

**Music Education and Mutually Beneficial Partnerships:
Building a Model for Long-term Professional Development**

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Abstract: Although music programs are not considered to be mainstream subjects in schools, most collegiate music programs serve to assist p-12 programs and professional development schools, which in turn provide mutually beneficial results for instructors, teacher educators, and aspiring educators. This article discusses how music programs prepare university music students while highlighting the commonalities between collegiate music programs, their mission, and their relationships with p-12 programs.

KEYWORDS: professional development school; music education

NAPDS NINE ESSENTIALS ADDRESSED:

1. A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community;
2. A school–university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community;
9. Dedicated and shared resources and formal rewards and recognition structures.

Music programs across the United States serve various purposes. Traditionally, top-tier conservatories push to develop the “*crème de la crème*” of professional musicians for placement in orchestral and self-created performing opportunities, while many prestigious four-year universities and colleges work within the same model, developing professionally-capable musicians and teachers. Smaller schools help developed musicians in circumstances that, while not at the level of a tier one institution, provide other opportunities for students to excel and develop their skills as educators.

As a subject matter, music is subjectively treated depending on several factors, including cultural, socio-economic, population density, and administrative support. In a program such as ours at Midwestern State University, it is understood amongst faculty and students alike that there is essentially no delineation between “educator” and “performer.” Very few musicians have the luxury of simply performing, essentially acting as teacher educators. Music education is, by its own definition and by necessity, mutually beneficial. For most collegiate programs, there are early- and late-level partnerships. Early level partnerships primarily include performing ensembles and outreach programs including arts camps, while late-level partnerships include clinical teaching, assistance in summer and fall programs, and mentorships.

Many university students will work as interns during the beginning of the fall semester in marching bands, as the requirements of educators at Professional Development Schools (PDSs) can be overwhelming. K-12 music instructors are expected to possess working knowledge of every instrument on the field, how each instrument relates in a musical composition, and how they coordinate on a football field, sometimes numbering more than four hundred members. In these instances, it is imperative for those schoolteachers to receive help in the way of university students. This is the most common of all mutually beneficial relationships built between music programs and PDSs, but by no means the only relationship. The intent of this article is to better articulate how collegiate music programs can become more mutually beneficial for PDSs, as well as provide individuals in other subject matters a differing point of view to the development of relationships for aspiring educators and teachers already in the trenches.

Developing Professionals

Traditionally, most organizations external to the university music program have been better able to respond to immediate needs of the profession. This included university continuing education units, school administrations, arts organizations, and local/state/national professional organizations (Hussey, Estrada, Decker, & Crawford, 1999; Newman, 1998). University music programs have operated under two assumptions that include:

1. Provide the best product in performance in the hall, and the program will reap the benefits of new and talented students flowing into the program and
2. Recruitment and retention will be most successful based on consistent financial support.

While this is true for a handful of schools, it is not the case for the majority of university programs, which need continuous relationships, built on professional development and shared instruction, to help solidify their programs. Specific processes within a mutually beneficial

partnership include instruction in real-world examples through conducting, performing, and design. The results include multiples experiences in learning to instruct in a variety of manners, including jazz, string, wind, percussion, and voice. At present, while professional development is dictated by state and/or local education agencies and recognized as a necessity by educators themselves, it is not generally supported with financing or with release from teaching responsibilities. Thus, the importance of mutually beneficial partnerships with university and PDS programs becomes paramount.

It is typical for a student who studies music as a subject (or major) to spend time in a PDS above and beyond the required hours necessary for program accreditation. To maximize student learning within the context of PDSs, students should be provided opportunities to instruct and create in varied situations. Without these opportunities, musicians cannot grow their intellectual understanding of art, nor can they adapt to situations they will encounter post-graduation. Unlike most subject matters, music is more fluid and not nearly as restrictive as other STEM subjects. Literature choice is somewhat defined by state lists, Arts Education Alliances, and by what may be called “accepted concepts of musicality.” In essence, as we develop musicians at the collegiate level, we provide a foundation for what makes music “great.” This is done through music history, theory, aural skills, and ensemble performance.

