RESILIENT CHORAL TEACHERS

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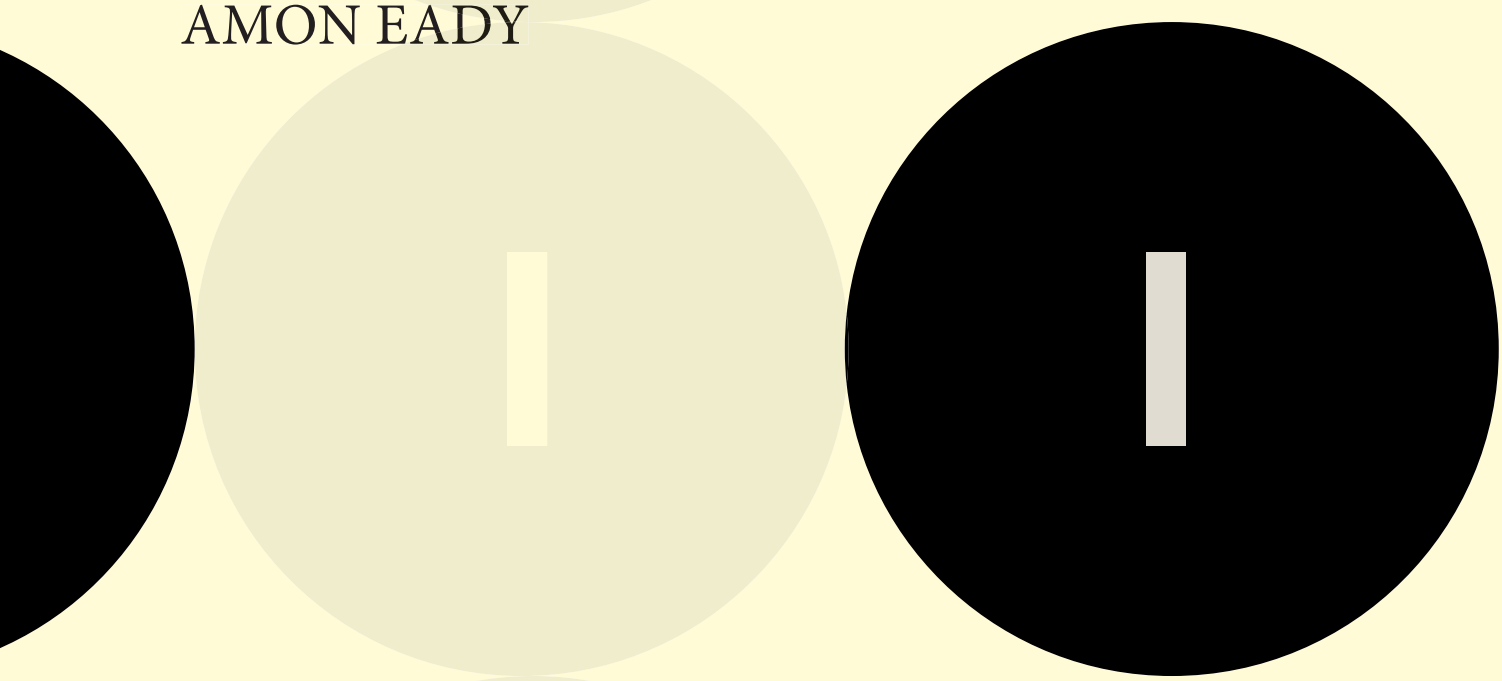

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New teachers enter a profession that is wrought with stressors and challenges. Whether it is shortage of monetary and educational resources, lack of active support systems, paltry compensation, or the extreme demand of emotional capacity required for such young professionals, beginning educators face a myriad of potential challenges upon entering the work force.

