

Opportunity-to-Learn: Concepts, Standards, and Considerations for Music Teaching and Learning

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to discuss opportunity-to-learn (OTL) as it relates to the field of music teaching and learning. Broadly, OTL is the consideration for all conditions or circumstances within schools and classrooms that promote fair and inclusive learning for all students. From an inclusion perspective and in the context of music education, OTL implies the assurance of a basic minimum standard of music education for all participating music students within a school environment. This article examines OTL from an inclusion perspective with regard to the *Every Student Succeeds Act* and the National Association for Music Education's OTL Standards For Music Instruction. Implications for the assessment of OTL in music classrooms and programs are discussed.

The *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* (1993) facilitated the beginning of what were called the "Opportunity-to-Learn Standards," which were designed as an accountability measure for schools to ensure quality instruction to students. Goals 2000 specifically included the arts and required the development of a set of standards to make sure students could achieve success in adequately meeting content and performance arts standards across the country. In response to Goals 2000, the Music Educators National Conference (MENC), now named the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) believed that, "every student at every level, PreK-12, should have access to a balanced, comprehensive, and sequential program of instruction in music and the other arts, in school, taught by qualified teachers" (MENC, 1994, n.p.).

In today's standards-based educational climate, opportunity-to-learn is at the forefront of accountability considerations, particularly in the arts and more specifically, music, with the *Every Student Succeeds Act* acting as an impetus (Tuttle, 2016). The purpose of this paper is to discuss Opportunity-to-learn (OTL) as it relates to the field of music teaching and learning. In particular, this article provides (1) a brief historical background on the origins of OTL; (2) a contextualization of OTL in relation to equity, fairness, and inclusion paradigms;

(3) considerations for OTL in the context of educational standards, broadly, and music standards, specifically; and (4) considerations for evaluating OTL in music classrooms.

Opportunity-to-Learn: A Brief Historical Background

Opportunity-to-learn (OTL) was first defined by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) as a set of guidelines to identify whether students had an equal opportunity to learn the same curricular content across districts, states, and countries (McDonnell, 1995). Specifically, McDonnell (1995) reported the earliest formal comparisons between students were made in the area of mathematics as part of the First International Mathematics Survey (FIMS, n.d.). In order to directly compare students across country boundaries, it was advantageous for stakeholders to evaluate the specific curricula used to teach the varying groups of students across classrooms and programs, as it was thought that the curriculum itself was directly related to students' academic achievement. Much of the research literature pertaining to OTL highlights the importance of an alignment between content taught and content tested and how this relationship affects students' academic performance (Leinhardt and Seewald, 1981). However, Walker and Schaffarzick (1974) found in a review of the research literature, little impact of the type of curricula, such as "innovative curricula" (e.g., updated courses and materials) versus a "traditional curricula" (e.g., non-updated courses and materials), for example, on student learning outcome achievement. They concluded that the content included in the curricula and the teacher who was assigned to teach the content had the most significant impact on student achievement.

Teachers may consider data gathered on student achievement as one indicator of opportunity-to-learn; however, solely using test scores as a baseline for evaluating OTL is problematic. Stevens and Grymes (1993) sought to determine whether school districts were collecting and using information on student performance outcomes to determine opportunity-to-learn. After surveying representatives from 142 different school districts, researchers performed post hoc interviews with the survey participants. The interviews revealed that many districts felt uneasy about directly using opportunity-to-learn considerations as they had a potential confounding effect on student achievement due to a lack of sufficient knowledge of how to appropriately define and measure it.

Early considerations of OTL were the responsibility of the teacher, and the IEA concluded that it was unfair to assess students or hold students accountable for curricular content that they were not given an equal opportunity to learn (McDonnell, 1995). As applications and considerations of OTL matured in educational and sociological research literature, philosophical discourse ensued about not only how students were taught curricular content, but more

importantly, who was held accountable for the students to learn the content. Instead of students being solely responsible for their achievement, it was decided that schools should also be held accountable and should be held to specified standards specific to each field of study.

