

University of Alberta

Life Cycle of a Music Educator:
The Value of Mentorship to a Beginning Secondary Music Educator
Within Edmonton Public Schools

By

Roberta Baril



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fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education

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Mentors and apprentices are partners in an ancient human dance, and one of teaching's greatest rewards is the daily chance it gives us to get back on the dance floor. It is the dance of the spiraling generations, in which the old empower the young with their experience and the young empower the old with new life, reweaving the fabric of the human community as they touch and turn.

Palmer, 1998, p. 25

For Ray, my mentor in all things.

And for Lauren and Amanda, who have made my cycle of life complete.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this action research study was to determine in what ways the relationship between experienced and beginning secondary music teachers can help to create a more meaningful experience for the novice teacher. This study was motivated by recognition of high attrition rates for beginning music teachers. Research supports the idea that one of the most effective ways in which to combat novice stressors is through a professional collaboration in the form of mentoring where connection with a supportive mentor can help alleviate isolation.

This action research group consisted of 13 music educators employed by the Edmonton Public School Board whose teaching experience ranged from 1 to 25 years. Members of the group met over a ten-month period and, through reflective dialogue and journal communications, explored the value of relationship to their successes as music educators. Results indicated that mentoring relationships improved the quality of experience for the beginning music teachers and provided a renewed sense of purpose for the experienced teachers.

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Overture: Introduction

Prelude: The Long and Winding Road

For the last 20 years, I have been a junior high school music teacher and some might say that this classifies me as a survivor. I didn't set out to be a survivor; it just happened somehow. I hadn't thought of myself as being engaged in a struggle for longevity and I did not believe I was in danger of joining the ranks of the "burned out." As I considered the possibility of graduate studies, I openly fought the idea that I was in any way looking for a means of escape. And yet, in order to establish the context in which this research was undertaken, the question of why I embarked on the process seems unavoidable. Why was I sitting and writing a university paper at this point in my career instead of following my usual pattern of organizing the insanity in a junior high music room?

Interlude: The Sound of Silence

It is two weeks before Christmas and an eerie calm has descended upon me as I sit at my computer. I am doing something that is almost completely unprecedented in my life as a music educator. I am staring out of my window, marveling at the absence of sound. And I am *thinking*. It strikes me how important silence is as a prerequisite to thought. As I take in the icy blue sky and the frost clinging to the trees, my thoughts wander to an earlier time in my life as a music educator. What strikes me immediately is the complete invasion of sound. There is sound everywhere, so much so that it eventually begins to permeate my whole being. We are getting ready for the Christmas concert and I am aware of the sensation that I am

drowning as the activity level reaches a fervent pitch. The students are practicing and the satisfaction that ensemble sometimes brings is missing as each student is engaged in private warm-up. I should be bringing them back together, but I am busy. I am always busy. The phone is ringing and it is a very loud ring because the school administration has installed a special device to alert me to the phone's presence even as the band is playing. My computer appears to be singing as I have mistakenly opened up the Christmas message sent by a well-meaning colleague. A string of lights flash across the screen accompanied by a relentless rendition of "We Wish You a Merry Christmas." Parents are standing in line and waiting for delivery of their Christmas wrap, the latest in our endless effort to raise funds. A few of them are also wondering, just wondering they assure me, how I assigned the reserved concert seats and decided who would sit in the first row. Somewhere, in the background, I am aware of my lead trumpet player explaining that a grandmother's unexpected visit will mean he cannot play in tonight's concert and I catch a glimpse of a concerned looking principal who is uncertain as to whether there are enough chairs for the impending event. As I begin to sink deeper and deeper into my escape hatch, a sheet of paper on my desk catches my eye and I scan my hastily jotted list, the result of panic as I, in the role of mother, valiantly try to prepare for Christmas at home. I am sinking, I am falling and the sound is getting louder and louder.

As I shake myself out of this state of reverie I am left with a startling thought. Am I here because of a subconscious instinct for survival? Was I too, like countless music educators before me, on the edge of the burnout abyss? Am I sitting here now, writing, because I needed to find a silent space in which to think?

The answer to my questions might seem painfully obvious to others, but it comes as somewhat of a revelation to me. I have always felt that I would be the exception to the rule that defines the short career of a music educator. I love what I do and I do it by choice. The year preceding my sabbatical marked the highlight of my professional career, filled with accolades and awards, recognition and achievement. The idea of a leave of absence began as a small seed, a way of acknowledging and perhaps celebrating a high point after 20 years of teaching. I did not see it as a means of leaving the practical teaching world. And yet, as I moved further and further along in the process, I became aware of an increasing sense of relief that I would be taking a break from the pace I had set for myself.

There was also a second seed growing within my professional life and it was situated alongside my quest for time and space in which to reflect. I was beginning to notice an increasing connection with the young teachers that were entering into this adventure of teaching music. It began with student teachers that I had shared my classrooms with over the past number of years. I was becoming aware that the relationships we had developed were not ending with the termination of their pre-service rounds and that, even though these relationships were taking up countless hours of precious time, I was becoming more and more excited by the idea of maintaining these connections with the new generation. A

circle was forming that consisted of some of my previous band students who had gone on to careers in music education, my student teachers who were in their first few years of teaching, and other new teachers to the school district in which I was situated. I noticed that with every person who joined our group, another one or two were soon to follow, usually friends or classmates of current members. There was nothing formal in our organization. We simply began with a network of telephone and e-mail connections and made a point of meeting at conferences and festivals. Our communications were often requests for resources or information, but sometimes they ended up being opportunities to unload the burden of a difficult day or connect with someone who might understand the unique problems of the music world. I began to realize over time that, although I believe these novice teachers were benefiting from our relationship, I was also gathering strength from making contact.

And so here I sit, staring out my window, aware for perhaps the first time that I am here because of a need to face the future. I believe I entered into this research project at a very critical point in my career and that I was closer to the end of that career than I had admitted even to myself. In reaching out to these novice teachers, I was hoping to increase my own chances of survival. I wanted to feel that the 20 years of knowledge and experience that I had acquired would be of value if it could be passed on and, in hindsight I realize that I was also hoping to find some answers to the difficulties I was facing as a music educator in the 21st century. I was searching for connections and I was searching for a way to make those connections a reality. In this realization I begin to understand Jerome

Bruner's insight when he suggested that in discovering how to help the young to understand something, we further our own understanding. "Finally, one of the most crucial ways in which a culture provides aid in intellectual growth is through a dialogue between the more experienced and the less experienced, providing a means for the internalization of dialogue in thought" (Bruner, 1971, p. 107).

This study of my own location has helped me to see the word *research* as having true meaning for what I am setting out to accomplish. In looking at the life of a music educator through the eyes of beginning teachers, I am also re-searching its meaning for me.

Movement One: The Question

First Theme: Where Have All the Teachers Gone?

My initial motivation in pursuing this study of the life cycle of a music educator came in the form of a dismal realization that there could be a critical shortage of music teachers in the foreseeable future. Attrition rates for teachers in general across North America have been increasing at a steady rate. The National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 (NLS-72) was conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education (Heyns, 1988). Participants in the study were randomly selected when they were seniors in high school in the spring of 1972, and in a supplementary sample drawn in 1973. Data on education and career choices was collected and follow-up surveys were done in 1973, 1974, 1976, 1979, and 1986. All participants, regardless of background or professional choices, were asked at each juncture to complete extensive work histories.

In addition, those individuals who were identified as present or former teachers in 1986 or who had trained to be teachers were sent a supplementary teaching questionnaire. More than one thousand individuals responded to this supplement with detailed information on their professional lives, their attitudes toward teaching and the schools in which they taught. (Heyns, 1988, p. 24)

Results of this study revealed that 17% of beginning teachers left the profession after only one year and that nearly half left after five years (Heyns, 1988). These statistics become even more alarming when combined with findings from a 1996

report by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future where it was estimated that in the next ten years, nearly half of the current educators were expected to retire (Boreen, Johnson, Niday & Potts, 2000, p. 7).

This concern in the United States is mirrored in our own province. The University of Alberta, as a response to potential teacher shortages, has "named new recruitment liaison officers to increase awareness of the benefits of a teaching career" (Association of School Business Officials in Alberta, 2000, p. 33).

Teaching has become an extremely difficult profession and the chances of burnout are frighteningly high (Brock & Grady, 2000; Cox & Stern, 1993). When we consider the steep learning curve required of beginning teachers and combine this demand with the often poor assignments and working conditions with which they start out (Bey & Holmes, 1990), it is probably of little surprise that there is a such a high "probability that beginning teachers will leave the profession in the early years of their career" (Putz, 1992, p. 1).

This concern over teacher shortage in general is magnified in the field of teaching music. Adding a very specialized set of skills and intense extra-curricular demands (DeLorenzo, 1992) to the problems that face a first-year teacher can result in "overwhelming stress" (Cox & Stern, 1993, p. 34). This stress might be a contributing factor to the high attrition rates found among music teachers. One study (Krueger, 2000) surveyed 30 music educators in the state of Washington, all of whom were in their first ten years of teaching. These teachers represented a wide spectrum of teaching assignments ranging from kindergarten through grade 12, in rural and urban settings, and including choral, instrumental and general

music. The findings of this study revealed that 5 of the 30, or nearly 20%, had plans to leave teaching in the immediate future. This trend can also be seen in Edmonton Public Schools. Within this school district, of the 78 teaching positions advertised as vacant from May 13-21 of 2001, 10 of the 78, or 12.5%, were music positions. This is an alarming statistic considering that most schools in the district have only one music teacher. This trend can be seen to have even farther reaching effects as it is echoed in the graduate programs in universities. Not only is there a shortage of music teachers, but a shortage of music education faculty in post secondary institutions is becoming evident. “Without music educators staying in the profession long enough to gain the expertise and desire to prepare another generation of music educators, we have no ready pool of future music education professors” (Teachout, 2004, p. 235). Because I am a strong advocate of the value of music education in our schools, these facts acted as an alarming catalyst prompting me to look at some of the issues facing beginning music educators. There is much evidence to support teachers not feeling adequately prepared to teach after their university training (Aiello, 2000). Teaching is one of the few professions in which there is no initiation phase and the level of expectation is at its peak from the first day a novice enters the classroom. The list of expectations for a new music teacher is at best frustrating and, at worst, demoralizing.

As a director you will be expected to prepare bands for concert and jazz performances while working one-on-one with students on more than a dozen entirely different instruments. At the same time you will deal with finances, promotion, publicity, travel arrangements and fundraising as well

as show production and narration, equipment purchases and management, uniform design and maintenance, library and inventory, not to mention score selection and preparation, music arranging, private teaching and ensemble coaching, community service and festival preparation along with ever-present counseling and parenting. (Wise, 1996, Foreword)

It is little wonder that the U.S. Commission on Teacher Education in Music made the claim that music teachers “need to be outstanding persons” (Gary, 1976, p. 210) and that the descriptor of “outstanding” indicates a person who is “intelligent, open, creative, alert, responsive, aware, considerate, democratic, and a leader” (Landon, 1975, p. 184). Beginning music teachers trying to meet with these demands will undoubtedly risk becoming overwhelmed and disillusioned. An example of a typical day in the life of a beginning music teacher can be found in Appendix I.

Interlude: The Journey

The career life expectancy of a music educator is alarmingly short and yet, as I approach the midway point of my own career, I am surprised to note that 20 years have passed since its beginning. At this time, I see a fork in the road. I suspect that one branch of this road leads toward a career exit because it is plagued with stagnation and disillusionment. The other, I am hopeful, is one that I have already turned toward, perhaps it is a path on which I have even ventured a few steps, as I consider my future in the role of veteran music educator. From where I stand at the edge of this path, I see a group of enthusiastic, if somewhat frightened, student teachers

preparing to graduate. And down the road I see my colleagues, looking a little weary, frustrated, even sad, but with their arms outstretched toward the novices about to join them. At the side of the road, I see a small cottage. The lights are burning on its porch and I think I see a small fire in the hearth. If I strain my eyes, I can see large, comfortable chairs, what looks like a pot of soup simmering on the fire and an old piano awaiting someone's loving touch. While lost in this reverie, I am startled to hear the unmistakable strains of Tune #1 in the Beginning Band method book coming from a group of excited new music students somewhere in the distance, farther down the road. The eyes of the neophyte teachers widen in an anxious response; the veterans heave a sigh of resignation. I open my mouth, poised in invitation, ready to suggest a retreat to discover what may await us inside the cottage. Maybe we could talk. Maybe we could rest. The students will wait; they always do.

Second Theme: You've Got a Friend

As I searched for my place in the life cycle of teaching, I began to realize why my journey brought me to this place. I wanted to find a way to help new teachers discover meaning in their first-year struggles and I wanted to be there to offer encouragement as they battled for survival in the profession. Beginning teachers cite feelings of isolation as the leading cause of attrition (Boreen et al., 2000; Krueger, 2000). There is a wealth of research that supports the idea that the most effective way to combat these novice stressors is through a professional

collaboration in the form of mentoring (ATA, 1999; Baker, 1992; Boreen et al., 2000; Kealy & Mullen, 2000; Kochan & Trimble, 2000; Olsen, 1989; University of Dayton, 1994; Wunsch, 1994). Neophyte teachers can more easily search for meaning in their new experiences with the help of a supportive mentor and this connection can alleviate the feelings of isolation and loss of control that often accompany the first year of teaching, (Schmidt, 1994).

The word mentor can originally be found in Homer's poem, *The Odyssey*, in which Odysseus, about to leave for the Trojan War, entrusts the education and guidance of his son to his dear friend, Mentor. Mentor is not only responsible for the intellectual and physical training of the son, but also for development of a spiritual, social, and administrative nature (Bey & Homes, 1990, p. 5). The dictionary defines a mentor as an “experienced and trusted adviser” (Sykes, 1994, p. 405). For me, however, the most meaningful definition comes with the words “Breaking the circle of one” (Mullen, 1997, title) and the message the poem by this title presents.

