

Music on Their Terms:
Promoting Social-Emotional Development by
Expanding the Music Education Curriculum
Robin Yukiko Romine
The Pennsylvania State University

Music on Their Terms: Promoting Social-Emotional Development by
Expanding the Music Education Curriculum

In any educational pursuit, it is important for educators to cast a wide net to “catch” all types of learners. This may seem an obvious pedagogical philosophy, yet most music education is limited to band, orchestra, and chorus. When limited to these conventional modes of music education, learners miss out on significant opportunities for musical achievement as well as social and emotional development. Expanding the concept of music education to include modern and relevant aspects of musical creation increases accessibility by accommodating a wider variety of learners and increasing the ways in which students can participate in music. Additionally, such expansions could maximize the potential developmental benefits of music education.

Scholars and music makers have noted the connections between different types of musical experiences and specific developmental and aesthetic results. These results range from increased self-esteem to a sense of group identity. Of particular importance are the ways in which the music education curriculum can be expanded to include non-band or -orchestra instruments and creative skills such as songwriting, studio recording and production, and use of technology. By making use of these alternate modes of learning, educators can create more opportunities for social and emotional development for any age group.

The Connections between Music Education and Social-Emotional Development

Considering the widely accepted view that early education and intervention has the most impact on a person’s development, it is quite telling that, even in adulthood, music education has an effect on certain aspects of self-image. Concerned by the poor retention of students with

MUSIC ON THEIR TERMS: PROMOTING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

music aptitude in music courses throughout school, T.J. Draves (2008) looked into one undergraduate songwriting course for non-music majors. Data was collected and analyzed to assess students' music aptitude, music achievement, and musical self-esteem and to examine any relationships between these areas. The students wrote seven songs throughout the semester and kept reflection journals which were used to measure aspects of musical self-esteem. These included Personal Desire/Interest, Support/Recognition from Others, and Perceived Music Ability. The songs themselves were assessed by two qualified judges using a research-designed rating scale. Students also took an adapted *Self-esteem of Musical Ability* (SEMA) survey by Schmitt (1979) and AMMA, a music aptitude test by Gordon (1989).

Draves references a 1979 paper by Schmitt regarding her belief that there was no correlation between music aptitude and *Self-esteem of Musical Ability* (criteria referred to as SEMA). However, in a 2000 study by Sanders, relationships were discovered between the areas of music participation, music achievement, and SEMA. A significant correlation between music aptitude and music self-concept was also discovered. The study focussed on in this paper also found significant relationships between SEMA and music aptitude.

With this knowledge of these links, and the belief that social music-making may increase self-esteem, Draves suggests teachers increase encouragement to their students and provide more opportunities for social music-making in order to increase interest, higher levels of achievement, and the continuation of their musical education.

The range of development is much wider and more significant, however, when considering young children. In addition to self-esteem, crucial aspects of development include emotional regulation, self-awareness, self-concept development, assertiveness, appropriate

MUSIC ON THEIR TERMS: PROMOTING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

expression, and social skills. Alice-Ann Darrow (2004) asserts that children must receive an “affective education,” in which these emotional needs, not simply the academic ones, are met. Music education, she believes, can be a natural vehicle for affective education and ultimately help ease the transition into adulthood. This is especially true for children with disabilities, who often face extra challenges in these developmental areas.

Assertiveness is an important quality which Darrow believes can be developed in a musical setting. A teacher can encourage students to respectfully voice opinions regarding song choice, instrument choice, curriculum, and classroom layout. Having students defend their reasons for certain opinions also promotes critical thinking.

Darrow offers several examples of music increasing one’s sense of self-esteem, including learning an instrument and songwriting as a means for self-expression. Sharing the songs can also foster positive social interactions. Other group music activities are cited as having a bolstering effect on relationship-building, which contribute to feelings of self-worth.

Teachers play a crucial role in providing opportunities for socialization. Performance trips, partnering peers together both with students with disabilities and students without, and mixing up seating all can create scenarios in which social-emotional development occurs. With the help of the other adults in the child’s life, music educators can promote the child’s emotional well-being. By identifying long-term goals and providing instruction that can help the child meet them, music education can have a profound impact on positive outcomes in adulthood.

Expanding the Music Education Curriculum

There are several ways to expand the music education curriculum beyond band, orchestra, and chorus. Some of these include traditional songwriting, music production, and

related music technology. There are also ways to modify songwriting to allow primary school students to participate.

Songwriting

As mentioned previously, songwriting is a valuable skill which usually goes undeveloped in the majority of music students. Many music educators underestimate its importance or may not know how to include it in their curriculum, especially if it is not a skill they themselves possess. John Kratus (2016) discusses various rationales for songwriting as a subject, particularly for adolescents, and provides insight into implementing songwriting curriculum, instructional procedures, and assessment.

Kratus gives four main reasons to include a class devoted to songwriting. The first is that songwriting gives students an opportunity connect their culture with the skills they already have (playing their instrument, for example). Being able to apply these skills in a way that is meaningful to the students is invaluable. The second reason that Kratus mentions is that providing a songwriting class gives musical opportunities to young musicians who play less utilized instruments. Not many fretted or electronic instruments, for example, are included in a typical school ensemble. Kratus's third reason is the psychological and social benefits of self-expression, especially during the tumultuous time of adolescence. Lastly, Kratus states that a songwriting class provides students with a musical skill that enables them to self-sufficiently enjoy music for the rest of their lives.

