of the opposite gender” (p. 162). These results seem to confirm that gender bias can impact how students and teachers interact. Cleaver (2010) also discussed matching teacher and student demographics saying:

Increasing the number of male teachers isn’t primarily about providing more role models for boys – research on the effects of male teachers on boy’s education isn’t definitive – but about conveying values to students. ‘If you’re working in a community that’s 50 percent male, then your staff should be 50 percent male…it would naturally create diversity in the activities and curriculum.’ This would create an environment in which both genders could succeed. (p. 49)
Hansen and Mulholland (2005) conducted a study of early-career male elementary teachers where they found:

The experiences of the men in our study show how important new ways to envisage caring are for them as they try to relate to children in a range of school-based situations without engaging in behaviors that are culturally “suspect” for men. We see care that involves building professional relationships with children as most important for all teachers and something with which both male and female teachers should be concerned and for which both should be rewarded. (p. 130)

Male teachers cannot be expected to overturn all issues of underachieving males solely because of gender. Men can be good role models for males who have little or no male influence in their lives; however, teachers should not be expected to solve all societal issues just because they are good role models. A balanced approach of positive interactions and strong leadership can improve the entire school environment, regardless of gender.

Negative Factors Impacting Male Teachers

Increasing the number of males in early education is a noble task; however, there are strong stereotypical forces that influence a man’s decision to teach elementary school. The primary negative force is a perceived lack of masculinity for all men who teach young children, and this is especially compounded for elementary music teachers. One teacher, Brian, relates his experiences with principals who interviewed him for an open position. On several occasions, he was asked about his marital status:

I was asked some questions that were not only illegal, but inappropriate...finally I cornered one of the principals, ‘Why are these people always wanting to know if I’m married?’ they said, ‘Well you’re a male music teacher applying for an elementary school job, you must be gay’. (Roulston & Misawa, 2011, p. 15)
The issue of masculinity and male teachers is an area that has been explored by several researchers. Some have focused on the public perception of males in education (Benton, DeCorse and Vogtle, 1997; Bidenkapp and Goerring, 1971; Bradley, 2010; Mills et al, 2004; Shouldice, 2013), and others have focused on what male teachers are doing to combat this viewpoint, both positively and negatively (Cushman, 2010; Hansen and Mulholland, 2005; Hébert, 2000; Martino, 2008a; Martino 2008b).

One of the largest male teacher reform programs in the world is centered in Australia. The Queensland Male Teachers’ Strategy (Mills et al, 2004) outlines a plan to increase the number of males applying for education positions, increase job satisfaction, and improve working conditions. Mills makes the argument that this strategy is actually harming education. By laying the framework for the above changes, this plan targets educational environments as strictly feminized and in need of a masculine makeover. The Teachers’ Strategy says that changes need to be made in salary and school climate in order for schools to be more male friendly. Some see the feminine stereotype of elementary education as a means for keeping men out of elementary schools. Social influences and ideas often label men who enter elementary education as, “gay, ‘effeminate’ or a pedophile” (Mills et al, 2004, p. 360). By falling into the trap of this thinking, many men are discouraged from pursuing a career in education. This viewpoint is misguided since women have fought hard to gain the current status they have in education and other professional fields (Howe, 2009). The best male teachers avoid the stereotypical roles of a strong disciplinarian, coach, or overtly masculine teacher:

The current calls for more male teachers do nothing to support these men. Instead, the essentialist assumptions about male teachers implicit in the Queensland policy
and in similar arguments being proffered elsewhere will work to further marginalize men who perform non-traditional masculinities. (Mills et al, 2004, p. 366)

Cushman (2005) interviewed seventeen male primary teachers to gain a broader perspective of each man’s professional experiences. His research concluded:

For the men who do teach, their love of children, their commitment to the profession and their positivism in the face of endless scrutiny and challenges can only categorize them as a unique and remarkable group. But until the barriers and attitudes that underlie these challenges are addressed and alleviated, it is unlikely that the proportion of males to females in the staffroom photograph will change. (p. 239-240)

By avoiding stereotypes and working to project a unique personality as a teacher, many men are working to improve the education of both boys and girls (Martino, 2008b).

Female Dominated Areas of Education

When men combat broad social perceptions of certain professional fields, they often have to contend with the reality that women have traditionally dominated certain professions. While this does not mean that men cannot perform well in these jobs, it does present the idea that these men lack certain masculine traits. Two subject areas in education that have a strong feminine presence are Family and Consumer Science (formerly Home Economics) and Elementary Music.

Werhan (2010) explores male Family and Consumer Science teachers finding that, “family influences are important for men pursuing gendered careers” (p. 29). The two men interviewed acknowledged that there are prejudices that exist from colleagues and students when non-traditional gendered teachers are employed in this subject area, and that gender bias presented obstacles to getting hired. Both men often, “overcompensated by intentionally attempting to appear more ‘masculine’” to combat perceptions of homosexuality (Werhan, 2010, p. 30). Werhan concluded that increasing
the number of male teachers in gendered subjects would ultimately benefit all students, not only as role models, but because they can offer a new perspective on traditionally gendered professions.

The other traditionally female-dominated education field is elementary music education. Men who choose to teach at this level are often confronted with a dominant feminine environment where they feel a need to display traditional masculine roles of strength and power. Roulston and Misawa (2011) stated:

Male music teachers’ accounts of their work…suggest that for men who teach music –especially in elementary schools- demands to conform to hegemonic notions of masculinity are amplified, since the subject area of music occupies a subordinate role within school curriculums and historically has feminine associations. (p. 5)

Roulston and Misawa (2011) interviewed one male and five female music teachers about the teachers’ descriptions of gender in relation to elementary music education. They found:

(1) Teachers’ conceptualization of the relevance of gender in thinking about music teaching varied considerably; (2) the role of the male teacher in the elementary school was described in significantly different ways to that of the role of female teacher; and (3) teachers commonly referenced teaching strategies that reinforce gender stereotypes. (p. 3)

Included in their study, Roulston and Misawa interviewed a middle school choral director named Brian. He taught elementary school for six years before moving to the secondary level. He cited the primary reason for making the change in his career path as:

A partial response to the offences from others who questioned both his sexual orientation, and his right to teach in the elementary school. In Brian’s description, the ‘average’ male elementary music teacher takes on the role either because he is either incompetent, or using the elementary position as a springboard to promotion elsewhere. (p. 8)
To combat negative perceptions, some male music teachers go to extremes in order to project masculinity. Roulston and Mills (2000) presented two teachers who fit this profile. Tony is a long-haired, elementary music teacher who promotes his masculinity by trying to be the teacher every student likes because he is edgy and daring. His method of choice is including popular songs that may have questionable lyrics in his teaching repertoire. He also tries to be confrontational with other teachers, parents, and administrators. The other teacher, Andy, takes on an athletic coach mentality. He relates a story from his teaching of having a group of boys who did not want to sing, so he turned it into a competition to sing as well as the girls. He played up the competitive side and his own skills as a, “basketball and floor hockey coach” (p. 232). He also tries to combat the stigma with boys about singing. He turned singing into the cool thing that every guy did in order to be a strong male. Both men promoted themselves as being especially talented with boys who have disciplinary problems. Roulston and Mills (2000) warned that the approaches of both teachers actually cause harm to music education. By going to extremes to radiate masculinity, these teachers, “devalue behavior and characteristics which have become associated with femininity” (p. 234); therefore, confirming various stereotypes against male involvement in music education.

Fortunately, not all perspectives on males in music education are negative. McGregor and Mills (2006) offer an approach to help reach both male and female music students. They suggested remixing the curriculum to incorporate subjects that appeal to all students. This idea sounds very similar to differentiation, with the difference of abolishing gender stereotypes in music to reach all students. The authors also suggested that students and teachers should, “be engaged in a critical dialogue…as they deconstruct
the music curriculum in partnerships of meaning-making” (p. 227). Students and teachers should embrace all subject areas relating to music, and explore how gender has both positively and negatively impacted the way music is taught and created.

Issues in Music Education

Few studies focus specifically on elementary male music educators. Roulston and Mills (2000) drew data from two studies in music education on the male teachers’ perspective. They specifically focused on working with male students and the role of a male music teacher. Roulston and Mills (2000):

Argue that calls for increasing the number of male teachers in feminized areas of schooling need also to be informed by open discussion of the underlying assumptions about masculinity which teachers themselves bring to their work. (p. 221)

I found that the limited studies on male elementary general music teachers supported the idea that, “Male music teachers in elementary school are even rarer,” (Roulston and Misawa, 2011, p.5). Shouldice’s (2013) profile of the decision to change from instrumental to general music by one male music education student revealed student-teacher relationship as a major consideration as well as dissatisfaction with the culture in many instrumental music programs.

Musical Issues Impacting Male Teachers

Hellman (2008) conducted a survey of collegiate music education students, and found that, “Males tend to choose high school teaching at a much higher rate than that of females (68.2% versus 30.6%) and elementary teaching at a much lower rate than that of females (4.5% versus 32.9%)” (p. 67).

A final issue then, facing men in elementary music education is their singing range. Price et al. (1994) studied whether the male timbre, falsetto, or sine wave models
provide the best method for teaching young singers how to match pitch. A man’s voice is normally at least an octave lower than the children he teaches. This presents many problems with children’s perception of pitch-matching. When students try to match pitch with an adult male voice, they often are too low (Price et al, 1994), resulting in children trying to sing out of their normal register. One approach some males use to overcome pitch discrepancies is the use of an instrument such as a recorder, piano, or glockenspiel to give pitches. Unfortunately, this method does not help students develop the nuances of singing. Other males use a falsetto voice to match pitch with their students. Unfortunately, relying on falsetto does not give a healthy vocal model. Phillips (1992) shares, “The falsetto voice is a ‘false’ voice, in that it is a product of strained vocal technique in which the larynx rises and cuts out the laryngeal resonator, resulting in a weak and unsupported sound (p. 50). While there is some evidence that falsetto is not a strong vocal model, more research needs to be done in order to find the best means of conveying pitch and proper vocal technique from a male teacher to elementary students (Green, 1990).
CHAPTER TWO

This study was centered in the pedagogical practice and decision-making of male elementary general music teachers as they addressed the musicianship of young children. Capturing these perspectives across a variety of males who are at disparate points in their careers provided a unique lens into the issues of this specific facet of education.

Methodology

In this study, five male music teachers from southeastern Wisconsin were interviewed about their experiences, successes, and challenges as elementary general music teachers. These teachers included men at the beginning, middle, and end of their professional careers. These men were interviewed in person over the course of three months (August – October, 2014) using a series of 18 structured questions (Fontana & Frey, 1994) (See Appendix A). Each conversation was recorded using a digital audio recorder, and the audio transcribed for analysis. The complete transcripts can be found in Appendix C. I then used my personal experiences as an elementary general music teacher to answer the interview questions. The resulting interview responses were compared for common themes.

Study Participants

The five men interviewed for this study range in teaching experience from three to thirty years. Three of them are currently teaching, and two have retired. These men were chosen for this study based on their geographical location and availability for interview. Initially, seven male elementary general music teachers were identified and contacted via email. Six teachers responded to the initial recruitment and five agreed to be interviewed. Pseudonyms have been used for all participants.
Brandon Johnson is currently teaching elementary general music in a district of 7,000 students with five elementary schools. He has been teaching music for five years. Mr. Johnson started teaching in a suburban elementary school as a long-term substitute for one semester. The next three years were spent teaching part time elementary and middle school vocal and general music. He was hired into his current position beginning in the 2013–2014 school year. The 2014–2015 school year will mark the first time he has taught in the same place for two consecutive years. His student teaching experience included both elementary general music and band at the middle and high school levels. Aside from his student teaching experience and one middle school general music class, the majority of his experience has been at the elementary level. He did inform me that this year he would be teaching a section of seventh and eighth grade band in addition to his elementary building.

Matthew Long has taught for the past eighteen years, and is currently in the seventh year at his current position. He has taught elementary music for his entire career, but has also had classes at the middle and high school levels. He is currently in a suburban district with approximately 3,000 students and three elementary schools. In some of his previous positions, Mr. Long has taught music for all students from kindergarten to twelfth grade.

Richard Smith retired from teaching after being in his last position for twenty-two years. He began his career teaching in a parochial school with students in kindergarten through eighth grade. The majority of his career was teaching elementary music in a district with a current enrollment of over 78,000 students. There are a total of one hundred sixty schools in this district.
**Thomas Kastner** retired from teaching in June, 2014. He has been a music educator for nearly thirty years. He began teaching as a freelance musician directing adult and children’s choirs, and continues to direct community choral groups to this day. After a few years as a freelance director, he taught two years at the elementary level and two years of high school choir for a parochial school system. Over the past twenty-six years, Mr. Kastner taught in a suburban district with a current enrollment of 9,700 students and eleven elementary schools. He taught only elementary general music for twenty-one years before moving primarily to the high school level. Over the last five years, he taught one year of intermediate and high school choir, one year of elementary and high school choir, and the past three years as the choral director for two high schools.

**William Brown** is currently in his thirtieth year of teaching elementary general music. He has been in his current position for the past twenty years. This suburban district has approximately 2,000 students and two elementary schools. Mr. Brown’s first position was as a long-term substitute for an elementary music teacher on maternity leave. Following his time as a substitute, he taught in that district for ten years before moving to his current position. While he has taught elementary general music for his entire career, Mr. Brown has occasionally directed the pit orchestra for high school theater productions, but has never formally taught beyond elementary school.

I am currently in my eleventh year of teaching. I teach in the same district as Mr. Kastner, and have taught primarily elementary general music for the past eight years. I currently teach standard and special education elementary music after being in a different elementary school for the past seven years. While in this district, I have also taught three years of general and choral music at one of our intermediate schools. Prior to my current
district, I was in two districts where I primarily taught middle school vocal and general music.

Profile of School Teaching Staff

With men being very rare at the elementary level, I wanted to consider how many additional males were on staff with each of these teachers. Johnson is one of four male teachers, Long is one of five, and Brown is one of eight. Kastner and Smith were one of four and one of five men in their last buildings respectively. In my previous building, I was one of three men on staff, and currently I am one of six male teachers.

When considering the existing research, some of the male elementary teachers felt like outsiders in their buildings. This, then, was also an area of consideration in identifying elements of their teaching lives which I will touch on very briefly here. Overwhelmingly, each teacher felt valued as a member of their school staff. Sometimes Smith and Kastner did not feel like they were a member of the staff in buildings where they travelled, but as Kastner said, “that's not the fault of that staff; it's just your timeline.” In my own experience, I have also felt included on my staff. The other teachers often coordinated with me to support their curricula and showed genuine concern about my welfare. When I travelled, I felt that staff members would go out of their way to make me feel welcome, even if I was only in the building for a few hours a week.
CHAPTER THREE

Becoming an Elementary Music Teacher

My path to teaching elementary music happened by accident after accepting a new position in my third year of teaching. I initially saw myself at the middle or high school level as a choral director, and I had no teaching experience with elementary students prior to my first elementary position. The participants were asked about their personal history in choosing to teach in an elementary setting.

Initial Career Aspirations

When applying for their first jobs, each teacher had a different perspective on where they saw themselves teaching. When asked whether elementary general music was his first choice, Johnson said:

Elementary was…definitely my first choice. When I student taught, I kind of went into it thinking I was going to be a band teacher. That was where a lot of my background was, but (when) I student taught at (the elementary level), I was kind of blown away of all the possibilities of what could be done, and the variety involved. It was a lot different than the cutesy rainbows, kittens…that kind of mentality that I think I sort of had going into it. I didn't have a great elementary music experience myself growing up…my experience was impacted by that, so when I started looking for jobs, I really focused in on elementary general music.

Smith also saw himself teaching elementary from the beginning. He said, “Elementary was my first choice; I wanted to get to them right away.”

While two of the five men initially saw themselves teaching elementary general music, the others, including myself, felt that high school was where they were headed.

When Long graduated college, he said:

Initially…I saw myself at the high school level. Then I was like, man, I love junior high, and then I was like, you know I love elementary. So, I just started at the top and then moved my way down.

Kastner also initially wanted to teach high school, saying:
I think elementary became more interesting to me the more I worked with kids choirs… I was looking for simply a position of some sort… whether it was high school or elementary… We were expecting our first child that coming fall, so anything full time teaching was a plus at that point.

Brown wanted to be, “a high school teacher. Absolutely! I was going to be that cool, hip choir director.” For these men, elementary school was not initially seen as a viable option for teaching. They felt that teaching high school music was the best position for them.

This sentiment is supported in research by Shouldice (2013):

Many individuals decide to become music teachers by the time they leave high school… Specifically, high school ensemble directors tend to be the strongest and most pervasive influence on young people’s decisions to become music teachers, so strong that many express a desire to be like their high school directors. (p. 42)

**Becoming a Music Educator**

To gain a broader perspective on what led these men to teach elementary general music, they were asked about what influenced their decision to become a music teacher. Each of them had different individual experiences that led them to a career in music education, but there are many similarities as well. Long was led to music education through many positive experiences as a music student, saying:

Well I had some awesome musical experiences as a child with some excellent…teachers…. It’s something I’ve always wanted to do… ever since I was young… It’s what I enjoy the most. It’s what I’m the best at, and so for me it was a no brainer.

Smith was influenced by his experiences as a music student. He said, “Well, I’ve played accordion for my whole life, and I thought that I could pass on… my knowledge that I learned through the accordion, and I like working with children.” Kastner is also heavily influenced by his past experiences. He said, “It goes back somewhere in the late middle school, early high school days… I not only enjoyed what I was doing, but it was
something that I thought I could be good at…in the future, which was to work with choirs mostly, but that's where it started.”

Johnson was influenced by the creative thinking that students provide, and the amount of risk they take, saying:

I like working with the (elementary) age group. They're very much risk takers. They say what they think. They're very blunt. Sometimes overly blunt, but I think that is a very refreshing thing for me…I tend to be very…thoughtful of what people think about what I'm doing, and that…impacts the choices I make. Whereas, (the students) a lot of times will just go for it, and I think that's something I enjoy about teaching, especially the younger students…I think that through music they learn that there's not one right answer or one right solution…That's something that’s been very…inspiring for me as a teacher, and finding more ways to get to that kind of learning in the classroom has motivated me to want to continue to…train and learn how to do it better in different ways.

Johnson’s approach to teaching is inspired by how he sees students as an equal participant in the classroom. His students are challenged by the material being taught, but they also challenge him to reach a higher level of thinking and creativity through his teaching.

Brown’s pathway toward becoming a music educator came as he prepared for a singing competition. In a celebratory phone call with his mother, he realized that teaching students helped improve their skills as singers, performers, musicians, and whole human beings. He said:

Initially, I was double major in music and theater…I was in a NATS (National Association of Teachers of Singing) competition…I said, "Mom, I'm…at this thing called the NATS," and she said, “What's that?” “Well it's this voice competition, and…I'm in the finals!” (She said), “Well that's great. Do you know…that when you were in kindergarten…they wanted to hold you back?” And I was like, wait a second, I'm in this vocal competition in college and you're telling me they wanted to hold me back in kindergarten. Why are you telling me that now? When I was four or five years old, I loved to sing, and I was passionate about just singing…(but) I was not a good singer. They thought my auditory skills were so messed up that keeping me in one more year probably would be a good thing to do. I was the kid that the teacher said mouth the words, this isn't your
gift…Maybe (someone) said early on, because you couldn't match pitch you
couldn't sing, so they just decided I'm not a singer, therefore I'm not going to
learn.

Brown’s experience became part of his ongoing teaching philosophy:

And on the phone that day…I realized that…music is for everyone. Learning to
sing is a learned skill, and you're not born to do it. Some have gifts for it, but you
can be taught how to do that…If someone would have told me beforehand that
this (music) isn't your thing, I never would have become a singer. Music wouldn't
have been my thing. So…a couple weeks after that, I entered the school of
education and became a music education major…I was going to be that teacher
that helped those kids, whether it was in elementary or high school. This was a
skill and it can be taught.

