

## “The Lens of Who”

Douglas C. Orzolek, Ph.D., University of St. Thomas, Saint Paul, Minnesota  
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### Thanks!

Thank you to Linda and the entire board for this opportunity to share some thoughts with you. I sincerely appreciate the efforts SMTE’s leadership and everyone here at UNCG has made to help us all feel welcome. I also appreciate all of the interesting research and deep discussions we have been having over the past few days and I will certainly mention some of those in my comments today. Thanks to all of you for your work in advancing our profession through your willingness to share. Finally, I wish to thank the many people who have supported me and my work throughout my career. We have all been influenced and mentored by people who cared deeply about us and it is at these events that I often think of them and the many ways that they helped me to learn and grow.

### Introduction

Linda clearly articulated the goal of this Symposium in both her letter of invitation and her comments of welcome to the conference. As she noted: “This symposium seeks to encourage the examination our growth and provide momentum and vision for our future.” If you have attended these symposia before and if you have been reading the chair’s columns in the *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, you know that we talk a lot about vision and the future. And, for the most part, SMTE, our ASPA’s and the membership have done its diligence in working on the challenges that face us right now as well as planning for the future of our profession. There is no doubt that SMTE has had a huge impact on our profession through its publications, projects and myriad of other ways we have worked to support every facet of music education.

When we think about how SMTE arrived at this point, many of us recall the address given to our membership by Jeff Kimpton at the 2004 MENC Conference held in Minneapolis. Jeff recognized the potential of this body to move not only music teacher preparation forward, but also music education as a whole. He urged us to think outside the box, challenge ourselves and those around us and choose our direction wisely as he felt it would “determine far more than we might ever imagine” (Kimpton, 2005, p. 21). This Symposium and our ASPAs are the result of our work to heed that call.

I also think some credit is due to SMTE’s founders. When Charlie Leonhard, Eunice Boardman and others established this group, they stated that its purpose should be the advancement of music education, not just that of music teacher education. In the first *JMTE*, Leonhard wrote: “Music teacher educators are the elite in the profession and bear ultimate responsibility for progress in education” (Leonhard, 1991, p. 3). Charlie titled his article, “Full Speed Ahead,” and I think SMTE has been on that suggested course ever since.

As I have been preparing to come to Greensboro, I have been reflecting that SMTE's founders did us another favor. While its likely SMTE was probably given its name to parallel that of the Society for Research in Music Education, I have been thinking that calling us a society is even more fitting and suitable than our founders may have ever imagined.

According to the highly reliable and extensively scholarly source, Wikipedia:

A society is a group of individuals involved in persistent social interaction, or a large social group sharing the same geographical or social territory, typically subject to the same political authority and dominant cultural expectations. Societies are characterized by patterns of relationships (social relations) between individuals who share a distinctive culture and institutions; a given society may be described as the sum total of such relationships among its constituent of members.

(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Society>)

I think the last two parts suit SMTE quite well in 2019. While we all appreciate the learning, scholarship, wisdom and activity of SMTE, what we really appreciate most is the interactions we have with one and another and the strong relationships we have built through this symposium. This group has and always will be about its people. And, it is one of the reasons we all feel so connected to its mission and good work. It is also one of the reasons I am so pleased to see SMTE addressing the fact that some of our colleagues are unable to be with us here in North Carolina and I personally want to extend my appreciation to the board for listening to our concerns.

Now contrast the meaning of "society" with the definition of an "association" derived, in fairness, from Wikipedia as well. In general, an "association is a group of people organized for a joint purpose" (<https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/association>). The difference, in my mind is that societies are focused on people—or the who—while an association is focused on a specific purpose or thing. Honestly, I think that is exactly what an association should do. Like you, I belong to and participate in many associations and I believe that we can become much stronger when we join our efforts toward a common purpose. What that also means is that associations are often unable to meet the needs and support the challenges of its individual members. That is why we have societies and it seems to me that SMTE has positioned itself to consider, address, and even resolve the many significant concerns our profession is facing—David and Connie certainly reminded us of our ability to do just that yesterday. I think SMTE holds that capacity because of the perspective we are using to view those challenges has evolved to the place it should be—We focus on people or what I call the Lens of Who.

