# Music Teachers' Professional Growth:
## Experiences of Graduates from an Online Graduate Degree Program

By

Ronald P. Kos Jr. and Andrew Goodrich
Boston University

**Abstract**

*In recent years, increasing numbers of students have chosen to enroll in degree programs that include an online component. The purpose of this study was to explore music teachers' perceptions about how their beliefs and practices changed as a result of their participation in an online music education graduate degree program, as well as whether or not online coursework met the professional development needs of the enrolled students. The authors interviewed nine graduates of an online master's degree program. Interview questions explored participants' various backgrounds and how the online program affected the participants on a professional level in their own teaching situation. Themes that emerged from the data included empowerment, diversity, relevance, flexibility, and support systems. The data revealed that online graduate education can be a rigorous and transformative form of professional development for teachers.*

*Keywords:* music education, distance learning, professional development, graduate education

One of the most common forms of professional development for in-service music teachers is graduate coursework, including programs leading to advanced degrees (Barrett, 2006). Many states now require teachers to obtain a master's degree within a specified period, or to renew their initial license (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2006). In recent years, increasing numbers of students have chosen to enroll in degree programs that include an online component; several universities now offer entire degrees online. Such programs offer flexibility for teachers trying to complete a degree while they maintain a busy work schedule and family life; they also promise a challenging, rigorous education. Do online programs influence the teaching profession in the same manner as options that are more traditional?

In this study, we, the authors, intended to expand upon and draw connections between existing literature on professional development, graduate learning, and online learning in music education. No studies exist, to date, of students' experiences in a graduate program that is completed strictly online. Given the proliferation of these programs, it is important to determine if they do, in fact, influence teaching and learning in the classroom. Such studies could influence the structure, content, and delivery mechanisms of both current and future online degree programs.

The purpose of this study was to explore music teachers' perceptions about how their beliefs and practices changed as a result of their participation in an online music education graduate degree program. We were also interested in discovering whether or not online coursework met the professional development needs of the students who were enrolled. Three questions guided this study. First, in what ways did participants believe that participating in the program influenced their teaching philosophy and teaching

practices? Second, in what ways did the program meet the professional development needs of the students? Third, what factors did students indicate influenced their capacity to learn?

## Related Literature

There is a considerable body of professional development literature in general education. Studies have examined professional development for teachers of various content areas including literacy (Brady et al., 2009; Kinnucan-Welsch, Rosemary, & Grogan, 2006), mathematics (Borko, Jacobs, Eiteljorg, & Pittman, 2008; Spillane, 2000), science (Johnson, 2006; Johnson, Kahle, & Fargo, 2007), technology (Brinkerhoff, 2006; Watson, 2006), and the arts (Kamm, 2008; Lind, 2007). Other research has focused on specific professional development frameworks such as the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards certification process (Lustick & Sykes, 2006; Standerfer, 2008), Professional Development Schools (Conkling & Henry, 1999; Zeichner, 2007), and collaborative professional development (Glazer & Hannafin, 2006; Johnson, 2006). In the current educational reform climate, it is not surprising that researchers maintain an interest in professional development that supports school wide reform efforts (Johnson et al., 2007), including efforts to increase teachers' content knowledge (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Ruby, 2006) and pedagogical knowledge (Bain, 2010), as well as to improve student outcomes (Louis & Marks, 1998; Saunders, Goldenberg, & Gallimore, 2009).

Comparatively, research on professional development in music education is somewhat limited (Bauer, 2007). Most studies have examined music teachers' professional development needs (Bowles, 2002; Conway, 2008; Conway, Hibbard,

Albert, & Hourigan, 2005) or professional development models (Moore, 2009; Standerfer, 2008; Stanley, 2011). Some studies compared professional development at various career stages (Conway, 2008; Eros, 2011).

A number of studies have examined graduate study in music education. Teachout (2004) studied issues related to access to doctoral study in music education. Two of the top five barriers to doctoral study—anxiety over leaving the current job and proximity— are sometimes cited as reasons for pursuing an online degree rather than enrolling in face-to-face programs such as those studied by Teachout. Groulx and Hernly (2010) surveyed nine institutions that were accredited by the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) and offered online master's degrees. They concluded that students may benefit from the conveniences that an online degree offers; however, they also noted that curriculum may be limited and that interpersonal relationships between students and faculty were weak. Conway, Eros, and Stanley (2009) studied teachers' perceptions of the effects of a master of music education program on teaching practice and student achievement. The teachers they interviewed noted an important connection between the research component of the degree and practice. They also indicated that their coursework did influence the ways in which they approached teaching.

