

**Audio Transcription of Concluding Panel of the 2007  
Suncoast Music Education Research Symposium  
“Comprehensive Music Education in the Contemporary World”:  
Recommendations for Comprehensive Musical Understandings**

*Introduction by:*  
Carlos Xavier Rodriguez  
University of South Florida

*Transcription by:*  
Julie Troum  
University of South Florida

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**Introduction**

For the final session of the 2007 Suncoast Music Education Research Symposium, we asked the three keynote speakers to summarize their thoughts on the Symposium. The title of this panel was “Recommendations for Comprehensive Musical Understandings.” While each speaker presented unique aspects and conceptions of comprehensive music education, the discussion revolved primarily around the following broad themes: teacher training in music, subject matter and instructional methods in music education, and lifelong learning. A transcription of this final session follows, in which deep scholarly thoughts are embedded in a conversational style.

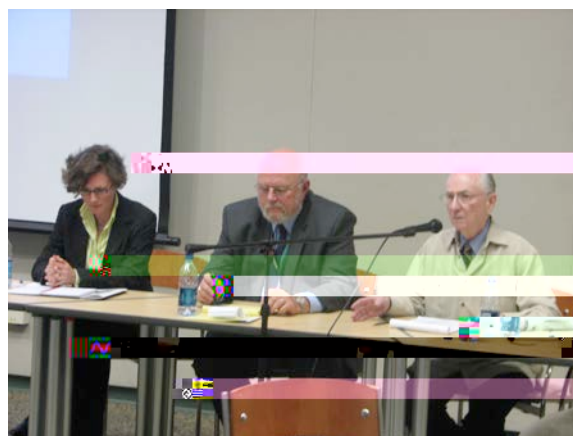
Order of Speakers:

1. Bennett Reimer,
2. John Hylton, and
3. Margaret Barrett.

**Bennett Reimer**

This panel is an opportunity for me to take my understandings about my vision of comprehensiveness further, as I did when I wrote the paper for this conference. As I

mentioned in my paper, this conception is challenging for me to articulate, especially at the level of implementation, and that is what we’re supposed to be talking about at this point. I have been jotting notes while people have been talking, and many new ideas have suggested themselves.



This conference is based on the assumption, with which I fully agree, that we haven’t achieved the comprehensiveness that we need to have. The fact is that our program of music education in the United

States is pretty much what it has been for about 75 years, when it all came together as general music in the elementary and middle school years, and band, orchestra, and chorus in the high schools. That is what we do. It has changed somewhat within all of those offerings but basically the program back then remains what the program is now. I believe that there is a tremendous amount of unreality in what we do now, and that unreality accounts for a great deal of what, not just myself, but a fair number of music educators now recognize to be the high degree of irrelevancy of music education in our present culture. We have a lot of work to do despite whatever advances we may have made, and I am proposing a major way of rethinking our entire program.

I want to start by talking about teacher education, since that is what many of us regard as one essential dimension for any real change. In educational systems around the world there are two parts: general education for everybody as the common curriculum, and specialized education to the extent that it can be provided to take care of special needs. It has been that way around the world for a long time and I don't think there is any good alternative available at the moment. And so I think that is an educational structure we can accept and work within.

First I want to talk about general education and teacher education for general music. (I wish I could think of a better name, don't you? So far we haven't come up with one that has done the job better.)

The first thing I want to suggest is that we need to recruit for general music teachers in a very specialized way. We need to find the kinds of people who are going to be the best general music teachers, and that means we have to be specific about the kinds of people we take in. What I want to look for are people who want to be music educators and have had good experiences

with kids at the elementary grade level. That is, with camp experiences, church experiences, or whatever kind of experiences that would get them in touch with kids of those ages, and then would say that those are the kids who they want to work with. The same for people who want to work with middle school or junior high school kids. Those people, by the way, are very special. You can spot them from a mile away. They have a special personality, very courageous, very patient with adolescent strife, able to stand a lot of angst, and still retain their sanity.

So first of all we need to look for potential teachers who are like that. We want to look for people who are anxious to work with young students and who also are interested in all different aspects of music. They're not the ones who say "I am a clarinetist and I am going to devote myself to students who play instruments and want to be like me." I was one of those, and I understand their passion. We are going to continue to need people like that but not for general music. For that we are looking for potential teachers who are curious about the entire world of music, of different kinds of music and different ways that people involve themselves with music. And there are people like that. There are young people who have approached music and experienced music in that way.

