Charting a Path: How a Group of Urban Elementary Music Teachers Understand Their Career Decisions

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CHARTING A PATH: HOW A GROUP OF URBAN ELEMENTARY MUSIC TEACHERS UNDERSTAND THEIR CAREER DECISIONS

A Thesis

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

in

The School of Music

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................ iv

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................ v

CHAPTER 1 ................................................................................................................... 1
INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................................... 1
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE ...................................................................... 3
Teacher Mobility ........................................................................................................ 3
Support and Satisfaction .......................................................................................... 6
Pre-Service Music Teachers’ Employment Preferences ....................................... 7
Literature Conclusions ............................................................................................. 10

CHAPTER 2 ................................................................................................................ 11
ASSUMPTIONS AND INTERPRETIVE LENS ......................................................... 11
PURPOSE .................................................................................................................. 13

CHAPTER 3 ................................................................................................................ 15
METHODS AND PROCEDURES .............................................................................. 15
Design ...................................................................................................................... 15
Participants and Sampling ...................................................................................... 16
Participants’ School District ................................................................................... 20
Data Collection ........................................................................................................ 21
Analysis ................................................................................................................... 24
Authenticity in Findings .......................................................................................... 27

CHAPTER 4 ................................................................................................................ 29
FINDINGS: RESEARCH QUESTION 1 ................................................................. 29
Personal Considerations ......................................................................................... 29
School Atmosphere ................................................................................................. 31
Student Behavior ..................................................................................................... 32
Teacher Student Relationships .............................................................................. 33
Diversity ................................................................................................................... 34
Isolation .................................................................................................................... 35
Support .................................................................................................................... 38
Administrative Support ......................................................................................... 38
Classroom Support ................................................................................................. 41
Value and Expectations ......................................................................................... 42
Other Types of Support .......................................................................................... 44
Student Opportunities ............................................................................................ 46
Choice ....................................................................................................................... 48
FINDINGS: RESEARCH QUESTION 2 ................................................................. 49
Sandra’s Career Journey ......................................................................................... 50
Natasha’s Career Journey ....................................................................................... 58
CHAPTER 5 ........................................................................................................................................ 65
DISCUSSION .................................................................................................................................... 65
  Support ........................................................................................................................................ 65
  Positive Change and Multi site Instruction .................................................................................. 68
  Personal Factors ........................................................................................................................... 69
  Efficacy and Stages of Teaching .................................................................................................... 70
  Isolation ........................................................................................................................................ 73
  Lack of Choice and the Reality of Job Change ............................................................................. 75
  Implications and Suggestions ......................................................................................................... 76

REFERENCES ..................................................................................................................................... 80

APPENDICES ..................................................................................................................................... 83
  A – OPEN ENDED ELECTRONIC QUESTIONNAIRE IRB APPROVAL ........................................... 83
  B – MULTIPLE CASE STUDY IRB APPROVAL ............................................................................. 84
  C – QUESTIONNAIRE .................................................................................................................. 85
  D – EMPIRICAL GENERALIZATIONS CODEBOOK ..................................................................... 90

VITA ..................................................................................................................................................... 93
LIST OF TABLES

3.1 Multiple Case Study Data Analysis Progression.........................................................26
ABSTRACT

This qualitative study was an investigation of the career journeys of two elementary music teachers employed in a large urban district. The study also examined the job changing experiences of eight other elementary music teachers in the same district. Perceived employment considerations (factors that are weighed when considering working at one school over another), and the detailed employment experiences of two of these teachers, were explored in order to better understand teacher mobility and attrition. An open ended electronic questionnaire was sent to all 28 elementary music teachers employed by the district. Two teachers were later purposefully sampled from the questionnaire participant group to participate in a multiple case study. These two teachers described their experiences when changing jobs, teaching in various schools, and contemplating working at one school over another. Questionnaire data were used to provide additional insight into the phenomenon and inform the multiple case study. Findings represent an amalgamation of both questionnaire and case study participants’ perceptions of their employment history, and preferences for employment conditions which have been constructed throughout their careers. Salient themes extracted from questionnaire and case study participants’ described experiences and employment preferences included: (a) personal considerations, (b) school atmosphere, (c) support, (d) student opportunities, and (e) choice.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When music teachers change schools, they generally do so to seek improved working conditions (Hancock, 2016). Past research on teacher attrition, migration, mobility, retention, and employment preference has shown that various types of support, a desire for personal accomplishment, and a multitude of personal factors are evaluated when considering job satisfaction and employment change (Baker, 2007; Gardner, 2010; Hancock, 2008, 2016; Madsen & Hancock, 2002). Administrative support, particularly, has been reported by preservice teachers as an important factor when deciding where to work (Robinson, 2010) and by in-service teachers as a contributing factor when deciding to change jobs (Baker, 2007).

Teachers’ employment preferences, or considerations that are weighed when seeking employment at one school over another, are often referenced as specific factors that may predict attrition, retention, or migration. Past research has identified the most common predictors of attrition, retention (Gardner, 2010; Madsen & Hancock, 2002), and migration (Hancock, 2008) in music teachers, which built on large scale research of turnover in the teaching profession as a whole (Ingersoll, 2001). Despite general knowledge of these predictors, there is insufficient understanding of what these employment considerations mean to individual teachers, and how the meaning may differ from one teacher to another.

Changing jobs within the field of teaching means working in a new building, creating relationships with new colleagues, navigating the normalized and possibly foreign procedures of a new workplace, and forging relationships with new students. Such a significant life change likely involves considerable contemplation of preferable employment conditions, or the prevalence of one (or more) noteworthy factors that ultimately steer the decision. This qualitative
study focused on these preferences as they are perceived by music educators working in a large urban school district. For these teachers, the journey through their careers was far more complex than a simple list of factors for consideration, further highlighting the need for understanding individuals when seeking to address attrition or mobility within a school or district.

I used qualitative methods to expand upon past large scale studies; by digging deeply into the lived experiences of a small number of teachers, a depiction can be created of their own understanding of their employment preferences. This can help others make sense of attrition, retention, and migration predictors in the context of an elementary music teacher’s working environment. Initially, I conducted an open ended electronic questionnaire to illuminate 10 urban elementary music teachers’ employment preferences through the description of their experiences. Secondly, I used multiple case study design to better understand two questionnaire participants’ perceptions of their employment preferences and how they made meaning of their paths through their careers. These two teachers’ experiences add a layer of individualized description to past research on the topic, and allow readers to better understand the phenomenon of elementary music teacher employment change by living vicariously through these teachers’ experiences.

My own connection to this topic stems from both my experience as a teacher and my personal life. While teaching public school band I was witness to a number of school music programs with a “revolving door” of teachers. The negative effects of music teacher turnover in these schools were noticeable, and sparked my interest in what it would take to retain good teachers in those schools. My inspiration to investigate elementary music teachers’ employment preferences, specifically, grew with the development of a close personal relationship with Natasha, who would later become a participant in this study. Hearing her experiences with parents, faculty, administrators, and the influence this had on her job satisfaction and her
perception of future employment opportunities informed my view of the topic before research began, while also providing motivation to conduct this study in the district where she was employed.

In the next section, I will review past literature on teacher mobility, support and satisfaction, and pre-service music teachers’ employment preferences, to provide the reader with perspective and orientation around the topic of teacher employment considerations, and the phenomenon of teacher employment change.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Teacher Mobility

According to Ingersoll (2001), general education research has often downplayed the negative effects of teacher mobility on the education system because mobility implies teachers are simply leaving schools but not leaving the profession. Music teachers change schools and leave the profession due to a large amount of factors, some of which are unrelated to schools or the profession (Madsen & Hancock, 2002). However, researchers have revealed a handful of salient factors within both the school environment and teachers’ personal lives that contribute to teacher mobility, retention, and attrition (Gardner, 2010; Hancock, 2008; Hancock, 2016; Ingersoll, 2001; Madsen & Hancock, 2002; Russell, 2012).

Ingersoll (2001) conducted a study in which an underlying assumption of data analysis was that teacher mobility impacts schools in the same manner as teacher attrition. He argued that a teacher leaving a school disrupts the school environment, regardless of whether they are taking a job at another school or leaving teaching for another profession. Ingersoll reasoned that teacher mobility disrupts the fabric of the school environment, and can have implications in schools that
have difficulty filling job openings. He found that schools that have difficulty filling job openings are twice as likely to have a higher than normal turnover rate (turnover includes both mobility and attrition). Private schools (18.9%) were more likely to experience teacher turnover than public schools (12.4%) and high poverty schools (15.2%) were also more likely to experience teacher turnover than those designated as low poverty (10.5%). Not surprisingly, schools with high attrition rates also had high mobility rates, indicating that there could be a relationship between the two.

Mobility in music education was studied by Russell (2012) in a survey of 321 secondary music teachers. Of those surveyed, 45.7% intended to leave their position (migrate or leave the profession) within 5 years. However, three quarters said they would remain in their position the following year. The music educators who did not wish to leave their current jobs cited higher levels of “satisfaction with their professional environment as well as student and psychological issues” (p. 74). Russell also found that music teachers who planned to leave their jobs taught a greater number of minority and special needs students than those who planned to stay.

Hancock (2008) analyzed data from the national 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey. Using the survey responses of 1,931 K-12 public and private school music teachers, Hancock determined which teachers were at a high risk for attrition/migration, and those were at a low risk. The characteristics and environments of high and low risk music teachers were examined to elucidate predictors of attrition/mobility. His findings suggested a wide range of factors that attribute to attrition/mobility, however, some of them did not align with previous research on the topic. Notably, Hancock found participation in a mentoring program was not a predictor of attrition/mobility.
Some elements that did correlate to attrition/mobility provide valuable insight into the intricacies of this complex issue. Hancock (2008) found that age was a predictor of music teachers leaving the teaching profession or migrating, with teachers below the age of 30 being more likely than older teachers. Women were more likely than men to leave teaching or change schools. Those teaching in a private school setting were more at risk for attrition/mobility than those teaching at public schools. Music teachers who perceived high levels of administrative and parent support, and those who suggested they were more effective teachers, were at a lower risk for attrition/mobility. Interestingly, putting in more time on “instructional and noninstructional activities outside the regular school day” was also found to predict lower risk of attrition/mobility (Hancock 2008, p. 140).

Hancock (2016) evaluated music teachers’ perceptions of improved working conditions after changing from one teaching job to another, as well as teachers who had left the profession all together, by analyzing national data from the 2003-2004 Schools and Staffing Survey and the 2004-2005 Teacher Follow-up Survey. The most common reasons cited for changing jobs were: (a) involuntary (asked to leave, etc.), (b) administrative support, (c) general job dissatisfaction. The broadest and most far reaching finding of the study is that teachers generally perceived job change as having a positive outcome. Teachers moving jobs reported improvements across most surveyed job satisfaction criteria.

Similarly, Gardner (2010) analyzed data from the 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey and the 2000-2001 Teacher Follow-up Survey in order to determine which factors influence the retention, turnover, and attrition of K-12 music teachers. Gardner found that music teachers chose to work at different schools because of negative workplace conditions at their previous schools, and administrative support had the largest effect on both job satisfaction and retention.
Gardner also found that music teacher mobility did not differ largely from non-music teacher mobility.

Administrative support and school environment factors are frequently cited as some of the most significant reasons for music teacher mobility (Baker, 2007; Gardner, 2010; Hancock, 2016). However, other elements often contribute to mobility which have been found to be more common in music teachers. Music teachers more often hold a part time position than non-music teachers and teach at multiple schools in a district instead of working exclusively in one school building. Music teachers also believe they receive less support for students with special needs than non-music teachers (Gardner, 2010). Gardner described how these factors often contribute to difficulty in teaching assignments and warrant understanding and support from administrators.

Madsen and Hancock (2002) collected 137 responses to a survey administered to music teachers who had graduated from one music teacher preparation program in the previous 10 years. The researchers were interested in how many of these graduates were still teaching, what their teaching environment was like, and the level of support for their teaching perceived by the educators themselves. In addition to quantitative data analysis, teacher responses were coded into 4 categories: (a) administrative support, (b) parental support issue, (c) financial issue, (d) personal issue. Written responses most commonly addressed personal issues, while administrative support was the second most common.

Support and Satisfaction

Madsen and Hancock (2002) also noted that while administrative support was generally rated favorably on a scale of 1 to 10, written responses addressed administrative support at a high rate. Though it was rated favorably, this high rate of written responses about administrative support could speak to other findings which represent support and satisfaction as contributing
factors in teacher retention and attrition (Baker, 2007; Hancock, 2016). Additionally, perceptions of support in the same context can differ depending on the teacher, administrator, and school environment (Baker, 2007; Russell, 2012).

Baker (2007) conducted a survey of 87 early career (first 5 years) secondary choral teachers in Texas as well as 53 administrators. In addition, nine people were randomly selected from the group of teachers and administrators to participate in open ended interviews as a follow-up to survey questioning. The participants reported being generally satisfied with their current places of employment. However, their satisfaction varied by location type, with those teaching in suburban schools reporting higher levels of satisfaction than those teaching in both rural and urban schools. Most of the early career choral teachers who intended to continue teaching the next year also intended to stay at their current school. Those who intended to change schools selected “other” as the reason.

Baker (2007) also found that early career choral teachers and their administrators varied when asked about the benefits of various types of support. Notably, among those who intended to either quit teaching or move to a different school, the teachers and their administrators differed largely on the most beneficial types of support. The early career choral teachers employed in urban schools cited wanting to leave the profession at a higher rate than those of suburban or rural schools. Reasons for these teachers wanting to leave the profession included lack of administrative support and low school morale.

Pre-Service Music Teachers’ Employment Preferences

Administrative support has also been found to be the most important factor for preservice teachers when asked to weigh factors associated with working at one school over another (Robinson, 2010). Additionally, researchers have studied the individual preferences of preservice
teachers in regards to their considerations for future employment and found that they would generally prefer to teach in suburban areas and schools similar to their previous experiences (Bruenger, 2010; Kelly, 2003). In a survey of 187 preservice music teachers, Robinson (2012) analyzed participant responses in order to determine which factors were most import when considering future employment. The preservice teachers cited administrative support, parental and community support, and program sustainability as the most important factors. Preservice teachers perceived administrative support as an important aspect of future employment, a common finding in similar research of in-service teachers (Baker, 2007; Hancock, 2016). Preservice teachers indicated school SES (socioeconomic status) and race/ethnicity makeup as least important factors when considering future employment. However, Robinson also found that participants seemed to want to teach in schools where the culture and size closely matched their experiences in K-12 schools as a student, and also where they completed their preservice teaching assignments; findings which support previous employment preference research by Kelly (2003).

