



MENTOR'S DESK

The Mentor's Role: Trusted Counselor and Guide

by Jane Linde Capistran

Back in the day, veteran teachers, do you remember some of these questions that kept you up at night?

- How do I seat the orchestra on the first day of class?
- Should I purchase this make and model of cello for the department?
- What is a P.O.?
- Who can help me set up the stage for the dress rehearsal?
- How do I plan a field trip to hear the Minnesota Orchestra?
- What repertoire should I select for the fall concert?
- I've got so many violins and no cellos—what should I do?
- I can't seem to get the bow hold balance set up correctly for the beginners—help?
- My students are talking during the rehearsal—why don't they listen?
- How do I keep track of all this fund-raising money?
- Is there a way to teach shifting and vibrato in the orchestra?
- Do I have to type the program for the orchestra concert?
- Is my beat pattern clear in $\frac{6}{8}$?

If none of these ring a bell, I am sure there were others that filled your first few years of teaching. For beginning teachers reading this, you may be saying to yourself right now, "Yes, I have that exact question in my teaching." And for those of us who have taught for many years, we still continue to seek answers for our questions when it comes to teaching our students, and probably turn to a colleague or a revered teacher from the past.

In my new capacity as Mentorship Advisor to the MNSOTA Board, I am excited to

connect beginning string teachers in their search of answers with experienced teachers, thus providing a mentor. As the heading of the article states, a mentor is a trusted counselor and guide. It is MNSOTA's mission to provide this string guidance to new teachers. The Minnesota Music Educators Association (MMEA) began a mentorship pilot program two years ago, and it seemed very timely to piggyback on this service by specifically offering this program within our own organization.

I have the opportunity to speak to the Instrumental Music Education class at Concordia College about string teaching every year. Both Dr. Scott Jones, class professor, and I always emphasize the wealth of knowledge that another teacher (mentor) can share with a beginning teacher. In fact, many school districts pair a beginning teacher with an experienced teacher for the first two years of teaching. This can be a tremendous help, especially if the district is large enough so the beginning teacher is paired with a faculty in the same field. However, if a mentorship program is not in place in your school district, MNSOTA is able to help. Let me guide you through the easy steps of finding a mentor.

- 1) Contact me at: capistr@cord.edu
- 2) Provide your contact information: phone, email and school address
- 3) Indicate your teaching level/grade
- 4) Optional: include specific teaching questions

After receiving this information, I will send you a mentor name(s) that you may contact with your specific question(s). I will also let you know the method that the mentor prefers to be contacted—email, phone or possible school visit. This will be a

resource that you can turn to when needed.

Experienced teachers, I encourage you to think about being a mentor. This summer at the MNSOTA workshop, several of you already volunteered and are on my resource list. For others who are interested, you may contact me directly at capistra@cord.edu or 218-299-3285, ext. 329 or go to the MNSOTA website. You can log on as a mentor by clicking on "About Us" and then "Mentoring." A form is available to complete your registration as a mentor. Having mentors in all regions of the state will be very important, so I look forward to adding your name to the list. I feel being a mentor is a win-win situation, for as we answer questions for new teachers, we also energize our own teaching in delivering the information.

Beginning teachers, you may still contact MMEA for more information about their formal mentorship pilot program. Please contact Mary Schaeffe at info@mmea.org or 763-566-1460.

Hmm...just this evening I asked my friend and colleague about a classical viola piece. So one is never too old for a mentor. Don't be afraid to ask—find a mentor today and you will gain much knowledge and confidence in your teaching.

Next article: texts and web sources that can also mentor.

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