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My Teaching Philosophy

My philosophy on music education is one of a community of individuals, all inspired to achieve a common goal through the emotional drive and motivation of the teacher. I believe that students should never stop questioning the world that they live in, constantly questioning even the most universal truths in life, which is similar to the concept of Learning Theory and Critical Pedagogy. With that, I believe that part of a music educator's job is to encourage that kind of thought through music. Additionally, I believe that music education as a whole should be an ever-evolving medium where modern technology and trends are directly incorporated into the curriculum. Generally, I am a huge subscriber to Music Learning Theory due to its emphasis on audiation and its failure to be classified as a *teaching* method. Rather, it is a process of how people learn through music that makes it very interesting to me. Music Learning Theory's concept of progressive learning throughout one's life is also something that I am a huge fan of.

Ever since I was little, I understood the importance of teamwork. I believe the first time I realized it was when I was watching a Sesame Street episode where two characters were building a train track that would go all the way down the street. Now, as I have grown older, I now understand that teamwork is one of the most important facets of humanity. Teamwork is a concept that is important at all levels of a person's life. I believe, in a music classroom, the importance of teamwork is only strengthened. I believe that the biggest difference between music

classrooms and any other classroom is that the student becomes part of something bigger than themselves; the student becomes part of the ensemble or the music making process. Unlike in a math classroom, where one student's success is not directly related to the class's success or another student's success. Rather, the music classroom requires the members of the ensemble to feel a similar sense of teamwork. "As musicians, we constantly and dynamically exist in the atmosphere of a larger community. That larger community can be defined as small as one or extend to hundreds. [...] But that relationship is much more than a simple interaction or acknowledgement of existence. It must be a union, a bond, a connectedness that brings human beings so close spiritually that they almost become one" (Jordan 75).

The music classroom's need for a connected student body lays the task to the educator to 'rally the troops', as it were. The music educator's job, in this sense, is to facilitate an environment where the students feel connected spiritually and emotionally with one another. The way that I would incorporate this kind of team mentality is through various team-building exercises.

Back in high school, all of the freshman were in Cantica Nova, which was the freshman choir. On the first day, our conductor gave us a checklist. On the checklist were things like "Has gone skydiving", "Has a pet", or "Is an only child". It was up to the students to find other students in the room who meet these certain criteria, and then ask them about it. Subliminally, it gave us a chance to meet new people and make connections. Because of this, we were a tighter knit group than we would have been otherwise. We were, according to our director, one of the closest Cantica Novas that he had worked with up to that point. He actually pulled a couple of us aside to ask us to bring some of this closeness to the upper class choir when we were

sophomores. That sense of community really paid off for us in the long run, and it creates such a great environment for young musicians. I believe that a strong sense of community within music making is important to the fundamentals of music.

At the same time, I also believe in the individuality of humans. Each person is created differently, raised differently, experienced different things. Because of this, I think people's individuality should be embraced. In the previous example of bonding exercises, what it also does is allow students to tell others about their life at home or outside of the rehearsal space. Allowing students to be themselves is something that I am a huge fan of. Because each student is different, you can't treat them the same way as another student. In the music classroom, this claim is only strengthened. Each student sings or plays a certain way that is different than another student. "It takes determined individuals to step outside their usual modes of interaction and comfort so they can feel publicly, and this emotion needs to be harnessed, channeled into the music" (Sharon 123). Music, as a medium, is an amazing place for students to be themselves. With that, it is up to the music educator to make them truly believe that the classroom is a safe environment to be who they want to be and create music. At the same time, I think it is important for the teacher to, once again, encourage students to work together in music. It will be a skill that each student will need in their lifetimes.

