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The Effects of Choral Music Teacher Experience and Background on Music Teaching Style

by

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The study investigated the effects of choral music teacher experience and background on music teaching style. Relationships between background variables and the effect of music teaching style and background on music festival participation and ratings were also investigated. Secondary choral music teachers (N=473) from a random national sample completed a background survey and the self-rated Music Teaching Style Test. Results showed moderate effects of teacher experience and background on music teaching style and moderate effects of teacher background and music teaching style on choral music festival participation and ratings. Trends across experience levels indicated self-reflective, broadening, interdependent, and deepening stages of development. Components of teacher background related to (a) time and advancement, (b) specialization and gender, and (c) geography and culture were identified. Discussion includes implications for teacher education and inservice training, behavioral and cognitive research, and for a variety of philosophical and curricular issues in music education.

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Research in the field of music education has led to a considerable body of knowledge about effective music teaching behavior. Utilizing classroom behavior observation techniques in both correlational and experimental methodologies, researchers have identified specific music teaching behaviors that have a significant effect on music student behavior. In review, the teaching behaviors of teacher approval (Forsythe, 1975), sequential patterns of task presentation and reinforcement (Yarbrough & Price, 1989), high intensity behaviors (Madsen et al., 1989; Yarbrough, 1975), rehearsal pacing and enthusiasm (Cox, 1989), modeling (Sang, 1985; Sang, 1987), metaphor (Watkins, 1986), and the amount and type of verbal behavior (Goolsby, 1999) were found to have significant effect on student behavior and overall ensemble success in music performance. A comprehensive musicianship approach (Dodson, 1980; Garofalo & Whaley, 1979; Whitener, 1983) and indirect student-supportive methods such as questioning and use of student ideas (Williams, 1990) were found to be effective in achieving cognitive learning results to complement music performance learning.

Despite the positive contributions to our understanding of the specific effects of music teaching behavior, a theory of the development of music teaching that is holistic and cognitive in nature has yet to be identified in research of effective music teaching behavior. The research has been limited by: (a) attention to behaviors in isolation of the overall pattern of music teaching behavior and underlying cognitive focus of the music teacher; (b) the characterization of behavior as momentary actions instead of as stable and consistent cognitively-related attributes; (c) use of limited criterion variables to categorize teaching behaviors as simply effective or ineffective; and (d) primary attention to teacher-oriented and music-performance-oriented approaches (Gumm, 1992).

More recent comparisons of experienced and novice teachers have come closer in providing an understanding of the development of music teaching behavior across time and experience levels. This research suggests that compared to novice or inexperienced teachers, experienced teachers take less time to teach music to students, talk less, verbally discipline less, stop and restart activities less, follow stops with specific and positive feedback and new instruction more, involve students in active performance more, and address concepts of musical style, tone, and intonation more (Goolsby, 1999), select more varied and difficult music repertoire (Dahlman, 1991), and focus on content, the involvement of the teacher, and on teacher feedback more (Goodman, 1999). The amount of verbal directions seems to differ especially between 4 and 10 years and over 20 years of experience (Meeks, 1999). In spite of these advances in understanding experience-based differences, it is still unclear what the differences represent beyond a behavioral context, and when and why these differences develop. The research has yet to "transcend the behavioral level of the teaching-learning process" (Gumm, 1993, p. 197) for a theory of developmental music teaching to evolve.

Research of background variables other than the amount of experience highlights further possibilities in the investigation of the development of music teaching. Background variables of personality (Cox, 1989), gender (Meeks, 1999), and ethnicity (Anderson, 2000), and the context variable of school size (Dahlman, 1991; Daniels, 1985; Gleason, 1992) have each been studied to explain differences in music teaching success and behavior. Yet to be investigated are a more thorough set of background variables, the relationships between background variables, their relative importance, and their unique impact in the development of music teaching style. In response to the limitations of the effective behavior approach, a distinct concept of music teaching style was identified and developed (Gumm, 1992; Gumm, 1993; Gumm & Essmann-

