

## SPECIAL CURRICULUM DESIGN SEMINAR

*Curriculum Design Part 2: History of School Based Music Education in the USA**Part 2 of a four-part series on Curriculum & Assessment for Music Education**by Patrick M. Jones***Introduction**

Welcome to the second article in our four-part series on curriculum design. In the first article of this series we began conducting fieldwork to become more familiar with our school communities.<sup>1</sup> Knowing and understanding the communities and musical environments in which our students live is the crucial first step toward developing music curricula that are meaningful and effective in connecting students to the musical worlds in which they live. I hope you are finding discovering the vibrant musical ecology beyond the school building to be an enjoyable and enlightening experience. Please continue to collect data on the demographics and musical offerings of the communities your school serves as we proceed through the curriculum design seminar this year.

Our series continues with this article on the history of school based music education in the US in order to add historical perspective to our growing sociological understanding of music education's role within society. Future articles and workshops will include analyzing and understanding philosophical perspectives, designing curriculum content, selecting and developing effective pedagogical approaches and creating and implementing appropriate assessment tools and strategies. Much of the hands-on

curriculum content and assessment work will be addressed during a double session on Thursday afternoon of the Annual Conference in April and sessions at our summer conference in July. Please be on the lookout for these sessions by Sharon Potter and myself and join us. Bring the work you've been doing on curriculum with you, as well as copies of any existing curriculum documents you have. Also bring laptops if you have them, and paper and pens. Our plan will be for you to leave those sessions with your curricular documents further developed than when you arrived.

*Patrick M. Jones***Studying History**

Before we delve into the history of school based music education in the US, perhaps it is prudent to say a few words about studying history and its role in curriculum design. Historical perspective is crucial for understanding humanity. Turning our vision to the past helps us see where our profession has come from and how we got to where we are. It helps us to see how past decisions fit within the context of their era, whether or not they served society's needs and can guide us in analyzing and meeting the needs of our current time.

Studying history is an exciting and dynamic area of scholarship. Unfortunately, many people do not enjoy history because they often learned it as a series of received facts transmitted through dread-

ful textbooks, boring lectures and tests of decontextualized "facts." (Sounds surprisingly similar to some approaches to music appreciation!) Nothing could be further from what studying history actually is. Doing history is the ultimate detective work where uncovering one letter, one diary entry, one picture, can reveal something unknown to the world.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the true purpose of studying history is not about memorizing dates, names and events. Those are merely historical markers historians use to discuss history. It is also not about learning historical events and their residual effects as having been inevitable. Nothing in history was inevitable. There were always other courses of action that could have been taken.<sup>3</sup>

Instead, there are three key points one learns from studying history. First, studying history includes immersion in the context of the time period being scrutinized. Second, studying history is about analyzing the decisions people made and actions they took based on their perceptions of that context. And third, reporting historical research is an act of presenting an informed interpretation of the context, decisions made and actions taken, as well as their impact.

The major thing for you to take away from this article is an understanding of a very basic survey overview of the history of music education in US schools and the realization that our current theories and practices are the results of decisions people made along the way based in the context of their

time. They were not infallible and their decisions were not inevitable. They were also not the only options available at the time. The results of their decisions, which we inherited, are not unchangeable. We have both the power and the ethical responsibility to carefully scrutinize them and to transform music education to meet the needs of today's context and the future as we can best predict it.

### ***Historical Overview***

While I cannot provide a comprehensive survey of the history of US school based music education in the space of this article, I will try to present an honest abridged overview of it here. What follows is a review of music education history in American schools that situates schools as social institutions that serve society's needs.

### ***Introduction of Music into the School Curriculum***

Compulsory education and the development of common schools began in the Nineteenth Century. These schools were the early public schools funded by taxes in which all children were to receive an equal education necessary for Americanizing immigrants and sustaining democracy. Music was seen as a way to improve the intellect, promote physical health, and teach morality.<sup>4</sup> Learning music was consonant with the broader educational goals of the common school movement and, therefore, was formally added to the curriculum in various states in the 1830s-40s<sup>5</sup> but was by no means universally offered in all states.

