

IS Music

Self Study Part 2

- teacher candidates will engage in a series of descriptive, reflective, and narrative writing opportunities throughout the course
- these writings will provide data for analysis that will enable teacher candidates to develop a deeper understanding of self as musician, learner, and teacher

Summary

- Choose 3-4 pieces of writing/journaling that are significant to who you are as a musician and/or learner and/or teacher
- Refine and hone each piece of writing until it richly communicates to the reader what you have noticed as significant within the piece
- Analyze each piece, identifying and describing themes that you notice emerging and that are significant to you. (A theme is an element of the piece that stands out and warrants further attention, such as an aspect of teaching or learning.) What do these themes tell you about who you are? About what you value? About what you know about teaching/learning/music?
- The final section of the assignment will describe personal implications for you as an educator – connections between the themes you have discovered and what you plan to do in your own teaching.
- Bring in some literature! In your analysis sections or final ‘implications’ section, connect to the literature from this course or elsewhere (bring in quotations, make reference to authors’ ideas, etc.)
- The Self Study should be submitted as a *paper with the following structure:

Piece 1 • Analysis • Piece 2 • Analysis • Piece 3 • Analysis • Implications for Teaching

*OR...

(video, powerpoint, website, play, collage of images, etc.)

Possibilities for ‘pieces’:

- a meaningful music moment
- a teacher that worked for me
- when education failed me
- when I failed as an educator
- being a student again...how did it feel?
- maxims to teach by (like R. Murray Shafer’s)
- significant experiences as a learner/listener/music maker
- describing personally significant pieces of music and why they are important to me
- responses to readings
- responses to class experiences
- journal entries
- during practicum:
 - something that made me feel like a teacher
 - something I learned about myself
 - something that excited or disheartened me
 - an issue that arose
 - the music program at my host school, and how it matches my vision of a great program
 - realizations, epiphanies, questions, frustrations, victories, defeats

Self Study Assessment Rubric

Professional Presentation and Communication: Is everything that you need in place (at least 3-4 narrative pieces, with analyses for each, and implications for your teaching)? Have you connected to the literature from this course or elsewhere (e.g. textbook)? Is the writing/presentation clear, error-free, and carefully and thoughtfully presented?

A (Excellent)

B (Very Good)

C (Adequate)

D (Marginal)

Richness of Narrative Pieces: Are the pieces a) well chosen and b) thoroughly refined and honed so that they will richly communicate to the reader what *you* have noticed as significant to you as a musician/learner/teacher? *Please be aware: the process of richly telling your stories (for example by adding descriptive detail) allows you to come closer to them, providing you a better chance of understanding the knowledge embedded within.*

A (Excellent)

B (Very Good)

C (Adequate)

D (Marginal)

Analysis: Have you shown thoroughness and thoughtfulness delving into the meanings that the narrative pieces hold? *What do the pieces illuminate about you and your understanding of music, teaching, and learning?*

A (Excellent)

B (Very Good)

C (Adequate)

D (Marginal)

Implications for Teaching: How thoroughly have you pondered the implications for your own teaching, and explained how the knowledge developed here might inform your teaching? Have you provided specific examples of what you might do and say and put in place when you teach?

A (Excellent)

B (Very Good)

C (Adequate)

D (Marginal)

Self Study Exemplar: *Voices*

Piece 1: I found playing clarinet in my high school concert band a profoundly un-musical experience. It quickly became apparent that taking initiative with any dynamic or rhythmic nuance was pointless; my voice was drowned out by the masses. I once soundlessly played an entire concert with a broken clarinet. We were on tour, and when I unpacked my clarinet before the performance I noticed that it was badly cracked. I showed the director, who said there was nothing to be done – I would just have to pretend to play. By the end of the concert I had come to a rather disturbing realization: the fact that I was not actually playing made no difference to the band’s performance at all.

Analysis: This realization was utterly disheartening. I felt as though there was simply no point in playing in the band – I felt as though my contribution was meaningless and irrelevant. While the school music program continued to provide me with social opportunities and high grades, I learned to abandon any expectations of aesthetic enrichment or opportunities for meaningful artistic contributions. As a musical performer, *my voice was silenced*.

Piece 2: One day, while in grade twelve, I arrived in the music room early, and caught the tail end of a grade-thirteen music class. A student was sharing her own music; a Sting song, *Russians*, was playing on the classroom stereo. I could hardly believe it. I had never had the opportunity to share *my* music. I was very jealous. I thought it was simply marvelous that this student was permitted to bring part of herself – her own identity – into the classroom. I could hardly wait until I was in grade thirteen. Unfortunately, the following year, when I was in my final high school year, my teacher decided to axe that aspect of his program.

Analysis: I felt jealous. I felt ripped-off. During my high school music classes I was never invited to share music that I listened to. How hugely important is a teenager’s personal music library? How important as a tool for discovering and sharing self-identity? How simple but wonderful to have that music legitimized and valued through a few minutes of class airtime? Without inviting us to bring in and share our own listening choices our teachers ensured the chasm between school music and student music (what many of us referred to as ‘real’ music) remained deep, wide, and unbridgeable. It was as though my music – my listening – simply did not count; it had no value in the school music context. As a listener and sharer of music, *my voice was silenced*.

