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MENC: Policy, Advocacy, and Enlightened Self-Interest

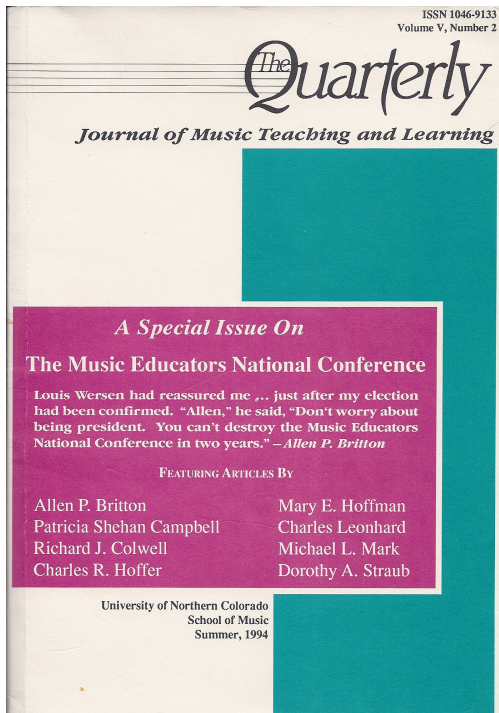
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It is with pleasure that we inaugurate the reprint of the entire seven volumes of The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning. The journal began in 1990 as The Quarterly. In 1992, with volume 3, the name changed to The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning and continued until 1997. The journal contained articles on issues that were timely when they appeared and are now important for their historical relevance. For many authors, it was their first major publication. Visions of Research in Music Education will publish facsimiles of each issue as it originally appeared. Each article will be a separate pdf file. Jason D. Vodicka has accepted my invitation to serve as guest editor for the reprint project and will compose a new editorial to introduce each volume. Chad Keilman is the production manager. I express deepest thanks to Richard Colwell for granting VRME permission to re-publish The Quarterly in online format. He has graciously prepared an introduction to the reprint series.

MENC: Policy, Advocacy, And Enlightened Self-Interest

By Mary E. Hoffman

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Before there can be discussion of the role of the Music Educators National Conference (MENC) as an organization which is concerned with music education policy and/or advocacy, there should be awareness of the conference as it exists today: its governance, membership, relationships with other music education organizations, what it is, what it is not, what it does, public perceptions of the organization, what the membership would wish it to do, and how the organization copes with these disparities.

In MENC's governance, there has been little change in the past 30 years. There have been, however, attempts to broaden some aspects of the governing bodies. For example, within the past five or more years leaders have attempted to enlarge the national executive board, but without success.

MENC's leadership includes a national executive board consisting of the six division presidents representing geographical sections of the country; three national officers including the sitting president, past-president (vice president), and the president-elect; plus a representative of the music industry. According to the constitution and by-laws, all the workings of the conference must proceed from this body.

Unlike the national government, MENC's governance system does not include a body which represents the population spread of the country. A state with 4,000 members has the same number of representatives in the

national assembly as one with 150 members. Since the national assembly is advisory only and constituted for making recommendations to the National Executive Board, it operates much like the U. S. Senate in an advise-and-consent system, but without the consent part!

MENC's membership is large, heterogeneous, and multi-faceted, representing all aspects of music education. The members are loosely bound together through state federated units, with a unified membership systems of dues. If one belongs to the state affiliate, one is automatically a member of the national organization.

MENC has very close affiliations and associations with other music education organizations such as American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) and American String Teachers Association (ASTA), to name just two. Within MENC itself, there have been organized special-interest societies whose functions are to be vested-interest protagonists for their particular branch of the conference.

The local administration of the state federated units is strictly in the hands of the members from that state. MENC mandates only that the state constitution should not be in direct conflict with the national constitution and by-laws. These units are as diverse as the states themselves in population, land mass, topography, and school law.

MENC is *not* an association to which a music educator must belong in order to teach music in the schools and colleges of the United States. It is not an organization which has the mandate to certify music educators. That is a function of state government, and the certification process varies from state to state. Even though MENC had, from 1990 to

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the end of 1993, administered a system of registering and certifying music teachers on a national basis, each music teacher must be certified within the state in which he or she wishes to work. The state departments of public instruction will not sacrifice this territorial imperative to a professional organization.

MENC is also *not* an organization which can mandate what is done in the schools or how it is to be done. Although MENC has joined with other arts organizations in preparing documents regarding national standards in the arts, the rights and privileges of determining curriculum still reside within the state education units and/or local school boards.

