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Teacher Preparation And The Voluntary K-12 Music Standards

By Samuel Hope

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Since national voluntary standards for K-12 education in dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts were released to the public in the spring of 1994, many questions have been raised about the multiple efforts needed to make student competencies delineated by the standards a living reality in American schools. Teacher preparation is often mentioned, as it should be. But such mentioning often reflects lack of information or sophistication about either the nature of the arts, or the nature of teaching. In the spirit that has come to characterize too much of education reform, the usual message is "everything is terrible, and everything must change." Systemic reform is the current code phrase for this sentiment, but systems do not teach students, teachers do. Music provides a pure example of this truth, since many of our finest young musicians hone their talents and skills under the guidance of private teachers. We need to be clear about this point at the beginning, because

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the standards *per se* are not about systemic reform, they are not about change, and they are not about delivery mechanisms. The standards are about the content of the arts disciplines, music, in our case. The standards are about *what* rather than *how*. They represent the last in a long line of continuing efforts to focus national arts education discussion and action on matters of artistic and intellectual substance.

Thus, as we look at teacher preparation aspects of the standards effort, one of our primary purposes is to get an overview of the possibilities inherent in the work that has been done, and in the new conditions created by that work. It is exciting to see so much energy and commitment being poured into substantive activities on behalf of music and the other arts. While no project or its results are ever perfect, I hope we all

agree that as a result of these efforts, music is far better positioned to become basic in K-12 education than it has ever been before. I expect we would also agree that the education of children and youth is a foundational activity for the music field as a whole. Basic connections between study and experience in early years and understanding and support in later years are clear to all.

While our achievements and prospects are great, human beings remain human beings. They make mistakes, they do things with the best of intentions that, in hindsight, turn out to be wrong. The law of unintended effect is always at work and, of course, those involved with arts education do not agree with one another, often on fundamentals. Thus, as the music field digests the fruits of these recent labors on its behalf, there remain many decisions to be made nationally, regionally, and most important, locally. The character, quality, and content of these decisions will determine whether the high promise we now have before us is fulfilled. These questions are in essence policy questions, and resolving them appropriately for specific conditions at specific times will require efforts of intellect, dedication, and desire for basic consensus at least as great as those that produced the standards text itself.

In this paper, I review briefly several overarching policy questions that need to be considered as we move forward. To have a bit of fun with language, I have chosen six issues, all beginning with the letter "S." They are: Substance, Sustainability, Support, Sensitivity, Sophistication, and Spirituality. For each, I have provided an overview followed by specific applications for teacher preparation.

1. Substance

Overview. We must never forget that the center of what we are doing is music. Music is the body of content for which we are primarily responsible. When the substantive content of music is known, that substance can be carried into other arenas. The more an individual knows music, the more such knowledge and skill can be carried and connected.

Many in the arts education policy arena are not supportive of substantive work in the disciplines themselves. There seems to be a fear of central basic things. There are passions for substituting experience for study, and words for musical sound. Today, these passions are usually manifested in superficial calls for interdisciplinarity. But it will not do us or our students much good to support approaches that use music and music-related materials and gestures without teaching the discipline of music itself. As a policy matter,

therefore, we must question all proposals with respect to what is going to be accomplished in music, not to be parochial or exclusive, but rather to ensure substantive learning in our field. Focusing on substantive music content does not mean the absence of cooperation, nor does it mean avoiding combinations with other subjects. But, we must ask ourselves whether music is ever at any time the first thing. If it is not, it is unlikely that music itself is being taught, thus highly unlikely that the standards will be met.

Teacher Preparation. In order to lead K-12 students to the competencies delineated by the standards, programs for student teachers must continue to be centered around music. Teachers must be competent musicians, or students will not respect them: standards for musical performance are too public. In addition to performance, however, teachers must not only have a comprehensive grasp of composition, history, improvisation, and theory, they must be able to help students gain competence in these areas to a greater extent than heretofore. This means that prospective teachers need to do more than simply pass requirements in various aspects of musical study, they need to learn how to teach these aspects to their students.

The K-12 standards thus suggest a new emphasis on the teacher's ability to combine, correlate, and integrate work in various aspects of music study. For example, ensemble conductors may engage students with the musical structure of works being readied for performance or facilitate connections between historical background and performance style. Such connections, however, must be made at levels appropriate to student capabilities. This means that faculty representing every musical specialization must become involved in the preparation of future teachers, not only in terms of mastering material at the collegiate level, but in terms of preparing future teachers to lead students to competence and understanding at the elementary and secondary school levels. In most music schools, change will probably be focused on readjustment, refashioning, and redeployment of the resources that exist rather than massive content change. After all, music study in higher education is based

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on the content of music, and so are the K-12 standards. The content is not new, but the attempt to teach it comprehensively to all students, albeit at the appropriate level, represents a new kind of challenge.

