

Steve McNeal: Sustained Excellence in Orchestral Education Through Relational Trust

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In 1962, Steven McNeal inherited a well-established orchestra program at Fort Collins High School (FCHS) in Fort Collins, Colorado. McNeal had only two years of music teaching experience but he quickly proved himself as a “master teacher.” Carol Agee began the orchestra program at Fort Collins High School soon after World War II and became the administrator at FCHS in 1962. One of Agee’s first tasks was to hire his replacement as the orchestra director. Spieker (2018) interviewed Agee as he reflected on McNeal’s tenure. Agee said, “If I looked all over the United States, I never could have found a better [director] than Steve McNeal. No way” (p. 18). This comment bolsters Brand’s labeling of McNeal as a “master” music teacher in his article *The Making of a Master Music Teacher*. Brand (1990) wrote, “This special focus section of the *Music Educators Journal* celebrates those extraordinary music teachers who easily live on both sides of the line between aesthetics and the daily mundane” (p. 21).

McNeal nurtured the orchestra program for the next 36 years to create one of the most recognized and successful school orchestras in the United States. This is evidenced by his two national awards: the National School Orchestra Association (NSOA) Orchestra Director of the Year Award in 1997, and a Music Educators National Conference Music Educator of the Year Award in 1987-1988. Another measure of McNeal’s master teacher designation may be found in his students’ successes. His orchestras received numerous superior ratings at large group music festivals, traveled to Europe and New York, and were selected through blind auditions to give several performances at Colorado’s music education conferences. Multiple students from McNeal’s program performed in all-state orchestra ensembles and some made music their profession either as a performer or music educator. After McNeal retired from public-school

service, he added an additional 13 years to his tenure by teaching a variety of music education courses at Colorado State University.

When former students and colleagues are asked about McNeal's success as a music educator, their responses mention very little about the many accolades he or his students received; rather, McNeal's (Mr. Mac's) daily interactions as a friend or a teacher dominates the conversation. His personality, warmth, and passion for people and musical excellence put a lasting impression on the hearts of many. Through a narrative research design, this paper will highlight McNeal's formative years and career as a music educator, and a plausible reason for his success will be forwarded using the four attributes of Bryk and Schneider's Relational Trust Theory.

Rationale

Educational literature engages the profession with many efforts on topics such as assessment, teaching strategies, and technology. There are journals dedicated to these topics such as *Educational Assessment*, *Creative Education*, and the *Education Technology Journal*. It is important for the profession to highlight these issues because there is a need for teachers who can navigate through accountability, best practices, and application of technology; however, our profession also must remember that one of the fundamental roots of good teaching is found in healthy, human relationships. Hall and Hall (1988) wrote, "Human dynamics of the classroom undoubtedly have a profound impact on the effectiveness of academic learning and social skills" (p. 243). Hargreaves (1998) stated good teachers "are emotional, passionate beings who connect with their students and fill their work and classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy" (p. 835). Recently, in music education specifically, Edgar (2013) stated, "Building collaboration involves nurturing relationships and caring" (p. 32).

McNeal was an exemplar teacher who understood the importance of meaningful and lasting relationships with his students all in the context of an orchestral music classroom. He fostered the four attributes of Relational Trust Theory in a way that helped him elevate young musicians to a high level of excellence and musicality. Bryk and Schneider led a team of researchers who developed Relational Trust Theory in a longitudinal study (over a three-year period) focused on education reform efforts in 12 elementary schools in Chicago during the early 1990s. Researchers conducted multiple interviews with administration, faculty, parents, and pupils to determine the effectiveness of the reform efforts. Bryk and Schneider (2002) wrote,

As we pondered the results of these first analyses of Chicago's reform, we became increasingly convinced that the quality of social relationships was playing a powerful role in determining whether a school community made good use of their newfound authority and resources." (p. xiii)

What resulted from Bryk and Schneider's work is a theory about relational trust that was evident between school administrators and teachers and the public and students. They theorize four qualities within relational trust: (a) respect, (b) personal regard for others, (c) competence, and (d) integrity. These characteristics are not realized in any particular order, nor do they convey any kind of hierarchy. Rather, they are more like a four-piece, interlocking puzzle (Figure 1) that creates the whole picture. Relational Trust involves interpersonal connections that occur within group settings. Bryk and Schneider (2002) wrote that these connections are characterized by "a discernment of the intentions of others," which they describe as "a fundamental feature of day-to-day interpersonal exchanges" (p. 21).

