

General Music Curriculum Framework Document

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This page is created to facilitate curriculum development for practicing educators and preservice teachers in the general music setting. It is designed to provoke thought about the rationale for planning and delivering curriculum, ultimately focusing the philosophy, goals, objectives, lessons, activities, and assessment measures so that each part is directly related to and reflective of every other part of the document. The major general music textbook series provide outlines of curriculum scope and sequence which can be adapted for entire programs. It would be quite beneficial to familiarize yourself with the curricula offered through your state education departments as well as those presented in the texts. Certainly, you will want to see *The National Standards for Arts Education* (MENC, 1994). After reviewing these curricular models, you can begin to work through the process of drafting or refining your curriculum with the following. This page is designed to help the educator to formulate, rethink, and refine curriculum to meet the particular needs of his/her students.

If you decide to take the time to work through this process, you will undoubtedly find that you will begin to question the reasons that you deliver curriculum in a certain way. This is healthy! We should be asking ourselves questions about planning, philosophy, and delivery in order to remain current and effective. You are encouraged to do some soul-searching in this process and to view other curricula in order to present the best possible curriculum for your program and your students.

This project is offered as a model or template from which to plan a sequential, meaningful curriculum with fundamental learning experiences for all children. It is based on the premise that general music is comprised of the elements of **melody, harmony, rhythm, and form** to which all other musical elements are related. None of these should be ignored at any grade level, but rather enhanced in order to demonstrate a higher level of sophistication with each successive grade. The general music learning experiences should include **singing, moving, listening, performing, composing/improvising, and reading/writing (literacy) music in each class meeting**. A basic “rule of thumb” in designating time to each component is to use one minute of time per activity equal to one year of age of the children. Hence, 5-year-olds can typically be expected to focus for 5 minutes on singing or moving before they “need” to change activities. Thus, in a 25-minute K music class, you could expect to change activities 5 times to maximize the attention span and learning capabilities of the students.

When children have had successive years of well planned and delivered general music instruction and have actively participated in these experiences, the outcome can be very substantial in terms of their skill level, knowledge, and competency with **reading/writing, singing, performing, moving, composing/improvising, and listening** to music. They also will demonstrate meaningful learning through their positive attitudes, acquired through skill development related to positive learning experiences. Therefore, the “end product” of that learning should demonstrate that students have acquired a basic and fundamental working knowledge of music.

There are two terms that are typically used with respect to curriculum: *scope* refers to the breadth of the curriculum, i.e., its inclusions. If you can envision a straight horizontal line, a line from point A to point B, if you will, you could “see” a curriculum. It encompasses the broad skills and competencies. The *sequence* is the specific order in which each particular concept is introduced and continually refined. In terms of visual presentation, it is vertical. Both scope and sequence should appear as an inverted funnel of sorts with the K students learning very basic skills regarding melody, harmony, rhythm, and form. As each grade level is completed, the funnel should be “expanding” due to the added skills and competencies gained at each level.

Part I: Guides for Writing Curriculum

A. The Philosophy of Music Teaching and Learning

The first step in attending to a project and document of this magnitude is to verbalize the philosophy which guides the music program. To do this, please make a list of the following:

- * What is your rationale for teaching general music? Why is it important to do so?
- * Why is it important for students to learn about music and attend music class?
- * What benefits does music learning have that are relegated only to music learning? What do students learn/achieve in music that they cannot gain in any other curricular area? Why is it important to learn for the sake of music?
- * What are the broad goals for your program and students?
- * What are the more specific goals for your program and your students?

B. The Goals for the Elementary General Music Program

The second step is to articulate the broad goals for the general music program. Step back, so to speak, and see if you can envision the scope of your program. How does it look? How should it look? What changes are imminent? Think about the following questions and respond to these on paper, and then analyze your responses to ensure that the goals can be traced directly to the philosophy. There should be corresponding themes.

- * What is important for each grade level to attain each year?
- * Is an obvious sequence already intact?
- * Is the sequence reasonable and age-appropriate?
- * Do these goals align with those at the middle- and high-school levels so that the students will experience consistency in their learning?

