A Philosophy of Music Education for All Students

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 Every educator understands that students do not learn subject material from them. Students learn many abstract life skills from their teachers, peers, and learning experiences. Students leave the classroom having learned how to work with other people, how to be creative, what failure feels like, and what success feels like. Therefore, it is important as a music educator to be aware of your students, how they learn, and most importantly if they are comprehending the materials presented in any given lesson. Hence, my music education philosophy is student based. My belief is that all students belong and are welcome in the music classroom. It does not matter if they have music experience, if they are new to music entirely, if they have amazing music abilities, or if they have a disability. Every student should have the opportunity to participate in music. To accommodate this, my philosophy of music education reflects why all students should be given the opportunity to learn music, how music is taught and assessed through playing, and creativity through improvisation and composition.

The first and most important part of my music education philosophy is the inclusivity of all students. Every student should have access and opportunity to receive a music education, and that starts with a prepared music educator. The music teacher should be able to adapt their classroom for every type of learner and every musical ability level. Therefore, there will be no problem accepting students with disabilities into my classroom. On the other side of the same coin students with advanced music ability should not feel hindered by a school music class. Instead, they should be given the opportunity to grow more with and through their school music program. Music classes are not just for the “middle ground” students. Music classes should be a place for every student to find self confidence that they may lack in other subject areas. Music provides a creative outlet that allows for definitive success in a field other than academics. The feeling of success developed in the music classroom can be drawn upon in other aspects of life, helping to boost the confidence of these types of students, and as a result, they do better elsewhere. Therefore, I could be labeled a “Therapeutic Music Educator” (Mitchell, 2016 p.32) because I believe student music education can lead to students, “developing their unique sound… fulfill their potential… and explore and develop self-awareness and a self-identity” (Mitchell, 2016 p.31). This entirely psychological side of music instruction makes students better at being students. It is for this reason that my classroom is open to any student who is interested and willing to learn. The feeling of success that can easily be developed in the music classroom has the power to inspire any student, making it possible for them to do whatever they need to in order to succeed, causing a domino effect of success.

The second aspect of my music education philosophy is that musicianship is taught through playing and performance; students actively participate in music making. Every student involved in music will learn to perform repertoire that is relevant to their skill levels and instruments. The final performance of any given piece will show a clear development in musicianship. By the time a concert or large performance happens, every student will have a background knowledge of the repertoire being performed, an understanding of the structure of the music they are performing, a developed technique for playing their instrument, and the ability to perform the repertoire consistently at high level of accuracy. As David J. Elliot expresses in his many works, music involves, “processes-and products” (Elliot) meaning students experience music in a way that is purposeful, contextual, and socially embedded. Long and short term music lesson plans can have the same general format: introduce new repertoire to students; analyze and research the music with the students; play and learn the music until the students are able to add musicality and expression to the repertoire. Although the process of teaching described above is long term, meaning a large concert performance will be used to assess the students, it can also be adapted to use as a structure for everyday instruction, meaning that the understanding and growth of students as musicians can be assessed on a day to day basis. This lesson plan structure is optimal because it can be applied to any group at any ability level, as it allows for skills to be taught and practiced while giving the students freedom and the chance to learn before assessment.

Additionally, my music classroom is an environment where students are encouraged to express themselves creatively through music. Students will understand concepts of music theory and musical expression. Teaching and practicing improvisation and composition will develop the student’s creativity, which will improve their musicianship and self-expression. Improvisation and the open option of creativity are key to developing great musicians because it is a, “way of being in or through music” (Higgins, & Mantie, 2013 p.41). Students will understand why music sounds the way it does, not just how to play it. To understand these valuable lessons, students must develop a deep understanding of music and the correlation between writing, improvising, and playing music, which can be practiced through improvisation. The rather abstract and confusing concepts of improvisation and composition force the students to learn concepts of music theory, including melody and harmony, key signatures, and time signatures. The skills that develop because of students practicing these complex aspects of music lead students to be able to create music on their own as well as better understand the repertoire they are studying. Ultimately, allowing for creativity in the music classroom, through improvisation and composition, will improve the overall musicianship of students through another form of playing. Therefore, it is necessary to have students work on improvisation and composition, even if in their simplest forms.

 Music education gives students a tool to express themselves, to work together, to be thoughtful and kind to one another, through the teaching of musicianship. The study of music allows students to think on their own about the part they play in the ensemble, how it fits in with the group, and how those ideas translate into their lives. Through music education that inspires this kind of meta-cognition, students will become great critical thinkers as well as creative, disciplined, and cooperative people. This type of music education creates better musicians and it creates better students. It creates thoughtful people, and it gives students a new perspective on each other and the world around them.

Resources

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