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## Mia's Music

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# Mia's Music

## **Abstract**

Mia's Music is a story narrating what I view as an ideal curriculum being put into practice. Music educators have an advantageous and unique position to explore a medium with students that truly has the power to bring people together and help them to understand one another. A curriculum based in the cultural themes that students identify with will challenge them to learn through sharing their experiences and understanding others'.

## **Keywords**

music, education, children's book, curriculum

## **Disciplines**

Art Education | Curriculum and Instruction | Curriculum and Social Inquiry | Education | Music | Music Education

## **Comments**

This children's book was written for Prof. Brent Talbot's course, *MUS 149: Social Foundations of Music Education*, Spring 2015.

# Mia's Music

A "Social Foundations of Music Education"  
Final Project

Written and Illustrated by Miranda Bubenheim

# **Mia's Music**

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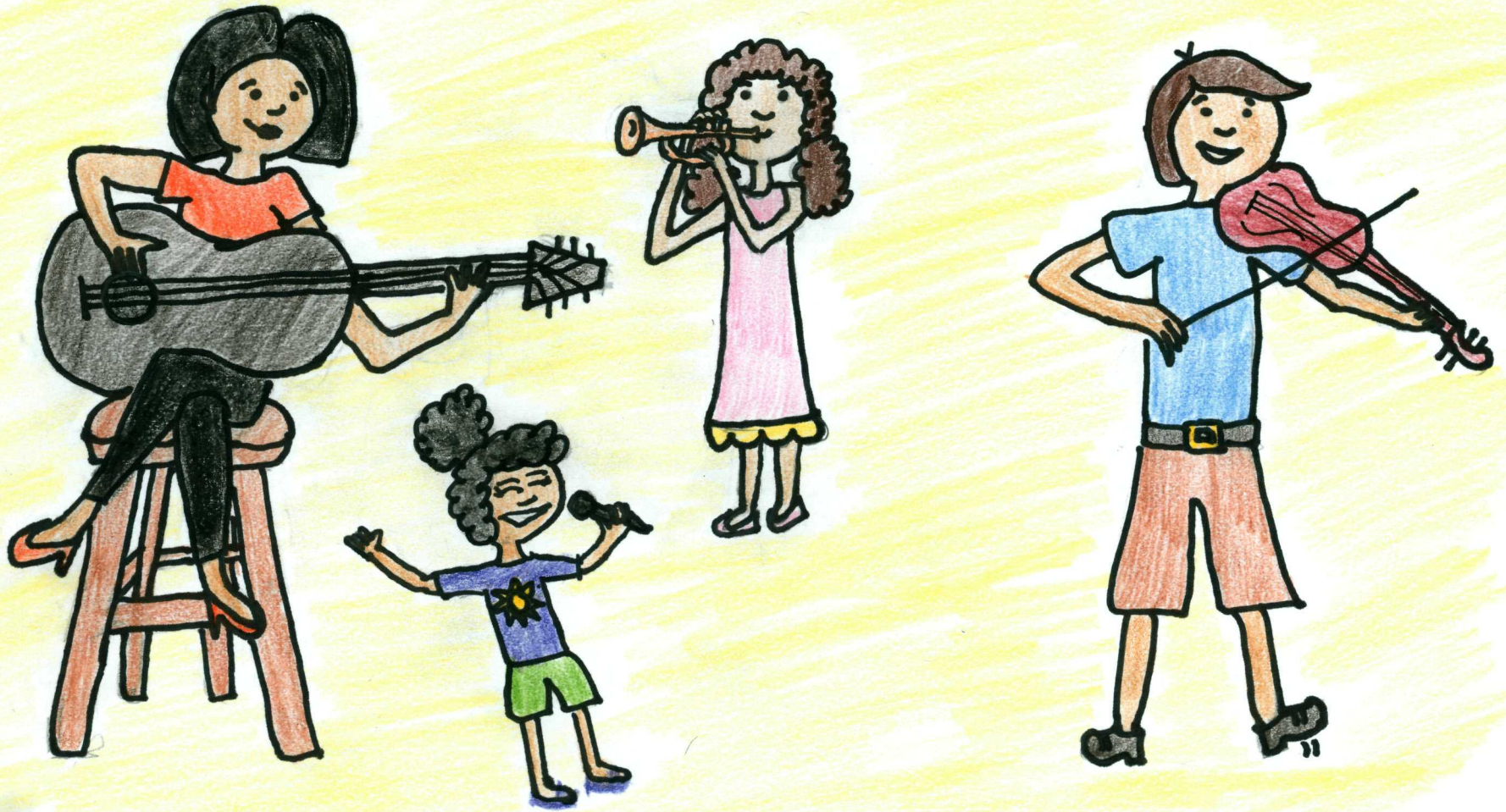
**How can we conceptualize curriculum  
and school knowledge to better address important  
questions of social change, contingency of knowledge,  
life in mediated worlds, and inequalities?**

