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**Author(s):** Madeline S. Bridges

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*It is with pleasure that we inaugurate the reprint of the entire seven volumes of The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning. The journal began in 1990 as The Quarterly. In 1992, with volume 3, the name changed to The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning and continued until 1997. The journal contained articles on issues that were timely when they appeared and are now important for their historical relevance. For many authors, it was their first major publication. Visions of Research in Music Education will publish facsimiles of each issue as it originally appeared. Each article will be a separate pdf file. Jason D. Vodicka has accepted my invitation to serve as guest editor for the reprint project and will compose a new editorial to introduce each volume. Chad Keilman is the production manager. I express deepest thanks to Richard Colwell for granting VRME permission to re-publish The Quarterly in online format. He has graciously prepared an introduction to the reprint series.*

# What Our Graduates Wish We Had Told Them

By Madeline S. Bridges

*Middle Tennessee State University*

**T**here are several ways to answer the question, "What do our graduates wish we had told them?" One way is to survey the research on this topic; another is to draw conclusions from observations of the graduates as they teach and to note the questions they ask of their music supervisors. Another way is to ask the graduates themselves, and this technique reveals both wide variations and amazing consistencies in what elementary music teachers wish they had been told in their undergraduate methods courses.

Graduates' perceptions of what they need to know vary with their length of service in teaching. As one of three Tennessee state music consultants, I serve as a resource person to teachers—not as a supervisor or evaluator. The primary function is to know the state's teachers of music and to provide staff development for music teachers and elementary classroom teachers. Teachers feel free to ask questions in many circumstances: one-to-one during school visits, before and after in-service workshops, in letters, during confer-

ences and in panic-stricken phone calls. Examining these recurring and sometimes urgent questions and concerns is important in assessing the quality of music teacher preparation.

Questions from student teachers and beginning teachers usually begin with the words "how" or "what:" "How can I...," "How should they...," "How do I handle..." or "What do I do about..." These teachers need concrete ideas with which to fill their lesson plans. Although the best beginning teachers are aware of the importance of setting goals and of sequencing instruction, nonetheless their first objective is to get through the school day with a feeling of success. As their consultant, I certainly can identify with their concerns, for I remember well my first year of teaching: I spent many tearful afternoons staring at

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the blank pages of my plan book.

When these beginning teachers come to workshops and teacher in-service days, they hope to be given lots of songs, activities, and management tips, because they will face up to 650 youngsters on Monday. Undergraduate methods teachers must not ignore this reality of their students' futures. While some workshops are full of cute ideas but little substance, some methods courses are "all lecture and nothing practical." Music methods students appreciate and benefit from the strategy of

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*Madeline S. Bridges is Assistant Professor of Music Education at Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro. Her teaching interests include the elementary methods class, the child voice, and the role of higher education in continuing teacher education.*

some methods teachers, who share one new song, chant, hand jive, game or other activity during each class session, particularly when the activities serve as preparation for or reinforcement of class content.

Many beginning teachers need help in learning how to write and teach a successful daily lesson plan. A beginning lesson plan should be so detailed and scripted that the methods teacher can recreate the entire scenario by reading the plan. Teachers need to use detailed plan-writing skills at various points in their careers. For instance, during a school visit I mentioned to the elementary music teacher that I would be sitting in on her next two classes. She replied, with a look of total panic, "But I don't know what I'm going to do!" This second-year teacher and former high school choral director had been reassigned to teach elementary music, and she literally had no plan from which to work. Because she was a relatively new teacher in a new teaching situation, a return to a highly detailed and specific lesson plan would help her overcome obvious obstacles to success.

A more typical case is reflected in another teacher's remark: "I just don't have time to write the kinds of plans they required in elementary methods." Having accepted her own belief as the truth, and not having the skill to develop and use an abbreviated lesson plan, this elementary general music teacher did little more than choose a song for next lesson. We should teach students to write abbreviated lesson plans as well as detailed ones, for as the students progress in the real world of teaching, they will indeed need this skill.

What about teachers with five to ten years of experience? Though they still ask questions beginning with "what," the questions tend to stem not from desperation but from the teacher's desire to prioritize. Experienced teachers have lots of ideas and they know many rhymes and folk songs. They are reasonably comfortable with the routine of school, they attend workshops regularly, and they may have spent a summer working toward Orff or Kodály certification. The most frequent questions from these teachers usually concern sequence: "When do I...", or "When should they..." If there is a "how" question at this stage, it usually concerns the

decision-making process: "How do I decide...", or "How do I choose..." These questions come in a rush: "How do I choose between du and du-de and ta's and ti's?" "When can I find the time to give my children experience with choir chimes and recorder?" "When do I teach cooperative learning and adapt to the nongraded classroom—not to mention getting ready to attend the symphony, and planning for the PTO performance next month?" In essence, these teachers are asking, "How do I choose what to teach from all these wonderful things I know and continue to learn?" Five- to ten-year teachers are keenly interested in unit and yearly plans.

