

The Impact of the Standards on Curriculum, Music Education, and Teacher Burn-Out
by Linda Lanier-Keosaian
Music Curriculum Development
Dr. David Elliott, Professor

Maybe it was the throbbing in my finger as I held it in the hot water; maybe it was the fact that I had been awakened in the middle of the night with the pain; but flipping through the pages of the MEJ (Music Educators Journal, May 2005) was not helping. Now, in addition to being in pain, I was also *angry*. The more I read, the clearer it became that the whole Journal had been converted to an advocacy for the *Standards*. The letters to the editor contained two about the recommended changes (dilution) in music teacher preparation, away from performance. Having just read Bennett Riemer's book, *A Philosophy of Music Education: Advancing the Vision* (2003), I recognized immediately what that meant.

One of the articles was written in support of Standard No. 8, Understanding Relationships between Music, the Other Arts, and Disciplines Outside the Arts. The article tells us that "this instructional approach can create bridges between musical works selected for your band, other disciplines, and the world outside the classroom." (Burrack and McKenzie, 2005) Is that really a valid teaching activity for the band? Do the history and math teachers do that with music? Do they feel it is necessary to demonstrate the parallels and connections between their fields and music? I can remember some months ago trying to get an English teacher to collaborate with me on a project which would investigate the process of setting poetry to music. We were singing a setting of a poem by e.e. cummings and it would have been interesting, I felt, to have a literary perspective on the music embodied in the poetry itself, the word accents, the rhythm of the words. For him, it was the wrong time! His class would not get to poetry until the end of the year and his chairperson wanted him to stay "in sequence.!" It could not have been terribly important or engaging to him or to his

supervisor to discover how a musician might even change or enhance the meaning of the poetry by setting it to music in a particular way. So much for mutual respect and curiosity, and common understanding of the value of music to the human being. So much, also, for his wanting to relate his content area to that of music as a valid educational experience.

On the other hand, I had a very positive experience working with a French teacher on a project involving her French class and one of my choir classes. We spent three class days explaining and exploring Impressionistic Art and music. We watched Debussy's ballet, *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, then listened to the music separate from the visual effect. We sang the major scale and the round, "Frere Jacques" so that I could demonstrate a *tonal center*. We then sang the whole tone scale, the pentatonic scale, and listened to two of Debussy's piano preludes using the whole tone and pentatonic scales prominently. On one of the days, we studied books of art works by Monet, Manet, Seurat, and Pissarro, then tried to create our own versions of their work with crayons and paper by using the dots, dashes, and short strokes we had observed in those paintings. We talked about the hazy effect of the painting style. We discovered the same kind of hazy, misty, hovering effect in Debussy's music and talked about how he achieved it. The students then did a project based on the experience, complete with reflections about their own feelings on viewing, then trying to re-create the art, and on listening to the music. The difference in the English teacher and the French teacher, is that she is a musician, a violist, and the English teacher is not. What I feel is missing from his life is direct and meaningful experience with making music. He had not experienced the thrill of discovering hidden meaning in the text because of the way in which music and text had been conjoined. Because he had never gone beyond the words, in the way that music can do for us, he did not understand the value for the human spirit of looking inside that experience in order to gain

understanding. The French teacher, on the other hand, appreciated the way I could work from the inside out in studying the music. She had a profound understanding of the meaning for her in experiencing the music and only needed some of my insights as a musician and theorist to construct the full picture. She regularly plays in an orchestra and a string quartet, both of which provide her with many opportunities to experience the "flow" experience described by Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi. (Elliott, 2005). This is an experience which balances our musicianship with appropriate challenge, resulting in enjoyment, self-growth, self-knowledge, and greater self-esteem. Perhaps what we need, instead of Standard No. 8, is to require all other "core content" area teachers to study an instrument, or sing in a choir, so that they can achieve a level of understanding compatible with a collaboration with musicians about music and any other discipline.