Figure 1

Bryk and Schneider's Four Attributes of Relational Trust Theory



Bryk and Schneider (2002) defined respect as the “recognition of the important role each person plays in a child’s education and the mutual dependencies that exist among various parties involved in the activity” (p. 23). Competence is in “the execution of an individual’s formal role responsibilities” (p. 23). Personal regard for others is a willingness to be involved with the community that goes beyond established roles. Bryk and Schneider consider this attribute as a “powerful dimension of trust discernment in school contexts” (p. 25). The authors mention further, “Expressions of regard for others in this context tap into a vital lifeline and, consequently, important psychosocial rewards are likely to result” (p. 25). Finally, integrity is an attribute given to others when there is a “consistency between what they say and do” (p. 25).

McNeal’s story is important to tell because music education professionals need examples of incredible teachers like McNeal. Perhaps more than ever, educators need encouragement to nurture relationships with their students they serve so that, in part, musical excellence can continue in our schools as evidenced by McNeal’s career in that his students worked hard for him as their director.

Methodology

McNeal's formative years and career as a music educator was explored through a narrative research design. Creswell (2014) wrote that a narrative is a "design of inquiry from the humanities in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives" (p. 13). Taylor (1989) described narratives as ubiquitous and natural ways to talk about past events. He also wrote, "we must inescapably understand our lives in narrative form" (pp. 51-52). Polkinghorne (1988) posits that narratives are "the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful" (p. 1). Bruner (1986) believed this is because narratives have a distinctive way "of ordering experience, of constructing reality" (p. 11). We also learn from, and can build upon, narratives of those from our past. Sir Isaac Newton famously wrote to his friend Robert Hook, "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants" (Bartlett, 2012, p. 279).

In 2015, I interviewed McNeal in two sessions on June 1 and 2. All cited quotes from him are from these interviews and ensuing emails. These interviews make up the bulk of the narrative and provide insights into his formative years. Creswell (2014) detailed that a narrative can also involve one or more individuals who knew the participant. As such, four other participants were sought, each representing a different "season" of McNeal's career. This was designed intentionally so as to look at McNeal's alignment with Relational Trust Theory throughout his career. The participant's data provided perceived realities about McNeal as a person, a musician, and music educator (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Richard Killmer was McNeal's roommate in college and he gave more insight into McNeal's formative years in becoming a music educator. Killmer was interviewed on August 5, 2018 and all quotes cited from him are from this interview and ensuing emails. David Agee offers insight into McNeal's early years as a

public school music educator. Agee was interviewed on September 10, 2018 and all quotes cited from him are from this interview and ensuing emails. Insight into McNeal's final years as a public school music educator are provided by Jenelle Steele. Steele was interviewed on September 7, 2018 and all quotes cited from her are from this interview and ensuing emails. Details about McNeal's collegiate teaching is provided through an interview with David Saccardi and all quotes cited by him are from an interview on October 15, 2018.

