

BRINGING OUTSIDE MUSIC INSIDE MICHIGAN'S K-12 CLASSROOMS

A FOUNDATION TO INCREASE DIVERSITY

by

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INTRODUCTION & DESCRIPTION

The classrooms of schools in the State of Michigan are segregated. There is a lack of diversity throughout the schools themselves, grades kindergarten through twelve (K-12), and the districts that serve as a conglomeration of the students, teachers, and administrations. As a state, Michigan has been historically segregated in several respects, be it geographically or socially. The education system is simply another contributing force to the preexisting segregated condition of Michigan.

It is no mystery that Michigan is racially divided. This year provides the citizens of the state with a stark reminder of the history its of racial divide, as it is the fortieth anniversary of the 1967 Detroit riot. No matter how many anniversaries come and go, the reminders only serve as remembrances and rarely procure an improvement in the situation. If a social-change group takes a stimulating spark like the riot's anniversary and uses it to move forward with race relations, that group rarely does so successfully targeting Michigan's schools.

The continuing problem of segregation in Michigan's schools has yet to be solved. The first issue is that the schools are a direct reflection of the cities in which they stand. "In the early 1990s, 95 percent of the African American students attending segregated schools in Michigan were enrolled in central city public school districts." (Landauer-Menchik, 2006, pp. 2-3). To address that, the Michigan Department of Education developed a system of charter schools. This did not solve the problem, however. "In 2004-05 there were 87 segregated charter schools in Michigan, none of which had existed in 1992-93. Most segregated charter schools are located within the boundaries of districts including Detroit, Southfield and Flint, where most traditional public schools are also

segregated. Other segregated charter schools are located in districts where there are no other segregated schools, including Lansing, Warren, and Ypsilanti." (Landauer-Menchik, 2006). It turns out that legislative initiatives and statistical switches were not sufficient enough to turn around a problem much larger in scope.

DIAGNOSIS

In order to hit the benchmarks that are so enforced by the Michigan Department of Education, teachers must overcome a lack of diversity in their classrooms. Charter schools have not done that. "In its 1999 study, The Evaluation Center at Western Michigan University reported that, on average, charter schools in Michigan (at least the 62 schools in their study) enrolled relatively more students of color than non-charter public schools (51 to 33 percent). The evaluators were quick to point out, however, that these numbers do not necessarily support the conclusion that charter schools are attracting more students of color than tradition public schools, or that they have not contributed to ethnic/racial segregation in their vicinity. Most charter schools in Michigan are located in urban areas, which are predominantly minority. In fact, the data indicate that the charter schools actually serving disproportionately fewer minorities in diverse areas. Sponsoring districts were 41 percent white on average while charter schools in those districts were nearly 60 percent white on average." The researchers concluded that "this provides evidence of ethnic segregation." (Cobb, C. D., Glass, G. V., Crockett, C., 2000, pp. 14).

There must be another way of increasing diversity in Michigan's K-12 classrooms. If urban schools are going to fill up with students that are of color and reflect the populace of the community, then teachers are going to have to come up with their

own method of bringing diversity into the classroom. A change in instructional techniques is both appropriate and necessary. The students in K-12 classrooms are young "people who need to learn in a context that is connected to their lives in a real way. Learning is facilitated by cooperative groups and helping others learn. [Students] are affected by the feelings and opinions of others, in general, and by the teacher, in particular. Thus... changing instructional techniques can have a positive impact on populations who historically have been at educational risk." (Bates, P., et. al., 1999, pp. 21). A shift to increase diversity in the classroom is more forcefully made by changing instruction methods and focus. The solution to segregation is found in the curriculum and its delivery, not the shaping of educational socio-economic structure and geographic layout.

PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Once teachers are less inclined to think negatively about the facts as they are, that schools are segregated and will remain so for the foreseeable future, educators can focus on making learning more meaningful for the students that are in their classrooms. This meaning will come through connections to prior knowledge. Teachers can motivate the students, for example, toward increased literacy by having students read lyrics. "Reading difficulties in the U.S. are particularly acute among minority children. Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress indicate that African-American and Latino children are far more likely than white children to experience significant difficulties in learning to read (Campbell et al., 1996). Research has shown that children comprehend text better when they have prior knowledge of the topic being discussed (Rumelhart,

1980; Schank 1977; Seidenberg & McClelland, 1989; Spiro, 1980)... Children learn to read more effectively if words are embedded in meaningful text."

An example of meaningful text could be popular song lyrics, or lyrics that the students create themselves and then put to music. "The 'meaningful' concept has many aspects, including culture; culturally related differences in prior knowledge may help explain why minority children have trouble learning to read."

MOTIVATION & INTERESTS

"Motivation is another key determinant of reading success (Eccles & Wigfield, 1995; Guthrie & Ala, 1997; Oldfather and Wigfield, 1996), and a student's interest in the material being read has a strong impact on motivation (Gambrell & Morrow, 1996). Contextualized reading instruction (instruction tailored to the interests and prior knowledge of each student) may enhance motivation, and therefore improve a child's reading ability." If reading was put in the context of song, through lyrical study, meaning and motivation would pair to drastically improve children's learning and the learning environment.

Another place where music would draw connection directly to the student would be through bridging the unique gap of various American English dialects. The theory of Ebonics took quite a bit of ribbing when it was introduced, however it is widely agreed that minority and urban students are commonly heard speaking "an English dialect such as Black English Vernacular. Ideally, all schools should use teaching materials and methods that allow students to encounter words, phrases, and ideas from their own oral language experiences. Unfortunately, few such culturally relevant and contextualized reading materials exist." (Pinkard, N., 2001, pp. 5).

CONNECTIVITY

Enter outside music into a classroom. Outside music would increase students' connectivity to the subject matter by incorporating the prior knowledge of commonly known songs. Connecting students to culturally diverse and recognizable outside music would produce meaningful learning. Once interest in the material is garnered, students will become increasingly motivated to learn. When all these steps are taken, culturally relevant and contextualized curriculum will exist, and learning will be enhanced. This can all be accomplished by bringing outside music into the classroom.

THE BENEFITS OF USING MUSIC TO EDUCATE

Music procures a well-rounded learning environment and lends the influence of its balanced nature to other school subjects. It is recommended that instructors "use music throughout the day to enhance the teaching of other subjects." This interdisciplinary approach spills over into the blending of students from different ethnic backgrounds. Or, even if all the students in one classroom are of one race, they must all be seen as individuals. Music dually collaborates the students as individuals and as a group of learners. "To meet the unique needs and interest of individual children... classrooms must provide adult-guided group music play where children come together to sing play instruments, listen to, and learn about music in a cooperative setting." In such a setting, students play instruments as individuals and then collaborate as a group together to perform a song in chorus.

Individual leadership can also be taught in this setting. "Children enjoy leading each other in such activities when a drum is placed in their play space." In the present

age, in which leadership is hungered for by the future generation, this benefit will not be taken for granted.

As exemplified by the leadership benefit, music is a form of applied learning and understanding. "Helmut Moog, German researcher and educator, suggests that understanding music is as attainable for every child as is understanding speech and reading: Musicality... is not a special ability but is the application of general abilities to music. The same abilities which enable a person to distinguish differences between noises... enable him also to distinguish similar differences in music... The ability to experience music is just as firmly woven into the total fabric of potential human abilities as the potential for understanding speech, for reading, for motor skills, and so on. Therefore the achievements and effects of musicality can only be considered as part of the total structure of human abilities. (Moog, 1976, pp. 45–46)." (Hart, C. H., Burts, D. C., Charlesworth, R., 1997). The application of leadership, when the drum is placed before the child, is an example of how children can use and enhance general abilities during a group music setting. The tendency to lead existed in the drummer, but the potential to lead was not realized until the drum was placed before him.