*Dedicated to*  
*Edward J. Holmes*

This is Mia.  
Her favorite thing  
to do is play the  
trumpet.







Mia also loves to play the trumpet with her family. Her older brother plays violin and her mother plays the guitar. Mia's younger sister even sings with them sometimes.



On the weekends, people who live near Mia come over. They form a mariachi band and play mariachi songs. This is Mia's favorite part of the week. Mia is always happy when she plays trumpet with her friends and family. There is only one thing that can ruin Mia's good mood...







The one time when Mia is not happy is when she is in school. She often daydreams about playing her trumpet when she is sitting at her desk. Usually her teacher, Mr. Smith, does not notice, but he did today.



"Mia!" Mr. Smith calls.

"Mia are you paying attention?"

"Wha-" Mia stammers,  
leaving her daydream  
behind.

Mr. Smith frowns at  
Mia and says, "Mia,  
this is MUSIC class.  
Not sleeping class. Please  
stay after class so we  
can talk."





A few students snicker in Mia's direction.

Mia slumps into her desk. Great, she thinks. I have to sit through this boring class and now I am in trouble and everyone knows it. Mia wonders if she is the only person not having fun.





After class, Mia nervously waits for Mr. Smith to come talk to her.

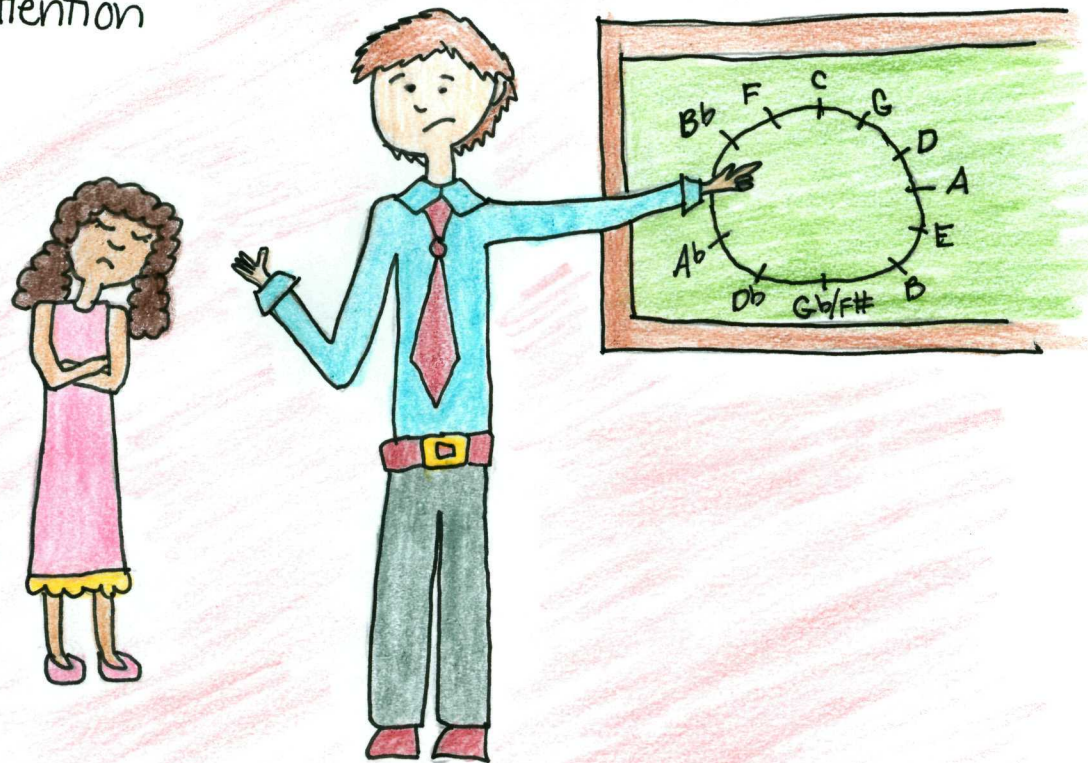
"Mia, why were you not paying attention in class today?" Mr. Smith asks.

