WHY MUSIC TEACHERS REMAIN IN THE PROFESSION:
CONVERSATIONS WITH CAREER MUSIC EDUCATORS

by

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Johanna J. Siebert was born in Rochester, New York on September 1, 1953. She graduated from Nazareth College of Rochester in 1975, where she earned a Bachelor of Science in Music Theory and K-12 music teacher certification. She taught instrumental music for two years before interrupting her career to start a family.

In 1984, Johanna returned to the classroom as a private school elementary general music teacher; she began teaching in the Rochester City School District in 1987. In the same year, Johanna began graduate studies at the Eastman School of Music, where she earned a Master of Arts in Music Education in 1989. Johanna taught in many of the City’s elementary schools, and for ten years was a mentor to new staff. She began doctoral studies at Eastman in 1997, combined with coursework toward the School District Administrator certification at the University of Rochester. While in the Ph.D. program, Johanna taught elementary general music, supervised field placements, was a member of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Music Assessment committee, served on the editorial board of Teaching Music, and was a liaison for the Rochester City School District/Eastman School of Music Partnership.

Johanna moved to the Webster Central School District in 2001 and soon became the curriculum supervisor of music. As administrator of a department of 38 teachers, she is responsible for all aspects of the district’s music program. Johanna has presented at numerous local, state, and national conferences. She is a current member of the editorial board of Music Educators Journal and president of the
Rochester area music administrator organization. Johanna continues to teach children as director of her church’s children’s choir.
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ABSTRACT

Ever-increasing attrition statistics cite unsatisfactory work conditions and lack of administrative support as reasons for leaving the field of music education, yet more music teachers remain in the profession than those who leave. In this qualitative study I investigated what enables the development and support of career music educators. Research questions probed why music teachers remain in their field and what support systems and work conditions are conducive to their retention. Qualitative research protocols for focus group interviews were utilized to answer these questions. Subjects with teaching experience ranging from 5 to 23 years were organized into categories of school level teaching assignments and levels of experience for interactive conversations with other music teachers. In these focus groups, 15 participants discussed their personal experiences and reasons for continued work in music education. Field notes and audiotapes of the groups’ interviews were transcribed and analyzed to provide insights into individual reasons for career longevity. These data were then interpreted to answer the posed research questions.

Responses from the focus group interviews revealed that career music educators find adequate music supplies and materials, a viable music curriculum, and realistic teaching schedules to be supportive conditions in their work. They also consider administrative support of their autonomous efforts to be crucial to their job satisfaction. Increasing numbers of positive experiences may also help to account for growing levels of career fulfillment.

Career music educators require appropriate professional development to increase their levels of competence; participation in such workshops also allows them
to connect with other music teachers to build and share a sense of authentic self. Music colleagues are essential to career music educators, and they help to make each others’ work meaningful and uplifting.

The participants in this study share the attributes of autonomous actions, interrelatedness, and competence in their developing careers. The synthesis of these characteristics produces self-determination in individuals, which is in accordance with Deci and Ryan’s theory of self-determination (1985). Results of the study suggest that career music educators develop and remain in the profession because of their self-determined and intrinsically motivated behaviors.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

My experience in developing and administering an exemplary public school music department began 6 years ago when I resigned from an urban district to assume assistant music supervisor duties in a neighboring suburb. In the City I had been a formal mentor for new music staff and a trainer for the district’s mentoring program; I worked closely with local music colleges to supervise student teachers and to provide professional development for both novice and tenured staff. I enjoyed this stimulating work and knew I made a difference in the lives of those I helped. During my 15 years there, however, I watched new and seasoned teachers become dissatisfied with working conditions and leave the district. They complained of student discipline problems, little influence on teaching schedules, and lack of important teaching resources and administrative support.

These above-mentioned issues are receiving attention in current professional literature. Reasons for urban teachers’ leaving the field are reported by Nieto (2003) and Williams (2001) to include lack of input into district decision-making processes, little opportunity for professional collaboration, inadequate working conditions, and insufficient parent support. Music teachers in cities add the following to the list: (1) unreasonable teaching schedules (multiple buildings, large class size, high student load), (2) isolation from other music staff, (3) poor building and administrative support, and (4) inadequate musical resources (Conway 2003; Krueger 1999; Scheib 2003).
I also found the growing lack of support harmful to the City’s music program. As a mentor I could support other music teachers with curricular, pedagogical, and management advice; however, I had little impact on moving the district’s philosophy toward the reality of a comprehensive music program. This convinced me to move to a new place, challenge, and role where I could have a greater influence on the performing arts. In doing so, I added to the growing attrition rate within my previous department, creating yet another change for my students.

Orientation to the Study

My current administrative tasks and duties have caused me to examine those same problems of support and balance with a more informed eye. Now that the responsibility for the quality of a district’s music program is mine, I understand the value of a stable and productive music faculty in the realization of rigorous curricular goals. Whenever a music teacher leaves, even the strongest of music programs experiences disruption; new collaborations need to be formed, understandings of students’ abilities learned, and organizational systems familiarized. The recruitment, development, and retention of a dynamic and committed department have become my primary administrative goals.

The lack of strong retention practices results in turnover of staff, a problem in all subject areas and in many districts; the literature is rife with statistics on teacher attrition, especially among new staff, providing an alarming warning of severe teacher shortages. The National Education Association (NEA 1997) reported that the overall average employment for full-time teachers in K-12 public education was 16
years, far from the 30-year standard retirement required for full pension benefits. This same source identified approximately 20% of the teaching profession leaving within its first 5 years.

More recently, the 2001 *Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS)* and its supplement, the *Teacher Followup Survey (TFS)*, reveal that 58% of all schools had difficulties in filling one or more teaching openings in the 2000-2001 school year. The most frequent need was in English, mathematics and special education (Ingersoll and Smith 2003). Although there were vacancies in music in only 34% of these schools, the varied grade levels and comprehensiveness of one person’s music teaching assignment can account for considerable interruption when a teacher leaves a district’s program (Krueger 2000).

Our profession needs to address this growing problem; however, there is little information to help us understand why music teachers choose to continue teaching (Tarnowski and Murphy 2003). This was evident in the 2005 *Symposium on Music Teacher Education* sponsored by the Society for Music Teacher Education (SMTE); the organization used as its theme *Rethinking, Researching, Revitalizing*. The purpose of the symposium was to examine three areas of critical need: finding, preparing, and supporting the professional development of future and present music educators. Keynote speaker Dr. Richard Ingersoll (2005) delivered his address (“The Teacher Shortage: A Case of Wrong Diagnosis and Wrong Prescription”) to those responsible for the preparation and development of music educators. Ingersoll questioned the veracity of an actual teacher shortage and suggested that attrition (i.e., resignation and/or movement from one teaching position to another) was the reason for the lack
of qualified staff. The SASS and TFS surveys also reveal a 46% attrition rate among all new teachers by the end of the fifth year (a startling increase of 26% from the NEA estimate in 1997). Dissatisfaction with employment, pursuing other jobs, and family or personal matters are listed as the top reasons for this attrition. Ingersoll’s words to those gathered were focused on keeping teachers in the education profession and avoiding the “revolving door” of openings caused by dissatisfied staff. The discussion of retention and support of music teachers was continued in subsequent symposium sessions, and break-out groups brainstormed possible research options for gaining insight into “why music teachers stay.”

According to the SASS, there were fewer vacancies in music than in other subjects; however, there is still reason for major concern. By virtue of certification, teaching schedules, and frequency of instruction, music educators develop long-term instructional and formative relationships with their students. They commonly work with multiple ensembles and grade levels, both simultaneously and for extended years; therefore, attrition in music causes a different and more pervasive change in instruction in this atypically structured academic subject. The withdrawal of a single music teacher from a school district commonly results in the disruption of a multi-level curriculum, as well as in the change of instruction for hundreds of students. This is not the case in most general education disciplines, where the majority of students are with a teacher for one grade level or a single course such as science. Considering this difference, Ingersoll’s call (2005) for increased retention of staff has particular urgency in music.
In contradiction to this statistical evidence, my current school district enjoys a stable teaching staff and a reputation for a high-quality music program. As music administrator I work with 38 highly qualified music educators in a suburban school system, with staff in various stages of career development. I supervise and evaluate music teachers, lead curriculum work, maintain and oversee a substantial budget, offer and obtain targeted professional development, and advocate for our many programs. As part of my ongoing support, I attend numerous concerts and community events, and frequently visit all teachers in their classrooms. This nurturing environment is quite different from that of my early teaching experience, and thus has been important to develop for the benefit of my new district’s culture.

Relationships and conversations with my current district’s music teachers have convinced me that there are many fulfilled and motivated career music educators who are pleased with their identities—music teachers. On a recent professional development day, I asked the members of the department why they have remained in their chosen field. At first I was met with blank faces; it was as though my question made no sense. “It’s what we do,” they said. Eventually, I heard more: the kids and seeing them “get it;” working with the same students over the course of a few years; work changing every year; experiencing a sense of accomplishment; strong collegial relationships; combining an avocation with our profession; because of “days like this!” administrative appreciation and support, and good salaries. These uplifting responses were not surprising in light of the low attrition rate in our district, but unusual in that this type of response is not represented in the research detailing music
teacher retention. The underlying issues of teacher longevity require a more focused inquiry.

*Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to investigate the development and retention of career music educators. Understanding what conditions and professional activities keep music teachers in their field can assist policy makers, college teacher educators, and school district administrators in providing growth opportunities and support for all music staff.

*Research Questions*

The central research question addressed in this study was: Why do music teachers remain in their field? Sub-questions that address the various elements of a music teacher’s occupation were also asked: (1) What working conditions and administrative support are conducive to the development of career music educators? (2) What professional activities support the life cycle of a career music educator? (3) Are there landmark events that increase the potential for longevity? (4) Does teaching at different school-age levels (i.e., elementary, middle or high school) have an impact on the decision to remain in teaching? (5) Does length of experience have an impact on the decision to remain in teaching? and (6) Are there additional factors to be considered in developing an understanding of career music educators’ longevity?
Relevance of the Topic

Other members of our profession are looking at this issue as well. SMTE has organized its focus on the future of music teacher education into twelve Areas of Strategic Planning and Action (ASPA). At the 2006 MENC Biennial National Conference, I joined members of the Teacher Retention ASPA to plan and carry out targeted research activities. Part of our charge is to provide a current listing of literature related to the topic; another is for each member to interview two experienced music teachers to ascertain their reasons for continued teaching in the field. I will be reviewing and revising quantitative and qualitative interview protocols for the committee’s use in its work while adding to the developing inventory of relevant literature. Presentation of our results will be shared at the 2007 SMTE Symposium in Greensboro, North Carolina.

By looking at the positive experiences and workings of teachers who have developed into career music educators, we may affect the reported rates of attrition within our ranks. There is an immediate need to increase the limited body of research on this topic. In this way we can respond to Vision 2020: The Housewright Declaration’s charge (MENC 1999) to identify the barriers that impede (and, by extension, those attributes that support) the full actualization of a comprehensive music education philosophy. A stable and developed teaching force can help us reach this goal.
Chapter 2
Review of the Literature

To investigate career music teachers’ reasons for their commitment to education, it is helpful to review what we know about professional practice with respect to longevity. The following review provides an orientation to this topic. Statistics and reasons for teacher attrition in general and music education are discussed, in addition to conditions contributing to teacher burnout. Research relating to beginning teachers, induction and mentoring programs, and the retention of staff is also represented. A “call to research” concludes the review.

Teacher Longevity Statistics

The exodus of public school teachers from their profession is well documented. In 1997 the rate of employment for classroom teachers with 20 years or more in the field was reported to be 35-45% (National Education Association 1997). At that time there was relative stability with 86% of the overall work force retaining its positions from year to year; 7% moving to new assignments; and 7% leaving teaching for retirement, other employment opportunities, or family responsibilities. The NEA reported further that full-time teachers averaged 16 years experience on the job, and approximately 20% of the profession had 5 or fewer years of experience.

Music teachers had somewhat higher rates of attrition, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES 1997); music teachers averaged a 7% attrition rate (compared to the 6.6% representing public school teachers in
general). MENC (2000) reported that almost half (44%) of the music teachers surveyed in 1999 were planning to leave the profession within the next 10 years, even though only 7% of those respondents were within 10 years of retirement age. This is comparable to attrition rates found by Gillespie and Hamann (1998) in their study of orchestra programs. According to Hamann and Gordon (2000), the attrition rate for music educators is higher, especially among its non-tenured members.

Data generated by the SASS and TFS are in disagreement with that of music research (Ingersoll, 2003). The results of those surveys indicate that math, science, and special education teachers experience higher rates of attrition than those in music education; however, music teaching vacancies are increasing yearly. Gardner’s interpretation of SASS and TFS data sets (2006) reinforces Ingersoll and Smith’s contention (2003) that, in general, teachers entering the field of education are choosing to leave before their fifth year.

**Reasons for Teacher Attrition**

There are several reasons teachers choose to leave the field. The 1997 SASS and TFS reported the following as leading explanations for this exodus: (1) retirement (13%), (2) staffing actions (20%), (3) family/personal reasons (40%) including pregnancy, child rearing, health problems, and family moves, (4) the pursuit of other opportunities (27%), and (5) job dissatisfaction (29%). While the first three responses are common to all professions, job dissatisfaction and the pursuit of other opportunities account for more turnover in education than does retirement; more than half of all departures cite work environment as reasons for leaving their positions.
Reasons for job dissatisfaction included poor salary, poor administrative support, student discipline problems, lack of faculty influence and autonomy, poor student motivation, inadequate time to prepare, poor undergraduate preparation, intrusions on teaching time, and too-large class sizes. The NEA (1997) also listed the following determining factors: little opportunity for professional advancement, excessive paperwork, and lack of resources, recognition, and variety.

Ingersoll (2003) posits that these findings suggest introspection into the internal organization and management of schools as a basis for making improvements in the quality of teaching jobs. He describes the current “shortage” of teachers as a misnomer, calling this instead a “wrong diagnosis” for the wrong treatment of the problem (2005). As an alternative, Ingersoll likens this shortage to passage through a “revolving door” where working educators not only leave the profession (leavers), but also change jobs from one district or school to another (movers), creating vacancies. Both categories result in new hires. He proposes that school districts devote more energy to effective induction and retention programs as a means of slowing this movement, with the ultimate goal of improving and stabilizing student performance.

**Music Teacher Attrition**

Data from Scheib’s survey of departing band teachers (2004) also yield recommendations for a more constant work force. If music teachers leave their jobs due to job dissatisfaction, then the solutions we seek to rectify the teacher shortage should address these concerns (p. 54). When asked why they were leaving music
education, the four general categories of teacher response were: (1) difficult working conditions, (2) low salary, (3) public perception of music teaching, and (4) low priority of music education within the school curriculum. These responses were delineated further to include an emphasis on “building numbers” in their programs (“quantity over quality”), unrealistic demands on time (especially among high school staff), lack of administrative and budgetary support, and the need to justify the music program.

Other research substantiates these complaints. Madsen and Hancock investigated attrition rates of music teachers, revealing that “many music teachers are leaving the profession early in their careers; this may be a critical factor in the need for new teachers” (2002, 14). Data from this study revealed that six years after graduation, 34.4% of participants were no longer teaching. Respondents to questionnaires administered in 1995 and again in 2001 indicated that a lack of administrative support was a leading cause for this discontent. Jessica Fredricks (2001), Bethune Academy’s Teacher of the Year for 2000-2001, suggests that the deciding factor in many resignations is the effectiveness of the administration.

According to Scheib (2006), different ideologies for different educational roles also bring about tension for music teachers. Today’s schools are often operated in ways similar to an industrial model that needs to run efficiently and in a cost-effective manner. Even though educators have earned degrees providing knowledge in the core understandings of schools and particular disciplines, Scheib proposes teachers are but workers who follow the directions of the foreman and plant manager (or administrator and superintendent). Disillusionment and resentment occur for
music teachers when they are not allowed the autonomy of creativity to plan and deliver curricular and methodological wisdom gleaned from professional education and experiences. It is the existence of such dichotomous practices that prompts Scheib to advocate for further research into the perceived lack of support for teacher empowerment.

Baker (2006) examined the relationship between music teacher job satisfaction and administrative support. Through surveys administered to early career secondary choral teachers (with job experience of five years or less) and principals, Baker asked respondents to comment on priorities in music education and the value of professional development. Respondents were also asked to indicate job satisfaction, factors that would increase that satisfaction, their intentions to remain in the field, and reasons affecting their decision to leave or to stay. While there was a non-significant positive relationship between teacher and principal ratings of the value of professional development, 13.7% (or 12 of the responding 87 teachers) indicated they planned to leave the teaching profession. The primary reason given for this answer was inadequate administrative support. Conversely, 85% or 74 of the respondents reported they were satisfied with their teaching positions; 41.3% or 36 identified administrative support as the reason for their job satisfaction. Baker recommended making administrators aware of the impact they have on developing career music educators and educating those administrators regarding what specific types of assistance are of greatest value in stemming the rate of teacher attrition.

Other job-related conditions affect teacher attrition. Conflict among ever-increasing expectations coupled with inadequate resources can result in role stress
between personal and professional duties. Gordon (1997) surveyed P-12 music teachers to determine the effects of environmental stress factors; respondents (n=166) reacted to stress with emotional symptoms (e.g., anxiousness, depression, and insecurity) and physical exhaustion. Scheib’s (2003) collective case study of role stressors depicted the abilities of teachers to meet the expectations of their positions. This research revealed that role overload (including the need for ongoing advocacy efforts), under-utilization of skills (seen in overwhelming administrative responsibilities), and overloaded teaching schedules combined to produce unreasonable amounts of stress for four high school music teachers.

While stress factors are common across various teaching disciplines and positions, music teachers often experience the effects of a combination of many “stressors”—inadequate program budgets, extended working hours, multiple performance expectations, unrealistic time requirements, student apathy, lack of student motivation, scheduling of classes across multiple buildings, large class size and student load, lack of pedagogical knowledge and planning, student discipline problems, and lack of administrative support (Hamann, Daugherty and Mills, 1987; Killian and Baker, 2006; Madsen and Hancock, 2002). These specific circumstances far outnumber those found in general education classrooms.

Gordon’s series of interviews (2000) with four practicing music teachers, two elementary and two secondary, identified three categories of stress factors: (1) behaviors and attitudes of students, colleagues, parents and administrators; (2) difficulties of program management which negatively impact the music curriculum and program; and (3) inadequate preservice preparation for music teaching. Gordon
claims these factors often cause music teachers to face profound professional difficulties. The author deduced that the high stress level common to music educators causes those teachers to experience multiple professional problems that can result in a departure from the field.

**Music Teacher Burnout**

The confluence of ever-present, multiple stressors often results in _teacher burnout_, a leading cause of music teacher attrition. Described as emotional over-stimulation that results in fatigue, anxiety, boredom, and/or depression, burnout is more than mere disillusionment. Those suffering from burnout lose the ability to laugh, are angered easily, and are more prone to sickness, absenteeism, and early retirement. Burnout frequently results in a teacher losing sympathy for students and developing negative attitudes toward work. The stress of overwork, physical exhaustion and professional frustration can produce such a condition (Freudenberger 1974). Hamann and Gordon (2000) describe burnout as a loss of idealism, a stress that’s not relieved, and a continuous effort made without reward. They suggest that it affects those most committed to their field.

The _Maslach Burnout Inventory-ES_ measures environmental factors that combine to produce burnout (Maslach, Jackson, and Schwab 1986). Maslach’s definition of the condition prevails upon three interacting subscales that measure depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and loss of feelings with regard to personal accomplishments. According to the authors, burnout results in reduced teacher effectiveness, often convincing the teacher to pursue a different career. McClain
administered an electronic survey to 898 school music teachers (2005) and used the *Maslach Burnout Inventory-ES* to determine their level of burnout. Respondents in McClain’s study (514) qualified as “moderately burned out” in the area of emotional exhaustion. On average, they displayed negative feelings about (1) various types of support (with lack of administrative support ranked as the primary reason for exhaustion), (2) excessive preparation, (3) inability to work as part of a team, and (4) receiving a poor evaluation. Teachers demonstrated “low burnout” in depersonalization and had selected administrative support, the positive interactions of others (teachers, parents, community) and the ability to handle stress as reasons for this designation. Subjects also exhibited low burnout in personal accomplishment; again, ongoing support enhanced this rating. McClain’s recommendations to schools to reduce teacher burnout were to provide an effective work environment that included strong administrative support and training in stress and classroom management. McClain advised, “Teachers who wish to avoid burnout also must build support for their music programs among other teachers and within their community” (82-83).