Kelly (2003) surveyed preservice music teachers at four large universities in order to determine how cultural factors affect preservice music teachers’ preference for future teaching environment. Through the survey, most participants denoted their high school choral programs as being large, suburban, and either superior or excellent in quality. When responding to survey questions asking where they would like to student teach and where they see themselves eventually teaching full time, participant responses were similar to their answers to questions about their previous experiences. Specifically, most participants’ responses indicated a preference for large suburban programs, a reflection of their past experiences.
When asked to rate the quality of their elementary, middle school, and high school music programs, participants in Kelly’s (2003) study rated their high school programs as higher quality than their elementary and middle school programs. Kelly suggests these positive experiences could explain the higher rates of respondents wishing to student teach and eventually teach full time at high schools. Similarly, participants’ responses indicated a preference to teach in low minority suburban schools. Kelly expressed a clear implication of these results: pre-service music teacher education programs need to work to recruit students into the profession who represent the diversity of the population as a whole, because of “the tendency of students to seek teaching positions in environments from which they came” (p. 48).

Bruenger (2010) wanted to understand the “criteria” a small group of undergraduate students used to decide whether they should teach in an urban setting upon graduation, or in a rural or suburban setting instead. Using an action research design, Bruenger interviewed 11 participants who had graduated from her teacher preparation program in the last 5 years. The participants were selected by three faculty members as the most excellent graduates from the previous 5 years. Four of Bruenger’s participants did seek positions in urban school districts, but did apply to “midurban” Title One schools. The label midurban was used in the study to designate schools that were part of a large, mostly urban, district but on the “fringes” of the urban area, therefore having access to resources that result from being located near wealthier suburbs. Bruenger wrote that these midurban schools were of similar socioeconomic makeup as the nearby urban schools, but opportunities for ensemble success were perceived by the participants as being higher. Three of the 11 participants sought employment in urban districts, but only one eventually taught in one. Reasons given for applying to teach in an urban district included location and “to make a difference” (Bruenger, 2010, p. 35). Those who did not seek
positions in urban schools said they would consider it if there was a financial incentive and they were guaranteed administrative support.

**Literature Conclusions**

Despite a large body of research on teacher attrition and retention, the reasons for, and effects of, teacher migration/mobility are still underrepresented in the literature. Music teacher employment preferences specifically, which have implications in music teacher mobility, have mostly been investigated only in preservice music teachers. There is a need for more studies that focus on clearly presenting in-service music teachers’ specific employment preferences. To avoid overgeneralizing, this research may better serve music teachers by being conducted regionally, or in individual school districts. There is also a need for focused, district-level, qualitative studies that provide more personalized depictions of the teachers’ employment preferences and daily struggles that can be remedied. It is important to be able to specifically describe music teacher employment preferences in order to enact district policies that consider these preferences, and make recommendations that will attract teachers to schools where there are shortages of good, long term teachers.

In the next section I provide a description of my own position and assumptions in regards to teacher employment preferences and change, and also define the interpretive lens through which the multiple case study was conducted. I also detail the overarching purpose of this study and my questions which guided it.
CHAPTER 2

ASSUMPTIONS AND INTERPRETIVE LENS

As a teacher who has previously chosen to work at one school over another, I often think of my own employment considerations when trying to gain perspective on the topic. Anecdotal evidence certainly informed my perception before beginning this study. I am inclined to notice teachers’ references to “school reputation” because the reputation of various schools (as described by colleagues) has been my most significant employment consideration. Additionally, my close relationship with an elementary music teacher has molded my perspective of elementary music teachers’ employment considerations through an in-depth knowledge of her own experiences. However, delving into past empirical research on the topic has added enormous depth to my understanding of the phenomenon by bringing perspective to the weight of employment considerations I previously ruminated about.

The multiple case study was approached with the interpretive lens of social constructivism. The underlying assumption of this interpretive framework is that participants’ employment preferences, and how they are weighed, have been altered through a series of social experiences which resulted in a complex, multi-faceted, and individualized perspective of this issue. As such, case study participants’ own views of the phenomenon of school change, as well as their perceptions of “historical and cultural norms” (Creswell, 2013, p. 29) are represented fully in the findings of this study and were considered thoughtfully throughout data collection and analysis.

The impetus for the use of a social constructivist lens was a participant in the questionnaire who focused exclusively on administrative support in his responses to questions about job change. I perceived his propensity to focus on administrative support as a result of his
only job changing experience. He described this experience as: “I was not let go or transferred. I chose to leave because I could not work under an administration that did not want me there.”

When examined through a social constructivist lens, his described experience has almost certainly influenced his future employment considerations. Similarly, a more experienced teacher could view employment considerations through a more judicious lens; constructed gradually across a number of employment experiences. A more experienced teacher could also be more likely to thoughtfully weigh multiple considerations as a result of her experience with numerous school changes.

The use of a social constructivist lens carries with it implications for the multiple case study. Case study participants’ employment considerations were likely influenced by their participation in the questionnaire. The open-ended questions presented to participants during the questionnaire, as well as the general introspection that accompanies answering such questions, may have resulted in participants focusing on their concluding answers to those questionnaire items during participation in the multiple case study. Conversely, they may have been open minded to considering more factors when contemplating employment change because of the reflective experience and the time that passed between the questionnaire and the case study interviews. The use of Seidman’s (2013) recommendations for interview protocol, as well as the criteria of his three-interview series, ensured participants of the multiple case study were allowed to develop descriptions of their experiences without being strictly bound to their participation in the questionnaire.

Conducting this research has afforded me with rich insight into 2 teachers’ employment changes and their considerations when navigating such a significant life event, with further perspective gained from a glimpse into 8 other teachers’ employment changes. I gained
knowledge from the questionnaire, which then informed the multiple case study. I then constructed knowledge with the 2 case study participants throughout our meaningful interviews and my later observations at their schools. There is no doubt that this experience has shaped both my employment preferences and those of the participants’. The interview process stimulated introspection for the participants’, and hopefully brought some clarity to their perceptions of their career paths.

PURPOSE

After reading and summarizing previous research related to the topic of teacher employment preference, retention, and mobility, I still wanted to know what thought processes occur when music teachers consider employment change and how they make meaning of their career paths in retrospect. Understanding more about these employment considerations could provide insight into the decisions that lead to music teachers leaving one school for another, and also uncover specific information that can be disseminated to the district in which the research occurred. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to learn how a group of urban elementary music teachers describe and understand various aspects of employment when considering a school change. Explaining how these teachers understand their employment considerations, both from their perspective and mine, is necessary to expand upon past research which has focused largely on identifying these factors (Gardner, 2010; Hancock, 2008; Hancock, 2016; Ingersoll, 2001; Madsen & Hancock, 2002). To address the purpose of this study, two research questions guided my research:

1. What do elementary music teachers in a large urban school district contemplate when undertaking a school change?
2. How do two elementary music teachers in a large urban school district understand their career journeys?

In the next section, I will provide my methodology for answering these research questions and include measures taken to ensure authenticity of findings. The qualitative methods used were intended to reveal the unspoken intricacies of participants’ experiences in different schools and their resulting inclinations to seek employment at one school over another. Varied forms of data collection ensured data which would faithfully represent participants’ experiences and provide an opportunity for diverse analysis procedures intended to further bolster the reliability of this study.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Design

An open ended electronic questionnaire was used in order to begin to understand the job changing experiences of elementary music teachers in a large urban public school district and to illuminate these teachers’ employment considerations. Twenty-eight participants were contacted individually through email and asked to answer open ended questions contained in a Google Form. This method of inquiry allowed me to potentially collect data from all elementary music teachers employed in the same large district. Participants were asked to respond to closed ended demographic and classroom environment questions, then answer one of two sets of employment centered questions. The participants had access to different sets of employment centered questions, depending on if they had changed schools in the past (determined through the demographic portion of the questionnaire).

Electronically delivered open ended questioning was chosen as an interview methodology to foster data collection from a larger sample size than in person interviews would have feasibly allowed (Fischer et al., 2014). Participant responses occurred on their own time and helped alleviate in person interview scheduling issues. Participants may have been more willing to respond honestly to questions delivered electronically because of the perceived anonymity associated with interacting through the internet (Meho, 2006). The ability to potentially collect data from 28 participants provided a wide array of personal experiences, enhancing the validity and breadth of the study.
After collecting and analyzing data from the questionnaire, a multiple case study was used to discover how two elementary music teachers understood and weighed various personal and school related employment considerations when undertaking, or considering, changing jobs within the field of elementary music education. Two participants from the questionnaire were interviewed and observed in order to obtain richer descriptions of perceptions of their employment preferences, and ultimately to provide insight into the phenomenon of teacher employment change. Case study was chosen as a research methodology to gain a “rich, ‘thick’ description of the phenomenon under study” (Merriam, 1988, p.11), and to focus the study within the bounded system of elementary music teacher employment change (Cresswell, 2013). A multiple case study was selected to elicit two participants’ detailed experiences, which yielded contrasting descriptions of decision making processes (Yin, 2009).

**Participants and Sampling**

Sixteen participants out of a total of 28 elementary music teachers employed in the large urban school district responded to the open ended electronic questionnaire, resulting in a 57% response rate. Of the 16 respondents, 1 noted that she had been displaced from her school site due to a recent flood event, and therefore was teaching at a different location. Because some of her responses represented this significant event, her data were not included for analysis. Additionally, one teacher described her assignment as a “talented music teacher,” meaning she traveled between multiple schools in the district and gave small group music lessons to students who had been selected to participate in the talented music program. Her data was also excluded from the study due to the unique circumstances of her position and in an effort to isolate the participant group to only elementary music teachers employed at one school site.
Of the 14 remaining participants, 4 were still employed at their first teaching job. These four participants’ responses were coded, but the decision was made to exclude their data from further analysis and inclusion in this study. By purposeful design, the four participants who were employed at their first job were not able to access and answer questions pertaining to the topic of job change, which was a central focus of many of the open ended questions posed to other participants and a key element of the purpose of this study. Ten participant responses were included in the findings of this study.

I notified the large urban district’s arts supervisor via email of my intent to conduct a study 13 days before emailing teachers and requesting their participation. In order to provide me with the email addresses of the elementary music teachers employed in his district, the arts supervisor carbon copied all elementary music teachers in his district on his reply to me. This resulted in an unintentional pre-notification of the study to participants when they all received the personalized email originally sent to the arts supervisor.

Participants were chosen due to their employment in a large urban school district which was near the researcher’s university, and because this large urban school district employed a sizable number of elementary music teachers. I hypothesized that elementary music teachers in one large district would have had similar experiences when considering employment opportunities due to their decision to seek employment in the same district. Illumination of these shared employment considerations has clear implications within the district by aiding administrators in attracting and retaining elementary music teachers.

Elementary music teachers were specifically chosen, instead of secondary ensemble teachers, because of the focused circumstances of their employment. Secondary music teachers, whose teaching responsibilities concentrate primarily on large ensembles, likely evaluate
employment opportunities based on a number of factors specific to ensemble teaching and program development. I expected elementary music teachers’ employment preferences to be more clear and focused because of fewer “program” considerations that may affect secondary music teachers’ decisions (e.g. large budget, previous ensemble sizes, previous ensemble performance ratings).

However, based on many past interactions with elementary music teachers, I expected participants to describe having placed some weight on the program aspect of working at one elementary school over another. An elementary music program generally encompasses (a) the presence or lack of a classroom for the teacher, (b) an expected number of school performances, (c) designated monetary resources, and (d) equipment resources. In addition to these program considerations, elementary music teachers generally teach all students in a school. The program considerations are something the elementary music teachers could and often do, to some extent, control and improve. I was extremely interested to discover how participants weighed these schoolwide and program considerations, in addition to personal considerations, when seeking employment.

Two participants from the questionnaire were purposefully selected for the multiple case study because of their described experiences and convenience of location. All teachers who participated in the questionnaire lived and taught within an hour of my home and university. The convenience provided by their location facilitated the eight total in-person data collection events (interviews and observations). Stratified purposeful sampling was used to select these two different but comparable participants (Creswell, 2013). Further, these two participants met the following criteria as judged by their participation in the questionnaire: (a) gave detailed answers to open-ended questions, (b) described employment change that was interesting, unique, or
typical, and (c) represented two contrasting employment histories to promote comparison during data analysis.

Sandra, 1 of the 2 case study participants, was a late career teacher (approximately 25 years of experience) with an enormous number of experiences at different schools. Her current district is the only public school district she has ever been employed in. For approximately the first 10 years of her time in the district she was assigned to two schools each year, with those schools sometime changing in the middle of the year. This resulted in her teaching at approximately 13 different schools across the district during her time there. She emphasized didactic pedagogy in her lessons while drawing on her past experiences of being subjugated as an immigrant. She gives special attention to students who do not speak English as their first language, and strives to teach tolerance and inclusion to her students.

The other case study participant, Natasha, was an early career teacher (4 years of experience) who has been employed by two public school districts. Her first full time job was at a rural school which provided all of the support and mentorship she felt she needed. In her current district, she feels like she lacks this support and mentorship, and has been overwhelmed by many of the challenges typical of teaching in a high poverty urban school. Her employment history was short, but full of experiences which rapidly constructed her preferences for employment.

Due to the involvement of human participants, exemption from oversight by an Institutional Review Board was requested and subsequently approved for this study. Documents submitted detailed this research project along with evidence that it would not bring harm to the participants. However, discussing employment decisions can include recounting personal, and possibly sensitive, experiences. Therefore, all questionnaire participants digitally signed a
consent form and were aware that they were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time. The two case study participants, in addition to their head administrator, were asked to sign a similar form. I assured anonymity in each email to questionnaire participants and later to case study participants, to promote honest and thoughtful responses. All district, school, supervisor, and participant names appearing in this study are pseudonyms.

Participants’ School District

All of the schools in the large urban district from which teachers were sampled are designated as Title I schools. In 2013, 89% of students in the district qualified for free or reduced price lunch, though all students in the district currently receive free lunch with no requirement to apply for the benefit. Eighty-nine percent of students who attended school in the district identified with a minority race. This percentage differs greatly from the larger county as a whole (roughly equal proportions of Black and White with a small percentage of other minorities). The district used to serve the entire county, until small, predominantly white middle class areas began forming their own school districts. Racial divides are further exacerbated in the county due to the prevalence of mostly religious private schools which act as an additional option for residents with the financial means to send their children there.

Prior to conducting the questionnaire, I was unaware of the district’s previous elementary music teacher job assignment policies. In two questionnaire participants’ responses, they described working in their current district for many years but for a portion of the time they were assigned to teach at two or more schools. These school assignments changed each year, and occasionally in the middle of the year; the teachers had no choice in their assignments. I now know that the district changed this policy around 2005 and permanently placed only one elementary music teacher at most schools.
This policy change is likely the reason many of the teachers who responded to the questionnaire reported teaching at a surprisingly large number of schools. One case study participant described the transition that resulted from this policy change. The teachers were asked to choose which school they would prefer to make their permanent place of employment. According to this case study participant, most teachers chose their “home” school; i.e., the school they considered their primary place of employment, despite splitting their time between two or more schools. This policy change likely explains why many questionnaire participants reported working at many schools, but had been at their current school for approximately 10 years. If I had knowledge of this past district policy before conducting the questionnaire, participant answers would have been clearer when responding to how many teaching jobs have you had instead of how many schools have you taught in. However, teaching in a large number of schools likely provided these teachers with tremendous perspective on the topic of employment preference.