Stories and statistics of teacher burnout and attrition are ubiquitous, and the U.S. Department of Education has reported similarly abysmal numbers over the past twenty years. The music classroom is no exception, especially in complex situations such as urban environments. In a study conducted over a ten-year period in a large urban school district in the mid-south, only 17 (13.7%) of 124 secondary band and choral programs experienced no teacher turnover. The other 86.3% (104) experienced turnover, with 55 of those schools experiencing moderate or high teacher turnover, and one school changed music teachers every year during the ten-year span.[1]

We will not dwell on the negative aspects of the teaching profession nor discover an elusive "secret" to keeping teachers in the profession. Instead, the aim is to identify and investigate attributes of successful teachers who defy disadvantageous constructs and thrive as choral directors. These teachers demonstrate resilience. Resilience is a product of how one interacts with their environment over time, and such evidence of a teacher's resilience might only become visible when they encounter adverse situations. Melanie Tait suggests, "Resilience is a mode of interacting with events in the environment that is activated and nurtured in times of stress."[2]

The study of teacher resilience, especially thriving teachers, is a somewhat nascent field of inquiry. Gu and Day indicate that only as recent as the 1980s, and continuing through the decades to follow, has the research on resilience shifted focus to the positive traits and strengths of the resilient, rather than the negative situations they overcome.[3] Beltman, Mansfield, and Price compiled a review of fifty educational research studies on teacher resilience from 2000 to 2010 focused on "quality retention." These researchers identified recurring concepts of resilience:

> Individual characteristics such as self-efficacy, confidence and coping strategies are important in overcoming challenging situations or recurring setbacks.[4] Difficulties are not simply managed, but individuals are able to bounce back quickly and efficiently, persevere and thrive.[5] Successful adaptation occurs despite obstacles, and personal wellbeing is maintained[6] Reciprocal, mutually supportive personal, professional and peer relationships are important in this process.[7] The outcome is that teachers maintain job satisfaction and commitment to their profession.[8, 9]

What does resilience look like for the choral teacher? We have focused these recurring concepts of resilience in the research literature into three areas concerning the pre-service music educator and beginning choral teacher:

- Self-Efficacy and Skill sets
- Personal Magnetism
- Support Systems

We will explore these factors of resilience-building for the pre-service and early-career choral conductors through three reflective personal essays.

Self-Efficacy and Skill Sets

Self-efficacy and confidence are some of the most common conceptualizations of thriving teacher resilience in research literature. Self-efficacy refers to a person's belief in their ability to accomplish a goal. The psychological study of self-efficacy stems from the work of renowned psychologist Albert Bandura and has greatly influenced learning theories in education. Self-efficacy concerns the combination of cognitive faculties (thinking, logic, memory, etc.) and affective faculties (emotion, instinct, etc.). High self-efficacy involves a trust in cognitive abilities coupled with positive outcome expectancy.

Individual perceptions of self-efficacy can develop over time, and the undergraduate college experience is, for many, a time of concentrated personal growth and development especially in the area of emotional maturity. College teacher-conductors are likely not strangers to modern university students' struggles with self-doubt, anxiety, and depression. Oftentimes for pre-service music educators, these struggles manifest themselves in stunted development of self-concept and confidence on the podium and beyond. Students seem overly concerned with the possibility of failure in front of others, even students who may display little to no anxiety in solo and ensemble performances. Of course, potential for failure is not without consequence in the classroom, and master teachers maintain a dedication to creating successful experiences for their students. However, this diminished perception of self-efficacy in pre-service music educators prevents them from having the requisite confidence to effectively display resilience in times of stress.

Feelings of self-doubt and insecurity are typical struggles throughout a teaching career. These feelings are most frequently experienced in the beginning stages.

> Ordinary social realities are strewn with difficulties. They are full of impediments, failures, adversities, setbacks, frustrations, and inequities. People must have a robust sense of personal efficacy to sustain the perseverant effort needed to succeed. Self-doubts can set in quickly after some failures or reverses. The important matter is not that difficulties arouse self-doubt, which is a natural immediate reaction, but the speed of the recovery of perceived self-efficacy from diffi-

culties… Because the acquisition of knowledge and competencies usually requires sustained effort in the face of difficulties and setbacks, it is the resiliency of self-belief that counts.[10]

While the "resiliency of self-belief" is ultimately the most important factor in teacher bounce-back, the development of the resilience innate in a music education student's "acquisition of knowledge and competencies" is foundational. It does take years to achieve mastery of the fundamental musical and teaching skill sets necessary for success in the choral classroom. These skill set proficiencies must be in place as second nature. They serve as a baseline for choral teachers to cultivate the resiliency of self-belief.

