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"THE CURRICULUM: MISALIGNMENT OR "MISSED-ALIGNMENT?"

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"THE CURRICULUM: MISALIGNMENT OR "MISSED-ALIGNMENT?"

Ronnie Wooten

Associate Professor of Music
Northern Illinois University

"Many times, the curriculum in our educational institutions teaches from a perspective that is often insensitive and/or biased towards the students who sit in the classrooms each day. As the population of our society and certainly that of our schools become more and more diverse each year, attention to this matter cannot be left to chance."

In schools at every level across this country and elsewhere, curriculum is heavily dominated and influenced by Western cultural, philosophical, and performance practices. Most schools use the "Western ideal" as the standard by which most curricular issues are decided and/or implemented. It is imperative in the new millennium that those of us charged with the responsibility of classroom teaching must be about the business of curriculum and proper curriculum alignment. Many times, the curriculum in our educational institutions teaches from a perspective that is often insensitive and/or biased towards the students who sit in the classrooms each day. As the population of our society and certainly that of our schools become more and more diverse each year, attention to this matter cannot be left to chance.

We do not have to look very hard to find curricula that when weighed in the balance are more often than not found wanting. Many educators and educational psychologists have provided research, which supports the critical need for change in this area. Curricular problems can be found at a variety of levels, in a variety of situations, and in a variety of disciplines. Not only are they found in many of the materials available for classroom usage, but also in the manner that teacher-training institutions prepare our future teachers. In spite of the myriad demographic changes that we are currently witnessing in this country and around the world, many of these institutions do a negligible job of preparing prospective teachers who are capable of teaching and/or creating curriculum that is appropriately aligned. This is no small task, however, there are issues that must be addressed so that our school curricula are not misaligned and certainly not "mismatched".

I can refer you to numerous scholarly books from my chosen discipline that describe any non-Western-based materials in terms such as "primitive", "barbaric", "unsophisticated", "simple", "noise", or just plain "ugly". A large number of these books do not even mention this information at all. The same holds true for other disciplines, and some disciplines lend themselves more readily to curricular alignment and issues of inclusion. In this country it is generally assumed that the right to education is universal (a common misconception). Common sense tells me that if the right to education is indeed "universal", then who am I with my Western prejudice, to say that anything in the curriculum which espouses a non-Western focus is "primitive", unsophisticated, or

"barbaric"? In my mind, this type of commentary from "trained" and "educated" persons does not indicate a fundamental mind set for universal education, and could hearken a return to the day when education was for "the classes" of people, and not for "the masses" of people. My point here is this-if education is indeed a universal right and I guess on some level it probably is-then we should not impose cultural standards in regards to curricular issues that neither suit nor serve the students who must sit before us in the classroom each day. Is it possible to create curricula that are not misaligned? I believe so, and while no curriculum is perfect in every regard, there is much that we can do to eliminate the misalignment that we often find and hopefully eliminate the instances of "missed-alignment" as well.

Presenter:

Ronnie Wooten is a year 2000 recipient of the Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching Award at Northern Illinois University, where he is currently Associate Professor of Music and coordinator of Instrumental Music Education. In addition to guiding the undergraduate and graduate programs in instrumental music education, he also serves as conductor and music director of the Northern Illinois University Wind Symphony. A native of North Carolina, Wooten received the Bachelor of Music Education Degree with honors, from East Carolina University. He received the Master of Music and the Doctor of Musical Arts Degrees from Michigan State University, where he held a teaching assistantship and a competitive doctoral fellowship in the School of Music. He has pursued additional study in conducting and music literature at the University of Calgary (Alberta, Canada), University of Michigan, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and Campbell (NC) University.

Dr. Wooten's research interests include: wind literature by black composers, analysis of wind band literature, conducting history and pedagogy, music teacher education and ethnicity and gender issues in teaching. Currently, he is preparing an annotated bibliography of works for concert band/wind ensemble by black composers. He was selected in 1995 as a participant in the first NIU Multicultural Curriculum Transformation Institute, and has presented research before the Illinois Committee on Black Concerns in Higher Education, the Illinois Music Educators Association, as well as at various universities across the country. During the summer of 1998, Dr. Wooten was invited to serve as Orchestra Director for the international conference: "A Multicultural Celebration of Diversity in Music" in Flagstaff, Arizona, where he prepared concerts which featured music of black composers. Those concerts can be heard on National Public Radio.

Maintaining an active schedule as guest conductor, adjudicator, lecturer and consultant for instrumental music education, Dr. Wooten has conducted clinics and workshops in over 15 states thus far. He holds professional memberships in the Music Educators National Conference, Illinois Music Educators Association, MidAmerica Bandmasters Association, Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia, Pi Kappa Lambda, and Kappa Kappa Psi and is a member of the College Band Directors National Association, where he serves as a member of the National Committee on Ethnicity and Gender Issues, and chairs the Subcommittee on Mentoring.