In the field of music, OTL is a prevalent and important topic, particularly with the recent revision of the National Core Arts Standards (NCCAS, 2014; NAFME, 2014) and more specifically, the revision of the opportunity-to-learn standards (Council of Music Program Leaders, 2015; see Appendix A). As Lehman noted, “In the United States, we don’t have an educational system; we have 13,809 educational systems” (Lehman, 2014, p. 4). As Lehman inferred, a diverse array of educational opportunities exists across the country in the field of music, each with subtle educational nuances and opportunities for students to engage in music instruction. Opportunity-to-learn considerations help promote equity across each of these educational systems, which is critical for facilitating quality music instruction across the United States.

Equity, Fairness, and Inclusion

From today’s modern education perspective, OTL can more concisely be defined as “a multi-dimensional construct central to quality teaching and prerequisite to student achievement” (Elliott & Bartlett, 2016, p. 1). The *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* define OTL as “the extent to which individuals have had exposure to instruction or knowledge that affords them the opportunity to learn the content and skills targeted by the test” (American Educational Research Association (AERA), American Psychological Association (APA), & National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME), 2014, p. 56). In these contexts, various barriers that may limit the ability of the student to meet educational goals, objectives, and outcomes set forth in related content and performance standards are considered. Equity in education implies every student is given a fair chance to learn the material set forth in a specified curriculum (Adams, 1993). In order to determine whether equitable treatment of students is being achieved, both fairness and inclusion are often examined.

Fairness can be defined as “responsiveness to individual characteristics and testing contexts so that test scores will yield valid interpretations for intended uses” (AERA, APA, & NCME, 2014). In other words, fairness means that all students are given an equal opportunity to succeed in the classroom regardless of any outlying factors such as ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic status. These types of factors should remain irrelevant when it comes to determining a student’s opportunity to learn. Fairness, however, is a consideration most often with high-stakes, standardized tests. The field of music does not often rely on large-scale testing practices to measure or define student achievement for a variety of technical reasons, such as the difficulty of assessing music due to its performance based nature, variability in contact hours across

music classrooms, lack of standardized curricula, and variability in student-to-teacher ratio (Shuler, Brophy, Sabol, McGreevy-Nichols, & Schuttler, 2016). However, one important example of large-scale testing in music is the Advanced Placement (AP) Music Theory exam. In the case of standardized tests such as the AP Music Theory exam, the test constructors evaluate fairness using a variety of statistical indices through published testing reports (College Board, n.d.). However, for classroom music teachers, the operational definition of and use of fairness considerations is not particularly relevant.

Inclusion, on the other hand, is much more relevant to the field of music. Inclusion can be defined as the considerations for which a student is able to minimally meet prescribed academic expectations set forth in content and performance standards as related to other students within the context of the school environment (Vakil, Welton, O'Connor, & Kline, 2009). Any limitation of the opportunity for a student to learn at the same level as their peers either within or across school environments demonstrates a lack of inclusion. As one example, a lack of inclusion within a school environment might arise in the case of special needs students without access to adaptive devices to aid in their music instruction. Lack of inclusion across school environments might also be caused by space limitations, or lack of a dedicated music classroom for music students to study, rehearse, and engage in music instruction on a regular basis compared to other music programs. Inclusion can be examined formally and informally and may aid in identifying specific limitations that deter students from meeting prescribed content and performance standards. As discussed below, inclusion considerations are the embodiment of the National Association for Music Education's (NAfME) OTL standards.

Music students must be provided with equitable and inclusive learning opportunities within the music classroom and across the school instructional environment in order to expect them to meet minimum levels of achievement set forth in the national standards (NCCAS, 2014). Therefore, music educators, administrators, and stakeholders must first, philosophically and pragmatically consider the role of inclusion in their music programs, and second, move forward with taking action on evaluating, measuring, and improving OTL considerations in their music classroom and school environments. There is a need for music educators to clearly define opportunity-to-learn, to understand how to identify it, and to consider how it can be measured in the context of music programs.