Picture a life filled with caring and supportive relationships
with mutual trust and respect
where there is time and space to talk,
to grow,
to share meaning
to co-create text
to be
a real person
whether or not “real” personal
where lines blur
and mentors and mentees become one
cycling in and out of each other's lives
cycling back, checking in
sharing the real stuff of life
a relationship that looks different
depending on where you stand. (Mullen, C. 1997, p. xxiii)

Interlude: Lean on Me

If I close my eyes and let my mind wander, I can vividly remember all of the feelings that accompanied my first year of teaching, almost too vividly for these are not comfortable thoughts. I can recall how quickly my burst of neophyte enthusiasm was squelched and how lost I felt when I discovered that I was completely unprepared for the task ahead of me. I

had wanted to be a teacher since I was 11 years old and a music teacher since I was 13, but in these first few months of trying to turn that dream into a reality, I was faced with the strong feeling that I had made a mistake. I was convinced that I had been very wrong about my career choice. I can still feel my heart race as I picture early encounters with parents when their looks most certainly told me they felt I was too young and inexperienced to be making decisions regarding their children. I can remember endless searches for supplies and materials and those awful moments when I had to confess that I had jammed or perhaps irreversibly damaged some piece of school office equipment. I can feel the humiliation as every one of my grade nine drummers lay down on the bandroom floor and refused to work because they didn't like me and they wanted their old teacher back. Who could have predicted that when I ran out of the room in tears they would have such poignant suggestions to place in my naive idea of a suggestion box? It seemed that every single day held some new challenge that got in the way of my endless search for an identity. I was flailing, striking out in a desperate attempt to define who I was in this very new role of Teacher.

As I sit back now and reflect, some 20 years later, I wonder what it was that gave me the will to continue? As I search for an answer, my mind wanders to yet another memory, this a more recent one. I am sitting at the front of a crowded conference room, filled with music educators. I am being introduced to them as an experienced teacher who has been around

for many years (How did that happen?) and who would like to speak on the issue of the critical shortage of music teachers in our province. I begin by stating a fact that I imagine has brought us all together in this room - "Isn't this a tremendously difficult job?" I feel the tension break a little and an immediate bond, a connectedness, form through this admission of adversity. I look out amongst the people in search of a clue as to how to begin. I see the faces of my last five student teachers and when their eyes meet with mine, I see the future. And there, I see the smiles of my peers showing support, the present. And then, amidst all of these people, I find the weary face of my own first cooperating teacher, the past. I find I am almost moved to tears by the moment and I throw away all plans at a prepared speech.

I am back to the same question. What was it in those first few dismal months of teaching that encouraged me to keep trying? I think the answer is that it was discovering I wasn't alone. There were people looking out for me, knowing the path I was taking and waiting to guide me around the pitfalls. In fact one of those very people is sitting a few feet in front of me, that same cooperating teacher of mine. I'll tell this group that story, I decide. Mr. A. gave me a survival kit on my last day of student teaching - a bottle of Tylenol, a box of Kleenex, a book of bad jokes to tell audiences, important stuff like that. And for the first few months of that first year, he called on a regular basis. He seemed to know when the down times would be. On a particularly bad day, just as I was giving myself the next deadline

for leaving this awful mistake of a job, the phone rang in my office. Mr. A. had called to see how I was. After listening for a lengthy time to my litany of complaints including a desk full of instruments that I had tried to fix and now couldn't put back together, he said "I'll be right there." I expected a shoulder to cry on but instead, he showed up with a tool kit. A tool kit! I wondered if the tools for survival in the profession could be hidden in this magic box. No, in this box, as it turned out, were actual tools. Mr. A. had listened to me on the phone and realized that my most pressing need at the moment was not finding an answer to a big theoretical or moral issue; it was the need for a tangible solution. For the next two hours he patiently explained how to fix the piles of broken instruments that had gathered in my room. He gave me one small thing over which I could feel in control, a place to start. And mostly, as we sat and turned tiny screws and hammered out little dents, he gave me companionship. I felt I was part of a community and I began to think, through our conversation, that I might eventually actually belong. As he got up to go, he said "Someone did this for me about 20 years ago; I expect the same from you 20 years from now. It's lonely at the beginning; help someone out."

This is the story I told at my session that day and as I finished, I realized that the past, present and future, all assembled in that room, shared a common well for the tears we shed. And once that fountain of emotion began flowing, there was no end to what we could share. The next two hours were a revelation to me as I sat and listened to story after story.

I realized when it was done that I was not the same and that I had entered into a new phase of this teaching career of mine. After such a tenuous beginning, I had learned to love the job I do with a true passion; now I needed to take on a new role, that of the experienced teacher, and fulfill my promise to Mr. A. In order to extract meaning from this new phase of my career, it was time to pass on what I had learned so that I could, in turn, feel useful and positive. The message these new teachers were sending out was clear - this job was too difficult and the rewards were too long in coming to have to face it alone.

The beginning music teacher is faced with a great deal of professional adversity and this sets up a need for support in the initial phases of a career in music education. When taken in this context, my research question can be stated as the following:

In what ways can the relationship between experienced and beginning music teachers help to create a more meaningful experience for the novice teacher?

Movement Two: Review of Literature

The research literature for this project involved studies on the difficulties facing beginning music teachers, the value of mentoring to these teachers and the use of the research method of action research in music education. A University of Michigan Proquest Digital Dissertation search revealed that there are no doctoral dissertations that relate specifically to my study, namely connecting the area of mentorship with the experiences of beginning music teachers within the setting of an action research project.

Doctoral Dissertations

Doctoral dissertations that appear to be related to some degree to this investigation include the work of Liebhaber (2003), Vartanian (2002), and Turner (2002). Liebhaber explored the relationship between the cooperating teacher, student teacher, and college supervisor in music education within the context of action research. Liebhaber defined mentorship as the opportunity for these three levels of educator to both teach to and learn from each other. She produced two in-depth case studies using qualitative research techniques and relied upon data collected through interviews, journals, discussions and e-mail communications. She concluded that the triad of relationships between the student teacher, cooperating teacher and college supervisor in her case studies proved to be of immense benefit to all involved, especially when the more experienced teachers were accepting of the high ideals held by beginning teachers and when they allowed them to try out new teaching ideas. Within this positive setting, Liebhaber concluded that all involved came away with new understandings about teaching music. Liebhaber

considered the study to fall within the realm of action research because she believed that, as a college supervisor, she would be able to effect change based on her findings in terms of student teacher placement, the preparation of cooperating teachers, and the facilitating of student teacher experiences. She determined that the positive value that the student teachers in this study gained from the student teaching experience was directly related to the relationship he or she was able to establish with the cooperating teacher. Compatibility of character and philosophy and sufficient time in which to establish relationship were of key importance.

Vartanian (2002) examined the needs and concerns of first-year instrumental music teachers. A four page researcher-constructed questionnaire was sent to 159 first-year instrumental music teachers working in Los Angeles and Orange County in the state of California as identified by a directory of the Southern California School Band and Orchestra Association. Survey results were based on responses from 114 teachers, indicating a return rate of 72%. In part one of the questionnaire, teachers were asked to respond on a five-point scale to questions that were meant to explore their perceived readiness for the job of teaching music. The questions were formulated using data from a pilot study Vartanian had conducted in the previous year of 44 first-year teachers. From this earlier study, Vartanian had identified 25 teacher situations with which the novices indicated they had difficulty. She used these responses to compose 25 Likert scale questions for her questionnaire based on the following rating scale: (1) = I found this area comfortable, (2) = I had few problems with this area, (3) = I found this area somewhat difficult, (4) = I found this area difficult, and (5) = I found this

area overwhelming. The most frequent responses included “Finding time to continue own musical growth” (M=3.8), “Preparing a budget” (M=3.7), “Maintaining a classroom environment with few student interruptions” (M=3.1), and “Maintaining classroom rules and regulations” (M=3.0). Other responses included difficulties in adapting music lessons to special needs students, communicating the value of music education to administrators and colleagues, working with a parents’ association, and developing routines that facilitate effective classroom management (M=2.7-2.9). In part two of the questionnaire, questions were designed to discover “who or what was most helpful to the new teacher in his or her first year in the profession” (p. 42). Questionnaire results indicated that new teachers believed their greatest assistance came from experienced colleagues in the field and from assigned music mentors. A third section, allowing for narrative responses, reinforced the belief that mentoring assistance from an experienced music educator was an essential component to success in the first year. Vartanian developed a mentoring model in her conclusions designed to assist first-year music teachers. While this information is most useful in developing a context for my work, it does not allow for the in-depth study of these identified situations that might come with the conversation format of an action research group.

Turner (2002) studied the number and types of mentoring programs offered to first-year music teachers in the Northwest United States as well as the opinions of new music teachers in the state of Washington as to the value of these programs. A researcher-devised survey was mailed to each district superintendent

in the states of Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming. It asked if mentoring was available for new music teachers and requested a description of the programs that did exist. The return rate for the superintendents' survey was 86% with a total of 902 surveys being returned.

The states of Montana and Oregon reported mentoring programs in less than one third of the districts that returned questionnaires. Idaho and Washington noted more than half of the responding districts included mentoring programs for their teachers. The two remaining states, Alaska and Wyoming, provided mentoring in more than one third but less than half of the districts replying to the questionnaire. (Turner, 2002, p. 56-7)

Turner indicated that related literature suggests smaller districts might encounter difficulty offering mentoring programs because of their more limited personnel resources and this was consistent with the above results. Survey returns also indicated that mentoring was offered in a wide variety of forms, ranging from the very formal whereby the school district assigned a specific mentor to a first-year teacher upon entering an assignment, to the very informal where first-year teachers connected with experienced teachers by chance. A separate survey was mailed to 291 first- and second-year music teachers, as identified by district superintendents, in the state of Washington. Teachers were asked to comment on the mentoring, if any, that they had received, and their perceived value of this mentoring. This survey had a return rate of 53%. Of these, only 31% indicated that they had been formally assigned a mentor in their first year. As well as the availability of mentoring programs, the survey also sought to determine the value

of the programs that were offered. Sixty-two percent of respondents cited that the actual activities of mentoring were the most valuable aspects of mentoring. These included such things as receiving positive feedback from mentors and gaining insight into professional practice. Thirty-one percent mentioned the value of mentoring was most evident in the nature of the mentor him/herself. These beginning teachers most valued mentors who were expert musicians and who taught in their subject areas. Fifteen percent valued the structure a mentoring program provided and this included things like scheduled meetings and planned time for the observation of other teachers. Turner concluded that, while mentoring was generally considered to be of great value to first-year music teachers, it was far less meaningful if the mentor did not have a background in music. Beginning teachers also indicated that the mentoring experience was less valuable if it was not set up in such a way as to allow for teaching feedback and for frequent contact in order to establish a relationship between mentor and mentee during the first year of teaching. Turner suggested that training programs must be set up for mentors in order that they understand how best to help first-year teachers succeed. She also recommended that more research be done in developing effective mentoring program models. In my study, I chose to provide all participants with the opportunity for frequent interaction and to invite only those participants who were actively engaged in teaching music in Edmonton Public Schools. Turner's findings would seem to support my belief that this format would result in a higher level of satisfaction for the teachers involved in the study.

Doctoral dissertations that appear to bear peripherally on the subject of my study include those by Fields (1999) and Luce (2001). Fields looked at alternatives to current teacher education pre-service programs that might better prepare beginning teachers to deal with the realities of the classroom. In response to calls for reform in education, the Georgia College & State University implemented a newly constructed teacher education program into which extensive field experiences, mentoring, and opportunities for collaborative learning were incorporated. Fields selected four graduates of the field-based teacher education program at this institution to be part of her interpretive qualitative case study. She based her selection on the grounds that these graduates had been teaching for no more than two years, had been recommended by their university mentors, and were not personally known by Fields. She conducted interviews with the participants and observed them in their classrooms as well as met with them as a focus group over a four-month period of time. Fields determined that participants were influenced as teachers by three categories of people: (a) those in their preservice teacher education programs, (b) those from their personal lives, and (c) those from their current practices. In studying these relationships, she concluded that mentoring and other opportunities for collaborative learning were effective ways of dealing with the disillusionment and consequent attrition of new teachers. Implications for future research included exploring the use of teacher action research within the area of mentorship of beginning teachers.

Luce (2001) examined the value of collaborative learning processes to both the students and instructor in a course on the fundamentals and principles of

music therapy. This study was initiated as an action research project based on phenomenological inquiry and was conducted at Michigan State University where students may be granted bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees in music therapy. Luce used the students enrolled in the first class in the undergraduate music therapy sequence, an introductory course in the history, philosophy and practice of music therapy and a course for which Luce was the instructor. Of the 21 students, 17 agreed to be part of Luce's study. Luce's sources included written course materials, his own instructor reflexive journals, videotapes of the classes, weekly collaborative group process evaluations, and Myers-Briggs Type Indicator profiles for each of the participants, completed by the university's counseling department. Luce did not deal with mentorship directly, but his definition of collaborative learning could be transferred to a study of the value of mentorship. Luce defines collaborative learning as a "teaching methodology which recognizes that a community of knowledgeable peers socially construct knowledge, and that the authority of knowledge is shared amongst the members of that community by developing interdependent personal relationships" (p. ii). Luce concluded that collaborative learning positively contributed to the quality of the students' learning experience and to the degree of understanding of the subject matter. He suggested that further study consider how collaborative learning might positively affect professional and personal development.

