

Teaching Philosophy
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Seminar in Music Education

Evidence shows that music has been a part of the lives of humans since the species began (Reimer, 2000). During the early development of American public education, music became part of the curriculum and, despite setbacks, has remained a critical and valued part of education in the United States. As such, musical learning is an important part of education for every person because music is critical to the human experience. Since humans experience music in a variety of ways, music should be taught in a way that supports all students. This must include being inclusive of students' backgrounds, previous experiences, and interests.

The arts have been a central component of the human condition, and music is a unique art form. It allows humans to express their emotions, connect with others, and create both independently and in groups. "Being musically creative, in all the ways this can be accomplished, not only fulfills the human capacity for bringing meanings into existence as only music can do, it also deepens the perspective on the nature of musical meanings" (Reimer, 2000, p. 38). Besides providing opportunities for creativity and connection, music serves other functions in our culture including entertainment, communication, expression, and aesthetic enjoyment (Merriam, 1964). Music serves these functions while also having a powerful ability to deeply impact people on emotional, physical, and spiritual levels because of the aesthetic experience it is able to provide. Reimer states, "Arts are the means by which humans can actively explore and experience unbound richness of human subjective possibilities" (2000, p.39). Music is

important because of its unique ability to symbolize feelings that can otherwise be difficult to express through language (House & Leonhard, 1959). As such, music education plays a crucial role in every person's school experience.

Music instruction provides opportunities for students to have meaningful and life changing experiences, to develop as a whole person, and to express their emotions; engaging students with music also helps to build creativity, fuel inspiration, and give opportunities to connect with others who are different. Despite these benefits, administrators, school officials, lawmakers, and community members often fail to see the value of music instruction. Furthermore, when teachers attempt to advocate for music programs, they often argue that music should be taught because it increases neural connections in the brain and benefits learning in other subjects. This reasoning, though valid, should not be the sole reason for the inclusion of music education in schools; it should be taught in schools because it enriches the human experience and because of its strong impact on the mind and soul.

Because of this transformative impact, musical instruction must be widely available through high school and continue in collegiate settings and in the community. Furthermore, during elementary, middle, and high school, all students must be provided with musical instruction, not just those who show talent or potential (Elliot, 1995). "Music educators are frequently criticized for focusing on students perceived to have talent while ignoring those with less ability" (Kelley, 2011, p. 74). All students, regardless of talent level or musical aptitude, must have the opportunity to participate in music education programs from Kindergarten through high school and should leave high

school prepared to be lifelong musicians as well as a music appreciators. Therefore, all types of learners must be involved and welcomed, including students with special needs, students of all socioeconomic classes, and students with no previous musical experience who can be accommodated with extra instruction and appropriate opportunities (Jellison, 2000). By providing a wide variety of options for students and making necessary accommodations, music programs will be fully inclusive and equitable.

Music offerings available to all students in grades Kindergarten through 12 should encompass the musical interests and experiences students bring to class. Each student's unique background and tastes in music need to be identified and embraced by music programs and class curriculum. "Students' backgrounds and lives should be a part of music instruction. Reach them where they are and acknowledge that students bring different experiences to class" (Abeles & Custodero, 2010, p.30). Varied and quality music programs must include options for students to participate in large, small, and emerging ensembles as well as general music classes. The large ensemble is part of the rich musical history of the United States and must be part of students' musical education in elementary, middle, and high school. However, chorus, orchestra, and band cannot be the only choices for musical engagement for students. Schools must provide opportunities for all students to find a place in the music program. Curriculum offerings must include emerging ensembles and music appreciation classes, such as film music studies or music technology. As Jellison states, "Students in middle and high school will have a wide array of opportunities in addition to band, orchestra, and chorus

for participation in music” (2000, p.93). These alternatives to large ensembles cannot be given more importance than the large ensembles; all musical offerings should be recognized equally for their merits and values, and should be provided the necessary funding for success.

Musical offerings for adults and for students in grades K-12 must be varied and embrace student interests. These courses should teach a variety of music including classical, folk, world, and popular music. The musical repertoire taught in classrooms should represent musical cultures found in students’ communities and around the world (Jellison, 2000). “Without an opportunity to experience as many musical relationships as possible, a student may never find the hint of success or interest that can develop into the desire to investigate further, thus extinguishing their intrinsic motivation to learn” (Kelly, 2011, p.74). Musical instruction must include opportunities for students to engage with the surrounding communities and include relevant themes in repertoire selection. This instruction should include authentic learning experiences as often as possible, which can include guest appearances by expert musicians or bringing students to see performances in the community with professional ensembles. Music instruction must make connections to a student’s community, home life, classmates, and to the world. Placing music in context within life outside the classroom, including musical opportunities in the community, is critical for lasting and meaningful learning.

Community engagement includes teaching and engaging adult learners. Individuals who are no longer in the school setting should have a wide variety of opportunities to continue their musical learning and participation. In order to provide a

space where everyone can feel successful, barriers in community and collegiate music organizations must be removed. Opportunities should be available in the community both for adult learners who have previously sung or played an instrument and for adults with no previous musical experiences. Adults of all ages should have opportunities to engage in musical learning and performance in their communities.

Music taught both in schools and communities to students of all ages should always be of high quality, regardless of genre. Quality music engages and challenges all levels of musicianship. Materials used for teaching should include a broad variety of instrument experiences with both traditional and non-traditional instruments. Curriculum in courses should be at the discretion of the teacher and chosen to best support the students in the class; it should not be prescribed by the district or a distant supervisor. A teacher should choose materials for the classroom that fit with their teaching philosophy and meet the needs and interests of their students. Assessment in these classes should be qualitative whenever possible, and assessments should always be given with the goal of improving instruction.

One of the goals of musical instruction for music learners of all ages must be to learn skills that allow students to continue making music beyond the walls of the classroom and long after the class has ended. Skills should include notation reading, listening, analyzing, performing, writing, technique, and improvisation. Instruction should also emphasize life skills such as creativity, collaboration, and an understanding of diversity. Music instruction should meet the requirements of the National Standards (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards [NCCAS], 2014) while not being limited by

these standards. Instruction and performances should emphasize process over product; concerts should be a celebration of learning and a chance to share learning with the community rather than the focus of instruction. Concerts should be positive experiences for students, families, and the school community, and represent a milestone in student learning.

In order to achieve these goals of instruction, music teachers need adequate training programs that prepare them to teach a variety of music styles utilizing a myriad of class formats. David Elliot states, “An excellent music curriculum, I have said, is largely an excellent music teacher in action. I might add that an excellent school music program reflects the dedication of one or more teachers who are musically, pedagogically, philosophically, psychologically, and politically savvy” (1995, p.309). Music teachers should have strong musical skills and an innate sense of musicianship; to teach others, one must have a deep understanding of the topic. Music teachers should also enjoy sharing musical experiences with learners and have experience in a real classroom setting long before their first teaching position. Preparation courses are helpful but nothing truly prepares a teacher like classroom experience (Elliot, 1995). Music teachers should also be lifelong learners and continuously look to expand their teaching and musical knowledge throughout their careers. Before moving on to higher degrees, music teachers must have classroom experience from which to draw on in their continued learning.

Music is a critical part of the human experience. Therefore, musical learning must be part of the education for every student and be available for all individuals throughout

adulthood. All humans are capable of appreciating, experiencing, and making music, and should have opportunities to do so from birth to death. Because music is an innate, yet individually unique, part of the human experience, all musical instruction must take into account students' backgrounds, previous experiences, and interests. Music is a consistent and important part of life, and therefore, music education must be a valued part of schools and communities (Kelly, 2011).

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