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INTRODUCTION

This book is intended for music teachers who either intended to teach or have taught secondary instrumental or choral music, but are now facing a job as an elementary music specialist.

If you find yourself in this position—essentially teaching elementary music despite your preference or intentions—this book was written for you. We hope it will help you understand your new position better and, perhaps, even look forward to trying something new. Even if teaching elementary music was your original plan, this book may be helpful as you go forward.

Within this book, we will deal with attitudes (yours, your new students', and those of the adults around you), school environment, classroom management, curriculum and assessment, and performance, as well as offer concrete lesson plans for each grade level. We hope to help you calm down, figure out the job, and find the joy.

Hello, my name is Michael. (Hello, Michael!) I am a recovering high school band director. I have taught music for over 30 years, and spent most of that time (27 years to be exact) at the high school and collegiate level. Due to budget cuts in 2009, I ascended to a new career as an elementary music specialist.



When presented with this new and unique opportunity I found myself being moved to a new city—not of my choosing—called Transition. In this city I had many neighbors: hope, despair, creativity, clarity, reality, joy, and sadness. One of the lessons I have learned is that the neighbor I choose to live with will determine what I do and how I live.

Living in this city, I had a few reactions and many questions. The first question was, “Which questions do I ask?” My questions fell into three areas:

First: The Emotional Questions

How could they do this to me!
Do they not know what I have done for this program and these students?
Do they not know how much of my life I have given to this band program?

Second: The Run Questions

What do I do now?
Should I quit and go to another school district?
Should I quit the whole thing and do something totally different? (Wal-Mart greeter?
French fry specialist?)

Finally: The Real Questions

Do I need a job?
Do I like teaching music and working with kids?
Do I have the skills to meet this new assignment?
Am I musically and pedagogically prepared?



Answering these questions helped me determine how to move forward. If you are in a similar situation, answering these questions, or similar ones, can help you determine what type of teacher you will be, where you will lead your students, and how to do more than survive—maybe even thrive. This book, at least my part of it, is a reflection of that journey and the things I learned and some helpful information.



Hello. My name is Mari. (Hello, Mari!) I am a recovering percussionist. I have taught music for 15 years. I assumed I would be a professional percussionist. If not that, then a band director. What else was there, really? When I realized I didn't have the attention to detail that would be required for me to land one of the few orchestral jobs available, I went with the fallback and got a job as assistant director of bands at a middle school in Austin, Texas. I was prepared for the job musically, but my classroom management was a disaster. I'm not much of a crier, but I cried every day.

At the end of my year of tears, my new husband and I moved to a new city so he could finish grad school. I sent out two sets of applications: any music position available and truck driving school. I was offered two positions: general music in a K-7 school and truck driving school. After careful consideration, I accepted the position that would pay me money rather than the one that would cost me money.

Unlike with band, now I was unprepared musically and still had no classroom management skills. It was a nice school with nice teachers who helped me out. The one thing I figured out right away was that when the kids had fun, I had fun—and vice versa. So, I got some books on music games and we all had fun. At that time, I didn't know how to find the lesson in the game, so although we were all having fun, none of us were learning much. Now, 15 years later, I still have fun every day (though I get more tired having fun than I used to), but just about all of my fun has a purpose.

My goal in writing this book is to help others, who, as Mike and I once did, stand in their first elementary classrooms with panic in their eyes and maybe even bad tastes in their mouths. If you embrace it, teaching elementary music can be one of the most fulfilling jobs there is. My goal is to help you embrace it.



GETTING STARTED



Chapter 1

ATTITUDES: YOURS, THEIRS, AND OURS

YOUR ATTITUDE

Your attitude is the single most important aspect of both your curriculum and your classroom management. Regardless of whether you are excited to try something new, dreading the new position, or just unsure of how to proceed, the first thing to do is honestly reflect on your attitude about teaching elementary school.

Remember my questions? The emotional questions, run questions, and real questions? Here is how I approached answering them for myself:



The Emotional Questions: The Man in the Mirror

(No, this is not the Michael Jackson song!)

First, I tried to be honest. I tried to figure out what my own attitude was about teaching, my students, my work environment, and where I saw myself. When transitioning from my old job to my new position, I had to come to the conclusion, "It's not about me." It is not personal; it is just business. Does it feel personal? Yes! Does it hurt? Yes!!

Know that there is always someone younger, faster, and cheaper than you. (Ouch! Sorry.) That may sound dark and a bit cynical, but know what you did was good for your students and the program and be satisfied with it. Whether the move proves to be best for the kids or not remains to be seen. Looking back, I definitely did not think moving me to elementary school was best for either my high schoolers or the elementary kids I would soon teach. As they say, "Hindsight is 20/20." In my case, the move provided some clarity for the next steps.

When you are asked to move positions, state your preferences, but ultimately, you must do what it takes to move forward. In your new position, keep your focus, keep your head up, and keep your eyes open for help and inspiration. You will find it. You are the author of your story. The end is yet to be written.

I began my new journey with help from a former student, some new friends, and a well-timed summer class: World Music Drumming.

The Run Questions

If you go to another school or district, you are the low man on the totem pole. Last in, first out. At least in our region, when you move to another district, you will be the first person who is reduced in force, just due to your length of time in the district.

If you leave the profession, make sure it is for something you are passionate about. You don't have to reinvent the wheel. Just refine your skills to make the wheel roll the way you want it to.

The Real Questions

The economic downturn forced me to ask some tough questions and, more importantly, the right questions. (I know I may sound a bit Dr. Phil-ish, but it helps. I promise I'll stop soon.)

