

Moving Forward with the Alliance for Active Music Making: A Process involving Imagination, Curiosity, Creativity, and Collaboration

by Judy Bond



Teaching music from a child-centered perspective requires that we acknowledge our past as we seek to understand and integrate the musical, social, and cultural experiences that shape our students and their families. (Abril and Gault, 2016, p. 259)

As music educators we have great traditions to uphold, with the challenges and joys of living, teaching, and making music. Our work and our play are two strands woven to become one, bringing us together as we make music and share our love of music. And yet, we are experiencing the challenges of a world torn by pandemic, war, racial and cultural tension, and political division. What do we imagine for the future, and how will we, as music educators, find our pathway to a more peaceful, beautiful, and satisfying world as we continue to work and play with music? Can the Alliance for Active Music Making be a force for the common good through modeling a collaborative approach to

teaching music through active music making?

In 1998, when the Alliance for Active Music Making was first imagined, the world situation seemed less chaotic than what we are experiencing in 2022. The time seemed right for general music teacher educators to focus on ways to improve preservice music teacher education, especially in the undergraduate preparation of general music teachers. Teachers of Dalcroze Eurhythmics, Edwin Gordon's Music Learning Theory, the Kodály Method, and Orff Schulwerk Music and Movement gathered at conferences of the groups associated with each approach to share, collaborate, and teach each other. By 2004, the imagination, creativity, and collaboration of these dedicated music teacher educators resulted in the formation of the Alliance for Active Music Making (AAMM), often referred to as "the Alliance". The AAMM founders agreed that the mission of the organization would be "to promote active music making approaches in general music education". (www.allianceamm.org).

Starting in 2003, the AAMM has presented collaborative "Four Approaches" sessions each year at state, national, and international conferences. The sessions are open to in-service classroom music teachers and pre-service undergraduate and graduate music education students as well as college and university music teacher educators. The longevity and popularity of these sessions, along with testimony from participants, provides strong evidence of the response from participants. (Marshall, 2021)

Was there a reason the four approaches listed were the foundation of the AAMM? Reflecting on the Alliance through the lens of CULTIVATING CURIOSITY, let's consider the musician/teacher/composer inventor of each approach. A high degree of curiosity was required in each case. Dalcroze was curious about why his conservatory students seemed to understand music theoretically, but not emotionally. Gordon embarked on years of research because he was curious about how people learn when they learn music. Kodály pursued ways to develop music literacy through exploring folk music of his own country and starting formal music instruction in early childhood, and Orff's curiosity led to a new way of thinking about the unity of music and movement, and the importance of improvisation. The general music teacher educators who formed the AAMM also had a high degree of curiosity. Realizing that each approach is unique, the founders decided to accept and value the differences, while recognizing the common elements. As they were drawn together by the desire to learn and grow from each of the four approaches, they wanted to cultivate this same curiosity in their undergraduate and graduate music education students, with the hope that each student would choose their own pathway based on interest, curiosity, and the desire to learn more.

But what of the future? Are the four approaches initially chosen to form the AAMM still valid in today's world? What changes and adaptations have been made over the past 20 years? What adaptations are required now due to current and inevitable future changes in culture and society? These questions and others demand our attention, imagination, curiosity, creativity, and collaboration.

Consider this: The inventors of the four approaches were all white men. All of them were great music educators of the Western European musical tradition of the 20th century. But now we are well into the 21st century. We need to think about the AAMM in a new way, with new concerns and new vocabulary. What are you curious about? Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion? Ableism, Racism, Sexism, Colonialism? Access? Cultural and Repertoire Expansion? Ethnic and/or Religious Discrimination? Exploring teaching and learning practices in other parts of the world? The impact of technology on music education? Each word or concept leads to a pathway for exploration and discovery important to teaching and learning music. In addition, consider cultural relevance, social/emotional learning, and making deeper connections with the lives of students. These aspects of education are part of the total picture. And though it seems like a tall order, the possibilities are exciting.

Final thoughts: Remember a typical general music class you may have experienced or taught. What stands out? Do you remember the “basics” of singing, playing instruments, movement, listening, and learning notation? What music do you remember? Do you remember the teacher, the other students, the physical environment? Is your memory good, neutral, or negative? After reflecting and sharing your memories, imagine a general music class moving into the future, considering aspects listed above. Remember that general music is music for everyone, rather than special groups such as choirs, bands, and orchestras. With that in mind, what is your vision for the future of general music education, and where will your curiosity lead?

References/Resources

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Biography

Judy Bond, PH.D., is Professor Emerita, University of Wisconsin Stevens Point, a past-president and honorary member of the American Orff Schulwerk Association, recipient of the 2022 AOSA Distinguished Service Award, and Chair of the Alliance for Active Music Making. Judy has taught workshops, courses, and Orff Levels I, II, and III across the U.S. and in several other countries. Since retiring in 2015, she has continued as an active music educator, advocating for collaboration and deeper understanding between teachers of Orff Schulwerk and other active music making approaches. She is an advocate for social justice and culturally relevant teaching in general music education. Judy is an author of two K-8 textbook series published by McGraw-Hill.