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Addressing the accessibility gap in music: A review of the literature

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ADDRESSING THE ACCESSIBILITY GAP IN MUSIC: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A Thesis Submitted

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Introduction

In music learning, much like in other disciplines, the goal of the educator should be on the success and the growth of the student. Music in schools has long been focused on the product, or, the performance of the musical literature programmed by the director. In recent educational discourse, there has been a greater emphasis on the process of learning and the enjoyment of music by the student and by the community. Recently, there has been a push in the realm of music education to rectify issues of underrepresentation in music ensembles and repertoire chosen for students in order to create a more student-centered approach to learning. This is specifically geared towards reaching the needs of students with exceptionalities, students of a lower socioeconomic status, students of color, LGBTQ+ students, and other students that may feel underserved or underrepresented in traditional ensembles. Modern Band programs have been introduced in some areas to better reach and serve these students that need additional assistance in their musical learning and development. Methods used in Modern Band programs can be translated into practices in traditional ensembles and general music classrooms to make music learning more accessible and enjoyable for all.

Definitions

Notation

"Visual representation of musical sounds" (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2014, p. 14).

Standard Notation

"System for visually representing musical sound that is in widespread use; such systems include traditional music staff notation, tablature notation (primarily for fretted string instruments), and lead sheet notation" (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2014, p. 18).

Iconic notation

"Representation of sound and its treatment using lines, drawings, pictures" (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2014, p. 10).

Review of Literature

In this review of literature, I plan to address some of the common issues that may hinder a student's participation or success in traditional music ensembles as we have seen them previously, and problem solve ways to overcome them. These issues can include lack of accessibility of instruments and literature as well as lack of opportunities for instruction and student choice in performance, instrumentation, and repertoire. The goal of my research is to address these issues from the lens of Modern Band programs and the creative solutions often utilized in them in order to take a more student-centered approach to all ensembles.

What is Modern Band?

Modern bands typically play pop music. The music choice is primarily driven by student interest. In the National Association for Music Education (NAfME)'s first All-National Honors Modern Band, the sixteen students chose songs by Lizzo, John Mayer, and Hiatus Kaiyote, as well as an original composition (Powell & Clauhs, 2021).

Arguments for Modern Band can include facilitating more relevant music opportunities, a greater reach of students, and cultivating an increased interest in music programs (Blackwell et al., 2022). Instrumentation in these bands is extremely flexible. Typically, instruments such as guitars, bass, keyboards, drum kits, ukulele, vocals, and electronic instruments are used (Powell & Clauhs, 2021). Modern Band instruments can increase student interest, as this is more relevant to the music that students currently listen to (Blackwell et al., 2022). This sort of student-centered approach has proven to be successful in retaining interest and participation as ownership of the learning is given to the learner.

Modern Band has grown in popularity and prevalence in the past decade. As of today, more than 2,500 K-12 teachers in over 400 school districts throughout the United States teach Modern Band in their school music program (Powell & Clauhs, 2021). Modern Band maintains its relevancy by playing popular music that will reflect the interests of the students (Blackwell et al., 2022). Additionally, music educators across the globe have utilized teaching methods that aim to improve the overall growth of the student and better prepare them to succeed on their own in future endeavors. This placed a greater emphasis on the benefit of the student, not the product being performed (Hernandez-Bravo et al., 2015). Placing emphasis on the benefit of the student prioritizes the process over the product, creating a more desirable approach to students as they are the priority, rather than the work. This has contributed to the rise in prevalence of Modern Band programs around the United States.

Methodologies in Music Education

Methodologies for music education evolve over time, as do their connection to subjects in the non-music curriculum and other areas of development. Some countries recommend that all teaching of music in schools should be classified as either "class teaching" or "individual teaching." Class teaching, in this line of thinking, would include breathing exercises, singing quality songs, and listening to quality music. On a more student-centered note, individual teaching would include concepts such as music theory, solo singing, or the playing of an instrument (Hernandez-Bravo et al., 2015). Class teaching in this sense would mainly consist of technique, whereas individual teaching would primarily focus on the other skills involved in music learning to deepen their understanding. These two types of teaching are vital to student understanding of concepts.