Paulsen, 2001). The research measured music teacher self-perceptions to define music teaching style in cognitive terms as the teacher's underlying focus, orientation, or intent that is represented in the overall pattern of music teaching behavior. Rather than each teaching behavior functioning distinctly, it was shown that several teaching behaviors coordinate toward particular behavioral and cognitive "effects" or priorities of teaching. Whereas music teaching behaviors have been assumed to change from situation to situation, music teaching style was shown to be relatively stable across time (Gumm, 1993). Representing these priorities, eight dimensions of music teaching style identified and validated in the research were labeled Assertive Teaching, Time Efficiency, Nonverbal Motivation, Positive Learning Environment, Group Dynamics, Artistic Music Performance, Music Concept Learning, and Student Independence. The dimensions were shown to be useful in distinguishing music teachers into groups by their common patterns of behavior, with each group's inferred orientation ranging from traditional music performance to comprehensive musicianship, teacher-controlled to student-centered learning, discovery learning to cooperative learning, from simple task presentation to deep content learning and to those whose self-ratings seemed to lack focus or intent (Gumm, 1993). The eight dimensions of music teaching style were divided statistically into two higher-order factors, with the breadth of active behavioral learning inferred as the common focus of the first four dimensions listed above and the depth of student reflective cognitive learning as the focus of the latter four dimensions (Gumm & Essmann-Paulsen, 2001). The research provided a new theoretical model of distinct dimensions, orientations, and higher-order factors that defined a larger set of priorities and approaches than previously recognized in the field. The theoretical model was shown to have construct validity and external cross-validity, with results confirmed with multiple samples (Gumm, 1993; Gumm & Essmann-Paulsen, 2001).

Music teaching style research also provided a method of inferring teaching priorities by the teacher's choice of music teaching behaviors. Methodologically, self-rating techniques have been shown to be acceptable and reliable for purposes of teaching style research (Bennett, 1976; Cicchelli, 1984; Schultz & Switzky, 1984). Though behavior observation techniques are more objective than self-ratings, "teachers' perceptions may be more pertinent to detecting a teacher's 'orientation' than is measured by an objective observer" (Gumm, 1993, p. 97). Self-conceptualization techniques, in addition to behavior observation, have been recommended as vital to the formulation of theories of teacher development (Winitzky & Kauckak, 1995). The research instrument used in music teaching style research was shown to be valid and reliable for use with teachers and students in choral and instrumental music.

The primary purpose of the present study was to investigate the development of music teaching style based on analysis of years of experience and other teacher background variables. The research sought to answer the question, "What effect does choral music teacher experience and background have on music teaching style?" Secondary questions were also of concern in the research. What are the relationships between background variables, including experience? In parallel to a common criterion of effective music teaching behavior research, what are the relative effects of background and music teaching style on music festival participation and success?

Method

The present study was the final stage of research that began with the development and validation of a theoretical model of music teaching style (Gumm, 1993). The present stage of research was delayed until adequate multidimensional statistical procedures were identified for use with the type and number of variables included in the study. Background variables for the

research included both categorical grouping variables and quantitative variables that remained unexamined and unreported in the initial stages of research (Gumm, 1993). For categorical grouping variables, subjects were asked to circle the word that best indicated their (a) female or male gender; (b) Caucasian, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian, Middle Eastern, and other ethnicity; (c) Protestant, Catholic, Hindu, Jewish, Moslem, Buddhist, Mormon, none, and other religion; (d) choral, general, and/or instrumental music area of training and area of teaching; (e) National Education Association (NEA) or American Federation of Teachers (AFT) teacher's union, American Choral Directors Association (ACDA), Music Educators National Conference (MENC), Music Teachers National Association (MTNA), and other primary professional affiliation; and (f) best reason for success as a teacher, including performance skills, empathy and friendliness, enthusiasm and energy, knowledge of music, planning and organization, creativity, and conducting skills. For quantitative background variables, subjects indicated their (a) age, (b) years of experience, (c) years in present position, (d) level of educational degree, (e) frequency of workshop participation rated as "rarely," "every few years," and "yearly;" and (f) school size of 0-249, 250-499, 500-749, 750-999, or 1,000 or more. In addition, subjects indicated "yes" or "no" about their participation in music festival or contest with their choirs within the previous two years and the "superior," "above average," "average," or "below average" rating they received if they had participated. To capture differences by geographic region, subject address zip codes were categorized into regions according to MENC and ACDA divisions.