It continued to be added to school curricula across the US throughout the century.<sup>6</sup> Vocal music appears to have been introduced more widely than instrumental music. Many of the early teachers were trained in the singing schools,

which focused on note reading. The methods of the singing schools and their emphasis on note reading became the main focus of music education in the common schools.<sup>7</sup> However, instead of utilizing the music of American composers and arrangers as in the singing schools, Lowell Mason and other early teachers chose to use music "reminiscent of that produced by the lesser European composers."<sup>8</sup>

American school music education is still grappling with these decisions of the original public school music teachers. Instead of developing music education programs based on individual student creativity, musical diversity, and embracing the American music they found all around them, they focused on developing skills in note-reading and learning bland pieces based on the Western European tradition written specifically for school.

### ***Mechanization and the Development of "Methods"***

The emphasis in public education following the Civil War was to prepare students for the mechanized society of the time. School subjects were to be "organized scientifically and evaluated accurately."<sup>9</sup> This led to the development of elementary schools, which were created to teach the "elements" of subjects.<sup>10</sup> The music education profession, therefore, began emphasizing learning atomistic "elements" of music. However, music instruction in elementary schools was primarily provided by classroom teachers with musicians acting as supervisors. Therefore, graded music basal series were published that contained songs written specifically for pedagogical purposes and "methods" for instruction were developed so that general classroom teachers could teach music. Publishers ran sum-

mer schools to train teachers and music supervisors in using their books.<sup>11</sup> This was a continuation of the practices of the earlier singing-school masters who moved from town to town selling their tune books and then offered "singing schools" to teach people how to sing the songs in their books.<sup>12</sup> One new methodology of the time that caused a controversy was the "rote-note" method where students were taught the song before its notation, just like they learned reading. This was a departure from the traditional approach carried over from the singing schools of teaching students to read by "note" and caused quite a stir within the profession.<sup>13</sup>

Several residual effects of this period can still be found in current school music approaches. Many teachers still emphasize learning atomistic elements of music, graded basal series books written for classroom teachers are still widely used and an emphasis on "methods" of instruction permeates much of music teacher education and conferences. The "rote versus note" controversy is still being debated and the genre of "school music" composed and arranged to emphasize certain elements still predominates not only in general music classes, but in performing ensembles as well. Finally, the publishing industry (and now also other music products companies) still exercises a great deal of influence over the profession through sessions at conferences that are merely workshops on how to use the latest materials and products they are selling.

### ***The Child-Study Movement and Progressivism***

Urbanization and industrialization in the late 19th and early  
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20th Centuries, coupled with the development of psychology as a discipline separate from philosophy, had a profound influence on education. Members of the Progressive Movement advocated that education should focus on the child and his/her developmental stages, not formal methods and content; that learning should be active, not passive; and that learning in school should be connected to the student's world outside of school.<sup>14</sup> This led to the expansion of the school curriculum and the addition of elective offerings in many areas.<sup>15</sup> Music was perfectly suited to the aims of progressive education and a variety of elective offerings in music were developed.

Of the most lasting was the introduction of instrumental music on a wide-scale, and particularly bands since town bands were ubiquitous and, for many, the popular music of the day.<sup>16</sup> There was simultaneously a movement for music appreciation, which was facilitated by the new technologies of the phonograph and the radio.<sup>17</sup> Music appreciation, however, did not fare as well as instrumental music. According to Keene, performing groups drew the "better and more interested musicians of the school" and the more widely based curriculum did not encourage general music for all students at the high school level.<sup>18</sup> The post-war baby boom, growth of the suburbs and booming US economy all contributed to an explosion of offerings in music that lasted until the 1970s.

The expansion of music offerings during this period resulted in specialized teacher education at the university level. Instead of becoming music teachers in a broad sense, many music educators became specialists in

instrumental, vocal, or general music. Some states developed certification specifically in various areas or grade levels. Collegiate ensemble conductors began to exert influence on music education that has resulted in some teachers further identifying themselves as specialist conductors. The impact of specialization from this period is still ubiquitous throughout the profession.

### ***Post-Sputnik Reform Era***

US education received a wake-up call on October 4th, 1957, when the Soviet Union successfully launched Sputnik I, the world's first artificial satellite, into space. This called the efficacy of America's school system into question. The near half-century following the launch of Sputnik I has been one of continual reform and restructuring within the educational establishment at large and, to a lesser extent, within the music education community. While showing some progress at least at the theoretical level in the 1960s, the music education profession has been slow to evolve past the offerings and specializations developed during the progressive era. There have been important developments since the mid-1990s, but it is too soon to tell to what extent they will have a lasting impact.<sup>19</sup>

**1960s.** In addition to the space race and reaction to Sputnik, the 1960s was filled with many social changes such as the Civil Rights, youth, counterculture movements, and the rise in popularity of rock musics. Leading thinkers in the profession truly sought to reform music education to meet the needs of society in the 1960s, but those changes are a textbook example of "too little too late." Various conferences, symposia and efforts to reform music education were held during the decade. These

included: the *Contemporary Music Project* (1962),<sup>20</sup> *Yale Seminar* (1963), *Northwestern Seminar* (1965), *The Manhattanville Music Curriculum Project* (1965), *The Tanglewood Symposium* (1967), and *The Goals and Objectives Project* (1969). Each of these offered ways to reform school based music education to meet the needs of society. Most of the ideas developed at and through these meetings and movements still resonate today as current needs such as: focusing on the development of student musicianship in a variety of musicianly roles; including a variety of repertoires and ensembles that include contemporary, "world", and popular musics; connecting school musicing to musicing opportunities in the community; and capitalizing on emerging technologies for improving and transforming music education practices. These ideas, however, failed to gain a wide degree of influence and it would take another quarter century before they would begin to have an impact in the profession.

There are practical reasons why the profession didn't transform itself during the 1960s. Although there was national concern with school performance in math and science due to the space race and society was changing all around them, the reality was that the economy was booming, the tax base was strong, and the schools were overflowing with baby boomers. Therefore, music teachers had no pressing reason to change what they were doing and primarily continued to offer the classes and ensemble experiences that had been developed for the progressive era. The economic situation would change in the 1970s, but the narrow training music educators had received in their teacher education programs left them ill-prepared to address the contemporary changes

in music and society.

**1970s: Recession and Downsizing.** The music education profession entered the 1970s with a list of innovative ideas developed in the 1960s that were ripe for wide-scale implementation and might have had a positive impact. Unfortunately, the educational environment changed radically so that those ideas never had a chance to be fully operationalized. The economic recession of the 1970s coupled with the peaking of the baby boom generation's school attendance mid-decade dealt a financial blow to school districts which soon found themselves with a reduced tax base, stagflation, and too many teachers and too much infrastructure for their declining student population. This resulted in severe cutbacks in personnel and budgets, the selling off of physical assets, and the reduction or total elimination of music programs in some schools. Thus, instead of moving forward with reforms envisioned in the 1960s, the music education profession circled the wagons and began what has been a thirty-plus year engagement in advocacy to maintain the status quo.

This lack of response to the changes in music and society of the time, while understandable from the perspective of self-preservation, has nonetheless resulted in a legitimation crisis requiring continuous advocacy to maintain offerings that are irrelevant to the musical needs of contemporary society. MENC actually contributed to the problem by advocating the aesthetic theory promulgated by Bennett Reimer as the basis for music education. Reimer's theory legitimized maintaining the status quo offerings and, if it had any positive effect at all, merely caused music teachers to do a more

comprehensive job of teaching the same kinds of offerings the schools already had.<sup>21</sup>

**1980s: "A Nation At Risk"** Just as the nation was coming out the recession in 1983 the report *A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* was released by the National Commission on Excellence in Education.<sup>22</sup> This report, and others like it issued in the 1980s, identified great weaknesses in the quality of education in the USA as compared to other countries.<sup>23</sup> As with the launch of Sputnik I, the release of *A Nation At Risk* sent shock waves throughout the educational establishment. Much of the educational reform agenda of this era was critical of progressivism.<sup>24</sup>

The two largest competing reform ideologies were those of perennialists, such as Mortimer J. Adler and Allan Bloom who advocated a canonic approach to education,<sup>25</sup> and essentialists such as E. D. Hirsch who advocated parsing educational content into atomistic pieces.<sup>26</sup> Many music educators found much to agree with in both camps. Those who believed the purpose of music education was to have students study masterworks based in the Western European art music tradition agreed with the perennialists while those who believed music education was about learning specific facts, skills and knowledge and that "school music" arrangements and books were sufficient to do so agreed with the essentialists. This de-emphasizing of progressive ideals of student centered learning and the necessity to connect learning in school with students' lives outside of school alleviated music educators of any immediate necessity to reform their existing offerings to better address the musical needs of society.