It is easier to know what MENC does and surely will continue to do as a group with a vested interest in music education. These are ongoing tasks which are constitutionally mandated of the organization and its leadership.

- It publishes books and magazines.
- It provides a forum for special-interest music groups to work in collegiality.
- It produces videos and other technological products.
- It presents in-service conferences at both national and divisional levels. The state conferences are presented by the state federated units and are not sponsored financially by MENC.
- It organizes national assembly meetings.
- It provides assistance in governmental liaison for state federated units.
- It testifies when called upon before committees, commissions, and boards of state and federal governments.
- It organizes public relations events such as Music in Our Schools Month.
- It represents music educators and music education as required by articles of concordance with the DAMT group (Dance, Art, Music, Theater), *et al.*

MENC also engages in one-time and occasional efforts which are organized to investi-

gate specific questions in music and music education. The Tanglewood Symposium: Music in American Life and the Brigham Young Conference: The Young Child and Music are two examples.

MENC members have their own ideas about what the organization should and should not do. Often these are dichotomous. Here are a few examples I garnered from my presidential mail:

- Save jobs.
- Save *MY* job.
- Devote major portions of print and video material to my special interest in music education.
- Broaden the scope of the print materials to include more generalized information.
- In conventions and conferences, be more generalized.
- Lower dues.
- Raise dues and do something serious with the money.
- Don't have unified dues. I just want to belong to my state federated unit.
- Keep unified dues. Numbers matter.
- Stop trying to control the state federated units.
- Strengthen state federated units.

The public has very few perceptions of the conference. On a day-to-day basis, MENC is the most visible organization to whom the general population goes

for answers to music education questions, yet there are few questioners outside the immediate and tangential professions. Most of the general populace doesn't know that this organization even exists. They know about music education in their local schools *if they have school-aged children or grandchildren*. They neither know nor care whether there is an organization to which the music teachers belong. In terms of school-aged children being involved with music, most folks are interested only in the quality of the half-time show and the basketball pep band. Ironically, although MENC is the most articulate and visible of the music organizations and

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boasts the largest membership, it is almost unknown outside the profession.

Setting the Stage

MENC can plead a cause and be an advocate for music education in the schools, but it cannot and should not try to make national policy. Its membership is too diverse, and the nation's school units are too numerous, too disparate, and too controlled by governmental strictures. Again, the territorial imperative dominates.

MENC has a continually changing leadership, so there are few constants. Each leader has an agenda to which he or she is committed. At times, the membership will not follow where the leader wants to lead. Many times, the rank and file doesn't know or care where the leaders want to take the organization.

MENC members often don't really care about the organization at the national level, simply because they do not deal with MENC in their day-to-day work. Many members don't have the time to read the *Music Educators Journal* thoroughly. They consider themselves lucky to find time to peruse their state journals let alone to keep up with their professional reading in the special fields. MENC members care more deeply about the organization when:

- their jobs are in jeopardy;
- they are elected to state music education boards and state music education society committees;
- they become involved in organizations where the expertise of the national organization is needed; or
- when they are asked to host a divisional or national convention.

Members are ambivalent about the role MENC should have in the daily operation of music programs in the schools. Music teachers serve the master who pays them, and they view MENC as the support system when things get troubled, not realizing that by this time it may already be too late.

MENC and Policy

MENC, as it is now constituted, is almost incapable of making policy or policy statements for some or all of the following reasons.

Terms of Office

As with most professional organizations in which elected officers have other employment, MENC's leadership changes quickly. The national president serves but two years in that role; even the National Executive Board (NEB), although serving staggered terms, sits for only two years. There is some carry over by virtue of the fact that nationally elected officers serve extra terms as president-elect and immediate past-president (vice president) and do sit and vote on the National Executive Board, but the number of such officers is small. Also, there are few National Executive Board meetings, and a multitude of affairs crowd every board-meeting agenda. Presidents often advocate time on the agenda for "the good of the conference" items, but sometimes the time is simply not available to attend to these philosophical matters.

Diverse Geographical Makeup of the National Executive Board

Although the board members are cautioned to think nationally rather than regionally, it is very difficult for them to comprehend the vast differences in both place and job in sections of the country that differ from their own. Agreement is difficult, and even when a commission or committee is constituted to draw up a series of statements (as in Hoffer's "Future Directions" discussed below), the National Executive Board must give its consent to the publication and promotion of such philosophies. The board is directed to apportion monies for all MENC-sponsored projects. If members of the board disagree with the notions promulgated by the committees, or other MENC groups, providing a platform for such ideas becomes difficult.

