

Thomas N. Gellert – The School Music News Editor



What Would We Do Without Them?

The following editorial is one I really enjoyed writing almost 15 years ago. It deals with a topic in which every teacher is fluent: parents. At this time of the year when we reflect on Thanksgiving and the approaching festive December season, we give thanks as music educators and we often focus on our students and colleagues. But shouldn't we be thankful about the parents of our students too? Are the parents of our students much different today than in the past? Well, yes and no. Certainly the pandemic beginning in 2020 has changed the landscape and relationships between teachers and many parents (students too). Here's a reminder of the relationship between teachers and parents.

Parents. You have to love them. I was recently thinking about the song *Kids* from *Bye Bye, Birdie* and the lyric in the song, "Why can't they be like we were, perfect in every way." I know what you're thinking. (Me, too.)

I'm taking the month off from all the hubbub going on around us to share with you some quotes about my second favorite topic after kids, and that would be (you guessed it), parents. It's ironic sometimes that as teachers, we find ourselves doing a great deal more educating outside of the classroom these days than we did in the past.

A friend of mine (most recently a retired music educator) used to explain the changing shift in today's parenting this way: "No wonder. Today's parents are our contemporaries from the '60s and '70s. You remember the '60s and '70s, don't you?" I won't get too much into a philosophical discussion here based on his sage observation except to say that, I'll leave you to make the inference here, as you like (he said with a knowing smile).

Changing times?

Here's an interesting quote to start this month's editorial: "Where parents do too much for their children, the children will not do much for themselves." The person who said this really understands today's "helicopter" and "lawn mower" parenting, don't you think?

You may be amazed to find out that the person who made this statement was Elbert Hubbard, a well-known American writer and publisher. But, guess what? Hubbard lived most of his life during the second half of the 19th century! Funny, I guess that things weren't much different back then.

Then, we have two great quotes from the wonderful contemporary American humorist, P.J. O'Rourke, who said:

"Everybody knows how to raise children, except the people who have them." I do like that quote, but I also really like this quote from O'Rourke: "Because of their size, parents may be difficult to discipline properly." Wow, if only we could, how wonderful would life be?

"Dr. Love," better known as the motivational author and speaker Leo Buscaglia, had this to say about the relationship between teachers and parents: "It is paradoxical that many educators and parents still differentiate between a time for learning and a time for play without seeing the vital connection between them."

Buscaglia said this a few years back in the '90s, but his words really resonate today as so many of our students are stressed to the max in and outside the boundaries of school. Sometimes, you really feel bad for our students who lack any breathing room.

Each year we have what we call, 4th Grade Parent Band Nights [in my then school district]. Essentially, what we do over two evenings with a large number of the parents of our 4th grade band members is to impart a little philosophy about being supportive of their young musicians. Then we actually teach parents to learn to play about 5-6 notes on their child's band instrument. The experience ends with a little band concert that the parents play for their children (switching audience and performer roles). It's an eye-opener, to be sure.

Fostering encouragement

At any rate, each year I make a little speech to our 4th grade parents about the unintended intrinsic message that kids sometimes get from their parents at the inception of our instrumental band program. I'll say something like: "Parents will always ask their child if they need

help with their homework when they get home from school." Yet, how many parents when confronted with their child wanting to practice their band instrument will say something like: "Go up to your room to practice and, be SURE TO SHUT THE DOOR behind you!"

A famous comedian once made a remark that sort of validates what parents really want: "They just want quiet." The same can sometimes be said of a music educator. The trouble is, we can't always say that to our kids, can we?

Here's another surprising quote: "Parents wonder why the streams are bitter when they themselves have poisoned the fountain." Ouch. This quote is a little blame heavy, wouldn't you say so?

Like the Hubbard quote that I used at the start of this editorial, this quote is not a recent observation. Instead, it comes from the 17th century English philosopher John Locke, only this time, Locke's parenting quote predates Hubbard's quote by about 200 years! We're in good company, my friends. It's always been about good and effective parenting (even back in the 1600s)!

Finally, I'll leave you with my favorite quote about parents: "Children learn to smile from their parents." Look around you. You know this one quote is so true. You can tell those kids who come from good parent situations by their demeanor and that big smile. It speaks volumes to us as educators. So who said this? Why, none other than the great music pedagogue and Japanese violinist, Shinichi Suzuki. Is it any wonder that a music educator truly understands the relationship between the teacher, student and parent? No surprise, here.

Oh, by the way: Happy Thanksgiving, Happy Chanukah, Merry Christmas, Happy Kwanzaa and Happy New Year! ||