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## “Realities of Music Teaching: A Conversation”

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### Reflections

By

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As my mother tells it, I wanted to be a teacher from the time I could talk. And she claims that as a young child I spent many days convincing my younger sister to “play school” so I could be the teacher! Whether these recollections are accurate or not, I do recall that by the eighth grade I knew that I wanted to be a teacher. This dream was confirmed by the excellent teachers I was fortunate enough to have throughout my education. While the subject I wanted to teach changed over time, my commitment to teaching is at the core of who I am. The kind of teacher that I am has been influenced and inspired by both the excellent role models I have encountered, and by those ineffectual, unimaginative teachers to which I was subjected.

When I read Estelle’s chapter on the realities of teaching, I was prompted to reflect on her statement about the low status and poor pay of teachers in the United States (p. 255). My early reality in my life was that teachers were highly respected—an attitude expressed by the members of my family. I also knew, however, that their salaries were

low compared to other professions. In fact, after receiving a scholarship during my senior year in high school, my father did his best to discourage me from becoming a teacher because it did not pay as well as other professions. My response was that I wanted to spend my life doing something that I was passionate and excited about—I wanted to do something that I could look forward to doing every day. It may be possible that my perception of the respected status of teachers forty years ago was influenced by my family's high opinion of teachers. Unfortunately, I do think that the status of teachers in the United States has declined over the past forty years because of societal views of the purposes of education and of teachers. If my perspective is correct, this raises the question: how can we better prepare teachers to be better advocates for what they do and the importance of their work, and thus change their status?

Even though I always wanted to be a teacher, what I thought it meant to be a teacher was based on watching my role models—my teachers. In the seventh grade I thought I wanted to be a physical education teacher, and then I realized how many sciences courses I would have to take. So, that was out because I thought I was neither good nor interested in science. Then in the eighth grade I thought I wanted to be an English teacher. I often met with my English teacher after school. And, even though she talked to me about the number of papers I would have to grade, all I focused on was that I could teach students how to parse sentences—which I thought was totally cool! So, during my senior year I was resolved that I was going to be an English teacher with a minor in either physical education or music education. Then during my college freshman orientation, I had to visit the three departments in which I thought I was going to major. I decided that I would go to music, then English, and finally physical education because it

was the most convenient and economic route to returning to my dorm. During the fifteen-minute music meeting Dr. Ohlsohn made one statement that changed my life. He said, “Can you go through a day without making music? If so, you should choose another major. If not, you should stay with us.” It was in that moment that I knew that I had to be a music teacher. And, in the long run, what it really meant was that I did not have a clue about all of the realities of being a music teacher. And, I did not have a career plan—I thought I would be a music teacher forever.

That perspective changed because of the following events. During my student teaching, I participated in a countywide meeting in which an experienced music teacher was very negative about students, teaching, and the profession at large. Later, when I started teaching in the same high school from which I graduated, I witnessed students making fun of former teachers whom I had admired and respected. From these two experiences I was determined to acquire administrative skills so that I would not have to be in a K-12 classroom beyond the time when I was passionate about teaching students, or beyond the time I could impassion students about making music. So, I pursued a Master’s and then a doctorate degree. While at Indiana University I had an opportunity to apply for the Fine Arts Consultant position at the Indiana Department of Education. So, after eighteen years as a teacher and department chair in the public schools, I went on to an administrative post and the political world. During that time, I also worked as an adjunct professor at Indiana University/Purdue University in Indianapolis (IUPUI). I presently teach at Central Connecticut State University.

During my tenure as the Fine Arts Consultant at the Indiana Department of Education my reality changed. Although I was no longer in the classroom, fulfilling

many of the aspects of the position provided me an opportunity to teach in other ways. One of my responsibilities was to help the districts to develop or refine their curriculum. And, I was charged with the responsibility of providing professional development opportunities for all the arts teachers in the state. During the first year and a half, I followed the accepted trend, which was providing one-day workshops. I fulfilled my perceived duty and the teachers were happy because they walked away with something to use the next day. However, I became increasingly distressed about two primary issues related to the points I would like to address. First was the number of teachers who did not challenge themselves to be thoughtful about the curriculum, or imaginative about the implementation of the curriculum. Second was the number of teachers who had not found their own voices as educators within the larger picture of education so that they could be advocates for music education.

