On the 50th Anniversary of the Tanglewood Symposium

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Abstract:

In my previous column, I endeavored to talk about the future by looking to the past to chronicle the many efforts that had been made to move music education and music teacher education forward. I mentioned the 1967 Tanglewood Symposium as a touchstone, a point of demarcation that represented a call for change in the way we teach about music as well as in the way we prepare those who will teach it. By the time this column is published, we will have observed the 50th anniversary of the Symposium, and as is often the case with anniversaries, I am tempted to reflect on the meanings this event had and still has for our profession.

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The story of how the idea for the Tanglewood Symposium came about has become a critical part of the historical narrative of the music education profession. It was a direct response to the limited representation and input of music educators at the 1963 Yale Seminar, a gathering where musicologists, theorist, and music historians (who represented half of the attendees) purported to make recommendations about how music education should be conducted in American schools. Needless to say, the music education profession did not take kindly to being “dissed” and the idea for Tanglewood was born.

The title of the Symposium, *Music in American Society*, provided an overarching theme for the investigation and discussion of several critical concerns about the status of music in society and in schools. Robert Choate, the director of the Symposium project and then Professor of Music in the School of Fine and Applied Arts at Boston University observed:

> The Symposium sought to reappraise and evaluate basic assumptions about music in the "educative" forces and institutions of our communities—the home, school, peer cultures, professional organizations, church, community groups, and communications media—to develop greater concern and awareness of the problems and potentials of music activities in our entire culture and to explore means of greater cooperation in becoming more effective as we seek new professional dimensions. (Choate, 1968, p. iii)

What becomes clear when reviewing the purpose of Tanglewood is that the description of the concerns of our profession in 1967 could just as easily reflect our concerns today. Looking back on some of the statements and ideas presented in the Symposium may provide us with a perspective on how far music education and music teacher education has come and how much farther we have yet to go.

When viewed from a 21st-century lens, the documentary report of the Symposium and the Tanglewood Declaration itself seem to be a mass of contradictions. On one hand, there are statements that seem inappropriate, insensitive, and/or exclusionary. Some terminology is dated by today's standards (the words "man" and "mankind" are used throughout in reference to humanity). Descriptors such as sociocultural "conditions," "culturally disadvantaged," and "culturally deprived" that exhibit implicit cultural bias are frequently used in characterizing the would-be recipients in making a case for what music can *do* for them. Indeed, while the Symposium placed great emphasis on addressing the needs of students in urban school settings, to my knowledge, there were no Symposium participants from the same racial and ethnic groups as the students who most frequently populated those settings. As I read through the transcripts of the presentations given at the Symposium and the various recommendations provided, I could not help but wonder how the Symposium might have been enhanced if more facets of diversity had been evident among its participants.

On the other hand, many presentations made during the Symposium accurately identified issues that challenge us today: How to establish or maintain curricular relevancy, broadening the content of the music curriculum in P-12 and in undergraduate music education beyond the Western European canon, redefining what it means to be musical, challenging traditional teaching practices and using research to support the profession and to enhance teaching and learning in music. Symposium presenter Samuel Gould even warned against promoting the notion that music and other arts are a sure means to a more humane society.

> All of us are prone to think euphorically about the aesthetic effects of the arts and accept as an unquestioned fact that by adding new cultural dimensions they make for a more human citizenry. This *can* be true, but there is nothing sure about it, any more than one can be certain that more education generally always means more humanity. Great ideas and great works can sometimes be used for ignoble purposes. (Gould, 1968, p. 53)

The Symposium and its resulting Declaration became the basis for mapping the future of our profession because of the progressive nature (at least when compared with the status quo of the time) of many of its recommendations.

If we peruse the documentary report for statements pertaining specifically to music teacher education, we find a very interesting (and surprisingly prophetic) description of both the characteristics needing to be developed in teachers to enable them to effectively meet the challenges of urban schools and the kind of undergraduate music teacher preparation that would foster the development of such a teacher.

We recommend that teacher education programs in music be modified or expanded to include the skills and attitudes needed for specialized tasks required in the inner city. These tasks call for (a) a person whose solid musical background is equal to that expected of all music teachers in schools; (b) a person with positive attitudes toward himself, toward children and toward society, with a commitment to his task and with a sense of responsibility toward music as well as empathy for the social needs and conditions of other people; (c) a person who possesses the initiative and imagination to relate the school and his skills to the unique needs and resources of the families and traditions of the neighborhood he serves; and (d) a person who is informed by conditions and trends in the community, including those of minority groups, and who has the skills to apply his insights in a flexible way to the societal problems he faces.

> We recommend the formulation of a new curriculum for teacher training institutions that will attract such persons and educate them in actual community situations during the pre-service period. This curriculum might include (a) courses from the social sciences that are most relevant to community structure and change, group relations, and family life; (b) direct experience in the application of music to the community during the training period, and especially in the student-teaching period; and (c) continuing experiences by teachers in the field along these directions to meet problems of conflict and change in the community that will continue and perhaps become more pressing in the years ahead. (Choate, 1968, p. 132)

I marvel at how prescient these descriptions seem considering current emphases on the ecology of music teaching and learning and the need for culturally responsive and relevant music teaching pedagogy. Even though this picture of a “new” music educator was being offered to address the question of how to meet the needs of school children in one specific context (the “inner city”), we have come to understand that these are characteristics that would serve any music teacher regardless of the community setting of the school. Reflected in the recommendations for music teacher preparation we can clearly see ideas that became commonly accepted in our models of early field experience practicum and student teaching, even as we currently strive for innovative approaches that would move beyond these concepts. While I am amazed at how much these recommendations speak to the needs of our profession currently, I am also aware that because these recommendations still hold relevancy for us today, they remind us how far we have yet to go in realizing them.

As I noted in the April Chair column, there have been other meetings, institutes, and symposia since Tanglewood that have attempted to address the challenges of music education and music

teacher education. However, as Mark (2000) has observed, the Symposium and its resulting Declaration gave structure and direction to the profession, enabling us to identify critical issues and develop the leadership required to address them. The vision evidenced in the Tanglewood Declaration, and indeed in the entire report of which the Declaration is but one part, set the bar for all subsequent efforts. As we prepare for our 7th biennial Symposium on Music Teacher Education and its theme of *Imagining Possible Futures*, I hope we can be inspired by the legacy of visionary thinking established at the Tanglewood Symposium and I am encouraged to know that 50 years later, we still have the capacity to effect change because of the hard work of those who preceded us.

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