

# *Strategies for Curriculum Reform on Music Education Major At Regional Colleges and Universities*

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**Abstract:** Curriculum reform on music education major has become an imperative for regional colleges and universities as they are shifting their focus from research to talent training and development. As to these higher education institutions, curriculum reform now is their core task in adapting their music education major to the new focus. This article discusses the strategies for the curriculum reform on music education major at regional colleges and universities while giving consideration to the teaching experience as well as methods for preliminary curriculum reform that have been produced from years of practice, attempting to find efficient approaches for the curriculum reform and promote the development of “application-oriented” music education professionals and majors.

## **1. Introduction**

The Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China formally issued in January 2018 the National Standards for the Teaching Quality in Bachelor’s Degree Programs at Ordinary Colleges and Universities. According to the National Standards, it is proposed to implement the three-level major certification mechanism based on the principle of “meeting the minimum requirements, ensuring the pass rate and pursuing excellence.” This has specified the requirements on the development of college majors, and provides guidelines for curriculum reform.

According to the National Standards, the music education major at regional colleges and universities should be developed based on local conditions and needs, and aimed at producing music education professionals who can meet the diverse needs of local cultural undertakings and industries, including those who have mastered the basic theories, basic knowledge and professional skills of music education; have excellent practical ability, innovative spirit, and the capability to teach music and do research on music education; and are competent to do music education work in primary and secondary schools, kindergartens, community activity centers, art training centers, enterprises’ art troupes, public art museums, regional culture centers, military’s art troupes, trade unions and other departments.

## **2. Establishing a Systematic Curriculum for Music Education Major**

“Application-oriented professionals refer to those who are capable of applying their professional knowledge and skills in their professional and social practice. These professionals should have mastered the basic knowledge and skills required for front-line jobs in social production and

activities.” For systematization of music education curriculum, the priority is to clarify what core technologies and skills should be mastered by the music education graduates from regional colleges and universities. The author of this article have many years of experience in teaching and management, and have revised three times the plan for achieving the goal of the author’s institute for music education talent development. Based on this experience, the author hereby proposes the following seven requirements on the development of music education talents at regional colleges and universities.

1). The talents should master professional skills necessary for doing theoretical research on music education, namely should master the basic theories and methods of music education, have a deep understanding of musical culture, a solid and systematic understanding of music theories and frontiers of the discipline and specialty, and understand the basic principles and methods of a certain field of music education. 2). The talents should have professional skills to do jobs related to music education, such as the ability to sing, play an instrument, sing and play at the same time, or organize dancing or chorusing rehearsals or training; and are capable of doing research on education and application of performance and music 3). The talents should have music education skills, namely the basic theoretical knowledge of the relevant discipline necessary for music education, the ability to apply teaching methods in practice, and excellent music-teaching skills. 4). The talents should have the ability to plan and organize music activities, including an excellent ability to learn, communicate and cooperate with each other, innovate, design plans for music activities, and organize rehearsals and performances. 5). The talents should have abilities in connection with music languages and computer application, including the ability to search music-related information and literature, and use modern information technology to obtain information about music education; master a foreign language; and can write and work with the foreign language. 6). The talents should have a deep understanding of how to be a professional teacher, including having knowledge about China’s and the Communist Party’s relevant sciences and technologies, intellectual property rights, policies and regulations; should be familiar with policies, laws and regulations in connection with primary and secondary schools; and should love students and have a strong sense of morality. 7). The talents should have some special musical skills with regional characteristics, such as being able to play an instrument or sing a song with regional or ethnic characteristics; should have a deep understanding of the regional characteristics of musical culture; and should be able to impart this knowledge to their students.

A systematic curriculum structure should be established based on these seven goals for the development of music education talents at regional colleges and universities, so as to optimize the curriculum structure of music education major. For many years, the curriculum structure of music education major have been developed with reference to that of professional music colleges and universities, and now is insufficient to meet the development needs of the market and society. Therefore, it is particularly urgent to build a systematic curriculum structure that emphasizes the teaching skills of music teachers and educators. Except for the curriculum of liberal arts education, the curriculum structure of music education major is preliminary designed as follows: A. Curriculum of liberal arts education, B. Specialized curriculum of education major, C. Curriculum of discipline-based education, D. Curriculum of teaching practice, E. Curriculum of innovation, entrepreneurship and professional development.

The systematization and structuralization of curriculum is the key and foundation for curriculum reform. The curriculum provided should not only meet the talent needs of society and the market, but also should follow the law of development of the curriculum itself. In addition, the curriculum should also highlight the further development of specialty while being universal.

### **3. Increasing the Proportion of Practice-Based Teaching in the Specialized Curriculum of**

## Education Major

The stereotypical classroom instruction has been insufficient to meet the demands for training “application-oriented talents.” Primary and middle schools can provide only limited job positions for music teachers, while the demand of all walks of life for music education professionals is increasing. Communities, educational institutions, training centers, early learning centers, and corporations specialized in performance arts training and communication of music and culture are all demanding more music education professionals. The most general need of these educational institutions and centers in terms of talent is to recruit music professionals who can fit in their job positions quickly, especially those who have a comprehensive ability to sing and play songs, organize rehearsals, perform arts and dance in arts events involving chorus conducting and performance. This has led to higher requirements on the development of music education talents at regional colleges and universities. Therefore, in establishing the curriculum structure, we should not only focus on the in-depth improvement of playing and singing skills, but also put more emphasis on the students’ versatility. In this regard, increasing the proportion of practice-based teaching in the specialized curriculum of education major is obviously more imperative and important.

