

Rock and Roll Academy Foundational Research

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Rock and Roll Academy (RRA) is a social emotional, research based, music curriculum that centers upon the education of the whole child. Through a user-friendly facilitator's guide, adults, regardless of musical background or expertise learn to guide students through experiences of learning – not just music, but social/emotional skills, time management, and a range of cognitive skills transferable to every academic area. A key feature is a vivid program outcome evident to a wide range of stakeholders – administrators, teachers, parents and families, and the community. The accomplishments of students in RRA are recognized with a student concert production culminating the end of the semester. The following review provides a discussion of music education and tenets of learning that underlie the player-based philosophy of Rock and Roll Academy.

Music

Music holds a significant place in the lives of human beings across cultures and continents. Music is a medium of expression common to man throughout written history. The first evidence of musical notation is found on a 4,000-year-old Sumerian clay tablet (Andrews, 2015). The ethnographic fieldwork of Blacking and Nettl (1995) prompted the assertion that music making is a fundamental and universal attribute of the human species and a “primary modeling system of human thought and a part of the infrastructure of human life.”

Music has a powerful influence on human emotions, moods, and behavior (Hallam & MacDonald, 2009). This medium provides seemingly endless means to “express, trigger, and evoke emotions, fulfill hedonic needs, reduce stress, and regulate one's mood, motivation, and arousal” (Karreman, Laceulle, Hanser, & Vingerhosts, 2017). Beyond this most obvious feature, music is known to enhance cognitive ability,

develop physical skill, and provide health benefits for a variety of populations (Fancourt, Ockelford, & Belai, 2014; Hodges & Luehrsen, 2010; Walter & Walter, 2015). Socially, music appears to be a consistent way in which groups of human beings identify themselves by adopting unique musical styles and using them to tell their stories. The place and prevalence of music within a society has been generally correlated with its degree of well-being and prosperity – economic, social, and spiritual. Major advancements throughout the centuries have usually been accompanied by a proliferation of unique musical innovations and styles (Davis, R. A., 2005). Confucius is to have said, “Music produces a kind of pleasure which human nature cannot do without” (Arts Education Partnership, 2011). It is indeed a central characteristic of the human experience.

Music Education

The importance of music in the human experience is displayed by the historical inclusion of music as an essential element within the education of youth. The National Association for Music Education recollects the First Resolution of the Dallas Meeting of The Department of Superintendence in 1927 that declared:

“We favor the inclusion of music in the curriculum on an equality with other basic subjects. We believe that with the growing complexity of civilization, more attention must be given to the arts, and that music offers possibilities as yet but partially realized for developing an appreciation of the finer things in life.”

Kalivretenos (2015) reports multiple positive associations between music education and student outcomes including higher verbal and math scores on standardized tests; and workforce skills such as creativity, teamwork, communication skills, and self-discipline. Attitudes about school, social skills, and general behavior have also been known to be positively impacted by school music programs (Hallam, 2010). Group participation in music activities is also reported to increase student leadership skills and future success

(Cortello, 2009; Kokotsaki & Hallam, 2013). Kim and Kemple (2011) assert that music is not a mere supplement to education, but an “active developmental tool” supporting all domains of growth.

Music education in schools has been jeopardized in recent years due to funding and time redistribution brought about by school accountability legislation. Persellin (2007) found that out of fifteen thousand school districts, 71% reduced time for music and other subjects to make more time for reading and math instruction in response to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Today, while music education still struggles for higher priority in schools, the National Center for Education Statistics’ nationwide arts survey indicated that a critical “equity gap” exists in the availability of arts instruction in schools with high numbers of economically disadvantaged students (Parsad & Spiegelman, 2012). National organizations of music educators continue to advocate for additional funding and recognition for school music programs. As well, private foundations have contributed significantly to these advocacy and fund raising efforts in recent years.

School music education has traditionally taken place via courses in music appreciation; foundations of music classes; vocal music classes and school choruses; and instrumental music experiences such as band and orchestra. The content of music education generally deals with, as Hoffer describes, “the ‘stuff’ of music – musical works, facts, fingerings, patterns of sound, understandings of the process of creating music, and interpretation” (2017, p. 18). Although the content of music education is generally well defined, how it is taught is highly variable. Although there are commonalities among programs where music is taught, in modern times, schools, communities, and resources are highly diverse, requiring that music education be

individualized to the given context. Present conditions within schools and school districts make, in many cases, even the presence of a music educator an exception rather than the rule. The absence of a trained music specialist often places any music or arts related instruction on the shoulders of the classroom teacher or other adults. It is now recommended that classroom teachers be confident and competent to lead music-learning activities and integrate music into student experiences (Naughton & Lines, 2013; Russell-Bowie, 2009).