The foundation for modern music education is primarily based on the work of three men: Dalcroze, Orff, and Kodaly. Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, a Swiss composer and educator, developed a system that synchronized music with body movement. A German composer named Carl Orff introduced ideas that gave children more freedom of imagination and creativity so they could remain engaged in the process. His philosophy combined the love of music-making and sound in order to facilitate an increase in the level of ownership that students take in their music learning. Zoltan Kodaly emphasized the importance of learning in a group for music education, and the importance of culture as it relates to music (Hernandez-Bravo et al., 2015). All of these composers went about their teaching with a goal to deepen the understanding of their students in a more sustainable way than simply reading notes off of a page. They emphasized that music is

an art of people participating wholly, not simply passively allowing the message and intent of music to go over their heads. They encouraged integration of body movement, individual choice, social learning, and the overall connection between music and us (Hernandez-Bravo et al., 2015). This sort of holistic process emphasizes the effect that music has on people and the role that we play in its production, placing importance on interpersonal communication and expression through music.

Typically, music education programs that are based on these modern musical foundations have two basic goals: (1) musical benefits, such as the improvement of musical skills and the promotion of enjoyment of music in children, and (2) non-musical benefits such as an increase in social competence and creativity, boosted self-confidence, more well-adjusted emotional responses, and better academic achievement in areas such as literacy, math, and language (Hernandez-Bravo et al., 2015). It is important to note that the product or performance of the music itself is not the goal; rather, the goals are focused on the benefits to the student. This improves overall efficacy of instruction, as students learn processes and skills necessary for music learning, better preparing them for future projects and more challenging endeavors.

Support for Modern Band

Several teaching organizations have displayed a desire to spread the ideas of Modern Band learning to public schools in order to reach more students and give more opportunities for success in music. Little Kids Rock provides educators with resources that support the expansion of access of music to all children through the use of Modern Band (Powell & Clauhs, 2021). These resources include teaching aids, posters and

other visuals, lesson ideas, and ideas for differentiation, as well as practice help for students at home. Additionally, the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) facilitates the implementation of an annual all-national honors Modern Band. Sixteen students took part in NAfME's first All-National Honors Modern Band in 2019. This included four vocalists, three guitarists, three pianists, three bassists, and three percussionists (Powell & Clauhs, 2021). NAfME's promotion of this ensemble gave students an opportunity to showcase their work and put a focus on the methods and approaches used in Modern Band ensembles and how they compare to the methods and approaches used in traditional ensembles.

Teacher education and preparation programs have started to introduce knowledge and methods of Modern Band as a part of their curriculum. In fact, more than 65 music education programs in the United States include Modern Band as a part of their teacher preparation program (Powell & Clauhs, 2021). These programs use the support of organizations such as Little Kids Rock to help prepare preservice teachers to teach Modern Bands and how to adjust their instruction to better meet the needs and the goals of the students. More and more teacher preparation programs are looking at adapting music instruction to improve differentiation of instruction and provide a more equitable curriculum. Even in traditional ensembles and other teacher instruction courses, a concerted effort is made to program work that reflects the population of the ensemble and the surrounding community as well as highlight the work of composers that have previously been marginalized. This shows an increase of awareness and a greater push to connect the music to the performer and center the instruction around the student.

Impact on Students

Every human has an average level of musicality - there are no completely unmusical people. This means that every human can benefit from music teaching, regardless of differences (Hernandez-Bravo et al., 2015). Modern Band programs have proven to be beneficial for student learning of musical concepts, connection to culture, social skills, self-efficacy and confidence, and ownership of their work. Many students that are underrepresented in traditional music ensembles have been able to thrive in Modern Band settings due to the student-centered approach of these programs.