Based on my experiences in the classroom and at the Indiana Department of Education, my images of what it means to be a teacher have changed. As a professor preparing future music teachers, what I have come to believe is that we need different kinds of teachers for the future. As Karen Gallas (2003) states, “We need a new paradigm for education that places imagination in the center of the process, and that paradigm is limited only by the imagination of those who care about our children and children themselves” (p. 169). Like Gallas, I believe that education is at a critical juncture and that our imaginations as teachers of teachers matter if we are to help create as Eisner says, the “kinds of schools we need” (Eisner, 1998). And as I reflect on the primary characteristics of the “excellent” teachers I have had throughout my education, I have come to realize that what they had in common was that they were thoughtful, respectful of students’ ideas

and were imaginative in finding ways for students to think and probe ideas. While my personal teaching style has transformed to a more constructivist approach to teaching, these are the traits that I continue to embrace as my vision of what it means to be a teacher ever evolves. So, in addition to imagination, it seems to me that creating teachers that are thoughtful and engaged with ideas also matters. Maxine Greene (1994) states that the arts are means for releasing the imagination and that discussions of art are the spaces in which a democracy can develop.

From my perspective, it is clear that common notions of cognition and the purposes of schools have to be revisited and revised to keep pace with the continual changes in our culture. It follows, then, that we have to revisit and revise the ways in which teachers are prepared, and help them to develop a different vision of what it means to be a teacher and what their role will be in changing the direction of education and music education. In working with pre-service teachers, I continually encounter students' attitudes about what they think it means to be a teacher. They are convinced that they are going to be the next high school band or choral conductor, and that their view of being a teacher is based on what they have experienced. For the most part, that is a view takes a teacher-centered, didactic approach to teaching. As I work with them to consider a different view of their role as a teacher and construct a different reality, I have come to realize that I must first "deconstruct" their view of what it means to be a teacher. This is often a struggle, but one that I think is necessary if I am to help them to find their own voices and if they are to become agents of change.

At the university level, we have a powerful opportunity in our classroom to serve as models for different ways of teaching, learning, and releasing the imagination. By

discussing music and pedagogical approaches to music education, we can help them to be thoughtful and open to the notion of change. And, in turn, we can help future teachers construct their own view of the world and themselves in a thoughtful way. Finally, we can also model ways for our future teachers to find their own voices so that they can become advocates for music education and as well as the profession at large.

Unfortunately, research shows that many students continue to teach the way they were taught, not the way they were taught to teach! Clearly, we have to do more than just modeling. I have found that, in particular, it also takes assigned analyses and reflections that challenge students thinking about ideas in readings, as well as observations of both dynamic and didactic teachers in schools and evaluate the effects of these teachers' approaches on student learning. However, one of the most meaningful and powerful ways of helping students to transform their reality of what it means to be a teacher is for them to teach a lesson based on a constructivist philosophy and experience first hand how it positively impacts student learning.

So, in response to Estelle's question, in what respects do things need to change, my point is that we need more imaginative, thoughtful music teachers in order to help create the kinds of schools needed to meet the needs of future generations. This, from my perspective, means recruiting more imaginative and thoughtful teachers to the profession, as well as helping students currently in our programs to become more imaginative and thoughtful. From my viewpoint, creating democratic classrooms in which we help tomorrow's teachers find their own voices, and to help them construct a new reality based on new ideas and experiences is critical to help them to broaden their vision, develop or advance their thinking, and transform their vision of what it means to be a music teacher.

In helping prospective teachers broaden their personal visions of their work, as well as their role within the larger picture of education prospective teachers can find their own voice, and be better prepared to create a new paradigm for education and music education in the United States.

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