

ALL IN

Identifying Your Musical Learners

By Elizabeth Sokolowski

The key to success is you.

We all want success. Success for ourselves, our programs, and most of all, for our students.

We want to reach the highest graduation and attendance rates. We want to help our students have the highest in social, emotional and intellectual capacities and the highest levels of citizenship. We want our students to have a lifelong relationship with music. And we want them to have the grounding in music that will help them achieve in life.

For each of us to evolve from good music teachers to great music teachers, we need to build success on the pillars of trust: honesty, integrity, dignity, ethics, and sensitivity.

Developing quality relationships is the bridge to guarantee success.

This part of the ALL IN series shows how identify the students you work with, the community in which you teach, what is relevant to your students and the community; and how to make connections to your curriculum and evolve your music program.



ALL IN: THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

What are those qualities found in the exemplar music educators that result in a life-changing experience for students? Through their curricula and practice teaching, collegiate programs do a good job of preparing teachers. The graduates of these programs understand the basics of pedagogy and musicianship. Yet, the great music educators have that “something extra” which goes beyond the material and concepts covered in school. It is that “essence” which empowers the Ninja music educator to have a profound impact on students, inspiring them to succeed not only in music but in life. Students who study music stay in school and demonstrate higher GRADUATION rates than those who do not. The evidence is broad and deep that music learning improves a student’s academic achievement. But the best programs even further strengthen test scores and grades, and lay the groundwork for success in professional life following school. Behind each and every outstanding program is an outstanding teacher.

What is it then that stands apart the model music educator? Such an educator:

- 1) Believes in him/herself as someone who can make a difference
- 2) Is inspired, passionate, AND persuasive
- 3) Is primarily interested in the PEOPLE s/he is teaching and working with
- 4) Is able to make personal connections
- 5) Is a music missionary

How can I, as a music teacher, create, revive, or invigorate a program than can reach my students, help grow them, and increase the likelihood that they will graduate? I should:

- 1) Investigate and determine whom I am serving. I need to make a sensitive and strategic assessment to learn what music-making modalities already strongly live in the community. It is important to consider what kinds of music-making might engage or be interesting to this body of students. I must remain open to a variety of musical styles and genres.
- 2) Perform an honest self-evaluation of my unique special interests, biases, and skills. I should consider all possibilities, be willing to free myself from a particular approach to music-making and embrace what may already exist in the community.
- 3) Develop ethical but real personal connections with the students. It is personal relationships that allow me to grow as a human being and to succeed as a music teacher.
- 4) Develop relationships with colleagues, administrators, parents, and citizens in the community
- 5) Become a well-informed, compelling advocate for music educations, able to motivate and persuade stakeholders of the core value of the music program
- 6) Become a dynamic and determined fundraiser, equipped to generate significant resources to advance the programmatic mission.

As music educators, it is imperative to know and understand the students we serve. Our responsibility is to provide a thorough and sequential music education program that is rooted in musical skills and understandings. Connecting the content to what is musically relevant to our students is a critical bridge to build as we establish value and meaning on our music programs. Designing opportunities within our course curriculum that are sensitive to and supportive of the interests of our students is critical to musical growth. What do we need to know about our musical learners to provide a relevant music education experience?

The questions posed in this part of the ALL IN series are designed to help you identify concretely the students you work with, the community where you teach, what is relevant to your students and the community, how to make connections to your curriculum, and how to evolve your music education program.

For more information on the ways that curriculum can connect to the Core Music Standards, see nafme.org/standards.

REFLECTING, PLANNING, AND DESIGNING

What do I need to know about my musical learners to provide a relevant music education experience? Work through the process questions and prompts, providing your own answers in place of the Reflections, Planning, and Design provided. (These observations are developed as some that might occur in an urban setting.) You might only need to work through some of the questions; this depends upon the resources currently available to you in your school, and the type of implementation of new and relevant musical experiences you are envisioning for your students.

