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This publication focuses on school music programs and
music education. The document features information about performance;
goals of music education programs; a broader role in the curriculum
for music education; the role of contemporary music; and a
description of four general music courses designed by teachers. An
18-item bibliography is included. (NL)
ASCD
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JUNE 1990

MUSIC EDUCATION: Experts Take New Look at Performance, General Music
Music Education: Experts Take New Look at Performance, General Music

By John O'Neil

Prize-winning orchestras and choral groups, marching bands a hundred strong or larger—these are arguably the most visible signs of music's prominence in the school program.

Ironically, the success of such groups obscures, and may even contribute to, the field's Achilles' heel: the vast number of secondary students who never participate in any formal music study. According to the U.S. Department of Education, only one student in three ever takes a music course in high school, almost exclusively in performance classes that have been attacked as overemphasizing entertainment at the expense of their educational value. And while general music lessons are standard fare for primary and middle grade students, the limited amount of time devoted to music and the number of students who need to be served by each music specialist at those levels make a comprehensive, sequenced program of music learning difficult.

"I think the biggest issue in the field is to convince people that music is more than entertainment—it's a legitimate part of the curriculum," says John Mahnmann, executive director of the Music Educators National Conference.
various musical styles and their own impressions of them after taking the class, she adds.

Gray's class, one of the subjects of a research project sponsored by the National Arts Education Research Center at New York University, addresses one of the key questions confronted by music educators nationwide: How can music strengthen its role in the general education of all students?

For a variety of reasons, experts on music education assert, the goal of musically literate graduates has been more strongly endorsed than supported in practice. Particularly at the secondary level, they say, programs have failed to adequately balance musical performance with strategies to help students think critically about music of different genres and styles, make sense of music history and theory, or become otherwise musically literate (see box, this page).

"I think we're still attempting to overcome the perception that the arts are either for the entertainment of the general student or for the serious study of talented students," says Richard Bell, national programs director for Young Audiences, Inc. "The great middle ground of kids who may not be exceptionally talented but are not without ability or interest aren't being served at all."

Window of Opportunity

While reaching out to more students and strengthening music's position in the core curriculum has been an ongoing struggle for music educators, several factors have converged to raise the stakes.

First, the school reform movement of the 1980s raised academic graduation requirements in many states, putting the squeeze on elective subjects such as music. The new mandates hit especially hard in secondary schools where six-period day, where college-bound students, in particular, sometimes had to quit music groups for other mandated courses. As a result, music educators more than ever must seek to attract not only the most musically talented students, but also those with interest but no previous training.

Finally, school reform now requires a more multidisciplinary approach that forces new methods to tighten its articulation of outcomes and program phases (see box, p. 3). "Unlike the traditional curriculum, schools now have clear and objective associated with the music education district," says Wichita School Board member John Miller.

Dan Smith, director of after-school services for the Wichita Symphony, sees the National Arts Education Research Center as a national effort to solve the problem of music education for all students. "This is where some states are suffering and losing ground, or some music programs are struggling to meet the demands of a new educational philosophy," he says.

"We're seeing an exodus of music programs from many states," says David Hoffer, president of the National Association of State School Officers. "This is just beginning to happen, and if it continues, the national music education community will definitely feel the pinch."

Although some states have homogenized the arts into a single course for all students, others are looking for ways to reach those middle ground kids who may not be exceptionally talented but are not without ability or interest.

Several states have passed legislation that requires all students to participate in the arts. In Arizona, for example, music is now required in grades K-12 (see box, this page). The legislation is virtual requires that music and art programs are comprehensive in scope and are integrated into the general education curriculum in all grades. Additionally, the legislation requires that music and art programs are offered to all students.

The legislation also requires that music and art programs are taught by qualified music and art teachers. Finally, the legislation requires that music and art programs are evaluated on a regular basis to ensure that they are effective in meeting the needs of all students.

"We're seeing a real commitment to ensuring that all students have access to music and art education," says Arizona State School Superintendent Ray Johnson. "This is a new phase in the history of music and art education in Arizona, and we're excited about it."

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Curriculum

Ina manager of information for the Music Educators Conference (MENC), says, "Millions overall have not undergone the reform era, but attrition do exist, often every period a day is the norm. A lack of music programs is above, he says; but the talented students meant that directors had to face 1st clarinet, the 1st and the 1st bassoon and maybe that was the only day you had."

Moving to a full school day, says Charles professor of music at the University of Florida and MENC can "almost double in elective courses" such a reason, also the offspring of reforms, is the passage in states of graduation requirements in arts. In 1979, only two dated a course in the fine graduation. Twenty-nine states have a fine arts course, or will require by 1992, according to a recent report by the Fordham for the Arts. Some leaders in the music field are disappointed that these new graduation requirements count courses not as the core fine arts (music, theatre, and dance), there is unanimity that the new courses provide a golden opportunity to reach out to more

An issue framing the school's adding of academic disciplines-deciding what core skills within each music does not seem to be defined, measurable," asserts Donald Corbett, chair of the school of music at \( \text{E} \) University. Only when
comprehensive math program would you have, and what would you expect students to know by the end of the 6th grade?" asks Hunter March, associate professor of music education at the University of Texas and chair of MENC's Society for General Music.