Some groups are more susceptible to burnout. Common victims are secondary music teachers, teachers unprepared for dealing with disciplinary issues, those without administrative support and/or recognition, and educators teaching in urban settings (Gordon 1997). Burnout affects all levels of veteran teachers, often striking those most productive and committed. “The experiences that teachers want for their students are based largely on the experiences they once had as students” (Scheib
and their attempts to produce the same aesthetic qualities in a new generation can be overwhelming and unsatisfying.

Teacher Retention and Renewal

It is important to note that more teachers remain on the job for their full educational careers, in spite of the previously noted factors that contribute to attrition and burnout. Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch and Enz (2000) attribute this to a reflection and renewal process that leads to continuous progress. “With the appropriate support, teachers can continue to enhance their abilities throughout their careers, using reflection and renewal as the mechanism to propel personal and professional growth” (104). The authors’ description of a life cycle for career teachers (i.e., successive phases of novice, apprentice, professional, expert, distinguished, emeritus) is reliant upon formative growth experiences and development that increase the expert knowledge and skills of career educators. The need to discourage withdrawal and to provide professional development opportunities are the means to progress through the developmental phases of this model.

Williams (2001) conducted in-depth interviews with 12 exemplary North Carolina urban and rural teachers with 15 or more years of experience. The author asked them about their sources of inner strength and the necessary workplace dynamics that contributed to their professional fulfillment and long-lasting success in the classroom. Responses indicated (1) the burning need for intellectual stimulation, (2) self-imposed change (not change designed in isolation by administration), (3) professional opportunities (mentoring, teaching classes to parents, hobbies),
(4) personal bonds with students and colleagues, and (5) immediate and constructive feedback from supervisors. These teachers also had a sense of humor, yet each experienced a time when they seriously considered leaving their field. All credit “talented administrators for involving their faculties in creative activities that helped them develop strategies, envision possibilities, and create opportunities for learning that challenge, stimulate, and satisfy the most creative minds” (75). Being engaged in life-changing activity sustained these teachers in both good and bad times of their careers.

Nieto’s 2003 research also involved in-depth conversations with seasoned and excellent high school teachers in an urban area. This study revealed that skilled, veteran educators (1) value and reflect on their own life stories, (2) are angry at (but don’t give in to) school bureaucracy and disrespect, and (3) make real and lasting differences in the lives of their students. The teachers in this urban school found sustenance and renewal through engagement with student teachers with new ideas, supportive colleagues, and students who returned for visits. They shared adult conversations, collaborated in curriculum development, attended conferences, were active members in professional organizations, and mentored new colleagues. Nieto recommended the existence of an equitable and supportive environment that gives teachers the time, guidance, and resources to grow as professionals.

The music education profession has long advised the pursuit of both institutional and individual development. MENC dedicated the November 2000 issue of Music Educators Journal to “The Life Cycle of a Music Teacher.” In this issue Smith and Haack (2000) stressed the importance of gaining new insights, skills and
challenges that move music teachers forward in their profession. The authors advised developing a plan for lifelong learning that enhances teachers’ effectiveness, helps avoid burnout, and provides balance between personal and professional lives.

Revitalization is key to lifelong learning. In the same issue, Cutietta and Thompson (2000) reported that most continuing music teachers identified a continuing education experience as the main support in their professional lives. The cycle of development from novice teacher into a master educator is a natural one, yet one that requires thoughtful planning and personal reflection. In more recent research, Madsen and Hancock suggested that it is important for music educators to have a “career ladder” (2002, 14) as do other professions that offer incentive for development.

Movement through the stages of a successful music teaching career requires support in many forms, and recent research has yielded positive and formative steps that help to build music teacher longevity. Bowles (2000) advised self-selected learning experiences to sustain “happy” music educators. Conway (2003) recommended successful induction programs, collaborative opportunities with co-workers, and revitalization of experienced staff through expert-teacher activities (e.g., mentoring, curriculum writing, hosting student teachers, and presenting workshops).

*Induction and Mentoring Programs*

Placing and keeping new teachers on such a continuum of development has been a focus in recent educational reform. Induction programs that give support to new staff throughout the year are designed to lessen the overwhelming feelings common to this period. In these programs, first-year teachers are familiarized with
curriculum guides, instructional materials, networking opportunities, and required professional development (McCann, Johannessen, and Ricca 2005). Gilbert (2005) surveyed 222 beginning teachers in six Georgia school districts to ask what proved to be the most productive induction activities. The teachers listed (1) giving new teachers the opportunity to observe other teachers, (2) assigning new teachers to smaller classes, (3) assigning mentors to new teachers, (4) providing new teachers with co-planning time with other teachers, and (5) providing new teachers with feedback based on classroom observations.

State-mandated mentoring programs are at times part of the certification process. These programs provide additional one-on-one induction by veteran teachers to novices in their daily work. In analysis of the 1999-2000 SASS data, Ingersoll and Smith (2003) discerned that the turnover (movers and/or leavers) of first-year teachers who did not participate in induction and/or mentoring programs was 40%; of those with some mentoring and induction, the turnover decreased to 28%; and those with full mentoring and induction represented a smaller 18%. Berliner suggests, in an interview in Educational Leadership (Scherer 2001), that mentoring programs have been one of the most promising reforms in the past ten years; not only do they cut the dropout rate of new staff, but they also help new teachers think about their experience and handle the emotional side of teaching.

Mentor programs can fail to offer benefits and inspiring advice; however, poor selection of mentors, lack of peer coaching training and communication skills, inconsistent scheduling of meetings, and unrealistic expectations by both parties can thwart even the best intentions (Villani 2002). Mis-matched mentor/new teacher
pairings was also cause for concern (Gilbert 2005) and especially non-helpful for music novices with non-music advisers (Conway 2003; Krueger 2000). Considering the specialized circumstances of a music teacher’s position (e.g., breadth of curricula, public assessment of program, large class size, management of large ensembles, itinerancy, isolation from peers), it is the fortunate new teacher who is mentored by someone in the same certification area who has experienced these issues (Conway 2001).

*Professional Development Opportunities*

The education profession recognizes the importance of ongoing professional development for its teachers throughout their careers, and most states require its continuing presence as part of the permanent certification process. It is not feasible for college music programs alone to meet the needs of its education students over the expanse of their professional careers. Bowles (2000) emphasized the vital nature of lifelong learning as part of a “happy” career music educator’s preparation for passage through progressive career stages. Teachers should plan a personal strategy for a satisfying professional life through revitalization and development activities that supported professional growth.

Bowles’ survey of Midwest music educators (2003) yielded much information about most frequently chosen development topics, how far teachers were willing to travel for these opportunities, how much teachers were willing to pay, and the duration of the development. In the questionnaires teachers wee asked to rank pre-selected topics for workshops and correlated the responses with the teachers’ stated
specialty areas. It appeared important that teachers had the opportunity to express their own needs as learners, and that those responsible for providing professional development respond to the needs of their teachers (reported also by Bush in 2007). Bowles recommended using such a survey instrument frequently to ensure the appropriateness of professional development in meeting the changing needs of music educators.

Conway (2003) added Bowles’ data and suggestions to her own research findings in a collection of writings on music teacher support. In Conway’s chapter titled “Ongoing Professional Development” (151-166), she shared an individual Professional Development Plan for continued growth that includes personal, intellectual, musical, and instructional goals, for both beginning and experienced teachers. Conway also recommended specific options one might consider in advancement of their professional status. Leadership roles (e.g., mentoring, curriculum writing, music administration, and teaching in higher education) are natural outcomes of the successful progression through a professional life cycle. Additional recommendations were made to music and district administrators to plan teacher-informed workshops and provide increased opportunities for music teachers to meet and talk with each other.

There is little research about music teachers’ choices to continue teaching. Tarnowski and Murphy (2003) compared elementary music teachers’ reasons for entering the field of education with those for remaining in the profession. Respondents to the survey (281 out of a possible 816, or 34.4%) had an average of 15 years experience and education beyond the bachelor’s degree. Over 97% of
respondents listed a love of music and working with children as their motivations for entering the teaching world. Reasons for staying in the field reflected these two top responses in addition to financial security, liking one’s colleagues, and administrative support. Overwhelmingly, 97.5% of the respondents reported that their participation in revitalizing professional development activities was also responsible for their longevity in the field. Tarnowski and Murphy recommended that administrators look for ways to recognize and reward quality music teachers.

Elementary general music teachers were the subjects of Bernard’s (2003) study that described expressions of their identities as musician teachers. Six elementary teachers who were also active musicians outside of their classrooms were interviewed about bringing their musician-identities into their classrooms and their teaching. Data revealed that engaging in both music-making and teaching activities was a means for forging rewarding and fulfilling music careers.

It is also important for veteran teachers to engage in advanced levels of revitalization. One example of experienced teacher professional development is documented by Standerfer (2003). Case studies of secondary choral teachers undergoing certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards provided evidence of unintended and transformational development. Qualitative interviews revealed participants’ feelings of accomplishments and growth as they reflected on their teaching and gathered evidence for their assessments.
Call to Research

While much has been written and researched about attrition rates and reasons for career change, little is known about why music teachers remain active in their profession; the dearth of information regarding music educators’ reasons for longevity is evident. A few of the previous studies depict administrative support as integral to the success of the teacher. Findings from other studies recommend self-selected and meaningful development as means to sustain music teachers. This limited evidence about what keeps music educators in the field, combined with the increasing number of music teacher resignations, clearly identifies our need to learn more about conditions and activities that support music teachers in their careers.

The future of music education appears to be in crisis. Many beginning teachers do not remain in their positions long enough to become expert teachers. This situation has been acknowledged by our national professional organization. The Spring 2005 issue of the Journal of Music Teacher Education was titled “Special Issue: The Future of Music Education.” As President of MENC, Circle introduced the contents of this issue with a recommendation to teacher educators to strengthen each link of the teacher education continuum, suggesting that university faculty work with school districts to provide ongoing teacher development. Journal contributors responded to questions that had been posed by Kimpton in his 2004 MENC conference keynote address. Warning of the declining longevity in music teaching, Kimpton asked: (1) What partnerships must we create for music education in the future? (2) Where will the supply of new teachers come from? and (3) What is the role of professional organizations in providing leadership for music education?
Among other strategies, the JMTE authors (1) offered suggestions for potential collaborations (Robbins and Stein 2005); (2) proposed developing a recruiting pipeline (Fredrickson and Burto, 2005); and (3) sent a plea for a concerted effort among supporting organizations to devise, disseminate and implement action plans for improved teacher retention (Ester and Brinkman 2005).

The SMTE sponsored a Symposium on Music Teacher Education in September 2005, where the discussion of music education’s future continued. The formation of 12 Special Action Groups (SAG, later changed to Areas of Strategic Planning and Action, or ASPA) focused attention on identified areas of need in music education (e.g., recruitment, preparation, development, and retention of music educators). Each original SAG prepared a list of actions for the following six months, leading up to the 2006 MENC Biennial National Conference. The Retention SAG called for investigation into “why teachers stay,” and committee members agreed to assist in designing and carrying out personal interviews of career music educators to determine reasons for teachers’ longevity.

This research will be essential in identifying retention strategies that will allow us to become proactive in supporting progression through the life cycle of career music educators. The importance of job satisfaction expressed by those in the profession makes it imperative that we discover what keeps music teachers engaged and thriving in their profession. The future of music education depends on the commitment of dedicated teachers; identifying and replicating the elements of those professional environments that support successful career music educators will help us to develop and retain such a work force.
Chapter 3

Research Procedures

The purpose of this study was to investigate the development and retention of career music educators. To explore the individual reasons for teacher longevity, I elected to use a qualitative design. This chapter includes the reiteration of the posed research questions, an overview of the methodology of the study, preliminary steps taken to implement the study, and protocols for the collection, coding, and analysis of the data.

Research Questions

The central research question posed to address this issue was: Why do music teachers remain in their field? Sub-questions that address the various elements of a music teacher’s occupation were also asked: (1) What working conditions and administrative support are conducive to the development of career music educators? (2) What professional activities support the life cycle of a career music educator? (3) Are there landmark events that increase the potential for longevity? (4) Does teaching at different school-age levels (i.e., elementary, middle, or high school) have an impact on the decision to remain in teaching? (5) Does length of experience have an impact on the decision to remain in teaching? and (6) Are there additional factors to be considered in developing an understanding of career music educators’ longevity?
Methodological Overview

Qualitative research is an appropriate inquiry approach, says Creswell (2002), for exploring and understanding a central phenomenon (i.e., the career music educator). This type of research considers the participant’s view, describes it within a setting or context and explores the meaning persons hold for educational issues (49). Thus, qualitative data collection and analysis methods were central to the interpretation of this research.

Because personal information is so important in this type of study, a focus group interview strategy was selected to collect such data. Krueger and Casey (2000) describe a focus group study as:

a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment. Each group is conducted with six to eight people by a skilled interviewer. The discussions are relaxed, and often participants enjoy sharing their ideas and perceptions. Group members influence each other by responding to ideas and comments of others. (5)

The intent of this strategy is to promote self-disclosure among the targeted population. Krueger and Casey recommend forming groups with subjects from like settings, as well as from various organizations (in this case, districts) so that knowledge of past history is not an impediment to open communication (172). Studying the paths of successful career music educators (the central phenomenon in this study) to ascertain the reasons for their commitment might provide a basis for replicating similar supportive conditions and opportunities for beginning teachers and those already in the profession. In this way, the topic of teacher attrition can be addressed and positively impacted.
Preliminary Steps

Two essential steps preceded the actual data collection process. These included (1) gaining required institutional approvals, and (2) implementing a method for gaining access to the focus groups’ participants.

Institutional Approvals

Before beginning this study, a formal proposal was presented to and accepted by the Music Education Department and Graduate Research Committee of the Eastman School of Music. Components of the proposal that delineated methodology, recordkeeping, and disclosure of collected data were then submitted to the University of Rochester’s Research Subjects Review Board (RSRB) for approval (see Appendix A, p.126). Materials were subsequently distributed to the targeted population described in the following section.

Gaining Access to Focus Group Members for the Study

The population for this study were members of the music educators association in a county in western New York State. All music teachers from public schools within that county (approximately 300) are automatically enrolled through school district rosters submitted to the organization; urban and suburban settings are represented. Permission from the executive board of the association was obtained to use the membership list as a means of contacting the population (Appendix B, p. 128).
Teachers in the county music organization (N=294) from 17 school districts were mailed a description of the study and a request to participate (Appendix C, p. 130). A response form and return envelope were included for their reply (Appendix D, p. 133); on the form was a short questionnaire asking for information regarding career longevity, level and area of teaching, and whether administrative duties were included in their assignment. The answers to these questions became the bases for assignment to the various categories of focus groups.

Because of my personal knowledge of the county’s schools, I knew which districts assigned teachers to carry out non-supervisory duties and leadership for their music departments. These teachers were usually released from teaching on a part-time basis, and included: (1) lead teachers who were in charge of building matters, such as supplies and concert organization; and (2) music coordinators and department chairs who handled budget, helped with staffing and professional development, and led curriculum meetings for the full music staff. A few districts employed a director of music or music supervisor, who were certified administrators; in addition to the previously mentioned duties, they carried out supervisory and evaluative duties. The question regarding administrative duties was used to identify those performing dual roles of music leadership/teacher, and to subsequently screen them out of the focus groups; it might be compromising to the study (and uncomfortable for such a participant) to include administrators in the discussions about “administrative support.”

Previously cited research indicates that approximately 50% of new teachers leave the field within the first five years. Therefore, subjects for this study were
limited to those teachers with a minimum of five years of school teaching experience to construct a deeper understanding of why these music teachers are still in the profession after that timeframe. Because burnout statistics often feature aspects common to secondary music teaching positions, I also wanted to consider whether teaching at various grade levels would have an effect on the retention of music teachers. These questions of experience and teaching level were included in the questionnaire as well.

Table 3.1. Information about the initial questionnaires (n=294)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires sent</td>
<td>294</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Districts represented</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires returned</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Districts returning questionnaires</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineligible responses (due to administrative duties, longevity)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential subjects from returned questionnaires</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual subjects from those surveyed</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual subjects from those returning questionnaires</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual district participation rate</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A questionnaire return rate of 31% was realized (90 out of the original 294, table 3.1); 11 responses that did not meet the stated criteria were rejected (e.g., less than minimum teaching experience, inclusion of administrative duties). This reduced the eligible participants to 79 teachers (or 27%). These teachers were sent additional invitations via email to contribute to a focus group discussion (see Appendix E,
and all affirmed their interest in participating in the study. These responses are represented in table 3.1.

**Organizing the Schedule**

Initially, nine focus groups were to be formed, their makeup dependent upon categories of years of experience (5-10, 11-15, and 16 or more years) and grade levels taught (elementary [kindergarten-grade 5], middle [grades 6-8] and high school [grades 9-12]). Each group was to contain up to six subjects, as recommended by Krueger and Casey, and to be identified by number for subsequent analysis and interpretation. Not all of the proposed groups were equally represented in the return of questionnaires; this created an unbalanced and under-represented pool of subjects for some of the proposed groups, as seen in table 3.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed categories of focus groups, with number of returned questionnaires/scheduled subjects</th>
<th>5-10 Years Experience</th>
<th>11-16 Years Experience</th>
<th>16+ Years Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Teachers</td>
<td>Group 1 – 7 returned, 4 scheduled (57%)</td>
<td>Group 2 – 6 returned, 2 scheduled (33%)</td>
<td>Group 3 – 20 returned, 3 scheduled (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School Teachers</td>
<td>Group 4 – 4 returned, 2 scheduled (50%)</td>
<td>Group 5 – 7 returned, 0 scheduled (0%)</td>
<td>Group 6 – 13 returned, 1 scheduled (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Teachers</td>
<td>Group 7 – 8 returned, 2 scheduled (25%)</td>
<td>Group 8 – 2 returned, 1 scheduled (50%)</td>
<td>Group 9 – 13 returned, 0 scheduled (0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers were contacted again via email to arrange specific dates for their participation in the interviews. Multiple attempts were made to schedule respondents into appropriate focus groups (see table 3.3). Myriad conflicts, however, caused many
problems. Private teaching, solo festival preparations and solo festivals, evening school concerts, and rehearsals for school musicals created scheduling dilemmas, especially for teachers assigned to groups 4 through 9. Additionally, participation in various community music ensembles, enrollment in college courses, family responsibilities and conflicts, bad weather (night before county “snow day”), and vacation breaks prevented many interested teachers from participating in the focus group discussions.

Table 3.3. Actual scheduling process for focus group interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed Focus Group</th>
<th>Scheduling Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>held, rescheduled original date to get participants; one subject originally in Group 3 responded incorrectly to questionnaire, later matched criteria for inclusion in this category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>held, able to schedule with one date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>held, rescheduled original date to get participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>not held, rescheduled twice, continued conflicts; two subjects originally in Groups 2 and 7 responded incorrectly to questionnaire, later matched criteria for inclusion in this category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>not held, rescheduled twice, continued conflicts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>not held, rescheduled once, bad weather cancelled last session; one subject originally in Group 2 responded incorrectly to questionnaire, later matched criteria for inclusion in this category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>held, rescheduled original date to get participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>not held, rescheduled twice, continued conflicts; one subject from Group 7 responded incorrectly to questionnaire, later matched criteria for inclusion in this category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>not held, rescheduled twice, continued conflicts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reorganizing the Schedule

Because of stated conflicts with teachers’ schedules, the original plan for distribution into groups was revised, resulting in four focus group interviews. During the course of the interviews, I discovered that due to some inaccuracies in questionnaire responses, a few subjects had been scheduled into groups that did not
match their experience and/or teaching positions. Thus, teachers of mixed experience were grouped together, although the individual focus groups were well-balanced in terms of teaching assignments. Participants appeared comfortable with each other and contributed well to the discussions. There was a reasonable distribution of levels of teaching experience within the interviews (see table 3.4). The repeated responses gleaned from the various focus groups indicated that a saturation point had been reached. Representation of a majority of the county’s music districts was also achieved (i.e., 10 districts out of a possible 17, or 59%), therefore I decided to halt my attempts to schedule additional interview groups.

