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High School Band Students' Perspectives of Teacher Turnover

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Abstract

Teacher turnover remains an important issue in education. The least researched perspectives, though, are those of the students who experience teacher turnover. The purpose of this study was to examine how high school band students experience teacher turnover. A total of twelve students were interviewed, representing three schools that experienced a teacher turnover that year. Students were asked to give advice to teachers leaving a program, teachers coming to a new program, and for students who learn that their teacher is leaving. The study shows that reactions to teacher change vary, and that there is more to the turnover process than just the teacher leaving or a new one arriving. Students make connections with their teachers, and when a turnover takes place, they experience a full range of emotions.

Introduction

In typical large high schools, teachers of academic classes may be assigned to a grade level, such as tenth-grade English or junior-year Chemistry. Students may not notice when an academic teacher leaves at the end of a school year as they already expect to move on to another. In contrast, turnover of a Performing Arts teacher does not go unnoticed. In most high schools, performing arts teachers (e.g. music, theater, and dance) may see the same students during multiple years of their high school careers. A band teacher's presence in the life of students is further magnified by afterschool activities (marching band) and community events (parades and concerts). Teacher turnover is defined by Boe, Cook, and Sunderland (2008) as:

Major changes in a teacher's assignment from one school year to the next. Turnover includes three components, the most studied of which are leaving teaching employment (commonly referred to as attrition) and moving to a different school (commonly referred to as school transfer or as teacher migration). A third, but neglected, component is teaching area transfer, such as the transfer of a teacher from an assignment in special education to one in general education. (p. 8)

Much of the research literature on teacher turnover focuses on the teacher, and why they move from one position to another, or quit the field entirely. Ignored are the perspectives of music students who experience this teacher turnover. The purpose of this study is to investigate what high school band students experience when their teacher leaves, and a new one enters. More specifically, how are students in a high school band program affected by a teacher turnover?

Review of Literature

Teacher turnover is heavily researched. Existing studies explore national statistics (AFEE, 2005; Boe, et al., 2008; Ingersoll, 2001, 2003; NCES, 2005; NCTAF, 2003, 2005), teacher supply and demand issues (Ingersoll, 2001; Murnane & Steele, 2007; Terry & Kritsonis, 2008), effects on student achievement (Guin, 2004; Sanders & Rivers, 1996), and the importance of hiring effective teachers as a result of teacher shortages (Ingersoll 2001, 2003; Murnane & Steele, 2007; Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Terry & Kritsonis, 2008). Reducing attrition through teacher preparation and mentoring (AAFE, 2008; Ingersoll, 2003; NCTAF, 2007), is also researched along with the high attrition rates of teachers who generally take "shortcut" certification methods to fill positions (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003).

Few studies of music teacher attrition and retention exist. Hancock (2009) found that yearly rates of retention, migration, and attrition are very similar to national teacher trends. One

finding from this study was that 28% of music teachers who left teaching positions listed going back to college as a reason. Hancock notes that it is possible that some of these individuals will return to the profession with stronger qualifications.

Madsen and Hancock (2002) reported that in a six-year study of 255 music education graduates from one institution, 34% of music educators left their teaching positions. They also note that traditional causes of teacher turnover are not necessarily the same for music teachers. They found that “the reinforcing nature of music, idiosyncratic teacher prerequisites, and unique demands placed on the in-service music teacher (e.g. performances)” (p. 8) make generalization on national trends difficult. Idiosyncratic concerns found only in music education, including a perceived lack of musical challenge, interests outside of music, wanting to perform rather than teach, were also reported as reasons many music educators left the field.

Kloss (2012) explored a correlation between band teacher turnover and student participation in marching band. Almost 41% of the participating schools had a teacher turnover (a new band teacher) within the four-year study period. Kloss also found that participation in marching band was reduced by almost 9% in the year following a teacher turnover.

Method

Students from three schools in the metropolitan Phoenix area participated in the present study during the spring of 2009. In an attempt to limit the variables of this study, each school qualified to be included by having a new band director for the 2008 – 2009 school year, and having had the same band director for at least three years up until then. This turnover represented a new change into a previously stable program, experienced by all the student members of that program. The new directors were contacted and asked for their participation in selecting and interviewing four students currently enrolled in each of their band programs—preferably juniors and seniors, and to have both genders represented in the interview pool. It was also suggested, if possible, to provide students with differing views of the current teacher in an effort to reduce student biases.