The most relevant work to the current study is Walls's (2008) study of distance learning in a graduate music education program. Walls studied the impact of a hybrid on-campus/synchronous distance learning master's program on the professional development of in-service teacher educators. Current students and graduates of the program completed questionnaires or participated in telephone interviews with the investigator. Participants were asked (a) their reasons for enrolling in the program, (b) how well the program met

their needs, (c) how the program affected their teaching philosophy, (d) how the program affected their teaching practice, (e) how the program affected their integration of technology into their teaching, and (f) what they learned about conducting research. An important theme that arose in Walls's study was that of professional development, specifically with regard to teaching philosophy and pedagogical practices. Furthermore, students and graduates of the program discussed the importance of interactions with other students and professors as well as high academic standards.

The studies reviewed above demonstrate a need for a study of a program that is offered entirely online. If personal interactions are an important part of professional development as well as graduate education, how will an online program contribute to the professional development of teachers? Will such a program with students who may be pursuing a degree with different motivations and facing a different set of challenges still influence their practices and teaching philosophies?

**Method**

We sought to portray the perspectives of the participants in detail to understand their experiences with regards to whether their beliefs and practices changed during their participation in an online music education graduate degree program. In this study, we sought an online program that would provide an information rich case for study (Patton, 2002). The institution was NASM-accredited and designated as a "very high research activity" institution by the Carnegie Foundation. The program that we studied was a 32-credit degree program leading to a Master of Music in music education, with coursework that included foundations of music education, musicology, music theory, electives, and a curriculum project—the final project for the degree program. Students were able to take

all coursework online, although some students chose to take one or more courses on campus during the summer. The institution also offered the program in a traditional, on-campus setting.

We contacted all of the students in one cohort during their final semester in the degree program and invited volunteers for interviews. At the time of this study, 33 students comprised the cohort. Two of us served as investigators for this study and we interviewed nine participants, whose ages ranged from early 20s to mid-50s, during a one-month period immediately upon conclusion of the degree program for the students. We interviewed each participant once; researcher number one conducted 5 interviews and researcher number two conducted 4 interviews. Eight participants taught in the United States; one taught in Southeast Asia. All names used in this study are pseudonyms and all identifying factors were changed to hide the identity of the participants.

Interview questions explored the participants' various backgrounds and how the experiences in the online program affected the participants on a professional level in their own teaching situation. We conducted interviews using Skype, except for one student who opted for an interview by phone. We recorded interviews using a digital recording device; QuickTime and HyperTranscribe programs were used to assist with the transcription process. For the interview protocol, we used semi-structured questions. This allowed for flexibility to use follow-up questions when warranted. Participants reviewed the interview transcripts to check for accuracy. We noted and incorporated any changes based upon their suggestions. All interviews were in accordance with the specifications and approval set forth by our university's Institutional Review Board.

Data analysis for this study occurred upon conclusion of the data collection period

and lasted for two months. We coded the data from our respective interviews to create an "organizational framework" (Glesne, 2006, p. 152) for the emergent themes based upon the participants' own words. Codes for this study consisted of 2-4 letter codes. As we coded the data, we began to identify codes related to the participants' perspectives about their experiences in this online program. During the coding process, we periodically reviewed the research questions to determine if the codes were applicable to this investigation. As a result, codes changed and evolved. We grouped the codes into categories and subcategories for ease of organization. From these categories the following themes emerged: relevance, empowerment, diversity, flexibility, and support systems.

We established trustworthiness of the final report with the use of member checks, peer review, and reporting of bias. Upon conclusion of an interview, we emailed the transcript to the participant, who reviewed it for accuracy. For peer review, we reviewed each other's transcripts to confirm or disconfirm what we found in the coding process. We recorded the biases that we brought to this study in the form of research memos. Our biases for this study included our support for online learning and our belief that it is a valid way to earn a graduate degree in music education. With our experiences designing online courses, we considered an online program a valid platform for delivery of instruction. Keeping track of our biases assisted us with avoiding an imposition of our perceptions of online teaching and learning onto what we heard the participants saying.

