

The following is an interview between myself (Andrew Robichaud, first year music education student) and Ms. Angela Maccaroni, a very impactful educator of my past. Angela Maccaroni studied a music education degree at Western University. The following is paraphrased due to the length of such interview.

Q: Did you have a teaching placement during teachers college?

A: Yes. It didn't go quite as expected since there was a massive teacher walk out that same year. The college was forced to remove all students from their practicums or they would have been put on a black list and would not be able to get a job. I did eventually have three different practicums. My first real teaching experience was in grade 13 teaching a keyboard class. From this I went on to creating my own summer music camp. At this camp the students played recorder, percussion, sang, reading basic notation, and even made straw oboes.

Q: What was your inspiration to teach high school?

A: All the way until the second half of grade 13 I was determined on becoming a veterinarian, with a plan to attend the University of Guelph. It was one day after conducting a choir and teaching private lessons that weekend that my dad said, "It's too bad you won't have time for music next year." I immediately thought, of course I will! So I went to guidance counselor who called the university and asked about possibilities for continuing music while taking a heavy course load. They said it would be very unlikely. From that moment I knew music was where I needed to go. When thinking about my musical background it was all over the place. Playing clarinet, flute, singing, and organ. High school music teacher was the profession that had it all, plus I loved being around kids and had a background in the field.

Q: What was the scariest part of your first day?

A: Being in a portable by myself with no instruments. To give some context the previous choir director had zero musical experience. Eventually we received 8 instruments, two of which were a bass and snare drum. Something that took a bit of thought was I never took grade 9 music because I could read music. It was a big shock having 14 year olds who can't count 4/4 without drastically speeding up.

Q: What has been your biggest reward of teaching?

A: There have been a few things. First I have always felt appreciated, whether it has been my students or administration showing gratitude. There is always a tremendous amount of joy when seeing a student's progress within four years. Something else would be achieving personal goals such as going to nationals, or receiving gold at a festival. One of the most rewarding moments was a parent came up to my dad and said that her son being in my ensemble saved his life. Or having two kids meet in your class, fall in love in band and are now married with one kid and another on the way. It's the moments like these that make my profession so special.

Q: Have you thought about teaching something other than high school?

A: Yes and no. It was actually Dr. Woodford who inspired me to really consider a masters in music education. At the time you needed two years of teaching before you could pursue a masters in education. During my first few years of teaching this was defiantly in my mind; especially when working with the 75 year old instruments or having a rough day where you think it's been enough. I also like the idea of the intellectual challenge. But after being in high school for almost 20 years I'm a lifer. In university you don't see that grade 9-12 difference once a student graduates.

Q: What is the biggest lesson you want your students to leave with? Music related or not.

A: That they can. They can do it. They are good enough and deserving. Gifting somebody with enough self confidence and pride in their achievements to make them want to continue doing those things, will make them the most successful in life and happy. I want to give them a place where they feel welcome.

Q: When working with grades 9-12 (14-17 years old) how do you get them to open up/portray the emotional aspects of music without feeling embarrassed or like they're too cool?

A: You need to model this behaviour, don't be afraid to be emotional yourself. Make sure to spend discussion time on the topic. Asking questions like, how do you think the composer felt? That way they don't have to really own it, they put the emotion on the composer while still critically thinking about it. One year our choir sang in Flanders fields. While on the 401 (highway of heroes) the bus had to pull over because of a soldier's body being brought home. Once we arrived at the workshop the conductor asked what the students were thinking. They told her what they encountered on the way there. The next run through some of the students were crying because of how powerful it was. Or when we walked by the memorial of the unknown soldier it was the students who wanted to sing, paying their respects to those who sacrificed themselves for our freedom.

Response:

Relationships. That is what stood out from this interview. I had a close relationship with MzMac (as we would call her) and so did so many other students. MzMac always had an open door policy, no matter how much work she had to finish she always puts students and their wellbeing first, if you need to talk she is always there. Going back to the last question, she mentioned always creating a safe place for her students. I found it interesting that she strives to create this environment for everyone including students who misbehave. She said, bullying will not be tolerated in her classroom and if a student is caught doing so you need to call them out. But in doing this the bully must always feel safe so when coming in the next morning both parties can move past the incident and have a productive lesson. While conducting this interview it surprised me how little she does not tell her students regarding her pedagogy. She is truly open about what her course goals are and how she strives to achieve them. If a followup interview were to occur I'd like to discuss specific examples of tough situations with students and how to handle them. During my elementary school co-op I saw a different perspective of student reactions towards teacher discipline. Some teachers would yell showing real power over their students. I believe there should never be clear power over a student, rather a communal relationship for the purpose of a higher education. Although there should not be power over a student their still needs to be a certain amount of respect in this relationship and that is what I want to dive into further. Is there a recipe to earn respect from your students? While keeping a well balanced environment where open thought, joy, and the common goal of learning is encouraged. In my experience this doesn't happen until students become much older/mature. I believe this can be achieved at a younger age but we need to trust our students. To try and sum up my thoughts, I am still confused about how to create this utopia of learning but it is something I would love to discuss further. Something I am sure of is finding a way to encourage maturity at such young age directly correlates with MzMac's idea of relationships. Having a safe environment where thoughts like these are to come by these days, sadly in 15 years of schooling only a handful of teachers have done this.