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Intro to Music Education

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### The Philosophy and Practice of Music Education

Music holds a unique and transformative place in education, offering students the ability to explore and express their inner lives in ways few other subjects allow. A student may enter the classroom burdened by challenges at home or in school, yet leave feeling grounded, happy, and at peace. While academic subjects focus primarily on cognitive development, music and the arts create opportunities for emotional growth, aesthetic experiences, and social cohesion. Abeles, emphasizes that schools must “provide as rich and full a life as possible for all students,” a goal music uniquely fulfills. Reimer (2003) further explains that “education in the arts...can be regarded as the education of feeling” (p. 153), highlighting the importance of cultivating emotional intelligence alongside intellectual skills. In the music classroom, students are encouraged to take risks, experiment, and discover their own artistic voices, learning empathy, sensitivity, and imagination along the way. The shared act of music-making connects students with sounds, texts, and each other, often in ways that traditional academic subjects cannot, producing what Abeles describes as a richer and more meaningful life. Beyond individual development, music fosters community by teaching a shared cultural language. Many people remember songs from their childhood music classes, whether humorous, comforting, or resonant at the perfect moment, demonstrating the lasting impact of shared musical experience. Outside

the classroom, music continues to unite people at birthdays, religious gatherings, and concerts, illustrating that humans are most connected when they share sound. As a future educator, I view music not merely as an art form but as a vital channel for helping students feel, belong, and live more fully.

The provision of music curriculum in schools is essential because it offers intellectual, emotional, and cultural experiences that no other subject can replicate. Research indicates that sustained musical learning actively shapes the developing mind, strengthening neural networks and engaging distributed brain systems (Hodges, 1999). Bob Duke (2005) warns against overvaluing the so-called “Mozart Effect” and emphasizes that music’s true power lies in the “important, authentic, substantive, meaningful artistic experiences” students gain when they rehearse, perform, and create together. These experiences foster discipline, focus, cooperation, and belonging while allowing students to witness the tangible connection between effort and accomplishment. A strong music curriculum ensures that students are not only academically capable but also musically, emotionally, and cognitively enriched. Teaching music is ultimately about providing access to artistic growth that lasts far beyond the classroom, cultivating skills and perspectives that support a lifelong engagement with music.

Equity in music education is fundamental. Raspberry illustrates this through the failed Publibus system, where well-intentioned plans collapsed because the infrastructure was insufficient, leaving passengers abandoned. Similarly, an elitist philosophy of music education that reserves training for the “highly talented” is bound to fail its broader purpose. It neglects the diverse needs of students, much as Publibus ignored competent drivers and accessible routes.

While accommodations for students with special needs are essential, the failure to serve students from deprived environments is not a reason for exclusion but an argument for designing a robust program capable of meeting all learners. There's a way to include everyone, and as a future educator, it is my duty to fulfill that. The music classroom is a no man gets left behind environment, end of story. Providing foundational "vehicles" and "routes" ensures that every student can access meaningful musical experiences. A system that only works for the already advantaged is, by definition, a failed system, as Raspberry warns.

A curriculum must also balance standards with meaningful, culturally relevant material. The national standards for arts education provide a framework emphasizing creating, performing, responding, and connecting, but field observations demonstrate that a strictly technical approach can hinder engagement. For example, in one band rehearsal, instruction focused almost entirely on exercises from a single book, producing a rigid, teacher-centered environment. In contrast, Mrs. Pratt's choir class was highly effective. Students were engaged, responding to questions, practicing posture and diction, using kinesthetic techniques to understand music, and participating in sight-reading exercises. She gave specific praise, turned mistakes into learning opportunities, and maintained trust and positive energy throughout the class. Timing of instruction was equally important; she knew when to intervene, when to reset focus with a deep breath, and when to give students leadership roles, keeping the class productive and energized. Effective pedagogy is not just about what is taught but how and when it is delivered, combining skill development, creative application, and culturally relevant material. While Piaget's stages suggest readiness ladders, Bruner's spiral curriculum allows any subject to be taught meaningfully to any learner at any stage. Effective teachers use scaffolding, knowing when to

provide direct guidance and when to step back. Successful pedagogy is not just about what is taught but how and when it is delivered, combining skill development, creative application, and culturally relevant material.

My ideal philosophy of music education emphasizes inclusivity, structure, and play. Gatekeeping for the “talented” few is replaced by a classroom where standards meet student identity. Drawing from Kodály’s structured literacy, Orff’s creative exploration, and Bruner’s spiral curriculum, lessons can be rigorous, accessible, and joyful. Classroom management involves clear routines, nonverbal signals, and positive reinforcement, creating a safe environment for risk-taking and creative exploration. Music literacy develops sequentially, beginning with solfège and rhythm syllables and advancing to composition through the Orff process. A typical week might include a folk song connected to historical or cultural context where students actually get the historical background, skill-building on notation, ensemble rehearsal, or a station-rotation day where students choose among ukulele, recorder, (whichever instruments I have at my disposal), rhythm composition, or singing practice. Such a variety ensures multiple access points and sustained engagement, meeting the diverse needs of all learners. Also, accommodations would be made so all students feel comfortable while still challenged.

The philosophy outlined above is not merely theoretical; it forms the blueprint for my classroom practice. Music instruction will be a space for emotional exploration and social cohesion, beginning each session with grounding rituals such as call-and-response patterns or movement sequences. I would love to start the week off by giving students the opportunity to

share something they are proud of, no matter how small, so we can build a warm community as well. Sometimes giving students that space to share makes them feel as though they are able to fail comfortably, ‘failing’ being a loose term and really just not being afraid to try new things, like a challenging new topic. Repertoire will be curated to reflect diverse cultural narratives and emotional landscapes, forging community through ensemble negotiation, problem-solving, and shared responsibility. Every child will be welcomed, with proactive accommodations for the neuro spicy and deliberate support for students from deprived environments. My curriculum will balance technical skill acquisition with creative expression, employing the scaffolding approach to introduce foundational concepts early and revisit them with increasing complexity over time. Timing will be guided by pedagogical intuition, formative assessment, and immediate, specific feedback. Instruction will combine structure and play, fostering independent music literacy, creativity, and ensemble collaboration. This system, with prepared teachers, multiple methods, and a spiraling standards-based curriculum, ensures every student becomes an independent, confident, and joyful participant in music. Students leaving my classroom will not only know about music, they will know that they are musical.