"Because it was boring!" Mia responds.

"How could music possibly be boring?" Mr. Smith points to the chalkboard. "We were even learning about the circle of fifths today!"

"What is a 'circle of fifths'?" Mia asks.

Mr. Smith becomes upset. "See, you would have learned that if you were paying attention."



Mia thinks about playing trumpet and sighs. "I just wish it were fun!" she exclaims.



With a confused look, Mr. Smith responds, "I think it is fun, but... well, what is fun to you, Mia?"

"What do I think is fun?" Mia is surprised.

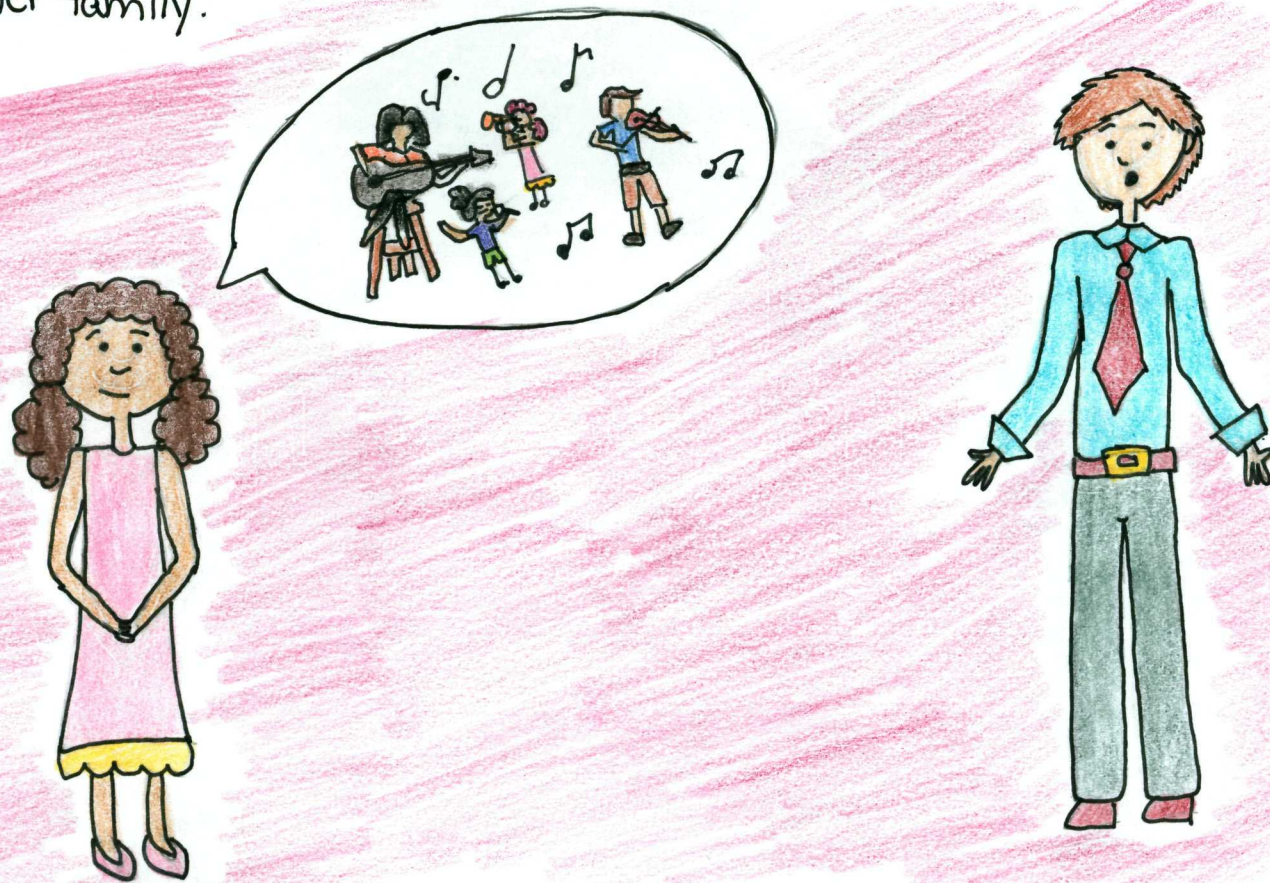
"Yes," Mr. Smith smiles. "I want to know what you think is fun."