Three sites were used to confirm data through “triangulation” as described by Creswell (2007). A peer review process was also incorporated to increase validity. At each school site, I conducted interviews with four students in a private room (either a practice room or an office), in which audio was recorded digitally, each lasting between 15 and 30 minutes. In total, ten participants were male and two female, with eight seniors, three juniors and one sophomore. All of the interviews took place during the last week of April and through the second week of May in 2009.

I approached this study from a phenomenological perspective, which Creswell (2007) defines as describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon. The purpose, then, is to find among individual differences a universal “essence,” as interpreted by the researcher. Focusing less on the researcher’s interpretation of events, and more on the participants’ descriptions of their experiences, the phenomenon under investigation in the present study was how students experience a teacher turnover.

Interview recordings were transcribed, and after all transcripts were completed, data were analyzed by examining significant statements from the participants and combined into themes. Afterwards, data were compared across all participants from the three schools to find global themes. School, teacher, and student names have been changed to preserve

anonymity. All IRB guidelines were followed in terms of consent forms, permission to interview/record, and voluntary participation.

School Setting and Context

Adobe High School

Adobe High School, an “Excelling” school as labeled by the Arizona Department of Education, is located in an affluent neighborhood and recently completed a five-year construction project resulting in first-class facilities in all departments. The instrumental classroom is very large, roughly the size of a high school basketball court, with two-story ceilings. Adjoining with the band room is an almost equally large choir room, which has been converted into a piano lab. An orchestra room is further down the hall, and has been converted into the Contemporary Music room filled with computers, recording equipment, and various instruments associated with rock or pop music.

When Mr. Milner began teaching at Adobe High School several years ago, he was a full-time band and orchestra teacher, and there was also a fulltime choir teacher at the time. Over the years, numbers in his instrumental program decreased, and he offered to teach a Music Theory/Songwriting class based in part on his personal interest in the recording studio industry. Over time, with the help of grants and increasing student interest in songwriting, the contemporary music program (including guitar and piano classes) became a fulltime position. Meanwhile, the choir, band, and orchestra programs steadily decreased to the point where one teacher leads all three ensembles and still does not have enough students to be considered full time.

Mrs. Owens was hired in the summer of 2008 to teach the band (including marching band), orchestra and choir students. Mrs. Owens has both choir and band experience, and was teaching at several schools a day (middle and high school) prior to coming to Adobe High School.

Branson High School

Branson High School has been rated as “Highly Performing” by the Arizona Department of Education. With a long tradition of musical excellence existing at Branson High School, several successful band directors have taught here in the past, one of whom is now conducting an Air Force Band, and another who is a respected community college director of bands in the area. Four years previous to the study, Mr. Sears was a young assistant band director to one of these directors, and was working half time at Branson High School and half time at an elementary and middle school. Eventually the program numbers declined and the head band director received another opportunity, so Mr. Sears took over the Branson High School program without an assistant. Seemingly an easy transition and already knowing the students, Mr. Sears continued the band’s success during that transition year. However, the student numbers further declined the following year. Mr. Sears decided to leave the program to become an assistant at a larger band program, though he neglected to tell his students he was leaving. Over the summer of 2008, the band parents and students were informed through the grapevine that Mr. Sears was not coming back, and that he had left to go to another school.

Mr. Vosk was hired at the end of the summer and quickly organized a band camp and the upcoming year with no help from the former director. Mr. Vosk, a veteran member of the Army

Reserve Band with a personality and teaching style that reflect his military experience, was much older and had more teaching experience than Mr. Sears. When I visited the school, the band room was clean and organized, and the students were held responsible for putting all equipment away after each class period.

Copland High School

Also labeled “Excelling” and with similar socioeconomic qualities to the previous two schools, Copland High School had one band director in its 17 years of existence prior to this study. In comparison to the other two schools, the band room was quite small for the size of the program.

Mr. West, a teacher with National Board Certification, created and maintained a successful program and was considered a leader in the field. With only a few days of school left before the summer of 2008, Mr. West told his students that he was leaving—initially by gathering his leadership students together and reading them a letter. He then announced in each class that he was leaving to open a new high school in a growing community southeast of Phoenix. Mr. Hart was hired over that summer from another state, and made several attempts to meet with students before the school year began.

