Bivocational Music Teaching: Liminal Spaces Between Church and School

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore the intersecting landscapes of five public school music teachers who also served as church choir directors. A specific focus was placed on how bivocational participants performed dual roles in two different contexts, and how they called upon their own preparation in music and pedagogy to guide their work. Research questions were (a) How do bivocational music teachers make sense of their religious and professional crossroads? (b) How do bivocational music teachers negotiate the musical and pedagogical underpinnings of church and school? and (c) How do bivocational music teachers' perspectives shape their work with students and congregations? Turner's (1977) concept of liminality served as the theoretical framework for this study. Data sources consisted of semi-structured interviews, digital artifacts, and performance recordings. Overall, participants identified instructional, musical, intrapersonal, and religious crossovers as the most pertinent aspects of their dual roles in church and school, although personal spirituality was more nuanced. Participants appeared to live and work between various endpoints, along a liminal continuum, gliding between roles and identities associated with ritualistic practices in Christian churches and public schools. Implications include meeting diverse learners' needs, identifying mentors in church music pedagogy, cultivating healthy church- and school-based networking, and assembling pedagogically-sound music resources for churches.

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Introduction

School music teachers often assume multiple musical roles in their communities. Out-of-school opportunities can range from personal music-making endeavors to community ensemble participation (Bell, 2004, 2008), where music teachers can serve as either performers or directors and can employ the artistic skills they espouse during the school day. One community music-making path includes leadership opportunities in Christian churches, particularly in the choral setting. As Rohwer (2010) maintained, church choirs "can serve as a model to understand more completely the gestalt concept of community music" (p. 2). In-service music teachers who accept additional responsibilities as church music directors can serve dual roles in two different contexts; however, the musical and pedagogical underpinnings of school music education could stand in contrast to those found in church settings. In the case of church music, the relationship between music pedagogy, music performance, and spirituality can be complex (Hawn, 2007; Kroeker, 2016), as these elements often are reconfigured in school settings (Clark, 2021; LaMontagne, 2019). The current study represented one such exploration of the intertwined notions of music teaching in Christian churches and public schools. To situate the context of this research, it is important to consider operational definitions in three broad areas of scholarship: (a) bivocational music teaching, (b) music education and church settings, and (c) liminality.

Bivocational Music Teaching

The term *bivocational* has been associated most closely with Christian ministry (Stephens, 2021a; 2021b). While researchers (Bentley, 2018; Brenneman, 2007; MacNeil, 2020; Stephens, 2021a) generally have applied this expression to pastors who maintain a second paid job inside or outside of the church, Stephens (2021b) noted that definitions are ambiguous and range in scope. Stephens (2021a) also referred to bivocational ministry as a "multivocational, covocational, dual career, partially funded, or tentmaking ministry" (p. 1). In some cases, bivocational pastors have accepted additional work or other church engagements out of financial necessity (Bentley, 2018); in other cases, churches have sought bivocational pastors due to institutional budgetary constraints (Smith, 2014; Stephens, 2021b). As bivocational ministry has grown over time, especially in North America (Smith, 2014; Stephens, 2021a), researchers have continued to explore ways of addressing challenges in under-resourced churches (Brenneman, 2007), fostering congregational missions that can assist time-strapped bivocational pastors (MacNeil, 2020), and responding to the increased need to prepare and support theology students' entry into an expanding bivocational landscape (Stephens, 2021b).

Music teachers also engage in bivocational pursuits. While school music teachers' motivations for securing a supplementary teaching position might differ from pastors' motivations for securing a supplementary preaching position, dual vocations subsist nonetheless. Given the contextual landscapes they occupy, music teachers who work in both churches and schools could be considered bivocational. For the purposes of the current study, *bivocational*

will be used when referring to school music teachers who also hold positions as church music leaders. Such terminology could be useful in denoting music teachers' explicit connection to church ministry.

Music Education and Church Settings

Music teachers encounter numerous boundary crossings between church and school. Aside from negotiating their own identities as musicians and teachers (Dolloff, 2007; Froehlich & Smith, 2017; Wagoner, 2021), music educators also navigate larger issues that shape music programs and student involvement. Principles of inclusivity (Benedict et al., 2015; Hess, 2019), ensemble participation (Elpus & Abril, 2019), repertoire selection (Abril, 2006), and responsive teaching practices (Bond, 2017; Korthagen et al., 2013; Lind & McKoy, 2016; Sweet, 2016) abound, as do the intersectionalities of age, race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, among others (Beagan & Hattie, 2015; Benedict et al., 2015; Garrett & Palkki, 2021; McBride, 2016). Myriad sociological boundaries in churches (Clarke, 2011) and schools (Froehlich & Smith, 2017) require music teachers to consider various gestures, particularly in choral settings.

