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Why they stay and why they go: a study of retention and attrition during the transition from middle to high school in the large-ensemble instrumental music classroom

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WHY THEY STAY AND WHY THEY GO: A STUDY OF RETENTION AND ATTRITION
DURING THE TRANSITION FROM MIDDLE TO HIGH SCHOOL IN THE LARGE-
ENSEMBLE INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC CLASSROOM

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Music Education

in

The School of Music

by
Kathryn Strickland
B.M.E., Louisiana State University, 2000
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ABSTRACT

Factors relevant to three eighth grade instrumental music students' long-term commitment to school band were investigated during the course of this study, with each student representing a category of intentions toward continuation: one who was committed, one who was not, and one who was unsure. Specifically, the students' perceptions of their own character, personality, attitudes, and motivations were examined in the context of pending decisions to continue or discontinue participation in school-based instrumental music study. To generate a broad, inclusive perspective on the retention/attrition phenomenon, procedures included parent and instrumental music teacher perceptions of child/student obtained by means of a semi-structured interview; semi-structured interviews with each student; a questionnaire intended to assess locus of control, to be completed by each student; and observations of each student in the instrumental classroom setting. Specific attention was given to the influence of locus of control and attributions on the decision to continue or not continue.

Interviews, observations, and questionnaire responses revealed that locus of control and attribution style each bear on students' inclinations to remain in band. All students, regardless of intentions to continue, expressed the majority of attributions in the category of effort. The student committed to not continuing was found to have a strong external locus. Both the student committed to continuing and the student who was unsure were found to be internally motivated. It was found that all students expressed a desire to be more challenged in the instrumental music classroom, and this need affected their motivation to participate. In addition, the more externally motivated student desired greater opportunities for performance, which might lead to positive attention from influential others.

INTRODUCTION

Though students can elect to stay in or opt out of school instrumental music programs at any point during their experience, there is one critical juncture that largely defines student retention and attrition: the transition between middle school and high school (Hayes, 2004). Across the last forty years, investigators have contributed much to advance our knowledge of the factors related to attrition and retention (e.g., Boyle, DeCarbo, & Jordan, 1995; Corenblum, 1998; Hayes, 2004; Mawbey, 1973; McCarthy, 1980). Most have examined external influences on attrition in instrumental music programs, and they have done so using quantitative methodology. Comparatively less research has been conducted on how established personality traits, attitudes, and perceptions affect the retention and attrition of school music students (Miksza, 2006; Morehouse, 1987), a question perhaps best answered through a qualitative approach.

Internal motivations for student decisions are those directly related to the student's personality or behavioral traits, for example, pessimism vs. optimism, patience vs. impatience, extroversion vs. introversion, and the ability to delay gratification (Miksza, 2006; Mowery, 1993; Schmidt, 2005). External factors that motivate student decisions related to retention include conflicting activities (e.g., sports), or situations beyond students' control (family socio-economic status, scheduling conflicts, teacher effectiveness) (Boyle, et al., 1995; Correnblum, 1998; Klinedinst, 1991; Rogers, 1989). While it is important to investigate the multitude of external issues that can affect whether a student chooses to stay or go, the need for probing research into internal influences is vital; student personality variables may transcend the influences of external motivations (McCrae, 2002).

The value inherent in the large ensemble experience, still the driving force in school music, is to a large extent predicated on participation by more rather than fewer students. In a climate in which bigger often brings quality, stature, power, and funding, the appeal of music making among a community of student musicians is challenged by curricular requirements that sometimes make it difficult for students to commit long-term to elective courses like band and orchestra. This appeal is also challenged by school and community activities, ranging from myriad sports to academic and social clubs, which vie for student participation. For students who try to “do it all” there are increasing demands on their time, especially from teachers, coaches and advisors who press for “championship” performances. Undoubtedly, additional research, especially that which might reveal internal factors about retention and attrition, has the potential to provide music educators with the means necessary to assess student intentions from a thoughtful position, in turn saving time and effort by exposing the motivations that drive student decisions.

The high school instrumental music classroom is a unique one where teacher/student relationships form and evolve across a number of years. High school instrumental music teachers interact with both students and parents (as chaperones, boosters, and audience members) outside of the classroom setting, forming bonds that are often heightened by shared successes and disappointments. These are among the reasons that directors often define the issue of attrition as a personal one, resulting in feelings of disappointment and professional failure. There are few justifications for research in music education more tangible than answering what can be a perplexing, personal question: why do students choose to discontinue participating in school music programs?

The loss of instrumental music students across their public school tenure is a pressing problem in various educational environments across the country. For example, both Texas and Louisiana are faced with a similar retention/attrition dilemma. Following a single class of instrumental music students from 6th to 12th grade in Texas starting in 1998, Figure 1 shows that 85% of those students discontinued study by the 12th grade, with 40% discontinuing at the juncture between middle school and high school (cited by Duke & Byo, 2009). In a single snapshot of students in Louisiana from the 2007 school year, Figure 2 reveals that 81% discontinued instrumental music study by the 12th grade, with 49% dropping out at the juncture between middle and high school (cited by Duke & Byo, 2009).

Answering questions related to retention and attrition in the instrumental music classroom is of real value to music educators. While a substantial base of research has focused on how external factors affect students' decisions to stay or go, there is considerably less research investigating internal influences, those that might best be studied qualitatively. The general purpose of this study was to fill this gap utilizing qualitative methods to uncover student perceptions of their own character, personality, attitudes, and motivations in the context of continued participation in school-based instrumental music.

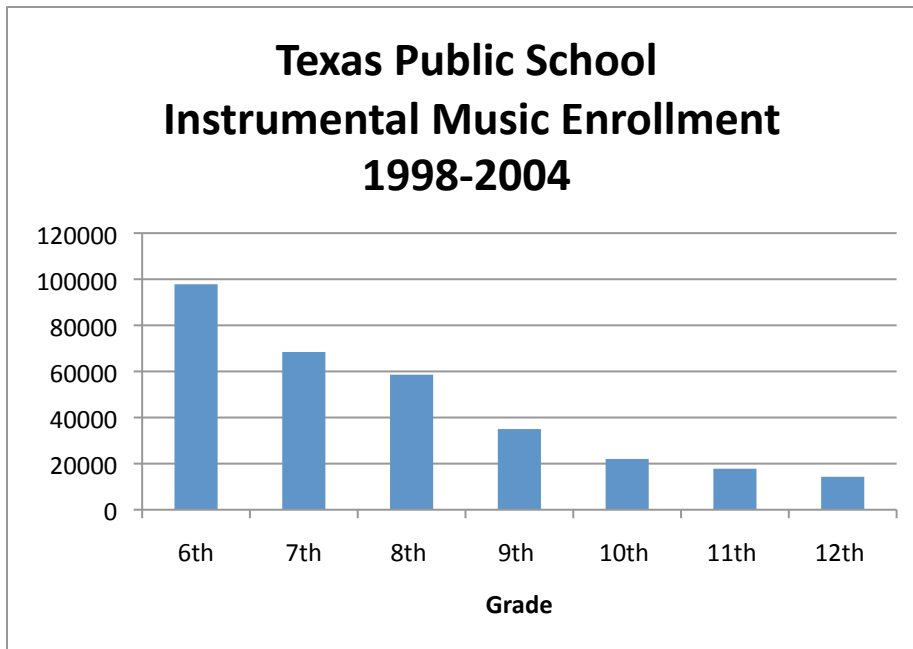


Figure 1: Texas Public School Instrumental Music Enrollment, 1998-2004.

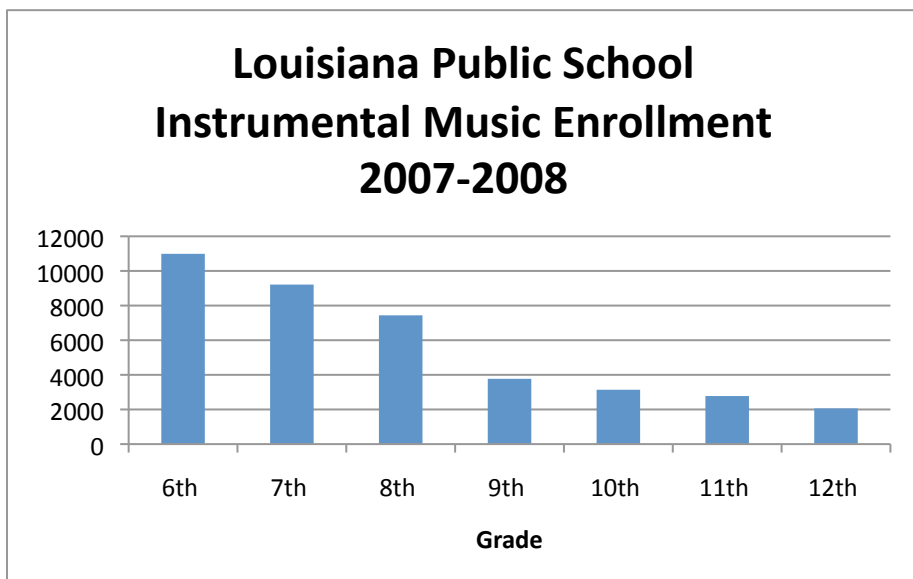


Figure 2: Louisiana Public School Instrumental Music Enrollment, 2007-2008.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Music education researchers have studied systematically the attrition and retention of students in music for the past 30 years. In analyzing the extant literature, it became clear that motivation is a key factor in the decision that leads to either short- or long-term participation. Two major themes related to these motivations emerged: attribution theory and locus of control (LOC). The following section will review the research literature related to both of these areas, define each, as well as highlight specific studies that influenced the direction of the present study.

Attribution Theory

Attribution theory, first developed by Austrian psychologist Fritz Heider in 1944, was conceptualized as a way to analyze how people explain the causes of their behavior (Heider & Simmuel, 1944). The theory is rooted in the idea “that learners’ current self-perceptions will strongly influence the ways in which they will interpret the success or failure of their current efforts and hence their future tendency to perform these same behaviors” (Vockell, n.d., p. 1). According to attribution theory, there are four causal categories to which success and failure can be attributed: ability, task difficulty, luck and effort. When investigating students’ reasons for discontinuing music study, it is important to consider the correlation among self-assessment, success and failure is, because previous research has found correlations between self-assessment of ability and retention in music programs (Asmus, 1986; Boyle et al., 1995; Klinedinst, 1991).

Using the Music Attribution Orientation Scale (Asmus, 1986) and an open-ended response form, both Asmus and Legette (1998) found that students are more likely to attribute their musical successes and failures to ability and effort than task difficulty or luck, but the precise nature of attributions is affected by the expected level of success. Neither study

investigated the origin of these attributions. Corenblum (1998), in discussing his finding that students who were successful in music were more likely to attribute their success to ability and effort, wrote, “Although attributions were unrelated to intentions, the more students liked band, the more likely they attributed their grades to effective learning strategies, and the less likely they were to make attributions to luck or circumstance” (p. 136). Sosniak’s profiles of professional pianists from their childhood to professional career further reinforces this idea that students who are successful in music are more often committed to (and attribute success to) musical work: “Again, time at the piano seems to have been translated into learning, which resulted in positive attention from teachers and others, better feelings about oneself, and an increased commitment to learning” (Sosniak, 1985, p. 40).