Research Journals

An understanding of the difficulties that a beginning music educator might face in the first years of teaching is necessary in order to establish a context in

which the novice teacher might search out relationships with experienced teachers. Madsen and Hancock (2002) presented the results of a survey used to determine issues relating to teacher retention and attrition in their study. In 1995, an alumni questionnaire regarding job satisfaction was sent to music education graduates from a large southeastern university in the United States. "Subjects were a randomly selected sample of 225 certified teachers representing a population of 433 graduates who had finished a bachelor of music education (BME) degree during the past 10 years" (pg. 9). One hundred and thirty-seven alumni members responded, representing a return rate of 17.5%. In a follow-up survey sent out in 2001, researchers set out to determine the attrition rate of the original sample and the reasons why teachers who were no longer teaching music had chosen to leave the profession. In this second part of the study, data were collected from 122 of the original respondents. Results indicated that 56.6% were still actively involved in music education. Those respondents who had left teaching indicated that a lack of administrative and parental support as well as financial issues and difficulties with classroom management were major contributing factors to that decision. While this study listed many other factors that make the job of teaching music a difficult one, it also acknowledged that these difficulties may be specific to the individual character and/or teaching situation being studied. The effect of "professional dialogue and collegiality" (p. 15) was determined to have a profound impact on beginning teachers, however, regardless of circumstance. This would indicate that mentorship may be a valuable resource for the beginning music teacher.

Conway (2003) studied mentor practices by interviewing beginning music teachers from 13 school districts in mid-Michigan. Participants included six men and seven women who were first-year music teachers, starting their first public school music teaching positions. “The state of Michigan requires that all school districts provide mentors for beginning teachers” (p. 11), however, the programs themselves were widely varied with little consistency from case to case. Conway established that there were many issues facing these beginning music teachers and that these issues significantly interfered with their success rates. Issues included such things as administrative duties, classroom management, parent interactions, district policies, personal issues, curricular questions, and the inability for beginning music teachers to access music mentors. Many of the issues were extremely large in scope and were often administrative and political in nature.

Based on these results, Conway recommended

the profession must work to provide support for music teachers once they are employed.... If beginning teachers are to be able to implement innovative teaching approaches learned in teacher preparation programs, they are going to need assistance in grappling with the messy issues in school change and curriculum reform. (Conway, 2003, p. 21)

Conway listed the content of the beginning music teacher and mentor interactions included in the research and presented suggestions for music mentor practices.

This article provides important background information for determining the value of my study and leads well into my use of an action research format to explore the relationship between beginning music teacher and mentor.

Stanulis (1995) studied the possibilities of using action research as a way of learning about the mentor/student teacher relationship. Stanulis is a university educator in charge of Field Experiences at the University of Georgia and serves as a mentor for student teachers placed at Comer Elementary School in Athens, Georgia. He conducted his study with a fifth grade teacher from this elementary school and an undergraduate student placed at Comer Elementary for a ten-week period. Stanulis used conferences, interviews and journals to study the relationship between student teacher as mentee and cooperating teacher as mentor. After a review of these sources, several themes emerged including the desire for respect as a teacher, the importance of a learning community, the transitions in a mentor/mentee relationship from student to colleague, and the possibilities for learning in an action research setting. Stanulis concluded that collaborative learning allows both the mentor and the novice teacher to examine teaching practices and provides opportunity for reflection and thoughtful inquiry.

Music Education, Mentorship, and Action Research

There is a scarcity of literature on the use of action research in music education. Conway and Borst (2001) looked at “Action Research in Music Education,” however, this is strictly an exploration of research theory rather than a practical study. The authors concluded that action research seems to be an ideal research method for music educators. In describing action research as a method that is “intended to support teachers, and groups of teachers, in coping with the challenges and problems of practice and carrying through innovations in a reflective way” (p. 3), a strong context from which music educators may use

relationship to strengthen program advocacy is established. Regelski (1995) suggested that research in music education has historically produced results that seemed somewhat irrelevant to the practicing music teacher. He concluded “it happens everywhere else except every day in the classroom, where it is needed” (p. 65). In contrast, action research “incorporates the subjective variables involving intentionality, purposiveness, and value signification and the objective formal properties of music in a dynamic yet constructive dialectic that can explain and propose solutions for human action” (p. 67). Thus the literature supports the theory that action research may be a successful methodology for studies in music education but shows that there have been few practical applications of this theory to date.

Some basic assumptions can be established from the review of existing literature in the areas of music education, mentorship and action research. First, there are strong and definite issues facing the music educators of today and these are impacting the retention of beginning teachers within the profession. These include:

1. A lack of training on the part of new music teachers to deal with the current education system.
2. Increased professional demands on the beginning music teacher.
3. A feeling of inadequacy on the part of new teachers to deal with the demands of parents and school administrators.
4. Increased feelings of isolation.

5. Increased professional demands on time leaving less time for individual musical development on the part of new teachers.

Secondly, it is understood that mentorship, being defined as relationship between novice and experienced teachers, is a valuable tool in reducing the isolation of beginning teachers and improving both the quality and the longevity of their experiences. And finally, it can be determined that action research is a suitable methodology for dealing with the complexities of the above issues and for providing a meaningful and relevant research experience.

The review of literature, however, also reveals a lack of research placing mentorship as a meaningful source of support for beginning music educators within an action research context. While there have been a few action research projects carried out in the field of music (Anderson, Henke, McLaughlin, Ripp & Tuffs, 2000; Campabello, De Carlo, O'Neil & Vacek, 2002; Lewis, 2002), they have generally been about the effects of using music as a means of enhancing learning in general and not about the teaching of music itself. Where action research has been used to explore mentorship (Beasley, 1996; Crocco, Faithfull & Schwartz, 2003; Levin & Rock, 2003; Mullen, 2000; Mullen & Lick, 1999; O'Donnell & Thomas, 2003; Rauch & O'Rourke, 2001; Rudney & Guillaume, 2003; Saurino & Saurino, 1999; Sullivan & Glanz, 2000), it has been with regards to education in general and not specifically in the area of music. And finally, exploration of mentorship within music education (Conway & Zerman, 2004; Haack & Smith, 2000; Krueger, 2001; Ponick, 2003; Robinson, 2001) has taken place in the United States where political and administrative conditions provide a

very specific set of circumstances in which to work. This would support the need for an action research study of the value of mentorship to the beginning music teacher within Edmonton Public Schools.

Movement Three: Methodology

First Theme: Why Action Research?

Music education has had a lengthy history of quantitative research (Ross, 1995). Music teachers have had to fight long and hard to gain legitimacy in the education field and, therefore, have needed the acceptance that this traditional approach to research enjoys. This might come as a surprise to those who consider the world of music to be immersed in the abstract and creative rather than the concrete and sequential. Music, in fact, is very much based on mathematical precision and specific interpretation and thus, the statistical analysis of quantitative research has been helpful in defining the “how to do it” in the music classroom. What seems to have been lacking, however, is a way of defining just exactly what the “*it*” is. It is in the fulfillment of this pursuit that music educators have begun to consider the benefits of qualitative research. When I compared the research characteristics of quantitative studies with those based on qualitative methodology, I found the latter to be much more suited to the direction that my research was taking. For a comparison chart of Quantitative and Qualitative Research Characteristics, see Appendix II.

After considering the various approaches to qualitative research that were available to me, I felt confident that action research would best suit my study. “*Action research is reflective inquiry undertaken by educators in order to better understand the education environment and to improve practice*” (Grady, emphasis in text, 1998, p. 43). Action research implements a qualitative approach and seems to deal most often with problems that are of a real and immediate

concern to the practitioner. It encourages the practitioner to become the researcher and to learn to reflect on professional practice. This sort of research has a very personal quality to it and I think this is a necessary characteristic for dealing with the complexities of the life of a beginning teacher. It goes beyond the method and deals more closely with the “*it*” of teaching. Within this kind of research, the words of *action* become ones such as doing, intervening, committed, motivated, and impassioned. *Research* words include inquiring, standing back, disciplined, evidence, and systematic (McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 1996, p. 9). Van Manen (1997) says that by strengthening the relationship between research and action, we can also strengthen the relationship between thought and action. Action research “re-instates lived experience itself as a valid basis for practical action” (Van Manen, 1997, p. 155). Kemmis and McTaggart (1982) have said “the linking of the terms action and research highlights the essential feature of the method: trying out ideas in practice as a means of improvement and as a means of increasing knowledge” (p. 5).

Second Theme: Action Research and Mentorship

Through trying to define what action research could mean to my work, I also came closer to defining what I wished to accomplish by introducing the idea of mentoring to music education. Action research is based on a spiral of cycles, each of which includes the steps of planning, action, observing and reflecting (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2000). The cycles of action research provide a wonderful match to the idea of mentoring. In rereading Mullen's poem “Breaking the Circle of One” (1997), I was struck with its invitation to share meaning and

co-create text because, even though it referred to mentoring, it also read like a script for action research. I found positive connections between the complicated and often messy process of mentoring and the signature spirals of action research. The focal point of both mentoring and action research seemed to be situated within the idea of collaboration and this further suggested that the two ideas are well suited to each other.

The heart of my research lay in providing music teachers with the opportunity for conversation and reflection. These are very much a part of what both action research and mentorship have to offer. In considering the stages of teacher development, there is no denying that the first year, and quite possibly the first few years of teaching, are dedicated to survival (Burden, 1980). There is a necessary focus on the gathering of information about organization, supplies, resources and discipline. When a beginning teacher is left to develop these skills in isolation, the struggle has the potential to use up all of the novice's time and energy and leave little time in which to reflect on the higher level realizations of teaching such as relationship and identity. I am convinced that this is one of the primary reasons for the high degree of disillusionment amongst beginning teachers.

Action research presents an opportunity for teachers to engage in conversation with others and in conversation with self. In this way, a beginning educator might be able to begin a journey toward the knowledge of self *as a teacher*. Connection with experienced educators will, of course, aid in expanding the beginners' repertoire of knowledge within the discipline of music and of teaching skills, but self reflection and discussion with peers will also open up

spaces in which to define their roles within the profession. Consider John Dewey's view that "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds which supports it, and the further conclusions to which it tends, constitutes reflective thought" (Dewey, 1933, p. 9). The opportunity for group reflection would be a welcome addition to the beginning music teacher's world. It is difficult to think through or absorb the impact of any given situation when you are also trying to come up with a lesson idea for Tuesday's third period. Group support encourages the taking of time for such thought. As a music education student, there is a focus on *self*, however, once a new teacher enters the classroom, focus necessarily shifts to one's own students, the *other*. Making this transition while also trying to form a new sense of *self* as a teacher may be difficult for the beginning teacher and it may be something with which an experienced teacher could help.

An action research group that centers around mentorship offers the chance for collaborative support and reflection and may help a novice to explore the formation of this new identity. Action research is a valuable form of inquiry because it is practical and allows participants to be involved in a meaningful way. It allows teachers to both contribute to and benefit from the process and this leads to a sense of empowerment. The approach fosters exploration as group members interpret various meanings and begin to understand that there is no one and true answer. This could be particularly valuable to the beginning teacher who is susceptible to feelings of insecurity. Ultimately, by encouraging teachers to reflect on and review the problems they are encountering, the format could also lead to a

problemetizing of relevant issues and exploring paths to necessary change (Schmuck, 1997, p. 29).

In my conversations with beginning Edmonton Public Schools music teachers, I became acutely aware of how overwhelmed they seemed when facing the challenges of the teaching profession. I was also conscious of the fact that they met suggestions of research and group approaches to professional development with some skepticism. There was a cynical view toward ideas of change that had originated outside of the practical teaching circle. This may have been an expected response as these particular young teachers attended public school in Alberta at a time when education was bound by achievement results. These teachers agreed that they were products of a system where imposed curriculum and outcome-based testing guided their school lives. The system in which they were educated taught them that academic disciplines operate in isolation and that the construction of reality was outside of their control. It did not surprise me, therefore, that they sometimes lacked the ability to approach their new teaching experiences with a sense of connectedness and reflection and that they were leery of projects that suggested educational reform. I did find, however, that when I described action research to these same teachers, they began to show an interest in the process because of the differences that the method employed. It empowered them as teachers, it admitted to being messy and circular rather than claiming to be direct and linear, and it allowed participants to be the creators of their own journeys.

Variation: Categorizing.

I became confused at times when considering what kind of action research my study represented. Action research can take on many forms including Practical, Critical, and Post Structural. Practical Action Research places emphasis on collaborative action that is intended to change professional practice. There are many challenges within the music education system and the conditions under which many teachers have to work provide a formula for stress and early burnout. Introducing mentorship as a way of addressing these challenges places my project under a Practical Action dome. Critical Action Research is used as a vehicle for emancipation and social reconstruction. While music education may not be considered socially critical by society in general, those within the profession see a need to restructure the education system in such a way that the arts will become equal partners with other areas of curriculum. The philosophical rationale for considering music as an essential discipline is broad and it includes the belief that the arts help students to reach beyond themselves, both inwardly and outwardly, to explore new realms of meaning. Music educators have also done a great deal of research on the academic effects of an arts enriched curriculum and have determined that study in the arts enhances the development of academic achievement skills (Eisner, 1996). This sort of advocacy may not be something that beginning music teachers immediately think of in terms of a survival strategy and yet, they will need to explore their ideas on music's place in the curriculum if they are to make administrative and organizational demands for their programs. In many ways, beginning teachers will not be able to create more positive experiences

for themselves until there is some degree of social change. The experience of veteran teachers may allow novices the time and space in which to explore these avenues and thus, this project could be considered Socially Critical.

