Chapter Sixteen

Music-Making For Everyone
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Abstract

This chapter essentially focuses on junior and high school music and argues that at this level music education is practiced as orchestra, band, or choir. There are departures from this but most music teachers resent and neglect these alternatives. The problem with “non-performance” music, meaning usually “general music,” is that it lacks the scope and sequence clarity of performance music, and usually consists of students who lack the attitude and discipline valued in performance ensemble participants. After examining the problems with non-music-making “general music,” it looks at the difference between performance and music-making, and explores music making possibilities in “general music.” It argues that alternative ways to make music in the classroom, like guitar, steel pan, African drumming, gamelan, composition and improvisation, can be considered “general music” because they are accessible by students who lack the years of consistent instruction needed for high school band or orchestra. The chapter argues that music education has an obligation to reach all students, even in junior and senior high school. The means proposed to accomplish this is a variety of socially and culturally relevant forms of music-making. However the “musical” content of music class is only part of the solution to the exclusivity of music classes. The “pedagogical” content is equally if not more important. The chapter concludes with an appeal an emotionally sensitive, child-centred pedagogy that develops greater student responsibility in collaborative small group contexts and features abundant tact, thoughtfulness, and playfulness.

Introduction

Should school music be for everyone? Most would say it should, for the first seven or eight years of schooling. But, after that there is no agreement. Those supporting traditional music programs do not really want “everyone” – they only want those talented, motivated, or well-disciplined students who make good ensemble members. Those music educators who have accepted the concept of music as one of the basic intelligences may theoretically believe music education for all students beyond eighth grade is a good idea, but are conflicted about the pragmatics of accommodating those with less motivation, those with less skill and aptitude, and those with inadequate preparation for the level of attempted entry. But the problem is not just one of “talent” and motivation, it is now also one of cultural relevance. In 1981 StatsCan identified only six “ethnic enclaves” in Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal. In 2001 StatsCan identified 254 “ethnic enclaves” in those same three cities (Toronto Star, September 27, 2004, p. A6). Part of the problem is knowing what to do with those students who do not fit neatly into the traditional performing programs dominated by both the musical and
pedagogical tradition of western Europe. The solution tried most often is “general music.”

“General music” as a class that basically listens and talks about music is conceptually appealing to music educators as an alternative to performing ensembles because it does address one of the main problems of performance-based programs – limited access points to the program and the need for pre-requisite knowledge. A student who has not begun to play an instrument at the starting point for the instrumental track will probably not start later. The student moving from an area without an instrumental program to a school with one, will probably not start mid-stream. The access problem is accentuated by economics, culture, and regional and international mobility. But the very concept of “general music” is a problem. Bennett Reimer (1994) observes:

“That music educators have not achieved a carefully constructed and widely shared concept of general music is attested to by our dissatisfaction with the name. No one is very happy about the name “general music,” but no good alternative has presented itself. This is not a trivial matter easily fixed… it reflects nothing less than our inability as a field to answer many of the most fundamental questions underlying general music education (p. 3).

Determining what “general music” does mean today is not simple. Is it everything other than band, orchestra, and choir? The Society for General Music (SGM) within the Music Educators National Conference (MENC) includes teachers of classes from K-12, teachers of Orff and Kodaly programs, teachers of Junior High guitar classes, and teachers of non-performance college preparation music courses. Each teacher may call what s/he is doing general music. Is general music all of this?

At its broadest, general music can be described the way Eloise Haldeman (1988) does as:

a larger framework that encompasses comprehensive, in-depth and quality musical learning; that allows those in performing ensembles to study and to become acquainted with music that is beyond their performance ability; that can be adapted within a pluralistic society to fit the needs of local areas and populations; that leads all learners, within their abilities to develop understandings, appreciations, and aesthetic sensibilities—not only in music, but also in other arts and in the humanities—that will continue to grow during their lifetimes.” (p.4)

In this definition general music is viewed as an over-arching concept of music education. It is an educational ideal focused less on performing than on “understandings, appreciation, and aesthetic sensibilities.” It is not specific to any one type of program. Band, orchestra, or appreciation classes could all be pursuing this form of “general music.”