Brown was told very early on that his voice was not very strong. Instead of taking the
criticism of those around him, he realized that singing was a skill that takes practice and
improves with time and experience.

My own path toward music education was paved with several positive, and one
negative, musical experience. I had many great music teachers in school and church, and
each of them fostered my love of music. My parents were very supportive as well. They
often drove me to various children’s choir rehearsals and performances, and always were
proud of my accomplishments in music. Unfortunately, I had a very poor music
experience in middle school with a revolving door of long-term substitutes, and a director
who was absent more than she was in school. I saw many students drop out of music
during those two years, and I vowed to become a music educator in order to keep
students involved in music. These poor experiences were followed by many positive
opportunities in high school and college, and where I saw the personal growth that could
come from a strong education in music.

Looking at what drew each man into this profession, I find that a solid music
education from elementary through college was one of the strongest factors in guiding the
development into music educators. With parents and educators nurturing their musical growth, these individuals were able to find and develop the skills necessary to become experienced musicians. Knowing that great music educators helped develop this love of music, each expressed passion for giving that love of music to a new generation of students.

**Becoming an Elementary Music Educator**

After hearing how each of these men became music educators, it is important to know what ultimately led them to teaching elementary general music. Were they drawn to the elementary level by choice, or was it part of the job for which they were hired?

Kastner ended up teaching elementary through a district assignment, saying:

> I want to say we went through a process with personnel or human resources and the music coordinator...with the idea that a general or high school position would be open, and it wasn't specifically for a school or a job. The assignment came shortly thereafter.

Brown was initially assigned to teach elementary, but quickly found that he loved the age level, and had strong skills, saying:

> It was the first job I got...my (college) supervisor, who was a male elementary teacher too said, “You know, there's too many guys not choosing this field because...this is elementary, this isn't cool, and you know, it's not conducive for their voice type for instance. You should really consider doing this.” I remember my cooperating teacher saying oh yes, and I think not really truly believing it...and so then the position I got...was a long-term pregnancy leave at the time...I had a very outgoing personality, and...having had the great undergrad experience, (I) had a lot to learn about music education being more than your vivacious personality and good looks. None of which I have anymore (laughs).

While Brown did not initially want to enter elementary music education, he had many people in his life that recognized his gifts, and pushed him toward this level. It took him several years to finally feel comfortable teaching elementary students, but he was surrounded by many great educators and mentors.
In my own experience, I was not initially drawn to teaching elementary students. It was only after being hired in what was initially supposed to be a middle school general music position, that I found out two kindergarten and two elementary cognitively disabled classes were being added to my class load. At first, I was not sure what to do as I had no training in elementary music outside of my methods class in college. Fortunately, I had several very helpful colleagues who took me under their wing to share professional knowledge and experience. After teaching a year in that position, I found a strong passion for teaching these students the foundational skills of music. When looking for a new position, I intentionally applied for elementary positions and was hired into my current district.

Johnson, Long, and Smith were all drawn to the elementary level because of the students. Johnson loves that the students are just starting their educational career and are eager to learn. He chose to teach elementary general music because of the:

Developmental level of the kids, (and) their attitude towards learning. But also…I enjoy…that you don't just get the students who are choosing music. You get a really broad spectrum of student, and even if they don't end up as professional musicians, even if they don't go that route, I think…they can be very positively impacted by music.

Long fell in love with the elementary age group after teaching in several K-12 schools, saying:

I really fell in love with this age group, and realizing that this is…the important…age…If these kids aren’t turned on to music now, then when they’re competing in middle school and high school with all these other things and all these other factors… it makes it much more difficult…I am very passionate about music and music education, and I want to make sure that these kids have a solid foundation and a positive elementary experience…to build from.

Smith was drawn to elementary students through his experience teaching accordion, saying:
If I was going to teach music, I was going to teach elementary children because they were the most influential of all the children to learn...I decided to go with general music, as it's called now. It was vocal at that time... (Also) my accordion students were younger children. I enjoyed teaching them.

Several common themes emerged when considering how each of these men became elementary general music teachers. A majority of these teachers (four of six including myself) did not initially see themselves teaching elementary music. Most of the men were initially drawn to a secondary ensemble position. However, each of these teachers was influenced to consider teaching music by a music teacher, professor, cooperating teacher, parent, or personal musical experience. When looking at how each teacher finally ended up teaching elementary music, it is evenly split between being assigned an elementary school through a hired position and being drawn through experiences with students. Ultimately, each teacher has decided to remain in elementary general music because of a variety of successful experiences, which will be explored in the following section.
CHAPTER FOUR

Professional Successes

With a good understanding of what drew these men to the profession of elementary music education, it is important to know what kind of professional successes these teachers have had and how their gender may have impacted those experiences.

Male Role Models

Each teacher overwhelmingly felt that being a male role model has been a positive aspect to their career, which has provided unique opportunities. Smith had a simple answer: “In elementary school, most of the teachers were female, and therefore didn't have a male influence on it.” Long agreed that male role models were rare in elementary school. He said:

Elementary in general has very few male role models, which I feel kids need. That's one of the reasons when I came here, one of my big first pushes was to start a dads club…These kids need male role models, and they need to know that their dad is just as involved and just as invested in them as their mom. So I think that being a male role model is…huge. As a matter of fact, just this past year I had a kid (say), “I wish you were my dad.” It hits you, but it puts it in perspective, like, well at least I'm glad I'm here.

Long created a Dad’s club in response to the PTA, which he felt was dominated by mothers. The club even helped to build shelving for the music room. Kastner felt that his position allowed him to be a role model for students. He said:

The first building I taught at…was, at the time I was there, the most transient building in terms of students going K-6…and most of the rest of the staff was female. We actually had the only all-male music staff in the entire district for quite a while. I think (my gender) made a difference for the kids because they didn't really have a lot of father figures…So for a lot of the kids, I think we kind of gave the sense of that other half of the parent set that maybe was missing in their lives…I got a lot of good feedback from the kids over the years, so I'm assuming the parenting aspect of it, or the "Father figure”…was probably the most (influential) for the kids.
Brown’s experience is rooted in being a male role model as well. In his thirty years of teaching, he felt that the rarity of being a male elementary general music teacher was actually one of the strongest assets. He said:

I don't want to sound sexist, but I just think for the reasons that we are so unique, I think we can bring a different dynamic… I especially think… not just boys, but girls need male role models, and they're missing that, and especially in music education… For boys, music, it can be a cool thing, and on so many different levels, and for girls too… that maybe don't have a father figure in their life, or a stable father figure in their life. It really brings a whole new dynamic to the classroom experience, and I teach in… a suburban school, but we have a very diverse population, and I think we sell short about what kind of impact we can have as male role models for those kids.

Brown alluded to the idea that boys are more likely to think singing is acceptable if a male is teaching. Johnson also felt that boys respond more to a male singer. He said:

I think that with young boys, for instance, being a guy sometimes gives me an advantage. Because if I'm doing it, they may feel that they won't be criticized by other kids for joining in, because I'm a guy. And so I think that I have that sort of relationship with them that a female teacher wouldn't. It wouldn't be something necessarily 'girly' to do, to sing, or whatever. So I think that has helped.

Kastner also felt that being a male helped encourage boys to sing. He said, “It’s helped because the boys didn't feel like it was such a strange thing to want to sing or to want to play an instrument or to just want to do things musical.”

The teachers overwhelmingly felt that being a male elementary teacher provided an opportunity to be a positive male role model for students who need more men as mentors. Also, three of the teachers felt being male helped to encourage boys to enjoy making music. Often music can be perceived as being a feminine field (Roulston and Mills, 2000; Roulston and Misawa, 2011; Werhan, 2010), but a male music educator can help positively influence boys to sing. The sentiments of these teachers align well with my own experiences. While I don’t feel that every male student has begun to love singing
just because I am male, I do feel that being male shows that loving to sing is acceptable for boys. With older male students, I am also able to relate to them as they begin to experience the voice change. I can offer advice and personal experience that females just cannot.

Other Musical Outlets

Since being a male is seen as being a positive aspect in teaching elementary music, it seemed important to explore what kind of successes these men have had in their careers, and whether their success was related to their gender. Long felt his success comes from the large variety of extra opportunities he provides for his students. He started a mallet club, drum club, and honors choir, but he also mentioned that seeing students grow musically over the six years from kindergarten to fifth grade is so rewarding. Smith found success in, “getting the children to enjoy music, and to learn about the aspects of music.” He also felt accomplishment in his performances, including a biennial music festival that included music students from across the district in a large performance. Kastner felt that his success could be found in the musical growth of his students and putting on quality performances, saying:

As much as it was important for the kids to learn things, it wouldn't have worked if it hadn't been a good set of performances that parents not only enjoyed, but was presumably a step up or beyond what they had experienced before in the previous settings…I am always happy to hear from kids that come back…and tell me now how much fun they had or how much they remember doing certain things that we did in class, or now they like to go out and perform and it's partly due to the fact that we made them comfortable as performers back then.

Johnson found success in his performances and providing new opportunities for the students. He said:

On the recorder, they did some composition with that, and then there were a few other composition activities that I did throughout the year that I wasn't really
sure…how they were going to turn out, but the kids kind of ran with it and ended up surprising me with what they did…I had changed up the way concerts are done at the school. Which at first I got a lot of emails about why are you doing this, and not a good start, but I got a lot of very positive feedback from the community after the concerts. I felt like I had done a good job, and I was being accepted, and they kind of understood what I was adding rather than what I was taking away perhaps. So I thought that was a success and that gave me confidence then to do more of my own thing I guess.

Johnson initially faced criticism about some of his changes to the curriculum from parents and community members, but gained confidence to keep pushing for more significant student experiences that help them to become better musicians, which ultimately paid off in positive responses from the very people who initially criticized his changes.

Brown felt most successful in the lives of his students and the opportunities he was able to provide. On two separate occasions, his choir was selected to perform for an Orchestra fundraiser in downtown Milwaukee. His students were able to meet several prominent musicians and receive recognition from many community members. One event stood out above others as a reason why he felt successful in his position. His choir was performing for a new symphony director when the students looked into the hotel ballroom and saw a chocolate fountain:

One of these inner-city kids was, "That's a chocolate fountain man!" I chose twenty kids to perform. Ten kids who were exceptionally good musicians, and ten kids who just needed this experience. He was one of the ten that needed that experience. And he turns to this mom and he goes, you know what, I think this is the best night of my life! There have been a lot of those ‘pinch me’ moments like that.

My own personal experiences of success have often come in the comments of parents and students. When students said they loved performing in the concert, or they put a handwritten card in my mailbox, I feel that I was successful as a music teacher. Hearing students of all ages exclaim that they love music, or that they can’t believe music
class is over because we had so much fun, tells me that everything I put into my teaching is worth it to help students enjoy growing as musicians.

When considering the various experiences and anecdotes of these men, the personal and professional successes are not rooted in their gender. While these teachers are role models for students who need positive males in their lives, success comes from the education each of these teachers is able to provide. Whether they are providing high-quality lessons, or experiences of a lifetime, these men are doing what all music teachers do every day—demonstrate a strong passion for music that is shared and taught to students at every opportunity.

**Professional Challenges**

After hearing about the many successes these men have had in their teaching careers, understanding what kind of challenges they have faced was also an important issue. Considering the existing research about male teachers, it was reasonable to assume that many of the teachers’ challenges would be related to gender (Benton DeCorse and Vogtle, 1997; Bidenkapp and Goerring, 1971; Bradley, 2010; Johnson et al, 2010; Mills et al, 2004; Roulston and Misawa, 2011; Shouldice, 2013). This line of investigation would confirm if my initial assumptions were correct, or if the professional challenges of these men were similar to those faced by all music educators regardless of gender.

In my own personal career, I have had many different challenges including classroom management, adapting to changing national, state, and district mandates, figuring how to teach elementary students with minimal experience, trying to teach students to sing despite the octave displacement, and adapting to teaching music travelling room to room on a cart. The teachers I interviewed had many similar
challenges to my own, including the difference in singing voice. In this section, I will address those challenges beyond singing which were raised. Teaching students to sing will be addressed in Chapter Five.

As any elementary music teacher can attest, the daily teaching schedule can be a huge challenge. According to Wisconsin state law:

Music instruction shall be provided in accordance with a written comprehensive music curriculum including developmental experiences involving singing, playing instruments, listening, movement, creative expression, and music reading. Music instruction shall be provided for all pupils in grades kindergarten through 6 and shall be performed by or under the direction of a licensed music teacher.

(Wisconsin School District Standards)

All of the men I interviewed had the same basic schedule of two thirty minute classes per week for every student. With the large number of students in each building, the timing of most elementary music classes are scheduled back-to-back with little or no time between each class. Johnson said:

The schedule is pretty grueling. There (are) really not breaks during the day. It's pretty much go, go, and it's all different grade levels, you know, you're always doing different things with different instruments…As one class is leaving and the next one is coming in the door, it's like, ok, switch gears, and you've got to start right away or they're (going to) start themselves, which usually isn't good.

Long mentioned the schedule as one of his challenges as well. He was fortunate that currently he has a, “rotating schedule; with two back-to-backs and then a little break. So it works really, really well to swap out those instruments.” The schedule can be a challenge to make sure the classroom is ready for the next group of students. Depending on how grade levels are scheduled, it can also be challenging to transition mentally and physically from a kindergarten class to fifth grade.

Another challenge that all elementary music teachers face is the limited amount of instructional time with students. In Wisconsin, most schools meet for 180 days each year.
That divides into thirty-six weeks of instruction. With the current state recommendation of an hour of music instruction per week, that allows for a maximum of thirty-six hours of music instruction per year. Long said, “That’s not a whole lot of time. You have to make an impact. You have to get them engaged, highly engaged, in just that short amount of time.”

Kastner found his challenges in developing lessons and getting to know the district’s curriculum. He said:

A lot of it was getting started that first year. I had to familiarize myself with the sets of materials that were available in the building and really come up with effective lesson plans and knowing where the kids had been. The person that was there before me…was mostly an instrumentalist who was finishing off his career by teaching elementary music…So I was trying to figure out to not just get by but get the kid’s skill levels brought up and try to fill in gaps of what they were missing…It was (challenging) trying to come up with ideas to teach them things that maybe they hadn't encountered before, or have them be interested in something they weren't exposed to before.

Many of Kastner’s students were not exposed to Classical music, or any music besides what was on the popular radio stations. He felt challenged to expose students to music outside of what they hear on the radio. He wanted his students to know that there are many different styles, and he works to broaden the musical tastes of his students.

With Brown’s thirty years of teaching experience, he has had many challenges, and has seen some of them return cyclically. While being in a financially strong district, issues with money periodically come around to offer challenges to his program. He said:

At one point they were thinking of having me travel to the other elementary school and cutting that position in half, and having music meet for K through third grade…twice a week for a half hour. When I started, kids came to music on a six day rotating schedule. They came three times every six for a half hour. So on one week, they’d have 90 minutes of music, and the next week it would be an hour every other week.
Brown felt challenged by an administrator who wanted to combine classes when enrollment was going down in the district. It was proposed that in grades Kindergarten through third grade, music classes would be twice a week for half an hour. Grades four through six would meet once a week for thirty minutes, and for the second half hour each week, all of the classes in grades four through six would combine in one room for a class called *choir*. Brown elaborated:

So it would be compulsory, and I was trying to argue...when you come to my classroom, yeah we do singing, but we play, we move, we listen, we do this, and I said I've had kids who are really good singers, but singing isn't their cup of tea. But they sing and they do it for me because they know they're going to play, they're going to listen, they're going to compose, they're going to do this on computers. But when we make singing compulsory, not a choice, that's all there is, there isn't any other choice, we're going to make it a punishment....you can't do that to these kids. I teach the whole child.

Brown also found that the current state of education as a whole, and the myriad of different programs and expectations from the district, state, and national level, was causing great stress on teachers. He said, “The motives are pure: Common core, RtI, Teachscape, SLOs, PGP...but we're under a tremendous amount of program fatigue.”

Brown felt that teachers are not well prepared by undergraduate institutions to teach music. When he left college, he felt that he was well prepared to begin teaching. The worst grade he received in college was in his methods class. Brown explained:

I had an outstanding teacher, she poured herself into this. And the last day of her class she said, “So you guys think you're ready for student teaching?” We're all like “YES!” And she just laughed, and she said the best of you...are barely ready for your first day of student teaching, and when you finish your student teaching experience, the best of you are barely ready for your first day of teaching, and she was right!

Brown felt that it takes a minimum of three years in the same position to find your own teaching personality. From personal experience, I worked in three different districts during my first four years of teaching, and each time I changed districts or schools, it
often took a year or two in order to develop my own teaching personality. I do feel, however, that the longer I teach, the amount of time it takes to feel comfortable in a new place decreases with experience.

When I asked Smith about the kinds of challenges he faced during his career, I was amazed at the type of issues he faced and the length of time they lasted. For twenty-two years, Smith had to teach music from a cart going room to room; he calls it, “Music à la cart.” He was limited in the type of lessons and curriculum he could bring to the students because going into general education classrooms, there is not very much room, and the classroom teachers are not always willing to accommodate the needs of another teacher coming into their space. He said, “Because going room to room, you're...on their turf....So, you're always in the teacher's environment so it always took time and some teachers they would butt in...and I just told them no, I want to have control of my class.”

I have had a similar experience teaching music on a cart. For the last two years, I did not have a music classroom, and I had to adapt my curriculum in order to continue high quality music instruction, but also maintain the ability to quickly move from room to room given the continued scheduling of classes back-to-back.

The most surprising and disappointing challenge facing Smith occurred during his last nine years of teaching. In Wisconsin, student attendance on the third Friday in September determines how much state funding a school will receive. During his final nine years, Smith found himself starting the school year in one building or position, yet after the third Friday count, being moved to a different one. He elaborated:

Another drawback was moving on to a different (school) every September...If there weren't enough students or there were too many, then you would have to go to a different school or have two schools. At the end I had three schools, with no room. Every other Friday I also substituted, not in music either.
When I first crafted the question about professional challenges, I initially thought that some of the issues faced by these men would be gender related. Existing research initially led me to believe that a major factor facing these men would be gender stereotypes of male elementary teachers (Bradley, 2010; Cleaver, 2010; Cushman, 2010; Eisenhauer, 2010; Johnson et al, 2010; Mills et al, 2004; Martino, 2008a; Martino, 2008b; Roulston and Mills, 2000; Werhan, 2010). I was surprised to find out that only one issue was related to gender, and that was the octave difference in singing voices between males and their students.

**Solutions to Professional Challenges and the Impact of Gender**

Considering the many challenges facing teachers, it is important to know how teachers have adapted to or solved these issues. Solutions these men have found for their professional challenges and whether they felt that being male had any impact on their successes and challenges was the next area to explore.

For Johnson, being organized is essential to his success. He has worked hard to be in control of his lessons and know how to accomplish each task. He said, “elementary students are very high energy, obviously, and so one of the challenges for me is I'm very laid back naturally, and so something that I had to adjust right away, when I started student teaching even, was just being the leader of the group.” He felt that adjusting his own demeanor to be more outgoing has helped force him to be ready for, “what's coming next, and knowing how you're going to transition there…So there's just a lot going on that you have to kind of make flow.” When asked whether he felt his gender impacted his successes or challenges, Johnson said:
You know I don't know. Being a guy, (I) have a different demeanor than maybe a woman teacher…I guess you might think of a female teacher having a kind of motherly demeanor, not that all of them would, but that kind of caring aspect…it just comes off differently with me…I think that part of being successful in that is just being who I am, rather than trying to be like so-and-so other teacher, because I think that students would kind of tell that that was not who I am, and probably would not respect that.