Mia excitedly answers, "I love to play the trumpet. That is fun!"

"You play the trumpet?!" Mr. Smith cannot believe his ears.

"Yes! It's my favorite thing in the whole world." Mia tells her teacher all about the trumpet and playing in a mariachi band with her family.





Mr. Smith is amazed. "See? You do love music, Mia!"

"Really? But I hate the circle of fifths!" Mia exclaims.

The teacher laughs. "But you love mariachi."

Mia looks confused. "But that is not music. It's just something I do. No one else at school understands it."

"You know more about music than you think you do, Mia," Mr. Smith tells her. "You just do it in a different way. And I bet more people would understand it if they knew more about it. I have an idea that I think could help both of us..."





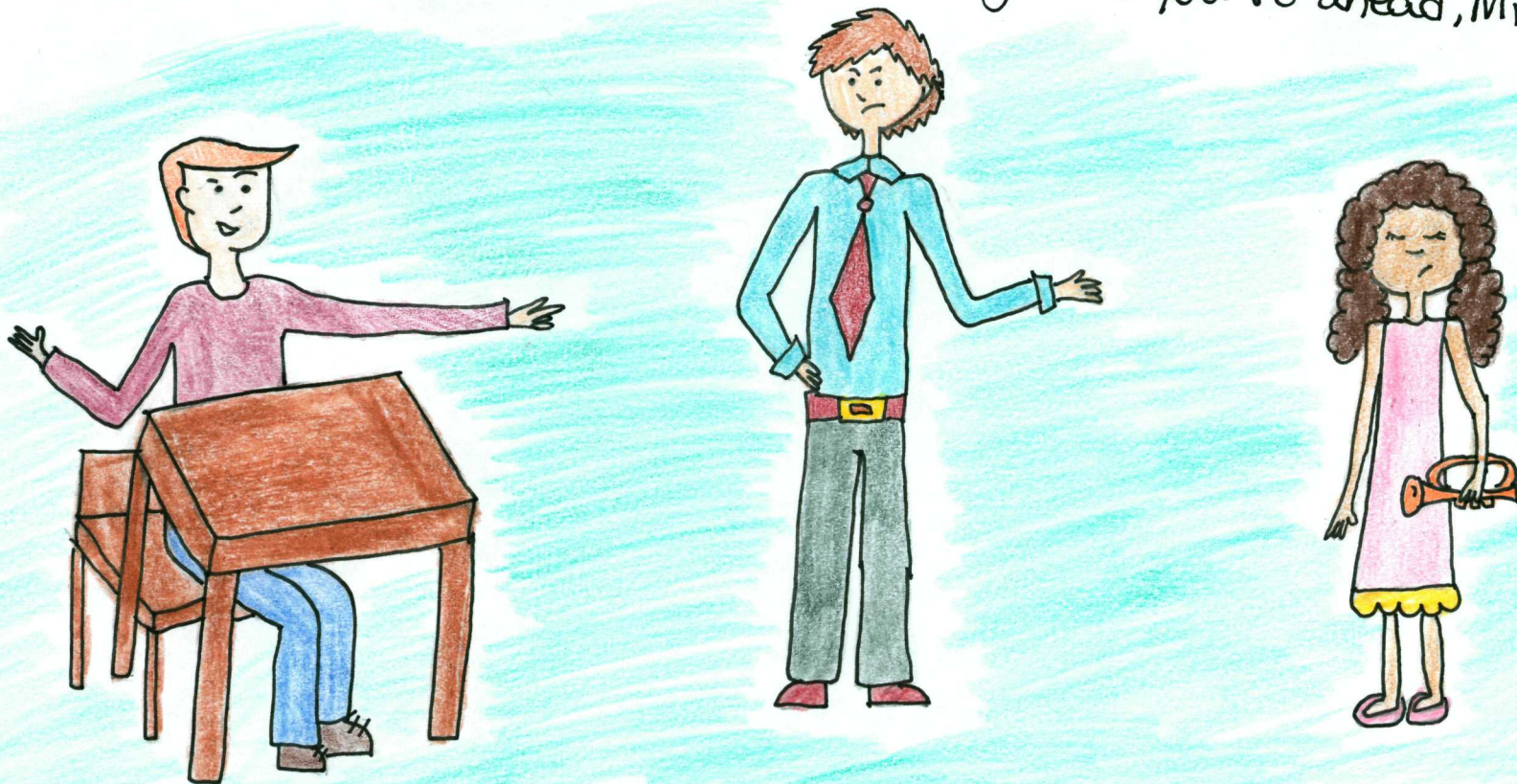


The next day, Mia brings her trumpet to school. Mr. Smith had asked Mia to share mariachi music with her classmates. She has butterflies in her stomach. What if they don't like it?

When it is time for music class, Mia nervously walks to the front of the room. Mr. Smith nods encouragingly at her.

"What are you doing up there?" one boy named Edwin asks. "You are not the teacher!"

A bunch of students start to laugh, but Mr. Smith interrupts. "Actually, I asked Mia to come up today to share something with you. Go ahead, Mia."





Mia looks at her trumpet in her hands and knows just what to do. She begins to play.

Almost everyone in the class stops laughing and is drawn to her playing. When she is finished with her song, all but one student claps excitedly. Edwin just crosses his arms and asks, "What was that?"







