

If Only You Could Go Back....

By Chris Gleason

If you had access to a time-turner (ask a Harry Potter Fan if you don't know what that is) and could go back in time to visit yourself during your first year of teaching, what advice would you give yourself? This is the intriguing question the 2010 National Teacher of the Year, Sarah Brown Wessling, asks her guests on the Teaching Channel podcast "Sarah and Friends". I can remember my first year of teaching middle school band at East Troy Middle School vividly. I struggled with motivating and engaging my students. My focus was solely on the notes and getting ready for the next performance. I was in such a frenzy to push kids through the lesson book, do theory worksheets and collect practice charts. Like many of you, I felt the constant pressure of the next concert. I also knew that my FTE was based on the scheduling decisions of eleven and twelve year olds. It seemed as if music publishers only exacerbated my fear by writing sale's pitches such as "Your audience will surely love this" or "You will be a star" or "Students will flock to your room."

I felt like I was training kids rather than educating them. My strategies and techniques centered around a "doing to" approach rather than a "working with" approach. I used the strategies and techniques I experienced as a student—mostly fear and intimidation—with little success. I turned to rewards and bribes, basically manipulating students into compliance. This just resulted in students who focused on the reward but didn't make connections and thought only superficially about the topics, eventually losing interest. All of these strategies left me concerned about how students find their passion, cultivate their curiosity, and engage in learning. I had finished my first year of teaching and felt defeated, frustrated, burned out, tired, and scared.

Things I Would Have Told Myself

If only I could go back in time to tell myself that there was more to my class than the performance; that there was more to a musician than a skill set. That the most important thing my students would learn in my class would be difficult measure and impossible to represent with a single letter or number grade. I would have told myself to stop focusing on the performance and to start focusing on the kids and the music. I would have told myself to read "Drive" by Dan Pink and that it was impossible to *make* students do anything. The secret to motivation is mastery, purpose, and autonomy not carrots and sticks. I would have challenged myself to create lessons and opportunities to increase my student's curiosity each and every day. Finally, I would have asked myself to consider these questions:

1. What do these students need?
2. What music is best for these students at this time?
3. How will my choices impact my student's love of learning?"

Most importantly, I would have told myself to face my insecurities about the affective domain. As a young teacher I just defined affect as "that touchy feely stuff". My viewpoint was narrow and I considered it to be an unnecessary waste of time in class. Then my world got rocked. I decided to attend my first CMP Workshop that summer and

my life changed forever. Among the many things I learned at that workshop, considering the affect was the most influential.

For Example

Recently, my seventh-grade bands studied *Salvation Is Created*, by Pavel Chesnokov. The students learned that this work was one of Chesnokov's final sacred works. Russia mandated that he write music for his country only. Unbelievably, Chesnokov never heard *Salvation Is Created* performed. After listening to this utterly magnificent work in class, I softly whispered to my students: "Can you imagine writing something this beautiful and never hearing it performed? What must it have been like to be Chesnokov?" Students responded with words like hollow, empty, sad, abandoned. This was my entry point into a broader goal of teaching my students about empathy. Throughout the course of the year, we studied empathy and compassion, after which students like Quimby reflected: "I am much more aware of others. I find that I ask people more questions and try to put myself in their shoes."

The affective domain allows you not just teach music, but rather to teach through music. Intentionally teaching to the affect has allowed student's to explore their values, opinions, desires, wishes, personal knowledge, self-awareness, and character. Just consider for a moment all of the great things that would potentially not be covered if we just focused on the notes – creativity, resilience, motivation, persistence, curiosity, humor, endurance, reliability, enthusiasm, civic-mindedness, empathy, leadership, compassion, courage, sense of wonder, resourcefulness, spontaneity, and humility. As educators we need to teach beyond the musical notation.

It is imperative that we recognize the difficult and complex work we do. During the past decade, we have learned more about how diverse and distinct intelligence is. Excellent teachers navigate not only different learning styles but also emotional, social, physical, economic, and ethnic differences among students. Having a time-turner would certainly be an effective tool for an educator. Yet, we must realize that we already have a powerful teaching tool called self-reflection. We can revisit our past experiences in our mind and reflect on ways to improve our practice. Great educators constantly contemplate and wrestle with ways to better reach and inspire all students. As Ken Robinson stated: "What you do for yourself dies with you when you leave this world. What you do for others lives on forever." I challenge all of us to continue to reflect, to strive to improve, and to light fires in kids!

Chris Gleason is an instrumental music educator at Patrick Marsh Middle School in Sun Prairie, WI. He is a finalist for 2017 National Teacher of the Year. Website: chrispgleason.com