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Mentoring Relationships in Music Education: Pre-service to Experienced Teacher

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In the field of music education, undergraduates engage in master/apprentice type relationships as part of a two pronged preparation in musical and teacher training. They have a long-term relationship with a major performance area professor who initially determines whether the student will be admitted to the School of Music and later verifies the appropriate level of performance attainment and growth. Simultaneously, students interact with multiple professors in the music education area. Between the final stage of pre-service learning and the transition to in-service teaching, students encounter the guidance of cooperating teachers who nurture them during this capstone undergraduate experience. Literature supports the importance and benefits of mentoring for novice teachers who are still learning to combine the principles of teaching with the practice of teaching while facing challenges related to instruction, assessment, curriculum, student behavior, parent interactions, and administrative duties. The purpose of this paper is to: 1. Articulate the types of mentoring relationships encountered during the music teacher maturation process through the lens of developmental relationships; 2. Document, through music education literature, the challenges faced at each developmental juncture; and 3. Present literature on existing mentoring programs in the United States, including: a. Existing music teacher mentoring programs; b. Characteristics of exemplary teacher mentoring programs, including characteristics of exemplary music teacher mentoring programs.

Music education, like many other professions, is rewarding yet challenging. Undergraduates who enter music school endeavoring to become music teachers often do so because they had a positive musical experience in elementary and secondary school and/or were influenced by a music teacher (Thornton & Bergee, 2008). However, they are often unaware of the diverse demands of the degree course load. Along with being individual members of a performance studio, which requires hours of practice and a high level of achievement, they are immersed in a rigorous academic curriculum. Throughout the course of study and into student teaching students simultaneously try to fulfill their roles as performers and music students while they transition from pre-service to in-service teachers, and while they learn to combine theory with the practice of music teaching they are also working to develop their own teacher identity. Building developmental relationships at each phase of the journey from pre-service to in-service greatly assists music educators in reaching their professional goals.

The purpose of this paper is to a. articulate the types of mentoring relationships encountered during the music teacher maturation process through the lens of developmental relationships; b. document the challenges faced at each music teacher developmental juncture; and c. present literature on existing mentoring programs in the United States, including existing music teacher mentoring programs; and characteristics of exemplary teacher mentoring programs.

For purposes of this paper, developmental relationships will be defined as “formal or informal relationships where an individual takes an active interest in and initiates actions to advance the direction of another” (Rock & Garavan, 2006, p. 330).

Mentoring Relationships Encountered through The Music Teacher Maturation Process

A major responsibility of music education faculty is to help students find their teacher identity. During the student teaching phase, music education faculty and cooperating teachers (practitioners who allow students into their classrooms and agree to guide them during this capstone experience) work together to help pre-service student teachers develop an initial repertoire of teaching competencies and understand the dimensions of music experience and student learning. These dynamic teams of mentors work, within development relationships with the students, to create a culture of mentoring that encourages pre-service teachers to further pursue professional growth. Pre-service teachers are empowered to think about ways of engaging in music and pedagogy; to consider their perspectives on teaching and learning music, and be encouraged to go beyond their own ideas (Campbell & Brummett, 2007).

Student teaching provides pre-service teachers the opportunity to further develop their skills. The cooperating teacher assists in helping the pre-service teacher develop into an independently functioning educator. Fenton and Rudgers (1988) illustrate a five step process to gradually develop independence:

- Orientation: visiting and touring the school, meeting administration and other faculty prior to the start of student teaching;
- Observation: allow the student teacher to sit in on classes to become familiar with class procedures, organization, schedules, and materials;
- Introduction: where the student teacher is formally introduced as a teacher. The student teacher must be introduced in a way that lets the students know that this person is a teacher and should be treated as such;
- Participation: the student teacher should be given a few classes at a time, limited objectives, and assignments based on their background and experiences rather than just throwing them into teaching full time;
- Evaluation: an ongoing process involving reflection and communication for both the cooperating teacher and the student teacher.

As mentors, effective cooperating teachers promote a climate of caring, trust, and safety where student teachers feel free to ask questions and seek advice without judgment. They help the student teacher set challenging but achievable goals, and support efforts and achievements. This developmental relationship is one based on respect, sharing, and cooperative learning (Draves, 2008).