Strong skill sets are the first line of defense for the pitfalls of self-doubt. Therefore, the choral conductor is charged with developing strong skills in personal musicianship as well as effective sequential teaching patterns and rehearsal planning. Below, we briefly consider some areas of personal musicianship and rehearsal organization for preservice and beginning choral teachers to consider. By no means is this list exhaustive, but it highlights a few areas we encounter teaching preservice choral teachers.

Areas of Personal Musicianship

Singing (Vocal Model)

The vocal model is of extreme importance in building tone. More broadly, "modelling is the first step in building competencies."[11] For most young singers, especially in at-risk situations, the choral conductor is the sole voice instructor. The choral conductor's vocal model will be one of the strongest influences on the development of choral-vocal technique and tone. Having singing skills outside the Western Art bel canto style is also beneficial for reaching more singers. A strong vocal model should include:

- Supported breath
- Vocal fold closure
- Raised soft palate
- Chiaroscuro (bright-dark, balanced) tone
- Active resonance areas
- Intonation
- Diction – and sound understanding of pronunciation of foreign texts
- 120–70: you might have to give what you think is 120% to get 70% of what you want back from the choir
- Practice singing all parts before the first rehearsal

Conducting Technique

Conducting technique is developed in action. It is difficult to become one with gestures intended to elicit sound without the context. Conducting gestures can also be the first thing to go in times of stress.

- Make conducting gesture second nature; practice conducting while doing other things, develop hand independence
- Breathe (on the vowel) with little to no audible sound; metric breathing with each prep, eye-contact
- Show the equilibrium of breath flow in the resistance and fluidity of the wrist
- Use the rebound to control time and "stay in the pocket" (beat speed change, 60+% in the rebound, 40%> in the takt)

Keyboard Proficiency

Do no harm. You do not have to be an amazing pianist to run a choral rehearsal. You do have to have some basic proficiency. The need for the choral conductor's piano proficiency cannot be undersold. Often in secondary school choirs, the choral conductor is the sole source for piano assistance until the dress rehearsal and concert. This has a great effect on the quality of

the outcome. The choral conductor cannot afford to be without piano skills.

- Make rhythm the most important
- Maintain a consistent tempo
- Give a harmonic context, think chords
- Ask yourself: how can what I am doing help the choir progress with the piece?

Knowledge of Theory and Formal Structures

Many students engage only with college theory instruction as a formality-style requirement of their degrees. This is an unfortunate reality, as the information investigated in the theoretical study of music is actually exceedingly important in developing the shape of a piece – right down to the shape of each line. When choral teachers begin truly applying concepts of theory, form, and analysis to choral music for rehearsal, they open up huge possibilities for success. Understanding formal analysis in the process of score study allows the choral teacher to develop a concept of how the piece should sound—the aural image of the work.

Aural Image and Error Detection

The aural image also includes the various shades of tone, timbre, and color that make up the concept of choral sound. This task involves committed critical listening and seeking out opportunities to hear different choirs of many ages and backgrounds with various levels of training in live performance and recordings. It involves expanding the tonal palate and distinguishing the differences in what you hear, engaging your ear with unfamiliar and foreign tone concepts, asking why you perceive different sounds the way you do. A choral teacher's aural image also connects to their personal experiences as a singer in choirs. It also involves understanding how different musical styles dictate different styles of vocal production and tone.

Upon establishing an aural image for a piece, how does the choral teacher get the choir to the finish line of the final performance living up to the aural image? The choral educator is responsible for teaching what needs to change in the ensemble to get the singers from the actual performance closer to the aural image in the choral educator's mind. This requires accurate listening, solid vocal models, and specific feedback.

Direct Instruction Teaching Cycle Model Using Sequential Teaching Patterns

Once the choral teacher knows what academic information they need to teach for the chorus to approach the aural image of a work, they must apply sequential patterns to deliver the instruction within the context of a rehearsal plan. The vast research of Clifford Madsen, Cornelia Yarbrough, Harry Price, Judy Bowers, and many others concerning sequencing and reinforcement in music teaching has produced a brilliant framework of operational definitions for sequential teaching patterns (1 – Teacher presentation, 2 – Student performance, 3 – Teacher reinforcement). This comes out of the Direct Instruction Model.[12] The most effective sequence is task presentation, student performance, with immediate, specific, positive feedback.