Who are my musical learners? What do I need to know about my musical learners to provide a relevant music education experience? Scenario: Urban Setting	
Process Questions and Prompts	Reflections, Planning and Design
1. How many students are in your school district?	In my school district there are approximately 100,000 students.

<p style="text-align: center;">Who are my musical learners?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">What do I need to know about my musical learners to provide a relevant music education experience?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Scenario: Urban Setting</p>	
Process Questions and Prompts	Reflections, Planning and Design
2. How many students are in the school where you teach?	I teach in a smaller local elementary school that serves a neighborhood within the city. Approximately 300 students in grades K-5 attend this school.
3. What is the ethnic/socioeconomic landscape of the school community?	The ethnic landscape consists primarily of a population of Caucasian and Hispanic students. Families are in a lower socioeconomic status, most working in service industry positions within the city limits.
4. What are the traditions/events that are meaningful to your students and their families? These can be family-based and/or community based.	In this community, there is a rich Polish and Catholic tradition among the Caucasian students and their families. The local churches play an integral role in the lives and social aspects of these families. Within the Hispanic population in the community, most families predominantly speak Spanish as a first language, especially among the older generations. These families focus their social and familial endeavors around the rich traditions of their heritage, especially in regard to music and food.

<p style="text-align: center;">Who are my musical learners?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">What do I need to know about my musical learners to provide a relevant music education experience?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Scenario: Urban Setting</p>	
Process Questions and Prompts	Reflections, Planning and Design
<p>5. What are the musical interests of your students, their families, and the community?</p>	<p>The Caucasian students in the community listen primarily to popular (Billboard 100) music. Their musical interests often inform their dress, language and behaviors in social settings, as they emulate their favorite artists and bands. Some students in this population play school owned instruments as a part of the instrumental music program, but few students own their own band or strings instruments.</p> <p>The Hispanic students listen to popular music, but are also immersed in more traditional and cultural forms of music, popular Hispanic artists and music, and tend to engage in music making in the Mariachi style. Most students in this population play instruments outside of school but do not play a traditional band or orchestra instrument in school. Students in this population dress within their economic means, most typically in basic and available clothing; some new and most consigned or handed down.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Who are my musical learners?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">What do I need to know about my musical learners to provide a relevant music education experience?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Scenario: Urban Setting</p>	
Process Questions and Prompts	Reflections, Planning and Design
<p>6. How can you evolve your music curriculum/music program to provide the depth of sequential music education while bringing the relevance of student (and potentially community) interest into the classroom?</p>	<p>My role as a music educator in this school community is to provide general music to the children in grades K-5. Ways in which I can evolve my curricula and the materials and resources I use to support the sequential curricula are:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">To make connections to music that interests my students and to incorporate this music into my lessons.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">My elementary curriculum focuses on the elements of music – I can find ways to teach these elements in ways that are relevant to my students – whether through songs they like, through rhythms and beats in popular or traditional songs, to write songs in the style of what they listen to, and to learn quality singing strategies through melodies (without the lyrics) of songs they listen to. We can study form of popular music and connect to the more traditional examples currently provided in my curriculum, and also identify key musical elements like dynamics, time, tempo and articulation in the popular music of today as an extension of learning these key musical elements. Maybe I can incorporate bucket drumming into the classroom – we can learn different popular beats and apply various elements of music to our playing- application is key to student engagement and I think that buckets would be a great way to get all kids engaged in playing.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Who are my musical learners?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">What do I need to know about my musical learners to provide a relevant music education experience?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Scenario: Urban Setting</p>	
Process Questions and Prompts	Reflections, Planning and Design
<p>7. How can you incorporate in your music education curriculum those musical styles/genre/traditions that are valued by your students, their families and the community?</p>	<p>I can incorporate the rich traditions of our students and their families that are valued by my students in the following ways:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">With the rich traditions in our community, we can bring these into our classroom. Perhaps asking community ensembles to come and give performances for our students, and to focus certain lessons on the rich traditions that our students celebrate with their families and social/church communities outside of school. We can make connections to their musical heritage within our curriculum and extend and transfer our learning. If possible, we can also invite students to sing and/or play music that they play in the community during class.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">We can learn folk songs and/or songs that are important to the communities that serve our school to support our curricular goals.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">I can seek out via the internet great performances that relate to the traditions of my learners to use within my lessons to teach the goals of my curriculum and the elements of music.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Finally, I can investigate opportunities to bring new types of learning to my students through the ensembles and types of music that is relevant to their lives. Perhaps we can start a guitar program and students can learn how to play basic chords to the songs they like and they can learn to play and sing the popular music they enjoy outside of school. I can also work with community members and seek out organizations that can bring a Mariachi program to our school, as an after school endeavor.</p>