Students involved in Modern Band ensembles self-reported ability to play instruments increased significantly by the end of the year (Powell & Clauhs, 2021). Nine hundred forty students participating in a self-reporting study in a Modern Band program in New York City showed significant increases in students' abilities to play various instruments at the end of the year (Weiss et al., 2017). The NAfME annual conference showed recognition of Modern Band as a widespread school music ensemble by featuring an All-National Honors Modern Band for the first time. Many Little Kids Rock teachers in secondary education programs incorporate Modern Bands into their curriculum for general music classes. Many of them also foster specific Modern Band ensembles as an extracurricular outside of normal class hours. In one New York City school's Modern Band program, students performed every Friday afternoon (Powell & Clauhs, 2021). The ample performance opportunities given to students through this model is much higher than the performance opportunities of most modern ensembles. The frequency of the performances and the student-led repertoire choice often gains more community attention and engagement, as the program and performances are

more accessible to community members and more often align with community and audience interests.

Modern Band has been proven to increase student interest in music. These programs often reach more students than traditional ensembles (Blackwell et al., 2022). This is due to the flexible approach to music learning that allows for more choice and expression than typical ensembles. These programs have been proven to attract students who have not previously participated in musical ensembles in their school. These students more accurately represent the racial and socio-economic diversity found in their schools than the current traditional programs (Clauhs & Cremata, 2020). Students of the highest socioeconomic status are over-represented in traditional large music ensembles. Additionally, students of color have been shown to be underrepresented in high school traditional instrumental music ensembles (Elpus & Abril, 2019). Often, students with financial strain struggle to gain access to instruments. In some cases, students that receive assistance from the school with regards to a rented or borrowed instrument still struggle with expenses such as reeds, valve oil, rosin, or other maintenance costs that are smaller than the cost of an instrument but can be a more frequent stress. Additionally, students with added stressors such as an extra job or taking on a larger role in household duties such as childcare, grocery shopping, cooking, laundry, etc. can feel overwhelmed in traditional ensembles. While the combination of reading traditional notation while learning an instrument at the same time can be daunting for all students, those that take on these additional household and family responsibilities and handle life stressors often have even less time to prepare for class than their counterparts and are often less able to seek help from teachers outside

of class times. These gaps in accessibility are found to be much higher in traditional ensembles than in Modern Band programs, which to reflect the people in the group and their creativity and expression.

Modern Band programs impact students by creating a more accessible learning environment, placing the student as the focus of the learning, encouraging students to take ownership of their own work, and providing opportunities to showcase their work in a way that allows them to connect with the overall community. This creates an environment that gives students access to creative music making experiences that they may not have in larger ensembles. Programs like these both compliment traditional groups and give a wider range of musical opportunities in schools. In addition, this style of music education promotes inclusive music that is culturally responsive and accessible for all learners (Powell & Clauhs, 2021).

Modern Band programs are also extremely beneficial for students with disabilities and exceptionalities, as the ease in which they can be adapted to meet the needs of their students makes for swift accommodations for students that would otherwise not be able to be as successful in traditional music ensembles (Cremata, 2017). The flexibility in instrumentation opens the door to instruments like the orba, a pocket-sized synthesizer that can be connected to a smartphone or tablet to change the pitches and timbre of the sound that comes out. The player then can use the numbered buttons on the orba to play the desired notes, chords, and drum parts. This opens the door for students that would like to produce sound on specific instruments but may lack the motor control necessary to play that instrument without modifications. This can also apply to a guitar or bass that can be modified in the way that it is strung in order to allow

the player to play the first and fifth notes of a chord by laying a finger across the strings rather than trying to position their hand in a way that is not feasible for them. Additionally, technology such as a beat machine can be used to enable students to play drum beats that have disabilities affecting motor function, such as ataxia or muscular dystrophy, that may disrupt the coordination of multiple limbs. These can be analog machines or digital applications on a tablet that can often be downloaded for free, giving students an affordable way to make an accommodation that works to support them. Additionally, the utilization of Orff instruments such as a mallet instrument that has removable bars can be utilized to ensure that only the intended notes are in the players arsenal, allowing for more freedom in improvisation as there are no "wrong notes."