**Data Collection**

A Google Form, delivered through a personalized email, was used first to efficiently collect and organize participant responses to open ended questions and basic questions about demographic information. An individualized email was used to increase the response rate and make a personal connection with participants (Fischer et al., 2014). The elementary music teachers in the large urban school district received these personalized emails on three occasions requesting their participation in this study. A follow-up email was sent 4 days after the initial email to teachers who had not responded, and a final email was sent 8 days after the first email.

The Google Form facilitated collection and analysis of data by automatically filtering data and permitting aggregation of data into a spreadsheet. Participant answers to open ended
questions were immediately accessible to the researcher after submission of the Google Form and sortable by question and participant. Additionally, participants answered each question independently without the researcher in the room. Participants had ample time to think privately and respond thoughtfully (Meho, 2006).

I ensured the Google Form was inviting through encouraging anonymity and full, descriptive responses. The Google Form was designed such that demographic and open ended questions would appear one at a time, minimizing distraction and focusing the participant on a single item. Below each open ended question a single line response area appeared that would expand infinitely as the participant typed. I perceived this single line response area as being somewhat discouraging of detailed, rich responses, so the following text was included above each open ended question: “The space will expand as you type. Feel free to be as detailed as possible in your answer.” Despite the insertion of this text, many participants did not respond with more than 1 or 2 sentences per question.

Some questionnaire participant responses were altered when quoted in the findings section of this document to enhance clarity through the remedying of grammatical errors, spelling errors, and minor adjustments to sentence structure. Additionally, a semi-structured exploratory interview, approximately 10 minutes in length, was conducted with Natasha prior to deployment of the questionnaire. During the interview, I asked her to talk about administrative support in her school and what it meant to her. Data from this interview was included for added depth and understanding about her experiences.

After analysis of questionnaire data, a multiple case study was carried out which included interviews, observations, and collection of relevant artifacts. All case study interviews were conducted in accordance with Seidman’s (2013) three-interview series. Among the benefits of
this structured interview process was the opportunity for interviews to occur on different days, which alleviated the concern of one interview not proving fruitful because the participant was ‘just having a bad day.’ The first interview provided context by asking participants to recount life experiences relating to schools and teaching from as far back as they could remember until the present. During the second interview, participants were asked to provide a detailed account of their lived experiences when changing jobs or considering an employment change. The purpose of the third interview was to provide meaning by addressing “the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants’ work and life” (Seidman, 2013, p. 22).

Interviews were schedule for approximately 90 minute sessions, which Seidman (2013) recommends as a suitable amount of time to convey purpose and value for the participant, allow for a fruitful session without being too long, and provide structure to the process. In practice, the interviews lasted between 30 and 85 minutes, which I deemed appropriate based on the participants’ willingness to talk and saturation of the interview content. The interview sessions with individual participants occurred 5 to 7 days a part. Seidman recommends this spacing to allow participants time to ruminate about the previous interview while not losing the benefit of connecting and building upon the previous interview’s content.

When scheduling the first interview I asked Sandra if she would like to meet at her school in the hopes of meeting her in a place where she felt most comfortable. After a fruitful and comfortable first interview, I decided to hold the other two interviews at her school as well, which she seemed to expect. The first interview with Natasha occurred at a coffee shop, while the other two were held at her home.

I also kept notes while observing each participant for one entire school day. The purpose of the observation was to provide breath to the description of the teachers’ employment context.
Their interactions with faculty, administrators, students, and various elements of their school environment offered an additional layer of understanding in regards to their employment considerations, which have probably been molded by their time at their current school.

**Analysis**

Questionnaire data were analyzed by extracting themes from participants’ responses, then separately using empirical generalizations (i.e., findings from past transferable or generalizable research) as a theoretical framework for further understanding. I coded transcripts descriptively both before and after discussing participant responses, and my initial coding, with a peer debriefing colleague. Saldaña (2016) wrote that descriptive coding “identifies and links comparable contents” (p. 102). This was accomplished by assigning topical codes to data. Topical codes aided in accurately representing all participants’ experiences, despite the number (10) of participants and the inherent challenges of one time open ended electronic questioning. Topical codes were extrapolated from participants’ described experiences then compared for similarity and contrasted. Additionally, descriptive coding was used to create a “categorized inventory” to sort data by personal or school related factors and to aid in second cycle coding (Saldaña, 2016, p. 104).

The theoretical framework of empirical generalizations was utilized during second cycle coding of questionnaire participant data by building a codebook based on these generalizations (see appendix D). Past research discussed in the literature review of this paper was investigated to extract the salient generalizations that were most common across strands of teacher employment preference research. The codebook was then used to code data and map these codes to ones generated during first cycle coding. The framework enhanced analysis of my qualitative data by looking for findings that aligned with past generalizations and those that differed
Participant’s reported experiences when considering employment were examined for congruency with previous researchers’ findings. Elements of participants’ experiences that were dissimilar from these previous findings were highlighted for their uniqueness. Before collecting data, I expected that some previous generalizations relating to music teacher employment considerations would not hold true due to some uniqueness of either the school district being studied or the individual.

Multiple case study data were analyzed through a variation of the case study analysis progression recommend by Creswell (2013), and also using Stake’s (2006) method of comparing themes across multiple cases. First cycle coding, which occurred between interviews, began with in vivo coding to represent data in the participants’ own words. After using in vivo coding to analyze the first interview with each participant, I decided descriptive coding would better serve the participants’ responses. Each interview and observation were summarized in order to gain an initial understanding of participants’ experiences within the context of the theme of the interview or observation.

After data collection was complete, I focused on “cycling back” to the beginnings of first cycle coding and developing new insights into participants’ experiences that could emerge because of the passage of time, use of a different coding system, or reflection on initial first cycle analysis (Saldâna, 2016). Data were then coded using descriptive coding while revisiting transcripts with a fresh perspective. The data was then organized into themes and an operational model diagram in order to begin to understand participants’ thought processes when changing jobs and their described experiences while holding various positions.

I used focused coding as the sole form of second cycle coding to distill data into broader categories “without distracted attention” (Saldâna, 2016, p. 240) by categorizing codes generated
during earlier data analysis into categories, when appropriate. Themes extracted from codes generated during first cycle coding were compared to process categories generated through focused coding. This comparison revealed which themes were associated with a change or action, and which were simply ideas that were components of processes. Themes were also compared across cases using Stake’s (2006) methods of judging the expected utility of participant-specific themes in explaining the phenomenon and generating assertions from the importance of themes across cases. Findings were extrapolated from this comparison of themes and categories, which revealed the many themes which were congruent between both the case study participants and their colleagues in their district.

Table 3.1
Multiple Case Study Data Analysis Progression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Stage</th>
<th>Analytical Device</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>Margin Notes</td>
<td>Additional Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>Summarization of Event</td>
<td>Validity Measure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection/1st Cycle Coding</td>
<td>In Vivo/Descriptive Coding</td>
<td>Code Taxonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis/1st Cycle Coding</td>
<td>Descriptive Coding</td>
<td>Code Taxonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>Operational Model Diagram</td>
<td>Participant Process Clarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis/2nd Cycle Coding</td>
<td>Focused Coding</td>
<td>Thematic Distillation/Category Creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>Thematic Comparison</td>
<td>Compare Themes with Categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>Cross-Case Analysis</td>
<td>Compare Themes Across Cases</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Authenticity in Findings

Validity was achieved during the questionnaire through peer debriefing sessions and the use of empirical generalizations as an analytical framework. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described peer debriefing sessions as an opportunity for a peer to discuss the project critically with the researcher. Notes were kept by both the researcher and the peer during these debriefing sessions in an attempt to ensure accountability and aid in analysis. I met with a colleague on 3 occasions for peer debriefing sessions. One session was held during data collection, the second after data collection, and the third during coding. These peer debriefing sessions proved to be both helpful and revealing. Though my colleague brought her own preconceptions to the table, she utilized her working knowledge of my coding methods to add to, and question, some of my own coding. Her ‘outsider’ viewpoint during coding allowed me to become unencumbered by the coding process and analyze the data at face value. The use of empirical generalizations as a theoretical framework, which was discussed in depth in my peer debriefing sessions, provided another layer of validity to questionnaire data analysis by adding a step which included comparing and contrasting findings with past research.

In the multiple case study, validity was achieved through adherence to a social constructivist lens during data analysis and reporting of findings. That is, truthfully representing participants’ experiences as individualized constructions of their own realities, influenced by social experiences. To achieve internal validity by honoring participants’ ontological viewpoints, Merriam (1988) wrote, “It is important to understand the perspectives of those involved in the phenomenon of interest, to uncover the complexity of human behavior in a contextual framework, and to present a holistic representation of what is happening” (p. 168). These perspectives have been presented through “rich, thick description” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252);
providing sufficient detail to fully describe participants’ experiences, which further enhances authenticity.

Data was also triangulated to ensure authenticity, a procedure Stake (2006) describes as “a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning” (p. 37). Stake also designates triangulation as a method of exposing “diversity of perception” (p. 38), a vital consideration when analyzing data through a social constructivist lens. As a component of data analysis, triangulation provided validation, but also aided in recognizing workplace factors that are perceived differently by the participant during interviews and the researcher during observation. Member checking was used to ensure that participants perspectives were being accurately represented in findings. Participants were asked to review portions of coded transcripts, and later an initial draft of their portraits. The process of member checking, which occurred after data collection, may have also served to further inform participants about their own view of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013). As an additional measure of authenticity, observations, interviews, artifacts, and researcher notes were compared for congruency.

The next chapter will provide a detailed account of the findings of data collection. Participants’ responses to the questionnaire were analyzed to provide the researcher with a fundamental understanding of these teachers’ employment considerations and past experiences. The multiple case study represents two questionnaire participants’ career journeys from their own perspectives. These findings are organized by research question and themes which emerged during data analysis.
FINDINGS: RESEARCH QUESTION 1

Questionnaire and multiple case study interview questions revolved around the topic of change; specifically, changing jobs within the field of elementary music education. In this section, participants’ preferences for employment, generally presented through descriptions of past experiences, are presented by theme: (a) personal considerations, (b) school atmosphere, (c) support, (d) student opportunities, and (d) choice. These themes are accompanied by rich description of participants’ experiences in order to answer the first research question of this study:

What do elementary music teachers in a large urban school district contemplate when undertaking a school change?

Personal Considerations

When reading and conducting research about teacher mobility, attrition, and retention, it is easy to overgeneralize common factors that predict a teacher leaving a school or wanting to work at one school over another. This study revealed the truly personal nature of these teachers’ decisions. Essentially, participants constantly revealed they were not just teachers looking for jobs, but primarily people: persons with a personal life, with families, and with any number of considerations that may always take precedence over the factors we might assume they would consider the most. One questionnaire participant often changed schools because of her husband needing to move for his own career. Another explained that the convenience of school location is very important, and a major factor when deciding to work at one school over another. Children, spouses, salary, benefits, and furthering their own education were all mentioned as meaningful
considerations when contemplating a school change. At the end of the day, some participants were simply interested in having a job to support themselves and their family, to whatever end.

Sandra, who participated in both the questionnaire and multiple case study, is a veteran educator who has been teaching for over 25 years, and at her current school for 17. Each employment decision she has made has been with her family in mind. To Sandra, having a family means thinking about how to support them. Having a job with a salary and benefits is of the utmost importance, and supersedes most other considerations. Sandra left a job at a private school to work in her current district exclusively because the private school did not offer benefits to her, and she had small children. Sandra settled in her current city after marriage, and she intended to stay there and support her family.

When the district’s multi site music teacher policy changed, and music teachers were asked to choose a school to remain at full time, Sandra had to choose between two great schools she was working at. In the end, she chose the one closest to her home because of the location. In traffic, it can easily take an hour to drive from one end of the school district to the other. In our interviews, Sandra often spoke about the hardship of traveling to so many different schools. When she mentioned a school she worked at, she was sure to mention how far away it was.

Conversely, Natasha, an early career teacher and case study participant, is now extremely open to different locations. During her first job search, she was only interested in working within the metropolitan area she grew up in. After that job search was unsuccessful, she became willing to work anywhere in the entire state she grew up in. This openness led to a job in a rural area, and although she didn’t love living in that rural area, she was willing. For Natasha, simply having a job now trumps location.
Although Natasha isn’t married and doesn’t have kids, her family (parents & siblings) were her primary focus when looking for her first job. The criteria was that it had to be near where she grew up. After working in her first job, Natasha moved to her current district, a state away, because her boyfriend was moving there as well. Her personal life led her to a new city, and subsequently into a job search with only one criteria: teaching music. For both case study participants, personal relationships were a primary influence on their employment decisions.

School Atmosphere

A school’s atmosphere encompasses an enormous variety of factors, some of which may present themselves at one school, but not another. However, most of participants’ responses that would intuitively be described as part of a school’s atmosphere revolved around the way the school made people (e.g., students, teachers, parents) feel. Feelings, both good and bad, permeated their illustrations of school atmospheres, and were placed at the forefront of their described experiences.

A questionnaire participant described mostly intangible qualities of a school as being of importance: creativity, open mindedness, reputation, atmosphere, professionalism, and consistency of instruction. Natasha described her school’s atmosphere as “doom and gloom.” These descriptions are difficult to define, but I was given some clarity while spending a day at Natasha’s school. I observed a teacher dropping her students off in the cafeteria for lunch, then begin to leave. She walked past me on her way out, let out a sigh, then said, “Here to take in the chaos?” I immediately remembered my interview with Natasha: doom and gloom.
**Student Behavior**

Two questionnaire participants described good student behavior—engendered through effective student behavior management plans—as considerations when deciding where to work. Natasha said that the plan should be “detailed and organized,” suggesting she prefers a thoroughly developed and systematic approach to school wide discipline. These teachers mentioned student behavior multiple times in their responses, possibly signifying importance. In our interviews, Natasha was consistent with her references to student behavior, often making connections to the support she received for regulating student behavior, systems for managing behavior, and the differences in student behavior she perceived between the two schools she taught at and her own experiences in school.

Sandra put significant emphasis on the idea of positive vs negative behavior management strategies. She described negative strategies as having an adverse effect on herself, her teaching, and especially her students:

> From the minute I walked in, because the atmosphere was so negative and everybody was so angry, I’m like oh my God...and here I’ve gotta come in and teach music. “Hello let’s sing!” When they’ve just been scolded and this one’s sitting over there and that one’s mad and punching that one. That was really difficult.

