

SPREADING THE JOY



The text, *Music Content and Strategies for Elementary Classroom Teachers (C & S)*, was written across decades as we taught a music course to many, many undergraduate elementary/early childhood education majors. It has been a grass roots project molded by our experiences with future teachers in an attempt to make the course expectations realistic and practical and the participatory experiences positive and enjoyable. All our endeavors were rooted in our desire for elementary children to participate in music and to be emotionally affected by it. The children were the impetus for the text. We have found that classroom teachers are capable of providing participatory music experiences for children if they have the competence, confidence and desire to do it. In developing this text, our hope was to bring those factors to fruition. Here, briefly, is our journey.

Take a minute to think about how you got where you are now. What was your path? We realize that most reading this will have been music/music education majors and that this information is addressed to them. However, if you majored in visual arts, dance or theater, you had the same passion for your art as the musicians had for theirs. Therefore, if you substitute your learning and teaching experiences for those described here, our message will be clear and you'll easily grasp its pertinence for all arts instructors.

Most of us – we being among the group – started young, perhaps by taking some music lessons and/or singing in a youth choir, or maybe we found elementary school music class experiences particularly enjoyable. In any case, it was the participation that gave us the special feeling that we wanted to continue. We didn't want to observe, but rather to be actively involved. At a young age, we were hooked on performing. So, as we progressed, we participated in school music organizations – different types of bands, orchestras and/or choruses, perhaps music theater productions. We developed a special admiration for and perhaps bond with our school music teachers who opened our world to a variety of musical genres. We might have been a member of out-of-school performance groups. By the time we were high school juniors or seniors, music and music performance had become an integral part of our lives. We loved it. We couldn't imagine living without it. Music was so important to us and had so greatly enriched our lives that we wanted to extend the experience to others. The effect of music on our feelings was our motivation for deciding to teach it. We knew that music is an essential aspect of children's education and we wanted to provide experiences that would impact others as greatly as we had been affected.

In higher education, we continued to take lessons and to perform solo and with others in different ensembles, large and small, featuring a variety of genres of music. We studied music theory and music history. We added pedagogy and methods courses. We completed all the requirements, did our student teaching and graduated. We began teaching music and learned even more as we taught. We enjoyed seeing our students learn and saw their emotional reaction to the pieces they performed and/or heard. We were spreading the message: Music is wonderful and powerful; it expresses and deepens the human experience. Along the way, we took graduate courses and finally made our way to the front of college/university classes. Here we are. At this level, our influence will go far beyond those we teach to those our students will teach. Many, many children who we never will meet will benefit from our efforts as they perform in general music classes and/or in ensembles. Our responsibilities are great, so we take them seriously.

We stand before various types of students. Most are music education majors, undergraduate and/or graduate. We understand them. We've been down that route. They understand us. They know that we've taught children and look to us to provide expertise in helping them become successful teachers, spreading the joy of music through participation. All is well.

However, we sometimes stand before another group of students: pre-service elementary teachers. They do not share our passion to take the power of music to others. The majority do not share our life-changing experiences with music. They frequently think of the study of music as remote and foreign. Unlike the music education majors who are anxious to learn about the theoretical and historical aspects of music and to acquire skills and strategies to teach it, most of the elementary/early childhood education majors take a music or integrated arts course for children because it is a requirement.

The future teachers' situation is comparable to our being told that we have to take a single course to learn chemistry and how to teach it. "Delighted" probably is not a descriptive word for our reaction to the news! Instead, most of us would feel overwhelmed before the class began. We might be convinced that we can't "do" this. We'd probably be scared and nervous. We'd become tense and perhaps reluctant to try. We'd complain and question why we have to take the class, with certainty that we'll never use the information. We'd want to survive the course – period. That wouldn't make us bad people, but rather just ignorant in the topic of chemistry. We have other abilities and lots of them. In this case, our single deficiency is chemistry.

Now think about the pre-service elementary teachers. "They" are the "we" in the preceding paragraph. Why do they seem hesitant and/or negative? Why wouldn't they? Their reactions actually are quite normal. They're still fine human beings with human feelings. They are not inferior or stupid. They have a deficiency in music. That's all. They don't need criticism or condescension. They don't even need pity although a bit of compassion would be nice. All they need is instruction. They need instruction that will lead to feelings of competence and confidence in music content and teaching strategies and that will open their awareness to the feelings that music affects.