Music teaching style was measured using select items from a set of 134 music teaching behavior descriptions identified in the research (Gumm, 1992) and determined to most reliably and validly measure each of eight dimensions (Gumm, 1993). Subjects were asked to rate the

frequency of their use of each teaching behavior on a five-point scale of "Never," "Rarely," "Sometimes," "Often," and "Always." Dimension scores were computed by summing the ratings for the set of items for each dimension.

For data collection, research materials were addressed to choral music teachers and sent to 2,000 private and public schools selected at random from a list of all secondary schools in the United States, with approximately one out of seven secondary schools in each state and territory chosen for inclusion in the study. Two followup mailings were sent to schools from which there was no reply. The resulting sample consisted of 473 secondary school choral music teachers.

Statistical analyses were computed using SPSS-10 advanced statistical software on a Macintosh computer. Categorical principal components analysis with optimal scaling was used to find the relationships between teacher background variables. Categorical regression analyses with optimal scaling were used to investigate the effects of teacher background on music teaching style and to investigate the effects of teacher background and music teaching style dimensions on choral music festival participation and success. Optimal scaling procedures allowed the full range of categorical (nominal) and quantitative (ordinal and numerical) variables to be analyzed in a single model for each dependent variable. Contrary to traditional significance levels in analysis of variance and regression analyses, regression with optimal scaling reports "importance" levels. Importance is calculated based on an optimal combination of traditional Beta, error, F, correlation, and tolerance statistics. Descriptive statistics were computed for each background variables and Chi-square statistics were used to analyze trends across a range of experience levels.

Results

Of the 2,000 research materials delivered to schools across the United States, 473 were returned with data that were complete and useable for statistical analysis in this study, which translates to a 23.65% rate of useable returns. Frequencies of categorical grouping variables (see [Table 1](#)) were low in particular groups, therefore it was decided to recode data for ethnicities other than Caucasian and Black into one group and data for religious groups other than Protestant, Catholic, Mormon, and none into one group for purposes of regression analysis. Descriptive statistics indicated that one-fourth of the subjects had six years of experience or less, half had 13 years of experience or less, and three-fourths had 20 years of experience or less, with an average of 14 years and a range of 40 years of experience. With an average age of 39 years and range of 44 years, 25% of subjects were 32 years old or less, 50% were 38 years old or less, and 75% were 46 years old or less. With an average of eight years and range of 34 years in the present teaching position, 25% of subjects were in their present position for two years or less, 50% for six years or less, and 75% for 12 years or less.

Principal components analysis of teacher background variables identified three sets of related variables (see [Table 2](#)). The first component had a Cronbach's alpha reliability of .725 and comprised years of experience, age, years in the present position, educational degree, and school size. The second component comprised area of training, area of teaching, professional affiliation, and gender, with a reliability of .539. The third component comprised geographic region, religion, and ethnicity. Reason for success had low crossloadings on all three components and frequency of workshop participation showed no meaningful relationship with any of the three components. Reliability was .341 for the third component and .912 for the total three-component solution.

The total multivariate set of teacher background variables accounted for significant variance in each dimension of music teaching style (see [Tables 3 and 4](#)), with an average 23% of explained variance. Analyses resulted in the identification of three to five important predictive variables for each dimension. Notable results were that size of school, geographic region, and reason for success were the most broadly important predictors, accounting for variance in five, six, and seven dimensions of music teaching style, respectively. Age, number of years in the present school, and educational degree were not found to be important in predicting music teaching style.

Chi-square analyses indicated no significant year-to-year differences in music teaching style up to ten years of experience except for Time Efficiency between two and three years of experience ($\chi^2=14.518$; $df=6$; $p<.043$), and for Group Dynamics between seven and eight years of experience ($\chi^2=15.448$, $df=7$, $p<.031$). A significant difference was found in music teachers with between 20 years and 30 years of experience for Music Concept Learning ($\chi^2=165.424$, $df=135$, $p<.039$), and significant differences were found in music teachers with more than 10 years of experience for Time Efficiency ($\chi^2=419.775$, $df=348$, $p<.005$), Positive Learning Environment ($\chi^2=692.254$, $df=609$, $p<.011$), Group Dynamics ($\chi^2=799.713$, $df=551$, $p<.000$), Music Concept Learning ($\chi^2=833.711$, $df=754$, $p<.023$), and Artistic Music Performance ($\chi^2=812.663$, $df=638$, $p<.000$).

