

A Philosophy of Music Education Through the Lens of an Aspiring Music Educator

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MUS 241 - Introduction to Music Education

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The College of New Jersey

December 10, 2019

Abstract

In this paper, I will argue that my personal philosophy of music education is grounded in the belief that receiving an education in music acts as a medium in fostering the physical, emotional, and cognitive development of a person. Philosophers that are cited and whose ideas are expanded upon are Bennett Reimer, David Elliot, Zoltan Kodály and Carl Orff. This paper draws personal connections and applies them to the terms and concepts of these philosophers and other cited sources in developing a personal philosophy of music education.

Oxford Dictionary defines a philosophy as “a set of beliefs or attitudes held by a person or an organization that acts as a guiding principle for behavior” (Oxford Dictionary). As a second-timer to writing a philosophy, I had the notion that this would serve as a superficial task to complete. However, as I began to contemplate my ideas, this proved to be inaccurate. Embarking on the path to pursue a career as a music educator, I held a set of preconceived beliefs which persuaded me to aspire to this profession. These have since been strengthened and further conceptualized through research, and the knowledge I have acquired through learning about the various philosophers of music education. However, what I found most complex in devising my personal philosophy of music education is how to best articulate my beliefs. As a result, I borrow a quotation from a philosopher that I believe best expresses the foundation of my personal philosophy of music education.

Plato once said, “Music is to the mind as air is to the body.” My personal philosophy of music education is grounded in the belief that receiving an education in music acts as a medium in fostering the physical, emotional, and cognitive development of a person. I believe that it is never too early or too late for a person to experience music. Scientific studies show that an education in music is directly correlated to a person’s cognitive development as early as in utero. Due to the advances in brain imaging, we are now able to confirm that music does, in fact, alter the fundamental structures of young brains (Bradley-Kramer, 2017). I was personally exposed to music in utero, and throughout the duration of my childhood. I cannot recall a time in which I was not actively being exposed to music. Some of my earliest recollections include attending Broadway musicals with my parents and singing the signature tunes performed on the way home and for days to come. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that it was this

exposure that nurtured my love and passion for music, and also helped me to tackle other academic subjects during my formative years.

I believe that a person needs to experience music through all of the various components of human function. Previously, in Western history, many held beliefs that the mind, body and feelings were considered to be separate components of human function. However as we have come to discover today, these components are interconnected. I firmly believe that students should be actively utilizing their mind, body and feelings when engaging in the different topics that music education has to offer. Whether this be cognitively listening to, physically moving to, or emotionally relating to a piece of music, students need to be invested. Bennett Reimer, commonly known as the “grandfather of music education” is among the philosophers that have helped me solidify my philosophy. Reimer specifies that a music education affords a person to undergo an aesthetic experience, the highest level of experience available to humans, encompassing the mind, body and feelings.

The bodily basis of human reality is the influence of our bodies on how and what we can know and imagine. Imagination is the power all humans have to perceive things and events as being connected in some way, whether by similarity or difference. It is the power to achieve patterned, coherent experience. Without the imaginative capacity to make connections among what we experience, our lives would be chaotic, completely without form. Meaning would be impossible, as would purposeful action. Human imagination is at the core of human thinking and doing.  
(Reimer, 2015)

Like Reimer, I understand the role and power the “imagination” has in educating children. I am also aware and hold true to my belief that all aspects of the human being must be involved in the learning process. In the classroom, I intend to take a multi-sensory approach in order to engage my students in active physical, listening and vocal activities in music. From my personal experience in receiving a music education, I know that music encourages an active imagination and mind. However, I personally do not believe this suffices. Inspired by David Elliot, I believe that in order for students to truly appreciate music, they must also be actively “practicing or doing” music. Wilfried Gruhn, Emeritus Professor of Music Education at the University of Freiburg, elaborates on Elliot’s argument: “A praxial approach to developing musical understanding integrates so-called practical and mental skills; it brings together doing, making, feeling and thinking; and it complements actions with reflection” (Elliot, p.106, 2003). Students need to be exposed to the different forms of music making: performing, improvising, composing, arranging and conducting, although only specific forms will apply to students depending on their grade level and their musical aptitude.

Glancing into the future, in the classroom, I can see myself developing differentiated instruction for my students by combining components from the Kodály, Orff, and Gordon methodologies. This is not to say that I will be limited to these approaches, but will simply be using them as building blocks as I begin teaching. I appreciate Kodály’s philosophy due to the fact that it reaffirms my core belief of engaging the entirety of the human body in music: “Music involves a natural synthesis of thinking, feeling, and moving.” Utilizing the Orff approach I will be able to put my shared philosophy of Elliot’s praxial learning into play. The Orff method consists of the components of teaching, integration, performance and music literacy. The two

components of his methodology that resonate with me currently are (1) improvisation, and similar to Gordon, (2) teaching and learning music by rote. Music literacy or what is commonly referred to by some today as musicianship, is a crucial component of music, as I know to be true in my personal studies in sight singing, ear training, and rhythm, however I do not believe that this is all there is to music education. As a music teacher I do not want my students to simply read notes and rhythms off of a piece of sheet music they are given. I want my students to be actively listening and making connections with the music. I want my students to be able to truly immerse themselves in the music they are making.

I believe that the teaching and learning process needs to be student-centered and diverse. In today's world of music education, we may often see educators who are determined to teach the music that they are passionate without actually taking into consideration what their students' opinions are. I want my students to enjoy, understand and feel comfortable performing the music they make. I also want to expose my students to various genres and different cultures of music. Regardless of race, political ideology, gender, sexual identity or socioeconomic status, I believe that every person should have the opportunity to receive a music education. As an educator, I will have the responsibility of facilitating a safe, nurturing and interactive learning environment in the classroom. In my opinion, this is a crucial aspect of being a teacher. Being a teacher is not easy and it is not for everyone. A teacher has the ability to make a positive or negative impact on a student. I want my students to view me as a role model and be inspired by my teaching, not be afraid of coming to class.

In conclusion, I believe that a music education acts as a vehicle in one's physical, emotional, and cognitive development. Students need to be invested in the music they make by

undergoing emotional experiences in music and by actively practicing music. I am fully conscious of the fact that my philosophy of music education will change as I keep maturing and developing throughout my undergraduate years, however as of right now these are my beliefs.

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