Findings: The Students’ Experience

The students’ descriptions of the experience of a change of teachers fell into several contradictory categories. Some believed a teacher change was “no big deal,” while others felt abandoned. Some students thought transitioning from one teacher to the next would be a bad experience, while some found it to be much more positive. All of the students who were interviewed could have chosen to quit their band programs, but decided to stay, even though some of their friends quit. Many of the students over the three campuses had similar experiences, although unique experiences were identified.

It’s no big deal

One of the ideas expressed by participants in all three schools is that they participate in band because it’s what they like to do; it doesn’t really matter who is teaching. Making music is what band means for them. At Adobe High School, Zachary didn’t noticeably care that his director left. He commented “It didn’t really matter to me. I’ve been through two band teachers, not here but at two different schools. A band teacher is a band teacher to me.” When I asked him about how he reacted to hearing about Mr. Milner leaving and Mrs. Owens appearing, he responded: “I didn’t care. Not really. Just another band teacher.” Margo’s comments were very similar when I asked her about what she felt when she heard Mr. Milner was leaving: “I don’t really remember. It didn’t have much of an impact on me really, I guess. Teachers come, teachers go. It was like, ‘Oh, he’s leaving, we’re getting a new one.’ I’ll be out of here in a year anyways.” Similarly, Charles “didn’t really mind” that Mr. Milner was changing positions, saying, “If he’s going to do other stuff, then, whatever. Stuff happens.”

Students from Branson High School described their love of making music, as well as being with their friends, when asked why they chose to stay in band. “I just love music. Just because we got a new director doesn’t mean I’m going to hate it,” Michael responded. William discussed his love of playing music with his friends: “The only thing that kept me through was like the people who didn’t use [the change of teachers] as an excuse to quit. Having those friends with me and just playing the music. Just for the passion of playing the music. Yeah, the people haven’t

changed. All that is changed is the person giving us tips on how to do better.” Thomas remarked, “I really don’t care who the director is or how things change.”

At Copland High School, Jonathan in particular was adamant that having the same band director for four years was a detriment to the program. “I think, I honestly think, that a lot of kids get so focused on the one person, that it’s not a good thing.” He continued:

I think that you should have a different director every year, so you can learn what it is like to have a different director. There are kids that make regionals and go to the regional band and they have one conductor up there, and he wants it done one way. But you’re not used to that. You’re not used to having someone tell you to do something different, or how to do it differently. You just don’t know. So it’s hard for you to understand that. Then you make All-State and you get someone completely different. People get so set on doing one thing that it’s not good. I think people really need to have a different director every year, or at least every two years.

His peers did not echo his comments. For every student who commented that changing directors was no big deal, there were others who felt abandoned or betrayed, by their departing director.

Abandoned

Although many students expressed feelings of sadness, loss, or dismay about losing their band director, feelings of abandonment and anger were most evident at Branson High School, where the band director neglected to tell the students that he was not coming back the following year. Cory was among the students who wanted more honesty and transparency from his former band director:

I mean, it kind of sucks that he went to another school. It would have been nice if he was more of a gentleman about it and said, “Listen, I’m going to another school next year. I had a great time with you guys” instead of just leaving. Why did he leave us like that? It’s very disrespectful.

William also wanted to be informed that a change could be coming when he said, “And then he’s gone. And I’m like, ‘Wow, thanks, dude.’ Just totally ditched us. It was like, ‘Way to leave us in the dust.’” Thomas came into the band room to borrow some equipment after the school year had ended, talked to Mr. Sears, and then “I found out a couple of weeks later that he left. He didn’t tell anybody this. So I was a little upset. He just left us in the middle of nowhere, on our own.” Michael didn’t like being “left hanging” without knowing the future of the program.

Michael commented:

He just left. Didn’t tell us what to do, didn’t give us any help. Nothing. It pissed everyone off. If you’re going to quit, at least help us out. Like a two weeks’ notice, you’re still there working, so maybe they can find a new assistant, or whatever. He didn’t help with the director find. He didn’t help with band camp, organizing band camp...any of it. He didn’t call the middle schools and make sure the kids were coming. Nothing. He just left and it was all up to the students and the band parents which, you know, is hard. It sucked.