**Emergent Themes**

As we reviewed our data with respect to the three research questions, several themes emerged from the participants' own words that had particular importance for

several—and in most cases, all—of the participants. These themes, which included relevance, empowerment, diversity, flexibility, and support systems, are discussed in detail below.

**Relevance**

Coursework was relevant to the participants' own teaching situations. Relevance for the students in this study was multi-faceted. The coursework provided the participants with opportunities for connecting their classrooms to popular music and assisted them with course design. They used ideas that their classmates provided on the discussion boards to connect with students in their classrooms and to connect their students to music from outside of the school.

**Connecting to popular music.** For Lucy, a K–12 parochial school music teacher, "this idea of incorporating popular music into my teaching was one of the biggest things that's changing with my teaching." Before enrolling in the program, Lucy did not want to teach popular music in the classroom and felt that "all they hear is popular music… and I want to give them something they don't hear." Although Lucy still considered classical music "very important" in the classroom, she said that the coursework changed her teaching philosophy. Thus, she "adjusted" her teaching so she could "open them up in different ways to things that they think they know—like popular music—so [she could] teach them about the musical properties of band using that type of music."

Kathy, a general music teacher, used "a lot of traditional Western Art Music to talk about the musical concepts [she] wanted to talk about." Over time, however, Kathy began to believe that "it is more important…to be meaningful and relevant to the students, to teach the things they are likely to do when they leave my class, than it is for

them to know who Beethoven was." Kathy began to use popular music as a starting point for teaching her students how to be competent musicians. She felt that it was important to connect to the students with the music they listened to because "the stuff I listen to on the radio is not necessarily the same stuff they listen to." Theodora, a middle school string teacher, used a method book as the primary source of music for her instruction. Now, she is "more willing to incorporate newer styles and bring up what they are listening to at home to help teach things like rhythm."

**Course design.** Brian, a band director, found the coursework helped with his course design work at his school. When Brian discovered that he would be teaching general music, he approached his principal with a proposal for a guitar-based blues class that he worked on in an elective blues course. For Brian, a self-admitted "praxialist," he felt that "the kids needed an instrument in their hand" in a general music class. The principal approved the course, which was a "cultural history course as much as a performance-type class" and ordered 30 guitars. Brian said that "the kids really liked" the class. Amber, a younger teacher at an international school in Southeast Asia, used information she learned in the coursework to help her write a music curriculum "based on Southeast Asian music" so that she could "teach the musical elements through [her students'] own music."

**Discussion boards.** Many of the courses made use of discussion boards, a tool that allowed students and instructors to interact asynchronously. The discussions might be focused around a particular prompt or they might be more open-ended. These online discussions provided an opportunity for the participants to share ideas with each other. Camille believed her teaching was more current as the result of sharing ideas with her

fellow students. Amber considered the online discussion boards an opportunity for her to connect with fellow students who taught at a variety of grade levels. The information her student colleagues brought to their discussions made Amber "really think" about what she taught, and when she designed a curriculum for the middle school, she "used a lot of popular music," which in turn provided her students "the flexibility to explore one's own world of music and connect it to the things we study in class."

Although the participants generally considered the coursework relevant, Kathy found that the course discussions "were geared for folks who were ensemble directors," and she did not learn much information regarding her general music teaching. Despite this issue, Kathy did consider "the experience I had…so worthwhile because it wasn't with people like me." Julie maintained that some of the online discussion boards did not contain practical information, and thus were not relevant to her teaching situation. For example, she found that many of her colleagues discussed the advantages of technology, but Julie's school budget had no money to incorporate technology into the classroom. Although Lucy incorporated much of what she learned from the coursework and discussion boards into her own classroom teaching, she thought that video demonstrations of people actually teaching popular music in the classroom as a model would have helped.

**Empowerment**

Several of the participants discussed feelings that touched on the idea of empowerment. Only one used that particular word; others described increased confidence, perceived prestige, or knowledge. Regardless of the specific terminology they used, they each indicated that they felt more inclined to take on leadership roles in

their schools.