8. Now that you have identified what is relevant to your students, and you have thought about ways to re-design your curriculum to incorporate new modes of teaching and learning music through their interests, what materials and resources do you need to make this plan actionable? This is the time to create a list of what you will need, and the cost involved.

List of materials and resources needed to achieve my goals:

I have a classroom set of books and various instruments that we can utilize to bring popular music into our curriculum as an extension to our foundational learning of the elements of music.

I have a computer and a sound system, so playing musical examples is something I already do, but what I will need is the opportunity to purchase some new/popular music. My home and school association (parents organization) often asks for “wish list” items. Perhaps I can ask for an iTunes gift card so that I can begin to update our musical library at school. This will also allow for me to choose appropriate popular music that we can connect to our classroom.

BUCKET DRUMMING: I will need large plastic buckets and 25 sets of drum sticks. I can seek out local hardware stores or businesses that might donate buckets for our classroom and I can price out basic drumsticks from various online retailers to see where I can get the best price.

GUITAR PROGRAM: I will research if there are any organizations that offer grant opportunities to purchase guitars and training (as I am not a guitar player and will also need to learn some skills). I will also price out the cost to purchase 25 guitars for my classroom, and I will compile the information to give to my principal for consideration. I will also list the benefits of engaging in playing an instrument to support the musical learning of my students as a part of my proposal.

MARIACHI PROGRAM: I know that we have many community members engaged in mariachi. I will reach out to the parents of my students whom I know are musicians in this genre and I will invite them in to my classroom to perform for our classes. I will also seek out mariachi ensembles within our community to find out if there are ways in which we can begin a program at our school, either during school or after school. Once I have collected the information about how we can do this, what it will cost, and if there are any grant opportunities to begin a program, I will provide my principal with a

<p style="text-align: center;">Who are my musical learners?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">What do I need to know about my musical learners to provide a relevant music education experience?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Scenario: Urban Setting</p>	
Process Questions and Prompts	Reflections, Planning and Design
	<p>detailed plan and will schedule a meeting to review my ideas.</p> <p>For both the guitar and mariachi program ideas, I will also seek out local music vendors to see if they have interest in supporting these initiatives. Perhaps they can help me to find better pricing and/or would provide instruments at cost.</p>

Who are my musical learners?