Too many MENC members think narrowly about their role in the field of music education, calling themselves band directors, elementary general-music specialists, or Orff or Kodály teachers. What has happened to the teacher who really fathoms how students learn in music, whether it be through a recorder class or a show choir?

Diverse Nature and Goals of Affiliated and Associated Organizations such as ASTA or ACDA

MENC has many comprehensive working relationships with other music education organizations. Thus, the organization must be careful not to make statements detrimental to the philosophy and goals of these groups.

Unlike organizations such as the National Education Association (NEA) or American Federation of Teachers (AFT), professional organizations such as MENC are not workplace-oriented. Although MENC would like to insist that a fair share of school time and monies be apportioned to music education, there is no enforcing segment to call a strike if the policy is ignored by the employers.

The closer the agency or institution is to the workplace, the more likely its policy is to be monitored for compliance by the taxpayer as well as by state and local boards. Therefore, public school boards seem to be the most visible educational policy makers. It is this body to whom the public — the education consumers — must apply for redress when they perceive that an educational wrong has been committed or when they want a policy changed. The school board does make policy — it must, as a means of insuring that what it wants done is really done. Policy is simply philosophy with teeth!

The local school boards make policy because the states in which they are geographically located enact laws pertaining to education. The laws lead to mandated policy and regulations at the state level. In most instances, before such major decisions are cast in stone, affected parties may present testimony for or against these laws. At this point in the policy-making process, the state federated units of MENC can exert their greatest influence on the policy of the state. This implies, however, that the state federated unit has a watchdog group monitoring all actions

of state boards of education and state legislatures. This is not necessarily so.

If Not Policy, What?

School-system policy directly affects the local teacher of any subject when it touches upon curriculum, pedagogy, scheduling, inclusion, facilities, materials, and the work day. Lately, some states have begun making philosophical policy — mandating certain forms of learning events such as outcome-based education or total quality management.

Of course, curriculum and pedagogy are self-explanatory. The teacher must be concerned about what is to be taught, when it is to be taught, how it is to be taught, and by whom it is to be taught. It is when the policy-making goes too far afield — that is, when the parents start to fight the procedures, or when the teachers themselves disagree with the policy as set forth by the school board — that a battle ground of problems can occur. Another policy-making body fighting in this arena will not help. It is at this point, more than any other save the loss of programs, that MENC should step in as a music education advocate.

MENC as Advocate

Advocacy is proactive, not reactive. Decisions as to what an organization advocates for its members can be made well in advance of the emergency. Calm thinking can go into the formulation of any belief system. There is time in the advocacy process for research, for grass roots input, and for executive board decisions to be made without the distraction of a crisis mentality.

Advocacy is more than just testifying before committees and commissions for the purpose of preserving music programs in the schools. During Frances Andrews's presidency, the Goals and Objective Project (GO Project) was initiated. It was thought that the preparation for the future trends of music education should start with the suggestions

that had emerged from the MENC-sponsored Tanglewood Symposium, mentioned above. This is an example of the kind of long-term, calm thinking which can result in substantive problem-solving. A large group of people volunteered time and effort to flesh out statements to which MENC members should give attention. The committees prepared 35 statements, eight of which were given MENC priority for the immediate future (1970):

- lead in efforts to develop programs of music instruction challenging to all students, whatever their sociocultural condition, and directed toward the needs of citizens in a pluralistic society;
- lead in the development of programs of study that correlate performing, creating, and listening to music and encompass a diversity of musical behaviors;
- assist teachers in the identification of musical behaviors relevant to the needs of their students;
- advance the teaching of music of all periods, style, forms, and cultures;
- develop standards to ensure that all music instruction is provided by teachers well-prepared in music;
- expand its programs to secure greater involvement and commitment of student members;
- assume leadership in the application of significant new developments in curriculum, teaching/learning techniques and technology, instructional and staffing patterns, evaluations and related topics, to every area and level of music teaching; and
- lead in efforts to ensure that every school system allocates sufficient staff, time, and funds to support a comprehensive and excellent music program.

Careful perusal of these statements shows that almost everything one could hope for in the education of children through music is somewhere in these eight rather broad and vague statements. One wonders, then, what could possibly be encompassed by the other 27 of the original 35 items! This series of statements developed into a very carefully-thought-out advocacy plan.