On the one hand, for many years, music education students have chosen their major subjects in their third year at university. Some music education students who are better at singing and playing would be diverted to a major subject that allows them to further improve their ability to sing and play. On the other hand, some or even most of music education students under this diversion mechanism can just barely finish their study for further improving their singing ability. This has led the music education students who are better at singing and playing, to a talent development pattern similar to that of the students majoring in musical performance or singing and playing, while the students who can barely finish their study also fall into a talent development pattern similar to that of students majoring in musical performance. However, music education students in general are inferior to musical performance students in terms of singing and playing skills, and fall short of the standards set for musical performance professionals.

The National Standards has set clear objectives for the talent development of music performance major and music education major: more efforts must be put in the teaching training for students majoring in music education, so that they can meet the education needs of training centers and institutions at all levels. The learning of singing and playing skills is not the ultimate goal for the development of music education talents. Although numerous educational and theoretical courses have been provided, these theoretical courses are far from meeting the needs for practice-based teaching skills, unless we increase the proportion of practice-based teaching training in the curriculum.

On the practice-based teaching course platform, we have graded the practice part in courses based on the curriculum structure mentioned above. In centralized practice-based teaching activities, we applied a project-based mechanism, where the teacher instructs the students to collect and sort out data, make reviews of literature review and present their results. We have set requirements on the maximum and minimum number of students for each project group, which is required to submit a project application in advance and get approval from the practice teacher team before carrying out a project such as the investigation and analysis of the current situations of basic music education in communities, the analysis of the challenges in the dance training aimed at dance grading certificates, and the manufacturing of cucurbit flute and the development of this craft.

On the individual practice platform, investigations are carried out mainly on the current situations of music education in communities, towns, training institutions, early learning centers, etc. Results of individual practice are assessed based on the submitted corresponding questionnaires and the analysis of results of the said current situation investigations. In this mechanism, students are

encouraged to conduct follow-up investigations on a particular institution twice a year, and to engage in the teaching practices of various institutions.

The strategy of micro-class practice is mainly to use micro-classes to carry out lectures, presentations, trial lectures, online class reviews and teaching competitions. This part of the curriculum is combined mainly with courses of “Music Pedagogy,” “Music Teaching Method” and “Practice Guided by Orff Cases” in order to highlight the training and assessment on the students’ practical ability. We also subject the videos recording the demonstration of teaching skills and assessment of the students to an archives management system, and publicize the excellent video archives on the Internet in order to stimulate the students’ enthusiasm for practical courses and create a positive atmosphere.

As to practical ability training, we will follow the overall schedule for music education major at colleges and universities, according to which music students are required to demonstrate their basic skills every two years. In our university, we carry out annually the “Basic Skill Competition” for music education students, and gradually improve the students’ three teaching skills: “dance performance,” “singing and playing at the same time” and “giving trial lectures in the form of micro-class.”

#### **4. Highlighting the Regional Characteristics of Music Education Courses**

In addition to establishing the said curriculum structure and carrying out curriculum reform concerning practice-based teaching, regional colleges and universities should develop their music education major with a focus on “regional music education,” so as to highlight their regional advantages. On the one hand, for the sake of sustainable development, regional music culture needs to be seen and transmitted by music professionals. On the other hand, with the transmission effort by music professionals, regional music can be publicized and developed in a more efficient way. To boost the development of music education talents at regional colleges and universities, a good “ecological environment” for music education is necessary.

Regional music should be included in the curriculum, and the results of regional music study should be assessed every semester.

The singing through imitation and sight singing of representative music that originated in minority regions should be included in certain units of the course of “Sight Singing and Ear Training.” The students should be required to play a special rhythm of regional music by imitation and write it down, and this part of study should be taken into account in the final assessment at the end of the semester.

In the course of “Introduction to Chinese Traditional Music,” students who are enrolled in the study of their regional music should be grouped together to present their regional music works. Such presentation should be turned into videos and subject to an archives management system. Then these videos should be summarized and used for weekly presentation for teaching purpose. In the meanwhile, students’ ability to give trial lectures should be improved with the course of “Music Teaching Method.” Each performance and composition group should be required to make micro-class videos to introduce representative regional music instruments.

In the course of “Practice Guided by Orff Cases”, unit exams should give emphasis to the regional characteristics of music education major by requiring students to prepare lesson plans and strategies in connection with regional music or ethnic minority music, and do practice guided by Orff cases.

Elective Courses on the manufacturing and crafts of regional and ethnic music instruments, such as cucurbit flute and awu (a Chinese ethnic instrument), should also be provided based on the practice course platform.

Adding some contents of regional music education to various courses is certainly only the first step in highlighting the regional characteristics of music education courses. A higher expectation is that such addition can even promote the development of regional music courses. Of course, establishing a course requires a long-term pooling of resources and validation. Thus adding some teaching contents of regional music and related assessment mechanisms to other courses is far from enough. As far as the goal of course development is concerned, compiling regional music textbooks can lead teaching activities to be more reasonable, so that the education on regional music can be pushed forward in a long term. The focus at the current stage should be put on compiling the textbook “Sight Singing Guide of Regional Music and Melody,” which is expected to be an approach (rather than just a beginning) to the gradual development of the course of “Regional Music.”

## 5. Conclusion

The curriculum reform on music education major at regional colleges and universities has become an imperative. Training music education professionals is a core task in basic education. On the one hand, we should pay attention to the social demand for music education talents. On the other hand, we should put forward the in-depth curriculum reform on music education major according to the National Standards issued by the Ministry of Education, and with consideration of the advantages of regional colleges and universities in terms of educational resources. Based on years of experience in teaching and methods that have been applied in the preliminary curriculum reform, the author proposes to establish a systematic curriculum structure aimed at improving the teaching skills and practical ability of students majoring in music education, and pushing forward the curriculum reform through adding contents of regional music teaching in the said three aspects. The author also expects more effective suggestions and strategies from peers for substantially improving the development of music education talents.

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