

How Music Education Policies Come to Be and What Teachers Can Do

Lucas Brown

MUSC 777

Northern State University

Dr. Wendy Van Gent

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In the article *How Music Education Policies Come to be and What Teachers Can Do*, Ryan Shaw (2020) discusses many of the different aspects of education policy, and curriculum among music educators. Shaw describes ways that these policies are used and how music educators are required to include these policies in their classrooms for the tested subjects. Many of these test subjects are included in non-academic subjects to help in raising test scores. However, these policies do not always allow students to take part in arts classes, which may actually help with their growth and in raising grades.

In a brief description on how politics ends up in our classrooms, Shaw (2020) talks about the different ways that we as educators can get involved in creating policies and being the music education activist allowing our voice to be heard. Shaw states that it is important for Music Educators to always be current with the present legislation and to follow the meetings of the education policy makers so that we can lend our attention and present a voice if necessary. When curriculum and policy decision directly affect what is taught in the music classroom, Shaw suggests that music educators need to get involved so that our subject matter is not diminished in value. These decisions are directly affected by budget, compensation, expenditures, and even scheduling problems. These problems need to be addressed by those it will affect, the music educators.

Shaw (2020) presents an idea that these policies often effect our classrooms indirectly, creating what Shaw calls collateral damage. Shaw states that collateral damage in music education is the aftermath of the other policy making efforts negatively impacting the original policy effort. This brings the problems of general subjects into the music classroom, requiring music teachers to include activities that reinforce those subjects that are assessed in tested

subjects, not allowing students them to take arts classes, which affects program growth, retention, and recruitment. This collateral damage creates problems within the arts programs, and later causing possible cuts, this was seen largely in high minority, high poverty settings, and areas with low socioeconomic status.

When No Child Left Behind (NCLB) expired, teachers were required to affectively include more activities that focused on the use of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). These standards have asked all teachers to teach ideas and concepts such as argumentative writing, mathematics, and so many other topics. These topics are not necessarily related to the music curriculum but with the all hands-on deck mentality, this was thought as a way to possibly raise tests scores. Shaw (2020) states that in the NCLB era, music education policy experienced “triage,” to help with the improvement of the schools and districts test score averages. This is where double blocking was strongly enforced.

Another instance of collateral damage in music education policy making is with economic career competition, and Career Readiness Programs. Shaw (2020) states that the use of Art integration is introduced to provide enrichment in the core subjects. This was also used in larger scale efforts, especially in turn-around schools. Shaw mentioned a quote from Michelle Obama, she stated that Arts education should not be added, but rather we should start with it as a beginning. This is a means to an end, setting schools up for success in non-Arts priorities.

Twenty-first century skills are skills that include creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration in music education which have become a crucial skills says Shaw (2020). But with the interdisciplinary focus for other non-arts priorities in STEAM education, the arts are now integrated into subjects such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. If we look deeply, music already teaches these subjects, so why is it that we find

ourselves trying to fit, when we already fit in? Many times, music education is left behind in the full spectrum of development of students and the development of strong foundational policies.

Shaw (2020) goes further to discuss what he calls eleventh-hour additions. These additions are goals that bring in the music education goals into non-music specific policies. He mentions that with the list of “core” subjects music was not first considered, but later added when the list was expanded to eight subjects instead of the initial five. Shaw talks about the passing of NCLB and how the focus was primarily on math and reading (ELA) but demonstrates how this was detrimental and effected the growth of music classes. With the decline and the hollowing of programs, staffing cuts proved to be detrimental in music education. Shaw states that when all standards were updated, music was not even considered about until 2014. Educators took it upon themselves to create and update the standards. This was a non-federal funded movement, and it wasn’t even mentioned.

As music educators, we are setup in a weak position in our school’s curriculum and development (Shaw, 2020). We see that sometimes that this is the only way to achieve music education outcomes in the public-school setting or even higher at the state or federal level. Shaw (2020) says that as music educators we truly need to be activists in our work no matter how harrowing it may be. If we are active in the policy and curriculum creation process, we are more apt to have a stronger standing in and for the education of all students.

References

Shaw, R. D. (2020). How Music Education Policies Come to Be and What Teachers Can Do.

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