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Philosophy of Music Education

Music is a human constant. It is present in every contemporary and historical culture. Music transcends time and space. People today can hear music from 1,000 years ago and 1,000 miles away. As an integral part of human culture, music deserves representation in schools that is genuine, well-rounded, and beneficial to students' lives.

What drew humans to music in the first place? Music offers us a personal artistic outlet and a truly unique form of expression. It is the "expression of our most intense emotions" (Glidden, 2000). Through it, we can express emotions that are otherwise difficult or impossible to explain with words. Music is both "pleasurable and profound" (Reimer, 2000). We enjoy music and at the same time experience music at a level far below the surface of our humanity. Music is integral to cultural identity. It is as central to a culture as its language and serves many similar purposes such as communicating, recording history, or transmitting values. By involving music in our lives, we maintain deep connections to our humanity and emotions in an increasingly materialistic world. For some, music is a primary mode of intelligence and a unique way to understand the world. Finally, music is art, and art is inherently human. Any computer can do mathematics, but art is a truly human experience.

As part of the foundation of culture, music education cannot possibly be excluded from the education of our children. Music should be taught, first and foremost, for music's sake. Ours is a consumer culture. Children should learn about music so that they can become intelligent consumers of music, from iTunes to the concert hall. The function of a school is to pass down the collective knowledge, values, history, and traditions of society. Music is part of the collective knowledge of our society. The Music Educators National Conference believes that "every American student...should receive a balanced, comprehensive, sequential, and rigorous program of instruction in music and the other arts" (MENC, 1997). To exclude it is to leave a gaping hole in the education of the next generation.

The positive "extra-musical" effects of studying music are well documented, and the skills students learn in the music classroom can help them reach other curricular goals. However, to focus primarily on the ways that music supports development in other areas is to make it a second-class citizen in the school curriculum. Studying the arts is part of a balanced, well-

rounded education, which provides every student with the tools and opportunities to succeed. As such, music should be considered as a primary subject in the curriculum, not only as an aesthetic addition to it.

Students deserve to be taught by well-trained, competent educators in music class. Teachers must have exceptional musical and teaching skills to guide students in music experiences. Excellent teaching skills are a necessity for music educators because they teach *children* through music. Music educators should both take music seriously and know how to enjoy making music. Above all, they should be knowledgeable and energetic.

In order for music education to be most effective, it must begin as early as possible, even before children are old enough to attend school. Once children attend school, our society accepts that students are exposed to music through the elementary grades. After that time, exposure to music generally tapers off. Continuing music education through the middle and high school levels is important so that students can continue to develop their skills and expand and deepen their knowledge of cultures. In a perfect world, everyone would learn music in schools.

Access for all to music education should also include access for students with disabilities. With creativity and perseverance on the part of educators, students with disabilities can participate in music class to the fullest extent appropriate. Educators must collaborate to find the most beneficial environment for the student because “correct classroom placement can make the difference between a successful music experience for the special learner and a miserable situation for all” (Pontiff, 2004). As Ryan M. Hourigan writes, “the key to participation by a student with special needs is that the experience must be meaningful” (2008). Students with disabilities can and should meaningfully participate in music classes to the fullest extent appropriate.

If music is to be considered a primary subject in the curriculum, it needs to be assessed. In the post-NCLB world, “what is tested is what is valued” (Holster, 2007). Assessment in music must be recorded and be as authentic as possible. As Kimberly Holster states “if music is to be valued by the community at large it must be demonstrated that it is a discipline worthy of study” (2007). In order to determine if valuable, worthwhile skills have been learned, teachers need to evaluate students and their skills. By assessing musical skills, educators can help the public understand the learning that takes place in the music classroom.

A comprehensive music curriculum must include authentic music of varying cultures. Music is a fundamental element of culture. No culture exists in its own isolated bubble; rather cross-cultural transfer of ideas occurs constantly. A music classroom should be no different. If the music of non-western cultures is to be valued by society, it must be taught in schools. As educators, music teachers have the responsibility to “lead students to value cultural pluralism” (Rauscher, 2007) and the contributions of others. This learning can occur through music. A multicultural music program could include the music of traditional western European cultures, cultures from which the students’ families come, or other cultures which students may not otherwise come in contact with. Context and authenticity are essential for teaching of music of varying cultures and for teaching students to value diversity.

As more and more technology is developed, music teachers should take advantage of technology tools in their classrooms. Technology should be used to support the learning process and extend students’ knowledge and skills. As such, tools need to be chosen carefully so that they contribute to learning, rather than distracting or filling time. With careful, thoughtful research, music educators can find technological tools are truly helpful to teacher and students.

Music is a human constant. As part of human culture and collective knowledge, schools have a responsibility to pass down the knowledge of music. Music has a place as a primary subject in the school curriculum. Any music program should be balanced, comprehensive, well structured, and genuine so that students may fully benefit and truly learn.

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