Choral teachers' responsibilities in churches and schools can be distinct. While choir directors' roles in both settings typically involve selecting repertoire, leading rehearsals, developing singers' vocal skills, organizing services and performances, recruiting members, and overseeing program details (Clark, 2021), church choir directors often are charged with fulfilling additional expectations. Most notably, Rohwer (2010, 2011) emphasized the importance of church choir directors' ability to serve as spirit-filled leaders who can facilitate worship and engender fellowship. Kroeker (2016) furthered this notion, maintaining that the relationships church choir directors create are "defined by a faith that demands selflessness, service, and a commitment beyond personal goals and ambitions" (p. 11). Given the contextual differences between churches and schools, as well as the sacred and secular backdrops that can frame them (Clarke, 2011; Froehlich & Smith, 2017), examining overlapping characteristics between both environments could be fruitful.

Communal music-making is a primary attribute that church music and school music contexts share. Inclusive community-building in music settings has received increased attention and holds promise for sustaining empathetic learning spaces (Benedict et al., 2015; Henricks, 2018, 2021; Talbot, 2018). Closer examinations of race, access to music, repertoire selection, and long-standing teaching practices also have led to growing calls to enact anti-oppressive music education (Benedict et al., 2015; Bernard & Rotjan, 2021; Hess, 2019; Koza, 2008, 2021). Hendricks broached these topics through the lenses of compassionate music teaching (2018) and authentic connection in music education (2021), views that could be applied to both church and school settings. Hendricks (2021) highlighted how music, spirituality, and wellbeing could transform music teaching and learning:

> Authentic connection can flourish between humans in spaces of radical openness and hospitality. It thrives where compassion is less about pity and more about shared experience…where empathy is less about imagining others' needs from one's own perspective and more about attunement to another person's values and world-views…when inclusion is an act of common sense rather than a quota, and where diversity and difference are viewed as welcome opportunities for everyone to grow and learn from one another…Authentic connection is the essence and backbone of communal music-making. (pp. 249-250)

Because communal music-making occurs in churches and schools, learning how choir directors operate in dual contexts could clarify the pedagogical, musical, and spiritual factors they encounter regularly.

Related research has shown patterns in the religiosity of school choral directors (Clark, 2021), choir directors' preparation for church ensembles (Hawn, 2007; Kroeker, 2016), and church choirs as learning environments (Rohwer, 2010, 2011). Clark (2021) examined school choral directors' repertoire selection practices and found that the more religious the teachers, the more likely they were to program religious repertoire, the overwhelming majority of which was Christian in nature. Clark (2021) also highlighted the subsequent tensions between secular and sacred content in public school music classrooms. From a church music perspective, Hawn (2007) stressed the importance of preparing well-versed church choir directors through reevaluating the conventional church music canon and reexamining the place of choral ensembles in worship. Similarly, Kroeker (2016) noted the worthiness of fostering church music participation and emphasized that church music directors can become valuable servant leaders in congregations and communities. From a pedagogical standpoint, Rohwer (2010, 2011) acknowledged that church choir settings have not been viewed necessarily as learning environments, where members have specific instructional needs that must be met alongside social and spiritual needs. Rohwer (2011) elevated the notion that church choirs, like other community ensembles, are educational enterprises that require sound pedagogy amid the amalgamation of roles that church music directors perform. While church choirs may be more complex because of the augmented strata of worship and liturgy, pedagogical concerns remain. As Rohwer (2011) concluded,

> The job of a church music director is a challenging one; the director must be musician, teacher, liturgist, motivator, organizer, God-loving individual, and all-around good person. In order to be as prepared as possible, directors should consider how to develop these skills while also keeping at the forefront the gestalt idea of the joy of church music in the community. (p. 56)

Rationale and Purpose of the Study

Researchers have chronicled church musicians' instructional and spiritual needs (Rohwer, 2010, 2011), school choral directors' repertoire selection (Clark, 2021; LaMontagne, 2019),

and practical considerations related to music and Christian worship (Hawn, 2007; Kroeker, 2016); however, it is unclear how bivocational music teachers make sense of their pedagogical, musical, and spiritual dualities. Furthermore, there is a lack of empirical evidence from church choir directors' perspective, particularly those who also serve as school music teachers and must navigate bivocational teaching. Music teachers and ministerial leaders stand to benefit from additional narratives surrounding these overlapping contexts.

Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore the intersecting landscapes of public school music teachers who also served as church choir directors. A specific focus was placed on how these individuals occupied dual roles in two different contexts, and how they called upon their own preparation in music and pedagogy to guide their work. Research questions were (a) How do bivocational music teachers make sense of their religious and professional crossroads? (b) How do bivocational music teachers negotiate the musical and pedagogical underpinnings of church and school? and (c) How do bivocational music teachers' perspectives shape their work with students and congregations? Liminality, the theoretical framework for this study, is described below.