Because it is not possible for teacher education programs to provide teachers with all of the knowledge, skills, understandings, and experiences they need before they begin their professional teaching careers; mentoring is one way to facilitate the continued growth of novice teachers beyond the teacher education curriculum. Mentors give concrete advice, pose questions to prompt reflection, model-teaching techniques in the classroom, and offer feedback to novice teachers. Mentors create an environment based on collaboration, exchange of ideas, and professionalism. Their experience helps the novice teacher balance professional development with day-to-day details (Moir, 2005).

Challenges of Undergraduates, Student Teachers, and Novice Teachers

College students face a number of challenges in general. For most, it is their first time living away from home. In addition to course load, they face challenges related to independent living, being separated from friends and family, time management, peer pressure, and sleep deprivation. Many often balance work and school, perhaps struggling with financial issues. It is increasingly common for college students to suffer from anxiety and depression. However, only a percentage of students seek counseling and treatment for these afflictions (Wristen, 2013).

Music education majors are members of a performance studio and ensembles, while learning to be teachers. Someone, usually a music teacher, helped them decide to pursue the career. Reasons for becoming a music education major are varied and include loving teaching and sharing music; savoring making music, performing, listening, and creating; wanting to make a difference in the lives of future students; and, wanting to be a role model (Jones & Parkes, 2010; Thornton & Bergee, 2008).

Music is an extremely competitive field requiring a high level of constant discipline and exposure to criticism. Many musicians personally identify with their work from which they cannot always separate themselves. Along with the performance expectations comes performance anxiety, an added challenge specific to music majors (Wristen, 2013).

Beyond performance expectations, music education majors often struggle with time management, balancing time devoted to development in their major performance area with time focused on academic coursework. They also fear their performance accomplishments are not as visible or recognized as those of music performance majors (Conway, Eros, Pellegrino, & West, 2010). Music students need communication skills to equip them to be professional music educators; skills such as time management and organization, strategies for studying, and healthy habits related to sleep, nutrition, and exercise. They also need to learn how to effectively deal with peers, family, and teachers (Bernhard, 2005).

Those who arrive as what have been called “regional treasures” (Conway & Hodgman, 2009, p. 35) face one of the biggest challenges of undergraduate music majors. These students were the very best

performers in their hometown or region and soon find out they are not quite ready for the culture of the music department. It is often difficult for students to understand or accept different techniques in their performance studios or ensembles, or a different outlook on music education. Their previous experiences are influential and they may resist alternative perspectives at first (Conway & Hodgman, 2009).

Student teaching is the capstone undergraduate experience helping students continue to construct their teacher identities and transition from pre-service to in-service teaching. Student teaching is where the content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge gained in the teacher education program are applied in real world settings (Silveira & Diaz, 2014). Student teaching presents its own challenges, some personal, and some professional. Student teachers may struggle with their teacher identity and wonder if they are cut out for teaching. They may lack confidence, struggle to apply knowledge and techniques, and feel unsure of their growth as a teacher. Student teachers often perceive a disconnection between college courses and clinical experiences (Abrahams, 2009). Networking, communication, establishing procedures, confidence, and discipline are other issues, as is trying to find a balance between their personal and professional life (Killian, Dye, & Wayman, 2013).

Pre-service teachers recognize cooperating teachers as role models, but do not always want to imitate their behavior. However, many times the student teacher feels or is obligated to do so (Abrahams, 2009), which presents yet another challenge.

Novice music teachers face challenges unique to their subject. For example, elementary and secondary music teachers often teach large classes comprising multiple grade levels (Haack & Smith, 2000). Music teachers have unique classroom arrangements that can change daily. Classroom management is frequently an issue with large class sizes, unique arrangements, and multiple grade levels in one room. It is not uncommon for music teachers to travel from one school to another, which presents the challenges of working with two or three administrators, faculties, and sets of building staff (Haack, 2003).

Novice music teachers have cited isolation from other music teachers as a large problem while transitioning from pre-service to in-service teaching. Those who teach in one building are often the only music teacher in the building. Even more extreme, in some rural school districts, one music teacher may be in charge of teaching all K-12 students. For this reason and others, novice music teachers also reported experiencing a lack of team-based teaching as well as being left out of decision-making. Working in isolation away from more experienced colleagues without sufficient means of collaboration or sharing of problems, ideas, and practices negatively affects the teaching of novice music teachers (Krueger, 1999).