Data Collection and Transcription

Focus group interviews were utilized as the primary means of data collection. Groups met in my home; participants sat around the dining room table, were served light refreshments, and shared the same interview structure. Each session began with a welcome to the meeting, introduction of group members, description of the study and topic, and establishing of ground rules. All teachers signed appropriate consent forms for the use of their responses (see Appendix F, p. 136). A voice-activated micro-cassette recorder (Panasonic model #RN-405) and 90-minute micro-cassettes (Maxell #MC-90UR) were used to record each session. Although recognizable by their voices, all participants were assured of their anonymity in the reporting of the transcribed verbal data.

A progressive questioning route (Krueger and Casey 2000) was followed in which subjects were asked to talk about (1) their reasons for entering music
education, (2) memorable events validating the choice of a music teaching career, (3) the type of support for the music program, (4) length of teaching experience, (5) professional activities important to their development, and (6) recommendations for the retention of music teachers (see Appendix G, p. 138). All participants responded to each question. I used follow-up and prompting questions to interact with the speakers and to check for understanding of all statements. The collection and review of the data were ongoing over the course of the focus group interviews.

Table 3.4. Actual focus group participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group</th>
<th>Date Held</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Grade Level/Course Currently Teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>02-3-07</td>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Elementary general music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>02-3-07</td>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Elementary general music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>02-3-07</td>
<td>Joan</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Elementary general music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>01-11-07</td>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Middle school orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>01-11-07</td>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Elementary general music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>01-11-07</td>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Elementary band/general music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>01-11-07</td>
<td>Helen</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Middle school orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>01-15-07</td>
<td>Delia</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Elementary general music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>01-15-07</td>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Elementary general music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>01-15-07</td>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Elementary band/general music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>01-15-07</td>
<td>Donna</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Elementary band</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 (formerly #7)</td>
<td>02-6-07</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Junior High/High school chorus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 (formerly #7)</td>
<td>02-6-07</td>
<td>Paula</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>High school chorus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 (formerly #7)</td>
<td>02-6-07</td>
<td>Jen</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>High school chorus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 (formerly #7)</td>
<td>02-6-07</td>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>High school band</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Each focus group interview was transcribed verbatim by a professional secretary immediately following each meeting; the secretary used a transcription machine (Panasonic model number RR-930) to manage the task of transcribing dialogue from the audiotapes into a readable format. My field notes and reflections (see Appendix H, p. 141) helped to clarify the transcriptions. The text of each session’s conversation was committed to a Microsoft Word document, yielding approximately 360 minutes of interviews and 103 pages of printed text (see Appendix I, p. 144 for transcript excerpt). Each of the four transcripts was numbered to differentiate it from the others; a label was assigned including the date of the interview, (e.g., 02.03), and was clarified further by the page number of the document when used in a reference (e.g., a citation of 02.03/11 refers to page 11 of the focus group interview transcript held on February 3). Four of the 15 participants (the first subject to speak in each focus group) reviewed the transcripts of their group’s interview to verify the veracity of the written accounts. These “member checks” are recommended by Creswell (2002) to ensure that all voices are heard, and participants were satisfied with the quality of the transcriptions.

During frequent and thorough reviews of the collected data, I made additional notations in the margins of the transcriptions that summarized major ideas. I also rearranged the responses of the participants to align with each interview question (e.g., all responses to Question One were grouped together). By moving blocks of texts into this format, I gained a fresh look at familiar data and also another means to review and interpret responses. These practices provided a more holistic look at the information before beginning the coding process.
Coding Process

Coding is the process of segmenting and labeling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data (Creswell, 266). To do this, one must be thoroughly familiar with the data. I began this familiarization process by reviewing my margin notes; this reminded me of my past impressions and helped me to remember the dynamics of various groupings. Next, I identified and manually bracketed text segments as they related to specific ideas. Not surprising, many aligned with the focus of particular interview questions. Accounts of administrative assistance were given when asked a question about support, and early teaching experiences were described when subjects responded to that specific prompt. Other ideas began to emerge that I had not anticipated; subjects gave unexpected responses and diverse reasons for entering the teaching field. All answers were noted, and text segments were labeled with various codes. Codes that denoted negative feelings used the minus sign (-) as part of their designation, while positive codes included the plus sign (+). Overall, 44 initial codes were used to label the identified text segments (table 3.5).

Because I had only 103 pages of interview transcriptions, I elected not to use a commercial electronic coding software program. Instead, using the “find” function of the word processing computer program, I searched for repeated occurrences of the identified codes in the electronic transcriptions of the focus group interviews. I assigned each code a color, and either changed the text color of each code word or color-highlighted it to make its multiple occasions in the text more identifiable (see Appendix I, p. 144).
Table 3.5. Assigned codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Meaning</th>
<th>Code (+ = positive nature)</th>
<th>Code (- = negative nature)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Had inspiring teacher</td>
<td>Insp tch+</td>
<td>Insp tch-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loves kids</td>
<td>Kids</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loves music/kids</td>
<td>Mus/Kids</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Conditions</td>
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<td>Cond-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First year</td>
<td>Job1+</td>
<td>Job1-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>Stress+</td>
<td>Stress-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who you follow</td>
<td>Followed+</td>
<td>Followed-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itinerant</td>
<td>It+</td>
<td>It-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Res+</td>
<td>Res-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>Mtr+</td>
<td>Mtr-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher union help</td>
<td>Union</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal validation</td>
<td>Val+</td>
<td>Val-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>Admin+</td>
<td>Admin-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music administrator</td>
<td>MAdm+</td>
<td>MAdm-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration’s visibility</td>
<td>Vis+</td>
<td>Vis-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleagues</td>
<td>Coll+</td>
<td>Coll-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops</td>
<td>Wkshp</td>
<td>Wkshp-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal growth</td>
<td>Growth</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Performs personally</td>
<td>Perf</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing</td>
<td>Shar</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives advice</td>
<td>Advice+</td>
<td>Advice-</td>
</tr>
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<td>Ear</td>
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<td>It’s different daily</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical issues</td>
<td>Prac</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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In this way I could “see” patterns of response more clearly. The original 44 codes were regrouped into the following 17 code categories (table 3.6) and arranged in the order of the interviews’ questioning route.
Table 3.6. Categories of assigned codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Meaning</th>
<th>Code ( + = positive nature)</th>
<th>Code ( - = negative nature)</th>
<th>Code Categories</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Insp tch-</td>
<td>Why they began</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loves kids</td>
<td>Kids</td>
<td></td>
<td>Why they began</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loves music/kids</td>
<td>Mus/Kids</td>
<td></td>
<td>Why they began</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First year</td>
<td>Job1+</td>
<td>Job1-</td>
<td>First year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Cond-</td>
<td>Work Condition</td>
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<td>Stress</td>
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<tr>
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<td>It+</td>
<td>It-</td>
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<td>Res-</td>
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<td>Teacher union help</td>
<td>Union</td>
<td></td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>Mtr+</td>
<td>Mtr-</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Val+</td>
<td>Val-</td>
<td>Feel valued</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Admin+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Music administrator</td>
<td>MAdm+</td>
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<td>Visibility</td>
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<td>Student teachers</td>
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<td>Early</td>
<td>Ear</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>Loves work</td>
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<td>Different daily</td>
<td>Dif</td>
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<td>Personal growth</td>
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When combined these coded responses yielded themes that related clearly to working conditions, administrative supports, and professional activities outlined in the interviews, and to how those components influenced the longevity of music teachers. Respondents also spoke about additional aspects of career development not
included in the devised questioning route. The analysis of those patterns and emerging themes will be discussed in the following chapters.
Chapter 4
Data Analysis, Part I:
Meet the Career Music Educators

In this chapter, data gained through focus group interviews of the participants in this study is used to construct a description of the members of this culture-sharing group. The 15 teachers who contributed to this study possess characteristics of such a group (Creswell, 489); the participants are representative of a larger population (music educators), and they share patterns of behavior, belief, and language. Personal stories of these participants were so compelling, however, that I have included individual accounts of each participant in order for their voices to be heard. Important themes are identified and discussed that help to build an understanding of the participants, answer the posed research questions, and, ultimately, reveal why they choose to remain in their profession.

The following descriptions are organized in ascending order of years of experience. Each entry begins with an introductory quote that includes the teacher’s years of experience. (All transcript excerpts are cited using a numbering system explained in Chapter 3, p. 34.) To respect confidentiality assurances, participants’ names have been changed, and their school districts not identified. A table summarizing individual participant attributes (table 4.1) concludes the chapter.
Susan (5 years) – *I love what I’m doing, and I love being in the school!* (02.03/20)

Susan is an elementary general music teacher who decided to become a teacher because of her high school band teacher and positive music experiences. Her first year was uneventful in terms of stress because “I just didn’t know any better.” Susan remembers fondly her first concert with her students

… *because we all got through it, everybody sounded good. They were happy, the parents were happy, I was happy. I felt like they had a great experience.* (02.03/16)

Susan helps her building’s team arrange the teaching schedule; this is important to her, as it gives Susan a say in structuring her class and resource organization. She enjoys administrative support in requests for budget and conference attendance, and her principal is a positive thinker who supports the music program. He trusts Susan and “… stays out of the way!” She would prefer a music administrator. Susan is never observed or evaluated by someone with musical expertise and would like informed feedback about her teaching.

It is important to Susan to attend professional development workshops that apply to her field, and she takes advantage of local and state offerings whenever possible. Susan has also been a clinician at a national conference, and because she remembers the confusion and lack of confidence in her first teaching experience, she acts as an informal mentor to a new teacher. The school district’s inservice presentations, though, are not relevant because they rarely concern musical matters. Whenever the music department gathers, people argue a lot and little is accomplished. “As a brand new teacher, there were ‘a lot of ugly moments’” (02.03/8). Even though she loves her job, Susan is stressed and always glad when June ends and her summer...
vacation begins. She renews personal resources and comes back in September full of energy.

Amy (5 years) - *I think that sometime the best way to be a teacher is to know what you don’t want, the kind of teacher you don’t want to be.* (02.03/19)

Amy had always wanted to be a nurse, until she auditioned for and performed in her high school musical. Her success and thrill at being part of the music program, combined with the influence of her chorus teacher, convinced Amy to choose music education as a career. She feels fortunate to have made that decision. Like Susan, Amy teaches elementary general music and chorus, and has done so for five years. Her first teaching experience was difficult, middle school general music, part-time. It was very stressful; there was no curriculum, a burned-out colleague didn’t respect her, and

*I had 13-year old boys who swore and yelled, and I’m like, “Oh my God, what do I do with these kids?” I remember that I had really good people that could assist me. I had strong, positive experiences with a veteran teacher, so it was kind of like, when I heard her issues, it was “Okay, it’s not just me.”* (02.03/4)

Current building administration has not been supportive in helping Amy achieve professional goals; while she has been asked to teach to district writing objectives, she receives instructional feedback only from the music administrator. “Not hearing appreciation for what I do” is another down-side to the daily routine, although music colleagues provide a positive work environment that helps to make Amy’s job an uplifting experience. She benefits from the support of her music administrator, who provides funding for musical resources, advocacy for the department, and targeted opportunities for growth.
Amy enjoys her district’s music workshops and meetings, and feels it benefits the department to be together. She attends many other workshops and conferences, and likes knowing that she is part of a larger profession of music educators. Amy’s pride in her students shows as she recounts her emotion at seeing her initial class of first graders leave for the middle school:

*After five years of being in this building, my winter concert was the first one where I had completely taught all of the kids. I have been their only teacher and now I’m seeing what I started. It’s kind of scary how they’ve become little ‘mini-mees.’ It’s very cool, knowing that I did that. (02.03/16)*

**Joan (5 years) – The amount of planning was huge, and everything was overwhelming. (02.03/3)**

Joan always knew she wanted to be an elementary teacher, but it wasn’t until high school that she realized she would teach music. She has not regretted her decision; “Now I look at classroom teachers and wonder how they do it!” Joan had a rough first year as an itinerant between two elementary schools, teaching general music on a cart, with few supplies or resources. She did not have a mentor, which would have been appreciated as she was isolated from other music staff. Getting a teaching space in a single school her second year really helped Joan to feel part of the department and valued as an employee.

Joan’s current supervising administrator is her principal, and while he “doesn’t understand us or know what we’re doing,” he supports the music staff through a generous budget. She often goes a long time without administrative contact, and she works through the department’s lead teacher to solve curricular problems.
Development offered in her district does not include music inservice, so she attends many outside music workshops with her colleagues throughout the year.

Joan wants to have a positive effect on people. She remembers a concert with her third grade recorder students.

*Last year I got up the courage to make a change in the recorder concert. It had always been done the same way. We turned it into a recorder sharing informance for the parents. Everybody loved it, the principal loved it, the classroom teachers loved it. They said, ‘You have to do that again!’ The students loved just showing what they knew, and the parents left with a better understanding of my program.* (02.03/17)

Professional relationships are also important to Joan. She, Susan, and Amy are roommates and constantly act as a support and sounding board for each other:

*It’s amazing that the three of us all found jobs around the same time, and we’re all staying in the same district that we started in, and we didn’t do bad. You know, even though our first years were a little strange, we all managed to stay there.*

Joan (02.03/5)

*And the thing, too, is that we had each other. We could come home and we all understood what we were each going through….*

Amy (02.03/5)

**Wendy (6 years) – I think that I am much more inspired to do something that I think is something I need. (01.11/15)**

Wendy is a string teacher who has taught for six years, has always loved music, and cannot remember a time when she did not play the violin. Wendy did not start out as a teacher; her first goal was to play professionally. When she found she could not support herself on a performer’s salary, Wendy became a string teacher in the public schools. For two of her six years, she was an itinerant instructor in both an elementary and middle school. The first year was challenging.
The part that threw me was just working on procedural things. Those are the things that got the best of me. The first year, someone would come up to you and say “what about this?” and you didn’t realize you were supposed to do it. (01.11/7)

Yet Wendy considers herself lucky. All students in her district can choose the instrument they study, and her music and building administrators demonstrate their faith in her abilities by letting her choose annual goals that will benefit her string program. She feels supported in her daily work through ample supplies, equipment, and access to professional development opportunities. But it is Wendy’s students that make her feel successful; she smiled as she remembered a particular sixth grader from her first year of teaching:

I had a student who thought he was horrible. You know, “Oh, I’m terrible” and “I’m so nervous, I’m going to miss every note.” But his [performance] was the best in the room! (01.11/21)

John (6 years) – The fact that they said, “We really like what you’re doing,” that really meant the world to me. (02.06/17)

John was consistently motivated to become a high school choral director by a steady stream of music teachers. As an itinerant teacher who travels between buildings, he really benefits from knowing two different faculties and also the younger students who will eventually move up to his high school ensembles. John’s first teaching job was challenging. He was hired as a last-minute substitute for a well-loved teacher just before the end of the school year. It was this experience that convinced John he’d chosen the right career.

I got a phone call mid-May that a teacher was taking her students to perform at Hershey Park on May 20, returning on Saturday, and then packing and leaving for Minnesota on Sunday, because of a job transfer for her husband. And so [the kids] all went to Hershey Park, came back to school on Monday,
and I was their new teacher for the last four weeks of the school year, including directing the Spring concert. I had two weeks to prepare them for the Spring concert, and there were three more pieces of the program they hadn’t learned! So I had 10 days to teach 210 seventh graders the additional three pieces of music. This could have been the most horrifying experience of my life, but rather it changed me completely, and I loved it! (02.06/5)

John enjoys working with great colleagues and a “fabulous” music administrator who is his “number one advocate.” He wishes all administrative staff were as visible.

*My music director is at everything. He’s always there, and likewise he knows when NOT to be there, too. And sometimes he’s there when you DON’T want him to be there! My principal and assistant principal from both buildings are always very kind to me, very supportive, there’s always an open door to go to see them. I think they truly appreciate that I seek them out; however, I wish that they would attend concerts. I see administrators attending sporting events left and right, and then they do a disappearing act when something happens in music.* 02/06/12-13

John is involved in many types of professional development. County and state organizations’ events and conferences are great places to network and get new ideas, he feels, and he continues to sing professionally to provide both self-satisfaction and a role model to his students. John realizes that he works in a “privileged” district, and thanks his honest music administrator for guiding and supporting a strong philosophy for the inclusion of the arts.

**Paula (7 years) –* I feel safe enough to say “I don’t know how to conduct this,” I feel safe enough to let him see where I’m vulnerable and where I need help.** 02.06/10

Paula did not have many music classes in her Catholic school experience until she got to high school. While there, her mother encouraged her to audition for the school musical (in which she earned a part), and her music teacher began giving her
voice lessons. Because of these beliefs in her abilities, Paula decided to become a vocal performance major in college. She never intended to teach until many years later when she was enrolling her daughter into a new high school. She was impressed with the many musical offerings, and since Paula needed to “help pay the mortgage,” applied for (and gained) the posted vocal opening.

_It was literally a fluke that I threw my hat into the ring, and that first year I almost didn’t make it. What I didn’t know! I had no bag of tricks, I was afraid of the students, and I had the Women’s Choir from hell. Every day was a first day that entire year for me. My husband had to literally encourage me to go out the door every morning. I look back on it now, and I’m thankful for it, because I learned so much about myself and my strengths._ 02.06/4

Colleagues have been very important to Paula, both in her district and in the larger county and state music associations, and she relies on these highly skilled professional friends to help her grow. She always takes “something important” back from conferences, and she believes that she can learn more about her craft. Paula teaches private voice lessons, and is often a guest soloist at church and formal events.

Her district’s vision for music education is also important to Paula, and her music administrator is a constant advocate for the department’s music program. Whether it’s through the distribution of ample budgets for accompanists, supplies, or career development, or his guidance in district-based curriculum projects, Paula appreciates the integrity demonstrated by her department’s leadership. She wishes that other teachers had a music administrator like hers, and that those administrators could “be there for [all teachers], and go to bat for them.”
Delia (8 years) – How can you NOT have a mentor program now?

Delia was married at a young age, attended college in her mid- to late-twenties, and stayed home with her young family for a long time before she decided to teach. She had home-schooled many children and substituted in various districts, but had not given much thought to regular employment in the public schools. By chance she was offered a permanent, part-time position in an elementary city school to teach general music. A friend convinced her to accept the position, for which she is now grateful. But Delia’s first years were not easy.

There was a lot of mystery. I mean, what did AIS stand for anyway? All the stuff in the school outside of music was huge. I [taught] in a little store room that no one came into until one day, a district music mentor noticed me and asked, “You don’t have a mentor, do you?” You see, only full-time teachers got mentors. And she said, “Would you like me to look into that for you?” and I said, “Oh, yes!” And that really helped.

Delia talked about the support she got from her mentor, in classroom management as well as pedagogical issues, and about the many problems encountered in urban education. The need for resources, curriculum, musical instruments, and administrative assistance to meet the goals of her program was overwhelming. Personal validation was also important to Delia, perhaps because she received so little of it from her superiors. “Thank goodness for my mentor,” she exclaimed.

I’ve got to say this, I thought fourth graders were about 25 years old when I started! They’d come in, and you know they’re a little rowdy, and I remember one day just thinking “It’s just horrible, this is such a bad day, I didn’t teach them anything.” And the mentor looked at me and said, “Well, you did this right and you did this right.” I really did have those days in the beginning.

Now Delia gets validation from her students:
You know, that whole piece when you’re walking down the hall and the kids say “When’s music?” You feel like you’re a queen. It’s nice because you don’t get that anywhere else. 01.15/8

This is her eighth year in the district, and she finally feels she has the support of her principal.

The administration has backed me up to the point of going into the classroom with me, saying “This is a good program.” If I didn’t have that support, I would be on my own. I mean, we lost wonderful teachers because the administrators didn’t support them. 01.15/11

Because she is the only general music teacher in her building, Delia looks for opportunities to be with other music colleagues. She enjoys attending monthly meetings, and she is involved in collegial learning circles in her district. She also pays a fee to belong to the local Orff-Schulwerk organization where members receive helpful inservices and share best practices. Delia would like to see all new music teachers have a mentor who “knows the ropes” and is there to help the teacher to be successful.

**Jen (8 years) – I’ll tell you, what I love the most is getting to know other teachers because we are in our own little world. 02.06/14**

A choir teacher for eight years, Jen benefited from early influences toward her choice of a music education career, her parents had both been teachers, and her grandmother was a graduate of the Crane School of Music at SUNY Potsdam. But even with these family insights into what the job would entail, Jen, like some of the others in this study, was unprepared for a first year that was “horrendous.”

