

Missouri School Music

Drive!

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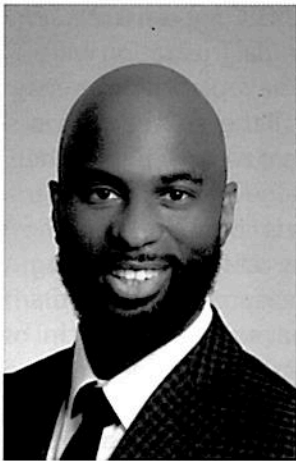
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Music That Connects
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Introduction

As America becomes more and more diverse, the American public education system is increasingly serving students from a variety of social and cultural backgrounds. The Census Bureau estimates that almost half of the U.S. population will consist of ethnic groups of color by the year 2050 (Banks, 2004). This projected evolution of the U.S. population presents a potential problem for an American music education system that “generally operates under the assumptions of the Western European tradition” (Bond, 2017, p. 154). This Eurocentric framework impedes the American music education system’s ability to provide a multicultural education that is suitable for a diverse student body.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to areas within the American music education system that can be improved upon. First, I will discuss the demographics of music teacher preparation programs and music teachers in America. Secondly, I will explore how the music curriculum can be expanded to appeal to the various cultures and interests of students. Improving in these areas will enable students from a variety of backgrounds to have an equitable music education experience in America.

Music Teacher Demographics

The hegemonic influence of European culture on American music education has contributed to a lack

of minority groups that are represented in music teacher education programs and as music teachers. The underrepresentation of minority students (who are preparing to be teachers) and minority faculty in music colleges (Clements, 2009) can contribute to the perpetuation of these exclusionary practices in teacher education programs that ultimately affect the entire field of music education (Bond, 2017). Elpus (2015) reported that 86.02% of the 20,521 music teacher licensure candidates in the United States between 2007 and 2012 are white. Matthew and Koner (2017) reported that 90.9% of the 7,463 music educators who were currently employed and members of NAFME are white. “It is possible that a lack of diversity among both music teachers and music teacher educators may... be related to the provision of social justice within preK through 12th-grade music programs” (Fitzpatrick et al., 2014). Therefore, it is important for music students at all levels to benefit from the various the perspectives and experiences that would emanate from a diverse music faculty (Palmer, 2011; DeLorenzo & Silverman, 2016).

Expansion of Music Curriculum

Traditional music ensembles. The American music education system’s commitment to European culture has relegated many public-school music curricula to traditional music ensembles. Unfortunately, most adolescents are not involved in these courses

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even though they really enjoy music (Williams, 2011). This lack of participation in traditional music ensembles has prevented American music education from thriving with success that is comparable to American music (Reimer, 2004). Thus, it is imperative that music educators expand their music curricula to include courses beyond the traditional band, orchestra, and chorus classes. This could mean the inclusion of a mariachi band or a class that focuses on the production of hip-hop tracks (Hess, 2017). In any case, this process begins with understanding the connections that students have with music and providing opportunities for students to continue their participation music ensembles, groups, and activities in which they are familiar.

Western classical music. Expanding the music curriculum to include nontraditional music ensembles and courses will likely prompt the inclusion of genres other than western classical music. In fairness, the music curriculum in America has evolved to include more multicultural music; however, western classical music has continued to be the premier music style taught in the classroom (Davis & Blair, 2011). A western classical music focus may stand in stark contrast to the social and cultural experiences of an increasingly diverse student population. Some music educators noted that having experiences with gospel music, popular music, and world music were vital to their preparation as teachers (Shaw, 2015). The implication here is that a strong emphasis on western classical music does not fully prepare teachers for a multicultural classroom. Further, having a variety of experiences with different genres of music will help music educators to develop a better connection with students musically.

Conclusion

As American music education continues to move toward the goal of multiculturalism, it is important to ensure that our pedagogical practices do not resemble those of culturally oppressive teaching. For example, music educators should not be presented as “the gatekeepers of knowledge who then dole out that knowledge to students” (Walter, 2018, p. 25). Conversely, music educators should employ culturally responsive teaching by “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (Gay, 2002, p. 106). This

requires music educators to get to know their students and understand their musical identities. When this happens, music educators will be able to offer more musical experiences, opportunities, and courses that connect with their students.

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punishments, no carrots or sticks. They just put their nose to the grindstone. A reward is cheating. You're better than that. The hard work is its own reward. The minute you hear anything like that, you'll know you're on the right path. Perfectionism only gets loud when people get moving (Acuff, 2017, p. 64)."

Let's get moving! Let's get motivated!

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Learning from the Maestro

Bernstein continues to serve as a model of teaching. While his talent may not be reproducible, aspects of his methods are, and remind us of their possible application in our own rehearsals and classrooms. Overall the Maestro loved people – children in particular. And he was a music enthusiast; something that was never diluted or hidden. He wore music on his sleeve that said – "I **am** music!" He was a master communicator using vocabulary that was easy for the young and uninformed to understand, yet at the same time sophisticated and insightful for professional level musicians to ponder.

Bernstein Learning Principles

[compiled by the author]

- Begin and end rehearsals and classes with music – NOT general announcements.
- Break complex topics down into meaningful parts from small to large concepts to ensure comprehension.
- Lessons should progress from simple to complex using musical examples every step of the way.
- Use language with colorful analogies and metaphors to clarify complicated issues.
- Answer questions in stages.
- Progress from the known to the unknown.
- Both teacher and students sing to enhance learning and motivation.
- Use all genres of music as points of reference.
- Conductors should look like the music – physically characterize the score while on the podium.

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