In the time allotted for the course, they cannot possibly replicate the path we took. They need instruction appropriate for their abilities and for their needs. This is not a foreign concept to us. For instance, Kindergarten children need different instruction from fifth grade students. Why? Because they are different. Their abilities, interests, and attention spans are just a few of their differences. You are aware of their differences and you understand the necessity of adjusting the materials, strategies and content of your lessons to meet the needs and abilities of the children in the two grades. The same principle applies to teaching the future classroom teachers. We can't simply consider them a diminutive version of music education majors because that's not what they are. However, that does not mean that their class is less important than one for music education majors.

Look at it this way. Perhaps you teach 25 pre-service teachers in a class and teach one class each semester. That's 50 future teachers in one year. Each pre-service teacher potentially will teach about 25 students in a year resulting in 1,250 elementary school children being affected. If all 50 of the current pre-service teachers teach 10 years, 12,500 children could be affected. If you teach just two sections of 25 future teachers each year for five years, as is quite possible, you will have taught 250 pre-service teachers in which case 6,250 children will be affected. If they teach for 10 years, you, through your students, they will have reached 62,500 children. Play with the numbers and you'll see how important you are to many unknown, unseen children. You want children to have music in their lives and one avenue is through their classroom teachers. Whether music and other arts with various curricular subjects or just provide a positive, enthusiastic attitude and atmosphere for music and arts classes and events, their experiences in your class will have an impact on children. Although the circumstances under which the future teachers will guide children's participation in music are unknown, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that specifies that arts including music should be part of every child's education greatly increases the probability that they will provide some experiences in music and other arts for their classes. Therefore, we should accept responsibility for preparing them to fulfill their role whatever it may be.

Yes, the abilities and attitudes of the pre-service classroom teachers are different from ours, but the ultimate goal is the same: Music-making for children. The education majors are distinctively different from us and from music education majors, so if they are to finish the class excited and ready to take music into their classrooms, the course must be designed specifically for them. So where to begin? At the beginning, of course.

These students in adult bodies are primarily beginners. This was our first realization and one that had a major impact on the development of this text. Although capable of abstract thought, their conceptual and skill development are at a Kindergarten level. So "the beginning" does not mean music theory. Remember that we learned theory *after* we'd had performance experience. Besides, what would they do with it? Heaven forbid that they should take it into elementary classrooms and have children doing pencil and paper assignments in the name of music education. If you can't hear it and

you can't feel it, it's not music! (You may quote us on that.) Also, classroom teachers are too busy presenting lessons on a broad spectrum of subjects and preparing their students to take standardized tests to devote hours to tasks such as figuring out key signatures, reading the notation of a new song, transposing it or harmonizing it. "The beginning," to us, meant simple concepts and skills learned through active participation. They need to hear and feel. They need to learn by doing. Consider this scenario: An adult comes to you for piano lessons. Do you tell the student to read a book on playing the piano, or do you say, "Sit down at the piano"? Just because the students are adults does not mean that we can begin their music instruction at the abstract level, with notation. We realized that they need active participatory learning experiences at a level appropriate to their abilities. They need to begin with the basic concepts and skills necessary for music performance.

Next, we considered quantity of content knowledge. Although an elementary music teacher is responsible for the music instruction of a whole school, grades K – 5 or 6 across many years, a classroom teacher's responsibility is limited to only his/her class: one group for one year. That's a big difference. How much do the future teachers really need to know? Answer: Enough to teach one class for one year. That's all. So, we reasoned, if we start with the basics and include only the fundamental concepts and skills, that children are capable of developing, the students should be able to master the content knowledge. We realized that in order to want to lead children in making music, the future teachers must be absolutely confident. So, by limiting the amount of concepts and skills they develop to the bare necessities they could possibly need in an elementary classroom, we hoped to increase the degree of their mastery and therefore their confidence. We then could show them how to develop a lot of musical experiences for children using the minimal content knowledge they had gained.