This new lens provides opportunities for students that traditional ensembles do not reach (Blackwell et al., 2022). Many students feel disinterested in traditional ensembles because the music does not interest them or reflect their learning goals. They often feel that music learning is a rigid, unadaptable structure that they must fit into, rather than a flexible support system that can accommodate them and their personal goals and overall learning. Attempts to reach the 80% of students in schools that do not participate in large music ensembles can alienate students who are interested in music (Cremata, 2017). Students participating in extracurricular ensembles showed a strong preference for learning in a smaller group, choosing their own repertoire, and felt that larger, traditional school music ensembles could not meet their needs (Pendergast & Robinson, 2020). Modern Band Programs have been proven to attract students who have not previously participated in musical ensembles in their school (Powell & Clauhs, 2021). These students felt best served in a small, adaptive

environment that aimed to reflect their personalities and wishes while still learning to make music and achieve their goals of processing and understanding how to create music and connect to those around them.

Integration of Core Arts Standards

Core Arts Standards and Modern Band are both new to music education, causing a simultaneous integration of both into school music programs (Powell & Clauhs, 2021). These new standards have a large emphasis on the processes involved in music making, allowing the students to take a more active role in directing their own learning in order to achieve their goals. The standards: Creating, Performing, Responding, and Connecting, are flexible and can be applied to any piece that students may be working on, so students learn to consistently apply these aspects of musicianship in their practicing and learning.

The Creating music standard allows for student expression and experimentation. Improvising and writing original songs are taught in Modern Band. Even arrangements of pop songs that students recreate have originality and the students arrange the song to fit their group and its needs (Powell & Clauhs, 2021). Students can adjust parts as needed to fit the needs of their group and the sound that they want to produce. This can include substituting instruments in order to make the piece more accessible to students.

Performance standards are very easily met in Modern Band since the learning results in students actively performing music. Students are provided several opportunities to perform during the year (Powell & Clauhs, 2021). Performance opportunities give the students an opportunity to focus their work and refine the pieces

that they chose by connecting the skills that they have learned to their understanding of the music and what they would like it to sound like. This also gives students an opportunity to showcase their learning and connect with the community. In the Core Arts Standards, reading music in notation that is considered to be appropriate for the style is considered to be a standard of performance (Powell & Clauhs, 2021). Since modern band is not a traditional ensemble, standard notation is not required for written works. Students often use iconic notation or may otherwise modify the notation so that it makes sense to them and accommodates their needs. This accommodation may create opportunities for students with vision or reading disabilities such as dyslexia to be more successful or more involved in music ensembles in school. This is a practice that would be beneficial to employ in traditional ensembles as well, as a means to reach and accommodate students that may face struggles with reading standard notation. Adapting the form of notation would make music reading much more accessible to students, helping them succeed in music making by adjusting the process to support them.

The Responding standard is intended to display enduring understanding of a topic. This can be seen in the decisions that a musical group may make based on the knowledge and understanding that they have. Music selection of students is influenced by their experiences and their interests, as well as their understanding and purposes. Using information such as the ability level in the group, goals, and other factors, students apply specific criteria in order to select appropriate music for their purposes. Students apply what they have learned in order to make the music they have chosen more comfortable for them, making adjustments to things such as the key and the way

that the piece is arranged. The meaning and context of a song has influence over the purpose that a Modern Band plays it for (Powell & Clauhs, 2021). Students also respond to their challenges by finding creative ways to overcome them, such as adjusting notation or instrumentation. Students respond constantly to their assessments of how their understanding and performance is progressing and adjust their technique accordingly, taking note of what they need to build their knowledge on in order to more effectively learn and process music.