Approval for the project was given by my institution's Internal Review Board. Interviews were semi-structured in nature. McNeal's interview was face-to-face and interviews with the other participants were conducted through phone calls and emails. Two articles further informed the narrative concerning McNeal's viewpoints about teaching: Brand's "The Making of a Master Music Teacher" (1990), and McNeal's "Building a Successful Orchestra Program" (1998). Finally, my long-time relationship with McNeal, thick description, and member checks with McNeal and the other participants served as validation strategies (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The narrative concerning McNeal's formative years convey a feeling of a historical paper. Selected photos are included to foster this historical aspect of the narrative and to help give the reader a sense of realism about McNeal, but it is not the thrust of the work. There is also a discussion highlighting the observation of a plausible reason for McNeal's success through use of Relational Trust Theory. This addition adds significance in the results as it may help answer the research questions, which are:

1. What were McNeal's formative experiences and how did they shape his understanding of music and music education?
2. What are some of the accomplishments that set McNeal apart as an example of an exemplary music teacher?
3. What are possible reasons for McNeal's success as an exemplary music teacher?

Findings

Steve McNeal's Formative Years

McNeal was born on October 14, 1938. He was the first of two sons to Olive Virginia and Silas Wayne McNeal and grew up on a 160-acre family farm south of Kersey, Colorado. Music was a part of his childhood and some of his fondest memories were of Olive and Aunt Jean playing piano duets in the summer when Jean came to visit. Both McNeal's mother and aunt were elementary school educators in small country schools; as such, teaching music was a part of their responsibility. Summers provided opportunities for educators to attend music teaching workshops at Colorado State College of Education (now called the University of Northern Colorado) and McNeal especially remembered Aunt Jean talking about the great ideas she learned in the workshops.

Steve recalled his earliest memories of music learning, "Mom tried to get me going on piano...and all I wanted to do was be outside...and play ball. I enjoyed athletics." Singing was also a part of McNeal's musical beginnings: "When we were pretty young, my brother and I, Jim, would sing duets for church and PTA meetings. We could do parts and so we learned to kind of read music. We also sang Christmas carols with our classes."

Instrumental music, other than piano, began for McNeal around Thanksgiving during his eighth-grade year. Olive had an old, metal, Selmer clarinet (Figure 2), which McNeal still displays proudly in his living room. Olive started McNeal on this instrument and that following summer put him in a small school band in Kersey, Colorado. "I don't know how many kids were in it, but Wendell Jones was the band director and he was a good clarinet and bassoon player." Before the first rehearsal, McNeal played for Jones and was told, "Well, you're the best one we

got, you're first chair." After this experience the clarinet became a serious discipline for McNeal and it was then he began private lessons with Conrad Miller, from Greeley, Colorado.

Figure 2

McNeal's First Metal Clarinet (Selmer, Circa Early 1930s)



McNeal's teacher and mother, as role models, played vital roles in shaping his career choice. This supports some literature emphasizing the importance of role models and their guidance in helping mentees with career choices in music education (Gillespie & Hamann, 1999; Rickels et al., 2019). Although these role models guided McNeal toward music education, there was also an important set of high school experiences that solidified this choice.

McNeal's band director in secondary school was J. D. Morsch, whose wife experienced serious physical disabilities. There were many times in which Morsch was unable to teach at school due to his wife's condition. Around McNeal's junior year of high school, "The superintendent would come down and he would say, 'Okay, Steve, you take the band today because Mr. Morsch can't be here.'" Being forced to teach and conduct his peers during these early years gave McNeal many formative experiences even though it was awkward feeling for him. "I felt kind of funny because you don't teach your peers, it doesn't work very good, but somehow we made it all work."

Morsch saw in McNeal an aptitude for teaching and encouraged him to pursue music education. An early impression of this for McNeal was a reading clinic event at the University of Colorado. Morsch brought McNeal to the event at least two times. McNeal related:

The orchestra and band would play a lot of new publications. He [Morsch] would take me, and he would talk with me...it was crazy because here I was, this high school kid, sitting with all of these teachers around and listening to all of the stuff. I didn't say anything, I was just in the background soaking it all up.