Long’s solutions to his challenges were very similar to Johnson. He said that, “Time management is key. To get it all in…it’s like multiple things happening at the same time…it’s this spiral…that you keep coming back and revisiting those (concepts) and building on them.” Long’s eighteen years of experience as a teacher has allowed him to find many solutions to challenges. He said, “The more years you teach and the more professional development you attend…you pick up more resources and tools to use. So I feel, oh yeah, there (are) always challenges and there's always more to learn, but I feel like bring it on.” When asked whether gender has impacted his success or ability to deal with challenges, Long does not feel it matters. He said, “I would be successful either way, but…you know that there are certain students who maybe respond differently, you know, I don't know. That's a hard one.”

Kastner found it challenging to get students to realize that there is a lot more music in the world than what is currently playing on the radio at any given time. He felt that it is important to point out that music has a long history, and that composers and artists base new works on the styles of the past. Kastner said that, “For a lot of the kids, going back ten or twenty years in the music timeline even, for them was an oldie of course, and they didn't realize where it had come from.” He felt that if students know the sources of popular music, they will be better informed musicians and consumers of music. As with the previous teachers, when he was asked whether he felt that his gender
had an impact on his successes and challenges, Kastner was not sure if it made much
difference. He said:

Maybe yes, maybe no, I suppose the fact that I'm a six foot six inch male may
have had some influence...even though once they got to know me, I'm not a tough
guy by any stretch of the imagination...I don't know that I've ever had anybody
say to me it mattered whether I was male or female... I'm thinking of some kids I
know that even had police records back when they were in elementary
school...and just being there to support them, whether we were male or
female...I don't know if it made a difference or not. Not sure about that.

The impact of colleagues has had a strong impact on solving the challenges faced
by Brown. When he started his first long-term subbing position, the teacher he took over
for had provided, “two weeks of lesson plans in front of me, ten years’ worth of materials
on the shelves, and a phone. She made sure that her kids were very excited about me
being their teacher.” He also had a colleague that shared her extensive knowledge of
elementary music and Kodaly pedagogy. Because of the support and sharing from his
colleagues, “they gave me a chance to consume and adapt their ideas to my success.”
Coincidentally, that same colleague that poured herself into his success was the colleague
who mentored me when I first started teaching elementary general music. When
considering whether his gender impacted his success and challenges, Brown said, “The
uniqueness of being a male teacher, being a good role model, I don't think it was
exclusive to the gender. I think it can (be) marginally part of it, but not exclusively part of
it.” His opinion on the relationship of gender and success matched the other teachers’
view that while gender may have an impact, it is not an exclusive factor in professional
challenges and successes.

Smith’s major challenge for a majority of his career was teaching music on a cart.
He had to find ways to adapt his instruction to a teaching environment that changed every
thirty minutes. One tool that helped him be successful was a well-stocked cart. He had a three-tiered cart with a keyboard and a variety of rhythm instruments. He said, “I'd use the keyboard a lot…that helped the children hear the pitch that they were supposed to sing.” Smith’s response to how gender has impacted his challenges and successes followed the trend of all the previous men. While he felt that being a male did have some impact, it was not a definitive factor in his success and challenges. He said:

I think so, because they’re hearing a male voice. They have a male perspective, especially for the males in the class…As a male gender you have to be careful about female students and…you just learn, you know. I mean some of the kids, especially the kindergartners, they walk up to you and they just walk right into you.

For my own challenges of classroom management, travelling to different buildings, adapting to new expectations, and teaching on a cart, I have learned it is important to be flexible and always seek out professional development. Flexibility is important, especially when teaching on a cart. I was dependent on the classrooms of my colleagues, and while they were always very accommodating to my needs, I was still teaching in their space. I had to adapt lessons involving movement around tables and desks in the room. When I used instruments, I had to plan out what I needed ahead of time and make sure I was able to transport the materials easily. I was fortunate to have a very nice cart built by several parents, and I was able to haul a lot of materials, including a full-sized keyboard and stereo. I had to make sure that I had all my materials before I left my office each morning; because I could not easily access something once I was moving around the building. I also utilized students as my “Road Crew” to help transport materials from one class to the next. Professional development has also been very useful in helping me solve my challenges. By working with colleagues, attending conferences, and taking classes, I have been able to find many solutions to my challenges.
As I consider whether my gender has impacted my challenges and success, I agree with my fellow male elementary general music teachers. They feel that gender may have some impact, but are generally unsure whether it is an influential factor. This conclusion is in agreement with existing research (Dee, 2005; Hansen and Mulholland, 2005; Jones and Dindia, 2004; Split et al, 2011). Hansen and Mulholldand (2005) stated: “We see care that involves building professional relationships with children as most important for all teachers and something with which both male and female teachers should be concerned and for which both should be rewarded” (p. 130). Gender does impact the ability to teach students to sing, and it can provide an opportunity for male students to see a successful male musician, but beyond that, gender does not seem to be much of a predictor of successes or challenges.
CHAPTER FIVE

The inception of this entire study came from a simple comment of a colleague in my first elementary position. She said, “How are you going to teach them to sing?” I knew that my voice had changed from when I was a child, and with voice as my primary instrument, I was very aware of how the voice works and how to create beautiful sounds vocally. However, when it came to teaching elementary students who sing an octave higher, I found myself without any clear answers. My colleague was also perplexed as to how I would vocally model for students aside from singing in falsetto.

Overcoming the Octave Difference

Initially, I tried singing in my natural voice, but most of the students tried to match my pitch, which was physically impossible for their young voices. Because the students could not sing to match my pitch, they mainly used a low pitched talking voice. After being unsuccessful with this technique, I just started singing in falsetto with my elementary students. I will admit that I taught like this for nearly four years. I did try playing the piano to give pitches, but it was not as successful as just singing the notes for the students. After using my voice like this for so many years, I began to feel tremendous strain on my voice, and even the secretary at my school did not know that I could sing well because all she ever heard was my falsetto voice.

When I began my Masters program at the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, I spoke to a professor about how I was teaching singing, and he was appalled that I was singing in falsetto. He told me that I was not helping my students, but rather hurting them by giving a poor vocal model. Shortly after that meeting, I decided to take video of a class and, for the first time, really listen to what I sounded like singing falsetto. I sounded
terrible, and I was disappointed that I had been teaching with such a poor model for so many years. I decided at that time to abandon falsetto singing and focus solely on singing in my natural octave. I am happy to report that I have been nearly falsetto free for five years.

When I made the commitment to abandon falsetto singing with my students, I knew that I needed to find alternative means for getting my students to sing on pitch in their natural voices. Over the past several years, I have tried many different techniques to help my students sing in their natural octave including playing piano, xylophones, and glockenspiels. I will often play and sing the melody, or just play the melody and have the students sing back. I feel that this method has been successful, but I wanted to know what other male elementary general music educators were doing to teach their students to sing. I knew I was not the only person who had this issue, but I was unable to find any standard methods for males to teach young children to sing. There were many anecdotes from colleagues about slide whistles, puppets, and recorders, but I did not have specific ideas of how to use these tools in my teaching. I feel there is a strong need to present specific strategies on how men teach young singers.

Each teacher mentioned the octave difference as a significant challenge in teaching elementary general music. Long, Johnson, and Brown have been in their current positions for two, seven, and twenty years respectively. They all felt that their students have become accustomed to the octave difference over the years, and for new kindergartners, they do not know any differently. One common theme expressed by Johnson and Long was that taking over a position previously held by a female teacher is difficult. Long said, “Where I’ve had an issue is when I stepped into a position that was
previously filled by a female. Some of the students will have a hard time adjusting because they're used to that upper range.” Johnson was hopeful about having an easier time this year. He said, “I'm hoping that this year will be easier than the beginning of last year making that adjustment because they had a female music teacher before.”

**Singing in Falsetto**

On the issue of whether or not to use falsetto in teaching young singers, each teacher had an opinion. Long said, “I certainly don't use my falsetto. I mean, every once in a while, if a kid is struggling, I'll demonstrate up there…I know some elementary male teachers that only use their falsetto all day long. My vocal chords could not, would not, be able to do that.” Johnson agreed saying, “Well my falsetto voice is terrible, so I don't, unless everything else fails, I don't do it. I have a band background, and not a vocal background, and so that's maybe part of that.” Brown said he avoided using falsetto instinctively, “because I had to save my voice.” Brown followed the advice of elementary music education expert John Feierabend. Feierabend is an authority on music and movement in early childhood and a professor at The Hartt School of the University of Hartford (Feierabend, 2003). Brown was introduced to Feierabend through the Master’s program at Silver Lake College. Brown said that:

He (Feierabend) insists that male teachers at the elementary level, which he is…use falsetto as little as possible and never if you can avoid it…you'll vocally be trashed if you keep using that falsetto, unless you are a counter-tenor.

While Johnson, Long, and Brown avoid falsetto whenever possible, Kastner and Smith used falsetto often in their teaching. Kastner used falsetto primarily with his younger students. He said:

The kindergarten, first, second grade area where maybe it was more difficult for them to understand the differences conceptually, so sometimes I would try to sing
as much as I could up high with them at least in the lower parts of those songs and things like that and pitch it so that they could match with me but I'm in the very upper…part of my range and they’re probably more in the low to mid part of their range.

Kastner used falsetto more when he was younger and his voice was stronger. As he became older, singing in falsetto became more difficult, and he was not able to sustain that practice. He said, “After I taught for a while, and using the voice more…it wasn't always there. Sometimes you just had to tell them (the students)...I'm going to sing it down here. You guys match it up above.” Like Kastner, Smith also used falsetto with students in kindergarten through second grade. He said, “For younger children, I did a lot of falsetto, which wasn't good for my voice, but I did use falsetto especially for kindergarten.”

Each of these teachers knows that falsetto singing is not a sustainable method for teaching young singers. From my own personal experience, I agree with them. While Kastner and Smith often used falsetto with their younger singers, Johnson, Long, and Brown avoided singing in falsetto at all costs. Occasionally, each teacher will sing a note or two in falsetto to help a struggling student, but they quickly shift back into their natural range. As I experiment with different methods of teaching students to match pitch, I find that when I do sing in falsetto, I often have students that will sing an octave or more higher than my falsetto pitch. They often overshoot the intended pitch, but when I shift back into my natural range, the students are able to match pitch more accurately.

Methods for Teaching Young Singers

In establishing that falsetto is not an appropriate vocal model, it is important to find other methods for men to teach young singers. Each teacher had several ideas and approaches to accomplish this very important task.
While Smith used falsetto a lot with his youngest students, his main tool for teaching students to sing on pitch was the piano. He used an electronic keyboard because he taught from a cart, and he would play the pitches for the students to match while singing in his natural voice. The older students were, the fewer problems he had getting them to match pitch. He said, “By third grade, they'd…know that my voice was 8 notes lower. Although for the biennial music festival, some of the girls, they needed some help…I would sing falsetto just to teach the notes… I would go into my normal voice, or I'd just play the piano.” Kastner primarily used falsetto and the piano as well. He would often utilize the recordings included with the music textbooks from the district curriculum. Kastner never found a single solution for overcoming the octave difference. He said:

I don't know that I had any one ultimate solution for it, but I think we made it at least comfortable, and I don't remember that there was any difficulty hearing kids in the wrong octave let's say at performances or in most of the general singing we did. If I had detected it, I certainly would have encouraged them to…make the shift.

Johnson approached singing with two techniques. First, he often played the melody on the piano in the students’ octave, but took away the piano doubling as soon as the students were able to sing the melody on pitch. Second, he felt that the timbre of his voice is helpful. He said:

Even though I'm singing in a different octave… the quality matches more with theirs, and sometimes with kindergarten I'll sort of… bridge that gap a little more. Sometimes I still hear them not matching, and so I will… point out, well this is what I'm singing, and this is what you're singing. I might do it in a falsetto with them. Usually they giggle (because) it sounds silly. I might use… a bell set, or a xylophone or something when I'm doing it. And usually I find that over time, they stop getting goofed up with it. Occasionally I'll have to go back and work on that.
Johnson’s approach is very similar to my own. He used the piano to help establish the pitch, but stopped doubling the melody as soon as possible to build vocal independence. If there were occasional students trying to drop down an octave, he would use bells or xylophones to help bring them back up.

Long began teaching students to sing right away in kindergarten. His first focus was getting the students to use their head voice. He used multiple tools to encourage students to use their head voice. He incorporated slide whistles, stories, puppets, flashlights, yo-yo’s, tennis balls, drawing on the board and flash cards. He said:

I use my recorder a lot, I use the slide whistles, I use bean bags, I use flashlights, I use dog sounds, I use, you name it, to get them up in their head voice, and once they’re there, then I’m demonstrating it down low. I feel that kids are very adaptable, and they’re smart. They can figure it out once you teach them and instruct them and break it down for them. They get it.

I wanted to know how he used the slide whistle, and he said that he plays a pattern, and the students echo the pattern back to him in their singing voices. For the beanbag, he will toss it in the air and the students have to sing a siren pattern to match the shape of the beanbag’s flight path. When asked whether he sang along with the beanbag activity, he said:

I'll demonstrate, and then, if I have a student that is struggling, I'll listen for one that is really solid, and I'll use that student as a model...I'll use males and females as models...if you're not getting the results you want, just knowing how to change your course a little bit, take a different path to get them there.

Long’s students are constantly playing games and telling stories that encourage making sounds in their head voice. He uses stories that have “alright” or “oh no” said in a high pitched voice. He often has students in their head voice for an entire lesson without them realizing it because they are playing a game and having fun. While the students feel they are playing, Long is assessing which students are able to get their voice into that
octave, and which cannot. If they cannot match the pitch, he will then employ something else like puppets. He said, “Kids, they'll sing to a puppet. It's amazing…I can build from that.” He also builds a strong level of trust and comfort with his students. Long said:

It's creating that climate too, that comfort level where...kids are not afraid to take risks...Singing, it's a very vulnerable and intimidating thing. We do it constantly, we do it so much that it just becomes...what we do. Yeah, we are singing by ourselves. Oh, no big deal! It's just part of what we do, but the kids are so used to it because we do so many activities and it's not like the whole class is sitting or staring at them.

He also uses visuals and activities from a music curriculum called *Gameplan* (Kriske & DeLelles, 2014). This curriculum, written by Jeff Kriske and Randy DeLelles, is a complete curricular series for kindergarten to fifth grade. Long used the diagrams and illustrations included in each lesson to help students visualize pitch. Picture books are used to illustrate how the voice should move for a certain melody. The curriculum is described as:

An active music curriculum for children, organized chronologically (Sept-May) with 4 lessons per month, each with approximately 60 minutes of activities. Each grade level includes experiences in imitation, exploration, improvisation, and visualization; repertoire rich in folk literature, nursery rhymes and traditional singing games; a yearly plan categorizing objectives in 5 conceptual areas (rhythm, melody, harmony, form, timbre); written assessments. Each grade has correlating picture books. (Kriske & DeLelles, 2014)

When asked about use of a xylophone or piano while his students are singing, Long said, “Absolutely! I do it in a variety of different ways and depending on what the goal and the purpose is of that lesson. You know I'll play it, but I do a lot of inner ear training.” He explained that developing a child’s sense of pitch internally will make them much more successful as singers. He said:

If they can't internalize the pitch, then they can't produce it. It has to be in here (points to head) before it can be here (points to mouth). I feel very, very strongly
about that. So I'll use a lot of exercises, even in Kindergarten and first grade that develop that inner hearing, that inner…sense of pitch.

I asked Long to elaborate on what kind of exercises he uses to develop an internal sense of pitch. He will take a melody with multiple phrases and take away the first phrase. The students have to sing that first phrase in their brains and then continue singing the rest of the song out loud. He gradually takes away phrases and uses movements to reinforce the pitch levels. He said:

I use solfège a lot, and I use the hand signals…I use little activities where…I'll show them the card, you know, think it, show it, sing it. Or even on their instrument…think it, click it, play it. So it's here (points to head) before they're actually playing…It’s all of those little steps that really reinforce, and you can see who has it and who doesn’t.

Ultimately, Long uses a variety of techniques and tools to get his students singing on pitch, and internalizing their own sense of pitch. He often uses different methods with different classes to best meet the needs of each student in that class.

Like Long, Brown’s many years of experience have resulted in a comprehensive approach to teaching students to sing. Much of his system is based on techniques used by John Feierabend. Like the other teachers, Brown uses a variety of tools to get students singing in their head voices. He incorporates slide whistles, siren techniques, games, and a powered helicopter. The first student to match pitch in a class gets to press the button and make the helicopter fly. Brown uses “carrots”, or incentives, to motivate students to sing in their head voices. Aside from the helicopter, he waits until a majority of the class can match pitch before allowing his kindergarten students to play Orff instruments. He believes strongly in never telling a student they cannot sing well if they do not match pitch. Even if it takes multiple lessons, he always says “thank you” or “good job”. When a child finally matches pitch for the first time, Brown’s key word is “Bravo”. He shared
that Feierabend, “would send a certificate home. Mom and Dad, I sang in tune today for the first time in music class, or something like that.” This allows the student to celebrate that they matched pitch for the first time, and can share that accomplishment with their family. Long also sends home awards when a student matches pitch or sings alone in class. Long said, “They take that home, and the parents or grandparents ask them to sing for them. The kid's then taking what I taught them in school and bringing it home.” When there are students solid enough to be a vocal model, both Long and Brown use these students to sing as examples for other students. Both teachers use male and female models, but Brown recommends using boys to model whenever possible. I have begun using student models in my classes as well, and this allows students to have positive attention and help the teacher and the rest of the class at the same time.

When teaching a song to new singers, Brown recommended starting the song in a falsetto voice, and then dropping out. He is a strong proponent of Feierabend’s suggestion to avoid singing with your students. Brown said:

Feierabend also insists never sing with them...we do that sometimes because we're worried. It's a subconscious, almost insecure thing. They'll never develop vocal independence...I'm not going to be able to assess whether you know something unless I'm not singing with you. And to have that courage to not play with piano, to let them sing a cappella so we can really gauge that vocal independence.

I find that many music educators fall into the trap of singing along with their students. While I do feel it is important to sing with your students, it is equally important to know when to drop out and let them sing alone. As Brown suggested, that also includes not playing the melody on piano. I am amazed what I can hear if I just get out of the way and let my students sing alone. I am able to assess their singing more accurately, and the students become more confident with their voices.
One final technique that Brown employs is using stories to help students explore their head and chest voices. Feierabend has an entire series of pitch exploration stories as part of his *First Steps in Music* curriculum (Feierabend, 2003). Brown shared *Cowboy Joe* (see Appendix B) as an example of a story where students have to say “Yee-haa” in their head voices throughout the story. He also shared a story called *The Airplane Ride* where a man goes through a series of adventures in his airplane. Brown explained:

A man went up in an airplane. “Alright!” (Head voice) but the plane didn't have an engine “Oh No!” (chest voice). The first day I tell them how to say “Alright” and “Oh no”. But the plane didn't have an engine “oh no”. But the man had a parachute “Alright”, but the parachute wouldn't open “Oh no”. But there was a haystack under him “alright”, but there was a pitchfork in the haystack “oh no”. But he missed the pitch fork “alright”, but he missed the haystack too “oh no”.

Brown felt that anything that can get students exploring the full range of their voice will help develop their sense of pitch and vocal independence.

When considering the challenge of teaching students to sing as a male elementary general music teacher, I knew that falsetto was not a viable technique for teaching students to sing. What I did not expect was the incredible wealth of approaches these men shared. The first method was using an instrument to play the pitch in the appropriate octave for the students. This can be a piano, xylophone, recorder, or any melodic instrument. The second method was to use tools that encourage students to make sounds in their head voice. These tools include slide whistles, beanbags, puppets, tennis balls, flashlights, yo-yo’s, illustrations, and helicopters. Third, Long and Brown both used stories that encourage students to make sounds in both their head and chest voices. The stories are simple and allow students to have fun while developing strong vocal skills. Fourth, it is important to build vocal independence. This can be accomplished by using activities to internalize pitch as recommended by Long, or by allowing students to sing
independently of an instrument or teacher model. Finally, several of the teachers used other students as vocal models to not only build vocal independence, but to encourage students to help each other become stronger singers. The techniques listed above are valuable for these men to ensure that their students are singing on pitch independently, but they are not limited to male elementary general music teachers. Regardless of gender, these approaches can be used by any vocal music education teacher to develop students into strong singers and musicians.
CHAPTER SIX

The path each of these men has taken to become elementary general music teachers has been explored in the third chapter of this study, but the final idea to be considered was if they would recommend elementary music to new males entering the music education profession. It is important to know what kind of advice they would have liked to have at the beginning of their careers and whether that was gender-based. Each of these men said that their advice would be the same regardless of teacher gender.