Regression analyses revealed that teacher background and music teaching style accounted for 31% of the variance in music festival participation and 34% for music festival ratings (see [Table 5](#)). Geographic region, frequency of workshop training, experience, Artistic Music Performance, and Group Dynamics were the most important predictors of participation. For

music festival ratings, educational degree, area of teaching, Artistic Music Performance, and Nonverbal Motivation were the most important predictors.

Discussion

The resulting sample was of more than adequate size to provide sufficient variance for factor analysis and multiple regression. Whereas Asmus (1989) suggested a minimum 3:1 subject to variable ratio for factor analysis, the present study achieved almost a 32:1 ratio for the 15 variables entered into the factor analysis and a 21:1 ratio for the total number of variables in the study. However, the lack of subjects in each group and the 23.65% rate of return of useable research materials bring into question the adequate representation in the study of the population of choral music teachers. Bias seemed to have occurred due to volunteerism in spite of the random selection procedures. Potential sources of bias include: (a) task difficulty of completing the detailed and time-consuming research materials, (b) mistrust in providing sensitive background information, (c) confusion due to bulk mail delays that caused subjects to receive research materials after the stated due date, and (d) error due to the indirect method of subject selection--it is unknown how many surveys were sent to schools that were without a choral music teacher or closed since the publication of the list of secondary schools. Previous research has identified a similar low diversity of minority groups (Ausmann, 1991), and the almost even split of men and women seems to discount sampling bias of this type, unless the actual ratio in the population of music teachers is significantly different than found.

The strongest finding in the factor analysis of background variables was the identification of two fairly reliable components of background. It was inferred that time and advancement in the music teaching profession was the common link between the variables of the first component, and that specialization in the music education field was the common link between

the variables in the second component, except for gender. The connection of gender to specialization may imply that females and males tended toward different areas of specialization. The third component, which seemed to contain variables related to geography and culture, had too low of a reliability to indicate a robust set of related variables. The small number of subjects of diversity in the sample could have contributed to the low reliability. However, combined with the finding that reason for success and frequency of workshop training did not coalesce into any of the three components, results could simply point out a lack of commonality between certain variables of background.

Findings related to time and advancement background variables suggest that music teachers in larger schools seemed to have a more varied and deep music teaching style and music teachers seemed not to differ substantively in music teaching style in short ranges of experience. Instead, a series of multi-year developmental stages can be deduced from the results. On average, in the first two years music teachers were least assertive, efficient, and conceptually oriented, and specifically were less time efficient than teachers with three or more years of experience. Supported by similar depictions of novice teachers in previous research, the current findings suggest an initial self-reflective stage of development in which music teachers are focused on expressing and sorting out their own thoughts instead of efficiently concentrating on the actions and thoughts of students. Between three and seven years on average, music teachers were generally more efficient, assertive, and conceptual in their focus and markedly more focused on efficient task completion, developments that suggest a broadening stage during which the breadth of active behavioral learning is the focus. Between eight and ten years, the significant increase in focus on Group Dynamics suggests a transition to collaborative and self-responsible learning in the classroom environment, implying an interdependent stage of development. Music

teachers with more than ten years of experience were more efficient, positive, collaborative, conceptual, and artistic in approach, implying that teachers focused on deeper cognitive forms of student learning to a greater extent. An inferred deepening stage of development is further supported by another significant increase in Music Concept Learning after twenty years of experience.

Results with specialization-related variables of teacher background suggest that choral music teachers with a larger variety of choral, general, and instrumental training had a more interdependent and conceptual music teaching style and that choral music teachers with experience in a variety of areas achieved higher ratings at festival and had a more time efficient music teaching style. Choral music teachers were shown to vary in focus on interdependent group activities and artistic music performance according to their professional organization affiliation. It also seems that females, more than males, focus on supporting students' independent ideas and feelings, a result that corresponds with previous findings that females allowed more student questions and talk in choir (Meeks, 1999).

The result that music teaching style and music festival participation varied significantly by geographic region suggests that choral music teachers in different MENC/ACDA division tend toward different priorities and patterns of teaching behavior. The result that teachers of different religions and ethnicities varied significantly in their assertive and positive learning focus suggests that cultural differences in background have an effect primarily on breadth of active music learning.