Negative school environments that resulted, at least in part, from behavior management strategies, had a significant impact on Sandra. When I asked Sandra what it would take for her to leave her current school, which she loves, the only thing she could think of that would make her consider leaving was if her school transitioned from behavior management strategies rooted in positive reinforcement to negative ones like she experienced before (i.e., students are belittled and kept at the bottom rung of a highly stratified power structure, resulting in students fighting for a sense of agency).
Teacher Student Relationships

Both Sandra and Natasha connected student behavior to teacher student relationships. They have determined that relationships with students are essential to managing student behavior, in addition to positive reinforcement strategies. Natasha sees staying at her current school as a necessary part of improving student relationships, which takes time. She hopes that if she stays put, the younger students who would then become her older students, would know her and trust her enough for her to have a respectful and personable relationship with them. Conversely, she also considers student relationships when contemplating leaving. She assumes that if she left her position, there would be a revolving door of music teachers in her spot. These music teachers wouldn’t have the opportunity to build relationships with students, and subsequently wouldn’t feel satisfied and effective in the position. She also describes this as a significant drawback when considering working at another school. She would have to start over building these relationships, which she explained takes years.

Sandra, who immigrated to the United States as a young child, knows hardship and draws on those experiences when connecting with students. She approaches behavior management with a strictness she attributes to her time spent in ‘difficult’ schools, but also uses empathy. Relating to students is a primary device for building relationships with them, and therefore regulating student behavior. When Sandra described the importance of connecting with students, she often spoke of teacher student relationship approaches that diverged from what she believed in:

Intimidation, that’s the best word. Some of the schools teach through intimidation, period, that’s it. And I saw that a lot, especially in some of these inner city schools. And listen, I understand. I completely understand where they come from. They have issues with children that unfortunately have noo support at home, no kind of discipline, no role models or anything, nobody. So, they just act out all the time. I saw kids kicking teachers, spitting on them, throwing fits on the floor, everything but what we normally expect for kids to do. And the teachers, the only method they had was intimidation.
Here, Sandra showed her understanding of *why* some students act the way they do (even why the teachers act the way they do), while describing a strategy for behavior management contrary to one that would draw on that understanding. Though she could be described as a somewhat ‘strict’ teacher, Sandra doesn’t believe in this model of behavior management which relies on extremely stratified power hierarchies within the school environment. Instead, hers, and Natasha’s, relies on power in the classroom being distributed to the students as much as possible. Natasha refers to this as students trusting her, Sandra views it as respect.

**Diversity**

The large urban district which employed all participants was not diverse. As of 2013, 81% of students who attended school in the district were Black, 11% were White, and a total of 89% identified as a minority. Both case study participants talked about their value for diversity while referencing their current schools, though Sandra was the only participant who mentioned diversity in her questionnaire responses. In Sandra’s school, that label fit. Students in her school differed substantially in terms of race and ethnicity from the district as a whole. When I observed Sandra, I was particularly struck by how beautifully diverse the student body was. I remarked on this diversity to Sandra on multiple occasions, which generally sparked a reference to her heritage. Sandra experienced what it was like to be a minority when she attended school herself, and is therefore cognizant of the bullying and hardship that can accompany it. She also came to America not knowing English then learned it while in elementary school. Because of her experiences, she recognizes the diversity of her school, and is also aware of the number of ESL (English Second Language) students enrolled (approximately 80). When I observed Sandra’s choir rehearsal, I immediately noticed the theme of the piece they were rehearsing: inclusion and loving all people.
The student body in Natasha’s school was composed of very similar demographics as the district as a whole. When I observed her, I had the opportunity to shadow her during lunch duty. In the cafeteria, I was privy to a broad look at approximately half of the school’s students, who appeared to be almost entirely Black. During our interviews, Natasha described her value for diversity which stems from her experiences in school as a child. She remembers her schools as a colloquial mixing pot, composed of students of all races represented in equal proportions. These experiences normalized being in a diverse setting for her, and later led to her noticing intolerance for diversity. She referred to diversity not in terms of her school actually being diverse, but in reference to her enculturated appreciation for diversity. She values working in a school that isn’t predominantly comprised of a traditionally majority race.

Isolation

Both case study participants and a questionnaire participant used strong language when describing feelings of isolation both in their school environment and in general terms. For these teachers, isolation occurred as a result of their position as music teachers, district policy, and simply being a teacher. In their school district, participants are referred to as “ancillary teachers,” a title which encompasses: music teachers, art teachers, physical education teachers, library teachers, and any other certified teacher who does not keep the same group of students in their room all day. This term came up often in data collection and has obviously become normalized within the district.

In a questionnaire participant’s response to the question, “What is important to you when considering working at a particular school?” he brought up this divide between traditional classroom teachers and other teachers: “As a music teacher, I also appreciate music and all arts as a valuable part of the students’ learning; not just a “break” for the “real teachers.” The last
portion of his answer, alluding to subjugation within a schools’ faculty due to his specific teaching discipline, was echoed in a short interview with Natasha conducted prior to the questionnaire. After she spoke about not feeling treated as an equal among the faculty, I asked her to describe a scenario that she perceived as equal treatment towards her within her school: “Well first off, the title of teacher as opposed to ancillary. Having my schedule created based on the needs of me teaching my curriculum, rather than based on the needs of other teachers needing breaks throughout the day.”

Sandra used the term ancillary often, but did not use the phrase “real teacher.” She did, however, recount experiences in schools that viewed her role as substantially different from the rest of the teachers: “One day you’d be in a closet and the other day just...wherever they found a spot for you, so you really were not important or valued, and I had never felt that way in some of the schools. I had never felt that I was a part time...they needed a baby sitter basically, for the classes.” Sandra’s statement, like the other teachers’, was infused with feelings of being placed in a different category from the rest of the faculty because of her teaching discipline.

Isolation manifests itself in many contexts, and is not limited to being relegated within a school faculty. Sandra taught in the district during the many years when music teachers were assigned to two or more schools at a time. For her, one of the biggest hardships of this policy was feeling like an outsider in her workplace. She often felt “out of the loop” or disconnected from the socio-political happenings of the schools where she taught. Sandra described this feeling well by recounting an experience when she wasn’t at 1 of her 2 schools to hear an announcement instructing teachers to wear a particular color on a specific day. When she arrived at the school that day, her position as a part time teacher there was fully revealed for faculty, and students, to see.
After music teachers in the district were assigned to only one school, the budget for music teachers was not entirely secure. Towards the end of a school year, Sandra heard from her administration that they were going to have their ancillary budget cut and they needed to make the difficult choice of which ancillary teacher position to eliminate. The administration decided to be open and democratic about the decision by using a poll. The poll asked teachers, parents, and students to choose which ancillary classes (e.g. P.E., Art, Music, Library, etc.) they liked the most. The loser of this poll lost their job at the end of the year. Luckily, Sandra was not “voted out” of her school. However, she described this experience with a tone that denoted both amazement and disdain. The presence of her job on the poll separated her and the other ancillary teachers from the rest of the faculty. She described the entire experience as her job being left up to a popularity contest.

Natasha’s experience with isolation in her current school manifested itself physically in addition to the experience of being relegated as an ancillary faculty member. Upon accepting her current job, she was shown a closet that would become her office in lieu of a classroom. This closet was being used as an extra storage room, and only had space for her to walk in and turn around. To use this closet for an office, Natasha tasked herself with throwing away or finding another place for all of the items that were surely forgotten or considered extra. The closet-office took shape when she was able to fit a desk in the room. However, because she wasn’t given a computer, she rarely spent any time in the office and ended up using it for storage. Instead, she spent her planning time in the school’s library writing her lesson plans on the student computers. The next year, she was given her own classroom: a 12 year old mobile temporary building behind the school.
Support

Administrative Support

Administrative support was the most commonly mentioned employment consideration in participants’ questionnaire responses. Seven out of 10 questionnaire participants reported administrative support as an important part of their employment considerations. Five out of 10 also mentioned another type of support, such as support from their faculty, students’ parents, or the surrounding community. During my interviews with case study participants, issues of support were raised often and included specific examples of what support looked like to them. Many of Natasha’s descriptions of support included feeling valued. To Sandra, support empowered her to teach and build her program as she saw fit.

For two questionnaire participants, their experiences with administration at their previous place of employment resulted in them leaving that school. When asked to describe his thoughts when deciding to leave his last job, one participant simply said he “became tired of lack of support from administration and parents.” The other participant left his job because of “lack of support and the administration verbalizing they did not want the program to continue...I chose to leave because I could not work under an administration that did not want me there.” These described experiences also aligned with their answers to a previous question about what is most important to them when choosing to work at a school. Their answers placed administrative support first, denoting both importance and a possible awareness due to their previous experiences.

Both case study participants mentioned their former and current administrators many times in our interviews, often while describing seemingly separate topics. Their references to their administration were often accompanied by descriptions of what they perceived as support,
which included: (a) administrators conveying their value for the music program, (b) consistent interaction with administrators and administrator availability, (c) administrators stepping in to help with classroom behavior issues when asked, (d) administrators showing respect to their teachers, (e) administrators providing mentorship to new teachers and general moral support, and (f) administrators working to meet music teachers’ needs when developing schedules and by providing a suitable space for music class.

Natasha’s often described her experiences with administrators at her previous place of employment, and compared them to her current administrators.

I had grown accustomed to having superiors who were always available. My emails and texts were answered promptly. My classroom was visited frequently by my principals and I was given constructive feedback often. When I struggled with behavior problems in my classroom, I always knew it would be taken care of.

Her tone suggested she was not receiving the same support at her current school that she became accustomed to at her old school. Natasha was conditioned to expect administrators to assist her with behavior problems she felt needed to be addressed beyond her classroom. She also expected her administrators to be available, and provide support and mentorship for her as a young teacher. When she moved to her current school and began her third year as a full time music teacher, she was stunned by the change in administrative support. Interestingly, Sandra casually said that administrators will only see her teach when they carry out required, official observations. She chooses to make herself visible to administrators on her own.

Natasha and Sandra both discussed their desire to feel that their position and their programs were valued by administrators, and that they were shown respect and treated as equals within their school. Over the course of her career at many different schools, Sandra worked with administrators who showed their value for her and her profession, and some who did not: “I went to schools where the administration would tell me flat out ‘I don’t like music, we don’t support
music, we have no money for music, you don’t even have a space.’ You’re just a traveling salesman, basically.” Her tone when she said this indicated feelings of exasperation and sadness. During one of our interviews Sandra said a supportive administration can empower her and her program. Conversely, an administration that would not provide support took away some of her power to do her job well and feel welcome and energized in her workplace.

Both Sandra and Natasha conveyed negative emotions when talking about these instances when they perceived their administration as being blatantly unsupportive. Natasha became extremely passionate when I asked her about the changes she’s experienced after moving to her current school in regards to her administration:

I have been called out in front of students for, you know “I need this student removed from my classroom, he’s throwing chairs, he’s kicking other kids,” and the assistant principal will come in and look straight at me with a disappointed look instead of looking at the child with a disappointed look. And then scold me for calling her in there, when the student was acting...I mean putting other students in danger, and the whole class of children is seeing me being scolded by my superior in front of them. It undermined my authority...

These experiences of not receiving support from administrators left Natasha feeling demeaned and at times disillusioned with her role as a teacher in her current school.

Participants also described their perceptions of positive administrative support based on both their experiences and expectations. One questionnaire participant simply described administrative support as “genuine concern and enthusiasm for the performing arts.” Natasha spoke highly of her prior administration’s presence in her classroom, which included: taking notes, providing constructive and positive feedback, and telling her often what a fantastic teacher she was. Sandra worked with administrators who were extremely supportive of her students giving performances. Her descriptions of this support mentioned only their enthusiasm for her drive to have students perform for an audience, but she spoke of them with graciousness.
Classroom Support

Included in the demographics section of the questionnaire was a question which asked teachers to briefly describe their teaching assignment: i.e., if they had a classroom, if they taught all students each week, and if they facilitated any after school activities. These components of an elementary teacher’s job assignment are all, at least somewhat, in the hands of their administrators. Five participants reported having a classroom and 5 were “on a cart,” meaning they travel from classroom to classroom for every class. Though questions did not ask for description of their feelings about this situation, one participant replied, “I DO NOT have a classroom,” another, “On a Cart!” The use of capitalization and an exclamation mark here seem to denote displeasure with not having a classroom.

Not having a classroom didn’t seem to be a huge concern for Sandra, who is extremely experienced “on a cart.” She is well adapted, very organized, and it works well for her (although I’m sure she wouldn’t be opposed to having her own classroom). Natasha was very taken aback when she got her current job and was told she didn’t have a classroom. She hadn’t heard of elementary music teachers going to each classroom with all of their supplies instead of the students coming to them. The negative experience of not having a classroom was further exacerbated for her when she realized there were vacant classrooms in the school being used for storage or meetings.

I classified each questionnaire participant’s descriptions about which students they teach each week as either an unbalanced schedule or a balanced schedule. Teachers who were noted as having a balanced schedule taught all students each week and did not describe seeing some classes more than once each week. Teachers who did not have a balanced schedule either didn’t teach certain classes or grade levels because of scheduling, only taught one class per grade level
for an entire month before changing, or taught multiple classes/grade levels extra times during the week. By these criteria, 6 participants had a balanced schedule and 4 had an unbalanced schedule. The implications of schedules can be seen in Natasha’s valuing every class in the school having music, instead of only the ones who fit into the schedule.

I only asked Sandra and Natasha about their schedules informally after interviews and during observations, but both easily worked them into their descriptions of administrative support during interviews. Sandra expressed a desire for administrators to understand the stress teaching elementary music can have on the human voice. She was happy with her allotted planning time and number of classes, but she wanted her voice to be taken into account when administrators are creating schedules by not giving her more than a few classes back to back. Natasha was also concerned with the number of classes she had back to back, and her frequent loss of planning time. At the time of our third interview, Natasha was experiencing a long stretch of frequent planning time loss due to a school wide standardized testing related tutoring which the ancillary teachers helped facilitate. Though she was not concerned with her amount of planning time, Sandra stressed the importance of it. She explained that it is necessary for teachers to have sufficient time during the school day to reflect on their lessons that have already been taught while planning future lessons. Sandra practiced organized, reflective teaching from the early days of her career, always assessing what worked and didn’t in her lessons to constantly improve her teaching.

Value and Expectations

Support was referenced in many ways, but a vast majority of teachers’ descriptions of it hinged on the idea of value or expectations. Value and expectations are a two way street; participants had expectations for their school, students, and community, and they also wanted to
have expectations projected on them. Natasha often draws on her own experience in elementary music as a model for her school and classroom. Further, her expectations for a school were further constructed during her first teaching job in which she strived to afford students with the opportunities she was provided in elementary music. In one of our interviews, Natasha said she wanted her school and administration to have expectations for her teaching; she wants to teach in a school that expects a minimum number of performances each year and for students to receive a quality music education daily in her classroom. She spoke about this preference while describing a lack of value for her teaching in her current school.

