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ABSTRACT

This study identifies the personal characteristics and external support systems which may lead to longevity in the careers of theatre arts teachers. One particular theatre teacher, Nan, was identified and studied. This teacher was an outstanding theatre teacher for 30 years and worked in the same school for that 30 year period. Interviews were conducted with Nan, her current and former students, and colleagues. Classroom and rehearsal observations were conducted and artifacts used in teaching and directing were collected. Early hypotheses on longevity focused on the physical school environment and the administrative support systems of the teacher. At the conclusion of the study, these factors did not appear to play pivotal roles in longevity but were a significant part of the larger puzzle. Contextual conditions, created and sustained by Nan for a significant period of time, emerged as a possible explanation for her longevity. Several of these significant contexts included: her long term working relationship with a colleague in an environment she helped create, which allowed her to share the responsibilities and stresses of teaching theatre; the use of her previous teachers' contexts, some of which she eventually adopted as her own; and her ability to maintain her love for the art of theatre and keep theatre within the context of an art form. Towards the end of her career, when she was no longer able to control her changing contexts, she retired from teaching. Several other internal and external qualities seemed to characterize the longevity of this particular teacher. It appears that if a theatre teacher is inspired to teach theatre and allowed to do so in a supportive and autonomous setting with the help and presence of other talented and supportive individuals, longevity in the profession may result. Contains 70 references. (Author/RS)

LONGEVITY AND THE SECONDARY THEATRE ARTS TEACHER:

A CASE STUDY

by

Cynthia Lynn Brown

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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This study identifies the personal characteristics and external support systems which may lead to longevity in the careers of theatre arts teachers. One particular theatre teacher, Nan, was identified and studied. This teacher was an outstanding theatre teacher for thirty years and worked in the same school for that thirty year period.

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to teach theatre and allowed to do so in a supportive and autonomous setting with the help and presence of other talented and supportive individuals, longevity in the profession may result.

To my husband Dean, and my children Chris and Megan who were always there. To the many teachers in my life who have made such a difference, and to the many students for whom I hope to have made a difference.

To Bob who told me to take the risk, to Doralyn who helped me see it through to the end, and to my dad, who I know would be proud.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I

Introduction to the Study

Educational theatre has traditionally been one of the major purveyors of theatre arts in this country and, in some cases, perhaps the *only* theatre experience for thousands of students and their families. However, even within its own discipline, educational theatre has not been acknowledged as an important and valuable contributor to the art form because of its inconsistency and often questionable quality. Secondary theatre arts programs are the "step children" of the theatre community. Much has been written bemoaning the lack of quality productions, inconsistencies in curriculum, and the fact that high school theatre students emerge from programs unable to take their places as intelligent arts consumers or unprepared for college work in theatre. Many critics place the blame for these poor quality programs squarely on the shoulders of the theatre arts teacher.

In 1991, the Educational Theatre Association, in conjunction with the International Thespian Society, conducted an investigation of high school theatre in the US. This extensive study of the status of theatre in US high schools was the first of its kind in nearly twenty years. The study concluded that "the teacher is the most significant factor in high school theatre education" (Seidel 16). It is interesting that it has taken so much time to document this fact in the arena of secondary theatre. Teachers, as professionals, have long been recognized as the key players in nearly all of the recent demands for educational reform. Much of the responsibility and potential for the success of that reform rests on the shoulders of the classroom teacher. Why the

importance of the high school theatre teacher has been overlooked or undocumented for so long is a mystery to me.

This study, previous studies, and the experiences of high school theatre teachers and students, concur with these findings. Successful theatre teachers will lead successful theatre programs, thereby increasing the positive impact of theatre arts on the lives of students and the thousands of people who attend high school play performances. By what means can the success of the theatre teacher be encouraged? Teacher education is one area that should be attended to. Theatre arts, and the arts in general, must be taught by well trained people. In the opinion of the Working Group on the Arts In Higher Education, teaching in the arts is an enormous responsibility:

> The preparation of arts teachers is a major social concern. The arts shape values and values shape the nation. Teachers are the key. Identifying, preparing, and supporting outstanding teachers of the arts is a priority that needs increased recognition and support.
> (Working Group 2-3)

Teaching theatre well is a complicated activity, and many theatre arts teachers are not prepared to complete the complex tasks required to manage a high school theatre arts program, meet the complex needs of today's students, and understand the demands of new curriculum standards. Teaching theatre requires remarkable organizational skills, extensive knowledge of the art form, and skillful communication with students, parents, colleagues and administrators. Training for theatre arts teachers should be rigorous and extensive, but that is not always the case. Not only do we sometimes find the inadequately trained theatre major in the drama classroom and on the stage, but the field is also populated with well meaning English and speech teachers

and a number of untrained instructors who are delegated the duties of "putting on a play." Granted, many English and speech teachers have a genuine interest in theatre, and perhaps some stage experience or training in theatre. Nevertheless, most schools, regardless of size, wouldn't hire a math teacher to direct a music program simply because he sang in a high school choir for a year. In general, administrators and the public alike do not value educational theatre enough to insist upon hiring highly trained, competent theatre teachers. As I will demonstrate in Chapter II, contemporary research in the field bears this out.

In light of their tremendous responsibility and impact, the training, certification, hiring, and sustaining of quality secondary theatre arts teachers must become a higher priority for the universities who train them, the administrators who hire them, and the parents whose children sit in their classrooms. Examining research in education and theatre reveals that comparatively little research has been conducted in secondary theatre, and even less of that research has focused on experienced and productive theatre teachers and what they may have to contribute. Many populations could benefit from studying these theatre teachers: students now contemplating a career in theatre arts; new teachers who are struggling and wondering how they will be able to "make it" through another year; and experienced teachers who have sustained themselves and their careers over a period of time and want to compare their experiences with others. What might be learned about the experienced theatre teacher? What has kept her active and involved in her demanding position? What impact does her training, work environment, or past history have on her longevity? What contexts can a theatre teacher seek or

create to prolong her career and her productivity? Can a teacher actually change her teaching contexts to foster longevity?

Purpose of the Study

From the beginning of the study I focused on secondary theatre. I am particularly interested in the secondary arts teacher, not only because of my extensive experience as a theatre arts teacher, but because secondary theatre has not received the research focus it deserves. Initially, I reduced the broad category of theatre teachers to *experienced* theatre teachers, and eventually to experienced and accomplished theatre teachers. Staying power then became the central focus. Why can some teachers "go the distance," staying in high school theatre 30, even 35 years or longer? Longevity and the secondary theatre arts teacher finally emerged as the topic for the study.

Another, more personal issue also needed to be examined; my own longevity in secondary theatre, or lack of it. I had taught theatre for nearly 20 years, when I came to the realization that somethng was wrong, something was missing. As much as I loved theatre, and loved kids, it wasn't enough. I had to know what had gone wrong. As sometimes happens in qualitative research, the questions that surface often come from the life and experience of the researcher as well as the life and experience of the participant.

In this study I attempt to identify the personal characteristics and external support systems which may have led to longevity in the career of a specific theatre arts teacher. This teacher is unique because she spent her 30 year career in one school, did quality work consistently, and maintained a positive and professional outlook. This single case study was chosen for its uniqueness and intrinsic value (Stake 1994), and to advance the understanding of longevity

as it relates to teaching theatre. For the purposes of this study, I defined longevity as "staying power," or the ability to remain actively and positively involved in teaching theatre for 20 years or longer. (According to Seidel, the average theatre teacher has been in the classroom 12 years.)

Longevity in education is a complex issue, and when the demands and pressures of theatre production, auditorium management, and school-wide politics are added to the teaching task, the contextual complexities multiply. The theatre teacher must function effectively in many contexts and play many roles: in the classroom she must function as teacher, critic, playwright and mentor; in the auditorium she must function as director, designer, arbitrator, producer; and finally, in the school at large, she must function as facilitator, colleague, educational leader, and politician. Successfully constructing some of these teaching and directing contexts emerged from the study as a possible contributor to longevity.

There were many questions that surfaced during the conceptualization of the study, but first and foremost came the question: Why do some teachers manage to stay vital and involved in the field of teaching theatre for a long period of time, while others don't or can't sustain themselves in this very demanding profession? Other questions that I explored in the study include: Does the continued support of those closest to the participant factor into longevity? How significant is the working environment, including the influence of colleagues, administrators, facilities, etc.? Where do flexibility and openness to change fit into the profile of longevity? How important may a continued relationship with a university or college be in the life of a theatre teacher? These specific questions and others were examined.

I first interviewed Nan in 1993 as part of a research project, and before the topic for this study was conceptualized. At the time of the exit interview in 1997, Nan had retired, and was looking ahead to new horizons. I must admit that, as the process concluded, I came to the realization that I had established a relationship with Nan that had advanced beyond participant and researcher. I had become empathetic, and this empathy had been my constant companion and my constant challenge while constructing my choices and conclusions.

There was something very unique about Nan that was apparent from the first moment I met her. I wanted to understand that uniqueness, and I wanted to know why she was able to stay so vital in such a demanding job. Nan had been a theatre teacher in the same school for 30 years. She was still creative and focused. Her colleagues and students respected her and she had a reputation that extended beyond her school and her district. How had she accomplished that? What had made that possible?

Implications for the Field

Today, it is more difficult than ever to keep good, quality teachers in the classroom, which makes our knowledge of productive longevity even more important. Teachers face many problems daily: inadequate facilities; lack of respect; time constraints and excessive paper work; constantly changing expectations from the district, community, and society; and the continual challenge to do more with less. Teachers at all levels of experience are seeking professional opportunities elsewhere. Younger teachers, especially, seem to feel the stresses of teaching as they enter the field. Many young teachers in all subject areas and at all levels of teaching leave the profession after only several years, seeking jobs that are less stressful, more lucrative, less

restrictive, and for which they earn more respect. Indeed, many young educators trained in our schools of education elect, after four or more years of training, not to enter teaching at all (Tyson 144).

Keeping young teachers is important, but maintaining and challenging teachers currently committed to remaining in the work force, for whatever reason, is also crucial. Some researchers, (Fessler and Christensen, 1992; Seidel, 1991; Waak, 1982) have speculated that in spite of the daily challenges and difficulties, many experienced teachers *are* remaining in the teaching profession, albeit sometimes unwillingly. Lack of mobility after a length of time in the profession is a contributing factor to teachers feeling "trapped" in a profession oftentimes viewed as having limited salary potential and little chance for professional advancement (other than "up" into administration which removes teachers from the classroom). This trend in longevity may be attributed to: the current economy, which demands two incomes for a middle class family; the difficulty in re-entering the field after an extended leave; and finally, the increasing difficulty of finding teaching positions which are fulfilling and professionally satisfying.

Finances may, for some teachers, be the most compelling reason to stay where they are. There is less mobility in the teaching profession, particularly after several years of experience, when changing positions may mean going back to the beginning levels on the pay scale in a new district. Frequently districts will credit only a minimum number of years of experience on pay scales: for example, a teacher with 15 to 20 years of experience may be credited with only 3-5 years of that experience on another district's pay scale, resulting in thousands of dollars in pay cuts. Theoretically, the more teaching

experience a teacher has, the more effective they become and, regardless of mobility, the more they should be paid.

However, excellence and experience do not always go hand in hand. Being "forced" to stay in the teaching profession over a long period of time can, in some cases, result in apathy, burnout, frustration, and feelings of entrapment. There are teachers in schools who are simply waiting to retire, or to "put in" their time, and exit the profession. Instead, the goal should be to keep all teachers vital and involved until they retire.

Researchers have been looking at the human life cycle for some time; others have taken that research and applied it to career life cycles; still others (Huberman 1993; Fessler and Christensen 1992) have explored the career cycle of teachers in particular. Much of the earlier research on teachers focused on preservice teachers, and at best presented the teaching "cycle" as linear in nature, leading predictably from college graduation to retirement. Teaching, however, is a lively and interactive process, more cyclical than linear in nature. There are many points of entry, exit, return, exuberance, disenchantment, and re-commitment. The task of teaching theatre is itself complex and demanding. It is a multifaceted job that requires a tremendous amount of knowledge, stamina, and training. It is no wonder that good teachers burn out, that many do not even attempt to teach the *art* of theatre, and that some, already in the profession, simply give up the pursuit of artistic fulfillment or meaningful instruction in order to survive. The life cycle of the theatre teacher, embedded in its many contexts, must be illuminated and studied.

In light of the tremendous responsibility and impact of secondary theatre arts teachers, their training, certification and hiring must be influenced by research and informed by those active in the field of educational theatre;

qualified teachers of theatre must be recruited and kept in our high schools. Theatre teachers may influence future audiences, community theatres, and amateur actors by introducing thousands of students to theatre arts every year. Theatre teachers also may have a tremendous influence on students and their choices of professions within the world of professional theatre. It is the theatre teacher who often encourages young actors, directors, designers and teachers to enter our universities and theatre training programs. Where might these institutions be without high school theatre arts teachers? Understanding what may keep quality theatre teachers productive over a long period of time can improve educational theatre and perhaps bring these most important members of the profession to the level of respect they deserve.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

The quality of many high school theatre programs is often inconsistent and both curricular and extracurricular practices have been brought to task. However, production work, the most visible aspect of a theatre arts program, is criticized most often. Since theatre entered the realm of the public school at the turn of the century, educational critics have condemned the high school theatre program for its poor quality. Citing lack of production values, ineffective directing in the production program, and an unfocused curriculum, college professors in various fields, and secondary English, speech, and theatre teachers have all written, in a variety of formats and venues, expressing their frustration over the lack of quality productions and meaningful artistic experiences for our high school students and their audiences. It is apparent to anyone who works in theatre that improvement for any program or department is always possible and valuable. But where and how can that improvement begin? Who actually bears most of the responsibility for the success or failure of the high school theatre program?

According to a 1991 study conducted by the Educational Theatre Association (ETA), in conjunction with the International Thespian Society, the theatre teacher is the most important element in the effectiveness and ultimate success of a theatre program. These findings verified what Joseph Peluso alluded to in his 1971 landmark study. Peluso began with the assertions that larger high schools would have better theatre education, and that the strongest programs would exist where the most money was spent per pupil (89).

However, Peluso concluded that the amount of per pupil spending did not indicate a strong program; but Peluso's idea that the larger schools had stronger programs was validated - - although not necessarily for the reason he had initially asserted. Burnett Hobgood synthesized the Peluso and ETA surveys in his comments, published with the ETA survey:

> The large urban school, identified as the probable site of a "strong" theatre program, also proved most likely to have engaged a teacher with good qualifications. Peluso survey personnel may have assumed that quality high schools attract well-trained teachers the way good universities do. However, the study's evaluation of secondary theatre teachers' training did not support this notion. The most stunning comparison between the ETA study and the Peluso report is in the new survey's evaluation of the teacher's role. The ETA study supplants the ambiguities of the Peluso report with a definite finding: the teacher is the most significant factor in high school theatre education. No ifs, and, or buts--a forceful conclusion. (Qtd. in Seidel 16)

It must also be acknowledged that larger high schools generally hire teachers with degrees in theatre because the schools have larger programs; the larger the school, the larger the program, requiring a specialist in the field of theatre to teach acting and technical theatre classes.

Hobgood cites information from the Secondary Theatre Project, formerly sponsored by the National Arts Education Research Center, which further supports the importance of the theatre teacher. Here, the student voice adds its assenting vote. The project was asked to define five "crucial qualitative factors" for secondary theatre education. "In order of their perceived significance to students, they were: the teacher; the school; dramatic production; community

environment; and the theatre curriculum" (Qtd. in Seidel 17). Recent research has corroborated what students and experienced theatre arts teachers have known for a long time: theatre teachers are the key to the success or failure of the high school theatre arts program.