While the first three standards are considered to be artistic processes, the music standards do not include Connecting as an independent artistic process, unlike media arts, dance, theater, and visual arts. Rather, Creating, Performing, and Responding are used within the Connecting common Anchor Standards for music in order to embed artistic processes within this standard. The Connecting Standard utilizes and brings together the artistic processes from the first three standards. Writing lyrics to songs is considered a clear example of connecting Creating, Performing, and Responding in order to meet this standard (Powell & Clauhs, 2021). Utilizing connecting as a standard allows for student processing and individual interpretation. Students can use the learning and concepts from the other standards to better understand how to weave all of their learning together in the process of creating a whole musical product. Students can also gain a better understanding of how music can connect cultures and people. The Connecting standard is, at its most basic level, the culmination of other standards at play to achieve a layered understanding and utilization of techniques and theories used in the learning process.

Music Teaching in Spain

The push to create a more student-centered approach to music learning is not exclusive to the United States. Music became a core subject in Spain in 1990, with the laws following in the years after that increased the prevalence and accessibility of music education in schools. Music must now be an active experience for students, and they gain the ability and opportunity to compose, create, listen, and respond to different styles, cultures, and time periods in order to better understand its historical and cultural background. This sets the foundation for five goals for music teachers in primary schools (Hernandez-Bravo et al., 2015). First, help the students develop individual musical abilities as well as aural perception of musical aspects such as tone and rhythm. This aligns with the individual teaching concepts addressed above. Second, teachers should aim to help students find pleasure and enjoyment while learning to make music with their voice as well as with instruments. Third, teachers should facilitate this learning of music by teaching musical notation and demonstrate how this can be written and understood to create and reproduce music. Building upon this, teachers should then assist students in understanding musical form, basic concepts and elements in music theory, and musical history and culture. This is goal number four because it helps students understand and connect musical ideas to the world around them, enriching their learning rather than simply repeating what they have been taught to do on a stage. Additionally, goal five for primary school music teachers is to help students appreciate, accept, and enjoy quality music. Students should also be exposed to music from different cultures as well as music from their own culture in order to form a more well-rounded idea of music in the world around them and learn to understand

how music is a product of culture and therefore is influenced by it (Hernandez-Bravo et al., 2015). This push for student centered intentional instruction and the goals that align with it are in agreement with the practices in Modern Band ensembles. It is also important to note that the skills and the processes of music learning and literacy are prioritized rather than isolated products. Developing musical ability, enjoyment, and understanding are intended to be achieved before note reading in the order of goals in the Spanish core curriculum. This process-based approach is extremely beneficial for student success, meeting needs of diverse learners, and working to maintain cultural relevancy. This sort of approach seems to be extremely beneficial both for the students and for the music programs as a whole, and can be seen as an example for schools in the United States.

Challenges

One challenge that some have raised in the area of music education is the integration of Modern Band methods into concrete learning standards, in part because of its intentionally flexible structure and student led approach. Due to Music Standards shifting towards independent literacy rather than understanding and skills, Modern Band must find creative ways to fit into the new Standards (Powell & Clauhs, 2021). This is addressed through the same sort of creative problem solving that allows students to adapt their learning to meet their goals. These standards must be addressed and implemented in ways that ensure that the student may benefit from the learning, not cause the student to jump through hoops to meet a goal that has no relation to their learning process or individual goals. Some curriculum standards may seem challenging to implement into effective classroom learning. In addition, the true purpose and

usefulness of music in relation to core curriculum subjects is not entirely agreed upon universally (Hernandez-Bravo et al., 2015). Some educators maintain that the product is what shows the learning of the student, not the process. This is due to the fact that success in that sense is often much more easily measured and observable from an outsider perspective. The growth of Modern Band programs and practices shows a greater push to emphasize the process rather than the product in order to ensure the best experience for students.

Closing Thoughts

Music has long been a field in which student participation has not been representative of the population of the school and the community. In particular, students with disabilities and exceptionalities, students of color, English learners, and students with a low socioeconomic status have been underrepresented and underserved in traditional music ensembles. The goal of this research was to study the ways in which Modern Band programs utilize techniques that place the student first and adapt instruction to reach all, and to explore the ways in which traditional ensembles may implement similar methods when appropriate.