After playing, Mia is not nervous anymore. She confidently tells the class all about mariachi. She talks about playing with her mom, brother, and sister and Mia shares stories from playing in a band on the weekends.

Some students jump out of their seats and run up to Mia asking to see her trumpet.

"I wish I could play mariachi," one girl comments.



Suddenly, Mia has an idea! "I bet you could! Mr. Smith, can you help me?"

"I don't know, Mia," Mr. Smith looks flustered. "This is your lesson."

Mia thinks for a minute. "But, I want it to be our lesson."

Mr. Smith smiles before going to his closet. "In that case, I have something that might help," he says.







Mr. Smith returns with an armload of instruments, including drums and guitars. Students run up to grab them. Mia and Mr. Smith walk around the room helping people play them. Some students sing instead. Others dance up and down the aisle to mariachi music.



Edwin still sits with his arms crossed.  
Mia walks up to him and hands him a  
pair of maracas.

"I don't want those," he says. "This  
is stupid!"

Mia sets them on his desk anyway.  
She says, "If you try it, you might  
like it. But only if you want to."





Edwin reluctantly picks up the maracas. He shakes them a few times and gets into the groove of the song. Slowly but surely, a smile spreads across his face.

"Isn't it fun?" Mia asks him.

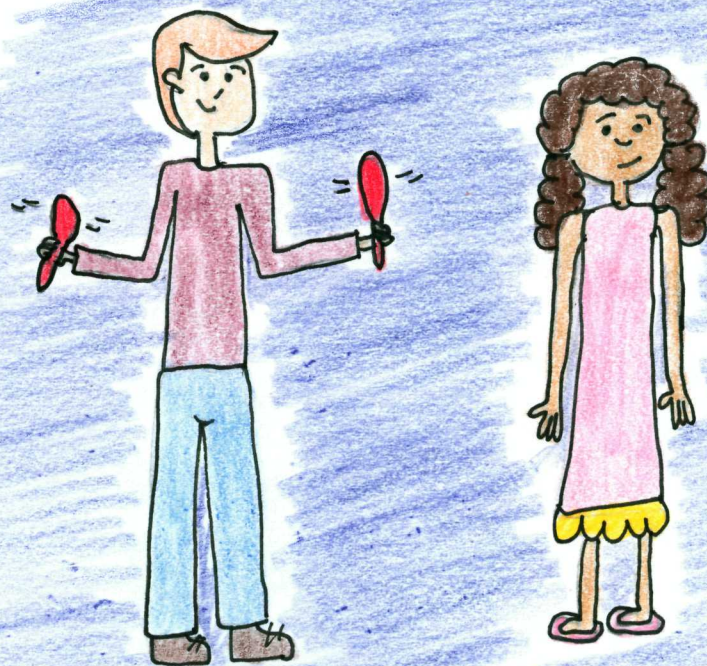


"What?" Edwin looks surprised, then glares and folds his arms again. "No, definitely not," he says.