Although there is not a large body of research in secondary theatre, much of the research that has been done in recent years has revealed the need for improvement, not only in theatre programs, but in the way theatre teachers are perceived, treated, and educated. Laura McCammon (1992), in an excerpted case study from her dissertation, focused on the negative impact of stress on the theatre arts teacher. In her article, "The Story of Marty: A Case Study of Teacher Burnout," McCammon chronicles the burnout of a young and committed theatre teacher. Marty's burnout is perpetuated by an uninvolved administration, a demanding job, exorbitant artistic demands, and disillusionment with students. McCammon touches on just a few of the complex issues theatre teachers must deal with on a daily basis. It is no wonder that finding and keeping qualified theatre teachers is challenging at best.

In a summary of her completed dissertation (1994), McCammon shares in greater depth the world of the theatre arts teacher in an arts magnet school setting. One may think that the performing arts magnet school would be an ideal place for theatre artists to work, to form collaborations, and find a supportive atmosphere. McCammon observed the opposite in the magnet school she studied. "Teamwork is Not Just a Word: Factors Disrupting the Development of a Departmental Group of Theatre Teachers" describes a disjointed and uncommunicative group of theatre teachers in the theatre arts department of an arts magnet school. The study focused on organizational factors which would lead to successful group work and collaboration in the

educational setting. What McCammon discovered was that schools generally, because of administrative ineffectiveness and natural teacher autonomy, are very difficult places for team building to develop. Theatre and teaching theatre can be intensely personal activities, but theatre teachers must be able to see beyond their own personal agendas and investments. The theatre teacher must realize that collaboration and team building are essential to success and longevity.

Kathleen Gershman (1990), in her dissertation and later in an article for a leading theatre teacher's magazine, Teaching Theatre, documented a high school production of The Skin of Our Teeth. Titling the article, "The Skin of Their Teeth," Gershman sums up the play production approach of many high schools: the play is poorly produced with little attention to production values; the play is inconsistently directed and insufficiently rehearsed for successful production; and often the director is more concerned with the literature and symbolism of the piece than the theatrical and dramatic demands of the script. What is intriguing to Gershman is how and why high school students continue to do theatre with such poor direction and ineffectual production methods. Gershman's qualitative look at the world of the high school theatre student and director does indeed document the reality of play production in many high schools in this country.

How are theatre teachers prepared for this daunting job? What kind of requirements are asked of young teachers entering the field of theatre education? Are we requiring enough? Some research has been conducted in the area of theatre teacher certification, documenting a viable interest in the field concerning teacher certification, and the curriculum and training that should lead to that certification. David Cropp, in his 1970 study, explored

certification practices in secondary schools. He saw certification as an important step for high school theatre teachers, one that protects the student and the profession. Cropp sides with teacher trainers who would decrease the number of education courses and increase subject matter courses for theatre educators. Another study of certification practices by Carolyn Combs concurred with Cropp, but her findings emphasized that *experience* in all areas of theatre was crucial in theatre teacher training (1971). Still another survey of theatre teacher certification requirements, conducted in 1984, provides a list of certification practices in the United States and District of Columbia (Dietmeyer).

Others have written of the knowledge and skill required to become a theatre teacher. Kim Alan Wheetley, examining the three-year National Theatre in Education Project, provides an overview of what theatre educators K-12 should know and be able to do (1988). Dave Dynak examined three exemplary teacher training programs and their curricula, attempting to determine the perceptions of students, and profiling for future reference the effectiveness of the programs (1994). Theatre programs have also been studied and evaluated (Peluso 1971; Waak 1982; Murphy 1990; Opelt 1991), as well as theatre teacher competencies (Helfert 1977; Wozniak 1990) .

However, research in secondary theatre appears to have ignored a valuable, and unique group: *experienced* and *satisfied* theatre arts teachers. I found very little information which addressed longevity in education, and no research which focused on secondary theatre teachers and longevity. In light of the fact that the previously mentioned studies document knowledge and experience as the key to a successful classroom and program, I believe this group can provide insight into successful teacher training and curriculum development.

I found much research on issues of professional burnout affecting teachers but even in that arena very little was found which related specifically to secondary theatre teachers. However, much of the information on stress and burnout is relative to any teacher in any field. Of particular interest was a collection of essays entitled Teaching and Stress, edited by Martin Cole and Stephen Walker. Although British in its perspective, this volume summarizes several points of view on stress and burnout in teaching. Burnout in teachers is the result of the dynamic process of stress, brought on by several factors which include: changes in the role of the teacher and increasing contradictions in that role; an increase in societal and educational instability, which in turn decreases teacher stability; deterioration of the image of the teacher; increased violence in the schools; and teacher exhaustion due to increasing demands (Cole and Walker 8-19). Cole and Walker also bring teacher training programs to task. They note that education programs prepare their students to teach in an idyllic situation, a "should be" situation and not the reality of "what is." "Idealism is challenged once 'real work' [actual teaching vs. teacher education] begins" (50).

Although young, inexperienced teachers are most at risk, other teachers are also at risk. Those most at risk are: teachers who lack multicultural knowledge and background; teachers who find it difficult to orchestrate and organize their teaching; senior teachers who are in the greatest position of role conflict (department chairs, team leaders, etc.); career aspiring teachers who are "blocked from advancement"; and caring, highly committed teachers who refuse to compromise high ideals, thereby increasing physical and emotional strain on one hand, while experiencing less self-fulfilling performance on the other (Cole and Walker 95).

When the risk factors mentioned above are applied to the theatre teacher, burnout seems almost inevitable, and longevity a lost cause in the theatre profession. For example: theatre teachers are often educated in the world of the university with highly trained, experienced staff, and state of the art equipment and technology at their disposal; while in the real world of high school theatre, teachers frequently find themselves in less than ideal situations, producing their plays in gymnasiums or cafeterias. Many theatre teachers are trained in programs that do not introduce them to multicultural issues, plays, or artists. Young teachers often find themselves teaching students whom they know nothing about, having no background to aid them in understanding their students. Theatre educators are not often given the opportunity to learn how to "orchestrate" or organize their teaching. Most education programs aim their classroom management curricula towards elementary teachers, or teachers on the secondary level in the larger, subject specific areas such as English and social studies which are structurally quite different from theatre. The difficulties encountered by the theatre teacher in time management are seldom or effectively dealt with. Theatre teachers are often in leadership positions in their schools, regardless of their experience. They frequently function as the only theatre teacher and thus are in the position of department chair as well as advocate for their program and the art of theatre. Theatre teachers often seek advancement for their program, expansion in their department, and professional growth. School districts, boards of education and principals are notorious for their lack of support for such aspirations in the arts and the teachers who attempt to foster this type of growth. Finally, teachers who work closely with students in theatre usually grow to care a great deal about those students and invest in them emotionally. Caring too much can put a teacher at risk which

makes theatre teachers even more vulnerable to stress and burnout than the average classroom teacher. Cole and Walker actually state that the most caring teacher is the one most vulnerable to stress (94). It is indeed, the exceptional theatre teacher who avoids the traps set by burnout and stress and yet manages to attain longevity. Pursuing the study of longevity in theatre arts is a necessity if we are to take advantage of the knowledge and survival skills of these remarkable teachers.

Teacher longevity appears to be a newer issue than burnout. Longevity could be viewed as the opposite of burnout, a more positive and proactive approach to keeping quality teachers in the classroom; what *to* do is emphasized instead of what *not* to do. Experienced and successful theatre teachers should be studied to acknowledge their contributions to the field; to educate and prepare the preservice teacher entering the field; to inform theatre teacher training at the university level; and to foster quality instruction in theatre arts in our high schools. Further benefits of such research may be: to enhance the professional lives of those teachers already in the field; to reinforce already successful behaviors in new and mid-career teachers; to educate the professionals who work with, hire and supervise theatre arts teachers; and to educate theatre teachers about the possible impact of their personal choices in their working environment.

Recently, it has become apparent to researchers that the career of a teacher is cyclical in nature and not simply linear as previously thought. One of the more interesting works on career cycles is authored by Ralph Fessler and Judith C. Christensen, The Teacher Career Cycle: Understanding and Guiding the Professional Development of Teachers. Fessler and Christensen believe that the teacher's career is not simply a linear process that predictably leads

from graduation to retirement, but a vital and circular process. "Teaching is a process that spans many years of preparation and experience. For years this process has been simplified: pre-service, instruction and in-service instruction" (1). Although the focus of the book appears to identify the various stages of teaching to provide more effective teacher in-service training, the cyclical nature of the profession is explored in depth. Researchers are now examining the complexities and constant changes of the teacher's career *cycle*. As teachers work through their professional lives they go through many stages of development. These stages are not linear, and the process of professional growth itself is definitely not linear. "Teacher development is a dynamic, career long process" (Fessler and Christensen 21).

If teaching is cyclical in nature, then it follows that intervention during a specific cycle of crisis or stress could be a way of intercepting burnout and eventually fostering longevity for more teachers. Studying experienced theatre teachers may help identify time periods or specific contexts that are problematic and where intervention may be helpful.

I must add a note of caution here: Simply because a teacher spends a long time in the classroom does not automatically make her a good teacher. Teacher longevity is not necessarily an indicator of teaching excellence or success. Today, the issue of teaching excellence has also become the focus of education policy makers. Whereas in the past, policy makers have been concerned about real or imagined teacher shortages, today's major policy issues seem to focus on teacher quality (Planchon in Boe and Gilford 9). Although we find teachers remaining in the classroom for longer periods of time, excellence in education does not necessarily follow. Teachers are staying in the profession, or in a specific location for many reasons, not the least of which

may be seniority, choice of classes, comfort level in a given building, the garnering of materials and supplies, etc.

The literature in the field of educational theatre appears to be primarily focused on the training and certification of theatre teachers, on theatre programs, and teacher competencies. I believe longevity is a positive issue that must become the focus of more research.

Chapter III
Methodology

The Case

In the fall of 1993, while co-authoring a research project on assessment with one of my professors, I met a remarkable theatre arts teacher She had been in the field for nearly 30 years when I first met her. She was vibrant, focused, and dedicated. She had high production standards and was open to participating in research. I began to experiment with interviewing techniques and participant observation. People, not just numbers, became viable and fascinating opportunities for study. Perhaps this teacher, observed within a qualitative framework, could help answer the questions I had about longevity in the field of high school theatre and, on a more personal level, concerns about my own longevity in this demanding field. I hope that this work will interest secondary theatre teachers, those who train them, and those who hire them.

After I limited the focus of the research to a single case study, I began to seek out other researchers who valued the life stories of teachers, to see if the credibility of the study could be supported in the literature. I found Michael Huberman's book, The Lives of Teachers particularly interesting. In his introduction to the text, Andy Hargreaves, another researcher whose interests lie with the lives of teachers, had this to say about Huberman's approach:

> Teacher's just don't have jobs. They have professional and personal lives as well. Although it seems trite to say this, many failed efforts in in-service training, teacher development and educational change more widely are precisely attributable to this neglect of the teacher as a

> person - to abstracting the teacher's skills from the teacher's self, the technical aspects of the teacher's work from the commitments embedded in the teacher's life. Understanding the teacher means understanding the person the teacher is. (ix)

Robert E. Stake in the Handbook of Qualitative Research describes the case study not necessarily as a strictly qualitative methodological choice, but more as a means of study which can be shaped by interest and a need to understand what is unique to a specific case:

> Case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of object to be studied. We choose to study the case. It draws attention to the question of what specifically can be learned from the single case. . . . As a form of research, case study is defined by interest in individual cases not by the method of inquiry used. (236)

Nan Johnson interested me, and I felt that much could be learned from her experience.

I conducted a case study of Nan for this research project. The study included eight interviews with her, from fall 1993 to fall 1997. We met in her office, her classroom, her theatre, and both backstage and in the auditorium. At the time of the interviews, Mountain Heights was a school of approximately 2,300 students. The presence of security guards was evident on campus, and the school was described as an "inner city" school by one of Nan's colleagues. A large number of ethnic groups was represented on campus, which contrasted with the relatively low numbers of ethnic students in the drama classes. The large campus covered several acres, and classes were housed in multiple buildings connected by sidewalks and covered walkways.

The theatre classes themselves were held in a black box theatre, with temporary seating for approximately 75 people against one wall, and a performance space opposite. All Nan's theatre classes met in this space, although her stagecraft class also spent a great deal of time in the 2,000 seat theatre and well-equipped stage. Two classrooms, adjacent to the stage and black box theatre, doubled as costume and make-up areas.

Several of the interviews took place off campus at nearby restaurants so we could get away from the school and its constant demands. All interviews were taped, transcribed and thematically coded. For some of the interviews a specific list of questions was devised, and for others a topic was introduced which became the focus for that particular interview. Forty hours of observations were conducted of Nan in her theatre and English classes, at rehearsals and meetings with students and colleagues, during a student matinee performance, and at a technical rehearsal she supervised for a production directed by her friend and co-worker. Field notes of the observations were reviewed and became the subject matter for the researchers' personal journal, reflection log, and memos. This process of taping, transcribing, coding, journaling, etc., was followed after all interviews. I used Seidman as a model for the interview process and Jorgensen as a guide during the initial observation stages of the process.

I conducted one formal interview and several informal observations and conversations with Nan's closest colleague and collaborator, Peggy Simon. I observed Peggy at a rehearsal, student meetings, and during informal discussions with Nan. Peggy and Nan worked together for over 16 years, and during that time they shared the responsibility for the theatre and speech programs.

I also interviewed one of Nan's former principals. The interview was conducted at the administrative offices of the school district in which Nan was employed. Dr. Winter, director of secondary personnel for the district at the time of the interview, carved out nearly 45 minutes for our conversation, and although he appeared to be very busy (the district was in the process of RIFing nearly three hundred teachers), the interview seemed to be a welcome though momentary diversion.

I interviewed Nan's current and former students. Nan spoke to several of her students and asked them if they would be willing to be interviewed. The three high school students I spoke with seemed honored to have been asked to be a part of the research. It is possible that it may have been valuable to have chosen the students randomly. However, Nan chose talkative, involved students whose parents she knew would allow them to participate in the study, thereby significantly reducing time spent in identifying articulate and available contributors. I interviewed each student once for approximately 30 minutes during one school day. Two of the students had been observed previously in production work, and all were actively involved in Mask and Gavel, a speech and theatre organization at the school.

I identified one of Nan's former students through my teaching at Arizona State University; the young man had been a student of mine in an introductory theatre class I taught as a graduate student. He graduated from Mountain Heights in 1991 and returned to college to get a degree in theatre. The 40 minute interview took place on the university campus.

Along with interviews and observations, artifacts which reflected Nan's evaluation, course expectations, syllabi, and teaching philosophy were also

collected and evaluated. Huberman and Miles (1994) and Stake (1994) were used as references for further data analysis.

The final steps in the data analysis were to identify patterns, develop separate codes for each person and determine the relationships between participants. Similar patterns emerged from the different interviews. Since Nan was someone all participants had in common, it is only natural that some codes would be similar. However, the similarities were so strong that almost identical terms and phrases were used by participants. For example, the influence of drama teachers both current and previous. Obviously, Nan's current students felt her presence and influence in an immediate sense, but what was fascinating is that they used language so similar to her own as she described the influence of *her* drama teacher. Peggy, too, echoed the fact that the reason she was in theatre was because of her high school drama teacher. I found that information compelling and interesting because I, too, am in theatre because of the influence of my high school theatre teacher. This really should not be a surprising factor considering that research shows many teachers are currently in the field because of a previous relationship with a former teacher or relative who was a teacher (Tyson 1994). However, the similarity in language and the consistency of responses were startling echoes of each other, thus supporting triangulation and reliability. Finally, Nan was given a copy of the study for her response, verification and input.

Chapter IV

Nan Johnson

In this chapter I introduce the focal point of the case study, Nan Johnson. Nan's background, education, family experience, professional relationships, etc., are at the heart of this work. Readers should have the opportunity to, figuratively speaking, meet Nan and begin to form some inferences of their own. I begin with a chronological overview of Nan's education and teaching career.

