

PERSPECTIVES

On Preparing Classroom Teachers to Teach Music

Rethinking Expectations Peggy D. Bennett

-Expecting a course for nonmusic majors to prepare them to teach children music is delusive. In fact, our attempts to turn nonmusic majors into music teachers may backfire; students may be less inclined to lead music activities after completing our course than before they entered it. Even if we wanted our education majors to be music teachers and even if they wanted to be music teachers, there are many obstacles to success in this quest.

In preparing teachers, we face a wealth of materials and a crisis of conscience: "I should be doing *more*." Sometimes critics can help fuel the guilt about our accomplishments in courses for nonmusic majors: "How can a student pass a university music course and not know *that*?"

The push toward integrity of musicianship from the opinions of colleagues and from within ourselves influences our course content. But the pull from our conscience as we watch students struggle and sometimes fail to meet the music demands of our courses causes many of us to rethink our expectations.

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On a continuum, with tedious music mechanics at the extreme left and joyful music making at the extreme right, where would we place our course expectations? What do we lose or gain as we move toward the right? How do we know if the gains are worth the change? What if we just gave up the notion that our music methods course could make nonmusic majors into music teachers?

We must all answer these questions and design our courses accordingly. Some perspectives are offered here that may help illuminate the dilemma of music expectations for nonmusic majors.

Teaching music activities is not teaching music. An important distinction exists between teaching music and teaching music activities. In one or two courses it is impossible to prepare students with little or no music background to teach music to children. It is possible, however, and imperative, to prepare them to teach music activities.

Among other proficiencies, the ability to teach music activities stems from:

- knowing activities appropriate for a variety of students;
- anticipating how students might respond to activities;
- recognizing potential music and extramusical benefits to students as a result of participation in activities;
- demonstrating listening and singing skills that provide accurate production of the music experienced; and
- believing in one's own capabilities for beginning, leading, and developing music activities for children.

Add to this the ideal of a sensitivity to levels of quality in making music.

In contrast, teaching music requires, among other proficiencies, knowledge of:

- notation (meters, keys, rhythms, pitches, clefs, measures);

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- the internal structures of music (beats, scales, harmonies);
- instruments (voice, keyboard, recorder, orchestra instruments, classroom instruments);
- appropriate scopes and sequences for teaching music to children; and
- characteristics of music learning and skill development in children.

Added to these items is the ideal of a sensitivity to levels of quality in making music and exposure to the alternative methods and resources available.

Music backgrounds are critical. Many students who take methods courses for classroom teachers have little or no background in music. Even those with years of experience in private lessons can feel inadequate about teaching music. The challenge is great enough to adequately prepare music majors to teach children music. Why do we think we can accomplish a similar goal when students lack music background?

No course, and perhaps no degree, can completely prepare future teachers for the array of contexts in which they may teach. Many factors, such as students' various developmental levels and cultural backgrounds, various schedules and curricula, levels of administrative and parental support, and available resources, can influence what can and should be taught in the school music class. Can preservice teachers be prepared to customize music instruction for these diverse contexts?

Time limits adequate preparation. If the class meets three times a week for fifty minutes during a fifteen-week semester, we have forty-five class periods of instruction to offer music to non-music education majors. Subtract two days for exams, two days of review, two days for discussing exams and assign-

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ments, two days of absence, one holiday, one day for impromptu discussions, one day to deal with course organization, and one day for a guest speaker or video presentation.

Then if we subtract days that deal with other nonperformance activities, actual time spent on learning about music and learning music activities may be closer to twenty-five classes (about twenty hours). Imagine expecting a teacher to teach a foreign language (one that has a totally different symbol system) after only five days, meeting each day for four or five hours. The improbability of such achievement sets both us and our students up for failure.

Must this course be dreaded? Classroom teachers have described the "Music for Nonmusic Majors" course as the one they most feared and dreaded in their degree preparation. If future teachers' experience with studying music is more intimidating and overwhelming than confidence-building and satisfying, those impressions of music will likely transfer to their own attitudes toward leading music activities.

No matter how effective and nurturing a teacher is, when the music expectations of methods courses are beyond the capabilities of most of the students, the teachers' efforts and the students' joy of music can be sabotaged.

It is not possible in a semester to prepare nonmusic majors to teach music. The fact that I object to one extreme in music expectations does not mean that I favor the other. I do not wish to imply that we should teach *no* music skills to these students or that we should teach math and language arts through music *instead* of teaching music.

It is possible to offer basic skills in listening to and producing music.

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Students can experience enjoyable, non-threatening music activities that engage children. They can learn about social, movement, language, musical, and thinking skills present in classroom activities. Our focus as music mentors of nonmusic teachers should be on these goals. The following are key premises for rethinking expectations:

- Skills in reading and writing notation are important components of studying music; but this does not mean students can teach what they know.
- Paper and pencil work with notation is important to knowing music. These proficiencies pale, however, in comparison to the lasting value and importance of being a joyful music maker who can also lead others in joyful music-making experiences.
- Nonmusic majors deserve to know the difference between teaching music and teaching music activities. This helps them understand the emphasis of the course and helps them see their own role in working with children and music.

Consider these "Do's" and "Don'ts":

Don't make students so doubtful of their own music skills (especially singing) that they have no confidence in leading others in music activities.

Don't overwhelm students so much with the theory of music that they do not know the joy of producing and sharing music with others.

Don't convince students that only music teachers should offer children music experiences, or that, if they don't know much about music, they should not teach music activities to children.

Do build students' confidence in singing and leading others in singing.

Do offer students sensitivity to the

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music-making potential of groups at various skill levels.

Do help students recognize the importance of sharing a common heritage of songs and music activities.

The way we approach our classes can make or break teachers' confidence and interest in including music in their classroom activities. Some classroom teachers are the only source of school music activities. Although classroom teachers may be required to teach their own music, those who are convinced that they do not know enough to teach music probably won't. And we must admit that children might be better off receiving no music instruction than receiving it from a teacher who begrudges the responsibility.

What affects classroom teachers' desire to initiate music activities in their already overcrowded schedules? It is music's power of creative expression, human connection, and hearty involvement that captures classroom teachers' devotion. It is the heart of music, not its mechanics, that causes them to value its presence in the lives of children.

By moving the nonmajor methods course expectations closer to the heart side of the music experience continuum, we could gain teachers' enthusiasm for sharing music with children, which would pay off in children's positive attitudes toward music. There may be no greater mission for teachers of methods courses than preparing classroom teachers to regard music making as something they can do and something they want to do to enrich the lives of their students.

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