We continued to consider that if they develop the content and skills using participatory methods that can be transferred to elementary classrooms, they will be prepared to teach as they have learned. They won't learn in one method and then learn to teach through another. In the methods portion, they then can become cognizant of what they did. Yes, they'll have to analyze a bit, but if the general principles of the strategies are rooted in the learning theory they've gained from education courses, the transfer will be easy. This is the type of thinking we used in writing *C & S*. We've tried it with future teachers in our classes and have been pleased with the results. Yes, we understand that when they're in the classroom, they'll have many, many responsibilities. However, we believe that if they have mastered some fundamental strategies necessary for guiding children in making music to the point where they can apply them quickly and easily, they will at least have a viable option of taking music to the children in their classes.

We admit, though, that even if the text is followed closely, there still is one ingredient missing: You, the instructor. Never doubt your importance. Just as some teacher(s) ignited our spark, we must inspire these students. Your students

must see your joy and fulfillment, your passion for music and teaching. In order for the course to result in the students' wanting to take music to their students, they must have not only competence and confidence, but some of the love of music and the enthusiasm for teaching that we music educators have. The text provides necessary materials and participatory strategies, but not the positive energy necessary to bring music experiences to life.

In using this text, you will not be a lecturer, but a model of musicianship and teaching effectiveness with the delight that results from guiding the music-making experiences of others. As in all educational situations, the primary factor determining student attitude is the teacher. That's your very special contribution. As you did when you taught children, you will provide these beginners with encouragement and support as they try new experiences and grow through their participation in music-making activities. Knowing that the subject matter presented in this text is comfortably within the future teachers' grasp, you will voice your confidence in their ability to master it. Beyond that, you also will present the model of a person whose life is filled with music. Joy invites joy. Enthusiasm invites enthusiasm. You can and must be the best that they could become.

Absolutely, we intend for the course to be as enjoyable and satisfying for you, as it is for your students. It will be as you see the students develop concepts and skills, as you see their expressions of awareness, interest and understanding and as they become excited about music and its place in their future classrooms. After all, what is more important and satisfying to teachers than the growth and success of their students? The text essentially provides the lesson plans. Just add a wonderfully inspiring instructor.

We have found that when led by an enthusiastic, passionate, caring instructor, the overwhelming majority of students using this text develop a positive attitude as they (1) become aware of the emotional impact of music and value it as an art, (2) enjoy the practical, realistic and satisfying participatory involvements, (3) feel competent and confident with the music concepts and skills they have mastered, (4) realize that they have developed enough basic teaching skills to guide a variety of musical experiences appropriate for children, (5) recognize that their students will enjoy music-making experiences and will learn from them. Most leave excited to take music into their classrooms.

Although this is descriptive of our current classes, it is not where we started. We took a very bumpy road, so we understand disappointments as well as triumphs. We've share your feelings of frustration and elation. We've covered the gamut. That's why we want to help you, our colleagues, if and how we can.

We realize that using a new text for teaching a course can be difficult. You might ponder as you contemplate possibilities regarding sequence of experiences and the time necessary for your students to develop the concepts and skills included in this text. You may vacillate when selecting *C* & *S* experiences and exemplary music to present during various facets of the course and deciding on the number and types of assignments with grading.

After you've used a text several times, probably experimenting along the way, these issues fall into place. You settle on a sequence that is comfortable for you and your students. You learn how the course "fits" the allocated number of classes. You identify the experiences and music examples that most effectively and efficiently "make the point" for your students. You determine realistic expectations and develop assignments that provide you with an assessment of your students' accomplishments. We understand the necessity of the course belonging to you. You must mold it according to your teaching style preferences and the needs of your particular students, possibly changing it semester by semester. This will come, but the first time can be tough.

So, for now as you plan to use this text for the first time, whether in a music or integrated arts class, colleague to colleague, we present a few suggestions based on our experiences. We offer you the opportunity to learn from our mistakes and experimentation. Although you definitely should use your own expertise and preferences to make final decisions, you might find our thoughts, observations, suggestions and recommendations beneficial when you plan and teach the course using this text for the first time.