For those who are headed for being general music teachers there would be no audition requirement for entrance into the music teacher education program. Now that in itself would be a major change, because we have always assumed that the only possible way that you could be any good in music is if you can perform well. On that assumption our colleges and universities want the best performers they can possibly get. Why? Well the band director needs them, the orchestra director needs them, and the chorus director needs them. And this

immediately shuts off kids who don't identify with being performers. It also guarantees that the kids who do get admitted to music teacher education will want to do performance for their career because we are selecting the best of them that are devoted to that. Not only do they have little or no interest in being general music teachers, but they deplore the whole idea of ever having to be involved in general music in any way. They want to be ensemble directors, period, and almost always at the high school level. Maybe they will stoop to working with younger students who are beginning instrumentalists and starting grade five because that's okay, because that's still "me."

We have catered overwhelmingly to that one aspect of the music teacher education program for a very long time. Some of the best of the performance teachers in the school eventually become our performance teacher education faculty members in higher education. Naturally those people want students who want to be what they themselves are. Specifically, not to be general music teachers.

So, to get back to the point, no audition for prospective general music teachers, or perhaps only as an option, because a good general music teacher might, in fact, be good at performing but not necessarily. There is no evidence, I124 (t)-2 (i not)-2 ( )v

Remember, these people are going to be teaching in K-8, and they're not going to be doing any of the specialized kinds of teaching that performance directors will come in to do, starting in around grade five. But they can do the introductory kinds of lessons that get the kids involved with instruments, with the help as well of the instrumental and choral specialists and with people from the community who can help out as well.

I am suggesting that that a big part of their teacher education program, that is the lessons, and the playing in ensembles, and so on, need not be at the same kind of intensity that the performance specialist has to go through. That frees up a whole lot of time, because they are not going to be practicing the way we did and doing recitals and spending enormous amounts of time in rehearsals. Instead they will be taking courses and having experiences relating to all the different roles, learning what critics, philosophers, researchers, and social critics do and how to introduce their school students to all that as the content of their general music offerings.

You say, well, if they are going to be teachers in those lower grades, kids can't learn stuff like that. Well, yes, of course they can. Yes, kids can do philosophy, for example, and, in fact, they do philosophy in their life because it is part of what humans do when they talk about what is good, what is not good, and what good values are. These are philosophical matters and kids can get into that as it is related to music. How exciting that can be both for general music teachers and their students, the entire world of musical possibilities being opened to them in ways appropriate to their age and development.

These people are specialists in breadth, these general music teachers. That is their specialization, being broadly trained in a variety of roles. And remember that

they are teaching young children, and they can get specialist help when they need it. They will be using community resources, the culture bearers who can come in and be the exemplars in real life of the kinds of things that they are teaching in their general music classes. So that is going to be an important part of their preparation, as to how to make best use of such people.

In their teaching they are being prepared to offer a curriculum. And they need to explore ways that curriculum might be offered through various topics, in addition to the roles, that would be appropriate at the different grade levels and developmentally through K-8.

Here are some things that I jotted down as possible organizers, topics, or dimensions for lessons, not just one lesson, but for a series of lessons that would explore these things. Melody, form, style, the orchestra, Chinese opera, social justice, musical creativity, old music, new music, music among the arts, music and the brain, music and politics, musical theatre, feeling and emotion, folk music, following tradition, breaking from tradition, musical pioneers, and on and on. All sorts of lessons, probably hundreds more that good teachers can think of and that the profession can think of.

never been satisfied with teachers who conceive of sequence as preparing for the next rehearsal, or in general music, the first thing you do in the school year is Halloween music, then the next thing is Thanksgiving music, the next thing is winter celebration music, and so forth. That isn't a musical sequential curriculum, it is just kind of a way to get through the year. We've always wondered about how to be sequential, and we need to work that out in ways that are developmental among these topics, each topic explores through its characteristics and the ways the topic is carried out in various musical roles it entails.

The balance of choices would be achieved during the year by exploring all of the roles and topics that also include the roles played within each topic. For example, with melody, kids would perform songs and other melodies, discussing what performers need to know and do when dealing with the kinds of melodies that have to be performed. They would compose melodies, noticing what that particular engagement with melody requires in order to be successful. Same for improvising melodies, arranging melodies, listening to them, critiquing them, analyzing them, understanding their historical and cultural bases, like elements in other arts and unlike elements in other arts, and being like other subjects in some ways and unlike other subjects in some ways.

All the roles would be covered several times during the course of a year. So the kids would put on the composer hat, put on the critic hat, put on the philosopher hat, put on the psychologist hat and get a sense of what each is about. First steps taken in the early grades and then continuing to develop through a curriculum we need to work out. In each year with new topics and some repeated topics. This kind of curriculum would be individualized to different cultural groups throughout our country, by location, by indigenous life ways, and so on. So there

need not be just one national curriculum. That's something that the standards tried desperately to avoid. We didn't want to do that at all.