In spite of these claims, I see my research as falling more under a Post Structural framework where the emphasis is placed on interpretive knowing and on an appreciation for the complexity and ambiguity of our personal and professional lives. It is within this definition that the terms hermeneutics and phenomenology can be found, insomuch as Post Structural action research stresses that the answers are not as important as the journeys toward them. Van Manen (1997) says that

phenomenological research as action research is ... thoughtful learning
Thoughtful learning does not only change what I know but what I am.
Thoughtful learning transforms my being by making me more attentively aware of the meaning and significance of unique aspects of pedagogic situations. (p. 3)

A music teacher's professional life is so complex and ambiguous at times, that seeking some sort of understanding of these complexities is necessary before wider change can be sought. This study's action research group of novice teachers and willing mentors provided an opportunity for its participants to explore many valuable things such as the search for identity as a beginning teacher and the location of a place within the profession. The silence and the space that this sort of group provides can give the participants a chance to reflect on their actions and discover meaning in those reflections and this in turn presents a welcome change

from the constant pressure a teacher feels to think while acting. This group, therefore, may not have had a stated political agenda, but I am confident that the resulting thoughtfulness may eventually lead to concern regarding the more global issues of music education and a commitment to making changes outside of the group.

Restatement of theme: Narrative inquiry.

Action research is not considered to be a research method as much as it is an orientation toward research and, as such, it affords the opportunity to use various methods of representation. The opportunity it provided to make use of narrative inquiry appealed to me. I have always loved to write and a research approach that allowed me to explore that interest was very attractive. Luce-Kapler (1997) describes the writing process in words that strongly resonated as notes within a chord for me. “You begin with the chaos of impressions and feelings, this aura that overtakes you, that forces you to write. And, in the process of writing... the order-the marvelous informing order emerges from it ...” (p. 188). My eternal quest for extra hours in the day found a connection as Luce-Kapler lamented over searching for the time to write.

I do more writing, but in snatches.

Caroline says to me

you have to put aside

Caroline in her way says

you have to put aside half an hour everyday

or one hour everyday

and then I'm:

putting aside one hour to find time to go for a walk,

to find time to read a book so I'm ready

for what I'm doing tomorrow

and there's so many hours

I put aside

I don't have anymore hours for writing. (Luce-Kapler, 1997, p. 189)

The opportunity to have words speak in such a powerful way was exciting. Jean Clandinin explains narrative inquiry as a way of understanding experience and sees story as a way of negotiating relationship, purpose and transition (University of Alberta, EDSE 510, Class Notes, Oct. 18, 2000). As such, I have come to place great value on narrative and story within the approach of action research.

Storytelling became an important idea when I began to think about how best to let other music educators know what my action research group and I had discovered through this journey. Practicing music teachers have traditionally been relatively unreceptive to the idea of research. I was living proof of this when, for most of my teaching years, I shelved the music research journals unopened as they

arrived in the mail. I seemed to fear the statistical data, formulas and what seemed like incomprehensible results of the studies contained within those pages. And yet teachers are very receptive to story, both in the telling and in the listening. I have often sat in the audience at various conferences and watched my colleagues erupt in laughter and dissolve into tears as keynote speakers related stories of “A day in the life of” Dolloff (1999) states that “as we share stories we become privy to alternative experiences. Some will mesh with our stories, concurring with our perspective. Others will offer insight we had not yet considered and lead to a transforming and reshaping of our perspective” (p. 37). The obligation of sharing what is learned through research is an important consideration in action research. The use of narrative in my work offered a way of making contact.

Development: Forming the Circle

The research group for this study consisted of three first-year and two second-year teachers who were considered to be novice educators, four veteran teachers who had between 15 and 25 years of experience, and four teachers with between 6 and 8 years of experience. These latter teachers served to bridge the gap between the beginning and experienced teachers, considering themselves to be members of both groups at varying times. It was my initial plan that the beginning teachers would be asked to make their own choices regarding possible mentors to bring into the group as I believed compatibility and relationship were important factors in the success of this study. Consultations with the novice teachers, however, revealed that they were reluctant to suggest specific veteran teachers because they felt they did not know the educators currently teaching music within

Edmonton Public Schools well enough to make this decision. As a result, I attended a meeting of Edmonton Public junior and senior high music teachers, presented my research concept to them and accepted volunteers into the study.

The participants in this study had very different backgrounds in terms of music education. Of the five beginning teachers, only two had instrumental training and a university education in secondary music. These teachers were also the only novices to have been educated at the University of Alberta and consequently had a working knowledge of the system into which they were placed as first-year teachers. Two of the novices had choral music backgrounds including post-secondary training and were educated at smaller colleges in rural centers. The fifth beginning teacher had taken music as a minor and had comparatively little musical training. Of the four intermediate teachers, two had instrumental music backgrounds and two had choral backgrounds. None of these four had studied at the University of Alberta. Three of the veteran teachers had strong instrumental backgrounds and had been educated in large urban centers, two at the University of Alberta and one at the University of Toronto. The fourth veteran participant had taught private piano lessons for many years and had returned to the University of Alberta to secure a degree in education after raising a family. This variance in educational and musical backgrounds allowed for a wide spectrum of experience to be brought to the group, although it also affected the level of understanding at times between the group's members.

Once established, this action research group met once a month for a three-hour period from September through June of 2001-2002. I used my home as

a meeting place in order to facilitate a warm and open atmosphere and to avoid being in the work environment. Evenings began with a social gathering during which the participants got to better know each other. The formal part of the sessions began with questions presented by myself and then opened up for conversation generated by the group. The purpose of the opening questions was to stimulate discussion and to encourage collaboration rather than to serve a specific research agenda. I wished to develop the mentor-mentee relationship rather than elicit responses to specific problems. Sessions were audio-taped so that I could transcribe them for later analysis.

The conversation within this group took the form of reflective dialogues. Mentors were instructed to be cognizant of the relationship needed for true conversation, as I suspected there might be a strong urge on the part of the veteran teachers to try to save the beginning teachers the pain of experience by providing them with the “answers.” I saw the most valuable mentor-mentee relationship as being a means of learning the process of problem solving so that autonomy rather than dependency was increased. I suggested the use of a dialogue journal by way of encouraging reflective dialogue and fostering self discovery. This could have taken on a traditional form but ultimately took the form of e-mail correspondence in the interest of convenience and time. These journals became a safe place in which to explore personal thoughts and feelings, without distraction, and were a way of trying to see cycles or patterns that emerged in daily teaching activities. While the dialogue journal was suggested as a vehicle for observations, questions and reflections, I also saw it as a way of supplementing and encouraging reflective

dialogue within the group. Many of these conversations began as very practical explorations of procedures, tactics and resources but evolved into higher level discoveries.

Interlude: On Being a Mentor

I think I lived through what this action research project might eventually feel like today. It certainly didn't feel like a journey along a clear path with a beginning, a middle and an end. It felt more like stepping into a vortex and being asked to make instant and crucial decisions as you fly from one point to the next. I have this image of being bounced around inside of a pinball machine. This feeling comes from the mentor-protégé relationship I have developed with the first-year teacher who is taking my place for the year. So far, the mentoring in this relationship has taken the form of phone calls and meetings which follow a question and answer format and whose value seem to be in getting this protégé “through” the next hurdle. I know this is important because the learning curve for a beginning music teacher is intense. Someone has to tell him which bus company is most reliable, how many chaperones to take to camp, what to say to the grade seven horn players, all of whom want to quit and how to legally photocopy a music score when you forget to order originals for the festival! I sense a rising panic, a kind of despair, as my protégé struggles for survival. But if I am handing him all of these solutions, shouldn't I be noticing a positive change in his feelings toward the teaching experience?

After each session together, it bothers me a little more - what am I missing? From this insecure place, I hand him more and more pre-packaged “help.” I give him more newsletters, more resources, more advice and sense more and more frustration in him. Then today, I finally stumble on an

answer. I slip by the school to drop off some more “stuff” and I run into a former student. “How's it going?” I ask, more out of politeness than as way of spying. And she replies, “It's okay but he's not the same as you.” An innocent answer that contains worlds of meaning. What I think I have been sensing is my protégé's search for identity. He has been a student and a student teacher, now a "protégé, but he still hasn't discovered who he is as a teacher. Perhaps this realization will let me approach him in a different way.

After this chance encounter with the student, I go to find my “protégé. My idea of a new approach is put to the test immediately as he announces that he is withdrawing his band from the upcoming festival, an event that is only four days away. I hear warning bells in my head and feel dizzy with my own sense of panic. This is a mistake. And yet, suddenly I know that I can't just tell him that; it isn't my job as his mentor to give him the right answer. We sit down and we systematically remove the perceived obstacles to his participation, one by one, until all that is left is this young man himself. There is silence and I know we have come to a very important place. What we are facing now is fear - a fear of failure from him and also from me because I want to feel I am doing my job as a mentor. With the opening of this new space, all of the "what ifs" begin to flow. What if the kids don't show up? What if we sound terrible? What if the other directors judge me? What if I'm just no good at this? What if ... what if I'm just never going to be a good teacher? And there it is. What if

after all these dreams and hopes and aspirations and all of the hard work that it took to get here, I am just not meant to be a Teacher? And then we can finally talk, this protégé and I. I share stories of my first few years, some are funny and some still seem heart-wrenching after all this time, and when it is done I realize that we have formed a stronger bond. We both understand how difficult it is to be taking this huge leap and how much of a risk it seems to be.

As a beginning teacher you walk to the edge of the circle of all that is safe and comfortable and take a flying leap in search of a new identity, with only the mantle of "teacher" to carry you forward. My protégé is going to the festival. He is still scared to death and I can't guarantee him a positive outcome, but he is going. And I hope it will be an important step for him as he takes a risk and stands in front of those students as their leader, as their teacher. As for me, I feel like I've taken the first step toward real action in my action research. It's exhausting and it's frightening but it feels right.

Movement four: Thematic analysis

Dissonance: An Unexpected Shift in Context

On February 3rd, 2002, after a failure in contract negotiations, Edmonton Public School Board (EPSB) teachers went on strike for what eventually became a three-week long absence from the classroom. The strike ended on February 22 when the Alberta government issued a back-to-work order for the 22,000 striking teachers working in what had spread to 22 school districts. While teacher remuneration was one of the concerns, the main issues in the dispute were class size and class composition.

This activity had obvious implications for my research as the study took place in the same year as the strike. Talk of a potential strike began early in the school year and permeated many discussions between teachers. Midway through the first school term, school staff meetings often revolved around negotiation talks and teachers began to gather at meetings called by the Alberta Teachers' Association in order to discuss developments. As teachers were composing their year plans, they were careful to consider the possibility of work stoppage and the cessation of such things as field trips and extra-curricular activities. The atmosphere became one of anxiety and uncertainty and these feelings eventually developed into anger and disillusionment as it became clear that there would be no expedient end to the dispute. Once the strike was underway, public sentiment soon swayed away from the side of the teachers as each family began to realize the impact that a shortened year might have on individual students. When the strike reached its conclusion by means of a forced return to the classroom rather

than an agreeable settlement to the dispute, the negative air surrounding education reached its peak.

In the weeks following a return to work, with negotiations ongoing, teachers engaged in a “work-to-rule” campaign, withdrawing all voluntary services and providing students with only what was deemed essential. As a veteran teacher, this proved to be one of the most difficult years of my teaching career. For a beginning teacher, the situation seemed to present almost insurmountable obstacles. The first year of a teacher’s career is almost always difficult. The learning curve is extremely steep and there is an obvious lack of experience on which to fall back. Adding a teachers’ strike to this scenario tilted that curve to an almost unscalable angle. Firstly, there was a general air of pessimism surrounding the profession. Many teachers were questioning their ability to do their jobs given the current resources. A perceived lack of public support led teachers to further question their choice of profession. Novice teachers sorely missed the encouragement that veteran teachers might have provided upon their entry into teaching if the circumstances of the year had been different. From a purely pragmatic perspective, teachers were so focused on the unfolding of political events that there was a lack of time and patience with which to help novice teachers work through some of their questions and concerns. Where veteran teachers might have normally provided stability for the beginning teachers, the uncertainty of this year caused all teachers regardless of experience to question the future. This was a difficult situation for all teachers, and was especially trying for beginning music teachers. Schooling was pared down to its most basic form and it

became very hard for novice teachers to get an accurate picture of what a typical year in the music classroom might look like. All of this certainly impacted the teaching lives and the thoughts and opinions of the members of my action research group. And finally, the beginning teachers in this group not only lived through a strike in their first year of teaching, but were faced with the school board's decision not to offer contract renewals for their second year.

This context could not help, therefore, but shape the results of this study. It must be noted, however, that not all of the effects were necessarily negative. Firstly, the teachers' strike provided participants with a more highly perceived need for contact and interaction. It presented both the novice and the veteran teachers involved in the study with a way in which to communicate with peers in a positive manner. The novice teachers were able to find a safe and inviting space in which to ask questions and formulate thoughts and the veteran teachers were able to feel that they were making positive contributions. Secondly, the strike influenced the directions that group discussions followed. Conversation was often directed toward large, global education issues due to the political climate in which we found ourselves working. Thirdly, the situation provided the group with time in which to meet, albeit in a strange and convoluted way, and that time was unhindered by teaching obligations and distractions. This, in turn, helped to bond the group in a way that might not have been possible under the conditions of a normal teaching year.

