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Revised Philosophy of Music Education

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 relax and express myself in ways otherwise unforeseen. Playing angry-sounding music helps me vent when I'm upset about something. The first movement of Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* helps me express sadness when I'm feeling down. I play my best interpretations of Bach's *Invention #8 in F Major* when I feel happy. Music provides one of the best, if not the very best, ways to express emotions. I seriously doubt shouting "The fact that two plus two equals four makes me very angry!" would be very effective.

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.

Along with the topic of which students should be taught music in school is the discussion of exceptional learners. If you ask me, it's as simple as this; music should be available to all students, regardless of any classification such as race, gender, age, or mental capacity. Exceptional learners have just as much a right as anyone else to express themselves through whichever way they choose. If music is one of those ways, I'll take every single student who wants to.

Assessment in music is the only way to ensure that students are learning what they're being taught. I see two essential ways to assess students; examination and performance. Students should be able to both identify and perform different aspects of music such as articulations, dynamics, sharps/flats, and key signatures. I will assess students in these areas through written tests and well as playing tests, so that I know that students are absorbing and remembering what they're learning.

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.

World music is a topic that I believe is not covered enough in music classes today. It is crucial to be open to music from other cultures because of the vast amount that we can learn from it. Yes, music in America is wide and varied as it is. But, imagine how much more we can do if we integrate musical concepts, ideas, and techniques from other cultures. Afro-Cuban hand drumming is something I first experienced in high school and plan on introducing to my first ensemble as soon as I can. Simply studying this multicultural aspect of music is a fascinating experience!

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 always be up-to-date on the latest instructional technology that can be used in the classroom. Just as educators are always learning, technology is always evolving and will only become more useful as time progresses. It's a well-known fact that students love using computers. All the better for me if I can use new computer technology to aid me in teaching.

Summing up, I'm going to become a music educator to make a difference in the lives of young musicians. It's been proven that students that took music through high school had better grades, better college-entrance test scores (ACT, SAT), and made more money throughout their lives. Bridging the gap between musical cultures is also a necessity for me. The possibilities for further learning and understanding in music are endless. I'll take it upon myself to take my students and explore those possibilities to their furthest extent.