

Setting a Strong Foundation for Music Students within Jackson Public Schools

Ramon Jackson¹

¹Jackson State University

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Abstract

This specific issue can be addressed by developing a plan to enhance student's sight-reading skills, prepare them for auditions and improve tonality through optimal and appropriate breathing techniques.

Introduction

Music has evolved to become an essential part of modern life. In the context of education, music is a crucial subject that can impact positively on the life and achievement of students. It is for this reason that schools around the world have embraced music education and made it a critical component of the curriculum. According to Yudkin (2008), music education refers to the learning and teaching of music and related elements and concepts. In particular, it touches a wide range of areas and domains such as the acquisition of knowledge, development of musical realm, and internalizing of musical components. Since music is regarded as a fundamental component of human behavior and culture, many nations have embraced the practice of teaching music from preschool all the way to post-secondary levels of education (Rauscher & Zupan, 2000). However, it is essential to state that nations and schools often take different approaches to music education (Register, Darrow, Swedberg, & Standley, 2007). These strategies and methods are determined by a broad spectrum of factors such as history, culture, and politics (Register et al., 2007). These differences notwithstanding, music remains a critical aspect of human culture and a fundamental element in the modern education system.

Music education entails teaching children how to play different instruments such as recorders and keyboards, singing in choirs, and understanding elements of musical creations (Overy, 2000). In other cases, students are taught about the history of music and given opportunities to develop their artistic skills by performing in musical ensembles like orchestras, choirs, and concert and school bands (Overy, 2000). Later on, at the post-secondary level, students can receive academic credits after taking various courses related to music. Irrespective of the level of education and the curriculum in question, music education usually involves individualized, community, and lifelong learning contexts (Schellenberg, 2004). The students take various musical lessons that enable them to develop their skills and capabilities. In this sense, it is evident that music is a critical feature in the modern education system that can significantly influence the future and achievement of students.

Music education advocates and researchers have stated that music is an important subject that can enhance academic achievement among students. In particular, they have argued that music can improve knowledge in various areas and subjects such as science, mathematics, history, foreign language, physical education and geography (Rauscher & Zupan, 2000; Schellenberg, 2004). Other researchers have suggested that students who take music classes tend to perform better in tests that measure various elements of spatial-temporal lobe activities compared to those who do not study music (Rauscher & Zupan, 2000; Bosacki & O'Neill, 2013). The

spatial-temporal lobe activity is critical because it related to the study and understanding of mathematics, engineering, and science. In other contexts, it is argued that music programs can help in improving students' desire to learn (Bosacki & O'Neill, 2013). Also, it provides a strong learning foundation that helps in building student's capabilities and skills (Rauscher & Zupan, 2000; Schellenberg, 2004). Without music lessons, especially for young students, teachers may not be able to provide a strong foundation for education and learning. Therefore, schools and educators must work hard to provide opportunities for students to learn music and improve their levels of achievement.

Problem Statement

Music is a universal language that provides opportunities for students to advance to their highest levels of achievement. Music offers students and teachers a means of personal expression and acquaints them with the environment. However, educators, schools, and other stakeholders in the education sector have a role to play in using their musical abilities to cultivate a continuous growth of children in understanding music, skills, and knowledge. Jackson Public Schools is one of the institutions that strive to promote music education and create opportunities for students to improve their skills and abilities. However, the institutions face challenges that may compromise the music education initiatives and programs.

Music sight-reading is one of the primary weaknesses and a critical crippling factors within the Jackson Public School's Music Department. Each year, instrumental bands and choirs perform before judges to receive a rating. Band, Choir, and Orchestra Directors. These bands are often placed under enormous pressure to perform in many school functions throughout the year. In the long run, the pressure and well as the unbearable demands hamper the foundation of implementing sight-reading and various techniques. Therefore, it is critical to come up with a plan that can help in improving sight reading skills. This study aims to develop a plan that can help in increasing increase sigh-reading skills and knowledge, to musically prepare first-year students for auditions, and enhance tonality through better breathing techniques.

