

Cross-Cultural Evidence for Promoting Life-Long Musical Investment Through Music Education: Exploring Best Practice Approaches

Amanda E Krause^{1,2} & Jane W Davidson¹

Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, The University of Melbourne, Australia
School of Psychology and Speech Pathology, Curtin University, Australia

Introduction

While research has broadly considered the wide-ranging intellectual, social, personal, and physical benefits of active musical participation across the lifespan (e.g., MacDonald, et al, 2012), there is little research that has focused specifically on how music educators can best promote participant investment inside school and beyond. The slim quantity of existing research that does consider recruitment and retention for musical participation has been limited focusing, for instance, on single points in time such as the transition from elementary to secondary school (e.g., Mantie & Tucker, 2008). However, with increasing evidence supporting musical participation for health and well-being benefit (e.g., Creech, et al., 2013), it is important to consider how music facilitators can promote continued musical participation.

Method

Aims

- To investigate what constitutes best practice in music education, focusing on ways to facilitate on-going engagement in music.
- To explore these practices within a range of cultural and pedagogical contexts.

Semi-Structured Interviews

- With leading European and Australian music educator-research experts (N = 6) from within a secondary school system as well as tertiary institutions.
- Focused on the participants' reflections of their own practice and beliefs.
- **Interpretative phenomenological analysis** of the transcribed data.

Results

Influenced by Local, National, Curriculum Trends

"[Music is] seen as a specialist area. And often, by the way it's packaged in Western societies, it requires years of induction into this skilled mastery, ... but, also, we're trying to explore ways in which we can support other areas of development, and that other areas of development can support music. And that is incredibly difficult when the conventions across the whole of the school systems across the world either put subjects into blocks, which are separated, which are hierarchical, because that's how the philosophers tell us knowledge is. But, people in the arts, and people in the neurosciences tell us this is not how it is at all. So, there's this real paradox, tension..."

"At the national level, I can see strongly how school curriculum has influences the way people think and function in relation to music. So, in Scandinavia, for instance from the local community through school and national levels, singing is something that is highly valued and is a natural part of school life. In France, music tends to be very badly taught in school, but where it is taught they teach solfège, and so people who successfully negotiate that system have those particular skills. But the whole issue of national trend becomes problematized when now nationhood is a very, very complex issue."

"I would go between the different [schools] and the hardest thing there was that it absolutely depended on the classroom teacher doing the work, and they wouldn't. ... In the schools where it did take off, those kids improved in everything they did. Their maths improved, their English improved, and no one could say why, except for me – music is so spatial. It's ... perception - you're learning perception on a completely different level."

Amplifying positive beliefs about music's value to culture

"is there anything else more important when you look at young people's lives, the way we use music in that way? [The educator] might have some experiences that might enable them to find their niche, the things that really light their candle musically. [The educator needs to show the students that] the options are huge..."

"I have worked with refugees, young children whose parents have settled in the UK and Australia as new homes, and when those refugees and children come from cultures with musically rich backgrounds, they most definitely use music to find their new place, find connection to people and the new landscape. And that music gives them a continual companionship to their past – they can imagine it in their heads just like they may do with a poem or story from their cultural root."

"The value is that if you want to nurture this specific yet holistic development, to ensure that your workforce are literate and numerate, the evidence is that engaging in the arts in general, and music in particular, will promote much better basic literacy and numeracy, but will also give them much greater creativity and flexibility, so that they're more able to fashion products in a modern, technological society."

Counteracting the myth that everyone is/cannot be musical

"For me it's a moral position, an ethical position. On the one side, there's all this evidence that we are musical because there's a whole history going back thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of years, of people making sense of sound as music, arguably before they had language, but anyway... it's part of the human condition to explore and make sense of the world through sound... so we are designed to process sound. We're designed to make sense of music."

"People happen to be curious souls, so they allow me to perhaps push the boundaries a little more. And they'll experiment with me"

"Music is accessible to everybody. We start hearing music from mother's womb and we have music surrounding us all of our lives. Now we can do with it what we want. We fall in love with music throughout our lives you'll continue with it."

"So many people would burst out saying I always wanted to sing but I was told not to do as a child. If only those teachers knew what they were doing to these children!"

Educators need to think beyond the structure of their own music education to provide more culturally diverse educational experiences

"Holistic education... that is absolutely critical to the mission [of the teaching]"

"You may actually not be a master at all of some of the things they want to learn... If the ultimate goal is wanting these people to have enriching musical lives, it's so incumbent upon us to make sure that they get the opportunity to experience the richness of musical experience"

"The paradox is that research data tells us that 90% of the people that are graduate musicians [in UK] will earn a living outside of Western classical music. So, they'll be doing lots of other things. So, ...you discover that you come out of the Western classical tradition also with lacks... a lack of knowledge of how to just make music... make music for fun... be creative, to be able to improvise, to be able to write music, to make music in the moment with other people. You can't do it. You find it incredibly difficult. It colours the whole system."

"One of the things I had to unlearn was the limitations of learning music through the piano - a rigid instrument. You can't bend the note and so ...I really learned how to just let fly with what was stirring inside me."

"I think it is essential to learn about other cultures in many different regards. And music, because of its emotional elements or associations and representations, can be very powerful tool in having access to other people's cultures."

"[Provide] exceptional opportunities to develop those skills"

Theoretical Considerations

The nature of the evidence provided from the four themes aligns with Self-Determination Theory's foundational element regarding the three basic psychological needs: autonomy, relatedness, and relatedness. If people feel able, included, and in personal control, they will likely feel enjoyment, progress, and satisfaction. Thus, meeting these needs leads to personal growth, vitality, and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Educators can support life-long investment by shaping education practices to support these three needs in their students.

- **Autonomy** (the need to feel one's activities are self-endorsed and self-governed): Educators can empower students to research, make choices, state preferences, lead where their own interest lies.
- **Competence** (the need to be effective in one's efforts): Educators can furnish students with knowledge and the appropriate means to engage, learn, and flourish.
- **Relatedness** (the need to be socially connected and integrated in a social group): Educators can promote culturally safe and appropriate connections and opportunities for group work and development, nurturing respect and collaboration between students.

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