Reread your goals. With these firmly in mind, list your objectives for each grade level for each month of the school year. Next, check your objectives for each level for each month of the year, being sure to connect these to the year-end goals. There should be an integral connection between the objectives, the goals, and the philosophy to ensure program consistency. Finally, list specific objectives each for **singing, moving, listening, composing/improvising, performing, and reading/writing music**, relating these to the monthly and yearly objectives and goals.

C. Conceptual Learning in the General Music Program

Now that your goals and objectives are in place, site the specific concepts that you will introduce at each grade level. You will need to articulate the refinements that will be made at each grade level so that your program goals are met in terms of skills and competencies. Bear in mind that your students will have preferences for different ways of learning. Some of the students will learn primarily through visual means, i.e., icons; some will require active learning, i.e., physical engagement in activities; some will respond well to the learning of symbols of music, i.e., rhythms and melodies; some will prefer thinking about and reflecting on their experiences with which to draw conclusions; and some will learn best through a combination of learning presentations. Therefore, it will be necessary to present each concept in aural, visual, physical, and symbolic ways to maximize the learning potential of each student.

D. LOTS and HOTS Learning

There are a variety of ways and means by which the students will learn. LOTS refers to lower-order thinking skills, those relegated to the acquisition of simple facts and knowledge, e.g., the piano is an instrument. Comprehending (see Blooms' Taxonomy of Learning) is one step beyond the knowledge level, offering a basic understanding of an idea or concept, but still resides firmly in the LOTS category. While a certain amount of learning will first require LOTS, the ability to challenge students to move into the realm of HOTS, or high-order thinking skills, is very important. HOTS will allow the students to apply their knowledge, to analyze and self-correct, to synthesize information from a variety of sources, and to evaluate their progress as well as that of the group. When students can apply their knowledge of music, can analyze for themselves, can synthesize and evaluate, they have been given skills and competencies which will allow for life-long learning to occur.

At this juncture, you will need to analyze your program delivery. How will you respond to these:

- * What forms of LOTS occur at every grade level?
- * How frequently are LOTS the only kind of learning transpiring within a class period?
- * What levels of HOTS are occurring in the classroom?
- * Do HOTS occur in every class period?
- * How should LOTS and HOTS be integrated in terms **of singing, moving, listening, composing/improvising, performing, and reading/writing music?**

E. Outcomes of Learning

At this point you should have the framework of your curriculum already in place. What yet remains is the articulation of the skills and competencies that will be attained by the students each year. In other words, what should students at each level know and be able to do? What are the specific outcomes that can be directly traced to the goals and objectives you have established?

F. Active Learning in General Music

Meaningful learning experiences are requisites for life-long skills to accrue. Review your goals, objectives, concepts, and outcomes once more. List particular activities in which you will engage the students so that they will acquire skills and competencies. Keep in mind that active learning is typically much more effective, efficient, and long-lasting because the senses are, in essence, “bombarded.”

More specifically, you must now make literature choices that will be worthwhile, motivating, and important in order to provide a general, fundamental base for your students in ***singing, movement, listening, composing/improvising, performing, and reading music***. Review your choices to ensure that these logically prepare and lead the students into subsequent levels which are age-appropriate and are comprehensive in terms of a variety of styles and genres of music.

G. Threading the Concept

Herein lies, perhaps, the most critical part of the curriculum. Within each lesson there should now be a focus on one concept, e.g., tempo. Rather than presenting a host of unrelated activities, the threading or threaded approach continually reinforces one concept, providing a variety of ways for students to learn within the confines of a class meeting. The focus on the concept and only that concept for that lesson will demonstrate how it pervades all aspects of music as well as facilitates the verbal, visual, and physical reinforcement of the that concept. The obvious, concerted focus within the context of each class provides powerful learning experiences through intensive dedication to the idea via ***singing, moving, listening, composing/improvising, performing, and reading/writing music***. The result is that the students have been immersed in learning a concept in a most productive way, one that is very similar to way we acquire language skills; we hear conversations and replicate sounds, ideas, and patterns from listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Lesson Plan Example: note the elements of the lesson and manner in which the concept of AB Form is integrated or threaded into all aspects of the lesson, serving to fortify the conceptual learning. This lesson is targeted for third grade general music.

