

## Philosophy of Music Education

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Music is a form of creative expression unique to human beings and distinctive among the arts for its manipulation of the medium of sound. Though not accurately conceptualized as a language, music is communicative in an abstract manner that is far more expressive than explicit. In the sense that every human culture on the planet creates music—music as unique and diverse as the cultures themselves—music is universal. Every human being has an innate ability to perceive, create, and respond to music as well as the capacity to develop those abilities.

Given the ubiquitous nature of music within almost every aspect of human society and the myriad purposes to which human beings put music (e.g., entertainment, ceremony, play, artistic expression, etc.), a music education is essential for every person. At all levels, music instruction should focus as much as possible on *doing* music rather than simply learning about musical concepts. Though content is obviously vital, it can and should be embedded in active practices. As affirmed in the National Core Arts Standards (2014), music students should be engaged in multiple processes of music (i.e., creating, performing, responding, and connecting).

The music classroom should be a place where student voice is reflected both in classroom procedures and the selection and refinement of musical

works. In this way, music teachers empower their students and support students' sense of autonomy and ownership of their own musical learning. The music classroom should also be a safe space where every student can feel like they belong and where connectedness to their peers and their teacher is implicit. Within the classroom, students should experience high-quality materials and collaborative instructional approaches designed to provide optimal challenge, to support each student's sense of competence, and to provide the opportunity for each to experience meaningful success. In addition to providing students an engaging, enriching music education, I believe employing these strategies and providing this type of learning environment can also help a music teacher support their students' intrinsic motivation in music—an aspect that I feel is vital to a student's choice to continue his or her music education past grade-level advancement or graduation from formal education.

Outside the classroom, I believe every music teacher bears the responsibility to engage continually and systematically in proactive music advocacy and to work ardently educating their communities about the value and importance of music education for all students. While even the most accomplished and experienced musician can struggle to clearly articulate what music means or what value it brings to an individual or society, the music teacher must do all he or she can to convey a compelling message in support of school and community music programs and organizations. Though prefabricated advocacy resources abound from state and national

organizations (e.g., state MEAs, NAFME, NAMM, etc.), the music educator must tailor advocacy efforts to fit his or her own specific school and community situation.

I suspect the predominance of music advocacy initiatives based on claims of non-musical benefits of musical study (e.g., higher test scores, increased intelligence, greater self-discipline, etc.) stems from a perceived need within the profession to articulate the benefits and value of music in terms that resonate with the general public and important school/community stakeholders—many of whom doubtless have limited musical backgrounds. With a significant majority of people in the U.S. ending any music instruction or training by the age of 10-12—having had, in many cases, as little as 30 minutes a week or less from Kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade—I believe the average person in our society lacks sufficient musical knowledge and experience to instinctively appreciate, in musical terms, the relevance and importance of music as a curricular school subject or art form. Without the frame of reference that a more extensive education in music could provide, the job of advocating and generating community support for music is made significantly more difficult. As a profession, I feel this may explain, in part, why we sometimes find ourselves relying on specious claims of non-musical benefit that frequently fail to demonstrate what makes music instruction unique in the school curriculum. I feel strongly that advocacy efforts in the following areas, if successful, could result in outcomes that mitigate this problem:

- A) Every student in school music programs should be taught by a certified music teacher.
- B) Compulsory music instruction in schools should extend through the eighth grade and include both instrumental and vocal music.
- C) P-5 students should be guaranteed a minimum of one hour of music instruction per week.

Along these lines, I believe music education advocacy should be focused as much on music making and music education across the lifespan as on music in formal education. Preservice music teachers should be taught strategies and be provided with tools to successfully affect not only grade-level transition in formalized music instruction, but to also successfully connect students to opportunities for continuing in music beyond graduation. Avocational music making possibilities should be emphasized in classrooms to the same degree as vocational music pathways, and teachers should reinforce class discussions about these possibilities with frequent opportunities for students to experience real-world examples of both (e.g., college/university band performances and clinics, community band participation and performances, performances at community events, etc.).

To summarize, I maintain that an education in music is fundamental for every human being, and I feel strongly that our profession should do more to advance music education and musical engagement at every stage of life. In addition to creating classroom environments that promote student ownership

and that support the development of intrinsic motivation in music, music teachers must also clearly elucidate and provide connection to the ways in which music can continue to be part of students' lives following graduation or grade-level advancement. To further facilitate continuing musical engagement for students, music teaching practices must help students become adaptive musicians who are equally at home in a large ensemble, small chamber group, or as a solo performer. In this way, students may be better equipped to engage with any form of musical activity they may find in their communities. Finally, proactive music advocacy—at the school, community, state, and national levels—is inherent to being a music educator. Music teachers should judiciously consider what claims of non-musical benefit are employed and make every effort to ensure that these claims have merit and are always balanced with a clear, articulate, music-centric advocacy component.