**Recommending Elementary General Music**

Each teacher was asked whether they would recommend elementary general music to new male music educators, and while they would all recommend teaching elementary music, there are a variety of reasons that were presented. Kastner definitely recommended teaching elementary music because, “elementary teaching in general (is) a very female dominated profession right now, and I think there need to be more male role models and more male examples in that level for the kids.” In his experience, he has known several music educators who began their careers in elementary and moved to intermediate or high school later in their careers. He has also known teachers who began at the secondary level and moved to elementary later in their careers, and they absolutely loved the change. Kastner knew several men who began teaching elementary music because they physically could not handle the secondary schedule any more, and, “they loved doing elementary. They wished they had done more of it.” He adds that all of these men were strong music educators, “who were fully capable of doing whatever they set their minds to doing.”
Johnson recommended teaching elementary general music as well, but the current state of education and popular support for teachers is challenging. He said, “You have to know what you're getting into.” He felt that elementary music educators are often misunderstood by the general public, and are sometimes seen more as a prep time for the general education teachers than educators with their own curriculum to teach to the students. Johnson came from a band background, and he was excited by the expanded opportunities to be creative in an elementary setting. He said:

There are so many teaching opportunities that we get to do that you can't take time to do in a performing ensemble…I loved being in band, but…at the elementary level I get to create a lot of the curriculum myself…Even when I'm singing a kids' song, I get to choose how I accompany that song, or I get to choose which ones I do. So even though they’re kids’ songs, I can still make it musical…You know, if I was going to sing them with a bunch of people my age, it'd be totally different, than…when you're singing a song with a group of kindergartners. It doesn't seem weird anymore because it's at their level.

Johnson’s opinion resonated with my own experiences. While elementary music seems very simple on the surface, there is an incredible level of complexity that goes into planning each lesson and teaching each concept.

For Smith, he would recommend elementary music to new male music educators, but cautioned that, “there is some difficulty in it, but…it also depends on the person themselves.” He explained that because elementary education is so heavily dominated by female teachers, there is a strong need for male role models, and he feels that males bring a different perspective to their teaching.

When Long works with a music education student or a student teacher, he would never recommend teaching elementary school solely based on the person’s gender. He said,
They would obviously have to have the skill set and enjoy working with this age level...being able to demonstrate vocally, instrumentally, all of those things. Communication, collaboration...I have to look at the big picture. I wouldn't really base it on male or female. For me I really look at that skill set and say ‘would this person be great?’

Long felt that the skills a person can bring to an elementary position are more important than their gender. He needed to see that the person would be a good fit at the elementary level before recommending that a person pursue a position at this level. Brown agreed with Long in that he would not blindly recommend someone become an elementary music educator. He said, “It depends on the individual.” If the person is committed to maintaining high quality musicianship, then they will be successful in whatever position they choose. He would recommend elementary music if a person seemed like a good fit for this level, even if the individual themselves did not initially see themselves as an elementary general music teacher. Brown was glad his mentors recommended he pursue a career in elementary music. He said:

If someone said...you're not going to like it so I'm not going to recommend you do it, then I never would have succeeded. Did I struggle? Yeah I struggled. I had a lot to learn, but after that first two years, I was like, you know, I can do this. Tell you what, I'm going to recommend it, I would do it if...I could almost guarantee they'd have someone to stand with them.

I have definitely benefited from having amazing colleagues to mentor and guide me as I began my elementary music career. When I struggle with something, I ask for help, and soon I have at least six solutions to my problem. As for my own recommendation of teaching elementary general music, I do believe that there need to be more men teaching at this level, but the difficulty of teaching elementary general music is deceiving. A male elementary music teacher needs to know that the schedule is grueling and you need to be very flexible to adjust lesson plans at a moment’s notice. The level of
musicianship at an elementary school needs to be just as high as an intermediate or high school ensemble. Teaching students to sing on pitch in their own natural voice rather than trying to match a model given an octave lower is a constant struggle, but with the right preparation and tools, young singers are able to adjust to a male vocal model. I have found great success in teaching elementary school, but every level of teaching has its own unique set of challenges, and new teachers need to find where their strengths lie as they begin a new teaching position.

For me, the fundamental reason why I enjoy teaching elementary music, and why I would recommend that more males consider this level, is that I am laying the foundational music skills for all of my students. I am able to build upon the musical skills developed in the earliest years of a child’s development and refine those abilities. I teach my students the skills necessary to create and express their own musicianship. This is what drew Long to elementary as well. He said:

This is where it starts, this is one of the reasons I wanted to do elementary because I want to be a part of that start, and I wanted to make sure that they're being taught properly. That they're getting those steps, those building blocks, that they're getting that foundation.

I know that most of my students will not become professional musicians or music educators, but the reason I am an elementary music educator is that I can build a strong foundation of music skills so that they can become informed and educated producers and consumers of music.

**Professional Advice for Music Educators**

Each of these men brings a unique perspective to the field of elementary general music, and I wanted to know what kind of advice they feel every music educator should know. Kastner said:
Stick to it and know that there’s no one right way to do it. Whether it’s music or anything else… I had to find what kind of worked for me, and it might take a few, 2, 3, 4 years to do it, but… find out where your comfort level is, what works for you, and go with that.

Johnson agreed with Kastner’s assertion that it is important to tailor your teaching style to your personal strengths. Johnson said, “When I’m interested in what I’m doing…I do a much better job with it…I often teach those (lessons) much better than I would something that just someone else does.”

Johnson’s advice to music educators was to teach using personal strengths rather than teaching only to your comfort level. As a student teacher, Johnson had to push himself to go beyond his comfort zone and adopt a teaching style that engaged the students. He incorporated movement, used different character voices when telling stories, and tried to have fun teaching the students, rather than being concerned with what he may look or sound like. He said:

I think if you are going to be a male general music teacher, you kind of have to get over that macho stigma, and I have found that when I do that, the kids enjoy it. It’s not something that they think is weird or stupid, or whatever. And I think that I’ve probably matured a lot just being comfortable with doing that kind of stuff rather than being nervous.

Smith recommended that all teachers continue to develop professionally by attending conventions and workshops. While he did not have the needed space or instrumentation, he often attended Orff workshops to gain new ideas. He said, “Even though I didn’t have the instrumentation…I would always come back with some idea to use with my kids.” He also said it was important to listen to your students “because you can learn from them.” Smith’s final piece of advice was to stay a practicing musician. For him, staying musically active outside of teaching helped reinforce what he did in the classroom.
Brown also recommended maintaining a high personal level of musicianship. He spent twenty-six years singing in a symphony chorus to perfect his craft. He said:

Work hard at preparing your musicianship and your pedagogy so you…can market yourself to the place you want to teach…If you prepare yourself well, and can market yourself as an outstanding music educator, and can get great recommendations, and inject yourself into the community, then you can…pick and choose where you’re going to go.

Brown said that having strong professional connections with other music educators was vital to personal success. Teachers constantly share and steal ideas from each other. Some ideas may not exactly fit your situation or students, but those ideas can act as a launch pad for new innovations that will resonate with your students. Kastner, Johnson, and Smith all suggested that music educators must continue to grow professionally and adapt new ideas to personal strengths. Brown suggested that teachers attend workshops and take courses at the Masters degree level to supplement their undergraduate education. He did whatever it took to make his students musically literate. He said, “Not because they’ll become music educators or performers. Thank goodness some of them do, some of them have. But they’ll also become music appreciators too.”

Long’s advice to music educators was to never lose the passion for teaching at the highest level possible. He said:

I see too many music teachers that get lost or caught up in just teaching the repertoire, just focusing on that without really developing the skill. I would say, if you’re enjoying what you’re doing and you’re passionate, and you’re having fun, the kids are going to be passionate, the kids are going to have fun, the kids are going to love it.

Maintaining a high level of passion in teaching students is critical to the success of students, and they will strive to be the best musicians if the teacher is willing to go through the process of teaching the necessary skills to attain that success.
My own advice to music educators echoes that of all the men I interviewed. It is vital to maintain a high level of passion for teaching music and educating future musicians. As music educators, we are equipping our students with the skills necessary to create and consume music at the highest levels. As professionals, we can never stop learning ourselves. Whether we attend workshops, conferences, classes, or just share ideas with our colleagues, we need to constantly strive to be the best music educators possible. While it can take many years to feel confident in this field, all music educators need to be confident in their own skills and adapt ideas to their personal strengths. Elementary students are smart, and are capable of amazing things if we give them the proper tools to succeed.

Conclusions

When I began preparing for this project, I felt very alone as a music educator. I knew many great female elementary general music teachers, but I did not know any males. I thought I was alone. I had many questions about how men teach elementary general music, but I was unable to find much research to help answer my questions. Most of the existing research was focused on how to attract more men to elementary education (Cleaver, 2010; Johnson, 2010; Mills et al, 2004; Martino, 2008b; Sternod, 2011; Weaver-Hightower, 2003). One major issue featured in much of the existing research was cultural stereotypes about male elementary teachers (Cleaver, 2010; Cushman, 2010; Eisenhauer, 2010; Johnson et al, 2010; Mills et al, 2004; Martino, 2008a; Roulston and Mills, 2000; Roulston and Misawa, 2011; Werhan, 2010). Roulston and Misawa (2011) stated that many male teachers face suspicion from parents and administrators and pressure to conform to masculine stereotypes. None of the teachers I interviewed felt
victims of cultural stereotypes around males working with young children. Each teacher felt he was an important part of the school environment and was not treated differently because of his gender.

Very little research exists about how men are teaching music to the youngest learners (Price et al, 1994; Roulston and Mills, 2000; Roulston and Misawa, 2011; Shouldice, 2013), including practical advice on what male elementary general music educators were doing in their classrooms. The conversations I had with these five men helped to validate the pedagogical decisions I had made on my own, and gave me many new ideas and approaches to bring back to my students. I realized that these men knew they wanted to be music educators, but most never saw themselves teaching at an elementary school. They were all heavily influenced by their own music teachers and mentors to become music educators, and work each day to instill a love of music to their students.

Because men are rare in elementary schools (Bureau, 2012; Roulston and Misawa; Sargent, 2001; Sanatullova-Allison, 2010), we often become role models for our students. Despite our gender, our students look up to us as model musicians as they work to develop their own passion for music. While there are many challenges to being a male elementary general music teacher, I now realize that there are many great solutions to those challenges including teaching to strengths and continuing to be an active musician outside of the classroom. I thought that singing an octave lower than my students would make teaching them to sing very difficult. Through the advice of these five men, I now have a wide range of tools and techniques to continue overcoming that challenge.
I am happy to finally have a network of other male elementary general music educators with whom I can share ideas and find new ways to improve teaching. Their passion and excitement for teaching students is contagious, and I feel a renewed desire to improve my own teaching every day. It is my hope that the stories, experiences, and advice of these men will serve as a guide to other male elementary general music educators, and that their words will serve to inspire all music teachers regardless of gender.
References


APPENDIX A
Interview Questions

Interview Questions for Male Teachers in Elementary General Music

1. How long have you been a music teacher? How long have you been in your current position?
2. Have you always taught at the elementary level, or have you taught other levels?
3. When applying for jobs, was elementary music your first choice, or did you see yourself at a different level?
4. What impacted your decision to be a music teacher?
5. What led you to teach at the elementary level? Was it by choice or were you assigned?
6. My research focus is specifically how being a male influences teaching at this level. Do you feel that being a male has a positive impact on your teaching? If so, what are they?
7. What are the successes you have had as an elementary general music teacher?
8. What are the biggest challenges you face teaching elementary music?
9. What solutions have you found to your challenges?
10. Do you feel your gender has impacted any of your successes or challenges?
11. How many men are on staff at your school?
12. Do you feel included in your staff, or are you more of an outsider?
13. How do you specifically deal with the octave difference when teaching singing?
14. Do you use falsetto, an instrument, or some other method?
15. Would you recommend elementary music to a new male teacher? Why or why not?
16. What advice would you give a male teacher considering elementary music?
17. Would you give the same advice regardless of gender?
18. Is there anything else you would like other male music educators to know?
APPENDIX B
“Cowboy Joe” (Feierabend, 2003, p. 5)

Cowboy Joe

Cowboy Joe was a bold young man,
He dreamed of rustling cattle, most of all.
He wanted to see if the cows would come
When he let out his cowboy call.
    yee-haa

He practiced all day from morning to night,
And he practiced both summer and fall.
He knew some day he'd have his chance
To try out his cowboy call.
    yee-haa

Well, finally one day, it was proudly announced
That his ma and pa and all,
Were takin' a trip to his grandfather's ranch
Where he could try out his cowboy call.
    yee-haa

He jumped for joy and grabbed his gear
And he ran back down the hall.
He hopped into the car and was ready to go
To let out his cowboy call.
    yee-haa

When he arrived at the ranch he was happy to see
That the cows were not in the stall.
He dashed to the field where they quietly grazed
And he let out his cowboy call.
    yee-haa

Well they all did come right up to the fence
And he sure felt ten feet tall.
“I'm Cowboy Joe. See how the cows come
When I let out my cowboy call.”
    yee-haa

Now, that was really some day for Cowboy Joe
And he sure did have a ball.
Now he's wantin' to try bigger and better things;
So he's practicing his elephant call.

(?)

— John M. Feierabend
APPENDIX C
Teacher Interviews

William Brown  September 30, 2014

Please tell me who you are and how long you have been a music teacher?
My name is William Brown, and I've been a general music teacher for 29 years. This will
by my thirtieth full year as an elementary music teacher. And I've been in my current
position for, this is my twentieth year, I taught ten years in Oconomowoc. My home base
was Park Lawn elementary. I've been to Ixonia, summit, meadow view, greenland.
Greenland was my first, Greenland I was a long-term pregnancy substitute at greenland
and meadow view. The only one I never taught at was Okauchee because Kay Kline was
there. And I taught at the middle school for a year too.

Have you always taught at the elementary level, or have you taught other levels?
I taught other levels, but officially those were other things like I taught the pit orchestra
for West Side Story, so it was more as an, I wouldn't say an avocation, but not as the full
time position. No, been always full time elementary for the most part.

When applying for jobs, was elementary music your first choice, or did you see
yourself at a different level?
I saw myself as a high school teacher. Absolutely. I was going to be that cool, hip choir
director.

Where did you do your undergraduate at?
I got my undergraduate degree from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. And um, it
was a really dynamic, pretty heavily Kodaly based. Although we got experiences in all
the different methodologies and approaches, it was mostly pretty heavy Kodaly based
curriculum.

What impacted your decision to become a music teacher?
Well initially I was double major in music and theater, in performance, and it got to be
my junior year and I was in a NATS competition. For a lot of different reasons I got into
the finals, which was kind of a surprise to me at the time for different reasons. and I
called my mother. The competition was up in Eau Clair, and I called here. I said, "Mom,
I'm up at Eau Clair at this thing called the NATS, and she said, what's that? Well it's this
is voice competition, and you're never going to believe it, I'm in the finals! Well that's
great. Do you know, did you know that when you were in kindergarten that they wanted
to hold you back? And I was like, wait a second. I'm in this vocal competition in college
and you're telling me they wanted to hold me back in kindergarten. Why are you telling
me that now? Well let me tell you the reason. I have a twin sister, and when I was four or
five years old, I loved to sing, and I was passionate about just singing, singing, singing. I
could not have been, I was not a good singer. We'd go to church I'd be like (in a poor
singing voice) "Praise to the Lord" and it would just seem all my, I'm the last of nine
children. All my sisters and brothers were like Whoa! you know? None of them told me I
was a bad singer. The reason they wanted to hold me back in kindergarten is they thought
my auditory skills were so messed up that keeping me in one more year probably would
be a good thing to do. To teach me how to be a good listener. My Mother, being that I
had a twin sister did not want to make me feel bad, so she put me in summer school, a
special school to help me get caught up, and nobody told me, how many times have you
as a musician have been told, oh you're a musician, or you can sight read, I wish I had
that gift. Well, when I was younger, I was the kid that the teacher said mouth the words,
this isn't your gift, or someone told you, maybe they said early on, because you couldn't
match pitch you couldn't sing, so they just decided I'm not a singer, therefore I'm not
going to learn. And on the phone that day in Eau Clair, Wisconsin, I had realized that all
that all these people that had been told, and of course the Kodaly philosophy, and I didn't
know this at the time, music is for everyone. Learning to sing is a learned skill, and
you're not born to do it. Some have gifts for it, but you can be taught how to do that. And
I remember in third grade I started to make this connection between this (eyes) and this
(ears) and this (voice) and this, and that was when started making those connections. And
if someone would have told me beforehand that this isn't your thing, I never would have
become a singer. Music wouldn't have been my thing. So at that moment, I, a couple
weeks after that I entered the school of education and became a music education
major. Because I was going to be that teacher that helped those kids, whether it was in
elementary or high school. This was a skill and it can be taught.

What led you to teach at the elementary level? Was it by choice or were you
assigned?
It was the first job I got, and I remember my cooperating teacher saying, and I did student
teach at the high school level, and I taught at...my supervisor, who was a male elementary
teacher too said, you know, there's too many guys not choosing this field because this is
not, this is elementary, this isn't cool, and you know, it's not conducive for their voice
type for instance. You should really consider doing this. I remember my cooperating
teacher saying oh yes, and I think not really truly believing it, you know, and so then the
position I got, you know was a long term pregnancy leave at the time. I enjoyed it, I was
ok at it. I had a lot to learn. I mean I had a very outgoing personality, and I had, even
then, having had the great undergrad experience, had a lot to learn about music education
being more than your vivacious personality and good looks. None of which I have
anymore (laughs). It's about an approach, so. So that was my, yeah.

My research focus is specifically how being a male influences teaching at this level.
Do you feel that being a male has a positive impact on your teaching? If so, what are
they?
I don't want to sound sexist, because I gave it. I think it could be, but I just think for the
reasons that we are so unique, we're I think we can bring a different dynamic. Now, we
have to work harder than in other fields. We might get into that later about the use of
falsetto for baritones or even tenors. Um, but I especially think not just in the in the inner
school or urban settings, are younger kids, esp- not just boys, but girls need male role
models, and they're missing that, and especially in music education, and again, I teach the
whole child, I'm not just singing. Singing, it's the initial instrument I'm using, but to teach
the whole child about being just full music education, this thing, for boys to have that
example, you can be, music it can be a cool thing, and on so many different levels, and
for girls too. To see role models, that maybe don't have a father figure in their life, or a
stable father figure in their life. It really brings a whole new dynamic to the classroom
experience, and again I teach in Shorewood, which is is considered a suburban school,
but we have a very diverse population, and I think we sell short about what kind of
impact we can have as male role models for those kids. Huge! Especially when it comes
to music education. One of the comments I get from people that come and observe me, I get a lot of, some aides that come in, they're men, ones that are coaching, who are usually on, their avocation is coaching, and they have to be an aide for the special needs kids that come to my school/class, and they're just blown away at sixth graders that come in and they sit up and they have to sing, and they have to sing A's and match pitch, and there's even three part singing, and even if they're struggling with their singing, they're doing it. They really want to be singers, and it just, they just can't believe this, because it isn't their experience. You get this all the time I bet.