Theoretical Framework

Liminality is a concept that originated with van Gennep's (1960) work on anthropological rites of passage. Turner (1977), who further adapted the theory through an examination of rites of passage in tribal systems, defined liminality as the process by which individuals move from one fixed point (e.g., context, role, ritual) to another. It is an ambiguous place of "inbetweenness . . ." where individuals are "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (Turner, 1977, p. 95). Through a similar perspective, Brown (2007) described liminality as a blurring and crossing of thresholds and boundaries as well as the fluidity and hybridity of identities. In essence, liminality can be viewed as the transition from one state to another (Turner, 1977).

Researchers have used liminality as a theoretical framework when examining societal issues of power and place. Examples have included the status of performing musicians (Brown, 2007), the friction in beginning teachers' career induction (Pierce, 2007), the transformational qualities of musicking (Boyce-Tillman, 2009), the dissonances between urban and suburban music education (Emmanuel, 2011), and the leisure and recreational practices of collegiate a cappella singers (Mantie, 2015). A common element among this body of research encompasses the fluidity of self, in which individuals are "caught" between contextual worlds and must make sense of and navigate their surroundings.

Given the ritualistic complexities of churches (Clarke, 2011) and schools (Froehlich & Smith, 2017), bivocational music teachers could be regarded as "threshold people" (Turner, 1977, p. 95) who repeatedly must negotiate an array of social, cultural, musical, and religious norms. Viewing liminal spaces as junctures where teachers move between contextual thresholds could be useful in understanding the fluidity and hybridity (Brown, 2007)

of music teachers' personal and professional identities. Because music teachers can enter and exit these junctures on a daily basis, applying the concepts of liminality to bivocational music teaching could illuminate the intersecting and potentially reliant qualities of school music teaching and church music teaching. Such a lens could highlight possible tensions and resolutions that surround teaching in dual contexts.

Method

Design

This study encompassed a qualitative descriptive design, which Sandelowski (2000) described as "the method of choice when straight descriptions of phenomena are desired" (p. 339). In this model, researchers attempt to acquire and verify facts related to surface-level data as well as the meanings that participants provide. Interviews, content analyses, and theoretical frameworks are common features of qualitative descriptive studies (Hyejin et al., 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), although methodological choices can vary and can be borrowed from other qualitative traditions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Sandelowski, 2000, 2010). While the qualitative descriptive method is less transformational than other qualitative designs such as grounded theory and phenomenology, it can provide a comprehensive summary of events in everyday terms (Sandelowski, 2000) and can "translate findings into practice" (Sullivan-Bolyai et al., 2005, p. 129). Given the exploratory nature of the current study, particularly due to the combined tenets of church and school music, a qualitative descriptive method provided a suitable approach for garnering preliminary assumptions about bivocational music teaching. Finally, this research was an outgrowth of a separate project on Christian congregational music-making; consequently, the scope of the current study was limited to a Christian perspective as a result of that original focus.

Data Collection and Analysis

After receiving Institutional Review Board approval and participant consent, I collected primary and secondary data sources over the course of 10 weeks (June-September 2021). Primary data sources consisted of semi-structured individual interviews that I conducted with five public school music teachers who also held positions as adult church choir directors. Interviews lasted between 41 and 65 minutes and were conducted and transcribed through Zoom. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) noted, semi-structured interviews are useful in obtaining participants' descriptions of everyday life and are used widely in qualitative descriptive studies to elicit "the viewpoint of the person(s) 'in the midst' of the experience" (Sullivan-Bolyai et al., 2005, p. 128). Thus, interviews became the primary means of capturing participants' experiences as bivocational music teachers. Secondary data sources included online artifacts (e.g., participants' professional websites, choral concert programs, video recordings, audio recordings) and e-mail correspondence. I used professional artifacts and choral recordings to confirm and supplement interview accounts. E-mail correspondence with the participants served as a practical and dependable means for corroborating and

adjusting research protocol and emergent findings as they occurred.

I analyzed the data iteratively for emergent meanings (Saldaña, 2021), employing in vivo coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Wolcott, 1994) to catalog topics within the data, then pattern coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to assemble the overarching themes. This process allowed me to move from a summative approach to a holistic interpretation of the data. This progression also bolstered reflexivity as I examined emergent findings alongside the subjective nature of my roles as researcher, church musician, and community ensemble director. Consequently, I worked to strengthen trustworthiness through member checks, peer review, and the triangulation of primary and secondary data sources (Patton, 2001). Two faculty experts in music education and church music reviewed the initial findings for dependability. The peer reviewers suggested minor alterations for repositioning codes, renaming categories, or reducing inadvertent redundancies, and I rearranged the findings accordingly. I verified the findings further through an additional round of member checks with the participants, to maintain the integrity and cohesiveness of the final themes.