Research on Music Education

Music education is part of the education system. Research shows that music education facilitates and supports the learning of other subjects in schools. Also, it can enhance the skills that students use in a wide range of areas of life (Randles, 2014). In this sense, music is a rich subject that improves the skills and experience of children as they sing, listen, and move. While exploring the significance and role of music, researchers have noted that making music entails more than the voice or fingers playing instruments. Instead, it requires students to tap into multiple skills and simultaneously use them to learn music. These are critical issues that students must be trained on from time to time for them to benefit from music and other related practices. The integration of the skills into the learning process makes student better learners and put them on the right track to a prosperous future.

Further attempts have been made to improve music education due to its role in language development. Researchers contend that one of the leading areas that music affect among young learners is language development. Others scholars have argued that language development is vital for learners, especially during the early years of schooling (Randles, 2014). Children usually come to the world when they are ready to decode words and sounds. However, music can go a long way in improving their natural abilities in language (Randles, 2014). Also, music reinforces the language skills that children acquire at birth. Existing research evidence shows that musical training can physically develop the side of the brain that influences the processing of language. The relationship between language development and music is socially advantageous. Thus, music can be used to make students verbally competent.

The link between music and increased IQ is the other area that researchers have focused on the recent years. Previous studies have reported that music can contribute to a substantial increase in IQ among children. In particular, musically elements and components such as piano lessons can increase the IQ of children and enable them to succeed in a wide range of academic tests. It is, however, worth noting that the increase in IQ can only be noticed when music lessons are delivered over an extended period (Bosacki & O'Neill, 2013). Thus, the continuous teaching of music in schools can help in improving the IQ and the academic performance

of learners. However, further studies are required to validate the claims. Additionally, the studies should focus on determining the type of music lessons that can contribute to significant improvements in IQ and academic achievement among students.

In other instances, researchers have reported that the brain of musicians, including the young ones, tend to work differently from the non—musicians. The recent years have witnessed an explosion of information and research findings of the working of the human brain. Similarly, new imaging methods and techniques have allowed neuroscientists to review the functioning of the brain and assess the factors that influence it in one way or the other (Bosacki & O'Neill, 2013). The efforts by neuroscientists to study the brain have also provided more answers about the significance and role of music in human development and learning processes. In other instances, it has led to more questions and mysteries regarding music. These questions revolve around reasons why human beings are musical, the manner in which music is processed in the human brain and the strategies that can be used to achieve optimal learning of music (Register, Darrow, Swedberd, & Standley, 2007). Research evidence shows that the human brain can engage in and respond to music. Moreover, the musical brain often operates from the day of birth and persist throughout the life of a human being (Register, Darrow, Swedberd, & Standley, 2007). However, ongoing musical training and learning can affect the organization as well as the functioning of the musical brain. The process entails the alteration of the extensive neural systems that affect cognitive, affective, and motor functioning.

Over the years, there has been a sustained attempt by neuroscientist to study sound production and processing in human beings and other animals. Also, studies have been done to explore fetal responses to music and assess how the trend changes in the course of development (Bosacki & O'Neill, 2013). In other cases, a sample of the special population has been used to study different aspects of music production and processing in human beings. The results from the studies show that music is a critical factor that influences the working of the human brain.

When people listen to music, they acquire and learn vital skills that enable them to live a better and fulfilling life. It is also important to state that music is a species-specific trait linked to humankind. Thus, all human beings have some form of music that influences their biological processes in one way or the other. However, this does not mean that all human beings have a natural guarantee of becoming musicians. Instead, humans have the capacity to participant in and respond to music in their living environment (Overy, 2000; Butzlaff, 2000). In this regards, music is considered as one of the hallmarks that makes us human being. Much of the literature that supports this particular notion often comes from anthropologist studies. These studies have argued that all human beings tend to engage in musical behavior at any given time. The studies, together with the neurological evidence provide mounting evidence in support of human engagement in music (Register, Darrow, Swedberd, & Standley, 2007). In this regards, it is apparent that music has a serious implication on education. Also, music education is something that should not be reserved for those with talent or restricted to people whose parents can pay for the classes. Instead, every human being should get an opportunity to be involved in music.

