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A Personal Philosophy on the Importance of Music Education

Tristan Galinski
University of Lethbridge
Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada

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Abstract

Music is a subject that is one of the most consistently threatened to be terminated at our schools. As someone who is preparing to enter into the field of education, I have decided that a clear philosophy on the importance of music would allow others to understand why I do what I do. I feel that music is one of the most important subjects a student could take and present this idea with various research that validates my beliefs.

Music Education is something that I find extremely important in today's society. As we strive towards the future I feel that we sometimes lose sight of what makes us human. The Mahattanville Music Curriculum Project (MMCP) states that "the logic of discovery is far more exciting than the logic of the discovered"¹. When we are young, we feel that sense of discovery all the time. Every opportunity is a learning opportunity and we are introduced to the world through wondrous sensations. We tend to purposely search out those new discoveries and marvel at the beauty of existence. As we grow older, the beauty begins to fade and the stresses of life start to take over. We forget about discovery as we start to search for a career that will support ourselves and our families. Sadly, education helps to foster this pathway by placing more emphasis (and funding) in "core subjects". This in turn causes a downgrade or worse yet, a cancellation of the arts programs which help students feel that wonderment of discovery. But how do we solve this ongoing problem? I feel that a clear understanding of the importance of music education helps us to answer this question. Throughout this paper, I plan on clearly defining my personal music education philosophy by answering a series of smaller questions that I have been asked by people who wanted to learn of my beliefs.

What is Music?

At first, I didn't really have an idea of what music meant to me personally. I knew what I liked and knew that music was important but I couldn't answer **why** it was important. As the first family member to choose the career of music education, I realized quickly that I better have a concrete answer to not only satisfy my family and friends but to satisfy myself as well. I started to look within myself as well as look through different publications and media for inspiration. I found that inspiration in one of the oddest places. I remember watching a television show about a young boy who wakes up in the forests of Vancouver not remembering who he is. Throughout the program, it is revealed that he is incredibly intelligent. He can solve complex math questions in his head but is completely unaware of the English language, social interaction norms and the arts. There is a great scene when he hears a woman playing the piano for the first time in his life. He describes it as "one part mathematical equation and three parts euphoria".²

Surprisingly, this was a quote that I could relate to in regards to my feelings about music. There is a part of music that is scientific (organized displacement of air that eventually reaches your ear to be changed into musical tone) but music is so

much more than that. Researching Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, music is outlined as one of the basic human forms of intelligence.³ The beauty of music, however, is that it allows us to foster many other forms of intelligence that Gardner has pointed out in his theory. The logical-mathematical intelligence is defined as the ability to detect patterns and think logically.⁴ Music helps us to see patterns in chord progressions when we are analysing classical music or preparing to improvise a jazz solo. Another example is how bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence is defined as using your whole body or parts of your body to solve a problem.⁵ Not only do we use our fingers, hands and diaphragm to create musical pitch but we also pay attention to body position and breath support to make that pitch more pleasing to the human ear.

Music is something that benefits many aspects of our lives. From physical to spiritual, one cannot argue that music plays an integral role in our personal development. It allows us to express our needs and desires through song as well as gives us an insight into some of the most talented people of our history. Music also allows us to develop other aspects of our minds by giving us a multi-faceted form of expression that we can use to gain a better insight into the world around us.

What is Education?

I started getting this question a lot more when I became a member of the education program. As I looked through different resources and started to formulate a more concrete belief on music, I came across a statement made by the MMCP. I agree strongly by what was stated in that the "purpose of education is to open minds and to provide the substance and enthusiasm for continued learning"⁶. I believe the words "opening minds" does not mean to tell the students the information and let them assume that there is only one correct way, but rather have the students use and develop their own critical thinking skills and learn how to discover the information on their own. As free thinking human beings, we should ask questions and challenge each others thoughts and opinions to come up with our own educated view, therefore coinciding with the logic of discovery. I'm not saying that there is anything wrong with a stand and deliver approach because some classes need that type of teaching method (imagine a free thinking calculus class) but education must allow students to learn critical thinking skills in order to determine the person they are.

The second goal of the MMCP's statement of education is to "provide the substance and enthusiasm for continued learning". James L. Mursell states that education is a system of human values.⁷ By continuing to learn after our formal school years, we start to gain a broader perspective of ourselves. Because of this, we continue to shape our beliefs and ideals as human beings. I see this as a sense of personal discovery which in turn produces feelings of fulfillment. We become a more educated, informed society that is able to see the positives and the negatives in our actions, plus we receive the ability to make the proper decisions that can benefit the world population as a whole (something that is needed at this point in time).