Opportunity-to-Learn and Inclusion: A Standards-Based Approach

A multitude of changes in educational policy throughout the last several decades such as *A Nation At Risk* (Gardner, 1983), *No Child Left Behind* (2002), *Goals 2000* (1994), and the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015), for example, provided policy makers, educators, and scholars grounds to develop varying

frameworks for opportunity-to-learn (OTL) standards. The goal of OTL standards is to provide a list of measurable criteria to be used when evaluating opportunity-to-learn from an inclusion perspective within the school environment. The criteria included in the OTL standards are intended to be met by schools and related districts in order to ensure students have an equal opportunity to achieve learning outcomes at a minimum level of achievement as prescribed in related content and performance standards (Chism & Pang, 2014). From an inclusion perspective, OTL standards can aid teachers in identifying educational contexts whereby students are not provided comprehensive access to content, materials, and/or educational opportunities. Furthermore, OTL standards can provide administrators and other stakeholders opportunities for considering when students are not being taught at a high level or are not participating in minimal educational opportunities (Gidley, Hampson, Wheeler, & Bereded-Samuel, 2010).

One important inclusion consideration is what curricular resources (e.g. textbooks, materials, and technology) students have access to in the classroom (Gidley, Hampson, Wheeler, & Bereded-Samuel, 2010). Yarbrow and colleagues (2016) evaluated the impact of classroom technology on student learning. She highlighted five important areas for consideration when integrating technology into the classroom with regard to inclusion considerations: (1) increasing access to learning resources; (2) enhancing communication and feedback between teachers, students, and parents; (3) restructuring teacher time; (4) extending the purpose and audience for student work; and (5) shifting teacher and student roles (Yarbrow, McKnight, Elliott, Kurz, & Wardlow, 2016). Considerations of these areas in classroom environments may directly impact students' opportunities toward improved learning and achievement as they relate to learning outcomes aligned to content standards (Elliott & Bartlett, 2016).

Another important inclusion consideration is the quality of instruction in the classroom. Researchers discovered that after controlling for variables such as students' socioeconomic status and ability levels, examinations of OTL demonstrated only a moderate effect on student achievement (Elliott & Bartlett, 2016). It was found that many teachers were inefficient in planning their teaching with respect to time, and this in itself was found to be an inclusion issue. Time-efficient teachers provided students with more learning opportunities than teachers who were found to be inefficient with planning or timely content delivery.

The modern OTL perspective was derived from research on national and international scales. Based on this OTL framework, Stevens (1993) identified 4 factors to assist in the development of impactful teacher practices, which in turn help foster student learning: (1) content coverage variables, (2) content exposure variables, (3) content emphasis variables, and (4) quality of instructional delivery variables (See Figure 1). Content coverage measures students' opportunities to examine the core curriculum for the grade and/or subject area being studied. In

music, this may include the development of a high-quality core music curriculum to accompany a set of standards across the United States. Content coverage measures may help delineate a necessary set of resources music educators need to provide their students adequate opportunities to succeed (Shuler et al., 2016). Content exposure encompasses the time allocated for students' instructional time and the quality of the information and teaching being provided. Quality instructional time in the music classroom may indicate the amount of time a teacher allots to providing individual and group feedback instruction during a rehearsal, or more broadly, the amount of contact time teachers have with students across ability levels, grade levels, or student academic achievement levels within the educational environment or compared to other music programs.

Term	Definition
Opportunity-to-Learn	The extent to which individuals have had exposure to instruction or knowledge that affords them the opportunity to learn the content and skills targeted by the test
Opportunity-to-Learn Standards	A list of measurable criteria to be used when evaluating opportunity-to-learn from an inclusion perspective within the school environment
Equity	Every student is given a fair chance to learn the material set forth in the curriculum
Fairness	Responsiveness to individual characteristics and testing contexts so that test scores will yield valid interpretations for intended uses
Inclusion	The considerations for which students are able to minimally meet prescribed academic expectations set forth in content and performance standards as related to other students within the context of the school environment