Novice music teachers have specific ideas about the types of assistance they find most and least helpful. They want: a) someone to corroborate with regarding their teaching and teaching-related problems, b) release time to meet with experienced teachers in the district, and c) workshops that provide hands-on strategies for the music classroom. It is especially helpful to have a mentor who is also an experienced music educator. Having someone who can listen and understand their challenges, assist with planning, curriculum, grading, and assessment is beneficial (DeLorenzo, 1992; Smith, 2009; Stevanson, 2005; Vartanian, 2002). What novice music teachers find least helpful are in-service and professional development training with mentors who are not musicians, and having mentors who are not interested in their own professional development (Smith, 2009).

Novice music teachers need consistent support from colleagues in order to be successful and prosper in the music education profession. Those who have access to support networks are better equipped to gain the knowledge and experience required to meet the needs of their students and feel more positive about their commitment to teaching (Krueger, 1999, 2003).

Existing Mentoring Programs in the United States

Beginning teacher induction programs were introduced in the 1980s. These programs, developed by local school districts, university education departments, and state agencies were designed to have mentor teachers assist and support novice teachers in their professional development. A number of well-crafted induction models are in place across the United States.

The Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) program is a state-mandated and state-funded program in California. Approximately 150 programs exist within the BTSA. All programs must serve teachers for two years, and have some form of mentoring. Mentors are either fully or partially released from teaching or given an additional stipend to work with beginning teachers. One program within the BTSA is the New Teacher Center (NTC) induction program, in which teachers stay for two years. All

new teachers are given a full-time mentor, who works with no more than 15 new teachers at a time and visits each at least once a week. Mentors are veteran teachers who are carefully selected and matched as closely as possible to mentees according to grade level and subject matter. They attend a five-day mentor academy to learn about coaching, mentoring, and the use of formative assessment tools. Throughout their assignment as mentors they meet weekly for half-day training sessions in which they discuss ongoing issues, look at case studies, and solve problems (Strong, 2009).

The Connecticut Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) program is another example of an exemplary mentoring program. All teachers work with a mentor or a support team regularly during their first year. Mentors are required to participate in 24 hours of professional development related to new teacher development, the state teaching standards, and the BEST portfolio assessment process. They continue teaching full-time and do receive release time to provide instructional support to novices and to help them reflect on their teaching (Strong, 2009).

Dal Lawrence thought teacher professionalism could be improved by having expert teachers mentor new teachers. In 1981, his idea based on evaluative mentoring was the impetus for the Toledo Plan of Peer Assistance and Review (PAR), in which a nine member advisory board made decisions about assisting new and veteran teachers. A number of school districts have initiated programs based on this model. A PAR program involves “consulting teachers” (CTs) and “participating teachers” (PTs). CTs provide mentoring and assistance to PTs—either new teachers or veteran teachers experiencing difficulty. The CTs are trained at a three-day workshop in the summer, are paid to be mentors, and gain professional development. The PTs receive a one-week orientation and see their CT for about 20 hours over the course of the semester. The PAR model differs from other induction programs because it focuses on teacher evaluation as well as mentoring. The CT conducts a formal evaluation of each PT twice a year and recommends whether or not that PT should be rehired (Strong, 2009).

In Washington, the Teacher Assistance Program (TAP) provides state funding to school districts for beginning teacher induction programs. The funds provide a mentor teacher for beginning teachers, training for both beginning teachers and mentors, and release time so beginning teachers and mentors can observe each other (Conway, Kreuger, Robinson, Haack, & Smith, 2002).

Although many states have some form of teacher mentoring, and exemplary models do exist, many other states have no teacher mentoring program, not all mentoring programs are comprehensive and effective, and funding is often uncertain. This lack of consistency across districts and states remains, leaving inadequate services for many novice teachers including music teachers.

Characteristics of Exemplary Teacher Mentors

Exemplary mentors act as role models in many ways. They are experienced educators and exhibit competence in their teaching. Mentors are committed to their role as teacher and mentor and understand the challenges of classroom dynamics and teaching. They know firsthand the struggles, failures, and successes that are the daily life of teachers (Fibkins, 2002; Smith, 2005). Keeping up with contemporary views and teaching practices is important, as is being able to model and demonstrate effective instructional behaviors (Podsen & Denmark, 2000). Effective mentors have highly developed communication skills and value the loyalty and privacy of their mentees. They are nurturing, insightful, honest, and show warmth (Smith, 2005). Effective mentors are leaders, skilled in listening and respected by other teachers. They provide non-judgmental feedback, and are able to promote the mentoring program (Fibkins, 2002).