When talking about her experiences in different schools, Sandra never mentioned a desire for external expectations. Instead, she spoke about her own expectations for providing student opportunities, and the value they show to others. She described student performances as a way to create value for herself, advice she received from her first district arts supervisor: “He would tell us that all the time, ‘You’ve got to make yourself invaluable at your school. Wherever you are, wherever you’re teaching.’ And it really sunk into me.” Although Sandra did want to feel valued, and mentioned it multiple times, she largely strove to create her own value, both for job security and for her students.

Value and expectations were also at the forefront of participants’ descriptions of other types of support which seemed important to their satisfaction with their jobs. Community support was only briefly mentioned by one questionnaire participant, while Natasha quickly included the community in her desire for expectations of her program. However, four questionnaire participants mentioned parent support as an important part of their employment considerations. In one of our interviews, Sandra talked about parent involvement when speaking highly of a school she previous worked at and loved. Later, when she told me the story about her
administration polling teachers, students, and parents to decide which ancillary position would get cut, she credited her students’ parents with ensuring her job would remain intact. The parents overwhelmingly supported keeping her and the music program, and Sandra (somewhat ironically) received more administrative support as a consequence of the poll results. This experience speaks to her awareness of necessarily keeping her program visible and valuable to the school and community at the advice of a previous music supervisor, who specifically told her to involve parents in school performances.

Other Types of Support

Natasha mentioned the support she received from her own parents while learning the flute as a teenager, then connected those memories to her past band students who told her their parents didn’t want them to practice at home because they didn’t want to listen to it. She seemed saddened by this, and further expanded upon her perceptions of lack of parent support by describing parents of her current students who didn’t show respect to their children. To her, support from parents is more fundamental than parents showing up to school meetings and performances. Natasha teaches students whom she doesn’t believe receive the basic types of support a parent should provide as a customary part of raising their children. As a result, she must serve the role of the supportive parent in their place, and ultimately put this before teaching music.

Some form of coworker support was mentioned by three questionnaire participants, with one participant expressing a desire for a faculty that collaborates well, and two others wanting coworkers who showed interest and value for the arts. Case study participants mentioned their coworkers often as sources of moral and professional support, and echoed these desires for a collaborative faculty that values music. Although Natasha described her current coworkers as
participants in her negative school atmosphere, she also designated them as sources of support. When she accepted her current job she was a young teacher entering a foreign school environment. Her coworkers helped her understand the micro-politics of her new workplace while also explaining the reasons behind normalized events at the school which Natasha hadn’t previously experienced (e.g., extreme student behavior issues). Natasha explained the attitudes among her coworkers as “we’re all suffering together.” At her previous school, located in a small town, her coworkers were generally supportive of the arts and made her feel welcome, but weren’t as open to fully accepting her as one of their own. Many of Natasha’s coworkers had known each other or each other’s families for a long time. She didn’t perceive any interest from them to forge meaningful relationships with her.

In Sandra’s current school, she is content with her coworker relationships and seems to be content with the level of support they show to her program. In her previous jobs, Sandra had difficulty building relationships with coworkers due to her part time employment at various schools. If she were to be assigned to a school part time again, Sandra would work harder to forge relationships with coworkers for practical reasons; so she could know what is happening at the school that wasn’t announced while she was there or in formal communication. However, Sandra also expressed value for coworker relationships that extend beyond professional courtesy and needs. She sees intimate coworker relationships, preferable fostered somewhere other than the school campus, as an important component of a happy faculty, and positive student outcomes.
Student Opportunities

This study largely focused on elementary music teachers’ experiences through which they constructed individualized perceptions of a desirable workplace. However, participants often shifted focus away from themselves, and instead to the students whom they are ultimately hired to teach. Earlier I presented teachers’ descriptions of their school atmospheres—and the support they have received—as enabling or detracting from their ability to teach. At the center of their descriptions of teaching was the idea that part of building a successful music program involves providing opportunities for students. These opportunities were generally described as events outside of the scheduled general music class time. However, some teachers also described using their time with students, in whatever setting, as a vehicle for extra-musical benefits (i.e., developing life skills or supplementing academic studies).

I selected elementary music teachers for participation in this study, instead of secondary music teachers, based on my conjecture, presented earlier, that they would not place as much weight on “program” considerations due to the nature of their teaching area. After conducting the questionnaire and subsequently spending time talking to and observing two case study participants, it has become clear that these elementary music teachers do consider their program when choosing to leave their job or accept a new job. One questionnaire participant described having to decide if she wanted to build a new program and start over when choosing to change schools. In her answer to an open ended questions on the questionnaire, Sandra used the word program to describe student opportunities:

The decision to stay at a particular school over another was about continuing to build on a program that was previously non-existent. Working there full time has allowed me to start a choir, provide performance opportunities for students to participate in staged musical productions, collaborate with other teachers on talent shows, take students on field trips to the opera and the symphony, and coordinate various musical experiences during the year for our students.
Here, Sandra outlines what she considers facets of an elementary music program, all of which she wanted to provide for her students: starting a choir, musical productions, talent shows, field trips to the opera or symphony, and other musical experiences and performance opportunities. In our interviews, she told me about the difficulty she had establishing consistent student opportunities when she was being assigned to different schools each year or in the middle of the year. This lack of continuity made it difficult for her, and likely other teachers in the district, to put in place procedures and expectations for a school choir, recorder ensemble, annual student performance, or any other event that required planning and tradition in order to consistently provide the opportunity to students.

Natasha described trying to build her program as a primary consideration when contemplating staying at her current school. She believes the process of establishing the funding, procedures, and expectations for plentiful student opportunities takes years, and if she leaves her school another music teacher would need to start over. Interestingly, Natasha somewhat uncertainly stated that if she chose to take another job, she would want it to be in a school without a well established music program so she could build it. Though the word “program” may mean different things to these elementary music teachers than it would to a primarily large ensemble music teacher, the concept is the same; an all-encompassing term for the quality and amount of opportunities or resources provided for their students.

Beyond student opportunities, or possibly as a result of them, participants expressed a desire to influence students extra musically through music. One questionnaire participant framed this as “making a difference/impact,” which was something he needed to feel like he was accomplishing in his job. In her response to a questionnaire item asking if there were commonalities between any of her past employment decisions, Sandra described something
similar. She wanted to “bridge social and economic gaps through positive musical experiences,” which was rooted in her desire to teach in diverse schools.

Choice

When I designed this study, I was fixated on what elementary music teachers’ job changing experiences were like and what considerations they made when choosing to work at one school over another. Collecting and analyzing data revealed a variable in their decision making processes I hadn’t considered: no choice at all. All participants had preferences for their ideal employment situations, but most described an experience in which they simply needed a job so they took the only one they could get. Lack of choice was also a prominent theme across many participants because of the district’s past elementary music teacher staffing policies. Many teachers spent years being assigned to new schools without any input into the decision.

One questionnaire participant took a job because she needed one and it was the only job available where she lived. Natasha experienced a similar scenario: “Both of my teaching jobs were the first offered to me. I did not have many options in either case.” When asked to describe whether the decision to change schools was more about leaving, or more about taking a new opportunity, one questionnaire participant responded: “Initially, it was about finding a job wherever I could. There is not much turnover in elementary music.” Earlier, I described a questionnaire participant who left his job because his administration said they didn’t want him there. When asked about personal factors weighed when changing jobs, he answer began with “There were none to be weighed.” Though he didn’t describe a lack of future options, he felt like he had no choice but to change schools.

For one questionnaire participant, her job change that led to her current district was a result of her husband getting a new job and needing to move. Natasha, who described not having
many options when looking for the two jobs she has held, also moved to her current district because of her significant others’ career. Although for both of them the decision to move may have been the result of a mutual agreement with their partners, they both described this job change as if there was no choice but to leave their previous schools. Before Sandra took her job in her current district she was employed by a private school. The private school did not offer benefits and she had small children so she felt she had to get another job to provide benefits for her family.

These participants’ experiences point to the reality of job changes within their elementary music teaching careers. Elements of a school that these teachers may perceive as important (school atmosphere and issues of support) can be superseded by critical individualized considerations: simply having a job and including family in the decision making process. Sandra, a veteran of teaching at schools without choice, learned to make the most of her situation and do what she could to be successful and satisfied where she was. She taught in many schools that did not satisfy her school related employment considerations. As a result, Sandra learned a skill necessary to endure and serve her students: adaptation.

FINDINGS: RESEARCH QUESTION 2

An important component of Seidman’s (2013) three interview series was framing case study participants’ job changes by asking them to describe any and all experiences in music or teaching from as far back as they could remember until the time of the interview. The second interview zeroed in on only their job changing experiences, which were generally described sequentially by the participants. In the third interview, I asked questions intended to make meaning of the first two interviews, both for myself and the participants’. This process,
supplemented by my interactions with the teachers during a day of observation at their schools, painted a clear, detailed picture of their career journeys.

Definite commonalities existed between Sandra and Natasha’s careers, they both: (a) valued mentorship, (b) changed schools as a result of considerations unique to them, (c) learned to adapt to their current school, and (d) experienced identity shifts as a result of their school changes and stages of their careers. In this section, Sandra and Natasha’s lives in music and teaching will be presented individually to answer my second research question: How do two elementary music teachers in a large urban school district understand their career journeys?

Sandra’s Career Journey

I began our first interview by asking Sandra to tell me about herself. Without hesitation, she eagerly told me about her and her family coming to America from a Spanish speaking country at a young age. Being an immigrant, and the experiences that resulted from this past, permeated much of Sandra’s description of her childhood. Once the conversation moved from childhood to teaching career, she continued to draw upon her immigrant past, which she described as reasoning behind many of her methods as a teacher.

Upon moving to America, Sandra was immediately confronted by a language barrier which she was expected to overcome in order to assimilate into her 3rd grade class. Though she learned English quickly through singing American songs and participation in an in-school English learning program, the experience of being unable to communicate with others was profound. Sandra was introverted, but being able to sing songs for her schoolmates, regardless of her knowledge of the language, was a primary foundation for escaping her shell.

Even before moving to the US Sandra had rich experiences with music. Her father was passionate about music and he guaranteed she was enculturated into the art form. From a young
age, Sandra’s father played instruments for his daughters and had them sing with him. This expectation for music making extended beyond the immediate household when Sandra would go to family members houses and they would all perform music for each other. She described being musical as not unique to her family, but simply part of the culture of her country. Musicality, and the ability to comfortably sing and share music with others, became her source of social value when assimilating into her elementary school in America.

Being a teacher, like her musical background, is also rooted in her family. Sandra’s mother was an elementary school teacher before moving to America, and she often tutored her children at home. Sandra credits her mother, along with the education system in her country of origin, for her abilities in school. This dual influence of having a mother who was an educator, and a father who was musical, influences her identity to this day; she is equal parts teacher and musician.

In addition to her families influence, Sandra’s choir participation in school led her on a path to excellence as a vocal performer, and also to college. She excelled in high school choir and was recognized nationally for her accomplishments. After high school, Sandra completed both undergraduate and graduate degrees in music performance. Looking to the future, Sandra saw herself in opera. Her father took her to see zarzuela performances when she was young (a Spanish language lyric-drama similar to opera) which exposed her to the world of vocal performance as an occupation. For many years, becoming an opera singer was her ultimate goal, not teaching.

Although Sandra spent her undergraduate years focused on growth as a performer, she spent a considerable amount of time teaching. She taught her undergraduate choir on occasion, taught at a local summer music program, and assisted her choir director with local school choir
events. She values these sprinklings of teaching experience, and as a result of them received encouragement from her choir director to consider being an educator. While she was still in college, her choir director recommended her for a part time job at a local private school. She took this job, but did not continue teaching after graduating. As Sandra put it, “life happened.”

Sandra started a family: she got married, had kids, and worked at an insurance company. Music was still a part of her life, but her only lingering connection to music was teaching lessons in her spare time. This era of Sandra’s life represents career decisions that were made which were unique to her situation. She adapted by getting a steady job and putting aside her music career, which at the time didn’t seem to be a viable option. After starting her family, a recurrent theme of Sandra’s career journey was always considering them first.

The opportunity to go to graduate school to study vocal performance, which was a result of a former teacher being on the faculty at the school, indirectly propelled Sandra back into teaching. At the end of her graduate degree, she took a job at a local private school; her first full time job teaching music. Because she was working on getting certified to teach while in graduate school, and she had previous experience teaching part time at a private school after her undergraduate work, this first teaching job officially took the place of the intern teaching portion of her certification program. However, the school did not offer benefits of any kind, a must for her because of her family. Though she enjoyed teaching, she wasn’t ready to give up her dream of being an operatic performer. Sandra decided to again pursue her performance career by auditioning for the Metropolitan Opera’s Young Artists program, and Julliard. Her pursuit of an opera career culminated with these auditions. Despite a positive outlook on attending Julliard, family and finances took the front seat. When considering going to Julliard, she also had to include the effects of the decision on her husband and her three daughters. She considered living
expenses in New York, a prominent factor, and also evaluated the local school systems her children might attend. Ultimately, Sandra decided against the move. She could have done it by herself, but not with her family, and she was not willing to leave her family.

After her decision to stay put instead of moving to New York, Sandra began more graduate work and decided to volunteer at her daughters’ elementary school to help organize a musical production while the music teacher was on leave. The school’s principal was impressed with her teaching, and openly conveyed this perception to Sandra. At the recommendation of this principal, Sandra accepted her first full time teaching job with benefits at a school in the district. Although she changed schools many times during her career in the district, this first teaching job with benefits would become her most preferred school, and the one she would eventually remain in until retirement.

The seed was planted to be a career teacher by Sandra’s mother when she was very young. However, she didn’t identify fully as a teacher until she made the decision against being an opera performer to teach full time. Leading to that first job in her current district, Sandra taught to make a living. She enjoyed it, but was still first and foremost a performer. She now describes her professional identity as equally teacher and musician. The teacher component of her identity developed over time as a result of both the adaptation necessary to support her family and the positive encouragement of her teaching abilities by her own mentors along the way. Despite her current full time job as a teacher, Sandra does still engage in the world of performance. She sings and teaches at church, and has always taught private voice and piano lessons. Sandra is a true musician and teacher, and she believes others teachers in the profession should be as well.
When Sandra first began teaching in her current district she was eager to apply her work ethic and thirst for excellence learned while pursuing her performance career to her teaching. As she put it, she realized this was her career now so she had to be the best teacher possible. However, she struggled with a lack of resources needed to accomplish her goals. Many schools did not have instruments or books for students, and she described one that did not have enough resources to provide a paper copying allotment for teachers. To gather resources and teach well, Sandra had to adapt. She spent her own money on supplies for her classroom, something she described as very difficult for a younger teacher who may not have much money to begin with. She also spent her own money at local stores that specialized in making copies. If the school couldn’t the supplies necessary for music class, Sandra was going to do what was needed to ensure she could provide them instead.