So what are these Standards and where did they come from? The original version of a congressional bill titled "Goals 2000: Educate American Act," stipulated required learning for all students in core subjects, but did not list the "arts" as a core subject. This is all part of a movement titled the "Educational Reform Movement," also called the Standards Movement. (Elliott 2005) As a result of the actions of MENC (Music Educators National Conference), the arts were added to the list of core subjects, along with languages, mathematics, science, etc. A task force, a small group at the top of MENC leadership, wrote the National Standards in Music, and then began a campaign of publicizing them for general use in all music classrooms. This was an old-fashioned top-down approach to curriculum changes, which was initiated by a few, without involvement of the membership. The teachers were then (are now) being inundated with material and training in teaching the Standards.

U.S. NATIONAL CONTENT STANDARDS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments.
4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines.
5. Reading and notating music.
6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.
7. Evaluating music and music performance.
8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.
9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

Bennett Reimer, in his *A Philosophy of Music Education: Advancing the Vision* (2003), saturates his writings with the importance of teaching the standards for the continuing acceptance of music as a core subject. When reading through the standards, I do not see anything wrong except the fact that so much is omitted. There is a great deal more that we teach than I see in that list. The danger is that our teaching might be limited to this list because our students will be tested for them. There is also the matter of reordering our priorities according to someone else's wishes. Reimer is adamant about moving emphasis in the classroom away from performance and onto listening. He says "singing and playing" are listed first in the Standards, not because they are essential or even the most important ones, but because they are the most familiar! This is a shocking statement from a musician, particularly in light of the recent brain research showing the importance of the early years for learning and building skills.

There is agreement that during the first decade of life a child typically has up to twice as much neural activity and connections as an adult. This means, of course, that children learn much faster than adults. The Critical Period, the Optimal Period, and the Window of Opportunity of learning are all in the early years.(Flohr and Hodges, 2002) In fact, in overall development, the brain appears to be more plastic and malleable during the first decade after birth than in adulthood.

Plasticity refers to the notion that the brain is very malleable, fluid, or “plastic” in the way in which it can adapt. It has been found in research that involvement with music may help keep the brain fluid, or more fluid, as opposed to no musical involvement throughout the human life span. (Flohr and Hodges, 2002) Given these findings, we should increase rather than decrease our efforts toward helping children to develop skills in singing and playing. Listening must be done in conjunction with making music. We learn to listen to ourselves first. As David Elliott says in *Music Matters* (1995), “Learning to listen critically, with strategic judgement, develops from listening for one’s own efforts to make music well. It grows by making practical musical choices, assessing the outcomes of one’s musical choices, testing alternative artistic strategies in musical problem solving, and developing personal accounts of these alternatives in relation to the artistic constraints of a musical practice.”

If I may be permitted a reflection on Reimer’s reordering emphasis away from performing, it is this: I think it has more to do with the fact that he gave up performing as a young man, due to a physical inability to play wind instruments without risking a collapsed lung. He seems not to have replaced the wind instruments with anything else and hence, has no experiential means of creating music. This had to have been a life-changing event for him. From a very young age, most of us create ways of living and coping that revolve around making time for practice and performance. When we are not practicing, we are planning for it: when we will practice, where we will begin, and what we will aim to accomplish. We choose colleges and universities that will give us the means to grow and help us take our places in the profession. We choose our friends and often our mates from those also heading for the profession of music. What happens when we are no longer a legitimate part of it as performers? When we can no longer share in the “flow” experience of making

music, or communicate in this way? The prospect of this happening to me is shattering. Yet I could not imagine trying to turn others away from experiencing the actual making of music simply because I could no longer do it myself. This is what I think Bennett Reimer is trying to do with his writings about the standards. What I read that night in the Music Educators Journal was chilling because it seems that he is succeeding in turning some of us in high places away from the very thing which defines us and gives us life: performing and a life spent in fulfilling ourselves, improving our techniques and expanding our repertoires. Listening cannot replace making music, and listening separate from making music will not prepare students to experience music deeply.

