

Philosophy of Music Education  
Matthew J. Miles, November 7, 2006

Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary defines the word *philosophy* as "a search for a general understanding of values and reality by chiefly speculative rather than observational means". In other words, a philosophy is what we think about a particular subject. So, what do I think about music education? Well, let's start with the most basic of questions.

Why IS music important in our lives? We often hear this question asked, but how often do we actually take a step back to reflect on it? This is the time to do just that. Music is one of, if not the single most important thing in my life today. But why? I'll tell you. Music gives me the ultimate chance to not only express myself, but it also helps me to relax. If I like a particular piece of music, I will generally put more effort into expressing it as I like. If it's a song that I like, I usually will listen to it more than others. If I don't really like a particular piece of music, I usually won't put as much into it. I'll follow what's written by the composer, but I won't go out of my way to make it shine. Along with expressing comes the lyric, which obviously is a big part of music today. Songs with lyrics usually have a theme to them, whether it be apologizing to someone, expressing anger, or declaring undying love to a partner. I have used songs with themes such as these when talking with friends. Finally, I use music as a soother when I feel angry, upset, or confused. I just open up my iTunes, double-click *Move Along* by The All-American Rejects, and all my troubles just fade away. Works every time!

Music needs to be taught in our schools for a few reasons. The first, obviously, is for students that want to study it, like myself. For those of us that are dedicated to music, want to play with other people, and want to improve the overall quality of their

musicianship, music in school is a necessity. Second, music should be taught for those students who enjoy playing, but aren't as fiercely dedicated as those who wish to study it later on. I have a few friends who were also in band in high school. They aren't music majors like me. One is going into art, one into zoology, and one into athletic training. But they enjoyed music enough that they still wanted to play it. They could have been music majors if they wanted; all three were first-chair quality players. They played in the band because they felt that music was still an important part of their lives. These are the people we should be teaching music to, and this is why it is necessary to keep music in our schools.

What music should be taught in schools? Wow, I haven't had to answer this one yet. My first answer would be all types of music. Speaking from a high school-level standpoint (which is where I want to teach), I think everything from classical to today's music should be taught. Why? Because it shows students not only the variety of music out there, but how music has changed as well. Audiences will appreciate the music of classical composers such as Mozart, Beethoven, and Bach. The students will enjoy playing today's music that has been arranged for pep band. As a director, I will enjoy directing the fine music of some of the greatest contemporary composers, particularly Robert W. Smith. When you play a little bit of everything, everyone wins.

Anyone who wants to enroll in an ensemble in middle or high school should have to take some sort of extremely basic theory class covering nothing more than rhythms, clefs, key signatures, simple chord structure, and basic history of composers and eras. To be successful musicians, students should have a basic knowledge of what music really is. To me, enrolling in music classes is completely optional and completely up to the

individual. A student should not be pressured into joining an ensemble. Those who enjoy music and want to play will join without any influence. Students who do not want to learn music simply won't learn it if it's forced upon them. If schools were to force every student to have a music requirement, I fear that the quality of the music departments would actually drop because the situation of having non-interested students involved would be at hand. Music is open to those who enjoy it and want to be involved in it. It is those students that should learn music in school.

Not just anyone should be able to teach music in schools today. It takes a person who is genuinely enthused and eager to teach music to students. A music educator should possess excellent people skills, as well as an ability to get the most out of his students. It takes an educator who is willing to take time to sit down with each individual member of the ensemble and develop his or her musicianship, from playing that one tough spot in an ensemble piece, to preparing a solo for contest. A music educator should also be well organized. He should know where everything he needs is located, and be able to help students should they have emergency problems such as a chipped reed or a misplacing of a folder. Finally, a music educator should have his own philosophy of music education, which he should stick to at all times, yet modify as needed. A philosophy lays the groundwork for how an educator will teach. Obviously, that might need to be modified on more than one occasion. But hey, everyone has to start somewhere, right?