Traveling between schools and teaching students in their primary classroom instead of having a separate music room taught Sandra to be incredibly organized. On days when she taught at two locations, she had to be sure all of her materials were in her vehicle and ready to be used at the next school. She would eat lunch on the way, arrive at the school, then continue teaching, hoping she hadn’t forgotten anything. This organization was very apparent during my observation at her current school as I watched her moving from classroom to classroom on her cart loaded with everything she needed. All of her materials, along with her legal pads full of lesson plans, were staged and ready to go in her office when I arrived the morning of the observation. Before heading off to teach a different grade level, Sandra collected the materials needed for the next lesson on her cart while removing what was no longer necessary (many of the instruments/games were already on the cart that morning ready to go). For a lesson that required video capability, she dropped off her cart full of instruments and retrieved a separate
cart with a television strapped to it. She learned from years of going into different teachers’ classrooms that their technology was not likely to work reliably or be operated the same way. She could, however, rely on her own technology.

During her tenure in her current district, Sandra often felt the pressure of possible budget cuts that could result in job loss. There were times in her career that budgets were reduced to such an extreme extent that she was one of only a few elementary music teachers in a district with over two dozen elementary schools. Despite the almost constant threat of not having a job the next school year, Sandra remained intent on working in the district. Her and her family lived within it, and she had no intention of commuting to a new job or moving her family to be closer to one. During the time when Sandra was still traveling between schools, one of her principals unknowingly asked her what her plans were for the next year, insinuating that she would not have a job. Sandra was aghast to learn that the decision had been made for some time to cut her position, but she had not been told. Presumably, this was because an administrator at her home school was still lobbying to keep her job funded. Regardless of the possibility of her job still being funded, Sandra was forced to look for a new job, and she would have enjoyed having more notice to do so.

Throughout the summer, Sandra kept in contact with the human resources department of her school district while they worked to find a position for her, which could include using her skills as a native Spanish speaker. Just before the start of the next school year she got a call to interview for a Spanish teaching position at a middle school in the district. Though she wasn’t certified to teach Spanish, Sandra went on the job interview purely because she needed to remain employed. When she arrived at the school for the interview, exited her vehicle, and began walking towards the school building, she heard loud gunshots nearby. Sandra immediately
sprinted into the school building and was met with laughter from the front office staff who joked “this happens all the time.” She ended up getting the job and accepting it. Her fear for her safety was outweighed by her fear of not being employed. As she frantically prepared to teach Spanish with the school year about to start, Sandra got a call about an elementary music position that opened up within the district. Of course, Sandra took the position teaching music because it was where her expertise and certification were. She spoke Spanish, but was by no means a Spanish teacher. Reflecting on this experience, Sandra quipped “I dodged a bullet...literally.”

Her skills as a Spanish speaker would be used again when she was assigned to specialty school in the district in which instruction was based on foreign language emersion. Because Spanish was one of the language paths available for students at the school, she stayed at the school (half of the week) for many years teaching music entirely in Spanish. When the district fully funded elementary music positions and asked each teacher to choose which school they would like to teach at permanently, Sandra chose her current school over the foreign language immersion school. She loved the immersion school, but she lived closer to her current school; a huge factor. However, she has continued to draw on her bilingual past. There are approximately 80 non-native English speaking students at her school, and she is drawn to helping them adapt. Sandra remembers her experiences as a child learning English at school, and the ridicule she faced for her perceived inadequacies. When I observed her teaching instrument identification through a bingo game with students, she spent extra time with non-native speakers when they answered. She ensured they pronounced the name of the instrument well, and asked them to repeat it more than the other students.

Aside from teaching language, Sandra also focuses on supplementing students’ academic subjects during music class. When students announced they had a bingo in her instrument
identification lesson, they were required to identify the direction of the bingo (e.g. horizontal, vertical, or diagonal). She stressed the knowledge and understanding of these words, which appeared to be a somewhat primary goal of the lesson. Her emphasis on academic subjects aligns with her description of her own experiences when young, which included her mother tutoring her at home, and stressing excellence in her school work. She also described her approach to building relationships with her students as a result of her experiences in school, where she was bullied and ridiculed for her heritage. When she sees students struggling with bullying or hardships at home, she shows them that she can relate. Her past positions her in a way that is both unique and appropriate for a teacher in a large urban school district of predominantly minority children from low socioeconomic families.

In our interviews, Sandra often described her value for mentorship and professional development. She relied heavily on her elementary music teacher colleagues within the district while gathering lesson ideas and supplies early in her career. At that time, district wide elementary music teacher professional development occurred once per month (now twice a year). She described these meetings as invaluable; teachers could share lesson ideas while also providing support for one another. As Sandra’s career progressed, her perspective of mentorship shifted from desiring to be mentored, to wanting to mentor others. In the last 5 years, she has experienced steady stream of observers and intern teachers in her classroom from the local university. She enjoys the assistance they provide, the company of another musician, and most importantly, the opportunity to share her knowledge with a colleague.

Sandra’s time in her current district has been filled with difficulties, but her experiences at many different schools helped her construct knowledge and gain perspective on her career as a whole. When Sandra was assigned to two different schools each year, sometimes changing
schools at seemingly random times during the school year, she was forced to adapt to each situation in order to serve her students and enjoy her job. Part of this adaption included learning to be stern enough to teach in what she described as the most “difficult situations.” In retrospect, she recognizes how tough those school changes were, but views the experiences as opportunities to learn. When I first talked with Sandra I immediately got the impression I was speaking with a veteran music teacher who values the wealth of knowledge she gathered while teaching at a dozen different schools across her large urban school district over the course of her career. Her strategies for organization, pedagogy, building relationships with students, and navigating workplace politics are all rooted in a myriad of anecdotal experiences. She has morphed from an inexperienced teacher who craves mentorship and resources to a self reliant veteran who wants to pass her knowledge to the next generation of teachers. Although she cautions that she does not have it all figured out, she is obviously comfortable in her day to day teaching and her current job, which she intends to hold until retirement.

**Natasha’s Career Journey**

The word suburbia carries with it a number of assumptions and likely elicits a mental image of what a suburban area looks like. Natasha comes from suburbia, but her suburb doesn’t fit neatly into the parameters of colloquial generalizations. Natasha’s suburb provided her with varied and substantial opportunities for academic and artistic growth, while also being extremely diverse. These opportunities provided to her, along with growing up in a diverse school, cultivated within her high expectations of a schools’ quality and culture.

Natasha grew up in a dense suburban area neatly packed between two large cities. She described the schools she attended as large, well funded, and excellent. Her elementary music teacher in particular stands out to her as a significant influence, both because of in class content
and her teacher’s personality. Yearly large scale musical performances from each grade level were normal, and resources were plentiful. Every time Natasha went to music class she knew she would experience something different. There may have been a circle of Orff instruments which had been set up before school, or classical music might be playing to prime them for a lesson about a particular composer. These experiences shaped her expectations for an elementary music program, which she aims to replicate.

As a result of a recommendation by her elementary music teacher, Natasha was asked personally by her middle school director to join the band. Learning the flute and participating in a culture of excellent large instrumental ensemble music at her school set Natasha on a path to becoming a highly trained musician, and teacher. When I asked Natasha what she remembers about middle and high school, practicing was her first response. Her motivations to do so came primarily from competition. The band program she participated in fostered competition, and she did not want to end up second chair flute. As a result, Natasha’s parents did not have to encourage her to practice, and but they also never asked her to stop; they provided unwavering support and little pressure. The drive to develop her skills on the flute, which began as a primary goal during middle school and persisted through college, has since manifested as a drive to grow as a teacher.

Natasha’s high school was the size of a small community college. Navigating this sprawling, crowded complex was scary at times. She generally only socialized with a few band students and described herself as being shy. However, she cites the experience of attending a large school as a source of somewhat overcoming her anxieties associated with being around lots of people. Her aspirations to be a teacher and a leader began at a young age. Natasha remembers playing school with her friends when she was very young, and she always had to be in charge
and be the teacher. Despite her anxieties, she was drawn to the idea of having an official stage to share her knowledge.

Competing, and rising to internal and external expectations, drove Natasha from her high school band program into her career as a musician. At her high school, all band students were expected to take private lessons from the on-staff private lessons teachers. Students families funded the private lessons teachers’ salaries, but Natasha was on scholarship; her family could not afford the full amount. The very few who did not participate in private lessons were somewhat looked down upon and relegated to a lower ensemble placement. Natasha’s private flute teacher was an inspiration to her. She invited Natasha to her house for make up lessons, which often went well beyond the original hour time slot. This devotion to playing the flute would carry into college when she enrolled as a music performance major.

Natasha switched between being a music performance major and a music education major on multiple occasions, sometimes majoring in both simultaneously. Her original motivation to major in music education was as a fallback for her performance career. While Natasha was completing her mandatory 6 month music teaching internship as the last requirement of her degree program, her focus shifted quickly to music education as a viable long term career. Her internship in a middle school band program solidified her desire to teach music, though she perceived teaching large ensembles as a drawback of the job.

After graduation Natasha embarked on a job search in the large metropolitan area she was from. Because of her own experiences in school music and her teaching internship, she was exclusively looking for jobs as a band director. This job search ended without a single interview or a full time teaching position. During this year without a full time job, she taught piano lessons to toddlers once a week at a private studio, while also working another part time job to achieve a
livable income. The next year, Natasha applied for every band job with an opening in the state she was from. After a few interviews, she accepted a position in a rural area as an assistant band director and elementary music teacher. Her experiences at this first full time job, which she held for 2 years, brought about the realization that she did not want to teach band, and instead wanted to teach elementary music exclusively.

The job interview in this rural area was a confirming experience, and very contrary to the intimidating interviews Natasha went on in other parts of her state. The head band director drove her around the town in his personal vehicle while introducing her to everyone they came across. He made her feel welcome and openly conveyed his expectations, and assumptions, to her. He knew she was a young teacher, and as such expected Natasha to need time and mentorship in order to develop her teaching skills. Hearing this up front, along with the hospitality shown, forged the perfect, safe environment for Natasha to begin her first full time job. Moving to a rural part of her home state she had never heard of seemed to be a welcome compromise considering the prospect of having a full time teaching job.

Once she accepted the job, Natasha received the mentorship she expected. Her administrators were always available and visited her classroom on a regular basis to provide encouragement and feedback. If she struggled with discipline issues, her administrators would help her with them and always followed up on how the student was doing in the following days and weeks. Natasha’s experience at this school constructed a vision of administrative support and school atmosphere that aligned with her expectations, despite her unexpected presence in a foreign geographic area.

During the 2 years she spent at this job, Natasha became aware the students and subject matter she preferred to teach. She was enjoying the half of her day in which she taught
elementary music much more than the half that included teaching band. Though she enjoyed teaching small groups of beginners, teaching large ensembles, and marching band, wasn’t for her. The head director at her school made all of the decisions, and was ambitious. He and his wife were both employed by the small school district, and his children attended his school; there was no reason to make time for home. He and Natasha taught private lessons to their band students until late in the evening every day of the week and held marching band practice at night during the Fall. Natasha was at the mercy of the work ethic of her head director, her superior, who wanted more than anything to build his band program. Though Natasha agreed that his goals and methods were mostly appropriate, the time commitment, on top of large ensemble teaching, turned her away from being a band director. According to Natasha, her only saving grace was living in a small town; she wouldn’t have had anything to do even if she had time for a personal life, so it was probably best that she was working.

When Natasha moved with her boyfriend to her current location 2 years ago, she was looking to teach elementary music exclusively, but also applied for middle and high school instrumental positions to ensure she found a job. One week before the start of the school year, she found a job teaching elementary music in her current district. This was the only job available to her within an hour drive of her home. She was immediately faced with the challenges of teaching in an urban school, with only her prior experiences with suburban and rural schools to draw upon. Natasha, in her third year as a full time teacher, was left without the mentorship and support she relied upon, or as she put it: “drowning by myself until my first official observation.”

Many of Natasha’s trepidations about her new school stemmed from student behavior. Student behavior issues resulted in what she perceived as decreased efficacy in the classroom, which in turn created a working environment she didn’t enjoy. At her first job, she knew she was
building efficacy in the classroom through gained experiences and a foundation of support from her mentors. When she began at her current school, she felt as if her career was beginning to spiral downward, and often contemplated whether or not she should be teaching elementary music at all. Despite the different and often more severe behavior problems she was facing in the classroom, Natasha endured on her own. She stopped calling administrators when students were being only moderately violent towards each other, and getting students to prepare to learn music became the primary goal; getting to teaching music was secondary.

Now in her second year at this school, Natasha has been forced to adapt. She looked furiously for another job after her first year, but was unsuccessful in finding any elementary music opening within an hour of where she lived. Her thoughts going forward have been simple; she had already survived a year at the school, so the only possible consequence staying will be some type of improvement. Natasha developed skills for building relationships with students in order to earn their trust and regulate behavior while teaching at her first school, which was predominantly composed of students who identified as a minority race or ethnicity and came from low socioeconomic backgrounds. During her second year in her current district, she fully understood that this skill would need to be her strongest asset. She now sees developing relationships with students as the starting point to being able to teach them music, and as a result worries that leaving the school would mean abandoning these relationships.

During our interviews, Natasha reflected on these challenges with indignation and occasional sadness, but did so by describing what she has learned alongside the unresolved issues in her school. Looking to the future, she is unsure if she could resist an opportunity to work at a school most would describe as “easier,” but she sees abandoning what she has just started at her current school as a heartbreaking disservice to the students she has grown to love.
Whether she stays or leaves, her experiences have propagated the formation of new expectations and preconceptions about school environments, administrators, and students she might teach. Over span of her 4 year career, her identity as an educator has been rapidly and forcefully altered from that of a fresh, inexperienced teacher, to a grizzled young veteran who can serve any student put in front of her despite circumstances outside of her classroom.
DISCUSSION

In the previous section, I presented participants’ perceptions of their experiences and resulting employment preferences. In this section, I will expand upon their described experiences by adding my own understanding, and by examining connections between their experiences and past empirical research. My coding methodology (using a codebook generated from past empirical research) helped clarify where questionnaire participants’ responses aligned with past research and where their responses were unique. Similarly, the typical or atypical nature of multiple case study participants’ employment experiences and career journeys will be highlighted through comparison with past research. This studies’ theoretical framework, social constructivism, has been drawn upon throughout interpretation of participants’ experiences.

Support

Throughout study data, mentions of support were surrounded by strong, candid language indicating support is a primary employment consideration. Every answer one questionnaire participant gave to open ended questions, which centered around the topic of school change, suggested administrative support was the most prominent factor in his decision making. When asked what personal factors he weighed when considering a school change, he wrote, “I knew I had to leave the district due to lack of support,” and later answered, “Knowledgeable and supportive administration!” twice when asked about important factors when making a decision about where to work. His desire, along with other questionnaire participants’, aligns with past large scale research in which administrative support was found to be the largest predictor of music teacher job satisfaction and retention (Gardner, 2010). Similarly, both case study
participants directly named administrative support as the most important component of their employment preferences. Natasha is having difficulty justifying staying at her current school due to perceived lack of support, which aligns her thinking with many of her teacher colleagues studied by other researchers (Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2011; Gardner, 2010; Hancock, 2008; Hancock, 2016).