2. Sustainability

Overview. Musicians are experts on sustainability. It is central to their art form. Individuals who cannot sustain long-term effort towards predetermined goals simply cannot be musicians. We live in a time when sustainability is under attack. We are told that everything must change constantly. But is this really true? Many things do not change. Human nature does not seem to change much, nor does the fact that musicians must have sustaining power at the center of their lives. If we put ourselves in intellectual and operational positions where everything must change constantly, there is no possibility of sustained work over time towards predetermined goals. Thus, for example, there would be no possibility of holding the national voluntary K-12 arts standards in place long enough for them to be effective. Indeed, there could be little progress on anything of substance, on any subject matter that requires time for the development of basic knowledge and skills. The question we must ask constantly is whether proposals about what to do feature sufficient sustainability to accomplish substantive objectives.

Teacher Preparation. Successful music teachers have always been masters of sustainability. They are able to lead students to the sustained effort necessary to achieve significant results. They are able to deal with contextual change while remaining centered on fundamental goals. Future teachers will need to continue this long tradition. The national K-12 standards present a significant challenge in this regard. They ask that the music community sustain interest not only in high quality performance groups whose outstanding achievement can be readily under-

stood by anyone, but also interest in programs that teach music more comprehensively. This comprehensiveness often results in knowledge and skills that are exhibited in non-traditional ways. An analytical essay on the work of Duke Ellington cannot be expected to appeal to the community as immediately as a performance of Ellington's music by a first-rate high school jazz band. In other words, the standards ask for sustained effort in areas of music study where results are not obvious to the general public. This represents a new level of challenge for teacher preparation because the music teacher must be prepared to represent more than performance, both as a teacher and as a proponent for music study in the community.

To some extent, this challenge will require a new look at the place of methodology in teacher preparation programs. Given the mandates of the K-12 standards, rapidly advancing technological capabilities, and the variety of elementary and secondary school settings for music study, it seems increasingly important to focus on studies that enable future teachers to develop their own approaches and methodologies based on educational goals, student needs, and resources available in specific situations. The goal should be to enable each future music teacher to become proficient at teaching the content in various ways. These skills will be essential if an adequate number of teachers are to be successful with the standards over time sufficient to sustain a rise in general music competence over the population as a whole.

3. Support

Overview. At times, it seems that issues of arts support are so prevalent that they occlude focus on such issues as substance and sustainability. This situation is made more complex by the fact that relatively small amounts of funding can receive huge amounts of publicity. Even at today's unsatisfactory levels, the amount being spent on

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K-12 arts education throughout the nation is many, many times more than the education budgets of all federal, state, and local arts councils put together. It is no doubt larger than the total capital of the largest foundations. It is simply a huge amount of money, much of it tax money. This fact does not obscure the reality that music is under-represented in public education. It is to say, however, that most K-12 music education is funded without reference to those arts councils and foundations whose pronouncements and projects acquire so much press coverage.

I want to make clear here that I am not speaking against arts councils, or foundations, or other support mechanisms in their orbits. The arts education community, for example, owes a tremendous debt of gratitude to the National Endowment for the Arts for its direct and indirect support of the standards project. The United States Department of Education, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and several foundations also deserve tremendous thanks, and we all should give this thanks gladly, publicly, and without equivocation. The point is, however, that the past and continuing national investment in arts education is far greater in size and scope, and particularly, in effect than the efforts of those agencies.

And so, questions of support need to be considered, first with respect to issues of substance and sustainability. In any given instance, to what extent are we promoting the images of funders at the expense of sustaining capabilities for developing student competencies? What policy questions should guide our decisions about support? Is something always better than nothing? For example, what larger values are developed over time if music comes into the schools only in subordinate and superficial ways? Is it more important to gain any kind of foothold at all than to be concerned about the quality and viability of the foothold itself? These and other questions concerning sup-

port will be central to making wise decisions about the future.

Teacher Preparation. Support is a multi-faceted element of teacher preparation programs. While financial support is critical, other resources such as time, the nature and content of goals, and available expertise are all equally critical. Teacher preparation is also a challenge because so much must be accomplished in so short a time.

One major question involves the extent to which state-wide goals for K-12 student learning in music provide the rationale for strong content-based teacher preparation programs. The standards provide forceful arguments for such programs. They set up an "if/then" sequence. If we wish students to meet the competencies outlined in the standards, then we must have teacher preparation programs that will enable us to succeed. Therefore, it is extremely important to make the case for support in terms of music study, rather than just music itself. The purpose of teacher preparation programs is not first of all to prepare students to lead young people to enjoy music, a goal already accomplished, but rather to help them study music as a basic subject. Enjoying music does not require study, but meeting the national K-12 standards does. This distinction is critical and must not be lost in arguments for support. It is the foundation on which arguments about time, money, and other resources can be built.