On February 15, 2002, the following appeared as a Letter to the Editor in the Edmonton Journal:

...belligerent teachers ought to get it through their heads that nearly everyone that has a job is expected to work beyond their “regular hours” for no extra pay. Teachers sure sound as if they are in it for the pay, not for the children. ...I am appalled by the actions and statements of these greedy teachers and am more convinced than ever that home schooling is the best choice for us. (Brown, 2002, p. A19)

On February 15, 2002, the following advertisement was placed in the Edmonton Journal:

Teachers....We go to work, and rely on them to direct, instruct and inspire our children. They give our children much of their courage. They teach them respect and discipline, also showing them how to challenge, and to fight for justice. Who brings more value to our lives and our children’s well being than teachers?We stand with teachers now as they show us their courage, as they fight for justice for themselves, but also for our children, and for a good system of education. (United Food and Commercial Workers Local 401, 2002, p. B2)

There is no doubt that this was a confusing time in which to be a teacher and, consequently, there can be no doubt that this context greatly impacted the workings of the action research group assembled in this study. It is my belief, however, that while it could have negatively affected the results of this study,

instead it provided for a greater richness of discussion and a closer bond among the group's members.

The adverse conditions present during my research, namely the teachers' strike and the consequent budget crises present within our education system, also shaped my personal views during this study. They forced me to question what it was that I truly valued in music education. This caused me to search out the positives as I set out to encourage beginning teachers to continue on their chosen career paths. At times I would not realize how strongly I believed in what I was doing until I heard myself passionately trying to convince the other teachers of those beliefs. My passion sometimes took on the sound of fear as I realized how easily the face of music education could be negatively affected if the novice end of the teacher spectrum was shifted or erased. This sense of urgency permeated group discussion and is evident in the results.

First Theme: Factors Affecting the Development of Relationship

In considering my initial research question, it is important to revisit the idea of relationship. There are many current definitions of mentorship that appear to bypass the development of relationship in favour of a more expedient solution to a novice's concerns. There are phone numbers to call and websites to visit that promise quick and easy connections with experienced teachers. One such service, provided by the Music Educators National Conference (MENC), presents four experienced music educators once a month who field online questions from novice teachers. While this format may be a convenient way in which to receive answers

to specific questions regarding practice, it was the experience of our action research group that the development of relationship is necessary in order to gain the full benefits of mentorship.

John (novice): When I first came into this group I thought “I don’t know these people; I won’t have anything in common with them.” And so I decided the group might be good to get a few questions answered, but that would be about it. But the more I sat here and listened to you guys, the more I could relate. I recognized myself in your stories and I wanted to share some of my own. Slowly it began to matter what you thought about some of the things I was saying and my focus changed from needing to get quick fix answers to really wanting to talk to you all. I would store away bits of my teaching day to bring up when we met together. That’s when I started to feel as though the group was really making a difference for me.

Mentorship implies a certain amount of trust and this trust is necessary if the relationship is to move beyond its initial level of simple question and answer. As our research group became more comfortable, a relationship built on trust began to develop and this changed the discussion format for the group. In early sessions I began the discussion by asking specific questions in order to stimulate conversation; in later sessions this was no longer necessary as members were eager to begin talking as soon as they arrived. In beginning sessions, members arrived with their own questions written on pieces of paper, indicating not only the pragmatic and needy phase of teaching in which they found themselves, but also a tendency to avoid deeper level conversation. Discussion in later sessions,

however, became much more philosophical and broad. Members became willing to take risks in offering opinions and music education was seen in a more global light rather than in the context of the individual classroom. A trusting relationship was the catalyst for this level of discussion.

Relationship can be defined as connection and, while connection was strengthened each time the group met, individual differences did affect the extent to which connections could be made and consequently each member's ability to make full use of the mentoring relationship. These differences can be divided into three broad categories: background, both musical and educational, philosophy of music education and biological age.

In order to be hired as a music educator with Edmonton Public Schools, the minimum pre-requisite is a Bachelor's Degree in Education. There is no requirement for a major in music, although of course that is factored into the decision, and there is little concern for whether a candidate has the proper musical focus for the job in question. In other words, it is quite common for a choral musician to be hired as a band teacher or for a teacher trained in elementary music education to be placed in a secondary school. It is generally understood, however, that teaching music is different from the teaching of other subjects and that some degree of musical expertise is desirable in ensuring the success of a teacher placed in the music classroom.

Adam: In math class we say "Well, hope you make it. Oops, sorry – you didn't!" And that's the end of it. In band class, we spend an extended length of time working to help them make it over the common hurdles. It

becomes a passion, even a crusade because we are faced with so many extra obstacles.

Linda: We're a team. In band, we're all working together to make a beautiful thing. It's not like in math class where if one kid doesn't know his fractions, it doesn't really affect the others.

Shelby: And what about the music itself?

Adam: We finally hit a point last week when it changed from just notes to playing music in class. We made a statement. We were kind of on the same page and we were all telling the same story. It made the kids feel proud. I teach other subjects besides music, but it just isn't the same. We just don't get to that point of feeling connected. It just matters more to us, somehow.

The teachers in this research group could all relate to the passion implied by the above statement and all agreed that their time in the music classroom required a unique set of skills. It also became evident, however, that our differences in terms of musical background influenced our ability to communicate and to relate to one another. It seemed to also affect our eventual success as band teachers.

In November of 2001, Dennis Tupman, a known advocate for music education in Canada, came to speak to music teachers in Edmonton. One of his major points was that there was nothing more important than having qualified teachers in the arts. More specifically, he went on to suggest that a generic arts background did not make enough of a difference, but that rather a dance teacher should be a dancer, a choral teacher should have a singing background and so on. The members of the research group attended this session and spoke about it

afterwards. It became a very divisive topic within the group as the majority of participants did not fit Tupman's definition of the ideal educator of instrumental music. At one point in conversation, Bob, an instrumentalist who played in bands throughout his secondary school years and earned his degree in secondary education with an instrumental music major, argued strongly in favour of supporting Tupman's philosophy. His ideas clashed with those of Scott, a musician whose background was singing in choirs based outside of the school system and who has a degree in elementary education without a music focus.

Bob: There is no way that you can do this job effectively if you haven't experienced band from within. Sure, you can learn which valves to push down and what strength of reed to buy, but you will never truly understand what it is you are fighting for.

Scott: Whether I'm an exception to that rule or not, I guess time will tell. But I certainly love music and I love teaching music. Maybe I am just more comfortable with expanding on your traditional definition of teaching music in schools. If a kid doesn't want to play the clarinet and I let him play guitar in the band, is that a problem? If I add some world music tunes to the marches that a band often plays, are my students suffering? Won't that added dimension mean that interest level will increase, both mine and the students'?

These differences in musical background affected each individual's ideas regarding music education. How this influenced their longevity in the profession will be discussed in the conclusion, however, these differences did interfere with the

group's ability to communicate effectively. Bob did not return to the group after this session. He said that he was discouraged to discover that he not only had to advocate for what he believed with administration, parents and teachers of other subjects, but with other music teachers as well. Scott returned to the group, but not on a regular basis, and each time he came with a specific list of practical questions that he wanted to have answered. From this session forward, he did not engage in philosophical discussions.

The group's members also came from different backgrounds in terms of performance experience and this seemed to greatly influence each member's basic philosophy of education. Those with a strong background in instrumental music, both in grade school and in post-secondary training, had a definite belief in the importance of training students to strive for excellence with public performance as a major goal. Those without band experience tended to speak in favour of a more "educationally based" approach where attaining a certain performance level was not as important as providing a musical experience for every level of student. Any discussions with regards to philosophy tended to expose wide differences in opinion.

Shelby: If we aren't striving for excellence and working toward a high level of performance, then we aren't doing our jobs.

Scott: That's not right. Students shouldn't have to make such huge commitments this early in life. They should be allowed to just dabble a little and enjoy themselves without the pressures of performance.

Linda: Can't you have it both ways? Can't there be a difference between rehearsal and performance? Performance must have its place, but can't you still "teach" in rehearsal?

Brianna: I saw a concert by a Texas Band when I was at the Midwest Conference last year. Texas is infamous for its performance-oriented approach and its insistence of high quality. This Texas group was "perfect" but there was no joy in their music making. Then I heard a fiddle group. The fiddle group had relationship; they were having fun. What is our motivation as music teachers? What end product do we wish to achieve?

These proved to be healthy discussions for the group and helped both novices and veteran teachers work toward a personal philosophy of music education. They did, however, cause some friction and were easier to undertake once the group members had established relationship. In earlier sessions, members would become defensive and conversation would falter. Once trust and a certain comfort level had been established, members became more willing to accept disagreement as part of relationship.

A third division point within the group revolved around age, and in this case, age as defined by generation and not necessarily years of teaching experience. From very early in the process, there was friction between the younger and older members of the group in terms of belief regarding the place that teaching music should occupy in an individual's life. The younger teachers claimed that the

successful veteran teachers were devoted to their careers almost to a fault and that the number of hours spent was unhealthy.

Brianna: This is my first year of teaching and it has become my mantra – “This is my job; it is not my life.” I leave school at 4:00 every day. I mark language arts for 3 hours every Saturday morning and that’s it. If it doesn’t get done in that time, it doesn’t get done.

Shelby: I just can’t relate to that. Every year, I feel I am working just a little bit harder to keep a program at a certain level.

Dennis: Is the job really getting harder or do our demands just increase with time?

Scott: I love music, but there’s a whole lot of other life that I want to experience out there. If I spend those kinds of hours, there won’t be time for anything else.

While once again, this was productive conversation, it became apparent that neither side came much closer to understanding the other’s point of view and the resulting philosophical split did at times interfere with conversation.

There is no question, however, that in spite of differences, relationship was necessary in order for conversation to develop and for the mentoring relationship to become more meaningful. Early sessions were quiet and consisted of the hearing of single voices in question and answer format with the questions centering around the idea of “me.” In other words, participants had specific agendas and were motivated by the possibility of gaining answers that would help in their day-to-day teaching. By the midpoint in our sessions, the group evolved

into dealing with more philosophical issues that considered the state of the profession in general. The development of relationship allowed participants to risk and to venture into less comfortable conversation. This coincided with other developments in that beginner teachers were also becoming more familiar with their own teaching situations and their year was moving away from the more pragmatic needs of September to the more reflective processes at year's end.

Second Theme: Issues Facing a First-year Music Teacher

At each meeting of this research group, it became apparent that the beginning music teachers were facing similar obstacles and seeking answers to similar questions in terms of teaching practice and program administration. Veteran teachers found they could relate well to these questions. The issues can be divided into the following categories.

1. Year Planning
2. Problems with scheduling
3. Recruitment and retention of students
4. Assessment
5. Instrument technique
6. Program organization
7. Repertoire
8. Performance
9. Working with administration
10. Working with parents
11. Advocacy

While ideally, each teacher would have the time and resources to develop his or her own answers to these questions once teaching experience was gained, reality dictates that more immediate answers are necessary in the first year of teaching. Group members agreed that one of the great difficulties of teaching music is that teachers are required to learn the job and make their mistakes in front of an audience. There is no trial period in a beginning music teaching position. From the very first day, novices are required to be in charge and to make vital decisions with regards to their students' education. They must do this while being evaluated by administrators who are determining the beginner's contract status and by parents who are, at best, suspicious of a first-year teacher's abilities.

Group members found that having the expertise of veteran teachers to draw upon when dealing with the above issues allowed them to avoid making large scale mistakes and gave them the time and emotional and mental space in which to begin to develop their own styles and methods.

Brianna (Beginner): I know I have to go into my principal tomorrow and have a discussion about timetabling for next year. I know what I need to say, but I am terrified that I will anger him. He is evaluating me for my permanent contract and I don't think he appreciates teachers who rock the boat. But he is planning to add extra option choices for next year and he wants to go to a trimester option plan. That will absolutely destroy the band program. I've lost a lot of sleep lately just thinking about it. Should I just let it happen and not try to change too much in my first year?

Dennis (30 year veteran): Administration isn't really malicious. They just don't know. Don't be afraid to say "This isn't working because..." You might be surprised by the positive exchange of ideas. Administration doesn't intentionally make bad decisions, but sometimes principals just don't have enough background information, especially when it comes to subjects like music. A principal will completely respect a first-year teacher who comes to him or her with a well-thought out argument and alternate plan of action. That's the kind of teacher they want on staff.

Clare (15 year veteran): Always frame your comments to administration around what is best for the kids, and not what works for you. For example, I want to have rehearsals at noon, but it conflicts with intramurals. I asked my principal if we could give intramural points to kids who come to band. Everybody wins. Kids will feel they are contributing to their classes (instead of being the band nerds who let their sports friends down), the band will sound better, parents will approve because the kids don't have to make difficult choices. What administrator wouldn't want that? And you can further help the situation by avoiding needless conflict. For example, don't schedule concert band opposite senior basketball. Instead, why not plan ahead and talk to the other teachers so that you can come up with an extra-curricular schedule that works?

At this level, the mentoring relationship was not based on conversation, but on question and answer. The beginning teachers were often very quiet during these discussions, seemingly absorbing the vast amount of information being presented

and trying to apply it to their own situations. The veteran teachers, on the other hand, became increasingly animated during these times and seemed to enjoy the rare opportunity to share ideas about their teaching with an interested group of participants.

Third Theme: Qualities of a Successful Music Educator

Determining the qualities that define a successful music educator became a recurring theme within the research group. All members were very aware of the alarming statistics regarding teacher attrition and several attempts were made at creating a portrait of the music teacher who is able to avoid burn out. This profiling exercise was enriched by combining the idealism of the novice teacher with the realism of the veteran and both parties agreed that the process was valuable.