The most valuable specific teaching a conductor can do in guiding toward an aural image is presenting academic musical tasks and related feedback to students' performance. Students will better internalize academic musical concepts, techniques, and skills with clear instruction, an opportunity to try it, and specific, related feedback. We may recall examples of the breakdown in sequential teaching when a teacher has given high-magnitude disapproval that is specific but unrelated to previous instruction. Often, conductors are reactionary in error-detection mode and fail to be proactive in teaching what will eliminate the errors prior to rehearsal. Proactive sequential teaching helps allow singers to build independence as individual musicians rather than only seeking not to displease their conductor.

Although an older study, readers are encouraged to access the detailed breakdown and operational definitions of sequential teaching patterns in music in the 1993 *JRME* article "The effects of sequential patterns on rehearsal evaluations of high school and elementary students" by Cornelia Yarbrough and Catherine

Hendel.[13] By being able to name these behaviors with operational definitions, music education students can quantify actions in the classroom and begin to shape their own teaching behaviors toward best practices. Additionally, when students can identify effective teaching sequence cycles, they can eliminate the practices that reduce their effectiveness and efficiency.

Rehearsal Technician Skills

Another contributor to success and efficiency is rehearsal planning. Rehearsal organization and pacing create a foundation and rhythm for growth and success. The structure of routine in a rehearsal plan maximizes student engagement and makes consistent forward progress. It is worth mentioning that these skills also proactively manage the potential for off-task behavior in the classroom.

We include a suggested general outline for a 60–75-minute rehearsal plan (Table 1 on page 24). Sections of Forward Progress and Continuity and Retention can, and should, be cycled, and possibly shortened, based on the needs of the repertoire and singers. This is a general outline that may be adapted as needed. The fundamental tenants of this outline exist to keep students engaged. Do not spend too much time on any task. Move things forward, and emphasize retention.[14]

Bandura notes that a unique aspect of human cognition is the self-reflective evaluation.[16] How did it go? How do we adapt? With the fundamentals of personal musicianship, sequential teaching patterns, and rehearsal organization in place, choral teachers have established the first lines of defense against self-doubt.

Though the power of positive thought is not without merit, if someone is struggling with self-doubt, it is unlikely that this fear will subside by simply thinking about it or through it. Choral teachers will eventually stand in front of the class, and they might fail. Hopefully, it is a safe pre-service environment where failure can lead to learning, but sometimes it is not. When beginning choral teachers do fail, how do they not let

Table 1. Suggested Choral Rehearsal Outline and Sections

Warm-ups (5 – 7′)	• Stabilize ensemble focus (on-task) • Make a need for yourself as the conductor and leader • Stabilize ensemble focus (on-task) Numerous resources exist for choral warm-ups • Stabilize ensemble focus (on-task) Suggestion: "The First Five Minutes" from *Foundations of Choral Conducting* – Kevin Fenton, 2009[15]: ◦ voice activation ◦ skill development ◦ ensemble enhancement
Gratification Zone 1 (15′)	• Most important: have success! • Area where singers can find success quickly. A less challenging read or a piece that students have rehearsed previously • Establish choral sound • Continued sound building from the ensemble enhancement portion of the warm-ups. • Focus on tone and intonation • Mild polishing can be done in this zone. • Create an atmosphere for success – get choir ready to work on difficult material
Forward Progress Zone (15′)	• Most challenging material you will cover in the rehearsal • New material • Biggest teaching zone • Singers' minds are in the optimal focus place for learning
Continuity Zone (10 – 15′)	• Transitional material • Connect the forward progress to preceding and following sections in the music • Put things in context – always have "the gestalt" (big picture of a section, piece, or work) in mind • This zone transfers from the minute detail work to the full section material – do not work on things in complete isolation, context fosters musicality
Retention Zone (10 – 15′)	• Material covered previously (earlier and/or in previous rehearsals) • Can progress naturally from Continuity Zone, especially if goal section is part of a larger movement of piece with previously rehearsed sections • Memorization work can be done here • Polishing possible in this zone
Gratification Zone 2 (10′)	• End with success • Piece or section that is fun to sing • Polishing in this zone • Positive attitudes leaving the rehearsal • Singers leaving your rehearsal still singing is a good thing

it destroy them? How does the "confident" or experienced conductor behave and think? This confident behavior is often referred to as personal magnetism.