Participants

I selected the five participants in this study – Meredith, Mark, Simon, Will, and Fiona (pseudonyms) – through purposeful stratified sampling (Patton, 2001). I recruited participants after consulting three professional contacts in the field who recommended school choir teachers in their respective regions who also served as church music directors. Of the nine potential participants I contacted initially, each of whom held varying backgrounds, teaching experiences, and church appointments (e.g., adult choir, children's choir, praise band), five individuals responded and agreed to participate. At the time of this study, all participants were mid- to late-career P-12 public school music teachers who held concurrent positions as adult church choir directors in Roman Catholic or mainline Protestant denominations (e.g., Episcopal, Lutheran, United Church of Christ). Ultimately, this form of sampling supported an intersectional approach (Carter, 2014; Crenshaw, 2019), whereby participants' overlapping social identities were represented (e.g., age, race, gender, location, career stage, musical background, sexual orientation, religious denomination). Participants were located across the eastern, midwestern, and southwestern United States, and represented urban, suburban, and rural settings.

Meredith was an accomplished vocalist and pianist who held previous experience as a pre-school teacher and a middle school choral and instrumental director. Later, she became a rising Kodály specialist and taught K-5 elementary music in a rural community. She also directed the adult choir at a Lutheran church, having accepted the position after responding to a flyer on a university bulletin board. She had 11 years of teaching experience.

Mark was a quick-witted teacher and organist who began playing at a Christian Science Church while he was still a teenager attending a Methodist high school. As an adult, he was in demand as a vocal soloist and led an Episcopal church choir comprised of both amateur and semi-professional singers. He taught high school choir in a large, urban area and had

taken his high school and church choirs on U.S. and European concert tours. He had 17 years of teaching experience.

Simon was obsessed with the pipe organ as a child. During his preschool graduation, Simon's peers announced they wanted to become doctors, lawyers, and firefighters when they grew up; Simon announced that he wanted to become a church organist. He became an interim organist at the age of 12 and has been a choir director in the Lutheran church for years. He maintained an active and visible high school choir program in a suburban school district. He had 20 years of teaching experience.

Will became a church organist at the age of 15. At 16, he became the music director at a small Catholic church, but moved to a Methodist church temporarily before returning to another Catholic church to rebuild a floundering music program, which he did successfully. He taught at a large metropolitan high school with an extensive choral program. He had 21 years of teaching experience.

Fiona had the most teaching experience of the five participants and taught choir at a mid-sized, suburban middle school. She described herself as a staunch anti-racist, and was an advisor for a diversity and anti-bullying support group for school students. She had been a church choir director for decades in the United Church of Christ, although she was raised Presbyterian and was married to a Presbyterian pastor. She had 35 years of teaching experience.

Findings

Based on the analyzed data, four overarching themes encapsulating 14 codes emerged: *Interchangeable Collectibles* (teaching, rehearsal techniques, vocal pedagogy), *Musical Justice* (repertoire selection, social justice, educational freedom, role conflicts), *Blended Selves* (identities, incorporation, boundaries), and *Manifested Spirituality* (faith, religion, integration, separation). Overall, participant accounts coalesced around instructional, musical, intrapersonal, and religious crossovers. These themes are described below and include supporting material from participant interviews.

Interchangeable Collectibles

The first theme embodied the idea of pedagogy and the teaching techniques that participants used interchangeably with teen and adult singers. Participants acknowledged the numerous "tricks" they collected over the years as well as the swift-footed, improvisatory approach they adopted during rehearsals. Mark spoke of the "mental Rolodex" he kept in his head that was full of various warm-ups, teaching approaches, rehearsal strategies, and classroom activities that he "flipped through" while teaching, including the holy trinity of teaching cycles: instructions, work, and feedback. Mark's mental Rolodex was similar to Meredith's "toolbox" and Simon's "bag of tricks," which they employed with a variety of ages and used as inspiration for other ensembles. In one example, Will compared his instructional approach with youth and adults:

Rehearsal technique is probably the same for both. You know, breaking the piece down and teaching it. That's going to be the same no matter where I am…I find the most parallels between the freshmen and the adults. If something works with the freshmen, it's going to work with the church choir…but I'm going to be more patient with the students, because I expect the adults to move quicker and work more on their own.

Similarly, Meredith acknowledged,

I find myself using things from my middle school teaching days when I taught choir from behind the piano. Visualizations like sprinkles on a cake or cheese on nachos work for balance issues, and the Tootsie Roll analogy works for vowels. Those visualizations work with students as well as adults.

Fiona, like Will and Meredith, reinforced the notion of a consistent teaching approach across teens and adults, and, like all five participants, relied less on vocal pedagogy with adults. Fiona also read research voraciously and constantly searched for new ways to improve her teaching:

I'm not sure that my rehearsal technique and rehearsal persona are all that different [between church and school]…I do a lot more vocal pedagogy with my school students, obviously, because they need it. The adults are kind of tired (laughs), so I don't always make them stand up and do all that (mimics kinesthetic movement), but I try to enlarge their vision, too...I keep reading articles about how to work with the aging voice and what happens when those ladies can't hit the high notes anymore, when they start getting that wobble thing going on. But I wouldn't know anything if I didn't study it myself.

