

## CMP AND PRIVATE TEACHING

The handbook for the 2002 Texas Orchestra Directors Association convention was filled with sessions on conducting, recruiting, and technology in the classroom, but as a private cello teacher, I found none of these topics the least bit intriguing. Figuring I was too much of a misfit amongst my public school teaching colleagues, I was about to give up on attending any clinics. Let it suffice that I would attend the TexASTA board meeting, my primary reason for being there. But finally, a session about teaching musicianship caught my eye—although the description sounded too good to be true. I'll give this one a chance, I thought— but oh, no!—this clinic seemed to have a sponsor. What was “CMP,” and what were they selling, anyway? Method books? New-fangled instruments? Software? Now I was just sure this was one of those come-ons: what gizmo could an orchestra director use to lead students into a personal, meaningful discovery of music-making in a classroom setting?

Despite my skepticism I attended the session, and to my amazement and great satisfaction, the clinician Randy Swiggum wasn't selling anything, just offering lots of creative suggestions for teaching real music-making from the inside out. I felt an immediate unanimity with Randy, because he was talking about all the things I love about working one-on-one with students: really exploring the music, the composers, the harmonies, why the music was written, finding parallels in the music to life experiences—all the while getting students personally involved with making great music, working with their individual strengths, and helping them become independent learners. But incredibly, he was doing all this with a big group of kids in a classroom setting!

This was my introduction to CMP: Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance, a state-wide Wisconsin teacher training program. It began back in 1977 when some Wisconsin teachers recognized a significant problem in the music education trend: most students were learning only the basic skills they needed to get from one concert to the next, without gaining any real understanding of the music they performed. Driven by their desire to make music education substantial and meaningful to all students in the state of Wisconsin, these concerned teachers developed a teaching model which demonstrated how band, orchestra and choir students could be taught comprehensive musicianship while preparing for concerts. Over 25 years later this program is still going strong, supported by their state music education system, and led by a committee of creative and dedicated teachers. These teachers work throughout the year to advance the CMP mission, as well as plan and teach the summer workshop attended by more than one hundred teachers every year.



### A FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE

I was so drawn to the ingenuity and creativity of the program that when Randy invited me to come to the four-day training program the following summer, I decided to go. There in Whitewater, Wisconsin, I encountered the teachers of the CMP leadership who volunteer their time and energy to work with other music teachers who, in turn, extend themselves at their own time and expense to absorb all they can about what it means to teach comprehensive musicianship. This was truly a program propelled by the teachers' love of music, great pride in their profession, and ready willingness to help one another become the best teachers possible.

But as much as I felt a strong connection with Randy, the CMP committee, and their passion for teaching music, I did feel a bit out of place. These were primarily public school teachers, after all, and I am a private teacher and a performer. I do believe that when it comes to teaching, despite the practical differences in our working situations, we all share the same desire: to impart our knowledge and love of music to our students. Yet a sense of division lingers on, stemming in no small part from the way we were “brought up” in music school. With few exceptions, most schools train performance and education majors with a different set of standards: performance majors don't really need to be able to teach, and music ed majors don't really need to be able to play. Neither premise is true, but this segregationist way of thinking can be challenging to overcome. I could tell from the beginning of the workshop that this was going to test my “we're-all-in-this-together” ideal about music teaching.

There were definitely things about basis of the program that made me uncertain that this was anything I could benefit from myself. CMP's approach to teaching is based on five areas on planning—and by that they do mean creating a Lesson Plan (*noooo!*)—Selection, Analysis,

Outcomes, Strategies, and Assessment. Now, as a private teacher in the worst sense of the word (and I indeed *was* at this point in time) I immediately dismissed most of these topics as “public school teacher stuff.”

*Let's see... Selection means picking music for your next concert that the not-so-good ones can play and doesn't bore the good ones to death—good luck with that, but that's not my problem. Analysis isn't necessary because I already know the pieces I teach pretty darned well. The word “outcomes” is music-ed-speak, which makes me crazy—why do they talk like that, anyway?—so I'm just going to ignore that one. Strategies are okay—I like coming up with different ways to teach my students how to play the cello—it's a fun part of my job. Assessment means grades—thank god I don't have to do that. And look, when it comes right down to it, no one is going to make Me, a Private Teacher, write a Lesson Plan. So now what?*

### IT'S LESSON PLAN TIME...

Well, as it turned out, they really *did* mean for me to write a lesson plan, and I didn't have the heart to say no. After all, I did come up here to learn what CMP was all about. Since I pride myself in my egalitarian viewpoint about the music teaching business, I'd better do *something* to substantiate it. Certainly for a few days I could do what they do, wear a different hat for a while, and see what it would be like to have to do this all the time—and then be thankful I'd never have to do it again.