The ability to assist in the areas of lesson planning, classroom management, assessment, and instructional materials are other important characteristics of effective mentors. In addition to providing instructional support, effective mentors provide emotional support, encouragement, and affirm emerging professional capabilities and dreams (Smith, 2005; Villani, 2002). They provide information about the daily workings, political structure, and the cultural norms of the school community, sharing knowledge and history of the school (Villani, 2002; Fibkins, 2002). Perhaps most importantly, a mentor is willing to stay primarily on the agenda of the mentee (Smith, 2005). Exemplary teacher mentors share a number of characteristics based on the areas of emotional, cultural, instructional, and leadership support, along with personal and educational attributes.

Characteristics of Exemplary Teacher Mentoring Programs

There are currently no national guidelines for the mentoring of novice teachers. The structure, goals, and resources of mentoring programs vary as they are implemented in school districts across the United States. However, successful programs share the following characteristics.

- All beginning teachers participate, all are assigned a qualified mentor, and the program lasts at least 1 year.
- The program has clearly defined qualifications for choosing mentors, and provides adequate training and stipends or other forms of compensation for mentors.
- Both the mentor and the mentee have reduced teaching loads, with the mentor provided time to observe the mentee in action.
- The mentor and mentee are matched according to grade level and subject area whenever possible.
- A summative review of each beginning teacher completes the mentoring program (American Federation of Teachers, 1998; American Federation of Teachers, 2001).

Jacobs (2008) presented a model for the effective mentoring of music educators that begins with the foundation of state government funding and administration of a teacher mentoring program. Layers are built on this foundation, including: support from professional organizations; mentor selection, training, and compensation to increase the effectiveness of mentors; mentor-mentee release time; and a multiyear design for the program. Completion of the mentoring program is required in order to finalize permanent state teacher certification and serves as the last phase of the Jacobs' model. Progressing through this model can result in a formalized system of mentoring that is beneficial to all new music teachers. The model is provided as a point of departure for experimental trials, future research, and comprehensive program design.

Implications Drawn from Existing Literature

Undergraduate music education students are often focused on performance competencies for the first half of their music education degree programs before focusing on developing music teaching competencies. Early field experiences (during the freshman and sophomore year) with practitioners in the field would provide music education majors the opportunity to develop their teaching skills with small teaching assignments under the guidance and coaching of experienced teachers in the field. This type of opportunity would also give young students a start on developing a network of future colleagues (potential mentors).

During the student teaching capstone experience, pre-service teachers are gently inducted into the lives of their assigned cooperating teachers (mentors). By the middle of this experience they are teaching a full schedule further developing teaching skills at a rapid rate. These student teachers apply their theoretical knowledge and brief field experiences to the context of a classroom for which they are fully responsible (yet have the safety net of their cooperating teacher/mentor/coach). These student teaching experiences are usually one semester, which spans between 12-15 weeks depending on the institution and state requirements. Given the steep learning curve required to become familiar teaching music in a K-12 setting, a longer pre-service practicum experience is highly recommended. One full academic year would more adequately accommodate the pre-service rate of development enhancing preparedness making for a smooth transition to in-service teaching.

Novice in-service music teachers often find themselves on a professional island isolated from others who teach in the same subject area. This reality creates many challenges since the district provided mentoring program (if one exists) most likely is not adequate since there is no content specific mentor who can fully understand the challenges specific to music instruction. Further development of the previously mentioned Jacob's (2008) model would assist with this problem but would not solve the isolation problem altogether.

A longer-term problem for novice music teachers is finding ways to continue getting feedback and coaching as the years progress. A continuing education professional development program like the Professional Reflection in Music Education (PRIME), currently in the developmental phase at our institution, will bring together cohorts of novice teachers via a distance-learning model to provide an extension of the student-teaching experience. PRIME will be learner driven, coordinated by a university music education faculty member, and administered along with lead facilitators/coaches versed in the

specific area of music education relevant to each cohort. The focus of this professional development program/course will be reflective practice, coaching novice in-service teachers to reflect on their own teaching and identify areas of further professional development. Hopefully this type of approach will bridge the distance gap and open up avenues for networking and support within the field.

It is our belief that mentoring should continue throughout a career. Peers, even at a distance, can potentially provide feedback and coaching to each other as mentors. The network for music teachers must be broadened to span beyond individual school districts or even immediate regions. With the advances in technology: video conferencing, data sharing, social networking, etc.; the possibilities are endless. Given this “on an island” isolation challenge unique to music teachers, one question for further study remains: how do we effectively implement and maintain successful mentoring programs that are meaningful to the growth of music teachers throughout their in-service careers?

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