Although researchers tend to anthropomorphize animal traits and behavior, it is not possible to determine the actual processes that take place in the brain with respect to music. The understanding of the music and sound making processes in the human brain are complex processes that require further studies (Bosacki & O'Neill, 2013). Despite this being the case, the impact of music on the human brain is something that has not be questioned. Instead, research has shown that when an individual is playing an instrument or singing, he or she uses more of the brain compared to someone who is not engaging in any musical undertaking. In fact, neurological studies have carefully examined brain images of children undergoing music training and practice and found that they were linked to excellent motor skills and sound discrimination (Overy, 2000; Butzlaff, 2000). Furthermore, the brain images show significant changes in the network of the brains that influence motor tasks and sound discrimination. Therefore, the teaching of music in school is a method that can be used to enhance the functioning of the brain and prepare students for future tasks and undertakings.

The other benefits of music education are often seen in the manner in which it influences the development of children. Existing literature shows that a great and exciting song can light the eyes of children and

encourage them to move around or dance. In other cases, such songs tend to instill a sense of confidence in children (Bosacki & O'Neill, 2013). Other studies have reported that musical can significantly contribute to the development of children by enabling them to acquire critical language, fine motor, and cognitive skill and abilities. In this context, children who engage in music from time to time are better placed to acquire such skills within a short time compared to their counterparts who rarely take part in music (Overy, 2000; Butzlaff, 2000). Furthermore, these children experienced desirable brain development and cognitive outcomes such as better memory and improved critical and abstract reasoning. Within the context of academic achievement, music is known to contribute to child development but enhancing their math skills and literacy capabilities. The strong neurological pathways associated with musical patterns tend to give children the skills needed to succeed in math and acquire critical language and thinking skills.

Still, within the context of child development, some studies have shown that music education can inspire creative thinking and build confidence among young learners. Whether it entails creating lyric or dancing to beats, children often tap into their inner creative spirits to succeed. Also, they leverage on the inter-hemispheric communications taking place in the brain to remain creative (Register, Darrow, Swedberd, & Standley, 2007). As learners continue to indulge in music in one way or the other, they also build their level of confidence. The trend is partly attributed to the fact that music gives children an opportunity to express their skills. Furthermore, it gives them the chance to enhance their skills and perform in front of other people, peers included. Therefore, educators can rely on music as one of the interventions that can be used to improve the learning process while also enhancing the level of confidence among students.

It is undeniable that music education can significantly improve the development and the skills of children. Moreover, music gives students a chance to enhance their capabilities, IQ, and academic achievements. There is a wide range of intrinsic benefits that have further been linked to music education such as learning new skills, getting exposure to the world, and improved level of confidence (Register, Darrow, Swedberd, & Standley, 2007). However, it is also important to recall that music alone cannot make students smarter. There is a wide range of factors that influence the academic process and achievement among students such as the availability of learning instruments, teaching methods used, and the behavioral traits of learners. These factors may influence the effect of music on the child in one way or the other. Despite this being the case, teachers and parents should provide a conducive environment for students to learn music. Furthermore, there should be a sustained effort by the relevant stakeholders such as schools and teachers to ensure that all students get a chance to learn and study music (Bosacki & O'Neill, 2013). This way, children will be better placed to improve their learning process and skills and understand the significance of art in the world. Furthermore, music will give all leaders a chance to interact with other people and express their feelings and thoughts (Overy, 2000; Butzlaff, 2000). On their part, educators should look for effective methods that can be used to teach music. Since teaching methods often influence the learning process and academic achievement, the use of the most appropriate instructional strategies can go a long way in ensuring that students realize the full benefits of music education. Moreover, it will ensure that the intrinsic benefits of music are felt by all students irrespective of their backgrounds, race, and family status.

In the recent years, researchers have shown and proven that music can affect the whole world. In particular, it is a form of art that provide an enriched and excellent experience for children that can facilitate their growth and development. Today, it is known that music is a force within our daily life and a part of the human heritage. It is for this reason that schools have taken it upon themselves to teach music at various levels of education. At the elementary level, students are often trained on how to play different kinds of musical instruments such as recorders and keynotes. Besides, they are given a chance to sing in choirs and lead the basic elements of music such as sounds and notes. When students get to the secondary level of their education, they are accorded the chance to start learning about how to play specific types of musical instruments, perform in musical ensembles and work on their skills. By the time such students transition to college, they will have learned about the mosaic of music s and developed their skills in the subject. At this stage, the focus will be on the different note values, balance and blend, sight read, music theory, music compositions, and the history and work of various composers. In some institutions, teachers ahead to develop band programs that are used to introduce students to general music and the public. Students who

take part in such programs get the chance to hone their skills and understand the public as their primary audience. The programs give students an opportunity to transition from the classroom music environment to a broad audience. Therefore, music education is a systematic journey that goes a long way in improving the skills of students and introducing them to the world audience.