Here's a conversation I'm going to have, and I'm getting off on a tangent, but...you're at a social function, let's say some sort of cocktail party or something. Somebody comes to you and says Scott, what do you do for a living, and I say I'm a music educator, oh cool, what high school do you teach at? They just make that assumption, well I don't teach at a high school, I teach at the elementary. Oh you're the band teacher, no I'm, I teach elementary general music. And it's just like, oohh, that's nice. Like they found out you just work for the peace corps, Because all their childhood experience about their elementary music experience comes back. And I can't explain to them in a five, in an elevator speech until I get people to come in and visit me. I've got friends of mine who are accountants, who are investment bankers who come in and watch me teach, and it's just, blown away, because it's not their elementary experience.

**What are the successes you have had as an elementary general music teacher?**

Recently, within the last five years, actually eight years, the watershed moment when I realized that, in sixth grade we teach chord progressions, and how I've always wanted to make that next step to teach three part singing, not just three part playing or three part analyzing. Getting in to sing in three different parts. Now what I used to do to do that, is in their major performance called Winter Sing, would be like, three classes in each track. Oh there are three classes, Oh this will be perfect. I'll teach three part chord progressions, chord inversions will be easy because one part will only have to sing like two notes, and we can still do three part singing. I'll take the weakest class and teach them that part, and I'll teach the other two classes the other two parts. And it always failed, because they would get together, we'd have two hour and a half rehearsals to prepare for this performance, which should be plenty. They couldn't hold the pitches because they hadn't experienced it until those two hour and a half rehearsals. You know what, I have to teach them the three parts within the general music classroom, and making that realization and then really trying it, and where it starts out being really encouraging, and just really staying relaxed. They're more like middle school students in sixth grade. When I did that finally and then taking them for a walk down the hallway and taking them into a stairwell where it's really echoey and putting one part on each level and hearing them hear that was a great epiphany and a great success. Um, right after that happened, being in Shorewood, we're part of the ACE program, and I remember Marvin Hamlisch was named the principle pops conductor, and they were giving a gala dinner the night before his first concert, where big donors were allowed to go to a small dinner party for him at the Milwaukee athletic club, and all the money from that dinner was going to go for the education department. So they called me up out of the blue and said hey, most of the money is going to be going toward education, and be for the ACE program, we thought it would be really cool if you had a group of kids that could do some kind of performance for Marvin Hamlisch. But it just so happened that I had a great group of sixth graders that
were singing in three parts. I had two kids who were brilliant violinists, uh and, it was a week after the winter sing performance. So I had an arrangement of "You Raise Me Up" that Josh Groban had done at American Idol the year before. I wrote the violin parts out for the two violinists, and they performed for Marvin Hamlisch, got a standing ovation, and all the kids got to meet him the next night. They got to meet him backstage. The following year we did a similar thing for Edo de Waart at his first concert, you know, so those are...here's what's cool. The second one for Edo de Waart, we're sitting out there, there's parents helping me get the kids ready, and they're going to sing one number. One song. And it was at the Wyndham hotel, this grand ballroom, and the kids were looking, before the rehearsal. Looking in, and there was a chocolate fountain. One of these inner-city kids was, "That's a chocolate fountain man!" We were lining up outside preparing to go in, and one of my parent volunteers was sitting at the back of the line as this kid from the inner-city was sitting in the back. He turned to her and he said to her, because I had chosen ten kids, I chose twenty kids to perform. Ten kids who were exceptionally good musicians, and ten kids who just needed this experience. He was one of the ten that needed that experience. And he turns to this mom and he goes, you know what, I think this is the best night of my life! You know, and there have been a lot of those pinch me moments like that at Atwater because of where I'm teaching. Atwater is a very unique experience for me. I'm very fortunate to be in a school like that. Any of the people that have been to that class, it's a big classroom, it's got a fireplace. It's 50 feet by 35 feet. I've got thirty Orff instruments. I've got, I was the third teacher to have an interactive white board. I've got 5.1 surround in that room. I've got a desktop that has fiber optic connected with that interactive white board so I can haul up my iTunes. I had a wish list for to get a new piano. I was going to get a grand. They couldn't raise the grant money, so a parent grabbed the superintendent and dragged him into my room, and said this, that and that. He had some extra money, the school board bought me a brand new Yamaha upright with a damp chaser and five inch caster wheels and it gets tuned every year. Twice a year. I could go on. I live a very, my mom said to me once, you have led a very charmed life. I could go on and on. And it's funny because you asked why elementary. When I came to Shorewood after ten years, that was twenty years ago, I was thirty years old, and I was sitting at the breakfast where they give silver bowls away to people who had spent 25 years in Shorewood. And at that time I still wasn't convinced I was going to stay in elementary. I had turned to my colleague, the part time elementary teacher that I hired, Theresa, and I said Theresa by some happenstance you and I are still here in twenty-five years, and they give me one of those, shoot me in the head. Because I didn't think I'd still be doing this, but had I not, I wouldn't have experienced these, there's not enough tape, digital memory in this to tell you all the experiences I've had.

**What are the biggest challenges you face teaching elementary music?**

The obvious ones come up cyclically. Financial burdens, and even in Shorewood, they, at one point they were thinking of having me travel to the other elementary school and cutting that position in half, and having music meet for k-3 grade would meet twice a week for a half hour. When I started Scott in 1995, I had an obscene budget, we had the ACE program, and all the ACE fees were paid for by the district budget, including bus fees. Those kids didn't spend a dime. Kids came to music on a six day rotating schedule. They came three times every six for a half hour. So on one week they'd have 90 minutes of music, and the next week it would be an hour every other week. It was obscene. So, a
few years ago, when our enrollment was really going down. We have an administrator, a crazy administrator, who was proposing that we eliminate the old general music position in the other elementary school, we've got two. I would travel to both schools. Kindergarten-3 would have general music twice a week for a half hour, 4-6 would have it once a week for a half hour, and then the second half hour, all the fourth through sixth graders would meet together in one room and we'd call it choir, and I would teach it. So it would be compulsory, and I was trying to argue, you know when you come to my classroom, yeah we do singing, but we play, we move, we listen, we do this, and I said I've had kids who are really good singers, but singing isn't their cup of tea. But they sing and they do it for me because they know they're going to play, they're going to listen, they're going to compose, they're going to do this on computers. But when we make singing compulsory, not a choice, that's all there is, there isn't any other choice, we're going to make it a punishment. Never make it, you can't do that to these kids. I teach the whole child. So those are some of the challenges. The other challenges are, the family unit is becoming more and more diverse and what we define as a family unit. We, I don't apologize, we know that the kids who come from intact families with a mother and a father are always going to be better than those are not. Those who are not are becoming more and more, not only that, they come from much more constrained situations in terms of their home life. Um, I think lately, especially with, the state has a lot of initiatives, and the motives are pure. Common core, RtI, teachscape, slos, pgps, eeg, you know all those things. It's not as bad for me as it is for the regular classroom teachers, but we're under tremendous amount of program fatigue. And as long as I've been here, there's always new programs, but it really, more so than any other time in our lives as teachers, I've a student teacher right now whose required to, she's got to write her lesson plans for me, she's got to do other things, but not only that, she's got another new initiative where not only does she have to have her state standards in all of her lesson plans. We have to video record four segments of the same class, and she has to identify all of the students with special needs and how she's accommodating them, and we have to edit that video, and she's got to do all, and the requirements of all these new teachers, of what you had to go through because you are not on a five year license cycle anymore, you're probably on the professional growth plan. Now when I started, we had lifetime licenses. They didn't have to do anything, which is probably not a healthy thing to do. But we've got the five year license thing, but now the requirements, I don't know, the incentive to be a teacher. Where is it? It's hard for me to get kids excited about music education through just, I just wanted to be a music educator. I have a passion for music, I wanted to share it. But they're making it so hard. It doesn't mean we shouldn't prepare people to student. Another issue, you just mentioned another issue you had to dealt with, undergrad schools, schools at the undergrad level are not preparing our teachers in music education enough. You are not prepared enough. I thought I was prepared well, and I was, and my methods teacher, it was the hardest class. The worst grade I got was my methods class Scott. It was the worst grade I got. It was called materials compilation, and I can get into that later. I had an outstanding teacher, she poured herself into this. And the last day of her class she said something like, so you guys think you're ready for student teaching, we're all like YES! And she just laughed, and she said the best of you, and I wasn't one of the best. The best of you are barely ready for your first day of student teaching, and when you finish your student teaching experience, the best of you are barely ready for your first day of
teaching, and she was right. Because you knew as a teacher, you had to find out who you were. What's your teaching...Scott's teaching personality? And I would venture to guess it would take a minimum of three years, and being in the same place. I went on too long.

**What are the solutions you have found to your challenges?**

As a music educator, you first of all, you have to be the best you can possibly be. One, my successes initially in Oconomowoc were because I had two, three music educators. now it's five, who really poured themselves into me. My first long-term subbing position was for a lady named Mary Peterson. She had been teaching for ten years, she was an Orff specialist. She had her baby, and the day after she had her baby, I was in her classroom. I had two weeks of lesson plans in front of me, and ten years’ worth of materials on the shelves. And a phone. And she would not, she gave and gave. She made sure that her kids were very excited about me being their teacher. She had never seen me teach once. But through the process of interviews, he's going to be fabulous, you're going to love this guy. He's a man, he's different than me. Because he's doing something different than me I want you to just keep that up. So she set the table. Secondly, she and a lady named Connie Holzmiller, who is a Kodaly specialist, poured herself into me. And at the time, there were teachers in the field who were like nope, I'm a success, these are my successes, they're mine, and I'm not sharing them, if you can believe that. And because of that, they gave me a chance to consume and adapt their ideas to my success. When I became successful after ten years of feeling successful, and things were not in a place I wanted them to be, it gave me the wherewithal to look for another position, and have my resume positioned where I could do that. Because education does not afford you as in business you, you are successful, you will get paid more, you receive bonuses, you receive the office down the hall, the corner office. Whereas in education you don't get that. You’re only job is you can't go to an administrator and say I need more money, or I need a better schedule. You need to do that for me. No we don't. So my only recourse is to look for myself. To get myself good enough where I can network myself so I can throw myself into that ring.

**How do you feel gender has impacted your success and challenges?**

As I mentioned before, the uniqueness of being a male teacher, being a good role model. I don't think it was exclusive to the gender. I think it can marginally part of it, but not exclusively part of it.

**How many men are on staff at your school?**

Teaching staff? second grade teacher, fourth grade, uh two fifth grade, two sixth, so we have got seven, one phy ed teacher, several aides, yeah.

**Do you feel included on your staff?**

I've always felt included, and that goes back even when I first started in Oconomowoc. I thought one of the greatest compliments I ever got when I first started in Shorewood was that I was a new teacher to them. They didn't know that I was a veteran teacher. I had to prove myself all over again to the staff and the parents. Another teacher saw me in the hallway and she was going to ask me something that a veteran teacher would know, and I didn't, and she goes oh, you know what, I forgot, this is your first year here. It just seems like you're just such a natural, that you're a veteran teacher, that you've been here all the time. I thought, cool!

**That's great**

**How specifically do you deal with the octave difference when teaching singing?**
Did you ever hear of a guy named John Feierabend? I was at a workshop, and this was after having training under John at Silver Lake college. That's where my master's program is from, and I completely agreed. I instinctively did because I had to save my voice. He insists that male teachers at the elementary level, which he is, think about Henry Leck, although Henry Leck uses falsetto a lot. He insists that you use falsetto as little as possible and never if you can avoid it. If you can. Sing with your students. Uh, here's why. First of all you'll vocally be trashed if you keep using that falsetto, unless you are a counter-tenor. Secondly, if you start in kindergarten, and you have a group of kids and you're trying to get them to match pitch, and find that head voice, using slide whistles, using different siren techniques, using different games. I use a powered helicopter, and the kids, the first child that uses their head voice correctly in tune, they get to push the button on the helicopter. The carrot. Never telling a student that they're not going to sing well, always saying thank you or good job. But when that kid matches pitch, our key word is Bravo! John would send a certificate home. Mom and Dad I sang in tune today for the first time in music class, or something like that. But once you find that Kid, boy or girl, especially boy, boys and girls, Adam would you sing this for me, "Hello Adam" (in falsetto) "Hello Mr. B" That's how you want to sing it. That's how you're going to get to be a helicopter player. That's how you're going to be able to play the instruments. They're not allowed to play the Orff instruments until the majority of the class can match pitch in their head tone. Carrots, carrots, carrots. And because of that, what you do is when you initially give that pitch in your voice, and then they start let's say you're doing an echo song. Oh my aunt came back, (singing) Oh my aunt came back, and when they start, go "Oh my aunt came back" (in falsetto) and then drop out. And until they get secure, stop. They seem to gravitate toward that, so by the time they get to first grade, they're doing it automatically. They're singing in the normal head voice. They make that transition. So much so that if I sing a falsetto to try and get them to match pitch, they sing an octave way too high. Some of them already do that. Feierabend also insists never sing with them. It's such a, we do that sometimes because we're worried. It's a subconscious, almost insecure thing. They'll never develop vocal independence plus here the term he uses. It's not hiccup singing, you know that if I'm singing and you don't know something by rote quite so well, I'm perceiving you singing with me and singing in tune, but you're not. You're singing a millisecond after me. You really don't know and I'm not going to be able to assess whether you know something unless I'm not singing with you. And to have that courage to not play with piano, to let them sing a cappella so we can really gauge that vocal independence. I went to the OAKE conference in Denver, CO and there was a lady doing a session on student teaching. How to handle student teachers. Somebody asked, a man, what do you do about your male teachers who are baritone or tenors. Oh, I insist they use falsetto, and I just bit my tongue. Because if you can get that independence by Kindergarten, get them right away, how much easier is it going to be for you as an educator? Just like when you get these kids to be musically literate and get to put them on multiple part Orff arrangement on the screen, I can tell my fifth graders and sixth graders, I want to hear the alto xylophone line. I want you all to work on it even though you're not playing altos. I'll put a clock up, you've got three minutes to practice that with your hand motion, and they can read it. It's glorious. It's like, oh my gosh. And I tell them in fourth grade, do you know why I'm giving you a test on the letter names on
the staff this year? Because I'm lazy. It's going to give me so much joy to put something up there and say "Go do it, you can go do it". It just makes my job easier, I'm lazy.

**So, you mentioned slide whistles, helicopter, anything else you use?**

I'll take a slide whistle and I'll go OK everybody. Feierabend has a whole series on vocal exploration. Do you know of them? Cowboy Joe. Cowboy Joe was a bold young man who dreamed of rustling cattle most of all. But the real reason he wanted to rustle cattle because of this he wanted to use his cowboy call (higher voice). And everybody goes Yee ha! (High voice). Right there. A man went up in an airplane. Alright! (Head voice) but the plane didn't have an engine Oh No (chest voice). The first day I tell them how to say Alright and Oh no. But the plane didn't have an engine oh no. But the man had a parachute Alright, but the parachute wouldn't open Oh no. But there was a haystack under him alright, but there was a pitchfork in the haystack oh no. But he missed the pitch fork alright, but he missed the haystack too oh no. That's your chest voice, that's your head voice. Vocal exploration. For my master's thesis, I was doing a study of how we can take advantage of a child's normal speaking voice and transfer that into singing. Do we sing first because we first speak, or do we speak because we first sang. I think it's we speak because we first sing. Because infants don't need to have syntax, punctuation, because they (baby sounds) and parents are, the vocalises the parents do "awoo, aboo, oooooo" that's critically important for a child because you're doing vocal implanting. Language is critical too. So I came up with a poem to try to induce the kids to say please and thank you. So I had these pictures. I want to go outside to run and swing and play in the trees. But mom says I can't go outside today until I first say "Please" so they're sustaining this, and then there are all these things where they have to say please. And at the end of the poem is a picture of a mom with her son in bed snuggling with him. I had a wonderful day today and my mother said, that's true, but before you say goodnight, make sure you say...and all of the kids inevitably in either a major second or a minor third go "Thank You". So I recorded forty kindergartners saying thank you, not copying me, just in their natural pitch range, and I did a whole analysis about that pitch. So again, there's a Please in the head voice, having to listen to each other. The lovely princess. There's a picture of a princess and it's got a line in there. I think that's um, she just retired, she had a whole series of instrumental bingo, ahhh, she taught in Brookfield for years. Cheryl Lavender. So there's a line on the top of the page and princess, and every time you see the princess you point to the line and there's two "O's". Once upon a time there was a lovely princess "oo" (head voice) she locked away in a castle at the top of the never ending stairs. One day a handsome prince "Ahh" (chest voice) came riding over the hills, "Oh" (up and down). So vocal exploration. There's a ton of different things you can do.

**So would you recommend elementary music to a new male teacher?**

It depends on the individual. I mean, I've had great joy and great success. I never dreamed I would. If they have. I would only recommend it to someone who, well any music educator, well I think it's mostly at the elementary level. I spent 26 years in the Milwaukee symphony chorus perfecting my craft. And any music educator, I want them to be exceptional musicians, because, I remember once I was teaching a lesson for Connie Holzmiller, and she did not hesitate, she said Will, that was great, but you got to be careful, you were almost a quarter step flat. I was shocked but she was right. I would recommend someone who was completely committed to the most outstanding music making possible. I don't mean idiomatic music making. I'm not talking about, yeah my
kids listen to a lot of classical music because we're part of the ACE program with the Milwaukee symphony, ok. yeah they're going to get a ton of that. No matter what kind of music making you're doing, it's of the highest quality, whether it's a folk song. I hear you're doing something like here comes santa in a red canoe, you know, because you think it's cute, but it's not. It's not an authentic folk song because you invented something you think's going to fit curricular thing, but it's just not good music. So, yeah I would do it, but it depends on who they are. If they're not going to be. And even if they think they're not, because I didn't think I was going to like it. And if someone said well Will you're not going to like it so I'm not going to recommend you do it, then I never would have succeeded. Did I struggle? Yeah I struggled. I had a lot to learn, but after that first two years, I was like you know, I can do this. Tell you what, I’m going to recommend it, I would do it if they had, if I could almost guarantee they'd have someone to stand with them and, again, pour themselves into.

**What advice would you give a male teacher considering elementary music?**

Work hard at preparing your musicianship and your pedagogy so you have You can market yourself to the place you want to teach. Because, I mentored some people who have come to me from let's say MPS, who are acquaintances who went into music education, but there's only so much I can give them. If they're a teacher on a cart, there's only so much I can give you. I can give you some fundamentals, but you're on a cart. If you have a classroom with only one Orff instrument, I can only give you so much. But if you prepare yourself well, and can market yourself as an outstanding music educator, and can get great recommendations, and inject yourself into the community, then you can market yourself, choose and pick, pick and choose where you're going to go. Because that's what happened to me after ten years in Oconomowoc. I was in a place in Oconomowoc. It was a great experience, but I wanted something else. By the grace of God I had the wherewithal and the tools to market myself to be competitive for a very coveted music position in Shorewood. When I called the mentor that I got my first long term subbing job from, I told her about this position. She said I am green with envy. She said, if I wasn't living out here, I would kill for that position. There's no free lunch, you're getting your master’s degree. You're working hard for that. This isn't an online two year program where you're going to hit print and you’re going to get a certificate. You're working hard for this. I'm assuming your teaching has benefited, not just because of the instruction you are getting, but the people you're meeting. It's who you know. It's like oh my God, that's such a great idea. My wife is an elementary music teacher. Do you know of someone that you can trade ideas with? And then taking that all the great ideas are stolen and then they're adapted to who you are. Your situation. Oh I can use that with my smart board. I don't have a smart board, but I can do it this way. I don't have Orff instruments, I teach ukulele, I'm going to do this.

**Would you give the same advice regardless of gender?**

Yes, absolutely.