For some educators “general music” refers to music instruction when it is given to all students in the school as a required part of the curriculum. This then refers specifically, in most places, to music instruction in elementary K-6 classrooms.

Many educators use a narrower definition for “general music” – a definition that deals more with the structural school realities of who is in the class and why rather than the content of the classes. The most common is to classify all music classes that are not part of a band, orchestra, or choir program as “general music.” In addition, it is often used as a classification only for those levels where band,
orchestra, or choir programs are available. These performance programs enrol the really “serious” students (at least those serious about school band, orchestra, or choir) and those who are not as serious about music (i.e. typical school music) are then left for “general music” classes which then, in most schools where there are no opportunities outside of orchestra, band, or choir, become non-performance classes.

Paul R. Lehman (1988) points to the need for music classes in high school for the “general student.” “By 'general student' I mean the student who for lack of interest, ability, or time, or for whatever reason, does not participate in the school's performing groups” (p.79). The hegemony of the orchestra, band, or choir is daunting indeed, and the disparaging designation of “general student” for someone who may be very serious about some form of popular music or world music but is assume by the music education establishment to “lack … interest [or] ability” is disturbing.

Thomas Regelski, in his book *Teaching General Music*, focuses on middle and high school classes that engage primarily in active creating, exploring, or listening to music sounds. That essentially means classes other than orchestra, band, or choir. He recommends instruction be planned to meet specific behavioural objectives related to the development of conceptual knowledge. Action oriented learning is planned to illustrate and reinforce these conceptual learnings. Teachers engaged in doing this are teaching general music.

I reluctantly use the term “general music” with the most common definition—music classes in middle and high schools for students not in orchestra, band, or choir; music classes for the differently-motivated students; music classes for students who may lack interest in the kind of music performed by the traditional performing ensembles.

**What Are The Problems With Non-Music-Making “General Music”?**

Teachers now teaching general music with the primary objectives of developing conceptual knowledge and aesthetic response are experiencing problems. In a survey done almost 20 years ago of the Georgia chapter of the Society for General Music (Monsour, 1988), the two most critical problems identified were (1) “setting realistic goals,” and (2) “motivating students in music.” Although elementary teachers were involved in this survey, the problems identified are keenly experienced by teachers of middle and high school general music. In 1998 Irma Collins concludes that “major issues for reform of general music identified in 1987 are still true today” (p. 7).

The first problem, “setting realistic goals,” is basically a problem of what should be learned in music class. When the assumption is that students will not systematically learn to make music, what is to be learned becomes a difficult question. What should be learned about music? Should students in 10th grade first be taught to: (1) understand the concept that a melody is a string of tones organized in time or (2) develop an awareness of rhythm in nature? The problem is that there is no natural sequence of conceptual learning. Responding to the "MENC Goals for 1990" call for a K-12 curriculum that is "balanced, comprehensive, and sequential," Bennett Reimer (1988) points out a problem of general music. He asks, "How does one achieve a 'sequential' program if one is not clear about (a) what to sequence, and (b) how to sequence it?" p.82) Consequently, the teacher setting out what is to be done in music class and what is to be learned is faced with the difficult challenge of setting realistic learning goals for students with differing experience with music and balancing this
with time constraints and motivation levels.

The music-making solution to this problem is simple. What is to be learned in music class is music-making. Music teachers are generally experienced and skilled at recognizing the music-making level of students and consequently can determine what needs to be taught first. The sequence of instruction is then determined by the pieces selected to be played or sung. The selection of pieces becomes the critical act of long-range instructional design but what is to be learned is always clear - you meet the musical challenges of the piece. Is conceptual learning then irrelevant? Not at all. But the sequence of conceptual learning flows from the core of music class – music-making. The concepts verbalized, the listening done, the notation analyzed are all determined by what enhances or extends the making of the music under study or soon to be studied. If a particular bit of information, analysis, or verbal reflection does not contribute to an enhanced experience with making music it is irrelevant.