MENC has advocated in other useful ways. In 1974, in order to get MENC's message across to the public, school boards, and other decision-makers, the conference published the first edition of *The School Music Program: Description and Standards*. This

document appeared shortly after the Tanglewood Symposium and the subsequent GO Project conferences and as a response to needs registered in both these documents. According to past president Paul Lehman, in his introduction to the second edition of the document (1986):

... it quickly established itself as an extraordinarily valuable resource. It has been used extensively by superintendents and principals, state departments of education and state supervisors of music, music educators and laymen. It has been referred to and quoted by various groups concerned with accreditation or certification and it has been cited in innumerable curriculum guides. It has been the most popular publication in the history of MENC.²

Lehman follows this introduction with his own three basic standards for the 1990s:

By 1990, every student, K-12, shall have access to music instruction in school. The curriculum of every elementary and secondary school, public or private, shall include a balanced, comprehensive, and sequential program of music instruction taught by qualified teachers. At the secondary level, every student shall have an opportunity to elect a course in music each year without prerequisites and without conflicts with required courses.

By 1990, every high school shall require at least one unit of credit in music, visual arts, theater or dance for graduation.

By 1990, every college and university shall require at least one unit of credit in music, visual arts, theater, or dance for admission.³

More recently, past-president Charles Hoffer, through his initiative called "Future Directions," challenged MENC members to identify issues in American education and society. A strategic planning committee has refined these concerns into a set of specific goals:

Music and Children at Risk: Develop appropriate responses to the several major societal problems that are affecting America's youth. Implementation: MENC will work with school boards, administrators and education agencies to develop in-service programs and publications to assist music educators in teaching at-risk students.

Music in Early Childhood: Increase the amount and quality of music in preschools, day-care centers and kindergartens. Implementation: Through publications, research,

and collaborative efforts with other organizations, MENC will work to increase awareness of the benefits of music education for the very young.

Music in Middle Schools: Maintain and build high-quality programs in America's middle schools. Implementation: MENC will develop a position statement and rationale, recommend a curriculum with ideas for effective scheduling, and develop materials for teacher preparation.

Music Teacher Education and Recruitment: Ensure that all future music teachers receive adequate preparation and that a sufficient number of able persons enter the profession. Implementation: As fine-arts requirements, including music, enter the general curriculum, there will be a need to train teachers in general music at all levels, including secondary school. Teachers will need skills to infuse multicultural experiences into the music curriculum. Mentor programs will be needed to offer professional and personal support to new teachers.

Inform Others: Educate persons who are not music educators about the purposes and value of music education in the schools. Implementation: Through its publications and a year-long public awareness campaign with the National Association of Music Merchants and the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, MENC will foster a clearer understanding of the importance of music in the curriculum.

Affirm the Importance of the Profession: Provide music education with a concise statement of belief and supporting rationale which will affirm the importance of the profession and affirm those who practice it. Implementation: MENC will develop and promote a credo and rationale for the profession. In addition, magazine columns and testimonials will reaffirm the importance of the profession of music education.³

These are examples over a span of 20 years which reveal the depth of thinking needed to formulate a schema of advocacy for a large organization. But advocacy by the leadership at the national level is not enough to ensure that anything will happen in the future. Advocacy is only as strong and dynamic as the membership believes it to be.

Toward Enlightened Self-Interest

Advocacy works for change when a sufficiently large number of people become knowledgeable advocates. Of course, this is called self-interest; but in this context advocacy works only if each member knows and understands the total music program from early childhood to lifelong learning for senior citizens. Too many MENC members think narrowly about their role in the field of music education, calling themselves band directors, elementary general-music specialists, or Orff or Kodály teachers. What has happened to the teacher who really fathoms how students learn in music, whether it be through a recorder class or a show choir?

Our profession has become fragmented and thus has been roundly criticized, particularly in the National Endowment for the Arts publication, *Toward Civilization: A Report on Arts Education*.⁴ Many existing arts curricula and guides focus on skill development rather than the art form as a whole which reinforces divisions within the profession. Little interaction occurs among arts education theoreticians and researchers who develop the curricula and the arts-curriculum coordinators and teachers who must use them.

As professionals, music educators must strive to become advocates for the entire music education curriculum. One cannot effectively advocate for only a portion of a program. We need MENC members who are speakers, writers, and group coordinators cognizant of the advocacy strategies of the organization. Each member must be ready to reply to criticism of music education with professional expertise and communication skills that will influence decision-makers. Only with thorough and consistent advocacy by those with enlightened self-interest can a difference be made.

Notes

1. Michael Mark. (1978) *Contemporary music education*. New York: Schirmer Books, pp. 50-51.
2. Music Educators National Conference. (1986) *The school music program: Description and standards* (2nd ed.). Reston, VA: author, p. 5.
3. Music Educators National Conference. (1990) *Soundpost*. Vol. 7, No. 1, Fall, p. 5.
4. National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). (1988) *Toward civilization: A report on arts education*. Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office. 