Developing a Model for Change in Music Teacher Education

By Maud Hickey and Fred Rees

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The purpose of this article is to share information about a process that brought together interested music educators who had the common goal of creating change in higher music education. The products that emerged from this process are still in undeveloped form, but it is hoped that they will provide steps toward further quests for change. Issues highlighted at the beginning of this article as important to music education emerged as needs and were discussed by participants at the first College Music Society Institute on Music Teacher Education, held in June 2001. This article will provide background information on concerns facing music teacher education, explain the process of putting together the CMS institute, and describe the institute itself as it provided a beginning for addressing needs in music teacher education.

What Are the Problems?

The issue and process of change for music teacher education have always been part of the dialogue among those striving for continued excellence in how we train and educate future music teachers. Although innovation is not always a priority in our profession, altering curricular elements, broadening the scope of course content, and incorporating new pedagogical methods have been among the activities of the profession. This provides evidence of the profession's willingness to acknowledge the importance of change in what we need to know and do to be effective music educators.

Since the 1970s, when some of the last curricular experiments of significant magnitude were undertaken (e.g., Burton, 1990; Contemporary Music Project, 1965, 1966, 1971; Thomas, 1970), most music teacher education programs have retained a curriculum of compartmentalized and specialized courses intended to develop future teachers' expertise in general music, band, chorus, or strings. While such contemporary educational issues as music technology, non-Western music, or jazz may surface periodically in parts of the collegiate music curriculum, they largely compete, without much success, for time and attention in degree programs that are already overloaded with required course work.

In many ways, this compartmentalized approach to training good musicians and educators is sensible, because teaching requires high levels of competence, and students must learn a great deal to learn in order to be effective ensemble directors or general music specialists. Nevertheless, the substantial amount of technological and sociological change over the past 30 years, which has transformed virtually every aspect of how people learn and interact with music, suggests that there is a need to reexamine the music teacher education curriculum and search for ways that the profession might prepare future music practitioners for the contemporary world.

Now is an opportune time to foster a new type of music educator who would complement those who are already in the teaching ranks. Because of the continually evolving music technology, access to a dizzying array of musical genres and styles that were not available to most musicians before the Internet,
and the growing awareness of cultural diversity and different learning styles in student populations, there need to be options for addressing the music-learning interests of all students in the public schools, the vast majority of whom do not participate in music ensembles. There may also be unseen dividends and outcomes of a reformulated music teacher education program that could only occur through curricular reform.

Curricular change, particularly on a nationwide basis, is neither simple nor quick to accomplish. On the one hand, teacher educators are scrambling to address state mandates and new educational requirements. Yet teacher education programs have little curricular space or time for new courses, making it next to impossible to meet these demands. In the case of music teacher education, the academic requirements of most collegiate music curricula supersede exposure to early childhood studies, music technology, world music, testing and learning assessment, research, student composition, cultural sensitivity, and different learning styles, as well as incorporation of national, state, and local standards.

Time for Change

Looking at these issues reveals both a problem and an opportunity for reexamining music teacher education, possibly picking up from where programs such as the Manhattanville Music Curriculum Program (Thomas, 1970) and the Contemporary Music Project (Contemporary Music Project, 1965, 1966, 1971) left off in the 1970s. These efforts shared a common interest in looking for new ways to address the education of the undergraduate music major and the public school music student. The collegiate music curriculum was one of the principal avenues through which such efforts were undertaken. However, the profession is faced with several issues related to this effort.

One problem in sustaining curricular reform is gaining a consensus of peers. Any music teacher educator who has engaged in curriculum review, let alone reform, probably recalls the mind-numbing turf battles with non–music education specialists, the arguments over what course content should stay and what should go, and the unread final reports that all but sealed the fate of any meaningful change. One reason that earlier curricular initiatives in music were not sustained was a lack of a critical mass of stakeholders. Initiatives taken to precipitate change are usually generated by a few people and then dispensed to or imposed upon the many. This is an excellent formula for failure, no matter how meritorious or well-meaning the effort. It is a challenge to achieve change without alienating peers who might be open to discussion but would resist any initiative that might be seen as dissident and politically divisive.

An additional aspect of peer constituency to consider is that music teacher education programs across institutions are not necessarily the same. While course content and degree program requirements are similar across the country, student profiles, professorial expertise, institutional resources, political realities, and budgetary constraints are different, particularly for colleagues whose institutions vary from major research universities to smaller teachers' and liberal arts colleges. How to target interested parties is another concern, as there has been no recent major forum for discussion of music curriculum.

Another concern is that any likely substantive change in curriculum would occur through human action—not just through discourse, tracts, or reports. Putting together task forces or university committees that investigate institutional problems and yield policy or position statements that provoke controversy or are too vague to implement is not likely to precipitate change. If curricular change is to occur, all members of the music community engaged in an academic unit's program review must be involved from the outset. Building stakeholders out of colleagues is the only way to ensure that enduring
curricular change has a chance of occurring.

Lastly, evaluation is particularly important. With the exception of the body of compositions generated during the Contemporary Music Project, there were no follow-up evaluations to show evidence of program effectiveness among the various curricular initiatives in the 1970s. This deficiency may have played a decisive role in their demise. A clear goal for follow-up assessment of any curricular change is crucial.