Not fitting any particular component of teacher background were the reason for success and the frequency of workshop training. Mostly a cognitive matter of personality, the self-perceived reason for success in teaching was one of the most broadly related variables to music

teaching style. Frequent workshop training, on the other hand, only accounted for differences in choral music teachers' artistic approach to music performance teaching and in the level of participation in music festival.

Apart from the effects of teacher background on participation and ratings in choral music festival, music teaching style was shown to also have an effect. Choral music teachers whose ensembles received higher ratings were more artistically focused and more nonverbally motivating. Those who participated in festival were more focused on building a dynamically interdependent group and were also more artistically focused in music performance. Results are consistent with previous research findings that effective music teachers (a) change rehearsal pace and show greater conductor intensity--behaviors comprised in Nonverbal Motivation; and (b) focus on modeling and metaphorical descriptions of musical sound-behaviors comprised in Artistic Music Performance.

In spite of the large set of teacher background variables included in the study, the research accounted for only a marginal amount of the variance in music teaching style. The size of effect suggests that music teacher experience and background offer only partial explanation of the patterns and priorities of music teaching behavior. Likewise, teacher background and music teaching style combined accounted for only a portion of the variance in music festival ratings. An explanation is that not all music teaching behaviors are focused toward performance goals, as suggested in the variety of priorities represented in the theoretical model of music teaching style. The finding that almost one-fourth of the subjects did not participate in music festival also implies that other priorities than music performance exist in the profession. Given the complexity of possible alternate influences on the music teaching-learning process, 34% of explained variance may be a reasonable amount to attribute to the music teacher.

The findings of the present study support a distinction between the changing nature of music teaching behavior and the stable nature of music teaching style. The present study supports a definition of music teaching style as the stable focus, orientation, or intent underlying the entire pattern of teaching behaviors. This distinction has important implications for music teacher education and inservice training. Specific behaviors and approaches of music teaching should be taught and practiced in view of their underlying philosophical intent and in the context of a more far reaching philosophy of music education. Music teacher educators and inservice clinicians should anticipate the unique focus in each career stage and provide the philosophical rationale and pedagogical tools to develop breadth, interdependence, and depth in music learning.

Future Research

The several findings in the present study that were consistent with those based on behavior observation research methodologies support the face validity and continued use of the self-rated research instrument as well as the theoretical model of music teaching style. However, future research of concurrent validity of the self-rated instrument with a parallel form using behavior observation techniques needs to be conducted to more objectively determine validity. The tentative developmental stages of music teaching that emerged from the present study must be validated in future research. Future research should include a variety of self-conceptualization and behavior observation techniques. Present findings could be generational rather than developmental across time. Therefore, future research needs to include longitudinal as well as comparative methodologies.

Based on the finding that school size is an important variable in music teaching, future research is needed to determine the needs of different size schools and to evaluate the connection

of larger schools with older, more experienced, and higher-degreed teachers. Different music teaching styles may be best at different school sizes, which is an important consideration in career and hiring decisions. Future research needs to focus on finding the factors that influence effectiveness at different sizes of schools.

The finding that music teaching style varies according to geographic region lends caution to generalizations of research findings based on localized samples. Future research is suggested to clarify and explain regional differences in music teaching style.

An important question for future research is whether there is a lack of diversity in the population of music teachers in the United States. To better understand the contribution of diversity to music education, future research needs to include either larger samples or oversampling to capture a higher diversity of music teachers in the research.

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Table 1
Teacher Background Variables

Variable	Groups and Frequencies						
Gender	Female	Male					
	243	229					
Ethnicity	Caucasian	Black	Asian	American Indian	Other		
	449	16	1	3	3		
Religion	None	Protestant	Catholic	Jewish	Mormon	Buddhist	Other
	14	347	74	5	13	1	15
Educational Degree	Associate	Bachelors	Masters	Doctorate			
	1	234	231	7			
Frequency of Workshops	Rarely	Every Few Years	Yearly	Other			
	21	67	378	2			
Professional Affiliation	None	Teacher's	MENC	ACDA	MTNA	Other	
	21	35	207	160	7	33	
Area of Training	General	Instrument	Choral	General & Instrument	General & Choral	Instrument & Choral	All
	2	23	57	6	139	41	205
Area of Teaching	General	Instrument	Choral	General & Instrument	General & Choral	Instrument & Choral	All
	N/A	N/A	44	N/A	192	33	205
School Size	0-249	250-499	500-749	750-999	1,000+		
	102	97	88	36	142		
Geographic Region	East	South	Central	North Central	Southwest	West	Northwest
	80	56	60	81	72	31	24
Reason	Performance Skills	Empathy & Friendliness	Enthusiasm & Energy	Knowledge of Music	Planning & Organization	Creativity	Conducting Skills
	26	52	163	43	27	19	143
Festival Participation	Yes	No					
	352	114					
Festival Ratings	Superior	Above Average	Average	Below Average			
	197	116	20	0			

