Mentoring for New Teachers

The focus of this issue of *Praxis* is mentoring. Most professions recognize the mentoring process as a requisite component for licensure or certification leading to the privilege of practice. For example, physicians must complete a residency at a hospital and attorneys must complete an internship at a law firm before earning the right to engage in professional practice. Aspiring doctors and lawyers engage in rigorous study of concepts and theories that are essential for application in *practice*. Conceptual and theoretical elements can be described as *knowledge* whereas techniques for application can be characterized as *skill*. Although these two dichotomous terms do not encompass everything involved with obtaining a professional education and working as a professional, they are useful for analyzing the role of mentoring in acquiring professional skill.

Similar to the fields of medicine and law, the tradition for mentoring in the teaching profession has been apprenticeship. Unlike most other professions, however, the law requires teacher candidates to earn their certification credentials before being placed as an apprentice. In fact, for teachers of young children and youth, certification requirements include rigorous conceptual and professional training for promoting acceptable educational and ethical standards. Because this training falls predominantly into the category of *knowledge*, mentors can offer the help essential for early-career music teachers to translate that knowledge into skill. An apprentice who recognizes the role and importance of a mentor can become empowered to progress more readily from knowledge to skill.

Ideally, the young teacher should be intentional about seeking mentors. Fortunately, most accomplished teachers consider mentorship to be a natural element of professional development and are willing to help new colleagues. This leads naturally to a positive professional relationship that is beneficial for both partners and encourages a learning culture that enhances success for teacher and student.

We offer this issue of *Praxis* not only to encourage new teachers to seek mentors, but also to urge experienced teachers to consider serving as mentors, sharing their wisdom, and facilitating purposeful development of both knowledge and skill among our new, less experienced colleagues. Ultimately, as new teachers become experienced, they may move into the role of mentor and thus continue the cycle of learning.