### Lenses

The theme of this particular conference is "Cultivating Perspectives and Practices" (Thornton, 2019, p. 8). How does a society cultivate perspectives? What does that mean? I have been thinking about it in terms of the various lenses we have used to view our work and create vision for our profession. A lens could really be anything that facilitates and influences the perception, comprehension, or evaluation of how we see something. For the purposes of this presentation I

have narrowed it down to these lenses. If you recall, Ken Zeichner used very similar lenses as a frame for his questions about teacher education when he presented on Thursday evening. In the early years of our profession, it seems that we spent a good deal of time concerning ourselves with **where** and **when** music education should be offered and made available—things that seem to be rather practical. Not long after that, the discussions of **what** we should be teaching in our classrooms became important. For example, we developed texts and eventually national and state standards that intend to guide learning and outcomes for PreK-12 programs while things like dispositions, standards for effective teaching, accreditation bodies and mandated teacher evaluations impact curriculum in higher education.

We also debated the philosophical concerns raised by the question of **why** we have music education. Those debates are also important and they help us understand the value and existence of our profession. Another lens or perspective is **how** we teach and share music. As a profession we have developed and implemented many different approaches, methods, theoretical models and best practices provided to us to consider and try in our own settings. Then we have a lens of my own making: I call it the “**what the hell**” group. These are things that seem to have no place in our profession and simply make us shake our heads, things like: why booster groups raise money to pay the salaries of the music teachers; the edTPA; music teacher evaluations based on students’ math scores; the continued need to espouse the value of music education; the edTPA; college admissions scandals; whether or not certain is music worthy of being taught in a classroom; the edTPA.... Maybe the edTPA deserves its own group!

I appreciate understand that each of these lenses require continued attention and development—the **why** of music education, for example, is ever-evolving and constantly changing. But when we only use those perspectives—which we could probably retitle as historical, practical, curricular, philosophical, theoretical, and pedagogical—to make decisions about direction or shape our visions for the future of the profession, I feel we fall short of our intent. We really need to put our emphasis on the most important lens of all... the lens of **who**.

Two years ago in Minneapolis, during this same plenary session, Sandy Stauffer shared a similar thought. She offered that “our seeming perpetual need to focus on what and how questions means, to me, that the music and the presentation of music is the object, the “it,” the focus, the “thing” that matters to us most. I can no longer make the music more important than the people” (Stauffer, 2017, p. 6). I could not agree more. She also suggested this: “we need to start imagining things through a new point of view...” (Stauffer, 2017, p. 7). I certainly align with that too. I believe it may be the “**Lens of Who**” we need to use more often as we create and imagine our visions for the future of our profession and I think there is a lot of evidence that SMTE is already doing just that.

### Rationalizing the Lens of Who

The truth is that we make use of this lens all of the time. Music, after all, is a human endeavor. It is deeply personal and we each hold a special relationship to it. In some way and at some point, its power moved us and it is likely that music is the very reason we are sitting in this

room today. Education, in my mind, is no different. It too is a human enterprise that allows each of us to unlock potential and grow in our understanding of the world and people around us. When we combine the two—music and education—we establish an opportunity to deeply impact our world. But, I would argue that we have to keep one thing in mind—we need to put the who before the what just as Sandy reminded us.

But Sandy and I are not the only ones who have thought about this lens and made an application to education and learning. These two people understand the importance of who in their work. Both have remained a constant a source of inspiration for us over the years as we consider our work. Mr. Rogers, of course, is known for his efforts to make each of us feel connected and loved as a part of his neighborhood. His television show reminded us that focusing on each child's emotional and mental health can do wonders to help their development as people. Dr. Seuss did the same through his beautiful books and illustrations reminding all of us that 'A person's a person, no matter how small.' His many other books offered similar reminders about the importance of thinking of others and being a good person.

If the other lenses find their foundations in the areas of historical, practical, theoretical, philosophical, curricular and pedagogical discourse then it is quite likely that the lens of who finds its home in the arena of sociological thinking. Given that sociology is concerned with human relationships (Wright, 2009), it seems that its application in considering the lens of who is easily warranted. Hildegard Froehlich (2017), speaks to this rather directly when she opines that "School music teachers should always keep in mind that they work with people whose experiences, culture, and upbringing are different from those of the teachers and that each person's socialization processes, therefore, result in the construction of differently perceived realities" (p. 32). Juliet Hess (2019) also recognizes the lens of who in her recent book by considering what she describes as "the potential for music to foster connections with Others, tell stories and share experiences, and engage politically in the world" (p. 10). That seems very important in this day and age and bravo to Juliet for her work!

The idea of sociological thinking as a lens to examine our profession and use it as a means for the creation of vision has also been considered in the sociology of music education literature. Ruth Wright (2009), for example, shares that:

Not only does sociological thinking present us with a new lens or set of lenses through which to examine such issues but it may also help us to being to see our way towards answers to questions, answers which have proved particularly elusive in the past. (p. 1)

Froehlich (2017) agrees with that idea and offers that "sociological thinking can help a teacher place himself or herself into the why, what, how and for whom of music teaching in particular social contexts" (p. 1). All this suggests to me that the lens of who a a very appropriate means to consider our profession.