The second problem identified by the Georgia general music teachers was student motivation. It is linked to the first. When what is to be learned in music class is not clear to teachers it is even less clear to students. Without clearly identifiable content deemed important in relation to the students' existing culture or conscious needs, motivation derived from subject material will be lacking.

To make the situation worse, if the teacher's agenda in class seems irrelevant or runs counter to the students' desires or expectations, motivation for the subject matter is decreased. Most, if not all students, in our schools are active listeners to the music of their culture before they come to music class. The connection between “music class” and the student's music culture is often not apparent (O’Toole, 2000). And, when it is apparent it is frequently a relation of conflict. The typical goals of school music education are to a great extent the goals of a particular socioeconomic and cultural subgroup of western society. To verbalize critical reaction to the sequential intervallic structure of the second phrase of a musical composition by a European composer of 200 years ago, may not seem culturally, intellectually, socially, or psychologically relevant to a recent immigrant to Toronto. It may seem just as irrelevant to an adolescent who has always lived in the U.S Midwest. When there is not a closely related application of music within the culture experienced by students, motivation to learn is understandably a problem. To compound the problem, when music instruction is not essentially musical, motivation suffers further.

Motivation to enrol in music class can be apart from the content of music class or its apparent relevance to the student's life. If this is the case, the content will at best capture the interest with time or at worst the content will be distasteful and the student will become disruptive to the class. Requirements of an arts credit course in high school may bring students to music class who would not otherwise be there. These students with little intrinsic motivation present a challenge to teachers in as much as the teacher has an opportunity to expand the students' interest in music and enrich their lives through music-making. Engaging students in the heart of music - music-making – affords them the best possible opportunity to enjoy music and to experience it as culturally relevant.

Although our concern often is restricted to those “in music class,” we must become more conscious of those not in music class. The question is, why are they not in music class? Do we feel any obligation to make music class appealing and appropriate for ALL students, not just for the talented, motivated, compliant, and disciplined “music students”?
The music-making approach to music education addresses the problem of motivation by creating experiences for students that are culturally relevant and situated at the centre of music as human activity—music-making. A student living immersed in Soca music may find an appreciation class focused on the music of Bach and its structural relation to gothic architecture boring, irrelevant, and highly unmotivating. But the opportunity to play steel pans in music class may result in enthusiastic participation and an openness to many other learnings. The satisfaction of playing familiar tunes valued by peers and “getting into the feeling” of the music is satisfying and highly motivating.

A third problem of general music is related to the first two problems. Bennett Reimer (1988) describes the problem like this:

there are some high school performance directors who take such courses seriously, enjoy them, and give them their best shot. But there are many more who disdain them, are threatened by them because they have never been helped to learn how to deal with them, and regard them as an imposition on their time and energies. (p.82)

Important reasons high school music teachers dislike non-performance general music courses are, of course, that the “talking” content is not clearly musically worthwhile, not clearly determined, not clearly sequential and, consequently, not appealing and motivating to students. Music teachers became music teachers because they first like to make music and they prefer to teach others how to make music. When they begin a course with the assumption that the students are not capable of or interested in making music, teachers understandably lack enthusiasm. It is also not simply a dislike of “non-performance” music classes. Most music teachers feel most comfortable with rehearsal-performance oriented band, orchestra or choir. Other forms of music making like guitar, steel pans, class piano, or even computer or synthesizer-based music making are considered less worthwhile. If they begin with the assumption that “classical” or traditional “school” music is really the only music worthy of class time, they will communicate a cultural elitism that implicates students’ “cultural inferiority” and quickly and effectively alienates them. Of course it also diminishes a teachers’ enthusiasm. Other reasons for teachers’ lack of enthusiasm are obviously possible, but will not be examined in detail here.