Figure 1. Definitions

Content emphasis can be characterized by the relationship between content in the curriculum and its cognitive rigor, ranging from low-level thinking, such as simple memorization, to high-level thinking such as problem solving and critical thinking skills. It is therefore important for music educators to consider the importance of developing specific objectives at varying cognitive levels to determine what knowledge, skills, abilities, and dispositions they want their

students to gain in the music classroom, and more specifically, the level of thinking they want their students to achieve (Wesolowski, 2015). Quality of instructional delivery explores whether or not the practices of the teacher affect the students' ability to learn the material and achieve academic success (Stevens, 1993). The music classroom fosters an environment for frequent delivery of formative assessment feedback during rehearsals, and music educators can use the natural quality of the environment to their advantage when developing students' skills as individuals, or as an ensemble. Stevens (1993) four factors can be used to help guide and facilitate the process of fostering students' opportunity-to-learn the curricular content in music classrooms.

The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) and Opportunity-to-Learn

Opportunity-to-learn is highlighted by a variety of different educational initiatives to help facilitate students' ability to adequately meet content and performance standards. The most current version of the opportunity-to-learn standards was published in May 2015, preceding the passing of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) (2015) in December 2015. ESSA was a replacement act for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). For the field of music education, the importance of the passing of ESSA was that music was specifically named as part of the national curriculum that every student should have the opportunity to learn.

Music education was identified as a necessary part of a student's education with the passing of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* by the U.S. Government in December 2015. This act has designated music as part of a "well-rounded" education that all students should be able to access:

(52) WELL-ROUNDED EDUCATION. – The term 'well-rounded education' means courses, activities, and programming in subjects such as English, reading or language arts, writing, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, geography, computer science, music, career and technical education, health, physical education, and any other subject, as determined by the State or local educational agency, with the purpose of providing all students access to an enriched curriculum and educational experience. (§ 8002)

The National Association for Music Education (NAfME) provides a "comprehensive analysis" on the *Every Student Succeeds Act* in the context of music and provides three key words of importance within ESSA: "well-rounded, music and arts" (NAfME, 2015).

Opportunity-to-Learn Standards in Music Education

After the passage of the *Every Student Succeeds Act*, NAfME revised the former OTL standards with the intention of providing a checklist to music

educators to ensure all students have the proper opportunity to adequately meet the Core Arts Standards in the music classroom. This not only provides music educators with strong guidelines around which they can operate, but it provides an incentive for the administrators to advocate for funding resulting from Title IV (21st Century Schools), specifically Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The goal of these grants is to provide funding to schools and students in the hope of closing the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students. These grants focus primarily on three different areas to be funded: (1) safe and healthy students, (2) promoting a well-rounded education, and (3) effective use of technology (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Safe and healthy students has to do with any environmental factors that might be an obstacle in a student's right to an equitable education. Promoting a well-rounded education emphasizes the importance for the instruction of subjects, such as the arts. Effective use of technology addresses any need for funding that schools might require for all students to have equitable access to technology that will help with the improvement in academic achievement (Cook-Harvey et al., 2016).

The updated opportunity-to-learn standards for music were designed with the values of equity and inclusion in mind for grades Pre-K-12. The National Association for Music Education (NAfME), with the help of the Council of Music Program Leaders, adapted a set of meaningful OTL standards for each branch of music education. The branches of the field in NAfME's 2015 OTL standards include: All Grades-All Content Areas, PreK-2 General Music, Grade 3-5 General Music, Grade 6-8 (and all Secondary) General Music, Ensembles (Elementary and Secondary Grades), Composition/Theory, Guitar/Keyboard/Harmonizing Instruments (Elementary and Secondary Grades), and Technology. Each of these branches is divided into four separate categories of importance: (1) Curriculum and Scheduling, (2) Staffing, (3) Materials and Equipment, and (4) Facilities. Some of these categories are further divided into subcategories. For example, staffing includes Teacher Qualifications and Load, and Professional Development and Evaluation. Materials and Equipment includes: (1) Instruments, (2) Accessories, (3) Content, and (4) Technology. Furthermore, each of the four categories (e.g., Curriculum and Scheduling, Staffing, Materials and Equipment, and Facilities) is split into two divisions of the standards: basic and quality. According to the standards, a quality program provides students with more variety of opportunity than a basic program, and it adheres specifically to all of the standards and courses prescribed by the Core Arts Music Standards (NCCAS, 2014).

