

**Your North Star: Time to Reflect on the You!!**  
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**Who are you?**

Often we spend much of our planning time thinking about what the students want and need. At the end of a program, or at the end of the year, we often sit down and write up what a former military colleague calls an “after action report.” We make a note of what worked what didn’t and tentatively plan for next year. Sometimes we only pay attention to the practical aspects of our teaching. This kind of narrow focus, over years and years, can wear down even the best teachers! As you begin this year, what if you thought about YOU as well as the students?!? The goal of this article is to foster reflection on *who we are* and *what we do*; how each teacher can celebrate his/her unique contribution and still cherish the unique harmony made by our professional family.

**Superteacher to the Rescue?!?**

According to Doloff, “Who we are, more correctly, who we ‘see’ ourselves being has a tremendous impact on how we live our life, who we invite into our lives, how we treat people and how we expect to be treated.”<sup>ii</sup> In the past, I often compared what I did to some ideal image of Kodály greatness I thought was the way it was “supposed to be.” Children should sing songs in 4-part harmony in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade or some other superhuman feat. I heard great ideas and stories from what my Kodály friends did in the classroom, often not recognizing the amazing experiences my own students received through working together to make great music. Was my image of the “Superteacher” even realistic? Did my ideal take into consideration my school context or my own life experience?

**Reflection on You and Your School**

Each teacher has a unique situation, a unique background and unique challenges. According to Lois Choksy, one of the founders of Kodály teaching in North America, “I only hope that teacher using these books bring understanding, intelligence and musicality to the task. And I hope they realize that there is no one ‘right’ order or process. And that only they can know what is ‘right’ for their children.”<sup>iii</sup> In your discovery of what is ‘right’ for your students, how does this change YOU as a teacher? How does your philosophy of teaching change? (Mine changes every year!) How do you think about what you and your job differently? What might be your call for who you are to be as a teacher this year? According to Palmer, “Any authentic call ultimately comes from the voice of the *teacher within*, the voice that invites me to honor the nature of my true self.”<sup>iv</sup> What might be some ways to reflect on you and your classroom this year?

**Take A Moment**

Take a moment today to consider what your inner call to teaching might include in this next year. If you are in Flagstaff or Prescott, grab a cup of coffee and find a mountain to gaze upon. If you’re in warmer places such as Phoenix as Tucson, you might prefer a cold drink and a sunset. Think about the beautiful moments you had with your students in the classroom last year; think about how you changed over the year as a teacher; think about your school and community culture and what kinds of music experiences resonate the

most. What might be the one thing, the one calling, the North Star of your inner voice that guides you through the year?

### **30-day Challenge**

Think about taking a 30-day challenge as you begin the new school year. What if you wrote one (or a few) sentence every day about who you were as a teacher that day, or how your life experience made the students' music experience more rich! Mine might have a few lines like this:

Day 1: Today, I got to share some of my Russian language knowledge with the students during Sasha! It really made them connect with the dance!

Day 2: Today, I felt joy when I sang a lullaby to my kinder students.

Day 3: Today, one of my parents shared how our music class helped her child adjust to a new school, how cool is that! I made a difference!

Day 4: Today, my 1<sup>st</sup> grade students came in and sang so-mi with hand signs to say "hello." How it makes me happy that they are excited about making music!

Day 5: Today, I performed with one of my 4<sup>th</sup> grade classes for their teacher; it was so much fun to make music with them. This is what it's all about!

What might your list have on it? In what ways are you an expert teacher for your students? In what ways does your life history and your own creativity enhance the music experience for students in your class? I wonder if we shared these experiences, what might be similar and what might be unique to each one of us!

### **Unique is Okay!**

As Kodály teachers, we have some awesome tools in our bag of tricks: tuning forks, solfege ladders, music literacy, tuneful singing, folk music, art music, world music, etc. According to Choksy, "I'm not suggesting that fa and ti-ti-ta are not important, but rather that they are only the *vehicle*. Music. . . must be the *destination*."<sup>v</sup> Just as we all drive different cars and use different routes to get where we're going, we all have different personalities and will approach teaching in different ways. Our choices stem from our school, our students, and - most deeply - from *who we are!* As we learn about our unique tones, let them blend with our colleagues to create our collective, unique harmony.

### **We Gather Together**

I always love singing, "We Gather Together" with my Kodály teaching family. The beautiful harmonies remind me that though we teach in many different contexts, yet for those three minutes, we are singing in harmony. We are of one heart to help our students, to help our world. Will that "harmony" in every context be four-part choral octavo or a jazz quintet? Well, I suppose that depends, on us and on our both individual and chapter calling! In any case, let us bring some of that harmony, *who we are* as Kodály educators, into *what we do*. Let us allow our students to sing in their harmony, teaching them to be *who they are*, blending with others into our own, beautiful, unique song. "To remember in this moment of friendship, love and joy, that music made together can one day heal mankind!"

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<sup>i</sup> Palmer, Parker, 2004. *Courage to Teach*. San Francisco, CA: Josey -Bass, 7.

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<sup>ii</sup> Dolloff, Lori-Anne. 2007. "All the things we are": Balancing our multiple identities in music teaching. *Action, Criticism & Theory for Music Education* 6(2), 2.

<sup>iii</sup> Choksy, Lois, 2003. Making (which?) music together. *International Kodaly Society Bulletin* 28(2), 9.

<sup>iv</sup> Palmer, 34.

<sup>v</sup> Choksy, 5.

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