Finally, Mark reflected on the pedagogical and technical strides that his choirs made prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and considered how best to move forward in terms of safeguarding vocal health:

I appreciate the momentum that both of my programs made [pre-pandemic] and the skill-building that happened. Now we have to recalibrate and rebuild in a way that is supportive of everyone's needs…I think that's a big one for me at both school and church – how to get back on the horse in a way where we don't injure ourselves as we're trying to rebuild. That's a big one.

Musical Justice

The second theme exemplified the repertoire choices that participants made with their respective groups, with Christian underpinnings either explicitly or implicitly in view. Participants' musical choices also reflected their individual and contradictory journeys in navigating broader issues of social justice, educational freedom, and teacher role conflict. All participants advocated for programming diverse music, even at church, but were intentional about its purpose and quality. Participants' repertoire considerations spanned a variety of composers (e.g., Bach, Brahms, Duruflé, Mozart), stylistic genres (e.g., Baroque, Classical, Romantic, Contemporary, Broadway, American Folk), and performance themes (e.g., Lessons and Carols, collaboration concerts, intergenerational choir concerts, universal topics). However, participants also noted the challenges in selecting age-appropriate classical repertoire for developing voices. For example, Will commented that the extended ranges and vocal athleticism required to perform some Western Classical repertoire can leave choir students "huffing and puffing across the finish line." He also was in favor of providing well-rounded repertoire for his school students, but took his church choir role quite seriously because of the focus on the liturgy:

> Everything we do at church is in service to the liturgy, so it's all about high quality, whatever the style. It has to be good. At school, I don't have that constraint. It's in service to what the kids are doing and what's best for them. At church, it's whatever is best for the liturgy, even if it's not necessarily best for the choir – and that sounds kind of weird to say out loud – but that's really what it comes down to. It's much bigger than any of us and bigger than the choir. It has to be focused on what's happening on the altar.

Simon noted that he strives to program diverse music at his school, not only to reinforce representation, but to honor the diversity of his students:

> I do try to be conscious when I'm programming music at school, to make sure we have different genders, identifications, cultures, or styles of repertoire represented. I try not to overprogram the "Jesus music" (gestures with air quotes) at school, just because that's not who my students are…90% of my students are Jewish. Whether we're singing a piece that's clearly Christian in nature or a piece with text by Langston Hughes, I approach them the same way and want to provide equal validity to both pieces.

Mark also set up a distinction between the majority-classical repertoire he selects for church and the latitude he practices at school, stating, "I don't know that the church repertoire I select necessarily overlaps with school. At school, I cover a breadth of music in terms of world music by composers of color, music by women composers, or music by rap poets." Further, Will commented that

the dead White guys have their place, but it becomes smaller and smaller every year as I become more aware of what I want to use for [school] concerts…That awareness comes from me realizing how Eurocentric my repertoire has been in the past, and working hard to diversify that to better reflect the students in front of me.

Fiona took an activist approach toward repertoire selection, citing its humanizing impact on her students, who may need it more than her adult church choir. She wanted to make her students better people for the world and to help them look outside themselves more than they did before. However, she described her struggle with conservative mindsets in her community, in that they had the potential to impact negatively her freedom to determine the direction of her classroom instruction:

There are opinionated people in our area coming to school board meetings who are misinformed about the content and breadth of diversity education. I'm pretty sure that if they came into my class, they would have a problem with the way I teach. For instance, I cannot teach an apartheid freedom song without talking about what apartheid was and the anguish it inflicted on people, and to help students understand its origins and the government's involvement. I have to do that, but I'm guessing those people [community members] would have trouble with anything that could possibly involve guilt.

Fiona's narrative further shed light on the growing racial and socio-political movements she championed, and highlighted the tension between her in-school and out-of-school effectiveness as a change agent:

I quietly lurk on our city's Black Lives Matter Facebook page, but I really don't comment because I'm a teacher. I really feel we're teaching in a challenging time where it's our responsibility as music educators to help children see more of the world than what's right in front of them.

Blended Selves

The third theme represented lingering intersections where school and church worlds merged and ran alongside each other, and where participants named their dual identities. According to participants, learned patterns in deportment, teaching, repertoire, and soft people skills (e.g., adaptability, problem-solving, organization, planning) transferred naturally from one context to the other, allowing them to feel like parallel experiences. In one example, Meredith recalled the frequency with which her school and church worlds "collide" in public or social settings, and how these "collisions" create unexpected opportunities for extended professional or musical networking. From an intrapersonal standpoint, all five participants generally felt they were the same person at school and at church. Mark, for

example, stated, "I don't see much of a difference [in myself] between school and church… (laughs) although I filter more with the kids at school than with the adults at church." Simon encapsulated the participants' overriding sentiments when he affirmed,

> This sort of intersection has played out in my life for a very long time…It's so hard for me personally to parse out "school Simon" and "church Simon," because I think it's all one in the same in my brain. I am who I am, and I'm just going to be that person wherever I am and will meet everybody where they're at and get them to be slightly better.