Knowledge contributed to Amber's and Camille's feelings of empowerment. Amber talked about how she felt empowered to write a new string curriculum, a task made possible by her newly learned research skills and knowledge about curriculum. She said, "It really helped me make my mark in [my area]." Because of the work she was doing in her classes, "I was comfortable talking about things like curriculum and music. I would have case studies to back myself up." Her feelings of self-worth were enhanced when "as a younger teacher in [my school], I was really able to contribute something."

Camille had been teaching longer than Amber, about 15 years. She said that the coursework "empowered" her to teach material that she was not comfortable with before. She had never "felt good at" teaching music theory, but "Now I'm totally empowered to do that. I feel like now I'm as good or better than anyone else in my music department in my district….because of my classes." Camille also said that she was more confident in her ability to contribute to the department. Before beginning her degree, she let the other, more experienced teachers dictate how the department would run. She said, "Since I've been in the program I feel that I've learned a lot about how music departments should run and the things that are important. I speak up more. I offer up the things I learned. I feel more confident." This confidence is also evident in her teaching practice. Although much of what she learned about was already a part of her existing practice, she felt that her studies reinforced her beliefs or provided justification for what she was doing.

Amber spoke about how her graduate study "really helped [her] kind of make [her] mark in Southeast Asia." We considered this perceived prestige as evidence of empowerment because it came about from "doing all this writing and…talking about

things like curriculum and music." Even though she was much younger and less experienced than her colleagues were, Amber felt that she "was really able to contribute something." Other participants also spoke about prestige, but we did not consider all of those to be related to empowerment. Lucy, for example, spoke at length about the prestige of having a graduate degree. Unlike Amber's perceptions of personal betterment, Lucy's interests were competitiveness in the job market and placement on the salary schedule.

**Diversity**

When participants talked about diversity, they often spoke about the diversity of the students enrolled in the program and the benefits of that diversity. They believed that had they enrolled in a more traditional setting, they would not have been exposed to students with experiences so different from their own. The diversity came from different teaching assignments, differences in school demographics, as well as regional and national differences. Participants also became more aware of diversity in their own schools and their own communities.

**Diverse contexts.** The diverse perspectives that the students brought to the program were especially evident during class discussions. Participants discussed the benefits of studying with students from different teaching contexts: band or chorus, rural or urban schools, public or private schools, American or international schools. In most cases, the participants found this diversity beneficial, although there were cases, such as Kathy's described above, in which some students struggled to find the relevance in class discussions. Kathy noted that even when students were in similar positions, they had "vastly different job requirements." She said that kind of experience "was really cool"

and beneficial. She said that in a more traditional classroom setting "it is very unlikely that I would be interacting with someone from Tokyo, that I would be in a classroom with such diversity." Julie had similar thoughts, saying, "I thought it was good to get people's different perspectives from their own geographic locations and their own life situation. That was really interesting." She pointed out that everyone at her local university was from the same area.

Amber was one of the few students in her cohort who specialized in early childhood. She also happened to teach at an international school in Southeast Asia. She brought a unique perspective to discussions in her classes that sometimes expanded the scope of the content being presented in the class. She described a "heated" debate about the appropriateness of teaching popular music to young children: "People were pulling articles about how preference starts at grade one and that's when they start preferring rock music and [arguing that] Kindergarten and Pre-K [students] should be doing as much folk and world as you can."

Most of the participants noted, at some point during the interviews, the benefits of having colleagues in the program who were teaching in schools around the world, and for students like Amber, being able to reconnect with American teachers. Camille commented that "interacting with people from all over the world" was particularly appealing: "I particularly loved the interaction with the international teachers. Teachers teaching in Japan or Finland and different areas in the classes and getting that perspective was wonderful….It was very exciting."

**Diverse perspectives and points of view.** Some participants noted that the diverse perspectives presented by their fellow students helped them to become more open

to a variety of points of view. Samantha discussed this openness, saying, "We are reading everybody's discussions and you have to respond…to people that you might not necessarily agree with and you have to do it respectfully." Although many students had belief systems that were quite strong, some—like Lucy—became more respectful of others' thoughts and more open to modifying their own thinking based on others' arguments. She thought that reading her classmates' responses to philosophical or sociological readings "broadened my view. I benefitted from talking to the other teachers, seeing their teaching situation, seeing what they do in the classroom with what their issues are and their ideas."

