

Elizabeth Anderson

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I believe that a quality music education is essential to every child's well-rounded education because it teaches the important life skills of creativity, collaboration, and cultural understanding. As an educator, I encourage my students to achieve mastery of their instruments and to discover the joy of creating and performing great music, and simultaneously, I strive to teach music as a 21st century skill. My approach to teaching music combines my strong background in orchestral, fiddle, and contemporary styles with my belief in participatory and culturally aware approaches to music making.

I believe that students at all levels can learn to be creative. I use improvisation tasks tailored to students at each level as a tool to allow them to explore important concepts and to encourage them to play solo. I begin by introducing very beginners to improvising four-beat melodies, while with older students, I use fiddle tunes as a supplement to their orchestral repertoire to teach improvisation and arrangement techniques. I also begin early to allow ensembles to make their own interpretations of written music in areas such as dynamics, articulations, phrasing, and balance, and to guide them toward more artistic choices. I believe that encouraging creativity helps students internalize concepts, develop their aural skills, and take ownership of their music. Introducing creative music making from an early age is the key to developing students' skills and cultivating a culture of self-confidence.

Ensemble classes provide a unique opportunity to teach collaboration. Unlike most academic classes, success in an ensemble is only achieved if members are mutually supportive. In my orchestra classroom, students understand that everyone has something to contribute to the orchestra and that the job of their colleagues and their teacher is to help them realize their individual potential for the benefit of the orchestra. I have been profoundly influenced by the student leadership program at Foxborough High School. In this program, student leaders, who are chosen for their musical ability, dedication, and their ability to inspire their peers, mentor younger students. The program creates personal relationships between orchestra members and provides underclassmen with role models and motivation. I aspire to implement a similar program in my next position because it truly embodies the spirit of collaboration.

Finally, I address the cultural aspect of music with my ensembles. Music can be used as a vantage point to examine history because it reflects the spirit of the time and place in which it was written. A symphony by Haydn can spark discussions about the birth of the symphony and the culture that brought it about, while a fiddle tune can tell the story of the people from whom it came. I also believe it is important to include contemporary composers in students' repertoire and to explore the ever-expanding range of musical styles accessible to strings players. As musicians, it is important to be aware of where we stand in global and musical history while making music that speaks to our current culture.

I believe in teaching music both as an expressive art form and as a context for practicing skills that will serve my students throughout their lives. I encourage students to find their own creative voice, and in my classroom they develop confidence in their ideas that will allow them to be innovative adults. From the collaboration that students experience in my classroom, they learn to strive for success as a team. My approach to music from a cultural perspective gives students a framework for understanding other places and times, and making music that speaks to our own culture. Whether my students continue make music after high school or not, they leave my class with the musical and personal skills they will need in their further musical endeavors and their chosen careers.