During informal discussions with Natasha before and after interviews and on the day of my observation, she described her head principal as both unsupportive and hard working. On the day of my observation, I ran into Natasha’s principal on multiple occasions in the hallway, she visited the cafeteria during lunch, and even visited Natasha’s classroom during one of her classes later in the day. I remembered Natasha telling me her administrators never came to her classroom unless required and was generally not available, so I perceived her head principal’s visibility as noteworthy. After Natasha’s last class left her classroom that day, I asked her what she thought about her principal’s visit during the previous class. Natasha hadn’t noticed her principal enter the room and was astounded when I said she had. She initially didn’t want to believe me and asked me to describe the person I saw to verify it was her. Where I saw a principal who was working to be active and engaged within her school, Natasha saw a rare occurrence which seemed to do little to alleviate her feeling of alienation which has been built over a year and a half at the school.

A weakness of this study, which became more apparent as administrative support surfaced as such an important participant consideration, was the exclusion of administrators’ perspectives. It is possible that Natasha’s administrators do believe they are showing support. Baker (2007) found that choral music teachers and their administrators perceived support very differently, which could also be the case in Natasha’s current job.
Sandra described issues with her workplace satisfaction that directly resulted from her time working for unsupportive administrators. Gardner (2010) found that administrators simply showing interest in music teachers’ discipline had a positive effect on those teachers’ job satisfaction. Sandra described a blatant lack of interest and value from some of her past administrators. To her, building a program at a school run by an administrator who expressed disinterest in her music teaching would have been nearly impossible.

Three questionnaire participants mentioned faculty support as an important element of their employment considerations. Early career choral teacher participants in a past research study described faculty support as other teachers “attending and assisting with concerts, allowing students to go to the choir room for extra rehearsals, and providing grades to verify contest eligibility” (Baker, 2007, p. 82). Case study participants did not indicate a preference for faculty support for their music programs.

Baker (2007) found that community support was the most frequently selected factor contributing to the job satisfaction of early career choral teachers. While there may be a variation in importance of community support in elementary and choral teaching environments, only one questionnaire participant in this study expressed consideration of community support. Natasha mentioned the local community in one of our interviews when talking about her desire for external expectations of her program. To her, expectations seemed to mean value, which could be conceptualized as a type of support.

Parent support, a factor that has been found by Hancock (2008) to decrease the chance of music teacher mobility, was listed or described as a consideration by six questionnaire participants. Hancock’s finding seems to be corroborated by participants in this study who cited parent support as a vital part of the music programs and student wellbeing, and a significant
consideration when evaluating the quality of their jobs. Both Natasha and Sandra mentioned low levels of parent support in the schools which they disliked working in, while connecting positive parent support with the schools they favored. Hancock’s finding seems to be corroborated by participants who perceived parent support as a vital part of the music programs and student wellbeing, and a significant consideration when evaluating the quality of their jobs.

According to Gardner (2010), music teachers do not receive the same levels of support for students with special needs as other teachers. One participant valued support for students with special talent in music and expressed the need for small group instruction for these students. No other teachers mentioned considering support for students with special needs. I observed Natasha teaching a special education class of 4 students who were accompanied by 2 staff members. She said the 2 aides were always with the students for the entirety of the class and often participate in the activities with them. Natasha enjoyed teaching the group and felt that she had all the assistance she needed with them.

**Positive Change and Multi site Instruction**

When a music teacher moves from one school to another, it is logical that the outcome would likely be positive. Hancock (2016) found this to be true, a conclusion which was corroborated by seven questionnaire participants’ responses. When asked to describe factors that were weighed when considering a school change, one participant made a list depicting his purposeful consideration of whether a new school would be better, or worse, or the same. At least one of his past school changes was because of a “new opportunity.” Another participant said she did not have a choice in the change, “but I am very happy with where I am.” Natasha’s only school change, which led to her current job, was the result of moving to a new city and taking the only job available. This change was largely negative. Conversely, Sandra’s school
changes have culminated with her current position, which she is extremely happy with. Looking forward, Natasha seems to contemplate changing schools simply for improved working conditions. She often described the possibility of changing jobs in the future to find something better than how she saw her current school.

Gardner (2010) notes that there are additional challenges which result from music teachers who teach at multiple schools. Sandra described many of these challenges, but questionnaire participants who mentioned working at multiple sites didn’t choose to write about any difficulty associated with those past positions. Participants who said they chose their own school when single site music teacher staffing was established have likely experienced a positive outcome because they had the opportunity to teach at a variety of schools before choosing where to work full time, and ultimately chose their favorite. This was a unique situation, and quite possibly contributed to the high number of questionnaire participants specifically reporting a positive change from their last position, which was, or seemed to be, teaching at multiple sites.

**Personal Factors**

When surveying music teachers about teaching status and their perceptions of support, Madsen and Hancock (2002) noted that most participants chose to include a variety of personal issues in their additional comments. Likewise, participants in this study chose to include a high number of comments about personal factors. This finding highlights the truly individualized nature of teachers’ preferences for employment which may be due to a number of factors external to the school environment (e.g. distance from their permanent home, where their own children attend school, potential salary in relation to spouse’s salary, religious beliefs, etc.).

Two questionnaire and both case study participants mentioned after hours work. Teachers who spend more time working outside of regular hours are less likely to migrate or leave the
profession (Hancock, 2008). A questionnaire participant expressed her value for after hours access to the school site. However, Natasha described her past job as requiring too much after hours work: work she was not passionate about because it involved teaching band, not elementary music. Natasha doesn’t mind spending considerable time working after hours in order to serve her elementary students. However, she wants this work to be valued by her administrators and the community, and for it to result, at least in part, from external expectations of her music program.

Interestingly, Sandra was the only participant to mention salary, a predictor of job satisfaction and possibility for migration (Baker, 2007; Hancock, 2008). She described her expectations of teacher salary in practical terms: enough to support her family. She primarily left her first full time job at a private school because it did not offer benefits or a salary comparable to her current public school district. Sandra leaving two private schools (first part time then in another full time) align with past research findings that music teachers in private schools are more likely than public school teachers to migrate (Hancock, 2008).

**Efficacy and Stages of Teaching**

Music teachers who change schools tend to receive an improved sense of personal accomplishment and of making a difference (Hancock, 2016). Six questionnaire participants expressed a value for personal accomplishment through describing the need specifically or lack of accomplishment at a school they left. Two specifically addressed the need to make a difference through their teaching. It is likely that an unaccomplished teacher, or a teacher who feels as though she/he is not making a difference, would seek a change in schools, hopefully before a change in career. Similarly, teacher efficacy, a predictor of migration (Hancock, 2008),
was identified as an issue in two questionnaire participants’ responses, though these instances of efficacy could also be identifiable as accomplishment.

Natasha reported struggling with effectively regulating student behavior at her current school. According to the findings of a study by Malinen & Savolainen (2015), her perceived ability to regulate student behavior may be connected to her sense of low job satisfaction. Sandra also implied negative job satisfaction when describing schools with frequent student behavior issues, though she described herself as now well adapted to managing student behavior. Interestingly, student behavior was not a prevalent topic across all participants’ reported experiences. Instead, they focused on larger issues that could lead to regulating student behavior (administrative support, positive school environment, parent support, etc.).

Through a large scale music teacher identity survey, Wagoner (2011) found that teachers’ perceived self efficacy increased with teaching experience, with the largest increases during the first 5 years of teaching. Natasha’s perceived self efficacy could increase as she becomes more experienced. However, it is also possible that her efficacy is largely linked to her current school environment (Lee, Dedrick, & Smith, 1991). Sandra, extremely experienced and teaching in a school she prefers, never questioned her efficacy in interviews.

One of the primary reasons for sampling Natasha and Sandra for participation in the multiple case study was the extreme contrast in their levels of teaching experience. In Conway & Eros’ (2016) study of 12 music teachers in their tenth and eleventh year of teaching, participants described feeling more confident in their abilities to manage a classroom and generally more “settled” following their third of fourth year of teaching. It is interesting that Natasha is in her fourth year of teaching, but still described struggling with classroom management. However, she mentioned a wide variety of behavior regulation strategies she uses and has used, and appeared
to fare well when I observed her teaching. One participant in Conway & Eros’ study who described feeling settled did so by detailing his ability to understand and navigate his classroom and workplace, while also receiving student, parent, and school support. It seems that making connections between Natasha’s experiences during her first 4 years of teaching and their participant’s is difficult because of the different school environments and levels of support. Natasha does not perceive stability or consistent classroom efficacy in her current school, and as a result does not feel “settled.” She is contemplating leaving her school for a job which will provide her with a greater feeling of efficacy.

Conversely, “settled” is the perfect word to describe Sandra in her current position and stage of her career. She has been teaching in her district for 25 years and has no plans to change schools before retirement. She enjoys mentoring student teachers, is confident in her teaching abilities, knows how to manage any classroom, and is mostly happy with her school’s environment. Sandra’s desire to mentor teachers mirrors Conway & Eros’ (2016) assertion that more experienced teachers have different needs than younger teachers, and should be provided the opportunity to take on leadership positions. Sandra grown from a young teacher who, like Natasha, desired mentorship and collaborative professional development, to an experienced teacher who values sharing her knowledge.

In her questionnaire responses and during my time with Sandra, she never mentioned interviewing for a position in another district or a time when she contemplated leaving, even when describing the hardest years of her teaching career which were largely connected to teaching in highly impoverished and low performing schools. Perhaps knowing she may have been assigned to a different school the next year made these situations bearable, or her
The overarching goal of didactic pedagogy provided purpose for her struggle because she felt it was most needed in those schools.

Though Sandra didn’t have a student teacher when I was conducting the case study, she described having one consistently for at least the past few years. Her student teachers bring new life to her career by sharing their fresh prospective and knowledge with her, providing an opportunity for her to share her wealth of knowledge with them, giving her assistance in the classroom, and somewhat alleviating the isolation she has experienced as the only musician on her faculty. This symbiotic relationship presents the new challenge of teacher education to an educator who met and conquered her most significant challenges years ago.

**Isolation**

Throughout Sandra’s career, isolation has manifested both in her workplace and personal life. When Sandra was teaching at multiple school sites, she often felt “left out of the loop.” Even when teaching at one school full time, she was aware of her position as a teacher without a permanent classroom and being the lone faculty member teaching music. The workload associated with teaching music well isolates her in her personal life by taking the majority of her energy she would need to fully enjoy her free time after school hours. Further, relating to adults can be difficult for her because she spends so much of her life interacting with elementary children. Sandra’s feelings of isolation are not unique, and mirror researchers’ findings of music teacher isolation (Sindberg, 2011; Sindberg, 2014; Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005).

In Sindberg’s (2011) study of urban music teachers, participants expressed many of the same feelings of isolation Sandra felt, for largely the same reasons. Even when they attempted to build relationships with colleagues to head-off the subjugation that can result from being the only person teaching a very different subject matter, they felt their efforts weren’t met with the same
enthusiasm from the rest of the faculty. Sandra is very personable and a likeable, but she spends so much time planning and teaching it is difficult to find time to develop relationships with coworkers, especially when she wasn’t consistently teaching at the same school. Sindberg’s participants also echoed this sentiment, which was described as a form of self isolation resulting from the workload all teachers were trying to manage. When completing paperwork, calling parents, planning lessons, and teaching lessons requires immediate attention, taking time to develop relationships with colleagues can move to the back burner.

Finding of Sindberg’s (2014) study of urban music educators included the impact teacher mobility has on music teachers’ sense of isolation. Significant attempts to build meaningful relationships with colleagues can be interrupted by teacher turnover when teachers leave the school before there is a chance to really get to know them. When Sandra moved schools each year as a result of the district’s staffing policy, she was subjected to constantly building new relationships with colleagues, on top of the handicap of only teaching at each school for half of the week. For Sandra, she was the one who was mobile. Sindberg’s participants also described isolation which resulted from teaching in an urban school, something Sandra did not mention. Sandra’s collaborative experiences are district based, meaning she has the opportunity to socialize with music educators who teach in roughly the same urban environment she does. Sindberg’s participants described feeling isolated at professional meetings which included teachers from non-urban districts because they could not empathize with their teaching situation. It is possible Sandra would experience the same type of subjugation from her peers if she were to socialize with music teachers from surrounding suburban districts.

Natasha didn’t report feeling isolated within her faculty. She spoke positively about the support she received from other teachers. However, she is physically isolated from the rest of the
school in that her classroom is a temporary building behind the main school buildings, and she has been left on her own to solve problems in her classroom, despite her relative inexperience in the profession. Her feelings of isolation, and Sandra’s descriptions of mostly past isolation, align with the findings of previous research which suggests music teachers in their first 10 years of teaching feel more isolated than those in later stages of their careers (Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005).

**Lack of Choice and the Reality of Job Change**

The most striking finding of the questionnaire, and one not easily transferable to past research, was participants’ lack of choice, or lack of options. One questionnaire participant attributed his scarcity of school choices to what he perceived as lack of turnover in the elementary music profession. Their described lack of choice has likely led to past employment in schools which did not meet their needs, though one participant did describe a positive outcome that resulted from a lack of choice. Considering the past policy of multisite instruction in the district, it seems likely that most of the language used around the topic of choice was directed at the past. This could signal that many choice disparities occurred while these teachers were employed in the same district, but assigned to multiple schools each year with no voice in this assignment.

Natasha described a lack of choice in detail, both in her first job search in her home town which did not yield employment, and in her third job search which resulted in working at her current school (the only job available). Although this study is predicated on the notion that teacher turnover is bad for schools (Ingersoll, 2001), I want participants to have choices so they can find schools that meet their preferences, keep them in profession, and ultimately provide satisfaction. Ingersoll (2003) notes that turnover (attrition and migration) is higher in teaching
than other occupations, and that teachers leave both urban and high poverty schools at higher rates than suburban/rural and low poverty schools. It is interesting that participants perceive turnover as low in their area, which results in a lack of options. Even when problematizing mobility, it is important to account for teachers’ need to change jobs for their own personal well-being, which requires desirable schools with open positions.

**Implications and Suggestions**

This study was designed to discover a group of urban elementary music teachers’ employment preferences and provide a medium for reporting their experiences throughout their careers. The most immediate implications of this studies’ results are within the large urban school district which participants were sampled from. The task of disseminating findings within the district is difficult due to the promise, and importance, of anonymity. With appropriate tact, information from this study might provide the district’s supervisors and administrators with insight into their elementary music teachers’ employment preferences, hopefully aiding retention, job satisfaction, and future recruitment.