After giving these rationales for songwriting class, Kratus discusses methods for maintaining the proper classroom environment (a nurturing one), suggestions on how to incorporate the class into the existing music curriculum, and standards on what the students

should learn (creating, performing, and responding). Methods for assessment are given careful consideration as feedback is important but potentially devastating to a student.

Music Production

Evan S. Tobias (2013) takes the argument for expansion even further and calls for music education to reflect the new reality of music. This means not only including recording, engineering, mixing, producing, and use of related technology in musical learning, but also considering them elements of composition. By extension, the concepts of aural skills and music literacy must be adapted as well to meet the role production and music technology play.

Music production, he explains, has traditionally flowed in the order of pre-production (recording set-up as well as preparing the music to be recorded), production (the act of recording), and post-production (editing, mixing, etc.). However, some of that has evolved to include studio recording and production as songwriting tools. He uses a great quote by musician Brian Eno (2008) to illustrate his point:

Where you no longer come to the studio with a conception of the finished piece. Instead, you come with actually rather a bare skeleton of the piece or perhaps with nothing at all Once you become familiar with studio facilities, or even if you're not, actually, you can begin to compose in relation to those facilities . . . actually constructing a piece in the studio.

Tobias includes a case study of several high school students in a Songwriting and Technology Course (STC) and their final projects. Over the course of four weeks, the students used their own processes to develop and produce a track (a finished product of a song that has been arranged, recorded, and mixed, and containing all the idiosyncrasies of the particular production method). Tobias made mindmaps for each project in order to analyze different aspects of students' creative processes.

The various ways in which the students created music indicate that the current framework of music education is insufficient in that does not meet the educational needs of those students with diverse musical instruments. He suggests expanding conventional pedagogy to consider the various methods of music-making, including recording, production, and technology.

Modifications for Young Learners

To many music educators, having a recording studio and nearly self-sufficient students creating their first single is so far out of the realm of possibility that they may not believe it practical to expand their curriculum in any way. However, Bill Harley (2010), a twice Grammy Award-winning storyteller and songwriter, sets an example that songwriting is “Not Rocket Science.”

He gives an account of a day spent at Paul Cuffee School in Providence, RI in which he wrote and recorded a song with each second grade class. He explains the methods he used, the overall response to the project, and the benefits that came of it. He ends with suggestions on how teachers--even non-music teachers--might use this activity.

He began by having the children brainstorm different things about their class and what they did in it. The topics they came up with were generic at first but, with Harley’s guidance, they started naming things specific to their class. Their worm farm, which featured beneficial worm poop, was, amazingly, a source of academic interest. One class’s token economy of seashells in a jar (which earned a popcorn party) was mentioned as something that differentiated their class from others.

After coming up with sufficient material, Harley began eliciting song lyrics using an existing melody (“This Little Light of Mine,” “Aiken Drum,” “This Land is Your Land”). He

explains this is a time-saving technique which also puts the students in the right mindset. Having students work to come up with lines that fit the number of syllables makes the task of writing a song simpler. He does not use the term *scaffolding*, but it is implied as coming up with a new melody *and* lyrics would likely be overwhelming to second-graders. The students began to understand and identify when a rhythm did or did not work, but needed some help to come up with phrasing that worked. After completing the song, the class practiced it a few times and Harley recorded them while he sang along and accompanied them on guitar.

He mentions a few benefits of this exercise: the excitement of the kids (which is audible on the recording he includes) and a sense of group accomplishment. A growing group identity was another benefit the children experienced through the activity. Harley concludes with encouragement to teachers, even those without a singer's voice, to try this activity using simple, well-known children's songs. Finally, he adds that this activity can be expanded and made more complex (to grow with the children).

Conclusions and Future Study

One might further study the effects of an expanded music education on social-emotional development by observing students with disabilities, particularly with emotional behavioral disorders, in specific musical settings. There are a variety of songwriting exercises that could be used, from a Harley-inspired lyric re-write to a co-writing project with a pair or small group of students. Tracking target behaviors (e.g. outbursts, positive/negative social interactions, or expressing one's own ideas) throughout the songwriting projects or term could serve to substantiate aspects of music education not only as valid instructional practices but as potential intervention tools. Choosing projects which specifically address students' particular challenges

(e.g. working in a team, taking initiative, etc.) would be most effective, while taking into account the students' strengths would increase the likelihood of success.

The papers discussed suggest that providing opportunities to participate in and enjoy ownership of music further promotes social and emotional development and increases positive outcomes in school and adulthood. While further study is certainly encouraged, there is currently enough student feedback to demonstrate the intrinsic merit of an expanded music curriculum.

References

Darrow, A. (2004). Promoting social and emotional growth of students with disabilities. *General Music Today* 25(1), 29-32. DOI:10.1177/1048371314541955

MUSIC ON THEIR TERMS: PROMOTING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Draves, T.J. (2008). Music achievement, self-esteem, and aptitude in a college songwriting class. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 178, 35-46.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40319337>

Harley, B. (2010, March 18). Songwriting with kids – not rocket science. *Song, Story, and*

Culture: A blog by Bill Harley - storyteller, singer, author. Retrieved from

<https://billharley.wordpress.com/2010/03/18/songwriting-with-kids-not-rocket-science/>

Kratus, J. (2016, March). Songwriting: A new direction for secondary music education.

Music Educators Journal vol. 102,(3), 60-65.

Tobias, E.S. (2013). Composing, songwriting, and producing: Informing popular music pedagogy. *Research Studies in Music Education* 35(2), 213–237. DOI:

10.1177/1321103X13487466