I walked into a position where, number one, the [resigning] teacher didn’t want to be there. I walked into an absolute mess. I can remember going home to my apartment and just calling my mom in tears, and crying “I’m horrible, I can’t do this.” I don’t think I ever saw the inside of the faculty room until the
following school year, because I was working so hard to try and grasp all of this. I was still trying to build up my toolbox of tools of what works. I honestly can say, my classroom management skills are so good now! I’m proud of myself for it. 02.06/5

Colleagues and administrators have helped Jen to grow both as a teacher and a professional. She really likes her work in the county music organization because she gets to meet and learn from so many people. Fellow teachers in her building also provide camaraderie and understanding when she “needs to vent.” Her first principal believed in her and assisted her with some difficult behavior issues. Her building administrators are always at evening concerts, which is a big part of the validation Jen receives toward her work.

*The presence there says a lot, because it doesn’t necessarily happen [elsewhere]. We’re so very different from some of the other disciplines, and while some teachers look at test scores, for us it’s very much what we see on that given night, and I think it’s so important that we see people other than parents there. It says a lot to the kids, and the kids notice it.* 02.06/11

Jen has many wonderful memories of her past eight years, and she’s kept a “smile folder” to remind herself.

*Anytime I get something, whether it’s from a parent or a child, I keep it because, let’s face it, we all have days that we’re just kind of like “why, what am I doing, I’m not getting through” – you do question yourself. And every time I have a student teacher with one of those exciting things, I say “Okay, now you have to start your smile folder, it will get you through.”* 02.06/18

Jen advises administrators to extend mentored experiences beyond the first year of teaching. She would also have liked continued assistance, as she still encountered problems that second year. And because music teachers have such different responsibilities than the remainder of the staff, additional time with a mentor to learn to manage the roles and responsibilities of the position can only improve teachers’ and students’ achievement.
Steve (11 years) – **Our administrators know when not to be present, when to just have trust that what we’re doing is good, but they’re there enough that should something come up, they know what is going on. 02.06/12**

Steve has had a lot of professional experience. Saxophone performance, teaching positions that include a community orchestra’s outreach program, early childhood music classes, general music and theory classes, and high school bands are all part of his history as a music educator. His sense of humor is evident when he talks about his memories of the early years:

*I think my first year was actually my second year on the job, too. All of the headaches of a normal first year teacher came back when there were changes in administration. My life was made such a living hell that I was this close to becoming a greeter at the local Walmart store [rather] than going back for a third year.* 02.06/8

Steve has since earned the trust and support of his administration in his current school district. Steve works with administrators “that tolerate our eccentricities” and allow him and his colleagues construct a teaching schedule that meets their needs. They appreciate the time allotted them to work together as a department instead of toward other subjects’ issues. Because his district does not have a music administrator dedicated to the concerns of the music staff, Steve believes strongly in the need for mentoring new music teachers to help keep them in the profession.

*It should be done in such a way that it’s understood it’s informal, and that the things said at that point are not to be held against [the new teachers]; the mentor [should be there] to help get through the struggles of those first couple of years.* 02.06/23

But when asked what conditions supported his teaching the most, Steve answered

*That’s easy – good people to work with is how I survived in that other district. They kept me sane, and it’s what we still do for each other. I know personally I have gotten to appreciate them more.* 02.06/9
Rebecca (12 years) – *I’m sure that there are other things that I could do, but I just can’t imagine anything else that I would love like this.* 01.11/23

Even though she is currently an elementary general music and chorus teacher, Rebecca has had a lot of experience teaching at different grade levels. One year, she went from working with first through third graders to directing seventh through twelfth grade choruses—all in the same week! Rebecca was an itinerant for a long time, and now states, in her current one-building elementary school vocal position,

*I feel like for the first time ever in my teaching career that I am truly a part of a community, and part of that building’s community. I’ve just gotten to know a lot more people, I guess. I feel more grounded, and I think that “fit” is really important.* 01.11/11

Rebecca has two loves—one for music and the other for children. In seventh grade she knew that she wanted to make music teaching her career, and she is happiest when working and playing with her students. Rebecca takes an interest in every child, making countless trips to counselors and homeroom teachers to find out more about individual students that can inform her teaching. Since her placement in her current building, Rebecca has felt so confident that she has begun writing a children’s book.

*There are songs and they’re through art and movement. It really came about by accident because I was creating a song I could use with my own children, just this little song. And it’s exciting for me now, to be able to share with other people. Every now and again something just sort of happens to just energize me.* 01.11/19

Rebecca feels fortunate to receive support from her principal in terms of an adequate budget and teaching space, and also for assistance with misbehaving students. Because she works so hard in her chosen career, Rebecca is glad to receive
personal validation from her students singing her songs in the hallway, but feels that her administrator needs to demonstrate professional validation for her program.

I’m looking for her acknowledgement that the music program is important to the whole community, you know. And I know that she believes that, she just doesn’t demonstrate that she believes that, she just doesn’t show it. 01.11/17

Even without public affirmation, Rebecca “knows in her heart” that she’s “doing the right thing for kids.”

Beth (13 years) – Holy cow, I was like, under water the whole first year.

01.11/4

Beth had decided to become a band teacher and fully expected to teach this subject after college. She prepared by studying music education courses, and student taught both in elementary general music and middle school band. It was a challenge, then, when she accepted her first job as a kindergarten through grade six chorus and general music teacher.

When I student taught in general music, I was doing K-2. Now there were vocal warm-ups, directing the chorus, choosing the music. My first year I would stay until 8 o’clock at night, like every night, just trying to survive. When I first started, I was swamped and I went home every night feeling like I was not ready for the next day. Oh, it was terrible. I was single and I had no life. 01.11/4

Now Beth teaches both elementary general music and elementary band. She is an itinerant between two schools and proud of the abilities she has developed to be a successful teacher in both areas. Beth enjoys her varied schedule and weekly traveling to different schools, because “the interaction with other teachers is very important to me.” This need to be involved with other educational professionals has
caused her to take part in her district’s professional development offerings, both as a participant and a presenter.

*That’s been really nice for me, to be able to take “Good Classroom Management,” and I got a lot of ideas from that and all the computer classes. Teaching a class gives me a whole new thing to think about, it’s something new for me to do.* 01.11/18

Beth feels she does not get a lot of support from all of her administrators. In one building, the use of a stage is not ideal as a band teaching space as opposed to a dedicated classroom. She does have a well-equipped and spacious general music room in her other school. Beth feels the principal of the first school lacks value for her program, a reason her supportive colleagues are so important to her. As a seasoned teacher of 13 years, she does not need assistance in disciplinary matters, and therefore finds little need for interaction with administration. Beth rationalizes the issue of support by thinking “maybe back in the beginning it was more important because then I had more issues.”

**Alice (17 years) – That would be the number one frustration music teachers of all ages have, beginning to veteran, is administrators. 01.15/11**

Alice came from a very musical family, so it seemed natural to her that she would be involved in a musical career. But she didn’t start college until her mid-20s, after she had had children, so when she began her first elementary general music job, she figured “it would be a piece of cake.”

*I thought, oh, this is going to be easy, I have three kids, I’ve done Brownies and Scouts and all that stuff. But when they’re naughty at your home, you can send them [to their] home. It’s a little different when there’s all these bodies, you have to learn how to manage the class. So I started right in my very first year and I’d go to those workshops and think “Oh,” and I’d watch somebody and think, “Oh, all those techniques.”* 01.15/4-5
Professional development has continued to be important to Alice throughout her 17 years of public school teaching. She belongs to the local Orff-Schulwerk chapter and has served on its executive board, has completed three levels of Orff-Schulwerk certification, continues taking courses at a local music college, and is in demand to host student teachers. Even though there is a music administrator in charge of their program, Alice is very disappointed in her district’s development offerings. She feels that instruction is becoming standardized, and that music teachers are given little say in how and what to teach.

*It seems like the creative process should be allowed when you’re teaching. Everybody with all this experience, well, we’re nothing, we’re chopped liver. It’s like the new teachers are getting to call more shots than an experienced teacher. When we have a full day of professional development, it’s very tense because we’re all on a different page.* 01.15/26

Alice agrees with others in her group that “the response of the children is the fun thing.” Feeling validated by her students’ reactions to her lessons and their enthusiasm upon entering her classroom, it’s “what gets her up in the morning,” in spite of myriad negative features of the job. Alice would like others to hear her advice: “no matter what conditions you have at work, if you don’t like what you’re doing, you won’t be happy.”

**Helen (20 years)** – *Not that we are the greatest, but you know if we all share our ideas, we’re just going to be better at this, and it’s going to be more fun.* 01.11/19

Helen decided to go into music education in spite of her early teachers. In elementary school, she was subjected to screaming, having her desk dumped over, favoritism (towards others), and a general lack of interest in individual students’
development. Until a kind teacher came into her classroom and asked, “Who would like to play the violin?” Helen did not realize school was not meant to be like that.

I thought, I am going to make a difference, I am going to be exactly what those teachers were not, and I’m going to be nice even to the children I don’t like. And what better to teach them than what I love doing, which is playing the violin. 01.11/2

Helen feels that the personal connection among her colleagues is a crucial one. She recalls the lack of respect and camaraderie in her first position, where she taught strings in seven different elementary schools.

Because I had to travel so much, I couldn’t have a rotating schedule (for lessons). So the students came out the same time every week, most of the class came, so what could the teacher teach with the last few kids that were left? So not only did I not get to sit in the faculty lounge, I had to eat my lunch in my car traveling. But I was a “pullout,” I pulled out three-quarters of their class and they hated me, because I took their class away and they couldn’t teach. You know, it was terrible. There was still a thing, they would have a school party, and no one would invite me to any of the parties. I remember I used to have to go set up my concerts and I would go to find the seven different principals and a couple of them would be like “uh,” just actually roll their eyes when I said, “Could I talk to you for a minute?” 01/11/7

Since that first job, Helen has found success in other positions. Having taught elementary general music classes and orchestras for 20 years, Helen knows what she needs to make herself happy and productive.

The key is, I’m happy when I’m around people. I’m an extrovert. So if people are happy to see me, and I’m with kids that are happy to see me, then that’s all I need. 01/11/9

It was not surprising that Helen is excited about development opportunities. Just to be with other teachers is a professional activity, whether performing in a community orchestra or attending state conferences. “You start making connections,” she says, “with people you wouldn’t normally know.” Helen is fortunate to have a music administrator who arranges for meaningful workshops and discussions to
further individual growth, and likes having to set yearly goals: “The minute you have to think about teaching and set goals, it makes you change.” Helen appreciates being validated, working with the right people and having supportive working conditions, but she stays in her career because “it’s the kids—absolutely!”

**Amanda (22 years) – I had very supportive administration back then… room for error, you know, without retribution. 01.15/3**

Amanda comes from a musical family and a teaching family, so the mixture of music and education for a career was easily determined. Her entire path of choosing a career, attending college, and working in her first band position seemed charmed. She was fortunate to have a supportive administration whose “door was always open, and I could go in and not have anything held against me.” To this day, 22 years and four districts later, Amanda has found that a supportive administrator can make or break a successful career, and thus worries about this for new teachers in the field.

*In the beginning, [new teachers] need to be allowed to feel like they can make a mistake and still be supported. It’s not going to end up in an evaluation, like it does today. 01.15/22*

Amanda endorses the role of the mentor in the same subject area for beginning staff so that they can ask questions and confide in a knowledgeable teacher in their discipline. Realizing that most districts don’t have music administrators, and that building principals don’t always appreciate the varied responsibilities and logistical issues a music teacher faces, she is grateful for the music supervision in her position.

*The outcome of music coordination is huge. We have our levels meet in our buildings, the band is together, the handbook is polished. There’s just tremendous support and consistency. I’m going to be getting thousands of*
dollars worth of new equipment. It speaks highly of the value for your program. It’s nice. 01.15/9-10

Professional development is a big part of Amanda’s life. She attends meaningful district workshops, plays in a swing band, is president of the local piano teachers’ guild, and attends many conferences. Amanda is also a cooperating teacher for student teachers and proud to have had many of her own students go into music education. One young graduate was actually a long-term substitute in Amanda’s classroom when she needed to be out on sick leave. Even though the practical benefits are attractive,

It’s a wonderful retirement system, wonderful medical insurance, and you know, every six weeks you do get a break. It’s especially nice if you’re a single parent. 01.15/20

it is the type of influence and continuity she has for children that keep Amanda teaching. “It is such a creative field to be in,” she smiled, “I always consider myself lucky to get paid for doing what I like.”

**Donna (25 years)** – I just wouldn’t have been successful alone had I not had the other individual there. 01.15/6

Donna has been teaching elementary instrumental music for over 25 years. She went into music education because of her deep admiration for her high school band teacher, which actually caused Donna a bit of a problem.

I ended up student teaching with my old teacher, which was a good and bad thing. It was good because I got to do way more things than other (student) teachers. You know, he just put me right in there right off the back. But the bad thing was that I didn’t see anything else than what I’d grown up with. So when I got out into the real world the following year, it was a bit of shock. No one left any directions. It was a disaster area because [the last teacher] was just someone who was not a very strong teacher. 01.15.5
The first ten weeks of that school “were just a blur” for Donna. Yet even though formal mentor programs hadn’t been established, she got through it.

*I had the good fortune to be teaching with someone who was a strong teacher and knew how to get what he needed. He mentored me, and wouldn’t let me get into a big problem, or really go into the deep end. It was a small district so it was just the two of us and I grew a lot that year. And it ended fine, by Christmas, things had turned around.* 01.15/6

Things that frustrate Donna are mostly scheduling issues. Because of increased focus on state assessments, her ensemble rehearsals and lesson groups have to be adjusted (and at times cancelled) to allow for more test preparation. Down to one band practice a week, Donna’s extensive experience has informed her practice so that she is able to manage her concert preparation under these terms. She still feels badly for new teachers who have to put on a performance without adequate time to prepare.

*I can do things because I know some shortcuts because I’ve been doing this for a long time, but there’s a limit to that, too. I can get the results I want or know how to get the results I want, but a new teacher doesn’t. There’s kids that get into their first year of teaching, and they barely know how to make out a schedule, never mind how do you adjust the schedule. There is not enough support for new teachers.* 01.15/22-23

Donna values administrators who “let the teachers determine the direction they want their program to go in” and are helpful with different types of resources. Additional support for national and local conference attendance comes from her music administrator, who structures regular music meetings among like-area staff and is in charge of annual music performance evaluations. Donna is thankful to be supervised by a music professional, and she likes her district’s policies. She finds that she appreciates her workplace even more “because you realize it isn’t the same every place you go, and you realize that it isn’t half-bad the way we do it.”
Summary of Teachers’ Descriptions

Each of the focus group interview sessions allowed participants opportunities to share important aspects of their careers. As illustrated in the previous accounts, the career music educators have had multiple professional experiences and were eager to talk about their work. The following table (4.1) organizes various attributes of the study’s fifteen music teachers into a chart summary. Included are years of experience, grade levels taught, and type of administrative oversight. (Descriptions of varied administrative models are on p. 28.)

Table 4.1. Teacher attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Grade Level/Course Currently Teaching</th>
<th>Type of Administration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Elementary general music</td>
<td>Building administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Elementary general music</td>
<td>Music administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joan</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Elementary general music</td>
<td>Building administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Middle school orchestra</td>
<td>Music administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Junior high/high school chorus</td>
<td>Music administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paula</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>High school chorus</td>
<td>Music coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delia</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Elementary general music</td>
<td>Music administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jen</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>High school chorus</td>
<td>Music coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>High school band</td>
<td>Building administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Elementary general music</td>
<td>Music coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Elementary band/general music</td>
<td>Building administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Elementary general music</td>
<td>Music administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Middle school orchestra</td>
<td>Music administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Elementary band/general music</td>
<td>Music coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Elementary band</td>
<td>Music administrator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in table 4.1, there are a variety of teaching experience, teaching assignments (i.e., general music, band, orchestra, chorus), and supervisory models represented in this study. Nine of the career music educators interviewed are
elementary teachers; six teach general music and three teach band. Two of the band teachers also teach some general music classes. There are two middle school orchestra teachers and four high school teachers, including the chorus teacher who also teaches a junior high chorus. Two of the participants are currently itinerant, although others have held this type of traveling position in the past. Administrative tasks in the represented districts are carried out in multiple ways, with seven of the 15 teachers directly supervised by their music administrator. In the following chapter, we will discover how these attributes contribute to the development of career music educators as the participants answer the posed research questions.
Chapter 5

Data Analysis, Part II:

What Makes a Career Music Educator

This chapter utilizes data from transcripts of various focus group interviews to provide answers to posed research questions. Responses to the six sub-questions are interpreted first: (1) What working conditions and administrative support are conducive to the development of career music educators? (2) What professional activities support the life cycle of a career music educator? (3) Are there landmark events that increase the potential for longevity? (4) Does teaching at different school-age levels (i.e., elementary, middle, or high school) have an impact on the decision to remain in teaching? (5) Does length of experience have an impact on the decision to remain in teaching? and (6) Are there additional factors to be considered in developing an understanding of career music educators’ longevity?

Answers to these and other questions will be used to address the central question in this study: Why do music teachers remain in their field?

**What working conditions and administrative support are conducive to the development of career music educators?**

Because participants responded to two different interview questions about working conditions and administrative support, I organized their responses into those same categories to answer the posed research sub-question.
Working Conditions

It was interesting to hear varied interpretations of “working conditions.” Adequate music supplies and materials, a viable music curriculum, and a workable teaching schedule were mentioned by all as positive, necessary attributes in the workplace. Teaching in only one building was also important to the teachers (with the exception of John and Beth, who enjoy being itinerant), as was the use of a dedicated music classroom.

Joan (5): *I was between two schools and I was on a cart. In one [of the schools] I had a classroom, but it had no windows, it was like an old copy room or something. I had to plan, without a lot of materials. But then the next year, the district opened a new elementary school and I got that [position] full time.*

JS: *With a room?*

Joan (5): *Yes, and I got to pick the instruments for it, too. Having a room is a huge thing.* 02.03/3

When asking about supportive working conditions, I was prepared to hear those previous responses; however, I was surprised by the overwhelming mention of the importance of colleagues in building the essential aspect of community in the workplace. The participants viewed their subject area as different and less understood from that of their non-music colleagues, and their fellow music teachers were integral to the success of their careers. The following dialogues are excerpted from different focus group sessions, and are separated by group, by a line of asterisks.

Jen (8): *I think that if I didn’t share an office with such awesome colleagues, I don’t think that I would make it through some of the day. We have a relationship where I can close the door if I’ve just had a horrendous experience of some sort. I can close that door, and I can vent and whoever’s in there will listen to me and be awesome about it.*
Paula (7): I feel privileged to work with the colleagues that I’m able to be with everyday. I share an office with two really nice people, but we’re crowded in there, and I love it! We really balance one another. 02.06/10

***************************************************************

Susan (5): I think having other music people [there my first year] made a big difference for me because you didn’t feel like it was you against the rest of the school. It gives us a community in our own building.

Amy (5): I have a very strong department [in my building], even though there’s just me teaching general music. My orchestra and band teachers – we work so well together as a group. We all have such great camaraderie. It’s “let’s see how we can work together to benefit the kids.” 02.03/6

***************************************************************

Helen (20): It sounds like we’re all extroverts in that social interaction is a big thing. When people want to talk with me about teaching, that’s really it for me. It’s the collaboration with my colleagues and the joking around. You know, little things like “Helen, can you help me with this?” And I love doing that.

JS: So, you’re the working conditions for other people?

Helen (20): (laughing) Yes, I love to teach, I love to help people out. 01.11/12-13

Administrative Supports

Some participants did not have a music administrator or department chair in their districts. In those instances, the need for program and personal validation was the most common complaint.

Rebecca (12): We need to be validated by our administrators.

Helen (20): Yeah, absolutely.

Rebecca (12): We need to be validated in a way that shows us what we do is important to the school community. And I think that if we are valued by our administrators, then the whole community benefits. It’s very exhausting when you don’t feel that. I happen to work for an administrator who has a very
difficult time telling people she appreciates what they do. I’m always looking for her acknowledgement that the music program is important to the whole community. 01.11/13

The least experienced of the participants expressed their wish for sincere and knowledgeable feedback from their building administrators in regard to their own teaching practice:

Susan (5): I wish [my administrators] would walk in my room instead of just stopping by to ask a question while I’m teaching. My vice-principal once was on the phone during one of my observations.

JS: Oh!