One other aspect must be mentioned. K-12 music teachers will all fight support battles of their own. Teacher preparation programs must attend to this need by giving students intellectual, verbal, and experiential tools for fighting resource battles. Music teachers who cannot argue for the content of music and its importance as an educational basic are disadvantaged terribly in the justification and accountability environment where the K-12 arts standards will be pursued.

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4. Sensitivity

Overview. Obviously, the interrelationships among substance, sustainability, and support are difficult. It is never possible to know exactly what decision should be taken. It is also impossible to know the exact twists and turns that public values will take over any but the shortest period of time. Wise decision-making will require extreme sensitivity, diplomacy, willingness to take risks, and patience to work for conditions that support substance and sustainability. To succeed with long-term implementation of the standards, the music community needs to cultivate conditions where sensitivity, grace under pressure, and quiet expertise cover a will of steel focused on the interests of the art form in matters of art and education.

- We must be sensitive to overarching issues and questions as a means of dealing with the ebbs and flows of fads and fancies that often rise to hurricane force only to subside and be forgotten, except by those who experienced specific destruction from them.
- We must remain sensitive to the power of music at its highest levels to transcend everything else, and to the fear that this fact raises among individuals in many walks of life who can accept the arts only in utilitarian terms.
- We must be sensitive to the sources of anxiety and the belief systems that work across the entire spectrum of political opinion, even the points on that spectrum that produce disagreement, or even revulsion within us.
- We must understand the fears of parents, the yearnings of children and youth, and the concerns of the public at large.
- We must find a way to be sensitive to all these without turning our discipline into

nothing but branches of sociology, psychology, or politics.

Please note I am not suggesting that music is without its sociological, psychological, or political dimensions. But I am concerned about the notion that, because certain social problems are great, music and the other arts have no meaning except to the extent that they are harnessed to someone's concept of how to solve these other problems. It is critical to be sensitive both to the issues and needs inherent in the development of the field, and the issues and needs of an evolving society. Obviously, over-concern about one area at the expense of the other will not work.

Teacher Preparation. All baccalaureate programs in music teacher preparation have a general studies component. Studies in the humanities, sciences, and social sciences are expected to accomplish multiple goals. Each discipline involved is significant in and of itself, important as an exemplar of a mode of thought, and critical to understanding and working with current complexities. Work in these disciplines can produce the capacity for informed sensitivity, but only if such work focuses on building the capacity to think through issues and problems from multiple perspectives. Indoctrination or sensitivity training is not a substitute for this broader competence. Often, there is not much that music faculties can do to influence the orientation and content of general studies courses. But music faculties can provide a powerful example to students, not only in the way they conduct their personal lives, but in the way they conduct their intellectual lives. They can encourage by word and deed serious study of both sides of arguments; reading, thinking, and writing in the other arts and in the humanities; connections between other disciplines and questions of music per-

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formance, analysis, or policy; and thoughtful situational analyses about current events that demonstrate understanding of underlying causes and effects. These types of examples and approaches can inspire a capacity for sensitivity based in individual knowledge, skill, and thought. This is exactly the kind of sensitivity that future music teachers will need if they are to implement the standards in the varying conditions they will face. In general studies and in connections among general studies and music, it seems more important to focus in the undergraduate years on fundamentals that do not change rather than on trends and atmospherics that are apt to change. To do the former produces the capacity for sensitivity throughout one's career. To do the latter is to encourage a freezing of sensitivities to current fashion.

5. Sophistication

Overview. These days, sophistication is often castigated. "Elitist" is the regnant epithet, a melodramatic debate-stopper that masks an increasingly schizophrenic posture with respect to issues of quality and high achievement. Our rhetoric calls for maximum performance, but whenever efforts get under way that might actually achieve maximum performance, massive opposition arises. Sociological, psychological, and political reasons are all brought forward to blunt the thrust of sustained focus on matters of substance. This fear of sophistication is dangerous to the development of our society, and particularly counterproductive with respect to the development of general competence in music and the other arts. For the highest achievements in the arts, no matter what the cultural source, represent sophistication. The same is true for the highest levels of work in other disciplines. And so, educational policy considerations involve

central questions of sophistication. On the one hand, there is the level of sophistication of those making decisions; on the other, the level of aspiration for the development of sophistication in students.