The solution to the general music teacher's lack of enthusiasm is to encourage the music teacher to make music-making the central feature of music class for ALL students. The level of music-making will not be equally advanced with all students but ought to be as musically competent as possible with all. This may appear to be an argument for what Regelski (1997) seems to condemn as “…trends that either deny any value to music education that does not involve ensembles or aim to make general music class largely into ensembles” (p. 5). What Regelski’s “Action” approach argues for is “to get general music students to be musically intentful or mindful in creating music – which is to say, to bring music into being as performers, composers, and listeners” (p 8). The confusion seems to be between being “performers” and being an “ensemble.” The difference is between “performance” and “music-making.”
Difference Between Performance And Music-Making

By music performance we generally mean a form of music-making. But, performance has the implication of music-making for someone. A performance music program generally focuses on the learning and rehearsing of music to be performed at a concert. However, not all music learned or made in class or in rehearsal has to be performed publicly. The notion that music-making has its highest fulfilment is formal public performance is one of the cultural developments of the past few hundred years that has created the separation of stage and audience (Bartel, 2000), that constructs musicians as unique and talented, that disenfranchises the music potential of many people, and that removes music from its most potent form as community builder.

Music-making can fill most of the time in music class but the students in that class may rarely perform for an audience other than themselves or each other. If the class itself is developed as a social community, such sharing of music-making is a meaningful experience. Music-making is an enjoyable and rewarding activity for the music-maker apart from sharing that activity with an “external” audience. Music-making can be the “intentful or mindful” activity that is the core around which creating and listening find meaning. So I would like to define general music as an approach to music education where music-making is the primary occupation of music class but may not be intended for public performance. I would like to call this “community music” but that term has been associated with music performance outside of the school.

What Are Music-Making Alternatives In General Music?

To be a viable alternative to non-performance general music, the content of a music-making course must meet several requirements. First, it must be accessible to all students regardless of previous music experience. One of the features of traditional, ability-level-grouped, lock-step, large-group-instruction-based, performance programs, particularly orchestra and band, is the limited number of entry points. For example, a student reaching 10th grade, who for some reason has not been in orchestra up to that point, will find joining the orchestra in most schools impossible because of inadequate ability. Even choral programs are intimidating to students who lack early experience with music, who are not fully inducted into the style of western art music, or who have not sung through the middle school years. Music-making alternative courses should be open to ALL and should be designed to attract ALL. The instruction level must accommodate the student who may not read standard notation, who is not familiar with the musical language of “classical” music, or who cannot vocally match a pitch. The “class culture and climate” must be welcoming and supportive for the student for whom these may be first attempts. In other words, instruction must accommodate EVERYONE.

Secondly, a music-making course must offer the possibility of satisfying musical experience in a relatively short time. If the student in high school takes music class for only one year or semester, there is no point in beginning instruction that would lead to satisfactory performance in another 2 or 3 years. The student wants and needs to experience satisfying music-making within that year or semester.

Thirdly, a music-making course must have potential cultural relevance to the students' experience. For students to be attracted to a course and motivated by the content, the music that is made in class
ought to resonate positively with the music valued in their culture. In some cases students develop an interest in a type of music because of curiosity or the appeal of the exotic or because someone they know likes the music. The musical language they have heard in the first years of life will be easier for them to learn, but a musical sound or style associated with an admired person or valued group will have particular appeal. More important than pre-existing preferences, however, is having a positive music-making experience with music worthy to be shared.

What kind of music-making meets these requirements? Of course, no one type of music-making will meet these requirements in all settings. In fact, many schools may need to offer several types. Some of the possibilities include: guitar, steel pans, drumming, handbells, MIDI/computer, folk instruments, gamelan, various world musics, and orchestral percussion-based classes.

**What Is The Need For These Alternatives In The Schools?**

I just argued that music-making alternatives to orchestra, band, choir, and non-performance courses are needed in all schools, and that these need to be accessible to all students regardless of previous music experience, offer the possibility of satisfying musical experience in a relatively short time, and have potential cultural relevance to the students' experience. Why are courses that meet these criteria needed? Basically they are needed because of the realities I perceive in the schools today.

The first reality is essentially political. I have already pointed out that in most high schools in North America, students are now required to take at least one course in the arts before graduation. This has created new opportunities and challenges related to students not involved in traditional performance programs. But, connected to this fact is the increased requirements students face in the curriculum with the result that more students who in the past might have taken a traditional performance stream are now looking for only a single unit in music. This means, of course, that a satisfying musical experience in a relatively short time is an important factor in course design. The tendency is, however, for administrators to urge that the single credit course be “academic” and, therefore, consist of talking about music and its role in culture. Courses that can involve students in an authentic performance experience as well as the examination of related musical and cultural issues are most urgently needed.

