

Core Style Bands

Ferd Vollmar

Before you jump to any conclusions about the title of this article, please let me assure you I am not a poor speller, nor do I wish to debate marching band styles in Texas. In this instance “core style” refers to a concept that all parts of the state should be able to agree with. What I am referring to is an involvement of our band programs and fine arts classes in the core curriculum. Many band directors and fine arts educators I have visited with believe their class is part of the core curriculum, but in today’s educational world we need to prove it. We must develop a collaborative method of instruction that will make involvement with the arts a basic part of every student’s learning experience. This “core style” approach is about improving student performance/achievement, and demonstrating the value of music and fine arts classes in our schools.

Music and the arts no longer need to be characterized solely by their ability to promote learning in the arts, but by their ability to promote learning in all disciplines. Often times learning in other disciplines offers development of a single skill or talent. Music and the arts regularly engage multiple skills and abilities. Research shows

that music and the arts provide a reason, and maybe the only reason, for students being engaged with school and community. Our challenge is to convince the core curriculum faculty, administrators, and the public that learning through music and fine arts will provide the connection that makes learning relevant and meaningful.

Rather than wait for an invitation from the core curriculum, we must initiate the connection. Band directors and fine arts educators need to create instructional methods that will allow our programs to work collaboratively with our core curriculum colleagues. In today’s climate toward music and the arts in education, such strategies as this are imperative for our programs’ survival. We must break down “walls” that exist between

core curriculum and the arts, and work along side our school’s faculty to implement the type of lessons that our young people will find exciting and beneficial. Who better to do this than us? Complacency and boredom in the classroom are barriers to success. Music and the arts can connect learning experiences to the world of real work by our ability to generate ideas, to bring ideas to life, and communicate them is what matters to a successful workplace. Whether it is designing a marching band show or developing a technological breakthrough, the ideas are what matter. Learning is deepest when the students can represent what they have learned. The multiple disciplines of the arts all provide modes of representation.

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In a recent staff development session with new teachers we began the exploration of how this integrated curriculum could become reality. During our discussions many wonderful lessons began to emerge. Listed below are some of the lessons our new teachers discussed:

World Cultures/Languages:

While learning about African, South American, Asian, and Eastern European cultures, include a segment on how stories and tribal history were passed down by dance, drumming, and singing. Bringing in a student demonstration group will make the lesson meaningful and memorable.

Science:

A physics class studying acoustics and sound waves could use a laptop computer with a visual sound wave program to make observations about the wavelengths of different instruments and voices. The class could take measurement in different acoustical spaces to study how space affects what we hear from the same instruments and voices.

Kinesiology/Sports:

Bring a coach into your music class to speak about muscle groups, posture, and exercises that will help increase breath support and control.

History:

While learning about a particular time period in history, incorporate a lesson that studies the music and art from that time. Performers, art work, and recordings could be utilized to create a more complete lesson.

Language Arts:

Share a concert with an English class involving poetry and narratives written by the students.

These are only a few of the lessons that were discussed at our new teacher inservice. The possibilities are endless.

Music and the arts should be more widely recognized for their current and potential contributions to the improvement of education in Texas. I am convinced that the partnership we must construct with the core curriculum will make all course work more relevant, improve student achievement, and secure the position of music and the arts in our schools. Students learning in and through the arts become their own toughest critics, and the result is a high level of self-directed learning. Effective learning in the arts is both complex and multi-dimensional, and that is why the arts will assist learning across the curriculum. I am not suggesting that we dilute what we are doing as music educators, but rather enrich and preserve our great Texas band programs. As band directors and fine arts educators, we must continue to work with the administration and faculty to make involvement in music and the arts a basic part of a student's everyday learning experience. With this in mind, we all must become "Core Style" educators.

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