With Selection as the starting point of the model, I needed to choose a piece that would be the basis of my lesson plan. I had a student back home needing to learn the entire Elgar cello concerto for music school auditions, so I chose the last movement. CMP stresses the selection of high-quality literature, so I knew this was a safe choice—but not because I thought it was great. I had always loved the rest of the concerto, but the fourth movement was my least favorite. It was too full of technical twaddle and excessive modulations, and the last page seemed meandering and incoherent, redeeming itself only with the return of the opening chords. I knew my negative opinion it would not be helpful to my student, but if nothing else I figured this planning session would help me come to grips with the fact that teaching it was unavoidable.

The selection process behind me, I mustered my courage (having done precious little of this since college) and did my Analysis. The harmonic outline confirmed the meandering tonal centers, but it was interesting to discover thematic elements from other movements, and a structural overview revealed more organization than I had seen before. This gave me ideas for ways my student could practice while he gained an understanding of the piece, so that pleased me—something good was actually coming out of this!

Nothing prepared me for the next eye-opening moment, however. In the assortment of reference materials that CMP makes available to participants, I found a book of short biographies on composers. I looked up Elgar, and read that when he was a boy, one of his siblings had died, and his grieving parents seemed lost and unable to carry on. Twelve years old

at the time, he wrote a play with music about how, when adults had lost hope, it was the children's duty to carry on. Many years later, near the end of his life and career, with his popularity fading, he wrote the cello concerto. I now felt sure that this final movement represented how he, like his parents, had lost his way—scrambling from one key to the next, looking for answers, and ending up lost in a dark wilderness. The final return of the opening chords brings the whole piece—presumably his life—full circle. I immediately felt his grief—both as the little boy and the old man—and I found myself apologizing to him for having not understood this before.

After this turning point, virtually all of my reluctance to follow the CMP plan disappeared. Appeasing myself by silently changing the wording of “Outcomes” into “goals and objectives,” I came up with a rich list of skills and concepts for my student to learn: techniques at his cello, knowledge about the movement's structure and harmony, and of course the story behind this piece that would surely enhance his understanding and musical interpretation. No problem with Strategies—I had more than enough ideas to help him learn these things. Assessment presented a challenge, though, until I started to think outside the grading box (which, by the way, they strongly encourage all teachers to do). Of course he would perform with technical mastery and musical understanding—that seemed too obvious to write down, but since they are the basis of my work with my students, it needed to be stated. A short schedule outlined when he would play the piece memorized (in sections and in its entirety) and the pre-audition performances he would give. The final assessment would be his performances at the auditions as well as the results. By the time it was all over, I was really looking forward to getting home and teaching this piece. I had a plan—and way new approach my teaching.

### A CMP CONVERT

The more I considered these CMP planning points, the more I could see that this was a great model for all teachers, regardless of how or what they taught. So why wasn't CMP being offered to private teachers as well? The answer was mostly self-evident: originally designed by public school teachers for public school teachers, and given the disconnect between those who teach publicly and those who teach privately, it was generally assumed that no one else would be interested. Teachers who taught in both areas knew they could use CMP to improve work with their private students, but no teacher who only taught privately had ever come to a workshop to learn what the public teachers were doing.

I was very pleased when they agreed to look at the possibility of opening the CMP training to private teachers, and thrilled when, a year later, they asked me to lead the private teacher initiative. I have since met with a wonderful group of private teachers in Wisconsin who are equally excited about the project. We are currently working with the CMP model, point by point, to focus on areas of interest and concern to the private teacher. Our discussions have already produced some fabulous teaching ideas. Since you have already gotten a snapshot of how the CMP model works in creating a specific lesson plan, let's consider other ways that this very adaptable model can develop and deepen private teaching.