Early opportunities to work with peers helped McNeal to realize how much personal enjoyment and satisfaction he experienced while teaching music. This is an important element of becoming an effective teacher, as research suggests there is a strong, positive correlation between job satisfaction and progressive educational outcomes for students (Demirtas, 2010). McNeal had a private clarinet student who was doing well: "When we worked, I could see the progress in her and when you give them ideas, it just starts expanding and growing." He also recognized this self-satisfaction and affirmation when he filled in for Morsch. Even though McNeal didn't fully understand what he was doing, he tried rehearsing specific spots in the music where he thought the ensemble struggled: "Mr. Morsch would come back and go right to those spots, 'Ah, that's doing a little better.' And that was kind of a verification that I was doing okay."

A pinnacle moment in McNeal's decision to become a music teacher happened at the very beginning of McNeal's senior year. Morsch must have seen real potential in McNeal for the profession and asked McNeal if he ever considered being a music teacher. McNeal then talked to his mother about becoming a teacher or maybe an athletic coach while doing homework at the kitchen table. Kersey was a small school, making McNeal a sought-after student in sports and other activities. "And so, football, basketball, baseball, and track I had always participated in because we all had to do everything." McNeal had thought he would be a coach of some sort, but his mother told him, "Have you ever thought if you became an athletic coach in a high school or

junior high, and you didn't play somebody's son or daughter, how angry the parents would be? Maybe you don't have the stomach for that?" McNeal commented that his mother knew him, "inside and out."

In 1956, McNeal began his collegiate studies at Colorado State College of Education. Many relationships were made during that time, which included woodwind faculty, fellow classmates, and his future bride, Martha Fredling (nicknamed Punk). Richard Killmer (a long-time oboe instructor at Eastman School of Music) was his roommate and together they formed a life-long relationship. Killmer remembers McNeal and those undergraduate years fondly. One musically formative experience they had together was playing in a woodwind quintet. Killmer and McNeal were freshman musicians along with an older undergraduate student and two faculty members at the college, one of which was Dr. William Gower:

We all played doubles, so when Steve and I joined the quintet... Dr. Gower said, 'We are going over to Fort Collins to play in a recital. So, you are going to be in a saxophone quartet, a double reed quartet, a woodwind quintet, clarinet quartet, and a flute quartet.'... I mean we didn't know nothing. I said [to Dr. Gower], 'Well I don't know how to play' [some of these instruments]. Oh yes you do.' [was the reply] So we just got saxophones, sat down and played.

Steve McNeal's Professional Years

McNeal's first teaching position was in Eaton, Colorado where he was the band and choir director at the junior and high school levels. He followed an excellent educator, Chuck Childers, making the transition difficult. "That first year at Eaton was really tough. I lost some very good students just because I didn't do it the way Chuck Childers did. It is all part of being the new

teacher...it doesn't make any difference if they tell you this is going to happen, you have to experience it."

In 1962, (Figure 3) after two years in Eaton, Colorado, another friend, Dick Jamison, told McNeal about an orchestra job opening in the Poudre R-1 School District. Jamison taught band in the district at Leshar Junior High School. The newly-opened orchestra position was divided between this school and Fort Collins High School. The current teacher was Carol Agee, who started the orchestra program when he returned from serving in WWII. The program was highly successful and finding a competent teacher was important to the school district (Spieker, 2018). McNeal taught at both schools until his retirement in the Spring of 1998 (Figure 4).

Figure 3

McNeal's First Faculty Photo at Fort Collins High School, 1962



Figure 4

McNeal's Final Faculty Photo at Fort Collins High School, 1998



McNeal's retirement did not last long. Three years later, in 2001, he took on an adjunct position at Colorado State University teaching a variety of classes such as instrumental methods, string technique, and concert orchestra. This additional work lasted for 13 years, making his tenure as an educator 51 years.

Steve McNeal's Accomplishments and Accolades

Excellence in teaching at the same two schools for 36 years gave McNeal many awards and recognitions from the school district and the state of Colorado. Poudre School District awarded McNeal a longevity award and more notably, named the McNeal Performing Arts Center at Fort Collins High School (Figure 5) after him when the building opened in Fall 1995. A distinct honor for any band, choir, or orchestra teacher in the state of Colorado is to have your ensemble selected to perform at the Colorado Music Educators Association (CMEA) Conference. Only two Colorado school orchestras per year were selected to perform at the conference, though specific school ensembles could not perform in consecutive years due to a new rule. Throughout McNeal's career, his ensembles were often selected to play and when asked how many times he performed, McNeal said:

I knew you were going to ask that.... I don't know, for a while it was about every two years there for a spell until they said you can only go every three years. They made the rule and then it was about every three years.

