
PRESIDENT'S PAGE

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MORE THAN A DESTINATION

Musings on odysseys and outcomes in music education

As music educators, we constantly navigate a timeless tension: process or product? Journey or destination? The weeks and months of work — or the final performance?

Most of us know the truth: music education is, at its heart, more about the journey than the destination. This mindset shifts our focus from competition and outcomes to growth, self-expression, and lifelong engagement with music. I often ask my collegiate students, “As music educators, do we entertain or educate?” The answer, of course, is “Yes!” Performance matters, but the true value of what we do lies in the daily process of learning. It lives in the quiet moments of discovery, creativity, frustration, persistence, and joy. The journey is where identity is shaped, resilience is built, and a love of music takes root.

Advocacy is part of every music educator's job, and performance is one of our most powerful advocacy tools. Performing gives students the chance to showcase their commitment, growth, and experience. It brings visibility and often defines how our programs are viewed by the school and community. At its core, music is a communal event. Educational theorists like John Dewey emphasized experiential learning. Pedagogical approaches such as the Suzuki Method highlight nurturing, encouragement, and holistic development. But while performance helps us advocate, the learning happens in the weeks and months leading up to it. The classroom and rehearsal space — that's where the real education unfolds.

Music is a living process that grows alongside the student. And the relationships we build with our students? They are the key ingredient to success. Generally speaking, about 10% of students will work hard and succeed on their own. Some are wired that way; some were raised with those values. A few love music. Others love achievement. Some love both. But your job — make no mistake — is to bring the other 90% along. You do that through healthy, positive, rewarding relationships.

When students are encouraged to explore, question, and create, their connection to music becomes personal and meaningful. Improvisation, composition, reflection, and collaboration become just as important as note-reading and technique. The process nurtures transferable life skills: patience, critical thinking, emotional regulation, empathy. Students learn to navigate mistakes and setbacks with persistence — skills that go far beyond the music room.

Whether in ensemble, small group, or general music settings, music becomes a tool for connection. The goal shifts from competi-

tion to community — mutual support and shared growth. Students strive to succeed not just for personal pride, but for the benefit of the group — and to please their teacher. In their eyes, you are their second-best advocate.

Yes, festivals and competitions offer recognition, and students and teachers should take pride in those achievements. But we must not lose sight of our mission in the pursuit of a medal. Educators who embrace a journey-first philosophy often design their teaching to reflect that belief. Teachers who consistently succeed build strong student relationships. They create opportunities for students to explore musical meaning and personal experience. They set student-centered goals, use process-based assessments — journals, portfolios, and performance tasks instead of grades — and encourage creative work like composition, arranging, and even interdisciplinary projects.

Performances still matter (remember the advocacy!), but they should serve as checkpoints, not the final destination. Some worry that focusing on process means sacrificing rigor. But meaningful, sustained engagement in a positive environment builds deeper understanding. Goals and milestones still matter but we reach them through process, not pressure.

In the end, only a few students will go on to become professional performers. The ones who do will be moved by music's expressive power and energized by performance. Others will connect through composition, arranging, technology, or production. Some will find the love and become teachers. But *all* of them will carry the gifts of the musical journey into adulthood, whether as creative thinkers, thoughtful listeners, active community musicians, or simply more empathetic, resourceful human beings.

In music education, the most profound growth often begins not with answers, but with questions, not with arrival, but with the courage to take the next step. After all, the destination is fleeting. The journey is ongoing.

Thank you for the extraordinary work you do each day. Thank you for continuing this journey and for guiding others as they begin theirs. That, truly, is a destination worth striving for. As music educator and philosopher Bennett Reimer once said, “The goal of music education is not to produce musicians, but to help children become more fully human.” When we teach with that in mind, we honor both the art and the learner.

All the best to you as you begin another school year—another opportunity to invest in the journey! ||

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