Branson High School students expressed similar feelings of disappointment in how their band teacher left the program.

A few of the students from Copland High School also expressed feelings of abandonment, but none more so than Richard. Richard was the third child in his family that participated in Mr. West's band program. His older sisters would drag him to rehearsals and events from the time he was 8 years old. In the second-to-last week of his junior year, Mr. West told Richard that he wasn't returning. "It was the worst possible thing to happen, ever," Richard said. For ten years he had gotten to know his teacher, and he lamented, "Everything changes so much, the one constant has always been Mr. West."

Change is Bad

With a new teacher, all of the students were aware that their band program was going to change. They decided to stay in band for another year and see what happened. One of the changes, primarily at Adobe and Branson high schools, was that their new teachers had different expectations for their students. Mrs. Owens's students at Adobe High School thought there was more work involved this year. Margo quit marching band during the season because "[Mrs. Owens] started to actually make us do stuff, and I'm a very lazy type of person." Margo rejoined in the spring for her last semester of concert band. In contrast, Mitch enjoyed the new expectations, stating:

We got Mrs. Owens as a teacher who is more serious about marching band. She got us, for the first time since I've been here, a drum instructor. So it was cool to have marching band more serious, but a lot of kids didn't take it that way because it was the first year.

Charles, a junior at the time of this study, had the most to say about the changes to his band program at Adobe High School. He was resistant to higher expectations, which cut into his social time:

We have more concerts now. We do a lot more practice now. We work in sectionals. We've gone through a lot more pieces of music, because last year we only had two concerts, so we only played, like, six. Now we've gone through maybe 20? And I would just say we're doing a lot more this year. I just think of band as like hanging out with friends, having a good time. Concerts are fun, but when you do too many, it's just tough.

Because of this trend, he told me that he would not be returning to band his senior year. "If we didn't have so many concerts and stuff like that, and so many afterschool things," he said, "I probably would stay. But it's just too much."

Branson High School students noticed immediately the difference in teaching styles in their new teacher. Michael's first impression was not very positive:

I was stressed out because I wasn't used to, you know, he's military. I wasn't used to the whole, like band is very military, but [this year] it's always been very military-like and very strict. So when he got here it was kind of a different attitude than Mr. Sears. [Mr. Vosk] was more of, "Let's get this done and let's get it done right." At first I thought he was a pretty mean guy, he yells a lot. But is he really yelling or is he trying to be loud to

make sure everyone can hear? After band camp I thought he was pretty mean. I have to be honest.

Thomas agreed, saying “At the beginning of the year, things were rough, very rough.” William recalled what band used to be like:

It was definitely more laid back. It was like, I don't know. [Mr. Sears] seemed to be able to make the whole “band is fun” thing a bit better than Mr. Vosk can. And Mr. Vosk wants to make sure you are getting things played correctly rather than “let's just have fun” sort of thing. I mean, he wants you to have fun, but he wants you to actually do the music, not just goof around.

For students at Copland High School, reactions were mixed with the appearance of Mr. Hart. Students felt that communication with the new teacher is what changed the most. Several students commented that Mr. Hart was more “shy” and “quiet” than their previous teacher. Richard commented that “[Mr. Hart] knows what he is doing, but he doesn't really put it across in a way that we would probably get it.” He described feeling that this was only going to be temporary, when he said, “Even now some of us think it's really weird because it's more like Mr. West has a substitute than anything. It's how most of us feel. That's how we felt at the beginning of the year.” Mark's friends quit band because they “didn't want to deal with this new dude.” Susan thought that the overall discipline and students' attitudes were what changed the most, commenting, “Everyone has this horrible attitude this year.” Jonathan's first impressions of Mr. Hart were negative, “I didn't like him. He just seemed too uptight. He needed to relax a little bit. He's very controlling and possessive.” He went on to say:

I was his TA for first semester. I didn't do anything. I did absolutely nothing. The most I did was to re-file music and then put it in score order, and that was it. With Mr. West, I came in and helped him and stuff. He had kids building stuff. This [practice] room was painted by one of his TAs. There was an endless amount of paperwork. I didn't do any of that [this semester].

For Jonathan, what changed the most was the decrease of student participation in the creation, design, and running of the marching band season.

Change is Good

Some students with negative first impressions of their new teacher saw things in a different light by the end of the school year. At Adobe High School, Mitchell remarked, “So I've been happy with the change. I'm glad that Mr. Milner's [contemporary music] program got to grow, and with Mrs. Owens we got a little more serious about the other types of band.” When asked about the transition, he remarked, “That sucked, but I feel the program has grown a lot from it.” Charles agreed when asked about Mrs. Owens's long-term outlook:

For the school? I would say it was probably a good thing. We are going to have a better band program now. After a while, it's just going to get worked up. But, I didn't like [the transition] personally, but I figured it eventually would be good.

With changing expectations, Zachary appreciated Mrs. Owens's new style of teaching: “I think it is better because Mrs. Owens has gotten us more tied down to practicing. She's making us do tests about music.”

After the initial rough transition, many students had positive things to say about Mr. Vosk the more they worked with him. Cory appreciated his new teacher's honesty:

I liked him. I thought he had a lot to offer to help the band. At band camp, he came out and said "This is who I am. I'm kind of a jerk, get used to it." He's a good guy, and I saw that. But the seniors had this resistance "I don't care" kind of thing.

Thomas had the same misgivings at first:

Well, at first I didn't really like Mr. Vosk, but I got over it. To this day, I still have a little something, but it's nothing major compared to some of the kids I know for a fact. They have issues. It's just different teaching styles, different personalities. He's in the Army Reserve band. Of course he's going to bring some of that into the high school. He's got something like 17 years of teaching experience. In rehearsal, he's down to the bone, hard core, "We got to get this done now." Off the field he's a really chill, relaxed guy. Overall, it was a great change for us.

Students at Copland High School were also positive about the future direction of their band program. When asked about the long term prospects for the band program, Susan commented "[The change was a] good thing because he has a lot of good ideas. It's just having the people to help him get started and people finally realize that it's not Mr. West's band anymore. It's [Mr. Hart's] now." Jonathan commented, "I think he's trying to change things too quickly," but is positive in his long-term outlook.

Quitting Band

I was not able to interview students that quit their respective band programs, but the participants all knew people who quit. Charles commented about how the teacher change at Adobe High School affected the program, "Well, numbers went down right away, that's a direct effect. Other than that, I don't see much. Most of the good people stayed." Mitchell thought people quit because of the changing expectations, saying, "I was ready, I was excited for the transition, but a lot of people weren't. A lot of people dropped out of marching band because they didn't think it would be as fun and as laid back as it was last year." Richard, at Copland High School, watched several of his friends quit:

A bunch of people quit. Granted some of them were already quitting. This girl that was in my class, she signed up for it and was like, "I don't know if I can take another director." She quit. A couple of people quit halfway through the [Fall] semester, or halfway through the year. Several people were very saddened. It's a different perspective, they didn't like it as much either.

Jonathan saw the same types of attitudes, even from the seniors who were graduating in just a few days:

A lot of my friends were not happy. A lot of the seniors last year, they didn't like it either. But I was like "Why do you care? You're not going to be here, it doesn't make a difference to you." Some people were really upset. I know some people didn't come back because of it. I know some people were, "Ok, we'll try it." Some of them left at semester, some didn't even last two weeks. It was a lot of different things.

Susan describes the students that quit: “We don’t really talk to them anymore because they stopped talking to us.”

Conflicts at Branson High School

None of the students at Branson High School were given any notice of the teacher change until a few weeks before the start of the school year. With the previous band director not telling the students he was leaving, a lot of anger was directed at the new teacher. Michael’s resistance to the new teacher was evident when he commented:

He’s not very organized. This year was super rough, super unorganized, because it was a new program for him, and a new director for us. He didn’t know us, we didn’t know him. And it’s like, “Who is this guy coming in? Trying to take over and we have to listen to him?”

Older students, like Thomas, talk about the resistance to change at the beginning of the year:

The band director can choose to do whatever he wants with the band just as long as he keeps with the old traditions and integrity and stuff. The senior class, well, they never did like the new director. There’s a lot of conflict and issues. I just learned to deal with it. [Mr. Vosk] brought discipline back, and of course some kids were like, “No, what are you doing? This isn’t how it is.” Us seniors who know, like, that’s the discipline. I’m glad he brought it back. He’s got different teaching styles. He’s been doing this a long time. I think overall, the [change in] teaching style is what got to some of us.

