Music education in the schools during the past 5 decades has witnessed a continuous transformation in curriculum content, scheduling, its function in academia, as well as course offerings. Several key events have played a role in this transformation.

Many public educators viewed school curriculum in the 1950s as imbalanced—particularly lacking education in the arts. According to Ole Sand, the American Association of School Administrators responded in 1959 with a statement specifying that a well-balanced school curriculum will include the arts alongside other academic subjects such as history, mathematics, and science, emphasizing the value that general education teaches students to “appreciate, understand, create, and criticize with discrimination those products of the mind, the voice, the hand, and the body which give dignity to the person and exalt the spirit of man.” The National Education Association through its Project on Instruction document also supported the inclusion of arts in the school curriculum.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Public Law 89-10) provided support specifically for music education in Title I, permitting low-income-area school districts to receive funding to hire music teachers and purchase instruments and equipment. This was extremely significant, as participation in school music programs in the 1960s grew considerably nationwide.

Several national meetings occurred in the 1960s to address issues and concerns in music education. The Yale Seminar (1963) was a federally funded project to explore the problems facing music education and to find potential solutions. The current curriculum did not appear to produce musically literate students and active participatory adults. Music curriculum in Grades K-12 needed to be examined. Results of the Yale Seminar were highly critical of the quality of instructional materials used in music classrooms. The Juilliard Repertory Project (1964) was then created to locate music of the highest quality for instruction in K-12 music classrooms. In 1967 another historic meeting took place, this time in Massachusetts, with representation from the field of music education as well as from sociology, philosophy, history, psychology, labor, and the media. The Tanglewood Symposium sought to identify the role of music education. Outcomes included the call for music as a core curricular subject in the school curriculum and for music education to be taught comprehensively, specifically including music of various cultures. Curricular revisions followed.

Michael L. Mark and Charles L. Gary noted a concern for accountability in the schools rose in the 1970s from noticeably declining results in SAT scores. A return to the “basics” prompted cuts in music programs throughout the country. Music Educators National Conference (MENC) responded with efforts toward music education advocacy through publications, advertisements, and conferences. In 1988 MENC was a part of a national ad hoc coalition monitoring policy that affected the arts. The Goals 2000 Act included arts education as a core subject due to this coalition. Advocacy efforts also led to an MENC publication on the National Commission on Music Education report (whose members included notable actors and musicians) titled Growing Up Complete: The Imperative for Music Education. This publication played a key role in future decisions to include the arts in the core curriculum.

One of the most significant projects for arts education initiated by the government was the
establishment of the national standards of arts education. MENC published these standards in 1994 and they continue to be utilized as the primary resource in arts education curricula. These standards emphasize what every child should know and be able to do in the arts, K-12. Although the National Standards for the Arts are not required by all school districts, many states have adapted them into their own state academic content standards for the arts.

Affecting lifelong learning beyond the K-12 curriculum, the New Horizons music education movement was established in 1991 by Roy Ernst of the Eastman School of Music, for adults 55 years and older. Today there are over 150 bands, choirs, and orchestras created for adults who are learning to play an instrument or sing for the first time, or who want to rekindle musical skills from their high school musical experiences. Several of these organizations are associated with universities with music education programs, allowing future music educators to assist in educating adult learners. The New Horizons Music programs have reinforced and expanded a goal of all music educators—that of lifelong learning and participation in music making.

A monumental meeting took place in 1999 to review the status of music education and to lay the groundwork for the future—Vision 2020: The Housewright Symposium of the Future of Music Education. Sponsored by MENC and Florida State University, this symposium called together music educators and representatives from the music industry and community. A culmination of agreements and invited papers were published by MENC as a result of the symposium. The Housewright Declaration gave affirmation to the Tanglewood Symposium of 1967 and also recognized concerns produced over the previous 4 decades, which included inadequate instruction time, shortage of music teachers, and vast technological advances. The declaration emphasized that professional and accrediting organizations, universities, and PreK-12 schools must encourage and implement policy, curricular, and pedagogical innovations, which will engage all children as musicians.

In January 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) declared that the arts (to include music, visual arts, drama, and dance in most states' definition) are core academic subjects in America's educational system. In Section 5551-Assistance for Arts Education, the NCLB states its goals:

1. To support systemic education reform by strengthening arts education as an integral part of the elementary school and secondary school curriculum

2. To help ensure that all students meet challenging state academic content standards and challenging state student academic achievement standards in the arts

3. To support the national effort to enable all students to demonstrate competence in the arts.

Although funding assistance for these initiatives was to be made available for such capacities as research, planning model-based arts education programs, development of arts education assessments, curriculum development, and professional development programs, it appears that insufficient funding has been devoted to the arts.

The NCLB impetus during this past decade has been to emphasize basic skills (particularly reading and math) and high-stakes testing versus learning in an environment that educates the whole person. School administrators have been forced to devote more time to core subjects that are tested, often leaving music and the other arts with less instruction time. However, music education leaders continue to advocate the significance of a comprehensive education to include the abilities to appreciate, create, and produce musical works of art. In today's global society, music educators have the means to
reinforce students’ understanding of our own culture and those around us, and to help develop students who will be able to think critically and creatively, and appreciate the meaning of music.

The avenues through which we produce, consume, enjoy, express, and understand music have changed considerably over the past 5 decades. Computer technology has transformed the nature of musical products, processes, and delivery systems, opening new creative possibilities. We now have 24/7 access to music from throughout the world. Research in the fields of sociology, psychology, and neuroscience has provided educators with new information about how music is learned. The disciplines of musicology and ethnomusicology have provided and expanded the range of music worthy of study. In response to these decades of change, an international group of distinguished music educators, performers, researchers, and scholars from a variety of fields assembled in 2007 to examine these issues. Tanglewood II: A Symposium on Charting the Future was a symposium conducted in the same spirit of the groundbreaking Tanglewood Symposium of 1967. The Tanglewood II Symposium examined the challenges that these transformations pose to the practice and instruction of music and called for radical change.

Including music education in the schools to enhance all students’ education PreK-12 is widely considered a priority in overall curricular reform. In an effort to reinforce and augment other academic subjects, many music educators have adapted their curriculum to integrate the teaching of music with other academic subjects, such as reading, science, and mathematics. This practice is a direct result of the National Standards for the Arts, which state that students should be able to “understand relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.” Currently, the traditional music education curriculum offered after elementary school involves only those students who participate in bands, choirs, or orchestras. To meet the National Standards in Music Education, high schools in particular need to offer more courses that would appeal to and be accessible to students who do not choose to participate in the traditional music offerings.

Music education in PreK-12 has changed with societal events, in response to governmental policies, and most often has taken a back seat in the curriculum. However, as is widely recognized and understood, music education can be one of the most positive influences in a child’s education. And yet, the curricular imbalance recognized in the 1950s continues 5 decades later. Advocacy, not only by music educators but also by school, community, and governmental leaders, is vital if music is to be consistently treated as a core academic subject.

Further Readings


https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/music_education

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