

## Of Patterns and Profiles

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### **Abstract:**

Prior to writing my first column as Chair of the Society for Music Teacher Education (SMTE), I decided to take some time to review all the “From the Chair” columns written by the chairs preceding me. I’m certainly not the first to do so. Previous chairs have referenced earlier columns as a way to remind us of the recurring issues forming the focus of our work as music teacher educators. Others have elected to reflect on previous chairs’ columns to mark anniversaries of the Society, as Rosemary C. Watkins did in the Fall 1995 issue of the *Journal of Music Teacher Education (JMTE)* where she provided a brief history of the then 15-year-old SMTE, and as Sara Bidner did in the spring of 2002 when she reflected on 20 years of the Society.

**Keywords:** Music teacher education | Music education

### **Article:**

*To understand is to perceive patterns.*

—Isaiah Berlin (1997, p. 129)

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By my count, there have been 52 columns written by the SMTE National Chair since the first *JMTE* issue was published in 1991 (the Spring 1997 issue didn't include a column from the SMTE chair). While I was reviewing the columns, I noticed thematic patterns across many of the titles. Given my predilection for word games and puzzles, I became aware of how frequently particular words appeared across the various column titles that had been written throughout the 25-year span of the journal. I decided to list the titles of each of those 52 columns and to paste them into a word cloud generator. In the graphic produced by a word cloud generator, the more frequently a word occurs in the text source, the larger the size of the word appears. If I accept the assumption that important words in a text source appear more frequently, then a word cloud could be a way to examine the column titles as signifiers.

Beyond the words “music,” “teacher,” “education,” and “SMTE” that you'd expect to exhibit the greatest frequency, six words appeared three to four times across the column titles: “forward,” “moving,” “making,” “call,” “action,” and “future.” I want to examine each of these words in light of how they suggest what past SMTE chairs have viewed as important considerations in music teacher education. Furthermore, I want to share how this analysis provides a profile of how SMTE has been and continues to be responsive to the changing facets of our profession.

### **Forward/Moving**

The focus of several columns was on some aspect of movement, reflected in the use of metaphors that suggested embarking on journeys, points of intersection among multiple pathways, and most particularly, the notion of momentum. Our approaches to the preparation of music teachers and how we work with music teacher candidates influence their developmental journey to become music educators. In addition, as music teacher educators, we set out on our own journeys of professional development to ensure that our programs reflect and/or critique current thinking and practice.

Chairs have observed that many constituencies influence music teacher education, though they may travel multiple paths. We have been encouraged to identify points of intersection between and among these pathways and to examine what new strategies might be revealed for moving the profession forward in strategic ways.

There has also been recognition of the forward momentum generated by the activities of the Society, particularly and significantly represented by the work of the ASPAs (Areas of Strategic Planning and Action), and the need to maintain that momentum if substantive outcomes are to be realized. The concept of momentum discussed in some of the chair columns suggest movement toward goals that would strengthen our profession, such as the goal of a strong, richer community or the importance of eschewing the security of the familiar to embrace the possibilities and opportunities that call to us during times of change.

### **Making**

The idea of “making,” that is, formulating something new or causing something to come about, was clearly indicated in many of the “From the Chair” columns. Today's music teacher education programs represent the accumulated knowledge gleaned from decades of research on

music teaching and learning. Bringing a critical eye to the work that we do by reexamining established theories, research, and instructional practices enables the kind of innovation that keeps our profession vital.

Much of the recent work of SMTE members has resulted in the formation of cooperative systems that can facilitate new visions of what music teaching and music teacher education can be. Such systems can be helpful as we challenge the validity of policies created in the guise of strengthening teaching and learning but that actually ignore what we know to be true: that teaching is not a “paint by numbers” endeavor. Rather, at its best, teaching is a highly nuanced enterprise that can be evaluated accurately only by employing multiple measures designed to accommodate contextual variation and diversity of thought.

### **Call/Action**

One of the definitions of a “call” is “an appeal or demand for something to happen or be done” (“Call,” 2016)—this was the definition reflected in several column titles in which a call for action or collaboration formed the theme. Among these was a column referencing Jeff Kimpton’s appeal to the music teacher education community to recognize the need for new and innovative curricular models and sponsored research in music teacher education (Teachout, 2005). Indeed, Kimpton’s speech actually served as a catalyst for the development of the first Symposium on Music Teacher Education. Another column featuring a call to action focused on how SMTE might develop a vision that is sustaining and meaningful, and suggested that our visions of good music teaching might serve that purpose effectively (Orzolek, 2014).

A column featuring a call for collaboration outlined the need to make connections with a variety of stakeholders in the preparation of future music teachers (Thompson, 2009). Within higher education, forming connections would require breaking down the departmental silos that often prevent us from making collaborative connections with our colleagues in the preparation of music teachers. It would require the development of authentic partnerships with K–12 teachers and school administrators, and it would require understanding how we can have meaningful dialogue with policymakers whose decisions affect the work that we do.

One of the most significant aspects of SMTE, particularly since the inception of the Symposium on Music Teacher Education, is that we now have the capacity to respond when there is a call to act. Our ASPAs are the structures that ensure that capacity.

### **Future**

It would probably come as no surprise that another theme well represented among the titles I reviewed was that of future directions. Given the many areas that constitute the stated mission of our Society, having a perspective that is future oriented is of critical importance. Such a perspective enables us to be proactive in addressing the possible challenges that the future may bring.

A future-oriented perspective can also fuel the search for new and innovative approaches to music education and music teacher education. What we do in our respective music teacher

preparation programs must be designed to keep pace with what we continue to understand about the significance of music in society and of music making as a human endeavor.

### **Coda**

It might be argued that an informal analysis of the frequency of words comprising the “From the Chair” column titles in the issues of *JMTE* may not contribute much in the way of a profound understanding of the nature of SMTE as a professional organization. However, what I gained from this exercise (beyond satisfying my aforementioned love for playing with puzzles and patterns of words) was a sense of connection across the many years of the Society’s existence.

We are, and have been, a Society of momentum and forward movement. We are, and have been, a Society that values the opportunity to research new approaches to the music teacher preparation process and to bring new ideas to fruition. We are, and have been, a Society that believes in its own agency. When called to action, we have the capacity to rally, to work together to address problems, and to effect change. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we are, and have been, a Society with an orientation toward the future of music education, because the students with whom we work are the very embodiment of that future.

In conclusion, I would like to note that our outgoing and incoming SMTE Executive Committee members and *JMTE* Executive Board members were acknowledged by my predecessor, Susan Conkling, in her final “From the Chair” column, and I share the sentiments she expressed. Since that column went to press, however, there have been some additions and changes to the SMTE Executive Board. We welcome Jason Thompson to the SMTE Executive Committee as Western Division Representative, and Lori Gray will return to the Executive Committee, this time as the Music Teacher Education SRIG chair, replacing Keith Dye whose new responsibilities at his institution prevented him from continuing in that position. I am excited about the possibilities that lay ahead for us as we continue our important work.

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