Music can seep into other disciplines directly, too, in addition to the conceptual affects that were previously explained. A direct example of tying music to technology is expressed by the activities of students in the Nicolet High School District who "make beautiful music, thanks in part to technology in the classroom. Symphonic band and music theory students use specialized software in their school's computers to write and edit musical compositions. The newly restructured and expanded music classes have re-energized students and taught them to recognize their creative ability. Students have

become independent learners in a risk-free, collaborative environment. The program's successes are due in great measure to a collaboration between the school's music teacher and its technology coordinator. By reaching across areas of specialty and school district boundaries, the educators eagerly share their experience and expertise with other disciplines and help students develop literacy beyond the languages." (Pioneering Partners, 1993, pp. 27). If a similar collaboration could be formed by music teachers and educators in any discipline, the possibilities are truly endless.

Interdisciplinary study does not just occur at Nicolet High School, it happens globally. "The integration of music with other school subjects is a very important topic among music teachers worldwide." The United States government saw the need for interdisciplinary study and attempted to initiate it across the country. "One of the earliest attempts at music integration was Project IMPACT (Interdisciplinary Model Program in the Arts for Children and Teachers), initiated in 1970 by the US Office of Education (Wenner, 1973). This program was designed to give the arts a more important role in schools by developing arts-centered curriculum models and providing in-service training to positively change attitudes of music and classroom teachers regarding arts integration. (Zdzinski, S. F., Ogawa, M., Dell, C., Yap, C. C., Adderley, C., Dingle R., 2007, pp. 3). The same study also described a similar program to integrate music with classroom subjects at the state level in Vermont and examined the interdisciplinary approach to music practiced by the Pecs Free School of Arts in Hungary.

The interdisciplinary approach spans seas and cultures, and it logically follows that cultural and gender differences of interest in scholastic subjects can be overcome by the interdisciplinary nature of music. A study of academic motivation and achievement

among urban adolescents found that "interest and knowledge partnership is exemplified by decades of research into the juncture of interest and achievement (e.g., grades)." The findings not only crossed races, but genders, too. "In addition, distinct gender differences appear to exist... Women, for example, can display a greater interest in music (Marjoribanks & Mboya, 2004), human biology, and social/moral issues, whereas men may exhibit preferences for scientific research and environmental preservation (Gardner & Tamir, 1989). When interest is conceptualized as a domain-specific motivational variable, educators use this information to investigate why students are motivated to learn specific subject matter over others when all the activities appear to have the same value and provide similar challenges (Alexander & Murphy, 1998)." The study continues to expand its reach and delves into looking at other countries. "More recently, empirical studies into this connection have continued in Europe, Australia, Africa, Canada, and the United States, indicating that academic interest is a cross-cultural phenomenon." (Long, J. F., Monoi, S., Harper, B., Knoblauch, D., Murphy, P. K., 2007, pp. 199).

To keep the students interested, teachers must discover what interests them. The previous study shows a tendency of women to be more interested in music than men. The study further states that men prefer to be interested in science. When Nicolet High School integrated technology and music, they accomplished the interdisciplinary weaving that is necessary to interest all the individual students. Interest in turn develops motivation which enhances the learning environment. When interest is paired with knowledge, achievement comes forthright.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance the learning environment by stimulating student interest, diversity can be inserted into schools by bringing outside music inside the classroom. I offer the idea of putting music into the classroom by assembling a group of volunteer musicians who perform for and teach Michigan's K-12 students lessons that are developed by an outside musical organization and approved by participating teachers. The organization would pull from all of the concepts previously listed: linking lessons to students' prior knowledge, using music as a tool of connectivity, interdisciplinary collaboration, and developing well-rounded education. This organization will be called the "OMIA Foundation."

The OMIA Foundation will increase diversity in Michigan's K-12 schools by using music as a tool of connectivity. The OMIA musician can begin a lesson by connecting to students as individuals and as a group. The OMIA musician can start with a song that is well known by the group. The musician can ask the group what songs they are familiar with and then perform the song. Once the class is involved and interested, the musician can vary his lesson to include a music genre with which the students are unfamiliar. Using the tool of connectivity will allow the musician to extend the lesson to cover subjects new to the students.