**What do I need to know about my musical learners to provide
a relevant music education experience?**

Scenario: Urban Setting

Process Questions and Prompts	Reflections, Planning and Design
<p>9. What is your timeline for implementation? Identify the steps needed from the initial proposal to your school administration, to the curricular modifications, teacher training and student implementation necessary for success.</p>	<p>I have some great ideas listed above, but this is a lot to tackle in one year. I am going to start with bucket drumming and expanding my music library. During this year I will begin to make connections with community members to see if we can have some mariachi ensembles come in to play for our students. Hopefully during this year as I get to know community members I can learn more about how to bring a mariachi program into my school, but this will take some time. Perhaps there is a way to connect a guitar initiative with mariachi, but there is much to explore and so I will take my time to learn as much as possible, to put a solid plan together, which I can then take to my principal for consideration.</p> <p>YEAR 1:</p> <p>Purchase drum sticks. I have a modest budget and can make these my priority.</p> <p>Seek out bucket donations from local hardware stores.</p> <p>Write curricular components to connect buckets to curriculum and elements of music.</p> <p>Write lesson plans to incorporate buckets.</p> <p>Request an iTunes gift card donation from my home and school organization.</p> <p>Purchase popular music to use within my curriculum, and which I can also use with bucket drumming.</p> <p>Write lessons plans to connect purchased new music to curriculum and elements of music.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Who are my musical learners?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">What do I need to know about my musical learners to provide a relevant music education experience?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Scenario: Urban Setting</p>	
Process Questions and Prompts	Reflections, Planning and Design
<p>10. What training will you need? What will this cost? Is there a course you can take? Is there online training available?</p>	<p>For the Year 1 plan I will not need any training. I will just need the time to plan and re-organize my lessons. For the mariachi and guitar program ideas, I will research cost for training. I will look to take a course where I can extend my guitar skills and perhaps take a course on mariachi.</p>
<p>11. Are there organizations that can provide support and guidance for this implementation? And/or other schools or teachers that you can reach out to who have implemented a similar program, unit or lesson?</p>	<p>I know that there are a few other schools in my district where guitar and mariachi is used. I will email these teachers and ask if I can meet with them to ask how they got started and how they implemented these ensembles into their curricular program, and/or how they have created after school opportunities for students. I will also ask my principal if during the school year I can go and observe these teachers so that I can learn how they teach guitar and mariachi.</p>
<p>12. What support, financially, do you need from your school administrator to deploy your plan? Make an itemized and very detailed list of all expenditures and a rationale for the resources needed and how this implementation will positively impact your students.</p>	<p>For the YEAR 1 items (buckets and drum sticks) I can use my \$100 allocation for materials and supplies. I will need to purchase 30 pair of drumsticks (25 total for students, a pair for myself for guided instruction and a few spare pairs). So, I will need to seek out sticks that cost roughly \$3 per pair. If I can find them locally, I can pay a bit more, but if I purchase them online I need to account for shipping. I will request a \$25 iTunes gift card from the home and school organization, as 25 new popular tunes will allow for me to seek out popular music for every grade level that is age and developmentally appropriate.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Who are my musical learners?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">What do I need to know about my musical learners to provide a relevant music education experience?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Scenario: Urban Setting</p>	
Process Questions and Prompts	Reflections, Planning and Design
<p>13. Are there community and/or business leaders you can reach out to in order to make your plan a reality? To help support this implementation?</p>	<p>For the mariachi component of my idea, I will speak with some local music vendors to see if (1) they can help me to learn about the needs for a mariachi program and (2) if they can connect me to any local community members, and especially those individuals who might have students in my school, so that I can set up a meeting to discuss my idea of beginning a mariachi program in my school.</p>
<p>14. Are there grants available to support the implementation?</p>	<p>In regard to grants for my guitar program and mariachi program ideas, I will also ask this question of the local music store vendor and I will search the internet for different opportunities and organizations that might cater to programs for schools and/or children.</p>

REFLECT – ACT – TRANSFORM - ENGAGE

Our teaching evolves over time as our experiences in the classroom and with students inform the decisions we make about our teaching. Our delivery, our planning and preparation, the classroom environment we create, and the ways in which we engage with all stakeholders in the educational community - our professionalism – all contribute to provide us with opportunities to learn and grow each year.

At the heart of education is YOU, the teacher.

You are the one who makes a difference in a student's educational life.

You are the one who brings the learning alive.

You are the person that leads, impacts and inspires every student in your class.

Every day.

Education is consumed with using assessment and student achievement measures as barometers of teacher quality. However, a fundamental necessity in the teaching and learning process is for the teacher to reflect upon and be aware of his or her strengths and to identify areas of growth. If we focus on addressing our own abilities and needs, this will only serve to strengthen student performance and understanding in our musical classrooms. The following matrix provides the opportunity for us to be honest with ourselves about how we are performing as teachers, and to appraise our own teaching capacity to personally evolve as music educators ... for the benefit of our students.

Use the prompts in the “reflect” column to replace the “Reflect upon my teaching” observations with your own self-reflections. Then, do the same with the act, transform, and engage charts.