Teacher Preparation. So far, we have talked about the various elements of teacher preparation programs. Sophistication results when future teachers gain the fluency to work with confidence across a range of materials and subject matters. In order to do all that is required to bring the K-12 standards into fruition, music teachers will have to be sophisticated as artists, as intellectuals, as pedagogues, and as proponents for study of the discipline. They will have to be able to combine, correlate, and integrate their knowledge and skills in all areas appropriate to the specific task at hand, whether it be preparing a lesson plan, developing a curriculum, teaching students, arguing for resources, or any other of their many duties and responsibilities. With few exceptions, such sophistication cannot be developed in a four-year undergraduate program. The undergraduate program can lay the groundwork, however. And so, a critical question for all institutions preparing music teachers is the kind of artistic, intellectual, and pedagogical foundation their programs are laying. For example, to what extent is a given program structured to promote intellectual curiosity and experimentation in method? How is the program working with integration across the range of musical knowledge and skills? How are students being shown that music can be at the center of a vast web of connections to other things? How can music-making be taught as something more than just technique? The questions go on and on, but good answers to questions such as these are critical. This is the case because the national K-12 standards reflect the full richness

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of musical endeavor. Elements that produce this richness, the composite richness itself, and their interdependencies and interrelationships are the goal. It takes sophistication based on real knowledge and skill, both to understand this goal and to bring it to fruition in a K-12 setting.

6. Spirituality

Overview. None of us need to be convinced that music and its sister art forms represent deep reservoirs of human spirituality as well as vast storehouses of capability to communicate matters of the spirit to large numbers of people. Yet, spirituality is a difficult subject to discuss. The words and phrases that come immediately to mind carry so many different symbolisms that shared meaning is often lost. And so, I will be extremely brief about this issue in the hopes of making a clear connection with what I have said previously: when music or any art form leaves the world of the spirit in any significant way, it loses its substance, it destroys its own sustainability, support becomes an increasing problem, the constant fine-tuning of mind that produces sensitivity and sophistication is interrupted, and all these dysfunctions together produce an even greater assault on the human spirit. Thus, a negative circularity is created. I believe this is one important meaning of the biblical warning about gaining the whole world and losing one's soul. As new prospects for the furtherance of music in education and in our national life unfold before us, it seems extremely important to heed this ancient admonition as we review specific proposals for what should be done.


Teacher Preparation. In all of the worry and bustle to provide and account for requisite knowledge and skills, it is easy to forget the powerful connection between art and matters of the spirit. While there is no doubt

that great works of art can have a powerful spiritual impact on the untutored listener or observer, it is also true that studies in music and the other arts can deepen individual connections between art and the human spirit. Thus, the music teacher's job has at least two dimensions. First, it is critical to work with music in ways that encourage immediate music-human spirit connections. This may be done through developing outstanding performances or other presentations. Second is helping individuals to build on the excitement of this immediate music-human spirit connection through study and practice, always ensuring that the spiritual dimension develops along with knowledge and technical competence. Again, this aspiration for depth and the knowledge and skills required to fulfill it are perhaps best and most usually inspired by example. Providing such an example leads every music program that prepares teachers back to two basic questions: What is music for, and why are we involved in music? The core answer to both of those questions determines much about the way we will deal with the standards and with the way substance, sustainability, support, sensitivity, and sophistication all combine to produce the incredibly powerful impact of the music-based aesthetic on the human mind and spirit.

Conclusion

Today, as institutions consider specific teacher preparation issues and projects, it is critical to review the whole picture and its parts in terms of specifics and interrelationships among substance, sustainability, support, sensitivity, sophistication, and spirituality. These touchstones of policy analysis can help each program find the wisdom to make good decisions. Given the level of resources available and the tenor of our times, most of

our decisions need to be good ones if the promise of the national K-12 standards for music are to be fully realized. Each teacher preparation program will need to consider relationships between what it is doing and larger goals for public competence. Each will need to find its own solutions, thinking through all aspects of its current and prospective situation. Such efforts are critical because the standards do not require standardization; they require competence. By focusing on content rather than process, on the substance of disciplinary work rather than the politics of education, and on the art of music rather than its immediate emotional impact or its powers to make money, there is

every chance that teachers, standards, students, and curricula can be placed in the kinds of productive relationships we all desire. To quote a famous remark of Margaret Thatcher's, "this is no time to go wobbly." We must not lose this opportunity to generate increasingly greater attention to music as artistic and intellectual subject matter. Only by keeping such a focus do we have a chance to make music a real basic in the K-12 setting. Only a large number of teachers who understand in every sense of the word can keep such a focus. The irreplaceable role of teacher preparation programs is clear, and fulfillment of that role, urgent. 

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