

## ArtsR4Life Conference

September 10, 2016

### Opening Session - Voices of Arts Educators

*How a Yellow Bus and Musical “Artistry” Changed My Life*

Good morning and welcome to this wonderful conference, a time of rekindling, reflection, reconnecting, and renewal. I am James Daugherty, an Instructional Program Specialist for Fine Arts and Distance Learning for the Davidson County School system in Lexington and the current President of the North Carolina Music Educators Association and a 23 year veteran teacher within North Carolina’s Public Schools.

On the screen above you see my professional photo—at least how it was in 1972 on my first birthday! Back then, we didn’t live real close to the road, or at least where the bus stop was. Our small mountain house was on a dirt road up the hill just off another dirt road that ran down by the creek. Several of us lived up on that hill and caught the bus at the bottom beside a long row of mailboxes. That’s where school began.

As I think back, what an impact a yellow school bus and the time getting to and from it had on my life. It has been said that your life is like a painter’s canvas. If that is the case, then yellow was one of the first memorable colors splashed on my life’s canvas and laid the foundation for everything that has followed.

Even though I had not joined the band with my classmates in sixth grade I saw the fun they were having and I wanted to be a part of this group. I don’t remember anyone in my family playing an instrument but I kept thinking to myself I could surely manage to play something like one of those

small instruments—a flute perhaps, and *that* would be easy to bring home on the bus. In seventh grade my Dad took me to the band sign-up night. Unfortunately, flute was not in my future and a tuba (by way of the trombone) made its way home with me. So much for easy things to carry on a bus!

By Christmas of the seventh grade I knew I wanted to become a band director. I didn't completely know how, when, or where, but I knew that band was something I loved doing and every one of us were excited everyday to make music and learn together.

Because my band directors were such wonderful mentors, their teachings and methods, and their passion for **music** left distinct memories in my head, much like photographs on a mantel or paintings in an art gallery, which built the foundation for my career and gives me strength even today.

These band directors were great artists working with us. Like raw materials, we were ready to be made into something beautiful and lasting. Both of these men placed profound colors and drawings on my life's canvas. Never drawing pictures for us, they instilled visions and made connections that allowed all of our lives to take on shape, form, and color. They shared their lives with all of us. They changed our lives. They changed my life.

While not true “artists” or art teachers, the impact of these band directors was just as profound as the work of Michelangelo, da Vinci, Van Gogh, Picasso, Monet, or Dali.

When these music educators, began painting music on our life canvas we began to take shape. Not only were we learning how to produce a quality

tone and to perform expressively with emotion, we were learning to never give up, to strive for our best, and to become leaders. These band directors knew that developing us was more than a standardized test. They knew that music could impact us in a way that no other subject could. They used their musical artistry to help paint our lives. So yes, they were artists. Music educators. Musical artists.

Their objectives, standards, and lesson plans were just vehicles used to allow their teaching craft to prepare us for life. These teachers saw something in me and made sure that my life had a canvas that wasn't gray and black but filled with rich and warm color where at times there was none to be had. Their strength and encouragement gave me success. They painted my life. They gave of themselves so willingly to help average kids, like me, have a better life. Without my school band experience, without music in my life, I would be a different person today.

Each day I want to be like the great teachers in my life and give my students and colleagues colors, brushes, and visions. Tools to help them, tools to dream, tools to succeed. Successful students and collaborative colleagues are worth more than any amount of money or any physical reward. Just like teachers painted my life, my students and my colleagues have also painted my life. And the unifying base color through all of my own life has always been music.

If my life memories are akin to an art gallery and the portraits of these great teachers previously mentioned hang in my "art gallery" then most assuredly, my greatest achievement would be to take a walk through the art gallery of a former student's life or even a colleague's life. If I view my "photo" on the wall of their gallery (just as the name of so many of my teachers hangs in

mine) I think I will know that in some small way I made a difference. That's an achievement. No one hangs a piece of art they don't want, admire, or like because in some small way every piece displayed speaks to them.

As you enjoy today's conference, remember that what you do has such a profound impact on the lives of so many students. You may never know the true impact you have had on a student.

Let this testimony remind you that you make a difference and that without you a child's life would be different. Music is truly the color wheel in the canvas of life.

So, if a student comes to you this year with a canvas devoid of color I suggest starting your "artistry" with yellow—possibly the best color. It's the color of the school bus that picked me up one day and forever changed my life.

Thank you.