Susan (5): My principal would frequently come in late or leave early when he was observing me, and I’d feel he missed the whole thing. I don’t have any music person who evaluates me, and the building administrators can’t really say much; I mean, it always comes out nice in how they write it up, but they never really talk about music specifically.

Joan (5): In my building, the principal supports us, but doesn’t always understand or know exactly what we’re doing. Sometimes I’ll go a long time without seeing him, and then every once in awhile he’ll come to me with an idea, and I kind of dread those (group laughter), like “I have an idea, you can use sight words in your music classes to help the classroom teachers.” (more laughter) As long as they can fit in with my music plans, I don’t mind doing that. 02.03/7

When asked about other types of administrative supports teachers received, many attributed the presence of the aforementioned working conditions to their building principals. Others commented on the assistance they received in disciplinary concerns.

Delia (8): I think that especially in an urban school, it is so important to have administrative help. The administration has backed me [in my new school] to the point of going into the classroom with me and saying “this is a good program.” Otherwise, I could be having horrible days.

Amanda (22): In my old district, I got zero support. I called the principal [when a student physically threatened her] and said, “The next time I’m not
calling you, I’m calling the police.” You know, if I hadn’t gotten out of there, I
don’t know what would have happened.

JS: So because you didn’t have administrative support, you left the
district?

Amanda (22): Yes. I have that support now, my principal is so supportive of
us. 01.15/11-12

An interesting view about discipline support was shared by a teacher in a
different focus group:

Beth (13): I think that maybe back in the beginning it was more important
[to have this kind of support] because I had more issues like that. And then
you teach for awhile and you start to handle things better. 01.11/16

Teachers who were led by a music department administrator or coordinator,
however, had positive things to say about the kinds of supports they received.

Amy (5): I think having a strong music supervisor has definitely been a
huge piece, because when things weren’t going well, a phone call or an email
– “Help me, help me!” – was all I needed.

All: (laughter)

Amy (5): Just knowing that my principal wasn’t the “end-all” of who I
could go to, I think that has been a huge piece for me, knowing that I have
somebody else I can go to for help that’s knowledgeable. 02.03/6

******************************************************************************

Wendy (6): I think that what I like [about being supervised by a music
administrator] is that you get to set goals and work toward something that
will benefit your program. They have faith and trust in you that you know
what you really need to work on. I think I’m much more inspired to do
something that I think is something I need than when someone says “you need
to do this” (group laughter), like a principal.

Helen (20): They don’t know anything about music.

Wendy (6): So it’s really nice for someone to have faith that you will
choose what you need for your program. 01.11/15

******************************************************************************
Jen (8):  
In my situation, it’s [the music administrator’s] presence at concerts. It says a lot, because it doesn’t necessarily happen everywhere. We’re so very different from some of the other disciplines, and so while some administrators may look at test scores, for us, our concerts are what you see on that given night. And it’s so important we see people other than parents there. It says a lot to the kids, and the kids notice it.

Steve (11):  
I would agree with that. It’s good to have a presence from your administrators. They also know when not to be present, and trust that what we’re doing is good.

John (6):  
Like Jen was saying before, my music director is at everything. He’s always there and likewise he knows when not to be there, too. And sometimes he’s there when you don’t want him to be there. (group laughter) But never do you feel that you’re being looked down upon. My building administration is always kind to me, but we really have to beg so there’s always one of them at a concert. But when I see the administrators attending sporting events left and right and constantly promoting the sporting events, and then they do a disappearing act when something happens in music – I just don’t see the same level of support.

Paula (7):  
I’ve been fortunate to have had two music administrators who were like “if you have a problem you can come to me” and they’d take care of it. I know my current music [coordinator] is respected at the district office, and all principals know the music program is running smoothly because he’s there. He’s respected by the teachers a great deal, and we know he’ll take care of us. We don’t have to go into areas that we don’t need to.

JS:  
That’s a morale booster, isn’t it?

Paula (7):  
Oh yeah, he makes the tough decisions. 02.06/11-14

Amanda (22):  
The outcome of music coordination is huge; in our district we can have our different [music] levels meet in the building. We have a handbook that’s polished. We have tremendous support and consistency from our coordinator.

All:  
Yeah, that’s great.

Amanda (22):  
When you get questions from a parent, we can say “it’s there in the handbook.”

JS:  
Others have called this “back-up.”
Amanda (22): *That’s right, that’s what we have.*

Donna (25): *For me, the things that are helpful are, you know, resources, and it doesn’t always have to be money.*

JS: *What resources wouldn’t be money?*

Donna (25): *Maybe a broader category of just letting the teacher determine the direction they want their program to go in, and the music administrator saying “that sounds reasonable.” When this happens, you appreciate the music administrator even more.* 01.15/9-10

These accounts depict teachers who have stayed in their field and developed positive attitudes about their work, despite individual problems with resources and inadequate supervision. It is clear that these participants place a strong value on the interactions they share with their music colleagues, and that the support gained from these relationships transcends the frustrating experiences and building problems that are often inherent in their jobs. Regardless of the specificity of administrative supervision, music teachers are responsible and resourceful in establishing their own support system, an attribute we will view again in the next research question.

**What professional activities support the life cycle of a career music educator?**

Each participant was eager to speak when answering this question. They were enthusiastic in sharing important growth opportunities and the enjoyment they gained from such participation. For some, development away from work was very important since their school districts did not offer music-related workshops.

JS: *Are district sponsored workshops valuable?*

Joan (5): *They do things in my district that don’t have a relation to music, specifically. Well, they did have a workshop last summer which was*
“Music for the Special Learner,” but it was in the summer and just for a half-day. That’s the first time the district offered one.

Susan (5): It’s very frustrating. We had a workshop a few years ago that would have been so much more beneficial if, in our break-out sessions, we were grouped with music people and could talk about music. It was a complete waste of time for everyone; we really had to fight to have our own time [with music teachers] in the grading session. 02.03/13

These comments were sad to hear, especially when compared to the words of Joan’s and Susan’s roommate, who enjoyed well-planned and appropriate inservices organized by her music department administrator.

Amy (5): We are usually together as a department [for our meetings and inservices], unless on a Superintendent’s Conference Day we might have a morning session as an entire district, and afternoon breakout sessions within our department. Often the whole day is given to us with sessions with audiologists, sight reading support, choral technique. It really benefits us as a department to get together like that. I think being able to have the workshops brought to us, where we don’t have to pay for them, and then you don’t have to go anywhere, you just show up for work and get a good session – you learn some great things and you apply them. 02.03/13-14

Yet these same teachers (the least experienced in the study) worked to find and attend additional, meaningful development to assist them in their professional growth. As roommates, it’s clear they also act as a strong support group for each other.

Susan (5): I think that NYSSMA winter and summer conferences and our local Orff chapter’s sessions have been the most helpful.

Joan (5): The local music administrators’ organization’s sessions have been good, too.

Amy (5): I think that we all go to so many [workshops] because I know my high school teacher always went to her NYSSMA workshops, because when I went to All-State, he was there. He went every year, so I went, your mom went (to Joan), your high school teacher was there (to Susan) – that was part of being a teacher. But there are so many people who never go to those things.
Susan (5):  I’m the only one in my district that ever shows up at anything.

Joan (5): THAT’S AMAZING.

Amy (5): I think it’s a personal choice for all of us that we want more ideas, we don’t want to become the “stale old music teacher”. I want to go to work thinking that “this is the coolest lesson the third graders will be so excited.” I’d never want to be that teacher, because if I’m bored, then the kids are going to be bored and then it’s not worth it.

Joan (5): I want to have a positive effect on people.

All: Right, yeah.

Amy (5): It’s good knowing people with the state level, too. The three of us have been asked two repeated years to run a session [at the state conference]. Some of those attending were 25, 30 years into their jobs looking at us and seeing “us kids up there.” And I remember one lady who said, “I’m so glad that this is what I’m turning my career over to.” 02.03/14.

Other, more experienced teachers were equally enthusiastic about adult opportunities for music learning, both for teaching and performance skills.

JS: What types of professional activities have helped you in your career development?

Jen (8): My association with the county music association has been wonderful. What I love the most is getting to know other teachers because we are in our own little world. We get so focused on our programs and our kids that we just lose sight of the fabulous people that are in our county. And I love my position [in the organization] because I get to meet so many people and learn from them.

John (6): I just love attending Area All-State, and All-County festivals because I love chatting and talking about that’s going on and getting new ideas. I continue to love singing, and being a professional singer, I keep up with that because I really feel like I’m serving as a model for my students.

Steve (11): I agree that continuing to lead a varied life outside of school is important. But also, for me, it’s heavy involvement in GIML, on a state and national levels. And I will say that the chance to work as a department is a treasured, good thing.
Paula (7):  *I have to say, too, that attendance at state conferences like NYSSMA, you do take some nice things away from those workshops, for the most part.*

Steve (11):  *You know what? (joking) Forget all that professional stuff. Heavy drinking with your colleagues has got to come in there at some point! (hearty laughter) I think that one of the things that struck me was at my earlier job, we gave each other a lot of extra special love and care. It was the monthly bonding that we did that kept us motivated.* 02.06/14-16

In addition to experiencing growth as a public school music teacher, most teachers were proud of their involvement in various performance activities and organizations that helped maintain their personal musicianship.

JS:  *What other types of professional activity do you participate in?*

Amanda (22):  *I play in a swing band.*

Donna (25):  *I play in one favorite band, and a few community groups. These things keep us music people hopping!*

JS:  *(laughs) I really found that out when I tried to schedule all of these focus groups!*

Donna (25):  *I also teach [privately] at night.*

Amanda (22):  *I’m president of the alumni chapter of the piano guild. . .*

Delia (8):  *I was in the piano guild.*

Amanda (22):  *. . . and I used to play at church.*

JS:  *How can you remember all the things you do!* 01.15/13-14

Many teachers viewed interactions with other music educators as professional development. Helen’s statements (below) summarized how most felt about meaningful professional development.

Helen (20):  *I play in orchestras, because then you meet other music teachers [from other school districts]. You start making connections. It just energizes me, I just get all excited about it.*
JS: So it’s a professional activity for you just to be with other teachers?

Helen (20): Yes, to be with other music teachers. I just love it. I can’t tell you how many “tidbits” I’ve picked up from my colleagues. The fact that we get together as a string department is just great. Our supervisor always brings us something “good and new”, about sharing and hearing other people’s successes. It’s the whole thing, about personal connections. And I think a theme that’s coming up is sharing. This is about sharing our knowledge, because it’s energizing and satisfying to help others do what we do.

Wendy (6): There are days like I feel I have good ideas, and you can tie them together with other people who have ideas, and then we can take something [new] away from it. That’s a good day.

JS: It’s nice to be with people like that.

Helen (20): Yeah, instead of with people who are like “this is boring, I hate this!”

All: (laughter) 01.11/18-19

The value that these career music educators placed on the importance of professional development was unmistakable. Whether through participation in district inservices, attendance at state or local conferences, involvement with professional organizations, or participation in performance opportunities, it was clear that growth opportunities were not only appreciated but also sought to support and enhance teachers’ pedagogical skills, personal musicianship, and positive attitudes.

Are there landmark events that increase the potential for longevity?

When asked to describe a memorable event that validated their career choice, many of the teachers were caught off-balance. Immediate responses like “oh, boy,” and “I need to think about this,” were mixed with long pauses while the participants reflected on their past experiences. The youngest of the teachers were the quickest to
pinpoint their memorable events, perhaps because they occurred more recently than for others.

Susan (5): *I think that my first beginning band concert was very memorable because we got through it! I felt like [the students] had a great, positive experience. It was the culmination of the first year, where if things hadn’t been so good, I would have felt bad for them.* (laughter)

JS: *And you, was it also a good experience for you? It was your first time.*

Susan (5): *That’s right. Yes, it was.*

Amy (5): *I think mine actually occurred at my winter concert. After five years of being in this building, my winter concert was the first one where I had completely taught all of the kids. I know I am the one who has done that, and that I am the only music teacher they’ve ever had.*

JS: *That’s very powerful.*

Amy (5): *It’s kind of validating to yourself to see that; it’s going to be very hard this spring to let that first group go [on to middle school].*

Susan (5): *It IS so gratifying.*

Joan (5): *I remember last year having a concert with our third grade recorders; in the past it had always been done a particular way. Last year I got up the courage to make a change, and we turned it into a sharing informance for the parents. And everybody loved it, the principal loved it, the classroom teachers loved it. They said, “You have to do that again!” It gave me more courage, so I told the principal at the end of the year, “I want to make the music program what I see, and not what I think has been done in the past, or at other school.”*

JS: *It gave you courage, confidence….*

Joan (5): *Confidence, that’s the word.*

JS: *When you try something new, it can be kind of risky.*

Susan (5): *Sometimes no one else knows how risky. 02.03/16-18*

It was evident that the approval of others was important to these most recently tenured teachers. Susan, Amy, and Joan found the validation and confidence needed
to take risks in altering established building programs, and spoke passionately about following their own instincts to design the best music program for their students.

The high school teachers’ examples were different. After they took time to think, they were able to share important memories of individual students.

Paula (7): It was my second year of teaching voice class and this young man came in, who wore all the black eye makeup and the black leather. I’ve come to desperately love that kind of student now more than ever. There wasn’t room in a performance ensemble, he wanted that, but there wasn’t room and he had to get the [graduation] credit. When he first came in, he had this really tough attitude, he wasn’t going to participate, he never did any work, he wanted to only sing his songs. But he was in voice class, so I had to push him. At the end of the school year, he sang “If I Can’t …” from Beauty and the Beast ... And it was incredible, I mean this beautiful tenor, high baritone tenor. His life had been transformed from that class. But it woke up something in him, and it woke up something in me, and the kids that were part of that class. It was just such an amazing transformation.

Jen (8): Mine was a similar student who was looked upon as different. One year, in 8th grade Chorus, I was blessed with three little Downs Syndrome kids in one class. I had a young man named Ryan, and Ryan took an immediate connection to music. The other teachers in the building were struggling because they could not meet these students’ needs, they couldn’t understand. He was learning at about a 3rd or 4th grade level. They couldn’t understand why they couldn’t help him, and they were frustrated. So mom had called me one day and said ‘we’re having a team meeting for Ryan and I want to tell you that Chorus is the only class that he is really having success in’. So I went to this team meeting, and we were able to show the teachers, this is what he’s doing, this is an area in which he really, really is growing. It ended up that he is now at [a community music school], he’s taking a drumming class and he continues to sing. He takes the guitar, he absolutely loves it. That was a defining moment for me. Just seeing this child, actually I had him in 7th and 8th grade, and I followed him. He loved singing so much, that he came back as a 9th grader, in 8th grade Chorus. We didn’t have a spot for him at the high school that was appropriate for him. So we gladly took him back into 8th grade Chorus, welcomed him with open arms; and he sang as a 9th grader, in 8th grade Chorus one more time. Just to be able to share with this child what he was able to do; when in other areas, teachers really, really struggled. It was pretty awesome.

John (6): I think probably for me was the day that I was told that they wanted me to come back and stay, and that they wanted me to continue. Feeling all along that they liked what I was doing, but never really hearing
that affirmation was hard. Then I heard, “we hope you’ll be coming back in September, we don’t want you to leave.” The fact that they said “we really like what you’re doing,” that really meant the world to me.

Steve (11):  
It’s the many little things, each year, that keep you going. Actually, my current regret is that I’m not involved in Early Childhood as much, where you get to see amazing growth in 10 weeks. This one little 14-month old was in a music play class, you know, the picture-perfect little boy who had never had any musical reaction in the whole summer worth of study. Then, going into a fall semester music class, one day he broke out of his shell and we heard him. It was a complete song, and that was special. It was really, really special to finally see his reaction, to be on pitch, and there were no tears. 02.06/16-18

These last teachers were able to identify a single memory that validated their work; each had a few more years of experience than the three roommates (five years each). Others’ careers, however, spanned such length that this proved difficult; they spoke in terms of groups of experiences.

JS: Is there a memorable event that validated your choice of career?

Amanda (22): The number of students who’ve gone on to major in music…

Alice (17): A lot of students who’ve come back to visit, from middle school and high school.

Amanda (22): And my student teachers.

Donna (25): I can think of a bunch of performances that, if I lined them all up, are really kind of a representation of different chronological periods of my life. Again, it’s all about the kids. And not necessarily the kids who went on in music, but just kids that are former students who went on in anything. Who, in some way, shape or form, I come in contact with later in life, and they, you know, tell me about something that we did (group agreement) – “I remember when we ‘blah blah blah’” and you think, oh wow.

Amanda (22): And, I know – students of former students!

(Group laughter)

Amanda (22): They say, “my mom had you, and she said ‘blah, blah, blah, and I ask “who’s your mommy?” because of course, her name had changed. 01.15/15-17
Career music educators find fulfillment and validation in many facets of their teaching; just one event is not responsible for their longevity in the field. Positive events and experiences provide a balance for the negative aspects found in the workplace (e.g., inadequate working conditions and a lack of informed administrative support). These events and experiences are often perceived as signs of personal and professional growth in overcoming difficult, first-year teaching positions.

**Does teaching at different school-age levels (i.e., elementary, middle or high school) have an impact on the decision to remain in teaching?**

For this study, I had arranged participants into different school-age teaching levels because I assumed I would find a noticeable difference among working conditions and responsibilities for those various jobs. My assumptions about these differences having an impact on career longevity were proved incorrect.

My teaching experience in elementary school had convinced me that the lack of out-of-the-day responsibilities inherent in that job would produce the least stressed teachers, and that high school staff would be the most harried, considering their work with multiple performance ensembles, concerts, and solo festivals. Through the responses of the five elementary general music teachers, I began to understand the impact of isolation from other music colleagues. I also did not understand that building administrators exerted control over music programs that resulted in such deep professional frustration for those teachers. Elementary band teachers faced similar frustrations through restrictions on their programs (e.g., inadequate scheduling of ensemble rehearsals).
Teachers in those high school positions that I believed would be most exhausting spoke eloquently of their love for their work; I didn’t hear any speak negatively of after school hours or numerable concerts. They and the middle school music teachers enjoyed all aspects of their teaching, and credited their colleagues with the support needed to carry out their work, in both professional and personal ways.

In spite of or because of these matters, all of the participants in this study demonstrated a commitment to their students and their careers. It does not appear that teaching at different school-age levels has an impact on the decision to remain in teaching.

**Does length of experience have an impact on the decision to remain in teaching?**

I had intended to organize teachers into focus groups by years of experience at their teaching levels. This was not possible, as explained in Chapter 3, due to the intricacies of individuals’ personal schedules. I found this was not important to the function of each group. The mix of experience levels in three out of the four groups actually assisted in spurring conversation among those group members.

I did not hear that more experienced teachers *stayed* in their careers for reasons other than those for which they *entered* their career. Helen, Alice, Amanda, and Donna, those with more than 16 years of experience, spoke frequently about the number of students whose lives they had touched, concerts they had given, student teachers they had hosted, and colleagues they had known. Perhaps it is this growing
and overwhelming evidence of a successful career that keeps them from questioning their choice in a music education career.

**Are there additional factors to be considered in developing an understanding of career music educators’ longevity?**

When asked what could be done to increase music teacher longevity, the overwhelming response from every focus group was “mentoring.” The teachers in this study felt strongly that effective mentoring of beginning staff could help significantly to reduce the attrition rate.

Steve (11): *Mentoring – it’s so important. And providing it in such a way that it’s understood that it’s informal and that the things that are said at that point, are not to be held against the person; they are to help get through the struggles of those first couple of years.*

Jen (8): *And I would say, extend the mentoring beyond the first year (group agrees). I mean we focus so much on the first year, well, let’s face it – I still had issues my second year that went unresolved*

Paula (7): *I still have issues now…*

(Group laughter)

Paula (7): *I have!*

Jen (8): *I can actually say this because there is a recently hired teacher in my building. She said you know “I got a lot of help my first year, and then it was like they dropped off the face of the Earth.” And we do have a great mentoring program our first year, but then after that they don’t do anything. I would say definitely take that mentoring, but just take a little bit longer and extend it through the second, two years; maybe even through tenure whatever that is for that particular teacher. 02.06/23*

Another group made a distinction between having a mentor and having a mentor who was more knowledgeable in the subject area.
Alice (17): The instrumental teacher that we have in our building is a new teacher, this is his third year. In his first year, the mentor person was a music person, although he only really had experience with general music. This is where it’s nice to have a mentor person who can mentor the general music teachers, and another mentor who could speak to the instrumental job. Because the mentor was a general music person, he had the new teacher doing all this other stuff which was different from what he needed in band. I mean, why do that to your band ensemble, why then not talk about recruiting?