The decision to discontinue participating in school-based instrumental music is typically not an impulsive one; the decision is instead a result of many experiences and interactions. When a student experiences a performance, classroom interaction, assessment or other important event in a musical life, impressions and ideas are formed related to these experiences that guide him or her toward a path of either continued participation or withdrawal. Understandings derived from the study of attribution theory serve to clarify the specific nature of the course toward a final decision.

Locus of Control

Attribution theory and locus of control are similar constructs in that they both address, in different ways, learners’ intentions to continue (or discontinue) behaviors. While attribution theory attempts to assess beliefs about success and failure as related to event outcomes, locus of control (LOC) explains where a person expects his control over coming events to reside. Developed by psychologist Julian Rotter (1954), LOC addresses the extent to which an

individual believes that he can control events in his life, how “a person views himself in conjunction with the things that befall him, and the meaning that he makes of those interactions between his self and his experiences” (Lefcourt, 1982, p.35).

While there are multiple descriptive categories of LOC, the most basic levels are internal and external, which assess where an individual believes control of coming events will reside (Lefcourt, 1982). Individuals with an internal locus of control are more inclined to take responsibility for their actions, and are not easily influenced by the opinions of those around them. By comparison, individuals with an external locus of control often blame outside circumstances for their mistakes, credit their successes to luck rather than effort, and are easily influenced by the opinions of others (Locus, n.d.).

Internal and External Motivations

The instrumental music classroom experience is one where the delay of gratification is commonplace. While more intermediary successes (for example, mastering a particular rhythm, learning a new note, working out a rudiment) are frequent, students routinely spend extended periods of time preparing for single performances, and depending on the rigor of the classroom, a great deal of musical work may be required during the preparation time. The personal discipline and patience inherent in delay of gratification is a defining trait of internal LOC (Schmidt, 2005). In contrast, students possessing an external LOC are “likely to make less of an effort to exert self-control in the present because they doubt their ability to influence events in the future” (Locus, n.d., p. 1). Lefcourt (1982) most adequately summarizes the ramifications of internal vs. external locus:

No matter what the experiences one has, if they are not perceived as the results of one's own actions, they are not effective for altering the ways in which one sees things and consequently the way one functions (p. 35).

Practicing, whether it be as an individual or a group, is at the heart of most positive musical experiences. Locus of control can have a significant effect on the commitment to (and quality of) musical practice.

The very beginning of instrumental music study is perhaps a time that requires the most delay of gratification for significant events. The nature of instruction at this level, where time must be spent learning basic habits and skills of performance (instrument assembly, posture, embouchure formation, music reading, fingerings, hand placement, etc.) can lead to long periods of very small conquests and delayed gratification. In a study profiling beginning piano students, Costa-Giomi, Flowers and Sasaki (2005) found that students who dropped out of lessons practiced less, completed less homework, missed more lessons and achieved less in the first six weeks of instruction than did their more persistent peers. These students also sought approval from their teachers more often but received fewer compliments than those who stayed; on average, dropouts sought approval from the teacher more than once a minute. The question left unanswered is the effect of internal factors on the pre-dropout behaviors listed by Costa-Giomi and colleagues (practiced less, completed less homework, missed more lessons and achieved less in the first six weeks of instruction than did persistent peers). Low socio-economic status, lack of instrument, and lack of parent support could all contribute to missing lessons and not practicing; however, seeking teacher approval is evidence of external LOC.

Other Factors Contributing to Retention and Attrition

While not directly addressing the concept of locus of control or attribution theory, research investigating the effects of established personality traits on retention in music has been conducted. Mowery's (1993) measurement of how student personality and self-concept relate to retention in orchestra showed that dropouts and persisters differ most in sensing-intuition. Dropouts rely on external motivations for inspiration while persisters are more independent and intuitive. In addition to these findings, Sandene (1987) found that dropouts tend to be unsentimental, have low expectations, are rigid and headstrong, distrustful, prone to sulk, and are more introspective. Conversely, continuing students are guided by feelings and imagination and tend to have a more cultured home-life provided by highly involved parents.

Lack of commitment to work was among the highest rated of music teachers' responses to why students decide not to continue participation in middle school band programs (Boyle, et al.1995). Other external factors, e.g., parental support (Hayes, 2004), socio-economic status (Klinedinst, 1991), extracurricular conflicts (Rogers, 1989), class scheduling conflicts (Rogers, 1989), peer influence (Hayes, 2004; Morehouse, 1987; Rogers, 1989), instrument choice (Morehouse, 1987), conflicts with teacher (Rogers, 1989), and band size (Hayes, 2004) are viewed by music educators as more significant motivators to drop out. In a 1997 study surveying piano students, their parents and teachers, Duke, Flowers and Wolfe found that when asked what factor *should* determine when lessons end, the response chosen most often by teachers and students was the student's achievement of independence on the instrument. When asked what factor most likely *will* determine when lessons end, teachers' most frequent answer was "When there are other things more important for the child to do." The most frequently selected answer by parents was related to "student enjoyment."

Assessing factors influencing student decisions to drop out of music study is a complicated task. While previous research has identified and studied external motivations, it has not to the same degree and magnitude examined personality-based influences. The design of the present study lent itself to contributing to personality-based research by investigating factors surrounding three eighth grade instrumental music students' long-term commitment to school band. Specifically, the purpose of the study was to examine students' perceptions of their own character, personality, attitudes, and motivations in the context of pending decisions to continue or discontinue participation in school-based instrumental music study. To generate a broad, inclusive perspective on the retention/attrition phenomenon, procedures included parent and music teacher perceptions of child/student.

One overarching question motivated this research: what are the internally-derived factors that shape adolescent musicians' decisions to continue or discontinue participation in band at the middle school/high school juncture? Three guiding questions fueled the data-collection process: 1) To what do student participants attribute their successes and failures in music? 2) Where does student participant locus of control reside? 3) How do attribution tendencies and locus of control enter into the decision to continue or discontinue music study?

METHOD

Three eighth-grade band students, their parents (one per student), and their band director constituted the sample for this study. These participants ($N = 7$) were selected from an established, successful middle school band program. The band director, Mrs. Carter (this name and all subsequent names are pseudonyms) was a 6-year veteran of the school who received the school's teacher of the year award in 2007. Her bands participated in yearly state-sponsored adjudicated festivals and received overall excellent ratings (1 or 2 on a 1-5 scale). For three years prior to this study, band members made up just under half of the school's total student population. The music education faculty of the local university acknowledged the vibrancy of this program and attributed it to the effectiveness of her teaching.

The school, Smith Middle School, is one of eight middle schools in a rural town within the south central United States. The city surrounding the school is one that serves as a bedroom community to a large metropolitan area, and has encountered a great deal of change in the last ten years. While Smith Middle School has been in existence for several years, a number of new schools have been built as a result of the influx of residents into the surrounding city: the population of the city grew from 70,000 in 1998 to 102,000 in 2008, a growth of approximately 31% (*U.S. Census*, 2008). While the school is located in a residential area, it is close to the city's main thoroughfare and a major interstate is nearby.

As author of this document and the researcher in this qualitative study, I am a participant whose background is relevant. I was a successful instrumental music teacher at the high school level for 8 years prior to beginning a 2-year master's degree program at the local university. My bands participated in yearly state-sponsored adjudicated festivals and received overall superior and excellent ratings at both district and state levels. My experience extended into the middle

school level where I did significant team teaching. I have supervised the work of several student teachers, and was recently elected to be a member in an honorary international bandmasters fraternity. I believe the weight of evidence establishes me as one with “insider” familiarity in settings of this type and the knowledge and perspective that come from recent, extended first-hand experience in public school music. On the other hand, having been removed from public school teaching for the past 2 years and firmly planted in master’s degree study, my view of school music teaching had expanded in ways that position me to avoid deleterious biases (to the extent possible) and engender necessary objectivity in the research process.

With the band director’s guidance, I selected a purposeful sample of eighth grade band students, which represented each of three categories: a participant who expressed a commitment to continuing participation in the high school band (“Mike”); a participant who expressed the intention to not participate in the high school band program (“Amanda”); and a participant who expressed uncertainty as to whether he would or would not participate in the high school band (“Jack”). According to the band director, each student exhibited behavior consistent with stated intentions. The director’s familiarity with each participant’s family and impressions of their accessibility and willingness to participate also factored into choosing which students would be approached. The sampling procedure used in this study represented what Patton refers to as “intensity sampling” (1990, p. 171) within the broader context of purposeful sampling. According to Patton, “An intensity sample consists of information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely” (p. 171). Of interest were retention and attrition. Information-rich cases were selected, on the basis of teacher recommendations, to represent not only three different categories of intentions toward continued participation in band (not continue, unsure about continuing and committed to continuing) but also varied samples of several relevant

categories, including, but not limited to: behavioral patterns within the school setting, extra-curricular participation, commitment to school music and instrument, peer group and apparent social status, academic success, musical success, and parental influence.

As dictated by federal regulations, research involving human participants requires approval from an Institutional Review Board (IRB), which was requested from the Louisiana State University IRB for Human Subject Studies (see Appendix A). In addition, approval from the principal of the participating school, letters of parent permission, and participation consent from each student, parent and the teacher were completed before the study began (see Appendix B).

The band director understood anonymity and confidentiality, their central position in ethical research, and the potential for conflict of interest given that she knew the identity of participants. She was committed to the research process, and pledged in writing to avoid having participation by students affect in any way their course grades or their relationship with her.

Field work with student participants consisted of questionnaire completion, on-site interviews, and rehearsal observations of each participant. The questionnaire and interview were completed in one sitting, with observations following. The option for more questioning after the observation was left open. This sequence of activities was preferred because participants' responses to the questionnaire and interview provided context that was helpful in collecting and interpreting observation data.

A variation of Rotter's (1966) locus of control questionnaire, found in Appendix C, consisted of 18 yes/no questions and was completed by each student separately. The original questionnaire was altered by both eliminating questions and altering text in an effort to create a

document that is more closely related to this study and clear to the participant age group. To introduce the process to each participant, I read the following script:

Thanks for agreeing to answer some questions for me today. For both this questionnaire and the interview that we'll do later, I ask that you carefully consider every question and be completely honest in your answers. Your honesty will help me understand better the things that cause some students to stay in band and others to drop out. How you answer will have no effect on your grade in band or your relationship with your band director. Eventually I will write a research paper that reports what you tell me, but I will never use your name. You will remain anonymous. Do you have any questions?

This portion, as with all portions of the procedure, was completed at the participant's own pace. The questionnaire consisted of 18 pairs of statements in a forced-choice format (Marsh & Richards, 1986), with one statement corresponding to an internal locus and one corresponding to an external. For example, the first entry included these two statements:

- A. Many of the poor achievement levels in a student's academic life are due to bad luck.
- B. A student's poor performance results from the mistakes they make.

Students selected one statement per entry and those statements were coded for their correlation to internal or external locus.

Participants were then engaged individually using a semi-structured interview protocol where topic areas and questions, shown in Appendix D, were pre-determined, but precise wording and order of questions was not. The opportunity to diverge from the guide was available (Patton, 1990). Questions were related to attribution style, LOC, and each participant's intentions to continue or discontinue instrumental music study. Similar to the format of Shields' (2001)

questionnaire, answers to these questions provided descriptions of the student, her school experiences, the importance and role of instrumental music in her life, feelings toward continued participation, and practical issues regarding continued participation in the instrumental music program.

