“2020 Vision”

Thomas N. Gellert – The School Music News Editor

“The year 2020 popped up when you turned the page last month on the school district calendar hanging on your wall. So, what is your 2020 vision (and I’m not talking only about eyesight my friends)?

Many of our priorities these days seem to deal more with outcomes than they do with the process of how we get there. It is human nature (especially in our rapidly changing technology-driven world) to look for shortcuts and faster ways to achieve desired results. The challenge though is that the delivery of music education is also about building intrinsic values in our students. To do this, we must understand the challenges of educating students in a rapidly changing world.

Are you relevant?

For those of my veteran music educator colleagues who have been teaching for more than a few years, it is probably safe to say that we have found a pretty good routine to what we do year after year. Sadly though, some among us will keep repeating this routine with slight variations over and over again as if that double-barred repeat sign with those two dots keeps coming up every 16 measures or so. While the intent of this philosophy is that one stays with what one knows best, I think that there likely is much more that can and should be done to stay more than just “effective” as a music educator. This is a good time to open your eyes (ah, there’s that 2020 vision reference again) to new trends in music and to the teaching of music. It’s time to make that jump into the present in an effort to stay relevant. I’m not suggesting that you completely abandon what has worked for you in the past. I’m just suggesting that there are exciting opportunities that await us if only we take advantage of them.

So much of what we do in the classroom and rehearsal classroom draws from history and hundreds of years of music and the teaching of music. No one disputes the value of embracing the past. I am officially a senior citizen but that doesn’t mean that I am unwilling to believe in the future, too. Indeed, what I truly hope for is that you and I and all of our music educator colleagues will embrace the future of music education through what we have always done best: connect music to kids. How we connect moving forward is key.

Making diversity work

While the influence of Western European music history has shaped everything we know and how we contemplate the teaching of music, we must now embrace the present world with an eye toward the future if our curriculum area is to stay relevant. This begins with the opportunity to look at the importance of diversity and how we can better embrace it. The relevance of just how music education will continue to attract and embrace all of our students moving forward is going to become (if it hasn’t already) a defining moment for our profession.

Addressing diversity through the arts is a no-brainer. Throughout history, time and time again, there have been countless musicians, visual artists, actors and dancers who have made history by raising an awareness of who we are as a society through the arts. The great philosophers and science fiction writers of the past made all sorts of wild predictions about where we’d be today in 2020. While some predictions have come true, many were just fantasy. That said, our world today and of the future demands our attention.

The questions looming large right now are: What will our vision be as music educators? How do we embrace (as our new NYSSMA® President Dr. David M. Brown’s theme intones) more students and involve them in our music education programs? How will we connect not only with students but with the parents of students to encourage them to become stakeholders in our school music programs? We all need to be a part of this moment. So, what’s your 2020 vision? Join us …

“You can’t connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something – your gut, destiny, life, Karma, whatever. This approach has never let me down, and it has made all the difference in my life.” – Steve Jobs (1955-2011)