Administration: Need vs. Desire

Administration has two basic dynamics to assess and adjust to the PDS model. First, inclusion is a major factor in the success and/or failure of a music program. In fact, it is one of the few subjects in contrast to the preferred student-teacher ratio. Simply, the more musicians you have, the greater the opportunity for success as a program. Second, state competitions, exhibition, and adjudication help to provide assessment for programs throughout the year. These adjudicators are usually retired directors, current music educators, and university/college conductors and composers. Current professional educators are particularly concerned about their changing roles from deliverers to facilitators of learning, and somehow balancing the need to effectively utilize constantly developing technology and research with the need to develop more effective teaching skills in a changing society.

Unfortunately, this is not always the case, as “the lack of communication between teachers and administrators regarding professional development, concerns regarding a one-size-fits-all approach to professional development, research on delivery formats for professional development, professional development leading to heightened collegiality and collaboration between teachers, and best practice professional development research” (Hammel, 2007, p.22). This is where the university program and the PDS can come together to better facilitate mutually beneficial practice by building strong models of preparation using multi-year engagement to enhance long-term student relationships, while reinforcing the moral/technical expectations of new teachers.

How does Music as a Subject Differ from Other Subjects?

Music programs are, by their design, professional development schools. They include conservatories, lab schools, performance, education, therapy, recording, and theatrical programs, to name a few. In all types of programs, musical performance is the primary assessment used for all students. Every rehearsal is an example of a daily assessment of knowledge and application. Unlike typical “lecture-style” classes, the instructor is also performer, as in the case of a conductor. This means that the instructor consistently models the basics of teaching music in the classroom. In most public schools, the music instructor is the singular instructor for their subject matter. As the typical development of a public-school trained musician begins at the 5th or 6th grade level, this relationship between student and mentor is uncommon with other subject matters.

The music classroom setting is unlike any in a public school. The classroom is filled with students learning different instruments with differing roles, all culminating into a single, cohesive entity. As every student has a different learning level and focus/desire for furthering their musical abilities, the music instructor must possess the skills capable of teaching on different cognitive levels based on the instrument of each student. While many are successful in their ability to do this, assistance is commonly needed for student learning by like instruments (single reeds, percussion, etc. In addition, the literature (classroom materials) selected by the instructor (partially based on state guidelines) should facilitate an array of learning competencies while providing all students with challenging benchmarks.

Unlike other subject matters, each student has a defined role in the completion of the subject, rather than as part of a singular informational track. Music compositions help to diagnose the gaps and build core knowledge over the course of a four-year track, but the materials are rarely the same. Unlike textbook instruction and teacher education tracks, music instructors help define their own curriculum and enhancing their responsibility in developing their students. As Linda Darling-Hammond (2006) of Stanford University eloquently explained, “Deep understanding of learning and learning differences as the basis of constructing curriculum has not historically been a central part of teacher education. These domains were typically reserved to psychologists and curriculum developers who were expected to use this knowledge to develop tests and texts, whereas teachers learned teaching strategies to implement curriculum that was presumably designed by others. In some ways, this approach to training teachers was rather like training doctors in the techniques of surgery without giving them a thorough knowledge of anatomy and physiology” (p. 303). This analogy succinctly describes the challenges music educators face in dealing with material instruction.

What Can Music Bring to Other Subjects to Help Emphasize Mutually Beneficial Partnerships?

Recruitment, retention, and professional mentorship are a constantly revolving relationship between college, high school, and junior high directors. Universities send students to interested schools for various work, including teaching, assessment, and development of performance standards and productions. The mentor teachers in turn assist the college director by sending interested and/or talented students to the university, thereby creating a relationship between the schools. As Darling-Hammond suggests, “if prospective teachers are to succeed at

this task, schools of education must design programs that transform the kinds of settings in which novices learn to teach and later become teachers. This means that the enterprise of teacher education must venture out further and further from the university and engage ever more closely with schools in a mutual transformation agenda, with all of the struggle and messiness that implies” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p.302). The novice, our youngest student, can be a lifeline to creating more lasting partnerships with programs and PDSs across the United States.

