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Philosophy of Music Education

What would a person's life be like without music? How would our cultural history be different? Who would we look up to as artistically great people? How would we fill the dead space in our lives? If answers for these questions even exist, I do not have them. Could I find in them in a lifetime? Probably not. In fact, I am not sure I want answers to these questions. A life, a culture, or a time without music would be a truly sad one in my eyes. Music is an integral part of our culture and our lives, and as such, it deserves representation in schools that will improve the lives of students. Because of that belief, I want to become a music teacher and have created a philosophy to guide my way.

Every human being has music of some kind in his or her life (with maybe a tiny percentage of exceptions). But why do we like music? What does it add to our lives? Music is important to life for a number of reasons. First of all, music offers us a personal artistic outlet. It allows us to express ourselves in ways no other form of art can. As Robert Glidden states in MENC's Housewright Symposium: Vision 2020, music is the "expression of our most intense emotions" (2000). Through it, we can express many emotions that are otherwise difficult or impossible to explain with words. Bennette Reimer, also a writer for Vision 2020, states that music is both "pleasurable and profound" (2000). We enjoy music and at the same time experience music at a level far

below the surface of our humanity. Music is also an integral part of our cultural history and identity; it permeates the events of the past and makes cultures identifiable from one another. By involving music in our lives, we maintain deep connections to our humanity and emotions in an increasingly technology-oriented world. Finally, music is art, and art is inherently human. Any computer can do mathematics or science, but art is a truly human experience. Music adds so much to our lives that we cannot possibly excluded it from the education of our children.

In addition to offering children all the benefits listed above, music education offers them still more valuable lessons, some specific to music itself and others that extend beyond the music classroom. In his MENC Vision 2020 article, Robert Glidden labels music “an outlet for creative energies” (2000). By learning about it in schools, children are exposed to a truly unique form of expression. Music is like no other art form, and through it, children learn about the artistic process and how to be generally artistic and expressive in all they do. Aside from the strictly musical or artistic lessons, music offers students a wealth of “extra-musical” benefits and lessons that extend beyond their time in the music classroom. For example, music teaches students how to work as a team and be responsible for their own part (of a piece of music, of a group project, of a homework assignment, etc.). Music also fosters a sense of accomplishment and what I like to call a sense of “healthy perfectionism.” With “healthy perfectionism,” students develop a desire to succeed and feel more motivated to work towards success. In addition, music teaches students to appreciate their cultures as well as respect ones that are different through the study of world music. I firmly believe that the arts are a part of a well-rounded education. Yes, math and science are important to every student’s

education, but so is art. It is just as much a part of our culture and society, and it deserves to be recognized in schools. There are also a number of scientific studies being conducted that explore how music education affects students' academic performance. Music may even help them grasp abstract topics in math, science, and language since they already understand an abstract system of symbols. Finally, there are no "sidelines" in music; everyone is included. Group inclusion is extremely important to a child's social development, and these miniature "artist communities" created in schools have been known to be very tight-knit and supportive. Music education opens the door to a lifetime of enjoyment and learning that only just begins in school.

I whole-heartedly believe in teaching music in schools, but exactly *what* music should we teach our children? I believe that variety is the key. Children must be exposed to as many genres as humanly possible. First, I think music educators should start with the "classics," the pieces everyone knows. They are the roots of the music culture and the music education culture, and we can never forget them. However, the living, breathing, art form that is music has more than just roots, and educators cannot afford to ignore its "branches." To balance the classics, music educators should mix in jazz, show-tunes, non-western music, modern music, new arrangements, and so on. Students must not be taught (either directly or indirectly) that there is a finite number of musical genres, but rather be taught to explore all of them. With this in mind, educators should not present music to students at random but in an organized fashion. For example, a conductor could program several pieces for a concert that all have something in common such as a time period, a composer, a language, a genre, and so forth. Finally, educators should not forget about one very important, but often overlooked, aspect of teaching

music: theory. I believe that theory is just as important as learning the repertoire since it increases students' understanding of the music they perform and can even help them learn music faster. Many teachers simply skip over music theory in schools, and as a result, many students are far behind when it comes to college theory. Theory in schools does not have to be difficult. It can be introduced slowly and directly connected to the music students learn. I believe that teaching a wide variety of music literature and including theory helps create successful, well-rounded musicians.

In a perfect world, everyone would learn music in schools. I realize that it is something of an unrealistic desire, so I believe everyone should at least have the *opportunity* to learn music in school, no matter their grade level. I think that a general music class is better suited for students in kindergarten through fifth or sixth grade. At these ages, it is better for children to explore music in a variety of ways and then decide what they like. After general music, regular orchestra, choir, or band classes are better suited for students in sixth or seventh grade through the end of high school. At these ages, children have a better grasp of what they would like to do and can apply the basics they learned in general music to the music literature in an ensemble setting. I think that middle and high schools could also offer a general or "survey of music" class for students who did not get started in music at an early age. The class could explore many facets of performing and listening to music to help students decide if they want to be in an ensemble class and what they would like to do. Finally, I think that every state should have a music education requirement for high school graduation. It is very important for students to, at the very least, be knowledgeable about music because it is such an integral

part of our culture. As I said, if not everyone learns music in schools, students should at least have the opportunity to learn.

While everyone should be given the chance to learn about music, I think people who teach music should have special qualifications. First of all, I think that a music educator should have a teaching license, no matter what grade level he or she teaches. Music teachers should also be willing to devote an entire lifetime to music and the growth of their students both as people and as musicians. They must have a desire to share the joy, wonders, and adrenaline rush of making and listening to music. At the same time, music educators should both take music seriously and know how to have a good time while making music. In my experience, the best music classes are those in which the group gets a lot of work done but has fun doing it. Music teachers should be energetic, fun-loving, animated people who are fired up about music and can get their students interested, too. Of course, an extensive knowledge of music is important, but a few idiosyncrasies never hurt anyone either! Above all, music teachers should be knowledgeable and energetic.

I hope that the creation of my philosophy of music education will guide me on my path to becoming a music teacher. As a firm believer in the power and value of music, I cannot even entertain the idea of life without music. Music is fundamental to the human experience. As such, it deserves to be taught in schools and taught well. It deserves to be valued in our culture for all the benefits, experiences, and joys it offers to the whole human race.