Figure 5

McNeal Performing Arts Center at Fort Collins High School



McNeal acquired many awards and recognitions from various organizations and institutions in the state of Colorado. In 1996, the University of Northern Colorado inducted him into the UNC School of Music Hall of Honor. In 1998, the Colorado Chapter of American String Teachers Association (ASTA) gave McNeal the Lifetime Service Award for outstanding teaching. In 2000, CMEA awarded him the prestigious honor of being inducted into the CMEA Hall of Fame. On April 23, 1998, McNeal's retirement was mentioned on the floor of the United States' congress by then Colorado's representative Bob Schaffer:

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate a constituent of mine, Mr. Steve McNeal of Fort Collins, Colorado, upon his retirement after 36 years teaching music in the Poudre School District. Hired in 1962, his last year marks the longest term of service to the district of all teachers presently employed. During his long career, he has gained the respect and admiration of generations of students, parents, teachers, and administrators. For his commitment to excellence, Steve was recently awarded the National School Orchestra Association Director of the Year. Even though the Fort Collins High School auditorium bears his name, Steve's legacy cannot be contained in a place or told in a word. As notable historian Henry Brooks Adam once said, "A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops." Steve McNeal is one such teacher, a person who touched lives through teaching music. To teach a young person to love music is to give that person a lasting virtue. To teach a person to play music is to give that child the ability to make something beautiful and the confidence to carry through life even when the instrument is put away. Although I can convey gratitude to match that which sounded forth last Sunday during a musical commemoration for Steve McNeal, I would like to

impart to Congress a note of my appreciation for this special Colorado teacher. His devotion to music and his students has brought nearly four decades of song.

Nationally, McNeal was recognized by the National School Orchestra Association (NSOA), which awarded McNeal Orchestra Director of the Year in 1997. Prior to the NSOA award, Music Educators National Conference awarded him Music Educator of the Year in 1987-1988. A 1990 *Music Educators Journal* article written by Brand, focused on master music teachers such as McNeal. Brand (1990) wrote, “Like other artists, the master music teacher ‘creates’ a special environment – one that will advance his or her students from one musical level to another” (p. 21). McNeal follows this statement in the article, “Combining the art of music with the art of working with those age groups creates the most exciting possibilities” (p. 21). What is this ‘special environment’ or the ‘possibilities’ mentioned by Brand and McNeal? The article did not specify, but through my conversation with McNeal’s former colleagues and students, some interesting and probable answers began to emerge.

Analysis

Relational Trust Theory

It is difficult to pinpoint McNeal’s success as a music educator on any one attribute, although he did write about this in a short article published by the National School Orchestra Association titled *Building a Successful Orchestra Program* (1998). In the article, McNeal listed some items he believed contributed to his achievements as an educator. He collectively called these items a “system” and listed them as a popular summer program, working with his students every day, and cooperation with the band program in having a full orchestra at the Junior High level. McNeal (1998) wrote, “I am convinced that the system we use in teaching instrumental music contributes greatly to the success of our program” (p.4). Former colleagues and students,

however, do not talk about this system when asked about McNeal's success. Typical comments made are, "He's a great guy," or "I really like Mr. Mac." The four research participants in this study, however, were pressed about why they believe McNeal experienced success as a music educator. It was through analysis of this data that Bryk and Schneider's four aspects of Relational Trust "bubbled" to the surface.