Piece 3: My high school music program offered me very little opportunity to exercise creativity or explore self-expression. I played clarinet and sometimes saxophone in a performance-driven band program. I recall once taking advantage of some class downtime to teach my stand partner a duet I had composed. She played the top part, I played the bottom, and it really sounded pretty good. Ms. Drew smiled politely, tapped the stand with her baton, and asked us to take out *Jingle Bell Rock*.

Analysis: At no point during my high school music classes was I encouraged to even *attempt* a musical composition. This form of creative self-expression was simply alien to my high school music teachers – perhaps it never occurred to them to encourage such an activity. As a result, I always felt a certain detachment from music class. I felt alienated. Certainly I was there, emitting sounds from the end of my clarinet or saxophone, but I was only partly there. The sounds I emitted were representative of the thoughts and ideas of Sousa, Holst, or whichever composer we happened to be playing. Their music did not work for me as a vehicle to express what *I* had to say. Those notes told the world very little about me. I wanted – I *needed* to send out my *own* music. But in my high school music program, as a composer, *my voice was silenced*.

To be fair, it is highly unlikely these teachers were aware that they were silencing my voice; at the time, I was not aware of it myself. I imagine their teaching choices were informed by their own understandings of what mattered in music class – an idiosyncratic amalgam of what they had experienced in their own music learning, tempered by what they had most valued and what they felt they were best at teaching, and then re-defined by the pressures of curriculum, community, administration, and colleagues. And I expect there were many in my classes for whom this program of music teaching and learning was just right. So how *can* a music educator provide opportunities for every voice to sing when there are so many unique voices in every class?

Implications for Teaching: In my own teaching, I will seek to encourage my students to explore and share their own, unique voices. They need to have rich and meaningful opportunities to play and sing, to listen and discuss, and to compose music. I will strive to provide opportunities for students to truly express *themselves* through music; that is how I will let the voices sing.

As identified in my first piece, a musician may find it difficult to find meaningful opportunities for self-expression when buried within a large ensemble. Shively writes, “With the teacher-conductor transmitting musical decisions to the ensemble members and each ensemble member playing a specific role such as 3rd Clarinet or Alto 2, the purpose becomes re-creating the teacher’s musical ideas as quickly as possible without any real attention to individual musical growth” (2004, p. 181-2). In my own teaching, in addition to working within large ensembles, I will strive to create opportunities for my students to participate in solo, duet, and small ensemble music making. In such contexts they will have more evident opportunities to explore and experience meaningful musical decision-making, and the musical growth that results. Through increased personal opportunities for expressivity and ownership, each student’s own, distinct voice can be heard.

In my second piece, I described how disappointed I was not to be invited to bring the music that I enjoyed into the classroom. Jorgenson (2010) warns that music educators may come to feel “out of tune with what students long to learn” (p. 22). Inviting and welcoming student music into the classroom is a way to reconnect, powerfully, with something that matters to learners. I believe students deserve the chance to share – *within* school – the music that matters to them beyond school. It is an opportunity for teachers to listen to the voices that young musicians attach to, care about, and draw from to construct their own.

As highlighted in my third piece, I passionately believe students deserve the opportunity to learn the skill of self-expression through composing. Music education programs in North America habitually claim to provide rich and meaningful opportunities for students to exercise creativity. However, the assumption that *any* musical activity will necessarily foster creativity is false.

In teaching music students to be creative, most schools are derelict . . . As arts educators, we lay claim to creativity as one of the pillars of our musical educative endeavours. Yet music education, so strongly rooted in performance traditions, has resulted in the virtual absence of creative problem solving processes in its teaching and learning practices. (Willingham, 2002, p. xvii)

It is deeply regrettable that students are denied creative opportunities in school music programs. Creative problem solving involves the student as an individual, making decisions uniquely representative of her or himself. Composing is a particularly rich vehicle for students to explore and share their own, unique voices. To help a student learn to compose is to acquaint that student with magnificent possibilities for personal expression.

Students deserve to hear their own voices above the tumult of the school music environment. “They need to feel a sense of ownership of what happens in the classroom. They need to believe that their personal ideas are valued” (Wiggins, 2002, p. 79). It is high time for music education to emancipate the individual – by enabling individual voices to be heard and valued in performance, by inviting students’ own music into classrooms, and by honouring and encouraging students’ genuine creative expression through composing opportunities. Students deserve to have the opportunity to represent their own unique selves through music.

References

- Jorgenson, E.R. (2010). School music education and change. *Music Educators Journal*, 96(4), 21-27.
- Shively, J. (2004). In the face of tradition: Questioning the roles of conductors and ensemble members in school bands, choirs, and orchestras. In L. Bartel (Ed.), *Questioning the paradigm*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Music Educators Association.
- Wiggins, J. (2002). Creative process as meaningful music thinking. In Sullivan, T. and L. Willingham, (Eds.), *Creativity and music education* (pp. 78-88). Edmonton, Alberta: Canadian Music Educators’ Association.
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