

New Mexico Male Music Elementary Educators Advocacy And Advisory
 (NMMEEAAA) "It's a guy thing"
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Dedicated to Janet Kahn, retired Director of Fine Arts, Albuquerque Public Schools, through whose efforts we are here today. (She was instrumental in laying the groundwork for the FAEA – Fine Arts Education Act of New Mexico)

Plan for the Day-

1. A little food for thought- the research (yes, there actually is some!) Results from a Google search for *Male Elementary Music Teachers*
2. Our stories
3. What's next?

Some of the issues around Male Elementary Music Teachers

Octave Problem	Positive Male Role Model - Education/ Graduation	Positive Male Role Model - Singer / Musician	Gender Stuff	Physical Contact	Legal /Liability
Use falsetto when necessary- best to avoid if possible	Your male presence in elementary settings is important	Use your best singing voice to model	stereotyping	Avoid as much as possible!	Never alone in room with one student
Alternatives- sirens, stories, accompanying in correct octave	You might be the only male role model in a student's life	We can encourage singing for 4 th and 5 th grade boys	"Masculinity Issues"	Ask permission to relocate a student before touching	"Two Deep" – have a second adult around

From the research:

The following 20 excerpts are from: Greger, Scott Victor, "Male Teachers in Elementary General Music" (2014). Theses and Dissertations. Paper 579.

<http://dc.uwm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1584&context=etd>

(Source: digital commons)

We will use these as springboards and starters for further discussion.

1. The primary negative force is a perceived lack of masculinity for all men who teach young children, and this is especially compounded for elementary music teachers.
2. One teacher, Brian, relates his experiences with principals who interviewed him for an open position. On several occasions, he was asked about his marital status: "I was asked some questions that were not only illegal, but inappropriate...finally I cornered one of the principals, 'Why are these people always wanting to know if I'm married?' they said, 'Well you're a male music teacher applying for an elementary school job, you must be gay'."
3. Male teachers cannot be expected to overturn all issues of underachieving males solely because of gender.
4. Two subject areas in education that have a strong feminine presence are Family and Consumer Science (formerly Home Economics) and Elementary Music.
5. A partial response to the offences from others who questioned both his sexual orientation, and his right to teach in the elementary school. In Brian's description, the 'average' male elementary music teacher takes on the role either because he is either incompetent, or using the elementary position as a springboard to promotion elsewhere.
6. To combat negative perceptions, some male music teachers go to extremes in order to project masculinity. Roulston and Mills (2000) presented two teachers who fit this profile. Tony is a long-haired, elementary music teacher who promotes his masculinity by trying to be the teacher every student likes because he is edgy and daring. His method of choice is including popular songs that may have questionable lyrics in his teaching repertoire. He also tries to be confrontational with other teachers, parents, and administrators. The other teacher, Andy, takes on an athletic coach mentality. He relates a story from his teaching of having a group of boys who did not want to sing, so he turned it into a competition to sing as well as the girls. He played up the competitive side and his own skills as a, "basketball and floor hockey coach" (p. 232). He also tries to combat the stigma with boys about singing. He turned singing into the cool thing that every guy did in order to be a strong male.

Both men promoted themselves as being especially talented with boys who have disciplinary problems.

7. While I don't feel that every male student has begun to love singing just because I am male, I do feel that being male shows that loving to sing is acceptable for boys.

8. Brown felt that teachers are not well prepared by undergraduate institutions to teach music. When he left college, he felt that he was well prepared to begin teaching. The worst grade he received in college was in his methods class. Brown explained: I had an outstanding teacher, she poured herself into this. And the last day of her class she said, "So you guys think you're ready for student teaching?" We're all like "YES!" And she just laughed, and she said the best of you...are barely ready for your first day of student teaching, and when you finish your student teaching experience, the best of you are barely ready for your first day of teaching, and she was right! Brown felt that it takes a minimum of three years in the same position to find your own teaching personality.

9. The inception of this entire study came from a simple comment of a colleague in my first elementary position. She said, "How are you going to teach them to sing?"

10. I spoke to a professor about how I was teaching singing, and he was appalled that I was singing in falsetto. He told me that I was not helping my students, but rather hurting them by giving a poor vocal model.

11. ...I know some elementary male teachers that only use their falsetto all day long. My vocal chords could not, would not, be able to do that."

12. I am happy to report that I have been nearly falsetto free for five years.

13. He (Feierabend) insists that male teachers at the elementary level, which he is...use falsetto as little as possible and never if you can avoid it...you'll vocally be trashed if you keep using that falsetto, unless you are a counter-tenor.

14. Long's students are constantly playing games and telling stories that encourage making sounds in their head voice. He uses stories that have "alright" or "oh no" said in a high pitched voice. He often has students in their head voice for an entire lesson without them realizing it because they are playing a game and having fun. While the students feel they are playing, Long is assessing which students are able to get their voice into that 45 octave, and which cannot.

15. If they can't internalize the pitch, then they can't produce it. It has to be in here (points to head) before it can be here (points to mouth). I feel very, very strongly about that. So I'll use a lot of exercises, even in Kindergarten and first grade that develop that inner hearing, that inner...sense of pitch.

16. The second method was to use tools that encourage students to make sounds in their head voice. These tools include slide whistles, beanbags, puppets, tennis balls, flashlights, yo-yo's, illustrations, and helicopters.

17. The first student to match pitch in a class gets to press the button and make the helicopter fly.

18. A male elementary music teacher needs to know that the schedule is grueling and you need to be very flexible to adjust lesson plans at a moment's notice. The level of musicianship at an elementary school needs to be just as high as an intermediate or high school ensemble. Teaching students to sing on pitch in their own natural voice rather than trying to match a model given an octave lower is a constant struggle, but with the right preparation and tools, young singers are able to adjust to a male vocal model.

19. This is where it starts, this is one of the reasons I wanted to do elementary because I want to be a part of that start, and I wanted to make sure that they're being taught properly. That they're getting those steps, those building blocks, that they're getting that foundation.

20. I am happy to finally have a network of other male elementary general music educators with whom I can share ideas and find new ways to improve teaching. Their passion and excitement for teaching students is contagious, and I feel a renewed desire to improve my own teaching every day. It is my hope that the stories, experiences, and advice of these men will serve as a guide to other male elementary general music educators, and that their words will serve to inspire all music teachers regardless of gender.

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