

Professional Development for Music Educators

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Music educators are among the many professionals who must continue to develop new skills and strategies for teaching in their field in order to maintain effective teaching and long-term success. This is partially because of developments in the fields of music and education and changes in their clientele—their students. Expectations for music educators' new knowledge and skills increase within the fields of music and education alongside burgeoning developments in technology and new learning tools, innovative teaching strategies, and better understandings in child development and human psychology. Similarly, music educators increasingly recognize the dual nature of the need to continue their professional development both for internal and external reasons. While satisfying their personal strivings to continue their own professional growth, they

appreciate the need to find new methods and techniques to assist them in educating the ever-changing student body they face each day in the schools.

The music education literature has long emphasized the value of professionals engaging in experimentation and clinical research in classroom and school settings toward identification of the more productive approaches to the teaching and learning of music. In one foundational publication by MENC (Knieter, 1971), five primary areas were defined in which future research needed to be conducted in music education to help the profession progress, two of which support this point well. Knieter stated that research can be focused into the following areas:

4. Experimentation that seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Research should move into the classroom since a profession should be guided by practices that are responsive to some form of scientific inquiry.
5. Research in music education to identify some of the more productive approaches to the teaching and learning of music (p. 16).

This direct approach for research includes experimentation with teacher training and professional development models. Applying theories of professional development and reflective practice, in-

service workshops and specialized training of music educators is often examined to reveal more productive approaches that are particularly effective in that setting. This information can also be of value to other music educators in similar settings.

Supervisors in a large public school system in Florida began to research music education literature to learn more about successful practices related to working with at-risk populations, students' musical compositions and improvisations in the classroom, reflective practice, staff development models, assessment, and mentoring and peer coaching among music practitioners. Among the resources examined were *Changing Schools Through the Arts* (Remer, 1990), *Champions of Change* (Fiske, 1999), *The Arts and Academic Achievement: What the Evidence Shows* (Smith, 2000), and *Mentoring Beginning Teachers* (Boreen, Johnson, Niday, & Potts, 2000). Among the music education publications utilized were *Assessing the Developing Child Musician* (Brophy, 2000), *Music and Students at Risk: Creative Solutions for a National Dilemma* (Taylor, Walls, & Barry, 1997), *Music Makes the Difference: Music, Brain Development, and Learning* (Music Educators National Conference, 2000), and *Vision 2020: The Housewright Symposium on the Future of Music Education* (Madsen, 2000). In addition, reference was made to "Coaching for Increased Teacher Effectiveness," from the workshop and consultant residency of Stephen G. Barkley, Performance Learning Systems, from 1999 to 2002, which is now available in book form (Barkley, 2005).

A three-year project, "Implementing the Standards for Music: An Integrated Approach" was created as a professional development project for music educators. Also identified as the Professional Development for Music Educators (PDME),

it received funding through a federal grant and was initiated in the school system, being administered successfully and extended to operate from 2002-2006. The results from the research and experimentation conducted throughout this project revealed very productive practices in professional development within the school setting which were beneficial to the music educators and supervisors of the system. Results of productive practices in this setting can be of great interest to other researchers and music educators in other school settings as well.

Overview of Important Strategies

An overview of the important strategies used in the project revealed essentially two strands, which were systematically employed in the professional development, namely a technology strand and a collaboration strand. The technology strand included emphasis on music technology training, online staff development, online technology mentoring, and online communications and newsletters. The collaboration strand included emphasis on peer-coaching, mentoring, curriculum development, writing teams, and a professional development plan with artist residencies and a Learning Community. More information on these strands will be provided to reveal promising practices and resources for professional development.

Goals of Professional Development for Music Educators

Four goals were identified for the Professional Development for Music Educators project. These goals were:

1. Establish a professional development program that is linked to research and provides the resources and opportunities for strengthening the musical knowledge, clinical skills, and technological expertise

of music specialists who serve K-12 at-risk students.

2. Establish the full implementation of the State Standards and Grade Level Expectations (GLE) for Music.
3. Create and establish models for assessing student progress.
4. Create models for curriculum integration that connect artistic training to the learning process that is necessary to the development of higher cognitive skills inherent in the arts and required as well by other subjects, such as mathematics and reading.