**Diverse schools and communities.** In addition to discussing the diversity of the students in the program, participants talked about the diversity of their own schools and their own communities. Most of them reported that since beginning their studies, they now gave greater importance to the social and cultural contexts in which they taught. Amber, who teaches in an international school, noted that the program helped her "solidify and ground" her thinking about the value of having a large amount of ethnic and linguistic diversity in a classroom. Much of what students learned about diversity in their coursework was affirmed when they learned about the demographics and musical lives of the students in their own schools as they developed a curriculum for their final project. As Kathy noted, "we came to realize that certain communities value different things, which goes back to your having to tailor-make your curriculum."

**Flexibility**

Another major theme that emerged during the course of this study was flexibility. The participants indicated that the online environment provided them with a variety of

convenient options, including logging into courses from any location in the world. Lucy went on vacations to the west coast of the United States while "school was in session" and Amber, a United States citizen living in Southeast Asia, was "looking for something that would be flexible wherever I was in the world."

In addition to being able to take the courses from anywhere in the world, participants indicated that they could log into the course at convenient times throughout the day, an advantage for Julie, who remarked that "you get used to having it at your fingertips when you have the online access." Other participants found that the online environment adapted to their personal schedules. Kathy could "work my life around whatever I had to complete instead of vice-versa." The flexible nature of the courses allowed her to spend time with her daughter every evening, starting her coursework after she put her daughter to bed.

Taking courses online allowed the participants the opportunity to continue with their teaching positions. Although Julie lived near a university which offered a masters degree, she liked the "flexibility of an online program" so that she could "be a student again" while continuing with her teaching position. Camille felt that the amount of time to complete an online degree was not unrealistic, and she was able to continue with her teaching position. Camille, a self-described "empty nester," enjoyed the flexibility of an online degree, but still used the local college music library as a resource. She found that "the whole internet aspect now just makes it fun and easier." Although Camille enjoyed the flexibility of an online program, she did encounter difficulties with her school district allowing an online degree to satisfy credit requirements. Camille's principal initially did not approve of her enrollment in an online program but finally consented when she

argued that she had no local options.

**Support Systems**

The participants also indicated that support formed a major component of the degree program. Support in this study included support from colleagues in the program to help with coursework. In turn, this support turned into friendships that extended beyond the degree program.

**Interactions with colleagues.** The participants found that their colleagues in the program helped them to get through the program. Theodora found her colleagues to be "supportive" and provided "help whenever I needed it." Lucy felt that the "discussions were really the most helpful part of the program where I could talk to my fellow teachers." According to Ann, the discussion boards helped her to interact with her colleagues, and she found that reading someone else's perspective regarding an issue helped her to "think about the other side of the coin." When Ann learned that she would teach choir, she found the interaction with colleagues around the country helpful: "I had never been in a high school or middle school classroom choral setting, so to hear some of their own techniques and strategies was really helpful to me in planning how I want to run my own classroom." Julie found the course discussions challenging but thought that "it was good to get people's different perspectives from their own geographic locations and their own life situation." Samantha found the discussions to be somewhat "forced," but they ultimately helped her to communicate with her fellow colleagues.

Although most participants felt the online environment provided a support network with colleagues, some encountered issues in this environment. Amber remarked, "I think in the online environment we were wary of ripping someone apart for the sake of

conversation because people would get upset." Samantha held a similar position in that "you are required to respond to people that you might not necessarily agree with and you have to do it respectfully because it is all there and all recorded." Julie added "we were challenged either to criticize others' comments, or look for shortcomings, or look for inconsistencies" and this was a challenge "because you don't always have a personal relationship with everyone." Julie did feel, however, that the online discussions allowed her to "think deeper into [her] own thought processes" because "when you can write something out, I feel like you really have your thoughts straight."

**Support beyond the coursework.** Support for these participants extended beyond the actual coursework. With this support, the participants developed friendships with people from around the country. Kathy formed friendships, which is something she did not expect when she entered the program. Despite her misgivings about the forced nature of the course discussions, Samantha developed a network of people around the country that she could consult with for help with her own teaching. Brian remained in contact with several people in the United States and Europe post-coursework and they discussed personal issues such as raising a family and shared advice on how to teach popular music and hip-hop in the classroom. Julie felt that although "sitting at your kitchen table doing your own work" made it hard to make friends at first, it became much easier as she progressed through the degree program.

