Narrative portraiture in research seeks to capture the distinctive features of lived experience. Tawnya Smith, Karin Hendricks, and Deejay Robinson observed and interviewed Michelle, an elementary music teacher of Bahamian heritage, to construct an account of her engaging pedagogy and practices. Influenced by the work of Christopher Emdin, who describes culturally responsive and liberatory approaches to teaching and learning, the researchers characterize Michelle’s teaching as representative of preaching styles found in the Black Pentecostal church. As music education seeks to diversify images of teaching and models of pedagogy, well-drawn narrative portraits such as this one expand realms of possibility in classrooms.

Stephanie Cronenberg and Brandon Williams address gaps in the profession’s knowledge of middle school music education, a widespread but curiously understudied area of inquiry. They conducted a national survey to convey the status of middle-level music education in public and public charter schools in the United States and its territories. A related set of questions investigated music teacher demographics and the perceptions of those teachers regarding their preparation to teach at the middle level. Cronenberg and Williams offer these data as a baseline for other researchers interested in investigating middle school music as a pivotal time of transition, both for students and for schools as required and elective courses expand course-taking options. In addition, they offer suggestions for preparing music teachers to better meet the needs of students at this consequential time in their education.

Eleven highly regarded music improvisers in an array of cultural traditions agreed to have their performances recorded while participating in the grounded theory study of Martin Norgaard, Matt Dunaway, and Steven Black. The researchers asked the musicians to choose pieces that allowed improvisatory freedom. Afterward, the musicians listened to these recordings and viewed visual representations of their improvisations in a stimulated recall setting. Some of the participants agreed to additional interviews to describe their musical histories. Norgaard and his colleagues coded interview data to draw attention to various strategies and thought processes, attending to aspects of cultural practices and conceptual categories. Teachers of improvisation and researchers interested in creative thinking in music will have much to learn from this intriguing study.

Benjamin Helton’s dialectical essay also looks at intersections of culture and pedagogy. He draws insights from research in cognitive neuroscience and sociology to posit a theory of enculturated pedagogy. His synthetic essay is an example of cross-disciplinary integration of two epistemological stances, intended to prompt further discussion, inquiry, and practice by placing two explanatory fields in conversation.

Janet Revell Barrett
Editor