

Philosophy of Music Education

Julie A. Ringlien

University of Wisconsin Oshkosh

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Music is part of our humanity. It is an essential element of our existence because it is an almost universal language that can express our feelings; our joys, sorrows, loves, dislikes, beliefs, and injustices across cultures. Music is used to protest political issues or support causes, to calm the soul and relieve stress, to keep us company when we're alone, and to enhance or be a background to just about every type of ceremony or social event we know. With this in mind it becomes obvious that music education in schools is essential. We cannot expect our children to live their lives without an understanding of one of our most cherished modes of self expression. Music comes from the heart, the soul and the mind and everyone has the capacity to not only listen to and enjoy or appreciate music, but to *create* with it. This creation takes place at many levels. Whether one composes, sings, plays an instrument, or simply feels the music and moves with it, there is creation and it is this creation that is an essential part of music education.

The study of music teaches discipline, teamwork, and dedication. Music's potential as a tool for learning other subjects is another reason for teaching music in schools. Students can write alternative lyrics to familiar tunes to aid in memorization, to tell stories, or to relate historical facts. Each culture in our world's history has created its own music and this diversity can easily be communicated to school children through exposure to multicultural music. Music is a wonderful way to support and enhance social studies and teach tolerance and acceptance. Children's creativity and musical diversity can also be a benefit to the community through school concerts and performance field trips to medical facilities and retirement centers. Children who learn music in schools can become members of community music groups and help to enrich the lives of everyone in their area.

Empowering students is another essential benefit of music education. Self-esteem and peer approval are often key factors in a student's attitude toward music education, especially in the middle and high school years. Many students view themselves as "not musical" and do not want to appear "uncool" or

silly in front of their peers, but each student does have the ability to be musical and a good music educator will show them this. A boy who considers himself “tone deaf” and won’t open his mouth to sing can pick up a bass drum mallet and keep the beat like a pro to great applause from his peers. Every child can learn music and enjoy the learning, even the reluctant ones. A good curriculum taught well will reach and inspire students musically and empower them in more than just musical ways.

A good music curriculum has many aspects and it must include more than just the basic theory and elements of music and it most definitely must not be purely performance-driven. Music educators are required to teach to the National Standards. Exceptional educators go beyond that to engage students in active music learning by encouraging creativity and exploration. The focus should be on the idea of music for the children and should balance theory, listening to music, discussing music, moving to music, singing, and playing instruments. The music examples used in this learning should include more than just traditional American or Western music. The curriculum should also include music from other cultures. This is essential to a well-rounded music education. Music of other cultures can be used to teach many of the concepts required by the National Standards, but more than that, it is rewarding in and of itself. “The music of Africa is uplifting and inspiring, full of energy and life” (Ford, 2000). With such knowledge and choices, students can help plan performances based on cultural and historical music. Students who have an active role in planning performances are more likely to be engaged and excited about the preparations.

A good music curriculum assumes that exceptional learners will be included. The law requires this but it not just because of the law that inclusion is a good idea. “General and ensemble-specific music is a core part of public school education in this country; thus, children with disabilities have the right to participate in these programs.” (Colwell ,____) More than this, there are many benefits to such inclusion. Music education enhances the lives of students with disabilities just as it does every other student, but adapting or accommodating a curriculum to aid in the teaching of exceptional learners can be a benefit to the teacher and to the rest of the students in the class as well. The use of cooperative learning by enlisting the students to help teach concepts to exceptional learners reinforces those concepts for the typical students

and teaches them understanding and acceptance. Educators who adapt their curricula find new ways to teach and become more understanding and creative. (McCord & Watts, 2006)

A good curriculum uses varied and appropriate assessments. This is especially important in assessing progress in music learning because music is both a subjective and an objective topic. In the past, music education has been considered less than valuable and little emphasis was placed on serious assessment. Now that music is considered to be a core subject, it is important to assess in a form similar to that of other core academic subjects with formative and summative assessments that are formal, objective and authentic. Testing should be used to measure student growth and progress toward goals in areas of music such as notes, note values, music symbols, and historical facts. In addition there should also be more informal or subjective assessments integrated into the curriculum to allow progress checks on an individual or as needed basis. Performance assessment is a valuable tool that is sometimes used too exclusively yet is quite appropriate and useful as a tool for measuring progress toward specific goals. Performance opens the door to a variety of assessment techniques such as projects, interviews, oral presentations, demonstrations, and portfolios. Such assessments also provide opportunities to assess the individual. (Nierman, 1996)

Whatever choices the music educator makes regarding the use of assessments should be periodically re-evaluated for validity, reliability, intellectual honesty, fairness and ease of administration (Nierman, 1996).

Even the best of curricula cannot be successfully implemented without a good music educator at the helm. But what makes such a teacher? Certainly a great music teacher is well-educated in music theory, history, performance and education, but it takes more than this. A music teacher has to wear many hats and has to have a passion for all of the roles those hats represent. These passions must include a love for children, sharing music with children and encouraging them to express themselves. The teacher must enjoy designing programs for teaching all types of music, planning performances, rehearsals and recitals, promoting the music program within the community, fundraising and generating support for a plan of growth of the music program in the future. The successful music teacher must also be computer literate and aware of the benefits of technology in the music classroom. This requires knowledge of available music software programs and their use as tools for teaching and student assessment. Music technology

itself can be a module of study in the curriculum and can be a source of inspiration for students who have no desire to be instrumentalists, but love computers.

Another role a music educator must play is that of recruiter. A good teacher is sensitive to the potential teacher in all students. Many music educators dream of grooming the next Broadway star or touring concert pianist, but a good teacher recognizes the talent to teach and promotes the development of students believed to have a strong potential to become music educators.

Music educators cannot be egocentric. Music education is all about the children and the children should be the focus. In the classroom or auditorium, any and all programs or curricula should be planned with this in mind. A teacher can choose music he/she is passionate about, but such choices should be made with the students' best interests at heart. The joy of teaching comes not from being in the spotlight and showing how well we've done our work as educators. It comes from the knowledge that we've shared our passion and our gifts with future generations and from the light that shines in the children's faces.

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