Schools understand that music education is critical to the development of children. It is for this reason that they undertake measures to ensure that all students get a chance to take part in music lessons and programs. It is also important to state that for students to meet the federal and state standards for music education and the subject to have the most significant impact on learners, music education ought to start at the early stages of schooling (Register, Darrow, Swedberd, & Standley, 2007). In other words, schools should introduce students to music from the elementary levels of their education. This way, students will be better placed to learn about the concept and its primary elements at an early age. Besides, they will be able to appreciate music education and view it as an important component of the education system. Finally, the introduction of music education in the early years makes it easy for teachers to train students on complex elements and aspects of music in the years to come and in their subsequent levels of education. Just like any other subject, however, music education requires that students are given a chance to learn about rudimentary concepts upon which their future training will lie. These rudimentary concepts will act as a foundation upon which educations will be able to instill new skills and impart knowledge in students. The process entails using instructions and approaches that will help elementary school children to learn about the fundamentals of music such as musical expression, rhythm, melody, and pitch. In the long run, the skills acquired in these early years of education will make students productive in the musical groups that they may be part of in the future.

Improving Music Education

While working with schools, educators and other stakeholders get the chance to identify, explore and discuss the unique challenges that are encountered in the course of music education. Furthermore, the interactions provide an opportunity for discussing the issues and problems that schools and teachers face when implementing and sustaining the curriculum (Elliott & Silverman, 2015). As noted earlier in this paper and previous studies, music is a universal language that connects the human race. It is a subject and a form of art that give students the chance to improve their skills and abilities. Furthermore, students get the opportunity to express themselves and learn about their environment by studying and engaging in music. However, an effort must always be made to ensure that students are accorded the right setting and environment that will enrich their achievement and growth.

As a stakeholder in music education, I developed an interest in improving the subject with a particular focus on the Jackson Public Schools. In the course of my interaction with the various members of the institutions, including students and teachers, I realize that Jackson Public Schools value music education. However, the enormous pressure under which the students, orchestra, choir, and bands operate make it difficult for them to improve their skills. Also, it hampers the ability of the students to have a solid foundation of vital musical skills and elements such as sight reading. Therefore, there is a growing need to develop mechanisms that the institutions and educators can use to create a robust and excellent foundation for music education and training.

In the US, the changes that have been witnessed in the recent years support the current project and underscore the need to improve music education and different levels of learning. In a rare moment of bipartisanship, the US Congress managed to pass the famous Every Student Succeeds Act that marked the end of the No Child Left Behind era (Hess & Eden, 2017). The move offered significant opportunities for students and educators and set out an excellent basis for transforming and improving the music education community. It is imperative to point out that the No Child Left Behind laws were the most significant attempt by the county to reform the education system and ensure that all children go the chance to acquire basic skills in a wide range of subjects such as math and science ((Hess & Eden, 2017). Although the legislation was well-meaning, it also precipitated a gradual yet significant decline in participation in art and music classes. The trend is attributed to the fact that the legislation focused more on what was considered to be the core

subjects such as engineering, science, math, and technology ((Hess & Eden, 2017). In the process, it relegated music education to something that could be done after schools. Correspondingly, it denied students the chance to take part in musical undertakings and bands. Instead, learners focused on preparing for the tests meant for the core subjects such as math. In this regards, it can be said that the No Child Left Behind legislation contributed to the decline of music education and denied students the benefits that researchers have linked with the subject such as better cognitive function and improve academic performance.

Taken at face value, the introduction of the Every Student Succeeds Act forms the basis for improving music education at various levels of learning. The legislation bodes well with music education and supports its inclusion in the core curriculum used in elementary, secondary, and college education (Hess & Eden, 2017). Also, the act strives to take the country past the early years where music and art were considered to play second fiddle to other subjects. Today, music educators have leverage for increased professional development, funding, staffing, equipment, and prioritized scheduling of lessons and classes. Also, they have witnessed a robust foothold when the school budgets get tight, and cost-cutting measures are being discussions. In this regards, schools no longer consider music as a subject whose budget can be cut in support of other subjects such as social studies, sciences, and math (Hess & Eden, 2017). A careful review of existing literature and the trend in the country reveals that there is a growing national conversation about the importance of music education. These discussions also revolve around the depth as well as the quality of content that is taught in the music classes. The conversations have provided a basis for a paradigm shift on how educators define outcomes among music students (Hess & Eden, 2017). Finally, it has motivated schools and teachers to move beyond discussing precise rhythms, clear ductions, and right notes to developing standings that will ensure that students benefit fully from music education.