Some of you may be familiar the name Willard Waller. His 1932 text, *The Sociology of Teaching*, is widely cited throughout the literature as it was one of the first major works dedicated to applying sociological perspectives to the field of education. Waller also used the lens of who in his thinking about change and growth in education. While some of his ideas reflect a very

different era in the history of education—for example: “Unquestionably, too, it is a mistake to exclude married women from teaching. It seems certain that married women are on the average more wholesome and normal than their unmarried sisters, and the schools lose by excluding them” (Waller, 1932, p. 454)—some of his other ideas appear to be well ahead of their time. He suggested that education as a whole should be far more attentive to each individual student, Waller suggested that a quasi-human resources approach to tracking students would be important. He suggested that:

This personnel work should follow the mode of social work rather than of personnel work in industry, and should look toward the mental and social adjustment of students... Complete case studies of every child in the school system should be made. (Waller, 1932, p. 456-457)

Here we are in 2019 where we are facing many questions about how to support the mental health and well-being of our students. It is quite likely that Waller was thinking of these very same concerns during his time—he was using the Lens of Who.

If we agree that a sociological perspective is an apt means by which to view our profession, then it seems appropriate to use it as a lens to consider the many issues and challenges we seem to face. Our dear friend Susan Conkling felt this way and, as you have heard, I can think of no one in our profession who felt as strongly about putting the people in music teacher education first—well ahead of the what, where, when, how, why or certainly the what the hell. Susan was a constant advocate for all of us and she wanted to see us meet our goals and our potentials. She and I spoke often about the people in our profession and I am sure she would highly endorse using of the Lens of Who in our decision making. Susan wrote: “Although social psychology is not the only basis for music education research and practice, it can provide a strong anchor during turbulent times, and its concepts allow for a broad research agenda” (Conkling, 2016, p. 4). I think there is tremendous wisdom in that statement.

### Breadth of Thinking

So how do we go about this? Many of us are vastly experienced at using the lens of who to support our work. We use it every day as we support particular students, contemplate how to ask a difficult question of a colleague or peer, consider how best to criticize someone or even express our feelings to a family member. But giving serious consideration to our profession’s most challenging concerns through a sociological perspective may require a bit more effort. Froehlich (2017) suggested that “developing such thinking requires a broad range of learning options and creative freedoms beyond the boundaries of accepted school learning” (p. 35). In a similar light, Ruth Wright (2009) cited the work of sociologist and thinker C. Wright Mills who felt that needed to develop their own “sociological imagination” as a means to “move beyond abstract, scientific enquiry, and to think imaginatively about social life” (p. 2).

As I was thinking about this session, I happened to be reading a relatively new book entitled *Range: Why Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World* written by David Epstein who is an investigative reporter and writer based out of New York City. I will admit to picking up the book because the title hit home for me. One look at my CV or bio and you will quickly recognize that I

am a generalist—I am literally “all over the place” in terms of my teaching, engagement and service and I think it serves my work at the University of St. Thomas quite well. While that may sound great, I often find myself thinking that I need to narrow my work and develop a more particular expertise. Every time I try, however, I seemed to get sucked into another direction and find myself exploring something new.

Epstein’s book made me feel a bit better about my choices. The basic premise of his book is that generalists are really important to the process of helping move things forward and advance our society. He finds that generalists are more creative as thinkers, more agile as decision-makers and they are able to make connections between things that their more specialized peers cannot seem to see. Throughout the book, he cites all sorts of research that support his contentions including that of music psychologist John Sloboda who you will recall for his book, *The Musical Mind*.

As I was reading this book, I kept making note of some reminders that seem rather applicable to our use of the lens of who. For example, when discussing researchers, Epstein reminds us that it is important to collaborate with others to consider things from a variety of angles. Epstein writes: “Everyone is digging deeper into their own trench and rarely standing up to look in the next trench over, even though the solution to their problem happens to reside there” (p. 13). I think our ASPAs a great examples of how we are avoiding this concern and using the breadth of our combined knowledge to make change and better our profession.

I found a few reminders and comments about breadth of thinking that seem applicable to this discussion. Based upon all of his reading and research Epstein comes to the conclusion that “thinkers who tolerate ambiguity make the best forecasters” (p. 256). That seems to suit our work in music quite well! He also quoted a few generalists who were quick to point out that they desired to look at problems in new ways and from new angles rather than doing things the same way as others. They share thoughts like: “I am not interested in re-search, only search” (p. 274). In that same discussion, Epstein points out that researchers who tend to find and build connections with literature from outside their own discipline have a harder time publishing their articles, but end up reaching a wider audience and thus have a greater impact in the long run (p. 274). Finally, I cannot think of someone in our world right now who is more broad thinking than Lin Manuel Miranda who noted that he “has a lot of apps open in his brain right now” (p. 213). His ability to combine the seemingly disparate fields of hip-hop, historical biography, and Broadway musical should further inspire us to find ways to make our own new connections in our work and lives.

So if we agree that the lens of who is a viable form of considering our profession’s challenges as well as creating direction and vision for our society, then what are some of the things we should keep in mind? Willard Waller (1932) reminded us that it is much easier to list our concerns that it is to truly resolve them (p. 448). And, it was C. Wright Mills who, in his 1959 book, *The Sociological Imagination*, suggested that it is our job—as sociologists (those who view things through the lens of who)—to help translate the personal problems of those we encounter into

public or societal issues. Finally, as Epstein outlined, as we work to solve some of these matters, I think it is important that we use the broadest and most elastic thinking possible.

### Using the Lens of Who

Let me now highlight a few examples of what I think might shed yet more light on what all of this might mean. What are some of the issues we face and how we should and could use this lens of who to help advance our work? I will try to share some recent experiences that portray situations where I think the lens of who was used well and those where I wish it been used more effectively.

By far, of all the who related concerns facing our profession, the one that seems most pressing for our society to address is how to best support the mental health and well-being needs of our students. I am so pleased that SMTE has formed a new ASPA to address this area. Our students seem to require even more of our patience, more of our time, and certainly more help than ever before. As a means to support one another, my colleagues and I are having very open and direct conversations about specific students and how we might best meet their needs—it is a regular part of our agenda at faculty meetings since nothing is more important than our students! We have established direct connections with our on-campus counseling centers and we are constantly seeking resources and more tools to help us in our efforts. We are encouraging students to ask us for help even though we are scared to death of doing or saying something that could cause harm. We are taking time at the beginning of classes and rehearsals to breathe, close our eyes and meditate and focus our minds. We are taking time to remind students to be joyful in their music making and learning. One of my colleagues, Vanessa Cornett-Murtada, has just published a book on this topic entitled *The Mindful Musician: Mental Skills for Peak Performance* and I encourage you to consider reading it. I know many of you share this sentiment and I hope we can continue to talk about this concern to support one another. And, as you'll soon hear, our newest ASPA, Mental Health and Well-being, is compiling more tools and resources to support us in our work.

I think it is fair to say that we spend a lot of time teaching and talking about curriculum in music education—in other words, the “what” of our profession. Of course, if you talk to those who direct ensembles, you are likely to hear them share that their curriculum is the repertoire they select for their ensembles. What happens, however, when music educators do not take the lens of who into account? Well, there are some very recent incidents of that very thing. Many of you are probably familiar with the story of composer Keiko Yamada. We were led to believe that Yamada was a female Japanese composer, but it turned out it was really a male American composer who was taking full advantage of our profession's desire for more diversity among our composers to sell more of his music. Unfortunately, many educators touted this work as a means to highlight women composers with their own students. The good news is that many others have taken both the composer and publisher to task and the piece has been pulled from lists and retailers.

The use of the lens of who was also absent recently when one of the Minnesota All-State Choir Conductors selected the well-known folk song “Blue Tail Fly” as the closing song for their part of the concert. Near the end of their dress rehearsal, one of the members of the audience—a performer with another group—left the concert in tears. Of course, “Blue Tail Fly” is not a well-known folk song, it is minstrelry—an intentionally offensive song performed in black face—that you likely recall as “Jimmy Crack Corn.” Eventually, the piece pulled from the concert by the state’s leadership, but it does leave one to wonder how so many students, music educators, parents, leaders and others saw that this piece on the performance list, but no one took the time to question whether or it was appropriate or mention its history or, more importantly, consider how it might impact the listeners.

We need to guide music educators to use the lens of who in their process. Music has tremendous power and it is the utmost responsibility of every music educator to know and understand every facet of any music they choose for their classroom. Even more important, however, is the music educator’s clear awareness of how music impacts the learning and life experience of every person touched by a particular piece—for it is in this consideration that we truly respect and honor music’s ability to affect and evoke the human spirit. In my opinion, any repertoire selection approach that does not take the lens of who into consideration is flawed.