Given these current circumstances, broader philosophies and innovative ways of providing music education to students are finding merit. West (2007) contrasted the traditional music education paradigm of “Perfection, Practice, and Performance” to a new practical paradigm identified by “Intent, Identity, and Involvement” that emphasizes the taking of student musical experience beyond the confines of the classroom. The centrality of individual choice in engaging in and sharing music making is prominent in this philosophy. The methods West outlines contrast a typical trait of children’s participation in school music, and school activities at large – the limitation of autonomy – and fixate upon freedom to choose the what’s and the how’s of musical expression (West, 2009).

Some music educators see encouraging possibilities in a more “open” philosophy of music education as articulated by Randall Allsup. While not without detractors, Allsup aims to reconceptualize music education beyond the traditional master/apprentice model that can often limit freedom, inspiration, and the drive to share one’s musical message. His work proposes music education with unpredictable outcomes and argues that shifting the power dynamics of music instruction opens student experiences up to unprecedented levels of engagement (Hess, 2017). Allsup’s work explores questions of how schools might open spaces for students to explore and create new music, seek opportunities for

creativity and self-expression through instrumental music, and better attempt to fuse the boundaries between school music and the types students enjoy outside of school (Allsup, 2003). His work values a “wondrous and unholy muddle” that harnesses the relationships among adults and students and the value of “musicking,” the playful and joyful experience of making meaning through music (Allsup, 2016).

Unfortunately, the principles of best practice across disciplines are often at odds with some characteristics of traditional studio teaching that are often the basis for how teaching should look in the music classroom (McPherson & Welch, 2018) However, the promise of Allsup’s concept of music education has been embraced as a consequential rethinking of music education quality described as “part apprenticeship, part experiment” (Reimer, 2015). These notions align with tenets of developmentally appropriate education already associated with what is known about the nature of learning and the types of relationships and environments that support it.

A familiar adage states: “Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.” In the realm of music education, this statement rings true as we consider the nature of learning, the role of the teacher/adult, and the aims of the educational environment. Jean Piaget, Swiss psychologist and preeminent educational theorist described the nature of learning as the construction of knowledge. This construction takes place as one authentically encounters the world complete with its complexities, incongruities, and novelties (Forman & Kushner, 1977). Piaget's theory has been used to develop broadly accepted approaches to education that recognize the unequivocal role of the learner in the process of coming to know. Constructivist theories undergird educational practice across content areas and age groups (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Research has repeatedly demonstrated that authentic, "hands-on," active, and learner-centered practices promote

higher levels of learning, understanding, and achievement as well as psychosocial outcomes (Brooks & Brooks, 2001; DeVries & Zan, 2012). Practices of this type usually embrace play as a crucial pathway for learning. Play allows the child to direct his own learning based upon his interests, abilities, and intentions. Play-based education is largely recommended for young children (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Elkind, 2007; Rendon & Gronlund, 2017). However, play approaches in education have also been found effective with older students, including adults (Evans, Nino, Deater-Deckard, & Chang, 2015; Honeyford & Boyd, 2015; Nell & Drew, 2013; Plass, O'Keefe, Homer, Case, Hayward, Stein & Perlin, 2013). Constructivist approaches to music education have been recognized as an informative balance between progressive and traditional views of music education (Shively, 2015).

The effectiveness of education is largely influenced by the role of the adult or teacher (DeVries & Zan, 2012). In school settings, this is especially true. In conventional school settings, the teacher often directs not only the scope and sequence of the curriculum but also how and when students pursue most learning tasks. Constructivist and other learner-centered approaches view the teacher as one who understands each student and facilitates access to information and experiences appropriate to the students' interests, goals, and learning strategies. Essential to this role is the teacher's knowledge of and relationship with the student (Pianta, Hamre, & Stuhlman, 2003). A positive student-teacher relationship situates learning opportunities for the student within the "zone of proximal development" (Eun, 2017; Vygotsky, 1978) but also serves as a critical asset to the child's affect, motivation, and attitudes toward school and learning (Wentzel, 2016). Teacher qualities and behaviors associated with supportive relationships with students include acceptance and warmth, the communication of

expectations/boundaries, trust and dependability, investments of time to observe and listen, and willingness to accept mistakes and offer problem-solving assistance (DeVries & Zan, 2012; Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011; Wentzel, 2016)

Informed knowledge about the nature of learning and the qualities of adult-child relationships that support it intersect to create the learning environment. According to DeVries and Zan (2012), learning and development are best supported in an environment where mutual respect is continually practiced. This socio-moral atmosphere is conducive to intellectual and social autonomy, affords intellectual rigor, and supports moral development within a democratic community (Gartrell, 2012; Palmer, 2005; Taylor, Fraser, & Fisher, 1997). One critical consideration of the learning environment is its impact upon the student's dispositions toward learning. These dispositions, however, are not confined in their application to life in school. The educational milieu is a strong determinant of whether students are proactive and engaged or passive and alienated. Ryan and Deci (2000) assert that environments impact innate needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Conversely, in contexts where excessive control, inappropriate or disengaging degrees of challenge, and a lack of connectedness persist, risks of distress and psychopathology are multiplied (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For a thorough review of self-determination theory and motivation, see Ryan and Deci, 2017.