**Is there anything else you would like other male music educators to know?**

I think it's hard if you didn't get a great experience at your undergrad level, you will, it would behoove you to go to workshops. Don't even have to enter a master’s program, but take courses at the masters level. Meet other colleagues because I really do fear about the next generation. I was given so much on a platter that you're not getting. And I'm, it really concerns me. Just think about the Milwaukee symphony, this is a symphonic, this
form of music I have a deep passion for and I'm concerned about, I'm making kids music literate not because they'll become music educators or performers. Thank goodness some of them do, some of them have. But they'll also become music appreciators too. That was Kodaly, Kodaly was like that. They would go and buy those tickets and give money to UPAF and go see the Milwaukee symphony. The Milwaukee symphony almost went under this past year. We don't have a classic music radio station anymore, and I want more quality music educators to be in the field. Because it is our last hope, our last bastion. Especially what we do, because yeah instrumental music is ok, but it doesn't teach the whole child. Don't play this back for anybody, but being involved in the ACE program, when I got to Shorewood, I was thinking Oh this is so cool, I get to work with Milwaukee symphony musicians in the ACE program. These really talented and creative people. Now they were talented, but they weren't creative and they weren't teachers because every day their life is sit down somebody puts a piece of music that they didn't choose and they have to play it perfectly, or if not perfectly the first time, by the second or third time it better be perfect or someone is going to get their job. They don't have a say, the person twitching up there gets to say how to do it. And that doesn't lend itself to creativity. Sitting and doing this is not necessarily the whole music education, we as elementary music teachers, ok here it comes, we get to, here comes your state standards. Ok? Sing, play, listen, improvise, create, compose, move, read, write, think musically. So if you're having a concept, syncopated rhythms. I'm going to teach kids to listen, think, improvise, identify, compose, read, write, play. That one concept. Piano, I'm just playing it. It's very kinesthetic, if you believe in Gardner's intelligences, and there's a lot of people, whether you do or you don't. You're only activating three of the intelligences by doing that. You get a kid, ok before we go and play an Orff arrangement, they have the solfege. La so fa mi re re mi la so fa mi re mi la so fa mi re re mi la do re re. We talk about the Dorian scale, a kind of medieval sound. So why would I make you solfege it before you go play it. They know, because I know it in here (ear) so when I'm going here (hands) I know what it should be. You know. That's where we have an advantage over a strictly a choir teacher or an instrumental teacher. You have to teach the whole child. Differentiated instruction. We've been doing that for a long time. I could go on for hours and hours and hours.
If you could tell me who you are and how long you've been teaching?

Ok, so I'm Brandon Johnson, obviously. I've been teaching for, it's hard to say. I graduated in '09, I did, I started student teaching in the fall. I started, I did a long term subbing position in Elm brook at Swanson Elementary in the spring semester. And then I taught part time between two elementary schools doing general music, and elementary choir in the same district for a year, and then I, there was no retirements, and then another part time position, so I moved to Glendale, or I taught in Glendale at Parkway Elementary. I was a K-3 general music, and that was another half-time contract position. From there I went to Wauwatosa. I taught middle school general and elementary general. It was world music class at sixth grade for a year, and a full time position did open up in Tosa, but I was offered the position here in the meantime. The Wauwatosa was a travelling, and this was just this building. So I accepted the job here and I've been here, this is my second consecutive year here, and my second consecutive year at any school, so yeah, I'm excited.

Have you always taught at the elementary level, or have you taught other levels?

The only other levels were I student taught in band at the high school and middle school, and I did one middle school general music class, but other than that, no.

When applying, was elementary your first choice, or did you see yourself at different levels?

Elementary was actually, was definitely my first choice. When I student taught, I kind of went into it thinking I was going to be a band teacher that was where a lot of my background was. But, I student taught with Dr. Loren at Marcy Elementary school. I was kind of blown away of all the possibilities of what could be done, and the variety involved. It was lot different than the cutesy rainbows, kittens, you know like that very, I don't know, that kind of mentality that I think I sort of had going into it. I didn't have a great elementary music experience myself growing up. It was more like name that tune, who's your favorite artist, that kind of thing. So my experience was impacted by that, so when I started looking for jobs, I really focused in on elementary general music. And this year actually, I'll be doing a little bit of band instruction at the 7 and 8th grade school as well, which will be good.

What has impacted your decision to be a music teacher?

I think that for me, the elementary general music classroom is a lot about, that kind of creative, divergent thinking aspect of the way that students approach problem solving. I think that through music they learn that there's not one right answer or one right solution. They learn how to go from a starting point and divergently just see what they can create. That's something that's been very, I guess inspiring for me as a teacher, and finding more ways to get to that kind of learning in the classroom has motivated me to want to continue to do it. To continue to train and learn how to do it better in different ways. I think that has been the most motivating thing for me, and the experiences in the classroom, have been, CAN be very rewarding as well. Even if the pay isn't, but I really enjoy doing it. I like working with the age group. They're very much risk takers. They say what they think. They're very blunt. Sometimes overly blunt, but I think that is a very refreshing thing for me, who, I tend to see. I tend to be very much thoughtful of what people think about what I'm doing, and that kind of impacts the choices I make. Whereas,
they a lot of times will just go for it, and I think that's something I enjoy about teaching, especially the younger students.

**What led you to teach at the elementary level? Was it by choice or were you assigned?**

I'd say the developmental level of the kids, their attitude towards learning. But also, one thing about the elementary level that I enjoy is that you don't just get the students who are choosing music. You get a really broad spectrum of student, and even if they don't end up as professional musicians. Even if they don't go that route, I think that there are a lot of positive...they can be very positively impacted by music. Whether that's just the development of that kind of creative divergent thinking, which applies not just to music, but to anything. I like that you don't just get the music kids, you get a whole variety.

**My research focus is specifically how being a male influences teaching at this level. Do you feel that being a male has a positive impact on your teaching? If so, what are they?**

That's a tough question. I think that there are possibly some advantages, I think that with young boys, for instance, being a guy sometimes gives me an advantage. Because if I'm doing it, they may feel that they won't be criticized by other kids for joining in, because I'm a guy. And so I think that I have that sort of relationship with them that a female teacher wouldn't. It wouldn't be something necessarily 'girly' to do, to sing, or whatever. So I think that has helped. I notice that in a further question you ask about vocal range, that's something that's a disadvantage as a male music teacher. Just figuring out how to get the kids used to singing in their register rather than mine. That might be I guess a little bit of both. Other than that, I mean I'm pretty tall, I mean that sometimes that can be, you know, a commanding aspect in the classroom. But if there are other ways, I don't know that I've necessarily have seen them as advantages.

**What are the successes you have had as an elementary general music teacher?**

I would say, I guess more recently, last year there were a couple of new things that I did, that I tried, that I felt were very successful, or very well received. I did some, like on the recorder, they did some composition with that, and then there were a few other composition activities that I did throughout the year that I wasn't really sure. I hadn't done them before, I wasn't sure how they were going to turn out, but the kids kind of ran with it and ended up surprising me with what they did. So that was cool. Also, last year being the first year here. I had changed up the way concerts are done at the school. Which at first I got a lot of emails about why are you doing this, and not a good start, but I got a lot of very positive feedback from the community after the concerts. I felt like I had done a good job, and I was being accepted, and they kind of understood what I was adding rather than what I was taking away perhaps. So I thought that was a success and that gave me confidence then to do more of my own thing I guess.

**So how did you adjust your concerts?**

The previous teacher, and some of the schools in this district do a kindergarten through fifth grade concert all at once, and so each grade will perform, let's say, four songs and that's all part of the same concert, and there might be a unifying theme. Usually they're holiday concerts, which was what the one here was. I was very intimidated by managing six grades all at the same time and things like that. So, I decided to pair grades up, so I did a K/1 concert, a 2/3 concert, and a 4/5 concert, which allowed me to better manage the students, even though it's still 200 kids performing at one time, it's still all the kids are
performing in every song. They're never just watching or observing, and so that allowed me a lot more control of what was going on. Everyone was pretty engaged, and then each concert had its own narrative or theme. The kids did some acting in between. I actually videotaped and played kind of like a movie on the screen, and we did some, I think kids also at different age levels had choices to do dancing with that acting, instruments, whereas before, it was just fifth graders who would get to do that kind of thing. So I think that was one difference that people appreciated. Also, they were, the concert wasn't you know two hours long, and you might have to wait an hour and a half to see your kid do the songs. I think overall they were all really well received. There's more content that they specifically are in charge of doing, and it doesn't always have to be holiday. It could be a lot more variety, which is more interesting to me.

**What are the biggest challenges you face teaching elementary music?**

I think elementary students are very high energy, obviously, and so one of the challenges for me is I'm very laid back naturally, and so something that I had to adjust right away when I started student teaching even was just being the leader of the group. That was something that I wasn't used to, and so I think that's challenging because that's not my natural mindset. I found that I've been able to affect that more and more consistently, and it's become more natural over time. I mean, it's draining, it takes a lot of energy, it takes a lot of organization to always be ready and know what's coming next, and knowing how you're going to transition there, and what to do if kids blurt out things or try to disrupt. So there's just a lot going on that you have to kind of make flow. So that's definitely something that's challenging. Not that there aren't obviously behavior issues at upper elementary, but those students are able to control themselves better, so there are different, just a different way of managing the classroom. So I think that can be a challenge, the schedule is pretty grueling, there's really not breaks during the day. It's pretty much go, go, go, and it's all different grade levels, you know, you're always doing different things with different instruments, so mentally staying on task and knowing what's coming next. As one class is leaving and the next one is coming in the door, it's like, ok, switch gears and you've gotta start right away or they're gonna start themselves, which usually isn't good. So I think those two are probably the biggest challenges for me.

**How many classes do you have?**

This year it's different because the fifth grade's left. So this year I have 22. So 22 sections twice a week. And then in the mornings I'll be going to the middle school to teach band. So less sections here, but more added on there. Which I've done travelling before, but it'll be interesting to see how it works this year.

**What solutions have you found to your challenges?**

Being organized is definitely one of them. I'm not necessarily an anally organized person, but I've had to really work at that. When I talked about being in control. Knowing what's coming next, how you're going to do it. Having things in the room as organized as possible. It's just something I've had to force myself to do to help with that. I just have to make myself be energetic. It's not always a spastic crazy, ahhhhhh, energy but just being focused and in control even when I feel like just kind of lying back, which would be my natural kind of mode of doing things, but doesn't work at all with any of the grades really.

**Do you feel gender has impacted your success or challenges?**

You know I don't know. I think that I, being a guy, have a different demeanor than maybe a woman teacher. And even that is not going to be across the board. I mean, I guess you
might think of a female teacher having a kind of motherly demeanor, not that all of them would, but that kind of caring aspect. And I think that it just comes off differently with me, and so, there are probably different ways I interact with the students. I think that part of being successful in that is just being who I am, rather than trying to be like so-and-so other teacher, because I think that students would kind of tell that that was not who I am. And probably would not respect that.

**How many men are on your staff?**
We have principal, phy ed, and one third grade, so four including me.

**Do you feel included on your staff?**
I feel included. I think that this building the other teachers, it's a very cool building to be a part of. And even though I am, even though they're all women, I'm not necessarily going to go hang out after work, at least here I've felt very included, they're always asking what do I need, How am I doing? Especially being new at the school, so I think that I feel included. I guess to give the short answer.

**How do you specifically deal with the octave difference when teaching singing?**
Well my falsetto voice is terrible, so I don't, unless everything else fails, I don't do it. I have a band background, and not a vocal background, and so that's maybe part of that, but I'd say the two main things I do are piano at least when we are learning a song or a melody. I usually at first will double it on the piano in their octave while I'm singing in mine. And then once they have it, I can take that away and they're fine. I think that the other thing that helps is the timbre of my voice. When I'm singing, is not, I guess I would say is a little more warm, not like that deep kind of bass kind of baritone voice, so I think that helps as well. Even though I'm singing in a different octave, it's the quality matches more with theirs, and sometimes with kindergarten I'll sort of affect that even a little more I want to say kiddish voice, to sort of bridge that gap a little more. I think those are the two main ways. Like I said, sometimes I still hear them not matching, and so I will, I may point out, well this is what I'm singing, and this is what you're singing. I might do it in a falsetto with them. Usually they giggle cuz it sounds silly. I might use, you know, a bell set, or a xylophone or something when I'm doing it. And usually I find that over time, they stop getting goofed up with it. Occasionally I'll have to go back and work on that, but I'm hoping that this year will be easier than the beginning of last year making that adjustment because they had a female music teacher before.

**So mainly piano, bells, or whatever?**
Yeah, any instrument that is going to be in their range that I can use.

**Would you recommend elementary music to a new male teacher? Why or why not?**
I would, I mean there are other things that I question that I, just the state of education in general. I mean is kind of a challenging thing. You have to know what you're getting into, but something I think that is misunderstood about elementary general music is it's seen as this very, you know like we just sing songs and kind of pass the time for the teachers to get a prep. And you know, when I tell people that I'm a general music teacher, some of them are like "Really?". Kind of like why, you know what I mean? I don't think that they understand that there are so many teaching opportunities that we get to do that you can't take time to do in a performing ensemble where a lot of it has to be skill and drill, and let's make sure we learn the songs. We have a concert, and I think that in a band setting one of the reasons I didn't want to do that is it's every day, or kind of pounding out these songs, and I loved being in band, but I think that there's so much more constant repetition
at those secondary levels that at the elementary level I get to create a lot of the curriculum myself. Last year we took time to make Native American flute melodies or do African drumming. There's just so much variety that's something I really enjoy, and I can tailor it to sort of what I want to with the kids. And even when I'm singing a kids' song, I get to choose how I accompany that song, or I get to choose which ones I do. So even though their kids' songs, I can still make it musical. And I think also the context when you're singing those songs. You know, if I was going to sing them with a bunch of people my age, it'd be totally different, than you know when you're singing a song with a group of kindergartners. It doesn't seem weird anymore because it's at their level, and you don't feel like you're doing something weird, it's just. So I would say that it kind of can be misunderstood, but it's something that I find, even musically rewarding at times too.

**What advice would you give a male teacher considering elementary music?**

Um, well one of the things that was really important for me when I started as a student teacher, was I had to do what I was able to, rather than what I was most comfortable with. So, that can look a lot of different ways, but sometimes we'll move or dance to music. That's not necessarily that I, something that me personally am really comfortable with, but it's something I can do, and it engages the kids and it makes their experience much better, and your's as a teacher or telling a story instead of just saying it in kind of a boring way. But getting into the character. Doing things that I am able to do, but I would have never done in any other setting. So I think if you are going to be a male general music teacher, you kind of have to get over that macho stigma, and I have found that when I do that, the kids enjoy it. It's not something that they think is weird or stupid, or whatever. And I think that I've probably matured a lot just being comfortable with doing that kind of stuff rather than being nervous about it. That was something I found really important to be successful. That would be something I would likely encourage a new music teacher with.

**Would you give the same advice regardless of gender?**

Maybe, I mean, I think that a female in the same role would have the same inhibitions about dancing, about acting, about things that even today as a music, I sometimes think of as female things. Things that you know guys are encouraged to play sports, and do all that guy stuff, but that's not necessarily true, it's just something that culturally sometimes we tend to get ourselves to believe. But it can be really fun to do it with the kids, first of all. But I don't know. I wouldn't necessarily expect that a female teacher would have that same personal fear of doing that kind of stuff with kids as maybe a guy would, but that is perhaps overgeneralizing. But I don't know.

**Is there anything else you would like other male music educators to know?**

That's a tough question. I don't know. I don't know if this would be helpful or not, but something I've been thinking about as I've gotten my own school now is tailoring what I do around my own strengths and personality. And it may not look like another teacher's, depending on the music choice, activity choice, and unit choice. But, doing things that get me excited that I'm interested in doing. I don't know, that would be pretty general music educator advice. But some of those choices would be different than maybe a female music teacher would. But, just so that, when I'm interested in what I'm doing than I do a much better job with it. That's something I've found, even when it takes extra work to figure out how you're going to do it, I often teach those much better than I would something that just someone else does.
Any other wisdom regardless of gender?
I don't know, something that was impact-full for me was thinking about why I do what I do? And, that's not a very deep answer. I guess going back to the beginning of what we were talking about, about that divergent and creative aspect of making music that impacts the way the kids think and sometimes it can be very easy in the middle and end of the year when things are crazy, to just try and find as much filler and you know to just kind of survive. And sometimes you just have to do that because things are really crazy, and schools don't necessarily tailor their schedules to their music teacher. You kind of deal with what is going on other places, but taking the time, even when it's extra time, to do really high quality things, and to try new things.
Thomas Kastner

October 23, 2014

Please tell me who you are and how long you have been a music teacher?

My name is Thomas Kastner, I have taught for a total of 26 years in the West Allis school district. A couple of years before that in the schools of the archdiocese of Milwaukee, and did freelance music work including working with kids and adult choirs before that and during that whole time as well.

Have you always taught at the elementary level, or have you taught other levels?

Before I taught in West Allis, I taught two years of elementary and two years of high school for the archdiocese for different schools. When I taught in West Allis, it was twenty one years of elementary, and the last five years mostly high school, with a stint in intermediate school and one year stint sharing with an elementary school, but the last three years were both high schools.

When applying for jobs, was elementary music your first choice, or did you see yourself at a different level?

I originally saw myself doing high school. I think elementary became more interesting to me the more I worked with kids choirs, and at the point which I was hired by west Allis, I was looking for simply a position of some sort within a program whether it was high school or elementary because we were expecting our first child that coming fall, so anything full time teaching was a plus at that point.

What impacted your decision to be a music teacher?

It goes back somewhere in the late middle school early high school days. Um, when I, not only enjoyed what I was doing but it was something that I thought I could be good at and wanted to do in the future, which was to work with choirs mostly, but that's where it started.

What led you to teach at the elementary level? Was it by choice or were you assigned?

It was an assignment when I first started. I don't recall when we interviewed like 26 years ago. I want to say we went through a process with personnel or human resources and the music coordinator who was Ken McMonagle at that time, but I think it was more with the idea that a general or high school position would be open, and it wasn't specifically for a school or a job. The assignment came shortly thereafter.

My research focus is specifically how being a male influences teaching at this level.

Do you feel that being a male has a positive impact on your teaching? If so, what are they?

I guess the answer would be yes. The first building I taught at in West Allis was Lincoln, and I was there 15 or 16 years. That building in particular was at the time I was there the most transient building in terms of students going k-6, moving in and out so much over the course of their time in those grade levels. And most of the rest of the staff was female. We actually had the only all-male music staff in the entire district for quite a while. I think it made a difference for the kids because they didn't really have a lot of father figures, and they didn't have that many of them at the building. It was basically phy ed, music, and the principal at that time. So for a lot of the kids, I think we kind of gave the sense of that other half of the parent set that maybe was missing in their lives. In terms of other things with the kids, I don't think, I think the influence was pretty strong. I never felt uncomfortable being a man in what was kind of perceived as a more female based profession, but I got a lot of good feedback from the kids over the years, so I'm assuming
the parenting aspect of it or the "Father figure" however was probably the most for the kids.

**What are the successes you have had as an elementary general music teacher?**

Getting the kids interested in singing without forcing them to sing. Certainly putting together numbers and getting kids interested in being in choir, things like that, which we were pretty good at. Being able to put on good concerts for the parents. As much as it was important for the kids to learn things, it wouldn't have worked if it hadn't been a good set of performances that parents not only enjoyed, but was presumably a step up or beyond what they had experienced before in the previous settings. And I am always happy to hear from kids that come back now and tell me now how much fun they had or how much they remember doing certain things that we did in class, or now they like to go out and perform and it's partly due to the fact that we made them comfortable as performers back then. I've got kids that are doing things in theater and even opera and things along the way. Some of them have come through and said that getting that start was a great thing for them.

**What are the biggest challenges you face teaching elementary music?**

I hated writing lesson plans, but who doesn't right? I think a lot of it was getting started that first year. I had to familiarize myself with the sets of materials that were available in the building and really come up with effective lesson plans and knowing where the kids had been. The person that was there before me, not a knock on him, but was mostly an instrumentalist who was finishing off his career by teaching elementary music. So it wasn't his strength, I think he just kind of did what he had to do to get by and so I was trying to figure out to not just get by but get the kid's skill levels brought up and try to fill in gaps of what they were missing. Um, the more fun things we did those first two or three years the more I realize what things worked well with the kids and what they liked. What I liked, what I felt got something from them. It was trying to come up with ideas to teach them things that maybe they hadn't encountered before, or have them be interested in something they weren't exposed to before. I mean, we know that for most of the kids we've encountered over the years classical music was not a big part of their lives outside of what they got in class and taking them away from the fact that the only good music they will hear is the music they heard on the radio, and introducing them to the fact that there are other things to listen to and other styles.