Personal Magnetism

Magnetism is a term used in choral music education. This term appears most often when the discussion centers around choral conducting with regard to behaviors associated with one's effectiveness on the podium. In a 1961 *MEJ* article, Elizabeth Green intentionally mentions not only the conducting technique but also the "personal magnetism" of legendary Hungarian conductor Arthur Nikisch, when explaining his success.[27] In the book *Essentials in Conducting,* Karl Wilson Gehrkens notes the struggles of several famed composers when conducting their own works. Assuming it could never be attributed to a lack of skill or musicianship in these giants of the music-making realm, he decides it is simply because of an absence of "personal magnitude," something he describes as "that peculiar ability which enables one man to dominate others." He goes on to explain that this ability seems largely inborn, but that those who do not naturally possess it, can acquire it, to an extent, by making a "consistent and intelligent attempt in this direction."[18]

Both authors clearly present personal magnetism as the counterpart to musicianship. This creates a necessary duality within the teacher-conductor persona that seems generally understood across the profession. For any music educator, this duality transfers directly to the dual mission of moving the ensemble developmentally forward both as a group, and as individuals, and both as musicians and human beings. For those who educate pre-service teachers, a developed personal magnetism is crucial because students will take on the traits with which they identify most easily, and strive to develop those they do not, but perceive to be contributors to success in the classroom/rehearsal. The pre-service teacher must capitalize on traits that already lend themselves to success, and strive to grow and strengthen other areas where needed. A developed level of personal magnetism can become a physical illustration of the idea "the best defense is a good offense" when it comes to facing the challenges in the music classroom. What does this look in the choral classroom?

A colleague once described magnetism as the way in which a teacher-conductor develops relationships with students, recognizing the relationship itself as the chief catalyst for success and achieving of goals within the ensemble or classroom. This relationship is how the educator engages with their environment. She made the point that educators will go about establishing and fostering these relationships in different ways, since each brings different personalities and value systems to the classroom. Still, the goal remains the same: creating a context of trust by which the teacher and students move forward with their goals. To her, this relationship yields continued magnetism in the life and career of the student going forward, not unlike the parent-child relationship. The teacher has established a platform, albeit easy to abuse, by which everything they say and do is quite literally magnified.

While this sounds nice, it also presents a very difficult and sometimes seemingly insurmountable reality. The teacher must not only overcome the challenge of striking balance between relationship building and the achieving of musical goals, both long-term and short, but many educators live in a perpetual "honor choir" scenario, where student turnover does not allow time for the building of relational inroads. Now they must call upon personal magnetism to establish trust and relationship while moving forward with goals in a truncated amount of time, balancing instruction, progress, inspiration, enjoyment, pace, skill development, team-building, and so on, knowing they may be starting the process over from scratch the next semester. But how?

When we consider how to better identify, define or describe magnetism, especially in a practical, tangible, and useful way, three sources of inspiration come to mind:

- Our own experiences with teachers and mentors.
- Our own experiences as teachers and mentors.
- Time spent with our students and choristers.

Many of the teachers and mentors exhibit a "take-charge" or "type-A" quality, often associated with leadership. The ability to be commanding and "larger than life" comes quite naturally. Some command respect on reputation, celebrity, or accomplishment alone, while others take a different approach based on different personality traits they possess. Many perfect the use of humor, or a well-constructed, anecdotal story, or even just a beaming smile. Organization and preparation are devices many use to ensure structure, clarity, and progress. What are these educators trying to accomplish, exactly? What is the purpose of expending so much energy on things that may not be found spelled out on the curricular map? Successful music educators reveal as quickly as possible, two imperative contributing factors to personal magnitude:

- A sense of willingness and commitment to do whatever is needed to accomplish the goal at hand.

- A level of care or passion for the craft of music education, and the students themselves.

It is to these qualities students attach themselves, from these qualities they draw inspiration, and the educator who exhibits these qualities they choose to follow.

Next, we need to consider what works for each of us as choral music educators. When facing low points as a choral teacher, such as reaching points of frustration with all that this career entails, it is our care for our students and passion for what we do that keeps us connected. We hold on to the traits we have learned from those who have invested in us, combined with our own personalities, to garner trust and respect from our students as we move toward shared goals.