Reading/writing: Introduce the song *Land of the Silver Birch* by having the students read the title, identify where the song originated and its classification (it is a Canadian folk song), and guide the students in clapping the rhythm of the verse and refrain. Drawing attention to the verse and refrain will already alert them that there are two sections of the song.

Singing: Have the students listen to a recording of the song, following the rhythmic notation. Teach them to sing the verse, referred to as the A section of the song, and then the refrain, known as the B section because it differs from A. Rehearse the first verse/refrain and have the class sing without the teacher.

Movement: Instruct the class to form a standing circle. Have them maintain a steady beat by patsching, rehearsing what they will perform during the verses of the song (use the recording to assist this). Ask a student to improvise a different movement during the refrain and have the class follow the improvised pattern. As you rehearse this and play the recording, verbally signal the class to patsch the verses and improvise during the refrains, using the terms A and B also.

Performance: Verbally prepare the students to use classroom percussion instruments; model the manner in which they can make their choices and handle the equipment. Instruct them to do the following: 1. Maintain a steady beat on the first verse, A, and improvise on the refrain, B, rehearsing this once before attempting this with the recording or piano; 2. repeat for verse two to instill the changing sections; 3. ask them to play the rhythm of the words on verse three and improvise on the refrain. Another tactic with performance is to ask the girls to sing a verse and the boys to sing the refrain, alternating their sections.

Composing/improvising: With their percussion instruments, ask a student to invent an introduction for the song, one which fits the tempo and style of the song. Ask another student to create a short coda. Rehearse these as soli or as group performance and then perform the song similarly to the earlier performance suggestions.

Listening: Introduce a new listening experience with a recording of *La Raspa*. Ask the students to actively participate in the listening by physically identifying the form: to show the A section by making the letter A with two fingers of one hand and the crossbar with a finger of their other hand; to show the B section by drawing the letter “in the air” (because it’s easily seen by the teacher for assessment purposes); and to show a different section, if there is one (there isn’t), by improvising another sign.

LOTS Learning: This is lower-level thinking, basically referring to recall and acquired knowledge of ideas and information. Asking the class to identify the kind of song, its place of origin, and reading the words are examples of LOTS learning.

HOTS Learning: Higher-order thinking skills includes application, synthesis, evaluation, and those kinds of thinking skills that require some sort of repositioning of the knowledge. Reading the rhythms of the song as the introduction (this is a new arrangement of rhythmic patterns previously learned in other songs) requires an application of knowledge. Improvising the B section of the song requires applying the concepts of meter, rhythmic duration, and semblance of the beginning and end of the piece (form) drawing upon synthesization skills. Listening to the new example of literature also allows them to apply their working knowledge of AB form to a new situation.

H. Assessment of Learning in General Music

A variety of assessment measures now need to be designed and utilized that will provide accurate and comprehensive evaluations of each student. The utilization of several kinds of measures will offer a more accurate “picture” of each child’s learning. You must measure the concepts and skills for which you have planned, reflecting the variety of learning the students have accomplished visually, aurally, physically, and cognitively. Therefore, you will need to assess different kinds of learning within the context of different kinds of activities.

I. The Curriculum

The document that you have designed should now be quite comprehensive, articulating a clear presentation of the philosophy and goals that drive your program. You are encouraged to work with all other music educators in your respective buildings in order to truly maximize the degree, quality, consistency, and kind of learning that each student will experience. Share this document with your administrators, for they will see that general music is not a mere service for classroom teachers to have planning time, but rather one in which the learning in general music is well planned and delivered with the ultimate goal of producing students who are becoming life-long learners and consumers of music.

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