Donna (25): And see, that’s what it’s like out there. There are kids that get into their first year of teaching, and they barely know how to make a schedule, never mind how do you adjust the schedule. It’s just make a schedule, and make it work, and work around lunch hour, work around this. There is just not enough support for new teachers. 01.15/23

Beyond having one-on-one assistance provided by a supportive mentor, many of those questioned felt that administration also played a major role in the retention of music teachers.

Susan (5): Administrators need to give specific feedback. Teachers need to know that they’re doing well. I think when you’re brand new, somebody needs to tell you when you’re doing a good job, ‘cause you just don’t know. You might be doing it well, but if somebody doesn’t call your attention to it, you’re not going to know that things are or aren’t going well. And then if they see something not so good, they should say ‘ok I need you to do such and such’, so you don’t feel totally overwhelmed.

Amy (5): I think I’m going to go with Susan – I think everybody wants to be noticed in a positive way, and have themselves validated, like “wow, that was great.” That would be my first thing. The second thing would be for administrators to know that music is itself. It’s not there to support the first grade reading lesson, or the third grade, and knowing that it is it’s own being, and it has own justification and all those things. It does overlap with other subjects, but it’s not there to support the other subjects. So, value what I do as itself.

Joan (5): I think also just observing children interested in what’s happening in their [music] classroom, administrators should walk in and see what’s going on in music room. 02.03/22

Beth (13): Administrators need to give new teachers classroom management ideas. That’s where I had the most trouble.
Rebecca (12): I agree. And I think [administrators] have too high an expectation for new teachers. They’re never going to act like a tenured teacher that first year; they need to be given time to grow.

Helen (20): Right. They need to nurture the new teachers.

Wendy (6): And [administrators] need to have more contact with [new teachers], not just through the formal observation process. Then they won’t feel so isolated. It can be informal, or social, or whatever. “Please notice what I’m doing,” I wanted to tell my principal. 01.11/25

Paula (7): Administrators need to be there for them, go to bat for them.

John (6): And to be honest. Because we always want to know how we’re doing. That’s something I never had to worry about. My music administrator has always been honest with me. 02.06/24

When I asked the teachers what else they would like me to know, one group told me about their current issues in the following way:

Donna (25): You mean, describe my ideal job?

JS: Sure! That’s a great way to put it.

Amanda (25): Because boy, it’s not ever what you think it’s going to be!

(Group laughter)

Donna (25): I’ve been pretty close to it a couple of times. Actually, it’s pretty good now. Before, there were enrollment issues, way too many students for just me to handle. And yet there were elements of an ideal job because I had a phenomenal principal and a phenomenal colleague.

Amanda (22): My ideal job would not to be looked at as the break-time specialist (laughter). It’s really frustrating. They’ve re-vamped the schedule so I can help the classroom teachers have common planning time. That makes my schedule crazy.

Donna (25): I get it. The schedule and facilities problems are what get to me, too. 01.15/30
Based on the responses of the teachers, many aspects combine to create increasing longevity in the field. To my surprise, support for new teachers through mentoring and constructive administrative interactions were direct answers to the posed question (considering only one of the participants had had a formal mentored experience). Examples of a conducive teaching schedule and adequate space and resources were additional ways to get those beginning teachers “over the hump” of the non-tenure period. For many, the power to plan, implement, and change their own music programs was a crucial component in job satisfaction.

The importance of colleagues, however, was an unexpected thread frequently referenced throughout the interviews. Sympathetic and understanding music colleagues, whether in the workplace or through local music organizations, could reduce isolation and share the comprehension of the day-to-day role of music teachers. Career music educators seek, find, and connect with others like themselves, and they grow and develop because of those relationships.

**Why do career music educators remain in their profession?**

There are many practical reasons to be a music teacher, I was told by the participants in this study. Extrinsic motivators like having school vacations off from work, “July and August,” starting over in September, favorable work hours for parents of school-aged children, good pay, and health benefits were important to all of those questioned, and important factors for staying in their jobs. But there was also deeper, more intrinsic motivation for making a career of music education.
In each focus group, one teacher’s comment captured some of those deeper meanings as participants discussed why they are still in the field of music education.

My favorite place is in my classroom. The other garbage, that is, what I think drives the people out, is dealing with the meetings, and the arguing, and the trying to get your program to where you want it to be. And I said it before, it’s my happy place, right here with the kids, watching them, especially now seeing them from start to finish. I think it’s very rewarding, and if you can fight through the bad stuff and realize it’s not this gripe or this test or this scheduling – then you’ll do fine. You’re there to be a teacher for the kids, and no matter how irritated you get, they will walk down the hall and you’ll get your 25 hugs on the way in, you’ll teach them, and then you’ll get your 25 hugs on the way out. It took me quite awhile to get there because I would come home with all the other stuff. And I think that even now, years later, when we come home, we might vent about behavior issues or something, but we come home with “my principal did this,” or “this is my budget problem;” it’s never “well, my lesson fell apart.” It’s not about bad teaching.

And even though I’m teaching the same curriculum and I’m doing the same thing, every day is different. And I think that’s another piece of staying where I am. I can’t imagine sitting at the same desk, going through the same paperwork of the same stuff, in a different job. Like even though I might be teaching the same standard ideas, the kids are going to ask me different questions and they’re going to look at it a different way, and they’re going to change every day even though I might have 5th grade every day, the first thing in the morning. Every class is going to respond differently and it’s constant change. I think that is very cool.

Focus Group 1 – Amy (5), 02.03/19-20

I think that for me it’s those moments that we talk about and you never know when those moments come. It’s almost like you never expect those moments, and when they do happen, and we’ve all been fortunate to have at least one a year, maybe a couple more than that. And it could be something as simple as a regular rehearsal, where you just made a break through, or it could be something very traditional like a concert. I think one of those things that keeps me going is when you’re in a concert, and you see the faces of your kids after they’ve done a phenomenal job (voice softens) and you’re able to acknowledge them. And you’re able to experience success from their performance as you stand next to them and you look out at their audience. You see their faces (emotional voice) – to me it’s priceless. And what they can accomplish, and what you can get them to do once you’ve developed that relationship with them – that’s absolutely priceless. I think that we teach so much more than music.
Focus Group 4 – Paula (7), 02.06/19

I love kids. I love kids, and I love music. Teaching music was the thing I most wanted to do, and then work with kids. Music has that aesthetic, it touches your heart. I think we really touch the kids.

Focus Group 3 – Alice (17), 01.15/20

I’m always surprised, when they ask kids what they want to be when they grow up, that they don’t say “I want to be a music teacher.” I think, well why wouldn’t you? It’s great. I know I wouldn’t want to be the same music teacher that I was when I first started, because that job was not fun. But, once again, when you’re validated, when conditions are right and when you work with good people, you can take the risk to develop and grow as a professional. But I think that takes work too, like a marriage, you can’t just expect your marriage to be good, you have to work at it. And the same with your colleagues, you’re not going to like everybody that you work with, so you have to work harder at that. I’m sort of like the peacemaker in our school. I try to keep things professional, and we might tease somebody, but tease them to their face, not behind their back, you know, and I think that has a lot to do with it, because it keeps us all friendly and helpful to each other.

Focus Group 2 – Helen (20), 01.11/23

In this study, all participants spoke passionately about their careers and the myriad elements that contributed to their longevity in music education. The combined love of music and children was mentioned by a few participants, and they shared how important it was for them to be effective in their teaching so that their students could achieve. The participants often complained about other teachers they knew who were “just coasting.”

Most of the participants credited professional development activities for their growing expertise and competence. While a few educators were fortunate to have meaningful music workshops held in their own school districts, all teachers sought out additional education and inservice through local and state conferences and
organizations. The teachers in this study exemplified the adage, “each one, teach one” as they shared multiple instances of learning from their peers.

Colleagues were equally crucial to the success of these music educators. Relied upon for both their content knowledge and camaraderie, fellow music teachers helped to relieve the sense of isolation many of the participants felt within their workplaces. They shared their duties, resources, joys and sorrows with department members throughout the years, and conveyed how their colleagues have helped to provide a feeling of relatedness to the larger field of music education. Belonging to organizations and performing groups also helped the participants “connect” with others like themselves, which in turn provided additional validation for their own professional efforts.

The participants in this study believe in “paying it forward;” they are proud to host student teachers and provide their classrooms for practicum experiences for area music colleges. Remarkably, even though only one participant had worked with a formal mentor, all participants in this study recognized this type of assistance as integral to the success of the newly certified. All recommended that beginning music educators be allowed to work with an appropriate music mentor to help understanding the intricacies of the job. Many of these tenured teachers have also provided informal assistance to a new colleague when mentoring services were not available. These participants monitor their profession to ensure a consistent stream of continuing and capable music educators for their schools.

Participants in this study are frustrated when not allowed to structure their own music programs. They know what is best for their students, and are not amenable
to teaching music in service to other subject areas. These are effective teachers who appreciate administrators who trust them, provide needed resources, and know when to leave them alone. They also respect supervision that is interested, informed, and reflective of their well-planned work.

When asked why they remain in teaching, these participants put it simply; they echoed Helen’s words, “It’s the kids, absolutely.” (01.11/23) In listening to the varied accounts of individuals’ paths to their current positions, I was struck by the oft-repeated displays of self-determination. These music teachers have pursued and are accomplishing career goals, at times overcoming major obstacles in the way of their success. I did not ask direct questions about their sources of motivation, and I am not aware that individual teachers detected their remarkable similarities to each other with regard to growing pedagogical abilities, satisfying relationships, and autonomous teaching as reasons for their longevity. There are enough commonalities among the 15 participants, however, to propose the application of a theory of self-motivation as the defining factor of the phenomena described as career music educators.
Chapter 6

Career Music Educators:

Why They Do What They Do

What causes music teachers to become career music teachers? Why is it that some educators stay in the field while others leave the profession after a few years? From responses yielded in this study’s focus groups, it is clear that the 15 participants in this study were motivated to develop into career music educators. Higgins and Kruglanski (2000) hold that there are three fundamental and universal social motivations: (1) to be socially accepted, (2) to be in control of one’s environment, and (3) to endorse one’s personal actions, or self-determination. While all of these categories apply, it is the third motivational forcer—self-determination—that encompasses all three types of social motivation and can suggest reasons for longevity of the career music educators in this study.

Self-Determination Theory

Applying the theory of self-determination to the data can help us to understand more fully the phenomenon of career music educators. This psychological theory and its important tenets are described below, followed by related excerpts from focus group interviews that illustrate the appropriateness of the theory’s application. (I chose to standardize the use of pronouns in the remainder of the text by assigning the female form.)
Self-determination theory has been articulated and explored by Deci and Ryan (1985). They describe the theory in terms of intentional behavior:

Some intentional behaviors are initiated and regulated through choice as an expression of oneself, whereas other intentional behaviors are pressured and coerced and thus do not represent true choice. The former behaviors are characterized by autonomous initiation and regulation and are referred to as self-determined; the latter behaviors are characterized by heteronomous initiation and regulation and are referred to as controlled. (1024)

Mutually dependent upon each other, three varied principles contribute to the theory of self-determination: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These interdependent elements are essential in creating a person’s self-determination.

**Autonomy**

According to Deci (1995), true choice applies only when a person’s actions are autonomous (i.e., the actions are designed by and carried out to one’s personal satisfaction). Controls, or extrinsic motivation, that threaten self-determination (e.g., rewards, working for a salary, threats, supervisory expectations and demands) tend to undermine intrinsic motivation; the desire to continue with the activity declines, even when the pressures are removed. Creativity, interest, and enjoyment are also diminished. The presence of autonomous behavior—as opposed to controlled behavior—is central to the true attainment of self-determination.

The types of motivations that underlie such actions are important in determining *authenticity*. A person is authentic when she can initiate and regulate an action of her own design and free will; she is true to herself and in control of her actions. To be authentic, persons need to feel that their behavior is chosen wholly by themselves rather than imposed by an external source. Self-motivation, rather than
external motivation, is at the center of authentic autonomy, and while persons in positions of authority can affect and support the motivations of their subordinates, they cannot provide the intrinsic motivation that supports autonomous decision-making.

Use of praise

Praise is often used as a motivator; it is assumed that if we praise someone for good work, then she will feel better and be more likely to repeat the desirable behavior. Yet Deci reports that even “positive praise given in a controlling context (e.g., ‘you’re doing as you should’) can inhibit intrinsic motivation, whereas simple statements such as ‘you’ve done very well’ can keep people’s interest and work ethic at a high level” (1995, 68). It is also better to keep both positive and negative feedback focused on the behavior and not on the person. Inviting an employee to share her perspective on either a problematic or stellar aspect of her job performance is a desirable approach for ensuring open and lasting communication. This type of interpersonal interaction is best for supporting individuals’ autonomy, providing for intrinsic motivation, and assisting them to be more optimal problem-solvers. In this way, “people will likely set their own goals, develop their own [high] standards, monitor their own progress, and attain goals that benefit not only themselves, but also the groups and organizations to which they belong” (73).
**Competence**

Motivation requires persons to see a relationship between their behavior and the desired outcome in their autonomous action; these relationships, or linkages, are called *instrumentalities*. Instrumentalities allow a person to believe that, through her actions, a result will be achieved. And although the creation of instrumentalities is extremely important for motivation, they must be accompanied by personal competence. A person must have possession of both the strategies and capacities needed to achieve the desired outcome, since competence is integrally entwined with the enjoyment of the activity itself (Deci 1995).

The sense of being effective in one’s task is extremely satisfying, and the need to be competent is an important energizer. In this theory, persons engage in varied types of activities to expand their own sense of accomplishment, such as taking on and meeting a seemingly daunting challenge. Deci believes that these feelings of competence affect intrinsic motivation and sense of well-being; the more often challenges are accepted and met, the greater the level of competence grows. Even more important, persons need to perceive themselves as competent and autonomous to maintain self-motivation. When the quest for competence and autonomy are joined, they turn into complementary forces that assist persons in becoming increasingly accomplished lifelong learners (1995).

**Relatedness**

As individuals become more authentic, they develop a greater capacity for autonomous regulation. They strive to master ongoing challenges, become competent
in their work, and integrate those experiences into a growing sense of self. This
development does not happen in isolation; it requires ongoing learning and supports
from the social environment in which the worker operates. This social context,
depending on its makeup, can either bolster or thwart the person’s natural tendencies
toward active engagement and personal growth, and “in the absence of adequate
supports, not only will intrinsic motivation be undermined, but so too will the
development of a more integrated or coherent sense of self” (Deci 1995, 83).

   To be effective, persons need to feel connected with others while in the
process of being effective and autonomous. They must be dependent on others for
interpersonal support, both in their careers and personal lives. This intrinsic
requirement for relatedness leads us to be part of groups, and it is the identity of
groups that individuals assume.

   The need to feel related leads persons naturally to take on and assimilate
aspects of the culture that can result in making fertile contributions, and autonomy
support from significant others helps this to occur. Individuals’ need for relatedness
leads persons to become responsible as they are becoming truly free. A graphic
representation of the theory of self-determination as applied to the central
phenomenon in this study is shown in figure 6.1. Based on the evidence supplied by
the participants in this study, the ongoing and simultaneous relationships among the
three interdependent areas of autonomy, relatedness, and competence are equal and
overlapping forces in the development and subsequent retention of career music
educators.
Acquiring a network of colleagues who will help the individual satisfy needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness is not borne by the worker alone; this is also an important charge for the supervisor of the worker. Deci states that the person-in-charge will not be effective in her supervision if (1) she does not assist the person in finding such a network, and (2) she does not take part in a supportive network of her own. Because we bring individual differences to the workplace in terms of needs and abilities, the interactions of varied personalities can determine to what degree social context supports autonomy.

Figure 6-1. *Interdependence of tenets in self-determination theory for career music educators*
Applications of the Self-Determination Theory

Relatedness and competence provide essential foundations in a person’s development of autonomy. In this section, self-determined actions of the study’s participants are viewed through their embodiment of the three tenets of this theory.

**Career Music Educators are Autonomous**

Some participants in this study stated their need to be in control of their programs; administrators who “know when not to be present, and trust that what we’re doing is good” (Steve 11) 02.06/14) were appreciated by those practicing authentic behaviors. Teachers’ necessity to be autonomous could be frustrated by certain administrative practices; creativity and productivity were shown to be affected when music teachers could not be authentic planners in their classrooms.

*How can you tell a band teacher to do journals during band [rehearsals]? I mean, that [rehearsal] is something you can’t have at any other time, you don’t get to have that very often. [Students] need to practice as an ensemble. Why would [administrators] tell them to do something like this?

*Every year there is a new “buzz word” and you’re supposed to drop whatever you normally do. And they want to take all your time for “special development” for this new thing, and you have to drop everything else.*

Alice (17) 01.15/21

Susan (5)’s words reflect her satisfaction in designing and teaching her own curriculum; she echoes Steve (11)’s sentiments about the building administrator, and mentions the importance of “trust.”

*I consider our administrators to be supportive because they stay out of our way—you know what I mean, like they really don’t try to come in and try to say “make sure you’re doing such and such.” They trust that we’re doing what we’re supposed to do.* 02.03/9
Most educators failed to mention the problems related by Alice. The teachers’ infrequent mention of administratively-controlled behaviors indicates the lack of such controls in their workplaces and lack of a developed sense of autonomous regulation for those individuals. Without realizing it, most of the participants in this study had developed authentic behaviors that contributed to their sense of autonomy, and they had been helped by engaging in the following professional relationships.

**Career Music Educators are Inter-Related**

Participants supplied overwhelming and unexpected data that corroborates the theory’s tenet of strong interrelatedness among teachers. Numerous examples of supportive music activities were given (e.g., conference attendance, membership in community performance ensembles, and maintaining a consistent presence in music organizations), but it was the importance of daily contact with their teaching peers that helped most to satiate the basic need to share and be supported by colleagues who understood their roles.

Steve (11): *Good people to work with is how I survived in that other district. [It was] the only thing that kept me sane – a good, good team of co-workers.*

John (6): *I could say the same in that I have wonderful colleagues to work with. I love traveling between buildings!*

Jen (8): *I completely support everything they said. I don’t think I would be able to survive in the environment we have to survive in if I didn’t share an office with such awesome colleagues. We have a relationship where I can close the door if I’ve just had a horrendous experience; I can close that door and I can vent, and whoever is in there will listen to me. 02.06/9-10*

Participants rely on their current colleagues for autonomy support; they also display a sense of responsibility to “pay it forward” in terms of working with student
teachers and supporting new staff through informal and formal mentored experiences.

Experienced teachers understand the need to build a coherent sense of self, and want to assist teachers new to the field to establish this.

*I would be glad to take one new person under my wing and volunteer to help that person. I think that’s what it would take [to improve teacher retention]. With the amount of time that I give to the Orff organization and stuff like that, I’m a lot about teacher training and trying to bring in the newer people. If you want to try something [when you’re a new teacher], you should have help in trying to do it.* Alice (17) 01.15/25

Being with others like themselves helps music teachers in many ways.

Wendy (6) shared that

*There are days when I feel I have good ideas, and when I tie them together with other people who have ideas and we take something new away from [the interaction], that’s a good day. It doesn’t have to be specifically for one reason, it can just be something that gives me a new idea and gives me that opportunity that makes me learn.* 01.11/19

In Wendy’s example, we can see the additional impact that connectedness makes to career music educators’ need to be competent. It is often the same occasion—a music conference—that provides both inter-relatedness and additional skills to music educators.

*Career Music Educators are Competent*

All of the participants in this study found value in professional development; even the most experienced shared their excitement about going to relevant learning events. For Donna, connectedness and skill acquisition were of equal importance in her conference attendance:

*I’ve been to national conferences. These are great because, well, there aren’t many of us double reed players, so these are actually international conferences. Just [having] the chance to sit and talk with people from Japan,*
Less experienced educators demonstrated their appreciation for development that would make them more effective and authentic teachers.

*I think it’s a personal choice for all of us that we want more ideas, we don’t want to become the “stale old music teacher”. I want to go to work thinking that “this is the coolest lesson, the third graders will be so excited.” I’d never want to be that teacher, because if I’m bored, then the kids are going to be bored and then it’s not worth it.*  
Amy (05) 02.03/14

For some, it happened in their districts, and for others, outside events and workshops helped them to achieve professional growth.