Plan for Improving Music Education

Teachers and schools often talk about classroom environment, climate, ethos, and tone as essential factors that influence the learning process. The significance of these factors in the music education have also been highlighted in previous studies (Elliott & Silverman, 2015). In particular, researchers contend that the classroom environment is a subtle and important concept that can determine whether learning and teaching goals will be realized. It is for this reasoning that educators and schools strive to create a positive learning environment that will be a desirable impact on student's attitude and the teaching process (Schratz, 2008). Also, previous music research has attempted to examine methods and ways through which educators can improve the learning environment to support improved teaching and learning. In the context of music education, however, it is important to point out that the achievement of learning goals goes beyond the classroom environment. Instead, it entails creating a solid foundation that will enable students to acquire basic elements of music and successfully integrate the subject into their everyday life (Schratz, 2008; DinçAltun, 2010). The argument stems from the fact that music is a part of the human heritage and it requires a solid foundation that begins in the early years of schooling.

Even as Jackson Public Schools leverages on the opportunities that are provided by the new legislation such as the now famous Every Student Succeeds, the institutions must come up with a clear plan that will help students to have a solid foundation in music. In particular, the institutions requires a plan and clearly set interventions that will help students to increase their sight-reading skills, prepare incoming freshmen for auditions, and enhance music skills and elements such as tonality and breathing techniques. In the long run, such initiatives will not only improve music education in the schools but also ensure that learners realize the full benefits of music. Below are some of the primary interventions that can be used to improve music foundation in Jackson Public Schools.

Nurturing music subject and education lead

Leadership plays a vital role in every area of human life and experience. With the more significant problems spread over a wider context, the networks that people develop for the sharing of information and ideas of best practice plays a critical part in communal and professional success (Elliott & Silverman, 2015). In the context of musical education, educators are required to show leadership as they train students in different

settings and under varying circumstances. The intention is to raise music teacher at every level of instruction (DinçAltun, 2010). Schools strive to encourage the continuous process of artistic, intelligent, and reflective teaching. Moreover, institutions endeavor to develop music teachers into catalysts for change and leaders through a wide range of collaborative programs and research. These programs enable teachers to respond to the complex and changing learning needs of students.

Jackson Public Schools should resort to nurturing a music subject lead so that it can improve the learning process and ensure that students get the best out of music students. In some schools, the music subject leaders are year teachers and can be switched from music to other subjects depending on the subject and staffing needs. However, music is a subject in which teachers and leaders require expertise and knowledge to succeed in their roles and make a significant impact on the life of students (Elliott & Silverman, 2015). Therefore, a good subject leader requires time to accumulate music education experience, plan and excellent and robust scheme of work, and implement programs geared towards improving the academic performance of learners. Also, the leaders work with other relevant individuals within the intuitions to ensure that staff members are skilled and confident in what they do (Elliott & Silverman, 2015). Time is also required to create instrument lessons and timetables and to build an excellent working relationship with current and visiting peripatetic staff. Other leaders need time to develop choirs, orchestras, and bands. Thus, music leaders must be given time to grow in their respective roles and acquire skills that would enable them to maintain various musical ensembles with longevity.

Quality subject leadership, as well as the extent to which institutions support teachers in terms of professional development opportunities and resources, are among the most critical factors for improving music education. The quality of the music subject leader is important even when specialists teach the music classes with unrivaled skills in the subject. The trend is attributed to the fact that the leaders influence the teaching process by ensuring that educators have access to the necessary resources and support (Barrett, 2010; Fermanich, 2011). Also, they guarantee that teachers use excellent instructional methods and approaches that will help students to get the best out of the music lessons. Finally, leaders have a duty of ensuring that teachers get professional development opportunities so that they can enhance their skills and understanding of the subject. Music, like any other core subject in the education systems, requires teachers to address the specific needs of leaders and use the most appropriate teaching and instructional methods (Bates, 2012). From time to time, teachers must take part in excellent professional development programs so that they can enhance their skills and interact with other specialists in the field. Furthermore, the development programs provide a forum in which educators can share about the challenges that they face in teaching music and come up with practical solutions to them. The subject leader must ensure that these professional development programs are available and that teachers get the chance to take part in them.

