

Philosophy of Music Education

A Statement of Educational Philosophy and Professional Purpose

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In order to establish a framework within which to consider the importance of music in education, it is necessary to consider what is important, and true about music. Music represents a basic function of human existence, arising from the physiological, psychological, and sociological needs of human kind. As such, the value of musical pursuit derives not only from the endeavor to achieve the highest forms of the musical art according to socially accepted norms, but also from the everyday musical encounters of every person. To this end, music is a necessary, life-enhancing experience which should be nurtured in all individuals, not only in those gifted with exceptional musical aptitude.

Music is an invariant. It has been present in all cultures, at all times, and throughout the known historical development of the human species, facilitating emotional, physical, and social expression. Music satisfies the human need for aesthetic enjoyment, provides for communication of cultural ideals, integrates, and enculturates. It serves as both a reflection of, and a catalyst for sociological and technological growth.

Music is both art and science. As an art, it manifests itself as the result of a creative process and of performance skill, in both cases requiring practice and refinement. As a science, its manipulation is subject both to physical laws and to theoretical structure. Innovations of musical performance result from and contribute to broader innovations. Musical function can be as much utilitarian as emotional.

Music can fulfill extra-musical purposes in influencing human behavior. Its therapeutic value derives from physiological and psychological effects which can be manipulated to encourage wellness in the infirmed and wholeness in the handicapped. The value of musical experience and instruction as tools for achieving extra-musical curricular objectives is well-documented.

Music has unique properties as a form of human intelligence which may be developed or remain undeveloped, but are a part of the whole person, regardless. For some individuals, musical intelligence is a primary way of knowing. For all individuals, musical potential can be developed in the same respect as linguistic, logical, spatial, and bodily intelligences. Music provides a knowledge system which allows individuals to interact with their inner and outer worlds. The failure of a society to develop the innate musical intelligence in its members leaves an unfillable gap in its cultural fabric and diminishes the potential for worthwhile contribution by those members.

From these assumptions, the importance of music in education is apparent. Since musical function represents a universal experience and a basic form of intelligence common to all people, schools have a responsibility to develop it to the full extent possible in each individual. Additionally, schools have an obligation to provide advanced instruction for those who find musical interaction to be a primary mode of intelligence. Not to do so leaves students lacking an important means of interacting with, understanding, and improving themselves and the world around them.

An argument can be made that if the human need for music is so strong, it will lead students to seek out musical experiences on their own. Certainly this is true, but this is no more an argument for excluding music from education than the drive for knowledge is an argument for excluding science, for example.

Without music education one must recreate the art, beginning at its simplest level, in order to achieve musical expression. If the purpose of organized education is to give students the benefit of the society's collected knowledge, and to develop the skills needed to interact within the society for the ultimate improvement of both the society and the student, then the absence of music in education (or music education which does not meet this purpose) is unfortunate.

Music, for the purpose of advancing the culture, must be taught by individuals experienced in music making, but also by those skilled in the art and practice of integrating aesthetic education into the development of the whole student. Music education must be an intense focus of the learning experience in early childhood, when it can function not only to grow musical skill and the expressive self, but also as a springboard for learning, rippling outward. Musical awareness that develops before and during the early primary grades cements a fullness of aptitude, realizes potential, and gives a child needed tools for future musical achievement. Without the strongest advocacy for complete and purposeful music experience and instruction from birth through the early elementary grades, communities allow generational decline that transfers easily to absence of larger educational standards. Society's ongoing cultural spiral itself suffers breaks from this too-easily accepted lack.

In a multi-faceted cultural environment such as is present in many American communities, the onus lies with public schools to ensure a balanced, sequential, comprehensive education in music. Building from a strong childhood musical foundation, schools must offer opportunities for students to perform, create, value, and understand music in its widest contexts. Music education that is limited in focus to the predominant cultural basis of a community stifles perspective. Conversely, music education that is broadly implemented without the opportunity to produce and experience measured artistic success in recognized ways stifles expression. A balance of musical skill, knowledge, and understanding are the ideal, and a similar balance of music within a complete and rigorous total curriculum serve both society and the individual, leading to ongoing generational advance.

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