## Discussion

This study was an exploration of music teachers' perceptions of an online master's degree program as professional development. We were particularly interested in the ways in which participants believed that participating in the program influenced their

teaching philosophy and teaching practices, the ways in which the program met the participants' professional development needs, and the factors that the participants indicated influenced their capacity to learn. Our findings, with respect to those questions, as well as the implications of this study, are discussed below.

**Influences on Philosophy and Practice**

Teachout (2004) found that graduate students sought degree programs that presented opportunities for the students to improve their teaching with new ideas. Participants in the present study reported that their beliefs about music teaching and learning and their actual teaching practices were, for the most part, impacted by their graduate study in an online program. Changes in teaching philosophy derived primarily from course content, particularly with regard to content knowledge and skills. This is similar to the findings of Walls's (2008) study, in which students reported an emphasis on change in their teaching practice to focus more on how their own students learn. This evolution of teaching philosophy challenged the participants to reconsider traditional ways of thinking about music and teaching practice.

In addition to course content, the online discussion boards provided a forum for students to engage and share ideas with each other. Although most participants enjoyed the variety of teaching experiences that students brought to discussions, some—such as Kathy—felt that the discussion boards focused primarily on ensemble teaching situations. This finding is in accordance with Bowles (2002), who found that general music teachers were "most interested in opportunities directly related to general music" (p. 37). The discussions were not limited to structured discussions initiated by the instructor; many students reported side conversations through email or community discussion areas. This

supports prior research that noted the importance of informal interactions as a preferred method of professional development (Bush, 2007; Conway, 2008).

**Meeting Students' Needs**

Barrett (2006) provided graduate programs as one option for professional development of music teachers. Learning in an online environment aided the majority of the participants with their professional development needs. Participants in this study reported that they sought graduate study either out of an innate desire to learn something new, or out of necessity for licensure purposes. We found that in this program, coursework aided the participants with course design in their own classrooms, which supported Barrett's (2006) belief that with professional development, "connecting teachers' desires for change with appropriate venues is paramount" (p. 23).

Not all participants felt that their professional needs had been fully met. Camille indicated that she would have benefitted from instruction in conducting, which this particular program did not offer. Several students, including Julie, appreciated the opportunity to take courses in Orff through on-campus courses. Most importantly, the changes the students reported to their practice indicates that their coursework was, in fact, an effective professional development experience, at least in the short term.

**Enabling Students to Learn**

Flexibility and support systems assisted the participants in this study with their capacity to learn and complete the degree program. Flexibility—both geographic and time—made it possible for several participants to complete the degree who might not have been able to do so in a more traditional setting. The examples that the participants described affirm Groulx and Hernly's (2010) suggestion that this flexibility does increase

the accessibility to graduate study.

Support systems for these participants assisted several of them with their capacity to learn the course materials. In this study, support systems included discussion boards and interactions with fellow students. The participants in this study engaged in a practice espoused by Conway et al. (2005) involving participation in shared communities to exchange ideas about their teaching practice. Further, the support systems extended beyond the degree program. Kathy, Samantha, and Brian reported that they continued with friendships after they graduated with the degree. Walls (2008) found that students in online degree programs do form relationships that continued beyond participation in the degree program, both Walls and the current study seem to refute Groulx and Hernly's (2010) suggestion that relationships between students in an online environment are weak.

**Implications**

Conway et al. (2005) posited that professional development often emphasizes teacher learning without making a connection to student learning. According to Conway et al., "teachers are not always given the opportunity to study their own students and the various methods that might make their teaching more effective" (p. 7). The evidence from this study of online graduate students, however, suggests that an online degree can change the teaching philosophy and teaching practice of music educators so that they can make a connection to student learning. Based upon the results from this study, rigorous, meaningful, graduate education in an online environment can influence music teachers' beliefs about music teaching and learning and their classroom practice.

Barrett (2006) indicated that "networks and institutes situated outside the school hold promise for fostering regular exchange and relationships among music teachers,

countering the problem of teacher isolation or intensification that makes collaboration difficult within school settings" (p. 25). Although Barrett referred to local and district networks, we argue that, based upon the results of this study, an online program can serve as a network for teachers to interact outside of their normal school setting and their geographical area. This could allow music educators to engage in what Barrett (2006) referred to as an examination of "diverse points of view, approaches, and strategies, which they can adapt, modify, or tailor to their particular school setting" (p. 25).