In many instances, college directors will visit schools to assist with final preparations for performance, assessment of quality instruction, recruitment of highly talented/eligible students for the university, long-term assessment for student teaching placement, and professional development from aspiring masters and doctoral-level prospects. Unfortunately, in most cases, first- and second year-year students are not included in the process of beneficial partnerships, when an opportunity is clearly available. This is particularly important, as there are usually one to three music teachers in each school (choral/band/orchestra) and the opportunity is readily available; again, there is little collaboration or “idea sharing” done outside of the classroom, so an opportunity to assist in collaboration would be significant.

In What Way Does This Help Professional Development Among PDS Instructors?

Continuing education and professional development is recognized as one of the most important aspects of professional employment. A study by Bowles (2000) suggested that “although university music teacher education programs are equally concerned with providing programs of study for those preparing to enter the field, there is no way for programs to meet the needs of teachers over a lifetime of teaching in countless situations” (p.11). For music educators, this is multiplied by the amount of information needed across instrumentation and voice. In fact, many music education programs inform their students that the rigors and information needed to be successful can require five years of university instruction. And in most cases, music educators believe they really know nothing about the subject until they are in front of their own students. Day (1998) suggests that teacher preparation programs are only the initial step in the course of a career requiring continuous development; teacher education programs best serve professionals by producing teachers who view themselves as lifelong learners (p. 420).

At Wichita Christian in Wichita Falls, TX, Mr. Adam Lynskey’s involvement with the local university program serves as an example for how the mutually-beneficial partnership can work. He states:

As a practicing music educator, teaching in a K-12 environment, I have benefitted from collaboration with the local university. I have had educational support in areas of my own teaching where I was not confident. And, in probably the most impactful benefit, I have had students from the university available to offer my own students various educational supports.

The local university impacted my own teaching with faculty involvement. In my current position, I am teaching k-12 music. While I went through a great teacher preparation

program during my undergraduate classes, I had taught exclusively middle and high school for over a decade.

Fortunately, a professor with a wealth of knowledge on elementary music assisted me in creating a blueprint for how to utilize my strengths to successfully teach elementary school music. We included Orff and Kodály (drawing on my graduate work in special education and literacy) methods, and she provided me with a wealth of ideas and resources. I credit my success with elementary music to that assistance, and the ongoing support provided.

A key benefit of the university/K-12 partnership is the interaction between my students and the aspiring music educators from the university. The modeling provided by the university students has been invaluable in preparing for performances and competitions, and I have had university students come regularly to work with beginners, as well as provide master classes for specific instruments. While long-term effects cannot be quantified immediately, the immediate feedback has been very positive. For my students, I have seen lasting results, from improvement to long-term gains resulting from mentoring opportunities.

Unlike other subjects, music is a year-round commitment for students and educators alike. This allows for summer instruction to play a vital role in professional development, although one may not consider “on-the-job” training as professional development. In several cases, discipline-based institutes seek to integrate the music educator, the administrator, and the classroom teacher, in collaborative initiatives to develop effective long-term summer training programs. (Anderson & Wilson, 1996, p. 38). And while summer training can be a valuable tool for educators, the proverbial “curriculum holes” are what most music educators seek out in their development. Bowles’ study regarding professional development accentuates this point. She states:

Respondents were asked to indicate which of the 18 topics listed they felt a workshop would benefit; the number of choices was not limited. They were also given an “other” option to write in topics in which they were interested that were not on the list....The most frequently chosen topics by descending rank order were Technology (66%), Assessment (57%), Instrument/Choral Literature (53%), Standards (45%), Creativity (43%), and Grant Writing (38%) (Bowles, 2000, p.13).

