



MENTOR'S DESK

Mentor or Helicopter Parent?

by Jane Linde Capistran

We have all dealt with them—the parent who is totally involved in their child's life to the point of being overbearing. For the elementary and middle school child, this type of parenting can be a bit of the norm and comes in levels of varying degrees. But as the child grows into high school and college, the helicopter parent can become a nuisance, leading older students to depend on their parents to face any little difficulty life may present.

I thought about my role as a mentor the other day, during a conversation with one of my older students. The student was asking me to search and set up rehearsals with pianists for upcoming performances. Was I the classic helicopter teacher/mentor? Had I done this so many times that now my student wasn't capable of completing the task? Wasn't this a task that I could assist with, but certainly have the student do the legwork? This was really a reality check for me!

And how about the actual rehearsal? For me, it's very important to be involved in the pianist/soloist rehearsal, and I always schedule two rehearsals—being the facilitator. But beyond that, I have decided to “let go.” It's time for the student to work out the

details that we already went over. They need to be able to verbalize with an accompanist about tempos, style and balance if I want them to learn these rehearsal skills.

And what about all the times we give them the answers to the questions we ask? Me?—Guilty! A good mentor can lead them to the sources, but let them find the answers. When a sonata, concerto, etude, symphony is assigned—it's important for both mentor and student to know the history of the work. Yes, we can lecture; but give them the tools to find it on their own too.

Much has been written about the helicopter parent—the good and the bad. In defense of the helicopter parent, Alfie Kohn, author of thirteen books on parenting, collected data that revealed that the parent who is actively involved and connected to their young adult child had a favorable effect on every aspect of their college experience.^[1] The parent is more concerned about the well-being of their child than their independence.

This is good news for the mentor! It's important for us to find the balance by letting them learn from our modeling and knowing when to give them independence. It's good for them to see you rehearse/

conduct a difficult passage, or execute a particular bow stroke and show them the mechanics to teach it. We can be a “helicopter mentor” and still give our future educators their wings of independence. Their well-being will lead to their independence.

Mentoring... parenting... thank you for navigating through these waters for our young musicians and future educators.

1 *The Myth of the Spoiled Child: Challenging the Conventional Wisdom about Children and Parenting*. DaCapo Lifelong Books
March 25, 2014

Jane Linde Capistran is Assistant Professor of Music at Concordia College, Moorhead, where she teaches violin and viola also conducts the Concordia College Symphonia, one of two full orchestras on campus. In addition, she is the conductor of the Fargo-Moorhead Area Senior High Youth Symphony, and Associate Conductor of the Fargo-Moorhead Symphony. In 2005, Jane received the Master Teacher: Studio Award from MNSOTA, and in 2007 was named the North Dakota String Teacher of the Year. ♪