Remember that to be at your best, you need to rate your own teaching – and remember that teaching is an art form.

REFLECT	<i>Reflect upon my teaching...</i>
<p>What do I do well as a teacher?</p> <p>What are my strengths?</p>	<p>As a teacher I feel as though I have a great rapport with my middle school students, especially in the ensemble classes that I teach. I am highly conscientious in my planning and preparation for both the ensemble and general music courses that I teach.</p>
<p>Where are my areas of growth?</p> <p>What can I be doing better?</p>	<p>In the general music classroom I need to do a better job of making the content in the curriculum more engaging, and to have students more involved in the learning. I do a lot of lecture style format teaching due to the nature of the course content, and often students do not get to apply and use their knowledge.</p>
<p>How can I best serve my students?</p>	<p>I can best serve my students in the general music classroom by finding ways to design learning that allows for students to create and experience music beyond hearing about it. I can also look to the relevance of the content I am teaching in regard to the types of music that my students consume. While we are learning about the various historical periods of music, I can find ways to tie content and musical elements we learn about to more popular music and the music that my students are listening to. I guess I can better make connections between the historical foundations of music and today's popular music.</p>
<p>Am I providing a musical learning environment that is attune to both the curricular needs and the personal interests of my students?</p>	<p>I am definitely addressing the curricular components of the general music course but I am not really doing a great job of making the content relevant to the personal interests of my students. I should find ways that are appropriate, timely and connect to the curriculum to incorporate what I know interests my students musically.</p>
<p>If not, what can I incorporate/do/design/establish/begin/provide for my students to make their musical learning relevant and useful in their lives?</p>	<p>I should also have a conversation with my students to really learn and understand what interests them musically. Again, I have perceptions, but I have never really engaged in a conversation about what they listen to and like in popular music. Then, I can connect their interests to the course content and even find ways in which we can make music instead of always being in the "sit and get" mode of learning that is typical for my students. While I try to mix up my modes of delivery - listening examples, video clips, lecture and book work, the application of concepts and elements is where I need to grow my planning and design of learning.</p>

ACT	<i>Act upon my reflections...</i>
<p>What can I change/evolve in my teaching, in the classroom environment I create, in my curriculum, in my planning and preparation, in my delivery of the curriculum, and/or in my professionalism to positively impact musical learners in my classroom?</p>	<p>Once I learn from students what music is relevant and meaningful to them, I can begin to incorporate some of this music into my lesson plans. Say perhaps we are discussing form, or even harmonic structure of a piece of music - if I can connect this to similarities and differences of what they listen to, they will be interested and might even find the historical repertoire we are listening to interesting. If I acknowledge and use music that they enjoy, I think this will be key.</p> <p>I can also find ways to better engage students in the “doing” of the learning. Perhaps I can find times to take them to the computer lab where they can go on a web quest to find information about what we are learning about. Maybe I can ask them, after learning and as a homework assignment to bring in a recording of a piece of music they listen to that has similarities to what we are learning about from a particular historical period in time.</p> <p>Perhaps I can look to begin a bucket drumming component that connects the rhythmic elements of classical music and popular music of today. This would be a relatively inexpensive way to get students engaged. Another idea is to seek out ways to bring guitars into the classroom - we could learn and apply the content in the curriculum through guitar as well as learning popular tunes. This however, will be a much greater expense and some planning will be needed. I will also need to brush up on my guitar skills as it has been quite some time since I have played guitar myself.</p>

ACT	<i>Act upon my reflections...</i>
<p>What pedagogical or curricular changes can I make to make more meaningful and relevant the musical opportunities I provide for my students?</p>	<p>I think I can go through the current curriculum and identify authentic places where we can make true connections to historical music and music of the present day. This will take some time and planning, but if I can insert specific places where we can make these connections and even a transfer of learning, I think the students will respond favorably.</p> <p>Another way we can change our practice is to involve more technology in how we learn. Students are so technological these days, how can I bring more technology into my classroom so that students can actively engage in not only learning about the musical styles and elements in the curriculum, but in ways that they can create music?</p>
<p>What is my blueprint for personal and professional improvement as a music educator?</p>	<p>My improvement needs to begin with a serious look at how I have been teaching and to ask myself what is working, what needs to be updated, and how can I make my middle school general music curriculum more engaging and a place where kids can create music as much as they learn about it. I should probably seek out some opportunities to take a graduate class or even a workshop that can help me to update my teaching practices and to learn new ways to bring the curriculum to life.</p>