One consistent theme in the literature was the emphasis on the aim of Modern Band programs to make music accessible for all students, regardless of ability level, experience, age, interest, background, or any number of other factors that may impact a student's decision to join or remain a part of an ensemble. Modern Band programs can set an example for how to include everyone in other ensembles as well. Traditional ensembles should aim to be more student-centered rather than product centered.

Students should be able to see themselves fitting into the ensemble, not wondering if they are able to meet expectations that seem out of reach for them. They should understand that their educator is there to help them reach their own goals and help them grow out of a concern for their best interest, not in order to serve the wishes of the instructor. A performance should be a celebration of the students and their growth and accomplishments. A performance should reflect the interests and joys of the students and allow them to take ownership of the end result and the process it took to accomplish the result.

A student should learn to connect music to the world around them and vice versa. Music learning is about growth and expression, which cannot happen unless the student feels comfortable, safe, and valued. A student that is invested in the product that they take pride in will be more motivated to work towards their own personal goals and they will be more satisfied with the finished product than if they had no interest in the end goal. Letting students set their own goals is a valuable asset in any type of learning environment, not just in music. The findings of the literature on the success and retention of students shows the positive impact that the Modern Band approach brings to the table. It also brings attention to various methods on how to better serve the needs, learning goals, and interests of students.

This sort of approach is essential in the effort to reach all students. Music learning, like all other forms, should be adaptive. Students should not be limited by disability, cost, or any other measure that may impede a wishful student. Many students in their early years of traditional ensembles switch instruments or even quit all together because they were told by their educator that it was not a good fit for them, and they

would not be successful. An educator that gives up on a beginning student has not given enough effort on providing the student with the support they need. An educator should teach all students - not just the naturally gifted at the subject at hand. In fact, Aristotle's view of our obligation to the vulnerable should be implemented. The more vulnerable or in need a person may be, the greater our obligation is to help them.

With these adaptations, teachers must follow the examples set by Modern Band programs and implement creative solutions to obstacles that students may face. The use of technology to make an ensemble accessible student should not be seen as unconventional or out of place in these traditional ensembles. Educators should encourage interest in the program and see that the program serves the students and not the other way around. Adapting an instrument or providing an alternative is a moral obligation to the student.

A student that suffers from ataxia or muscular dystrophy should be met with an alternative way to go about making music and still be included and an active participant in the learning process and the overall group. Adaptations such as a violin with fewer strings so that hand placement may be easier, or a synthesizer such as an orba may be implemented in order to ensure that the student's needs are met.

For a student with dyslexia or another learning exceptionality, perhaps alternative notation may be implemented in order to lessen strain on the student. If a more comfortable visual format is able to assist the student in creating alongside their peers, they should be given the opportunity to utilize it.

Limitations of the research further prove the need for an individualized approach to music. Students that may seem on the surface to have a similar circumstance as another may not require the same adaptations. Nor will the solution always be simple. Further research will be required in order to better meet the needs of students with obstacles in their music learning that this literature does not address, such as accommodating for students with deafness or Sensory Processing Disorder. No two students are alike, and no educator should assume that there is a black and white answer to accommodate every student with a certain disability. Each student should be assisted on an individual basis. This literature provides extremely helpful ideas that focus on the process of adapting instruction and curriculum for students without insinuating that every student with a certain barrier will benefit from the same treatment. Adaptations in technology were made through persistence and a process of trial and error. The approach to support and adapt the curriculum for our students should reflect that. No student is the same as another, so our approach as educators should recognize that. Music instruction must be flexible and eager to accommodate students if educators are truly wishing to benefit their students. It is imperative that modern music education aims to meet the needs of all and does not exclude those who may face obstacles. If the goal of education is to better serve the student, then the issue of accessibility in music is absolutely something that must be addressed. The accessibility gap in music education is truly something that cannot go unrecognized and must be addressed by every instructor in order to serve all.

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