"It's okay to have fun," Mia tells him.

Edwin looks at the maracas in his hands and shakes them again. "Well, this isn't the music I normally listen to. But I guess... I guess it is okay," he says.

Edwin and Mia smile at each other with understanding.







The two rejoin the rest of the class.

One girl calls out, "This is so much fun! It would be cool if I could show you guys the music my rock band makes!"

"Yeah," another boy agrees. "And I want to play my hip hop song! Can we Mr. Smith?"

Mr. Smith smiles broadly at the students. "You know what?" he says. "I think we can find a place for everyone's music."

The students cheer and Mia is never bored in music class again.



## Afterword

Through this story, I attempted to answer a big course question in Social Foundations of Music Education: How can we conceptualize curriculum and school knowledge to better address important questions of social change, contingency of knowledge, life in mediated worlds, and inequalities? In my opinion, this question goes in two different directions at once. First, how can we use the curriculum to reinforce equality in the classroom and keep students from feeling excluded? Second, how can we use the curriculum to teach students things that will actually be pertinent to their lives? I find that the best way to solve both of these concerns is to base the curriculum around things that already matter to the students. As music educators, we have an advantageous and unique position to explore a medium with students that truly has the power to bring people together and help them to understand one another. By allowing students to bring in their own music, they feel like an essential part of the class. At the end of the day, my job as a music educator will be to teach students musical concepts. However, there is no rule that says how to accomplish this. While classical western music is important in a student's musical development, it is equally (and sometimes even more) important to incorporate the music that they listen to everyday. **A curriculum based in the cultural themes that students identify with will challenge them to learn through sharing their experiences and understanding others'.**

My personal response toward this main course question, and the conception of *Mia's Music*, were greatly influenced by the four course texts:

- ***To Teach: The Journey in Comics* by William Ayers and Ryan Alexander-Tanner**

This book discussed in detail how to “liberate the curriculum.” Ayers asserts that the curriculum should be about much more than simply the subject matter. It is about “determining what knowledge and experiences are most worthwhile.” He believes the best way to teach students is to provide them with opportunities to



make discoveries about the world around them and take meaning from it. This constitutes a classroom that uses materials important to the student, the teacher, and even the community at large. We must draw on what the students know in order to “develop [our] agenda in light of theirs.” That quote in particular corresponds with my own thinking that to teach students what we want them to know, we must do it in a forum they understand and care about. In *Mia’s Music*, this is shown when the teacher allows Mia to bring her music, mariachi, into the classroom. She really cared about it and was able to share it with the students. However, when she wanted everyone to play the instruments, she needed the teacher’s assistance. They worked together to teach the proper technique to students. This would be an opportunity for teachers to work in their own teaching agendas as far as musical concepts are concerned.

Ayers, W., & Tanner, R. (2010). *To Teach: The Journey, In Comics*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

- ***Musician and Teacher: An Orientation to Music Education by Patricia Shehan Campbell***

This book approached music education with a multicultural view. According to Campbell, music is a cultural and learned behavior. She says that when music is learned “it is done so in ways that express the cultural priorities of teachers, learners, and the culture in which they live.” She also talked about the fact that only about ten percent of students in schools are involved in musical classes or activities. But when you think about it, one hundred percent of students probably have music as a part of their life in some way. We need to do more as teachers to involve those other ninety percent of students. Campbell believes that the curriculum should be aimed at developing the skills of students so they can more fully participate in the music of their community. Therefore, we should “juggle [our] programs and [our] lesson plans, making room for the music that [our] students value in their cultural communities.” All children have strengths that are waiting to be found and it is our job to discover their ableness. Campbell’s ideas have greatly influenced my own

