

Embodied Musical Knowledge



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Each dancer in the room has an embodied understanding of sound and music that goes much deeper than most musicians their age. That knowledge is incredibly complex and has been developed over years of listening and moving to music. The ability to embody music is a form of musical practice and music theory. We want to reinforce that practice, and build on top of it. Too often, there is a feeling of deficiency most dancers have about their musical ability. Let's eradicate that idea and empower dancers as they possess a wealth of musical understanding, and there is an effortless expression of that knowledge in every movement.

Music, like dance, is incredibly broad in the diversity of ideas that make it what it is. Thinking that knowing how to play a major scale is the only thing that makes someone a musician, is the same as thinking that knowing how to jump is what makes someone a dancer. These are only small fractions of the totality of each of the art forms. The embodiment and expression of music is the goal of any musician. Dancers have made this a central part of their daily practice since the very beginning. There is a mastery of music that every dancer has and we need to acknowledge and celebrate it. The best way to start doing that is to get curious about your students' musical tastes. Meet them where they are.

Music Practice - Top 5 Tracks

This practice serves three purposes:

- To get to know what inspires a student musically.
- To keep me up to date with new music.
- To build stronger connections between peers.

Ask each student to write down the five pieces of music they are listening to most right now. Have the students each share their list. Listening to each of the tracks would take a long time to do as a class, so maybe just pick one or two from each student and listen to only a little bit. This is a great way for the students in the class to get to know each other better. I love watching students develop closer connections to each other because of a shared love for a piece of music.

It is so important to listen to what music inspires a student. This gives me a way in, a connection to them that is individual and personal. It builds trust. It says, "I am curious about what you know about music!". Have each student give you their list. I usually make one big playlist of all of that music and listen to it throughout the semester. If I know what music a student resonates with, I can teach from their perspective.

I was very aware when I became twice as old as some of my students. If I think of all of the things I was listening to as a young adult, I can see the gap in time. It is nearly impossible to stay "current" with everything that is happening in music. I thought of this aspect of the practice while I was thinking about Miles Davis and how he would keep his music fresh by always working with young artists...and really listening to them. I can use what I hear from what students share with me when I am playing class as well. I'll cover songs, remix tracks, grab samples, and recompose elements that stick out to me.

Students need to "see" themselves in what I am teaching and playing. It is empowering. Just because someone might not be able to play music, does not mean that they are ignorant to how music works. Having an embodied knowledge of music will always be the most important element of music.