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[June 2013 MEJ]

From the Academic Editor

by Patrick K. Freer, Georgia State University, Atlanta

Teachers as Authors: Writing for *MEJ*

What makes *Music Educators Journal* so unique? Why, at 99 years and counting, has it lasted longer than any other similar publication? Why, with a print circulation of nearly 70,000 readers, is it the most widely-read journal in the field? The answer is simple . . . because *MEJ* focuses on our teaching of music, why we do what we do, and how we can do it better. Many journals focus on specific elements of teaching and learning, but no journal encompasses the breadth of our profession quite like *MEJ*.

Our ability to address the range of music education is made possible by the contributions of teachers who are deeply invested about their work and think carefully about refining their craft. Are you one of those teachers? Can you make a contribution that would benefit other music teachers and their students?

Where to Begin?

Successful teacher-authors for *MEJ* adhere to the common suggestion to “follow your muse,” where “muse” is defined as your source of inspiration or your guiding genius. The process of writing a successful manuscript often starts by either noticing something you’ve done that might help others, or by identifying a topic you’d like to learn about . . . and then share with others. For instance, my interest in working with adolescent male singers stems from my own experiences as a boy in conjunction with my first teaching job in a middle school. I realized I didn’t know much about the adolescent voice change and I set out to learn more. I later wrote about it in my state association’s journal, and I’ve continued to follow that quest through succeeding decades. In other words, find something that interests you, discover the elements of intrigue, and you’ll be on your way toward identifying the topic of your next *MEJ* article.

Suggested Topics

We welcome manuscripts about all topics. But, there are several topics that we would like to see addressed by future authors. Perhaps this list will spark an idea for your next manuscript:

1. Advocacy -- Proactive Steps toward Avoiding Crises
2. Assessment/Evaluation -- Toward Efficiency and Accuracy in Our Busy Lives
3. Classroom Management -- Toward Promoting Student Engagement and Achievement
4. Curriculum -- Retaining Relevancy While Maintaining Standards
5. Elementary General Music - Instruction & Planning
6. Orchestra and Strings -- Instruction & Planning
7. Philosophy -- How it Can Help Elementary General Music Teachers
8. Secondary General Music -- How to Increase Enrollment
9. Students with Special Needs -- Instructional Strategies (borrowed from your school's resource teachers?)

10. Time-Saving Tips for the Music Teacher -- Communicating with Parents, Taking Attendance, Assessment/Evaluation, etc.

11. Working with the Child Voice -- Advances in Research, Implications for Instruction

Organizing Your Thoughts

Once you've identified the topic, a good way to brainstorm the sub-topics is to ask questions. What has been done on this topic in the past? Why is this an issue today? What do I wish I knew, and why do I wish I knew it? How did the students in my classroom respond to my teaching when I made a change? What would be helpful for other teachers to know? What remains to be learned? Why is this important?

One suggestion is to approach the writing in stages: write the first and last paragraphs, then write the first sentence of each major section, then the first sentence of each paragraph, and then fill in whatever remains. Of course you will go back and make modifications, but at least you will have started to structure the key elements of your topic and develop some wording to convey the ideas.

Follow the Purpose of *MEJ*

Different journals have different missions. As stated on our homepage, "*Music Educators Journal (MEJ)* is a peer-reviewed journal that encourages music education professionals to submit manuscripts about all phases of music education in schools and communities, practical instructional techniques, teaching philosophy, and current issues in music teaching and learning. The main goal of *MEJ*, like that of NAFME, is to advance music education."

Know Your Audience

Effective writers are committed to serving readers rather than merely impressing editors or reviewers. And, experienced writers are preoccupied not with telling their readers everything they know, but with helping readers discover insights. For instance, when articles for *MEJ* report some kind of research project, it is more important to discuss the importance of the research findings than to report the intricacies of the research data. Remember that *MEJ*'s readership is vast, ranging from college students and first-year teachers to NAFME members who hold doctoral degrees. Not every article will be relevant to everyone, but articles should be broad enough to appeal to more than just a few readers.

Build on What Others have Written

Successful authors build on the work of others. It is important to know what other authors have written so that you can both learn from that work and work forward from where the previous work has concluded. One great way to search for past *MEJ* content is to use the search functions on our homepage (<http://mej.sagepub.com>). Type in keywords, find what interests you, log in using your NAFME membership information, and you have instant access to a century's worth of articles by teachers like you. A key piece of advice: find recent, related *MEJ* articles and analyze what those authors did . . . after all, they were successful at the process of turning ideas into print!

Follow the Guidelines

Many teachers don't write for their professional journals because they are unsure of (...or intimidated by) the required format of manuscripts. In days gone by, authors wrote *MEJ* content by hand, then by typewriter, and then with a word processor and printer. *MEJ* authors presently submit all material online. But, before a manuscript is ready to submit, it needs to follow the journal's guidelines for formatting and style characteristics. In any case, be certain to follow the guidelines for the length of manuscripts (about 12 pages of double-spaced text), acknowledge previously published articles about the topic, and make certain to maintain relevance for music teachers who will read the article. Complete guidelines for authors can be found by following the link to "Manuscript Submission" on our homepage.

Co-Author with One of Our Editorial Members

Do you have a great idea and would like to see it developed into an article for *MEJ*? Please contact me (pfreer@gsu.edu) and let me know your thoughts. From there, you might decide to move toward writing a manuscript, or we could partner you with a member of our Editorial Committee who has volunteered to assist you in the writing process. Our Editorial Committee members are intricately aware of how to develop ideas that are appropriate for *MEJ* and how to format manuscripts according to the style requirements of the journal. You and the Editorial Committee member would co-author the manuscript and see it through our peer-review process—a procedure wherein members of our Editorial and Advisory Committees determine the articles that will be printed in *MEJ*.

Read Articles about Writing Articles

There are many resources for writers available both in print and online. Three of the best are listed below. Your librarian can likely assist if you do not seem to have access to these through your library. The three articles listed here are available both in print and online. Please contact me for assistance if they are unavailable to you for whatever reason.

- Kenneth T. Henson, "Writing for Publication: A Controlled Art." *Phi Delta Kappan* 86, no. 10 (2005): 772-777.
- Janet K. Klingner, David Scanlon, and Michael Pressley, "How to Publish in Scholarly Journals." *Educational Researcher* 34, no. 8 (2005): 14-20.
- Bruce Thompson, "Publishing Your Research Results: Some Suggestions and Counsel." *Journal of Counseling & Development* 73 (1995): 342-345.

Once You Have Submitted a Manuscript

Manuscripts that meet all the minimum requirements for content and style are sent to a panel of peers for review. Most manuscripts require some revision, and the reviewers' job is to point authors toward ways they can improve the manuscript for maximum impact and relevance. This process moves unusually quickly for a major journal: authors customarily receive feedback within 30 days, and manuscripts are often printed within twelve months. Though this may seem like a long time, the elapsed time

between manuscript acceptance and publication can be as long as three years for other journals in our field.

Questions?

Please feel free to contact either Patrick Freer or Ella Wilcox with questions that you might have about potential topics, co-authoring with an Editorial Committee member, or the process of developing a manuscript from idea to publication.

MEJ Academic Editor and Chair of the Editorial Committees

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