Nan Johnson

The day I met Nan Johnson, the theatre arts teacher at a large metropolitan high school in the southwestern United States, we talked about Susan, a student observer from a nearby university. Nan thought very highly of Susan and her potential for future success in the field of secondary theatre:

> There's an energy that comes from the person. I knew it from the day I met her . . . there was something about her that I could feel. She knows her subject matter [and] that is essential, but beyond that she has this desire to teach and this enthusiasm for teaching. (Interview 20/10/93)

That is exactly how I would have described Nan after our first meeting.

I met Nan through a class assignment. Initially, I was to interview an experienced high school theatre arts teacher about assessment practices and approaches. Nan came highly recommended by several staff members at the university and had a reputation as an exceptional, award-winning, and inspiring theatre arts teacher.

After meeting Nan in fall 1993 and observing her in the classroom and the auditorium, there were several things that initially impressed me. Nan exhibited patience as a teacher and a director, even under difficult and

challenging circumstances. She consistently, from class to class and student to student, enforced her rules and expectations for a disciplined classroom as well as a disciplined production. Finally, she challenged students to think about theatre as an art form and not just "fun and games."

As we progressed through the interview process, other intriguing questions beyond assessment emerged. Nan had been at her high school for nearly 30 years. Why had she stayed a theatre arts teacher for so long? Why did she stay at that particular school for over 30 years? What factors led not only to her longevity, but to the continued and apparent success of her program?

Nan appears to be somewhat unique in the field of secondary theatre, indeed in the field of education. Not only has she stayed in high school theatre more than twice as long as the average theatre teacher (Seidel 7), but she has established a reputation for successful work that extends from the classroom to the auditorium and beyond. Some of her former theatre students are directors, theatre teachers, actors, technicians, arts administrators, designers, and television and film professionals. Her competition plays for the Interscholastic Association One-Act Play contests have been ranked consistently high. She has been recognized by her peers with awards. Her unique combination of involvement in secondary theatre education over an extended period of time and her ability to sustain a consistent level of high achievement in her theatre arts program made her an interesting and intriguing professional to study.

Nan: Her Life and Her Teaching

From the beginning, Nan knew that she wanted theatre to be an important part of her life. Her parents committed themselves to providing her with experiences in the arts and, as an only child, she had many opportunities to

explore her interest in theatre. But how did Nan come to be a theatre teacher? One of the most compelling influences on Nan's future, and a subject that emerged in nearly every discussion of Nan's theatre teaching, was the impact of her own high school theatre teacher, right down to the college she chose as an undergraduate: "I went to Southwest University. My high school drama teacher went to SU. She and her husband both went and they were my heroes. It's the typical thing that happens, I think, in a field like this" (Interview 13/3/95).

Junior high drama involvement fostered her interest, but it was in high school when she worked with her high school theatre teacher that her resolve to enter theatre crystallized:

> I can't remember wanting anything else. I think that high school reinforced it. I can't say that high school was the spot that made the decision for me, it's just that if I hadn't had that I might have changed my mind. You know, if I might not have had such a dynamic person, you know such a wonderful experience, I might not have stuck with it. . . . When I got to high school, having this magnificent theatre teacher . . . you know, absolutely changed my life.
> (Interview 13 /3 /95)

Nan describes her high school drama teacher, Mrs. Alexander, as an excellent teacher with high expectations in the classroom. "Academically she expected a great deal of us, not just performing all the time, we analyzed things." However, even classroom performances and projects were important for Nan: "I remember doing that scene from *Anastasia* between the Empress and Anastasia. I remember her liking it so much that she had us doing it for classes and she invited people in. It was just a real important thing to me because we had pleased her." Her teacher's directing skills also were strong:

> I think that the quality of what I have done is greatly influenced by her and because she was a demanding person in that she expected us to do only our best. She would take nothing less and she drove us beyond what we thought we could do. *But* she also made us enjoy doing it. . . . She was a terribly talented director. The shows she put on were spectacular, it was just an all around, all encompassing experience. . . . So everything in my life has been because of her. (Interview 24/1/95)

Nan also focused on the "presence" that her theatre teacher had, which seemed to heighten the impact Mrs. Alexander had on students:

> When you first [meet] this person they have a distance from you, there's that distance of teacher/student where you respect their knowledge and their ability and their discipline. And that you're there to learn. You had to earn her respect, and you earned her respect by working hard . . . that's when you would make your way into her little inner circle. . . . She knew how to keep that distance between her students until you earned the right to be her friend. She was very theatrical . . . she was beautiful . . . she had a physical presence as well as everything else . . . but she always gave this real cold exterior and kept us an arm's distance away from her. She was very young . . . and so she kept her distance, but you could always find a way to get underneath and she let down. Once she felt you were worthy of it. (Interview 13/3/95)

The Continued Influence of Educators

After high school, Nan's experiences with educators who would be significant in her professional development continued. Nan began college, as

many young theatre people do, thinking she might become an actor. However, she eventually discovered directing and found the creative control and challenge she had been seeking:

> I had already discovered in college that acting was not what satisfied me. I really found technical theatre to be more enjoyable and discovered stage managing. . . . I had a wonderful professor in stage lighting and he gave me lots of opportunities to be real creative. The moment I discovered directing was in my senior year in college when I took a directing class. When I directed then I realized that all those things came together, and that's what I really wanted. But [back then] women weren't directors, and the only way a woman could direct is to teach. And so that's why I decided to teach.
>
> (Interview 20/10/93)

Teaching and directing eventually became such a focal point for Nan that actors who became theatre teachers on the rebound from a frustrating acting career became a point of contention. Nan, along with most theatre educators, feels that teaching should be the first choice for a profession and not simply something to "fall back on."

Nan felt strongly that her training in college had much to do with her eventual success in her field. Her professors expected her and her classmates to be involved in every aspect of theatre and, as a result, her training in technical theatre was more intensive than that of many theatre teachers today:

> I think one of the things that I had that nobody else has is I had this enormous wide range of training. We did everything, we were expected to do everything, we were never given any choices . . . we just did it. They said this is the way we are going to educate you. You are going to

> learn acting, you're going to learn directing, you're going to learn lighting, you're going to learn everything. We had a work ethic that said you did it all and you did it well [with] an enormous dedication. . . . They forced us to learn so much, they forced us. You know, we were products of the 50s where you accepted and you didn't question, the 60s hadn't come along yet. If you were told to do something you did it, and the demands on us were enormous. . . . And there was a certain gumption about us, a certain drive, a certain desire to do well. (Interview 7/11/94)

After completing her formal undergraduate education, Nan entered the student teaching experience. Apparently, she was very pleased with her placement and liked and admired her cooperating teacher, eventually emulating him in her own teaching and philosophy. Once again, an instructor figured prominently in her professional and personal development.

> This is another belief I have that's been borne out over and over. I don't think you can teach anyone to teach. I think you're born to teach. . . . What prepared me the most was certainly not the education classes, what prepared me was I had the most magnificent cooperating teacher. He taught me everything I needed to know, and I'm still using things today that he taught me back then. . . . He could always find something positive to say about anybody. He had a wonderful way of making people feel good about themselves. But his standards were very, very high. He always praised them along the way and I think that's the lesson I took with me from him. (Interview 20/10/93)

Nan made connections during her undergraduate work that guaranteed her a job in an excellent school in the large metropolitan area where she would

eventually spend her career. The only problem was, the school district required a master's degree. Nan went directly from undergraduate school to graduate school on the west coast, knowing that when she completed her degree she would most likely have a position waiting for her. On the graduate level, teachers continued to have an effect on Nan's development as a director and teacher.

Nan's parents paid for her undergraduate and graduate education, allowing her to participate fully in all the experiences offered her. Both of her parents were college educated. Her father was an engineer, her mother a teacher, and they offered Nan every opportunity for success and learning:

> They paid for all my education. They paid for my college education and they paid for my graduate school . They wanted me to have the opportunity to get as much out of it as possible and they didn't want me to have to work while I was going to school, which of course enabled me to do all the things I did. . . . I could be involved in theatre, I could take extra classes, and my whole life could revolve around my education. There was never any discussion about *whether* I was going to college and no one ever said to me you are *going* to college, it was always just *assumed*. . . . I think the reason arts in education is so important and that it is absolutely essential in the school, and the earlier the better, is because that's where you get involved, where it influences everything that we'll do. And the reason I'm *where* I am, and *who* I am, is because I was exposed to this at a very early age, I was exposed to theatre, I was exposed to all the arts through my family. (Interview 24/1/95)

High Standards

Throughout her educational experiences, Nan was given the opportunity to work with individuals who, in her opinion and perception, were not only talented but set high standards. High standards featured very prominently in her definition of a quality high school theatre program and experience. She set out to require the best of herself and her students:

> When I started, I was so young, and so naive. . . . I know I was very demanding, but I was also in a school that had students that were capable of doing what I was asking of them. They bucked me a lot . . . it was my own personality, my own desire to have them learn. It made me force them to do it my way and not give in to them . . . I had a lot of battles . . . [they] learned that I meant what I said and learned that I did *know* what I was talking about. (Interview 13/3/95)

From the beginning of her career until its end in 1995, Nan continued to focus on students and worked diligently to teach and direct them. Although her students' focus and commitment have changed over the years, it was the students who kept her going. "I had wonderful students, tremendous support from the entire school, the faculty and the administrators, [but] the students are the main reason [I stayed]." She has kept in touch with many of her former students and considers some of them to be close personal friends.

Nan keyed in on honesty as the cornerstone in building relationships with her students:

> I find honesty is the best policy. If I'm honest with them, they'll be honest with me, and sometimes they'll confess to me things that they wouldn't confess to anybody else because they know that I'm going to listen to them, and, if they need to be punished or not given privileges,

> they aren't going to be given them and they know it and they accept it. But I'm honest with them, saying this is what I expected of you, you didn't do this, therefore this is going to happen. Consistency is the word . . . so they know what to expect of you. That way they respect you and want to do their very best for you, even sometimes when they maybe aren't even capable of doing that, to meet the standard. Sometimes they reach it just because they want to please you. And I think there's nothing wrong with your desire to succeed [if it] is to please another human being. . . . You have to be sensitive to every single individual and their needs . . . a lot of it's intuitive. (Interview 13/3/95)

High standards and high expectations permeated Nan's approach to teaching, directing, and producing. Nan feels that programs which do not take the art of theatre seriously are ineffective and possibly a waste of time for directors as well as participants. Nan joins others in the field of educational theatre when she bemoans the lack of high standards in the profession, and in the ineffectual programs that sometime result from inconsistent teacher education:

> I think there's a lot of theatre programs in high school where they're just fun and games. . . . It's fun, if you have the quality to be proud of what you're doing. You can't be proud of it if it isn't good. I know a lot of people who are out there, who've been there for a long time and they're doing garbage. (Interview 13/3/95)

Although Nan works hard to give her students a quality experience in theatre every time she directs a production, she does not always feel the same level of success or achievement that her students feel:

> For me to personally feel it's a success is an entirely different thing I think. I have to feel artistically satisfied and I don't always feel artistically satisfied even when the kids walk away feeling good about a performance. And that doesn't happen all the time, and it's not going to when you're doing this many shows. . . . I feel [artistically satisfied when] the production says what I want it to say, that it's unified, it's pleasing to the eye as well as the ear, that I'm proud of what it looks like as a total, in that all the elements are there to make good theatre. That's what's artistic, that it moves me, moves me to tears I guess. I've had a few productions that they performed, I mean, I just sort of stand there in awe. It just takes my breath away. (Interview 28/10/95)

Teaching Career

Nan spent 30 years in one district, at one school. For Nan, there were many reasons for staying at Mountain Heights. First and foremost, she seemed to have truly enjoyed her tenure at the school. Her feelings about the school and the educational environment in which she taught for 30 years are remarkably positive and, I speculate, a large part of her longevity at Mountain Heights.

One of the most important things a theatre teacher can have, which Nan found at Mountain Heights, is artistic freedom. Nan felt a degree of autonomy and artistic freedom not only in her school, but in her state. Apparently the turn-over in theatre teachers was frequent, and after a time, by virtue of her longevity in the state, she established and maintained a reputation for good work in theatre within her own district, her school and at the state level. A reputation brings with it a certain degree of trust, respect and, perhaps, autonomy.

The support from administrators had always been consistent, but Nan worked hard to welcome the many administrators who passed through her

building over the years. Mountain Heights was apparently an administrative "jumping off" point where principals would serve for only several years at a time and then move into district administration. Despite the constant turnover, Nan managed to reach out to each principal and attempted to make each one feel a part of the theatre department. Nan felt "protected and supported" by her administrators:

> Over the years I've gotten complaints on plays, I've probably gotten more than I even know about. Usually my principals fended it off and never even told me. You build that, I go out of my way to introduce myself, to get to know [principals], to bring them into the family. I think I'm a very personable person and . . . they like me and we do things to make them feel important and a part of it. But they are important and they are a part of it. There's been years where you've had to pull teeth to get a principal or an administrator to even come to the shows, but I seem to have more success than the other arts at getting the administrators there. And I think a lot of it is just making the personal contact. (Interview 13/3/95)

Nan has felt constant support from her administration which has given her tremendous artistic freedom. This freedom from censorship in the high school theatre is somewhat unique. Many high school directors must submit scripts to principals for approval. Others must follow strictly imposed rules about language, content, and subject matter. Still others have lost their jobs because of parental pressure on administrators. Is it possible that this reaching out to her administrators established rapport and engendered support? Communication is a skill theatre teachers must cultivate. Their jobs and their artistic satisfaction may depend upon it:

> I could never, never complain about this school district and everybody in it. I've never been given a hard time about anything . . . and I've had tons of reaction to my choice of plays from groups. I've been very fortunate . . . very protected and supported. . . . I've had artistic freedom where I know a lot of people haven't, that's one of the things I'm very grateful for. (Interview 3/11/93)

Nan's relationship with the English department was strong. During the latter years of her teaching at Mountain Heights she taught English, and although not always comfortable teaching in that subject area, she always worked to cultivate a strong relationship with the English department. She felt supported by the English teachers and worked hard to nurture that support:

> I've always had good support from the English department, but it was a matter of keeping it. The quality of the shows I did was high. I tried to choose literature that they could either use in their classroom or would be applicable to the classroom, or was good literature rather than the, you know, "high school play." And another thing I did, I did a lot of stuff *for* the English teacher, prepared plays and invited them in and did performances for them. (Interview 13/3/95)

Nan also cites her affiliation with a local university as an important influence in her staying power. The university provided valuable support for her own professional growth and for the personal growth of her students. She described her relationship with the theatre department at the state university as "invaluable":

> You learn from the university, you learn skills that you need, you learn short cuts, you get support, you get a chance for your students to see what's going on on another level. I mean it's invaluable. They learn

> from you, they realize that you exist and that you're doing a valuable job. Oh, it has been a godsend to me. . . . I had student teachers . . . so I had a relationship with [the university] from the beginning. But I'll admit I tried not to send my students there, but then Dr. Lipton [the theatre department chair] happened and instantly there was just a wonderful feeling about her, and I've watched what she's done and where she's taken this department and she has from the very beginning treated me like an equal, and that has made all the difference. I think their high school day has made it where [local high school theatre teachers] feel more that it's within reach, that they feel they can reach out. Dr. Lipton has made the atmosphere open and has asked her faculty to be available. (Interview 13/3/95)

Retirement Approaches

An ability to change, adapt, and to be flexible, seemed to be something that Nan actively pursued and something that had helped her maintain her career at Mountain Heights. Nan saw enormous changes in her school during the course of her tenure. The changes in the neighborhood surrounding the school and the opening of an arts magnet school in the district were two of the biggest changes that Nan had to deal with. The impact on her teaching and her program were significant. There was a drop in the number of students taking her theatre classes; the theatre curriculum had to be realigned; and advanced theatre courses had to be abandoned. Nan found herself in the English classroom for the first time in her career. Adaptation, however, also seems to have exacted its price. Nan reached a point in her career where she felt she could no longer adapt her teaching methods to meet the demands of an ever-changing student body, and she could no longer continue to pursue artistic

satisfaction and excellence in the ways that had been fulfilling in the past. After 30 years, it was time to retire:

> I've changed a great deal, what I'm asking my students today is not what I would have asked of them even ten years ago. . . . When I get up in the morning I *hate* the idea of going to school. I just wake up and I think , "Oh my god, I've got to go there again." I walk into that school and the first thing that faces me is that sign that has the circle with the line through it that says, "This is a gun free, drug free campus." The idea that we even have a sign on our campus that *says* that . . . turns me off. I'm fine once I get there and I see the kids then life becomes wonderful, they revive me and everything is great, but I think if I stayed much longer I wouldn't feel that way. . . . Thirty years is long, especially in this field. (Interview 24/1/95)

Nan considered retirement and mulled over the reasons why the time may have been right for her to leave the profession. One of the first reasons to surface was the fact that the creative "juices" that had once fed her were diminishing:

> I got into a position where I had autonomy, I mean it was almost like no one could touch me. I felt I had the creative freedom to do things that were satisfying. That's when I first began to think about retiring, was when I began to feel that I no longer had the ability to do the creative things I wanted to. Partially because of the type of student I have, partially because of the enormous change in the school . . . but once I felt that I couldn't do the kind of creative things that I wanted to, that's when I started thinking about getting out because that seems to be the

> thing that drives me, is to feed those creative juices. I've had so many wonderful students that have been able to respond to that. (Interview 24/1/95)

Yet another change caused Nan to consider retirement: a change in parental attitudes towards what she was doing and what she felt was important. Nan worked hard to communicate a certain level of dedication, commitment and responsibility to her students. Her feeling that theatre is a disciplined art form was one of the most important ideas she taught:

> One of the problems we have with kids presently is not with the kids but with parents. The parents don't give them values . . . and don't back you up the way I've found in the past. I send a letter home with the rehearsal schedule that tells exactly what the rehearsals are, when they are and any that are outside of school. . . . I ask the parent to sign it and return it to me. The parents will sign this, turn it back to me and then not respect it and tell me, "Well, I've gotta have my kid," and I remind them that they signed this and they say it doesn't matter. And the kids are really upset 'cause they're caught in-between. I've taught them how important this is and they feel they should be there but they don't know what to do. They have to obey their parents. They [parents] just refused to even talk to me, they just take the kids. They don't even consider it. It's just a whole different set of values. Up until recently the parents have been wonderful about it, understanding that what you're teaching is far beyond a high school play. (Interview 13/3/95)

As Nan approached her final year of teaching, she and her closest colleague and friend planned a retirement party. They invited many of Nan's former students and spent the entire year planning the event. A special

scholarship account for students to attend a regional Shakespeare competition was set up in Nan's name. Scrapbooks were brought out and reminisced over, and alumni called, wrote, and dropped by. As she made plans to exit the field of teaching theatre, Nan approached the end of her teaching career with optimism and few regrets:

> I never thought about it until I've been watching myself recently. I think that's because this is all coming to an end, I look at things differently and I look at what I do and why I do it, and how do you pass something like this on? I just try to examine things that I never examined before. I watch myself. I watch what I do. (Interview 7/11/94)

She remembered what her original professional plan was when she began teaching at Mountain Heights:

> You know what's really strange is that when I started teaching, I was going to stay at Mountain Heights for three years and then go off and do something else. What I was afraid of is, I had seen too many teachers stay in the same place and just grow old, and I never wanted that to happen to me. I always wanted to be excited about what I was doing, I didn't want to be forced to stay in one place, 'cause teaching forces you to do that. I wanted to always be a good teacher or good at whatever I wanted to do, and I thought if I stayed in one place I might not be, because it got too easy or you got too used to it or something like that, and you rested on your laurels or whatever you did, or just hid in a closet or something. So that was my original idea. I was so aware all the time that I didn't want to not enjoy what I was doing. (Interview 24/1/95)

Nan feels that good teachers have innate qualities that enhance their teaching abilities and give them a professional edge. She also feels that the universities who train young teachers have a responsibility to train them thoroughly. The education department has an obvious stake in the training of young teachers, but so does the theatre department which must be held accountable for a theatre teacher's subject matter knowledge. In her opinion, many university theatre departments do not give education majors the respect and training they need to be successful educational theatre teachers:

> One of my pet peeves is the way theatre departments and universities treat education majors. I see it all the time. I'm frustrated by the whole situation . . . the way they treat the arts in schools too. And I mean we've done it to ourselves in some ways because we aren't sending trained people out. We're not careful about who is teaching. Who is teaching theatre in the high schools? We should be as careful about that as anything else. (Interview 20/10/93)

Several times over the course of the interview process, Nan and I talked about new theatre teachers, the teachers who would take her place. What could experienced theatre teachers offer them? Production work for the new teacher can be a minefield. What plays to choose? How to challenge students and new directors without jeopardizing job security? Nan's advice to new teachers is to start slowly and cautiously:

> I think a young teacher would have to start out very safe, and my feeling is that with theatre teachers they need to stay in one place in order to become part of the community. There was such enormous turn over when I started out, and now it seems like more and more teachers stay put, not for any other reason than they're forced to. But there were an

> awful lot of theatre teachers not lasting very long. And I think the fact that I had a track record made a lot of difference and I did, I mean I didn't start out doing things that were going to offend anybody, and I didn't try to offend people. I think I did more challenging and more adult material later on, once I had established that I wasn't going to corrupt the morals of the community. But I didn't start out flying everything in their face and I was very careful not to offend. (Interview 13/3/95)

As always, quality work is an issue for Nan and even for young teachers beginning to explore the world of educational theatre. A key to success in the field is to do the very best work you are capable of:

> Do quality work by demanding that everyone, that everybody work to their best [and] highest level, the teacher as well as the students. Don't take second best. Have a lot of love and compassion for the kids . . . don't worry about whether they're going to become stars, but care about them as individuals. Not that you have to or *should* get terribly involved in their personal lives but be open to them and enjoy what you're doing, relax into it, it's hard, even I don't follow that advice, but relax into the job and just enjoy it. High school theatre is not the end of the world, or the beginning of the world, but it's sure a nice way to make a living. (Interview 13/3/95)

As retirement became a reality, the continued support of Nan's husband, Scott, was apparent. They had met while Nan was at Mountain Heights and, as a result, Scott had a chance to witness first hand Nan's involvement in and commitment to educational theatre. "Scott's been wonderful, since he knew who I was to begin with and [the] long hours I worked and what I did. He

certainly has been supportive and understanding and been there for me. That does make a lot of difference" (Interview 13/3/95).

Nan felt comfortable at Mountain Heights High School. She had been invited to work at the school before completing her education and had weathered many changes in staff, students, and facility. From her point of view, she had successfully completed her career and accomplished what was important to her - - sharing her love of theatre with students she cared about and respected.

Chapter V

Findings

In this study I attempt to identify some of the personal characteristics and external support systems which may have led to longevity in the career of a particular high school theatre arts teacher. The findings are divided into three areas: 1) the personal characteristics exhibited by Nan and identified by others which may impact on longevity; 2) the external support systems or environmental influences: 3) contexts, which seem to have been in place or were created by Nan to foster her own longevity.

I have rank ordered the findings by their perceived impact on longevity, i.e., what may have caused Nan to remain in the field for such an extended period of time. I also considered what teacher characteristics which may have benefited students most. The ranking choices were based on the experiences of both participant and researcher, and observation and research in the field. Interviews were also used to support and define the characteristics, which are rank ordered from least amount of impact on longevity to the characteristic perceived as the most significant to longevity.

Personal Characteristics and Longevity:

Internal

Personal characteristics are those distinctive, individual traits that make up the personality; they are features or qualities that identify or set someone apart. These characteristics are the unique features or aspects of a person's interactions with others. Personal characteristics are just some of the lenses through which we view the contexts within which we function, and from which we define our reality.

The personal characteristics identified as significant in attaining longevity are: a sense of humor; aspirations to become a teacher; patience; high standards; commitment and responsibility; caring about students; organization as a teaching and directing tool; the ability to deal with and embrace change; and finally, the importance of respecting students and their work in theatre.

Sense of Humor

The quality of being laughable or funny; something designed to amuse; the ability to see, enjoy or express what is funny; a state of mind

A sense of humor and the ability to laugh are not just teacher survival skills, they are life survival skills. Common sense as well as research leads us to believe that for the sake of our health and the health of those we live and work with, it is better to laugh and find the humor in a situation than to react with anger or frustration.

Dr. Winter, Nan's former principal, identified Nan's sense of humor as a contributor to her longevity. In his opinion, her ability to laugh and enjoy herself and her students may have positively impacted on her desire to stay at Mountain View and in the classroom. "I think one of the things that has something to do with longevity is a sense of humor. I think the fact that she was able to enjoy and to laugh . . . I remember her smiling all the time and having fun, a good sense of humor really" (Interview 20/4/95).

All of the students interviewed described Nan as "fun." Production work, class work, special trips, all of these activities were "fun" with Nan.
Sam Evans, a former student, insisted that working in theatre was hard work but under the expert guidance of Nan, the work had been fun: "It was always fun, it had its bad moments, but it was always fun" (Interview 23/3/95). Sandy Mack, one of Nan's students her last years of teaching, commented, "Everybody just loves her; she's like our friend and she's fun to be around. She's not

negative, she's never really negative, I mean like regarding our performances" (Interview 21/4/95). Theatre educators are often faced with the difficulty of maintaining a balance between making drama fun and trying to instill in students the knowledge that the art form requires in order to value it *as* an art form.

Humor in the field of teaching and in the field of educational theatre is not a new qualification but an acknowledged asset. Charlotte Kay Motter in Theatre in High School, a text used in several teacher training programs and a reference tool for hundreds of theatre teachers, lists a sense of humor as one of the qualifications for a theatre arts teacher. Camille Poisson, in Theater and the Adolescent Actor, also comments on the value of humor not only as a necessary tool for effectiveness in the classroom, but also as a tool for communication:

> A sense of humor is essential. Humor is an effective tool in showing the young that not everyone over twenty-one is dead. At the same time, it helps a teacher see adolescent childishness for what it really is: awkwardness, ready to be penetrated and dissolved. Humor, therefore, creates a common ground for understanding and an atmosphere of togetherness. And this togetherness is fundamental to teaching. (8)

Nan's students spoke of the program at Mountain Heights as their "home away from home," a place where they were all "one big happy family." Nan's sense of humor may be one reason why this sense of togetherness, described by Poisson, was so apparent at Mountain Heights. The ability to share laughter can also serve as a stress reliever and way of sharing our vulnerability as people. Students are often surprised by the *humanity* of their teachers, and what better way is there to share ourselves?

When teachers are not faced with the daily burden of maintaining a less than human facade, but let their students into the world of humor and laughter, life in the classroom becomes easier and less stressful. The more fun we have at work, the easier it is to go there, and the longer we stay.

Aspirations to Become a Teacher

A strong desire to achieve an objective; an ambitious goal.

Aspiring to teach may appear to be an obvious requirement for longevity. However, this very basic and important characteristic could be overlooked. Many young students enter colleges of education unprepared for the reality of the job they are training for, and lack the fortitude or desire to see the training through to its completion. Younger teachers, after meeting the challenges and difficulties of the first years of teaching, may give up and seek employment in another profession. Granted, there are many reasons why young professionals leave education, some of which have been mentioned earlier. But how serious were their initial aspirations? How dedicated were they to their goal? How ambitious were they as they faced the daunting prospect of managing their own classrooms and actually teaching students on a day-to-day basis?

It appeared that Nan wanted to become a teacher from a very early age: "I can't remember wanting anything else" (Interview 13/3/95). Her mother had been a teacher, and her life had been influenced consistently by teachers. Nan felt very strongly about the teaching profession. And even though she had once considered acting, she eventually came to be somewhat intolerant of actors who decided to teach as a last resort or because they couldn't "make it" as an actor: "Another pet peeve is these people who can't act or can't make it and so they decide, 'Well, I think I'll teach.' It's an entirely different art to teach theatre than it is to be an actor. I hate it because I think if teaching is not your first goal,

you're in the wrong place" (Interview 28/10/93). Nan's colleague, Peggy Gordan, had similar feelings about the commitment to teaching and the differences between those who really want to teach, and those who use teaching as a backup profession:

> I think that as a theatre teacher, if you're a frustrated actor you probably don't want to be a teacher. The better teachers I know aren't teaching just to make money while they're looking for an acting position. They're two different sets of skills. I think [actors are] a little less aware of student needs, and more subject rather than student oriented. (Interview 3/3/95)

Although slightly ambivalent at times as she explored the options theatre offered, Nan knew she wanted to teach and was committed to that goal. From Nan's perspective, teachers really have to want to teach; the desire and the commitment must be there. She compares the desire to teach to the similar drive that an actor has to have in order to succeed. She implies that teaching should be a mission of sorts:

> You've [got to be] a teacher. It's like an actor, an actor can't be an actor unless this is an all consuming desire that they have to act to live. And the same thing with teachers, I think. Unless you feel that teaching is your calling, like a minister . . . exactly the same. So unless you feel that strongly, I don't think you're gonna succeed. (Interview 28/10/93)

By the time she completed her undergraduate education Nan was focused on educational theatre as her future profession.

One of the first things Nan discussed when we first met (perhaps because at the time she had a student intern from the university) was that she believed

good teachers were born, not made, indicating from her perspective, that there is an innate predisposition or aspiration to teach. A natural or intuitive sense for the profession may be an aspect of this desire to teach. No matter what a teacher may learn in an education classroom, Nan feels that a teacher's success in a classroom may depend on her natural ability and desire to teach. This intuitive ability is honed by experience. Nan continued:

> I think experience is important. I took a lot of technical theatre and I don't think enough is required of people that are going to be theatre teachers. I had a lot of technical theatre background so I knew the whole thing. I also didn't start in an auditorium, I started with a black box kind of thing, that helped too. I kind of learned as I went along. It's going to sound pompous but I think there was something innate in me, you know? (Nan Interview 13/3/95)

Dr. Winter alluded to the idea that some teachers just have "something" that other teachers don't: "I think she loved what she was doing first of all. She liked teaching what she was teaching, and somehow she was able to bring out things in kids. Some teachers have a knack for pulling things out of kids that others don't have" (Interview 20/4/95).

Although current educational practice would obviously disagree with the notion that teaching cannot be taught, the fact remains that some teachers do have a "knack," an intuitive sense, and a "drive" that others do not. It would be inappropriate to negate the training of teachers in thousands of teacher training programs in this country and worldwide. However, it is important to identify those teachers with the desire, aspirations, and intuitive sense to teach, and train them to use those talents in the classroom.

Nan's co-director, Peggy, brought up one final thought on choosing teaching as a profession: it is more important to want to teach, then choose *what* you want to teach. When asked about the qualities that make a good teacher, Peggy responded with candor and emotion:

> I think that they would really care about working with students, whatever age level they are, I think that's before drama. Caring about being a teacher, because sometimes you have to sacrifice the artistic aspects to be a teacher . . . the teacher has to come first. (Interview 3/3/95)

The desire to teach, and the drive to do the best job possible, may be contributing factors in longevity. Not merely *wanting* to teach, but being *driven* on an intuitive and emotional level to commit oneself to teaching and students may be a powerful force in keeping a teacher in the classroom.

Patience

Enduring difficult situations calmly; tolerance; constancy; capable of waiting for the right moment.

One of the characteristics that stood out for those working with and for Nan was her patience. It seems she was patient with nearly all those she came in contact with. Dr. Winter identified patience as a possible contributing factor to teacher longevity: "I think if you're a patient person you have a really good start on teaching any child. If you don't, if you're a person that wants it to happen very fast, you're going to get frustrated. I think patience really is an excellent quality. Patience is a real, real important piece of longevity" (Interview 20/4/95).