The new OTL standards include considerations for the branches of Composition/Theory, Guitar/Keyboard/Harmonizing Instruments (Elementary and Secondary Grades), and Technology, and separates Elementary and Secondary music education into General Music and Ensembles. The updated OTL standards also address technology, which Yarbrow et al. (2016) indicate is an

important predictor of opportunity to learn. The new OTL standards can help by being a checklist to establish an adequate foundation for use of technology in the music classroom.

Not only can music educators use the updated OTL music standards as a comprehensive list of materials and curricular guidelines necessary to provide students with an equal opportunity to learn, but the standards also describe the requirements for teacher qualifications. This provides music educators with exemplars of what high quality instructional delivery may look like. The goal of the OTL music standards is to provide a better mechanism for music students to meet their educational goals, regardless of their age, ethnicity, academic ability, or whether or not they have limitations such as an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or special needs. It is important that OTL is not misunderstood to mean that all students must meet the same, or standardized academic achievement levels. This is impractical due to students having a variety of academic abilities and backgrounds. However, the essence of the OTL standards is to help provide every student, regardless of their academic or socioeconomic limitations, the opportunity to engage in music instruction to their highest possible individual ability. This means all students are taught musical knowledge, skills, abilities, and dispositions aligned to the NAFME Core Arts content and performance standards (NCCAS, 2014), regardless of their ability or level of academic achievement. With the new OTL standards, NAFME has provided the field of music education the necessary standards for teachers to use as a baseline to begin the process of helping all students gain equal access to curriculum, scheduling, materials, equipment, staffing, and facilities.

Opportunity to Learn in the Music Classroom - Can It Be Measured?

Multiple educational disciplines have explored ways to measure opportunity to learn in the classroom. According to Elliott and Bartlett (2016), measuring OTL “... is fundamental to providing teachers valuable feedback about their instruction and for monitoring changes in instruction” (p. 8). The most common way OTL has been measured is via a self-report survey, but the inferences drawn from the surveys are often considered invalid, as teachers tend to report what the student is achieving rather than what they have been taught (Elliott & Bartlett, 2016).

Elliott has dedicated much of his research to opportunity-to-learn, and what methods can be used to measure it. An important resource Kurz and Elliott (2013) provide that may be beneficial to music educators is the My instructional Learning Opportunities Guidance System (MyiLOGS). MyiLOGS is a model that was originally developed for use with students with disabilities (SWDs) and is now used as a measurement instrument for OTL. Elliot (2015) provides the following information on MyiLOGS model of OTL:

This model features indices for instructional time on standards, content coverage, and instructional quality...These three indices result in five MyiLOGS OTL Summary Scores: Percentage of Instructional Time Used (IT), Percentage of Content Covered (CC), Cognitive Processes Emphasized (CP), Instructional Practices Emphasized (IP), and Grouping Formats Emphasized (GF). (Elliott, 2015, p. 59)

MyiLOGS has now been documented being used in both general education and special education classrooms to measure OTL. MyiLOGS can provide teachers with several different types of feedback to drive their instruction and effectiveness of their OTL strategies (Elliott, 2015). The consideration of NAFME's OTL standards in conjunction with the reporting mechanisms of MyiLOGS may provide music educators with the tools necessary to provide the best possible opportunity to learn for each student in the classroom, and to continue to move forward and begin finding new ways to teach students the content they need to know.

It is not responsible to hold students accountable for information they have not been given an equal opportunity to learn. In other words, context matters when assessing the knowledge, skills, abilities, and dispositions of music students (Brophy & Fautley, 2018). Teachers and administrators must align the content being taught, with the content to be tested, and in the context of the learning environment. From an advocacy perspective, music educators should be focused on inclusion for all students in their program. Music is a core subject that has been identified as important curricular content to which students should have access. The current OTL standards provide music educators a platform upon which they can evaluate the important aspects of inclusion and build meaningful assessments for students.

