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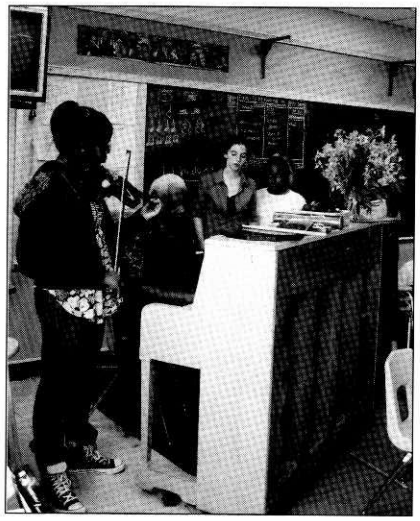


It Takes a Village to Raise an Orchestra

Don't Conduct it, Play it

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It Takes a Village to Raise an Orchestra

Marnie O'Sullivan developed a program in the fall of 2000 called the "Leschi Music Partnership" (LMP) which united a village of students, parents, teachers and community members to support music students at Leschi and help them attain their music potential.

by Ramona Holmes

As WMEA members we place a high value on public music education for every student. Many public school music programs, however, have experienced severe cut backs that leave only minimal music instruction time. The opportunities to enhance the school music program through private lessons, good instruments and practice space are dependent on economics.

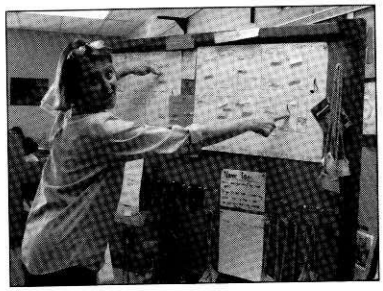
The instrumental music program in the Seattle School District has been eroded by budget cuts. Hard-working elementary instrumental music teachers cover as many as 10 schools in a week. Often they have only a half-day per week (two contact hours) for all of the beginning band and orchestra students in a given elementary. There is not sufficient space for all the students who want to start instrumental music. Without private lessons and outside school music opportunities, the drop-out rate for those who do start is very high.

Although Washington Middle School and Garfield High School are known for their outstanding music ensembles, students from Leschi Elementary and students who are from families with low incomes are sadly under-represented in the music programs. Marnie O'Sullivan, then a Washington and currently a Garfield parent, realized that without private lessons and full-time music teachers, children face enormous competition from their better-prepared peers. Believing strongly in the importance of music education for all, O'Sullivan developed a program in the fall of 2000 called the "Leschi Music Partnership" (LMP) which united a village of students, parents, teachers and community members to support music students at Leschi and help them attain their music potential.

The Leschi Partnership started with no capital funds. It is primarily run with volunteer time, but there are some items that require money. Over time, there have been some generous donations. The Leschi Community Council holds rummage sales with proceeds funding the reeds, strings, rosin and bus fare for students. La Panzanella donates the bread for snacks. Many students have donated their used music books so there is a library of student books to borrow. Some instruments have been donated or sold at cost. Some of the instruments were acquired through a grant written by a Garfield tutor who was "tired of flutes held together with rubber bands and duct tape."

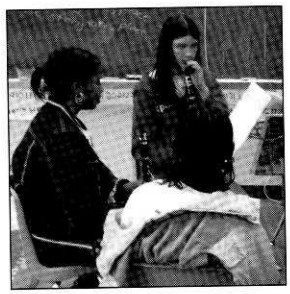
Leschi lessons

Leschi Elementary School has 325 students of which 68% are free or reduced lunch, 63% are not living with both parents, 13% have limited English proficiency and 93% are minorities. The school has no general music teacher although there is a before-school gospel choir taught by volunteer Debbie Cavitt. Due to cuts in Seattle's music program, the district instrumental music teacher last year was at Leschi only once a week for half a day. There is not space in the half day for all interested students to participate. Thanks to a grant, Leschi will have one full day of instrumental district next year. The Leschi Music Partnership works closely with the instrumental music teacher to support the band and orchestra instruction.