While improving the quality of music education appears to lie at the hands of those tasked with the duty of teaching the subject, it is critical to point out that each lesson must be developed to be a component of the entire curriculum use in the schools (Bates, 2012). In other words, music must be manifested not as a separate subject but as a part of the whole curriculum provision. Therefore, schools must come up with ways of ensuring that the manner in which music is taught in school contributes to student's personal development and enhance their overall academic achievement. The music subject leader has a duty of developing mechanisms that will help in making music subject a critical part of the curriculum that contributes to the development of students. Furthermore, the leader must work with the relevant authorities and other educators to ensure that all students get an opportunity to take part in music lessons. In the long run, such interventions will not only improve the quality of music education but also give students an excellent foundation that will positively impact on their academic life.

Creating sufficient time for music

Another possible intervention that can be used to set an excellent foundation for music education is the setting of time for teaching and learning of the subject. Music is an extensive subject with a broad spectrum of components and elements (Bates, 2012). The knowledge of these elements can go a long way in ensuring that students succeed in their musical journey and undertakings. Thus, educators and music subject leaders

must find time to allow children to collect, organize and analyze quality music recordings, take part in music assembles, make music, and listen to different kinds of compositions. Educators must ensure that they provide time for students to learn about the essential elements of music and integrate them into their musical undertakings. This way, learners will be able to incorporate music into their life and acquire the vital skills needed to succeed in the subject.

Several measures can be undertaken to create sufficient time for music education. One method of achieving this goal is by developing a clear music focus. As noted earlier, music is a vast subject with a broad range of components. Students must learn about the different aspects of the subject and use them to improve their skills (Barrett, 2010; Fermanich, 2011). Teachers, on their part, must work towards developing a clear musical focus that will determine the manner in which they teach music. In particular, educators must focus on projects and undertakings that will go a long way in increasing the student's musical creativity. For instance, the educator can dedicate a specific period to teaching students on the use of sounds. The students can learn through listening to different kinds of sounds and paying attention to the manner in which they affect musical creations and compositions. Furthermore, teachers must recognize the need to help students to move from the production of sound effects to the use of various other musical elements to create excellent compositions. During the lessons, the ability of the teacher to impart knowledge on the learners will depend on how well the skills of the students in musical elements is improved. Thus, there should be a sustained attempt to enhance the performance of the student in specific aspects of music and enable them to succeed in the subject.

Secondly, teachers can create sufficient time for music education and learning by building upon the previous lessons. For example, teachers can start by training students on the creation and use of different types of sounds. When the educator is convinced that the student has learned about the necessary skills and acquired sufficient knowledge, they can move on to another element of music that is based on the previously acquired skills (Fermanich, 2011). For instance, the teacher may opt to teach students how to integrate music instruments into different sounds to create a composition. By building on the previously learned skills, teachers will not only save time but also allow students to use the knowledge that they have acquired in the preceding lessons.

Third, teachers must work hard to streamline their lessons and get rid of the time-consuming work that may not have a positive impact on students. Instead of focusing on the time consuming administrative undertakings, teachers must spend more time with students and tackle their learning needs (Barrett, 2010; Fermanich, 2011). Furthermore, they must find methods of increasing communication with students, sourcing for the right instruments and materials, and training learners. It is also important to state that the process of streamlining the lesson entails coming up with a clear lesson log (Barrett, 2010; Fermanich, 2011). The lesson logs act as a guide that teachers follow to ensure that all the learning and teaching objectives are realized. Also, they use the records to identify and address the specific needs of their students. The lesson logs can only fix such problems when they are clear and oriented towards improving the skills and knowledge of students. Therefore, teachers must come up with records that set out the procedures that will be adopted to teach a given concept, the areas that need to be addressed to ensure that students succeed, and the manner in which the specific needs of each learner is addressed. Finally, the log should enable the teacher to carefully evaluate the outcome of the teaching process and identify areas that require further work to ensure that the learning process is successful.

