

Composing the Future

Matthew Arau, Guest Writer



Springtime is the perfect time to look back on all that we achieved this year with our students and to reflect on what we would like to plan for the future. During this busy time of year,

however, just keeping up with all that we need to do may make us feel like sugar gliders running on a wheel, getting nowhere. If we can take the time to pause, breathe and dream, we can be intentional about creating the music classroom we want by design. When we are in survival mode, we react to what is coming at us and it can feel like we are constantly putting out fires, but I would like to share an alternative vision. If we continue to do things the same way and expect different results, we will be disappointed.

Being proactive about planning for the future begins with self-reflection and focusing on what we want. Look for inspiration to see possibilities through attending conferences, webinars, reading books and articles, visiting schools and talking with colleagues. Stephen R. Covey, author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, writes that the first habit to grow our effectiveness is to be proactive. He explains that while many people simply accept their current situation and blame others and circumstances, the successful person is looking within to become the best version of themselves and taking responsibility for improving their own life.

I have found that a barrier to planning for the future is not taking the time to dream. We can learn from President Abraham Lincoln who said, “The best way to predict the future is to create it.” Composing a plan for the day, month or year is similar to composing a piece of music. We may look for inspiration, stare at a blank page of staff paper, try out ideas on the piano,

go on a walk or meditate. It is in these spaces that we begin to hear or visualize the piece of music. In the morning before racing out the door or night before going to bed, take five minutes to sit comfortably, close your eyes, breathe in slowly through your nose and your mouth, reflecting on what you are grateful for and what you would like to create.

As Napoleon Hill wrote, “Whatever the mind of man can conceive and believe, it can achieve.” Focus on what you want rather than on what you do not want. When your desire to create something is so powerful, the *how* will figure itself out. As the chair of music education, I get to prepare future music educators, and I often share with them that I believe that they are entering the field of music education at a very exciting time, of what I feel is the precipice of meaningful change. The changes on the horizon are exciting for the new teacher and for the veteran, seasoned teachers. Sure, there continue to be real challenges and substantive roadblocks for which we must be vigilant in our advocacy but rather than bemoan what we don’t have, celebrate and move forward with what we do have.

Here are some questions and wishes to stir the creative juices for visualizing the future you would like to create:

- Where have we been?
- Where are we now?
- Where are we headed?
- If there were no limitations what would I like to do differently with my music students?
- I wish I had more time to _____.
- I wish that my ensembles were more _____.
- I wish behavior in my classroom was _____.
- I wish my students would play more _____.

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Take time to meditate quietly on the answers to these questions and wishes and visualize the type of classroom or ensemble that you would like to create. When you have a clear picture of what you would like to create, then take action to make it happen. For example, you may decide that you would like to diversify the repertoire that you program for your ensembles by introducing your students to more female and ethnically diverse composers. Look to resources such as composerdiversity.com or colourfullmusic.com to discover a wealth of high-level pieces to choose from. You may decide, as I have, that you want to broaden your ensemble offerings to include Mariachi music and ensembles in your curriculum. You may decide that you want to bring more joy and excitement to your rehearsals. You may also decide that you would like to make improvisation and composition an everyday normal part of your program rather than just a special event.

Set your intention now for what you want to create and the *how* will reveal itself to you. Be open to receiving creative thoughts for the future just as a composer of music allows inspiration to arrive. Dream big and your composition for the future will not only change your life; it will change the life of your students.

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