Devon Schmidt

EFND Paper

Music Ed Philosophy

“IF MUSIC be the food of love, play on, give me excess of it.” And if not, what exactly is it for? The production and consumption of music is a big part of the human experience. The first use of commercial recording, in the form of Edison’s phonographs, was to bring music to the living rooms and picnic tables of those who could not afford to pay live musicians. As little as 100 years ago singsongs at home, the choir in the church and fiddlers in the pub were all that most people heard. Drawing from farther back in time, one idea that is widely touted is that music binds groups of people together. The resulting unity, its supporters suggest, might have helped bands of early humans to thrive at the expense of those that were less musical.[[1]](#footnote--1) The resounding studies, doctoral dissertations, and documentations are frankly unnecessary to the argument for music’s continued existence in our world. It is unlikely that any one theory or reason can ever explain why people create and listen to music; the matter is too multifaceted for that to happen.[[2]](#footnote-0) It’s been here all the while, and each and every human being enjoys it some how in their own way. The real question to ask is why anyone would attempt to deprive children of an archetypal human experience. Why take it away from the one place young people are required to be each weekday?

Music should be in schools because its study and practice are a basic developmental need for young people. There is no academic subject that combines the parts of the brain to read a note on a page and simultaneously produce the corresponding sound on an instrument. Music challenges students to think in a way that they’ve never been prompted to think before. Practicing and performing music combines correctness with personal expression. There is a correct note to play in the correct key, which demonstrates a basic level of achieved by the student. But the next level is something that can only be accomplished in the arts. The way in which that particular student plays a melody is unique to them and only them, and it cannot be replicated or challenged because they have taken it and made it their music. Music creates awareness and etiquette in students. An energetic, distracted boy who may have never considered the people around him is, in a music classroom, asked to listen to the sound he’s making and how it blends with those around him. He has to be considerate of the other students by playing the correct volume and style in order to fit into the phrase they are playing. Music fosters a reasonable work ethic. In a music classroom, whether it is individual playing at a piano or a large band ensemble, students are taught and shown that the end result is only reached through dedication and perseverance. A high school band only performs a concert when they have polished the program over many hours of rehearsal in the classroom. A student only performs a piano recital after she has spent the time working out the details of exactly how her fingers must maneuver the keys. All these things are valuable skills a young student should be learning in school, but the combination of these honed skills cannot be found in a long division course or an essay-writing seminar. All of these things are common to only the study of music. But the focus on non-musical goals is all too present. Music should be in schools because it is an integral part of the human experience on earth. It is a beautiful creation that we have been given to develop and practice as we choose, and there are endless resources and methods in which to do so. Music provides one of the most simple and inexplicable joys a person can experience, and children especially should be exposed to such a thing early on in their lives.

The content of any music program is a largely important aspect of the development of the student’s minds and ears. I believe no music should be excluded from a music curriculum. Although nothing should be excluded, this doesn’t mean absolutely all music needs to be covered. In a scholastic program, students should be exposed to enough music to spark their interest that they should seek out the rest of the boundless musical world. Regardless of the type of music class being offered, whether it is an ensemble or individual lessons, I believe classical tonal music should be practiced first. There is a reason we still use and enjoy tonal music today, and there is much to be learned from it.

1. “Human Evolution: Why Music?” *The Economist* (2008): <http://www.economist.com/node/12795510> [↑](#footnote-ref--1)
2. Abeles, Hoffer and Klotman, *Foundations of Music Education* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-0)