There was, however, at least

one contrary movement in arts education during the latter half of the 1980s that came from outside of the music education establishment. Researchers in cognitive science at Harvard University's *Project Zero* were interested in arts learning and assessment. They mounted a multi-year study of arts learning and assessment known as *Arts PROPEL*.<sup>27</sup> Instead of focusing on music as literature, as had been the concern of reform efforts based on aesthetic theory,<sup>28</sup> they focused on the development of individual musicianship and, in that sense, shared many theoretical aspects with the *Manhattanville Music Curriculum Project* and some of what was advocated in other movements of the 1960s.<sup>29</sup>

**1990s: New Directions, Goals 2000, and the National Standards.** The mid-1990s were pivotal years for the profession. Grass roots movements in three areas that had been gaining momentum throughout the preceding decades, but had been eclipsed by the larger emphasis to maintain the status quo, found expression in concrete ways that introduced reorientations in music education theory, content and pedagogy. These included the articulation of a Praxial rather than aesthetic philosophical basis for music education,<sup>30</sup> a greater emphasis on musics of non-western cultures,<sup>31</sup> and a wider embracing of digital technology in the music classroom.<sup>32</sup> In addition to these grass roots movements, a decade of working toward educational reform since *A Nation At Risk* culminated in *Public Law 103-227 Goals 2000: Educate America Act in 1994*, that included MENC's voluntary music standards which various states have since adopted or adapted into law.<sup>33</sup> These

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standards, though not uncontroversial, essentially mandate the implementation of many of the ideas developed during the 1960s.

Finally, MENC once again mounted a symposium on education in 1999 known as *The Housewright Symposium on the Future of Music Education* (1999).<sup>34</sup> It was touted as an updating of the Tanglewood Symposium of 1997. However, it appears to have had little, if any, impact in the seven years since it was held.

The argument can be made that the mid-1990s was the beginning of a new era in which some of the innovative ideas generated in the 1960s finally began to gain wider acceptance. At this point the quarter century of 1970-1995 appears to have been an interregnum between the reform agenda generated at conferences in the 1960s and the implementation of some of those ideas beginning in the mid-1990s. To what extent the current movements will have a long-term influence on school based music education remains to be seen.

### Closing

This survey of the history of music education in US schools has demonstrated that music in schools has flourished when it served the needs of schools and communities. It also reveals that the profession is conservative and has tended to simply add new features while retaining aspects developed in previous eras even after their usefulness has become questionable. Today's profession is an eclectic mix that contains the emphasis on

note reading as the purpose of music education and a bias for bland arrangements of music in the Western European art music tradition from our early years; the learning of atomistic "elements", basal series books, emphasis on methods, specialized compositions and arrangements that highlight elements, "rote versus note" controversy, and influence of the publishing industry from the post-Civil War years; and the ensembles, classroom offerings, and specializations created in the Progressive era. When faced with the social and educational challenges of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, the profession, perhaps bloated with all of this baggage from previous eras, proved unable to respond to the changing needs of society in any large scale way. If history is a guide, the momentum for transformation begun in the 1990s can only have staying power if the profession is willing not merely to add new features but, instead, to transform itself to meet the musical needs of society and the students and communities in which the schools are situated.

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### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Patrick M. Jones, "Curriculum Design Part 1: Demographics & Ethnography - Part 1 of a Four-Part Series on Curriculum & Assessment for Music Education," *PMEA News* Fall (2006).

<sup>2</sup>An excellent example of this kind of reinvestigating historical understandings, piecing together disparate knowledge, and making informed guesses to fill in gaps and reverse some previous beliefs is Charles C. Mann, 1491: *New Revelations of the Americas before Columbus* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005).

<sup>3</sup>For a fun book to read on American history that might have been see: Roger Bruns, *Almost History: Close Calls, Plans B, and Twists of Fate in America's Past* (New York, NY: Hyperion, 2000).

<sup>4</sup>Michael L. Mark, *Source Readings in Music Education History*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2002), 77.

<sup>5</sup>Michael L. Mark, Charles L. Gary, A *History of American Music Education*, 2nd ed. (Reston, VA: Music Educators National Conference, 1999), 141-151.