Although education can be effective when delivered online, it is important to recognize that some courses might be taught more effectively in traditional settings; therefore, universities may want to consider including on-campus options for students. Some participants in our study noted that they appreciated the limited on-campus options that were available to them, although others preferred to complete all course requirements in an online environment.

The participants we interviewed reported that their graduate education was a rigorous, transformative, professional development experience. It provided the skills and knowledge that allowed teachers to improve their practice, challenged teachers to rethink their belief systems, and provided teachers with an expanded network of colleagues. Although our own experiences suggest that not everyone is well suited to an online environment, this study demonstrated that for many teachers, online degree programs can provide accessible, rigorous, and transformative professional development.

## References

Bain, A. (2010). A longitudinal study of the practice fidelity of a site-based school reform. *The Australian Educational Researcher, 37*(1), 107-124.

Barrett, J. R. (2006). Recasting professional development for music teachers in an era of reform. *Arts Education Policy Review, 107*(6), 19-28.

Bauer, W. I. (2007). Research on professional development for experienced music teachers. *Journal of Music Teacher Education, 17*(1), 12-21. doi:10.1177/10570837070170010105

Borko, H., Jacobs, J., Eiteljorg, E., & Pittman, M. E. (2008). Video as a tool for fostering productive discussions in mathematics professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 24*(2), 417-436. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2006.11.012

Bowles, C. (2002). The self-expressed professional development needs of music educators. *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education, 21*(2), 35-41. doi:10.1177/87551233020210020701

Brady, S., Gillis, M., Smith, T., Lavalette, M., Liss-Bronstein, L., Lowe, E., …Wilder, T. D. (2009). First grade teachers' knowledge of phonological awareness and code concepts: Examining gains from an intensive form of professional development and corresponding teacher attitudes. *Reading and Writing, 22*, 425-455. doi:10.1007/s11145-009-9166

Brinkerhoff, J. (2006). Effects of a long-duration, professional development academy on technology skills, computer self-efficacy, and technology integration beliefs and practices. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education, 39*(1), 22-43.

Bush, J. E. (2007). Importance of various professional development opportunities and workshop topics determined by in-service music teachers. *Journal of Music Teacher Education, 16*(2), 10-18.

Conkling, S. W., & Henry, W. (1999). Professional development partnerships: A new model for music teacher preparation. *Arts Education Policy Review, 100*(4), 19-23.

Conway, C. M. (2008). Experienced music teacher perceptions of professional development throughout their careers. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education, 176*, 7-18.

Conway, C. M., Eros, J., & Stanley, A. M. (2009). Perceived effects of the Master of Music in music education on P–12 teaching practice. *Research Studies in Music Education, 31*(2), 129-141. doi:10.1177/1321103X09344381

Conway, C. M., Hibbard, S., Albert, D., & Hourigan, R. (2005). Professional development for arts teachers. *Arts Education Policy Review, 107*(1), 3-9.

Eros, J. (2011). The career cycle and the second stage of teaching: Implications for policy and professional development. *Arts Education Policy Review, 112*, 65-70. doi:10.1080/10632913.2011.546683

Garet, M. S., Porter, A. C., Desimone, L. M., Birman, B. F., & Yoon, K. S. (2001). What makes professional development effective? Results from a national sample of teachers. *American Educational Research Journal, 38*(4), 915-945. doi:10.3102/00028312038004915

Glazer, E. M., & Hannafin, M. J. (2006). The collaborative apprenticeship model: Situated professional development within school settings. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 22*(2), 179-193.

Glesne, C. (2006). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. New York, NY: Longman.