Lastly, working with pre-service music educators is a fascinating endeavor. Each brings his or her own unique personality, skill set, strengths, and weaknesses to the table. Some have a wealth of talent and skill at their disposal, while others have an unquenchable desire to be successful in each stage of their development. When you are a teacher and your students see that you care, and sense this intentionality and willingness to do whatever it takes, then they will follow you.

Personal magnetism is born in a music educator's willingness to do what it takes to reach the goal, and this same individual's level of care and passion for the students and the craft of music education. Angela Duckworth calls it "grit" and points to perseverance and passion as its two most imperative components.[19] Personal magnetism becomes a reality when these attributes and behaviors are always visible to those we intend to lead.

Support Systems

The third element upon which we can build resilience in early career or pre-service teachers is the navigating of support systems. In comparison to the other two elements, a support system is the element over which teachers feel they have the least amount of control, and encompasses all the factors contributing to teacher attrition, like isolation, low pay, perceived lack of importance, lack of structure, and so on. David Chapman and Sigrid Hutcheson explain that the body of research around teacher attrition places far more emphasis on the factors contributing to teacher attrition rather than the possible difference in characteristics between individuals who leave the profession and those who choose to stay.[20] It may be explained by saying that a sense of personal magnitude and self-efficacy, comprising both parts of the dual teacher-conductor persona, come from within the educator, and are fostered therein, while support systems exist outside the person. So, how can we teach young teachers to control what they can control?

Of course there are components of personal magnitude and heightened self-efficacy that will greatly contribute to one's ability to control what they can control. Still, the reality remains that so much of the environment into which beginning teachers enter exists and functions outside of the control of one music educator. It seems it would be most helpful to identify and define these support systems before discussing how they could be more successfully navigated. In the view of this educator, those systems of support fall into three categories: school, community, and professional.

The school support system is multi-faceted and complex, with different plug-ins surrounding the teacher at

all times. The support of an attentive and knowledgeable administrator, for example, can go a long way. In light of the fact that the music educator has no control over who sits in the position of administrator, how can the early career teacher be set up more for success in navigating this relationship?

Creating as many tangible experiences as possible in the pre-service training and degree programs seems the first and most logical step to preparing teachers for almost anything, including relationships with administrators.

- More classroom situations in the training experience = higher level of adaptability to any environment or situation

- Higher level of adaptability and comfort = greater likelihood a clear vision and expectation begins to develop

- Clear vision and expectation for the program = working dialogue with administrators concerning goals

So often, administrators are out of touch with the realities of the music classroom and are only involved when a problem arises or persists. Jumpstarting this working dialogue with a developed and shared vision can preempt the challenges every novice teacher inevitably encounters, and open the door to more possibilities to be explored with the administrator, and not alone.

Developing a class schedule, for example, that benefits and fosters the growth and development of the students and the program, is unattainable without the help and support of an administrator. This is territory that remains "uncharted" for so many music educators and becomes a "deal breaker" in the end. On the other hand, for those fortunate enough to get the schedule aligned appropriately, it opens the program up to unprecedented possibility. This must be done working hand-in-hand with an administrator. Exposure to different scenarios, environments, challenges, and demographics can help equip young educators with the confidence, vision, and creativity to move this administrator relationship toward shared goals.

The relationship to other teachers and employees within the school can bolster a beginning teacher's resilience, or play a large role in tearing them down. Young people hone their relational skills during middle and high school, and are supposed to begin converting them into professional social skills while in college. It is imperative that these future educators learn the relational skills necessary for making meaningful, tangible connections in the work environment and to bolster a positive mindset and a student-first approach to the craft of teaching. Mentor teachers and college professors can set an example to nurture both a positive mindset and altruistic motives in these future music educators through consistent, unwavering expectations, and open, fervent communication.

It appears students studying to become music educators attach themselves much more naturally to the stresses, perceived rigor and anxiety of the program, and sometimes lose sight, even while they are still students, of the joy of music education. They begin to resemble the countless educators who seem to exist only in a mode of survival. These students are losing sight of something they never really possessed, at least not as teachers, because it only comes through experience. Again, the solution must be in placing an increased emphasis on the actual teaching opportunities within the music education program. This can help to avoid a scenario where young people travel from surviving the class-to-deadline-to-class-to-deadline life of a student directly into the bell-to-bell-to-bell life of a teacher. Where is the joy? Though it can also be scary, experience provides not only the best instruction but a true glimpse into the joy that awaits a lifelong music educator and, yes, the challenges as well. Rather than the "misery loves company" style of connection, the early career teacher can then begin to use this learned sense of enjoyment and passion as a guiding light to making collegial connections in the workplace. They need not be overcome with the fear of the unknown that so often stands in the way of experiencing joy, and can also lead to feelings of isolation, but channel this positivity, learned through guided experience, into resilience.