The final area that educators can focus on to streamline their music lessons is the selection of the appropriate teaching strategy. In the US, teachers are expected to be competent, skilled, and experienced in the subjects that they are teaching. Music is considered to be an essential subject that can significantly impact on the performance and achievement of students (DinçAltun, 2010). However, research evidence shows that some teachers are frightened about the teaching of music and view it as a subject that should be left to a specialist (Fermanich, 2011). Despite this being the case, all teachers are expected to be prepared to teach music at the elementary levels of education due to limited resources and the shortage of specialists. For teachers to succeed in this role, they must develop and use the most appropriate teaching strategies that will ensure

that students acquire knowledge and integrate it into their everyday lives.

Analysis of the practices at Jackson Public Schools and a review of existing body of research evidence show that educators employ a broad spectrum of strategies and teaching activities in their music lessons. A study by DinçAltun, (2010) identified some of the common strategies that teachers used in music lessons. Table 1 below shows the typical strategies and their defining features. While the strategies may appear different, they focus on improving the skills and knowledge of students in music. In all the common strategies, educators teach songs and other musical elements such as sounds and instruments. Furthermore, they give students the opportunity to take part in musical ensembles as a way of ensuring that the skills taught in class are applied in actual settings. Thus, educators should select strategies that they believe will go a long way in improving the skills of students and meeting their learning needs.

Table 1: Teaching strategies in music

<i>STRATEGIES</i>			
Verbal Strategies	Description	Nonverbal Strategies	Description
Professional	<i>Technical: Vibrato, articulation, legato</i> <i>Conceptual: tone, rhythm, crescendo</i> <i>Aesthetic: blend, balance, intensity</i>	Musical modelling	Teacher performance provides a total image of what is desired either vocally or instrumentally
Experiential	<i>Imagery: colourful, pastoral, religious, connotations</i> <i>Metaphor: evoke qualities of feeling or movement, such as dry, violent, or nervous</i> <i>Analogy: includes words with living processes such as cohesion, expectation and stability</i>	Aural modelling	Teacher employs phonetic vocalization including humming and syllables in order to convey particular meaning or points of emphasis within the music
Process	Analyze, imagine, describe, explore, express, and demonstrate	Physical modelling	Includes facial expressions, physical gestures, formal conducting

(SOURCE: DinçAltun, 2010)

Integrating music into the wider curriculum

The curriculum that is taught in elementary and secondary schools can vary from one institution to the other. The variation can significantly affect the manner in which music is taught in school. Jackson Public Schools boasts of an innovative curriculum that seeks to improve the skills of students and help them to acquire the knowledge needed to succeed in personal, academic, and work life. There are some cases where learning institutions used curriculums that support the blocking of music and its exclusion from the list of core subjects. Fortunately, Jackson Public Schools has not taken such an approach. Instead, the institutions consider music to be a critical subject that can enhance the achievement of students and prepare them for their future roles in the society. Thus, attempts are made to get the best foundation for music learning by giving students access to musical opportunities from time to time. The institution strives to support the use of approaches that will enable students to get the right inputs needed to progress and develop in music. There are several ways through which the institution can improve the foundation of music education and

fully integrate it into the school curriculum.

First, the school and music educations should endeavor to define student's intimate understanding of music. The process entails coming up with appropriate mechanisms for accurately measuring how students understand a wide range of musical components such as rhythm, tonality, breathing techniques, and innate knowledge of composers (Finney & Burnard, 2007). Teachers should strive to educate students on the social as well as the cultural landscape that define different types of written or recorded music. Furthermore, they should teach learners about the circumstances that influence music creations as well as the triumphant mythology of great artists who have defined the musical scenes (Barrett, 2010). By taking this particular approach to music teaching and learning, educators will be better placed to improve the significance of music in the life of students and the school curriculum. Moreover, they will be able to demonstrate the significant role that music plays in both the life of students and the well-being and development of the society as a whole.

