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Is the Next Generation of Music Teachers in Your Classroom?

Look around your classroom. Do you ever wonder about your students’ futures? Will they remain active music-makers and music consumers after they leave your class? Who among the faces looking back at you might become future music educators and colleagues? When did you decide to become a music teacher? Who or what influenced your decision? Why is it important to think about your students’ future careers?

The national shortage of music teachers has been well publicized. In 2000, the Executive Board of the National Association for Music Education (MENC) selected “Recruitment, Retention and Revitalization” of music teachers as its top research goal, and in the years since, a number of research projects have documented some of the major issues. Past-president of MENC, Willie Hill, noted that about 11,000 new music teachers are needed every year, but only 5,500 actually enter the profession (2003). A national study found that 24 percent of openings for string teachers went unfilled in 1999–2000, and predicted that as many as 5,000 new string teachers would be needed in the United States in the next five years (Gillespie & Hamann, 2002). Every year, music teaching positions in school districts and private schools around the nation are left unfilled because of a lack of qualified applicants. Given increasing school enrollments, increased interest in music programs in some districts and teachers who leave the profession for a variety of reasons, Hill (2003) suggested that the lack of qualified music teachers threatens to shortchange an ever larger number of children, all of whom have “the right to be taught by caring, competent, and qualified teachers” (p. 7).

What can we do?

Of the more than 400 collegiate music education majors who participated in a study sponsored by MENC (Bergee et al., 2001), 213 cited a high school, middle school or elementary school music teacher and 42 students credited their private teachers as the most important influence on their career decisions. An additional 169 respondents said that a school music teacher was the second most important factor in their choices. This suggests that every day we have many opportunities to encourage our students to consider following in our footsteps. A first step we can all take is to do our jobs well, to continue to provide quality musical experiences for all of our students and to offer opportunities that will inspire all of them to make music a part of their lives after they leave us. Making music with others can become a means of communication between musicians, becoming a gratifying, fulfilling accomplishment and instilling the need for more of this “conversation” and a desire to share this love of music with others. As our students encounter significant musical activities that make a difference in their lives, they may be encouraged to see themselves as musicians, and a few may be inspired to consider careers as music teachers.

Second, we can all keep our eyes and ears open for the prospective music educators in our classes and religious or community groups, and make intentional efforts to encourage them to consider the profession. Make a list of these students and consider their potentials for becoming music educators. What barriers prevent them from becoming serious musicians? Can these barriers be overcome with our assistance? Clayton (2001) suggested that we should nurture those students who hang around the music room or who stay after concerts to help clean up, in addition to the students with high-level performance skills. We can talk to students and their parents as early as their middle school years about starting private lessons or pursuing classes in music theory. This will help provide the necessary background should they decide to audition in the future to become music education majors. We might help students investigate appropriate undergraduate programs and educational opportunities. Additionally, we could ask guidance counselors to help research scholarships such as those available to teachers who work in urban or rural schools for three years after graduation.

A third action is to give our students opportunities to view themselves as music teachers and to assume leadership roles. We can provide potential music educators with a chance to do some in-class coaching or mentoring, allowing them to assist other student learners so that they...
can get hooked on the feeling of satisfaction that comes from helping others to achieve. Teaching private lessons, coaching sectionals and working with solo and ensemble groups are all ways that budding young music educators can begin to get their feet wet. Students who gain confidence in these introductory teaching experiences may be given opportunities to conduct in rehearsals and concerts, to further encourage their skills in musical leadership and to let them experience success in the teacher's role. Leadership and conducting opportunities abound in athletic band venues; however, it is important to offer our students conducting/leadership experiences in all types of musical settings, perhaps even to help prepare a concert piece and conduct in a performance. Most of us can probably remember the first time we conducted a musical ensemble; that same feeling of unique communication is what we want our students to experience. In this way students can "try on" the role of music teacher, even if in a limited fashion.

