

Exploring Inequity of Preparation in Elementary General Music Methods

Among Undergraduate Music Education Students

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Abstract

Most instrumental music education students plan to teach secondary music (orchestra/band). In reality, some instrumental music education graduates end up teaching elementary general music (EGM). Because of traditional university programs that separate music education students into tracks based on instrumental or vocal specialization, instrumental music education students might not receive adequate training in elementary general music methods (EGMM). The purpose of this paper is to show the need for equity of EGM preparation for both vocal and instrumental music education students. In addition to reading current research on this topic, I collected data about undergraduate training in EGMM through a survey of EGM teachers in my school district. The survey yielded thirty three responses. Six of the participants in the survey answered follow up questions about their undergraduate experiences with EGMM. The results of these surveys indicate that while many participants came from a traditional vocal/instrumental track program, some came from programs that included EGMM for both specializations. It is my hope that this research will cause universities to consider changing music education degree requirements to include both a course in EGMM and EGM student teaching experiences for all undergraduate music education majors regardless of specialization.

Most instrumental music education students enter their degree programs with the intention of teaching secondary instrumental music (band/orchestra). I was an instrumental music education major during my undergraduate years and planned to be a high school band director like most of my peers. Instrumental music education students' notion of teaching secondary music is largely due to positive experiences in their high school music programs and the desire to emulate their high school directors (Shouldice, 2017). Also, undergraduate music education coursework typically emphasizes applied study of the student's instrument specialization and participation in ensembles.

Many universities use traditional coursework "tracks" based on the student's applied instrument or voice. Students are typically separated into track specializations of either instrumental or vocal music education. Instrumental tracks are primarily geared toward training students to teach band or orchestra. Vocal tracks are primarily geared toward training students to teach chorus or elementary general music (EGM). Many instrumental music education students have a poor perception of EGM because the track system does not expose them to elementary general music methods (EGMM) coursework or EGM student teaching experiences. My student teaching placement was in fifth through twelfth grade band. Although I asked my cooperating teacher if I could spend some time with the EGM teacher during my student teaching, the notion was dismissed because I "was going to be a band director." Consequently, I did not consider EGM an option and, like most instrumental music education students, did not anticipate having to teach EGM.

Without training in EGM, instrumental music education students can feel overwhelmed when faced with the necessity of teaching EGM. Those who end up teaching EGM often feel unprepared to do the job (Kuebel, 2019). I was hired to teach K-5 music with little more than a semester of training and spent my first year of teaching EGM feeling overwhelmed and unprepared. Due to inadequate EGM training in their undergraduate programs, many EGM teachers with instrumental backgrounds seek

professional development opportunities outside of school hours in order to learn new teaching techniques (Kuebel, 2019).

One of the biggest factors in preparing instrumental music education students to teach EGM is the EGM methods course (EGMM). Although most universities require such a course, some do not. Among EGM teachers with instrumental backgrounds, many have reported that their undergraduate EGMM course had adequately prepared them to teach EGM and influenced their decision to teach EGM (Kuebel, 2017; Reese, 2018; Kuebel, 2021). EGMM courses should be taught by qualified professors with a background in EGM teaching. EGMM courses should include exposure to common EGM teaching methodologies and require students to participate in field experiences to observe currently practicing EGM teachers (Salvador & Culp, 2021). I took an Elementary Music Methods course that included information about various approaches to EGM including Kodaly and Orff. I also observed a veteran EGM teacher during the required field experience for that course. In addition, my classmates and I team-taught short lessons to 4th grade students at a nearby elementary school. While many universities continue to adhere to tracks of coursework separating students into instrumental and vocal specializations, some universities have started changing their course requirements to reflect current trends in music education (Kladder, 2020). Although I still thought I would be a high school band director, I gained a new appreciation of EGM through my undergraduate Elementary Music Methods course.

Instrumental music education students may seek EGM teaching positions for several reasons. For some, a secondary position may not be available in their area and it is simply a matter of having a job versus not having a job. When I began applying for music teaching jobs, I initially only applied for band jobs because of my background and student teaching experience. However, due to the lack of available band jobs in my area, I opened up my search to include EGM. Some instrumental music education students may seek EGM teaching positions because EGM suits their personality and “feels

right.” Another factor instrumental music education students might seek EGM teaching positions is the desire to achieve work/life balance (Robison & Russell, 2022). Male EGM teachers have specifically indicated that they see themselves as positive male role models and are sometimes sought by administrators to serve such a role (Robison, 2017). Although I initially felt unprepared to teach EGM, I discovered that EGM was a natural fit for my teaching style and began to pursue additional EGM training in order to improve my skills.

Over the years, I have met many other EGM teachers from instrumental backgrounds with similar experiences to mine. These experiences brought up several questions:

1. Are universities still using a traditional tracking system (vocal, instrumental) in their music education programs? Why or why not?
2. How do traditional vocal and instrumental coursework tracks limit undergraduate music education students’ exposure to EGM?
3. Do undergraduate music education students have the opportunity to pursue EGM in their student teaching regardless of their area of specialization? Why or why not?

Method

Initial Survey

To gain further insight into undergraduate training of EGM teachers, I created a three question survey using Microsoft Forms and sent it to the EGM teachers in my school district. The questions were:

1. What was your undergraduate area of specialization? (instrumental/vocal/other)
2. Did you take a course in elementary general music methods as an undergraduate? (yes/no)
3. Did your student teaching assignment include elementary general music? (yes/no).

Follow Up Survey

After analyzing the initial data, I felt it necessary to explore additional aspects regarding undergraduate training of EGM teachers. I followed up the initial survey by asking survey participants to email me if they were interested in answering the following additional questions:

1. Please restate your answers to the initial three questions.
2. What year did you complete your undergraduate degree?
3. What state was your undergraduate program located in?
4. Did you feel adequately prepared to teach EGM after completing your undergraduate degree?
5. Did your exposure or lack of exposure to EGM have an impact on your career choice?
6. Any thoughts about this topic you wish to share.

Data Analysis

I collected both quantitative and qualitative data from the two surveys. Initial data focused on the number of answers to each question from the first survey. The initial data was then grouped into sets and sorted in a table of answers from each participant to reveal more focused data. Participants' answers to the second survey were sorted in a second table for additional analysis. Participants in the second survey were able to provide additional perspective through extended answers about their experiences in EGM.

Results

Initial Data

I received thirty three responses to the initial survey. The results were as follows:

1. Of the thirty three participants in the survey, fourteen identified as vocal, fifteen identified as instrumental and four identified as other.
2. Twenty eight participants indicated that they had taken a course in EGMM during their undergraduate program and five indicated they had not.
3. Twenty participants indicated that they had EGM as part of their student teaching assignment and thirteen indicated they had not.

Focused Data

Individual participants' sets of answers to the initial survey were also analyzed. For example, a participant may have identified as vocal, had taken a course in EGMM and had EGM during student teaching. Closer analysis of these answer sets yielded nine combinations of experience, as indicated in the following table:

Number of Survey Participants	Specialization Had or had not taken EGMM course Had or did not have EGM student teaching
9	Vocal Had taken EGMM course Had EGM student teaching
3	Vocal Had taken EGMM course Did not have EGM student teaching
1	Vocal Had not taken EGMM course Had EGM student teaching
1	Vocal Had not taken EGMM course Did not have EGM student teaching
7	Instrumental Had taken EGMM course Had EGM student teaching
5	Instrumental Had taken EGMM course Did not have EGM student teaching
2	Instrumental Had not taken EGM course Did not have EGM student teaching
3	Other (e.g. piano) Had EGMM course Had EGM student teaching
1	Other (e.g. piano) Had not taken EGMM course Did not have EGM student teaching

Follow Up Data

Six participants in the initial survey expressed interest in answering follow up questions. The following table is a summary of the quantitative data from the follow up questions:

	1 Restate survey answers	2 Year of graduation	3 Location of Undergraduate	4 Adequate preparation	5 Influence on career choice
Tara	Other No EGMM Course EGM student teaching	1991	GA	No	Yes -
Paige	Vocal EGMM course EGM student teaching	2005	GA	Yes	Yes +
Kim	Instrumental No EGMM Course No EGM student teaching	2020	GA	No	No –
Joe	Instrumental EGMM Course No EGM student teaching	1993	GA	Yes	Yes +
Lois	Instrumental EGMM Course EGM student teaching	2010	LA	No	Yes +
Sarah	Instrumental EGMM course EGM student teaching	1991	FL	Yes	Yes +

Discussion

Initial Data

I made assumptions about each of the questions in the initial survey:

1. Most teachers would have taken a course in EGMM during their undergraduate programs.
2. All vocal majors would have had EGM in their student teaching assignments.
3. All instrumental majors would not have had EGM in their student teaching assignments.

I did not make any assumptions about teachers who majored in another specialization (e.g. piano). The raw data seemed to reflect my assumptions:

1. Twenty eight out of thirty three teachers (85%) indicated they had taken an EGMM course.

2. Twenty out of thirty three teachers (61%) indicated that EGM was part of their student teaching assignment. Because there was a total of fourteen vocal majors, it was natural for me to assume that those teachers accounted for fourteen of the twenty.
3. Thirteen of thirty three teachers (40%) indicated that EGM was not part of their student teaching assignment. Because there was a total of fifteen instrumental majors, it was natural for me to assume that those teachers accounted for the 40%.