Groulx, T. J., & Hernly, P. (2010). Online master's degrees in music education: The growing pains of a tool to reach a larger community. *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education, 28*(2), 60-70. doi:10.1177/8755123310361765

Hanushek, E. A., & Rivkin, S. G. (2006). Teacher quality. In E. A. Hanushek & F. Welch (Eds.), *Handbook of the economics of education* (Vol. 2, pp. 1051-1078). doi:10.1016/S1574-0692(06)02018-6

Johnson, C. C. (2006). Effective professional development and change in practice: Barriers science teachers encounter and implications for reform. *School Science and Mathematics, 106*, 150-161. doi:10.1111/j.1949-8594.2006.tb18172.x

Johnson, C. C., Kahle, J. B., & Fargo, J. D. (2007). A study of the effect of sustained, whole-school professional development on student achievement in science. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching, 44*(6), 775-786. doi:10.1002/tea.20149

Kamm, C. B. (2008). *The effects of a professional development program on the assessment pedagogy of secondary arts teachers* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (AAT 3341325)

Kinnucan-Welsch, K., Rosemary, C. A., & Grogan, P. R. (2006). Accountability by design in literacy professional development. *The Reading Teacher, 59*(5), 426-435. doi:10.1598/RT.59.5.2

Lind, V. (2007). High quality professional development: An investigation of the supports for and barriers to professional development in arts education. *International Journal of Education & the Arts, 8*(2). Retrieved from http://www.ijea.org/v8n2/v8n2.pdf

Louis, K. S., & Marks, H. M. (1998). Does professional community affect the classroom? Teachers' work and student experiences in restructuring schools. *American Journal of Education, 106*, 532-575.

Lustick, D., & Sykes, G. (2006). National board certification as professional development: What are teachers learning? *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 14*(5). Retrieved from http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/76

Moore, J. L. S. (2009). Assessment of a professional development programme for music educators. *Music Education Research, 11*(3), 319-333. doi:10.1080/14613800903144304

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ruby, A. (2006). Improving science education at high-poverty urban middle schools. *Science Education, 90*(6), 1005-1027. doi:10.1002/sce.20167

Saunders, W. M., Goldenberg, C. N., & Gallimore, R. (2009). Increasing achievement by focusing grade-level teams on improving classroom learning: A prospective, quasi-experimental study of Title I schools. *American Educational Research Journal, 46*(4), 1006-1033.

Spillane, J. P. (2000). Cognition and policy implementation: district policymakers and the reform of mathematics education. *Cognition and Instruction, 18*(2), 141-179.

Standerfer, S. L. (2008). Learning from the National Board for Professional Teacher Certification (NBPTS) in music. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education, 176*, 77-88.

Stanley, A. M. (2011). Professional development within collaborative study groups: Pitfalls and promises. *Arts Education Policy Review, 112*, 71-78. doi:10.1080/10632913.2011.546692

Teachout, D. J. (2004). Factors affecting individuals' decisions to enter music teacher education doctoral programs. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education, 3*(3). Retrieved from http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Teachout3_3.pdf

Walls, K. C. (2008). Distance learning in graduate music teacher education: Promoting professional development and satisfaction of music teachers. *Journal of Music Teacher Education, 18*(1), 55-66. doi:10.1177/1057083708323137

Watson, G. (2006). Technology professional development: Long term effects on teacher self-efficacy. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education, 14*(1), 151-166.

Zeichner, K. (2007). Professional development schools in a culture of evidence and accountability. *School-University Partnerships, 1*(1), 9-17.

**Ronald Kos** (rkos@bu.edu), Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Music Education at Boston University. He earned his Ph.D. in Curriculum & Instruction at the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a concentration in Music Education and a minor in Educational Policy Studies. He holds a BM and MM in Music Education from Northwestern University. At BU, he teaches courses in Psychology & Sociology, Research Methods, Secondary General Music, and Contemporary Issues. He has taught general music, band, and choir at the elementary and secondary levels in the public schools of Illinois and Wisconsin. His research interests include state and federal education policy implementation and professional development for in-service teachers.

**Andrew Goodrich** (andrewg@bu.edu), D.M.A., currently serves as an Assistant Professor of Music Education at Boston University where he teaches Qualitative Research, Jazz History, directs the Boston University Big Band, and supervises doctoral dissertations. Andrew received his Doctor of Musical Arts Degree in Music Education with a Cognate in Jazz Performance and Masters Degree in Music Education with a Jazz Concentration from Arizona State University, and a Bachelor of Music Education degree from the University of Montana. Andrew taught junior high school and high school band and jazz band in Billings, Montana and taught general music for one year in Missoula, Montana. Andrew is active presenting research at international and national venues including the International Society for Music Education and the Narrative Inquiry in Music and Education conferences. Andrew serves on the Advisory Board for the *Music Educators Journal*.