



MENTOR'S DESK

The Student Teaching Experience

by Jane Linde Capistran

This year I have thought a lot about my senior students who are out student teaching this spring semester. As their studio teacher, my focus last semester was to prepare them for their senior recitals that were given in January. But at the same time, I had this nagging thought, “How is this going to prepare them for what’s coming?” as they stepped into their student teaching experience. As the studio teacher, do I do enough to develop their skills as a teacher as well as a musician?

In reading a newly published book by Colleen M. Conway, Michael V. Smith and Thomas M. Hodgman *Handbook for the Music Mentor* (GIA Publications), the authors have done an excellent job of dissecting the undergraduate coursework of the music education major. They also have included personal stories by students, which are very helpful in recognizing their perspective of their education and enlightening me as a college professor!

As Conway and Hodgman state, “... most students experience a conflict of identity as they try to develop as a musician and teacher simultaneously. The musician identity is more prevalent during the degree...” When I think back to my undergraduate training, I was totally focused on becoming a better violinist and didn’t think much about becoming a better teacher. Of course, all the wonderful professors I experienced in my “musician” training passed along their unique teaching styles, which formed many of mine today, but yet much of that was never verbalized. “What is challenging for the music education student is balancing sequential development of personal musicianship skills with the development of

skills needed to teach these same concepts to children of various ages and in various musical contexts.”¹

Before teaching at the college level, I had the privilege of hosting many student teachers in my elementary and high school positions. My duties and goals as their cooperating teacher were much clearer for me to identify. I knew they required experience in selecting repertoire, getting up in front of the class, conducting, scheduling, chaperoning, budgeting, and the list goes on and on. I was also able to assist them in helping them discover their teaching personality—a way that they could communicate to the students and get a response.

Now as their studio teacher, before they go out into the real world, I hope to give them skills that they can take into the classroom. I want my music education students to be able to articulate the “how-to” when playing a martelé stroke or finding an upper position. That way, when they get in front of their freshman orchestra at the high school, they can deliver instruction without being paralyzed. Just asking them to describe the repertoire they are playing in my studio is a way for them to be eloquent in speaking with no prior preparation, perhaps a way for them to become familiar with their teaching personality.

Another realization as a studio teacher happened while teaching an independent study course to my senior student Rachel. I was a bit horrified to realize that she had never played many of the important teaching pieces for young violinists! We immediately decided that would be a good project for her lessons after her recital, and I will keep this in mind for future students.

The *Handbook for the Music Mentor* has devoted several chapters to excellent advice about mentoring the beginning teacher. The chapter entitled *What Successful Mentors Do: Mentoring Practices* has one of my favorites sentiments: that if we as mentors do only one thing, that task would be to affirm and encourage.² The poignant stories shared in this chapter brought tears to my eyes as I remembered my first teaching years and of all the wonderful mentors I have had in my life.

In closing, I thank all the cooperating teachers who mold, mentor and shape the string student teacher. I also thank all of you who have volunteered your time and encouragement to the beginning teachers as mentors. It is my hope that we send these students forth into the teaching world as both capable musicians and educators.

1. Conway, Smith and Hodgman, *Handbook for the Music Mentor*, (GIA Publications Inc. 2010), p. 10
2. *ibid.*, p. 315

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