A second reality in today's schools is economic. Many schools face shortages in funding with obvious deterioration in quality performance music programs. One of the features of many of the course alternatives advocated here is that they are relatively inexpensive. For the cost of a tuba and set of tympani a classroom can be equipped with enough guitars or steel pans for 25 students.

A third reality in many communities is cultural diversity. The traditional performance programs do not connect in a relevant manner to the lives of many students. Increasing cultural diversity in our schools necessitates an examination of the musical content of our classrooms. The performance alternatives suggested here have cultural adaptiveness.

A fourth reality in our society is the relatively small percentage of students who are engaged in music-making in junior and senior high schools. General music classes have attempted to reach those not in traditional performance programs but have failed to involve students in authentic music performance. Performance alternatives can help to increase the proportion of students engaged in
music-making. All students have musical intelligence and, therefore, musical potential. As music educators we have an obligation to contribute as much as possible to the development of everyone’s musical potential, not just those we see as “talented.”

**How Is Alternative Music-Making General Music In The Broad Sense?**

You will have noticed so far that I am describing a particular kind of music teaching – music-making as central activity that is not orchestra, band, or choir at the middle or high school level. I am arguing for music-making around which listening, responding, creating, and the development of conceptual knowledge is organized. So is it “general music”? Yes, it is general music. Music for everyone. Music for the person who may be in orchestra but wants an additional experience. Music for the person without an extensive background in music. Music for the person with little interest in traditional music class. Music for the student who will only take one credit in music.

If this approach to music class is about making-music, is it still about general music in the broadest sense as described by Eloise Haldeman as “a larger framework that encompasses comprehensive, in-depth and quality musical learning”? (full quote above). Yes, it most certainly is and this becomes clear if music-making is understood adequately. Helping students learn to make music is general music education in the broad sense. How so? Music-making is not a simple skill merely involving fingers pressing the right keys at the right time. If it were, the chicken pecking out a tune on the xylophone at the carnival would be called a musician. Rather, music-making is a thoughtful and knowing act that involves a music-maker in musical and contextual cognition.

Too often traditional general music classes have attempted primarily to develop conceptual knowledge about music in the hope that this will lead to listening ability and appreciation. The development of this type of knowledge apart from meaningful music-making is not music education—it may be education about music but it is not music education. The flip side of this is the public performance-oriented program that focuses on the behavioural “skills” of performing with little attention to the development of holistic musical understanding and experience. The music director who thinks of nothing but competition success and takes no time to invite students to reflect, question, experiment, take responsibility for musical decisions may well be guilty of training performance skills and not doing music education.

The intention of all music instruction should be for the student to become a thoughtful and knowing music-maker—a musician—and a sensual and reflective music “experiencer.” Music instruction should develop musicianship in all students whether in orchestra, band, choir, guitar, steel band, handbell choir, MIDI class, jug and blues band, fiddling ensemble, or piano class. That is not to say that a student will become a fully developed musician in a single credit course in, say, guitar, but the process of development should be underway. More importantly, the teacher must see musicianship as the goal and, therefore, facilitate its development with the “social climate” in the class, the questions asked and invited, the reflective thinking encouraged, and the insights contributed. But, at the same time as developing the abilities and various forms of knowledge to be a music-maker, music class needs to provide opportunity to “just listen,” to experience the magnificent sensual delight of sound, without any obligation to analyze, label, identify, or replicate. Simply to revel, to enjoy, to love, to respond.
All students who will be educated musically must be involved in authentic music-making – music-making in a context where robust questions (where the teacher does not already know the RIGHT answer) are asked and invited, where reflective thinking is encouraged, where insights from music-making are contributed, and where conceptual knowledge is developed to inform music-making decisions. This type of music-making should not be restricted to the gifted and committed musicians in traditional performance programs. Such music-making situations should be available to any student in the school. Situations for the development of musicianship must be appropriate to the existing level of the student's musicianship. Although musicianship is a complex of knowledges, it exists at levels of development. At whatever level, however, the context must be authentic music-making with musical challenges appropriate to the students in the class.

