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MUSIC IN OUR SCHOOLS MONTH 

March is Music In Our Schools Month® (MIOSM®), “sponsored by the National Association for Music Education (NAfME). This year’s theme, Music: The Sound of My Heart,” was referenced in last month’s article “The SEL Heart of the Music Technology Lab.” This month, we follow up on how to reach the hearts of all students through a “Big Tent” music program.

THE “BIG TENT” MUSIC PROGRAM

PICTURE THE TYPICAL middle or high school students during “free” time before or after school, during the change of classes, or lunch. Many wear headphones or earbuds and listen to music they choose and control for enjoyment, and to control their sonic environments. Yet, how many of these students are actively involved in music programs beyond compulsory general music classes? Research by David B. Williams and Richard Dammers shows that 70-80% of students are not active in music programs when “general music” is no longer required, typically after 6th or 7th grade (<https://musiccreativity.org/>). David A. Williams further explains in “The Elephant in the Room” (Music Educators Journal 91, no. 1, 2011) that performance programs serving a minority of students gets the lion’s share of attention, staffing, and budget. What to do? Embrace models of education for “non-traditional music students,” defined by D.B. Williams and Dammers as:

- those in the 6th-12th grades
- non-participants in traditional performing ensembles
- as having a music life completely independent of school music
- those who may or may not be playing an instrument (if so, likely drums, guitar, or sing)
- those who may or may not be able to read music notation
- students who may be unmotivated academically or have discipline problems

Some music educators bristle at the thought of embracing a wider audience. This somewhat elitist attitude (a stereotype too often applied to all music teachers) has been prevalent in professional literature since the 1960’s. As reprinted in the NJMEA *TEMPO* in May 2021:

Interview question in *NJ Orchestra Director*, January 1966: “What do you think of Rock and Roll, the Twist, Shindig, and the Beatles?”

Response: “Personally, I do not care for this so-called music, but it seems to be a part of the young ‘Pepsi Cola Generation.’ Divest the Beatles of their wigs and wiggles, and what have you left? For the

good of our very young, let’s hope they bow out as quickly as they came in.”

However, in 1967, forward thinking teachers met at the Tanglewood Symposium. Most music education classes programs mention this conference, but few of us have revisited the conclusions of that gathering. The declaration on the closing day, August 2, 1967, is just as relevant today:

“Music teachers must be concerned with all kinds of people, and therefore all kinds of music, embracing rock, the finest concert music, and music of other cultures. The electronic media have exploded the dimensions of music in America.”

Too often, our students do not realize that many of us embrace them as they are. We do our best to truly hear and appreciate music that they have discovered. Middle school music educator Sara Munson details the recurrent questions in students’ minds about including their favorite rapper or Vocaloid popstar in a school music project: “Does *this* music count?” and “Does the music I *enjoy* count?” (NJMEA *Tempo*, January 2022)

In “Music Education at the Tipping Point” (Music Educators Journal 94, No. 2, 2007), John Kratus detailed the music industry revolution in progress – instant access to practically all the recorded music in the world. The growing trend in which students listen to music at every spare moment on personal devices using customized playlists has become commonplace. Refer back to the characteristics of non-traditional music students. These are the 70-80% of young people who love music but are not well-served by performance-focused intermediate and secondary school music programs.

IMPERATIVES FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Music educators are always concerned about budgets, and for good reason. Despite that music education is mandated for a “well-rounded education” by 1995’s Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), most middle and high schools do not require music classes for all students. By advocating for courses that will broaden their programs and reach a much larger student population, music educators help their programs stay relevant, become more

The “Big Tent” Music Program

inclusive, and form a key piece of school SEL initiatives (refer to last month’s *In Tune Monthly Teacher’s Edition*).

Most schools have an IDEA initiative of some kind – Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access. By embracing these values in performance and non-performance offerings alike, music programs can attract and retain a much greater percentage of the student population. Contrary to most educators’ fears, courses designed to serve non-traditional music students do not take away from performing ensembles, but in fact help attract students who may have been reluctant to take traditional music classes. (Barbara Freedman, unpublished dissertation *Impact of Implanting Technology-based Music Classes on Music Department Enrollment in Secondary Schools in the Northeastern United States*, University of North Texas) In my own teaching experience, dozens of young men and women joined choir and rejoined band after being recruited from music theory and production/composition classes.

INSIDE THE “BIG TENT”

Music classes fall into two large categories: those requiring public performance, and those that do not. In “non-performance” classes like music theory, music production, or music listening/appreciation classes, there is room for in-class presentation and sharing on a daily basis, thus meeting National Core Arts Standards 4, 5 & 6 for Performing/Presenting/Producing.

To get started “enlarging your tent,” consider adding at least one “non-traditional” music course beyond performing ensembles and music theory. The easiest starting point is to launch an elective called “Music Production” or “Music Technology.” Such courses generally focus on technology-based music production with a user-friendly and free or inexpensive digital audio workstation (DAW) program like GarageBand, Soundtrap, or Bandlab. Once established, this beginner course becomes the entryway to more advanced classes like “Songwriting,” when traditional music notation may be used.

