

## 2016 PASIC Education Panel Discussion – “Teaching Today’s Generation” – Thursday, Nov. 10<sup>th</sup> 4:00pm - Ben Wahlund, Notes

### THE STUDENT LANDSCAPE



### THIS EDUCATOR’S ROAD MAP

#### **The digital revolution has quickly spawned very high expectations.**

The highest standards are almost unattainable when measured against 7 billion people.  
Failure is a much more likely option when considered a “one or the other” proposition.

#### **Students are busy trying to meet high expectations.**

Exhaustion, anxiety, and depression are rampant.  
It is difficult to develop “soft skills” like time management, active listening, organization, and conversational skills.  
Students value empathy in the abstract sense but their empathy is underdeveloped in the personal sense.  
Students are often averse to risks for fear of failure.

#### **Specialization at a young age is rewarded and curiosity is not actively encouraged in most curriculums.**

Students tend to not recognize the value of developing a diverse musical skill set.  
Schools often use their most successful students as resources instead of availing themselves to students as resources.  
Group and individual assessments are almost always by means of competition.  
Music programs and students often value achievements over experiences.

#### **Technology saturation leads to information/opportunity saturation.**

Students welcome a digital-free environment in lessons but are happy to engage tech when presented.  
Technology is changing at faster rates.

Students and parents need clarity of purpose on a consistent basis.  
There are so many other interesting things available at any given moment.  
Music is often first presented as a product, not a means of expression.

#### **There is a lack of community in large part because of distracted/busy adults and classmates.**

We have severely limited inter-generational experiences.  
It is difficult for students to see the value in investing in community when community doesn’t make time for them.  
Students are recognized most for their achievements, not their character.  
Students are consistently accused by older generation(s) of being a self-absorbed, entitled, “selfie” generation.  
This is not much different than other generations, but most adults were just more discreet about these observations.

#### **Families’ incomes are not growing at the same rate that the cost of education is growing.**

Value matters, so students and parents expect more attention from teachers.  
Families have very little tolerance for peripheral expenses.

#### **There are limited job and career options.**

Students have limited work experience at a young age because of over-scheduling or limited opportunities.  
While already averse to risk, the idea of a career in music is more audacious than previous generations.

#### **Acknowledge and embrace excellence but develop realistic expectations.**

Identify the unique traits of every student and celebrate them.  
Present success and failure as a continuum, not a binary construct.

#### **Model moderation while still growing – “Moderation does not equal Mediocrity”**

Work with professional counselors to learn about the complexities of mental and physical illness.  
Model healthy “soft skills”. Engage students in conversation when possible. Ask questions and *actively* listen to them.  
Exhibit patience and empathy in private and group settings. Always err on the side of compassion.  
Have fun experimenting in rehearsals and lessons. Model appropriate risk-taking behavior and proportional responses.

#### **Celebrate skills developed at an early age but teach to students’ weaknesses as well.**

Craft engaging group/individual experiences that develop diverse skill sets to show their value.  
Be willing to put the second, third, or fourth best student on a first part.  
Consider guest artists, unorthodox community performances, & recording projects for feedback.  
Develop amazing musical *experiences* – group sight reading, improvisation obstacle courses, etc.  
Advocate at the administrative and community level to separate rankings/scores from what constitutes success.

#### **Adopt a role not just as the provider of information, but as a tour guide providing clarity in a sea of data.**

Use technology only when it is useful. Sparkly technology is nothing new to this generation.  
Reliable tools and skills: metronome app, tuner app, audio and video recording on phone for review, live sound reinforcement training, social media competence, website building, and high quality video/audio recording editing.  
Ideas need to be justified and presented in a sequential, coherent fashion. Use lesson plans!  
Take interest in students’ other activities and learn about them. Modeling curiosity will maintain theirs.  
The most interesting thing about making music is making music. Get out of the way and let it work. Students will focus.

#### **Slow Down. Make time for students and parents in and out of the classroom, but maintain appropriate boundaries.**

Consider unorthodox projects that reach out to other age groups - a parent ensemble, alumni coaching, hosting an “instrument petting zoo”, performing student compositions, outreach at churches, nursing homes, etc.  
Praise *behavior* publicly and privately on a regularly basis, but always make it specific.  
It is in a young adult’s nature to be self-absorbed. They are still trying to figure out who they are. Often, it is the adults that are inappropriately self-absorbed. Publicly acknowledge that the internet is just as pervasive in adults’ lives as students’. We are all responsible for availing ourselves to one another in an engaged, healthy, compassionate way.

#### **Always give families their money’s worth and don’t waste their time.**

Consistent and timely communication via face-to-face visits, e-mails, and/or texts is *very* important, but keep it on your terms; “I am a friendly teacher, but not your friend.”  
Always stay aware of and respect compounding expenses.

#### **Acknowledge that the future is unwritten, but show that we prepare the best we can.**

Expect behavior that is found in the workplace –organization, timeliness, professional discourse during rehearsals, etc.  
Embrace a spirit of entrepreneurship and model it. Show that there is *joy* in your work, not just stress and uncertainty.



**Ben Wahlund** is a Grammy nominated, award-winning music educator, composer, and performer who lives in the Chicago area. Mr. Wahlund serves as full-time percussion instructor at Northern Illinois University (DeKalb, IL), the Director of Percussion at the College of DuPage (Glen Ellyn, IL), and conducts the Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestra Percussion Ensembles (Chicago, IL). Published by Bachovich Music, HoneyRock Publications, and Innovative Percussion, his music compositions have won numerous international awards and are performed by professionals around the world. Additionally, Ben enjoys teaching many successful private students in his home studio, Black Dog Music Studio ([www.blackdogmusicstudio.com](http://www.blackdogmusicstudio.com)). Ben Wahlund performs as part of area orchestras, ¡The Screaming Norwegians! Percussion Duo, the Naper Chamber Players, is a member of the Yamaha Performing Artist roster, the Zildjian Artist Program, and endorses Innovative Percussion Sticks and Mallets.