

Music for All:
A Personal Philosophy of Inclusive Music Education and Ethical Promise

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Introduction

“Music for all” is individualized, yet collectivized. It acknowledges, appreciates, and utilizes each person’s differences while finding commonalities and ensemble within a diverse community. It is the creation of a space for students to be seen and heard for exactly who they are and for individuals to work together not in spite of, but in celebration of their differences. To me, the number one priority of music education is to create a safe, judgment-free environment for all students to be authentically themselves.

Collective access in music

I believe that music education is all-too-often institutionalized, requiring privilege in order to participate. To me, it is of the utmost importance to make music education universally accessible so that students of all abilities can take part. Classroom activities should be adapted to the needs of the individual and always incorporate elements of multiple learning styles in order to be all-inclusive. The classroom environment should be accessible for students with physical disabilities and eliminate all distractions that might interfere with learning. Classrooms should have safe zones for students who may need space for any reason. The safe zone should have objects and activities for easing sensory or emotional distress.

Music as a means of expression, well-being, and agency

I believe that music is expressive and should give students the opportunity to learn emotional intelligence through the exploration of different emotions and healthy ways of expressing them. Expression, to me, is crucial in the overall well-being of a student. Students should learn to be aware of their thoughts and feelings, and know that they have the agency to take action when something does not feel “good.”

I believe that students should be self-empowered. The music classroom should be a judgment-free environment for students to share opinions and make choices. I believe that the growing student needs a safe space to make mistakes, learn from them, and ultimately develop values. Through the exploration of personal values and choices, students will become strong, independent individuals.

Music as a means of honoring, developing, and discovering identity

Just as music is a form of expression, students should be encouraged to express their identities in other ways. This includes but is not limited to language, appearance, gender, and cultural identifiers. I believe that music educators have a responsibility to be inclusive and celebratory of all identities. The classroom should be a safe space that honors students for who they are and allows them to explore other possibilities in how they may choose to identify.

I believe that education should be simultaneously label-free and label-honoring. Educators must preserve individual personhood by not confining students to pre-existing notions; they must also honor the labels that students choose to openly identify with. The safe classroom is unassuming and uses all-inclusive language at the group-level, but honors consented labels at the individual level. For example, a class should be addressed as “friends,” not “boys and girls”; however if a student shares that she identifies as “woman,” this label must be honored.

I believe that music educators should teach students about different cultures and identities, and allow students to teach each other about their own identities. I believe a good music educator seeks to learn about the different cultural traditions of their students, and incorporates musical repertoire that honors these traditions without overstepping or appropriating. I believe it is a teacher’s responsibility to be aware of current events and socio-political issues, and to always be culturally and socially-responsive and inclusive.

Music as a means of community engagement

I believe that music, like all art, should be a means to community engagement. Students should learn the importance of engaging the community at large through public performance and service. Students should learn what it means to be a part of communities of a small scale, as well as communities of a large scale, and the intersectionalities of different communities.

Music as a means of collaboration

I believe that music education is not only intrapersonal, but interpersonal. All individuals contribute to the whole. Differences within the ensemble should be recognized and celebrated. Students should always feel supported by their teachers and peers. Even if a student prefers to learn individually, they should feel comfortable seeking help from others without any judgment.

I believe music education is a collaboration between student and teacher, and that the student/teacher binary must be broken. I believe that the teacher serves as a facilitator for student learning, and that students should have opportunities to become leaders.

The role of the teacher

I believe that teachers should never stop being students. Teachers should encourage both self-reflection and student learning through essential questions and clear goals. Teachers should employ discipline and routine in order to help students feel safe while they express themselves through choice, leadership, and creativity. I also believe that as teachers, we must lean into our discomforts, and seek to understand the root of these discomforts.

Conclusion

For me, the safety of my students will always come first. Any actions that put the safety or comfort of others at risk will not be tolerated. I seek to facilitate a class that erases binaries and allows students to explore the unknown through collaboration and personal discovery.