Self-Care and Health Through All Stages of a Music Teaching Career

Idaho Music Educators Association
Nampa, ID, January, 2020

Lori Gray, lorigray@boisestate.edu
Amy Wickstrom, amy.wickstrom@boiseschools.org

Exhausted when saying yes, guilty when saying no—it is between giving and taking, between other-care and self-care. This is a universal dilemma in the human drama. It is just more intense for those who are, by nature and inclination, emotionally attuned to the needs of others. It gets highly illuminated when intense human interaction—helping, teaching, guiding, advising, or healing—is the occupational core. Here, giving of oneself is the constant requirement for success. (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2014, pp. 3-4)

Teacher stress, burnout, and physical and mental health issues continue to be a rising trend and cause for concern in music education. Music education students in undergraduate programs often feel overwhelmed with stress, personal trauma, concerns about the future, and some are worried they may not be emotionally or physically prepared for the demands that contemporary music teachers face. According to Diaz (2013), “In contemporary psychology, mindfulness training has been investigated as a clinical intervention for enhancing emotional well-being, as a method for modifying aspects of psychological attention, and as a possible treatment for various physiological disorders (Greeson, 2009)” (p. 44). Self-care, mindfulness, and coping skills are viewed by many music education professors as crucial skills for music teachers. However, due to high number of credits required for the degree and extreme time constraints, few music teacher preparation programs offer much in the way of health and wellness courses or even discussions about this topic within methods courses for music education students.

In this session, Lori and Amy will share their personal stories related to the need for self-care and coping strategies in contemporary music teaching. Lori, a music education professor, has attempted to address this issue by publishing articles in state music journals on self-care and the need for support systems for teachers. She will also describe her own strategies for self-care during personal times of grief and outline her presentation of these ideas to both education and music education students through professional development workshops and classes on campus. Amy, a K-12 music teacher, will share her decision to leave the profession and her journey on making her way back to teaching music. She will discuss her decision to pursue a Master's in music education and the healthier route and new perspective she gained before her return to teaching general music. In addition, Amy and Lori will share the stories of music teachers in Idaho who have also faced personal trauma or teacher burnout. These music teachers have offered advice for coping with trauma and establishing healthy and happy career paths in music education.
The lived experiences of music teachers who have faced challenges and thrived, are needed as learning models for future music teachers. Lori and Amy will share self-care and support system ideas, discuss the school trainings and supports that may already be in place for teachers, and suggest additional steps that music teachers and music professors can take to ensure a healthy and thriving community of music students and music teachers as we continue to address issues of trauma and burnout. Amy and Lori will facilitate a conversation with session participants on self-care strategies, physical and mental health course offerings, and mentoring and support systems for music education students and practicing music teachers.

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