The 'Tone' Of Teaching Music-Making

One of the arguments that I have tried to develop is that music education has an obligation to reach all students, even in junior and senior high school. As a means to this I have proposed is a variety of socially and culturally relevant forms of music-making such as guitar and steel pan classes. However the “musical” content of music class is only part of the solution to the exclusivity of music classes. The “pedagogical” content is equally if not more important.

How should music be taught to students in general music classes? A better question is, How should students be taught? But even that is not the best question, because education is not so much about teaching as about learning. So an even better question is, How can we help students learn? Now this question does not say “learn music.” If we could restrict classroom learning to only subject matter, we might concentrate the question on ‘learning music' but that is not possible. The subject matter cannot be all that is on our minds.

In learning situations students shape their own self-perceptions and self-esteem, form concepts of others, develop attitudes toward the intended subject of learning, develop or lose competencies, gain increased or decreased curiosity, gain or lose energy and excitement, find their “souls” growing or shrivelling, and become more human or less human in the process. John Dewey (1938) in Experience and Education wisely says that each “experience” in learning lives on in future experiences in a helpful or harmful way. A teacher's focus then cannot be so much on content to be learned as on the overall learning experience with the designated content.

The question "How can we help students learn?" is still not asking the question quite correctly. That question would be, "How can we help Jim learn?" "How can we help Yolanda learn?" How can we help Gagan learn?" If we see only the class we are not seeing the ones who learn. Individuals learn. Real people learn. Each person will extract different learnings from the situation. As teachers we must see Jim and Gagan and Yolanda as persons. Especially easy in performance-oriented music is to see only the class or only the ensemble. Directions are given to the ensemble or section and if one person is not playing the correct notes the whole performance is marred—the music suffers and since perfect performance of the music is the goal the group fails and the teacher's disappointment and maybe even anger is justified. No! No!! No!! There are only individual people in the room and in the ensemble—people with differing goals and needs and desires and motivations. People are the focus of teaching, not perfect performance!
If perfect performance is not the top priority in a general music class, what is? I had a general music class in a school situated in a neighbourhood riddled with ethnic and language-related animosities, unemployment, the social degradation of reliance on government social assistance, and unstable family relationships. Several of my students in the seventh grade guitar class were being monitored by probation officers. Most of the students in the class took the guitar option because music was required and it was the least distasteful choice. Did they want to be in school? No! Did they want to be in band? No! Did they want to be in guitar class? Maybe. Was perfect performance my top priority? No! But did I engage the students in music-making? Yes! What was my primary priority? It was involving these students in music-making challenges they were able to meet successfully in such a way that they enjoyed the experience. They gained satisfaction and a substantial boost to their self-concept from the success. But, that reward would have been completely negated and perhaps been unattainable if the process of learning had not been enjoyable. Allan would come back to the music room to show me a new guitar chord he learned, before going to meet his probation officer. He was proud of his ability to pick locks. Now he was developing another, more acceptable, source of pride.

Music class must create an environment where all students are invited to experience music-making in a way that supports first attempts, that legitimizes musical exploration, that expects passions and preferences to surface, and that aims, above all, to open to students the joy, release and energy of life through music.

How is this done specifically? Perhaps I could tell you what to do but it is much more a matter of who you are. It is a matter of attitudes, perspectives, and qualities which you possess. A fundamental perspective needed is to see that students are not there for you, you are there for the students. Therefore, what goes on in the class must be for the students’ growth, not your reputation, merit pay increase, or satisfaction. You need an attitude that celebrates students and their achievement and not yourself. This attitude requires that you first see each student as valuable, able to learn, curious if curiosity meets with revelation, and as a feelingful individual experiencing life not by semesters or weeks or days but by the moment.

