

MUS 782

Discussion 12 – Oxford Handbook Ch. 25

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Read a different chapter of your choice from Section V of the textbook (use your classmate's descriptions to guide you). Express your understanding of this chapter.

Chapter 25: Music education for “all my relations”

First, the phrase “all my relations” comes from North American aboriginal communities, and it means that we are all interconnected, humans and other living things alike. It goes further to say it is our duty to serve as stewards and live our lives in a way that is harmonious and beneficial to all living things.

The goal of this chapter then is to incorporate this type of holistic thinking to current education standards. The status quo has art, business, math, physical education, economics, language arts, science, social studies and music education. But the world has problems. The author seeks to find ways to foster learning environments that address cross-curricular moral imperatives for social justice and ecological sustainability. This follows closely to David Orr's quote: “The goal of education is not mastery of subject matter, but of one's person. Subject matter is simply the tool.” Orr is a major proponent of incorporating environmental awareness, appreciation, and protection into all curriculum regardless of the particular subject.

To help music educators think about how to incorporate social and environmental concerns into their curriculum, the author shifts the focus from “what is music?” to “what do we need/want music to do for our children and society” by asking three philosophical questions: 1. What is education for? 2. What is curriculum for? And 3. What is music education for?

1. What is education for – Education's form will reflect the values and quality of life in that society. Therefore, democracy must be defined more widely than simply a form of government. It is also a way to foster “associated living” and “others thinking” in which students can hear and appreciate others' interests, concerns, and aspirations.

The indigenous teachings of the Medicine Wheel and the Circle of Courage emphasize the importance of harmony and connections, stressing the importance of being aware of oneself, other people, and other living things. The cycle of learning starts with an individual feeling and sense of belonging, then developing mastery and independence, and concluding when that

student starts the cycle again with a new apprentice to teach what they have learned. Also of vital importance is the emphasis of creating a sustainable life not just for yourself but for your children's children – a concept known as the “7th generation.” So, when a decision is being made, you must contemplate the implication of that decision seven generations after yours.

I must admit I never thought of how music education could be viewed as environmental in nature, but the book listed several ways. First, all the instruments, chairs, stands, music copies, etc. are all made of organic material. The makers of these materials require sustenance. Vehicles transporting these materials to our classroom are made from natural resources and require fossil fuels to run. My students expend energy and require food and drink to produce the music. Honestly, it's a bit out there for me, but still an interesting thought to connect music with the natural world.

2. What is curriculum for? Academic learning requires a multi-disciplinary approach in that students must learn about historical, scientific, and literary traditions to be able to be knowledgeable and engage in a broader discussion of the functioning of democracy and its importance in relation to social and environmental change. But most curriculum today is short-sighted and rarely thinks outside the box. The author discusses four curricular ideologies that contribute to this problem: academic rationalism, self-actualization, social efficiency, and social reconstructionism.

Academic rationalists believe their role is to teach children about a particular music subject-matter, and all related learning activities are called music education. Self-actualization nurtures the “whole child” which celebrates individual differences and gifts. Music education gets bonus points here because it can be a haven for children who learn differently to be able to express themselves kinesthetically. The social efficiency orientation sounds like a factory process in that educators are seen as quality control agents and students are meant to learn to function in the existing social order without question. The curricular orientation of social reconstructionism desires to make the world more habitable and humane by redesigning schools to be an agent of social change.

3. What is music education for?

The author acknowledges – and I agree – educators may be reluctant to incorporate such huge topics as social and environmental change into their curriculum, and he cites three potential objections. First, music teachers don't think that social/environmental agendas do not fit well and are not obligated to be covered in their classes. Second, music education is a huge undertaking already without attempting to add critical thinking, problem solving, or ethical

discernment to the mix. Third, music teachers feel that this cross-curricular approach is wildly idealistic and impossible to attain.

The author concludes by listing two recommendations for music education philosophy. First, music education philosophy must include social and environmental justice in its vision. She feels that a failure to address this is a failure to do our duty as music educators. Second, music education philosophy needs to lead the way in cross-curricular outreach, conversations, and insights to ensure continued discussion of our democracy and its role in social and environmental justice.