

## **Sit a Spell: Take a moment to ask about YOU!**

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### **Who are you?**

We spend so much time focusing on the students, refining our process, selecting literature, etc. However, when is the last time you stopped and thought about YOU? When is the last time you thought about your unique contribution from your life and how who you are interacts with what you do? When is the last time you asked the Parker Palmer question, “Who is the self that teaches?”<sup>i</sup> 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?!?**

“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 imagined ideal of a super Kodály teacher, or Hungarian children singing in 4-part harmony. I heard great ideas and stories about what my friends did in their classrooms and felt sorry for my own students who did not get the amazing experiences it seemed like my friends’ students got; often not recognizing the amazing experiences my own students received. There were some areas of my teaching I just did not feel comfortable in, and possibly never would (e.g. teaching recorder). I would make herculean resolutions to do better next year, to try harder to be. . . what?!? What was the imagined “Kodály Superteacher” that I was “supposed” to be? (“Superman” theme here!) Was that even realistic? Did my “ideal” account for my school context or my own life history and the wealth of experiences? Was it even possible to reach the status proposed by my “ideal”? Below is my journey of self-discovery, as I began to listen to my inner teacher.

### **Teaching Out of My Self**

After a season of reflection this year, I have come to realize that we bring all of who we are as teachers, and as people, all of our past experiences and present realities to the table when we teach, We can’t help it. Who we are, is part of what we do, whether we like it or not. This is evident in my teaching through a peek into my lesson plans. Anyone who knows me, knows that I absolutely adore jazz improvisation. I love the feeling of having a structure, but leaving some room to play inside that framework. One friend – who shall remain nameless – asked me why I did not plan out every single transition to the *nth* degree. Honestly, I had to leave space for me – space for my students - to play, to improvise, our interactions together. I needed some freedom. We would’ve missed out on some magical classroom moments if I strictly planned it all out ahead of time!

### **Becoming My Self Through Teaching**

Not only do we bring who we are to what we do, but what we do also shapes who we are. I lived overseas and consider myself a “global person.” When I started teaching, I wanted my students to experience a sense of being part of the big wide world, frequently using world

music literature in class lessons. International students found dignity, students of various ethnic backgrounds valued their heritage, and we all became more open to the big, wide, world. These experiences made my identity as a *global person* develop into my being a *global teacher*. Who I was as a teacher developed from what I did with my students; my identity formed from their smiling faces, and eager learning. How did I learn about who I was as a teacher? I took time to sit, to reflect on who I was, who my students were, who I wanted to become, and why.

### **Sit a Spell**

There is a problem with sharing my stories. I am afraid some of you will decide that you need to be a global teacher, that you need to plan like a jazz musician (while some of you are properly *horrified* by my planning style.) When in fact, each one of you 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 teachers 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> The only way to access unique teaching for you and your students is through reflection.

For real inner growth to happen in our teacher selves, we need to eke out space for reflection on the exchange who we are and what we do. 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> Take a moment today – with a cup of coffee or a Coke or whatever you like – and take a moment to listen to your inner conscience, your inner teacher, for who you are and who you need to become. However, you might say, “I debrief after an event? Isn’t that teacher reflection?” Only if it is for an evaluation!

### **Beautiful Moments**

“Many times former students have approached me. . . not one of them has ever said, “That was a wonderful lesson on fa that day in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. . . they have. . . recalled specific songs we sang, pieces of music we listened to, concerts we gave. . .”<sup>v</sup> – Often as a teacher, as I reflect on an event, I focus on what worked, what didn’t and how to make it better. Do I take time to enjoy the magical moments? Do I take time to reflect on what was truly meaningful for me after a successful performance? It doesn’t have to ALWAYS be about the kids! Take time to savor those moments that were not only beautiful for the students, but that were memorable for YOU as well! Sometimes as teachers, we are more likely to remember what we taught, than the precious moments when we connect on a deeper level; the moments when our students become our teachers. Yet, it is those precious moments that give deep meaning to our practice. Let all of the funny things the kids say and the great class interactions soak into who you are; who you are always becoming as a teacher, and as a human being. Write them down; record them into a voice recorder while you are driving away from school; keep them in whatever way works for you, to remind you why you do what you do! When you’re reflecting, celebrate the unique YOU!

### **Unique is okay!**

As Kodály teachers, we have some awesome tools in our bag of tricks: (tuning forks, solfège ladders, music literacy, tuneful singing, folk music, quality 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, real music, must be the *destination*.”<sup>vi</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 with many different flavors. We come from many different backgrounds and experiences. Yet for those three minutes, we are singing in harmony, of one and heart to help our students, to help our world. Let us bring some of that harmony, who we are as Kodaly 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, for the good of all. “To remember in this moment of friendship, love and joy, that music made together can one day heal mankind!”

*Corrie Box is currently a doctoral student at Arizona State University and has presented on Kodaly topics in Texas, Minnesota and New Mexico. Wherever she goes, a little part her heart will always remain with her KET family. She looks forward to hearing stories of your teaching journey at: [corrie.box@asu.edu](mailto:corrie.box@asu.edu).*

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<sup>i</sup> Palmer, Parker. 2007. *Courage to Teach*. San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass, 7.

<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 Kodály Society Bulletin* 28(2), 9.

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

<sup>v</sup> Choksy, Making (which?) music together, 5.

<sup>vi</sup> Choksy, Making (which?) music together, 5.