Cory thought that there was a communication barrier between the students and the new teacher:

It’s been a tough year. I like him as a guy. I really like Mr. Vosk, but he comes in and is very militant on what he wants. I like him, but at the same time he and I have some communication issues. There’s kind of a language barrier between us. I kind of realize that. He will say things like, “I’m speaking English.” But there is a little bit of a barrier in the way he comes in and tries to say, “OK this is how things are” and then kids, such as me, say, “We don’t like that.” But we’ve also hindered ourselves. It’s been kind of difficult.

William blames Mr. Vosk for the transition problems, saying, “He came in too harsh. He didn’t ease into his tactics of teaching kids which made a lot of us dislike him pretty much for most of the season.” By the time I interviewed the students at Branson High School at the end of the school year, most of the resistance and communication issues seem to have diminished. All four of these students are actively participating in band, and think that Mr. Vosk coming to their school will be a positive change.

Staying in Band

At the time of the interviews, all of the students were actively participating in their band programs. Each student was asked why they chose to stay in the program. Students at Adobe High School had mixed reasons for staying in band. Charles commented, “I figured I would give it a chance. It’s like, why not? I can always change if I don’t like it.” Margo stayed because she needed the credit to graduate. Zachary was the only student at Adobe High School whose

response was about music. “I don’t know. I just like band. I like playing instruments,” he said. “That’s why I stayed.”

All four students from Branson High School responded that the love of playing music was the main reason they stayed in the program. Responses from these four students also included the social benefits of playing music with their friends, and for some, the feelings of wanting to commit to making music all four years of high school. “I stayed because I love the program,” said Thomas. He continued:

I mean, I’m in my fourth year already. It’s fun. It’s the only thing I could, or really want to do. I have a great time. I’ve got friends in this program. It gives you something to do in high school. I can say that I’ve accomplished something in my years at high school. I just love the program. My sister was in it for four years. I’m like, “I’ll do it for four years.” I really don’t care who the director is, or how things change. I will eventually, but I know that I’m here to have fun, enjoy, and play music.

Students at Copland High School stayed in the program for similar reasons. Many of them expressed their love of making music. “I stayed because I love music,” said Mark. “Honestly, that is really the only reason. I love music.” Susan added, “I just enjoy band. I’m not going to quit just because I don’t like the teacher.” Richard wanted to give Mr. Hart a chance:

It would be very unfair if I just quit without giving Mr. Hart a chance. I thought I’d at least give him a semester and see what I think of him. I would feel bad to just quit because the director changed. If I join [a college] marching band, I’m going to have a different director anyways.

Advice from Students: 1. For Teachers Leaving

Students were asked to give their advice to teachers leaving a band program. Overall, students wanted to hear the truth. “Basically come out and tell them the truth,” Jonathan, responded. “You were hiding something from them, now spill the beans. Just tell the truth in and out.” Other students wanted more time between learning their teacher was leaving to the end of the school year. “It was horrible timing,” lamented Richard, “because everyone was studying for finals and then he was gone. Don’t do that.” Students at Branson High School were really adamant not to leave a program without telling the students. “Definitely let the kids know what you are doing,” responded Thomas. “It may upset them, but it will be a lot better than picking up your stuff and not telling anybody. Leave them on a positive note.” Other students, like Mitchell, advised:

Try to leave stuff behind for the next teacher. We picked out the music for the next show, and we didn’t know if the new teacher was going to change it or leave it, we didn’t know any of that until band camp came around. Luckily, it all worked out, but we didn’t know if it was going to. It was an interesting change.

Advice from Students: 2. For New Teachers

Much of the advice from students to new teachers centered around the ongoing struggle of change versus tradition. Cory’s comments are representative of the students from Branson High School:

I would say go with the flow. See what the kids are like. Don't come in and say, "This is how it's going to be." You got to go in there and think, "This is what the kids are like, how can I take what I know and what I've learned throughout the years and put it to them." Don't try and change everything at once, because every band program is different. He didn't know what it was like here, he didn't know about the tradition of excellence we've had. So he came in here like, "I'm going to make this band better," but what he doesn't understand is we've marched for an amazing band, you know, my freshman year. I say do research on your program, look into your program and see what it's like, and feel your program out before making any big changes.

