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# INTRODUCTION FOR FUTURE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

Music is an integral part of people's lives. It is that way all over the world and has been for centuries. Why is music so central to life? Music is a reflection of the feelings of human life. For instance, people sing and dance to lively music to celebrate happy occasions. Their songs are different however when they are sad or lonely. Music is an aural symbolization of inner feelings. People perform music to express their emotions. People hear the music and are affected emotionally. You know that music affects your moods. Think about the music you choose according to your temperament at a particular time. Certain types of music or specific selections can either match your mood or change it. Music is a powerful force emitted from the core of the human spirit.

Children naturally express themselves through musical activities. Children shake things and strike them. Children bounce and dance. They chant and sing. Children are intuitively musical. Indeed, music is inherent to human life beginning in early childhood.

In the classroom setting, teachers have an opportunity to build upon children's desire to express themselves musically. Teachers can provide experiences that help children develop concepts and skills necessary to increase and refine their music-making. Through enjoyable, non-theoretical, participatory music experiences, children will retain their natural musical expression while growing and developing their music abilities and their understanding of music as a form of communication.

Music-making involves many dimensions of human life and development. Children develop cognitively as they perceive musical components such as rhythm and melody and as they form concepts of them. Psycho-motor skills increase as they sing, move and play classroom instruments. Social interaction is enhanced while they work together to perform and to participate in musical activities. Yet, it is the affective, feeling aspect of music-making that makes the experiences unique, enjoyable and satisfying. A musical opportunity brings an internally personal experience to each child. Each is enriched in an individual, private, solitary way; every nuance of every feeling connects the child with his/her humanity and with the rest of the human race.

Oh, yes, music is important and its importance has been recognized. On December 10, 2015 the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) became a law. Unlike emphasis on testing that resulted from No Child Left Behind, ESSA focuses on well-rounded education and therefore specifies that arts including music should be part of every child's education. No longer can the arts be considered "frills" or merely supplemental to the "core" curriculum. Music, specifically named in ESSA, now is of equal importance to other subjects. This greatly increases the probability that you will provide some music experiences for your classes. Although the amount of your responsibility cannot be determined until you are hired, you will be in one of the following situations:

1. A music teacher might fulfill all requirements. In this case, you will not be responsible for any aspect of your students' musical growth. However, you might integrate music with the study of other subjects. In that case, you could use the content and strategies from this course to arrange and lead the children's performances with understanding of how to apply the concepts and skills they developed in their music classes. Also, you could use music in non-lesson settings, perhaps to break up the academic day, giving the children a change of pace.
2. A music teacher might provide some of the instruction but not enough to fulfill mandated time requirements. In this case, you probably will be expected to follow up the music teacher's lessons. You might lead songs the teacher introduced, reviewing them and perhaps teaching more verses. You could be required to review and/or continue to guide the development of the concepts and skills that the music teacher presented. The music teacher will expect to see improvement upon his/her return to your class.
3. A music teacher is not present in your school, in which case you most likely will be totally responsible for the music in your classroom. You will teach music on a regular basis to fulfill state and/or local school requirements. You will choose the materials and will plan and present lessons to guide your students in the development of concepts and skills appropriate for their age and ability.

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Because you do not know where you will teach, you must be ready for any of the possible situations. School budget difficulties frequently require staff reductions. Often the position of the elementary music teacher is among the first to be eliminated. Your getting a teaching position therefore could be dependent on your answer to the question, "Can you teach music?" or "Can you fulfill the ESSA requirements mandated by the state?"

Perhaps you are among those who would immediately blurt out "no." Why? Why do you think that you can't teach music? Most likely your answer would be "I don't know anything about it." That's a logical answer and also one that easily can be reversed. Let's look at the situation realistically. Do you have a degree in mathematics that includes calculus and number theory along with probability and statistics? Probably not, but you can teach math to elementary children. Why? Because the content of math in elementary schools is not so advanced that all that knowledge is necessary. Have you studied historiography, anthropology, archaeology and the history of each of the continents? If not, you still can teach the content of a history curriculum appropriate for elementary children. Similarly, in-depth courses in physics and astronomy and biology and botany and meteorology and all the other sciences are not essential to teach elementary school science. You need to know enough to provide science content to the students in your class. In each elementary school subject, you need to know enough to cover the content of the subject in the school's curriculum.

In addition, you must learn strategies to teach each subject in a variety of ways in order to meet the learning needs of the students in your class. In other education courses you already know the content. For instance, you know how to read. Reading is the content. The education course(s) will provide methods for teaching reading to children. Or, you can do arithmetic. Arithmetic is the content, but you need to learn how to teach it.

To teach any subject you need (1) content appropriate for the students and (2) strategies for teaching it. This course is unique in that few of you understand and perform music. Unlike other subjects, many of you do not know the content. Yet, within one course, you will be expected to learn both the content and strategies for teaching it. That's a big order. It can be done, though, with careful attention to the quantity of content and an effective plan for presenting the strategies. Let's look at each facet separately.

Comparable to other elementary subjects, you don't need a degree in music to teach music. You need to know enough to provide the content to the students in your class. Unlike a music teacher who is expected to teach music to the children in all grades across many years, you would teach music only to your class during the year that you are their teacher. We are talking about ONE elementary school class for ONE school year. Phrased another way, you must know as much about music as an elementary child can learn in one year.

This text and course are NOT intended to turn you into a mini music teacher. Musicians study for years to perfect their art. No one can become a true musician in a few weeks of study. To expect this is nothing short of preposterous. However, it is reasonable to expect even those with no musical background whatsoever to learn elementary school music content. That is, you can develop the fundamental concepts and skills that elementary school children can master. You can do this even without any prior music experience and, as an adult, you can do it in a few weeks.

In addition to gaining content, you need some music teaching strategies, many of which are similar to the strategies used in teaching other subjects. In order to use class time efficiently and to prepare you to teach effectively, you will participate in activities as if you were an elementary school child. In order to develop the content, you will be moving, singing, listening, playing instruments and exploring/creating while using materials appropriate for elementary school children. These activities and materials comprise the strategies you will need to guide children in developing the same concepts and skills that you will have by the end of the course. So as you build content, you simultaneously will be building a repertoire of teaching strategies. This approach is not meant as an insult to your "adulthood" but rather to provide you with experiences through which children learn music. It is meant to build content through strategies that you can use in your classroom. You will learn in the way that you will teach.

This text is designed to be fundamental, realistic and practical. It is intended to present both (1) content and (2) strategies combined as they will be in a classroom. Within one course, you will be learning both the content, which is music, and some strategies to guide children's experiences. The experiences will be active and participatory, satisfying and even just plain fun.

If you feel competent with the content, have gained strategies for teaching and have enjoyed your experiences, you will be likely to enrich your students' lives with music-making activities. Also, you will be prepared to answer "Can you teach music?" or "Can you fulfill the ESSA requirements mandated by the state?" with an enthusiastic "Yes!" Now that you understand what you are going to learn, how you are going to learn it and why it's important, let's get started.