I am very concerned about what are students are learning about the lens of who in some of their other classes, particularly ensembles. Our conductor colleagues are very influential and they need to be more mindful of their roles as teacher, mentors and models for our future music educators— and even more so when they are also charged with teaching music teacher preparation courses in lieu of a music teacher educator. I am especially appalled when they are touting things like—“it has everything to do with the person on the podium.” That is not the lens of who, that is the lens of me and it reflects some of the lower stages that David outlined for us in his presentation. What we need is something more like the words of Anthony Bourdain: “In France, its all about the chef. In Italy, the ingredients are the stars.” Perhaps it is time for music teacher educators to start doing more of the conducting of college ensembles or maybe we should start putting pressure on accreditation agencies to stop putting the stamp of approval on music education programs that are not using the lens of who to determine who is best suited to develop future teachers.

I am also very concerned about the ever-increasing role that “data and metrics” are playing in decision-making by administrators and leaders. The intent, of course, is to help educational institutions run more like businesses—viewed through the lens of who, it becomes obvious that education is not a business and that there is no set of metrics that can aptly evaluate what happens in classrooms. SMTE and its members need to lead the charge on the ever-present movement to create alternative approaches to licensure in our state. We started these conversations many years ago, but we need to share our thoughts about who should sharing music with kids and how to help them prepare. I think about who is reading the vast amount of great scholarly work we are producing. We need to do a far better job promoting our research and getting that research in the hands and minds of music educators to help support learning in their classrooms. I think we should collaborate even more—we learn so much about ourselves



when we engage in scholarship with one another. And, we need to make it clear to tenure and promotion committees that shared research in music teacher education is just as powerful and important as solo endeavors.

I am concerned about the continued stratification of the music teacher education profession. Certainly we need organizations and publications that address the specific needs of the specific facets of our profession, but we should make every effort to try to get any of the other who-centered groups to join us at this symposium and work on meaningful projects. Finally, I think SMTE and all of you need to lead more. We need to lead the change both on national and local fronts. We cannot no longer be patient and hope that things will change—especially on the issues related to the who of our profession.

So, what can happen when we use the lens of who. I am very fortunate to be a witness to a school where that very thing is happening in my own community. Like many cities, Minneapolis continues to face shootings and other incidents that are quite painful to watch. But how is all of this impacting our kids? At a school that seems to be right in the crossfire of all of this violence, the principal is using the lens of who to care for her students and staff in remarkable ways and the outcomes have been astounding. Mauri Freisteleben—a three-time alumna of the University of St. Thomas—is that principal. One of our local TV stations spent a year with her and her students documenting the amazing things that are happening when we focus on the kids and I think the trailer will provide you with a good sense of this amazing project. The full documentary was released Thursday evening and I assume it will be made available soon through the website [lovethemfirst.com](http://lovethemfirst.com) and I encourage you to share it with your students and colleagues. I think this serve as a powerful narrative about what can happen when we put our focus on the thing that matters the most in education... our kids. [Video]

### Conclusion

Love, family, community, relationships, respect, integrity, care—these are the things that I feel when I watch this video and every time that I look through the lens of who. Those are also the things that I have seen and heard over these past few days too. The evidence that we are using the lens of who to change the world has never been more obvious. And it is no surprise since SMTE's mission encourages us to do just that. It was just a few years ago that our Social Justice ASPA challenged our profession by promoting and pushing for the publication and continued conversation about social justice, diversity and culturally relevant teaching in music education. These past days we have spent a great deal of time examining and considering the formation of identity, the value and significance of inclusion and equity, what good modeling means—all of which enrich us both as professionals and as people. And we have considered and tackled many other pressing issues too. I am so proud of us for everything we have accomplished and all that we will be doing in the name of advancing music teacher education in the future.

Finally, as I was thinking through all of this, I became aware of another theme that reoccurred in my consideration of the lens of who—maybe this is something for us to explore at our next symposium. That theme was the presence and use of the word imagination shared by those

who have been cited throughout the appear—Leonhard, Kimpton, Stauffer, Epstein and several others. This poem seems to reflect what might be an appropriate summary:

We are the music makers,  
And we are the dreamers of dreams[...]  
Yet we are the movers and shakers,  
Of the world, forever, it seems.

While often attributed to Willy Wonka, the entire poem was actually written by Arthur O’Shaughnessy (1873) and I think it serves as an excellent reminder of the charge this symposium has called us to meet—cultivating perspectives and practices. It is my hope that we will continue to be the movers and shakers and that our work is always imagined through the lens of who.

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