## SELECTION = QUALITY CHOICES

When I first started teaching, the only music I knew to teach was what I had been taught myself—but it didn't take me long to realize that these were not always the best choices. In fact, having to listen to some of these pieces lesson after lesson made me want to run screaming from the studio. I quickly discovered that I was better off giving my students music by Bach and Marcello over Romberg and Klengel because the lessons were much more interesting and enjoyable. CMP stresses choosing high-quality literature, music that has depth, range, meaning, durability, and “teachability”—interesting musical elements such as identifiable forms, colorful harmonies, sequences, rhythmic interest, and moments of musical surprise. Making quality selections doesn't mean limiting yourself to only main-stream composers—I have some teaching favorites by Squire and others not known outside the cello world because they have so much to offer. The main message here is that since there is so much high-quality music available that is age- and level-appropriate for school kids, there is really no reason to choose otherwise.

Good selection doesn't just mean literature to the private teacher, though—it includes our choices of scales, exercises and etudes, and how we use them to enhance learning. We often use books that sequence literature and other materials for us, and following those in order is the teacher's path of least resistance. But one of the great advantages to teaching privately is that we have the opportunity to individualize our approach to each student. We need to consider whether the next piece in the book is really the right choice for a student. And once we make an appropriate choice, are there ways we could better coordinate the supporting music we assign them? Could we have the student practice a scale related to the piece, or find an etude that would prepare the student technically for an upcoming repertoire selection? Another possibility is to consider using scales and arpeggios not just as technical exercises but as a vehicle for an ongoing theory lesson, or to teach improvisation. Exploring possibilities like these can begin to open our eyes to the ways we can be more intentional about how we teach, starting with the music we select.

## ANALYSIS = REALLY KNOWING A PIECE

Certainly any piece of music can be taught simply by showing a student how to play the right notes with the right rhythm and throwing in a few dynamics. But if we're honest about it, this kind of teaching only scratches the surface of what it is to play music. Music of real quality and value is certainly worth the extra time and energy it takes to explore and understand it thoroughly. In light of this, analysis means really getting to know a piece from the inside out: the form, the structural elements, the compositional devices, harmonies and rhythmic patterns, the period and composer, stylistic issues and pertinent background information. CMP analysis also bravely includes your having to decide what makes a piece really work for you, why you love it and want to teach it to your students—what they call finding “the heart” of a piece. The process of creating a “heart statement” is one of the biggest challenges CMP puts before teachers, but the process

of trying to identify and express this potent element puts us in touch with the power and significance of music in our lives, and the all-important need to find ways to explore this essential experience with our students.

It is easy to assume we know a piece well because it has been with us all of our lives as a student and a teacher. But how many pieces have we simply learned to play on our instrument without having explored them deeply enough to understand them? How much do we really know about the pieces we teach? My teacher in college insisted that I attended a Yom Kippur service when I studied *Kol Nidre* with him, and it helped me connect deeply to the piece—but not all of what I learned stuck the way it should have. Not long ago I looked up the title again, and the short explanation that followed the translation reminded me why the main theme comes back three times with increasing intensity. I immediately wanted to track down the students who had studied this piece with me, explain this important insight, and then apologize for my negligence! The more we understand about a piece of music, the better we will teach it because it becomes so evident that all aspects are integral to real musical understanding. In fact, when our own awareness increases this way, the thought of not sharing such vital information with our students begins to feel as unthinkable as teaching them every other note.

## OUTCOMES = WHAT STUDENTS WILL LEARN

Outcomes are those things we intend for our students to learn, both in the short term with a single piece, and in the long term in the months or years they work with us. Consider this: public school teachers do not always have complete personal choice with selecting outcomes for their students—they are often required to use local, state-wide and national educational “standards” as their guidelines. Private teachers, lucky dogs that we are, get to choose anything we want. *Anything*. So let's not squander this great opportunity—what is it we really want our students to learn during their time with us? By clarifying our priorities, our job as a teacher becomes much clearer, and our approach more focused.

No matter where we put our personal teaching emphasis, outcomes that develop our students' comprehensive musicianship will have a broad enough scope to include three areas of development: skill, knowledge and affect. If I dare to generalize here, private teachers have a tendency to lean towards skill outcomes, such as playing in tune, playing with a straight bow, learning to vibrate, practicing scales, and so forth. These skills are of course important to the success of our students as instrumentalists, but as we discovered in our analysis work, there are things to be learned—knowledge about various aspects of theory, composers, time periods, genre and forms, even fascinating stuff about the physics of sound and how their instrument works. It's also important to focus on affective outcomes, which have to do with musicianship and expression—learning how to shape a phrase, feeling and experiencing the music, having a story to tell, and exploring how music relates to life. Students who develop in all three areas and learn to interrelate them will have what they need to become thinking, independent musicians.

