

Where do we go from here?

Thoughts on Inclusion and Popular Music Education

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Abstract

If our mission is “encouraging the study and making of music for all,” shouldn’t we continue to **diversify the styles of music we study, create, and perform, as well as the methods in which we teach?** The inclusion of popular music genres affords us the opportunity to broaden our understanding and appreciation of styles, cultures, and musicking that might be unfamiliar to us while, at the same time, allowing us to connect with our students while modeling a culturally responsible environment. All within the context of providing a well-rounded, relevant, culturally appropriate, skill-laden music education to our students.

The Challenge

Music offerings in Elementary – *Music for all*



Music offerings in Secondary – *Music for few*

The Question

How do we include our student’s experiences, musical preferences, and heritages as part of an inclusive music education experience, thereby strengthening the relationship between their school and home lives and making school-based music education more relevant, relatable and, dare I say, valuable?

The Dialogue

Estelle Jorgensen, when considering curriculum renovation in her book *Transforming Music Education*, notes that “**each generation needs to renew education and culture for its time** and place...and this renewal constitutes the seeds of musical, cultural, and societal transformation” (Jorgensen, 2003).

NAfME Executive Director Michael Blakeslee, when discussing adopting practices that focus on culturally responsive music teaching states, “Dealing with this **requires a willingness to question existing practices with care**. We don’t want to delete or dilute things that have made us strong for a century or more, but we may well want to expand and enhance our offerings” (A New Year’s Vision for Music Education, 2017)

The College Music Society calls on universities to cast “a strong, critical eye toward the assumptions and practices of the conventional model which, shaped earlier in time, **is no longer fully resonant with the opportunities and the needs of students in our time**” (Campbell et al., 2014)

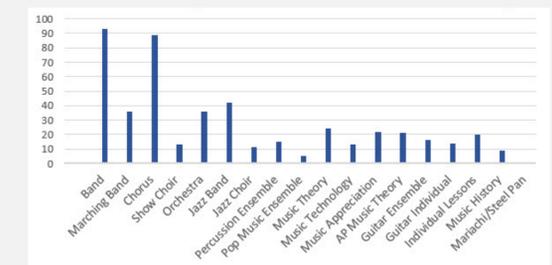
One of the greatest strengths of utilizing popular music in the classroom is not only its relevance to our students in their everyday lives, but that **popular music may be among the most powerful discourses available** to students as a means by which to construct personal identity and interpret social experience (Campbell & Herbert, 2000).

The core narrative of music education is, slowly, shifting. Yes, as enduring as they may be, core narratives are still provisional stories; they do change over time, and change can be uncomfortable (Staffer, 2016).

...music of all periods, styles, forms, and cultures belongs in the curriculum. The **musical repertory should be expanded to involve music of our time in its rich variety**, including currently popular teenage music and avantgarde music, American folk music, and the music of other cultures (Choate, 1968).

However, **for teachers who wish to reach students beyond the relatively small number involved nationwide in traditional large ensembles** in middle and high schools, or for some who may be seeking ways to revive arts programming in a district where funding cuts threaten to kill off music teaching altogether, popular music can provide myriad means to engage students in relevant, creative exploration of vital aspects of contemporary culture (Smith, 2018).

Current Course Offerings



Nationally, only 20% our middle and high school students have a music education experience (Edwards, 2006) via our current offerings. This has not changed since 1967 (Choate, 1967).

Conclusions

- Tradition and innovation do not have to be mutually exclusive
- We must address how to reach the non-traditional musician (NTM) by adapting our current offerings, expanding our definition of musical literacy, and reframing our characterization of music teacher education, thereby permitting us to engage the “**other 80%**”
- In the same manner our students have a diversity of learning styles, educators must possess a knowledge of a range of musical genres, and those style’s inherent musicking constructs, to better enable them to adjust and adapt to a given teaching environment

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