

The Lived Experience of Music Teachers Building a Professional Identity

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Because music education is often regarded as an ancillary subject in public school systems, music teachers sometimes struggle to establish a strong professional identity within the public school culture. As a new music teacher, this struggle may be all the more daunting due to lack of support from administration, isolation from teachers in other subject areas, and separation from their music colleagues. To gain a better understanding of this phenomenon, the purpose of this study was to understand and describe the formation of professional identity within music educators. The following four questions guided the interview process with the participants: 1) What experiences as a music teacher develop the perception of professional identity within the school culture? 2) What experiences affect the self efficacy of music teachers? 3) How do music teachers perceive their growth as professional educators? 4) How do music teachers view collegial relationships with their coworkers?

The four music teachers participating in the study had 3-7 years of experience teaching school music. Using a phenomenological framework to guide the inquiry, both textural and structural descriptions were used to summarize participants' lived experiences of developing professional identity in the school culture. Analysis of interview transcripts yielded six themes that influenced professional identity: impressions of self, support of others, success, feedback, independence, and professional development. Future research could be conducted to follow these participants and monitor changes in their perceptions of professional identities as they encounter new teaching contexts and learning experiences.