

Response to Cornelia Yarbrough's "What Should Be The Relationship Between Schools and Other Sources of Music Learning"

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First I want to thank MENC and June Hinckley for inviting me to join your deliberations this week. It has been a very stimulating time. One of the great advantages of speaking last is that you get to hear what everybody else has to say. It also turns out to be the greatest disadvantage since you may find that you do not have very much to say that has not already been said. Fortunately, I have Dr. Yarbrough's paper to address, which brings us an entirely new landscape to consider.

It is a truly visionary paper. This provocative, thought-provoking survey of music education's future fulfills its stated conviction, "that MENC's Vision 2020 should be about *dreaming*, not substantiating an institutional relationship between organizations and music makers, lovers and teachers" (p. 207).

This clarion call, we are told, is intended "to wake up our colleagues around the country"—to let them know that the future reality will be "a placeless society." (Do you remember when we used to talk about a paperless society? I don't think it ever happened, but the challenges and opportunities brought by technology have transformed our lives.)

But a *placeless* society. Imagine that! Increasingly driven and defined by technology, schools would be open round the clock to all ages, teaching would focus on not only "the acquisition of skills to work with a comprehensive repertoire of music from the current popular and concert hall musics of our own time, but also . . . the contemporary music practices of the entire global village" (p. 197). Music would be taught across the curriculum through "collaborations among music teachers, their students, and experts worldwide" (p. 198).

In this vision, the continually changing role of the music educator will call on you to access, evaluate, and interpret "massive amounts of information" that will be created, often "without regard for quality or accuracy." We are told that "the challenge for music educators will be one of blending the social and academic aspects of music learning toward the goals of both enjoyment and education," and one of "developing, monitoring, and facilitating the private music experiences being produced via advances in technology" (p. 195). Above all, music educators "must help students and their parents

understand and make the connection between music and life," and become "accountable for making music an important part of every person's life" (p. 199).

Ladies and gentlemen, I come to you today to offer each and every one of you my congratulations—along with this bottle of aspirin, which you may need in abundance as you embark on this great adventure.

As I read Yarbrough's paper, I could not help but recall a character in Tennessee Williams' play, *Camino Real*, who set out across a vast, imponderable desert that Williams called the "terra incognita." Knowing that he would never return, he said, "Make voyages. Attempt them. There is nothing else."

But whether the scenario envisioned by the authors of this paper strikes you as prescient or preposterous or just plain scary, there can be little doubt that if we fail to anticipate the tidal wave of possibilities now bearing down upon us, our role in shaping the aspirations and expectations of our profession will surely be marginalized.

I want to reinforce and expand on two recurrent themes contained in Yarbrough's paper. But first, let me remind you that I am not a music educator. However, I have worked professionally in the musical, theatrical, and educational arenas for most of my life, beginning many years ago with Noah Greenberg's New York Pro Musica, then passing through several university stints and professional gigs. I finally settled down as the director of the nation's leading provider of arts and education in-school services, Young Audiences, which last year produced over 82,000 programs in music, dance, and theatre, and reached over seven million students. So I speak to you today from the perspective of the outsider looking in, albeit one whose nose has been pressed firmly to the glass for the better part of a generation.

I should also share with you that I am not a fence sitter regarding the philosophical debate referred to early on in this paper where on the one hand "education is seen as a *private* or *personal* good, with parents as consumers of whatever public, private, or parochial education best suits their needs. On the other side is the argument that public education is provided for the *common* good, and that all children should share some common experiences in common settings" (p. 194).

As a Queens, New York, boy in the 1950s and '60s I was the beneficiary of an exceptionally fine public school education. My experience in public schools along with my parents' support is chiefly responsible for the professional life I enjoy today, and so I admit to a passionate bias and commitment to the egalitarian system of public education.

And in my view public education represents one of the singular achievements in American society. I believe its existence and success are worth striving and fighting for. Among the many characteristics that justify saving and strengthening the public education school system is its capacity to transform failure into success. American public education is the only system in the world that gives students multiple opportunities to

succeed even after repeated failures. In *The Merchant of Venice*, William Shakespeare put it simply when he said, "the quality of mercy is not strained."