Another aspect of the school support system beginning teachers will navigate socially is the relationship they develop and maintain with school staff. We can-

not shy away from making sure our future teachers understand these relationships are not a box to check but a reservoir where they may find resilience. Not only can these relationships see them through their most precarious moments, but often they become some of the most personally valuable, long-lasting, and impactful.

Within the school environment, the relationship between the teacher and student is the most central support system to teacher resilience, and the one upon which so many educators rely, especially when all other systems seem to have failed. This connection is best established through the shared experience of the craft itself. The "doing" that takes place in the music classroom. Harkening back to the characteristics of personal magnetism, this support system yields resilience when care and willingness are exhibited and reciprocated. What does this look like? While some aspects and specifics will differ classroom to classroom, this is precisely the question we can begin to answer while our future music educators are still students themselves. Students, who chose choral music education as a major, did so because of the great influence of a music teacher at the elementary or secondary level. The behaviors that inspired them must be reinforced in their training so that they will exhibit them as teachers. Punctuality, organization, planning, forethought, creativity, discipline, expectations, and even in consequence can all communicate care. These are the learned behaviors of a teacher who cares, and if they are evidence of intrinsic qualities, reinforced when the teachers were still students, they will become the resource from which they can find support and exhibit resilience as teachers.

The second support system a teacher must navigate in order to build resilience is the community. What is the support needed from the community that travels right to the heart of the shared goals within a musical classroom? Well-attended performances, especially by parents and administrators, serve as wonderfully validating and gratifying punctuations to the process of music education, but is there anything that compares to the experience of taking students to perform outside the regular school environment? The level of appreciation shown by audiences that do not usually get to hear live choral music making, especially by young people, is unique and celebratory in a way all its own. The energy of such reception and feedback can energize young music teachers and students enough to get through a semester or even a year.

These endeavors also allow opportunity for teachers to hone their craft, and for their students to travel and interact with individuals and cultures outside their school, neighborhood, state, and even country. This increases the sense of value in what music teachers are doing with their students, and provides a beautifully cyclic reminder of the experiences that inspire most to choose the profession in the first place. The performing arts offer the unique opportunity for young people to learn an artistic craft, but it becomes exponentially more meaningful and valuable when they get the chance to share that craft, and in so doing, create meaning for others. These kinds of experiences and performances build legacies of value with human interaction, expression and vulnerability at the epicenter of the event. The educating of pre-service teachers must continue this aspect of being a choral musician. Perhaps it could even allow them the chance to create these opportunities themselves, at least locally, recognizing that this is the crucial bridge between the inspirational experiences these future teachers had as students in high school, and the career endeavor of attempting to recreate them with their own students.

The final support system that can prove pivotal to teacher resilience is the network or community within the profession of choral music education. This profession is so unique in that it reaches every corner of the globe, but the network of educators is not overwhelmingly large. This network therein is the umbrella under which the imperative mentor relationship can be found. Personal mentors, friends, and family members can certainly play pivotal roles in keeping educators grounded, inspired, and supported, but a mentor from within the profession is an absolute necessity. The mentor relationship gives us the stability of a lifeline, and also a collection of experiences we can carry with us in addition to our own.

Local, state, and national associations can open up new worlds to pre-service and early-career educators, and also allow them to see their work through

new, evolving lenses. These associations often provide the first opportunity for beginning educators to seek value outside of the classroom that can be taken directly back into the classroom. Early-career educators can become leaders and challenge themselves in new ways, thus increasing a sense of value and adding another facet to their identity as a choral music teacher-conductor. ACDA provides a strong net of support that can catch a choral music educator at any stage or while dealing with any challenge. Only in such a network is it possible to celebrate the resiliency of an art form that has survived centuries, the profession of teaching it, and those who are preparing to teach it. CJ

NOTES

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