In dealing with people in our frequently stressful and frightening world you need to embody an attitude of hope. Max van Manen in a wonderful little book entitled, *The Tone of Teaching*, says,

> This experience of hope distinguishes a pedagogic life from a non-pedagogic one. It also makes clear that we can only hope for children we truly love, in a pedagogic sense. What hope gives us is this simple confirmation: "I will not give up on you. I know you can make a life for yourself." Hope refers to all that gives patience, tolerance and belief in the possibilities for our children. Hope is our experience of our child's possibilities. It is our experience of confidence that a child will show us how life is to be lived, no matter how many disappointments we may have experienced. Thus hope gives us pedagogy. Or is it pedagogy that gives us hope? (Manen, 1986, p.28.)

This attitude of hope, however, is not merely demonstrated in a set of behavioural objectives. Such objectives, encouraged by the industrial model of schools, appear at first glance to be statements of expectation for the student, statements of hope. But you see on close observation that they are
primarily focused on “doing” for the future, not on “being” now. Yet “being” with students in an attitude of hope is immensely important. Hope versus sterile sets of expectations makes a difference also in the learning encounter. Max van Manen says,

"Having measurable objectives" differs from "having hope." Expectations and anticipations easily degenerate into desires, wants, certainties, predictions. Thus teachers close themselves off from possibilities that lie outside the direct or indirect vision of those expectations. To hope is to believe in possibilities. Hope strengthens and builds. (Manen, 1986, p.28).

Engaging students in music-making who may not have done so before high school, who have been told by a previous teacher that they are not good at it, or who have very different interests than those exemplified by the school orchestra, requires the teacher to believe in possibilities. Students quickly sense the presence of possibility in the classroom. It is this to which they respond with engagement and achievement.

Look with me for a moment at a music class I visited recently. The school is located in an area of the city where cabs sometimes refuse to drive to at night. The school is in an area known for government assisted housing and for a drug dealing problem. In the school the band program died several years ago. A keyboard class attracts some students. But the real attraction is the steel pan class. We are looking at one of these classes.

Mr. Bowen the tall, elegant, brightly dressed teacher leans against the large glass window between hallway and classroom as he chats with lingering students from a previous class. A few guys dressed in baggy clothes sit on a counter over a storage cabinet at the back of the room. A few students drop their books at the side of the room as they enter and walk over to one of the soprano pans in the front row. They pick up the small sticks with rubberband tips and play a short repeating pattern on the pan. Their arms verily dance as they follow the across-the-pan scale pattern. It looks like the same muscular joy as I saw in the guy shooting a basket on the school courtyard when I arrived at the school. A familiar easiness that feels good. Wrists loose, arms easy, right hand circling the top, left hand following the bottom circle. Soon two girls are huddling over the set of bass pans in the back. They share the mallets that look like they are constructed of rubber bouncing balls and sticks. They alternate bouncing the mallet to draw out the rich warm bass tones. Soon a repeating walking bass pattern is evident and the students at the soprano and alto pans slowly merge into the music as they apparently search for and find the appropriate tune or motive to go with the bass pattern.

Mr. Bowen has been giving winks, smiles, nods, thumbs-up signs or high fives to every student that has walked in. Some drop off notes on his desk. Some seem to collapse in fatigue at the side of the room. Some hover around him for a word. But most have found their way to the pans. One person shows him a tenser on her wrist and he asks about it in concern and hands her one thin drum stick and gestures toward the brake drum on a stand at the side of the room. She goes over to it and with her good hand tries some rhythms. After a few gentle words to the ones around him, a pat on one student's back, and a signature on another's note, Mr. Bowen holds his hand with thumb, index finger, and pinky in the air for a moment. The playing at the pans subsides and he announces a song title. He gives a gesture of invitation to the two students reclining at the side of the classroom and points them to a tenor pan. He walks to a pan, picks up a set of mallets, taps his foot four times and starts to play. The students now play with enthusiasm what they were practising individually just a
moment ago. As they play he walks around to watch. He raises his hand and stops the class briefly to say, "remember when we learned this pattern on the board? There was a spot nine counts in where we gave a moment of silence for the swallow with the broken wing flying on its side? Don't forget the moment of silence for the quarter rest." He starts the class playing again. He steps in beside a girl who has apparently forgotten the note sequence. He takes her mallets and shows her in slow motion and hands them back to her and she joins the section. He walks over to the two students at the tenor pans who were evidently very tired earlier. They are looking a little mechanical in their movements and he starts to dance energetically. They laugh and play with more joy. He walks over to another student and teasingly pulls the pan off to the side while the student pretends alarm and strains to stay with the music. He then picks up a set of maracas and takes them over to one of the guys still sitting at the back of the room. He is obviously not a member of the class and is given the invitation to stay and play or apparently a suggestion to leave. He takes the maracas and plays the rhythm he has been shown.