TRANSFORM	<i>Transform my teaching...</i>
Put the blueprint into action	<p>My blueprint will begin with a T chart: on one side of the T chart I will make a list of all of those teaching and learning practices in my classroom that I think are valuable and that my students truly learn from. On the other side of the T chart I will list outdated practices. In response to these outdated practices or ways in which I think my students are bored or not engaged with the content, I will brainstorm ways in which I can transform my lessons to be more creative and interesting to students.</p> <p>My blueprint will follow with me seeking out some professional development opportunities to help update my teaching practices and to get some new ideas from others in the field. These might be graduate courses or workshops that I can attend.</p> <p>The next part of my blueprint will focus on updating materials and resources I use in the classroom. Specifically I will price out a classroom set of drumsticks and seek out a donation of a classroom set of bucket drums for use in my class. The bigger investigation will be into developing a guitar program. I think there are so many ways in which guitars can help us to learn the course content which is more historically oriented (we can still play this music!) as well as incorporate learning how to play music that the students relate to. I will need to investigate if there are any organizations out there that support guitar classrooms, cost for acquiring a set of classroom guitars and some resources to support what we are learning, and I will also need to get some additional guitar lessons myself so that I can be best prepared to teach my students guitar.</p>

TRANSFORM	<i>Transform my teaching...</i>
<p>Select the actions identified above that you feel you can proactively put into practice to evolve your teaching to benefit your students and their musical learning?</p>	<p>The first thing I can do is to review my curriculum and make updates. There is no expense to this, but I need to allot the time to do so and to then update my lesson plans.</p> <p>My next short term goal is to get some buckets and sticks. This is relatively inexpensive, and will immediately add an interest and engagement piece to my classroom.</p> <p>My next short term goal is to get my students to the computer lab and/or using technology more. I can begin with the resources we currently have, experiment with these and plan and prepare for use of technology. This too will provide a hands on learning experience in a medium that students find very relevant.</p> <p>My longer term goal is to begin a guitar program. This will take much more time and development, but I think in the end if we can bring guitars into the classroom we will be able to respect and apply the curriculum currently in place and to design some new learning that connects to the music that students are listening to today.</p>
<p>Have an honest conversation with yourself about WHY you teach and WHAT you teach, and HOW your learners engage in making musical meaning.</p>	<p>Honestly, I teach music because I love music. As a child I started learning the flute in the 4th grade and ever since I have been passionately involved in making and teaching music. Music impacts my life in so many ways and more than anything, I want to share this passion and love for music with my students... unfortunately what I have missed in the general music classroom is the importance for my students to be making and creating music actively and often. My ensemble classes are great because they lend to this consistent playing and creating of music. I need to get beyond presenting “just the facts and the timelines” in my general music classes, and get these kids making music as often as possible. In order to understand the concepts I am responsible for teaching, my students need to be DOING music!</p>

ENGAGE	<i>Engage my teaching...</i>
<p>Make a commitment to engage yourself in the transformation of your teaching practices and to engage your students in relevant musical learning to the best of your ability.</p>	<p>In making this commitment, I will begin with reviewing what is in place knowing that my teaching practices and the ways in which I give students the opportunities to learn about music needs to evolve.</p>
<p>If not, what can I incorporate/do/design/establish/begin /provide for my students to make their musical learning relevant and useful in their lives?</p>	<p>I need to think about and learn about the types of music, the artists, the modes of listening and consuming music that my students value. Then, I need to make curricular connections to what is relevant to my students.</p>