

Guest Lecture Reflection: Dr. Mark Hopkins

On January 18th, we were visited by Dr. Mark Hopkins to hear him speak about his teaching philosophy and the curriculum he wrote for teaching beginner band in Nova Scotia. I myself have no band experience but still found his lecture to be very interesting. I was fascinated by all of the thought and work that goes into designing a curriculum and the fact that Dr. Hopkins was very adamant about not teaching “the way he was taught.” Part of this stems from his his personal bias towards the use of method books. While he acknowledged that there are some benefits to using them, he argued that it places too much emphasis on notation and that it leaves little to no room for creativity. This showed me that fostering a good environment for teaching is not only up to the teacher, but can also be affected by the resources which the teacher employs. Furthermore, Dr. Hopkins points out that without a method book a teacher would have to work much harder in order to structure the class and find repertoire to teach. I believe this comes back to straying away from the “traditional” way of teaching beginners, because as we saw during the lecture singing or playing one pitch for long periods of time to learn note values is not very enjoyable for students. I believe the most interesting part of the lecture was Dr. Hopkin’s philosophy about looking at music as if it were a language. I had never associated the two before, but there is research to support the fact that music stimulates the same part of the brain as language. Dr. Hopkins formulated his curriculum around this premise and designed a program which he thought would help his students succeed. I was surprised to hear that he prefers to have students learn sound before sight, as in my music education there has always been a need for us to learn both concepts at the same time. Creative pursuits are encouraged

in this program from day one, and imitation and improvisation are valued. In this way, Dr. Hopkins told our class the outcomes of his class are student based and even assessments are made to take into account the process and person rather than just the product. This point really resonated with me because I believe that the product is valued when students are being assessed more than anything. Even here at Western, I feel as though a large portion of our grades depends solely on if we can play a passage perfectly or if we can write facts down on a paper from memory for an exam. This can contribute to students feeling anxiety when it comes to being assessed, and unsuccessful examinations can lead to feelings of inadequacy. Ultimately I think Dr. Mark Hopkins brought up many good points in his lecture that will be relevant to this class as we go on to become educators ourselves. And I feel it added a new perspective to my perception of music education.