The veteran teachers are reflective; their questions begin with "Why?" Often the question "Why am I doing this?" is the first hurdle. Some veteran teachers answer their own question with "Why, indeed!," and they quit teaching! Many others, however, recommit themselves to music education due to the will and conviction that this career choice is important. For whatever reason they stay, these recommitted veteran teachers often sincerely ask the question, "Why" as part of a personal search for a clear understanding of the art of teaching. They want to reflect on the role of music and the arts in our culture. They are not content to embrace every new music education trend until and unless the new fits their perception of the big picture. They tend to be eclectics by choice, not by chance. At this point in their lives and careers, the best teachers truly enjoy rereading music education philosophy. If provided the opportunity, the best become interested in research and perhaps subscribe to *The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning* or to the *Journal of Research in Music Education*.

What are the ramifications of music teachers' perceptions of their methods courses for music education professors? What are the implications of the chronological sequence of questions that teachers ask? Is it possible that our students first need to get their "feet wet," to see and hear and do elementary music, to see their professors teach, and then to try to teach the very same lesson themselves? Should our students develop a repertoire of hip-pocket music activities that produce smiles and good feelings as well musical learning? I am greatly

encouraged to see institutions require a one-credit-hour introduction to music education in the freshman or sophomore year in order to provide students with both field experiences and dialogue about the teaching of music.

In the elementary methods course, students must gain an understanding of musical concepts and the skills and importance of teaching sequentially. District music supervisors repeatedly lament the weaknesses of their music teachers in understanding the importance of sequence. As stated earlier, the biggest frustration of the five-year teacher is the challenge of "when" to teach. If sequential music teaching, both for skills and concepts, is given the proper importance in an undergraduate methods course, the teacher will have much less frustration. There is not time in one three-hour course to present a detailed sequence for each skill and concept, much less to make sure each student understands and has experienced each sequence. Careful, detailed sequencing of at least one skill area and at least one element can help methods students develop an overall comprehension of the importance of sequential teaching.

Thus, we should teach fewer topics more thoroughly rather than so many topics superficially. Students should know, as a result of their methods class, what they have been taught and what areas they must pursue on their own or through student teaching, teacher mentors, or workshops. It is worthwhile to involve students (through writing journals, for example) in the process of self-evaluation and reflection. Prospective music teachers must have a clear awareness of the concrete skills that they have not yet mastered, but which they can and should learn in other environments.

Music education majors need several models of unit and yearly planning. Students need help in interpreting and using a curriculum framework. They need to practice understanding how and when to augment the curriculum. While the students need experience in writing units of study, there is limited value in asking them to write a teaching unit until they have actually *taught a unit*, or at least taught from a unit.

The veteran teachers who ask the "why" questions have lived and taught long enough

to need to know why, but 21-year-old undergraduates also need a philosophical base for success in teaching. For the young students, however, the presentation of a philosophy of music education and assistance in developing a personal philosophy of music education should not be isolated from the doing in the classroom. In an ideal setting, a brief overview of the "why" can be interwoven with concrete examples of activities and teaching strategies that reflect the theory. That the semester and the student teaching experience should conclude with emphasis on personal philosophy seems logical, for a personal philosophy can best be developed after students have acquired a basic understanding of music concepts and skills, developed basic teaching skills, and watched and taught real children in real classrooms.

To borrow a line from *My Fair Lady*, "Wouldn't it be lov-er-ly" if music methods could be taught in three cyclical stages, during which teachers come back to the college classroom after the first year of teaching, after five years, and again after fifteen years? Such a plan would educate and enrich the teachers as well as their instructors.

In the spring, I conducted a very informal survey of Tennessee elementary music teachers. The survey listed 23 teacher competencies, and the music teachers were asked to rate each competency from two different perspectives:

(1) How adequately did your undergraduate music education curriculum (particularly your elementary methods course) prepare you for this competency?

(2) From your perspective as an experienced teacher, how important is this competency?

Finally, the survey included an open-ended question: "What do you wish you had heard, seen, and done in your elementary methods classroom?"

Approximately 56 surveys were mailed, and 37 were returned in less than ten days, often accompanied by lengthy notes; possibly this indicated that teachers were very interested in the subject. Did this survey have tight controls? No. Are the results statistically significant or generalizable? Probably not. Are the results interesting? I think so. Do they hold implications for music education methods teacher? Perhaps. (See Figure 1.)

The following two survey questions required a response on a Likert-type scale with 5 representing a high degree of importance or preparation and 1 representing a very low degree of importance or preparation, respectively:

From your perspective as an experienced teacher, how important is it to...?

How adequately did your undergraduate music education curriculum (particularly your elementary methods course) prepare you to...?

