

## **Philosophy of Music Education**

[Chris Peterson](#)

University of Wisconsin Oshkosh

November 2, 2004

March 29, 2007 (revised)

Ever since I can remember, music has been an important part of my life. As a young child, I was exposed to a broad range of different musical tastes. I probably heard Mozart and Beethoven first through my mother. Where she got her love for classical music, I have no idea. She was also big on musicals like West Side Story and the Sound of Music. I had two older brothers who loved Rock and Roll. They not only taught me to appreciate current musicians, but they taught me the importance knowing where the music evolved from. It was through them that I first learned to love the Beatles and the Stones. It is my father, however, who probably has the deepest appreciation for music. Strange thing too, he's probably the most tone deaf person I know. But you don't have to be musical to love music, and that is what I learned from my dad. My dad had folk records, jazz records, bluegrass records, country records, surf music, rock music, tribal music, yodel music. He loved it all! The part of my philosophy that comes from him is that all music is valid. For every kind of music in the world, there are people who get joy out of it.

I knew early in life that I wanted to make music. Nobody ever forced me into it (I actually had to beg my parents to let me take piano lessons). They gave in eventually and,

when I was eight years old, my dad brought home a piano. This was the beginning for me of something that has brought me immeasurable satisfaction and will continue to do so for the rest of my life.

Not everyone, however, has the desire to create music. Learning an instrument takes a lot of time and discipline, and much, much more to learn it well. But everyone does have the potential to love music and to get lifelong joy from listening. The joy of music is something that reminds us of our humanity. It's one of the things that make us unique as a species. Although it may not be necessary for survival, I believe music is crucial nourishment for the soul. And one might argue that the souls of many of our children are being malnourished.

So much emphasis is placed in the public schools on reading, writing and math skills. Does music belong among them in the school curriculum, and if so, when, what and how? It's my belief that teaching music ought to be a priority in schools at the earliest level. I feel that children should be exposed to all types of music while they are young, and that, by doing this they will learn to appreciate it. Teaching children about music history might give them a broader view of the world in which they can easily relate. I believe that by teaching our children to love music, we will increase their desire to want to sing or play an instrument. A child who learns to play music will have a definite academic edge over other students. A child who can read music has already begun to develop the mathematical part of the brain. But unlike algebra, the practical use of reading music is much more obvious and instantly gratifying. It's hard to get kids to LOVE algebra. But aside from this, playing music also teaches discipline. A child who

spends the time to practice is shown how rewarding it can be. For young children, this is invaluable.

It is my strong opinion that a good teacher is one who is equipped with both the determination and resourcefulness necessary to meet the individual needs of **every** student. Ideally, this is one who, not only satisfies the legal requirement of providing “free appropriate education” to each student in the “least restrictive environment” possible, but also one who invests himself/herself in pushing the limits of what is possible in this regard.

As a music teacher, I feel I have a unique and exciting opportunity to provide a wide range of exceptional learners with the chance to participate successfully and equally in the general classroom. It has always been my general philosophy as a music educator that technical proficiency be far inferior to the primary goal of teaching the child of the joy which can be had through musical experiences. It is with this philosophy in mind that I could never justify assessment based on one student’s skill level in relation to another. Rather, individual growth and attitude would be my primary assessment criterion. It would be my desire that, in the case of including exceptional learners into the general music classroom, my students would share this philosophy in helping to provide an atmosphere which can be equally enjoyable and beneficial to all who participate.

As far as how the individual needs of the students will, ultimately, be met, I feel it is important for new teachers to humble themselves and to make the most of every possible resource available to them. Most of what will be beneficial to the teacher in this regard will be gained through experience more than anything else. A positive attitude is essential! Establishing a close relationship with the special education staff and

participation in IEP meetings are key initial steps in this direction. In addition, I feel that the potential benefits achieved through educating oneself in special teaching tools (sign language, hearing aids) should not be overlooked or underestimated. Technology is continually providing teachers with new ways in which the confines of “LRE” can become less and less confining. It is the responsibility of a good teacher to stay on top of any new developments which could benefit their students.