Especially at the secondary level, music educators also must fight the perception that their programs are designed more to entertain than to educate, a byproduct of the pressure to perform publicly. Though outside forces have doubtless influenced this dilemma, numerous music educators admit that the field must share the blame for sending the wrong message. An overemphasis on rehearsals and performances, fundraising drives and group trips to Disney World, the expanded number of performance groups and the opening up of musical repertoires beyond those considered traditional or classic, and the failure to attract the general student—all have contributed to a view of secondary music as more an activity than a basic subject.

Hoffer points out that music professionals strongly support the cultural and artistic outcomes of the discipline in making a case for enriching its position in the core curriculum. But those are sometimes being sacrificed to a beefed-up performance schedule filled by a dizzying array of school music groups. "In too many situations, especially at the secondary school level, the impression can be easily gained that the purpose of music in the schools is to provide students a community," he says.

While acknowledging that band, orchestra, and ensembles are important contributions, music educators say that the message of rehearsing and (in some cases) diverting attention from performance to providing a sense of community is one that needs to be addressed.

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—Old Corbett, on the pressure to

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Several educators who asked for
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Music Questioned
English has its skirmishes
between proponents of the
"get kids interested in music,
all courses in music," including the
theoretical bases of the repertoire they
performed," concludes Paul Lehman,
senior associate dean of the school of
All courses in music," including the
in general music offerings for the
nonperformers, "need to do that to
extent. But when kids study
band, they're doing it to play an
Instrument.
Continued on next page
I Music

The role that performance, criticism, history, aesthetics, and criticism should play in the music program is equally important outside traditional performance groups. From band, orchestra, and chorus to the majority of secondary school music teachers who take music, numerous educators stress that more needs to be done to provide some kind of framework of music for the general student. Whatever

e of a fine course to fill the new fine arts requirement, say, largely on the success in terms of those who may learn about music but not necessarily join a music group.

“This is what music means to some of you. What do you think?” asks W. Brann, executive director of the Hawaii Music Educators Association. He says, “You can’t just say, ‘You can’t compete to everybody.’” The answer, some music educators believe, lies in initiating or expanding a range of general music courses for the secondary level that capitalize on students’ natural interest in music requiring the least amount of time commitment by performance groups. The goal should always be that students are musically educated, whether they join a performance group or not,” says Burton, an education professor at the University of Hawaii and president of the island’s state. He adds that, while 85 percent of secondary students are not enrolled in a music course, more attention is being given to music education this year than at any time in the history of music education.

Moff from this interest is a number of unique general music programs at broad student teaching rather than a study. General music teaching, he says, uses a variety of methods to motivate students of diverse interests to build music skills through such activities as performing, analyzing, understanding music. Teachers also attempt to “realize that basic musical concepts are present in all styles and exist in music of all cultures and historical periods.”

One trend having its impact on general classes is the applications of such technology as home personal computers, software, electronic keyboards, and MIDI producing music. Forman notes, “general music uses its only performance medium, cost of keyboards, however, increased their popularity and availability.

Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI) technology, for example, standardizes the output of
General Music Courses Offer Diversity

Four selected general music courses highlight very different approaches to providing music learnings for all students.

The Great Works

Students taking Music Perspectives, a course offered in Baltimore County (Md.) high schools, study music from around the world and concert pieces from Bach to Bernstein. All high school students who do not elect chorus, band, or orchestra take the course.

Music Perspectives begins with roughly four weeks devoted to "music of the world's cultures," including music of Africa, India, and the Orient, as well as a variety of folk music. Then follow six units on Western art music, from the Baroque era to the present.

The course emphasizes music history and appreciation. "Every student should have some exposure" to great works of music, says Rebecca Silverstein, who teaches the course at Woodlawn High School. By studying pieces such as Handel's Messiah and Stravinsky's Rite of Spring, students learn about tone color, melody, harmony, rhythm, and polyrhythm. They also learn about the cultural contexts in which the works were created.

To keep students motivated, the course uses participatory activities. "We try to make it as active a course as possible," says James Wharton, who teaches Music Perspectives at Catonsville High School. For example, students act out the first scene of Mozart's Don Giovanni in a translated, updated version before listening to the same scene in the opera.

The course is "going over very well," says Silverstein. While about half of her students, she estimates, are resistant to the musical selections at first hearing, end-of-course comments indicate that many of these students broaden their tastes.

Contact: Rebecca Silverstein or James Wharton, Baltimore County Public Schools, 6901 N. Charles St., Towson, MD 21204.