Although definitions of the word differed somewhat, all members agreed that passion, both for teaching and for music, was a vital ingredient in the vitae of a long term teacher. Much time was spent in listing the obstacles that music teachers currently faced and it was agreed that a true belief in the value of music education was necessary in order to survive within the system. The time and effort required to ensure a successful program would be too great a personal sacrifice for a teacher questioning that value. The subject of performance background once again became prevalent in this discussion. There were members of the group who strongly believed that a person who had not spent years playing in a band as a student could not become an exemplary music educator. Yet, upon scrutiny, it was discovered that two of the most successful and longest term

veteran teachers within the group had not had that experience. In this context, the passion for music itself became differentiated from the passion for teaching music. Members all had known students in university whose career goals were initially grounded in performance and who had been working toward a degree in education as a second choice. It was acknowledged that the majority of these graduates had either not pursued a teaching career or had remained in teaching for only a short period of time. Truly memorable teachers seemed to not only have had a love for music, but also have had a strong desire to pass that love for music onto their students. This was a trait that group members agreed they also had in common with each other. Regardless of performance background, long-term music teachers seemed to have an understanding of and tolerance for the exploratory nature of music education. They were appreciative of the process involved in learning to play a musical instrument. Beginning teachers agreed that learning to be patient with young musicians and gaining an understanding for what constituted an acceptable level of achievement at each phase of learning to play a musical instrument were very difficult. The realities of the music classroom necessitated that beginning teachers adjust their more idealistic visions of music education. For example, hearing a recording of a beginning band piece played by professional musicians is not the same as hearing the piece played by seventh grade students. Novice teachers agreed that having a better sense of what beginning instrumentalists were and were not capable would have made their transition into the classroom an easier one.

In working toward a profile of the successful music educator, members shared many stories about memorable music teachers that they had encountered. The stories presented by group members portrayed an educator who was able to motivate and to inspire. Almost all of the teachers discussed were able to face the classroom and their students with some degree of humour and were also somewhat flexible in terms of adapting to new situations or unexpected events. The most integral character trait, however, seemed to be an ability to teach within a style that was consistent with the teacher's own personality. This was a very poignant discussion for the beginning teachers because it was recognized that in the early phases of teaching, a personal teaching style is often lacking. In the time that it takes to develop such a style, novice teachers resort to mimicking teachers they have observed as students and as student teachers. Members agreed that this was a natural and desirable method of beginning in the classroom, however, that professional longevity was dependent on eventually teaching within a style that was consistent with personality.

The discussion of the qualities of a successful music educator was integrally linked to the questions of longevity and teacher burnout. Beginning teachers were concerned about the statistics that seemed stacked against them and believed that learning more about why music teachers left the profession might arm them against the odds. All teachers seemed to agree that the job itself was becoming more difficult and that the stories from even the most senior of teachers were increasingly disheartening. Examples of these stories can be found in Appendix III. The group questioned whether the educational times were perhaps

becoming so difficult that administration could no longer deal with the basic demands of the running of a school let alone the specialized needs of a music program. It was suggested that perhaps the greatest skill a music educator could develop was the ability to work with administration. It was then questioned whether this demand might be too much to ask of a beginning teacher who is learning how to meet the demands of a classroom and worrying about securing a permanent contract.

It is interesting to note that veteran teachers believed that the monumental advancement in the area of technology had had a major impact on the value that the education system placed on music. Over the past 20 years, technological literacy has become a focus in most schools and a vast amount of time, energy and resources have been put toward that end. The teachers in this research group discovered that not only had their current students been raised to question the value of an arts education in light of technological advancements, but that new teachers coming into the profession were also the product of such a belief system. Technology seemed to have created an atmosphere of isolation and a generation of relatively non-communicative students who tended to crave “me” experiences rather than those of the “group.” This seems in direct contradiction to the values that music education advocates. From a teacher’s point of view, it is the isolation that has proven to be the most devastating and perhaps the area in which mentorship can be of the most value.

Adam: What is this passion that we share for? Is it for the music? Is it for the kids? Sure we teach the stuff that goes beyond the academics, the stuff

that no one else can teach, the stuff that starts to deal with feelings and emotions. But what keeps us doing it when it's just getting to be so hard? Maybe it's not the music, not the repertoire, not the end product, but the bond. Maybe it's the most rewarding way for us to find connection.

There can be no denying that a reduction in isolation, both for teachers and for students, is a positive result of music education. The research group questioned why this result was not enough of a reward to keep teachers in the profession. Group discussions on this question led to the idea that in music, we have raised the bar that indicates success to the 100% level. In our pursuit of excellence, perfection becomes our ultimate goal; we believe that the higher we raise the bar, the more our students will focus on meeting that expectation and the better this pursuit of excellence will make them feel about themselves. Does any other discipline, however, demand as much of its students and, consequently, of its teachers? Both beginning and veteran teachers benefited from this direction in conversation. It was important for them to, firstly, profile the ideal music educator, but then to work toward the realization that increasingly unrealistic expectations for a teacher, within the context of higher demands and a less accommodating education system, might defeat even that most perfect of teachers.

Fourth Theme: Revisions in University Training

All members of the research group agreed that success as a beginning music teacher was very dependent on the kind of preparation received prior to entering the work force. Once again it was acknowledged that a beginning teacher does not have the opportunity to ease slowly into a classroom, but rather, must enter into a

position of authority immediately, allowing little room for error and little time for preparation. If a music education student were able to gather as much information as possible and were given the opportunity to observe and to ask questions during the formative years of university training, the group felt there would be a greater chance that he or she would be able to handle the stresses of the classroom.

John: A typical first-year teacher walks in with four years of university training, which provides a good academic background, but the truth is that he usually walks into a disintegrating band program, because that's the kind of job we first get, and is left to survive.

Group members believed that the university practicum experience was an integral factor in a beginning teacher's success. There was a general agreement that student teaching experiences would ideally begin earlier in training and needed to take place in the beginning of a school year as well as at the end.

The members of the research group had graduated from a total of four different post-secondary institutions. Of these, three out of four were set up in such a way that the music education class took place in the second semester and this precluded students from having practicum experiences in the first part of the year. This is difficult because many of the problems that first year teachers face develop from September through December. This is a time of the school year when students are not yet familiar with class routines and need more guidance and structure. The procedures and tone for the remainder of the year are also set at this time. Beginning teachers do not have a clear idea of the landscape of a full year. They have not yet devised year plans nor have given a great deal of thought

as to how to organize for them. Their students are unlikely to be flexible enough to learn new routines and rules part way through a year and not likely to understand the position in which a new teacher finds himself or herself. The group felt that the opportunity to witness the chaos of a September and to gather as many ideas as possible as to how to approach this situation may well make the difference between success and failure to a novice. While group members did acknowledge that devising a year plan is often an exercise that is assigned to music education students, they also admitted that it is probably a purely academic activity because it is one that is not based on experience or reality.

Carol: “We used to do an exercise called the ‘X-ville Project’ in university – an assignment where you had to make up a fictional town and set up a band program including the budget, etc. We had a lot of fun but we were so idealistic. I remember ordering grand pianos and nothing less than professional horns for the program because I was sure that if I was going to be a good teacher, I owed that level of quality to my students. It was pretty shocking to walk into my first job and not only see the state of the instruments, but realize that I had almost no budget.”

It was also suggested that, in some cases, students go about learning to teach in a backwards manner. Students involved in practicums are asked to create lesson plans and to carry them out. Often, there is little opportunity to determine if these plans are going to be successful or if they are based on realistic expectations and student teachers are left to test them out on classes that may not be sensitive to a work in progress. Group members considered the idea that, instead, student

teachers be handed plans created by experienced, master teachers, plans that have been created as part of a long-term goal, and that they be allowed to carry out these plans in order to experience success.

Discussion at this point turned to the question of logistics in the revising of a university's music education program. It is interesting to note that this conversation resulted in a change in the animation level of the group. The volume level rose and people began talking all at once. There was a sense that the group members wanted to come up with ideas that would help the situation for the first-year teacher. They wanted to do something practical, something with purpose, and something that would feel like an accomplishment. The concept of action at this point was appealing and it was apparent that research based on this premise was equally appealing.

Group members were aware that solutions to the problem of practicum experience in music education would involve wholesale changes in structure at the post secondary level and they were equally cognizant of the fact that change would be difficult to effect. Conversation turned, as a result, to ways in which change could be approached on a less formal level. Members suggested that having veteran teachers work more closely with music education students might serve as an intermediary step in the reform of practicum experiences. At this point, it was deduced that the major obstacle here seemed to be the time that it would take to form and develop these relationships.

Fifth Theme: Benefits and Barriers in a Mentoring Relationship

The underlying theme of mentorship was present throughout the year in which the research group met. Group members, however, did not consider themselves to be meeting as mentors and mentees, but rather, saw themselves as a group of educators who were considering the possibilities for mentorship in terms of music education in general. Again, it became evident that group members did not feel that mentorship could be arbitrarily imposed, but instead saw it as something that developed naturally out of formed relationships. Only one member of the group had had experience with a formal mentorship program, but all agreed that those educators whom they considered to be personal mentors had begun as influential teachers in their lives as students. None of the beginning teachers had specifically sought out a mentoring relationship, but in the first year of teaching, each of them had reconnected with former teachers whom they respected and with whom they felt comfortable in order to ask questions and seek advice.

All group members agreed that their first contact with more experienced teachers had been initiated in response to a specific and practical need. In other words, at some point during the first year of teaching, a problem or question had arisen that required more information and a second opinion. The natural response had been to call an experienced teacher and, in most cases, this person was the novice's former band teacher or a cooperating teacher from a student teaching round. In all cases, beginning teachers agreed that this initial connection and eventual formation of relationship were very valuable because they not only provided a vehicle for solving problems, but also helped to reduce the isolation

that was felt by novices. The more experienced teachers in the group felt that the relationship with beginning teachers had been equally rewarding for them. They enjoyed the same reduction in isolation as the novice teachers and felt a sense of self worth in being asked to share knowledge. They also reported that it was refreshing to match the beginning teachers' idealism and enthusiasm with their own realism. Teachers on both sides of the experience spectrum agreed that the relationship was mutually beneficial. As the research project neared its conclusion, group members began to understand that the same pattern of symbiosis they had enjoyed with former mentors outside of the group was developing in their relationships within the group.

The research group determined that there were many obstacles to the forming and maintaining of mentoring relationships. As already mentioned, time was considered to be a major deterrent. Beginning teachers were seen as being overwhelmed by the time demands placed upon them, and group members were certain that these teachers would be reluctant to give up either classroom time or preparation time in order to meet with other teachers. It was agreed that novice teachers would have to be shown and convinced that what they would gain from a mentoring relationship would be worth the sacrifice of time. It became apparent that the teachers in the group were increasingly convinced that mentorship could make a significant difference and were very interested in devising workable solutions for the problem of time commitment in such programs. In one brainstorming session, the group became excited about the possibilities that presented themselves when they paired novice need with veteran expertise in

terms of dealing with the complexities of the beginning of a school year in band. Beginning teachers felt that they were very unprepared for their first September and veteran teachers were very anxious to be of help to them. It was suggested that veteran teachers could offer their services to help set up “Jumpstart” programs in the junior high schools that were staffed with beginning music teachers. They could provide the lesson plans for teaching new students the beginning steps in playing their instruments and also act as instrumental clinicians. Group members were convinced that by ensuring that this part of the school year ran smoothly, beginning teachers could achieve a sense of success and enjoy the benefits of a solid beginning to the year. The group came up with many such scenarios in which veteran teachers could provide valuable and practical aid to new teachers and, consequently, help them use their time efficiently.

A substantial amount of time in group discussion was spent considering the ideals of a successful mentoring relationship. Members agreed that compatible personalities were very important as was a common philosophy of music education on the part of the beginner and veteran. They also agreed that a veteran’s motivation in wanting to be a mentor was a factor in mentoring success. While all agreed that there was a high degree of satisfaction involved in being able to pass knowledge on to receptive parties, they also agreed that this could have a negative effect if the veteran’s true motivation was rooted in a kind of longing for professional immortality. The desire to see one’s ideas and teaching practices continue on through someone else’s work was seen as different from wanting to

live vicariously through the next generation. Members agreed that there was a fine line in this difference.

Successful mentors seemed to possess the same qualities as successful teachers in general; they loved to share knowledge and were willing to provide the space and freedom for students, in this case, mentees to develop personal styles and create new ideas. The role of a successful mentor seemed to be that of a guide. Group members were particularly taken with the analogy of a teacher and student being inside a cave, one which had several passageways leading out. The teacher or mentor's job was to shine a flashlight up ahead every once in a while in order to help lead the student or mentee out of the cave. The choice of path was still up to the student/mentee; the mentor teacher simply opened up some possibilities. The successful mentor seemed to be a teacher with enough confidence to allow for this freedom; he or she did not get in the way of self discovery. Group members also agreed that, although experience would inevitably breed a certain amount of disappointment or negativity, successful mentors would be certain not to let this interfere with the hope of a novice teacher.

Movement Five: Recapitulation

Summary

The issues of mentorship and its value to both the beginning music teacher and the veteran mentor have been the main focuses of this study. Grant (2002) states that “a focused and effective mentoring program has a positive impact on the development of new teachers and the continued growth of experienced teachers who serve as mentors” (p. 19). This study describes the relationship that develops between novice and veteran teachers, the impact that these relationships have on the quality of teaching experience, and the formal structures that must be in place in order for the mentoring process to reach its full potential.

This study, conducted between September 2,001 and June of 2002, included three first-year and two second-year teachers, as well as four veteran teachers whose experience ranged from 15 to 25 years. Also included in the study were four teachers with between 6 and 8 years of experience in music education and they, at times, considered themselves to be novices and, at other times, took on a mentoring role. An Alberta teachers’ strike took place in February of 2002 and this impacted the study to some degree. Group discussions took place in monthly meetings and contact was continued between meetings through use of e-mail, journals, telephone conversations and classroom visitations. Group members were not placed in specific mentor/mentee pairings because many of the study’s members were already engaged in other mentoring relationships. Novice and veteran teachers in the study, instead, developed general relationships and formulated networking opportunities within the group setting, as well as

discussed the impact that the mentoring relationships they had formed outside of the group had on their teaching.

