



Make Music Education a Career Option

Recently, I read an article about finding and fostering music teachers in the classroom and the way recruiting potential music educators has an impact on a national teacher shortage. It inspired me to think about my personal journey and the impact I had on the hundreds of students who I prepared for music school auditions in their quest to become a music educator.

I remember the frustration I felt when some of my best music students auditioned for a music school with the typical three contrasting pieces only to receive a rejection letter. More often than not, that audition required a theory exam, some sort of aural skills / ear training exercise and what has always been for many of them, the difficult task of sight-reading. I think it is fair to assume that my students were well prepared and did a respectable job but did not measure up to the acceptance standards set by that particular higher education institution.

Rethinking the criteria

In thinking about it, I was that kid. I knew from a very early age I wanted to be a teacher. It was not until high school, under the influence of remarkable music educators who were NYSSMA® members and NYSSMA® adjudicators, that I decided it would be Music. Therefore, I must ask the following: Should proficiency on a major instrument and a student's ability to pass a series of entrance exams be the sole criteria for entrance into a

music education training program?

If we are truly the artistic leaders and advocates we say we are, should we not be looking for the inner musician within our students, those who display creativity, musicality, and a passion for making and sharing music?

When we ask, "What do you want to be when you grow up?", is it our responsibility as music educators to

*... is it our responsibility
... to encourage children
... to consider music
education as a
career choice?*

encourage children in our elementary and middle schools to consider music education as a career choice?

Most important, how do we get the message across that music education is a viable vocational alternative for students who come from diverse and varied cultural backgrounds?

Seeing potential

In short, I was not the most talented piano player, singer, or trumpet player. I got the job done, but most important, I was the kid who loved music and wanted to share that love of music with others. Moreover, I loved being in the marching band, being on

stage and in the pit for musical theater presentations. In addition, I found time in high school to play the electric organ in a rock band, a fact I cannot believe I'm sharing with anyone, let alone this professional community.

The number of students who fall into this category is limitless and we must find a way to excite and energize students who may not be on the traditional path toward a career in music education. Now, more than ever, music education should be more than three contrasting musical excerpts, aural skills exams, and sight-reading. Are there not music classrooms full of potential music educators, who, much like me, love music and want to share it with others?

Step One

Let us assume that the first step in our role of recruiting future music teachers is to identify students who would be good teachers. Every teacher who has spent any time with students in a classroom is able to identify the kid who is wonderful with others, compassionate, and desires to make a difference in people's lives. It all starts with a special young person who will thrive in human services.

Step Two

The second step requires some sort of recognition of talent and that is where traditionally it all starts to break down. Talent comes in many forms. We must begin to celebrate the talents of ALL children: traditional and non-traditional. Talent is

not taught. It is a biological ability to see or do something in a certain way. ALL children have talent! Our job, as music educators, is to take that talent and develop it into skill, something that our students will excel at and love doing.

Step Three

Let us assume that the look of future music teachers is going to be different from what we currently see in our music classrooms. Music students, particularly those from diverse backgrounds, will be more willing to join the profession when they are able to picture themselves as music educators. We must inspire the next generation who have shown an interest in majoring in music to have a musical experience that is comprehensive, diverse, and culturally responsive. Cultural competence needs to be a part of every music program from elementary school through higher education.

Students majoring in music education often enter the field based on strong teacher role models and musical experiences that were enriching and inspiring. As a music teacher and NYSSMA® member you can:

- encourage musical development regardless of the genre or cultural background.
- provide support and guidance in all artistic venues.
- unleash the power of creativity.
- create an environment that is welcoming and safe, where all students can belong.
- step outside of the box and try new and innovative things in your classrooms.

The work does not stop in our New York State public and private schools. We must work with our college and university colleagues to create a collegial environment that connects all the pieces. We are truly blessed in New York to have some of the finest music schools in the nation. The music institutions, both small and

large, in our own backyards, must be encouraged to provide:

- applied instructors who can and will be influential in making prospective performance majors aware of career possibilities in the field of music education.
- coursework in teaching and developing music programs in schools with limited resources.
- the resources necessary for preservice teachers to think critically about the musical needs of urban and rural populations.
- field placements in urban and rural settings.
- support and acknowledgment of preparation programs that are less Western-centric and allow students to focus on a wider variety of genres and cultural backgrounds.
- provide recruiting opportunities for our students to get a taste and feel for what music education opportunities exist beyond their local settings.

It was not my plan for this article to become about diversifying our profession. That said, it would be ignorant to not include a thought or two about what needs to change to make our music classrooms more representative of the students who are sitting in the chairs and standing on the risers.

It is time for us to accept non-Western classical instruments into our classrooms and studios. It is time to look at alternative genres that are consistent with musical techniques, cultural context, and diverse content. In the words of NAFME:

"Music Education should be built on a curricular framework that promotes awareness of, respect for, and responsiveness to the variety and diversity of cultures and should be delivered by teachers whose culturally responsive pedagogy enables them to successfully design and implement such an inclusive curricular framework."

Success stories

I would like to close this article with an acknowledgment of the young men and women who found something in me and my coworkers that inspired them to go on and become music educators. Whether you teach elementary music in Canandaigua, high school vocal music in Alexandria Bay, instrumental music in Sackets Harbor, or general music in Hempstead, I am proud of your work and thank you for carrying on the legacy that my colleagues and I, hopefully, instilled in you during your formative years.

If you are a student teacher who had me as a cooperating teacher and are now serving as an arts administrator in New York City, or a student teacher who had me as a university facilitator and you are presenting at the NYSSMA® conference, I welcome you to the profession and ask that you take this message of recruitment and pass it along to the next generation of college music majors.

We have all seen those episodes of *American Idol* and *The Voice* in which they highlight the music teachers of the winning performers. I think we all can agree that those accomplishments deserve the recognition they receive.

I, on the other hand, want to acknowledge two former students who in 5th grade could not get to my wife's music room fast enough to show her what they had learned in their band lesson across the hall. Now, a decade later, they are in their own band rooms, correcting fingering, teaching scales, and creating a love for music that will, hopefully, last a lifetime for the students they teach. It starts with us: Make Music Education an Option! ||