	Importance	Level of Preparation
Handle challenge of classroom management	4.9	3.0
Teach the skill of singing	4.9	3.1
Work toward yearly goals and objectives*	4.8	1.9
Make daily/weekly plans	4.7	2.4
Prioritize and sequence music instruction*	4.7	2.3
Meet needs of preschoolers through 6th graders*	4.7	1.9
Teach listening skills	4.7	2.7
Teach skills in moving to music	4.6	2.5
Evaluate songs for both quality and purpose	4.6	2.5
Use music textbooks and other resources	4.6	3.4
Evaluate own strengths and weaknesses	4.6	2.4
Teach music reading	4.5	3.0

\* These activities were rated by teachers as very important, but they rated their undergraduate preparation for these tasks as very poor.

The following replies represent the most frequent responses to the survey question: "What do you wish you had heard, seen, and done in your elementary methods classroom?"

Heard:	Seen:	Done:
Reality of the classroom!	Teachers in action	More observation
Child voice/Children's chorus	Actual students	More hands-on
Kodály and Orff	Kodály and Orff demos	More teaching real children
Prioritizing instruction		

**Figure 1.** Partial Survey Summary

What do our graduates wish we had told them? Many graduates generally praise what they heard, what they saw, and what they did in their methods classes. They find that much of what they learned is relevant to their teaching experiences because their instructors constantly revised and updated instruction based on experience, research, and observation of the experiences of others. Ironically, I suspect it is also true that much of what our graduates wish they had been told, in fact they were told—but they don't remember that information from their methods classes. Why? Perhaps their need to know was not sufficiently strong at that point in their journey.

It is with some apprehension that I return to the music methods classroom myself. It has been six years since I last taught elementary methods, and I have spent that time listening to and watching in-service music teachers. My personal challenge is to allow the information I received from in-service teachers to inform my teaching of undergraduates.

In some ways I am better prepared for this teaching task than I was several years ago. For instance, I am now reasonably computer literate, so some things should not be so time-consuming as they were seven years ago. I now have a VCR, and video cameras now use prepackaged video tape—not the clumsy reel-to-reel tape. Yet some changes seem to



present almost overwhelming tasks, such as the need to prepare students to teach in a multicultural world, and the sad truth that many general music teachers see each student for only 30 minutes per week. The limited schedule makes every minute so important that teachers must learn to weigh carefully every music-making minute and ask, "Is this the best use of this time?" As a methods teacher I am compelled to ask the same question: "Because I can't teach everything, what will I teach? How can I best use the hours during this semester?"

I have a strong conviction that we must honestly inform college students about what we are teaching, and what we don't have time to teach. We must honestly say, "We've covered this and this in class, but you must learn this and this as you student teach, attend summer workshops, speak with other music teachers, and as you teach." We must continue to work in partnership with school districts to continue the task of teacher education and guide young teachers in being honest with themselves about their own strengths and weaknesses. This is especially true for the college student who has a 98 percent grade point average, perfect pitch, and a winsome personality and expects to be instantly successful as a teacher. To let even one student leave our classes thinking he or she is completely prepared to teach is deceitful. Instead, students must be led to relish the idea of entering the long process of *becoming* a successful music educator.

There are four goals for music instruction that I will retain as I move from consultant to instructor. I first articulated these qualities while preparing for a music in-service workshop and later discovered they apply equally when teaching children. They apply as I teach prospective teachers.


My first goal is that the elementary methods class be a positive experience for students, whether they are aspiring high school choral directors or whether they have already seen the higher challenge of the elementary music classroom. Perhaps some disciplines can be taught without a positive, reinforcing environment, but music does not generally "take" unless it is presented positively. University students should leave most of my

classes with a smile and a feeling that they have been successfully challenged, for without success they will be frustrated. And without challenge they will be bored.

Second, my instruction must be relevant to the abilities of the students and relevant because I understand how young adults learn. It must be relevant because I relate instruction to real classroom situations and relevant because I understand the reality of university life; relevant because I know the frustrations students face in the classroom and relevant because I relate methodology to other classes in the curriculum.

Third, my instruction must be purposeful, and the purposes obvious to my students. I want to teach them in a manner that represents the best in teaching skills, and I want them to learn by doing. I want students to gain experience, to be presented with ideas, and then to have opportunities to practice and reinforce these ideas.

Finally, I want my class to be a place where expressive music making occurs regularly. How sad if we talk to students about the power of the aesthetic and never give them the opportunity to experience music's expressive content! They must feel the joy and pride in creating a rondo, they must relish the thrill of vocal chording, and they must delight in combining movement and words in a simple singing game.

What do our graduates wish we had told them? They wish to be told the truth about the real world of teaching, they wish to be given tools to be successful, and they wish to be inspired in the process. 

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