In that same issue of MEJ (May 2005, p. 11) is a letter from a college trumpet teacher who agrees with an article in the preceding month's issue: "I have felt for many years that music education majors need not be required to perform a solo recital, although I feel that they should have a number of semesters of applied instruction." Are his students such poor players that they cannot really do solo performances? If so, do we really want them to teach band? What is their frame of reference for fine playing if they do not aspire to solo or small ensemble literature? His next sentence is a *non sequitur*: "Learning to be a good musician starts with learning to play or sing really well." Yes, but how does one do that if not by studying and practicing very hard and, finally, performing?

As an undergraduate music student, I remember being surprised that after the freshman year, music education majors no longer took the basic music courses with the rest of us. Instead, they studied the various instruments for a semester, in addition to their own, they took methods courses, and they began teaching in local classrooms. My belief has long been that music pedagogy, methods, and certification should be an add-on to intense undergraduate study in music. I was happy to read

that there are many institutions which do just that. Will that change now that there is this shift away from emphasis on performing?

I contacted two college professors, Dr. Cathy Benedict from New York University, and Dr. Maredia Warren, from New Jersey City University, to find out if there have been changes in course offerings and course content as a result of the standards. Dr. Benedict says that she does not “teach to the standards” but makes students aware of them when they are preparing for interviews. She says that the New York City “blueprint” for the arts and music are of more concern to her. (E-mail message, April 28, 2005). Dr. Warren says that New Jersey has now adopted its own Core Curriculum Content Standards, and that the Music Education courses at New Jersey City University address both the state and the national standards. She says that her university holds accreditation from the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), and that they are held by standards which include and go beyond the state standards. Their curriculum is under review every six years by NASM. She feels that, in general, the standards for teaching are being elevated. Their students perform yearly on student recitals and are required to give either a joint recital or a full recital. (E-mail message, April 29, 2005).

Three major higher education organizations (The Association of American Universities, The American Council on Education and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities) have issued reports on teacher education. These reports were directed at institutional presidents, chancellors, and provosts, and emphasize the importance of placing teacher education at the center of the institutional agendas of colleges and universities. One of their arguments is that more attention needs to be paid to the important contribution to the education of teachers that is made by

subject matter faculty in the arts and sciences. “Research has convincingly shown that prospective teachers, including those who complete full academic majors, do not understand academic content well enough to explain things clearly to their pupils.” (McDiarmid, 1994, citation in Nierman, Zeichner/Hobbel, 2002). This seems to be the direction we are going to be moving in . It seems that there are those who feel that there has been too much emphasis on content area skills in music (conducting, analysis, applied lessons, music theory, and music history) and not enough emphasis on the pedagogical domains. Teacher education in music, with its past emphasis on content knowledge, seems to be substantially different from other teacher preparation programs in which methods, curriculum, psychology, and philosophy courses are the core of preprofessional preparation. This is because music really *is* different from other subjects. The standards movement has tried to superimpose upon music the same expectations we have of the other domains.

According to Nierman’s research, he found that Duquesne University has actually redesigned its undergraduate and graduate programs in music education based on the conceptual framework provided by the standards. (Niermann/Zeichner/Hobbel, 2002). As the National Music Standards are incorporated into the state standards (as in New Jersey), other schools may be expected to fall into line. The broadening of the content of music classes called for by the standards may mean a dilution overall of the experience of making music in the classroom. Rather, we are now to include in every lesson, in addition to performing and listening, composition, improvisation, and teaching across other disciplines. These latter areas are ones where many teachers confess a lack of confidence. (Niermann/Zeichner/Hobbel, 2002). Schools of music education can be expected to prioritize their studies for teachers in training to reflect their own state’s adoption of some form of the standards. In my view, if music teacher education becomes poorer in the *music* part of its

preparation, then we might as well have music education trade schools. This would be more honest than pretending that we are *educating* musicians and preparing them to teach.