The three-year project and its extension resulted in significant success in meeting the first goal to establish a professional development program that was linked to research, while also providing the resources and opportunities for strengthening the musical knowledge, clinical skills, and technological expertise of music specialists serving K-12 at-risk students. While building the professional development program, a K-12 seamless curriculum was developed alongside to establish the full implementation of the state music standards and system's Grade Level Expectations (GLE) for Music. Models for assessing student progress were created and established, and an online Assessment Course was launched. Additionally, models for curriculum integration were created, connecting artistic training to the learning process necessary for the development of higher cognitive skills inherent in the arts.

Program Design by Academic Year

The new professional development program for music educators was initiated in the first academic year with a program design based upon current research and input from a survey of the PDME team members, namely the music supervisors and 29 music educators selected from at-risk

schools to participate in the project. The project objectives directed the content of the faculty development sessions, the foundation for the music curriculum revision (K-12) was established, and standards were set for the addition of model lessons for integration of all areas of the curriculum into music instruction. The second year of the project was one of continuation of first year objectives, while adding the development of the bank of assessment models for each of the GLE's for Music in K-5, the implementation of the Sunshine State Standards for Music Education within the school system's regular music curriculum, and development of the Learning Community. Progress in the third year of the project solidified the professional development program, increased the impact of the study groups and peer coaching teams with over 38 teachers involved, extended the curriculum revision fully through levels K-12, increased the development of integrated model lesson plans, and expanded the Learning Community, making it available to all music teachers of the school system. An extension year was administered to complete the assessment and continue all successful practices established in the three-year project.

Project Objectives and Strategies

Project objectives were met through ongoing, successful in-service strategies designed to fulfill project goals. The following strategies were implemented each year:

1. Meetings were held each month for training and networking of the PDME team members and mentors.
2. Training was provided on classroom applications for all new technology equipment and software purchased through the grant funds.

3. Training was provided on strategies for teaching music literacy.
4. Training was provided on developing assessment models, culminating in the Assessment Bank and an Online Music Assessment Course.
5. Training was provided on creating and teaching model lessons for the State Standards.
6. Teaching materials and model lessons were developed and posted online for wider access and distribution.

Training in creating model music lessons was a specific component of the project. This was offered so that PDME teachers would be able to fulfill all objectives of the State Standards in their regular music instruction. This training also developed their skills so that they could create model lesson plans for the K-12 music curriculum based upon the State Standards. One unique strategy for developing effective teaching practices in music composing/arranging was launched through the BMI Young Songwriters Guild, initiated in year one and continued in years two and three. It was found to be an exceptional way to offer talented students an opportunity to develop their music composing skills while demonstrating effective teaching strategies to the participating music teachers. This helped the project staff to incorporate one of the more difficult State Standards, music composition/arranging, into the curriculum. This served as a springboard for other composition workshops to be held with area musicians and composers in the schools throughout years two and three, with positive results.

To establish the full implementation of the State Standards and GLE's for Music, over one hundred model lessons for K-5 were developed for the standards, distributed to project teachers of K-5, and posted on the

website for use by music teachers in the system. A total of 125 lessons were assigned for grades 6-12, with ongoing development and distribution for music teachers at those grade levels. These efforts resulted in the design, piloting, and publication of a K-12 seamless curriculum that fully implemented the State Standards for Music. A new *K-12 Music Curriculum Guide* was prepared in conjunction with Music In Our Schools Month, the national time for focus on music education that occurs annually in March.

Demonstrations of model lessons from this curriculum were administered during PDME teacher in-service sessions and project team meetings throughout the three-year period. Mentors and peer coaches presented these lessons and encouraged regular use of them by the team members, ultimately promoting the exchange of best practices among the music teachers.

Study groups were established to increase reflective practice. Peer coaching teams were identified and trained to provide feedback for improving the teaching and learning strategies with specialists within the study groups. Study groups met regularly during monthly team meetings throughout all project years. Teachers also used email, the internet, and *The Conservatory* intranet (a system-wide music resource for online teaching materials and model lessons, available to all employees within the district) to communicate with other peers and consultants regarding best practice.