Peggy saw and experienced Nan's patience: "[She has] a tremendous amount of patience in working with not only kids but other people" (Interview 3/3/95). Even when her patience was taxed, Nan was able to handle her emotions with restraint. Sam, her former student, made note of Nan's patience and its limits:

> She's definitely patient with her students, but she has her frustration level like we all do, and when she reaches it, it's reached and you know it. She throws her keys, or she'll get up and walk out if you don't have your lines. She never took it out on us, though, she would never like completely tear us apart. . . . But Nan never let loose, you know to the point that she actually like scared us or anything. We knew she was mad but she would get out of the situation, which is nice, which I think is good, and it's healthy for a teacher to be that way. (Interview 3/23/95)

Nathan, a senior during Nan's last year of teaching, didn't comment specifically on Nan's patience during the interview, but made an interesting observation when he encountered a director who exhibited a lack of the patience he may have been accustomed to:

> I remember one time I was at Utah, I was at the Shakespeare competition that they have. We noticed, like, some of the other directors, and there was this one guy who constantly just yelled at his theatre people because they didn't do anything right. He'd, like, just yell and it was this harsh thing. It was kind of upsetting to see. (Interview 21/4/95)

During the limited observations over the period of time I had contact with Nan, she didn't exhibit anger to any degree. She seldom appeared to feel inadequate or powerless. Although there were times when students and daily situations could "push [her] buttons," and things seemed to happen that were beyond her control, Nan dealt with the whirlwind of activity and demands which surrounded her with a great deal of patience. Her ability to patiently pursue her expectations, realizing that those expectations may not *always* be met, was less taxing and stressful than if she had constantly pushed for

unreasonable goals which may have been impossible to attain. Nan always seemed to patiently set out to discover just how far her students could go, and then supported them in the pursuit of that vision, always pushing and prodding them, but never trying to take them further than they could safely go:

> You just have to be able to feel what the difference is between demanding certain things and making them carry through and still understanding when you need to hold back and give them a little leeway. . . . You just have to kind of feel your way through it. You have to be demanding and expect high standards for what you are asking them to do, but be realistic in what they're capable of doing. . . . It's all changed over the years because the kids have changed. You have to look at the students you have and deal with them and not expect everybody to be the same. You've got to make them aware of the standards, and then if they don't meet those standards then they are graded accordingly, [but] you've got to be giving, you can't be unbending. (Interview 13/3/95)

I was also intrigued by the patience Nan displayed with her teaching colleague, Peggy. I once observed Nan helping Peggy get ready for a technical rehearsal. Peggy asked Nan several questions, interrupting our informal interview to get Nan's feedback on several technical matters. Nan, it seemed, had the technical knowledge, and Peggy sought constant advice even in areas where she, as director of the production and responsible for the "look" of the show, really had the only answers. In the office they shared there also appeared to be almost a teacher-student relationship between the two, with Nan playing the role of patient and supportive teacher and Peggy the role of the student still in need of advice and guidance. It is also possible that Peggy

played or assumed this role because of her earlier experience as Nan's student teacher, and that is the role both Peggy and Nan became accustomed to. Nevertheless, it appears that Nan continued in the role of patient nurturer to Peggy's student role.

Nan also worked patiently in her classroom to constantly enforce her expectations and her standards. It was a constant challenge, but Nan patiently pursued her goals. I remember one day in particular when we had an interview scheduled after school. She had spent a challenging day in her theatre classes teaching play analysis. Her students had been resistant and it had been a frustrating experience. Still, she patiently persisted teaching what she felt was important for her students to know. "My students are in rebellion. They don't understand why they should know how a play's put together. They don't want to study the written word. They don't want to sit, they don't want to listen. I guess what I'm reacting to is you're dealing with an entirely different population than ever before" (Interview 11/3/93).

It is easy to say that patience is necessary for success in teaching and in theatre, but how is that patience taught, developed, or maintained? Perhaps patience is developed through experience and knowing what to expect, or at least expecting the unexpected and understanding that all situations must be dealt with effectively and efficiently if the teacher and her theatre program are to survive. Patience, the ability to endure and wait for the right moment to reach out to an audience or reach out to a student, can be taught. Patience comes from knowledge and experience; it is common sense and communication skills. Patience is understanding that: students will be students; production schedules will be fraught with problems to solve; and each production we mount and each student we deal with will challenge us. Anyone going into theatre or into

education must realize that part of that experience will require patience to deal with the complexities of young adults in a demanding and constantly changing environment.

Standards

A high level of required excellence; a benchmark of success or value

Tied closely to appreciation and respect for theatre as an art form is the desire to do theatre well, to have high standards for teaching and production. Nan has developed her standards over a long period of time, and those standards have been shaped by many of the people in her educational, personal, and professional life. The old adage of getting from people what you expect definitely holds true for Nan and her work with students in educational theatre. She has high expectations and, as a result, feels that she has gotten excellent performances from her students in difficult and challenging pieces of theatre, including The Good Woman of Setzuan, The Serpent, Come Back to the Five and Dime Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean, and The Children's Hour.

Nan's high standards or high expectations may have begun with her parents. As an only child, she was very much aware that her parents wanted, hoped for, and expected the best from her. As an undergraduate, Nan felt that a great deal was expected of her and her classmates. She felt that she and her peers had a definite work ethic communicated to them and they followed through with that expectation. She was expected to "do it all" and she did. Her student teaching experience continued to affirm the ideals of high standards and excellence. Nan respected her cooperating teacher to the extent that she emulated him and adopted much of his philosophy of teaching:

> He could always find something positive to say about anybody. He had a wonderful way of making people feel good about themselves. But his

> standards were very, very high. He always praised them along the way and I think that's the lesson I took with me from him.
>
> (Interview 20/10/93)

Over and over, as Nan and I worked our way through the research process, Nan mentioned her high school theatre teacher having an enormous effect on her teaching and directing. High standards were discussed as an expectation, something her teacher just naturally anticipated: "I think that the quality of what I have done is greatly influenced by her and because she was a demanding person in that she expected us to do only our best. She would take nothing less and she drove us beyond what we thought we could do" (Interview 24/1/95).

Nan kept in touch with her theatre teacher throughout her life. When Mrs. Alexander passed away her death touched Nan deeply. Nan wrote to Mr. Alexander when production responsibilities prevented her from attending a memorial service. "As a teacher and a director, Pat always demanded that we dig deeper and reach higher . . . never be satisfied with what we did yesterday. I have found as the years have passed that this is a lesson I have used over and over again and passed on to my students. You never reach perfection . . . but you sure can try" (Johnson, correspondence).

When asked to think about her own definition of high standards and how to achieve a level of professionalism with high school students, Nan thoughtfully considered her experience with establishing standards for her students and her productions:

> I think it's the ability to make students care enough to want to do their very best. I've listened to former students [and] one of the things that they say that surprised me was, "You cared about us, you always seemed to be so kind to us." I didn't realize, because so many people

> were afraid of me, I've heard that from a lot of students . . . and part of that is, they were afraid of me because they wanted to do well for me, and therefore were afraid they would do something wrong. That can be good and bad. (Interview 24/1/95)

The people Nan worked with were aware of her high standards: Dr. Winter noted that the productions at Mountain Heights were some of the finest he had seen as an administrator, far superior to what he had seen in other schools. Students took pride in the accomplishments of the program, both past and present. The quality work of the department was acknowledged on a statewide level for over 12 consecutive years.

High standards usually imply a higher quality of production, a stronger curriculum, and higher expectations for student growth and commitment. The best theatre teachers have high standards, but these standards are often difficult to maintain in the face of administrative and cultural apathy. Adherence to standards and establishing requirements for students can be stressful, particularly because of current trends toward parental involvement and control in the schools. Administrators frequently give in to parental and district pressures and demands, often at the expense of good teachers who are seeking to implement and maintain high standards.

Doing quality work in high school theatre is one of the most important charges given to a secondary theatre teacher. It is perhaps this goal that should be consistently sought. Quality work, with high production standards for the classroom and the auditorium, could do a great deal to elevate the status of high school theatre. Nan's sense of responsibility and commitment naturally played into her expectations for quality work and high standards. The feedback and support she received as the result of this work must have gone far in

fostering her satisfaction with herself, her program, and her students. Satisfaction and accomplishment pave the road to longevity.

Commitment and Responsibility

A promise to do something; determined to complete a task; compelled to a course of action; a sense of obligation; an assurance that a person can be relied upon to do her part

Commitment to her students and pride in her work seem to have been further influences on Nan's longevity. Nan was committed to theatre and to her students, and to doing her part to share her love of theatre and the arts. Each director may need to define quality and commitment for herself; it seems possible that if a director is committed to her work, and achieves success *as she defines it*, the satisfaction that may result could be a determining factor in longevity. Although it may also be true that commitment can be a driving and negative force, one that could lead to burnout and frustration, Nan seems to have found a way to frame her commitment in such a way that she was challenged and even inspired by it.

Nan did not ever feel pressured or trapped by her commitment. Her level of commitment, which was extensive, didn't seem to push her forward but *propel* her forward. Theatre was what she loved doing, and she felt compelled to share her love of theatre with students, colleagues, and audiences; it was a labor of love and a commitment and responsibility she relished. Nan repeatedly stated that whatever pressure she felt as a result of her level of commitment, she placed on herself. At no time did she feel pressure from administration, colleagues, or parents.

"Commitment" was the word Nan's students used most frequently during their interviews when describing Nan and her expectations of them. Each student interviewed had his or her own example of their understanding of the

commitment level that was expected in the theatre program at Mountain Heights.

Sam used the word "commitment" many times when he talked about Nan and his involvement in the theatre program. He felt that commitment was even more important than talent if a drama student wanted to be successful:

> You have to be committed; you have to work really hard; you have to show that you are willing to do the work and put in the hours. And it's not even such a degree of talent, it's the commitment level. If you're, like, very committed and you're not the best actress in the world, you still get cast, because you're trying and you're willing to pull for what you need. (Interview 23/3/95)

Sam also felt commitment was a key ingredient in the success of the program itself, that the commitment level of the students led not only to their success but the continued success of the theatre program at the school:

> Nan and Peggy, they're such a great team, and through all the speech competitions and how we did so well as a school, especially in the play competition, we won 12 years in a row, first place. And it's just that level of commitment that made the program so strong. If you weren't committed you weren't there: you were on a crew or, you know, you weren't as active. (Interview 23/3/95)

Sandy also had something to say about commitment and responsibility. When Sandy discovered that other theatre teachers might not do things in the same committed and consistent way that she had become accustomed to at Mountain Heights, she was "blown away":

> Oh, [Nan] expects a lot. If you don't show up to rehearsal and you don't call, you're in for it the next day. I went to Indiana this past

> weekend, I was in St. Louis and I was talking to my cousin and they were doing the same show, coincidentally, that we just did, they were doing Scapino, which was really weird. And she was just talking about how rehearsal was such a casual thing and how her director, like, scheduled it around his track practice and all this stuff, and I was like, God, people miss it? People miss rehearsal? (Interview 21/4/95)

Nathan, a four year veteran of the theatre department, was also very much aware of Nan's expectations for commitment and responsibility. What he learned from Nan in the theatre program he had also taken into the workplace:

> I mean I admire her, I look up to her and she has such an impact. I mean, she's so stringent on her responsibility thing, she really encourages us to be real responsible for ourselves; that's helped me a lot I think. I've noticed at work . . . they always depend on having people be there on time and be there every day. You can't call in sick and things like that. And that's something I've gotten from Mrs. Johnson; she's so stringent on the fact that, you know, you've got a job to act and you can't miss a day because you're sick, can't miss a day of rehearsal and things like that. She's just done so much for us, you know? (Interview 21/4/95)

Peggy saw Nan's level of commitment almost as a fault. Those in theatre know that this can be true; theatre teachers often commit so much of themselves that there can be little or no time left for family or self. The fact that Nan commits so much of her time and herself means that, at times, she may overcommit:

> I think that she cares so much about doing something right when she commits to doing it, and sometimes she overcommits. I'd say if Nan has a fault, that's it. But she cares so much about meeting her obligations

> and finishing what she starts and doing it the best she can do it, that you can't help have that rub off on you whether you're a colleague, a student, no matter who you are. I think that you understand when you work with her for any length of time that that's just part of her. (Interview 3/3/96)

Commitment is an indicator of what is valued. It must remove some of the enjoyment and satisfaction from teaching if a teacher cannot commit herself to who and what they teach. A positive level of commitment may uplift a teacher, allowing them to see that there is something larger than themselves and, in turn, allow them to negotiate the challenges of teaching.

Caring

Protection; supervision; being concerned or interested; attentiveness to detail; conscientiousness.

Caring about her profession and about the students entrusted to her care are two of the most obvious requirements for being a good teacher. However, to *maintain* an attitude of genuine caring and concern can be challenging. Cynicism, brought on by the constant demands of students, districts, administrators, paper work, and parents, can creep in after only a short time in the educational environment. The need for attention, behavior problems, manipulations, and deceptions sometimes practiced by students are just a few of the things that can erode a teacher's belief in her students and impact on her willingness to genuinely care abut them.

The theatre teacher is particularly vulnerable to the wear and tear of the emotional roller coaster that adolescents often ride. Theatre teachers, who work with students outside as well as inside the classroom, have the opportunity to learn a great deal about their students' personal lives and private tribulations.

Often a theatre teacher is confidante, referee, and psychologist for the students in her classroom and her program.

Nan seems to have negotiated these challenging and sometimes wearing roles with consistency and openness:

> I've listened to . . . students [and] one of the things that they say that surprised me was, "You always cared about us, you always seemed to be so kind to us." I find honesty is the best policy. If I'm honest with them they'll be honest with me, and sometimes they'll confess to me things that they wouldn't confess to anybody else because they know that I'm going to listen to them. (Interview 13/3/95)

According to Peggy, Nan's giving of herself in such a caring manner almost went too far: "She's a giver. Of herself, of her time . . . putting herself out as a friend, as a teacher, as a colleague. [She has] real sensitivity to people's feelings" (Interview 3/3/95).

Nan apparently succeeded in letting her students know that she cared about them. Nathan, one of Nan's students her last year of teaching, labeled this sense of being cared for by a teacher "personal care." Nathan, whose mother is also a teacher, saw a difference between the caring displayed by Nan and other teachers he encountered in his daily routine:

> She just loves us all, there's no doubt about it. There's so many of our teachers that are just, like, just teaching you know, that's about it. But she has a personal thing with all of us, and it's different for each one of us. Most teachers just don't have that personal care for the people in the class. That's something I

> think is real important with drama. . . . You just can't say, "Oh, hey you guys, I really care about you." It's just something that's gonna come within and it's going to take a lot of energy. . . . Because, you know, dealing with us kids can be pretty tough, I'm sure. (Interview 21/4/95)

Sandy, a senior in the drama program during Nan's last year of teaching, perhaps gave the most definitive definition of a caring teacher:

> She cares and it's obvious, you know, she lets us know that. I mean she's told me that she loves me and that's really important, you know? I think that just makes me feel really special when she does that. It's just, I don't know, I think you can judge a lot by a person . . . how much they care about somebody else, by how much time they will give them, because I think time is really valuable, and she gives a lot of time and a lot of effort. (Interview 21/4/95)

Caring about students and about your chosen profession can, in the proper perspective, be an asset. Caring too much or becoming too involved in the lives of students can be a risk, particularly in today's world. But a healthy and respectful demonstration of caring can go a long way in communicating with students, and if you can communicate with students you can teach them. And the more you teach, the more satisfying a teacher's job becomes.