Secondly, teachers can contribute to the integration of music into the school curriculum by focusing on teaching students about styles and conception of different artists and composers. In this regards, the focus is on the aesthetics and the various musical elements associated with a given piece of music and the meaning that the artists were trying to pass across. Moreover, students should be taught about the inputs as well as the influences that go into the creation of a musical piece and how it can influence their compositions. In other cases, the discussions should touch on the definitive recording of the musical pieces and the making of qualitative judgments about them (Finney & Burnard, 2007). The idea is to illuminate the general concepts of different types of genders and to help students to understand their place in the world of music. Moreover, the move allows students to the explore and interpret various types of music and genres such as folk, jazz, and spirituals (Finney & Burnard, 2007). When educators take students through these critical elements of music, they will help them to improve their musical skills and integrate what is learned into their everyday life. In the process, the move will make music an important and necessary subject in the school curriculum. Furthermore, it will prepare students for further training and education on music and other related subjects.

Finally, educators should strive to make students understand that written score is just the starting point in their musical joinery. Like it is the case with any other subject, teachers can use summative and formative assessment methods to determine the performance of students and evaluate whether the teaching and learning goals have been realized (Randles, 2014). The process can entail subjecting students to written tests and practical exams at different points of their musical journey. The performance of the student in these tests merely marks the starting point in the musical journey and exposes them to the vital elements and skills that can be used to enter the world (Randles, 2014). The actual tour in music will require new skills, more research and extra effort outside the classroom and tests. Also, it is an insurmountable task that calls on the teachers to collaborate with other educators and stakeholders to ensure that students get the best possible training. Therefore, teachers and institutions have a duty of providing the right environment and the necessary resources that will enable students to succeed in the written tests and successfully proceed in their training in the field of music. Furthermore, they must support students so that they can understand the subject of music and use the skills and knowledge leaned to impact on the society in different ways.

Relieving pressure from students

Music is a vast subject that requires students to master a wide range of skills and learn about different components and elements (McPherson & Welch, 2012). Therefore, educators are expected to have an understanding of the various features of music and come up with ways of imparting the skills to students. Teachers often employ different strategies to teach a given aspect of music in or outside the class setting. The selection of the teaching method or strategy will depend on a wide range of factors that include the subject, topic, availability of researchers, time requirements, the needs of students as well as the curriculum targets (McPherson & Welch, 2012). Music is a foundation subject that requires teachers to have some levels of musical abilities such as voice management and musical hearing. Teachers are expected to possess an excellent understanding of the various elements of music so that they can improve the skills of learners (Randles, 2014). It is for this reason that the teaching strategies adopted in various lessons and classes may

differ from other core subjects. Similarly, the approaches often involve some artistic and aesthetic elements that help in imparting skills in learners. Unfortunately, the selection of the wrong approach to teaching may put significant pressure on learners and make it difficult for them to acquire foundational skills.

In the case of Jackson Public Schools, for instance, significant pressure is often placed on the Band, Choir and Orchestra Directors. These groups are expected to perform many functions, and the pressure makes it difficult for them to acquire basic skills. Thus, there is a need to resort to an appropriate strategy that will enable students to take part in the ensembles but also get the opportunity to improve their foundational skills in the classroom. For example, teachers should find time for students in the ensembles to be taught about different elements of music such as sight reading and breathing techniques in an appropriate setting. This way, the learners will be able to develop all their critical skills in music.

Another potential source of pressure is the assessment process. Teachers often use formal assessment to evaluate the performance of students and to determine the areas that require improvements. Furthermore, the assessments help them in identifying the specific needs of students that need to be addressed both in the short term and the long-term (McPherson & Welch, 2012). However, the formal assessments should not be a source of pressure for students. Music is a subject that needs to be enjoyed without undue pressures caused by formal assessments (McPherson & Welch, 2012). Therefore, the emphasis should always be on the teaching of music and the internalizing of the various elements associated with the subject. While the assessments can be used to assess the musical progress of students, they should not act as a source of pressure or a factor that hinders students from acquiring foundational skills in music.

Conclusion

Music has evolved to become one of the core subject taught in schools. It allows students to acquire critical skills and knowledge that will not only improve their personal development but also enhance academic achievement. Besides, previous studies have shown that music can improve the cognitive abilities and the academic performance of students. It is for this reason that schools come up with appropriate plans that can facilitate and enhance music education. Jackson Public Schools, just like any other institutions, faces some challenges that often compromises music education. However, the schools can improve the teaching of music by creating a conducive environment and providing support to both the students and teachers.

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