*I think that NYSSMA winter and summer conferences and our local Orff chapter’s sessions have been the most helpful.*

*It’s very frustrating. We had a workshop a few years ago that would have been so much more beneficial if, in our break-out sessions, we were grouped with music people and could talk about music. It was a complete waste of time for everyone; we really had to fight to have our own time [with music teachers] in the grading session.*  
Susan (05) 02.03/13

Participants value accomplishments in pursuits outside of daily teaching. Because *making* music is such an integral part of *teaching* music, it was essential to continue to participate in public performance; after all, their individual musicianship skills are on display at all times. They often included accounts of these activities when questioned about meaningful development pursuits.

*I just love attending Area All-States and All-County [student festivals] because I just love chatting and getting new ideas. I don’t really care too much for the professional development that’s offered in the district, we’ve done too much of it in the past. I also love continuing to sing and being a professional singer because I feel I’m serving as a role model for my students.*  
John (6) 02.06/15
A Self-Determined Career Music Educator

All participants shared many examples of autonomy, competence, and interconnectedness. While this wide distribution of self-determined behaviors is impressive, observing all three attributes is particularly effective, as evidenced in one of the younger and less experienced music teachers in this study.

Joan

Even though “the amount of planning was huge, and everything was overwhelming” in her first teaching position (02.03/3), Joan is now a confident and self-actualized teacher. She was an itinerant teaching elementary general music “on a cart” during her first year. By the time she had completed lesson plans, organized her materials and procedures, and traveled between buildings, Joan had little time to connect with other music staff in her district. She was isolated from most music colleagues. Even though she was at two schools within a week, Joan’s time was devoted to preparing, carrying out, and arranging the logistics of her teaching. She knew the classroom teachers in whose rooms she taught better than the music faculty. Joan did not have a music administrator for guidance or support as she contemplated changing the existing curriculum, a decision that was questioned by other music teachers in the district.

But Joan was fortunate; she was a roommate to two other general music teachers with whom she had attended college, and they provided the sense of connectedness that was essential to their continued development. The discussion
among the three in their focus group demonstrated that they knew how lucky they had been to share such a supportive and formative living arrangement.

Joan (5):  *It’s amazing that the three of us all found jobs around the same time, and we’re all staying in the same districts we started in, and we didn’t do bad. You know, even though our first years were a little strange, we all managed to stay there.*

Amy (5):  *And the thing, too, is we had each other. We would come home and we were like, ‘Oh my God.’ We all understood what we were all going through.* 02.03/5

Joan’s second year in her district improved; a new elementary school had been built, and she was selected to be its general music teacher. There was also a classroom for her subject, complete with all the needed music resources and equipment. She began to build professional and personal relationships with the band teacher in her building, and the classroom teachers were interested in her curricular work with their students. Joan’s principal supported her in developing her music program, even though it varied from others in the district.

*He’ll help [the music department] try to figure out how we can do something, even though in his mind [it might be] how can we relate this to ELA, or how can we bring other subjects’ material in. It’s okay, I can help him in this way when I can, and still be accomplishing what I need to do. But you know, I feel I can go to him with an idea and he will at least listen to it, and let me know what he can do to help.* 02.03/9-10

There is little music inservice in her district, so Joan takes advantage of other sources to increase her pedagogical skills. She participates in workshops and conferences, and is active in music organizations at the state and local levels. Joan relies on other music professionals for support and validation, in and outside of her school district, because she “wants to have a positive impact on people.” Both her students and music colleagues are important to Joan, and she feels that appropriate
professional development can help to build her abilities so that she can positively affect both of these groups. Competence, self-regulated behavior, and a sense of belonging have developed from association with others in her field as well as relevant, self-selected development opportunities.

Joan experienced many of the negative working conditions in her first year of teaching that have caused large numbers of teachers to leave the profession. A lack of resources, difficult teaching schedule, low priority for music as a unique discipline, and isolation from other music teachers are mentioned in both the burnout and attrition literature (Killian and Baker 2006; Freudenberger 1974; Ingersoll 2003; Scheib 2004), yet Joan overcame each of these conditions through the environment she constructed for herself. She has since extended her circle of support to include district colleagues and teachers from other areas, and has contributed to presentations at music conferences. It is clear that Joan is motivated to expand her own capacity for autonomy and authentic sense of self, and that her self-determination is responsible for her considerable success in growing into a career music educator.
Chapter 7
Conclusions and Recommendations

While little is known about the reasons for music teacher longevity, much has been researched about reasons for leaving the field of music education. Job dissatisfaction is identified most often as the reason for teacher attrition, and includes descriptions of poor administrative support (Baker 2005; Hamann, Daugherty, and Mills 1987; Killian and Baker 2006; Madsen and Hancock 2002); lack of influence and autonomy (Gordon 2000; Scheib 2006); unrealistic teaching schedule and lack of resources and recognition (Gordon 1997; Krueger 2000; Scheib 2003). These conditions contribute to the high rate of teacher attrition in general (approximately 50% within the first five years), and to the constant need for a renewable music teaching force to replenish the perceived teacher “shortage” (Asmus 1999).

A majority of music teachers are staying in the profession, yet little information exists to document their reasons for doing so. Discovering those positive conditions and attributes may help to sustain extended careers, so that those conditions can be replicated and music teacher longevity increased. This is the purpose of my study: to investigate the development and retention of career music educators.

Conclusions

This section includes a summary of responses and interpretations to the posed research questions, as well as the application of the theory of self-determination to the
development and retention of career music educations. Solutions to the sub-questions are presented first so that the reader can understand the contributions of various questions as they combine to provide the answer to the final and central research question. Implications for the profession and recommendations for further study complete the chapter.

**What working conditions and administrative support are conducive to the development of career music educators?**

As expected, participants listed favorable work conditions (e.g., adequate music supplies and materials, a viable music curriculum, and realistic teaching schedules) as basic to their work. Not surprising, the absence of these conditions was the reason for attrition in previous studies. Additionally, the importance of music colleagues was interpreted as a positive and essential working condition (Conway 2003).

The need for autonomy in program planning and delivery mattered most to these participants in terms of administrative support. Each of the four focus groups earnestly discussed building and directing a music program that is valued for its own body of knowledge; a great amount of dissatisfaction occurs when their autonomy is disrupted by building administrators. Teachers’ work should be validated by those in charge, and they should receive pertinent and timely feedback on job performance. Studies of beginning teachers by DeLorenzo (1992) and Killian and Baker (2006) produced similar results. Those participants who experienced supervision by a music
administrator responded positively to questions about the presence and value of administrative support.

**What professional activities support the life cycle of a career music educator?**

Access to appropriate professional development was important to the participants; recent research substantiates their feelings (Bowles 2000; Bush 2007; Cutietta and Thompson 2000; Smith and Haack 2000). The participants recounted examples of conferences, workshops, and district inservices that increased their musical skill sets, both in teaching and performing. Many belonged to local music organizations that sponsored presentations, and those teachers spoke about the practical strategies learned at the events. Others participated in regular performance opportunities through performing in community music ensembles.

Participants also stated the importance of development as a means to connect with others like themselves. I heard a few teachers say, as they left my home, that they enjoyed the focus group discussions, and wished they had “opportunities to talk like this more often!” It is clear that these music educators gather strength and knowledge from their coming together as common groups.

**Are there landmark events that increase the potential for longevity?**

The participants shared moving stories from their varied careers. Those with less experience related examples of demonstrated validation and the ensuing confidence that supported them in taking professional risks. More experienced teachers related stories of those they had taught, as well as visits shared by past
students (and parents of students). The growing number of such positive memories may help to account for a strong level of job satisfaction among experienced educators. These inspiring remembrances far outweighed any negative attributes of a music teacher’s job.

**Does teaching at different school-age levels (i.e., elementary, middle or high school) have an impact on the decision to remain in teaching?**

All school levels were represented in the four focus groups, and each teacher was enthusiastic about her current position and teaching responsibilities. Doubts about the appropriateness of their chosen careers only surfaced when participants were speaking about work conditions, inadequate administrative support, or lack of preparedness for the situation.

From the evidence collected and analyzed for this study, it appears that teaching at different school-age levels has little impact on the decision to remain in teaching. It is important to remember, however, that participants in this study volunteered to attend an evening interview session in my home to contribute to music education research. Therefore, the participants in this study may not represent the views held by others in their field.

**Does length of experience have an impact on the decision to remain in teaching?**

Because participants were in unlike experience groupings, the discussion of meaningful career events was diverse. Those with fewer years had fewer career events to relate, while more experienced teachers could remember countless
occurrences. The negative aspects of teaching were fresher in the five-year teachers’ minds; they had recently experienced the negative, while, much like the memorable events, the growing evidence of a satisfying career was concrete validation for the more seasoned veterans in their choice of a career. Teaching problems tend to diminish over time. For example, issues with classroom management are brought under control after mastery of different techniques. It appears that extended time in the field builds positive experiences and a sense of efficacy among career music educators.

Are there additional factors to be considered in developing an understanding of career music educators’ longevity?

Based on participants’ responses, there are various types of proactive measures that can help to support music teacher longevity. Supervision and guidance by a certified music administrator is important to teachers at all levels, not just for those in their first years. Informed feedback, meaningful and targeted professional development (as recommended by Bowles [2000], Bush [2007], and Tarnowski and Murray [2003]), and philosophical support for the subject itself can help educators to feel validated and a part of the school community. This feeling keeps the participants productive and growing in their skill level.

Music teachers appreciate building principals who spend time in the music wing of their schools, whether or not they share administrative duties with a district music supervisor. Recognition of the value of the music program by others in the school is important to all of the music staff, and not just to beginning teachers, as
reported by Madsen and Hancock (2002). It is also important that music is understood as a unique discipline unto itself. A fair allotment of needed resources and supplies from building administration is evidence of such a belief.

The provision of a music mentor for untenured staff was often suggested by participants in this study as a way to retain new educators. Many teachers told stories of teachers new to their districts who did not receive assistance in basic music teaching tasks, such as preparing for concerts, assigning and keeping a grade book, and setting up a teaching schedule. Assigned mentors should have a background in music so they can be of optimal assistance in the content area; these same recommendations are also borne out in research conducted by Conway (2003) and Krueger (2000).

The issue of isolation from other music teachers is reported frequently in the literature (Conway 2001; DeLorenzo 1992; Krueger 2000; Tarnowski and Murphy 2003). Providing opportunities for collaboration among a department’s music staff is an important strategy for decreasing isolation. Participants credited this type of interaction as the most valuable type of professional development in which they engage, regardless of the topic discussed. Due to the unique nature of the subject, it is essential for music teachers to be with others who resemble them, understand them, and can truly inform their teaching.

**Why do career music educators remain in their field?**

After 18 years as a public school music teacher, I assumed I could foretell how the participants in this study would respond to the various questions about their
careers. I had worked in numerous buildings, with different age levels, and in multiple school districts, so I imagined that my experiences in the field would resemble those offered by the 15 teachers in the focus groups. Therefore, I was not surprised to learn that these teachers (and I) had common experiences and a strong commitment to education. I also learned that we share one essential, overarching attribute that enables us to pursue long and worthwhile careers: we are self-determined.

**Self-determined music educators are connected to other music teachers.** They (1) rely on the interrelationships among their music colleagues to relieve isolation, (2) build a sense of self esteem and personal worth, (3) problem-solve job-related issues, and (4) validate their actions. They utilize this interdependence as autonomy support for each other. When administrative support is lacking, or mentored support is ineffective, the power of these interactions provides the means and resolve to continue. Research has shown that, without such a system of supports, new music teachers often find job requirements unmanageable and abandon their careers.

**Self-determined music educators are competent.** They continually seek to expand their pedagogical skills and their personal musicianship. These participants choose to take part in numerous and varied workshops that are relevant to their daily work, and they are particularly resentful of district-mandated inservice in support of only the core subjects. Those who participate in expert-teacher activities that provide revitalization become more competent. They tend to offer advice and they are the leaders in the department. Music educators also participate in performing ensembles
that require a high level of proficiency; this type of activity is seen as professional
development. It is also affirming of personal musical abilities and satisfying in its
execution.

**Self-determined music educators frequently participate in connectedness-
and competence-building activities at the same time.** Examples of isolation within
a building and a school district have been documented by the participants. The lack of
meaningful in-house professional development was also a concern; when this
happens, career music educators seek out those relationships and events that can
support their growth and development. Participants credited attendance at conferences
and participation in music organizations and performing groups as opportunities that
simultaneously increase both learning and sharing.

**Self-determined music educators display autonomous behavior.** They are
in control of their programs, and rely on an ever-increasing level of personal
competence to plan and deliver high quality instruction. These teachers are self-
actualizing. They are amenable to administrators’ requests for the inclusion of
additional subject matter as long as they can still teach to their own discipline.
Resilient in devising strategies to overcome adverse working conditions, career music
educators often rely on their connectedness to other colleagues to find solutions. They
are intrinsically motivated, lifelong learners who experience a growing sense of
accomplishment and satisfaction as they increase their capacity to meet and conquer
educational challenges. It is this sense of self-determination that develops music
teachers into career music educators.
This same sense of autonomous behavior is evident in the general education classrooms of 12 experienced, exemplary teachers in North Carolina (Williams 2001). Like Joan (see p. 95), they exemplify self-motivated individuals who thrive in challenging and rewarding environments. When asked about working conditions that had supported their development, teachers described the same attributes as detected in the participants in this study. “Life-changing activities” that kept classroom teachers active and engaged in their profession included (1) making personal choices and changes in their curricula, (2) participating in ever-appropriate professional development to support their growing capacities, (3) maintaining personal and professional connections with their colleagues, and (4) receiving qualified praise from their principals.

Recommendations for the Profession

Across the nation, all schools are under tremendous pressure to demonstrate positive gains in student achievement. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) requires all public school districts to “close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice” (U.S. Department of Education 2002). The public sharing of annual achievement results with local taxpayers is now mandated and, according to NCLB, future levels of governmental funding will be tied to individual districts’ performance toward acceptable levels of annual yearly progress (AYP). Special education students’ scores are included in tabulating a district’s results, which increases the need for additional intervention resources. To achieve satisfactory AYP,
many school districts have reallocated their resources to improve achievement in the targeted areas of mathematics and English language arts.

This reallocation of funds has frequently resulted in a reduction in financial support for various elective areas. Due to the increased focus on improved standardized test scores in other subjects, many districts’ music programs have experienced cutbacks in equipment, supplies, course offerings, and staffing. (Some participants in this study related examples of similar funding decisions in their districts, and attrition research cited in Chapter 2 further documents music teachers’ frustration when there is a lack of district support.) However, even though schools are required to achieve at specific levels of student performance in mathematics and English, it does not relieve districts from their responsibility for the development of the “whole child.” NCLB recognizes the arts as a core academic subject, and stresses that an arts education is basic to the formation of each individual. The importance of music in a school’s curriculum cannot be denied.

There are many implications for stakeholders and policymakers suggested by the findings of this research study. To affect the attrition of beginning music teachers in a positive manner, we need to replicate the supportive conditions reported by the study’s participants. We also need to provide opportunities for self-determined behaviors to develop and occur. State education departments, school district administration, teacher education colleges, music organizations, and music teachers share in the responsibility for a prepared and competent field of music teachers; recommendations for each of these areas are explained below.
**State Education Departments**

State education departments set teacher certification requirements; professional development stipulations are also mandated by many states before awarding permanent teaching license. If music teachers are to experience growth and development in their field, required opportunities to learn should be representative of particular certification areas. State governments can help to assure this will happen by authorizing districts to provide access to such relevant inservices and/or conferences.

Many states require a mentored experience for first year teachers. While this appears to be strong support for those new to the field (Scherer 2001), research suggests that when beginning music teachers do work with a mentor, it is often someone from a different certification area. Too often, those mentors do not understand the varied responsibilities and skill set required for the position (Conway 2003; Krueger 2000). Mentors should hold the same certification as those they mentor. In this way, the beginning teacher can benefit from a mentor who has experience with the issues particular to a music educator.

**School District Administration**

A school district’s administration should be proactive to affect self-determination. For example, to build and enhance opportunities for inter-relatedness among staff, scheduling common planning time for teachers of like disciplines ensures the availability of a regular meeting period for people to interact; such practice helps demonstrate publicly the respect held for that subject and the work done by its teachers. District-wide conference days also provide opportunities for new
and experienced K-12 teachers to plan, articulate, and assess curricular goals as a team. Music teachers should be consulted on these plans and allowed to form their own professional learning communities (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many 2006).

District conference days contribute to competence building among teaching staff. Sessions that are appropriate to each subject area should be included so that music teachers can increase their pedagogical skills (Bush 2007). If this is not feasible, alternative plans (and funding) to address such areas should be made, such as attendance at outside workshops or conferences. The creation of a “career ladder” (Madsen and Hancock 2002; Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch, and Enz 2000) for exemplary staff can help to target development and engage increasingly competent staff by offering challenging tasks to those most ready to accept them.

Experienced and new staff members might receive development opportunities through a mentor/intern teacher relationship. A mentored experience should last for the length of the tenure period, not just the initial year. A support person with music certification should serve as the mentor; these same recommendations are also borne out in research conducted by Conway (2003) and Krueger (2000).

Supervision of music staff should be purposeful rather than reactive. Music teachers should be observed and evaluated by a music administrator who can bring content knowledge and experience to the role. Beginning and experienced educators will benefit from insightful and pertinent direction, and all teachers should be held accountable. Principals who supervise music should consult state and local curriculum documents for assistance in assessing evidence of music teaching and learning. Administrators should provide opportunities for music staff to collaborate so
that a music peer group can help to inform teaching. Building administrators must support music, not as a subject in service of other core disciplines, but as a subject and body of knowledge unto itself. A representative from the arts department should always sit on building leadership teams. All teachers need to see their administrators’ interest in their programs and feel trust in their decisions. The school district has a responsibility to maintain an appropriate and rigorous curriculum through supervision, staffing, development, scheduling, resources, and validation of students’ and teachers’ efforts. This obligation should be carried out for every subject area.

*Collegiate Institutions*

College method classes prepare teachers to teach in the field. Effective college programs can also help to keep educators in their jobs. Student teachers benefit from observation by and connectedness to their fellow students and professors. They should experience the same level of interest by administrators and colleagues during their first year on the job. When this fails to happen, new staff often undergo a sense of isolation and frustration. Colleges should find ways for graduates to feel supported, and at the same time allow them to make a contribution to their institutions (Scheib and Burrack 2006). Colleges should host informal events for graduates to socialize and discuss their experiences, and seminars for undergraduates in which recently employed staff can talk about their first year experiences. Building relationships with area school teachers is an important step in identifying and achieving long term mutual interests.
Tenured and experienced teaching staff are necessary for the realization of college teaching programs. Student teaching requires school district placements, and those placements should be with competent and exemplary staff. Offering professional workshops and/or courses for educators at reduced rates can assist local professors in getting to know area teachers, and provide important skill development for the cooperating teachers of education majors. Colleges can invite highly skilled music teachers (and music administrators) to teach courses in classroom management and various curricula. Because of these reciprocal benefits, colleges and school districts should become intentional partners in the preparation and retention of music educators.

*Music Organizations*

The importance of successful music organizations cannot be denied. Their members look to these groups to organize social events, provide public validation of their successful teaching, hold educational workshops, and offer inspiration and support in difficult situations. Many music teachers willingly volunteer their time to hold offices and work on committees so that the organization can continue to serve. New teachers should be welcomed into these groups. They will benefit from the connectedness to others and serve as future leaders of the group.

These organizations also contribute to teachers’ competence. Therefore, regularly scheduled needs assessments among their members are important to inform the selection of workshop topics and clinicians. Formal documentation of session attendance can serve to supply school districts with evidence of professional
development fulfillment. Reduced membership rates for new staff might entice those less able to join. It is also important to include less experienced teachers as presenters whenever possible; this type of recognition can spur them to additional participation and personal growth.

Music Teachers

Music teachers control the means for increasing their self-determined behaviors if they devote time to each other’s development. They can assist each other in (1) management roles (e.g., concert preparation and supervision), (2) curricular issues, and (3) refining department processes and instruction. Collaboration will increase individual teachers’ self-determination.

Forming close bonds among the department members is crucial when there is not a music administrator to guide the program. In the absence of a formal mentor, music teachers can act informally to help new staff members acclimate to their new district and position. Music educators should be proactive in seeking out and inviting other music teachers to join their efforts so that they can provide autonomy support for each other. They need to become interdependent.