Making Change

Against this backdrop, the process of looking for a logical and potentially effective way to restart the dialogue on curriculum reform in music teacher education began. One immediate avenue was the involvement of the College Music Society (CMS), which sponsors professional development institutes and has a history of supporting initiatives for bringing together colleagues with similar interests. Also, CMS is the most interdisciplinary of the collegiate music societies. While this initiative for curricular reform in music education is currently focused on bringing together music teacher educators, the involvement of professionals in all areas of collegiate music is essential if curricular reform is to occur. It was also considered essential that MENC-The National Association for Music Education and the Society for Music Teacher Education (SMTE), a subgroup of MENC, be involved. As the body most invested in the education of the nation's music teachers, SMTE was considered a vital participant in any initiative that might lead to meaningful curricular reform in music education.

CMS, MENC, and SMTE supported the initiative, and in June of 2001, the first Institute on Music Teacher Education, codirected by Fred Rees and Maud Hickey, took place over four days at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. The purpose of this first institute was to gather an interested assembly of collegiate music educators who would begin to articulate, research, and formulate solutions and strategies for the future of music teacher education.

The Institute Process

The structure and implementation of this institute were unique. The institute's format grew out of the designers' desire to encourage participation and interaction among attendees so that colleagues would be actively engaged in session content. Rather than passively listening to presenters or following predetermined learning activities, attendees were involved from the beginning in shaping the institute's progress and outcomes. The participants came from across the country (including Puerto Rico) and represented an array of college sizes and teaching duties. Besides music education specialists, there were also administrators and music theory and performance teachers (and those who did all of the above).

In order to initially focus on issues that might be addressed at the institute, three faculty members were invited to act as catalysts for discussion and to guide ensuing work and discussion throughout the four days. Each faculty member provided unique ideas about issues and solutions in music teacher education. The faculty members and the topics they shared were Dr. Robert Crisp, director of fine arts education for the Detroit Public Schools, who discussed the need for better collaboration between universities and music education programs in urban schools; Dr. Jeffrey Kimpton, director of the school of music at the University of Minnesota, who focused on creating systemic change within an entire school of music in order to stimulate solutions for growing curricular problems; and Dr. Carol Scott-Kassner, music education consultant and general music textbook writer, who provided ideas for more comprehensive approaches to music teacher education curriculums.
After the three faculty members presented their thoughts during the first morning of the institute, a full-group brainstorming session was held in order to hear from the participants about the needs and issues they faced. A unique "post-it-note technique" was used to cull and cluster the issues that the participants introduced. Participants wrote four issues that they were interested in on four different notes. The participants then put their notes on a large surface next to others that were similar. All of the notes/issues eventually clustered into four major topics for four cluster groups: "Creating Change in Higher Education," "Partnerships," "Curriculum," and "Teacher Training." Participants joined whichever cluster group was most interesting to them and set out to work on the issues.

Each cluster group was made up of approximately eight institute attendees, one faculty member, and an institute design-team member. Design-team members not only helped to design the institute but also were charged with facilitating discussion in the four cluster groups. The design-team members were Mark Campbell from SUNY Potsdam and Kim Walls from Auburn University, both members of the CMS advisory board for music education, as well as Robert Dunn from Case Western Reserve University and SMTE chair Sara Bidner from Southeastern Louisiana State University. The four cluster groups worked for four days to more clearly articulate their issue and to begin to formulate ideas for change. Information gleaned from each day helped to shape the activities and direction of the institute for the following day.

At the conclusion of the institute, each cluster group generated and presented a report. These reports provide beginning ideas for strategic change on the issues that the groups examined. In addition, the work of the entire group brought about ideas for what should happen next in order to help expedite the changes discussed.

**Institute Results and Future Considerations**

The group reports, as well as an overview of the institute, can be found at the CMS institute Web site (http://faculty-web.at.northwestern.edu/music/hickey/CMSInstitute/). The reports are in an early and rough format, but they do contain ideas that group members are working on to initiate change at their individual institutions. The next step is to document change that has taken place as a result of initial ideas in these reports.

Other dialogue at the institute revolved around the need to keep this initiative moving forward. The next institute needs to include other constituents, such as those involved in technology, university administration, and public school administration and teaching. For instance, one specific idea for the next institute is to bring in teams of educators from universities with the goal of working on specific needs at their institutions, guided by experts who can help develop a custom plan for each team. Organizers of the next institute need to converse with existing organizations, such as the American String Teachers Association, the College Band Directors National Association, and the American Choral Directors Association. Finally, it is important to carefully document and study those changes that are successful in order to help others who face similar needs.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this first institute was simple: to stimulate discussion and begin formulating ideas for change in collegiate music teacher education. By the end of the four days, clear progress had been made and the beginning of new dialogue had started in order to ensure steps toward change in music teacher education. This constructivist approach to the institute enabled all participants to be a part of the
institute's outcomes, which in turn, will serve to supply the agenda for the next institute and interim activities. The authors hope that all educators interested in collegiate curriculum reform will help to move this initiative forward.

References