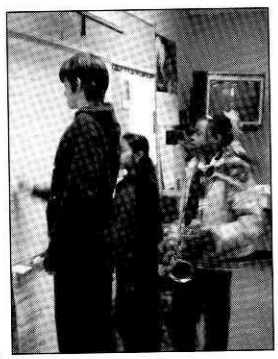


Leschi teachers allow students to do the tutoring in their classrooms after school. A complex schedule of tutors, Leschi students and rooms is organized by parent volunteers headed by O'Sullivan. If a student needs an instrument, every effort is made to locate one and get it in condition to play. Some instruments are available through the school district, and some have been donated specifically to the Leschi Music Partnership. If students cannot afford music books, they can borrow used copies from the program. Parent volunteer Joan McNabb picks up the snacks and arranges bus transportation. An intricate web of e-mails and schedules links the program.

From 2:30 to 4:30 every Tuesday afternoon, 20-30 Garfield High School and Washington Middle School music students walk to Leschi to provide instrumental lessons for fourth and fifth grade students at no cost. Tutors arrive at the tutor center and prepare for lessons. Students are dismissed from class at 3:00 and head to the tutor center. They sign in, meet their tutors, grab music stands and materials, and head to their assigned rooms.



Tutors are responsible for lesson plans, though they are provided with a basic outline of what to cover, such as proper playing position, scales, rhythm and pitch reading, and practice techniques. Students who are taking lessons with the school district instrumental music teacher bring their week's assignment to practice. Lessons are ideally one to one, but tutors sometimes work with small groups. The tutors help students with instrument technique, practice skills and tasks the district music teacher has assigned. Often tutors play duets with the students or play solos to demonstrate good playing technique.



The tutors often take time to work on music theory and reading. They devise games and incentives for the students to learn notation and to analyze their music. Lessons last until 4:10, when students and tutors return to the main classroom for snacks of fresh bread and butter. Tutors escort their students to the bus or to meet their parents.

Tutors help students prepare for their concerts. Sometimes the tutors play with the students for school events. The excitement of concerts seems to increase every year.

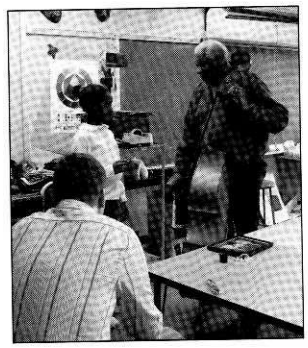


Occupational education

The Leschi tutors are talented and energetic high school students who are eager to learn more about teaching music so that they can help their young students. They are also very busy young people with already overfilled school schedules. Many choose to participate in band, jazz band, orchestra and AP classes. Washington state high school requirements include a 1.0 occupational education credit, and the Seattle school district requires 1.5 credits in occupational education. In fall 2001, O'Sullivan came up with a great idea to help them develop their tutoring skills and meet their high school requirements by earning academic credit in occupational education as tutors.

The state defines occupation education as credits "resulting from a series of learning experiences designed to assist the students to acquire and demonstrate competency of skills under student learning goals three and four and which skills are required for success in current and emerging occupations. Programs meeting the vocational-technical education program approval standards adopted by the superintendent of public instruction meet this definition." (http://www.sbe.wa.gov/reports/newgardreq.htm) The credits are part of what is now called "core technical education" and must be supervised by a CTE-certified teacher who has completed the 30 hours of state training. This teacher can then be a "work based learning" coordinator.

Garfield High School CTE teacher Gary Thomas agreed to help the Leschi students do work-based learning in music education with the support of Garfield principal, Ted Howard. The tutors need to log 90 hours of tutor time, have some guidance in best skills practice and safety, and write reflective essays to meet the .5 credit requirements. The Leschi Music Partnership added seminars and teaching logs for the high school students as part of a new "Teaching Elementary Instrumental Music" work-based learning class. Some students had enough hours of tutor time for the work requirement. Others added to their work time by attending classes at Seattle Pacific University, taking students to concerts and developing materials.



An array of presentations and a network of support were developed to present best practice classes. O'Sullivan contacted professional musicians, current and retired teachers, college students and music business leaders. Speakers included Patricia Kim from the Seattle Symphony Education Program, Gerry Marsh from Seattle Pacific University, Seattle Symphony bassist Bruce Lawrence and other prominent musicians.

Tutors are encouraged to take the initiative to make the program better. One tutor wrote the grant for instruments. Another developed marketing materials for the program, and one produced a video to use with prospective tutors and donors. Others have come up with innovative teaching methods, accompanied their students to local solo and ensemble contests and to Seattle Symphony concerts, found teaching materials on the web and developed their own instructional games.

