

By Alfred S. Townsend

# Driving MUSIC Education:

## WHO'S AT THE WHEEL?

For teachers on all levels, paying more attention to the concept of quality can help move classes in the right direction

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, we've all been influenced by exponential technological growth, a market-driven culture, and test-centered education. Are these factors now driving our profession? Who's at the wheel of music education?

The correct answer to this question ought to be "High-quality teachers." They're the ones who should be driving music education, not the market, not the media, not the paperwork. More than ever, we need teachers who not only are masters of content and craft but are also committed to placing *quality* at the center of every aspect of teaching and learning. By concentrating on quality, program advocacy will be strengthened, students will gain blue-chip experiences that will last beyond their school years, and these students will be better equipped to make decisions about what's important in life and learning because they will have been provided with standards of excellence.

The central concept of high-quality teaching can be linked to six key areas of instruction:

- Content
- Creativity
- Communication
- Comprehension
- Connections
- Character

In the model shown in Figure 1 (see pg. 32), quality functions as the core of

learning and drives the components surrounding it. Each of the components interacts with the others to create a dynamic foundation and driving force for the entire music program.

How can quality influence each of these six areas? Here are some ideas (see the sidebar on pg. 32 for resources in each area).

► **CONTENT** Effective teachers in subject areas such as English and the visual arts constantly strive to expose students to first-rate content through study of the monuments of literature and art and by helping students analyze these creations. Music teachers also have an obligation to the profession and the growth of each student to provide the highest quality literature for performance and listening experiences. When selecting music, ask yourself, "Does this literature have acknowledged artistic merit? Or is it just a product of slick promotion?" In addition, for students to be meaningfully engaged in today's global society, content should include frequent listening experiences and performance of high-quality musics from a range of cultures. By starting with quality of content, you'll provide your students with a journey well worth their efforts.



► **CREATIVITY** You can increase the creative quality of your programs by expanding learning experiences in composition and improvisation. You can *dramatically* increase the creative quality of composition and improvisation by providing sequential instruction throughout the grade levels. Although time allotments are shrinking, try to regularly devote small amounts of time to these areas throughout K–12 general music and performance ensemble settings. High-quality music instruction in composition and improvisation will help drive music education if you view them as essential

components of K–12 creativity, not just as specialty enhancements.

► **COMMUNICATION** Many music programs have booster clubs, newsletters, and Web sites that disseminate information and provide support through fundraising and social events. Why not take the next step and use these built-in mechanisms to foster communication that has real educational substance? Using these structures, you can effectively integrate student study with parent learning. By educating parents, you'll create a powerful source of advocacy for your program,

because parents will participate intimately and consistently as learners together with their children.

Involving parents in learning with their children could be accomplished by distributing a quarterly information packet outlining the concepts and skills students will be studying in music class and performing ensembles, along with suggested listening and other resources. The packet could also include short, self-scored quizzes for parents to take with their children in a spirit of friendly competition. In addition, it could feature sections such as “Beyond the Melody: What to Listen for at Our Concerts” and “How to Practice Your Instrument,” or musical games for the home tied to classroom study and Internet resources for enrichment. You could even provide certificates of achievement as the parent and student complete sections of these home packets.

As with all areas of communication, effective bonds between school and home will be forged if you provide information early and often, and if communication is a two-way street. Parent and student feedback are essential to program growth. Conducting surveys at the beginning and end of each school year encourages feedback, providing parents and students with the opportunity to comment on any and all areas of the program. High-quality communication will occur if you strive to move beyond mere public relations and invite parents to take the musical journey along with you.

► **COMPREHENSION** How do you know if your students comprehend what you are teaching? Carefully design assessment strategies and link them to scoring guides that provide students, parents, and school officials with specific reasons for your evaluation of student achievement. The use of such assessments will help identify areas for improvement, which could raise achievement levels and engender positive student growth. The information obtained from using these assessment tools will gain meaning if used to modify curriculum to align with national and state standards, match instruction to student abilities, and more effectively address the needs of a diverse student body and community expectations.

The quality of comprehension can be deepened by consistently checking for understanding and by encouraging students to discuss what they are doing. This immediate student feedback will rein-

force learning, keep students on task, and help them gain ownership of what they are studying. Assessment approaches need not be complex and time-consuming; they just have to provide parents and students with timely and clearly articulated reasons for the grades given.

By providing parents and students with clear expectations for each achievement level, giving students the necessary tools for meeting these expectations, and using assessments to effect program change, teachers lay the groundwork for authentic quality in comprehension.

► **CONNECTIONS** Connections between concepts can grow if we lift our eyes above mere skills development within our own specialty area and look toward building on each other's successes. Your programs will surely benefit if students experience the study of concepts and skills that are interconnected and in line with the National Standards for Music Education. Consider the heightened quality of learning if your study of performance literature were linked to concepts studied in other subject areas, including general music. While this approach takes cooperation and effort, the potential for a vastly stronger music program is worth it.

You can deepen your students' education by connecting to the cultures in your community. Meaningful integration of study with a range of world musics and cultures also enhances connections. However, meaningful integration doesn't mean just setting a familiar tune to a salsa beat, but rather linking cultural study with performances of world musics that strive for authenticity. A good place to start is with the cultures represented by your students.

One band director connected his stu-

dents with a range of cultures by using the theme "Around the World in 180 Days." With the Internet, he discovered that it was easy to connect with composers from around the world, who were willing to provide recordings and compositions for his use. Connecting all components of the K-12 curriculum with each other and with world culture can provide students with superb educational and artistic experiences that will enrich their lives and carry on beyond their school years.

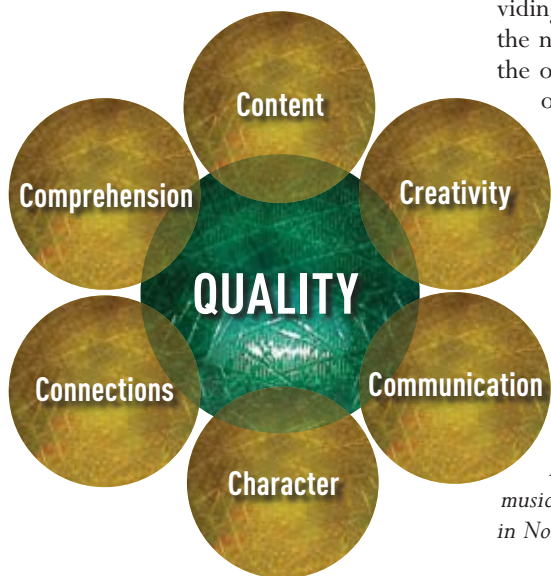
► **CHARACTER** This component should permeate all the others, for without character, we produce self-absorbed students disengaged from society. Infuse your teaching with responsibility, respect, leadership, cooperation, compassion, integrity, loyalty, and service. Your music program will benefit in the long run from students who will contribute positively as artist-citizens of a global society. To help your students develop character,

- Make it clear through all your words and deeds that character counts and that their commitment to excellence in this area is expected and appreciated.
- Never ask your students to work harder on their character than you are willing to work on your own.
- Consistently create a culture of character in which everyone always treats each other with respect and dignity.

The field of music education is tailor-made to build character. After all, as music teachers, you're dealing with a central aspect of the human spirit. Certainly, quality of character should be an essential component to consider when developing aesthetic experiences for your students that lift them beyond the ordinary.

Teachers who are committed to providing comprehensive programs to meet the needs of a complex world should be the ones driving music education. To do otherwise would invite the market and other external forces to take the wheel. Unless you are content to allow music education to ride in the back seat, you must become an expert driver of quality. Only then will you and your students be able to arrive at a meaningful destination of depth, discernment, and fulfillment. 🎵

**Alfred S. Townsend** is the F. Ludwig Diehn associate professor of instrumental music education at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia.



# Quality Resources

## Content

**Paul E. Rosene**, "10 Tips for Discovering High-Quality Music for Your Band or Orchestra," *Teaching Music*, April 2004.

**Consortium of National Arts Education Associations**, *What Every Young American Should Know and Be Able to Do in the Arts*. MENC, 1994.

## Creativity

**Jeremy Beck**, "Discovering the Composer Within," *Teaching Music*, February 2001.

**Maud Hickey**, *Why and How to Teach Music Composition: A New Horizon for Music Education*. MENC, 2003.

## Communication

**Tony Bancroft**, *Growing Your Musician: A Practical Guide for Band and Orchestra Parents*. MENC, 2004.

**Frank L. Battisti**, "Teaching Music: The Leadership Component," *Music Educators Journal*, May 1999.

**David Circle**, "A Vision—Community," *Teaching Music*, October 2004.

## Comprehension

**Spotlight on Assessment in Music Education**, selected articles from state MEA journals, MENC, 2001.

**Patricia Chiodo**, "Assessing a Cast of Thousands," *Music Educators Journal*, May 2001.

## Connections

**Carlos R. Abril**, "Music that Represents Culture: Selecting Music with Integrity," *Music Educators Journal*, September 2006.

**Patricia Shehan Campbell, ed.**, *Music in Cultural Context*. MENC, 1996.

## Character

**Frank Abrahams and Paul D. Head**, *Case Studies in Music Education*, 2nd edition. GIA Publications, 2005.

**Thomas Lickona**, *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility*. Bantam Books, 1991.

*Music Makes the Difference: Programs and Partnerships*. MENC, 1999.