With the specialized elective program we need as many specialists as possible representing expertise in all the roles. Each specialist prepared in a teacher education program concentrating on that specialization, a concentration equal in every way to the thoroughness that we have so magnificently developed to prepare performance directors. Every one of the roles deserves the same. Think of the thirteen music teachers in the high school that I showed you, all of them, with the single exception of whoever taught the theory course, teaching some aspect or other of performance. Surely those thirteen teachers could offer a more balanced program of specializations representing a broad, rich spectrum of musical specializations. I don't know if you need thirteen separate teachers each one teaching a different role. I think people can teach several different roles, including performance, if they've been educated to do that. Certainly among thirteen music teachers, even among five or six, even among two, we can represent more roles than are represented now for specialized choices, that is for elective choices. That would please me greatly because it would simply reach more kids with what they

think they are useful in their way to establish parameters in what one might expect of a third grader, and so on. I have no objection to that. But they don't allow us to offer the particular help for each individual that each individual needs.

The second word is role-specific. (If you put in a little hyphen it becomes one word so I can get away with it.) Role-specific, so that we don't just assess "music" because that's too broad to be useful. We must assess how kids are doing in each and every role that they're engaged in. That's the only way for assessment to be authentic to what music consists of, and to what music education consists of. We can accomplish that. We have to pay more attention to it and get the kind of help we need from assessment experts and research experts who work toward giving us the expertise we need. All our assessments need to be authentic in their being genuinely musical, contextual in the student's life, holistic, expressive, creative, all the things that make musical learning valuable.

A word about research. We need lots of research to help us do what we want to do in developing a meaningful musical curriculum. We will never get it with uncoordinated single-shot research studies. We just simply won't get it that way. We never have gotten it with that kind of research, and we will never get it so long as our research is as uncoordinated as it has always been.

We also need to have longitudinal studies. Single-snapshot studies are simply not sufficient and it's about time we realize that. We need to have role-specific research and we have to have research focused on individual learning. That is, research bearing on how individuals learn and how different individuals learn differently, and how to find out how to provide intensely individualized learning experiences. We have very little work on that, not only in music, but in all of

education. It's about time we start getting real about doing the research that will begin to get us somewhere.

One more thing I want to say. What I think is really essential for us to address is the topic of barriers to change. What I



their stomach goes up and down every time  
they take a breath and if they decide they  
want to cry for a few hours they do that with



questions; questions to which I do not necessarily have an answer. However, to build a little bit on what both Bennett and John have said so eloquently, Bennett referred to music curricula that follow tradition and break tradition. And I suggest that we're in a marvelous situation if we can have the courage to seize the moment, to *make* tradition. So ... we can actually craft something, we can generate something that we need and is needed by our communities. And in part, the following musings, might suggest ways in which we can make a tradition.



First of all, I have been struck by the language we use when talking about music education: if you like, the metaphors that underpin our discourse.

Why do we use these and what do they tell us? For example (and some of these metaphors have been appearing in a number of the presentations), we have laboratories: jazz laboratories, at least on the first day, and learning laboratories thrown in there somewhere. And I was thinking, "*laboratories*": the underlying metaphor derives from science. It locates learning in an environment of experiment and empirical testing.

What about "*learning studios*"? Here the underlying metaphor is that of the artist.

And a studio is an environment that locates learning in a place of experimentation, of creativity, of elaboration, of valuing, of judgment and creation. And we are artists after all.

Some of the other words that have struck me are "instruction." Thinking of instruction, my mind immediately goes to my recent experience of buying a very new sound system, a marvelous sound system. It was one of those ones with 953 instructions of how to put it together. And being a bit of a problem-solver, I, of course, ignored them immediately. And I started piecing bits and pieces together. I almost found my way through the whole thing, with some creative shortcuts, which I'm sure the writers of the instructions could have benefited from. "Instructions" to me is a list of stuff that you get through with a sequence, and it doesn't quite have the creativity that I would like us to search for in developing education.

A continuing argument, I should say conversation, that I have with my colleagues in faculties of education around Australia is related to the metaphors we use to talk about our work. We used to talk about teacher education, we now talk about teacher training. And for me, training has a certain meaning: we train penguins, we train dogs, and we train parrots to speak. Is training actually the underlying metaphor that we want in our profession? To me it is interesting to note that we've all spoken about music education and we've all described teachers in schools as music educators. Yet, we've described ourselves as teacher trainers and there is a real disjunct here, a really interesting disjunct in the way that we think about ourselves.

So, thinking on that it's important to remember that our language shapes us as we shape our language, and it might be worthwhile sitting back and reflecting on the language that we use ourselves. And perhaps that's one of the first steps of change: to

change some of the metaphors by which we  
live and think in our profession.