Who can say how many lives have been turned around, if not literally saved, because of this humane and pragmatic characteristic? This is in contrast to countries throughout the world where a single test or grade-point average can sometimes determine a child's professional options for life. The opportunities to succeed often turn on the efforts of a single teacher—one who is just stubborn and caring enough to keep students from falling between the cracks, which for many of our young people have become chasms in urban and rural areas today. So, with that as preamble, let me move on to the heart of the matter, which as I see it centers on addressing the assertion that music educators are teaching professionals whose command of the discipline of music may no longer be sufficient to justify their presence in schools.

Yarbrough and her colleagues quite rightly assert that in the future the role of music educators must be augmented to embrace the realities envisioned in this paper. In my view, two areas among the many cited here offer the greatest opportunities for ensuring a permanent and self-sustaining role for music educators in the schools of the future.

The first area involves teaching across disciplines, especially in elementary schools. The second involves using music as a means of engendering greater understanding and tolerance for the cultures that make up current and projected student populations. Now if this use of music as a means to an end appears overly pragmatic or causes concern about the intrinsic value of music let me recall how music first found its way into public education.

As many of you know, this occurred early in the last century in Boston, where it was the general consensus that the quality of singing in churches was so poor that only the regular systematic study of music in schools could remedy the situation. The evolution of the visual arts as a regular part of public education fifty years later followed a similar pattern, in order to prepare students to work in the factories that designed and manufactured hats and shoes throughout New England. Today, years after the hat and shoe factories have closed, and choirs have long since supplanted the need for singing congregations, music and art remain firmly ensconced in the public schools.

As previous authors have noted so eloquently, music is a language that is basic to the human condition, and once having gained entrance, by whatever means and for whatever reasons, music will inevitably be established for its intrinsic value. I love listening to Sam Hope. Only a composer could construct thoughts like that. One may not always understand or even agree with his assertions, but I still love to listen and absorb them, as one might reflect on a fine piece of music. His cautionary note about the importance of teaching the distinctive characteristics of Western European art music led me to recall one of my earliest experiences in the theatre.

The first time I came to Florida, I was a young actor. I played the title role in a play called *Cross and Sword* in St. Augustine. The play was about the founding of St.

Augustine. Does anybody know who founded St. Augustine, the first settlement in the New World? It was Pedro Menendez de Avilez. I played Pedro and I was a dedicated Method actor at that time. For those of you who do not know what the Method is, a simplistic definition is that as an actor you work from the inside out, rather than from the outside in. In other words, you have to find your motivation in order to say a line.

Well, as part of my research, I visited the local wax museum where they actually had a statue of Pedro. And to my shock and dismay, and after months of preparation, I found that Pedro Menendez was about five feet tall. And I could not get that thought out of my mind. I had prepared for the past two months, and in my mind, he was tall— probably very tall, just like me.

So on opening night in an outdoor amphitheater filled with two thousand people, I entered my first scene of the play as Pedro Menendez having just come ashore, and there waiting angrily are literally a hundred natives and their leader, Chief Oriba, who has a long speech that goes on for two pages. And any of you who know Paul Green's plays know that his work does go on. I had an even longer speech in response that began, "I am Pedro Menendez de Avilez, king of the western seas" etc., etc., for another two pages. And so, the Chief finished his part and he said, "Now, who are you?" and I said, "I am . . ." and I thought of that *little* man in the museum and for the life of me I could not think of my name. And you should have seen the Chief's eyes. They bugged out! He couldn't help me. What could he do, tell me my name?

So, in desperation after what to me seemed like hours but what I understand was only about fifteen seconds, but that's hours on stage, I stammered "I am . . . I am . . ." And I turned to my right and there was my trusted lieutenant, Lt. Alvarez, and so I said, "Lt. Alvarez." It was the only name I could think of. Now the fact that he was blonde and had just finished a scene with his lover and therefore was firmly planted in the audience's mind, meant nothing to me. I had to have a name.

Now, what could the audience have thought of Pedro? Either they were dealing with a schizophrenic who has lost all sense of reality or this is a very clever ploy by a general who is destined to rule all of Florida. The end of this story (and the point of it) is that after the performance, some friends came backstage and, of course, I was really despondent. And they said, "It was terrific. It was great." You know how people always do. And I said, "But what about the part when I couldn't come up with my own name?"

And, you know, they did not even notice. They had not even realized what had occurred. It was the first scene of the play. The audience was shuffling their programs, they were looking after the kids, eating popcorn. They were doing all the things that audiences do, so that excruciating moment just passed them by.

You see, the play is the thing, *music* is the thing. We will never lose that no matter what other subjects we focus on. Never be afraid of that. We will never forget our name.

