



MENTOR'S DESK

Mentorship in Action

by Jane Linde Capistran

Since the creation of the MNSOTA Mentorship Program, I have had the privilege of placing six teachers with four different volunteer mentors in the state. Most of the teachers seeking a mentor have been in their first year of teaching. I interviewed a first year teacher about the start of her year, and how a mentor(s) assisted her teaching.

Q: Did you find anything overwhelming as a first year teacher?

A: One thing I found overwhelming was the schedule. There was no specific time set aside for fifth or sixth grade orchestra students—I had to figure out where to fit them into my day while still maintaining their class time with their other teachers. I also had to incorporate students from the two parochial schools in town. At first I was very nervous to approach the homeroom teachers about taking their students out of class, but they have been very helpful, cooperative and supportive of what I am doing. Another overwhelming part was dealing with the varying levels of learning that my students encompass. Since I am in charge of orchestra from the ground up, I have students at many different levels. It was a little difficult at first to transition between groups, but I have a better idea now of where each group and individual is in terms of learning and I have a clearer picture of how to proceed. I could also mention some overwhelming things about recruiting... basically, it's really hard to do it at the beginning of the school year, especially for a first year teacher who is going a little crazy with everything else! I think there would be much more success if it's done in the spring and the students has some lessons during the summer.

Q: Did you have anyone in the district that could help with your questions?

A: I have had some very positive experiences with the people in my district, particularly when it comes to asking questions. The band teacher and the choir teacher are veteran teachers and have been in this district for a long enough time to know how things work. They have both been extremely helpful on numerous occasions. The principal at the middle school, which is where I spend the majority of my time, has also been very helpful, supportive and

understanding.

Q: Why did you request a MNSOTA mentor?

A: I asked for a MNSOTA mentor because I thought it would be helpful to have someone who is very knowledgeable in the string world available to answer my questions and provide an opinion from an orchestra teacher's point of view. Some things are musically universal and I don't mind asking the band or choir teacher here, but other issues seem to be strictly related to strings. Also, I am just glad to have another resource, period.

Q: How did you contact your mentor and what kind of assistance did you ask for?

A: I emailed my mentor and asked specifically for help with ideas on how to approach music reading. I have a group of students who have been playing for a year, and many of them are completely reliant on string names and finger numbers over each note in order to play the music. For several reasons, I would like to move them into actually reading and understanding music. My mentor has offered some helpful suggestions. He was also interested in hearing about my orchestra program.

Q: Are there other mentors you have contacted?

A: I have also contacted my former college professor, my supervising student-teaching teacher, and my high school orchestra teacher as mentors and colleagues.

Once again, I thank all teachers who have volunteered their time and resources in being a mentor. As noted in the interview—mentorship really works!

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