Nierman lists some current challenges in preservice music teacher education:

1. Music and the “core curriculum.” In states where music is not designated as part of the “core curriculum,” that is, subject areas in which all students should demonstrate skills and knowledge before graduation, there has been difficulty in recruiting and retaining music educators. The teachers are worried about security in a profession that is viewed as expendable in times of financial crisis. In some of these states, Nebraska, for example, some educators have advocated “crosswalking” objectives in music and the arts to objectives in the other core subjects in which standards have been written. *The concept of ‘crosswalking’ refers to finding ways in which various learning activities can be used simultaneously (or cross-walked) to achieve objectives in two or more disciplines, for example, understanding form in music and form in geometry.* (Nierman/Zeichner/Hobbel, 2002). No research has been done to show how this affects student learning. Again, we see desperate moves to have music accepted as important the way geometry is important, instead of special in the way that music is special.
2. Redefinition in light of the National Arts Standards. Music education is being reorganized to train teachers who will be able to teach the standards. With emphasis away from performance skills for teachers, there will be far less musicianship in the classroom. The standards do not specify at what level they should be taught and, therefore, it is quite possible that poorly educated musicians will be teaching low-level versions of the standards.
3. Directives from professional accrediting agencies. Institutions are required to design programs based on an established knowledge base, that is, various skills and knowledge that teachers need to

be successful. NCATE is interested in outcomes and documentation. This applies to multicultural music and technology in particular.

4. Internationalization and technologicalization. This has to do with the changing demographics of our American society and the increased contact with people from around the world. The explosion in technology of all sorts speaks for itself. Reimer sees technology as the means to teach composition to students who cannot read music. (Reimer, 2003).

5. The “hidden curriculum” and the “null curriculum.” The hidden message is that teaching is a low-status profession; teachers as a professional group lack power; and teacher education course work and practica tend to communicate an inaccurate view of work in the “real” world, e.g. that the real purpose of music in the schools is to provide entertainment for the community. (Nierman/Zeichner/Hobbel, 2002).

My feeling is that a music teacher, in order to survive in an atmosphere like that described, needs not less, but more training, education, and experience in the rich and intensive study of music. We say again and again that we are educating children in music, not so that they can pass a test, but in order to give them the possibility of fuller lives, far into adulthood. Here are some more words of David Elliott:

Music is neither a score nor sounds organized to be expressive (because ‘talk’ can be defined this way, too). Music goes far beyond notes or spoken words. Music is a living presence inside the human being; music is something that happens when humanly made artistic sounds ‘meet’ or intersect with the mind-and body of a person who knows the experience of musical sound patterns from prior experiences of creating musical sounds. Music-makers dedicate themselves to learning all sorts of things about music in order to experience the self-fulfillment that comes from being able to express themselves personally, meaningfully and creatively in and through music. (Elliott, 2003)

What David Elliott has just described is a significant spiritual experience, different from talk or reading a book. “A living presence inside the human being” being evokes a religious phenomenon., yet it rings true. Not being a theologian, I cannot attest to the authenticity of this experience of music when compared with the spiritual dimension of religion. What I can say is that for those of us whose life and work has been music, and whose waking and sleeping, and all of the hours in between, is spent planning and carrying out music for ourselves and for everyone around us, there *is* a living presence inside the self that dominates our lives. It pervades our very existence and gives us purpose. It sounds selfish, and, indeed, it could be for some. There are those who condescend to every other music-maker as being merely laughable. There are those who seek the limelight constantly, who cannot bear to share recognition with others for fear of being compared unfavorably. These are the pathetic ones who are so insecure that working with them has become impossible. These poor people drive other musicians away. For them, music has become so remote that, instead of becoming a positive means of communication, music is wielded in bitterness and resentment against others, particularly other musicians.

The rest of Elliott’s sentence, *music is something that happens when humanly made artistic sounds ‘meet’ or intersect with the mind-and body of a person who knows the experience of musical sound patterns from prior experiences of creating musical sounds*, describes the life of a musician. The more you (we) hear and make music, the more driven we are to hear and make more music. If I chance to hear a piece I have played or conducted, it will not leave my mind. I will wake up in the middle of the night hearing it. The only thing that will replace it is working on another piece which will then occupy my mind. In my head I work and re-work the music, perfecting it, trying different ways of playing or conducting it. I know that when I describe this in myself, I am also describing

most other musicians.