perspective on music education and this was reflected in *Mia's Music*. For example, the teacher, Mr. Smith, at first does not understand Mia's inattentiveness and is shocked when he finally discovers that she does have musical prowess on the trumpet. He uses this information and integrates it into the classroom to capitalize on her unique talents. Before, Mia was bored in class and might have lost interest in music altogether. However, Mr. Smith allowed her to bring her own cultural experiences into the classroom. By doing this, she was able to connect with her classmates. Even Edwin, who was at first against Mia's music, eventually found that he could respect and appreciate it. This reinforces the power music has at creating a caring and welcoming community that puts aside differences. The curriculum in this classroom was reflective of the teacher's goals, the student's desires, and the larger community as a whole.

Campbell, P., Demorest, S., & Morrison, S. (2008). *Musician and Teacher: An Orientation to Music Education*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company.

- ***Teaching as a Subversive Activity* by Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner**

This book focuses a lot on relevancy in the classroom. According to Postman and Weingartner, it is insane to teach something unless the students require it for an identifiable and important purpose that is related to the life of the learner. They view the current type of curriculums that exist today to just be a "strategy for distraction" that keeps students from knowing themselves and their environment. Students must see their curriculum as worth learning and teachers must develop an environment that gives the "highest possible priority to inquiry behavior. Postman and Weingartner believe that too many teachers do not take responsibility for their classrooms. Too often it is heard "I taught them that, but they didn't learn it." Instead, Postman and Weingartner say that teachers should not fear the youth, but should aim to truly understand the world they live in and use that to inspire their learning. I agree full heartedly with Postman and Weingartner's ideas of relevancy. That is why I do not think a music class is worth having without using



music that the students care about and understand. This is seen in *Mia's Music* when at first Mr. Smith is so confused that Mia is bored in his class. She would have learned about the circle of fifths if she had just paid attention to his teaching! However, why would Mia have any reason to care about the circle of fifths when it is presented in a way that has no meaning to her? Finally, Mr. Smith allows the students to bring their own music to class. He could use their music as a way to subliminally introduce the circle of fifths in a forum the students care about.

Postman, N., & Weingartner, C. (1969). *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*. New York, NY: Delacorte Press.

- ***Pedagogy of the Oppressed by Paulo Freire***

In a typical classroom setting, teachers are inevitably put in a position of authority and oppression upon the students. Freire presents ways in which he hopes to break down these walls to liberate people, their voices, and their opinions. One thing that crops up a lot is the idea that liberation of the oppressed cannot be done for them. It must be done with them. The teacher must work with the students on a co-intentional education with committed involvement. Freire sees the current education system as a “banking method” in which knowledge is bestowed by those who have knowledge upon those who do not. This reinforces an idea that the teacher is all-knowing and the student must submissively absorb knowledge. To combat this, Freire says that students may rely on teachers to learn, but they can also teach what they know. Of course, none of this would be possible without proper communication and dialogue. Both parties must work together to create a program that exemplify both parties goals. Students are co-investigators with the teachers. A lot of Freire's ideas created a framework for *Mia's Music* and my idea of how to implement curriculum in a classroom. First of all, when Mia is struggling to pay attention, Mr. Smith has a dialogue with her to find out her own interests and goals. He could have just failed her or yelled at her. Instead, he searched for a deeper solution. Then, he allowed Mia to bring in her own music and teach it to the class. This supports the idea that the



students have just as much knowledge as the teacher. At the same time, she was not left to her own free will. Mr. Smith and Mia worked together to teach students how to play instruments. The teacher was a guiding force and worked collaboratively with the student and her interests.

Freire, P., & Ramos, M. (2000). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Thirtieth Anniversary ed.). New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic.

Based upon all the above ideas from the course books, I believe the curriculum should let students bring in their own music and experiences. This will not only allow the teacher to better understand their strengths and weaknesses as musicians, but it will allow the students to connect and understand each other on a more personal level. *Mia's Music* is essentially a story narrating what I view as an ideal curriculum being put into practice.

-Miranda Bubenheim



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**I affirm that I have upheld the highest principles  
of honesty and integrity in my academic work  
and have not witnessed a violation of the honor code.**

***-Miranda Bubenheim***



