

THE FIRST FIVE YEARS OF THE “REAL WORLD:” AN IN-PROGRESS LONGITUDINAL INVESTIGATION OF MUSIC TEACHERS EDUCATED IN PENNSYLVANIA MUSIC EDUCATION PROGRAMS DURING THEIR FIRST FIVE YEARS AFTER COLLEGE

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The purpose of this in-progress investigation is to case study a small group of recent music education graduates through their first five years after college. Of specific interest in this first year and a half of data collection are interview experiences, undergraduate curriculum design (including field experiences, student teaching, beneficial coursework, and mainstreaming), successes and struggles in their first years of teaching, feelings of “preparedness,” relationships with mentors, and advice to future music teachers. Subjects for this study are 11 public school music teachers who were recognized by their university/college as SMTE Award recipients during the Spring of 2006. Participants will complete three yearly surveys and additional interviews, observations, and reflective journals will be scheduled throughout this project. Data for this specific presentation will be derived from surveys completed in September 2006, January, June, and September 2007, and January 2008.

Preliminary data indicates that interview experiences were fairly positive. All subjects had multiple interviews and almost everyone had some type of audition process or interviewed for multiple administrator panels or, in one case, a parent. Paper portfolios were prepared for every interview and the majority used them in their interview process. Overall, subjects believed that their biggest hindrances in interviewing were lack of experience and location uncertainty, while listing confidence, organization, networking, and undergraduate leadership as helpful.

Undergraduate field experience opportunities included site based methods courses and numerous observations, and most of the participants were placed in their student teaching locations by the music education area head and observed from three to ten times throughout their placement. The majority of subjects reported that methods courses, specifically instrumental methods, were the most beneficial aspect of their undergraduate curriculum and noted that core courses, statistics, form and analysis, freshmen seminars, and history of music education were not as beneficial to their current position.

When asked about their undergraduate and working experiences with mainstreamed children, subjects felt “prepared enough” through course discussions, observations, and student teaching, “not prepared at all,” or reported current struggles with assessment, inclusion, and a lack of well-trained teaching assistants. First year struggles also included developing relationships with colleagues and parents, teaching beginner flute players, and student retention, whereas first year successes included strong marching band seasons, solid winter concerts, and positive connections with students.

Overall, subjects felt prepared to do their current job both at the beginning of the school year and in January, though great improvements had occurred with time. For the most part, subjects were pleased with their undergraduate experiences, though several reported that they wished they had “studied a bit harder,” paid more attention to piano and vocal training, or spent more time rehearsing ensembles. Each subject had some type of mentor in the first year of teaching – most of whom are extremely helpful – and listed firmer management systems and more attention to concert preparation when asked to

name what they would like to change about their first months of teaching. Advice to future music teachers included gaining as much experience in as many different educational settings as possible and being completely sure about the decision to teach.