Furthermore, Conway (2007) suggests, “we as a profession may need to re-think our idea of what professional development really is. Is it about a one-day “let’s get pumped” experience led by “experts” in the field, or can we expand our experiences to be more meaningful? What about developing sharing communities of arts teachers who, as the real experts in many cases, get together to problem solve and exchange ideas?” (p.9). What is explicit is that the nature of the one-day professional development is regarded as a waste of developmental time for educators, while acting as padding for administrators and hourly stats, as suggested by McCotter (2001) that “professional development also is often hierarchical in nature: it is done to or for educators, rather than by or with them” (p. 701).

In the case of our own music education students, the time wasted on this endeavor is multiplied due to their relative lack of reference to the issues at hand. For this reason, we must continue to develop relationships between pre-service students, music educators, and university instructors in PDS entities.

How Can We Best Relate “Real-World” Experiences for Music Education Students in PDS Programs?

In order to develop mutually beneficial partnerships, we must focus on what are the most pressing elements for perspective music educators. Most university programs begin music students in a typical/accepted fashion. Year one includes introduction to music theory, aural skills (i.e. training the ear), piano proficiency, and mentored lessons on their primary instrument. Each of these four areas provides beginning education students (and their instructors) with opportunity to build a relationship.

For example, most programs emphasize beginning aural skills as understanding rhythms, pitches, melodies, and harmonies. However, most music educators utilize these concepts for error detection, a concept focused on in later semesters. Error detection is a vital part of music education, and through earlier introduction to listening skills in an ensemble situation, both directors and students can learn in controlled situations to help better understand how to effectively work with immersed sound. Furthermore, the work done in a PDS school for early educators may help develop “informed intuition,” a concept that conductors work with regularly.

Year two builds on those concepts, with the addition of music history, additional ensembles (such as small chamber ensembles), improvisation, and composition. Years three and four are more individual-based, including conducting, foundation classes, methods courses, and recitals.

Many call this experience, and while it is the same in music education, the ability to look at a score and anticipate what issues may arise in a classroom setting can be the difference between success and failure to properly execute lesson plans and develop long-term performance expectations for programs. The nature of performance for music educators is constantly changing. The subject of music possesses a foundation just as any part of STEM programs do. Unlike those areas, one may argue that standardized curriculum across music programs is unnecessary to provide consistent and developmentally appropriate education.

This is also true for professional educators. As Shuler aptly states, “a teacher who first enters the classroom at the age of twenty-one might spend over forty years in the education profession. Certainly, over the span of a career of this length, there will be many changes in the nature of music, the nature of students, and the nature of schools. Even well-prepared teachers must therefore learn to adapt to change. Old dogs must learn new tricks” (Shuler, 1995, p. 10). Hammel (2007) goes one step further, stating, “what teachers do must be continually evaluated and reshaped based on whether it advances learning, rather than carried out largely by curriculum packages, scripts, and pacing schedules as many districts currently require. This means that teachers need highly refined knowledge and skills for assessing pupil learning, and they need a wide repertoire of practice—along with the knowledge to know when to use different strategies for different purposes” (p. 304).

Conclusion

It is imperative that music programs in universities and PDSs continue to innovate in individually- and mutually beneficial teacher education programs. Their relationship needs strong commitment and positive leadership from both sides, which should include clinic practice, inclusion on techniques and concepts from p-12 programs, and an active engagement of young and more experienced student educators with mentors, professional educators, and administrators. No matter what hat a person wears, it is always important to understand that we are all educators. Our strength is dependent on our commitment to each other.

As we move towards redesigning teacher education, collaboration between music schools and universities can no longer be a matter of eclectic desires or individual wants. Instead, school/university partnerships focused on significant individual and group collaboration must become a significant part for all teacher education programs. We cannot afford to compartmentalize our programs to serve only ourselves. Instead, we must move beyond surface relationships and develop more meaningful university-school collaboration.

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