For one participant, however, there was one identity that was expressed openly in one context but not in the other. As an openly-gay teacher, Will has remained closeted at church, lest he be fired for being a member of the LGBTQ+ community. His narrative was rife with numerous contradictory thresholds that he has elected to cross or avoid, depending on the context and the cast of characters around him. He disclosed his efforts in separating his two worlds:

> I try to be as authentic and real as I can, and am probably more authentic at school because I'm out at school. I'm not out at church, so that's a big wall that gets put up a lot and shields [me]. In my mind, there's not a lot of overlap, because I purposely separate them. I have to keep them separated if I want to keep my church job. I have to be careful what I talk about. You know, this very liberal Democrat has to be very, very careful at church, because the Roman Catholics are very conservative and very Republican. So that's probably the biggest difference. I can talk to my school principal about anything, but I tread very lightly with my pastor and don't touch hot-button issues or attempt to discuss anything or advocate for those things at church, because I can't. It's exhausting having a double life, especially at 26 years in, because I'm so open and free in the rest of my life, and then I drive 5 minutes [to church] and it's like it's 1950, and I pretend I'm straight and everything is all fine and dandy.

Conversely, Will also acknowledged that in some church settings, he wields a degree of power as a change agent because he blends in unassumingly:

> But I also see my role as being sneaky, because I'm kind of like a spy in there, especially in [church] staff meetings. I'll let my opinion slip in and I'll get them to pull their focus away from where they wanted to go, and it's like, alright, I'm being that undercurrent pushing them in the right direction and getting them to not be so, you know, discriminatory.

Manifested Spirituality

The fourth and final theme encompassed participants' spirituality and the degree to which it permeated their work at church and school. In hearing the participants discuss their particular outlooks, two distinct perspectives emerged: delineated spirituality and integrated spirituality. Participants appeared to choose one of two paths – separation or connection – for situating their spirituality within the confines of secular and sacred spaces. While the following interview excerpts in no way represent a complete picture of participants' spiritual lives or personal faith formation journeys, they are included below simply to illustrate the range of responses between two opposing yet related perspectives.

With regard to delineated spirituality, Will, Meredith, and Mark acknowledged that they purposefully detach from their spiritual selves while at school, in order to preserve their role as a neutral, impartial school employee. According to the participants, adopting such a stance has allowed them to demarcate clearly their pedagogical and spiritual identities. Will, Meredith, and Mark each described a discrete, personalized form of spirituality at church and school:

> [My spirituality] is really, really separate for me. I don't think about religion or my faith much at all at school. When I'm at church, of course, it's the focus. My faith is involved in planning music, but then it takes a back seat when I'm at school. (Will)

> Personally, I try to keep my spirituality separate, even though I'm in a small school district out in the country, where before football games, those boys are praying, and before choir events, those kids are praying. That's maybe a little different than other school districts, but I do try to keep things fairly separate…I personally pray for my classroom and students, but working in public school, I do not openly express those things in the classroom. (Meredith)

> If I weren't doing church services on Sunday, the likelihood of me being in church is probably very low…I don't think I've received communion anywhere since 2001, so I don't see that as a necessity for me…My going to church has always been a part of my life, but I don't necessarily affiliate myself with any particular denomination. (Mark)

In contrast, Simon and Fiona described an integrated spirituality at church and school. Both participants acknowledged that their faith emerges at school and informs their interactions with students, and, by extension, their professional and instructional decision-making. According to Simon and Fiona, adopting such a reconciled stance has allowed them to perform their pedagogical and spiritual identities simultaneously:

For me, the church piece is more than just the job or the music. It's the spiritual end of things. It always has been, which is also interesting, because I'm so far to the left, I make Bernie Sanders look conservative. But I'm also a very faith-filled person. My students know that I'm a liberal human being but that I'm also religious, so I feel pretty comfortable. (Simon)

I have a different sense of who I am when I'm at church…I truly feel like God has called me to do this work in the church, and that I'm kind of like a vessel to help the congregation get to the music, that I'm just sort of invisible. At school, there are far more behavioral issues. I look at that child who is so difficult and think, "I can see the face of God in this child somehow." I have to look really hard, but I can find it, and it makes me behave differently with that child. So that would be my church-self emerging at school. (Fiona)

Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore the intersecting landscapes of public school music teachers who also served as church choir directors. A specific focus was placed on how participants made sense of their bivocational responsibilities and called upon their own preparation in music and pedagogy to guide their work. Turner's (1977) concept of liminality served as the theoretical framework for this study. Findings included several bivocational attributes that assumed fluid orientations within and across liminal spaces.