Interdisciplinary collaboration can spring from teachers' involvement with the OMIA Foundation and its goals. In a third grade setting, for example, the OMIA musician could sing a song about simple multiplication, thus pulling from basic math curriculum. In a high school political science class, the OMIA musician could draw from the pool of songs from the 1960's about political unrest and even extend the lesson to

current events and today's music with a similar undertone. When the instruction technique is tweaked to include the musician as lecturer, a positive impact can be seen in populations who historically have been at educational risk. The musician can reach across cultural boundaries.

Music can be used to stimulate overall learning. "It is widely believed that music learning, music reading, and/or music participation enhance academic achievement, especially reading and math (Tucker, 1981). Regardless of the method of literacy instruction, there is a growing body of literature that supports specific music experiences and activities in order to teach and practice essential literacy learning components utilizing both phonics and whole language approaches." (Register, D., Darrow, A. A., Standley, J., Swedberg, O., 2007, pp. 25). There simply is not a scholastic subject that cannot be enhanced through a connection to music.

A well-rounded education will be improved by inserting music into Michigan's classrooms. A well-rounded education includes a firm grasp on diversity awareness. Because students are drawn to subjects of which they have prior knowledge, music can be used to overcome that barrier. It would not be difficult to teach a lesson about the inner-cities and urban economic strife to those who are living it. It would not be difficult to get a student to listen to hip-hop if that was his favorite music genre. It would be difficult to get the hip-hop student to learn a lesson about rural America, which he has no prior knowledge of. But, if hip-hop was used as a tool of connectivity, then the lesson about rural America would go over smoother. The application of music to curricular themes stimulates student interest in subjects they would otherwise slough off. If they enjoyed folk music, for example, then they would enjoy a lesson plan that employs folk

music. In a study, one music teacher "identified music that related to curricular themes, for example, teaching a dozen American folk songs corresponding to the different U.S. regions that Grade 3 students were studying." (Pressley, M., Mohan, L., Raphael, L. M., Fingeret L., 2007, pp. 228). Instead of a bland and boring lecture, the lesson was given with vibrancy and was well received by the children.

If a teacher is searching for the best way to connect to a group of students who are from diverse ethnic backgrounds, the teacher must use music to cross cultures. If a teacher is aiming to convey a lesson to a group of students who are all of the same ethnic background, the teacher must use music to bring diversity to the classroom. Music is the enabling tool to achieve both of these goals.

Whereas some children prefer math and others sports, music exists in all of them. "Music is a basic intelligence which is a part of all human beings. Musical thinking requires the mind to behave in ways different from logico-mathematical thinking, and musical development is therefore important for total child development. Musical literacy is possible and should be the goal for every child." Already labeled as a tool of connectivity, music can also form itself into a stimulator of basic intelligence and cognitive ability. "An environment that allows children freedom and time to construct their own musical knowledge is an environment that provides opportunity for individual expression of each unique child. Such an environment also encourages integration of music with other areas of children's play. Group music activities help children sense the social values of music, and also provide opportunities for caregivers to facilitate integration of music with other content." (Hart, C. H., Burts, D. C., Charlesworth, R.,

1997, pp. 104-139). There is no better method by which to socially integrate children than through musical group activities.

TIMELINE

Group activities involving music are already present within the Michigan educational system. Unfortunately, there no way to track exactly how many hours each teacher performs interdisciplinary lessons that include music as a teaching tool. The preexisting lessons are wonderful and should not cease. It is the goal of the OMIA Foundation to complement these preexisting lessons. The OMIA Foundation was incorporated as a licensed private non-profit organization in the State of Michigan during July 2007. The OMIA Foundation plans to perform its first "official" set of lessons to a dozen Michigan K-12 classrooms in the Fall 2007 semester. The Foundation will reach Grand Rapids, Lansing, and Plymouth during this semester through previously existing relationships with teachers. The Foundation will receive licensure for soliciting charitable donations during this time, after which the Foundation will begin to generate income. Once a substantial amount of revenue is accumulated, the Foundation will begin an outreach and marketing campaign. It is expected that the number of classrooms per semester will double in Spring 2008 to twenty-four classrooms. This expansion depends on the financial and community support received during the Foundation's first quarterly period.