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Appendix A
Factors Impacting Teacher Practices and Student Learning as They Relate to the
Music OTL Standards

(Council of Music Program Leaders, 2015)

Content Coverage Variables		
Instruments	<p>1. Every room in which music is taught has convenient access to a high-quality acoustic or electronic piano, and sufficient sturdy music stands.</p> <p>2. Adaptive devices (such as adaptive picks, beaters) are available for use by students with special needs.</p> <p>3. All equipment is maintained in good repair, with pianos tuned at least three times each year. An annual budget is provided for repair and maintenance of instruments and equipment that is equal to at least 5 percent of the current replacement value of the total inventory of instruments and equipment.</p> <p>4. An annual budget is provided for the replacement of school-owned instruments that is equivalent to at least 5 percent of the current replacement value of the total inventory of instruments. The school program has a written depreciation and replacement plan for all instruments, specifically describing under what conditions instruments should be retired and replaced.</p> <p>5. All instruments supplied by the school are of a quality generally understood to be that of undamaged "student line" instruments, and thus are appropriate for student learning and performance.</p>	<p>1. Equity</p> <p>2. Inclusion</p> <p>3. Equity</p> <p>4. Equity</p> <p>5. Equity</p>
Accessories	<p>1. If a music task cannot be performed by students with special needs exactly as it would be by other students, adaptation is provided so that students with special needs can participate insofar as possible.</p> <p>2. Teachers have easy access to email, online storage, a school-sanctioned web portal and other online services for professional and curricular development, research, and other communications needs.</p> <p>3. The school program has a written depreciation and replacement plan for equipment.</p>	<p>1. Inclusion</p> <p>2. Equity</p> <p>3. Equity</p>

Appendix A: Factors Impacting Teacher Practices and Student Learning as They Relate to the Music OTL Standards, continued

Technology	1. Every room in which music is taught is equipped with a high-quality sound and video reproduction system capable of using current recording technology. At least some of the audio equipment can be operated by students. Every teacher has convenient access to sound recordings representing a wide variety of music styles and cultures.	1. Equity
Content Exposure Variables		
Scheduling	1. The course of study in all schools shall include music. 2. Pullouts for school assemblies, test preparation, or other non-music education activities are arranged to minimally impact music learning. 3. At the Middle and High School levels, ensembles and other large music classes are offered at times designed to allow participation by the maximum number of students. 4. Students in performance ensembles should be scheduled by experience or student proficiency level. 5. Just as other core academic subject areas meet during the course of the curricular school day, after- school rehearsals should serve to supplement the learning that takes place within the school day.	1. Inclusion and Equity 2. Inclusion 3. Equity 4. Fairness 5. Inclusion
Content Emphasis Variables		
Curriculum	1. The program provides all students the opportunity to achieve at levels consistent with their individual abilities and with the National Standards for Music Education listed for the appropriate grade levels. 2. At grades 5-12, the program addresses the needs of most students by offering a robust Ensemble strand consistent with allowing all students the opportunity to achieve at levels consistent with their individual abilities in all areas cited in the National Standards in that strand.	1. Inclusion and Fairness 2. Inclusion and Equity

Appendix A: Factors Impacting Teacher Practices and Student Learning as They Relate to the Music OTL Standards, continued

Curriculum	<p>3. At the High School level, the program addresses the needs of most students by offering a robust program consistent with allowing all students to achieve at the Proficient and Accomplished levels in the ensemble strand.</p> <p>4. Special education classes in music are no larger than other special-education classes.</p>	<p>3. Inclusion and Equity</p> <p>4. Inclusion</p>
Quality of Instructional Delivery Variables		
Teacher Qualifications and Load	<p>1. The primary responsibility for music education as a part of the overall education of the student rests with the certified music teacher. Certified non-arts educators are drawn on to expand students' opportunities for arts learning by providing curricular connections among the arts and other subjects.</p> <p>2. Teacher aides are provided for special-education classes in music if they are provided for other special-education classes. If a student with special needs has an aide to assist in other classes, the aide also assists the student in music classes.</p> <p>3. Every music educator working with special-education students has received in-service training in special education.</p>	<p>1. Equity</p> <p>2. Inclusion and Fairness</p> <p>3. Equity</p>