Fourth, we can present the profession of music education to parents and students as a positive career choice—a real career with numerous options, benefits and job security. The media and public opinion often portray a negative picture of teaching, citing low salaries, low morale, unwieldy bureaucracy, demanding parents or poor student attitudes. All of us have experienced these problems, and it would be foolish to deny that there is some truth in such portrayals (Brand, 2002). Still, we can make a conscious effort to tell our students about the joys of teaching music rather than letting them only hear us complain about the challenges. We can make a point of telling students that we do make enough money to live on and that there are sufficient rewards in our jobs to make us come to work each day. In addition, we can tell our students about our personal highs in music teaching. For example, we can share that we got chills directing them in the concert and that we are proud of their accomplishments. We can tell them how happy it makes us that they're really learning to read eighth-note rhythms or sing on pitch, or that the clarinetists are remembering the fingering for B-natural almost every time they find it in the music.

Additionally, we can remind students that we were once sitting where they are and feeling what they are feeling. Students need to know that we have had similar experiences participating in school and community music programs, and that through our hard work and commitment we were able to become music teachers. Hosting a student teacher also helps to remind younger students that someone like them can become a music teacher. Participate in your school's career day by partnering with another music teacher to give a presentation or by arranging for elementary or secondary students to shadow you for a "day in the life" of a music teacher. Cadet teaching programs that allow high school students to assist area music teachers for credit as part of the school day have been very successful as a readiness tool for developing music educators (e.g., Barnes, 2001; Kimball, 2000). Invite university students who are music education majors to demonstrate their craft and to share why they want to become music teachers.

As Henry Drummond, a noted Scottish philosopher, claimed, "The people who
influence you are the people who believe in you” (ThinkExist). Believing in and supporting our students’ musical activities may be one of the most powerful ways we can help direct students toward a career in music education. Recruiting future music teachers takes each one of us doing a small part. Advocacy efforts for our profession must include building support for our current programs as well as ensuring a steady supply of qualified teachers to continue those programs for future generations. Who do you see in your classroom that might some day help continue the work you’ve begun?

**Resources to Share With Students**


SBO (published annually). *Music students’ college search and career guide*. School Band and Orchestra, www.sbomagazine.com. (This annual publication is available for teachers to order for students through the phone number on the Web site. It gives tips for auditioning, financial aid and other useful topics, along with advertising for some specific institutions. The Web site has links to Peterson’s College Search and Peterson’s Financial aid search, both well-known and useful resources.)

Students’ guide to college music programs (2nd ed.). (2004). Needham, MA: Larkin Publications, LLC. Available from MENC and Hal Leonard. (A thorough reference, listing schools of music in the United States. Other chapters are on financial aid, preparing for auditions, how to record an audition, dealing with jitters, what universities look for and what is expected of incoming freshmen.)


Weller, Jan (1998). Bowing for dollars: Exploring careers in music. Order from: MacPhail Center for the Arts, Attn: Administrative Assistant for Program, 1128 LaSalle Ave., Minneapolis, MN, 55403; (612) 321-0100, $12.00. (An excellent and user-friendly resource for students even at the middle school level; this booklet describes careers in music and how to prepare for them while in high school.)

The Web site for MENC: National Association for Music Education has an excellent section with answers to all kinds of questions about careers in music. Send your students to www.menc.org and let them explore on their own.

**On-line brochures available at www.menc.org:**

- Careers in Music
- Why Teach? Why Music? Why Me?

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**Additional Resources**

**To read more about addressing the teacher shortage:**


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Brand, M. (2002). The love of music is not enough. *Music Educators Journal*, 88 (5), 45-46, 53. (Recommended reading for students of the realities of teaching music to help them be better prepared)


Kimball, M.C. (2000). Recruiting potential music teachers. *Teaching Music*, 7 (5), 42-43. (Describes Marietta, Ohio’s, Teen Teaching Program, where high school students assist in middle school and elementary music classrooms for credit)