Organization

To plan ahead; To prepare and arrange an orderly, structured whole; to systematize and coordinate

Nan's organizational skills seem to have made her job easier for her and for those working with her. Secondary theatre is a minefield of complex deadlines, responsibilities and expectations from students, administrators and parents. Organization and the ability to teach students organizational skills allow for more meaningful and less stressful participation for all involved. As one of

Nan's students put it, her organizational skills took the "heartache" out of theatre. The realization that high school theatre teachers have to "do it all," know it all, and organize it all, was not lost on Nan's former student, Sam:

> She was so organized. Like, she had forms for everything and she would have meetings with . . . people and lists. She always had these legal pads full of information for every crew head and what their job was and we never had to guess, there was no guess work in what we were doing. She was so organized, and it took a lot of the heartache out of the work, and she kind of took that all on and she was the costume designer, she was the lighting designer, the set designer. It's amazing how high school theatre teachers have to do it all. (Interview 23/4/95)

One look at Nan's classroom, her office, the theatre's scene storage and shop areas, and it was immediately apparent that organization was important. Everything was neatly stored, furniture covered, items catalogued. When something was needed from scene or prop storage the students always knew exactly where it could be found; everything was accessible. In the office she shared with Peggy there were shelves of alphabetized scripts. Prompt books from every show she had directed were organized on a shelf in chronological order. Scrap books from every year of production, compiled and created by the students, were also in the office. A look at her files also confirmed her organization: assessment sheets for each assignment; class syllabi with specific requirements and expectations; contracts for students to sign which placed responsibility for learning and behavioral expectations with them. Nan commented: "I'm an organization freak. I have to have everything in its place, and we plan a year in advance. I know what I'm teaching on May 23, not that I

will teach that on May 23, but I've got to have a plan, you've got to go some place if you're going to teach" (Interview 10/20/93) .

Nan's colleague, Peggy, also found organization to be an important tool in the complex world of educational theatre. Peggy's penchant for organization may also have played a part in Nan's longevity. Although Peggy came into Nan's program after it had established procedures and modes of operation, she developed her own organizational skills. Nan and Peggy shared the responsibility of organizing the program and the productions. According to Peggy: "My forte has been organization, business, the business end. . . . For every show for the last sixteen years . . . whether it's been hers or mine I have set up the program, handled the publicity crew and the box office crew and the house and done all that end. . . . Nan has been in charge of the crews" (Interview 3/3/95).

Organization is a critical skill in teaching, but it is even more critical for the theatre arts teacher/director. Production work is a large part of the secondary theatre teacher's job. Most theatre teachers teach a full load of classes which must be carefully planned and organized, and then head to the auditorium for another three to four hours of production work each day. The ability to handle those responsibilities with the assurance that good organization has taken care of the myriad number of details could significantly reduce the stress of directing and teaching. Considering the toll that stress takes on the professional and personal lives of teachers, it seems logical that minimizing the process of stress could only be a healthy and productive pursuit.

Change

To become different or altered; to lay aside the familiar for something new; a transition; a transformation.

Changing and dealing effectively with change appear to have been very important to Nan's longevity. Teachers must be capable of dealing with change on several levels. A certain flexibility must be achieved as teachers face constant evolution in job descriptions, student bodies, curricula, administrations, district policies, etc. These changes must not only be anticipated but expected. Change may have to be dealt with in a reactive manner, but a proactive approach is also possible. To be a better teacher, change should be sought and cultivated through professional and personal improvement. Nan appeared to challenge herself, to move forward in her teaching, and to achieve her own ambitious goals:

> I adjust all the time. . . . I'm not the kind of teacher that teaches the same thing year after year. I never teach anything the same way. I change. I think change, constant change, constantly finding something new, something exciting, and in theatre you can, if you can stand the hours, and the pressures. 'Cause you want to be better every time. (Interview 3/11/93; 7/11/93)

Dr. Winter pointed out in his interview that change for the classroom-bound teacher could be revitalizing. He felt that change and the opportunity to explore other aspects of education had been a factor in the longevity of his administrative career. He speculated that it may be the same for the classroom teacher:

> I think one of the things that's helped me remain so upbeat about everything is that I have really had terrific opportunities to change.

> I think the answer has to be in some kind of way to get [teachers] out of the classroom for periods of time . . . even on a daily basis. If we had some other kind of assignment where they weren't in the classroom quite as much that would be helpful. I think we need to take them out of that struggle which they're in all day long. It's heavy, it gets pretty heavy over a period of time, it gets *real* heavy. (Interview 20/4/95)

Is it possible that constancy and the complacency that could follow may be damaging to a teacher's longevity? Could no change be as detrimental as too much change too quickly? Surviving and coping with change is one of the keys to longevity, indeed to living. Having the tools to cope with change may be one of our most important adaptive skills, not only in the complex world of education but in our personal lives as well. What were some of the changes Nan faced and what adaptations did she make?

As many experienced teachers can attest, education itself has changed a great deal in the last 30 years. One of most obvious changes that Nan observed was the gradual evolution of the student body at Mountain Heights. When she first began, the student body was quite different than it was by the time she retired:

> The kids were all college bound, just an amazing student body. I had one boy who was a United States Presidential Scholar, one boy going to Yale, another to Harvard, another to Princeton. They were all heading to these schools, already having accepted scholarships. It was a much different school. . . . The students who used to go to Mountain Heights came from families who went to the theatre, who went to concerts, who had participated in children's theatre. They came with knowledge; they came with background. (Interview 20/10/93)

When Nan began teaching, there was an open enrollment policy in her district, and because of its fine academic reputation, many of the area's best students attended Mountain Heights. All the teachers were required to have their master's degrees in order to teach in the district. "Mountain Heights was considered one of the top high schools in the entire country, [it] had an enormously fine reputation" (Interview 20/10/93).

The biggest change for Nan, however, came about eight years before her retirement. The district began a reorganization plan which included an arts magnet school. Boundaries throughout the district were redrawn, high school theatre arts curricula were cut back, and new groups of students attended Mountain Heights. Nan noted: "It's been a difficult transition for me and a whole new way of looking at things" (Interview 20/10/93).

Nan's curriculum also changed. The students who came into her classroom hadn't had some of the advantages or experiences in the arts that had enriched her classrooms in the past. A philosophical shift in her teaching took place; Nan came to the conclusion that her standards should remain the same but her expectations of her students had to change:

> I know I've changed a great deal, what I'm asking my students today is not what I would have asked of them even ten years ago. They don't have the same background, they don't come with the same basic skills, and they don't have the same drive. I find it takes longer to cover the material and I cover less material than I ever did, but I try to cover what I cover as thoroughly . . . and still demand as much of them. (Interview 20/10/93).

Her production choices also changed, not only because of the perceived changes in her students, but because of the changes in her audiences: "Ten

years ago I could do Brecht. Not only could I do it with the kids I had, but my audience could appreciate it. Now I can't do the same level of material. Not just because my kids aren't quite there yet, but also because my audience would never be able to [appreciate it] " (Interview 20/10/93).

Partially as a result of the magnet's opening and the resulting shift in numbers throughout the district, Nan was assigned to teach English as well as theatre. As many teachers in the field today know, student numbers, staffing needs, and district guidelines often dictate what a teacher will teach, not necessarily the teacher's background, expertise, or love of subject matter. Nan didn't feel qualified to teach English and, as a result, this particular change may have been the most difficult and challenging to deal with and, as shall be noted later, one of the main reasons Nan considered retirement.

Bob Stanish, author and consultant for creativity in the classroom, has explored the importance of giving teachers and students the opportunity to change and grow. Flexibility and change should be fostered not only on a personal level but also on a district level:

> Confine plant forms to a container and you will know exactly the dimensions they shall reach. Confine your teachers to your restricting curricula and your paperwork and you will know exactly the dimensions they shall reach. And each budding branch and each extending child shall not extend far beyond the perimeters of their confinement. Space determines the shape of all living things. (117)

Teachers work in a challenging and difficult environment, one that is constantly under fire to change and adapt. The ability to embrace change and acknowledge the fact that change is ever present and even expected could empower a teacher and strengthen her resolve to stay in the profession.

Respect for Students and the Art Form

To feel or show concern for; a willingness to show consideration or appreciation; to honor; to hold in high regard.

Students are obviously very important to Nan, and it was apparent through the interview process, classroom observations, and observations conducted at rehearsals and meetings that Nan held her students in high regard. Although it may be stating the obvious, respecting students as people and treating them with respect does not always happen in every classroom. In today's world, Nan feels that to get respect from students you have to earn it:

> Kids don't come to school with built-in respect like we did. So you have to get it, earn it, and it takes a lot of work and a lot of energy to get that respect. And I think part of the problem is they have been told how bad they are and how awful they are and how dumb they are for so long, that they believe it and they think every teacher thinks that of them. . . . I've taken a lot of time to tell them that I like them. And to show them that I like them. (Interview 28/10/93)

It is difficult for Nan to talk about respecting students and not refer to another important link to her longevity: standards. For Nan, respect and standards are inextricably linked. How is it possible for students to respect themselves if they are not doing work they, and others, can respect? How can students respect a teacher or director who has not committed herself to high standards of work and performance?

When asked why she had stayed in theatre as long as she did, Nan replied as many teachers do, that it was the students who kept her going. She respected their creativity, energy, and their ability to respond to her creativity as a director. "I had wonderful students, tremendous support from the entire

school, the faculty and the administrators, [but] the students are the main reason [I stayed]" (Interview 24/1/95).

Nan's students felt her respect and concern for their stage work as well as their personal lives. Sam felt she treated her students like people. Nan didn't hold herself above her theatre students, but allowed them to express themselves and feel as though they had added something to the production process:

> As a director she lets you experiment and she lets you kind of feel your way through the character, and feel your way through the play. And then she'll make suggestions and move you in the direction that she wants you to go but it's very open and very free. And I think that's great for high school actors. As a teacher she treated me like a person; you were an equal. You didn't know as much as she did but you were always an equal and your opinion always mattered. What you're feeling always mattered. . . . She values the student's opinions. (Interview 3/23/95)

Sandy's thoughts echoed Sam's, and she experienced Nan's openness and respect extending even to the technical aspects of production:

> It's not like a dictatorship, I mean, we have the opportunity to express ourselves creatively, you know, just as much as she does. And in terms of like the set, I mean, we did a lot of the set, last minute painting stuff on it, and she was, like, fine with it. It was cool, I mean, but it was still her show. . . . She took our ideas, you know? That's, like, important to me. We would suggest things and she would say, "OK," and a lot of times she would go with it. And that was cool. (Interview 21/4/95)

Nan managed to communicate her genuine respect to her theatre students; they, in turn, were able to respect her and the work they did together. Students and teacher were able to support each other and work together in an environment of trust and creativity. Surely this type of environment and relationship with students would be a positive influence on a teacher's ability to last in this demanding profession.

Nan's respect for what she teaches may very well be another aspect of her longevity. How many teachers have been placed in classrooms teaching subjects for which they had no interest or aptitude? How many teachers have been burned out teaching classes they do not like or enjoy, or are not prepared to teach? How many theatre teachers, not really understanding the complexities of theatre as an art form, simply focus on production and don't allow themselves or their students the freedom of exploring the spectrum of theatre activities the art offers? Sometimes just "liking" or "enjoying" the subject you teach may not be enough. When a teacher respects her subject matter, she pursues knowledge in that area, she continues to expand her horizons, and, as a result, the horizons of her students. To understand the intricacies and appreciate the complexities and ambiguities of your subject matter can be empowering and exciting. Perhaps appreciation for the art form comes from experience and education. Is it possible that more training in the field makes for a better and more highly qualified teacher of theatre arts? Is it necessary to have a master's degree in theatre in order to appreciate theatre as an art form and teach it as such in our high schools? I believe so. In the educational experience, graduate school is the forum where not merely the doing of theatre but the understanding of why we do theatre is truly pursued. Is the perception of

theatre as an art form a matter of education or maturation? I believe both are essential.

Much of this respect for and understanding of theatre as an art form came from Nan's education, both undergraduate and graduate. From the beginning, when she was an undergraduate at the university, she was taught a great deal about theatre. Nan's graduate instructors also gave her further background in the art form and presented her with even more artistic knowledge and choices:

> One of my professors in graduate school, everything she taught she saw as an anti-Viet Nam piece. Everything she directed, everything was politically motivated. Its just had an absolutely enormous impression. I think subconsciously, all my choices of plays are always something that I want to say. (Interview 20/10/93)

Nan has strong feelings about teaching theatre and teaching it as an art form, not merely as a form of recreation or entertainment: "Sure, I could teach drama and we could do little improvisations all year, and I know that happens in a lot of schools, but I can't do that. I think too much of this as an art form. And [students] don't think of it as an art form; they think of it as fun and games" (Interview 11/3/93). Perhaps it is not only students who consider our art form to be fun and games. That image is one we in theatre have to confront each time we step in front of our classes or justify our courses to administrators, parents, colleagues in other subject areas. and the public.

Close to the conclusion of his interview, Sam made a comment which clearly connected Nan's love of theatre with her love for her students:

> She loves theatre; she is theatre and the longevity there [in theatre] I think has so much to do with her love of the arts and the love of instilling [that] love into students. I think she's very

> in to cultivating people's perceptions of theatre and becoming a part of that education. I think she just thrives on it. (Interview 23/3/95)

Respecting the work you do, the people you work with, and the subject matter you teach may be a basic precept of self actualization. The feeling that what you do matters, and that you have made a difference in the lives of students are powerful motivators, particularly for teachers. How is it possible to feel that sense of self actualization if you believe that what you are doing is not worthy of respect, and that those you work with are not significant? Longevity certainly is tied to job and self satisfaction.

Environmental Conditions and Longevity: External

Several environmental factors emerged as having a possible impact on Nan's longevity. Environmental factors are those factors identified outside the personal characteristics manifested by Nan. These factors are organized from those having the least amount of impact on longevity to those which may have the largest impact on longevity. Some of these factors may overlap and intersect with those previously mentioned. These factors include: professional associations; accessibility to production, teaching and classroom facilities; production choices; teaching assignment; the influence of previous high school theatre teachers; staff, colleague and mentor influences; and autonomy as a teacher and an artist.

Professional Associations

Interaction with outside organizations which may provide education, interaction and support; local agencies, theatres, universities or colleges through which professional alliances and sustaining relationships may be formed.

The ETA survey explored the relationship between the theatre teacher's professional membership and the "strong" theatre program initially introduced in Peluso's work. Citing several indicators as indicative of program strength, the teacher's association with a regional or national theatre association was significantly higher in stronger programs. Seventy eight percent of the teachers in schools with strong theatre programs had professional affiliations, while only 48% of the teachers in average programs had such an affiliation.

Nan, from the beginning, within her district and her state, had maintained a network of professional connections and support:

> I think that high school teachers are very isolated. I think that unless they make an effort to go out and talk to other teachers through organizations, through conferences, they're going to think they're the only one in the world who has these problems. I went to conferences and speech tournaments. To me the most valuable thing about them was going there and meeting with other teachers and hearing that we aren't any different. I think the national [level of organizations] is important from the standpoint that it gives you a broader voice and visibility. You learn from the university, you learn skills that you need, you learn short cuts, you get support. (Interview 13/3/95)

The isolation of the theatre teacher is a real issue. More often than not, theatre teachers, as mentioned earlier, are the only theatre specialists in their

schools, and in smaller rural areas may be the only theatre specialist in the district. Updating skills and knowledge, establishing collegial relationships, and getting away from the isolation of the school environment were all needs supported and engendered by professional connections.

Facilities

Appropriate and available areas for teaching and performance; control and monitoring of theatre space or spaces; availability of said spaces on a consistent basis to allow for rehearsal and performance.

Production work is the focal point of most high school theatre programs and, as a result, the production space becomes of particular concern to the theatre teacher. Although not often thought to be an important aspect of longevity, proper facilities and the availability of those facilities are valued not only by the theatre teacher/director, but are also viewed as an aspect of a respected program (Seidel 12). It is important for a theatre teacher to have access to a facility for rehearsal, set construction, and performance. Without this available space, production work becomes more difficult and challenging, and much more wearing on an already stressed director/teacher.

Facilities for secondary theatre are inconsistent at best, but recent research indicates that things have been improving in our nation's high schools. When Joseph Peluso conducted his landmark study of high school theatre programs in 1971 he found that: there were very few theatre classroom spaces; most production work was not being done in a theatre or production space; and most facilities, regardless of size, were ill-equipped.

High school theatre teachers generally require more than the usual amount of classroom space to accomplish the goals of their curriculum and support the production aspects of their programs. Drama classes in secondary schools tend to be large, with 25-35 students in each class; desks are not always needed, but room for movement, rehearsal and presentation is. There are times

when the public or other high school classes may be invited into a drama classroom or space to allow the class to share what they have learned. Larger high schools may have not only an auditorium/performance space, but also a drama classroom complete with small stage, modified lighting equipment and storage space.

