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**INTELLECTUAL DISHONESTY AND THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE
IN MUSIC EDUCATION**

There are a number of factors which contribute to the “low status” of music education: teacher training in music which is often poor in quality, the treatment of music teachers as mere entertainers who give classroom teachers a break, and the demands for entertainment on the part of parents and school administration. There is also the matter of the teacher who is possessed of training and ability who gets “burned out” because of the non-musical demands being made upon him/her. Then there is the teacher who fails to continue training and performance in music, who becomes more and more insecure as a musician but covers for this by delivering the lowest common denominator in music and hiding behind the policy of *tenure*.

When I was an undergraduate music student, I remember being appalled that students enrolled in the music education program were required to take so few of the basic music courses. In stead of music history, they took only a music history survey course. They took basic theory, but no counterpoint. They did not give full recitals, only half-recitals. Yet they were placed into classrooms as student teachers as early as the sophomore year. It seemed to me then, as it does today, that teachers are the ones who need more, not less, music study than the rest of the music-making population. When a student asks a question, a teacher should possess a vast reservoir of knowledge out of which to guide the student in the direction of discovery. If music teacher training, as opposed to education in music, is guilty of fraud in shortchanging future teachers in the very areas of their specialty, then the profession is in jeopardy of drowning in a sea of incompetence and dishonesty.

The teacher who is committed to lifelong learning for herself will value the building of

the generative kind of structure that Bruner speaks of (p. 121), one that permits reconstruction of details and a place to put new details as they are encountered, as part of this lifelong pursuit of knowledge. This structure is one that we should be helping our students build for themselves so that they, too, will go from our classrooms feeling, not that they know all there is to know about music, but that they have an overview, with some information, some experiences, which excite their curiosity to discover even more. We have a responsibility to help build the structures on great truths and not on cheap substitutes. The only way to do this is by learning all that we can, pursuing excellence for ourselves as musicians, as writers, as teachers, so that we have the resources to aid our students in a deepening understanding of music and culture.

In my many years of teaching I have seen so much intellectual dishonesty in the classroom that I hardly know where to begin. I will give only one example: As a new teacher, I was hired to teach only the third grades in one school, while all of the other grades, K - 8 were taught by a veteran music teacher. Among other things, I taught them to read notation and to teach each other. The other teacher's classes consisted of the students bringing their records which she played for them. Whatever I accomplished was merely a "shot in the dark." This teacher was politically well-connected and rose through the system eventually to high school. There are other examples, even from my town in Westchester, which are appalling. We are powerless over anything but ourselves. For that reason, I am obsessed with learning all that I can and with exhibiting excellence in all that I do. I am hard on myself when I fall short of it. I am angry when I encounter laziness and fraud in the classroom.

"Let the educational process be life itself as fully as we can make it." (p.126) If we give in to the dumbing down of music in the classroom, we are contributing to the cheapening of our culture.