**What solutions have you found to your challenges?**

Some of it was just finding ways to approach them by saying you wouldn't have, what you like to listen to now without this that came before and working our way back. Eventually getting to the point, especially with the older elementary kids, you realize that it was important to have certain historical things to happen within the music timeline to get to where we are now. Or perhaps it's these classical melodies sound familiar to you. Why do they? Because maybe people borrowed from them and used them in their own music or used them in commercials or, it's just things you've heard before. For a lot of the kids, going back ten or twenty years in the music timeline even, for them was an oldie of course, and they didn't realize where it had come from, and that this is the piece they love listening to but here's how it fit into the timeline for them. I think that, I'm trying to remember some specific examples but I know that especially when we got our share the music texts, finding that sixth grade unit on the decades of the twentieth century gave us the opportunity to go back with the upper kids and look at where we had been and where
things came from in terms of popular music and how it evolved. Where rock n roll came from because for these kids that's the basis of most everything they've listened to whether it's rock, rap or country or anything, it all evolved and some were kind of split apart around about the fifties and sixties. For them to know that and to realize that, oh I like this piece, well now I know where it came from. If you didn't have it, you wouldn't have gotten to what you like now. We also gave them a chance to open up and hear their own pieces and share with each other with the idea that you might like this and someone else might not, but you've all got different tastes.

**Do you feel your gender has impacted any of your successes or challenges?**

Maybe yes, maybe no, I supposed the fact that I'm a six foot six inch male may have had some influence on some of the kids because oh my God don't screw up. Even though once they got to know me, I'm not a tough guy by any stretch of the imagination. Um, but I think that sometimes it's helped because the boys didn't feel like it was such a strange thing to want to sing or to want to play an instrument or to just want to do things musical. I don't know that I've ever had anybody say to me it mattered whether I was male or female. I don't know that that's ever been something, or trying to give examples of the kids coming back and saying you now thanks for that, but I do know that I do hear from boys that maybe at their time were some of our rougher customers or not doing so well, but the only thing I've ever heard from them isn't so much that I was a male teacher, but just that we all showed how we cared about them and it helped them to keep persevering and eventually they found themselves and made themselves into better people. I'm thinking of some kids I know that even had police records back when they were in elementary school, and yet are now being very successful in life because, it took them a while but they figured it all out. And just being there to support them whether we were male or female I'm not, I don't know if it made a difference or not. Not sure about that.

**How many men are on staff at your school?**

At Lincoln it was usually for my first half of my time there it was the principal, custodian, phy ed teacher, obviously I was, maybe one or two K-6 staff were. Once in a while we'd get a student teacher that was. For a good deal of my time the band and orchestra teachers that came in were also male. Not the entire time. At the other buildings, similar numbers although we encountered more female principals as time went along. Usually it was the phy ed and the music person were male. I don't think any of the art teachers were, and then maybe one or two classroom depending on the building, but generally it was probably no more than 15%, maybe closer to 10% of the staff. Usually.

**Do you feel included in your staff, or are you more of an outsider?**

Oh yeah, we did party stuff together. It got to be more difficult, and you know how this works, when you get into being a travelling person you don't necessarily get to be involved in everything, but that's not the fault of that staff, it's just your timeline. But I found that I was pretty, I thought pretty well included in basically everything that happened at the buildings. I never felt that I was left out.

**How do you specifically deal with the octave difference when teaching singing?**

In the times when I felt that the voice was a little more comfortable I would sometimes sing in the upper octave with the kids. I had done it for a number of years with the kids groups and started getting my voice built up that way. After I taught for a while and using the voice more and it wasn't always there, sometimes you just had to tell them you know, I'm going to sing it down here. You guys match it up above. I might have played it on the
piano to give them more of a sense of that. We certainly used a lot of the modeling of the recordings on both the LPs with the old set, and the CDs with the newer set. My only concern was I think, probably more with the youngest kids. The kindergarten, first, second grade area where maybe it was more difficult for them to understand the differences conceptually so sometimes I would try to sing as much as I could up high with them at least in the lower parts of those songs and things like that and pitch it so that they could match with me but I'm in the very upper upper part of my range and therefore probably more in the low to mid part of their range. But a lot of times it was just for my comfort sake, I might sing it down low, join me an octave higher. If the boys voices started to shift a little bit, I always told them their welcome to sing it down with me if they needed to. Mostly fifth and sixth graders at that point, and it was interesting because that kept getting younger for a while. The voice changes in some of the kids would come really really early. But some of it was because they really hadn't sung high a lot before that, so it just dropped and stayed there. I don't know that I had any one ultimate solution for it, but I think we made it at least comfortable and I don't remember that there was any difficulty hearing kids in the wrong octave let's say at performances or in most of the general singing we did. If I had detected it, I certainly would have encouraged them to, hey, make the shift. Do my best to sing up high with them to get them out of that. I don't know. I'm doing a little bit of work with the archdiocese right now, and it's mostly fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth grade I'm seeing, and it's interesting that they had a female before me and did more singing with them than I have so far. Part of it is getting to know the kids and whatever, and I don't notice any difficulties in the singing. It's interesting that one of the things she tends to do I've discovered is she tended to encourage a lot of SAB singing, especially the 6,7,8 grade, which is considered their middle school. When they would do things at concerts, most of it was SAB so most of the boys were working on the baritone range already. Whether they had changed or not, it was still functioning more in that lower register so I think she skirted the issue in a different way. Um, because obviously she could sing down low with them, but I've not found anybody that's, I don't see the girls trying to shift down and sing with me obviously because it's a different kind of thing, but I just think it's kind of interesting because there are so many approaches that people use, and I don't know if anyone ever had one magical, unless you're someone that sang as a singer in the boys unchanged range for a long time and have manage to keep it, and can keep it into your adult life. I mean I kept some of it. I know people that kept all of it who when they work with a group of children can sing up there with them and it's a good sound, and it's obviously a better model than an adult male is.

**Most people I've found avoid falsetto**

Because of the strain it puts on their voice, yeah

**Would you recommend elementary music to a new male teacher? Why or why not?**

Oh yeah, especially if they like working with younger children. I think the hard thing about elementary teaching in general is that it has been, and in no way do I mean this as a condemnation, my disclaimer to UWM. It is not a, I see elementary teaching in general as a very female dominated profession right now, and I think there need to be more male role models and more male examples in that level for the kids. So no, I wouldn't discourage anyone from doing it. It's kind of up to where I think you find a comfort level. I found people who kind of took the route I did where you do elementary for a number of years and then you move up to the intermediate/high school level toward the end. And
they like that because of the change and the challenge that's different. In my case I kind of prepared for high school type of stuff early on, so it helped me anyway to at least be more ready. There are other people I know who after a number of years of teaching high school or high school/middle school combinations as they get older don't want the high energy involvement level, and they shift back to elementary to finish their careers and they love it. I can think of two or three people in particular who either were forced to or just chose to do it because they just didn't have the physical stamina to go through the high school day anymore, and they just said they loved doing elementary. They wished they had done more of it, so I think there's a lot to recommend it. And these were gentlemen by the way, so that kind of feeling that um, and they were all great musicians too who were fully capable of doing whatever they set their minds to doing.

What advice would you give a male teacher considering elementary music?
Outside of don't do it, I said that. I mean only because teaching is such a rough profession to get into these days in terms of what's available. Um, stick to it and know that there's no one right way to do it. Whether it's music or anything else. I think the danger is to watch all the people that make the presentations and give you the ideas and whatever and try to do exactly what they do because you can't be them. I remember always going to the music workshops and conventions and seeing what somebody did and thinking oh that's neat and this is neat and this is neat, and realizing that I can't make it work the same way because I don't work the way they do, and I'm not usually the same type of personality maybe that they are, or whatever, it doesn't work as well for me. And I had to find what kind of worked for me, and it might take a few, 2, 3, 4 years to do it. But kind of find out where your comfort level is, what works for you and go with that. More than you got to do it this way, you know, this is the ONLY way.

Would you give the same advice regardless of gender?
Yeah, absolutely.

Is there anything else you would like other male music educators to know?
Having grown up as a pianist, learning piano from a young age, whether it is piano or guitar, something that you feel comfortable on, make sure you have an instrument. It's not just your voice. For my case just being able take piano and use it for accompanying the groups. Helping the kids learn music parts, whatever, has been a real godsend because then you don't always have to worry about modeling the same way. You've already got the, especially the higher pitched things you can play as well. So you are supporting the kids that way. Something you can use as a background, and it probably doesn't hurt to have a little practice on recorder. For the years when that comes up. I also found, it took me a while to figure this out and to realize it, whenever you model something for the kids, not just vocally but also physically, don't be afraid to use mirror imagery. You know what I'm talking about. If the kids are supposed to use their right hand, make sure to use your left. The hardest thing for me took me a little while to get used to, is to start learning to play the recorder backwards. So that when I wanted the kids to use their left hand, I would be using my right so that I said that this is going to look like a mirror to you. And when they would tell me Mr. Kastner the wrong hand is on the top of your recorder, yes because I'm being your mirror. It sounds goofy but it takes a little practice to get used to. It does make a difference for the kids who perpetually want to put their right hand on top to see the mirror and look up and realize it's, their backward. Like I said, sounds silly but does help. But yeah, do it whatever, do it your way and you'll find something that works.
Matthew Long  
August 19, 2014

Tell me who you are and how long you have taught?
I’m Matthew Long and I believe 18 years.

How long have you been in your current position?
Six years, this will be my seventh year.

Have you always taught at the elementary level, or have you taught other levels?
I’ve always taught at elementary, but I’ve also taught at other levels as well at the same time. I’ve taught middle school and high school.

So you travelled between the two?
Right, well some of my positions were K-12.

Have you been in this district for your entire career?
I’ve been in other districts.

When applying for jobs, was elementary music your first choice, or did you see yourself at a different level?
I initially, when I graduated college saw myself at the high school level. Then I was like, man, I love Junior high, and then I was like, you know I love elementary. So, I just started at the top and then moved my way down. This is how it happened.

What impacted your decision to be a music teacher?
Well I had some awesome musical experiences as a child with some excellent, excellent teachers. Um, you know, it’s something I’ve always wanted to do I mean ever since I was young. That’s what I wanted to do. It’s what I enjoy the most. It’s what I’m the best at, and so for me it was a no brainer.

What’s your primary instrument?
Voice and piano.

What led you to teach at elementary, were you assigned or was it by choice?
No, I mean you know, teaching K-12 I just, I really fell in love with this age group, and realizing that this is where, this is the important, you know, age, you know, if these kids aren’t turned on to music now, then when they’re competing in middle school and high school with all these other things and all these other factors, you know, it makes it much more difficult. So I really felt, you know, I am very passionate about music and music education and I want to make sure that these kids have a solid foundation and a positive elementary experience. You know, to build from.

What are your successes and highlights as a music teacher?
Taking my mallet club down to a Milwaukee bucks game, and having them perform there. That was pretty cool, and it was a neat experience for them. That was a huge accomplishment. Starting my drum club, honors choir, mallet club. Just all these extra things, and seeing the growth, the six years of maturation and musical growth I think it is so rewarding.

What are some of the challenges you’ve had as a music teacher?
The schedule, the back to back at certain sites can be grueling, and it’s the instrumental set up, so the scheduling. I’ve been very fortunate at this site that we have a really nice rotating schedule; with two back-to-backs and then a little break. So it works really, really well to swap out those instruments, so that’s the biggest thing. You know, time management is key. To get it all in, you know, it’s like multiple things happening at the same time, and so it’s this activity and this activity, but this activity is focused on this, and this activity is focused on this and this, and so you know, it’s this spiral, you know.
that you keep coming back and revisiting those and building on them. You know, but it's the process that's really important. So that's been the biggest thing. Whereas at the high school and the junior high there a little longer periods, so you have longer blocks. So squeezing everything down into that thirty minute time block and making sure ok ya know that everything is ya know you're able to get everything in there.

So you see them twice a week for thirty minutes?
Twice a week, yeah.

So my research is specifically in how being a male influences teaching at this level. I know we're kind of a rarity at this level. Do you feel being a male has had a positive impact on your teaching?
Absolutely! I mean, elementary in general has very few male role models, which I feel kids need. That's one of the reasons when I came here, one of my big first pushes was to start a dads club, and all of those shelves there (instrument storage) were built by our dads club. Ya know, I said we have to get dads involved. It's not, PTA is all moms, ya know, and let's get these dads. these kids need male role models, and they need to know that their dad is just as involved and just as invested in them as their mom. So I think that, you know, being a male role model is, I think it's huge. I mean, I've seen, as a matter of fact, just this past year I had a kid, you know, I wish you were my dad. It's just like, uh, you know it hits you, but it puts it in perspective, like hmmm, well at least I'm glad I'm here. I can, I've only experience nothing but positive.

Anything else you feel that you bring to this position that is unique because you are male?
Obviously, you know the voice being different, but I've, for me, I've never had an issue with that. I take that back, where I've had an issue is when I stepped into a position that was previously filled by a female. Some of the students will have a hard time adjusting because they're used to that upper range. But I do a lot, I use my recorder a lot, I use the slide whistles, I use bean bags, I use flashlights, I use dog sounds, I use, you name it, to get them up in their head voice, and once they're there, then I'm demonstrating it down low. I certainly don't use my falsetto. I mean, every once in a while, if a kid is struggling, I'll demonstrate up there, but I don't. I know some elementary male teachers that only use their falsetto all day long. My vocal chords could not, would not be able to do that. I feel that kids that kids are very adaptable, and they’re smart. They can figure it out once you teach them and instruct them and break it down for them. They get it.

Building on the falsetto, can you elaborate on some of the techniques you use?
I use a lot of...starting in kindergarten and first grade, it’s getting up to that high light head voice. I'll use anything, we play games, I'll tell a story and I just want them to "alright" and "oh no" (in a high voice). I'll do it in as many different ways and many different, you know, I'll have lessons where their up in their head voice that entire time without even realizing it. They're having fun, it's a game, they're doing this, they're doing that, but I'm assessing are you up there. If they're not, then I'll try something else. Then I'll bring in a puppet, or, you know, kids, they'll sing to a puppet. It's amazing, I mean, I don't even care if they're struggling if it's a silly voice -ahhh it's like, there it is. You know, I can build from that. And it's creating that climate too, that comfort level where, you know, it's, kids are not afraid to take risks. I think that's a key part of it as well. Because singing, it's a very vulnerable, an intimidating thing. We do it constantly, we do it so much that it just becomes, you know, kindergarten and first grade, it just becomes,
this is what we do. Yeah, we are singing by ourselves. Oh, no big deal! It's just part of what we do, but the kids are so used to it because we do so many activities and it's not like the whole class is sitting or staring at them. You know what I mean? We have too many other things to fit in. There are times and places for that, and there are certain things where, ok, I'm teaching audience behavior or focusing on this or that. Every once in a while I'll have a student that will struggle, and not always male. On occasion it's girls too that have a hard time getting up in that head voice. I've noticed since I first started teaching till now, those are the two biggest deficiencies I see coming in are that head voice singing, and steady beat. So I start every lesson with steady beat. Music's playing when the kids are coming in, I meet them right there at the door, the music is already playing cause I like that, it's music, you know it sets the tone. It's always planned out ahead of time, whatever theme or whatever we need or working on. And they know they go to their spot, they show me the beat. We do it in different ways, but that in itself is a huge, I've noticed since I've been doing that a huge improvement. Cuz rhythm's easy, it's something you see, but the beat isn't something that you see, or, you know, or even hear in the music. You just have to be able to feel it. So that's a much harder concept, and if you don't have that, too many I think, music teachers just jump right in to rhythm without laying that foundation, and then when you try to go back and do ensemble stuff, that's when you're like pulling your hair out. Yeah, I mean I do slide whistles, I do stories, I have little doggie books, puppets, you name it. Flashlights, I'll use yo-yos, tennis balls, I'll just draw on the board, I use flash cards. Are you familiar with gameplan?

No
Oh, it's great. I use a lot. Jeff and Randy are big Orff gurus. They wrote the entire Las Vegas curriculum. They have to be certified in all three levels. Their curriculum is amazing because it's just seamless. Kid tested and kid proven, but the results are awesome. I use a lot of their visuals and their stuff. You can get it through West music. I actually purchased it when I was in Arizona. I taught, what, 7 or 8 years, and that's where, they did a lot of Orff workshops there, that's where I got word of that, and I've used it ever since. When I came to this district, that's one of the things I said, we have to get Gameplan. I mean, it's incredible. And so, it really develops the head voice, you know, and it develops good quality, healthy singing with excellent high quality literature. You know that's the thing too, you want to make sure you're using, that's something I just don't do. I don't do pop songs, I don't do, I stick to things that are high quality literature. Things that are going to teach what I need them to teach. And most of that stuff today just doesn't. I mean it's so repetitive, and you know it has very little substance. You know it's for pleasure not for teaching. This is the way I say, my first year when I started here I, the kids came in, and they're like, "Are we going to do pop songs?" I said no, "Well that's what the other teacher did." I said, well am I going to teach your ABCs? No. I said, why not? Well we already know that. Yeah, you already know these pop songs. Why am I going to waste my time and your time teaching you something you already know. You probably have the whole thing memorized already. I said, then what are you going to have for homework? You've got it all done, right?

Sometimes do you use like a xylophone or piano to, while you're singing.
Absolutely! I do it in a variety of different ways and depending on what the goal and the purpose is of that lesson. You know I'll play it, but I do a lot of inner ear training. A lot of training, because if they can't internalize the pitch, then they can't produce it. It has to be
in here (head) before it can be here (mouth). I feel very, very strongly about that. So I'll use a lot of exercises, even in Kindergarten and first grade, that develop that inner hearing, that inner, um, that sense of pitch, you know. There's a lot of them. A LOT of them.

**Can you give me one example?**
You can use a song, a melody for example, and, you know, if it has different phrases, then maybe you take the first phrase away and have them sing that in their brain. But then they have to start on the second phrase, so you teach them the whole song, once they have that finished and accomplished. They have to sing the first phrase in their brain, and then, you know, sing the rest. Then take the first and second phrase and internalize that, and then they sing the rest. And you keep taking you know parts away. And there's movements to reinforce. I use movements to reinforce pitch levels as well. Sometimes I use movement to reinforce the rhythm. Um, You know movement is a really integral part of music. The process, I mean, I think it's very important. I use solfege a lot and I use the hand signals. Um, and so that works well. I use little activities where they're, I'll show them the card, you know, think it, show it, sing it. Or even on their instrument, you know, um, think it, click it, play it. So it's here (head) before they're actually playing. You know, just as an example, and so, it’s all of those little steps that really reinforce, and you can see who has it and who doesn't. It is, you know, you look around, it's just like 'snap' instantly tell who's internalizing and who's isn't. You know, and the kids catch on and they know. If I'm not internalizing I’m gonna be really lost, or I'm not going to be able to win this game. The boys that are competitive, they don't like to lose. oh, I've gotta win this game. You've got to conquer, step up and do your job. And then, and they do. And that's a big part of it as well. so you know all of those little things, um, if I'm doing little flashcards on a three line staff or five line staff, even with pitches, you know, I'll have them just either show it to me, or think it, you know, and then I'll play it, and see if they match. You know, you can do it in so many different varieties. and I try to do as many different varieties to for all those different learning styles and, you know, for one class I may do it differently for another class depending on the needs of the students in there.

