Music Teacher Retention in Urban Schools: Some Clues to Best Practice

Society for Music Teacher Education Conference

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Overview

Long term study of urban music teachers in their first five years of teaching

Purpose

To explore what problems to young urban music teachers perceive that they encounter in their first five years of teaching and how they deal with them.

Questions

1. What factors influence the urban music teachers' decisions to leave or to stay in urban teaching?
2. What pre-professional training do urban music teachers wish they had had?
3. What in-service professional training and mentoring is helpful?

Methodology: Exploratory case study

Volunteer subjects

4 completed fifth year,

4 in fourth year

3 in third year

2 in second year

1 in first year

- 6 instrumental, 6 general music, 2 choral;
- 6 male 8 female

Data Collection

- Weekly email reflections; unprompted. They can write about whatever they wish.
- If they ask for advice, I try to give it.
- Each semester, face to face semi-structured interview.

Parameters

- All are volunteers
- I do prompt them if I do not hear from them for several weeks
- All are pursuing or have completed a masters as mandated within five years in NY.

Data sets

- Emails
- Audio recordings of interviews and transcripts
- No observations or interviews with colleagues or administrators
- Based solely on their perceptions

Tentative Findings

What factors influence the urban music teachers' decisions to stay in urban teaching?

1. Peer acceptance

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2. Administrative encouragement

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1. Peer acceptance
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3. Obvious improvement in program support
4. Fear of the unknown
5. True enjoyment of their students
6. Knowing they are making a difference

Tentative Findings

What factors influence the urban music teachers' decisions to leave urban teaching?

- Lack of professional respect from colleagues

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- Lack of professional respect from colleagues
- Non-musical requirements for their professional assignment
- Being worn down by the negatives outside their classroom
- Wishing to pursue another degree in another location

Tentative Findings

What pre-professional training do urban music teachers wish they had had?

Answers depend on where they student taught. For those who **student taught in the city**:

- Fund raising
- Dealing with the purchasing system
- Scoring for unusual combinations of instruments
- How to teach band and strings at the same time
- Formal training in conflict resolution

Tentative Findings

What pre-professional training do urban music teachers wish they had had?

Answers depend on where they student taught. For those who **did not student teach in the city**:

- Classroom management
- More emphasis on urban problems in methods classes
- How to teach children from diverse backgrounds when you are Caucasian

Tentative Findings

What in-service professional training and mentoring is helpful?

Difficult to report. They talk more often about what is not helpful:

Mentors who are not musicians

Mentors who are waiting to retire

Workshops on teaching that seem not to apply to music teaching

Workshops that have nothing to do with teaching but are supposed to develop the teacher as a musician

Tentative Findings

What in-service professional training and mentoring is helpful?

Peer group to ask questions of

Participating in this project

- help finding peers
- someone to listen who gets it

Graduate work because they find peers

Summer classes on things they didn't get in school

Strategies that help

- Buddy systems
- Teaching sequences
- Taking things into your own hands and coming up with a solution
- Talking with supportive colleagues
- Knowing they can change over time

The End

Your comments and questions would be appreciated

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