Mentoring and peer coaching became an ongoing strategy for professional development that was continued beyond the project years as part of teaching music within the school system. Mentors stated that they were better teacher-mentors as a result of their participation in training, roundtables, idea pools, sharing of research articles and models provided by the project, and with the coaching between themselves,

the project supervisor and director, and consultants from *the Learning Community*.

A bank of assessment models for each of the State Standards for music in grades K-12 was designed, piloted and disseminated. The summer months were scheduled as the designated time for the writing teams to meet and complete the assessment models for the K-12 curriculum. These assessment models were collected and made available to K-12 teachers in the system as the PDME Assessment Bank. Plans were made for other new assessment models to be added in the future as more lesson plans were continuously developed by teachers, particularly those of the integrated subject areas. In this way, the curriculum and assessments evolved to meet the needs of the changing students.

Project Assessments

All members of the project team were administered pre- and posttests their first project year and annual surveys thereafter to determine their level of understanding and agreement with project goals and objectives and use of project strategies. Annual assessments of project participants' evaluation of the various training offered indicated strong agreement that the training in technology and music literacy was helpful and very effective for improving their performance in classroom teaching and related duties. Data showed that 93% of the teachers surveyed "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that the training in the use of technology and music literacy improved their teaching, provided strategies and tools they have used in their classroom teaching, and increased their use of technology and music literacy in the classroom. Similar results were received for the evaluation of the peer coaching implemented throughout the project. The great majority (93%) "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that the "modeling of best practices

and mentoring in my peer coaching team" improved their classroom teaching skills while 96% said the "support of my peer coaching team" was helpful to them as a teacher. Overall, there was unanimous agreement (100%) among the respondents that the training received from all of the PDME sessions was helpful in classroom teaching and related activities.

Assessment of project team member's evaluation of their participation and usage of the Learning Community was administered at the end of year three of the project. All respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the understandings gained from Learning Community experiences were helpful for their professional development, that they used strategies and tools from this in their teaching and professional duties, and that they developed as a music educator as a result of interactions with those in the Learning Community. The three most important things received from participating in the Learning Community that were commonly identified were the sharing of ideas and interactions with music specialists, friendship and sense of community, and technology training.

Other forms of assessment included tracking of each team member's attendance and participation in PDME meetings and workshop sessions, as well as informal means of requesting voluntary submission of journal entries on PDME topics. Known as *Reflections*, these journals were encouraged as another form of reflective practice to enhance individual professional development. Formative assessments of the successes and/or weaknesses of project strategies and overall professional development of the team members were enabled through review of over 200 journal submissions. This informal assessment approach was very helpful in revealing levels of understanding and satisfaction

within team members on the goals and objectives of the PDME project.

To summarize, the action research in which the PDME participants were engaged included the creation of new model lessons which were research- and standards-based, the development of young student composers and strategies for teaching composition and improvisation, creation of assessment rubrics and assessment banks applicable to the system's curriculum, and online journaling and communication systems specific to the school district. Products developed from the project included a viable professional development program for music educators, the new K-12 music curriculum, and assessment banks applicable for use in the system. Additional products, such as student compositions, videos modeling best practices, the Learning Community, and online resources are of value to students and music educators beyond the project itself and merit further examination.

A majority of the teachers who participated in this project developed new leadership skills which they demonstrated as they shared their strategies and successes with other teachers throughout the project. They led presentations and demonstrations at in-service days, school board meetings, meetings of area principals, community meetings, and meetings of the assistant

superintendents. They took part in organizing and supervising the annual Fine Arts Festival held each spring for the school district. Several PDME teachers earned national certification; others have become regional leaders, serving as conductors at regional music festivals or as regional officers of professional music organizations. Still others have expanded their musical roles in the community as composers, arrangers and performers, demonstrating continued growth in new areas within the music profession.

Finally, note must be made of the constant dialogue about music and ways to teach it that occurred between the music teachers and researchers throughout this experiment. Music perception, the production of music, analysis of the art form itself, and reflection of its place in the lives of the students within the school and the people of our society were regular topics of conversation. This may be the most powerful benefit in the value of professionals engaging in experimentation and clinical research in classroom and school settings. In their efforts to identify the more productive approaches to the teaching and learning of music, these participants learned much more about music's value to themselves and their society.

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