Mountain Heights, over the course of Nan's tenure, went from a small black box experimental theatre space for class and production work, to a large auditorium complete with proscenium stage, fly space, loading dock, scene shop, orchestra pit, make-up space, and a small black box theatre/classroom space. Although there were some scheduling problems each year, and Nan had the extra responsibilities of auditorium management, the fact remained that she always had space available to do her work.

Today, according to the 1991 survey by the Educational Theatre Association, theatre facilities are somewhat improved, although in the opinion of those conducting the study, the facilities, in most cases, are still less than adequate. Even today it is the fortunate theatre teacher who has an adequate and available performance and classroom space. Fifty percent of theatre teachers have a regular performance space with a stage built specifically for theatre, while the other fifty percent use general purpose rooms, cafetoriums, black box theatres, or other makeshift performance spaces (Seidel 12).

Quality, not Quantity

To do fewer productions; concentrate all efforts into productions of excellence; produce the best plays possible with a finite amount of resources used to their best advantage.

Nan and Peggy made the choice to produce only two main stage shows a year and one contest one-act play. They had decided not to produce musicals, and as a result Nan had directed only one musical during her tenure at Mountain Heights. For the traditional production-driven high school theatre

program, producing only two mainstage productions a year may seem unusual; for the high school theatre teacher to have to direct only one production a year may also seem unusual, but that was the arrangement at Mountain Heights. Nan directed one show and the contest one act and Peggy directed one show.

The traditional length of rehearsal time for the productions was approximately seven to ten weeks. Peggy feels that the commitment to quality and not quantity made the difference at Mountain Heights and was a major factor in the success of the program:

> We have, since I've been here, done two major productions. [We rehearse] after school anywhere from seven to ten weeks. There have been a lot of drama class evenings done. . . . To do a quality show we both really have seen the need for weeks of rehearsal and to get a commitment for doing that and again the energy level, that's about all we've been able to handle well. (Interview 3/3/96)

The number of shows a program produces in a year varies from school to school. Some theatre teachers feel it necessary to produce several shows in a season, traditionally a comedy, a drama, a children's show, and a musical. This number of productions may be perceived by some directors as the required number of productions to offer to have a successful program, or to allow for growth in a high school theatre program. Peggy and Nan seemed to have chosen to do only what they wanted to do and could do successfully. By not succumbing to the unwritten law and pressure to "produce, produce, produce," these directors may have protected themselves from burnout and prolonged their careers.

Once again, a lack of administrative pressures played into Nan and Peggy's production choices. Whereas in some schools there may be administrative

pressure to produce the popular and money-making musicals, that was not the case at Mountain Heights. Neither the administration nor the music department pushed for the production of a large scale musical. Peggy speculated on the impact on the program as a result of the choice not to do musicals:

> We've been very lucky, we've never had administrative pressure. We've never had an administrator say, "You have to do a musical." I have done none here [and] Nan has done one. It was a wonderful and horrible experience. I think one of the reasons our productions, we feel, may be a better quality than many [is] that we don't do more [productions] and we don't do musicals. (Interview 3/3/96)

Perhaps theatre teachers would last longer if they perceived that they had a choice as to how many shows they could and should produce in a year. The fact that a choice *can* be made, regardless of what position they may find themselves in, may release theatre teachers from expectations that could be damaging and destructive. By controlling the context and number of production choices, a theatre teacher has the opportunity to pace herself and her energies and eventually discover, over time, what production schedule works best.

Teaching Assignment

The classes administratively assigned to a teacher; often based on student numbers, available funds, needs of the curriculum, school size, etc.

Teachers do not often have control over the courses they will be assigned to teach. Granted, all secondary teachers select a given subject area in which they are to be proficient. Many theatre teachers are especially encouraged to find a minor, an area in which they can teach when they can't find a teaching position in their chosen field. However, at any given time the demands of student numbers, department needs, shifts in enrollment or funding may supersede the training or expertise of the teacher. The teacher may then

find herself scrambling to become proficient in a relatively new and unfamiliar area.

During the last eight to ten years of her teaching tenure, Nan experienced some of her greatest teaching challenges. Chief among them was the opening of an arts magnet school which impacted significantly on the numbers of students in her theatre classes. For the first time she was forced into the English classroom and was not comfortable with the change. She felt out of her element and woefully lacking in knowledge and experience:

> For 20 years I taught only [theatre] and I've only been teaching English seven or eight years maybe. My first English class, I ended up in absolute tears everyday. I was mortified. . . . They used to separate the really, really slow kids, [and] I got the really, really slow kids. [I] had no idea what I was doing. [I'd] never taught English before in my life. (Interview 3/11/93)

Nan also noticed a difference in the way she interacted with her English students as opposed to those in her theatre classes. She found she was a bit more guarded in the English classroom and not as willing to share her personal side:

> I suppose it's the nature of the subject. In drama you're on your feet and you're not sitting in a classroom with the teacher in front of you. I find that in drama the tool you use is you. I become more personal as far as sharing with them who I am. In English I don't get to who I am until half way through the year. (Interview 13/3/95)

Peggy had had a similar experience, although it was much earlier in her career that she was faced with teaching a course she did not feel prepared to teach:

> When I graduated I was a speech and drama education major. [I] didn't even have an English major. In California [when] I taught eighth grade English, speech and drama I kept one night ahead in the English text book. . . . I went back to school and picked up an English minor and that has helped tremendously. I have taught English in some form for 20 years. (Interview 3/3/95)

"If I was still in theatre I wouldn't be retiring," stated Nan during an interview in 1995, just prior to her retirement. How many fine teachers have been led to retire or switch professions simply because they were asked to teach in subject areas for which they had little interest or preparation? Nan taught theatre exclusively for over 20 years and found it fulfilling personally and artistically. The students of Mountain Heights were fortunate indeed that Nan was not required to teach English sooner.

Influence of Previous High School Theatre Teachers

A power directly or indirectly affecting a person or events; to have significance; to cause to change; to determine a modification in character, thought or action.

The importance of the high school theatre teacher's influence on the lives of nearly all the people interviewed in this study (including the author's) is amazing. Both Nan and Peggy stated that the reason they had gone into educational theatre was because of their high school theatre teachers. I myself chose theatre because a high school theatre arts teacher told me (and I believed her) that I had talent. Length of time spent with the theatre teacher was not always indicative of the impact of that teacher. Nan was with her theatre teacher for three years; Peggy, on the other hand, had known her theatre teacher since childhood, from the time of her brother's involvement in theatre. I worked closely with my theatre teacher only during my junior year in high

school. This influence seems consistent and permeated the lives of those interviewed.

This influence reflects a trend in the teaching profession in general, revealed by a 1987 study conducted for the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. The study cited several reasons why students choose education as a career. Fifty-three percent of those interviewed said they were inspired by a favorite teacher to choose the teaching profession. This response was among the top five most influential reasons for choosing education, behind only "helping children grow and learn (90%)," "seems like a challenging field (63%)," and "like the working conditions (54%)" (Fessler and Christensen 47).

Many young teachers not only choose the profession because of the influence of a previous teacher, but also model their teaching style after that teacher and other teachers they have experienced. One teacher education program, in an effort to meet the demands of higher teacher training standards and the criticism of teacher training, actually feels the need to be certain that young pre-service teachers are not basing their desire to teach *only* on the memory of a favorite teacher. In her book, Who Will Teach the Children, Harriet Tyson cited the fact that many teacher training programs have to work hard to induct the new teacher educator into the real world of teaching and not allow them to inhabit the world of their memories of what school was like for them. Over-romanticizing the idea of previously modeled teaching behaviors from their favorite teacher should also be avoided:

> Lots of students enter college with the dream of becoming teachers. Most of them, it appears, think they already know how to teach, although their ideas about teaching are apt to be naive and incomplete. Good schools of education actively disabuse these students of their

> innocent ideas in the freshman and sophomore year, by sending them out into the schools for a dose of reality and by requiring them to take tough introductory courses. . . . This early exposure to the hard work of teaching not only sifts out those who are not cut out for it but also prods students along the path to adulthood. (105)

Nevertheless, the impact that teachers have on the lives of their students is apparent. Although Nan was fairly certain she wanted to be involved with theatre as a career, she credits her high school theatre teacher for her commitment to theatre education:

> . . . if I might not have had such a dynamic person, you know, such a wonderful experience, I might not have stuck with it. When I got to high school, having this magnificent theatre teacher absolutely changed my life. It was just an all around encompassing experience. . . . So everything in my life has been because of her. (Interview 24/1/95)

Sam was greatly influenced by Nan's approach to theatre, and although he may have chosen theatre as a vocation without her influence, his language choices do not deny her pervasive influence on his approach to theatre:

> Nan really grounded it for me; she really instilled a love of theatre in me. It just kind of happened. I think it's because of the work we did, and it was such great work. . . . She shaped and molded me, and put the whole love of everything into me. . . . You could tell how much she loved it, and I was right there with her. (Interview 3/23/95)

Nathan, who at this time has not chosen to go into theatre, also spoke strongly of the influence of Nan and the power of theatre to influence the lives of those who embrace it. There is much reported research that describes the benefits of theatre in the lives of young people, but to hear it in their words, not

as subject but as participant, is important. "We talked about how I have grown. Before I was real quiet and I didn't say much. I mean, I was a much different person and I know that she's brought a lot of that stuff out in me, the whole department has but especially her. She's just done so much for us, you know" (Interview 21/4/95).

The selection of theatre teachers and their training could have an even bigger impact on the field of educational theatre than realized. How many potential theatre arts teachers have been lost because they could not be reached or challenged by effective and well-trained theatre teachers? How many well-meaning but inadequately prepared theatre teachers do not encourage the dramatic or teaching talents of students in their programs? Because of the constant and often personal relationships that can exist between the theatre teacher and her students, the impact of the theatre teacher is significantly intensified.

Keeping gifted and sensitive theatre teachers in the classroom is advantageous to the field. These capable teachers certainly must feel a level of satisfaction as they observe the students they have identified and encouraged influencing the field of theatre. That sense of accomplishment could foster longevity. The longer a teacher is in the field, the more steady and continuing the positive influence of the accomplishments of former students may become. This by-product of longevity, a sense of investing in the future, could add to the process of longevity. Theatre teachers could be called the gatekeepers of the future of our art form.

Collegiality: Shared Responsibility with a Peer

Close association with a respected and trusted peer, one with whom the responsibility of the theatre arts program and production demands can be shared; a colleague with similar standards of production and expectations from students and curriculum.

Although Nan did not mention specifically that a particular professional relationship was an important aspect of her longevity at Mountain Heights, all other respondents at one point in their interviews identified Nan and Peggy's relationship as a possible reason for her longevity.

Dr. Winter noticed the close friendship and support Nan and Peggy provided one another. He referred to them as his "twins" because when he was principal, ". . . they were inseparable. They were very talented, I always think of them together. They put on excellent productions. The quality of their productions was so much better than I had seen at [other high schools]" (Interview 20/4/95).

Peggy, Nan's friend and colleague for 16 years, may have spoken for them both when she talked about what had kept her in her current position:

> Having Nan has kept me in this position. I think that being able to share, because when my bad days come there has been someone whose shoulder has been there. We tend not to have the same bad days all the time. I think that not burning out has been being able to split this [drama and speech programs] for 16 years rather than doing it alone. (Interview 3/3/95)

Nan and Peggy's students supported the notion that the relationship between them had been good for them as teachers and directors, but also for themselves as students. Sam speculated, "I think a lot of the team effort there with Nan and Peggy is what kept her there. She loves Peggy and Peggy loves her and they're great together" (Interview 23/3/95). Sandy added her

observation, "They're best friends, I guess. They think along the same lines a lot of the time, and at the same time they are completely different people. . . . The other one's always there to support. I think they're both really lucky in that respect" (Interview 21/4/95).

Nan did acknowledge the importance of collegiality for the theatre teacher. Understanding that the theatre teacher is often isolated in her own school by location as well as subject matter, Nan felt that many kinds of professional involvement and interactions were important if not essential. When asked about her involvement in professional organizations Nan explained:

> [Professional membership] is number one. I think that theatre teachers in high school are very isolated. And I think that unless they make an effort to go out and talk to other teachers through organizations, through conferences, they're going to think they're the only one in the world who has these problems. . . . I went to conferences and speech tournaments. To me the most valuable thing about them was going there and meeting with other teachers and hearing that we aren't any different. (Interview 13/3/95)

Nan also had support from the theatre teachers in her district. Periodically, the theatre teachers would get together just to talk about their problems and concerns and give each other a sympathetic ear:

> One of the things I had all the way through my teaching was, within our school district we had a very close knit-group of theatre teachers. We met all the time, from the very first year I started teaching we always found a way with our busy schedules to meet, maybe three or four times a year, to sit down and talk about what problems we were having, how

> we could help each other. So not only did I have a support system in my school, I had a support system from my district. (Interview 13/3/95)

During the course of her career Nan had the opportunity to work with several colleagues. Most of these collegial relationships were pleasant and worthwhile professional collaborations. There was only one that had been unpleasant:

> He was real egocentric and I think one of the reasons he came was he wanted to have a championship speech team, which we already had. It was too hard on his ego to do it the way it had always been done. . . . He had real strong ideas about things and he treated the kids with disrespect, and a lot of the things he did with them I thought was cruel, and his coaching was to win, not do the best job possible. That was at odds with the way I looked at coaching. (Interview 3/13/95)

Apparently it is not just the fact that someone is present to share the responsibilities of a particular program that becomes important, but that all parties involved share a common philosophy and approach. Asked if she would have continued in her position at Mountain Heights if she had been forced to work with this particular teacher for a longer period of time, Nan became speculative and uncertain. It is possible that her longevity at this high school would have been placed in jeopardy if the negative working relationship had continued. Consistency in the philosophy of a program can be essential in providing a united approach to curriculum and production. Without this consistency, divided loyalties among students and staff can be disruptive, resulting in a diminished program and a minefield of political difficulties to negotiate.

Autonomy/Artistic Freedom

Independent; the condition or quality of being free of restraints; choice; free will.

Control and artistic freedom are perhaps the most important issues for theatre teachers and directors. The freedom to pursue artistic and professional goals is important to personal and professional satisfaction and actualization. A teacher's control over circumstances, situations, environments, etc., all contribute to a sense of autonomy and freedom.

Autonomy may take time to develop and can be associated with respect and trust. Can a school and its leadership trust the theatre teacher to choose appropriate material for students and community? Will the theatre teacher consider the cultural context in which they must direct and produce? Does the theatre teacher do quality work which will not embarrass or demean the school and its program? How, and at what point, is a teacher or administrator faced with censorship and who will be allowed to make the final decision concerning issues of script control, language, etc.? Dr. Winter recalls walking the fine administrative line between accountability to his constituency and respect for Nan's work:

> We did have one difference of opinion, a major difference of opinion. I got a terrific amount of instant criticism from the community, I can't even remember the play or the content of the play. I was trying to answer the community's criticism so I called Nan and Peggy since they did everything together. I was trying to be delicate, not be a censor, you know, and censor her. I was trying to support her, but telling her to be more careful. (Interview 20/4/95)

With more and more community influence in today's schools, the independence and artistic freedoms of teachers may be further jeopardized.

Schools are seeking more parental involvement which can have a very positive influence on the education of children. However, that involvement also gives parents permission to promote their own personal agendas in a very public arena. Administrators are frequently called upon to placate parents to avoid the threat of legal action. Theatre teachers, like all education professionals, deserve to be supported, and must be allowed to direct shows and produce classroom projects that are significant, meaningful and thought provoking. Nan was fortunate to find such a place at Mountain Heights. "I got into a position where I had autonomy, I mean it was like no one could touch me. I felt I had the creative freedom to do things that were satisfying" (Interview 1/24/95).