Tutor reflection essays

The tutor reflection essays clearly show both tutors and students learn from the experience. Some comments from the tutors include:

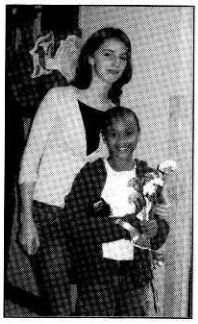
"I liked teaching the kids. It impressed me how smart these wonderful kids are, and how I might want to go into music or teaching music."

"The progress that kids make and how fast they can learn really gave me hope that a program like tutoring at Leschi can make a big impact. In a way, the microcosm of the tutoring program at Leschi gave me hope for broader societal change."

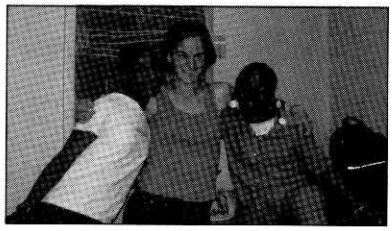
"...teaching the cello has strengthened my own basic technique. Having the experience of being a teacher has impacted me as a student in the empathy I have for my teachers and how I interact with them."

Some highlights

Does it work? There are many indications that the program has already made a tremendous difference. The attrition rate for both students and tutors is remarkably low. The drop out rate for instrumental students has fallen from 75% six years ago to around 20% for the past five years. Many tutors come back year after year. Some take a hiatus for sports or other commitments and later return. One drama student noted "I can't wait for the play to be over so I can get back to Leschi!"



A remarkable bond builds between students and tutors. One young Leschi violist went on to the middle school program and was ready for the local youth symphony. She may never have had the nerve to do that but was encouraged by her tutor. When she went to the first day of youth symphony and found her tutor, a member of the advanced group, there to meet her, the anxiety was gone. Such personal connections are part of the key to the program's success.

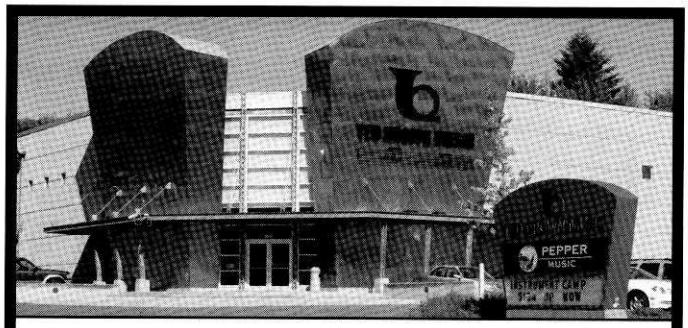


We may find some outstanding music education colleagues coming from this group of budding teachers. One tutor struggled to keep a trumpet student focused. Although there was no documented learning problem, clearly there were issues with attention. The tutor devised a system of breaking the long music pieces into bite sized chunks and putting up only a phrase on a flash card at any one time. The student eagerly learned with the new strategy. This is the kind of caring teacher we want in music education.

The next step

Thinking a program like this might help in your school? If you want to provide occupational education credit for your high school students you will need to find a Core Technical Education (CTE) certified teacher to supervise the work-based learning. There will be a minimum number of work hours required along with best skills seminars and reflective essays. You may want to contact Marnie O'Sullivan (marnieosullivan@comcast.net) or the author (ramonaho@spu.edu) for ideas. You will need to contact students, teachers, parents, community members, local musicians and more. After all, it does take a village to raise an orchestra.

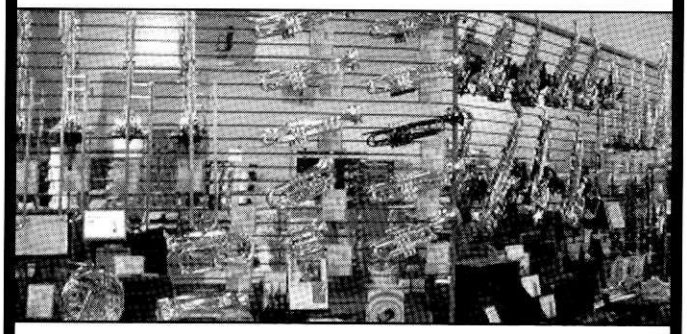
Ramona Holmes is professor and chair of music at SPU where she teaches ethnomusicology and music education. She supervises music student teachers in Seattle, Shoreline, Edmonds, Everett, Northshore and Bellevue school districts. She taught general music and strings in the Seattle and Shoreline school districts for 20 years. Her doctoral work at the UW was in both ethnomusicology and music education. She co-authored World on a String.



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