Observations of students' rehearsal behavior were recorded in field notes on a laptop computer. These observations provided a first-hand view of each participant in an authentic large-ensemble rehearsal environment where behaviors, surroundings, and ordinary activities relevant to this study were revealed (Bresler & Stake, 2006). I acted as a non-participant observer (Bresler & Stake, 2006). While the intention to be unnoticed by participants was not completely realistic due to the physical structure of the classroom, I did not interact with the students or participate in class activities in any way. Three observations were conducted, each the length of a class period (45 minutes). It was determined (with the help of the band director) that a complete, realistic period of participant behavior was observed (i.e., a typical environment as related to schedule, interruptions, teacher attendance, etc. had occurred) and data-saturation was evident (Merriam, 2002) after three observations.

An on-site interview with the band director was conducted using a semi-structured interview protocol as well. The questions, shown in Appendix E, attempted to assess the director's views of each participant's character, personality, attitudes, and motivations toward continuing instrumental music study and practical issues regarding that continuation. This interview was conducted after the student participant interview and before participant observations in an attempt to relate director responses to observed behavior in field notes.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with one parent of each participant, either on-site or at their home. I developed interview questions, shown in Appendix F, in an attempt to

provide a description of the student's character, personality, attitudes, and motivations along with practical issues regarding participation in musical ensembles (Sheilds, 2001). Parent interviews were conducted after student-participant interviews and before observations in an effort to relate parent responses to observed behavior. The three sets of interview questions (student, band director, and parent) had similar content for the purpose of discovering whether student, director and parent beliefs about sample behaviors and intentions were aligned.

In an effort to avoid disturbing the daily schedule of the class as much as possible, interviews with and observations of participants and the band director were scheduled at times approved by the director. Direct consultation with parents led to both informed consent and an approved schedule of interviews with each family. Observations and interviews were conducted in March and early April of 2010, with transcription and analysis completed during collection or within the following week. All nine interviews were recorded and transcribed in full.

Analysis

Field notes from on-site rehearsal observations and interview transcripts were analyzed using open-coding to identify emerging themes determined to be directly related to the purpose of the study (i.e. student character, personality, attitudes, and motivation). Closed-coding followed, in an effort to further organize those themes (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995).

Interview questions from all three groups (students, parents, and teacher) were recorded with a small voice recorder, of which all participants were made aware and none appeared to be distracted by. Interviews were transcribed promptly, no longer than a week after they occurred, and were coded simultaneously with transcription as well as multiple times after transcription was completed. Recorded interviews of all participants resulted in ninety-two pages of transcription, which were analyzed for emerging themes using a cross-case analysis format

(Patton, 1990). Questions grouped by topic in the interview guide aided in organizing the analysis (Patton, 1990). A member-checking process was used throughout the study to help validate results (Merriam, 2002).

The locus of control questionnaire was scored by assigning 1 point for each internal answer and 0 points for each external answer. An overall total score out of 18 possible for each student was calculated, reflecting the location of the participant's locus, with high scores reflecting a more internal locus and low scores a more external locus. The resulting score served to place each participant on a continuum.

Triangulation, another validating process, involved comparison of the three major sources of data (observation, interview, and questionnaire) and comparison of student, parent and teacher responses. It provided a varied and thorough pool of information which was analyzed inductively (Bresler, 2006; Merriam, 2002). Two analysis techniques were used: categorical aggregation, in which related instances are collected from a range of data, with the hope that issue-relevant meanings will emerge; and direct interpretation, where meaning is drawn from a single instance (Creswell, 2007).

While the most significant limitation of this case study is that only a small portion of the Smith Band is represented by the three student participants, the advantages are more significant and numerous. When considering retention and attrition from the point of view of motivation, data gathering must represent context-bound situations that are rich in information and open to unexpected directions. The uniqueness of each individual case and the inevitable variety of perspective create the potential for meaningful conclusions, some of which can be applied to every situation (Bresler, 2006).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Presentation of Findings and Discussion

Across an almost two-month period, my interactions with each student participant, his parent and Mrs. Carter resulted in an intricate web of questions and answers, observed behaviors, and material culture. In analysis, I was sensitive to emerging themes from these three sources, some themes revealing themselves easily and others requiring a more complicated probative process, as expected.

A comprehensive description of each participant will be made by combining interview and observation results, followed by a discussion of the three research questions: 1) To what do student participants attribute their successes and failures in music? 2) Where does student participant locus of control reside? 3) How do attribution tendencies and locus of control enter into the decision to continue or discontinue music study?

The Instrumental Music Classroom at Smith Middle

During all my visits to Smith, the instrumental music classroom environment was extremely organized and clean, including the classroom, director's office and library. It quickly became clear that a structured routine for entering and exiting the classroom had long since been established, as students were relatively quiet, efficient and orderly as they executed daily tasks. An agenda for each rehearsal was projected onto the classroom wall daily, and Mrs. Carter conducted the tasks of classroom teaching in a quiet and efficient manner. Her demeanor with students was calm, with behavioral corrections swift and composed, and the environment was businesslike and controlled. The students as a whole were receptive to her instruction, and respectful.

The music facilities at Smith were older but well cared for, with low ceilings, window unit air conditioners and a carpeted floor. Since coming to Smith 6 years ago, Mrs. Carter had completed significant improvements, including painting the inside of the facility and installing carpet and shelving, with the help of the Band Booster Club. Band classes ranging from grades 6 to 8 were the only classes held in the room, and Band was the only music course offered at the school. The school system eliminated middle school choir programs within the last 10 years. The room itself was of average size, with doors for entering and exiting and instrument storage shelves along the side walls. Small practice and storage rooms, a library, and the director's office were across the front wall of the classroom, which she shared with a regular stream of student teachers sent to the school from the local university. Percussion instruments were placed along the back wall, in a very structured fashion (the percussionists entered the room every rehearsal and promptly pulled the instruments out to a specific location for use, and returned them to their storage location efficiently at the end of every rehearsal, the instruments were never left "out" in the classroom space). Tape lined the floor indicating where chairs and stands should be located for daily rehearsals. Every wind instrument was shelved at the end of rehearsal, and all cases and mallet bags had matching hang-tags identifying the student to which they were assigned.

After conferring with the Mrs. Carter, it was agreed that two of the three observed rehearsals were what she would consider typical. The third was atypical in that a large number of students not enrolled in the regularly scheduled class were in attendance (for the purpose of a dress rehearsal). While the routine of the typical classroom structure was maintained, it quickly became clear that the added number of students affected the overall behavior of the group. This was taken into account while I coded field notes, and I found that behaviors relevant to this study still occurred, even when consideration was given to the altered environment.

During rehearsals I was always seated in the back corner of the classroom before the students entered, with a laptop to take field notes as the rehearsal unfolded. There were instances when I felt that both Jack and Amanda were conversing with peers about my presence or turning to see me; these instances were few (two for each).

Participant One (Jack): Uncertain About Continuing

Observations/Interviews

Student and parent interviews for Jack were the first of my information gathering processes, and were held on the same day at a local high school. We met early on a weekday during the Jack's spring break, a time when his mother had scheduled to be off work as well. Contacting Jack's mother and scheduling the meeting were simple tasks: I left one message and my phone call was promptly returned, at which time the interview was set.

Jack was small in stature, most likely a result of being younger than most students in the sixth grade (I discovered later that his height, as compared to his peers, was an area of concern for his mother. She felt that he was often "intimidated."). He was clean-cut, polite, and spoke in a vernacular consistent with that of a typical young teenager. He had a slight southern accent. This thirteen year-old lived at home with his mother and father, and had older siblings, some of whom lived out of state and attended college. Both his parents were employed, and his mother (the parent participating in this study) worked in accounting, setting her work schedule so that she could be a "hands-on mom." He was a percussionist, was currently in 8th grade, and had participated in band at Smith Middle since the 5th grade.

Once the interview began, Jack was open with his responses, often elaborating. I interpreted his responses as sincere, not forced or scripted. The most prevalent theme that recurred throughout the interview was his strong commitment to soccer, an activity he participated in year-round, in and out of school, for approximately 11 hours during the school week in addition to weekend tournament travel out of state. The importance of this activity in the Jack's life was unmistakable. He indicated that soccer would play a large part in his decision

whether or not to continue with band in the future, a reality affirmed by both his mother and Mrs. Carter.

Successful in school, Jack described himself as an A/B student who "...works real hard at school just to make sure I have a good grade." While he approached school responsibly, he openly discussed instances of less-than-satisfying academic performance, for example, he "had to struggle here and there to get my grade up where I want it." This led to a revealing discussion with Jack's mother, where she described at length his propensity to exaggerate his own weaknesses, a characteristic she blames on an unhealthy desire to be successful:

He has a competitive nature. Um, we've had to temper it sometimes because he is so competitive. All his life he's been competitive. To the point of a fault. For a while in school, if he didn't make the "A," he was crushed; it's very much a competition with himself. So when he would get home I would see something was wrong and say "What's the matter?" and he would say "I didn't make the A." I would say, "Well that's okay, what'd you make?" "I made a B." I would be sure to say, "Well that's okay!" So we've had to somewhat temper it back that the B is ok, the A is not the only sign of success.

The exchange became a very telling portrait of both student and parent: while the topic of this discussion may have been academics, the revelation was about Jack's personality, feelings toward success, where he places blame for failure (in his case, internally), and the importance Jack's mother places on guiding his reactions to success and failure in life.

Jack's school behavioral record was positive, as affirmed by both Director and parent. He considered himself to be a "pretty good" percussionist. Mrs. Carter labeled him as average in ability. His leadership, behavior and focused participation in an ensemble setting were stronger, in her opinion, than his musical skills. She believed this was in large part due to his lack of

commitment to practice outside of class time, something both he and his mother validated. When asked about his lack of commitment to practicing his instrument outside of the class day, he replied that, “I’m the kind of person who will just do it in class. Like if she’s working with the flutes and I know I got something wrong, I try to look over it and look at the fingerings to figure some stuff out.” Mrs. Carter validated his statement with her own: “I see him making no improvement between class periods. But during class periods he’s very ‘with it,’ he’s with me and he wants to get better and he does get better, but there’s nothing that gets better in the meantime.” Rehearsal observations lent further evidence to this idea: Jack was efficient with music-related tasks (set up and tear down of equipment, mostly), that is, in seeing that those tasks were completed in a timely and thorough manner. His musical ability was not strong, but when errors were made, he would exhibit behaviors of both frustration (hanging and shaking his head) and persistence (working on the part quietly while the teacher was otherwise occupied).

Jack’s group of friends within the band program was small, as he identified only one close friend in the group. Most of his influential peers participated in other elective classes. Despite this fact, when asked what events were most memorable and important to his overall band experience at Smith Middle, he cited social activities (a fund-raising event and eating at McDonald’s after Festival) more often than musical ones, saying: “every once in a while I kinda look forward to Festival because I want to do good and afterwards we get to go eat McDonald’s with everybody.”

At the time of my original interview, Jack was still unsure of whether he would or would not continue with band in high school. A month later, during a return trip to his school for a member-checking interview, he informed me that he had firmly decided not to continue.