With Elliott's next sentence, *Music-makers dedicate themselves to learning all sorts of things about music in order to experience the self-fulfillment that comes from being able to express themselves personally, meaningfully and creatively in and through music* (Elliott, 2003), we again view ourselves when we are not actually making music. We are learning more and more about it in order to satisfy our cravings for it. We want to know the music inside-out: the composer, the context, the performance practice, the analysis, the intent, other performers who have played it, how it fits into a style, and on and on. We just cannot get enough.

Now, what I have been describing is the musician who practices his/her art, one who has been prepared for life with the tools and equipment, the skills and curiosity born of a life spent in pursuit of the next musical adventure. We say that we want to educate the whole child for life. Do we not have the same obligation to the college student who prepares to teach music? Should we not also educate music students for their whole lives as well as for their livelihoods? Can we honestly trim away the deep and intense study of music that becomes the underpinning of both the student's profession and his future life as a musician? Can we compartmentalize music teaching to the point where a musician no longer feels any sense of self-fulfillment in doing it? If this is the direction in which we are going, I predict that many music teachers will find a profession more meaningful than what is offered the classroom music teacher.

After a day spent in the classroom, with problem students, disruptive students, lazy and uninterested students, juxtaposed with those students who are ready and anxious to learn, there are days when you have to think deeply in order to come up with a single positive thing that was actually accomplished, other than surviving. When you are preparing for a concert, you find that the two

weeks leading up to the dress rehearsal are filled with school-wide testing which means lots of students will be out of choir class, not rehearsing the music. You have a piece to prepare which requires pianist, bass player (a history teacher who does not read music, but has learned his part from a tape), drums (the biology teacher), none of whom you will be able to get together until the dress rehearsal. That piece is a tricky jazz arrangement by Phil Mattson. The dress rehearsal is so short, there is only time to go through everything once. In addition, for the Broadway medley, the soloists will have only the dress rehearsal to go through their solos, once. Then there is the LaCross team which will be late getting back on the night of the concert (the coach does not teach here and does not care). There is the key tenor whose mother declares to him that he must attend her college graduation that night and not the concert. There is the family who made vacation plans months ago, bought the plane tickets, and demands that you excuse their child from the concert on the grounds that the vacation is more important. Then there are the others who say they will not come, and you have to go over the commitment they have made once again, and remind them that this is their final exam. And, after all of this, you have to check them in before the concert, and check them out afterwards to make sure they stayed and sang (last year, a group of them left after the check-in). And this is a very good school. Can anyone imagine that the outcome of the concert is much more than survival? Occasionally there are those miraculous events when the spirit of music sweeps through the room and envelopes all of us in a moment of music. For that we can be grateful. But then we must hear how “the singer next to me was singing the wrong notes”; “it was so bad I just did not sing that piece”, or “our section did not come in at all.” The teacher whose personal life was prepared for a life in music can go home and enter that world, knowing that satisfaction that day meant bringing as much music as humanly possible into the lives of the students and their families.

But also knowing that *personal self-fulfillment* does not depend upon that concert. Personal satisfaction comes from making your own music where you set your own high standard and follow through. Without the skills and solid preparation gained in undergraduate music studies, this would not be possible.

This issue of teacher preparation has direct impact on one's classroom teaching, as well. Students know instinctively when you are master of your material. They have greater respect for you because of it. Your skill means that you can approach music of a greater complexity than your less-skilled counterpart. There is an element of self-fulfillment in being able to do music that is a challenge not only to your students, but to you as well. You can also be flexible because you know you have the skills to meet any challenge that shifting circumstances may provide for you.