Today and in the future, music specialists will be expected to use technology and hands-on professional development to connect students, classroom teachers, and the cultural community to the study of music, and to improve teaching and learning across the curriculum. Of course, this will create a conundrum of time and budgetary constraints, but these challenges can and will be addressed school by school, district by district, and teacher by teacher.

Unfortunately, the commitment of parents and communities in general to the study of music in schools is fragile. For the most part, the public perceives instruction as a necessary component of young people's education only if a student is talented and therefore potentially able to earn a living by pursuing music as a vocation. Yet music should be taught to all students for the same reason we teach math to all students. Not in the expectation that every student will become a mathematician, but rather because all students need basic math skills in their daily lives to balance their checkbooks.

The same case is now being made for the arts, but as Yarbrough notes, music educators will have to become researchers and facilitators in order to meet the needs of students and generalist teachers of the future. Classroom teachers, especially in elementary schools, have long been aware of the value of the arts, but they are often unsure how music can be used to improve student performance in other subjects. Through the use of new technologies and intensive professional development we now have the means to begin to address this challenge. We must provide generalist teachers with the skills and resources they need to create thematic units of study that connect the core subjects.

At this point, I am always asked, "Well, give us an example of what you're talking about." It is so hard to embrace interdisciplinary teaching, especially when we know what we are doing inside the discipline. But there are numerous examples.

Wynton Marsalis is an obvious choice. Every one of his music education programs is a model of interdisciplinary teaching. The last one I saw was about the life and music of Dizzy Gillespie. It was a lesson in music; it was a lesson in American history. It was a lesson in English, it was a lesson in the life of an individual and of a culture, and it all happened within about forty minutes.

Another example is a project called the Civil War Tapestry, developed by Kathleen Gaffney of Arts Genesis. Kathleen worked with a group of teachers and students in Wichita, Kansas. Each student assumed the character of a person who lived through the time of the Civil War, someone who was not famous, but a person for whom he or she felt a special affinity. The characters included farmers, slaves, and slave owners. And students learned about the context of each of those people's lives. And on the eve of the Battle of Gettysburg, each student wrote a letter home, in character. They could just as easily have written a song. Now that is interdisciplinary teaching and learning. But the truth is, we have very little experience in doing it, and it is very difficult to do well, and another truth is that most of us are not going to be very good at it, especially the first time.

I remember when I was in a production of *Julius Caesar*, and I played a little-known character. I do not think any of you would know this character. His name was Trebonius. Trebonius had one line in *Julius Caesar*. It was not a distinguished line. It was a line something like, "And so will I, thus and so." It was one of those lines. Not even, "Hark, the cannons roar."

Cassius had the lean and hungry look. Brutus, the noble Brutus. Casca was the first one to stab Caesar. Trebonius—nothing. But he was present, he was there. And so what did I do as the actor who was given the part of Trebonius? I made up a new play called *Trebonius Unbound*. And in this play, which ran parallel to *Julius Caesar*, Trebonius was the center of everything. And I constructed an entire life for him

Then, two weeks before the opening, the director came to me, obviously not in the best of spirits and said, "Richard, I'm sorry to let you know that you're no longer playing Trebonius." And of course, I was shattered, and asked "Why?" Because I had really worked on this role.

And he said, "You're too tall. You're getting in the way of Caesar and Brutus and Cassius in the stabbing scene. You're a little too tall for it." So instead, he gave me another part. Metellus Cimber. Now Metellus Cimber has no lines. He is an absolute zero. In fact, Hamlet is to Trebonius what Trebonius is to Metellus Cimber.

Now, I am sure some of you know that Shakespeare's theatre was an open stage with no curtains. So if you are on stage at the end of a scene, your job as an actor is to clear the bench or whatever scenery is on the stage so the next scene can begin, and whoever is the lowest actor gets this job. Needless to say, this task fell to me. Metellus Cimber is clearly the least-defined character in the play. And so out of that came the new play, "Metellus Cimber, Thief of Rome." And I can assure you, that at the end of that scene, I swooped down and took off that bench with a flourish of my cloak that would have put Count Dracula to shame.

The point is, we must not be afraid of what we do not know. We must simply make it up. If you don't know where you're going, every road will get you there. So be of good cheer, do not be afraid of these challenges. They are doable.