Advanced music production/composition courses with real-world career skills in live audio and studio recording also follow as a program grows. Entry level piano, guitar, and ukulele courses are popular in middle and high school, and often have a symbiotic relationship with both tradi-

tional ensembles and music production courses. Modern Band programs also grow from these course offerings. In more mature non-traditional music programs, multiple levels of studio-based music production, recording classes, piano, and guitar may be offered. Exemplary programs can include a school-based record label and/or an ‘alternative’ performing ensemble. Look to River Hill High School in Maryland, Lebanon High School in Ohio, and Greenwich High School in Connecticut for course offerings and models of instruction.

CLASS STRUCTURE AND FLOW

Unlike ensemble courses, non-traditional music classes focus on individual and collaborative music making. Typical class periods run like this:

- Segment 1: Listen activity or students resume work/practice from prior session
- Segment 2: Instruction – new concepts/skills or review & build on prior lessons
- Segment 3: Student work/practice (individual/small group instruction & peer coaching/collaboration) Pause student work as needed to add new ideas/instruction, and troubleshoot
- Segment 4: Put it together - performance, whole class sharing, closure activity/exit ticket

CREATIVITY IS KEY

Since the 1960’s, much has changed in the way music is produced and shared. In May 1990, a music education conference survey asked band directors:

Question: “How would you compare charting on paper to using the computer?”

Answer: “It is much faster to chart on paper but the computer is more accurate and allows for more creativity. However, the computer does not create.”

Technological advances since 1990 make it far faster to create digitally than on paper, with the advantage of immediacy in hearing and editing music. Still, technology cannot replace

Suggestions for program development and expansion

	Studio	Non-traditional Performance
Entry level	Music Technology	Piano/Guitar/Ukulele
Expansion	Music Recording/Production/ Audio Engineering	Modern Band
Public-facing expansion	School-based record label	Non-traditional performing ensemble

True art is non-exclusive and embraces all kinds of music and music-making. Embrace inclusivity and bring everyone into a musical “Big Tent.”

the creator or the teacher. The National Core Arts Standards (NCAS) place the “Create” standard first. Numerous surveys and studies in the corporate world identify creativity as a primary facet of employee and business success. To truly meet the NCAS and provide career-readiness, we must offer a wider array of music courses. Creativity and creative problem solving are at the forefront of skills taught in non-traditional music classes, whether they are music production or performance focused.

No matter what the technology, for musicians, teachers, students, and humans, the experiences we have making and sharing music with others will last a lifetime. Dr. Wiley Housewright, former dean of music at Florida State University once wrote, “Music is a humanizing force that can unite us in a divided age.” True art is non-exclusive and embraces all kinds of music and music-making. Embrace inclusivity and bring everyone into a musical “Big Tent.”

RECOMMENDED SOFTWARE & WEB-BASED RESOURCES:

DAWs (Digital audio workstations): Soundtrap, Soundation, Bandlab, Audiotool, GarageBand, Mixcraft, Ableton Live, Logic, Protools, FL Studio, Sony Acid, Cubase

Music Notation: Noteflight, Flat, Musenscore, Finale, Sibelius, Dorico, Notion

Learning Tools: MusicTheory.net, Teoria.com, Musition/Auralia, Breezin’ Thru, OnMusic.com, Focus on Sound, Chrome Music Lab, MusEdLab.org

Practice Tools (in addition to teacher-made tracks/videos): Sight Reading Factory, Smart Music, PracticeFirst, YouTube, ForScore, Newzik

EXEMPLARY SCHOOL PROGRAM MODELS:

Howard County (MD) Course Guide (Richard McCready)
<https://www.hcpss.org/f/academics/hs-catalog-2020-21.pdf?01-23>

Greenwich HS (CT) Course Guide (Barbara Freedman)
<https://resources.finalseite.net/images/v1617294181/greenwich/se9gw8qlonrzmblnmmbh/Courseof-StudyGuide2021-2022wA.pdf>

Lebanon HS (OH) Course Guide (Will Kuhn)
<https://www.lebanonschools.org/media/high-school/2021-2022%20Curriculum%20Guide%20.pdf>

RESOURCES & READING:

John Kratus

Music Education at the Tipping Point - Music Educators Journal 94, no. 2 (2007)

A Return to Amateurism in Music Education - Music Educators Journal 106, no. 1 (2019)

Music Listening Is Creative - Music Educators Journal 103, no. 3 (2017)

David A. Williams

The Elephant in the Room - Music Educators Journal 91, no. 1 (2011)

Barbara Freedman

Dissertation: Impact of Implanting Technology-based Music Classes on Music Department Enrollment in Secondary Schools in the Northeastern United States – University of North Texas (2019)
<https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1538794/?q=freedman>

Jen Rafferty

Mind the Gap: Traditional and Non-Traditional Music Ed (2021)
<https://www.giveanote.org/blog/2021/03/mind-the-gap-traditional-and-non-traditional-music-ed/>

Scholarly research on non-traditional music programs <https://musiccreativity.org/research.html>

Quotes from NJMEA “Tempo” – approved by executive director Bill McDevitt to use with proper citation.
https://issuu.com/njmea/docs/2021_may_tempo

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