When I talk to people I know about what they did not like about certain aspects of choir and music classrooms, a lot of them had a certain problem with the time period that we were covering. At first, I was a little puzzled. But then, I took a step back and realized what they were saying. If we want to encourage more people to do music, be in music classrooms, create music with others, the approach that I find most important is to make sure that the students WANT to

be making the music. I'll be the first to admit it; I'm fairly confident that most students, when they have their headphones in walking down the hallways between classes, are not listening to Bach or Brahms. However, if we, as music educators, want more students to be willing to join the class and make music, we need to appeal to what they are listening to. "[...] popular music is clearly a meaningful educational medium for many young people. Embracing it as a classroom subject or a set of practice and/or pedagogical approaches means adopting a non-traditional stance towards music education in schools[...]" (Smith 273). Popular music is a gateway for students to bridge their love of music into a classroom setting, if that student isn't already present in class of course.

This is something that I see directly in the rise of modern day a cappella groups on college and high school campuses. These kind of groups directly allow students to sing the modern pop hits of today with a group of peers. Often, they are student-directed, which benefits the students a lot when it comes to administration and leadership opportunities. However, if music educators would find ways to take this kind of acceptance of modern music and bring it to their own classroom, I think that most classrooms would see a huge resurgence in student enrollment. "History also tells us that the public's experience of music does not stand still: it keeps moving forward. For music education to remain relevant and provide value, it too must change with the times or experience the fate of the stationary shark" (Kratz 42).

I am not necessarily saying that we need to start rapping Eminem classics during a school day. Instead, I think that the best way to foster this kind of student-involvement is a simple one: ask the students what they think would be fun. See if you, the music educator, can accommodate. Once again, in *Cantica Nova*, my director handed all of the students Post-It notes. He then made

the announcement that Cantica Nova was going to be performing a pop song for the first time. Immediately, a couple of altos in front of me scream with glee. That's the kind of reaction I know that as a music teacher, I would love. Our job was to write down a song that we think would be cool and put it on the whiteboard. I remember it being so satisfying to have my voice, my thoughts on a project be heard.

That was not the last time that this kind of In one of the select ensembles at my high school, our director gave us the various options on what repertoire for our spring concert. She wanted us to talk about what we liked in each piece, what we didn't like, and if anyone had any suggestions on what pieces we thought would fit. I thought that this was awesome. As a student, I relished the opportunity to have input on the class's progression.

I am also a huge fan of the idea of Critical Pedagogy. The theory that Paulo Freire founded in Brazil to help struggling citizens created an environment of empowering students to take challenges head on. Critical Pedagogy allowed students to take what they knew from the classroom and apply it in certain aspects to the way that we see the world. It also gives the educator the freedom to know when to change up the pace. Critical Pedagogy's influence to educators is one that trusts the educator to know what he/she is doing and how the students are reacting. "The lesson model relies on the teacher as a music education connoisseur who knows from instinct and experience when it is appropriate to go with the flow, or when it is time to move on" (Abrahams 10).

But in short, Critical Pedagogy fosters discussion between students and teachers. I find that students respond better to teachers who are not just the people who come into the classroom and start lecturing you. I believe that students respond better to the person who comes off the

proverbial 'pedestal' that is being a teacher, and brings him/herself to the level of the students. Students respond well to someone that they can trust is listening to them, which is what I think that critical pedagogy is well-known for. Critical Pedagogy also suggests that it is not uncommon for the teacher's view to be changed by the student. "In critical pedagogy, not only do the teachers teach the students, but also the students, in turn, teach the teacher. This affects a transformation of both students and their teachers" (Abrahams 5). At that moment, true learning has taken place.

Finally, I believe that Music Learning Theory is a huge aspect of music teaching that I am a huge subscriber to. Music Learning Theory encourages students' minds and potential for music making be fully opened. MLT emphasizes certain aspects of learning that generally make students better at understanding music, like audiation and aptitude in music. I also am a huge fan of one of the major facets of Music Learning Theory: anyone can learn music. "All students are capable of learning music, given appropriate guidance and instruction. However, how much and how well individual students learn depends on individual levels of music aptitude and environmental influences" (Gordon 27). That's one of the things that I am most a fan of: inclusion for all students. Appealing to the students who are not as connected with their musicality is the most important aspect of a music educator.

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