Table 2
Principle Components Loadings

Background Variable	Component		
	1	2	3
Years of Experience	0.868	0.203	-0.219
Age	0.823	0.175	-0.161
Years in Present School	0.734	0.054	-0.305
Educational Degree	0.609	0.081	0.044
School Size	0.521	-0.099	0.422
Area of Training	-0.236	0.774	-0.218
Area of Teaching	-0.28	0.777	-0.193
Professional Affiliation	0.267	-0.51	0.029
Gender	0.189	0.35	-0.228
Geographic Region	0.245	0.298	0.649
Religion	-0.136	0.395	0.501
Ethnicity	0.104	0.197	0.483
Reason for Success	0.345	0.208	0.262
Frequency of Workshops	0.028	0.006	-0.062

Table 3
Regression Model for Breadth of Activities Music Dimensions of Teaching Style

Dependent	Independent	R ²	Beta	F	Importance	df	p
Assertive Teaching		.212		7.849		14,423	.000
	Reason		.251	30.592	.274		
	Experience		.337	11.859	.205		
	Region		-.215	22.651	.194		
	School Size		.145	9.015	.113		
	Religion		.146	10.566	.112		
Nonverbal Motivation		.172		5.206		14,423	.000
	School Size		.218	20.469	.248		
	Reason		.202	19.672	.217		
	Region		-.151	10.980	.117		
Time Efficiency		.192		5.807		14,423	.000
	Teaching Area		.216	22.468	.201		
	Reason		.191	16.750	.176		
	Experience		.155	2.413	.117		
Positive Learning Environment		.295		8.938		14,423	.000
	Ethnicity		-.328	59.469	.439		
	Religion		-.206	23.451	.151		
	Region		-.208	22.371	.148		

Table 4
Regression Model for Depth of Student Learning Dimensions of Music Teaching Style

Dependent	Independent	R ²	Beta	F	Importance	df	p
Group Dynamics		.241		7.291		14,423	.000
	School Size		.243	27.082	.285		
	Region		.198	19.830	.191		
	Reason		.197	20.217	.123		
	Training Area		-.219	24.412	.113		
	Affiliation		.140	9.993	.095		
Music Concept Learning		.268		8.102		14,423	.000
	School Size		.291	40.201	.348		
	Experience		.251	7.617	.186		
	Reason		.174	16.123	.139		
	Training Area		.231	28.298	.117		
Student Independence		.266		8.063		14,423	.000
	Region		.253	32.689	.273		
	School Size		.229	24.697	.230		
	Gender		-.186	17.661	.137		
	Reason		.174	16.084	.100		
Artistic Music Performance		.230		6.980		14,423	.000
	School Size		.261	30.835	.312		
	Affiliation		.167	12.965	.159		
	Reason		.170	14.701	.132		

	Workshops		.153	11.216	.128		
	Region		-.159	12.820	.094		

Table 5
Regression of Music Festival Participation and Ratings

Dependent	Independent	R ²	Beta	F	Importance	df	p
Participation		.314		8.251		22,418	.000
	Region		-.282	39.510	.221		
	Workshops		-.193	19.066	.126		
	Experience		-.319	11.629	.112		
	Artistic Music Performance		-.191	15.582	.106		
	Group Dynamics		-.201	16.681	.104		
Ratings		.343		6.713		22,305	.000
	Degree		-.176	9.450	.129		
	Teaching Area		.145	7.554	.092		
	Artistic Music Performance		-.200	14.759	.150		
	Nonverbal Motivation		-.163	8.159	.098		