

OPENING REMARKS TO THE EXECUTIVE COUNCILS  
OF THE QUAD-STATE SUMMER MUSIC CONFERENCE

I am certain many of you are familiar with the Hebrew proverb which states that the bearer of bad news is more unwelcome than the news itself. I hope in my case that you will make an exception.

In retrospect, it seems that I have been the bearer of bad news regarding music education for more than 25 years, ever since I was thrust into a secondary public school position and began searching for an answer to my basic question: "How can a teacher most effectively help students develop musically?" In an attempt to help myself answer that question, I eventually had to ponder another question: "How do we learn, when we learn music?" We, meaning infants, children, teenagers, and adults.

Not one of the courses I had taken in college had even raised these issues. Of course there were the usual methods courses filled with the techniques, the gimmicks, and the opinions on such things as to how to teach a rote song, what composers and what literature are appropriate at various age levels, what fingerings produce what sounds on various instruments, and the appropriate music theory prescribed for those days when I wanted to get serious and really "teach something".

The more questions I asked, the more diverse and even contradictory the answers became. The more I read, the more frustrated I became because even those authorities on whom music education traditionally leaned based most of their premises simply on their own experiences and their knowledge of music and psychology, as limited and biased as it may have been. The dearth of practical guidance derived from objective research in music education was (and still is, I regret

to say) an embarrassment to all practitioners in the field.

At the National Symposium on the Application of Learning Theory to the Teaching and Learning of Music held in Ann Arbor in October of 1978, I began my presentation with the following statement: "Music education is a profession in search of a discipline."

A few seemed thoughtfully provoked by this declaration, but generally speaking, the music education establishment has continued on its merry-go-round, largely directed by whatever faddish trend seems most prominent at the time, be it aesthetic education, related arts programs, the correlation of music with so-called academic subjects, music literacy, creativity, the "whole child" concept, sophisticated influences from abroad, the current fancies of private and government funding agencies, or whatever aspects of music the most recently published basic music series and methods books are promoting. However, this merry-go-round is becoming less merry as budgets dictate program and staff retrenchments. Perhaps an even more serious concern is that some of the most talented persons in our profession are "burning out" early, or are deciding on career changes, having confessed, in part, to the fact that they see no direction, or discipline, if you will, in either the philosophy of music education as it was presented in their college and university years, or the practice as they observe and experience it in action, in the elementary and secondary schools. Both vision and achievement become limited when a teaching position is dependent upon the success with which instrumental performance through notation or vocal performance through rote becomes the measuring stick of good teaching or the ultimate goal of a school's music program. Unfortunately, the profession, itself, encourages this expectation on the part of administrators and the public at large.

However, to continue to use students' music skills as component parts for performing groups and to pay little attention to these talents as they relate to the students' individual growth is becoming increasingly suspect.

The problem is not necessarily with the teachers in the schools, but rather, with college and university music and music education professors as well as those leaders who give direction to our national professional organizations. These are the persons who either do not understand that music education is not a discipline or they are not convinced of the importance that music education, as a profession, must become a discipline.

We need to develop curricula for music education which binds vocal, instrumental, general, and theoretical instruction sequentially from preschool through high school.

We need curricula at the college and university level that does not simply borrow courses from music, education, and psychology, but courses unique to music education -- ones that improve understanding of learning theory in music and how to most appropriately apply it to the teaching of music.

We need far more objective research in all aspects of music education so that both instruction and learning at all levels can be more efficient and effective.

We need extensive knowledge and practice in measurement and evaluation to better understand and teach to students' individual differences in terms of music aptitude and music achievement, the musically gifted as well as the musically handicapped. We further need these skills to evaluate new curricula as they emerge and to better understand and apply research as it becomes available. Knowledge of measurement is basic to the design of research.

How ironic it is that research strongly suggests that emphasis in time, money, and teacher quality should most correctly be placed in preschool and the primary grades rather than in secondary schools or what is referred to as higher education. With this information, for example, the curriculum itself will become the discipline of music

education for students from preschool through high school, and learning theory in music and supportive research endeavors will become the discipline of music education for undergraduate and graduate students. Materials, techniques, and methods should not be considered as part of the discipline of music education; they are tools an intelligent and alert musician acquires through reading, workshops, observation, and experience in student and professional teaching.

If our profession continues in its present modus operandi, I predict that in the not too distant future, music education will not have a place in the school curriculum. It will not be extra-curricular or co-curricular. It will be taken over by private interests outside of the schools. We can only speculate, in relative terms, how successful they will be.

Our profession can no longer expect to motivate with slogans rather than substance. The era of accountability is here and for the cause of music education, we should be grateful. To every human being, learning and developing music skills and understanding is an exciting, motivating experience. How refreshing it would be if such topics as "How to Develop Proper Attitudes in Music" and "Survival in the Junior High School General Music Class" were abolished forever and the profession itself became excited about how we learn, when we learn music. That is learning theory -- the establishment of objectives, sequentially, in terms of method, so that students can most appropriately and efficiently learn music skills and develop musical understanding. To ignore it and to continue in our circular approach in music education could prove to be disastrous. To investigate it, to encourage further research in it, and to apply it to our teaching could result in a discipline for our profession through which, I

believe, our culture would benefit.

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