## STRATEGIES = HOW STUDENTS WILL LEARN

Here's what private teachers are usually quite good at—getting students to learn what they need to learn. We develop ways to teach vibrato, articulations, shifting, and so forth. But again, most of these are technical in nature. Since now we recognize that knowledge and affect are as important as skills, we need to plan our strategies more thoroughly, and consider ways to integrate a more comprehensive approach into our lessons. Could we to look up an unfamiliar musical term with our student, talk about how the meaning affects the way the music could be expressed, and then help the student discover the technique on his instrument that would create this sound and style the best? This kind of strategy for teaching is not complicated or difficult, yet it encompasses all three areas and demonstrates the important relationship between them to our student.

Here's another thing: if we never took a music ed class in school, we might have missed out on information about different kinds of learners—visual, aural, kinesthetic, and verbal. Visual learners want to see what they need to learn, with visual demonstrations, pictures and imagery. Aural learners need to hear the sounds they will make, listening to their teacher demonstrate, listening to recordings, and learning to listen to themselves. Kinesthetic learners rely on physical experience: exercises, movements, stretches, and other “hands-on” approaches. Verbal learners take in explanations well, and their understanding is enhanced through descriptive terms and discussions. As teachers, we certainly cannot assume that, by teaching via our own personal preference, we'll connect with all of our students all of the time. By exploring and developing a varied approach, we will not only reach more students, but also reinforce all of our students' understanding at multiple levels.

Obviously, there are a lot of things for us to be aware of when it comes to developing ourselves as teachers. But before we all start feeling overly burdened by the responsibility to be the consummate teacher at all times, don't forget that a big part of helping students become independent, thinking musicians is getting **them** to do some of the learning themselves. CMP emphasizes that learning is often most significant and memorable when students explore, discover and think on their own rather than simply being told what to do. So rather than telling students how to fix their bow arm, have them compare and contrast their bow arm to yours. Instead of regularly reminding them to crescendo more, have students discover for themselves that this is the climax of the whole piece so that they'll **want** to give it all they've got. Also, consider creating assignments that do not always involve sitting down at their instrument. Have them research a composer online, write an expressive story that fits with their piece, or simply look up some “mysterious” terminology and report back the next week. A student-centered approach saves us from doing all the work and at the same time enhances their learning experience—the best of both worlds!

## ASSESSMENT = HOW WE'RE DOING

It is easy to lump the concept of assessment into testing and grading students, and most private teachers feel fortunate that this is something they don't have to deal with. Yet assessment is a daily constant in the life of a private teacher. We assess

students when they first come to us, to decide what they need move forward from where they are. We assess them at every lesson, to see what they have been able to improve from the previous week, and what still needs attention. We assess them when we decide if they have done enough to be “finished” with a piece, and use that assessment to choose the next piece. We assess them at their recitals for overall progress.

What do we base these assessments on, though? If the outcomes are vague, like “the student needs to learn to play musically,” it is much harder to determine if the student accomplished this goal. Of course playing musically is a good goal, but getting more specific makes it easier both to teach and evaluate. For instance, if the outcome is to “create a meaningful variety of sounds in Beethoven's *Theme and Variations*,” the strategy might be to have the student to come up with a mood or character for each variation, and then experiment with creating different qualities of sound. The assessment would then be obvious: you would be able to hear the variety of sounds when the student played. The outcome is still “musical playing” but the clarity of what constitutes musical playing in this situation makes it easy for both you and the student to know if the goal was accomplished.

In fact, student self-assessment is undoubtedly the most important part of the assessment process. Again, the student needs clear parameters in order to be able to assess his own progress. Students should be encouraged to participate regularly in the assessment process, by telling you what they have accomplished in their practicing that week, or what they were aware of during that last run-though of their piece. Rubrics can be helpful tools because it gives students a “checklist” to consider significant aspects of their playing: rhythmic accuracy, intonation, tone, articulations, and so forth. Self-assessment sheets that can be filled out and discussed after a recital or at the close of the school year are a more formal way to make sure the student can see his own progress in the bigger picture.

Other areas of students' development can be evaluated in a variety of ways. Weekly theory worksheets and short analysis-based assignments can help you know how much they understand the basics of music. Students can write program notes for recitals, giving them an opportunity to communicate what they have learned about their piece or the composer. It's even possible to assess students' musical independence by assigning a short piece to be learned without your help: within a week or two, the technical and musical choices they have made for themselves reveal their progress as independent musicians.

