

Philosophy of Music Education
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Music drives our lives. Every song, from every genre, period, and region, has its own voice, its own message, and its own story. For thousands of years, people have used song to tell stories, to celebrate, to lament, to fight battles, to rally followers, and to teach children. The Greeks even invented different modes to describe the psychological aspect that different scale structures had on the human mind when they heard a song constructed with them. Today, this tradition lives on in its own way. From birth, music surrounds us. Whether we play an instrument, sing, or just enjoy listening to the radio (or an iPod, for that matter), the art of the song lives on in our minds and our hearts.

Even more important than recognizing music in our lives is to teach this art to future generations. The American tradition is to teach children music from a young age, making it a part of lessons during the preschool age, and making music its own class at older ages, through high school. After elementary school, music classes often split up into ensembles, where students study the fundamentals of playing in a choir, band, or orchestra. This continuing education in a school setting from a young age has fundamental importance. This musical education has benefits that reach back into music, into a student's academic life, and into their lives outside of school and in the real world.

Students who learn music at a young age have musical concepts and ideas ingrained in their head, much like a language, which provides a more solid foundation for them to build on in later years when they may start seriously studying an instrument or their voice. Ensembles rely on the skills taught in elementary school general music like note reading, working in a group, and an understanding of rhythm. Students that study

music from a young age have increased abilities outside of music, including creative thinking, problem solving, reading skills, and language skills. Also, this study of music builds a solid foundation and solid life skills many will need as adults, such as self-discipline, teamwork, leadership skills, and an improved creative thought process.

Even those who understand why music should be taught in schools may ask, “What music?” To answer, public schools should teach a broad range of music representative of both many cultures and many periods of history. For years, American music education has been based in both America and Europe, where children learn our folk songs and the classical music of 18th and 19th century Europe. Though this classical music goes well with classical training, many cultures and races prominent in America have no representation through this system. As far as classical-style music goes, many countries in Central and South America have wonderful composers often overlooked in the quest for repertoire. Every country has folk songs and oral music just begging to be overlooked by choirs. The 20th century of music has also been almost completely overlooked in schools, aside from renditions of pop songs or movie scores. All these things typically ignored in school have tremendous value and as much right, if not more right, to be taught alongside Mozart.

After the why and what, the question of who should be taught music in school seems impossible to ignore. Simply put, any and all students would benefit from some type of music education from a young age, while upper level education and performance should be open to all who have any interest. In all school districts, elementary schools must teach general music to all students. Though not every one of them will go to school for performance or composition, every one of them benefits from this early education.

Many receive, if nothing else, a greater understanding of music which makes them grow in their own appreciation for the art. Many students also take this experience in elementary school general music and apply it in their next years, picking up a classical instrument or singing. In middle school and high school, general music can still exist in some form, but most schools instead have ensemble classes like band, orchestra (sometimes full symphony), and choir. These classes have multiple levels and skill ranges with appropriate repertoire to ensure that all interested students have a chance to participate. The schools should do more to encourage this participation. As it is, many school districts cut funding for music, give the educators little budget to work with, and do little to encourage students or tell them the benefits of studying music through school. Requiring students to study music for just one additional year in high school would open up a new world for these young adults and help make them a better-rounded individual that they need to be in order to succeed in life after graduation.

The last question remaining is “Who should teach music in schools?” I believe that children should be taught music by those who are trained in both education and performance, have an understanding of not only the music that they teach but of other styles and disciplines, have a well-rounded education themselves, have a passion for education and a heart for children, and act as an active member of the musical community. To give students anything less would be cheating them out of a quality education. A good music teacher is also a good performer, and a good performer can only teach in a school setting by learning the separate art of education. These teachers need to be well-rounded both in musical studies and in other academic disciplines so they can relate music to life outside of the classroom. Lastly, these teachers need to be music advocates and need to

have a heart for those that they are teaching. Once again, anything less would be cheating the school districts and the students.