Personal Regard for Others

Bryk and Schneider (2002) wrote, "interpersonal trust deepens as individuals perceive that others care about them and are willing to extend themselves beyond what their role might formally require in any given situation" (p. 25). This might be the most evident and overarching quality about McNeal as evidenced by Steele:

McNeal was amazing in the way he made us feel was unique.... A personal connection was that before I would perform, he would come over and say, 'your hands are cold.' I don't know, he just noticed these things and had that connection with everyone. He would always point out different things and really spend time with each person and know what they are doing, even [activities] outside of orchestra.

Agee agreed:

Steve was such a wonderful, warm person. When mom passed away, my dad, brother and I thought about who would give the eulogy, we immediately went to Steve McNeal. There was not one doubt that he would do it. He was there for us.

McNeal also spoke at Agee's father's funeral and attended his wife's funeral. Agee added, "You find out that he is there for you and that he is a life-long friend."

Killmer mentioned that McNeal is a “one of a kind” and when others are introduced to him, he has “a non-threatening behavior. Totally accepting where you are. He meets you where you are and accepts you where you are.” When Killmer’s wife passed away, Killmer said:

But he [McNeal] is that way with everybody. For instance, when we had the reception after the service for my wife. He was at the house. Every single person who was at the reception, and these are friends from all over, former students and just friends, and relatives, I have five kids in my family so quite a family. Every single person mentioned to me, ‘Steve. Oh my gosh, Steve McNeal. He's incredible. I think he is the nicest person I have ever met.’ And every single person had a serious conversation with him. That's really unusual.

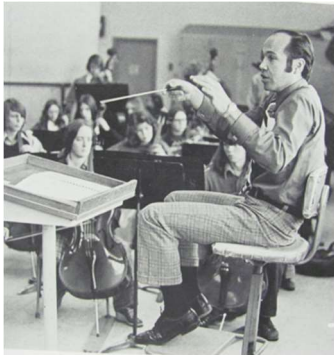
Integrity

Bryk and Schneider (2002) wrote, “In a basic sense, we think of individuals as having integrity if there is a consistency between what they say and do...integrity also implies that a moral-ethical perspective guides one’s work” (p. 25).

Although the other three aspects of Bryk and Schneider’s theory are more prominent in the research, McNeal did display integrity as an educator in the sense that he taught what he believed, especially during his time as a Colorado State University instructor. This is evident in Saccardi’s comments: “It was very powerful as an undergraduate to be learning about teaching and leadership from someone who had done it for over fifty years, and had the success and knowledge to back up what he was saying.”

Figure 6

McNeal Conducting the Fort Collins High School Orchestra in 1974



Competence

Bryk and Schneider (2002) wrote that competence is, “in the execution of an individual’s formal role responsibilities,” and it can be measured by the confidence from others in the person’s ability to perform (p. 23). McNeal, even at an early age, was competent as a player and conductor. Students willingly followed him because he was able to deliver a high level of instruction on a variety of topics.

Killmer said that McNeal’s competence on wind instruments was amazing even though he grew up in the country without many orchestral experiences. Killmer commented:

I think he always had the talent. A lot of things were new but he’s smart and he picked everything up. We both just dove in with both feet. I had played in the El Paso Symphony for a couple of years with my teacher. I don’t feel I was ahead of him at all except that I had that orchestra experience. But other than that, he was just dynamite. And I have seen him conduct. He could do everything.

Respect

Bryk and Schneider (2002) wrote that respect, in the context of school relationships, involves, “recognition of the important role each person plays in a child’s education and the

mutual dependencies that exists among various parties involved in this activity” (p. 23). In the school music ensemble, this aspect of respect is also shared between the teacher and the student.

Agee spoke about McNeal’s passion in the rehearsal and detailed that McNeal would be so intense and passionate about the orchestra “getting it right” that he would get angry if the students were not making it happen. “People do not think of Steve this way, but he could get quite angry if we didn’t play well.” Agee went on to say, however, “The real message is not about him being angry, but about how passionate he was because afterwards he was just so supportive in that we can do this [attitude].” This comment suggests the respect between McNeal and his students in that he was intentional with them, making sure everyone was on the same page and had the same sense of focus. Agee later added that McNeal wanted everyone to, “have the same intensity about playing with excellence [as he had].”

