



Being Musical:

Designing a Music Curriculum Around
Concepts of Authenticity and Relevance

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THE TRADITION, AND SOME QUESTIONS

THINK BACK TO YOUR TIME IN high school and imagine your experience with high school music—whether you were an active participant in music classes or not. The holiday concerts, the state and regional festivals and competitions, the parades, the halftime entertainment at football games, the belting-out of raucous pep music at basketball games—fragments of these memories inform our ideas of what high school music looks and sounds like. No matter how far back these memories go, it is highly likely that they provide a mostly accurate picture of what music education looks like today.

“What would a music program that attracted every student in a school look like?”

This is because, over time, the traditions of high school music have remained remarkably durable and unchanged. Location is no barrier: a high school music program in Eugene, Oregon, will look quite similar to one in Canton, Ohio, or Greenville, South Carolina. No matter the time or place, the American school music program, with its wind, orchestral, choral, and jazz ensembles, represents a kind of permanent model, with one individual program virtually identical to the next.

Indeed, when we think of successful music programs we tend to think of those at large comprehensive suburban high schools with large pools of students to choose from and large, active parent organizations that provide financial and tactical support for their children’s activities. But what about schools

that don’t conform to the suburban comprehensive model: alternative schools, magnet schools, urban schools, small rural schools, small schools within large buildings, charter schools, and the like?

It is not clear that the traditional model is universally applicable to all schools regardless of size or location, the kinds of students that populate the hallways, and the overall educational focus of the school. In fact, the traditional model of music-making—based almost entirely on a performing model in which students rehearse and perform published works of music—seems to miss the point that music is a potent force in our students’ lives beyond the confines of the schoolhouse. What if we wanted to design a music curriculum that took full advantage of that force?

In our work—as a teacher in a small alternative high school for the arts, and a school reform “coach” who works on small school restructuring—several questions drive our thinking with regard to curriculum design for music programs: first, is the traditional model a relevant and effective curriculum model for *all* schools? For that matter, is it relevant and effective for *all* students? Traditional performance-based programs seem to attract, in the best of circumstances, only about 25 percent of a school’s population. Some studies show that the number is closer to 5-15 percent. What would a music program that attracted every student in a school look like?

In addition, we’re constantly wondering

about several other questions:

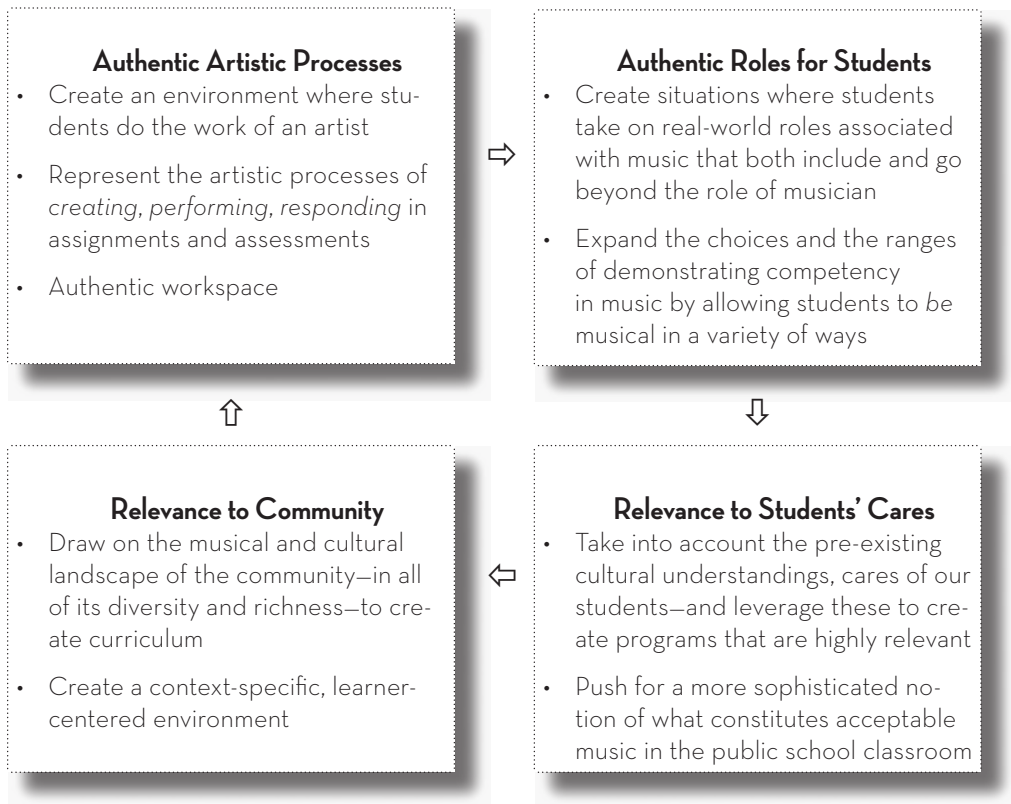
- How does the traditional music curriculum square with the actual musical universe our students live in, which includes diverse styles and genres not addressed in traditional music programs? Kids are hugely interested in music; most care deeply about music. Why don't we work with that care?
- What about communities whose cultural practices don't conform to the largely Western choral/concert band/big band/orchestra literature that pervades traditional classes: shouldn't music curricula be responsive to the communities they are in?
- If we believe in real-world experience in education, including having our students take on the roles of adults in the world of work, then what exactly is the marching band preparing students to do? What would music classes look like if we wanted to produce professional artists, musicians, music critics, or conductors?

Is there an alternative to the traditional large suburban model? When we talk to people about what an alternative approach to music education might look like we usually talk about two things: authenticity and relevance. These two terms—making schoolwork authentic by mimicking or creating real-world situations for our students, and relevant by accessing and building upon the needs and interests of our students—currently command a lot of attention in educational circles. We believe that, in as much as they have an important role in general education, they also have important implications for the music program.

We strongly support the notion of teachers-as-designers, that is, of teachers designing curriculum and learning environments based on the specific needs of their students. To assist in this process we've developed a conceptual framework, Figure A, that consists of four interrelated design considerations based on relevance and authenticity that teachers might take into consideration in order to aid their design process. We describe these as a) Authentic Artistic Processes, b) Authentic Roles for Students, c) Relevance to Students' Cares, and d) Relevance to Community.

The remainder of this article will examine these considerations, which are derived from two sources: (1) our reading of best practices in education (what experts in both music and general education are saying about good educational practice as it applies to music education) and (2) our experience and observations as educational professionals working in and with arts-focused schools. We will also include several short vignettes that illustrate how these concepts work in action from the Tacoma School of the Arts, a new Small School in Washington State, where one of us directs the music program (see Appendix A). We'll conclude by offering some suggestions for curriculum designers seeking to create or reinvent musical learning environments based on authenticity and relevance.

Figure A: Four Design Considerations for Creating a Music Curriculum Around Concepts of Authenticity and Relevance



AUTHENTIC ARTISTIC PROCESSES

THE FIRST DESIGN CONSIDERATION ASKS CURRICULUM designers to create an environment that more closely resembles the workspace of an artist. The traditional conception of music education emphasizes the role of performance, but in reality, art-making goes beyond this simple act of reproduction. The music education thinker and activist Scott Schuler has noted that a comprehensive arts education should involve students in three essential and inter-related processes: *creating, performing* and

responding to works of art (see Figure B).¹

This is akin to opening for students the door to the artist’s workshop, the rehearsal hall, or the recording studio. The student who takes on the role of “artist” understands the important notion that authentic activities and assessments should “replicate authentic, messy, real-world challenges, contexts, and constraints faced by adult professionals, consumers, or citizens.”² This thinking is based on the observation that the experience of the schoolhouse has all too often been divorced from real-world experience. We see this re-

Figure B: **Creating-Performing-Responding Processes**

The creating-performing-responding trio appears as processes crucial to effective arts education in several editions of state arts standards, including the Washington State Essential Academic Learnings in the Arts, as well as language in the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Collectively, these documents relate that:

- **Creating** refers exclusively to the process of producing original works of art. In music this refers not only to composition, where students will compose original musical pieces, but also to improvisation within various musical styles. The process of creating asks students to utilize their creativity and imaginations within structured environments to organize musical elements, forms, and styles into unified and presentable works.
- **Performing** refers to the student's ability to sing and to play instruments in front of an audience. This includes an emphasis on the rehearsal process and effective preparation for performance, as well as the development of proper interpretive skills needed to present music to one's audience in an affecting and powerful way.
- **Responding** has to do with the development of informed and engaged audience members. This asks music programs to educate students in higher-order judgment skills ranging from description of to interpretation, analysis, and evaluation of musical works and presentations. In short, students should become both informed critics and informed consumers of a wide range of musics that include and extend beyond their own cultural and historical worlds.³

flected in the “roles” students often play in schools, that of students, doing the things that *students* typically do: following directions, memorizing isolated facts, and passively listening to lectures.

Authentic work asks students to do the “significant and meaningful” work of adults, producing their own knowledge and making meaning, utilizing disciplined inquiry, and, in general, pointing “their work toward production of discourse, products and performances that have value or meaning beyond success

“Authentic work asks students to do the ‘significant and meaningful’ work of adults.”

in school.”⁴ Creating-performing-responding addresses this by producing a more authentic and real-world representation of the essential facets of art-making by artists. It asks our students to actually be artists and creators, with the responsibilities and problem-solving that that work entails.⁵

This effectively moves us beyond a performance-only emphasis. Each of the creating-performing-responding processes work together and mutually inform one another: to improvise effectively in a performance, the young jazz musician might need instruction in the domain of creating, being able to spontaneously and interactively place musical elements into a presentable performance.

Likewise, in order to be an effective performer it is essential that one's interpretational

and analytical skills be properly honed. In fact, for musicians, listening is a foundational skill, essential to the development of one’s craft. Being able to sing or play an instrument requires the developing musician to be able to listen critically to herself in order to evaluate technical proficiency and the quality of her own performance. She should also be able to listen critically to the works and performances of others to guide further exploration and ground those explorations in the performance standards and norms of the domain.⁶ As music teacher Daniel Newsome nicely sums up, “creativity can begin with their own responses as listeners and continue with the emergence of their own voices as performers.”⁷

At the Tacoma School of the Arts (SOTA), we see the three artistic processes in action. In the school’s innovative Songwriting and Audio Recording Program, for instance, students are asked to create original musical works. Central to this enterprise are songwriting courses that introduce musical concepts to students who then demonstrate their learning individually and in small groups by creating, performing, and recording original songs. The basis of this approach is the process of response in the form of music theory: students and instructors analyze the elements of great songwriting in terms of form, melodic and harmonic devices, lyrical elements, and the like. With this knowledge, students can then compose their own songs or musical arrangements of the works of others. The school has constructed a multitrack recording studio where students can perform, create, and document their musical endeavors.

Authenticity extends to the workspace. Upon

entering any of SOTA’s three buildings one is struck by how little these buildings resemble a “school” as we know it. Instead, it is most noticeably “real world”: the facilities look like a collection of workshops set up for the specific purpose of exploration in the arts, humanities, and sciences. There are dance studios, science labs, a photo darkroom, a professional recording studio, and various performance spaces, mixed with what might more accurately be described as traditional classroom spaces. The school spills out beyond its buildings as well: classes of ten exist in museums, office buildings, university classrooms, and performing arts centers in order to make the best use of community partnerships and resources, and to put SOTA students into authentic environments in close proximity to practicing professionals.

AUTHENTIC ROLES FOR STUDENTS

WE’VE USED THE TERM “AUTHENTIC” ABOVE to describe how the creating-performing-responding processes are a more accurate representation of what it is truly like to be an artist. But in our next design principle we ask curriculum designers to consider more and different ways that people can *be* musical.

Look for a moment at the way in which the philosopher of music education Bennett Reimer has utilized the Music Educators National Conference (MENC) National Standards for Music Education (see Appendix B) to visualize the various roles associated with music.

In Figure C, Reimer has taken the standards (the left column), and associated particular roles with each (the right column), then sepa-

Figure C: **National Standards for Music Education**
(as restructured by Bennett Reimer)

| | Standard | Role |
|---------------------|--|--|
| Musicianship | 1. Singing, Playing | Performer |
| | 2. Improvising | Improviser |
| | 3. Composing | Composer |
| | 4. Arranging | Arranger |
| | ↑ Reading and Notating Music ↓ | |
| Listenership | 5. Listening | Listener |
| | 6. Analyzing, Describing | Theorist |
| | 7. Evaluating | Critic |
| | 8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts | Psychologist, Philosopher, Neuroscientist, Educational Theorist, etc. |
| | 9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture | Historian, Ethnomusicologist, Anthropologist, Sociologist, etc. ⁸ |

rated the two horizontally by the categories “Musicianship,” and “Listenership.” The category that comprises “Musicianship” refers to any situation in which the student produces sound. The student who plays or sings is indeed a “performer,” just as the student who composes takes on the moniker “composer.” “Listenership” refers to those roles that engage people as audience members. This expansion of roles allows Reimer to delve deeper into perspectives that define what it means to be musical, with each role representing a unique way of knowing or of understanding music. Here the student involved in music might take on the rather obvious roles of “theorist” or “critic,” but also might take on roles not so obvious, and definitely those that move beyond

disciplinary boundaries: the neuroscientist, for example, or the anthropologist.

In this, the context again changes from schoolhouse to the real world, as the history student takes on the role of the historian for instance. This approach to authenticity answers the perennial questions posed by students, “why is this important?” and “how will I use this when I grow up?” by actually providing a working context that demonstrates exactly why the activities are important, and how they are relevant to the future possibilities that may lie before a student.⁹ Roles

therefore could take center stage in the design of student projects and performance tasks in which students play the role of an ethnomusicologist who is pursuing a line of inquiry on the rhythmic heritage of a jazz shuffle, or a historian who is investigating the influences, relationships, precedents, and antecedents of a famous classical composer.

With an expansion of the roles associated with being musical, the boundaries between the discipline of music and other disciplinary areas begin to blur. The well-rounded musician might need to know something about psychology or neuroscience in order to describe what is happening during the listening process—or, for that matter, the creative and/or the performance process. It is here

where students not ordinarily thought of as “music” students might engage in the musical experience. Students in an English class might put their critical and interpretive skills to use by working with popular music lyrics. Team teaching, guest artist-teachers, special collaborative units designed by an interdisciplinary group of teachers, student peer teaching, and such methods as project-based learning, are all techniques that could aid in this broader exploration of music and culture.

Reimer’s model further broadens our conception of what music education might look like. This model amounts to a “rebalancing” of the music curriculum: not a rejection of the traditional performance-based curriculum, but an expansion into areas that can appeal to broad segments of a student population in a school. In fact, Reimer’s goal is to help educators craft a music program that reaches all students, not simply those who have taken band, choir, or orchestra in lower grades and have moved up the ladder of technical proficiency. He calls for nothing less than a “comprehensive” approach that enables all students “to develop their awareness of the role that music encompasses in their culture, so that these roles can be appreciated, understood, and seen as the repertoire of musical possibilities open to all.”¹⁰ This is thinking big: music and music education are placed into a larger, deeper, more comprehensive context which expands upon the possibilities available in an environment limited just to performance.

At SOTA, students take on the tasks of professionals by engaging roles such as professional

musician, composer, arranger, record producer, and recording engineer. In the conservatory program for traditional band and orchestra instruments, the fall term is devoted to small ensemble work. Students audition for placement in various chamber ensembles: string quartets, flute quartets, piano duets, and the like. Music instructors “float” from group to group acting as coaches for these ensembles, each of which then perform at a culminating concert in December. Students, in the manner of professional musicians, must confront the notion that they are ultimately responsible for their performances.

Likewise, in the school’s Songwriting and Audio Recording Program, audio recording courses cover the basics of physics and acoustics, wiring and signal path, studio recording procedures, electrical safety, and the roles and uses of various effects in the recording and mixing process. Students in these courses take on the role of professional audio engineers: they are in charge of recording, mixing, and mastering all of the songs written by students in the songwriting classes.

This emphasis on authentic roles is also enhanced by the presence of artists-in-residence. Students are exposed to outside artist-teachers who share the skills that they regularly employ in their own roles as working professionals. Artists-in-residence are instrumental in the arts focus of the school, teaching such courses as African Drumming Ensemble, Audio Recording, and Film and Video Production.

RELEVANCE TO STUDENTS’ CARES

FOR THIS DESIGN CONSIDERATION, WE DRAW from a classic tenet of progressive education

that says that learning environments can and should be *relevant*; that is, they should take into account the passions, knowledge, interests, understandings—indeed the *cares*—of the students they serve. The curriculum can then build upon those pre-existing interests and understandings in order to more effectively reach those students. As author Lisa Delpit writes, “education, at its best, hones and develops the knowledge and skills each student already possesses, while at the same time adding new knowledge and skills to that base.”¹¹

Music curriculum should take advantage of this definition of relevance, if only because a vast majority of our students are *already* musical. It should go without saying that students place a high value on popular music forms. In fact, many students display what can only be described as a higher form of musical literacy, often demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of the music they love. This is an understanding that is usually associated with expert knowledge: we’ve seen otherwise disinterested students come alive when discussing their favorite music, rattling off seemingly arcane details and historical and cultural antecedents to elements of their favorite artist’s work.

Education thinker Nel Noddings has suggested that it is possible to demand much from students who are “passionately interested” or engrossed in a discipline or subject,

“.....
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 to bring more students into the
 educational process by accessing
 their passions and interests.”

attending to the “full rigor and beauty of the disciplines they study.”¹² We would suggest that music programs work with this passionate engrossment, building upon it to create meaningful learning experiences in the arts, as well as across the disciplinary spectrum.

Of course, opening up to the experiences of our students might mean that our conception of what constitutes acceptable music in the classroom would also need to be broadened. This is especially important when we are speaking of schooling in highly diverse communities, where students’ musical worlds might span a multitude of genres and styles. Music can serve as a tool to bring more stu-

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 dents into the educational
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 ics have noted, music
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 production and performance throughout the
 last century.¹³ An effective and relevant music
 curriculum might need to adjust our notion of
 what acceptable music looks like in order to
 reflect meaningful characteristics of our stu-
 dents’ music, their cultural sensibilities and
 values, and to engage more—or all—of our
 students.


The music program at SOTA reflects the real musical landscape at this particular moment in history. Western canonical works are performed on traditional instruments, but the program recognizes that there have been many important changes in music—including an electronic revo-

lution—over the past five or so decades. There is an esteemed place for the contemporary music that has so transformed modern popular culture. This music, far from being ignored, is treated as a valid topic for study and is brought into the curriculum as an effective teaching tool.

According to one SOTA teacher, relevance to students' cares and interests is woven into the fabric of the music curriculum: "I am a fan of a wide variety of popular music, including many artists that my students enjoy. I have a passion for figuring out what makes a song work and teaching students to think this way also. We utilize a process of reverse engineering similar to the analysis and composition process in traditional music theory courses.

Secondly, the daily routine in songwriting courses is that I may spend a day or two covering a new topic (such as modulation by secondary dominant) and then use the next four to six class sessions as open studio where students work individually and together. This is important time for them because the students get to know each other, form groups, exchange roles (I'll play guitar on your song if you'll sing on mine), and most importantly, engage in peer-learning. The students will teach each other as much or more than I could hope to teach them."

RELEVANCE TO COMMUNITY

UR FOURTH AND FINAL CONSIDERATION IS closely related to the third. While curriculum designers should consider the cares and interests of their students as the basis for creating curriculum, they should also pay close attention to the cultural practices that

take place within their students' respective homes and community. Just as the passions and interests of students can drive aspects of curriculum, students' cultural practices can also serve as a basis for learning.

The editors of *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School* stress that the design of learning environments should be "culturally appropriate," or "culturally responsive," that is, sensitive to the cultural understandings of students from diverse communities.¹⁴ And Gloria Ladson-Billings, a noted commentator on issues pertaining to equity and multicultural education, has written that teaching—especially in African American contexts—can be "culturally relevant," which is to say that the curriculum should reflect the cultural traditions and the history that students bring with them into the classroom. "Culturally relevant teaching," she writes, "empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes."¹⁵ Taking into account students' culture both authorizes that culture as a source of student identity, and provides rich material on which to build learning experiences. Borrowing from this thinking, a music program might build in some context specificity: teachers might begin by looking at the communities their students live in, looking for the natural cultural—and musical—literacy that their students might access on a daily basis. A program could then construct ensembles and learning experiences around the traditional cultural practices of its student population.

We know, for instance, of a high school

in Seattle whose music program features a mariachi band—a culturally relevant ensemble given that Latino students make up 23 percent of that school’s student population. The school reports that by working with the cultural practices of the student’s community, overall student achievement and attendance improves. In fact, the dropout rate at this particular school, reported at 17 percent, is half of the rate for Latino students at surrounding high schools, a situation that school officials attribute to this culturally relevant musical ensemble.¹⁶

Considering relevance to students’ community builds upon the consideration of relevance to students’ cares by honoring and legitimizing the traditions and cultural practices that students might bring with them from home. Schools in general, and music programs in particular, can leverage these traditions and cultural practices to engage—or further enhance—students’ participation in the educational experience.

The resulting model of music education is one that is well grounded in communities—sometimes highly diverse communities.¹⁷ It recognizes that students may already be fluent in cultural practices which perhaps need to be discovered and built upon by educators. Most of all, this approach can bring a vibrant and meaningful dynamic to our ever more multicultural communities. As author Lisa

Delpit writes, “diversity of thought, language, and worldview in our classrooms cannot only provide an exciting educational setting, but can also prepare our children for the richness of living in an increasingly diverse national community.”¹⁸

RESPONDING TO EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

AT THE OUTSET OF THIS DISCUSSION we asked whether traditional music education programs meet the needs of all students in the schools within which they exist. By concentrating on relevance and authenticity we have

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tried to give music and arts educators a way to respond to the changes that are occurring in education in general. Throughout, we have talked about seeing beyond the performance-only focus of many programs, which, we admit, amounts to questioning the assumptions that underlie

our educational traditions.

We are not indifferent to the value of tradition which can give a program identity, direction, and provide standards of excellence. But tradition also has the power to ossify practices. It can, as philosopher of music education Estelle Jorgensen writes, “stifle imaginative action and make it difficult, if not impossible, for musicians and educators to forge new approaches and to adjust and react to societal changes.”¹⁹ Indeed, we have encountered just as many music educators who feel hamstrung

by the traditional paradigm as we have educators who feel threatened by block scheduling and small schools.

Jorgensen’s point is not that change and innovation are always warranted—indeed, there is a dark side to change for the sake of change. Her point is that educational programs must carefully navigate between the poles of change and tradition based on a thoughtful reading of the “particular and changing circumstances of times and places” in which a school exists.²⁰ It is the social context that is at the heart of questions of change and tradition.

It is our belief that the music—or the arts—program can act like an engine within a school. It is, after all, a primary place where students learn to value high quality products and develop and appreciate excellence of technique in the schoolhouse. It is our firm belief that building on this—by introducing to students a love for authentic work, as well as introducing a relevance to their lives and communities—further enhances the learning experience and engages a powerful love of learning. In the face of this, creating new traditions based on the needs of our students seems our paramount responsibility.

DESIGNING AUTHENTIC RELEVANT MUSIC CURRICULUM: 21 SUGGESTIONS

AS A WAY OF BRINGING THIS discussion to a close, we offer some suggestions of concrete actions that you can take in designing your curriculum. These suggestions are loosely grouped from easiest (tasks that are

easiest to accomplish) to more demanding (tasks that might require more time and effort). We have also included a list of resources and further reading in Appendix C.

Overall Curriculum Design

1 Examine local, state, and national standards—many of which emphasize a broader, more comprehensive approach to music education—to familiarize yourself with what is expected of you, your program, and your students.

2 Familiarize yourself with the language and techniques of curriculum design. Many frameworks such as *Understanding by Design* or *Teaching for Understanding* give concrete steps for turning standards, big ideas, and questions into authentic and relevant learning activities for students.

3 Collaborate and forge connections with other staff and/or disciplines to integrate the learning. The above frameworks provide tools that make this easier. For example, physics plays a crucial role in understanding acoustics, as math does in the construction of instruments or music analysis, and visual arts history links to music history.

Consideration 1—To Increase Authentic Artistic Processes

4 Create an atmosphere of authenticity: see your band room as a rehearsal studio or your school’s auditorium as a professional performing arts center to enable students to see themselves in the role of professional practitioners.

5 **Introduce** a course that deals with music technology. Audio recording, MIDI, computer music, etc., to immerse students in the music of the twenty-first century and engage them in the process of creating, composing, and arranging.

6 **Introduce** Theory/Composition/Western Music History course sequence to give students the tools to create and respond to musical works. Include as much composition as possible.

7 **Forge** community connections with performing orchestras, youth orchestras, etc., to give highly talented students an opportunity to play at this level outside of school. Involve students in the larger community and supplement the decreased emphasis on large performing ensembles in the school.

Consideration 2—To Increase Authentic Roles for Students

8 **Strive** to engage students in adult roles—audio recorders record and mix on modern technology; songwriters write, perform and record songs; bassoonists play in small and large ensembles, play solo recitals, and study theory and history. Do as a real practitioner in the field does.

9 **Create** projects, exhibitions, performance tasks, etc., that ask students to take on authentic roles such as music critics, cultural historians, composers, arrangers, music therapists, and so on.

10 **Introduce** an annual course for seniors (or juniors and seniors) in which they

plan, practice for, research, and write programs for a recital to engage students more authentically in the role of the professional musician.

11 **Bring** in real-world artists and hire artists-in-residence to bring authentic artistic voices into the learning experience.

Consideration 3—To Increase Relevance to Students' Cares

12 **Introduce** classes like songwriting—with no prerequisites—that teach students music concepts (standards) to utilize the music of their lives. This could include a combination of popular music and music of a dominant ethnic population of students in your school.

13 **Introduce** ensembles requiring no prior musical training, i.e., African drumming, marimba construction and performance, to include students with little or no middle school training in ensembles.

14 **Replace** multiple large performing ensembles with expanded course offerings to broaden and deepen music education and foster a higher level of individual musicianship.

15 **Use** the money that annually fuels the machine of modern band/orchestra/choir model to educate more students at a higher level. Don't buy that third tuba, instead buy electric guitars, amplifiers, and a drum set.

Consideration 4—To Increase Relevance to Community

- 16 **Examine** your school's demographic data in order to better understand your students' ethnic and cultural makeup.
- 17 **Take** a "cultural field trip" around your school's surrounding neighborhood; talk with shopkeepers, social service providers, and community leaders and ask them for their perceptions of your school, their thoughts on culture, curriculum, and how they might be of help.
- 18 **Have** your students write, journal, and talk about their own culture.
- 19 **Introduce** ensembles that take advantage of the particular cultural practices that might be present in your student population.
- 20 **Introduce** a rotating curriculum of courses centered on music cultures of the world: i.e., Music of Sub-Saharan Africa, Music of Native America, Popular Music of America 1950–present, etc. Align these with the themes your school might be working with to integrate the learning and continue to expand the notion of acceptable music.
- 21 **Educate** your community: educate administrators, parents, and students about what you are doing and why in order to involve them as valued members of the community.

APPENDIX A

THE TACOMA SCHOOL OF THE ARTS (SOTA) is a public alternative school that gives South Puget Sound-area students access to high quality instruction in a small, personalized environment. Formed as a small public school, SOTA has created a learning community where students from every socioeconomic level have the same access to high-level arts and general education that is often available only to more affluent families.

SOTA is nestled firmly within Tacoma's revitalized cultural district, between a new branch campus of the University of Washington, several major regional art and historical museums, and performing arts centers. Its location serves as the perfect place for a new school emphasizing the arts and meaningful partnerships with community organizations.

More information can be found at <http://www.tacoma.k12.wa.us/schools/hs/sota/>

APPENDIX B

THE NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION, published by the Music Educators National Conference (MENC):

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments.
4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines.
5. Reading and notating music.
6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.
7. Evaluating music and music performances.
8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.
9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

More information can be found at <http://www.menc.org/publication/books/standards.htm>

APPENDIX C

THE FOLLOWING READING LIST WILL PROVIDE YOU with additional resources on arts and music curriculum and standards, curriculum and project design, authenticity, cultural relevance, and the philosophy of music education.

Arts and Music Curriculum and Standards

Connecticut Bureau of Curriculum and Instruction. (2002). *A Guide to K-12 Program Development in the Arts*. Hartford, Connecticut: Connecticut State Department of Education. Available online at <http://www.state.ct.us/sde/dtl/curriculum/currart.htm>

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Markham, T., Larmer, J., and Ravitz, J. (2003). *Project Based Learning Handbook: A Guide to Standards-Focused Project Based Learning for Middle and High School Teachers*. Novato, CA: Buck Institute for Education.

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Authenticity

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NOTES

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- ² Wiggins, G. (1996). Practicing what we preach in designing authentic assessments. [Electronic Version] *Educational Leadership*, 54 (4); 18-26. Assessment Design Standards section, ¶ 3.
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- ⁴ Newmann, F. M., and Wehlage, G. (1993). Five Standards of Authentic Instruction. *Educational Leadership*, 50 (7); 8-12, p. 8.
- ⁵ Authenticity has much to do with engagement: Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has noted that “the opportunity to meet serious adult standards” is crucial to student engagement with a learning activity. Quoted in Scherer, M. (2002) *Do Students Care About Learning? A Conversation With Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi*. [Electronic Version] *Educational Leadership*, 60 (1); 12-17.¶ 10.
- Fred Newmann also writes that student motivation is enhanced by meaningful “participation, connection, attachment, and integration in particular settings and tasks.” Newmann, F. (1989) *Student Engagement and High School Reform*. *Educational Leadership*, 46 (5); 34-36, p. 34.
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- ⁷ Newsom, D. (1998, Fall). *Rock’s Quarrel with Tradition: Popular Music’s Carnival Comes to the Classroom*. [Electronic Version] *Popular Music and Society*, Whose Agenda? section, ¶10.
- ⁸ Reimer, p. 253.
- ⁹ Daniels, H., Bizar, M., and Zemelman, S. (2001). *Rethinking High School: Best Practice in Teaching, Learning, and Leadership*. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann, p. 132-133.
- ¹⁰ Reimer, p. 252.
- ¹¹ Delpit, L. (1995). *Other Peoples’ Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*. New York: The New Press, p. 67.
- ¹² Noddings, N. (1992). *The Challenge to Care in the Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education*. New York: Teachers College Press, p. 172.
- ¹³ The composer Libby Larsen (n.d.) has suggested that, while music and the context in which music is made, have undergone major transformations in the last century and a half, music education has, for the most part not changed—at least it has not kept up with the rate of change within the culture. Music in this time has been influenced by social changes such as cultural migration patterns and we have seen the emergence of music out of churches and concert halls and into the realm of recorded sound over the airwaves on radio and television. In the last 60 years music has been transformed from a mostly acoustic to a mostly electronic medium. It has moved from an activity that was once predominantly performance-based and is now predominantly based in listening.
- Music education has largely ignored these changes, opting instead to cling to a homogeneous, decidedly Western-European-inspired model of choral and instrumental music. Hence, Larsen says that music education is “working at cross purposes with the music of our culture” by failing to represent the enormous diversity in musical styles that have arisen in the recent past. See: Larsen, L. (n.d.). *MENC Vision 2020 Conference Address*. Retrieved August 20, 2004, from <http://www.libbylarsen.com/ResourcesMENC.html>

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- ¹⁵ Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, p. 18.
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- ¹⁷ When we talk about looking closely at the cultural practices that students bring with them, we do so with the understanding that schools with overwhelmingly “white” populations might see themselves as somehow non-diverse or perhaps without cultural diversity. The reality might be more complex: we encourage teachers to “uncover” the cultural practices that exist in their immediate locales. The Buck Institute’s *Project Based Learning Handbook* for instance, suggests that students and educators “map” their respective communities by asking students to reflect on probing questions about their communities. For instance, the exercise begins with these questions: “What are the cultures in the community? How many cultures exist? Describe them.” Mapping your communities in this way could lead to some interesting discoveries. See: Markham, T., Larmer, J., Ravitz, J. (2003). *Project Based Learning Handbook: A Guide to Standards-Focused Project Based Learning for Middle and High School Teachers*. Novato, CA: Buck Institute for Education, p. 23-24.
- ¹⁸ Delpit, p. 66.
- ¹⁹ Jorgensen, E. R. (2003). *Transforming Music Education*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, p. 41.
- ²⁰ Jorgensen, p. 44.

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THE SMALL SCHOOLS PROJECT BEGAN IN September 2000, and is funded by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The Project provides technical assistance to new small high schools and conversion schools, primarily in Washington State. Assistance is provided in several ways: through our website, professional development activities for educators and school board members, publications (generally available at no charge on our website), consultant services, and the Small Schools Coaches Collaborative (SSCC).

The Small Schools Project currently works with 34 high schools on an ongoing basis, 17 of which are in the process of converting from large comprehensive high schools to small, focused schools.

The SSCC provides technical assistance in the form of school coaches to schools that receive reinvention grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The Collaborative is a partnership of the Small Schools Project, the Coalition of Essential Schools Northwest Center, and the National School Reform Faculty.

This paper is the first of a series addressing structure and design elements of successful small schools. As part of this series, during spring 2005, we will publish a paper describing the successful humanities program at Sedona High School in Sedona, Arizona. We anticipate publishing additional papers during 2005–2006 that highlight other design ideas that help make small schools successful. Future topics in this series may include exploring the structures, beyond advisory, that schools are designing to support personalization, and examining how schools are reducing teachers' student load.

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