PARTICIPANTS

The OMIA Foundation has two definitely secured performing musicians for the upcoming Fall 2007 semester. There are five pending musicians whom the OMIA Foundation is awaiting commitments from. There is one classroom to whom the OMIA

Foundation regularly performed prior to its incorporation and the Foundation has secured that classroom as an "OMIA Classroom" for the upcoming school year. Five classrooms are pending for the 2007-2008 school year. As word spreads and connections are made with teachers, more "OMIA Classrooms" will inevitably come on board.

Teachers, students, and musicians make up a major portion of the OMIA Foundation. As the Foundation expands in scope, school administrators will be asked to join as participants. A school administrator is in a unique position to promote the OMIA Foundation to a multitude of classrooms, rather than the one-on-one relationships which the Foundation was formed on. After school administrators become willing participants, the OMIA Foundation will also seek support from the Michigan government. This may or may not include reaching out to the Michigan Department of Education and the Michigan Legislature.

In the long run, there is nothing stopping the OMIA Foundation from continuing. At least, the Foundation will include the two existing musicians going into one or several classrooms each year. At most, the Foundation will expand to reach to dozens, perhaps hundreds of classrooms throughout the state each year. The Foundation will make every effort to ensure that the classrooms involved will be as diverse as the Michigan citizenry.

STRENGTHS AND BARRIERS

The OMIA Foundation is strong because of its infallibility. The Foundation was also incorporated by willing and dedicated individuals who devote their lives its furtherance. The strength of the Foundation lies in its infrastructure.

Participation may lack during the beginning stages of the Foundation. In a climate of benchmarks and fear of cut-backs, it is possible that the fraternity of

Michigan's teachers may be unwilling to try a new approach. The formation of direct relationships with the teachers will be the OMIA Foundation's attempt to overcome this hurdle. When the Foundation's performance can be shown as effective, the teachers will be hard pressed to come up with a knock against it.

Teachers are already willing participants. The OMIA Foundation is lucky enough to have several Michigan teachers as cohorts on start-up. The Foundation will attempt to have those teachers also form direct personal relationships with other teachers from their respective districts.

As with any non-profit, funding is a constant barrier. By its make-up, the OMIA Foundation receives private donations and will search to obtain both private and public grants. Oftentimes, the grant well runs dry. The OMIA Foundation combats this barrier by running an operation at very low cost. Other than driving to the class and taking a day of absence from employment, there is literally no cost to the Foundation's operation. Lack of funding will prevent marketing and outreach, though, which will hinder a furtherance and expansion of the Foundation's reach.

FEASIBILITY AND CONCLUSION

As previously stated, the OMIA Foundation will exist no matter what. The only question is how great an area the Foundation can cover. How many students will the OMIA Foundation reach in its first year? Year two? Can the OMIA Foundation expand into other States? Will it gain support from the Michigan Department of Education, Michigan Education Association, and/or the Michigan Legislature? These are all questions that address the expansion of the OMIA Foundation, but do not play any role in determining its longevity.

The OMIA Foundation will achieve its goal of bringing outside music inside the classrooms of those who are willing to participate. In turn, the Foundation will use music to increase diversity in those classrooms by expounding students' prior knowledge, motivating by boosting existing interest, using music as a tool of connectivity, and utilizing the many benefits that arise when music is applied to scholastic curriculum. The struggle will be convincing individual teachers, administrators, and legislators to break the mold and try something new. But when they do try it and see the results, they will wonder why they had not joined in sooner.

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