<sup>6</sup>James A Keene, *A History of Music Education in the United States* (University Press of New England, 1987), 155-186.

<sup>7</sup>Edward Bailey Birge, *History of Public School Music in the United States, New and Augmented* ed. (Reston, VA: MENC, 1966), 76-77.

<sup>8</sup>Mark, *A History of American Music Education*, 153.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 166.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 167.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 193.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 73-75.

<sup>13</sup>Birge, *History of Public School Music in the United States*, 107., and Keene, *A History of Music Education in the United States*, 188-201.

<sup>14</sup>George R. Knight, *Issues and Alternatives in Educational Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (Berrien

Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998), 96-102.

<sup>15</sup>Birge, *History of Public School Music in the United States*, 178.

<sup>16</sup>Keene, *A History of Music Education in the United States*, 225.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 227-263.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 268-269.

<sup>19</sup>An important caveat is necessary at this point. It is extremely difficult if not impossible to write history this close to the time period being studied. Perhaps another half-century will need to pass before a truly accurate history of the last fifty years can be written. For now a review organized by decade will have to suffice in order to illustrate what from today's perspective appears to have been intransigence of the profession during most of an extremely volatile near half-century.

<sup>20</sup>*The Contemporary Music Project* was an extension of the *Young Composer's Project* of the 1950s. However, it did seek to expand the perspective and make changes based on problems identified with the original project.

<sup>21</sup>Reimer outlined his philosophy most comprehensively in his 1970 book Bennett Reimer, *A Philosophy of Music Education*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, INC, 1989). He subsequently served as an author of the Silver Burdett basal series in the 1970s and 80s where he promulgated his theory.

<sup>22</sup>"*A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*" Internet [<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/index.html>] accessed 22 October 2006.

<sup>23</sup>Mark, *A History of American Music Education*, 335-336.

<sup>24</sup>Knight, *Issues and Alternatives in Educational Philosophy*, 107-118.

<sup>25</sup>For example see: Mortimer J. Adler, *The Paideia Program: An Educational Syllabus* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984), Mortimer J. Adler, *The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1982), and Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1987).

<sup>26</sup>See Eric Donald Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987). And his "Core Knowledge" series of books for each grade level.

<sup>27</sup>*Arts Propel: A Handbook for Music* (Educational Testing Service and the President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1992).

<sup>28</sup>Clarence Nelson Fritts, "The Historic Development of the Concept of Comprehensive Musicianship in School Bands" (DMA diss., The Catholic University, 1991). Robert Garofalo, *Blueprint for Band* (Galesville, MD: Meredith Music Publications, 2000).

<sup>29</sup>See Ronald B. Thomas, M.M.C.P. *Synthesis* (Americole, 1970), Ellen Winner, Lyle Davidson, and Larry Scripp, ed., *Arts Propel: A Handbook for Music* (Educational Testing Service and the President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1992).

<sup>30</sup>For his most comprehensive articulations of Praxial music education see: David J. Elliott, *Music Matters: A New Philosophy of Music Education* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995). David J. Elliott, ed., *Praxial Music Education: Reflections and Dialogues* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>31</sup>See, for example: William M. Anderson, and Patricia Shehan Campbell, *Multicultural Perspectives in Music Education*, 2nd ed. (Reston, VA: Music Educators National Conference, 1996), Patricia Shehan Campbell, *Music in Cultural Context: Eight Views on World Music Education* (Reston, VA: Music Educators National Conference, 1996), Terese M. Volk, *Music, Education, and Multiculturalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>32</sup>A pivotal moment in the embracing of technology was the creation of TI: ME – Technology Institute for Music Educators in 1995. TI:ME serves as a training and certification organization for music teachers. See [www.ti-me.org](http://www.ti-me.org).

<sup>33</sup>*National Standards for Arts Education: What Every Young American Should Know and Be Able to Do in the Arts*, (Reston, VA: Music Educators National Conference, 1994). Pennsylvania adopted its standards for Arts & Humanities in 2002: *Academic Standards for the Arts and Humanities*, 22 Pa. Code, Chapter 4, Appendix D, (11 January 2003).

<sup>34</sup>*Vision 2020: The Housewright Symposium on the Future of Music Education*, ed. Clifford K. Madsen (Reston, VA: MENC: The National Association for Music Education, 2000).