

Why Won't They Perform the Christmas Music?

Louisiana Music Educators Association Conference

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Every student is entitled to the same high-quality, rigorous music education as their peers, regardless of family background, social class, race, ethnicity, religion, native language, gender, and any other identifying characteristic.

Religious Distribution in the United States (Pew Research Foundation, 2020)

Christian: 71%

Non-Christian: 6%

Unaffiliated: 23%

Cultural Mismatch (Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1991)

- Occurs when identity is in conflict with school expectations
- Adjustments to identity can be painful
- Participation in school activity requires denouncing aspects of one's self
- Can result in feelings of marginalization, devaluation, and exclusion
- Overt dissonance:
 - Students engage in active non-participation
 - Non-participation is driven by fear of hostility from groups with which students identify
 - Students feel it is not worth risking the loss of belonging to one group in order to participate in school activity
- Hidden dissonance:
 - Students participate in school activities
 - Participation can be driven by the desire for social acceptance
 - Participation can be driven by fear of discrimination
 - Students will hide their pain and discomfort, making it hard for teachers to notice

Types of Holiday Music

- Religious Holiday Music:
 - Overtly depicts or represents theological aspects of the holiday or religion.
- Secular Holiday Music:
 - Is either directly or tangentially related to the celebration of the holiday, but contains no reference to its theology or religion.

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Get to know your students (Weidner, 2017)

- Can you explain your faith to me as you practice it?
- Who should I talk to about questions that I may have about your faith and how it relates to our class?
- What concerns do you have about music that we might perform?
- Can you give me examples from your music education in the past?

Get to know yourself (Abril, 2006)

- How frequently and what types of interactions did I have with individuals from backgrounds different from my own growing up?
- Who were the primary persons that helped to shape my perspectives of individuals from different groups? How were their opinions formed?
- Have I ever harbored prejudiced thoughts towards people from different backgrounds?
- If I do harbor prejudiced thoughts, what effects do such thoughts have on students who come from those backgrounds?
- Do I create negative profiles of individuals who come from different backgrounds?

Cultural diversity

- Empower all students without denigrating any of them.
- Individual worth and dignity are of paramount importance.
- Knowledge is placed within a context instead of being absolute.
- When each student's cultural perspective is given equal value, students are more likely to feel free to explore and experience others' cultures.

Evaluating music for school use (Music Educators National Conference, 1996)

- Is the music selected on the basis of its musical and educational value rather than its religious context?
- Does the teaching of music with sacred text focus on musical and artistic considerations?
- Are the traditions of different people shared and respected?
- Is the role of sacred music one of neutrality, neither promoting nor inhibiting religious views?
- Are all local and school policies regarding religious holidays and the use of sacred music observed?
- Is the use of sacred music and religious symbols or scenery avoided? Is performance in devotional settings avoided?
- Is there sensitivity to the various religious beliefs represented by the students and parents?

The decisions we make matter

- Does my decision reflect the purpose of my class?
- What is gained as a result of my decision?
- What is lost as a result of my decision?
- Who benefits from my decision?
- Who is hurt because of my decision?
- Did I choose the best option to accomplish my goals?

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