Focused Data

When looking at the specific data, there were some unexpected results. Contrary to my assumption that all vocal majors had EGM in their student teaching, four did not (29%). In addition, though I assumed that all instrumental majors would not have had EGM in their student teaching, seven did (47%). Finally, in contrast to my assumption that a course in EGMM was standard practice in undergraduate music education programs, five survey participants (15%) indicated they had not taken such a course. These numbers suggest that while traditional music education specialization tracks continue to be used in undergraduate coursework, some programs are changing their requirements to offer EGM student teaching placements to both vocal and instrumental majors. The data also suggests that there may still be universities that do not require or offer a course in EGMM.

Follow Up Data

The answers to the follow up questions helped bolster the results of the initial survey. The location of the undergraduate degree did not appear to be a factor. Four participants graduated from programs in Georgia, one from Florida and one from Louisiana. However, their experiences varied depending on the university they attended versus the state in which it is located. The year of graduation made little difference either. Participants indicated both positive and negative experiences in, and access to, EGM coursework during their undergraduate programs across the span of graduation years.

When considering the data from the initial survey along with the data from the follow up survey, contrasting themes emerge. First, it is clear that the data supports current research: some universities continue to use a traditional track of either vocal or instrumental coursework in their undergraduate music education programs. These programs make it difficult, if not impossible, for instrumental music education students to pursue EGM. In contrast to current research, the data also reveals that some universities allow both instrumental and vocal music education students to pursue EGM during their student teaching assignments.

These contrasting themes were expressed clearly when participants in the follow up survey were given the opportunity to share additional thoughts about their undergraduate EGM training. Those who had negative experiences with EGM during their undergraduate programs felt unprepared to teach EGM when the time came:

***Tara:** I definitely did NOT feel adequately prepared to teach EGM. I graduated with a skewed view of what EGM was. I graduated thinking that general music was pretty boring and that being a music teacher wasn't really "teaching" anything. There didn't seem to be a point to any of it.*

***Kim:** I had WANTED to take early general music pedagogy and education courses, but requirements as an instrumentalist prevented me from being able to go on the required observations and therefore made me unable to take the class.*

By contrast, those with positive EGM experiences during their undergraduate programs felt prepared to teach EGM:

***Paige:** [During my EGM course] we would do exercises in class where we would teach a lesson and someone in the class would be given a card that would say something like "Talk to your neighbor" or "Don't join in the lesson." The student teaching would get practice on how to deal*

with common behaviors that happen in a classroom. Every music education major, regardless of primary instrument, took elementary, secondary choir and secondary instrumental methods courses. We also had to do observations in classrooms in all three classes. During some of the observations, we participated in teaching small activities.

Sarah: *I believe that I was fortunate to have had an Orff based EGMM course. The course was not titled as such. It was fantastic! My instructor also made sure that the students in the class were able to intern with music educators that were as intentional with their pedagogy. Had I not had that I would have NOT continued teaching elementary school music.*

Joe: *A large part of my music ed classes involved learning about GM classes. It was “strongly suggested” that we attend Saturday clinics with both Orff and Kodaly local chapters. We also spent time with the Kindermusik class that met in the music department.*

One of the participants in the survey questioned the wisdom of limiting undergraduate music education students’ opportunities to pursue EGM:

Lois: *My university only exposed us to one option during student teaching. We had to choose elementary, band, orchestra or chorus and we only student taught for one semester. I have always wondered what people did who went into elementary but didn’t feel it was a good fit. They had never taught in any other setting. The same is true for the opposite. I know many people who left band or orchestra to go into elementary and did not have any experience.*

Conclusion

Current research into EGM training of undergraduate music education students indicates that most universities are still using traditional vocal and instrumental coursework tracks that limit instrumental majors' training and exposure to EGMM. However, some universities are reevaluating their music education programs to reflect current trends in music education. As the data from my research indicates, more instrumental music majors have had the opportunity to take EGMM courses and pursue EGM during student teaching. The data used in this paper is limited to currently practicing EGM teachers from one school district. Although the data reflects the findings of current literature on the topic of undergraduate music education students' experiences in EGM, further research on this topic is necessary. Expanding this research to a national level might support my findings or reveal other trends in undergraduate EGMM coursework and EGM student teaching requirements among instrumental music education majors. More extensive research may also reveal which university programs continue to adhere to a traditional track of vocal/instrumental music education coursework versus programs that changed coursework requirements to reflect current trends in music education and career needs of undergraduate music education students.

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