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Philosophy of Music Education

Music has found a place in every culture and aspect of the lives of people for centuries. It is so ingrained in our lives that no one can recall or refer to a time when music didn't play a role in the traditions, rituals, or customs of the earth's population. How has music become so embedded in our lives? Should this musical presence be attributed to the idea that people enjoy music, people are forced from habit to experience this music, or music is important to life? Looking at the various roles music has played and currently plays in everyday life, it seems a combination of these three reasons is the best answer.

Music is important in life for the same reason music first began. People use it to express themselves in a way that is beyond mere words or actions. Music is used for celebration, for goodbyes, for births, for tears. For every time in life, there is some kind of music that can convey what is being felt. Also, music is a sharing of ideas. Different cultures share traditions and rituals with each other and other cultures through music. Emotions are expressed through music when words are just not enough. Minstrels used to write songs to perform in the lords' halls that would tell the news of the kingdom and its people. Without music, many wouldn't know how to share who they are with others.

Then the question comes up – what about the people who don't have any musical talent? Is music a part of their lives? Yes, of course it is. How many times have you seen someone you know can't carry a tune if his or her life depended on it, belting out the lyrics to a song on the radio as they drive down the street? How many people do you know that have never played an instrument in their lives stop to plunk out a few notes on the piano sitting against the wall because they just couldn't resist? When you go to a party, restaurant or other public place, music

is almost guaranteed to be playing. Music has been a part of everyone's life for so long that even the ones who do not perform the music can't help but enjoy it.

The fact that music is so essential to everyone's life gives us a very good reason for teaching it in our schools. Its place in everyday life makes it as significant a subject as math or history. Music has benefits to those students who do take it. Life skills, such as cooperation, dependability, responsibility, and respect, are learned when participating in a large ensemble in school. Teaching music history and literature can give an added insight into other cultures and the history of our own culture in ways that can't always be found in a history book.

All these important reasons for teaching music in school lead people to wonder *what music* should actually be taught. Music from various time periods and cultures should be performed at all levels in order to fulfill these valuable objectives. Starting in elementary school, songs with simple rhythms and melodies should be taught in order to help the students get acquainted with music and its many uses. As the students get older, they should be started on basic percussion instruments and the recorder to introduce them to the instrumental aspects of music. In middle level schools, music educators should start to challenge the students with more complex repertoire and different sizes and types of ensembles. Also, more performance opportunities should be given, especially in small groups, to build confidence and ability. At the secondary school level, students should be pushed to find the limits of their talents and abilities. They should also be given the opportunity to join various groups that explore specific genres of music such as jazz or chamber music. At this level, most of the education should also promote the continuance of music outside of the school experience and level.

Going along with this, many ask *who should* be required to *learn* music. In reality it is imperative that all students be required to take music particularly in the elementary levels.

Changing requirements so that students are expected to complete at least one music course in

secondary school whether it is participating in a large ensemble or taking a music theory, history, or literature course could also be very beneficial. Currently, schools do not insist that students take music once they reach middle or high school; instead it becomes an elective. However, if you think about all the reasons music has become so important to our society and all the reasons music should be taught, you would probably agree that music is important enough to insist on in higher levels of schooling.

But *who should teach* all these music classes? People who were active in music throughout their own educations and have a passion for sharing music with others will make the best music educators. Music teachers should be people who love music and the idea of showing others the joys of music. This is especially important if music becomes a requirement for graduation because music educators will have to instill that passion into students who may otherwise have not taken music. A good music teacher doesn't necessarily have to be the best player or have to know everything there is to know about music; however, a good music teacher does need to have several characteristics. First of all, music teachers must have an appreciation for many types of music that they can share with their students. A good variety of types of music is important for a teacher who wishes to create well-rounded musicians. Second, music teachers should have knowledge of many kinds of music and music theory. This knowledge will allow the students to really get into the music on a more in-depth level. Though the teacher doesn't know everything about music and probably never will, it is also imperative that they commit themselves to being lifelong learners so they can motivate their students to become the same. Music teachers, like all teachers, should be dedicated to their job and students, like kids and be able to work with them, and have an ability to approach and teach their subject in several ways.

When considering music education, topics such as inclusion, multiculturalism, and assessment must also be addressed. It is essential to have a clear idea of the role each of these elements play and how an educator should manage them.

Albert Einstein once said, “I never teach my pupils; I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn.” This is what all educators must do with all their students and especially with disabled students. This same concept can be applied to the use of the term “least restrictive environment” (Fett, 2009). Teachers must create an atmosphere in which *all* students can learn. As music educators, it is important to realize that the inclusion of students with disabilities is something that is very likely to happen in the music classroom. Music classrooms often fall under the category of least restrictive environments in which the students are able to be in a class with the rest of the student body. Special learners have just as much right *and* capacity to learn as the other students in the classroom. With the use of creativity, patience, and careful planning, it isn’t hard to become adept at teaching *all* students. Always be well prepared or even over prepared for each day in the classroom. Also, don’t be afraid to ask colleagues, parents, and others for help and new ideas in working with special learners. You can never be too prepared or have too many ideas. Music is something that everyone can do and learn if given the chance.

Merriam-Webster (2009) defines multicultural as “of, relating to, reflecting, or adapted to diverse cultures. This is exactly what we need to do in the classroom. Music teachers should relate material to other cultures, use music that reflects many different backgrounds, and adapt authentic multicultural music to the classroom. Our nation consists of people from every background and area of the world. In each classroom, potentially every student could come from a different cultural environment. It is important that teachers be open to using materials from these various cultures and to teach the students about their classmates’ backgrounds as well as

other areas of the world. The benefits of teaching students about these cultures will reward the hard work it will take to teach them well. Students will enjoy learning about societies different from their own. When you study the culture of the individual students in your class, they will feel a sense of ownership about the topic and may even want to share personal experiences with the rest of the class. The sheer diversity that makes up our nation requires and begs for educators to teach the future generations about every culture and the uniqueness of its music.

Assessment is an important step in all areas of education. Even though assessment of music is not as simplified as other subjects, it is very important for music educators to find ways to use authentic assessment in their classrooms. There are many types of assessment and several tried and true methods to accomplish them. Many educators promote including the students in this process (Pontious, 1998). Once the objectives and outcomes have been established, have students set their own goals. When you are evaluating their performances, they can also have their own checklist or rubric out to self-assess the performance. This is where recordings will come in handy. As an educator you can both assess the actual performance and the students' self-assessments when evaluating the students. Asking students to identify the strengths and weaknesses in their performances gives the student responsibility over his or her own learning. It is important to keep in mind that effective assessment is best achieved when the curriculum and instruction are well developed. These three elements of the educational process are interrelated and each is very important. An educator needs a curriculum based on the standards, effective strategies to achieve the desired outcomes, and authentic assessment tools in order to best serve the education of each and every student (Wells, 1998).

The need to propose this philosophy is brought about by the enormous role music plays in everyone's life. Thinking through the idea of music education only brings its importance into clearer focus.

Works Cited

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