Here's one more thing to consider about what assessment means to the private teacher: who assesses us? For better and for worse, if we teach independently, no one is looking over our shoulder for tenure review or merit pay increases; no one scrutinizes our students' test scores for evidence of learning. Therefore, since we're generally a “one-person-show,” it's important to step back occasionally and get an overview of our own situation. Do we have equipment and materials readily available that allow us to work optimally and efficiently? Do we make it clear to our students what we expect of them? Are we teaching students at the level we feel most comfortable? Do we have a clear sense of what we are

offering our students? Are our students getting what they need from us? Without a doubt, examining our own teaching through the CMP model will make us more aware of ways we can teach with more clarity and intention, and by exploring such the answers to these questions we strengthen ourselves and our ability to teach our best.

## WHAT'S AHEAD

In June 2006, CMP welcomes all private teachers who want to be a part of this eye-opening and inspiring workshop. While there will be plenty of small group time for the private teachers to work together, everyone will participate in the large sessions, including teachers from all other walks of our profession—high school and middle school teachers, university professors, band, orchestra, choir directors and general music teachers. Some of the large sessions will be demonstration rehearsals and lessons, a chance to show each other some new possibilities and approaches. Other large group sessions will clarify and expand on the points of the model, and explore ideas and challenges in teaching music that are common to us all.

Private teachers who are not familiar to the world of public teaching will hear hair-raising stories of overwhelming workloads and severely slashed budgets. But we also learn about the dedication of our fellow teachers to overcome such difficulties, and the creative learning that's going on in classrooms everywhere in spite of it all. We might even find ourselves envious that our own situations don't always allow us similar large-group opportunities. How cool is the idea of a high school concert which traces the history of music through the "eyes" of a cello—written, narrated and performed by the students? How potent is the meaning of a concert which features Bach's Te Deum, a work of thanksgiving, where each orchestra member has invited an important person in their life as a special guest, to be seated in a reserved section of the hall and be thanked through the power of the students' own music-making? Ideas like these challenge and inspire me to find more ways to unify my cello class of diverse ages and abilities, and help them see that they, like their teachers, are all in it together.

## MAKING CHANGES ONE PIECE, ONE LESSON, ONE TEACHER AT A TIME

At this past summer's workshop I met with three wonderful private teachers—a pianist, a saxophonist, and another cellist. While we worked on the vision of CMP for private teachers, we had the most stimulating time comparing notes, exploring great ideas, commiserating over common problems, sharing solutions, and reveling in our professions. We all agreed that private teachers simply do not spend enough time together. Most of the issues we face in teaching are common to us all, no matter what instrument or level of students we teach. So this workshop will not be a pedagogy lesson on any specific instrument—it will be, however, a remarkable overview of what it means clarify a vision for yourself and your students, to teach with intention, and, in a profession that fosters isolation, to feel unified with other like-minded teachers.

And how might it change you as a teacher?

Depending on the way you already teach, the CMP experience can probably be anything from a wheel alignment to an engine overhaul. One of my colleagues on the committee, already a wonderful and highly respected teacher of all levels and ages, was leaving our group to go teach at other summer programs. He had this to say about CMP's impact:

*"I've taught and conducted at summer workshops for many years and have probably done it pretty well. I could go in this year and do what I've always done, but wait...I've been CMPeed! I've spent the last couple of hours in my office exploring these upcoming classes viewed through a much different teaching lens. I've been thinking more actively about "intentionality" and "outcomes" and looking at different ways of more actively involving the students in doing some of their own learning. It's exciting and a little intimidating at the same time."*

I know for myself that CMP has made me more aware of the importance of seeing teaching as a process in a bigger picture, rather than just teaching lesson to lesson, more focused on being intentional about what I teach rather than only responding to what is immediately in front of me, and has certainly opened my eyes to the areas I still want to strengthen and develop. While I don't have time to write a lesson plan for every student and every piece I teach, I now think ahead more about ways to "connect the dots"—from what I know about the music and my instrument, to what things I really want my students to know, to ensuring that the learning really happens.

And despite my original misgivings about writing lesson plans, I can honestly say that I look forward to doing more in the future. There is no doubt that taking a piece through the CMP planning process raises the bar of what it means to teach with more understanding, clarity, and intention. The CMP model has helped me begin to transform my grab-bag of beneficial ideas into a flow chart of great teaching and learning. Anyone who is willing to give CMP a try has the opportunity to discover an ideal that will likely stay with them for as long as they teach.