Education is one of the most important things we can pass on for posterity. It allows us to stay not only informed about the people around the world but ourselves as well. Unfortunately, certain subjects have been deemed more important than others when it comes to our schooling. An example of this is the segregation of "core" and "supplemental" subjects. Subjects, like music, are considered "frills" and dropped at the first sign of budget cutbacks. These statements and actions couldn't be more wrong. As I will point out in the next segment, music education is imperative to the education of youth and should be considered a top priority.

The Importance of Music Education

Bennett Reimer states that "music education exists first and foremost to develop every person's natural responsiveness to the power and the art of music".⁸ Although I agree that this is one reason that music education exists, I wouldn't say that it is the **only** reason. As stated above I feel that music is multi-faceted, therefore the importance of music education is also multi-faceted. I find that every student that takes music class leaves with a positive experience in some form or another. Some students enjoy the physical challenge of learning to play an instrument. Some students enjoy how music makes them feel emotionally. Some students enjoy the fulfillment of working together to achieve a common goal. There are even a certain amount of students who take music to get what they think will be an "easy credit". Whatever the case, the goal of music education is to allow a student to experience success within a musical environment.

I further believe that music should be integrated into what education considers the "core curriculum" of subjects in **all** schools (public, private, home, catholic, etc...). People are told that a strong education in these "core subjects" will help prepare them for a great career. Music allows students to experience a much more realistic view of the common job market with its emphasis on teamwork and as well as developing a student's active listening skills. These real life job skills are prized above all others. No longer do people sit in rows and try to solve problems on their own. The new office has people sitting in groups or "cells" in order to achieve a common outcome. If this is the way that business has evolved, and as educators our responsibility is to prepare youth for that world of work, shouldn't we help to develop the skills necessary for survival?

When it comes to who should teach music and when music should begin/end, I believe music should be taught from kindergarten to grade twelve by qualified members of the education field. By qualified, I don't just mean that they need an education degree, but a degree in music as well. People that have formal training in music have a better understanding of its importance in all of its facets. They are able to teach these values to their students more effectively. I also believe that these qualified individuals would be more aware of the numerous pedagogical techniques that have been designed for students to gain better understanding of what music has to offer (Orff, Kodaly, etc...). Finally, I feel a qualified teacher can make an educated decision on the need for quality music literature for the students. Keeping those reasons in mind, I feel that these would allow for a higher success rate over a teacher with no musical training whatsoever.

Closing Statement

There is so much to music that is beneficial to not only the arts student but to the entire student body. By allowing music to become an integral subject of our schooling, we open the door to students developing a wide variety of intelligences based on Howard Gardner's research. Not just musical intelligence but logical-mathematical, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences as well. By learning and honing the many skills needed to be an effective

student musician, students are able to become valuable and sought-out members for the current job market. As Wayne Bowman points out "Music is never purely natural material, but rather a social and historical product".⁹ It allows us to become people not of frill, but of substance as we gain a better insight into own lives and the lives of others. In closing, I find that music is one of the most important fields in education today and it carries the same weight as any "core" subject and deserves the same respect in regards to its validity.

About the Author

Tristan Galinski is currently enrolled in PS2 at the University of Lethbridge Education Program. He is a percussionist with the Lethbridge Symphony Orchestra as well as a private music instructor for both civilian and military groups throughout Alberta and the rest of Canada. Tristan enjoys Lethbridge and hopes to make it his permanent home when he graduates in December 2008.

Endnotes

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2. Kyle XY, ABC Family, Vancouver, British Columbia, 26 June. 2006
3. "Howard Gardner, multiple intelligences and education," 20 Feb. 2008 [[www.infed.org/thinkers/gardner.h ...](http://www.infed.org/thinkers/gardner.h...)]
4. Ibid
5. Ibid
6. Edwin Wasiak, Philosophy of Music Education Parts 2 and 3 Powerpoint presentation, Lethbridge, Alberta, 2008.
7. James L. Mursell, Human Values in Music Education (San Francisco: Silver, Burdett and Company, 1934) 4.
8. Bennett Reimer, A Philosophy of Music Education (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2003) xxii
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