**How many men on your staff?**
One kindergarten, no first, no second, no third, two fourth, one fifth, and me, so that's five

**Out of how many on staff?**
19 classes, so like 25% male, maybe a little less.

**Do you feel included in your staff?**
Oh yes, I do

**Do you feel your gender has impacted any of your successes or challenges?**
Does it impact my success?

**Do you feel gender makes you a better teacher, or doesn't it matter?**
I don't think it would matter

**OK**
I think that it does bring a different, I mean I feel like I would be successful either way, but I mean. Um, you know that there are certain students who maybe respond differently, you know, I don't know. That's a hard one.
These are more probing questions of things that I've wondered. I never student taught at elementary, but walked into a kindergarten classroom as my first experience at this level. I'll be honest, the first two weeks of Kindergarten probably isn't my favorite, but then after that, you know, and then it’s just like by the end of that kindergarten year you forget how far they've come when you get that new batch of kindergartners that come in with the big eyes. I mean you still have to love 'em they're so darn cute. Um, and easily distractible and they're crying because they miss mommy, after five minutes they, it's like I'll do whatever, for a few minutes you're just gonna forget about mommy because we have work to do here, but it's going to be fun. 

One of my colleagues wondered how I would teach my students how to sing. Oh, I just use my voice the same way. And so there's a segment of the population that don't understand how men could teach elementary. I know we're a small group of people that love teaching elementary. I feel that I have an advantage. I have a different instrument. It's a different size. I tell my students, boys don't sound like boys, boys don't sound like girls, girls don't sound like boys. You sound like kids, because, boys, girls, and females have the same size instrument which means they're pretty much going to sing in the same range of pitches. Because if I took you're voice box out of you and I'll even have this lesson with some of my upper grades, and I'll take just a minute or two, and what do you think, what are they going to look like. Let's compare and contrast, well these three are the same size, mine's bigger, that's why men have what we call an Adam’s apple. Cuz they're a bigger instrument. It protrudes a little more, right, takes up more space, so that's, and the bigger the instrument, oh, the lower the sound. Oh we learned that in kindergarten, and that's why a cello makes a low sound and a violin makes a high sound. And so, they get it, and they're like, once you explain it to them that boys and girls are supposed to sound exactly the same, I'm supposed to sound different. If I don't, then that means my voice box really hasn't grown, right?

What are the biggest challenges you face teaching elementary music? Oh, they're always challenges, but yes, of course, the more years you teach and the more professional development you attend, and the more national workshops and even state workshops and conventions you go to you pick up more resources and tools to use. So I feel, oh yeah, there's always challenges and there's always more to learn, but I feel like bring it on. I mean, I have a kid that's really struggling with their pitch or with their head voice, I take that as a challenge. This isn't a sing-a-long, this is me teaching you how to sing. This isn't "open your books to this page" which is what it was when I was in elementary school. Now let's sing this song, oh let's turn to this page and sing this song. Now let's do this film strip about this composer. It wasn't exciting, now let's turn on the record player and listen to this.

So how do you feel you have reached beyond that, what are some examples of things that you do to really update the music curriculum to make it more interesting and fun. Well as you can see, I'm very fortunate here to have a SMART board which is huge, I mean, that opens up a ton of possibilities, and the kids love that interaction. Um, I don't have, all of my speakers, I'm supposed to be getting four more in here, everything comes through the ceiling. I don't have speakers in here except for that. so it's played through my iPod, my computer, um everything, every single song in our entire series and
everything is all on here, and gets played through here which is nice. So it's the interactive listening maps, are awesome, whereas before it was the transparencies or the you know, now it's interactive, it's more, I think it's more visually appealing, it's more visually I think more effective because it tracks with the kids. I think, I still, I teach them when they're done with me they can open up a vocal score, and they can, my fifth graders can do three, four part music and they can stay on the correct system and the correct line so when they go to middle school and she gives them that music, you know, they're not reading line by line. It's like, no, you're going to do that. It's something you need to know. Once you explain it to them, they're like, oh, this is cool, or Yeah I kind of know this from church, so it's not that new to them. You just have to take the time and teach them. Once you give them the tools, kids are very smart and kids respond.

**Is your district going to the iPad at all**
No, we've gone to Chromebook and every fifth grader gets a Chromebook and that stays with them all the way up till they graduate. and they were even going to bring it down to fourth grade. The teachers have iPad, I don't yet, but I feel I have so many things too that, with technology if it works for me, that's great, but I don't want it to take real instruments out of the hands of my kids. Just for the sake of technology. I mean this stuff is just invaluable to me, you know what the experience here with these real instruments.

**Do you have a curriculum series?**
We do, we have the share the music that we've used, and I have tons of resources, and we also have gameplan and we have a lot of stuff, and a lot of resources. We don't teach, the way our curriculum is designed it's not textbook driven by any means. It is all skill and knowledge, and it's this spiraling, but it's really getting to those upper levels of learning. We just revamped our entire music curriculum K to 5 and really beefed it up, I mean it's intense, but it's good. By the time the kids are done here, they're, they've got a nice base, a nice foundation.

**Do you follow the state standards, or the new National core arts standards?**
So we are actually standards based here, which means when I am grading them on their progress reports, I'm grading them on each standard. So they don't just get one or two grades. There are no effort/behavior grades, with standard based it's just an expectation. There's not time for you not to do anything but be on task. We had to make it manageable, what we do is the nine national standards, and we assess them on every single one of those at different times throughout the year. Some of them are all four quarters. Some of them we decided, you know what this one is not as huge an emphasis, but we still want to make sure that we're doing that and that we're reporting on to parents, and that parents are seeing here's how your child did on that skill.

We grade by quarter, so on the average, it's about five sometimes six grades per quarter, which is manageable. You know, and I have tons of evidence of all of that in my gradebook. It's a lot of it is observation, I'll use the clickers and it's an interactive little thing. Every once in a while I might do a worksheet if, it just depends on what I'm doing, what I'm trying to accomplish.

**Would you recommend elementary music to a new male teacher, why or why not?**
Um, I wouldn't just base it on gender. I wouldn't ever make a recommendation simply based on gender. They would obviously have to have the skill set and enjoy working with this age level. I mean I think those are huge, obviously a lot of patience. I mean as I just said having this skill set would be key. And being able to demonstrate vocally,
instrumentally, all of those things. Communication, collaboration, everything would have to. I have to look at the big picture. I wouldn't really base it on male or female. For me I really look at that skill set and say would this person be great? That's how I would do it. **What advice would you give a male coming into their first elementary job?**

That probably their biggest challenge would be the vocal range. And my advice would be, don't feel like you have to use your falsetto, there's a lot of ways to teach kids how to get up into their head voice. So I would say, making sure that the focus is on the process and knowing what that process is and breaking it down into the sequential steps. You can say, here's where they are, here's where I need them to go. Here's how I'm going to get them there. I'm going to use this activity, this activity, this activity, this activity. I would say invest in a slide whistle if nothing else, and have the kids echo. I use that in almost every singing lesson as a little warm up and the kids just love it, K-5. It doesn't matter the age, just getting them up into their, so I'll use that as a little warm up. Or I'll use bean bags and we'll follow the bean bags. The only difference is that the slide whistle is an echo, and the bean bag, it happens at the same time.

**Do you sing at the same time when you use the beanbags, or do you stay quiet?**

I'll demonstrate, and then, if I have a student that is struggling, I'll listen for one that is really solid, and I'll use that student as a model. Oh, listen to this student, and I'll use males and females as models. The kids say, oh wow that's really good, and I'll say that's exactly how it should be. You know, kids want to please, so then they know, that's what he's looking for. So it's about being really clear and precise to, and if you're not getting the results you want, just knowing how to change your course a little bit, take a different path to get them there.

**Is there anything else you would like a music educator to know, any final wisdom?**

Never lose the passion. Enjoy what you do, and like I said, focus on the process. I see too many music teachers that get lost or caught up in just teaching the repertoire, just focusing on that without really developing the skill. I would say, if you're enjoying what you're doing and you're passionate, and you're having fun, the kids are going to be passionate, the kids are going to have fun, the kids are going to love it. If you're not loving it, they're not going to like it, and it will be very clear to them. So you have to love it. You have to be passionate about it. And that's not just at this level, I think that's at any level. So I don't see this level as any different, except that you're just dealing with a different level of ability. And every single thing has to be taught. I mean, my last student teacher is high school band in the Falls, and that was his first assignment, and his second assignment this past year was here. He came in, and he was whoa, they don't know anything. Yeah, everything has to be taught, this is where it starts, this is one of the reasons I wanted to do elementary because I want to be a part of that start, and I wanted to make sure that they're being taught properly. That they're getting those steps, those building blocks, that they're getting that foundation. And the nice thing about K-5 is you can make sure there's no gaps in there. These classroom teachers, what did they get last year, and what did they get the year before. They're planning is more horizontal, whereas mine can be more vertical, and I love that. Because, I can then see that vertical growth, and I can move them up this way instead of just this way.

**Bonus question, how do you plan your concert?**

It's all based on my curriculum, it's not a separate thing. What we do on a concert is the same things that I'm grading them on for their progress reports. Everything is just
So when I'm choosing literature, I'm choosing quality literature that can teach the skills and concepts that I need them to know, that I need to assess for their progress reports. I want to make sure that they're developing, they're growing, and the kids see that too and the kids know. And I use a variety of different things. It's not all one genre. There's tons of quality literature. When I'm choosing literature, I do use the CMP model. I feel it's a great checklist, if nothing else, just to keep you in that, you know, is this a high quality piece. Is this worth taking, investing this much time, this much time out of this lesson and this lesson. I don't have a lot of time with these kids. The classroom teachers see them way more. Sixty minutes a week, times how many weeks? That's not a whole lot of time. You have to make an impact. You have to get them engaged. Highly engaged in just that short amount of time. So I would say the CMP model is huge. Every music teacher should use that at any level. It's not just for middle school and high school. I use it at the elementary level. You know, obviously not every single thing, but I pull from that and like I said, I use it as a guide. My concerts aren't something separate. When I have my concerts, during those quarters, that's when I'm assessing, evaluating music or evaluating themselves and others. Then they can go back and evaluate their performance. We do that in class too. It allows them to see what makes a performance great. Why was that so great? And you're getting to that higher level. If they can tell me why it was great, well then they can apply that and make it even better. They can build from that. We know what makes it great, no we know we can accomplish that. We can build from that.

I do two concerts with everyone. A winter and a Spring. That's not an expectation, that's just something I do. The other sites only do one per year per grade. And that's the expectation. I feel two is, it's important to bring the community together. And it's important for kids to show what they've done. I have always done two, but in addition, what I will do too. I don't want parents just to see always the finished product. So maybe we're halfway through working towards a concert, and I'll open up certain lessons. I'll call them visit your child's music day. It's just an informance where they visit their child's music class during our regularly scheduled time, and I line up chairs all around the outside. I have the kids come in and we do a regular music lesson. Working toward that concert, and so then the parents can see here's what we're working on. Here's what we're working towards. I have parents say I like this better than the concert. This gives me more knowledge about what goes on in here. Parents were floored. I had no idea they did all of this and that in just thirty minutes. They were just floored, and so I've done that on occasion. Parents love coming in and visiting. I had a parent say, "I've never had a teacher invite parents in just for a regular lesson like this." They thought it was amazing, and they can see the process, and I would have at the very end, the kids teach what they learned in that lesson to the parents. The parents performed for the class, and the kids thought it was amazing. And if there was a kid who's parents couldn't come, I'd double them up. We made sure that everyone was covered. The kids thought it was the funniest thing too. You want to get to the point where you can step back and let the magic happen. I've done my job, let's see if you can do your's now. Just have these little performances in class. I tell parents this is what we do in here. We're performing all the time in here. Music is happening in here constantly. One of my biggest pet peeves is when a child goes home and tells the parents they didn't do anything in class.

I give little awards too, I sang by myself in music class today. They take that home, and the parents or grandparents ask them to sing for them. The kid's then taking what I taught
them in school and bringing it home. There are lots of ways to bridge that gap. That's one of the reasons too why I love elementary is that you can really develop and foster that, and bridge that gap. This is when they're discovering what their strengths are, what they enjoy. The kids really love it.

Well thank you very much!
Richard Smith
October 6, 2014

Please tell me your name and how long you were a music teacher?
My name's Richard Smith, I was a music teacher for approximately 22 years in Milwaukee public schools, and about 2-3 years in parochial schools, and I substituted here in West Allis.

How long were you in your last position?
22 years

Have you always taught at the elementary level, or have you taught other levels?
No, I've always taught elementary. In parochial school I had 7 and 8th grade, but that was only for 2-3 years, but mostly.

When applying for jobs, was elementary music your first choice, or did you see yourself at a different level?
No, elementary was my first choice. I wanted to get to them right away.

What impacted your decision to become a music teacher?
Well, I've played accordion for my whole life, and I thought that I could pass on some of my satisfaction.

Is that what you wanted to pass on?
No, I wanted to pass on my knowledge that I learned through the accordion, and I like working with children.

What led you to teach at the elementary level? Was it by choice or were you assigned?
Well I, if I was going to teach music, I was going to teach elementary children. Because they were the most influential of all the children to learn and therefore I went to college and took general music and I was even, I even played the clarinet for a while and the trumpet. I decided to go with general music as it's called now. It was vocal at that time.

What was the majority of your accordion students?
My accordion students were younger children, I enjoyed teaching them.

My research focus is specifically how being a male influences teaching at this level. Do you feel that being a male has a positive impact on your teaching? If so, what are they?
Um, yes because in elementary school, most of the teachers were female, and therefore didn't have a male influence on it, and um, I guess that's, can't think of anything else.

What are the successes you have had as an elementary general music teacher?
Well, my successes were getting the children to enjoy music, and to learn about the aspects of music. The composers and the different genres of music. And we had the biannual music festival every two years, and the children were influenced by me to be in that, and we did two part harmony. We did partner songs, that type of thing. Performances were successful, yes, very child centered.

What are the biggest challenges you face teaching elementary music?
Um, the challenges were to teach underprivileged children in Milwaukee Public schools. Um, there were times that the children came in angry and after music classes they were OK. A lot of the children that I taught were one parent families. Oh, and I didn't have a room. For twenty two years I didn't have a room. Yeah, I was music a la cart. Another drawback was moving on to a different every September. I taught 13 years in one school, and after that, after the third Friday, if there weren't enough students or there were too many, then you would have to go to a different school or have two schools. At
the end I had three schools, with no room. Every other Friday I also substituted, not in music either. And that was when there was a union. Every Friday, I'd have to get a call at five in the morning.

**How did you deal with teaching on a cart? What solutions did you find to teach high quality music given the limited resources you had?**

Well, I had a keyboard on top of the cart. It was a three-tiered cart. It had a keyboard, so I did not like using the CDs, so I'd use the keyboard a lot. And also that helped the children hear the pitch that they were supposed to sing, because sometimes a drawback for a male is not being able to match the pitches that the young children have to sing. I had a CD box and then I had maracas, hand instruments, not what you have. (laughs).

**Do you feel that your gender has had an impact on your successes and challenges?**

I think so, because they’re hearing a male voice. They have a male perspective, especially for the males in the class. And, what else can I say about that. Um, As a male gender you have to be careful about female students and um, so you just learn, you know. I mean some of the kids, especially the kindergartners, they walk up to you and they just walk right into you. You know, it's, so I don't know.

**About how many men were on staff?**

I would say no more that about five. We have three classroom, and myself and phy ed, so five.

About five, yeah. and our principal is male.

MPS has been starting to get more female principals, which has been a turnaround.

**Did you feel included on your staff?**

When I was full time at a school, yes. Where I taught at Lincoln avenue, yes I felt like I was part of the staff. But as soon as we started every year, then you felt like a break. They didn't remember to buy a retirement gift.

**How do you specifically deal with the octave difference when teaching singing?**

For younger children, I did a lot of falsetto. Which wasn't good for my voice, but I did use falsetto especially for kindergarten. Not kindergarten, first grade, second grade. Once I would teach the first and second graders, they'd, by third grade, they'd be used to. They know that my voice was 8 notes lower. Although for the biannual music festival, some of the girls, they needed some help on that, and I would sing falsetto just to teach the notes that they were, the ranges that they were supposed to. And once I would teach that, then I would go into my normal voice, or I'd just play the piano.

I used a lot of piano. Piano meaning electronic piano, not acoustic.

**Would you recommend elementary music to a new male teacher? Why or why not?**

Yes, I would. Um, there is some difficulty in it, but um, it also depends on the person themselves. But yes, I would. What was the second part?

**Why?**

Because the kids need, they need to have that, they need the male figure for one cause there's so many females in education, and also I think males have a different perspective on what they teach, or how they teach.

**What advice would you give a male teacher considering elementary music?**

Because music is important to students and even though I have to sing falsetto at times, its worth it to get the feedback from the children and the um, the successes that they go through. I mean some of them are successes. Probably less successes than failures I suppose.
You have to put more time into your teaching because of that. You have to take the time to, yeah I was an active Orff member. A lot of MPS teachers did not go to Orff. Even though I didn't have the instrumentation I didn't have the Orff instruments or anything like that. I would always come back with some idea to use with my kids. A lot of Orff you need a big room, and you'd be surprised how many teachers don't like you to move their desks around. I had that happen, and you can't take it out into the hallways or anything like that. Although I was told that by somebody. Just take it out in the hallway and they won't bother you anymore about it.

**How did you feel about working with the classroom teacher?**

A lot of times the teacher would stay in the room because they'd be working on something. Some teachers chose to, some chose not to. There were a couple of teachers I asked not to because I wanted control of my class. Because going room to room, you're in there, on their turf. I'm trying to think of, you had a stroke. So, you're always in the teacher's environment so it always took time, and some teachers they would butt in on, you know, and I just told them no, I want to have control of my class. What was the other part?

**How would you tell me to become a better teacher?**

Listen to your students because you can learn from them. You can learn from them besides you teaching them. I mean, I get help from that. I taught in a bilingual school and some of those children didn't understand, especially the little ones. you get the k4's, they don't speak a word of English. And I got help from the teachers with that part of it. If I chose a Spanish song, they would teach the lyrics to the kids because I couldn't. I didn't, I'd teach the notes and the rhythms and the tempos, yeah. Sometimes they didn't listen, but yeah. Listen to your students, that's a big one because you're going to learn a lot from that. I don't mean to choose your repertoire, because they can really go off if you go that way. Or can I bring a CD so we can listen to it, No this is music class. You can go home and do that. Music was always a safe place to be, that's true.

No bullying. It's a spectrum, some are better and we have to accept that isn't this good. That's true.

**Would you give the same advice regardless of gender?**

Oh, I think so. Yeah, it doesn't make any difference whether it's male or female.

**Is there anything else you think music educators should know?**

Well, yeah, you should know. I can't think now. For me it was important to stay a musician. You should stay in music, stay something other than teaching because that just helps to enforce what you're doing. That's important to stay in music.

**How important was it to stay in an Orff, Kodaly or Dalcroze organization?**

I felt it was important because it would help me bring things to the students and to the other teachers. Explain how a school can, we used to be in the ACE program when it first started. It was created for low socio-economic situations, and the curriculum was supposed to be based around the music program, and it was very difficult to get the teachers to see that especially the phy ed teacher because we had to use her space for the concert that they came, you know, and the activities that we would do. So it really killed the program. You were basically good friends with her (PE), but she felt her curriculum was more important and that a curriculum ought to be taught in the assigned space. Space was a big issue, so she got tired of taking the kids outside. If it was raining she'd have to teach in the classroom like I had to teach all the time. I mean it was, so the principal kind
of sided with her, so I don't know if I had a strong enough program, but anyway, I did not get the cooperation that I.

You perceive that as a failure?

Kind of, yeah. No I really had no control over that, and now it's all suburban. There might be a couple of schools in Milwaukee. And being in MPS, there was a curriculum, but a lot of times you couldn't follow it exactly the way it was. I suppose I'd say, yes today you have more responsibility with the new standards and that. The new standards came in later in my career, but we still had a curriculum, but the curriculum was from 1984. We had new books but lousy curriculum.