The music fragment that has been repeated over and over is becoming cleaner and tighter rhythmically and the students relax technically and start to move their knees or hips with the beat being laid down by the bass pans and the drummer. Mr. Bowen shimmies to the front of the group, holds up his hand for an ending and claps his approval to the group. A few 'spectators' outside the classroom window applaud.

The basic qualities other than excellent musicianship I see important in music teachers who will be able to engage all students in music-making are thoughtfulness, tact, and playfulness. When I looked at Mr. Bowen I first saw thoughtfulness. He saw each individual. That is he actually noticed, looked at, responded to the person. Each person mattered to him—they were not just another class to teach for 55 minutes. They were real people with real lives and with real problems and with real hopes and dreams and with real potentials and with real feelings. He was inviting real people to learn and play. He was thoughtful in relation to the specific needs and problems. One person had an injured wrist but he found a way to invite her to participate. Some students were tired and did not feel like participating but he encouraged them and asked them in and boosted their attitudes. Some students were eager to play and learn and he simply allowed them to do it. Some students were wanting to be part of the class and he did not chide them but made it clear that being in class required participation. All of this demonstrates thoughtfulness. Max van Manen calls thoughtfulness a special kind of knowledge. I think it is a knowledge particularly required in teachers of general music.

Thoughtfulness has the related attribute of tact. Tact is the knowledge of what will be a particularly appropriate and useful action in a specific situation. It is "the ability to appreciate the delicacy of a situation and to do or say the kindest or most fitting thing" (Morris, 1970). A teacher needs to see each student, needs to be thoughtful in every circumstance, and needs to say or do the kindest and most fitting thing in every situation. There are times when a brief dance with a student is more tactful than a word of encouragement, when a gesture is more tactful than a verbal instruction, when one word is more helpful than a sentence, when silence is more fitting than talk. What I saw in Mr. Bowen was tact.

Play is a word with various dimensions of meaning. We play basketball. We play with toys. We play instruments in music class. We play instead of work. Play implies amusement or recreation. It implies an activity that is done for its own enjoyable sake rather than for the practical benefit that
comes from it. But professional athletes or professional musicians earn their living “playing.” Play can be a very serious activity indeed. But “playfulness” captures the “fun” aspect of play more effectively. It seems to contain the meaning play has for children—an innocent absorption in the joy of the making and doing itself rather than in the product. It implies good humour and lightheartedness. It suggests high spirits and frolic in action or speech. But it does not have to mean “frivolous” or “silly” or “mischievous.” Playfulness does not mean always trying to be funny or telling dumb jokes. Students tire very quickly of that. Playfulness is a fundamental quality of enthusiastic life.

Music class ought to be playful as well as engaging students in musical play. That does not mean the students are not to gain specific and important knowledge. It does not mean music class is merely an entertainment for students. It does not mean that there is not rigorous hard work involved in learning to play music. But the process of making music should be play at its best—playful in its spirit. The joy of making music is what we want to share with students. It is the joy and playfulness of music that captures the soul of the general student and prepares them for a lifetime of musical enjoyment.

Mr. Bowen was playful in class. His dance, his teasing, his clapping, his reference to a swallow with a broken wing. All were demonstrative of his joy and of his pleasure in making music even at the basic level of a beginning pan class. It was evidence that he enjoyed being with those particular students at that time. He was interacting with music and the students in a way that communicated to them, "I like you and I like making music with you.” Music-making is fundamentally about joy. Joyful music is best made by joyful people.

References:


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