Music teachers must be proactive in building their competence. It is up to each individual to look for various ways they can increase their skills, whether through conference attendance or observing a colleague’s pedagogy. When inter-relatedness and competence combine to create the capacity for true choice, a music educator’s work can be fully autonomous. It is self-actualization that provides a deep sense of satisfaction and desire to continue in one’s chosen field.
For Further Study

Issues with the Research Design

As stated previously, there is little extant research that addresses the issue of teacher retention in music. Numerous studies have been cited that describe reasons for music teacher attrition and burnout, yet the scarcity of information about conditions supporting career development leaves us with little insight into how to retain music teachers. I designed this study to investigate the range of individual reasons for teacher retention, and thus chose a qualitative research design that supports such an inquiry. While data from this study cannot be generalized to a broader segment of the population, participants’ responses can contribute to the basic understandings necessary for designing future examination of career music educators and their reasons for longevity.

In deciding to use the focus group approach, however, I had to relinquish the potential benefits of individual interview sessions. A focus group strategy meant that anonymity among participants was impossible within each group, and this may have made sharing personal feelings with others difficult for some. I asked only ten questions in the sessions because the time needed for each participant to respond was extensive; individual interviews would have allowed for additional questions to be included. Individual interviews would have been easier to arrange than the focus groups. Due to scheduling difficulties, I involved fewer participants than originally planned, and working under this constraint may have yielded less data than from other methods. The advantages gained from focus group discussions, however, made this methodology appropriate for this study.
The intent of the focus group interview strategy is to promote self-disclosure among participants through the comfort of a permissive and non-judgmental environment (Krueger and Casey 2000). A group discussion allowed participants to react to each other’s statements, unlike in an individual interview, and the conversation helped the participants to recall various events and experiences. The small size of each group enabled each participant the opportunity to share, and this interaction promoted extended conversations about topics that were meaningful to individuals. Rather than contributing to a preconceived theory, the focus groups’ participant helped me to derive a deeper understanding of career music educators’ reasons for remaining in the field.

I also rejected options for a quantitative research design because I did not have a strong understanding of the central phenomenon (i.e., reasons for career music educators’ longevity). The qualitative data gleaned from this study, however, have contributed to that understanding, and are valuable for informing future quantitative and qualitative research.

**New Questions**

I was able to answer the posed research questions through the responses of the four focus groups. As a result of the conversations, however, other questions emerged. Additional research studies that answer the following questions could extend our knowledge of career music educators and their reasons for staying in the profession:
1. How do some music teachers overcome a lack of support and isolation to become career music educators? Some of the participants revealed experiences in difficult work environments, yet remain positive and enthusiastic about their careers. It would be helpful to understand their individual methods for overcoming such problems.

2. Why are the participants in this study so dedicated to supporting themselves and future music educators? It was uplifting to hear examples of support for new educators, and the willingness to host student teachers from area colleges. Does this apparent selflessness contribute to personal career satisfaction, or are there other reasons for this involvement?

3. How do economic factors contribute to career longevity? Does the promise of regular pay increases keep teachers in the field when they are unhappy with other work conditions? This aspect was not mentioned directly by the study’s participants, but was alluded to when talking about school vacations and work schedules.

4. What importance do leadership roles play in producing career music educators? The positive influence of these experiences on my professional life have caused me to offer similar opportunities to exemplary staff. It would be good to know if and how this increased leadership impacts career satisfaction for music teachers.

5. How do administrators comprehend their role in providing support for their schools’ music programs? Do they realize the influence they wield through their professional, curricular, and financial assistance? It would be enlightening to
understand various administrative perceptions of their responsibility for music education.

Teachers’ Suggestions for Research

In addition to the questions I have presented here, which result from my analysis of all the focus group comments, the participants in the study were eager to offer their ideas for future research. Further investigation into these areas could help bring us closer to our goal of increased music teacher retention.

Susan (5) – “It’s who you follow.” 02.03/21

When participants were asked to name other issues that could lead us to a better understanding of teacher retention practices, Susan suggested looking at the person the new teacher replaces and the program she left behind. Maltas (2007) calls these legacies “ghosts of music teachers past,” and encourages new teachers to get to know the history of the program they are inheriting. It would benefit the profession to research the perceptions of teachers regarding their levels of success in their first teaching positions. Collegiate music departments can develop records of their graduates’ experiences and hiring history, and thus have access to an ever-growing population. Students working on post-graduate degrees could be additional participants in such a study. Data from such research could help to inform teacher preparation programs and school districts of successful induction processes for use in their institutions.
Quantitative studies that expand our knowledge of career longevity are needed. Responses to a widely distributed survey could provide a broader understanding of positive working conditions and factors that influence teacher retention. Questions that address length of career, professional development, salary, work conditions, and other related topics could be included, and results could be generalized to the music teaching profession.

Rebecca’s comment upon leaving my home after the meeting of her focus group caused me to reflect on this type of opportunity. It would be helpful to have a social function scheduled for new teachers to discuss their experiences. As a mentor in an urban district, I had been in charge of implementing an “Intern Network” where recently hired music teachers could gather and relax while making connections with their peers. It was enjoyable for all involved, and helped to provide a peer group to consult when a member had questions. Such an activity would make an effective action research study documenting the effects of “planned connectedness.”

Many school districts have organized content area professional learning communities (or PLCs). Time is scheduled regularly for PLCs to meet to discuss actions and visions for improved student achievement, and the sharing of individual teachers’ ideas and concerns. There is evidence that participation in PLCs increases self-motivation and job satisfaction (DuFour et al. 2006). An ethnographic study of a
PLC dedicated to music education would assist in informing the profession of this type of teacher collaboration.

Donna (25) – “Describe your ideal job.” 1.15/29

When I asked each focus group about possible future research, Donna’s response to my question was to ask teachers to describe their ideal jobs. It would be helpful to survey active music teachers to determine the positive and rewarding aspects of their work. Results should be shared with teachers and school districts to make their work environments more conducive to music achievement and teaching, thus increasing job satisfaction.

Amanda (22) – “Oh, the stories I could tell!” 1.15/27

Music teachers who share Amanda’s wealth of experience should be heard. Case studies of career music educators should be developed so that the self-determined behaviors of such exemplary and experienced individuals are shared and appreciated by others. Especially motivating would be the stories of teachers working in urban and rural school districts, as well as those who continue to stay in music education through a life cycle of growth and leadership.
References


Ester, Don P. and David J. Brinkman. 2005. What is the role of MENC, NASM, or other state or national professional organizations in providing leadership and support for new research and models? *Journal of Music Teacher Education* 14, no. 2:37-43.


Fredrickson, William E. and J. Bryan Burton. 2005. Where will the supply of new teachers come from, where shall we recruit, and who will teach these prospective teachers? *Journal of Music Teacher Education* 14, no. 2:30-36.


Appendices
Appendix A:

Institutional Approval of the Study
From: irb@urmc.rochester.edu To: jjsieb@aol.com (Johanna Siebert)

Subject: RSRB: Notification of Study Exemption

Date: Thu. 2 Nov 2006 8:53 AM

Letter of Exemption

To: Johanna Siebert

Re: RSRB00016461

Study Why Music Teachers Remain in the Profession: Conditions and Professional Activities That Support Career Music

Title: Educators

The RSRB has reviewed this study and determined that it meets federal and University criteria for exemption for the following reason:

Study is exempt from federal regulation under the following category (45 CFR 46.101)

Category 2: Survey / interview / observational research

- Investigators are required to submit any changes (amendments) to a study prior to implementation to ensure that the conditions for exemption continue to be met.
- An exemption means that you do not need to submit for continuing review.
- Exemptions are not allowed in Categories 1-6 if the study involves prisoners.
- By University of Rochester policy, studies involving subjects under the age of 18 years must include parent/guardian permission. Exceptions to this policy are delineated under Consent Issues in Research Involving Minors and may be found on the web at:
  http://www.urmc.rochester.edu/rsrb/pdf/minor.pdf

- Studies involving surveys or interviews with subjects under the age of 18 years generally are not exempt under Category 2.
- Investigators must protect the rights of subjects enrolled in exempt activities by applying the principles put forth in the education program for human subject protection (EPRP or HSPP).

This research meets HIPAA regulations by:

HIPAA does not apply

Jeanne Grace, Chair, Research Subjects Review Board Date: 10/31/2006

The Department of Health and Human Services has approved a Federalwide Assurance (FWA) with the University of Rochester (FWA9386), which is in effect through November 28, 2008.

601 Elmwood Avenue, Box 315 Rochester, New York 14642 (585) 275-2398
Appendix B:

Request for Membership List
Johanna J. Siebert  
82 Matthew Drive  
Fairport, NY 14450

September 18, 2006

Ms. Patricia Welch  
President, Monroe County Schools Music Association  
33 Harvest Road  
Fairport, NY 14450

Dear Ms. Welch,

I am a doctoral student at the Eastman School of Music working on my dissertation. I am investigating what experiences and work conditions help beginning teachers develop into career music educators. My research design involves the use of focus group interviews with experienced area music teachers, where topics regarding individual career experiences will be discussed. In order to accomplish this, I need to gain access to a comprehensive listing of local music educators.

Your organization (Monroe County Schools Music Association-MCSMA) can supply such a list, since every music teacher in our county is part of the MCSMA. May I obtain a roster from the association so that I can contact the teachers through the mail? I will explain my study to them and request that they first complete a short questionnaire that describes experience, grade levels taught and types of administrative support. Next, members of the various focus groups will be selected from the responding teachers who have five or more years of school teaching experience. Discussion questions for each group will include reasons for becoming music teachers, important events in each person’s career development, and levels and types of administrative support experienced.

I hope your organization can grant my request. Confidentiality will be assured for all teachers and school districts participating in the study. Please contact me with any questions you may have about this research. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Johanna J. Siebert  
425-7017  
JJSieb@aol.com
Appendix C:

Initial Letter to Music Teachers
Ms. Jane Smith
100 Main Street
Rochester, NY 14604

Dear Ms. Smith,

I am a doctoral student at the Eastman School of Music working on my dissertation. I plan to investigate what experiences and work conditions help beginning teachers develop into career music educators. Would you consent to completing a short questionnaire as part of the study? Your answers would supply demographic information for the second phase of the research, where I will conduct focus group interviews with topics regarding individual career experiences.

Members of the various focus groups will be selected from the responding teachers who have five or more years of school teaching experience. Discussion questions for each group would include reasons for becoming music teachers, important events in each person’s career development, and levels and types of administrative support experienced.

I hope you will participate in this study by returning the enclosed “Informed Consent Form”/questionnaire postcard by October 10, 2006. It is important to respond so that a countywide view of teacher experience can be described. Once I have received your response, focus groups will be formed and I will contact those selected. I hope to hear from you soon!

Sincerely,

Johanna J. Siebert
425-7017
JJSieb@aol.com
Appendix D:

Informed Consent Form/Questionnaire
Informed Consent Form/Questionnaire

Name __________________________ School District ____________
Address _______________________________________________________________________

Telephone ________________ Email Address ____________________

Position of the Interviewee:

I have agreed to the use of the information on this questionnaire as part of this research study. I understand that the findings of this questionnaire and my role in it may be shared with the public in planning for future development. I also understand that my contributions will remain confidential, as well as all information about my place of employment.

_____________________________________________________________________

(signature)

Please complete the following and return by October 10, 2006:

Years as a school music teacher _______
Current position ____________________ Grade level ________________

Do you have any music administrative duties as part of your position? (check one)

No _____   Yes (please describe) __________________________________________________________________

Does your district have a music administrator in charge of your program? (check one)

No _____    Yes _____

Do you use email regularly?

No _____    Yes _____

I would like to be included in a focus group interview. (check one)

No _____    Yes _____

Thank you for your participation in this study.
I look forward to our work!
Appendix E:

Letter to Request Participation of Focus Group Members
Johanna J. Siebert  
82 Matthew Drive  
Fairport, NY 14450  

October 16, 2006  

Ms. Jane Smith  
100 Main Street  
Rochester, NY 14604  

Dear Ms. Smith,  

Thank you for your participation in my doctoral study. I have reviewed your completed questionnaire and see that you have been teaching for 11 years and are interested in being part of a focus group discussion.  

I am in the process of scheduling group interview sessions that are convenient to all participants, and will call you to determine your availability. I am including a copy of the consent form you will be asked to sign at the interview session. Again, I thank you for your valuable contributions.  

Sincerely,  

Johanna J. Siebert  
425-7017  
JJSieb@aol.com
Appendix F:

Informed Consent Form
Informed Consent Form

Focus Group Interview

Topic: Experiences of Career Music Educators

Interviewer: Johanna J. Siebert

Position of the Interviewee:

I have agreed to participate in this study that has been designed to gain greater understanding of why music teachers remain in their profession. I understand that interview sessions will be recorded and analyzed to identify common experiences. I also understand that the findings of the research and my role in it may be shared with the music education profession in hopes of improving teacher retention. I know that my contributions will remain confidential, as well as all information about my place of employment.

_____________________________________________________________________

(signature)

Thank you for your participation in this study.

I look forward to our work!
Appendix G:

Questioning Route
Questioning Route
Focus Group Interview

Opening:

1. Please introduce yourself to the group. Be sure to tell us how long you have been teaching, where you teach, in what area and grade levels, and if you have changed your grade level of teaching.

Introductory:

2. Why did you choose to become a school music teacher?

Transition:

3. Think back to your first school teaching experience. How did it live up to your expectations?

Key Questions:

4. What working conditions have been most conducive to your career?

5. What kinds of administrative support have been helpful to you in your job?

6. What types of professional activities have helped you in your career development?

7. Describe a memorable event that validated your choice of career?

8. What are your reasons for remaining in music teaching?
Ending Questions:

9. Approximately 50% of new teachers leave the field within the first five years. If you could speak frankly to school district administrators, what would you recommend to keep music teachers in their field?

10. You were included in this study because of your longevity in the field of music education. Considering your experience, is there anything else I should be asking that can help improve the retention of music teachers in our profession?
Appendix H:
Focus Group Interview/
Sample Data Collection: Field Notes Form
Focus Group Interviews
Sample Data Collection: Field Notes

Central Questions for Focus Group _____________________________________

Date _______________________  Location _____________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive Notes</th>
<th>Reflective Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduce yourself and your position.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Why did you become a music teacher?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How did your first experience live up to your expectations?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What working conditions have been conducive to your career?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What administrative support has been helpful in your job?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What professional activities have helped your career development?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Is there a memorable event that validated your career choice?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Why have you remained in music teaching?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Do you have recommendations for teacher retention?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Is there anything else I should have asked?</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Appendix I:

Colored Coding of Group 1 Transcript Excerpt, Question #3
Coding Categories and Representative Colors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why they began</th>
<th>Professional activities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First year</td>
<td>Sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Condition</td>
<td>Memory, event</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>Why they stay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itinerant</td>
<td>Gives advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Who you follow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>Colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel valued</td>
<td>Personal Growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question #3 – Did your first teaching experience live up to your expectations?

JS: I’m going to go onto another question. I want you to think back to your first teaching experience in a school, the first year you were being paid to teach. Did it live up to your expectations? Did it fulfill why you wanted to teach?

Joan: My first year was rough. I was between two schools and I was on a cart.

JS: Yeah, that was rough.

Joan: So I was, well, in one school I had a classroom, but it was like it had no windows, it was like an old copy room or something. So I had to make it work, and I didn’t have a lot of supplies in either building. So I kind of like struggled through the whole thing. The kids were great, except for the 6th grade class that I had. But other than that, I enjoyed the kids. The amount of planning was huge, and everything was overwhelming. I had to plan, like, without a lot of materials, like how was I going to do what I wanted to do without what I needed. Yeah, so it was hard… but I never thought about leaving, I never thought that maybe I should have another job in another district in another place.

JS: So you never considered leaving the field …

Joan: Right

JS: … or the placement

Joan: Right. But then the district, they opened a new elementary school and I got that full-time.

JS: With a room?
Joan: Yes, and I got to pick the instruments for it.

JS: That was nice – it had to be fun, too -

Joan: Yeah –

JS: You had the space you needed?

Joan: Right

Susan: I don’t seem to remember a lot my first year, really and I don’t have a lot of really strong memories of it. I started my first job as a long term sub in the spring of that school year, and it was just fun. You know I don’t remember feeling very stressed, but I think it was because I was a long term sub, so I just felt like this is what I’m going to do from year to year. I don’t know, it wasn’t very stressful that first year because I just finished student teaching, so I had been in my teaching mode, and then it just went right back into that and it didn’t seem too different; but then again, I knew I was only going to be there for awhile. I might have been just preparing myself like oh this is, you know, temporary, and …

JS: Was it … because you were a long-term sub?

Susan: Yeah. So now I look back and say oh my goodness, I’m so much better off now. (group laughter) You know I just didn’t know any better, so it was fine. Now everything’s fine and I know I’m going to be done in June – I don’t exactly remember, so I was just like happy. (group laughter) Yeah, I was happy I had a job because it was like student teaching. And it was a good job. Now perhaps it could have been, you know, something else like you, Joan, not going between two buildings or something like that, then I thought it would have been a lot worse. But you know, that’s the job.

JS: Amy, how about you?

Amy: Getting a job was fantastic. I started my career – I started .3 at middle school, two weeks later I was .5 at middle school, and then I slowly just kept adding tenths during the first few weeks of school. And I remember that I had really great people that could assist me, and then I had some really stodgy ones, set in their ways, people who didn’t like the 21-year-old new girl walking into school, and to work with someone who was on their countdown to retirement, versus me who had all these really good ideas, but “that’s not the way we do them.”

All: (laughter)

Amy: And the population of middle school takes a very certain person to do that job, and I discovered through the very first few months of that job, that that is not the
personality that I have. And it – now I think I can do it, but not then, in terms of there were so many things that kind of started off that year crazy – the building wasn’t finished, I didn’t have a room all the time and it was where can we put you for this class and what can we do. And it was just kind of like ok well, and the same thing, I didn’t know any better so I just kind of rolled with it. I had thirteen year old boys who swore, yelled and I’m like “oh my God, what do I do with these kids?”

JS: So it really didn’t meet your expectations at all …

Amy: No, and I remember middle school too closely to think “God I hated middle school” myself, like I totally know what these kids are going through. I hated every minute of middle school. I totally get you, I thought, like I totally understand what you’re going through but I was a 21-year-old teacher and I was not that far away from them, in terms of my age and their age, and it was just weird, it was just a weird thing. By the time February hit, I felt better about it, like I kind of came to my own thing and just waited, you know, because I was on probation. I was just kind of there – it was a part-time position, I had to be rehired, I didn’t know what I was doing and it was kind of a thing like with Susan like I could not be here next year. So, you know, it’s not like I wasn’t going to do a good job, but it was kind of like (sigh) maybe I don’t have to come back here (group laughter) … “they’ll be gone, and that horrible Green House of children that I had to teach will be at the high school, and good luck to you people. I don’t know how you’re going to deal.” But I did have a good support, too, like even though I had some negative experiences with one co-worker, I had very strong ones with another whom I shared my room with. She was a veteran teacher, so it was kind of like when I heard her issues… ok, it’s not just me. (laughter).

We didn’t have a curriculum, either. We kind of made up our stuff as we went along like ok well let’s just try this, and let’s see if this will work, and you know well should they be learning this … ok let’s just try it

JS: I remember your district was in a state of change, too, because it went from having a 7-9 junior high down to a 6-8. So your first shot was really the district’s first year, too.

Amy: … and two grade levels in that building were brand new. The sixth graders had been pushed out of the building to start middle school and then the 5th graders had been pushed out. So there were two whole grade levels that had just started in a brand new, not finished school (laughter), so I knew the construction workers more than I knew my principal (laughter).

JS: There’s a lot of stress around those kinds of things, you know, when you think about it being your first year –

Amy: Right –
JS: Even when you followed somebody else’s teaching and routines … and the same thing for you, Joan, starting in a building being in the middle of waiting for a room and all those things. So, (sigh), it’s no wonder why people leave (group laughter) …

Joan: It’s amazing that the three of us all found jobs around the same time, and we’re all staying in the same district that we started in and we didn’t do bad. You know, that even though maybe our first years were a little strange, we all managed to stay there.

Amy: And the thing too, is we had each other. We would come home and we were like oh my God (group response in agreement) … we all understood what we were all going through like ok this is enough … so I kind of had two that I dealt with ..