Although the participants in this study were all early to late career in-service elementary music teachers, the illumination of their real world, researched based experiences may help pre-service music teachers understand their future careers. Once employed, they will likely change jobs a number of times in search of one that brings satisfaction or simply fits their needs, and their reasons for staying or leaving may be typical and shared by participants in this study. A realistic understanding of positive and negative school attributes, and what effects they may have on a music teachers’ classroom efficacy, is important to frame the experiences they will have themselves in various schools. Similarly, in-service music teachers, and student teachers, may be
able to gain perspective on their current and future school circumstances by learning about others’ teachers understandings of their employment conditions.

An emergent theme of data analysis was lack of choice, which brings with it implied powerless as teachers move along their career paths. Considering music teacher turnover rates are similar to those of non-music teachers (Hancock, 2009), it would be interesting to discover whether non-music teachers in the district have experienced the same lack of options when seeking employment. Further, I would like to know if the local, and national, elementary music teacher job market is as saturated with as little turnover as one participant said, or if there could be another explanation.

Teacher employment considerations have a wide range of implications, and as such should be queried and utilized often to ensure an attempt is made to alleviate attainable concerns and propagate positive elements. The replication of this study, or any similar study, in every school district in America is an unrealistic expectation. However, school districts, including the one studied, could very easily conduct regular internal surveys similar to the questionnaire used in this study. Open ended and structured questions about job satisfaction and employment preferences, presented to teachers on at least an annual basis, could prove to be effective in retaining and recruiting teachers by providing a regular outlet for concerns and likings. Results from the surveys could be made available to teachers, with regular contact by district administrators about action taken to address concerns, and promotion of positive elements that are already keeping teachers where they are. The mere presence of a teacher focused survey may aid in retention by showing “district support,” especially if the survey allows for open ended, individualized responses, and there is a follow-up by supervisors. As in this study, anonymity is key when seeking honest, thoughtful answers.
Most schools hold regular, usually mandatory, professional development for both music and non-music teachers. Regardless of the subject matter of this professional development, and its applicability to the music classroom, all teachers could benefit from the incorporation of workplace satisfaction discussion. These discussions might look similar to this study, in which participants will be allowed to speak freely about what they value most about their school. Though the lack of anonymity in this type of exercise would likely result in “safe” responses, the process of constructing knowledge with colleagues would be beneficial. This process would need to be structured such that teachers are free to respond thoughtfully and honestly because they know their voices being heard matters.

When teachers leave a school, for whatever reason, it is important to know why. I’ve described Sandra’s reasoning for leaving a private school she taught in—she needed health benefits and an increased salary because she had children. If that private school conducted an exit interview with her and learned why she took the new job, then received the same reasoning from another music teacher leaving the same position, it could become clear that a pattern was developing and the school needed to offer benefits to their music teacher ensure continuity within the music program. Consistent and widespread implementation of exit interviews could provide an opportunity for individualized employment preferences to emerge, and aid future retention.

The syntax surrounding the topic of employment preference is particularly interesting, in that we use words and phrases to compartmentalize vast amounts of information which likely means different things to different people. For instance: school reputation was mentioned by one participant as import when deciding where to work, but not defined. A school’s reputation encompasses an enormous amount of quantifiable and anecdotal information, potentially
including: (a) federal, state, and local assessments of schools, (b) general “good” or “bad” sentiments spread through word of mouth, (c) the location of a school (low versus middle/upper class area), (d) information available online in the form of school ratings websites which often include scathing comments from displeased students and parents, (d) perceptions within the community as a whole built through residents’ children attending the schools, and (e) the success/visibility of extracurricular activities. We require all-encompassing words (e.g., reputation) to study and have discussions about where teachers want to work, but we must be careful not to overgeneralize using terms that only have an explicit definition on their surface.

As a music teacher myself, I too have my own employment considerations which have been hashed out in detail over the course of this study. As I’ve become familiar with the literature surrounding the topic, and constructed knowledge with participants, both the simplicity and nuance of my workplace preferences have emerged. I am (somewhat ironically) searching for my next teaching job, and I am finding myself identifying with all participants who had one unyielding consideration: finding any job. However, as I evaluate employment opportunities, I am noticing my awareness of one particular issue: support.

Participants who described negative experiences as a result of lack of support often did so by denoting how much of a handicap it was to their teaching. I am given some hope, though, by the adaptation and enduring nature Sandra described throughout our interviews. She remained in the same district for many years while facing all of the negative experiences described in this study. She found positive elements of her job to focus on, and was determined to do her best to serve the students put in front of her. At the end of the day, all of the employment preferences listed and described in this study are just that: preferred employment circumstances that happen around educating students in the classroom.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES

A – OPEN ENDED ELECTRONIC QUESTIONNAIRE IRB APPROVAL

ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST

TO: Joseph Casselberry
Music Education

FROM: Dennis Landin
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: October 19, 2016

RE: IRB# E10164

TITLE: Elementary Music Teachers’ Employment Considerations


Review Date: 10/18/2016

Approved X Disapproved

Approval Date: 10/19/2016 Approval Expiration Date: 10/18/2019

Exemption Category/Paragraph: 1; 2a, b

Signed Consent Waived?: Yes

Re-review frequency: (three years unless otherwise stated)

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable):

Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal: (if applicable)

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –
Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
8. SPECIAL NOTE: When emailing more than one recipient, make sure you use bcc. Approvals will automatically be closed by the IRB on the expiration date unless the PI requests a continuation.

* All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU’s Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at http://www.lsu.edu/irb

Institutional Review Board
Dr. Dennis Landin, Chair
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Baton Rouge, LA 70803
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irb@lsu.edu | lsu.edu/irb

83
ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST

TO: Joseph Casselberry  
Music Education

FROM: Dennis Landin  
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: January 23, 2017

RE: IRB# E10296

TITLE: Elementary Music Teachers' Employment Considerations: Determining, Understanding, and Weighing Employment Opportunities


Review Date: 1/23/2017

Approved X Disapproved

Approval Date: 1/23/2017 Approval Expiration Date: 1/22/2020

Exemption Category/Paragraph: 1; 2a

Signed Consent Waived?: No

Re-review frequency: (three years unless otherwise stated)

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable):

Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal: (if applicable)

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING – Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:

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C – QUESTIONNAIRE

Consent Form

1. Study Title: Elementary Music Teachers’ Employment Considerations
2. Performance Site: Email administered Google Form
3. Investigator: The following investigators are available for questions about this study, Monday through Friday, 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
   Joe Casselberry (225) 241-7589 jcasse5@lsu.edu
   Dr. Ann Marie Stanley (225) 578-2562 astanley1@lsu.edu
4. Purpose: The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of elementary music teachers’ experiences and considerations when moving from one school to another.
5. Subject Inclusion: Elementary Music Teachers
6. # of Subjects: 28
7. Study Procedures: I will conduct one interview per participant using a Google Form delivered via email. Each participant will respond to one of two question sets contained in the email form, depending on their employment history.
8. Benefits: There are no direct benefits related to participation.
9. Risks: Risks are minimal, however, employment decisions can be made for personal reasons. If participants feel uncomfortable, they have the option to stop completing the interview questions immediately.
10. Right to Refuse: You may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit which might otherwise be entitled.
11. Privacy: Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Participant identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law. Participant identity will only be known by the two investigators listed above.
12. Signatures This study has been explained to me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additionally questions regarding study specifics to the investigator. If I have questions about subjects’ rights or other concerns, I can contact Dennis Landin, Chairman, LSU 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.

1. By selecting "I agree," you are accepting the consent form above.
   * Check all that apply.
   [ ] I agree

Your name will remain completely confidential. No one, outside of myself and Dr. Ann Marie Stanley will have access to data containing your name.
2. What is your name?

3. What grade levels do you teach?

4. Briefly describe your music teaching assignment. Do you have a classroom or are you “on a cart?” Do you see all students in the school each week? Do you facilitate any after school activities?

5. How many years have you been teaching?

6. Have you taught at multiple schools? *  
   Mark only one oval.
   - Yes
   - No   Skip to question 15.

7. How many schools have you taught at since you began teaching?

8. How many years have you been teaching at your current school?

The space will expand as you type. Feel free to be as detailed as possible in your answer.

9. What is important to you when considering working at a particular school?

The space will expand as you type. Feel free to be as detailed as possible in your answer.
10. Describe your thoughts when deciding to leave your previous place of employment.

The space will expand as you type. Feel free to be as detailed as possible in your answer.

11. If you have changed jobs more than once, were there commonalities between your decisions?

The space will expand as you type. Feel free to be as detailed as possible in your answer.

12. Describe the personal factors that you weighed when considering a school change.

The space will expand as you type. Feel free to be as detailed as possible in your answer.

13. Describe the school related factors that you weighed when considering a school change.

The space will expand as you type. Feel free to be as detailed as possible in your answer.
14. Describe if the decision to change schools was more about leaving, or more about taking a new opportunity.


Skip to question 18.

The space will expand as you type. Feel free to be as detailed as possible in your answer.

15. Describe your thoughts when considering various schools/employment opportunities prior to your current appointment.


The space will expand as you type. Feel free to be as detailed as possible in your answer.

16. What is important to you when considering working at a particular school?


The space will expand as you type. Feel free to be as detailed as possible in your answer.

17. If you would decide to seek a position at another school, what factors could contribute to your leaving?


Thank you SO much for taking the time to answer these questions. I look forward to reading about your experiences and speaking with you in the future!
18. Would you be willing to sit down and talk about your experiences at a later date?
   Check all that apply.
   
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ I'd prefer not to.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code(s)</th>
<th>Source(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Interest</td>
<td>“Results of this study suggest that music teachers, regardless of their experience, appreciate supervisors’ interest in their endeavors, which may have positive effects on their perceptions of administrative support and their job satisfaction” (Gardner, 2010, p. 120).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Support</td>
<td>“Music teachers who indicated greater levels of administration and parent support when all factors were accounted for were less likely to be at high risk for attrition/migration” (Hancock, 2008, p. 141). “[M]usic teacher perception of the level of support received from administrators (0.807) was the strongest indicator of teacher opinions and perceptions of the workplace” (Gardner, 2010, p. 116).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After hours Work</td>
<td>“Teachers who indicated more time spent on instructional and noninstructional activities outside the regular school day were less likely to be at high risk for attrition/migration” (Hancock, 2008, p. 140).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Support</td>
<td>“Teacher selection of factors that might increase teacher job satisfaction appear in Table 2, with community/parent support (60.9%), higher salary (58.6%), and administrative support (41.3%) being the most frequently selected factors” (Baker, 2007, p. 81).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences of Support</td>
<td>“Results suggest that administrators’ and teachers’ perceptions are quite different. For example, teachers rated only 8 out of 19 listed types of assistance as being beneficial (with a mean of 3.0 or higher), whereas principals rated 18 out of 19 types as being helpful” (Baker, 2007, p. 81).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficacy</td>
<td>“Music teachers who reported greater efficacy in their classrooms and in their schools were less likely to be at high risk for attrition/migration” (Hancock, 2008, p. 141).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Support</td>
<td>“Early career teachers intending to stay in the teaching profession selected support of other teachers as a primary factor affecting their decision. Interviewees defined support of other teachers as attending and assisting with concerts, allowing students to go to the choir room for extra rehearsals, and providing grades to verify contest eligibility” (Baker, 2007, p. 82).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Making a Difference       | “The most notable improvements for Movers, as shown in Figure 1, were associated with the “intangible” rewards for teaching, such as making a difference in the lives of others, having a sense of personal accomplishment, and having work that was intellectually challenging” (Hancock, 2016, p. 431).
|                           | “Two participants based their measurement of success on the difference they made in students’ lives” (Bruenger, 2010, p. 35).                                                                                             |
| Multiple Sites            | “[M]usic teachers are more likely than other teachers to teach in multiple buildings within a school district” (Gardner, 2010, p. 117).                                                                                  |
| Parent Support            | “Music teachers who indicated greater levels of administration and parent support when all factors were accounted for were less likely to be at high risk for attrition/migration” (Hancock, 2008, p. 141).                      |
| Part time                 | “[T]his study corroborates that teachers who hold part-time and itinerant positions experience higher rates of turnover and attrition than teachers with full-time positions who are situated within a single building” (Gardner, 2010, p. 119). |
| Personal Accomplishment   | “The most notable improvements for Movers, as shown in Figure 1, were associated with the “intangible” rewards for teaching, such as making a difference in the lives of others, having a sense of personal accomplishment, and having work that was intellectually challenging” (Hancock, 2016, p. 431).
|                           | “[M]ost Movers experienced a stronger sense of professional prestige in their new positions” (Hancock, 2016, p. 432).                                                                                          |
| Personal Factor           | “Data indicated that most comments addressed personal issues (43%).”                                                                                                                                        |
|                           | (Madsen & Hancock, 2002, p. 12).                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Positive Change           | “In general, moving had a positive impact on an individual music teacher. Over half of the Movers changed schools to reduce their dissatisfaction with unsupportive administrators, workplace conditions, job descriptions, or job responsibilities” (Hancock, 2016, p. 431). |
| Private School            | “Music teachers at private schools are more likely than music teachers at public schools to be a high attrition/migration risk” (Hancock, 2008, p. 140).                                                        |
| Salary                    | “Music teachers who earn smaller salaries or are dissatisfied with their salaries are more likely to be a high attrition/migration risk” (Hancock, 2008, p. 141).
|                           | “Teacher selection of factors that might increase teacher job satisfaction...”                                                                                                                            |
appear in Table 2, with community/parent support (60.9%), higher salary (58.6%), and administrative support (41.3%) being the most frequently selected factors” (Baker, 2007, p. 80).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Similar to Experiences</th>
<th>“[M]usic education majors want to teach in music programs that are similar to those of their precollege music experiences” (Kelly, 2003, p. 47).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special Needs</td>
<td>“[M]any schools do not provide music teachers with the same level of support in working with special needs students as they provide other types of teachers” (Gardner, 2010, p. 120).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VITA

Joseph Casselberry earned a Bachelor of music education degree with a K-12 instrumental focus at Northwestern State University Louisiana in May of 2012. He taught grades 7 to 8 band in Dry Prong, Louisiana for 3 years. Beginning in the Fall of 2015, Mr. Casselberry accepted a graduate teaching assistantship and entered the master’s program at Louisiana State University (LSU) to study music education and minor in wind conducting. While there, Mr. Casselberry assisted with the teaching of music technology, secondary instrumental methods, elementary methods, and instrumental techniques courses. In the Fall of 2016, he created a beginning band at a local private school which did not previously offer instrumental music. In the Spring of 2017, Mr. Casselberry served as the instructor of record for the Brass Techniques course at LSU. Mr. Casselberry plans to continue teaching secondary instrumental music in a public, private, or charter school setting following his expected Summer 2017 graduation from LSU.