The key to achieving this goal of interdisciplinary teaching is to create peer-to-peer communication and resource networks using the interactive capacities of the Internet and the hands-on expertise of arts specialists. This approach offers a new role for music educators and may also help restore instruction in music because experience has taught us that interdisciplinary teaching and learning through the arts will not occur in the absence of serious arts study.

No other discipline lends itself to the use of technology and the concept of making connections across the curriculum so well as music and the arts. This is especially so in a multicultural context. The proliferation of musical genres and the explosion of languages

and cultures in our schools are circumstances that even the most confident and experienced music teacher will find daunting. But high-speed transmission of video and audio via the Internet and CD-ROM provide access to a vast storehouse of musical experience that no one teacher or artist can provide alone.

Of course there is no substitute for the human touch, but technology and the live teaching experience are not antithetical. Quite the contrary, technology gives us the means to extend and transform teaching across cultures and the core curriculum. But we cannot accomplish this alone, and we will not succeed without the appropriate training or the necessary resources, which brings me to one of the few caveats I have with Yarbrough's paper. Although it provides many examples drawn from the nearly three hundred music organizations listed on the Internet search engine Yahoo.com, there is virtually no mention as to how these organizations might help meet the challenges and opportunities presented in this paper.

A cursory examination of programs offered by arts providers in most areas of the country reveals a mix of field trips to major museums and performing arts institutions; in-school programs by opera, dance, and theatre companies; countless offerings by emerging arts organizations; and a wide array of programs presented by individual artists. These include introductory and career-centered programs, short- and-long-term residencies, broad-based curriculum integration, and comprehensive collaborations.

There are numerous examples of cities, including New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, with robust arts-in-education services but few full-time arts specialists. But there are also many examples of cities and districts that have maintained and strengthened instructional programs in the arts while simultaneously building a value-added component with the cultural community. Examples of these cities include Miami, Indianapolis, and Minneapolis among large urban centers, and Columbus, Ohio, and Wichita, Kansas, among mid-sized cities.

The role of artists and arts organizations in the schools has evolved over the past fifty years. Today these service providers represent a major resource to students and teachers in schools throughout the country. Although there are no reliable statistics to confirm the overall growth of these programs, and there is virtually no formal assessment of their value to student learning, clearly these programs are increasing dramatically. Unfortunately, most of the arts community is unaware of your deliberations concerning issues addressed in this paper. They often do not perceive the vital stake they have in the realization of your aspirations, nor do they understand their own responsibility to support your efforts to strengthen arts instruction. And for some of you I know the question arises regarding the possibility that these programs may be perceived as an adequate substitute for instruction in the arts. In my experience, this concern, though understandable, is groundless. It also represents the single greatest obstacle to developing more productive working relationships among teachers and artists.

My second caveat also concerns an area of omission. We are all familiar with the "chicken and egg" cycles that invariably accompany substantial change in schools (i.e., if

we are given the resources, the desired outcomes can be accomplished, but in order to receive the necessary resources, we must first meet these outcomes). The cadre of music educators teaching today at first may not be willing or able to embrace the vision presented in this paper. And our authors do not suggest how or where to begin. Quite rightly, they focus their powers of prognostication on the *why* and *what* of the matters at hand.

It would be tempting for this reviewer to sally forth at this point and call for a thorough examination of the way in which we prepare prospective teachers and artists. And clearly, there is much that could be said about the need to establish closer working relationships among our preservice schools of arts and schools of education where there is virtually no interaction at present. But as our time is limited and since I believe that "discretion is the better part of valor," I will simply note this area as one that sorely needs your further consideration.

In closing, let me say that the development of national standards in the arts, and the day-to-day efforts of music educators in schools has given new impetus to the need to define optimal working associations among educators and artists. The public-private sector partnerships that are a natural outgrowth of these collaborations may offer new opportunities to address many of the issues raised in Yarbrough's paper.

The arts community looks to the leadership of MENC and to music educators and your counterparts in the visual arts, dance, and theatre, to help us define ways in which we can support one another beyond advocacy for the value of arts education for all students. And so I invite each of you to work with your colleagues in the arts community, to help make your vision of the future as inclusive as possible. And as you proceed to the practical business of making these dreams a reality, I urge you to bring those who reside just outside your core constituency into the inner circle of your deliberations so that eventually we can harness these resources to help achieve a common vision of the future on behalf of the generations of students and teachers to come.

"Make voyages.... Attempt them. . . . There is nothing else."