First, with regard to religious and professional crossroads, participants believed they were the same teacher at both church and school, and that they received inspiration, creativity, and balance from the opposite context. Participant accounts appeared to epitomize the blurred boundaries and hybridized identities that Brown (2007) and Boyce-Tillman (2009) described, and might have stemmed from participants' long-standing connection to church music. It is possible that participants constructed parallel identities as church and school musicians early on, which could have cultivated bivocational dispositions in adulthood. According to participant accounts, the connection to church music was a prime motivator for pursuing bivocational work, rather than the supplemental income, which stands in contrast to bivocational ministry research (Bentley, 2018; Stephens, 2021a; Stephens, 2021b). Participants also maintained varying opinions as to how spirituality played a part in their teaching lives, although much of this had to do with the participants' diverse student body. Given that participants' school students held assorted religious backgrounds – or none at all – participants were cognizant about reaching all students while not proselytizing or being overtly Christian. LaMontagne (2019) and Clark (2021) raised similar concerns about the relationship between music, teaching, and school choir directors' religious perspectives. Additionally, Fiona and Simon acknowledged intertwining their two worlds successfully, while Will

disclosed choosing which parts of himself to reveal in each context. At church, he pushed his authentic self to the background; at school, he relegated his spirituality to the periphery. It is possible that participants' spirituality played a larger role than they initially indicated, at least in terms of their approach with students, colleagues, and supervisors. Reflecting on the overlapping intricacies of secular-sacred dualities appeared to be a novel and perhaps elusive undertaking for some participants, and may not be a relationship that bivocational music teachers consider regularly. These composite notions speak to the friction between teacher identities (Dolloff, 2007; Froehlich & Smith, 2017; Wagoner, 2021), LGBTQ+ narratives in churches (Beagan & Hattie, 2015) and schools (Garrett & Palkki, 2021; McBride, 2016), and how religiosity plays a role in music teachers' decision-making (Clark, 2021; LaMontagne, 2019).

Second, in terms of musical and pedagogical underpinnings, participants employed similar pedagogical practices and rehearsal strategies with youth and adult singers; however, they focused on vocal technique more with school students, mostly because they had additional rehearsal time, and because students' instruments were still developing (Sweet, 2016). All participants endeavored to program a variety of Christian and non-Christian music in a variety of styles – except for praise and worship songs – although it was clear that participants wanted their school students to experience a wider range of repertoire by diverse composers on timely topics, in order to challenge, expand, and shatter students' societal assumptions. While Western Classical music had its place in their choral curricula, participants described their dedication to programming repertoire that confronts injustice and teaches students of any age about unfamiliar histories. The participants' intentional actions speak to culturally responsive teaching practices (Bond, 2017; Lind & McKoy, 2016), informed repertoire selection (Abril, 2006), compassionate music teaching (Hendricks, 2018, 2021), and a reimagined church music canon (Hawn, 2007). Further, participants' activist dispositions could be initial steps in addressing structural inequalities in music teaching and learning (Benedict et al., 2015; Bernard & Rotjan, 2021; Hess, 2019; Koza, 2008, 2021; Talbot, 2018).

Third, participants reported that they used the same soft people skills with church and school stakeholders. They believed that adaptability, organization, problem-solving, attitude, and leading and following when appropriate transferred from one context to the other and helped them to negotiate productive relationships with numerous stakeholders, especially school administrators and clergy. Participants attributed these people skills to their music teacher preparation programs, where the tenets of working collaboratively, redirecting behavior, and planning for instruction were reinforced. These notions align with the qualities of successful church music directors (Clark, 2021; Hawn, 2007; Kroeker, 2016; Rohwer, 2010, 2011) and might warrant further explorations of core reflections (Korthagen et al., 2013), or the focus on inner strengths and beliefs that can impact teaching and learning positively.

Given the liminal spaces that participants in this study often occupied, it is important to

highlight some of the dichotomous tensions about which participants spoke. Participants seemed to live and work between various endpoints, along a liminal continuum (Brown, 2007; Turner, 1977), gliding between youth and adult learning tendencies, conservative and liberal bookends, private and public relations, and tradition and change. Participant accounts appeared to reflect and reinforce Turner's (1977) notion of "threshold people" (p. 95) who move between ritualistic settings; however, the centers around which many of these liminal spaces gravitated were the learners themselves. Whether they were school students or church adults, the learners seemed to drive participants' instruction, approach, and repertoire choices. As Simon frankly stated, "It's geared to whoever's sitting in front of me." The one exception might have been Will, who was taught that in the church setting, even the liturgy can supersede the choir's needs. Still, among the fluidity and hybridity of identities (Brown, 2007) that participants claimed to inhabit, the teacher role emerged as the predominant, most consistent character in each context. Maintaining an educative teacher-student relationship appeared to surpass other identities that participants occupied along their liminal continua (e.g., musical, personal, professional, political, social, spiritual). In this way, participants' teacher persona served to anchor, moderate, and deflect dichotomous tensions they might have encountered. Future investigations could show additional patterns in the junctures that music teachers navigate between professional and religious rituals, as well as how music teachers approach their change of status in the moments before a context transition occurs (Brown, 2007; Emmanuel, 2011; Turner, 1977). Over time, the liminal spaces that bivocational music teachers inhabit could become the "spaces of radical openness and hospitality" that Hendricks (2021, p. 249) envisioned.