Bryk and Schneider (2002) also state, “the process of genuine listening fosters a sense of personal esteem for participants and cements their affiliation with each other and the larger institution” (p. 23). Killmer made a similar observation about McNeal but expressed it differently. “Some [directors] are successful by being intimidating, but Steve did it with sheer love for music and for his students.” Steele said it this way,

I think he doesn’t have that guard up, there is no ego, he is very open. I think he really wants to connect with people and to make them laugh, and to let them know that he loves what he does and it is infectious. He wants everyone to love what they are doing. He is just a very joyful person to be around.”

Limitations, Future Research and Conclusions

Limitations

Narratives do have limitations with a measure of bias and this project is no different. Stauffer and Barrett (2021) summarized Bowman's keynote from the 2006 Narrative Inquiry in Music Education conference, writing: "Stories are contingent, complex, situated, temporal, often messy, and (because they are usually connected to conceptions of self and self-hood) rarely innocent" (p. 2). As the "story teller," my relationship with McNeal is overwhelmingly positive. McNeal was my cooperating teacher for my student teaching experience in the fall of 1990 and I followed McNeal as the orchestra director in 1998 after his retirement from Fort Collins High School. He had a profound impact on my professional life and we have since remained friends. McNeal shared stories of his formative years, many of which were positive in nature. The other participants interviewed were either friends or former students of McNeal who all look favorably on him as a teacher. I knew these participants and chose them because I believed they strongly represented each phase of McNeal's formative years and career as an educator.

Future Research and Conclusions

It is my hope that more effort and future research would be afforded to Bryk and Schneider's four aspects of relational trust as it seems to be a logical explanation for exceptional teaching. Literature on this theory seems to be limited and this may be due to the myriad of ways society explains a phenomenon (quality teaching, in this case) with each theory forwarding its own unique twist to explain something.

An example of application of Bryk and Schneider's theory may be found through Social Emotional Learning (SEL), which has received a lot of recent attention. Greenberg, Domitrovich, Weissberg, and Durlak (2017) emphasize that SEL is to "promote students' capacity to integrate

thinking, emotion, and behavior to deal effectively with everyday personal and social challenges” (p. 14). Mentioned earlier, Bryk and Schneider (2002) emphasized specifically that, “Expressions of regard for others...tap into a vital lifeline and, consequently, important psychosocial rewards are likely to result” (p. 25). Those “psychosocial rewards” could be students’ ability to think, emote, and behave well in daily life.

Edgar and Morrison (2021) have encouraged educators and administrators to consider that SEL policy is especially compatible with arts education. One way to “hook” students in the classroom and promote SEL initiatives is to consider the powerful effect of Relational Trust Theory. Each lasting quality of relational trust (respect, personal regard for others, competence, and integrity) gave McNeal profound tools while working with students. I have two strong memories in which McNeal gave me analogies about how he viewed his role as a teacher. Growing up on a farm, McNeal liked to consider the classroom as a garden. His job was to care for the garden and make sure it received what was needed such as nutrients, water, sunshine, and even weeding. The other analogy was to consider levers, which is a way to apply a force that produces an extreme result. In both analogies, the four aspects of Bryk and Schneider can be seen as a caring gardener or even a physicist. A new generation of music teachers can foster these qualities in their own work with children. Koehler et al. (2017) state, “while some qualities of perceived best teachers are innate and cannot be learned, many of the other qualities identified by the students can be learned, controlled, and even mastered” (p. 178).

The lasting legacy of McNeal will ultimately be among his students and colleagues. The everyday considerations he gave students have created memories that have lasted decades. There is also a desire that his work with students and colleagues will inspire another generation of educators to consider the effectiveness of Relational Trust; that is, to have personal regard and

respect for others, and to teach with integrity and competence. These qualities must be a hallmark for any educator, especially those that wish to create excellence among musical ensembles.

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