I just heard an interview with a fine young clarinetist on the radio. As a teenager he had shown great promise in classical and jazz studies. Then he experienced a great personal tragedy: his brother, with whom he lived at the time, was murdered. For months he was unable to pick up his instrument. What he described during that period sounded like death. It was as if he had killed himself and tried to come back as his brother, even to the point of looking like his brother. He came from a family of clarinetists for one of whom, his grandfather, a piece for orchestra had been written, entitled, "Good-Bye." His father, an orchestra player, arranged for the piece to be programmed in a concert. His grandfather conducted the orchestra, his father played, and the young man played the solo clarinet part. His description of the performance sounded like a re-birth. *Music is a living presence inside the human being.* (Elliott, 2003). The young musician, who experienced the loss of his voice in his grief, overcame it and experienced once again the living presence of music inside himself, giving him purpose and reason to live. How do you assess an

experience like this? How can this be compared to geometry or history? This is how music is special, a “living presence in us.” We nurtured the gift of music from the beginning, and now it has taken on a life of its own in us. It will continue to nurture and sustain us so long as we give it a measure of our focus and attention. Failing to do that, in my estimation, will create an unhappy situation, followed by depression and poor health, and for music teachers, burn-out, or a loss of the desire to communicate the love of music.

In early spring, I enjoy “window-shopping” for summer enrichment workshops, to offset the frustrations I feel in trying to get through the school year with my enthusiasm still intact. It is kind of like the gardener who spends January and February absorbed in flower catalogs: they are so full of possibilities. That night while I sat looking through the MEJ, I did the same, only to find, in place of workshops in conducting, Alexander technique, Gregorian Chant, choral arranging, singing with a famous conductor, it seems the workshops had been subsumed by the standards. There are workshops on multicultural music, teaching “music across the disciplines,” and jazz improvisation. There is nothing wrong with these, except that the others were missing. This narrowing of the possibilities for continuing education in music seems to be part of a controlled shift away from the very open approach to which we are accustomed, and toward a less intense focus on self-development and self-enrichment for teachers. It may just be that the information and inspiration that I seek can no longer be found in MENC or its journal, the MEJ.

REFERENCES

Books:

Elliott, David J. (1995). *Music Matters*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Ornstein, Allan C. and Hunkins, Francis P. (2004). *Curriculum: Foundations, Principles, and Issues*. Fourth Edition. New York: Pearson Allyn and Bacon.

Riemer, Bennett. (2003). *A Philosophy of Music Education: Advancing the Vision*. Third Edition. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. (2001). American Psychological Association. Washington, D. C.

Flohr, John W., and Hodges, Donald A. (2002). Music and Neuroscience. Chapter 52. *The New Handbook of Research on Music Teaching and Learning*. New York: Oxford University Press. (pp. 991 - 1008).

Nierman, Glenna E., Zeichner, Ken, and Hobbel, Nikola. (2002). Changing Concepts of Teacher Education. Chapter 42. *The New Handbook of Research on Music Teaching and Learning*. New York: Oxford University Press. (pp. 818 - 854).

McDiarmid, G. W. (1004). The arts and sciences as preparation for teaching. (As cited in Nierman/Zeichner/Hobbel, 2002).

Periodicals:

Burrack, Frederick, and McKenzie, Tammy. (2005). Enhanced Student Learning through Cross-Disciplinary Projects. *Music Educators Journal*, May 2005, Vol.91 No. 5.

Almeida, John. Letter to the Editor. *Music Educators Journal*, May 2005, Vol. 91, No. 5.

Personal Contacts:

Benedict, Cathy. E-mail message. (April 28, 2005).

Warren, Maredia. E-mail message. (April 29, 2005).

Unpublished Papers:

Colwell, Richard. (2005). *An Assessment of Assessment in Music*.

Elliott, David. (2005). *Music Education and Assessment*.

Other:

National Voluntary Curriculum and Standards for Instrumental Music (Band): A Project of the Canadian Band Association in Affiliation with CBA Provincial Affiliates with an Introduction by Dr. David Elliott. Third Edition. (November, 2003).

Radio Program, "From the Top". WQXR. May 7, 2005.