Basic Music Skills

Music in Our Lives "gives students an avocation" by teaching them to play guitar, keyboard, or recorder, says Ann Trombley, who teaches the course at Monticello High School in Monticello, N.Y. Approximately half the school's students take the course.

Music in Our Lives emphasizes playing and composing music, although Trombley gives basic information about the historical and social dimensions of pieces she introduces to the class. The course includes listening, performing, composing, and evaluation activities to give students a wide range of experiences.

"Trombley's students may not become proficient enough on their instruments to perform publicly, but they do develop basic music skills they can build on throughout their lives," says the emphasis on process," Trombley says.

Besides learning to play, students compose an original blues piece over the course of the year, so they have a "finished product" when the course ends. They also do special projects on topics of their choice and keep journals of their progress.

"Students are very positive" about the course, Trombley says. "They take pride in playing an instrument, and they like to hear their music performed." Many students wish to continue their musical studies, she adds. "They ask me if there's a second class they can take."

Contact: Ann Trombley, Monticello High School, Port Jervis Rd., Monticello, NY 12701.

Computers and Rock

Students in Music Lab, offered at Shoreham-Wading River High School in Shoreham, N.Y., use computer music systems to create compositions in rock and top-40 music styles. About 12 percent of the school's students take the course.

Students who are interested only in contemporary music get "locked out" of traditional music courses, says Tony Messina, who teaches Music Lab. "I pick up the rockers."

In a dramatic departure from the "conservatory model" of teaching music, Messina's students work with computers, synthesizers, sequencers, and drum machines. They also learn to compose using this equipment—without first learning traditional music theory and composition techniques.

Messina requires his students to keep music journals, in which they write music and describe their reactions to music they hear. He tries to help his students become "more selective" in their musical tastes and stresses tolerance of others' preferences.

Some Music Lab students may parlay their newfound knowledge of audiotronics into jobs in radio, television, or film. "I'm pushing [my students] to make serious job and career choices," Messina emphasizes.

While some parents only tolerate his efforts, Messina says, other parents are supportive. The students in Music Lab, he adds, love the course. In fact, many more students wish to take the course than can be accommodated.

Contact: Tony Messina, Shoreham-Wading River High School, P.O. Box 337, Shoreham, NY 11786.

A Cultural Blend

At Leon High School in Tallahassee, Fla., students who take Selected Musics of the Western Hemisphere study the musics and cultures of the United States, the Caribbean, and South America, and the role of African influences on them. "I'm trying to make music education relevant to all cultural segments of the school population," says Nancy Marsters, who teaches the course.

Through lectures, listening, and hands-on activities, Marsters' students learn how the fusion of three major cultures—African, Native American, and European—has given birth to the varied musical styles of the Americas. "All of it is a mix," she emphasizes.

In the course, students learn to recognize different instruments and styles, and to "listen with their brains," says Marsters. Students also learn about the peoples who made the music. "There is no way to understand the music without understanding the culture and the times" that produced it, Marsters explains. At the end of the course, students do research on music they like and then make presentations to the class.

Selected Musics of the Western Hemisphere capitalizes on the liking most students have for blues and reggae, but also expands their experiences and tastes. For example, many students develop "a great love of the music of the Indian peoples," says Marsters.

Contact: Nancy Marsters, Leon High School, 550 E. Tennessee St., Tallahassee, FL 32308.
Continued from page 6

music students, who may be less motivated or musically talented. “Finding ways to teach the general student, for teachers who’ve been prepared to do something else, is a real challenge,” says Mary Palmer, a music education professor at the University of Central Florida. “For some people, it may not be as satisfying and rewarding.”

Despite a growth in interest in secondary general music offerings among educators, only 2 percent of high school students ever enroll in a nonperformance course—and some of these are students also taking performance courses. Some educators complain that an opportunity to capitalize on new arts requirements is being squandered. “Everybody in music fought for those [fine arts] requirements,” says Burton. “But once they were there, the band director said: ‘I’m not going to teach that group.’”

An Uphill Battle?

Music educators are going to have to better resolve such issues, most experts agree, to strengthen the field’s place in the curriculum. Approaches to teacher training, curriculum development, and the policy arena need to be enhanced; progress in these areas will help determine if music is seen as a frill or a basic.

But while music may seem to be fighting an uphill battle compared with the support given disciplines viewed as more “practical” (for example, math and science), the ability of the arts to foster the human side of learning will always be in demand.

Lehman quotes John Naisbitt, who points out that every new technology (“’high tech’) introduced into society must be counterbalanced with a humanizing influence (“high touch”). “As society is increasingly overwhelmed by technology,” Lehman asserts, “we feel an even greater need to express ourselves.” Music, he says, is an ideal means for expression through participation.

References

In addition to interviews, the author drew upon the following resources:


