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Non-Performance Music Classes: Benefits & Hurdles

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Educational

Non-performance music classes are inherently inclusive, whereas ensemble classes often exclude a large portion of the student population. Music programs that embrace non-performance classes, alongside their typical ensembles, are able to increase the impact of the lives and education of more students. These classes help students “meet both musical and broad education(al) learning goals” (Abril & Gault, 2008).

Greater Impact

A broad array of non-performance music class offerings can attract students that would not be interested in taking an ensemble based music class. These courses lead to musical opportunities that would not otherwise be available, even to students who are enrolled in performing ensembles. Non-performance music classes can include offerings such as:

- Music Theory
- Guitar/Ukulele
- Hip Hop
- History of Rock and Pop Music
- Music in Society
- Song Writing
- Sound Design

Benefits of the wide variety of music classes include greater listening skills and/or musical creativity. The class atmosphere, attributed to the wide-ranging backgrounds of the students who take them, enhances students' education.

Administrative

Administrative hurdles can lead in two opposite directions: lack of administrative support or offering non-performance courses for the sole purpose of fulfilling administrative needs. Many schools do not have music requirements, even though principals believe that the arts are essential. Other administrators offer non-performance music classes, but not with the students' best interests in mind.

Instructor

Some teachers do not believe that non-performance music classes are important. Others may see the benefits, but not feel supported or prepared enough to confidently teach anything other than ensemble classes. Instructors also have a significant voice in which type of non-performance class to offer. Although this could be seen as a benefit, it can also disregard the interests of the students.

Social and Emotional

Non-performance music classes provide social and emotional supports in ways that other music classes do not. The more social atmosphere of these classes leads to students finding their inner-voice and creating a supportive musical community with their peers. This environment increases the student's sense of self-worth.

Lack of Training

Many current teachers feel that a lack of training holds them back from wanting to offer non-performance classes. Many undergraduate music education programs, based in Western ensemble music practices, fall short in providing meaningful preparation for future educators to teach non-performance music courses.

Inadequate Resources

Underfunded music programs, coupled with subpar facilities, create nearly impossible conditions for offering non-performance music classes. Since these classes are not as widely offered as ensembles, starting a new course requires funding and support. Some principals cited the high cost of music classes as a reason to exclude them from the curriculum.

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