Locus of Control and Attributions

When questioned about Jack's work ethic, Mrs. Carter responded in a very similar way to Jack's mother, saying "he's very hard on himself and I suspect he is on all areas of his life. When he makes a mistake he gets very frustrated" and "he will not give up on something." Multiple examples of Jack's strong commitment to success and ability to persist toward long-term goals continued throughout the interview, observation, and questionnaire process, painting a portrait of a student with an obvious internal locus and a long list of internal attributions, most often assigned to effort. The following scenario was depicted by his mother:

This was the first time he had a big task which was the term paper, and [the teacher] sent home papers for everyone to sign, and [Jack] was on task the whole way. And he looks ahead a lot, because soccer is such a big part of his life, that [he will say], "if this is going to be due and we're going to be out of town for a soccer tournament, then let me do this now, because I don't want to be concentrating on this research when I have other things on my mind."

The locus of control questionnaire completed by Jack validated the unfolding portrait of his label as internal: only one answer out of eighteen fell into the external category, that statement being "Most students don't realize how much their achievements are influenced by accidental factors." Notable internal answers included "Capable students who don't become high achievers have not taken advantage of all their opportunities" and "It is impossible for me to believe that chance or luck plays an important role in life."

Discussion

My understanding of why Jack's strong internal locus and attribution style didn't result in a desire to continue participating in band was a direct result of comparing his experience in

soccer to his experience in band. When considering his level of commitment to soccer (daily after school practices, weekend tournament travel), how passionately he described his experiences with soccer, and the fact that his decision not to continue with band was directly related to conflicts with soccer, it was clear that soccer provided a motivation for continuation for Jack that band did not:

(Interviewer): You mentioned that you're hurt right now, and you can't play soccer. And you can't wait until you can play again. But if you stopped playing in band right now, or playing drums all together, would you miss it like that, or anything close to that?

(Jack): No. Not at all.

Jack's decision not to continue with band is likely related to his strong desire to succeed and competitive nature: he enjoys a challenging atmosphere where feelings of success are substantial and frequent. This type of environment is where a student with a strong work ethic and multiple instances of attributions in the category of effort can thrive; challenging work is to be done, and a frequent, tangible payoff system exists. And while Jack enjoyed band and never seriously considered quitting during his middle school years, he never developed the passion for band that was necessary for him to continue despite the inconvenience of conflicting extracurricular activities (soccer). This revealing conversation came from a member-checking interview:

(Interviewer): So, you enjoy band more than you dislike it?

(Jack): Yeah, that's about right.

(Interviewer): But it's not something that you consider a passion.

(Jack): Yeah. I like it. But it will put me in stressful positions if I go on. And I like soccer more.

(Interviewer): Band is not a big enough passion for you to deal with that stress?

(Jack): Yeah.

In many band rooms across the country it would be a difficult task to shape the school music environment in such a way that the musical needs of students like Jack are met while not surpassing the many students who are less driven, perhaps less internal. The situation at Smith is one of those difficult ones: there is only one band per grade level, eliminating the possibility of creating a more advanced ensemble for highly motivated students and, despite a large number of students in the program, there is only one director.

It would be unrealistic to assume that all students possessing an internal locus and effort-related attributions as strong as Jack's can be recruited into staying. In this case, his desire to be "perfect" and competitive may have resulted in the ability to participate in only one activity, because there just was not enough room in his life for more. Previous research supports this idea, with the findings that internals set more difficult goals than externals (Spector, 1982), and that a strong internal locus must be paired with "competence, self-efficacy and opportunity" such that the person is able to have a feeling of responsibility and personal control (Neill, 2006). In contrast, there are students who are "stars" in more than one activity, who can spread themselves among multiple activities if a structure exists among those activities to support a co-existence. Regardless of whether the environment at Smith and the local high school could (or needed to) change in order for Jack to decide to continue with band, it should be recognized that Jack was not a student who was walking away from his experiences with music at Smith because of discontent, a dislike of music or his teacher, or any other negative feeling. His decision was purely practical; a reality that provides some relief for those teachers who take a personal stake in the retention and attrition of students.

Participant Two (Amanda): Committed to Not Continuing

Observations/Interviews

My interview with Amanda was held at Smith, in the Director's office during the daily band class. We had been introduced previously, when she was selected to participate in the study, so we began the interview process very quickly. As we talked, the sounds of the band bled through the office door, a fitting soundtrack to the topics of our discussion. She was well-groomed, wore make-up, and dressed in her required school uniform along with a black athletic jacket that read "Smith Middle Cheerleading" on the chest.

Amanda, a percussionist who had participated in band since the 5th grade, lived at home with both her parents and an older brother who participated in the Smith Middle Band as a percussionist before playing in the high school band for four years. Her mother was employed as an administrator for a Fortune 500 Company in a nearby city, and served as the parent-participant for the study. Amanda was open with her responses, requiring little prompting. She had a strong understanding of vocabulary and concepts, and spoke clearly and concisely for her age, often elaborating—lending evidence to her academic success as it was described by both her mother and Mrs. Carter. Once the interview began, it very quickly became clear that extracurricular activities played a large role in her life, ranging from a strong commitment to school cheerleading to school clubs, tumbling, and church. Amanda spent eight hours per week participating in cheerleading alone, where she served in an elected leadership role. She served as an elected student leader in two other major school organizations as well, one a service club and the other a mock-government. Amanda's mother described her as "active," "self-motivated" and "extroverted."

Amanda's high level of commitment to extracurricular activities was validated both by her mother and band director, and served as tangible evidence of Amanda's desire to function among her peers in a highly social manner. This is directly connected to her involvement in a large peer group, most of whom participate in similar activities, and some who also participate in band. Of the latter group, which comprises five close friends of hers, all participate in cheerleading and/or in the two clubs for which Amanda serves as a leader, and all have chosen to discontinue participation in band. Participation in cheerleading and the conflicts with band that have arisen as a result are Amanda's most commonly referenced reasons for deciding not to continue with band, as supported by her statement that, "if I didn't make cheerleading [in high school] I was going to go do band." Rehearsal observations further validated the important role that Amanda's peer group serves in her school life: during a one hour period of observation there were six instances of social peer interaction, and in all four observation periods, the time after students were allowed to pack up instruments was spent interacting (laughing, talking) with the same small group of students.

When discussing Amanda's level of commitment to band, two major themes emerged that were validated both by her mother and Mrs. Carter: a high level of commitment to band in the 5th and 6th grade that made her one of the strongest players of her instrument and a decrease in that level of commitment that emerged once cheerleading began in the 7th grade. Amanda's mother attributed this pattern to a more challenging environment in the earlier grades, which was validated by Amanda. A large contributor to this environment was the presence of an influential student teacher in the 6th grade, a percussionist who provided an added level of instruction during and after the school day, which led to a positive musical experience for Amanda. According to her mother:

two years ago, 6th grade, the percussionists did a little program with a student teacher, and he did a really good job and really made them focus, and they all did the xylophones and the bells and all that kind of stuff. . . . in the last two years, I don't find that that's really been the case. It's kind of like doing time; you're not really being graded, it's not challenging.

This influential adult, according to Amanda, played a dual role in her commitment to music: while she validated that the challenging environment he provided led to a more positive musical experience on her part, a single conversation with him (in the 6th grade) played a distinct role in her decision to not continue with band in high school:

(Amanda): About 6th grade, we had an instructor, percussion leader, [student teacher name], he was here. And, um, he knew my brother because he worked with [high school band] percussion section and all that and I said one day I wanted to be like them. And [the student teacher] said "I thought you were a Cheerleader" and I was like, "yes sir" and he said, "well, you can't do both." So that's . . . right there everything changed.

(Interviewer): Have you ever talked to anybody about it since then? Do you know if that was accurate or still is?

(Amanda): I don't know, but ever since then my mind shut down, like, "I'm not doin' band in high school." Like, ever since then, I've never wanted to do band again.

When asked why she continued with band beyond the 6th grade, Amanda responded that "the only reason I'm in band is because of wanting to spend time with my friends."

While her commitment to multiple extracurricular activities and a large peer group was strong, Amanda's commitment to band did not extend beyond the class day. Mrs. Carter described her as a student who was responsible with the execution of daily tasks (i.e., setting up

and tearing down percussion equipment) but considered her to have average musical skills, which she attributes to Amanda's lack of commitment to practice outside of the class day, a statement that was validated by both Amanda and her mother. When asked "What do you think you can do to improve your abilities on your instrument, and are you willing to do it?," Amanda responded,

Probably work on anything mallets. And I'm more willing now since I have more free time since there's no basketball or football games I have to cheer at. I mean, now I'm more willing when I have nothing else to do.

When describing Amanda, Mrs. Carter stated that she has "never, ever been rude or disrespectful" and is "a good kid." She attributed these positive behavioral traits to Amanda's parents, who were highly involved in both the middle and high school band programs, chaperoning events and participating in fundraisers, even helping the Mrs. Carter move into a new home when first coming into the area. Amanda's mother validated this statement throughout the interview, describing social events for the high school percussion section hosted at her home and saying: "It's been a big part of our life. We're band parents. We go to every performance, we work concessions, we are band parents." While Amanda's parents would like to see her continue with band in high school, they support her decision not to. According to her mother, that support would be rescinded if Amanda's decision was not rational, and if she were not taking part in other activities.

Scheduling an interview with Amanda's mother was difficult and seemed inconsistent with the history of support for the band program. The process included leaving multiple unanswered phone messages, a noticeably negative reaction from Amanda after being informed that the interview could not be conducted over the phone, two cancelled interview appointments,

and a final insistence that I conduct the interview at her home (instead of at Smith or another local school, where the other parent interviews were conducted).

As the school year came to a close, a return trip to Smith for member checking revealed that Amanda had briefly considered the possibility of continuing at some point since our initial interview. However, after being accepted as a member of the high school cheerleading squad, she firmly decided not to continue.

Locus of Control and Attributions

Multiple examples of external behaviors and beliefs came to being during the data gathering process with Amanda. The first example was a glaring one; during our initial interview, when asked, “Do you believe that most of the events in your life are in your control?” to which Amanda responded, “No. I think I try to do it myself, but usually I have no control over what happens. Usually I’ll go for it but how the outcome goes is, I don’t know, never in my control.” When questioned further as to where she believes control resides, her response was “God,” a belief that previous research has directly connected to a low internal locus of control (Jackson & Coursey, 1988). While my interview with Amanda yielded this clear example of an external locus of control, her statements reflecting attribution were all within the internal category of work.

When coded from the perspective of locus and attribution style, field notes provided examples of behavior that could be interpreted to represent varying degrees of both internal and external locus. External examples included: playing musical passages incorrectly multiple times without noticeable concern until the teacher intervened (three examples); missing musical entrances due to a lack of attention (two examples); chewing gum in the classroom, a violation of established classroom policies (two examples); negative body language at times of frustration

(four examples); and interacting with peers socially at inappropriate times (six examples).

Internal examples included: practicing during a time when it was not required (Amanda was not performing a musical passage correctly, and proceeded to work on it independently while the teacher was engaged with other students—four examples); completing tasks independently and efficiently (setting up instruments, changing instruments and packing up equipment—Amanda was efficient with these tasks during all observed rehearsals); and actively seeking help from peers and the teacher to improve her performance of musical passages (two examples).