It appears that in the large scheme of educational theatre, Nan had unique experiences with her principals. She felt "protected" and supported:

> I had some really exciting experiences and there's been some really exciting things that I've done over the years that stand out, some more than others. I've done some things that I never would have had a chance to do had I been in professional theatre or community theatre because of the autonomy I had. No one ever censored me. I've never had a principal that read my plays or even asked to. . . . I knew I would never be questioned. . . . Certainly I've been called up because they thought that something was too adult or something, but I've always been backed up by my administration. (Interview 24/1/95)

Nan also established a place for herself on a state-wide level based on her reputation as a contest winning play director, coach, and teacher:

> I'm in a unique situation. The turnover in theatre teachers is enormous. I have seniority over anyone in the state, [and] somewhere along the way, I don't know when this happened, I established a

> reputation. And it seemed that once that happened, I have never been under pressure from anyone except myself to do anything. (Interview 20/10/93)

Nan taught in a context in which her work was respected by administration, parents and colleagues. Her commitment to teaching and directing was strengthened by her sense of creative freedom and enhanced by her creativity. She connected herself to her students, her department and her school. It is important for the work of teachers to be valued and respected. "Maintaining commitment to teaching over the professional life cycle depends on a delicate balance between respect for artistry and autonomy within the classroom, on the one hand, and an enduring sense of connectedness with the school as a collective body on the other" (Lightfoot qtd. in McLaughlin et al. 28).

Chapter VI

Concluding Comments

Many questions surfaced during the conceptualization of this study, but first and foremost was: How do some teachers manage to stay vital and involved in the field of teaching theatre for a long period of time, while others don't or can't sustain themselves in this very demanding profession? In light of their tremendous responsibility and impact, the training, certification, hiring, and sustaining of quality secondary theatre arts teachers must become a higher priority for the universities who train them, the administrators who hire them, and the parents whose children sit in their classrooms. The study of one particular theatre arts teacher may open the door to further study and speculation on this issue.

After examining the data I have made several assertions. Longevity may be examined in the light of two specific support systems, one internal and the other external. Specific internal support systems include, but are not necessarily limited to: a good sense of humor, aspirations in the teaching profession, patience, having high standards, having commitment and responsibility to teaching and the art form, caring about students, having organizational skills, being adaptable to change, and respecting students and their work in theatre.

Humor in the work place provides a valuable support system for students and teachers. Not only can humor put difficult and challenging situations in perspective, but it can provide students and teachers with insight into each others' lives.

The desire to teach, which propels many into the teaching profession, may be yet another indicator of possible longevity. There may be a significant number of people entering the field of teaching who are using the profession as "something to fall back on" if success in the "real" desired profession does not materialize. This may be a significant problem, particularly in the arts where the teaching profession may be perceived as an available or desirable option when professional acting or directing proves disappointing. Without the initial desire to enter the teaching profession as a *first* choice, the basis by which a teacher may sustain herself through some of the difficulties and challenges of teaching may not exist.

Patience is another quality that may provide resilience for a teacher. The understanding that "kids will be kids," and that they *will* make mistakes makes dealing with those mistakes and problems easier. It is understood that there will be problems, and directors and teachers must solve as many of those problems at the time as they can. Patience with students, colleagues and self can only make a difficult and challenging job easier.

Being committed to high standards and being responsible for maintaining those standards implies that the work and the people you work with are important, significant, and worth the investment required to insure success and satisfaction. Nan was committed to her students, to her production work, and to the success of both. Nan's respect for her students and for what she taught were exemplary. Over and over again her students and colleagues commented on how important her work in theatre was to her, and how important it was that her love of theatre be transmitted to her students.

Caring about and valuing the profession, the subject matter, and the students entrusted to the teacher's care may also be important to longevity.

Investing in teaching and in students can result in an emotional return to help sustain the educator. A caring teacher may be allowed to make a bigger difference in the lives of students, and could lead to a feeling of efficacy. Caring fosters longevity through the emotional returns that may result.

Organizational skills are critical for success in the teaching field, and imperative for those in educational theatre who must juggle the roles of teacher, producer, director, and auditorium manager. Without the ability to organize and plan, the secondary theatre teacher will be ambushed by the myriad number of details and demands that command her time and attention.

The ability to adapt and be flexible may also be important in achieving longevity. Change must not only be anticipated but embraced as an opportunity for growth. As long as change is perceived as a positive force, satisfaction with the profession may be the result. Those individuals who refuse to acknowledge change or neglect to treat it as a positive force may be on the road to frustration, burnout, or termination.

Finally, the ability to respect the work of students and respect her own work may also have been important to Nan's longevity. Nan was able to see her theatre students as individuals with something to say. She saw theatre as the means of giving voice to her students' ideas. Her respect for the power and the art of theatre was transmitted to her students, enabling both to respect the work they did together.

It seems to me that respect may be the most important internal quality fostering longevity. If daily classroom and production work are respected, if the teacher respects herself and the work of her students, then theatre becomes an important and powerful means of giving voice to students' ideas and thoughts. Empowering students is the essence of education and few have the opportunity

to empower students as theatre teachers do; that power must be compelling in a teacher's decision to remain in the profession.

The external support systems that I identified as contributing to longevity are: professional associations, ready availability of facilities, concern with quality and not quantity in production and classroom work, satisfaction with the teaching assignment, the influence of previous high school teachers, collegiality, and autonomy.

I have found, and Nan concurred, that teaching theatre can be a lonely activity, and that professional associations lessen that sense of isolation the theatre teacher may feel. Very few colleagues in a school understand what a theatre teacher does. Associating and interacting with others who face similar problems, or who are actively seeking solutions to those very problems, may be invaluable for the theatre teacher.

Having a facility available for use by the theatre teacher and equipped to meet even the most minimal of needs for production, can significantly reduce the challenge and stress of mounting plays. Not having to battle other activities for valuable stage or performance space is crucial for quality rehearsal and construction time.

During all my years of production work I overlooked one of the most important elements which could have contributed to my longevity - control over my production season. Why are theatre teachers compelled to "fill up" a season? Why is it necessary to do three or more productions a season? Whose needs are best served when an already overworked theatre teacher attempts to do more than she is capable of doing? Theatre teachers should do as many shows as they feel capable of doing well--no more, no less.

The issue of teaching assignments is an external factor that can greatly impact on a teacher and her job satisfaction. I was saddened when Nan speculated that she may have stayed in the teaching profession longer if she had been allowed to teach what she loved most--theatre. It is true that administrators and districts must make the best use of their resources and, as a result, teachers are often placed in teaching situations less than ideal, but how many wonderful and happy teachers have been driven from the profession in the name of effective use of resources? It would seem a more efficient use of resources to allow teachers to teach subjects they like and for which they are adequately trained.

The influence of high school theatre teachers on the lives of students who may themselves one day be theatre teachers appears to be significant. In my opinion, the main reason young people choose to be theatre teachers is because of the influence of *their* theatre teacher, coupled with a love for the art form. This opinion is based on personal experience, the experience of Nan and Peggy, and my experience with students in theatre teacher training programs.

Having an individual to share the work and responsibility of a theatre program is important for longevity. The work load for a theatre teacher is enormous, and without someone to effectively share the load and shoulder a portion of the responsibility, isolation and burnout are almost inescapable. However, it is important that those working together share common goals, standards and visions for the theatre program. Working with the wrong person could be even more stressful for the theatre teacher than working alone.

Autonomy is perhaps the most important contributor to longevity. Theatre teachers should be allowed the freedom to teach and direct creatively and

without undue restraint. When a teacher is given autonomy, a sense of respect is implicit; respect is important for job satisfaction and longevity.

Another broader perspective emerged from the research, another way to view the question of Nan's longevity: the conceptualization of *controlled* contexts or circumstances in the teaching environment. An over simplified definition of context could refer to the teaching environment, the surroundings in which a teacher works. However, context is a rich and complex framework from which to view a teacher's professional life, and the individual teacher's control or input into the establishing of various and embedded contexts provides an interesting lens through which to view an approach to longevity. The internal and external characteristics described above are merely explorations of, and an attempt to define and structure, the secondary theatre teacher's contexts. *If a teacher can influence her contexts she can perhaps influence her longevity in the profession or, at least ,in her school.*

It is possible that one of the reasons Nan lasted so long was because she somehow managed to exercise control over some of her personal teaching and directing contexts for a significant amount of time. Context is one approach that may be used in the examination of the obvious differences encountered in explaining a range of effectiveness in education and educators:

> Scholars and educational leaders alike must consider why secondary school teachers, departments, schools and school systems can achieve dramatically disparate results with comparable resources. At the most fundamental level, context matters because effective teaching depends on teachers' opportunity to choose materials, objectives, and activities they believe are appropriate for themselves and for their students. (McLaughlin 2)

Teachers work in multiple and embedded contexts and defining any one of those contexts is challenging. "Effective teaching depends significantly on the contexts within which teachers work--departmental and school organization and culture, professional associations and networks, community educational values and norms, secondary and higher education policies" (McLaughlin 2). Although there are contexts we cannot control as individuals or as professionals, and although contexts change as society and culture change, a teacher's awareness of these changing contexts could influence longevity. Nan made wise choices within the contexts presented her; these choices contributed to her defining and understanding the contexts in which she functioned. Is it not possible throughout the teaching career cycle to continually redefine context and allow personal control over, or at least awareness of that context, to enhance a teacher's professional life? If you can define and identify context, how much control is possible to exert over that context?

McLaughlin and Talbert, in their collection of essays The Contexts of Teaching in Secondary Schools, stress the importance of the teaching context and the strong connection between teacher beliefs and values and finding success in the various and "permeating" contexts in which teachers function:

> Effective teaching depends significantly on the contexts within which teachers work--department and school organization and culture, professional associations and networks, community educational values and norms, secondary and higher education policies. . . . Effective teaching also depends on another, more complicated set of factors, namely, how teachers think and feel about what they do. Teachers through shared values and beliefs, individually and collectively mediate the influence of context conditions on student outcomes.

> Researchers have noted that teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and feelings about their work play an important role in supporting or undermining effective practice. (3)

Nan's story is a small window through which we may be able to view how one teacher thought and felt about what she did. Through her experience, knowledge and teaching talents, she was able to influence the contexts and conditions within which she taught at Mountain Heights.

Nan also exhibited some of the central *constructive* teacher "dispositions" identified by McLaughlin and Talbert. First, she was motivated and willing to expend consistently high effort in her work. Second, she believed that she was responsible for encouraging individual accomplishment and for responding to a wide range of student needs. She did not see her classroom responsibilities as primarily custodial and disciplinary, but remained enthusiastic about her subject matter throughout most of her career. Finally, she had a sense of efficacy, a belief that she was making a positive difference in the lives of her students. These important qualities are also shaped and defined by the *contexts* of teaching (3).

One of the contexts that Nan appeared to have a significant impact on was her independence within the context of production. Although she adjusted the types of plays and dramatic literature to meet her students' talents and the changing culture of the student body, she still felt a certain amount of control over her choices of plays, production schedules, etc. Autonomy, or the opportunity to make artistic choices independently and without fear or censorship, was an issue for Nan. Her autonomy at Mountain Heights was something she treasured and something that, sadly, is missing for many theatre teachers today. Effective and satisfying teaching and directing depends on a

theatre teacher's ability to actively participate in informing and participating in the construction of at least the school site contexts in which she works. This type of input is what educational reform has been advocating for teachers for years. Teachers must be involved in the construction of the contexts in which they teach.

Over which contexts did Nan have control or input? Her production season, curriculum, and working environment (office, classroom, auditorium, shops, storage space, etc.) to name a few. Nan seemed to understand who the gatekeepers were in her school and worked hard to incorporate them into her constructs:

> I go out of my way to introduce myself, to get to know them [principals], to bring them into the family. We do things to make them feel important and a part of it. I seem to have more success than the other arts at getting the administrators there. I think a lot of it is just making the personal contact. You build that. (Interview 3/13/95)

Granted, no one person has complete control over her teaching environment or the contexts within which she must function, but Nan had enough influence over her various and overlapping contexts for a long enough period of time, that she felt she had control and input into their structuring, maintenance, or redefinition. Nan developed the control of her contexts throughout her career, and continued to pursue it with consistency. As long as she was able to feel that sense of control over her context, she was able to continue at Mountain Heights.

It is interesting to note that at the end of her career, Nan seems to have finally succumbed to the contextual pressures she had fought to control for so long. Eventually, the changes in the student body, the diminishing numbers in the theatre classes, the necessary changes in her teaching, producing and

creating contexts took their cumulative toll. Although the students had been her main reason for staying, they eventually became her reason for leaving. As she reflected during our last interview, she revealed that she had come to the realization that she had perhaps not been as responsive to change as she had once thought. "I wanted them to change for me, more than I wanted me to change for them. There [was] room for change, but I still wanted them to see things my way" (Interview 29/11/97). Her personal definition of her teaching and directing contexts had to finally be compromised with her students' contexts and the resulting distance between the two could no longer be bridged.

Achieving productive longevity is not a result but a career-long process. From the reality shock of the initial years of teaching, through stable and committed periods, to periods of self doubt, re-commitment, exploration, and consideration of retirement, *a career is a process. And if longevity is to be achieved, it must also be pursued as part of this process.*

I believe that the internal contexts, and the emotions and feelings which shape those contexts, can have the most impact on longevity. Teachers remain vital and involved in teaching theatre over a long period of time by instinctively, or through acquired awareness or experience, learning to bring the internal contexts to bear on the external contexts in a positive and congruent way. When there is incongruence or dissonance between the internal and external contexts, and these differences cannot be reconciled, the result may be stress, burn out, or diminished longevity.

Nan's longevity in the field of teaching theatre could be attributed to her ability to inspire both her students and herself through the art of theatre. These positive, shared "creative juices," as Nan called them, resulted in a dynamic exchange of ideas and energies that sustained her as long as she and her

students maintained that symbiotic relationship. When the "juices" stopped flowing, Nan no longer had the energy to continue; when the teacher contexts and the student contexts could no longer be shared, Nan's ability to negotiate the complexities of the longevity process was compromised.

The internal and external characteristics identified in the study should not be held up as ideals to pursue if longevity is a teachers' goal. The complex interplay of Nan's internal and external contexts could never be duplicated; however, they are provided here for readers to examine and compare with their own contexts. As Nan negotiated the teacher career cycle, progressing through induction, competency, growth, frustration, stability, and career wind down and exit (Fessler and Christensen 1992), her external and internal contexts and responses were honed and developed, supporting her and sustaining her. Longevity is not simply a matter of lasting a long time in the profession. It is a process of developing positive, internal, contextual conditions and choices by an individual, and unique to that individual, resulting in an intrinsically motivated and artistically satisfied teacher.

Theatre teachers have many choices to make and many philosophies to chose from when considering how to approach the administration of their secondary theatre arts programs. There is the approach that theatre must be fun; in order to be successful, students must first and foremost enjoy themselves and their work in drama. The goals of this type of high school program may be: to simply involve as many students as possible; to expose students to different types of literature; to broaden their horizons; or to help students socialize more effectively. All of these are admirable goals and should be aspects of all programs. However, the other type of program, the type of program administrated by Nan and her colleague, appears to be better aligned with

artistic achievement and intellectual growth, which should be the goals of a secondary theatre arts teacher/director, both in the classroom and in the auditorium. Nan's approach to theatre was that it was an art form that must be respected. Classroom and production work must be committed, intelligent, and disciplined. The element of "fun" and the resulting good times and positive experiences must also be tempered with expectations of growth and learning in the art form.

I have come to the conclusion that one program may not be more "successful" than another. There are only differences in expectations, goals and contexts. However, I must admit a preference for the program and the teacher/director who defines her success not only by the number of happy, fun-loving students in her classes and programs, but also defines success and fulfillment as a job well done in an atmosphere of respect and discipline. This was Nan's program, a place where students were challenged by a truly gifted and knowledgeable teacher, and where the powerful art form of theatre was respected. Keeping these types of individuals teaching and directing in our schools should be one of our highest priorities.

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