

MUS 782

Discussion 9 – Oxford Handbook Ch. 17

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Read a chapter of your choice from Section IV of the textbook. Express your understanding of this chapter.

Chapter 17: Engaging student ownership of musical ideas

I feel like this chapter focuses on the importance of music education for music appreciation and development – a way for music education to stand on its own instead of relying on secondary benefits such as fostering teamwork, self-discipline, and social networking to determine its worth. The problem is, of course, appreciation and development are difficult to measure and/or to even agree upon. Most music education programs downplay a student's ability to comprehend music as music. This chapter addresses how a reformatted music program can explain music's qualitative value for human growth and development.

The current and most typical foundation for music education programs are designed to develop students' ability to perform and read music, know music history, and recognize formal structure (key signatures, scales, intervals, rhythms, styles, genres, etc.). The flaw occurs when one assumes musical understanding is necessarily and sufficiently tied to doing things musically. It's a loop to think that one must understand music in order to demonstrate (i.e. play) music. This tautology, which means saying the same thing in two different ways, causes educators to make it seem like musical ability is something beyond comprehension of the nonmusician and to take the easy way out while designing curriculum. The result is that the curriculum often ignores the question of how music encourages the growth and development of human beings, while instead focusing on making music education fun, appealing, and entertaining. This is seen with greater popularity of musicals, halftime shows, festival competitions and pop music incorporation into music programs. Not that these things are bad or misleading, but so many greater things could be accomplished by focusing on the mental capacity of students.

This chapter explains how to break free from the current curriculum shortcomings by first explaining relevant social science research. Prior to 1970, behavioral theory claimed that stimulus-response observation was all that was needed to explain the learning process. Today, most follow the cognitive explanation of musical understanding, which include multicultural music, musical social-cultural interactions, gender associations, therapeutic applications

learning, music in society, public policy, lifelong learning, and other recent philosophical literature.

A key point discussed is that information processing is not philosophical but is a psychological fact. We all experience things with our senses differently, based on cognitive memory and cultural influences. Two things set the human brain apart from other species: 1. Ability to learn one or more languages and 2. Capacity for developing “music” perception and understanding. This perception is a construction process – and itself does not take culture into account. The brain learns language and music early on in life, and the processes for learning are remarkably similar. I liken it to how music is sometimes described as a language. Culture plays an important role here and music varies widely around the globe. And, after you’ve learned your native language/music, widening your understanding as you age may be increasingly difficult if you are not exposed to cultures different from your own.

To improve music curriculum we must realize the foundation of music education is listening. Awareness is required for meaningful listening and understanding, and awareness requires consciousness. Ned Block suggested there are two levels of consciousness: phenomenal and access. Phenomenal consciousness is associated with nonthinking – i.e. barely being aware of music playing in the background while you’re in the mall. Access consciousness occurs when a listener is giving full attention to and having active cognitive participation during a musical performance. Current music programs underestimate a student’s ability to actively listen and therefore discern tonal-duration musical patterns and interpattern connections.

When you define music as a thought, you accept that a music response is cognitive, emotional, and physical. Cognition allows listeners to hear the music patterns and interpattern connections. The response is emotional in that it implicates anticipation, justification, and reward for listeners. Music is physical because sound impacts the autonomic corporeal systems. Taken together, the interaction among these three conditions shows an interaction between the hardwired brain and musical cultural evolution, beliefs, and traditions.

A goal of a successful music education system is musical ownership, which has 2 types. First, Ownership of Ideas 1 is concerned with intellectual property rights. We shouldn’t plagiarize someone’s work, but ownership of ideas 1 does account for owning copies of musical works. Ownership of Ideas 2, which originates with listening, is much deeper and entails that the performer has a concept of how the piece works and therefore can use that knowledge to perform well for the performer as well as the audience. Ownership of Ideas 2 can only occur with active, access-consciousness-level, learner-centered processes. This explains why music

education should focus on involvement IN music rather than providing information ABOUT music.

In summary, effective music education must lay out how musical ability and understanding are acquired through the marriage of many cognitive and corporeal processes that ultimately change a student's life intellectually, emotionally, and physically.