While field notes may not have provided a distinct label of internal or external for Amanda, responses to the locus of control questionnaire placed her farther in the continuum toward an external locus (when compared to Jack), with nine of eighteen questions yielding an external response. Examples of external responses selected by Amanda included, but were not limited to: “Many times I feel that I have little influence over the things that happen to me;” “It is difficult for students to have much control over whether they will be successful or not;” and “Sometimes I feel that I don’t have enough control over the direction my life is taking.” Some internal selections included: “Trusting in fate has never turned out as well for me as making a decision to work hard;” “Becoming a success is a matter of hard work, luck has little or nothing to do with it;” and “Most misfortunes are the result of lack of ability, ignorance, laziness, or all three.”

Discussion

When considering people who exhibit an external locus of control—they often blame outside circumstances for their mistakes, credit their successes to luck rather than effort, and are easily influenced by the opinions of others (*Locus, n.d.*)—it is easy to conjure the image of a low-achiever. Research has found this to be true, with a notable example being that students

exhibiting an internal locus are more likely to be successful academically than those with an external locus (Gifford, Briceno-Pierriott & Mianzo, 2006). Amanda's external locus, however, has not interfered with her ability to be successful academically, as well as in multiple other areas in her life. The effect that an external locus of control has on Amanda's life is more related to her motivation for success across multiple areas than her actual performance. For example, in the case of Amanda, good grades don't require much hard work, and the motivation for academic success is not rooted in the acquisition of knowledge or positive feelings that come from success. That motivation is more rooted in the recognition that results, as reflected in this section of my interview with her mother:

(Interviewer): How successful is Amanda at school?

(Amanda's Mom): She's very successful. She's an A/B student. She has two Bs on her interim. Right now part of that is Social Science. She doesn't like Social Science.

(Interviewer): It's not that she's not able to make an A in that class?

(Amanda's Mom): No. It's that she doesn't like it. And when she doesn't like it she doesn't put enough effort into it, in all honesty.

(Interviewer): Does the B make her upset enough to change? Or does it take a C?

(Amanda's Mom): Oh, she would not have a C. No.

(Interviewer): So if she got a C, she, not you, would be in "high gear?"

(Amanda's Mom): Yes. She likes being an A/B student.

(Interviewer): How hard does she work at being a successful student?

(Amanda's Mom): Not very hard. She's fortunate. I think high school, she'll actually have to study. She's fortunate that she hasn't struggled like a lot of other kids. [She] likes

making good grades, [she] likes the attention that comes from that. As opposed to what comes with making bad grades.

(Interviewer): Do you think that is her motivation? The benefits of being the kind of person who's good at school?

(Amanda's Mom): I think she really understands the point to it, the payoff down the road. Success in life comes from what you put into it. But she also likes the idea that that is who she is.

Further evidence of a socially-motivated external locus is found in Amanda's strong commitment to socially elevated activities (cheerleading, Beta club, student government) and the apparent influence of her peer group. The motivation to participate in these activities and commit to the work to be done is rooted in the social interactions and recognition that results, not so much in personal gain. A significant portion of Amanda's social circle participates in the same activities, and that group (with no exception) is not continuing with band. Previous research has validated this connection between an external locus and substantial desire for social interaction (Hamid, 1989) and compliance with social pressure (Lefcourt, 1982).

A direct connection can be made at this point to Amanda's early experiences in band: both Amanda and her mother described a more rigorous atmosphere in the sixth grade (at one point created by a student teacher) where progress was substantial, and performance opportunities yielded accolades from others. During that same time, Amanda had expectations of continuing on in high school in the same way her brother had: to be a member of the high school batter percussion section. Amanda, her mother and Mrs. Carter recalled a high level of commitment to band during this time: Mrs. Carter recalled that "she was really interested in 5th and 6th grade," and both Amanda and her mother described her practicing regularly at home. A

sudden change in commitment happened with the episode described earlier in the Findings section, where the student teacher informed Amanda she would not be eligible to participate in the high school drumline (marching batter percussion section). This description of Amanda's rash decision-making process serves as a strong example of how her external locus affected her participation in band not only at that time (6th grade) but also in the future.

Despite the negative connotation that may be derived from the description of Amanda's external locus, it should be noted that she was not a troubled student: she recognized work as the most prevalent indicator of success or failure (as reflected by multiple effort-related attributions), was polite, hard working, and possessed an overall positive disposition. Simply put, her motivation was not grounded in the good feelings that come from success, but rather the social status and interactions that result; a reality that, unlike many of the examples found in research of students exhibiting external behaviors (Gifford et al., 2006; Hamid, 1989; Marsh et al., 1986), doesn't cast Amanda in a negative light.

Participant Three (Mike): Sure in His Decision to Continue Participating

Observations/Interviews

During my initial meeting with Mrs. Carter to discuss selecting participants for this study, Mike's name arose because he was not the typical committed band student; he had a problematic discipline record at Smith, and the majority of the members of his peer group were not continuing with band (and were referred to by Mrs. Carter as "a tougher crowd" and her "biggest discipline . . . and attitude problems"). Despite these characteristics, when compared to his peers Mike exhibited a high level of ability on his instrument (bass clarinet), enjoyed playing, and was encouraged by the possibilities for musical growth that he believed music through high school would provide if he persisted. Mike, a bass clarinetist, was fourteen years old, lived at home with

both his parents, two younger brothers and a younger sister. He had participated in band at Smith since the 6th grade. The older of his two brothers was in his first year of band at Smith, and his father had been a percussionist in his high school band. His mother, who served as the parent-participant, was a part-time substitute teacher at a local elementary school while taking online classes toward a degree. Mrs. Carter had met Mike's mother briefly, and described her as "supportive." Scheduling interviews with both Mike and his mother proved to be a simple process, his mother returned my calls relatively promptly and scheduled a meeting, and I met with Mike during the class day at Smith. He was tall, slender, had a "shaggy" haircut and wore the required school uniform, but with his shirt un-tucked, a violation of school rules.

The interview process with Mike was different in several ways from those with Jack and Amanda. He often did not elaborate, requiring a great deal of prompting: 72 responses were three words or less, and he often answered with only a nod or shake of his head. At the same time, he was polite and courteous ("yes ma'am" was used 20 times as a response during our interview) which led to the belief that the brevity of his answers was not rooted in negative intentions, but simply that he had nothing more to say.

The process of validating information gathered from interviews with Mike proved to be a difficult one, as a number of his responses contradicted those from Mrs. Carter, his mother, or both. One example was his response to the question of whether he practices his instrument outside of class time, to which he responded that he does "once a week for 30 minutes." He went on to mention that he "just bring(s) it home and play(s)." When asked the same question, Mrs. Carter responded that "I don't think I've seen him take his bass clarinet home . . . in the last year," while Mike's mother recalled that he practices at home "maybe twice a year." Other inconsistencies that arose as a result of the triangulation process included Mike's response that

“nothing” is frustrating to him in band, while telling his mother that “he hates it” (a statement she doesn’t believe). Also, Mike cited reasons for continuing to participate in band were, “it’s fun to play my instrument” and “I get to hang out with all my friends in band” while his mother said that she had to force him to continue, and if given the choice, he would quit.

When asked during his interview if Mike had ever considered quitting band while at Smith, he responded, “In the sixth grade . . . it was boring because we were just starting to learn our instrument and everything.” This statement can be linked to others from both Mike and his mother regarding the level of challenge provided at Smith just previous to this study. It should be noted, before describing some of these statements, that the situation at Smith during the semester previous to the one in which this study was conducted was not a typical one. Mrs. Carter was on maternity leave and a short-term substitute teacher was hired, a situation that was mentioned with a negative connotation by every participant in this study. It is a common belief among the students, parents and director interviewed that the classroom environment in the Smith Band during this time was neither positive nor successful, and that it led to a spring semester in which the performing level of the Smith Band was diminished. It is difficult to assess how this particular theme (student and parent perception of rigor) was affected by the altered classroom environment. While it is known that the daily classroom environment during Mrs. Carter’s absence was not a rigorous one (for example, during this time, the eighth grade band did not practice their instruments during the class day for close to a month), it is difficult to evaluate the long-term ramifications of this period of ineffective instruction. According to Mrs. Carter, there were multiple lasting effects, including a decreased level of performance and overall commitment to band at Smith, most notably in the eighth grade band. It should be noted,

however, that while this opinion is valued, and more than likely accurate, it is difficult to validate.

Multiple discussions with Mike, his mother and Mrs. Carter were related to the theme of rigor in the instrumental music classroom at Smith, shedding light on both the idea that rigor is important to Mike, and why Mrs. Carter believes Mike is not challenged in her classroom.

Mike's mother related rigor to her son's success in band during this first exchange:

(Interviewer): Do you consider him to be successful in band? Why or why not?

(Mike's Mom): I would honestly have to say no, because I believe he can do so much more, if given the opportunity. To me the measure of success is about how much you can do when pushed to your limit. And he's not being pushed right now, so he could do so much more.

(Interviewer): He's not reaching his potential?

(Mike's Mom): Right. He has so much more potential than what he is being challenged to show.

Mike's mother also associated her son's desire to be challenged with his decision to continue in band in high school:

(Interviewer): Does Mike have an overall positive or negative attitude toward band and his instrument?

(Mike's Mother): I would say he has an overall negative attitude. Just because of the boredom factor.

(Interviewer): Does that permeate everything, right now?

(Mike's Mother): Yes, and he sees that changing.

(Interviewer): If the high school band he's going into was not successful, was mediocre at best, would you see him continuing?

(Mike's Mother): No. I think he would quit.

A similar connection was made by Mike himself, creating a greater sense of validity:

(Interviewer): What do you think you could do to improve your abilities on your instrument, and are you willing to do it?

(Mike): More practice.

(Interviewer): Yeah?

(Mike): And I'm willing to do it, but I don't need to.

(Interviewer): When do you think the time will come that you will need to?

(Mike): High school.

(Interviewer): What makes you think that?

(Mike): They play harder music.

Mrs. Carter shared a similar viewpoint, providing some explanation of why more challenging music is not played:

(Mrs. Carter): ...there's not a lot of incentive to go home and practice what he already knows. We get it done in class.

(Interviewer): Is it safe to say that his ability level is beyond what the average student in the class is, so you have to play music that is too easy for him?

(Mrs. Carter): Yup, absolutely. If anybody needs to practice in that class, [Mike] would not be on that list.

The topic of Mike's interaction with his peer group is a complex one, in part because the majority of his influential peers are not model band members and have chosen not to continue

with band in high school, according to Mrs. Carter. Rehearsal observations of Mike led to a mixed bag of rehearsal behavior: in two of the three observation periods, his class met in their regular format, with woodwind and percussion students only. In this scenario, Mike was well behaved: he sat quietly, followed instructions, played his instrument correctly, and executed tasks efficiently. The one observation period where Mike's usual class was combined with the other members of the eighth grade band (brass players) to form a class of approximately seventy, his behavior was noticeably different. During this particular rehearsal, Mike was moderately disruptive, missed musical entrances and played with poor posture. The most significant example of a change in his behavior occurred after the teacher reprimanded the class for their behavior as a whole (for excessive talking), during which Mike turned around in his chair to talk and laugh with peers. During the member checking process, in conversations with both Mike and Mrs. Carter, it was discovered that there are no students that Mike regards as "friends" in his regular class, consisting of woodwind and percussion students; all of his influential peers are members of the brass class. But while these students influenced Mike's behavior during the observed rehearsal, they did not influence his decision to continue with band, an idea that was discussed in my interview with Mrs. Carter:

(Interviewer): Do you think Mike is going to continue with band in high school?

(Mrs. Carter): I think so. We've had conversations about it. I've asked him, he's said "yes."

(Interviewer): Is that a surprise to you in any way?

(Mrs. Carter): Um, I can see it happening either way. I know he loves his instrument, but I also know he loves hanging out with a group of people who doesn't love band. His friends are a lot of people who aren't going to be in band next year. Those kids who are

on the football team and play the tuba now are not going to do all that next year. They're going to play on the football team and give up the tuba. And I know he's friends with those who are active in sports. It would not have surprised me if he said he was not going to do band.

The peer group referred to by Mrs. Carter results from Mike's involvement in multiple extracurricular activities besides band, including football, baseball, track and training as a volunteer fire fighter. None of these activities conflicted with band in a significant way. Mike's mother described his commitment to these activities as "not a passion," and Mrs. Carter was not aware he participated.

When questioned about Mike's academic success outside of band, Mrs. Carter responded "If I had to guess, he goes after things he wants to," a statement verified in my interviews with both Mike and his mother. While Mike had always been successful academically without exerting much effort (he held a 3.4 GPA, according to his mother), at the time of this study, he was enrolled in an Algebra class in which he was maintaining only a "D" average. Mike's response to his situation proved to be a valuable source of information about locus and attributions, and was described by his mother as follows:

(Mike's Mother): He ran into his first challenge this year in Algebra. That was . . . the only reason it was a challenge was because he refused to pick up the book and read or study or work on it.

(Interviewer): And when you say refuse, you mean you were pushing him to do it, the teacher was, and he wouldn't study or work?

(Mike's Mother): Yes. He just wouldn't. He's never had to study. Every year since he's been in school we've had a problem with him not being challenged and pushed. And he's always made exceptional grades. Well, this year was no different, other than Algebra.

(Interviewer): So what happened when bad grades resulted, as I'm assuming they did?

(Mike's Mother): They did. And he did nothing.

(Interviewer): Threw his hands up?

(Mike's Mother): He just shut down, and started complaining that it was too hard.

Locus of Control and Attributions

As mentioned before, after interviewing both his mother and Mrs. Carter, it became clear that Mike was not completely honest in his answers to interview questions, with a tendency to portray his school and band experience in a more positive light than did his mother or Mrs. Carter. As a result, the process of assigning a behavioral label had to be approached more carefully than it was with Jack and Amanda. Member checking proved to be a beneficial tool, as contradictions between the Mike's statements and those of his mother and Mrs. Carter were addressed and resolved (i.e. practice habits), as were some of some of what Mike considered to be misinterpretations of his own behavior (the most notable instance was my interpretation of Mike as quiet and introverted, which he thought was inaccurate; he considered this to be an accurate representation of his behavior only in the classroom, but not in his social interactions). Both scenarios led to a more candid discussion and greater understanding of Mike post member check.

When considered alone, the locus of control questionnaire and my interview with Mike yielded internal results. Mike answered every question on the locus of control questionnaire with an internal choice, including, "In the case of a well prepared student there is rarely ever such a

thing as an unfair test” and “Trusting to fate has never turned out as well for me as making a decision to work hard.” Coding of my interview with Mike revealed five examples of attributions, three of which were in the category of effort and two in the category of ability, both grouped under the heading of internal.

While the above-mentioned indicators of an internal locus were easily interpreted, others were more ambiguous. Mike’s ability to function independently of his peers (what Mrs. Carter referred to as “a self-confidence thing. He’s very self-assured”) was not a constant: his peers provided a noticeably negative influence in one of three rehearsals, but not the other two; and while the same peers decided not to continue on with band, Mike did.

Even though my interview with Mike yielded only internal attributions, his experience in Algebra was a clear example of an external attribution in the category of task difficulty, blaming his failure on the course being “too hard.” Also, while the locus of control questionnaire showed the characteristics of a remarkably internal person, Mike’s lack of desire to seek the information and knowledge necessary to be successful in Algebra could be interpreted as an indicator of an external locus.

Discussion

Mike’s intermingled internal and external behavior patterns led to the influential adults in his life viewing him differently. When told that Mrs. Carter was recommending that Mike take part in this study, two of her school administrators were surprised, as neither regarded him as a model student or one deserving of special attention:

(Director of Smith): And in conversations with the principal, when I told the principal that I had picked Mike to participate in this study they were shocked. They couldn’t believe I picked Mike to do a study. And I said that Mike has a really great story because

Mike's really into band and stuff, and it's something really wonderful for him, and they were just completely shocked. Because they know that he is probably someone you can count on to get in trouble if there is a group of people doing something wrong in the 8th grade.

Conversely, Mike's behavior in the band setting was positive, overall: he was rarely a discipline problem, played his instrument well, was an attentive and fast-paced learner, attended all required events and showed a desire to continue participating in music beyond middle school. When all factors are considered, I would label Mike as possessing an internal locus that could easily be misinterpreted as external. He is capable of success on many levels, yet works to achieve it very selectively; doesn't blame his failures on luck or fate; most often functions independently of his peers, but at times (with complete awareness) chooses not to; and abides by school and class rules selectively. Mike's manipulation of the truth both with me and his mother could be considered another element of his complicated internal locus. Mike is so internal that he is minimally influenced by outside factors, be those grades, his peers, or opinions of adults (teachers, parents); an internal characteristic that Lefcourt (1982) describes as "not simply resistant to any influence but . . . discriminating about what influences [he] will accept" (p. 51) and "a bulwark against unquestioning submission to authority" (p. 46). Simply put, Mike does what he wants to, when he wants to, and how he wants to (within socially acceptable parameters).

Mike's decision to continue with band in high school was uncomplicated, especially when compared to Jack and Amanda's decision-making process. The greatest motivations for continuation were that he enjoyed playing his instrument, anticipated a more challenging musical experience, and looked forward to interacting with friends already in the high school band:

(Interviewer): Do you plan to continue participating in band in the future?

(Mike): Yes ma'am.

(Interviewer): What are the most important factors guiding that decision?

(Mike): It's fun to play my instrument.

(Interviewer): Anything else?

(Mike): I get to hang out with my friends in band.

Mike maintained a busy extracurricular schedule (football, track, baseball, volunteer firefighter) but did not aspire to be the "star" in any activity. He was happy to simply participate. The same could be said for his participation in band. Mike was a talented musician, but did not work regularly to improve those skills outside of class, a common external behavioral trait (Spector, 1984). And while Mike cited spending time with friends as a major motivating factor for continuation in band, he was influenced by his peers only at times, as evidenced in field notes and as reported by Mrs. Carter when she made these two statements during our interview:

(Director of Smith): He has some sort of self-confidence thing that you don't really always see. He doesn't have to rely on his peers for a lot of stuff. He can play his bass clarinet and just be proud of what he does in class and tell his friends to shut up when they're talking and I'm trying to work on something.

and

(Director of Smith): Within the band, as we're doing social things, on the bus on the way to festival or here and there, he always wants to hang out with the kids who are my biggest discipline problems and my biggest attitude problems. Mike always gravitates toward them. Although I don't see that problem with him, I see who his friends are.

Mike's ability to be content with band on simple terms is an important factor when considering his decision to continue. In the cases of Jack and Amanda, the need for success,

social status and approval made the decision to continue with band a complicated one, but in the case of Mike, his extremely internal locus created an individual capable of operating as an independent individual.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide a Challenge and a Stage

Perhaps one of the greatest difficulties in teaching is discovering how to meet the needs of our students as individuals (be those academic, emotional, social or physical needs) while not neglecting the needs of the group. In coming to know what motivates the three Participants of this study, and how those needs affect their decisions to continue or discontinue participation in school instrumental music, two themes have emerged: these students' desire to be both challenged and celebrated.

All three Participants (and each of their parents) made mention at some point during the course of our interview of the desire for the music classroom to be a more musically challenging environment. While all involved valued this idea, I believe that none required it more than Jack, most likely as a result of his strongly internal locus. In this case, the evidence leads us to believe that a more challenging instrumental music atmosphere may have led to a decision to continue on with band in high school. This type of student (one possessing a strong internal locus) searches out experiences that lead to feelings of accomplishment and are a result of hard work; functions independently of his peers; and often does not persist in an environment where those needs are not met (Lefcourt, 1982). Jack's mother's description of him as "competitive with himself" is a telling recognition of his internal status, and further validates his need to be challenged in the instrumental music classroom.

Jack's decision to discontinue participation in band was not a result of a dislike of music or Mrs. Carter, but more an environment that did not meet his needs as well as one that did (soccer). In his words, "I like (band). But it will put me in stressful positions if I go on. And I like soccer more." Coupling an emphatic desire to succeed with the most basic component of

Jack's attribution style and internal locus (the belief that his own success or failure is completely dependent upon his effort and actions) results in a person disinterested in those experiences where his needs are not met, a behavior pattern supported in previous research (Lefcourt, 1982).

Mention has already been made of the difficulty inherent in meeting the needs of students who function at various levels of ability, especially in a situation such as the one at Smith (one director, many students). But if the goal is to keep internally motivated, hard working students engaged in music, this challenge has to be met. In the case of students with a locus and attribution style resembling that of Jack, perhaps the answer is to create a scenario similar to the one that Amanda and her mother described, that existed at Smith when both Jack and Amanda were in the sixth grade: a small ensemble setting (in this case, percussion ensemble) that met outside of class, where the teacher-to-student ratio was smaller, the musical material more challenging, and students were performing at a level that the students, their peers and parents alike noticed. In an environment such as this, perhaps Jack would have built the skills necessary to feel more successful (he saw himself as an "average percussionist," and Mrs. Carter labeled him as "slightly below average"), formed stronger bonds with his peers in the band program, found more "purpose and meaning" in assigned tasks (Lefcourt, 1982, p. 78) and eventually developed enough passion for band to attempt to continue in high school alongside other competing activities.

To consider exactly the meaning of "challenge" in this context is important. Creating a more challenging environment in the music classroom is not as simple as selecting more difficult music to perform (but that is often one aspect). A feeling of increased challenge can result from a heightened level of activity, a variety of experiences, or music that encourages a greater level of musical independence and thought. Using Jack and Amanda's 6th grade percussion ensemble as

an example, several characteristics may have existed to give them the feeling of a more rigorous atmosphere, including: a more active musical role as compared to performance requirements of most middle-school level band literature, including a larger number of instruments to play and fewer rests in the music; a feeling of being a soloist, as opposed to a rhythmic accompanist, as percussionists often are in the large ensemble setting; exposure to percussion instruments beyond the typical instrumentation of literature for young bands; and the more independent performance experience that often occurs in the small ensemble setting where students have increased musical responsibilities including beginning the piece, maintaining tempo, and focused listening skills that constantly assess balance and blend. From this point of view, it is easy to see how the inclusion of chamber literature in the large-ensemble instrumental music classroom can meet both the musical and non-musical needs of students in a way that the large ensemble setting sometimes cannot.

While internal and external students alike seek to be challenged in the music classroom, the needs of those more external students are more. Unlike her more internal counterparts, Amanda's external locus resulted in a desire to conform and required an elevated amount of validation from peers, teachers and family as a form of motivation; external characteristics validated by previous research (Lefcourt, 1982; Spector, 1982). How does this relate to the music classroom? To keep these students engaged and committed to participating, an environment that is not only challenging but also provides opportunities for performance and recognition is paramount. These themes are connected: when a challenging atmosphere exists, progress is significant and tangible (to both those participating and observing), and that progress (if displayed often enough) is celebrated by significant others, which leads to a greater commitment on the part of the student and continued progress. Frequent, meaningful, positive performance

opportunities, whether formal or informal, can motivate external students in a way that internal students would benefit from as well, but do not require as much.

It would be easy to overlook the needs of Mike as related to retention and attrition for one simple reason: he chose to persist. But there was a great deal to be learned from his complicated internal locus, including his repeated mention (along with his peers) of a desire to be challenged. His single and last-minute attempt at preparing for an honor band audition and the level of commitment he exhibited at that time (staying after school, bringing his instrument home) showed both a desire to excel and recognition of the need to work to achieve progress in music. While it is difficult to say whether his not being unsuccessful in that process led to a lesser degree of commitment to band (he did not audition again, nor did he continue to practice outside of the class day; but the instructional environment changed at that same time when Mrs. Carter left for maternity leave), I believe that it easily could have. While Mike was internal in that he was able to function independently of those around him and did not require a great deal of validation from his peers or teacher, he frequently mentioned his desire to perform more difficult music and how he looked forward to that need being met after moving on to high school. Perhaps if his honor band audition experience had been a more positive one, his current level of commitment to band would have been stronger, resulting in more positive outcomes for him and the class as a whole, especially his peer group that Mrs. Carter referred to as “her biggest behavior problems.”

Creating Change: Can We Shift an External Locus to Internal?

While it is true that students possessing either an internal or external locus of control can contribute to and get reward from participation in instrumental music, the point is clear that those who are more internal tend to function at a higher level. These are the students who are better

able to delay gratification, function independently of their peers, take a leadership role, and whose sense of ownership of their own success results in a stronger work ethic. Research tells us that locus of control is, to some extent, a response to circumstances, and tends to become more internal with age (Lefcourt, 1982). So change is possible, but how do we create it in the instrumental music classroom?

The beginning of instrumental music instruction is external in itself, with an abundance of “newness” in new instruments, new sounds, new surroundings, teachers and peers. Before we can create opportunities where external students can be shifted toward a more internal locus, we first have to keep them highly engaged by recreating these external gratifications, for longer than we would with more internal students. Creating an atmosphere where an external student has repeated reasons to “buy in” to what is happening in the classroom can eventually lead to a level of commitment that may trump the need for external gratification. Finding ways to create a close-knit music classroom culture where students experience little inactivity and are given frequent opportunities to perform (and those opportunities result in feedback from teacher, peers and influential others), may lead to a greater commitment not only to instrumental music, but also to the students with whom that experience is shared. Consider Amanda, and her strong commitment to friends: if a group dynamic existed in band that was similar to the one she and her friends experienced with cheerleading, where the celebration and stage led to a bond between those of a shared experience, motivation to continue may have created a greater commitment to musical work and tolerance of delayed gratification, regardless of where she believed control of coming events resided. Evidence of this type of close-knit musical culture that previous research (Adderly et al., 2001) has found to be a common factor among students in thriving music classrooms was not evident among this study’s three participants.

Searching out ways to address students' individual needs as related to retention and attrition in the instrumental music classroom serves a tangible and urgent need in our current educational environment. Students, for whatever reason, are leaving music programs in large numbers—a fact that, in many situations, must be addressed aggressively. In addition to focusing our energy on the trends we already recognize in retention and attrition: the effects of competing extracurricular activities, socio-economics, year of beginning instruction, and teaching style, perhaps we should aim to better understand each individual student by assessing what motivates him through measurements like locus of control and attribution theory, and in turn find how to best meet his needs in the classroom so that a level of commitment to music is established early and maintained across the transition from middle school to high school and beyond. While study of the aforementioned issues is relevant, it is incomplete without the recognition that the everyday experiences of students are context-bound, and the decision to continue (or discontinue) any activity is never completely disconnected from the setting and mindset in which the individual student exists (Holloway, 1997, p. 2). Armed with the results of this qualitative, in depth approach to studying the individual student, we can step back, broaden our perspective and better address the needs of our student population as a whole.

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APPENDIX A
LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY IRB EXEMPTION APPROVAL

Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight

Unless qualified as meeting the specific criteria for exemption from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, ALL LSU research/projects using living humans as subjects, or samples, or data obtained from humans, directly or indirectly, with or without their consent, must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU IRB. This Form helps the PI determine if a project may be exempted, and is used to request an exemption.



Institutional Review Board
Dr. Robert Mathews, Chair
131 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
P: 225.578.8692
F: 225.578.6792
irb@lsu.edu
lsu.edu/irb

— Applicant, Please fill out the application in its entirety and include the completed application as well as parts A-E, listed below, when submitting to the IRB. Once the application is completed, please submit two copies of the completed application to the IRB Office or to a member of the Human Subjects Screening Committee. Members of this committee can be found at <http://www.lsu.edu/screeningmembers.shtml>

— A Complete Application Includes All of the Following:

(A) Two copies of this completed form and two copies of part B thru E.

(B) A brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 1&2)

(C) Copies of all instruments to be used.

*If this proposal is part of a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment material.

(D) The consent form that you will use in the study (see part 3 for more information.)

(E) Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB. Training link: (<http://phrp.nihtaining.com/users/login.php>.)

1) Principal Investigator: Ph: Rank:
Dept: Ph: E-mail:

2) Co Investigator(s): please include department, rank, phone, and e-mail for each

*If student, please identify and name supervising professor in this space

3) Project Title:

4) Proposal? (yes or no) If Yes, LSU Proposal Number

Also, if YES, either

☐ This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant

OR

☐ More IRB Applications will be filed later

5) Subject pool (e.g. Psychology students)

*Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used: (children <18; the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the aged, other). Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI Signature Date (no per signatures)

** I certify my responses are accurate and complete. If the project scope or design is later changes, I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU institutions in which the study is conducted. I also understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at LSU for three years after completion of the study. If I leave LSU before that time the consent forms should be preserved in the Departmental Office.

Screening Committee Action: Exempted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Exempted <input type="checkbox"/> Category/Paragraph <input type="text" value="B-1"/>
Reviewer <input type="text" value="Mathews"/> Signature <input type="text" value="Robert Mathews"/> Date <input type="text" value="3/12/10"/>

Part 1: Determination of "Research" and Potential For Risk

- This section determines whether the project meets the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) definition of research involving human subjects and if not, whether it nevertheless presents more than "minimal risk" to human subjects that makes IRB review prudent and necessary.

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE CONSENT FORMS, LETTER OF PARENT PERMISSION, LETTER OF SCHOOL PERMISSION

Parent Consent Form

Study Title: Why They Stay and Why They Go: A Study of Retention and Attrition During the Transition from Middle to High School in the Large Instrumental Ensemble Setting

Performance Site: Galvez Middle School, Galvez, LA

Investigators: Principal Investigator

Kathryn Strickland

225-936-6747

lsukaty@aol.com

M/W/F 10:00-12

Faculty Supervisor

James L. Byo

225-578-2593

jbyo@lsu.edu

M/W/F 10:00-12

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research project is to examine eighth grade students' perceptions of their own character, personality, attitudes, and motivations in the context of pending decisions to continue or discontinue participation in school-based instrumental music study.

Subject Inclusion: Three student participants ($n = 3$) will be selected with the help of their instrumental music teacher, with the goal that they will represent the three areas of intentions toward continued participation in instrumental music at the high school level: one who plans to not continue; one who is undecided; one who is sure in his/her decision to continue participating at the high school level. One parent ($n = 3$) and the instrumental music teacher ($n = 1$) of each student participant will be interviewed regarding impressions of student attitude, character and motivation in general and as related to instrumental music study.

Study Procedures: In an effort to discover how character, personality, attitudes, and motivations influence this decision making process, I will interview each student, parent and music teacher using a semi-structured format; administer to students a locus of control questionnaire (a concept addressing a person's beliefs about what causes the good or bad outcomes in his or her life); and observe student behavior in the instrumental classroom setting. Interviews and fieldnotes (from observations) will be evaluated for emerging themes in conjunction with the results of the locus of control questionnaire. The identity of all participants will be kept confidential.

Benefits and Risks: The study may yield valuable information about what guides student decisions, which can in turn aid teachers in increasing retention rates in the instrumental music classroom. There are no risks to participants in this study.

Right to Refuse: Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time.

Privacy: Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

Financial Information: There is no cost for participation in this study, nor any financial compensation.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this investigation into retention and attrition in the instrumental music classroom. Please return this form to your child's teacher whether or not you wish for your child to participate.

Signatures:

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Mathews, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, irb@lsu.edu, www.lsu.edu/irb. I acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form upon request.

Yes, I give my permission for my child to participate.

Parent Signature _____ Parent Name (print) _____

Child's Name _____ Date _____

Study exempted by:
Institutional Review Board
Dr. Robert Mathews, Chair
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
P: 225.578.8692
F: 225.578.6792
irb@lsu.edu | lsu.edu/irb
Exemption Expires: 3/11/2013
Student Assent Form

I, _____, agree to participate in a study that investigates the factors affecting student decisions to continue or discontinue participation in the instrumental music classroom setting. I agree to be interviewed regarding my feelings about my

continued participation in instrumental music. I will complete the locus of control questionnaire when it is presented. I understand that I will be observed in the classroom setting. I understand that I may choose not to participate in the interviews, complete the questionnaire or be observed at any time.

Student signature: _____ Age _____

Student name (print): _____ Date _____

Witness: _____ Date _____
(Witness was present for the assent process)

Study exempted by:
Institutional Review Board
Dr. Robert Matthews, Chair
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
225-578-8692
irb@lsu.edu | lsu.edu/irb
Exemption expires: 3/11/2013

Teacher Consent Form

Study Title: Why They Stay and Why They Go: A Study of Retention and Attrition During the Transition from Middle to High School in the Large Instrumental Ensemble Setting

Performance Site: Galvez Middle School, Galvez, LA

Investigators: Principal Investigator

Kathryn Strickland

225-936-6747

lsukaty@aol.com

M/W/F 10:00-12

Faculty Supervisor

James L. Byo

225-578-2593

jbyo@lsu.edu

M/W/F 10:00-12

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research project is to examine eighth grade students' perceptions of their own character, personality, attitudes, and motivations in the context of pending decisions to continue or discontinue participation in school-based instrumental music study.

Subject Inclusion: Three student participants ($n = 3$) will be selected with the help of their instrumental music teacher, with the goal that they will represent the three areas of intentions toward continued participation in instrumental music at the high school level: one who plans to not continue; one who is undecided; one who is sure in his/her decision to continue participating at the high school level. One parent ($n = 3$) and the instrumental music teacher ($n = 1$) of each student participant will be interviewed regarding impressions of student attitude, character and motivation in general and as related to instrumental music study.

Number of subjects: 3

Study Procedures: In an effort to discover how character, personality, attitudes, and motivations influence this decision making process, I will interview each student, parent and music teacher using a semi-structured format; administer to students a locus of control questionnaire (a concept addressing a person's beliefs about what causes the good or bad outcomes in his or her life); and observe student behavior in the instrumental classroom setting. Interviews and field notes (from observations) will be evaluated for emerging themes in conjunction with the results of the locus of control questionnaire. The identity of all participants will be kept confidential.

Benefits and Risks: The study may yield valuable information about what guides student decisions, which can in turn aid teachers in increasing retention rates in the instrumental music classroom. There are no risks to participants in this study.

Right to Refuse: Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time.

Privacy: Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

Financial Information: There is no cost for participation in this study, nor any financial compensation.

Thank you for your time and willingness to participate in this study. Please return this form to the principal investigator as soon as possible.

Signatures:

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Mathews, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, irb@lsu.edu, www.lsu.edu/irb. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Subject Name (print) _____

Subject Signature: _____

Date: _____

Study exempted by:
Institutional Review Board
Dr. Robert Matthews, Chair
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
225-578-8692
irb@lsu.edu | lsu.edu/irb
Exemption expires: 3/11/2013

LETTER OF SCHOOL PERMISSION

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GALVEZ

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GMS

Sandy Waguespack
Principal

Michelle Bourque
Assistant Principal

Galvez Middle School

42018 Hwy. 933 • Prairieville, Louisiana 70769

Phone: (225) 621-2424

Fax: (225) 621-2434

June 17, 2010

Dear Sir or Madam:

This letter is to inform you that Kathryn Strickland has my permission to conduct her research study, *Why They Stay and Why They Go: A Study of Retention and Attrition During the Transition from Middle School to High School in the Large Instrumental Ensemble Setting*, at Galvez Middle School.

It is with enthusiasm and positive expectations that I await the conclusion and success of Ms. Strickland's research.

Sincerely,

Sandy Waguespack

Sandy Waguespack
Principal
Galvez Middle School

An Equal Opportunity Employer

APPENDIX C

LOCUS OF CONTROL QUESTIONNAIRE

Circle the letter (A or B) that corresponds with your beliefs.

1. A. Many of the poor achievement levels in a student's academic life is due to bad luck.
B. A student's poor performance results from the mistakes they make.
2. A. In the long run, students get the rewards they deserve in the classroom
B. Unfortunately, a student's worth is often not recognized, no matter how hard he or she tries.
3. A. The idea that teachers are unfair to students is nonsense.
B. Most students don't realize how much their achievements are influenced by accidental factors.
4. A. With the right motivation, a student can be an effective achiever.
B. Capable students who don't become high achievers have not taken advantage of all their opportunities.
5. A. No matter how hard you try, some people just don't like you.
B. Students who cannot get other people to like them don't understand how to get along with other people.
6. A. I have often found that what is going to happen will happen.
B. Trusting to fate has never turned out as well for me as making a decision to work hard.
7. A. In the case of the well-prepared student there is rarely ever such a thing as an unfair test.
B. Many times test questions tend to be so unrelated to what we do in class that studying is really useless.
8. A. Becoming a success is a matter of hard work, luck has little or nothing to do with it.
B. Being regularly successful depends mainly on luck.
9. A. When I make plans, I am almost certain that I can make them work.
B. It is not always wise to plan far ahead because many things turn out to be a matter of good or bad luck.
10. A. In my case, getting what I want has little or nothing to do with luck.
B. Many times we might just as well decide on what to do by flipping a coin.

- 11. A. Being successful with academics often depends on being in the right place at the right time.
B. Being good at school depends on ability; luck has little or nothing to do with it.
- 12. A. It is hard to know whether or not a person really likes you.
B. The number of friends you have indicates how nice of a person you are.
- 13. A. In the long run, the bad things that happen to us are balanced by the good ones.
B. Most misfortunes are the result of lack of ability, ignorance, laziness, or all three.
- 14. A. With enough effort, there could be no low achievers.
B. It is difficult for students to have much control over whether they will be successful or not.
- 15. A. Sometimes I cannot understand how teachers figure out the rewards they give.
B. There is a direct connection between hard work and my achievement levels.
- 16. A. Many times I feel that I have little influence over the things that happen to me.
B. It is impossible for me to believe that chance or luck plays an important role in life.
- 17. A. Students are lonely because they don't like to be friendly.
B. You shouldn't try too hard to please other people, if they like you.
- 18. A. What happens to me is my own doing.
B. Sometimes I feel that I don't have enough control over the direction my life is taking.
- 19. A. Most of the time I can't understand why other students behave the way they do.
B. In the long run each student is responsible for his or her success.

Note: Based on Rotter, J. (1966). Generalized expectancies for internal versus external control of reinforcement. *Psychological Monographs*, 80(1), 1-28.

APPENDIX D

STUDENT PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

I. Participant description

1. How old are you?
2. Who do you live with (parent/s or guardian/s, siblings)?
3. What is your race or ethnicity?
4. How do you feel when the teacher asks you to play by yourself in class?
5. Do you think you are a hard worker?
6. What do you do if you are having difficulty with something? (possible examples: figuring out fingerings for a scale, putting together a class project, finding a topic on the internet)
7. How do you feel if you have to work for a long time at something? (possible examples: a homework assignment, fixing something that is broken)
8. Optimistic or pessimistic? (look on the bright side, think everything will work out)
9. Do you believe that you can control most of the events that occur in your life? Why or why not?

II. School experiences

1. Do you think you are successful at school? How successful?
2. When you succeed at something, why do you think you succeed?
3. When you fail at something, why do you think you fail?
4. Think of an example of a recent circumstance where you were not successful at school (poor grade, lost game, etc). What were the details of that circumstance, and why do you think you failed?

III. The role of instrumental music at present

1. What grade were you in when you first started playing an instrument?
2. What grade were you in when you joined the school band?
3. Why did you decide to join the band?
4. Do you think you are a good player (of your instrument)? Why? How did you get that way?
5. Do you practice your instrument outside of band class? If so, about how many hours a week do you spend practicing?
6. How much does practicing improve your abilities on your instrument?
7. What band related event do you look forward to or enjoy the most?

8. Do you consider yourself to be a successful member the band program? (i.e., do you think that you contribute what is asked of you in order to contribute to the success of the overall group?)
9. What do you think you could do to improve your abilities on your instrument?
Are you willing to?
10. Do you participate in any extracurricular activities besides band? If so, what are they, and how many hours a week do you spend participating?

IV. The role of instrumental music in the future

1. Do you plan to continue participating in band in high school?
2. What are the most important factors guiding that decision?
If the answer is NO:
3. Was this a difficult decision for you?
4. If there were no conflicting activities (such as sports, studies, church) in your life, would you continue participating in band? (modify this question as necessary to conform with the participant's answer (i.e., if you didn't have to practice so much would you..., if you played a different instrument would you...)
If the answer is YES:
5. Was this a difficult decision for you?
6. How long do you plan to continue participating?
7. What long-term benefit do you think being in the high school band will provide for you?

APPENDIX E

DIRECTOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

I. Participant description

1. How long have you been teaching instrumental music? At this school?
2. What is the highest degree you have earned?
3. How successful do you consider your program to be? What factors guide this feeling?
4. How many students participate in your program?
5. How many 8th graders participate in your program?
6. Approximately what percentage of your 8th grade students continue participating in band in high school?
7. What do you believe are the most prevalent factors guiding your students who decide not to continue participating in band in high school?
8. What do you believe are the most prevalent factors guiding your students who decide to continue participating in band in high school?
9. What actions do you take to encourage students to participate in high school band?

II. Director's view of student-participant's role in the instrumental music program

1. Does participant X regularly attend school and all events required of band students outside of the class day?
2. Do you believe that participant X practices his/her instrument regularly outside of school?
3. Is/are participant X's parents/guardians active in the band program?

III. Behavioral patterns and student-participant's level of success and what that success is attributed to:

1. Does participant X regularly make eye contact with you during rehearsal?
2. Does participant X provide a positive influence over the ensemble? If so (and if not), what leads you to have the belief you do about the answer to this question?
3. Do you consider participant X to have a strong work ethic as related to band?
4. In terms of attention, how would you describe the participant's needs?
5. Is participant X able to work an extensive amount of time toward a goal without losing interest?
6. If participant X was unsuccessful at completing a task, do you think he/she would take ownership of the result or blame it on external factors?
7. How successful do you believe participant X is at school in general? (and explain)

8. How successful is X on his/her instrument? Based on what do you form that answer?
9. Is he/she talented, or does success on his/her instrument require hard work?

IV. The student-participant's attitude toward continuing instrumental music study and practical issues regarding that continuation.

1. Do you think participant X will continue to participate in band (at the high school level)?
2. What factors do you think most influence his/her decision?
3. Do you think participant X is solid in this decision, or may reconsider?
4. Have you personally discussed this decision with participant X?
If the participant does not wish to continue:
5. Does participant X's reason for not continuing to participate ring true, or do you believe there are other factors at play?

APPENDIX F

PARENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

I. Description of home atmosphere

1. What family members live at home with participant X?
2. Do parent/guardian(s) work, and if so, what are their professions?

II. Parent/Guardian perspective of the participant and his/her school experiences

1. Do you consider participant X to have an overall positive or negative disposition?
2. Does participant X tend to be shy or outgoing?
3. Do you consider participant X to be a hard worker? Why or why not?
4. How does participant X react when he/she is not successful at a particular task?
5. If participant X is not successful with a task, does he/she usually take responsibility for that failure, or blame it on something else? (i.e., if participant X failed a test, would he/she blame it on the test or his lack of studying?)
6. How capable do you believe participant X is of completing long term tasks? (is he/she able to work for long periods toward a delayed goal?)
7. How successful is participant X at school?
8. How hard does participant X work at being successful in school?
9. What do you consider to be your role in participant X's education?

III. The importance and role of instrumental music in the participant's life, and parent/guardian feelings about participation in the instrumental music performance groups at school

1. Do you or have you ever participated in an instrumental music program?
2. Do you think it's important for participant X to participate in band, and if so, why?
3. Why do you think participant X decided to participate in the middle school band?
4. How would you describe participant X's musical ability?
5. Do you consider participant X to be successful in band? Why or why not?
6. Does participant X practice his or her instrument at home? If so, how many hours a week?
7. When participant X has conversations at home in regards to band, what does he/she talk about?
8. Does participant X have an overall positive or negative attitude toward band and his/her instrument?

IV. Practical issues regarding the participant's continued participation in musical ensembles

1. Does participant X participate in any other extracurricular activities besides band?
If so, how many hours per week?
2. Do you think participant X will or will not continue participating in band in high school?
3. What do you believe is the most influential factor in his/her decision?
4. Is this the same as the reason participant X has conveyed to you?
5. Do you support his/her decision?

VITA

Originally from Gainesville, Florida, Kathryn Strickland is a candidate for the degree of Master of Music Education from Louisiana State University, where she obtained a Bachelor of Music Education degree in 2000. From 2000-2008 she taught secondary instrumental music at East Ascension High School in Gonzales, Louisiana, team-taught at both Central and Gonzales Middle Schools, and served as percussion instructor from 2000-2010. Her bands at East Ascension consistently received excellent and superior ratings at the district and state levels. From 2005-2007 she served as public relations chair on the executive board of the Louisiana Music Educators Association, and from 2003-2006 as secretary of the District IV Band Directors Association. In the Fall of 2008 she was awarded an graduate assistantship with the Louisiana State University Band Department, and in the fall of 2009 was inducted into Phi Beta Mu International Bandmaster's Fraternity. She is currently starting coursework toward a doctorate in music education at LSU, and has been awarded an assistantship in music education.