This study was motivated by the alarming attrition rates found among music educators in recent years (Krueger, 2000). Prior research indicated that isolation and stress were major reasons why music teachers left the profession (Cox & Stern, 1993) and that mentorship could have a positive effect on both of these factors (Schmidt, 1994). Much of the related literature on mentoring stressed the importance of the development of relationship between mentor and mentee, over a period of time, in order that the experience may provide opportunities for both parties to grow and to learn (Conway, 2003; Sagor, 2000; Stanulis, 1995).

Over the course of this study, the connection between novice and veteran teachers moved through several stages, beginning with a practical, non-evaluative, relationship based on simple questions-and-answers, moving through a more personal phase where questions of philosophy were introduced and ending in a collaborative stage where ideas were exchanged freely and ideologies were openly shared. At the end of the study, members found that while mentorship did improve the quality of their experiences as a beginning teacher, it did not necessarily ensure that they would remain in the profession. Members felt that a solid background in music education and a certain character profile were more conducive to longevity in the profession. Members found that undertaking the role of mentor as an experienced teacher, on the other hand, did seem to increase the chances that the veteran teacher would continue as a music educator. It was determined that both novice and veteran teachers were more likely to positively

benefit from the mentoring experience if certain formal and supportive structures were in place within the system.

Discussions and Conclusions

The following categories have been formed from the data of this study. Although the findings of this study may be restricted to the participating teachers from within Edmonton Public Schools, the experiences of these teachers and mentors may be transferable to beginning music teachers in similar settings.

Benefits of mentoring for the beginning teacher.

Mentoring encourages new teachers to remain in the profession by offering them a support system that includes the emotional backing with which to reduce the beginner's sense of isolation. First-year teachers tend to be centered on the "me" and "now" because they are inexperienced and set in a survival mode. Veteran teachers can afford to be more global in their approach because their level of experience allows them to be less centered on survival. This outlook provides a sense of balance for novice teachers. Mentorship offers the beginning teacher a sense of community, something that has become increasingly lacking for Edmonton Public School Board music teachers in recent years. Site-based budgeting and open school boundaries have developed an atmosphere of competition amongst schools and this has interfered with the development of a music education community. The connection between a mentor and mentee can help to counteract this trend.

Mentorship also lends support to beginning music teachers by providing instructional strategies, resources, ideas on classroom management, and advice for

working with parents, administrators and school districts. The novice teachers in this study found that by working under these improved conditions, they were more effective in the classroom and their students may have become more highly motivated as a result.

The phases of the first year of teaching have been identified as anticipation, survival, disillusionment, rejuvenation, and reflection (Moir, 1990, p. 1). This pattern was evident in the experiences of the beginning teachers in this study. The identification and understanding of these phases is an integral part of the success of a mentoring scenario for the beginning teacher. The anticipation phase begins as early as a music education student's pre-service practicum training and is marked by excitement, enthusiasm and idealism. This phase will also be marked by the anxiousness a new teacher feels regarding preparedness to teach, and by the questions he or she may have regarding job possibilities. If a pre-service teacher could be paired with a mentor teacher at this stage, the chances for success in the first year of teaching may be greatly improved. Mentor teachers can be of great value in this phase. They can balance idealism with realistic scenarios and provide music education students with much needed practical information and resources. This information is more likely to be processed at this stage because beginning teachers do not have to deal with the actual demands of a teaching position. Given an absence of the stress and tension that normally comes with a first-year teaching position, pre-service teachers may have more time and energy to dedicate to the gathering of resources and may be more open to ideas and suggestions. It is hoped that if a connection can be made between music education

students and veteran teachers, it might serve as a beginning point for the development of mentoring relationships.

The second phase of the beginning teacher's career is in the novice's first teaching position and is identified by a need for survival and a focus on the practicalities of daily routine. This is not the time for a new teacher to be asked to include a new mentoring relationship in his or her teaching life, although traditionally this is when formal mentoring programs are introduced. This may be one of the primary reasons for the failure of these mentoring programs. If a mentoring relationship is pre-existing, a novice teacher can use the experience of a mentor at this point to provide practical information, assist with the establishment of procedure and routine, and in general, provide support. This is not an appropriate stage for the first-year teacher to give up any additional time to a project that is not directly connected to the carrying out of daily teaching duties.

Perhaps the most difficult test in a mentoring relationship comes in the third phase, that of disillusionment. Traditionally this will occur in the second month of teaching when fatigue, and often corresponding illness, sets in and several new situations arise. This point of the teaching year is characterized by new and often public demands such as report cards, interviews, first concerts and evaluation. A first-year teacher may be at his or her most vulnerable at this time. A pre-existing mentoring relationship can allow the novice to voice doubt without fear of judgment. A mentor can fulfill the role of listener and can provide reassurance that these feelings are neither unusual nor a sign of imminent failure.

The mentor's greatest value at this point may be in his or her ability to provide hope and encouragement.

The next two phases, rejuvenation and reflection, typically take place in the second half of the year when a novice teacher has begun to establish routine and gain security. Shared knowledge and understanding can allow for a greater two-way communication flow between mentor and mentee, and, as a result, this time can often be as beneficial to the experienced teacher as it is to the beginner. A novice teacher might become more willing to try new approaches if a greater level of confidence can be built upon a degree of experience and success. Discussions with mentors become more of an exchange of ideas and this fresh perspective can improve the quality of teaching experience for both novice and veteran. Novice teachers now have the advantage of possessing lived experience in terms of teaching music and conversations with mentors can become more collegial. As the final term approaches, discussions become more philosophical; novice idealism and veteran realism cross over and combine at a middle point. In a successful mentoring relationship, the balanced mix of the practical and ideological provides for a healthy perspective for colleagues at each end of the experience spectrum.

Benefits of mentoring for the veteran teacher.

Mentor teachers can access a rich form of professional development through their work with novice teachers. Forming mentoring relationships allows the veteran teacher to pursue continual and lifelong learning.

One of the keys to being a good teacher is to remain a student....Music is not static. Music is something which is always evolving. It's an

evolutionary process and I think that if you're not actively involved, that evolution can stop and you tend to become static. Education is an ongoing process. It's a life long thing. (Allison, 2002, p. 54)

In this study, I found that mentoring can focus a teacher's efforts on the improvement of personal teaching practices; it can allow veteran teachers to be aware of the importance of communication and can foster a better understanding of the roles of administrative and supervisory personnel. Professional competency is improved when an experienced teacher is asked to consider personal teaching practices, approaches to lesson planning, and understanding of curriculum and administrative practice. It is in this way that novice teachers can become a source of new ideas and new approaches for the experienced teacher.

Veteran group members in this study found the reflection that was necessary to effectively mentor novice teachers also allowed them to combat the stagnation and fatigue that can sometimes develop after years of teaching. The opportunity to pass on knowledge that has been gained from experience offers a form of validation to the mentor and this, in turn, can lead to a renewed spirit. Self-esteem is enhanced as mentor teachers find meaning in a reaffirmed sense of worth. Mentoring experiences demand that veterans act as guides to beginning teachers, and that they also lead by their own actions. This develops leadership skills in veteran teachers.

The benefits of mentoring to the members of this action research group may actually have been of more value to the veteran teachers than to the beginning teachers. In spite of the many positive outcomes that a mentoring relationship

may present to a novice, there is some question as to whether these will be strong enough to combat the obstacles that beginners must face. While there is little doubt that mentoring enhances the teaching experience of a novice, it may not be enough of an influence to convince a beginning teacher to remain in the profession if the other issues become overwhelming. Veteran teachers, on the other hand, have already invested a great amount of time into their careers and are more likely to strive to overcome the difficulties that they face. The feelings of rejuvenation that a veteran teacher gains from a mentoring relationship may result in him or her extending a career in music education.

A sidebar benefit of this process was discussed among members of the research group and this was in relation to the influence that a veteran teacher may have in his or own teaching environment. Group members speculated that veteran teachers often have greater influence in schools than their novice counterparts and, therefore, the benefits of mentorship may also have greater effects in the schools in which they teach. Experienced teachers who have been revitalized by the opportunity to work within a mentoring relationship may become empowered to continue on a course of action in order to effect change. The veteran teachers in this study all continued to be stronger voices for the advocacy of music education after the study was completed. They communicated frequently upon the conclusion of the study and continued to join forces on school board and provincial committees in order to work toward improved working conditions and increased acceptance of music within a school curriculum.

Spirals of action research.

Action research is defined by the four steps of “planning, acting, observing and reflecting” and has a natural proclivity to be cyclical (Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2000, p. 12). In its fourth step, the reflection inherent in the action research process allows the researcher to analyze the results of the action. This, in turn, propels the research forward to new action. The action research process lends itself, therefore, to a spiral of cycles in which action enables reflection that in turn motivates new action. This progression was supported by the findings of this action research project and I have determined that its research spirals extend to both before and after the time of this study.

The initial spiral was formed prior to my formal study of mentorship in music education and, in fact, began even before I was consciously aware of the subject. It was developed during the years in which I accepted student teachers into my music classroom. During this time, I began to reconnect with the issues facing beginning teachers and to develop relationships that would later influence my choice of research subject. In 1999, while on sabbatical to pursue a Master’s degree, I was asked to join the Edmonton Public Schools’ mentorship program as a mentor to my first-year teaching replacement. This experience formed the second action research spiral and largely impacted my decision to choose mentorship as my thesis topic. In the fall of 2001, a third spiral saw the formation of the action research group that provided the data for this study. The culmination of that spiral could be identified as the completion of my thesis, however, I do not see this as the action’s final motion. It is here that the circles begin to spring out in

various directions. The current spiral continues to rotate around the informal relationships formed through this research project, but a new tangent has been developed that encompasses mentorship in its more formal approach. The next phase on this formal tact saw the formation of a provincial mentorship program sponsored by the Alberta Band Association, which I serve as a board member. Phases five and six, guided by members of this research group, saw the development of the Edmonton Public Schools' Program for First-Year Music Teachers in 2002 and the Edmonton Public Schools' Performance Standards Committee in 2003. This latter committee focused on mentorship as a means of ensuring that beginning teachers were given the resources and assistance required to produce quality music programs that could meet the performance standards.

Members of the research committee concluded that the ideas developed through group discussions provided the impetus for the formation of the above programs. Time for relationship and reflection allowed both beginning and veteran teachers within the group to formulate action plans with which to formally approach the Edmonton Public School Board. Members found the board to be receptive to the concept of mentoring beginning music teachers, but this did not translate into financial support for program development nor openness to the idea of structural change in order to better serve the beginning teachers. Members felt strongly enough about the importance of their goals to pursue program development on their own time, but are not optimistic that the programs will continue to run without their direct involvement and without formal endorsement by the board.

Recommendations for Practice

The formulation of a working mentorship program.

Mentorship can provide valuable networking opportunities for teachers. The connections it helps to form can become a major factor in the reduction of stress for music educators. Mentorship is often defined by the benefits gained by beginning teachers when mentored by more experienced educators, however, veteran teachers will also come away from the experience with increased knowledge and a renewed outlook. Mentorship is neither a new nor a difficult concept, but it is a concept that needs to be reformulated within the context of today's education system. The advance of technology and the increasing complexities of modern society have changed how teachers relate to one another. Electronic communication has taken the place of personal relationship in many cases and teachers may need to be reminded of the value that the simplicity of personal connection holds. The ease of forms of communication such as e-mail may allow teachers to share information quickly, but they do not effectively replace discussion and personal dialogue. Personal communication allows for the formation of relationship.

John: The only way I survived this first couple of years is because of my contact with other music teachers. There have been so many days when I've thought "Oh my gosh. There's my letter of resignation in one hand and my lesson plans for the next day in the other." What helps me plod through the mind field of indecision as to which hand to go with is the bond I have formed with other teachers.

Mentoring relationships are both valuable and viable, however, time is still a major enemy of the concept's success. If a mentorship program for beginning music teachers is to succeed, it must be well planned in order to make the best use of music teachers' time and efforts. Early connection, formalized support, and a coordinating administrator are essential to a program's success.

Mentorship programs currently available to beginning music teachers within Edmonton Public Schools can only be accessed once the school year is well under way. In order for such programs to be more practical and rewarding, however, ideally, novice teachers would be connected with mentor teachers prior to the beginning of the school year, possibly while still music education students at the university. It is not possible to access all pre-service music educators, however, it may be viable to connect with the music students who are studying at the University of Alberta. Secondary music education students at the University of Alberta could be contacted by an Edmonton Public Schools' facilitator prior to their fourth year of study. This connection would supplement the practicum experiences that are already in place. Where possible, students could be contacted early in the September of their final year of university and paired with mentor teachers at this time. Musical background and experience would be taken into consideration prior to these pairings, although it is likely that this would serve only as an initial contact and that it would not necessarily result in a continuing mentor-mentee relationship. Students would be given the opportunity to observe a start up routine in a junior high school and could be involved in activities such as Fall music camps. This would give them the chance to work with students in a

supervised setting where evaluation as a student teacher was not a factor.

Opportunity for observation, the gaining of experience and the gathering of ideas and information would be the motivational factors at this point. Ideally, the relationship between pre-service and working music teachers would be maintained during this important final year of study. It is understood that not all University of Alberta secondary music students would seek or gain employment with Edmonton Public Schools, however, the experiences gained by both education students and veteran teachers would be valuable regardless of final career plans on the part of the new teacher.

Perhaps a more important, and possibly more viable, point of contact could be made with beginning music teachers upon initial employment with Edmonton Public Schools. Assuming that the hiring of these teachers could take place prior to the beginning of the school year, and unfortunately this is a large assumption under the current system, this next point of contact would be in late August, prior to the start of the novice's first teaching assignment. The Edmonton Public Schools music consultant could gather the names of these new teachers and invite them to a pre-determined meeting of district secondary music educators in the last week of August. The agenda at this meeting would include social introductions, discussion of September start-up procedures, an overview of the annual calendar and the pairing of new teachers with specific mentors. Things such as musical background, geographical location, teaching assignment and personality would be considered when placing novices with veteran teachers.

In addition to early identification of new teachers and their subsequent connection with mentors, a successful mentorship program must also have the support of the school district in which it is run. In the mentorship program currently offered by Edmonton Public Schools, this support takes the form of a prescribed and quite rigid program. New and veteran teachers must volunteer to participate in the program, at which time they are arbitrarily placed in pairs. It was my experience that these pairs of teachers were not necessarily teaching the same subjects nor were they always teaching at the same grade level. This form of mentorship is not as meaningful for beginning music teachers because teaching in their subject area is so specialized. Contact between participating novice and veteran teachers is made through formal meetings at the school board where topics are presented and break-out groups are asked to engage in discussion. While group members are encouraged to meet outside of these prescribed times, the lack of relationship developed between members often dictates that this does not happen.

In contrast to this formalized system are those situations where mentoring simply develops because a new teacher seeks out advice from a more experienced colleague, this person being either someone who is working at the same school or someone under whom the novice worked as a high school student or student teacher. This is often the more productive form of mentoring, however, its lack of formal structure may make it too easy for time restrictions to get in the way of progress. If an informal mentoring process is to be more successful than the formally established program previously described, certain policies and practices need to be in place in order for the mentoring to reach its full potential. The school

board needs to be made more aware of the unique challenges of teaching music in the schools and the importance of veteran guidance for novice music teachers. It may not be possible for an outside administrator to successfully match mentor with mentee, as has been proven by the lack of success for music teachers in the current program, however, given administrative support and some release time, teachers could seek out their own mentoring relationships. School professional development for the music educator is another area that needs improving. Music teachers are often frustrated by their lack of opportunity for meaningful professional development within the school system. The majority of school professional development days are spent in discussing topics that apply to the teaching of core subjects within a regular classroom setting. The time allotted to these sessions could be put to better use if music educators were allowed to meet as a separate group. Once again, this would require administrative support on the part of the board and an understanding of the specialized nature of teaching music. A formal structure of this kind might allow music teachers the time to meet and this would provide an important first step in the development of relationship between novice and veteran teachers.

A large obstacle to all of the above is the fact that music lacks a strong voice within the Edmonton Public School Board. In most subject areas, there is a designated board consultant who acts as a liaison between the board and its teachers. When I began teaching with Edmonton Public, there was one full-time music consultant to oversee the elementary music teachers and another full-time consultant to take care of the secondary teachers. This service was provided free

of charge by the board to its members. Over the last 25 years, this position has been consistently reduced until, at present, there is a single consultant employed in a 0.3 F.T.E. (full time equivalent) position whose job it is to deal with the concerns of all music teachers in the system, kindergarten through grade 12. This does not allow the consultant the necessary time to adequately deal with the concerns of the board's music teachers. Unfortunately, this service has also become a cost recovery program where individual schools must pay for consultant time on an hourly basis. A full-time, secondary music consultant whose cost was covered by the board would have the time to be more present in the schools, would be able to better oversee the progress of new teachers and be more effective in providing for the mentoring of these new teachers.

Hiring practices for first-year teachers.

Mentorship has a positive effect on the quality of a new teacher's experience and this, in turn, fosters greater success in the classroom. However, certain pre-requisites need to be in place in order for mentorship to reach its full potential. First, it is important to ensure that a new music teacher is equipped with a strong background in his or her chosen subject area. In order to foster this, changes need to be considered in terms of the hiring practices within Edmonton Public Schools. Specifically, more consideration needs to be given to the musical background of candidates. Some degree of university training in instrumental music does seem to make a significant difference in terms of improving the quality of experience for a new band teacher. The knowledge that is gained from this training benefits a band teacher by providing a strong resource foundation from which to

work. Some degree of personal playing experience is also valuable for a prospective music teacher. A music educator who has worked from within a performing ensemble, whether as a high school student or in a university ensemble, may have a better understanding of the complexities of directing such an ensemble. A teacher that feels adequately prepared to teach a certain subject will be more likely to remain in the profession. It is my belief that if a strong background in instrumental music were a more important factor in the hiring of new teachers, there would be a greater likelihood that they would experience success and remain in the profession. In this research study, those participants with a background in choral music or with no formal training in music education left the profession within two years. The teachers with degrees in secondary education, majoring in instrumental music, are, at the time of writing, still teaching band within Edmonton Public Schools.

A second major obstacle to the successful mentoring of new teachers is the timeline for hiring within Edmonton Public Schools. New teachers in this system are often not identified for placement until late August, once all contracted teachers have been situated in schools. In order for a mentoring system to work to its full benefit, it must be in place well before the beginning of a school year. Ideally, new music teachers would be hired prior to the end of the previous school year but, failing that, they should be in place by mid-August. In this case, new teachers would be identified to the veteran teachers well in advance of the first day of school and the novice could be given assistance in making plans for the start-up of the school year. September is the most difficult part of the year for

instrumental music teachers, particularly in junior high where they are faced with training beginning instrumentalists, and an organized and well thought out plan for this procedure might ensure the success of the year.

Recommendations for Further Study

Music education researchers have not fully explored the possibilities of action research. If we, as educators, feel that there is a need for change, then we need to take the time to identify those needs and to say something about them. We can sit year after year and lament the poor state of music education, or we can choose to act. Action research studies such as this one may be small, grassroots projects, but they are a place from which to begin. Action research may provide enough of a structure to formulate further studies without insisting on a quantitative format that will be foreign to the music educator.

Based on the findings of this study, additional research is needed into the continued effects of mentoring on a music teacher. This would include such questions as: What form does the mentoring relationship take once the beginning teacher gains experience? Do the mentoring partners continue their relationship as colleagues? Of additional interest would be: Do teachers who have engaged in mentoring relationships have a more open approach to other forms of professional development? In what ways does a mentorship program for beginning music teachers affect students?

In order to fully explore mentorship in music education, researchers must develop a research base from which to offer suggestions for the improvement of in-service and pre-service music teacher education. Data regarding successful

music educators and their professional approach would provide a basis for further action. In this area of study would be questions such as: Who are the long-term music educators and what do we know about their backgrounds and careers? What would successful veteran music educators change about the profession as it stands today? Who enters the profession and why? Who chooses to leave the profession and why? What kind of professional development would be of greatest value to music educators? What are the issues connected with the erosion of a band identity?

Cadenza

My exploration of the possibilities for mentorship of beginning music educators within an action research setting has shown me that it can result in positive outcomes for both the mentor and the mentee. Action research is a meaningful way in which to conduct research, meaningful to those who participate and to those who might read its finished presentation. For me, this research has been about connection. It has been a way to connect to a new generation of teachers, and it has been a way of connecting with myself. I realize, as I look back, that my stories have been as much an exploration of my own journey as they have been a way of connecting with the future. I have begun to see life's journey more and more as a cycle, one that spirals in all sorts of unexpected directions. I find that I am looking forward to helping young music educators search for significant teaching experiences that go beyond mere survival. And, as I continue through this life cycle as a music educator, I realize one of the greatest joys of this veteran phase comes with being able to pass something of value forward, around the circle, so that it connects back to the beginning and helps members of the beginner phase embark on their own journey. This in itself would be a fulfilling definition of action for me and I am looking forward to the renewal that I hope this re-searching will bring.

Finale - References

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Coda: Appendices

APPENDIX I

A Day in the Life of a Music Educator

(As observed on February 28, 2001
while shadowing a first-year music teacher)

7:30 am	Arrive at school for extra Jazz Band rehearsal.
8:15 am	Distribution of Medical and Behavior forms to Grade 7s going to band camp.
8:30 am	Classes begin.
8:35 am	Band parent president comes in to have casino forms signed.
8:40 am	Parent calls for information re: band camp.
8:50 am	Fight breaks out while on the phone with parent. Fill out conflict forms and take students to office.
9:10 am	Parent comes in with auction donation.
9:25 am	Period 2 begins. Individual testing of 30 students (average 60 seconds per student).
9:45 am	Student breaks down in front of class because she is unprepared for testing. Private discussion in hallway while class practices. Testing postponed until next day.
10:00 am	Students bring in more auction items. Parent calls to discuss balance in fundraising account.
10:10 am	Nutrition break. Clarinet student comes in for extra help.
10:15 am	Period 3 begins.
10:25 am	Office calls. Secretary informs teacher that Field Trip forms must be sent downtown by noon today.
10:30 am	Class is given practice time. Field Trip forms are finalized. Call made to bus company to confirm departure times.
10:45 am	Parent comes in with auction item. Item is a basket of live plants. Parent leaves instructions as to their care until the auction in one month's time.
11:00 am	A-Channel (TV) calls. Wants to come in and film a class to go with education funding piece.
11:15 am	Period 4 begins. Guest speaker from university to discuss careers in music.
Noon	Set up room for rehearsal. Audition student singer for upcoming Fine Arts Night. Office requests updated instrument inventory list for school board insurance policy.

12:15 pm	Office requests computer shutdown due to system problem.
12:25 pm	Noon rehearsal (65 grade 7 students).
1:00 pm	Reading Period. Grade 9 meeting in the band room to discuss itinerary for spring tour.
1:20 pm	Teacher answers call from angry colleague who does not agree with meetings during reading period.
1:30 pm	Period 5 begins. Adaptation/Opportunity class. School board representative visits to watch class (re: funding and integration of Angelman's syndrome student).
2:00 pm	Call from bus company to discuss scheduling problems with upcoming trip.
2:15 pm	Computers back on-line. Class given assignment so teacher can upgrade inventory.
2:25 pm	Period 6 begins. Parent arrives to inquire as to how chaperones for trip were chosen.
2:35 pm	Bass drum stand cracks. Teacher and class work together on repairs.
2:45 pm	Industry representative arrives with new music order. Stays to chat about changes in festival entry rules.
2:50 pm	Phys. Ed. teacher drops by to discuss new gym tarp and its proper use (implications in upcoming concert as tarp takes 10 people and 45 minutes to set up properly).
3:15 pm	Parent phone call. Students dismiss themselves.
3:20 pm	Choir rehearsal for participation in Night of Music.
3:30 pm	Phone calls to choir members missing from rehearsal.
4:00 pm	Organizational calls regarding upcoming trip. Sorting of field trip permission forms. Creation of rooming lists.
5:00 pm	Heat up frozen dinner in staffroom.
5:30 pm	Sub. plans for tomorrow because of symphony field trip.
7:00 pm	Band parent meeting.
10:00 pm	Leave for home.

APPENDIX II

Table 1. Research Characteristics
From Grady, M. (1998), p. 6

DIMENSION	QUANTITATIVE	QUALITATIVE
1. Purpose	Prediction and control, cause and effect	Understanding, description and interpretation of behavior
2. Focus	Selected, redefined, and narrow variables are studied	A complete and holistic understanding is sought
3. Data	Data are impersonal but consistent, number driven	Data are personal but inconsistent, people driven
4 Instrumentation	Tests and instruments	The research is the primary data collection instrument
5. Reality	Stable, quantifiable facts	Dynamic, changing
6. Values	Value free or controlled	Values are explicated
7. Orientation	Predetermined hypotheses are tested	Answers and theories evolve from collected data
8. Conditions	Research is conducted under controlled conditions	Research is conducted under natural conditions
9. Results	The focus is on replicable but flat and thin data	The focus is on collecting rich and thick data

APPENDIX III

Negative Changes in Music Education – Sad Stories from Veteran Teachers

Ken is a very successful music teacher with 30 years experience. He has received many accolades and awards and his expertise is sought after by many. Ken was teaching at a prominent high school when the board decided to adopt the middle school concept for the district. This meant that he would lose his grade 9 band students to the middle school. In June, Ken agreed to move to the middle school, and give up his high school duties, in order to concentrate on building the band program in grades 6 to 8. He came back in September to find that band in middle school had been cut to two 40-minute blocks per week. Not only did this jeopardize his possibilities for building a strong program, it also meant that he no longer had a full teaching assignment. He now had to assemble a parent group to lobby on his behalf.

Pat has also been teaching for 30 years as a junior high school band teacher. After years of building a successful program, she was told that band at her school was going to be scheduled opposite core. The students would have to miss one science, one health and one math class a week in order to take band. Band students would, therefore, be effectively penalized for their option choice. After a year following this plan, Pat had only three grade 8 students left in band, one of which was her own daughter. All of these three, including her daughter, wanted to drop band in the next year because they couldn't keep up with the core homework they were receiving from missing classes. Pat had also lost all of her Program Needs/Administration time this year and so had been forced to teach an extra subject and take on supervision in addition to her band duties.

Carol is a 32-year veteran in music education and is acknowledged as one of the province's leading educators. Recently, she was asked to be assistant principal at her school while her principal was on long-term medical leave. The choice of applicants for this position came down to her and the Industrial Arts teacher in the school, but, in the end, they asked Carol to take the position because the administration felt that Industrial Arts was too specialized a job to find a suitable replacement teacher. The implication, therefore, was that band was not a specialized job. Carol was insulted because this was a school that openly valued the band program. She was shocked to find that the administration did not understand the complexity of her job.

APPENDIX IV

Additional Resources

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