Many students suggest that a new teacher take things slow at first. "The best way I can say it," Richard commented, "is to slowly integrate your ways into their ways and then by the time the year is over, when you start the next year it will be completely your way." "Definitely take things slow," advised Susan. "This is what Mr. Hart [at Copland High School] did really well. He understood that we were used to Mr. West's way and took it a step at a time. For a new teacher, it's just a good idea."

About the transition itself, Michael says, "I don't think you can make the transition easier." Mark advised new teachers to:

Trust people. Even though you are meeting them for the first time make sure you trust them. If you don't, they will not trust you. If they don't trust you, the people that look up to them will not trust you, either. When you have not trust, everything fails.

"I think any teacher that goes to a new high school has to be prepared," said Margo. "Kids are going to talk back and kids aren't going to listen. It's a fact of life." Mitchell advises to "have a plan A and plan B in case things don't work out the way that you want." Thomas would tell a new teacher, "Be expecting a lot of kids to resent you. It's not personal, it's just how it happens." Zachary would remind new teachers to "try not to be a tyrant. That usually doesn't go well with kids."

Advice from Students: 3. For Students

Students were asked what advice they would give to other students who just found out that their teacher was leaving. "Calm down and grow up," remarked Jonathan. "It's just one more person that is in and out of your life." Other students, like Thomas, share versions of this advice when he says, "Don't whine. Get over it. There's nothing you can do." Margo advised students to "deal with it." Mark would remind students to "realize that you're not there for the teacher, you are there for the music. You make the music. Just give people time." Susan would remind students "not to over exaggerate. It's not like they're dying, they're just leaving."

Mitchell was more positive, advising students to "be ready for the change. Embrace it. Don't be afraid of it." "Stick around the program," Zachary advises, "even for a little bit. Just so you can see what it is like." William suggests, "Just stay in the class. Sure you'll have a different director, but it's not like a different director is going to change the way music is written or done. It's just another guy." "Be open minded," suggests Cory:

Listen to what he has to say, he knows more than you. He's the teacher and you are not. Understand that he's here to teach and this is his passion. Music is his passion. We're all here for music in the first place.

Discussion and Implications

It seems that a relationship forms between band students and their teacher over time. Students learn that their teacher will guide them and lead them through various musical activities and events. The teacher guides their students through issues of responsibility (showing up on time), integrity (with their parts learned), and musicality (the audience wants us to play for them). When a teacher leaves a band program, that relationship is in some way affected. Students then confront a choice: stay in the program or quit.

This study's data imply that there is more to the turnover process than just the teacher leaving or a new one arriving. Students make connections with their teachers, and when a turnover takes place, they experience a full range of emotions. These emotions can affect their future participation in band, and have a collective effect on their friends.

One of the findings of the study is that students who love to make music will not let a teacher turnover stop them from participating in their band program. The joy of making music with their friends is still a strong reason not to quit. This is also consistent with findings from Kloss (2012) in which a majority of students remain in a band program after a teacher turnover.

This study suggests that high school students want to be involved in the turnover process between a teacher leaving and a new one arriving. Students want to know the truth about a teacher leaving, and have enough time to prepare for the changes that are about to occur. They also want to be involved in the process of indoctrinating a new teacher into the existing program. Whether or not the new teacher is open to keeping existing traditions is another matter.

All three new teachers in this study were hired in the summer, one of which was hired just two weeks before the start of summer band activities. For all three, that is a relatively small amount of time to acclimate themselves into their new school and classroom, organize a band camp, meet with students, and plan for an entire year. New teachers would do well to realize that attention should be given to their new students. A more successful turnover may occur if students feel they are being heard.

More study should be done on students experiencing these teacher turnovers. Although research on reasons why teachers leave the profession is important to help prevent attrition, studies on how to leave a program with the least amount of negative effects have not been done. Also, future study on student perspectives of a "revolving door (Ingersoll, 2001)" of teachers through their program is needed. A prolonged study of teachers and students before and after a turnover is also suggested. The ability to talk with students who quit their program before the new teacher arrived would also be beneficial to this area of study. The ultimate goal of this area of research should be to find ways in which to prevent student attrition thus keeping band programs alive and successful for all.

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