Finally, it is important to note that the findings in this study could have been shaped by some limiting factors, particularly with regard to size and scope. First, the small-scale qualitative descriptive design and single interviews might have restricted the level of data required to create more comprehensive assertions. Additional data from observations or multiple interviews could have revealed broader meanings. Second, while the participants held a variety of social identities (e.g., age, race, gender, location, career stage, musical background, sexual orientation, religious denomination), their primary work was as classically-prepared choral directors, and from a Christian perspective. Exploring other faith-based worship styles (e.g., folk, gospel, contemporary) as well as other religious or spiritual traditions (e.g., Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, West African/Latin American) could generate further connections between music teaching and worship. Additionally, the views that participants in this study shared may not represent fully the positions of their respective denominations or of individual churches within those denominations. Still, the current study showed, in part, how in-service music teachers have negotiated liminal spaces between and within Christian churches and public schools. Researchers could explore further the role that spirituality plays in the lives of school music teachers, the process of self-actualization as music teachers untangle their dual roles at church and school, and the ways in which church and teacher identities are constructed, maintained, and modified over time.

Implications

Bivocational music teaching in churches and schools is an underexplored area. While the views depicted in this study may not be fully transferable to other individuals or contexts, they could provide insight for music teachers who are interested in pursuing bivocational teaching opportunities or who are engaged in them currently. Future considerations for preservice music teachers, in-service music teachers, and church music leaders are addressed below.

First, participants in this study acknowledged numerous pedagogical practices and musical considerations that they used interchangeably with teen and adult singers. Acquiring the expertise to recognize and apply such connections early on could expedite bivocational readiness. Thus, for preservice music teachers who feel called to church leadership positions, preparation in working with diverse learners (e.g., age, ability) is fundamental. School students and church musicians likely hold a variety of pedagogical, social, and emotional needs. In many instances, responding to these factors can be more nuanced than musical considerations, especially in volunteer church ensembles where skill levels vary. A well-placed focus on lifespan learning theories and human development throughout teacher preparation programs could be helpful in this regard, and could highlight further the liminal spaces (and stages) that music learners face across their lifetime (e.g., graduation, marriage, family, career changes, retirement, health changes).

Preservice music teachers also might benefit from working with a mentor (e.g., music education professor, church music director) to explore best practices and pedagogical transfers between school and church. Mentors could facilitate discussions in applying lesson planning, repertoire selection, and rehearsal strategies from music education coursework to church settings. Explicit applications could assist preservice music teachers who might be familiar with the fundamentals of teaching, but may not be familiar with how liturgical elements shape worship and musical choices. As Rohwer (2011) acknowledged, church ensembles are perhaps more complex because of the added layers of worship and spirituality. Mentorship could prepare students more fully for working within church organizations, examining other faith traditions, considering repertoire in relation to its difficulty and situational appropriateness, and envisioning the delicate balance between worship, music, and fellowship.

Second, participants in this study were in-service music teachers who experienced varying degrees of overlap between church and school. Determining how to negotiate these context-laden landscapes – and the personal, dispositional inventorying that accompanies them – may require collaborative discussion with reliable confidants. For bivocational music teachers who find themselves in church leadership roles, continued support and mentorship could elucidate practical and spiritual considerations in both contexts, particularly if there are theological or musical differences among church leadership. Sometimes, church structures can be less intuitive than school structures. Thus, cultivating trusted networks of individuals inside and outside of church and school could help to illuminate cross-patterns

in both contexts, providing some clarity to the blurred thresholds that in-service music teachers might encounter.

Third, the participants in this study built productive relationships with numerous stakeholders, from school administrators and clergy to students, parents, and congregations. Participants believed that their background in pedagogy expedited networking opportunities, strengthened church music-making, and allowed them to make lasting connections with community members. For church music directors who may not have a background in pedagogy, clearer and more abundant resources could be useful (e.g., denomination-based, state MEA-based). Online tools, workshops, or professional development opportunities could be created or updated in collaboration with stakeholders who have first-hand experience in worship music and pedagogy. In this way, appropriate, vetted materials could foster musical growth and self-reflection among church music leaders. Additionally, music leadership resources could be especially advantageous for churches that find locating and attracting qualified music candidates challenging. Given that some churches face difficulty hiring music worship leaders who are well-versed in all areas, well-curated resources could be helpful.

School music teachers can occupy multiple liminal spaces throughout their careers. Bivocational teaching in churches and schools can afford music educators additional opportunities for pedagogical refinement, community engagement, and spiritual growth. Continued explorations of these intersecting landscapes could provide additional lessons for confronting and enacting change, repairing relationships within and across communities, and reimagining church music participation in the decades to come.

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