This unique ability for music educators to allow such a diverse range of successful participation provides an outstanding opportunity for advocacy of the music program. In a time when funding for the arts is constantly being threatened, I feel it is our obligation, as well as that of the community, to see to it that the music program continues to thrive.

We live in an exciting period of American history in which more and more diverse cultures are being increasingly represented within the public schools and in general. What makes this period particularly exciting is the way in which our general attitudes toward multiculturalism are beginning to shift from the (now outdated) “melting pot” mentality. It would seem as though we are in the midst of a *cultural awakening*. Whereas, it may have, once, been viewed as favorable to assimilate this diversity into a separate *blend* of cultures thought of as *American*, we now see value in the richness of these many cultures and seek, *enthusiastically*, to preserve them as much as possible. As *caring intellectuals*, we understand this *awakening* to be far more beneficial to, not only education, but to our progress as human beings.

It is important to understand that the purpose of multicultural education should not be to *appease* those whom might be *underrepresented* (in most cases – non European

descent), rather it should be thought of as beneficial *and necessary* for all of us as Americans. We educators, as well as our students, have much to gain by learning to understand our American brothers and sisters.

A crucial part of my own philosophy toward multicultural education is that it not be contingent upon the specific diversity of any particular classroom. Put another way, I feel that multiculturalism within the school curriculum is just as important (if not more so) in a rural classroom –which may, likely, be less diverse – as it would be in a more diverse urban classroom. Our obligation as educators to represent all cultures ought to be independent of the cultural composition of the classroom itself.

The specific methods for implementing this philosophy as a music teacher should be quite simple as compared with teachers of other disciplines. The most significant tools for bringing new cultural experiences to our students can be found in our choice of repertoire for study materials. The exciting element of music being its ability to *transcend* culture and that many general concepts need not rely on western European music alone. It is our responsibility as *lifelong learners* to take full advantage of the resources available to us regarding diversity. As new (and generally inexperienced) teachers, there is much to be learned, not only through materials available to us, but through the people around us.

I believe that success in music is achievable for any student, regardless of race, culture or any other speciality. If we can believe in our hearts that music belongs to all human beings, than *humanity* ought be the only prerequisite for music instruction. I believe that once a teacher can establish a positive environment in the classroom and a trusting relationship with his/her students, effective learning will, undoubtedly, follow.

A positive attitude among students and a collective willingness/desire to improve are to be my primary criterion for assessment. I believe that, once this is established, measurable progress on the *formal* level will naturally follow.

Finding useful and accurate methods for assessment is one of the many challenges with which music teachers are faced. There are several reasons for this and the specific reasons vary depending on the type of classroom. Ensemble directors (be it vocal or instrumental) often struggle with finding useful methods of applying formal assessment of their students on an individual basis. Even general music or classroom music instructors struggle with implementing formal assessment. Being that the greater extent of musical skills involve a complicated web of, mainly, aural concepts, it can be challenging for many teachers to find a written form of assessment which is both *accurate* and *easily adaptable*.

However, this being said, it is my strong belief that finding a useful formal assessment tool is not only crucial to the development of the child, but more importantly, to the development of the teacher. Teachers must always be striving toward their own improvement. One of the best ways for teachers to achieve success with their students is by having a multitude of approaches for teaching any singly concept.

We understand that music, unlike almost any other discipline, encompasses a broad spectrum of concepts which engage almost every part of the brain. It is important for teachers to appreciate this when assessing the strengths and weaknesses of their students. We, as teachers, should expect our students to thrive in some areas and struggle in others – every student will be different, and very rarely will a student excel equally in all areas.

So you can see some of the things that motivate me to want to teach music. I believe very strongly that an appreciation and understanding of music is key to the lifelong fulfillment of musicians and non-musicians alike. When I look at society today and the ever increasing conveniences bestowed upon us due to the technology age, I often wonder about the future of musicianship. Sometimes it seems like we are becoming victims of laziness and complacency. We cannot afford this if music is to survive. Is music a dying art form? I'm sure everyone will say "no". But ask yourself, who are the Mozart's and the Beethoven's of today? Who are the Charlie Parker's, the Dizzie Gillespie's, the Duke Ellington's? It is the music teachers of the world who keep this age-old tradition alive and thriving. They are the ones who understand better than anyone what the world would be like without it.