

Trends

Music

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Studying the Music We Play

I was one of a handful of music educators who attended the Second Getty Invitational Conference in Los Angeles in February 1989. Most of the presenters and attendees were visual arts educators, who have led the way in implementing discipline-based arts education (DBAE) in the schools. The bulk of the conference was made up of reports on the progress of these programs.

DBAE, the Getty Foundation's recommended framework for an arts curriculum, encompasses art criticism, aesthetic perception, art history, and production (performance) in sequenced instruction. The structure does not require that the arts be taught as integrated or interrelated or in any multiple form. DBAE acknowledges that each art form has its own set of historical, aesthetic, critical, and production values and scope; and that each art form, therefore, has its own set of adventures of the mind and senses, which can be organized into knowledge, skill acquisitions, and emotive responses. DBAE is not a prescribed, formulated set of lessons. Instead, it is a way of looking at the totality of an art form and trying to understand those ways of thinking about it that are honest and have historical and discipline-based validity.

As I listened to the informative presentations and panel discussions, I was struck by a sense of déjà vu. We music educators have long struggled in an environment where music is considered something to produce, but not something to study. Communities expect high school music departments to provide performances: marching band shows at football games, pep bands at basketball games, madrigal dinners as fund-raisers. Unfortunately, music education suffers from these pressures for performance; the very activities that keep us in the curriculum prevent us

from teaching music in a sequential manner.

The scope of our typical high school endeavors is thus very narrow: we teach students to read music well enough to sing or play in choruses, bands, orchestras, and other ensembles for public performance. But high school seniors leaving such a program often know very little about the style or structure of the pieces they play. It is unlikely that they have ever read a critique of *any* music, let alone of the pieces in their performance folders; nor do they understand such aesthetic concepts as *psychic distance* or *referentialism*. We cannot expect students with such limited knowledge to continue their involvement with music after high school or to consider music a lifelong pursuit.

In many instances, educators in the visual arts are still trying to organize some sort of scope, some sort of elemental structure of the art form that

can assist curriculum development. Music educators, on the other hand, have already fought that battle and have succeeded, at least in elementary and middle school general classes, in finding scope and sequence amid the elements, media, and styles of music. One has only to peruse basal music series to find that all have some sort of sequence in the construction of lessons, both within grades and among grades. These lessons and materials usually deal with music elements (melody, rhythm, harmony, and the like) and show how these elements have historically been combined in certain stylistic ways using various combinations of instruments and voices.

Such sequenced instruction already takes place in many elementary and middle schools across the country. And, although the materials used typically focus on the history and production dimensions of DBAE, some attempts have been made to include music criticism, connoisseurship, and aesthetic perception/response. Materials for teaching high school non-performance-based classes, however, are not readily available and won't be until publishers see a demand for them. Music teachers can break this vicious circle by setting meaningful curricular goals and objectives from which instructional strategies can be derived.

DBAE may not be the answer, but it is certainly a possibility for curriculum development—one that music educators should investigate thoroughly. For, until we take the study of music seriously, we will produce only students who can make music but not understand it. □

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