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Toward a Multiple Mentoring Model in Music Education

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Abstract

Literature supports the importance of mentoring relationships in making meaningful contributions to novice teacher induction, and that especially important in the relationship is matching mentor/mentee by subject and grade level and in close proximity. The physical location of mentors to mentees and their availability impacts the relationship. Proximity is necessary to view the mentor as accessible and provide opportunities for interactions during the school day.

In music education, matching mentor/mentee by subject and grade level and in close proximity can be challenging. Because of music's specialization, music teachers are often the only one in their building. I previously examined two music teacher mentor/mentee relationships within one state-wide novice teacher induction program and found that while these pairs were matched by subject and grade level, challenges of time and proximity were evident.

The purpose of this paper is to explore a multiple mentoring model in music education; how mentoring could be expanded beyond a one-to-one relationship to a broader, more collaborative and community-based approach that includes multiple mentors at the school building and district level with a variety of expertise in teaching and subject content area. This model will allow multiple relationships to form to provide novice teachers a support system including a variety of people in close and distant proximity. This model will build off Jacobs' (2008) model for the effective mentoring of music educators, and while it will focus on music, it can be adapted to fit all subjects.

Content

Mentoring is an essential part of novice teacher induction and development. The support and guidance provided help novices grow professionally and effectively contribute to the profession (Daresh, 2003). Mentoring benefits mentees, mentors, and school districts. In addition to professional support, mentees benefit from emotional support, increased job satisfaction, improved confidence, greater effectiveness working with students with various needs and abilities, improved problem solving, and a sense of belonging (Boreen, Johnson, Niday, & Potts, 2009; Daresh, 2003). Mentors learn through self-reflection, and gain new ideas, perspectives, teaching styles, and strategies from mentees, while becoming more knowledgeable about novice teachers' needs. Collaborating with mentees increases mentors' confidence in their own teaching, improves relationships with students and colleagues, helps self-identify strengths and priorities, and solidifies individual teacher identity (Hobson et al., 2009). Mentoring relationships foster a climate of support that extends across the district, helping create a more capable, collegial, and collaborative school where attitudes of life-long learning are created (Daresh, 2003; Hobson et al., 2009). Teachers show higher levels of job satisfaction and motivation when mentoring programs are in place. This leads to greater productivity (Daresh, 2003).

Previously, I examined two music teacher mentor/mentee relationships within the context of Connecticut's state-wide novice teacher induction program, Teacher Education and Mentoring Program (TEAM), a two-year induction program for beginning teachers that includes mentoring and professional development (Weimer, 2017). The purpose of this study was to examine how participants described their relationship, what was meaningful in the relationship, and how the relationship impacted each individual's professional growth and development.

Both mentor/mentee pairs described their overall relationship in a very positive light. However, findings revealed that time and proximity were challenges in these relationships. Finding a consistent time to meet and

sufficient time for teaching observations was difficult. Teaching at separate schools and having busy schedules limited time and availability. Proximity was an additional challenge in each relationship as neither pair taught in the same school as each other. Mentor/mentee pairs teaching in close proximity allow frequent contact and more time for interactions. A mentor with a classroom proximal to the mentee's can frequently stop in, providing additional support (Zuckerman, 1999). Time to interact is compromised when mentor/mentee pairs are not in the same building and able to meet as often (Wildman, Magliaro, Niles, & Niles, 1992). Mentoring is most effective when mentors and mentees are in the same school, have frequent contact, and share some of the same students (Mathur, Gehrhe, & Kim, 2012).

Weimer's (2017) findings also revealed that being matched by subject and grade level (in those two cases, elementary general music) was beneficial to both mentors and mentees. One mentor felt it was important for new teachers to feel like there is someone who understands their unique subject area. The other recalled previous mentoring relationships with music teacher mentees who were not elementary general music teachers, and the challenges of teaching different subject areas. The two mentees in the study indicated the repertoire and teaching materials shared by their mentors greatly impacted their professional growth. This was possible because of the mentors' accumulation of materials in their years of experience as elementary general music teachers. In these two cases, matching the mentor/mentee by subject area and grade level was beneficial to the relationship. Having a mentor who teaches the same subject is an asset, and is supported in the literature (Carter & Francis, 2001; Mathur, Gehrhe, & Kim, 2012; Wildman, Magliaro, Niles, & Niles, 1992). Conway (2003) found music teacher mentees paired with a music teacher mentor, rather than a mentor who taught a different subject, perceived the relationship as valuable.

Matching mentor and mentee by grade level and subject area is challenging. In music, teachers are typically certified to teach all aspects of K-12 music, but often have a specialized content area (i.e. band, choral, general, strings). Many teachers teach more than one content area (band and general music, for example). In rural areas, there may be only one music teacher for all of K-12 music. In music, matching by subject area is more specific—matching by exact content area.

Additionally, findings revealed a sense of isolation with each participant. The two mentees felt isolated being the only music teacher in their school, which is not uncommon among music teachers. Because music teachers are often the only one in their building, and/or travel between schools, they have few opportunities to communicate with and receive support from music colleagues, leaving them vulnerable to isolation (Krueger, 1999). This can influence job satisfaction and their desire to continue teaching music (Krueger, 2000). Sindberg and Lipscomb (2005) found that professional isolation had a negative effect on music teachers' teaching.

Novice teachers need to feel part of the teaching community (DeLorenzo, 1992). Previous studies have found that music teachers desire to connect with other music teachers (Ballentyne, 2007; Davidson & Dwyer, 2014; Sindberg, 2011). Mentoring relationships can reduce feelings of isolation among music teachers (Krueger, 1999), which was true in Weimer's (2017) study. The two mentees found comfort knowing a mentor was there for support and encouragement, even if not physically. They felt less isolated just knowing that they were not alone; help was available.

Art and physical education teachers also experience isolation. Music, art, and physical education are commonly referred to as "special" area subjects, particularly in an elementary school, with only one teacher for each subject per building. Isolation for art educators was described by Gates (2010) as an archipelago—a group of islands within an area of water. Within the archipelago, each island is unique, representing the physical isolation of art (and music and physical education) educators. However, when each island is considered part of the group, the archipelago, isolation is downplayed. Building bridges between islands provides opportunities for music teachers to collaborate and reduce feelings of isolation. The idea of music teachers being on an island in isolation and the need to build bridges of collaborative networks and expand professional development opportunities was discussed by Weimer and Thornton (2014).

Weimer's (2017) results led to consideration of a multiple model of mentoring that would be suitable for music teachers. Asking participants to reflect on previous perceptions of mentoring, Conway (2015) found that music teachers need several types of mentors. One respondent suggested a building level mentor and a music teacher. A multiple mentor model could fit within an already existing state or local district program. One that would provide the same benefits of mentoring, including reducing feelings of isolation, and combat the challenges of matching by grade level and subject and in proximity. Additionally, one that could draw upon the strengths and expertise of individual teachers within a district or between neighboring districts to foster a sense of purpose, community, and collaboration.

Jacobs' Model of Effective Mentoring

Some state-wide models of mentoring and induction for novice teachers exist. However, Jacobs' (2008) was specifically designed for music educators, created due to a lack of consistency, variable effectiveness, and level of commitment from school, district, and state administrators in the types of mentoring programs throughout the United States. His pyramid-shaped model contains nine components; state government design and funding; professional organization support; mentor selection; mentor compensation; mentor training; mentor and mentee release time; a multi-year concept; and certification requirement.

An effective mentoring model begins largely at the state level. Not all states have mentoring programs; those that do vary greatly in design and implementation (Jacobs, 2008). Having a state government design and funding of the program could provide consistency in the structure and content of programs. Funding for the other components of the program would need to be provided by the state.

Support from professional organizations was the second layer in Jacobs' model. The funding necessary for the first layer would require dedication and commitment to mentoring from state lawmakers, therefore increasing the responsibility of professional organizations to affect lawmakers at various levels. Professional organizations must also help implement state-designed programs. State and national music organizations must promote the benefits of formal mentoring to policy makers to increase awareness. Professional organizations have the opportunity to research and promote results of research necessary to shed light on the importance of mentoring programs.

Jacobs (2008) divided the mentor level of the model into three parts—selection, training, and compensation. Mentors' effectiveness can be increased by careful and thoughtful selection and matched by subject and grade level. Novice teachers are adult learners, which require a different set of skills and knowledge than educating young students. Many music teachers are willing to become mentors but are not properly prepared to take on that role. Effective training allows opportunities for mentors to become excellent resources for novice teachers. Because mentoring requires additional time, compensation is necessary as a way to recognize the mentor's time and effort. Other forms of compensation such as tuition waivers for graduate work, a laptop or reserved parking space, or professional development credit can be considered if a stipend cannot be provided.

The top two layers of Jacobs' model are mentor and mentee release time and a multi-year concept. Observation is very important—for the mentee to observe the mentor's classroom procedures, and the mentor to understand the context of the mentee's teaching situation. Expanding the model beyond one year facilitates life-long learning. It allows mentee's the opportunity to go beyond the first year of becoming familiar with students, procedures, and the school community, and develop a deeper understanding of teaching as they refine their skills. Jacobs stated that while it is possible for programs to include only certain components of the model, parts working independently would not be as effective.

A Multiple Mentor Model

Multiple models of mentoring have been discussed in previous literature (Baugh & Scandura, 1999; Burlew, 1991; Halverson et al., 2015). de Janasz and Sullivan (2004) argued that it was unlikely for one person to fulfil the mentoring role, and suggested that developing relationships with multiple mentors can assist mentees in various career aspects.

This multiple mentor model draws from both Jacobs' (2008) model and Gates' (2010) metaphor of an archipelago. This model is envisioned existing within a designed state or district-wide mentoring program in place; a multi-year one designed with clear goals and expectations for the program and participants. A program properly funded, where mentors are properly selected, trained, and compensated, and where mentors and mentees are provided release time to meet, observe each other teach, and interact.

This model brings music teachers together, from the isolated islands to the archipelago, building communities within, and even across, districts. However, it is designed to include non-music teachers as well. Every teacher has varied expertise and skills—technology, repertoire, parent communication, policy, assessment, programming, behavior specialists, modifying lessons to assist students with special needs, instrument technique, budgets, and inventory. Having multiple mentors work with a collective group of novice teachers provides opportunities for each mentor to put their specific skills and knowledge to work while the mentee benefits from communicating with a variety of people and getting specific questions on a variety of topics answered. At least one mentor would be in the same building as the mentee, the others would be in the district or across districts in smaller or more rural areas. Because music teachers are often the only one in their school, non-music teachers could serve as building level mentors—teachers who understand working with specific students of various abilities and needs, as well school policies and procedures, and the culture and climate of the school and community. This would also combat the issue of proximity, having a mentor in the same school, allowing opportunities to interact during the day.

While more mentors may be better, there can also be negative effects. As the number of mentors increases, so does the potential for conflicting advice, which may leave mentees confused (Baugh & Scandura, 2004). Care must be given that mentors do not impose conflicting demands (Baugh & Scandura, 2004). This does not mean that mentors should not offer various viewpoints based on their experiences and expertise; doing so provides mentees multiple perspectives to consider when working to improve their teaching. Mentors must allow the mentee to process the various perspectives provided and implement strategies and suggestions that will best fit their situation. Other negative effects of having multiple mentors may be mentees finding it difficult to manage multiple relationships, and an increased chance of having a poor mentoring relationship (de Janasz & Sullivan, 2004).

To help alleviate the potential for conflicting views and managing multiple relationships, novice teachers in this model are assigned a “coordinator” mentor rather than multiple “assigned” mentors. Depending on the number of mentors and mentees, this number would vary. If there are more mentors than are needed to be coordinators, the positions could rotate through all mentors every year or two, to allow shared coordinating responsibilities. The coordinator is the one who establishes a relationship initially and can help the mentee develop relationships with other mentors within the network. Each coordinator would be assigned one or two mentees, and be responsible for reaching out to before the beginning of the school year to introduce the mentee to the program and themselves as a point of contact. The coordinator would build a relationship with the mentee, and as specific issues, questions, or challenges arise, would put the mentee in contact with the person best suited to work with the mentee. The coordinator would also help the mentee develop relationships with other mentees within the network.

All mentors must be properly selected and prepared to take on their role through a relevant and carefully crafted training program. Additionally, mentors would be provided ongoing development throughout the school year and opportunities to share ideas, successes, and challenges. The focus must remain on providing the mentee the best possible support and professional development opportunities. Mentors within a designed program who are properly prepared to take on their role and provided ongoing development opportunities will be better equipped to understand their role within the network of mentors, communicate, and work collaboratively to support mentees without overwhelming them. Baugh and Scandura (2004) recommended having a matching process to connect mentees to other mentors with the skills and resources needed to be most successful. For example, if the mentee is an ensemble director unsure of what to program for a concert,

a mentor with expertise in repertoire selection and concert programming could assist. Another mentor with knowledge and skills in technology could help a mentee incorporate technology into the music classroom. de Janasz and Sullivan (2004) supported relationships with mentors who could assist mentees in developing a specific skill or competency. To assist the mentee with finding who may best help with a certain topic, mentor biographies and specialties could be listed on a mentoring page as part of the district website.

In this model, the mentors and mentees form the archipelago, aligning with Gates' (2010) idea of "allowing diversity and intersectionality within a collective identity" (p. 7). The network continues to grow. As mentees develop into experienced teachers, their role in the network shifts; they become mentors with their own areas of expertise.

Weimer and Thornton (2014) stated the "network for music teachers must be broadened" (p. 8). While still in its early stages, this model can provide a broadened network. Further, it addresses the challenges of time, subject area, and proximity. Having multiple mentors allows flexibility in scheduling; when a mentor and mentee are finding it difficult to meet due to conflicting schedules, other mentors are available. It also allows music teacher mentees to have someone in their specific content area available to share strategies and ideas based on their experiences and expertise. Having one of the mentors in the same building means someone is always in proximity, to check in and have a quick conversation with during the school day. While less is often more, in the case of mentoring novice music teachers, providing more mentors and opportunities for professional development would be an advantage.

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