Promising Practices in Music Education Environments

Cooper (2014) describes the coordination of several facets of the engaged music learner. At the center of her model is the teacher who manages on one hand an ongoing assessment of student engagement, evidenced by curiosity, enthusiasm, perseverance, and success. On the other hand, the teacher makes decisions about the appropriate corresponding strategies to support students' levels of engagement: encouraging critical

thinking; providing foundational knowledge, problem-solving opportunities, time for reflection, time for collaborations, and performance opportunities. Cooper's model exemplifies a balanced approach to music education that respects the interdependent roles of the learner, the teacher, and the musical experience that includes content, affect, and execution. Consistent with this image of effective practice in music education is the framework offered by Abramo and Reynolds (2015). Their work also esteems the role of the teacher within an environment characterized by respect for the background, needs, and interests of the learner. Chiefly, they focus upon creativity as the context for vibrant music education that yields positive outcomes across academic and developmental domains. Creative music educators are (a) responsive, flexible, and improvisatory; (b) are comfortable with ambiguity; (c) think metaphorically and are willing to find commonality among incongruent and new ideas; and (d) acknowledge and use different identity roles in order to connect with students. The combination of these promising approaches to music education conform easily to previously identified principles of best practice across content areas: student centered, experiential, reflective, authentic, holistic, social, collaborative, democratic, cognitive, developmental, constructivist, and challenging (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005).

Discussion of promising practices in music education that enhance holistic student outcomes should include consideration of new, non-traditional perspectives. Green's (2002) work examines origins of musical knowledge and ability that is derived outside of formal musical instruction and training. She suggests that music education glean from the experiences of popular musicians in order to create spaces for youth to explore their musical abilities in more appealing ways. In depth interviews of popular musicians aged 15-50 revealed the importance of individual motivation for achieving and sustaining

musicianship. Her analysis highlighted peer and group learning as essential to acquiring technique and other musical skills and knowledge. O’Flynn (2010) summarizes Green’s 5 key principles of informal music learning applicable to today’s classroom. In *Music,*

Informal Learning and the School: A New Classroom Pedagogy (2016), Green explains:

1. Informal learning begins with music chosen by the learners themselves (as opposed to formal education where musical materials are normally preselected by teachers).
2. The main method of repertoire- and skill-acquisition involves the copying of recordings by ear.
3. Peer and/or self-directed learning constitute an important part of informal learning processes.
4. Musical skills and knowledge are likely to be assimilated in ‘haphazard, idiosyncratic and holistic ways.
5. Informal music learning typically involves the integration of listening, performing, improvising and composing processes (rather than formal music education which tends to focus on just one of these activities at a time).

Green’s work suggests that attitudes and values such as discipline, enjoyment, self-esteem, and musicianship were essential to the “beginnings” of popular musicians who maintained their craft throughout adulthood. Green’s work echoes sentiments of others who advocate for approaches to music education that embrace the pedagogical potential of informal learning methods (Jaffurs, 2004; O’Flynn, 2010; Rodriguez, 2004).

Conclusion

This paper reviews literature relevant to the topic of music education, characteristics of a “whole child” approach to music education, and qualities of innovative practices that are being integrated in music education programs in response to the diverse needs of today’s students and school communities. From this review, several conclusions may be considered:

1. Current educational policy and priorities require holistic, multi-disciplinary approaches across content areas. Teaching narrowly defined skills and information in isolation is not supported by recommended practices and

undermines school resources. Music education must, therefore, benefit student learning beyond the subject of music.

2. Educational practice must address the needs of the whole person – physically, socially, emotionally, cognitively, and spiritually. Science substantiates the inter-related nature of development across domains. Music education is a valuable tool capable of supporting a host of essential psychosocial outcomes such as creativity, autonomy, and leadership while meeting curriculum goals.
3. Traditional music education conducted in classrooms by music specialists has experienced significant decline. Therefore, educators and stakeholders must consider alternative, innovative strategies that empower adults, regardless of musical expertise, to deliver effective music programs within schools and the community.
4. Effective music education programs should be characterized by scientifically based approaches that recognize the centrality of the learner in the construction of new knowledge, the necessity of positive teacher-child relationships for instructional and emotional support, and the impact of engaging, active learning experiences.
5. Music provides vast opportunities for students to take ownership of their learning and the realization of themselves. New conceptualizations of music education are emerging that challenge music education to embrace diverse styles and approaches to developing musicianship that will last beyond formal education.

Rock and Roll Academy offers educators and schools music education solutions that are in keeping with the demands of 21st Century education. Its social, play-based, and student-driven approach aligns with principles of developmentally appropriate practice in

rigorous, challenging, yet fulfilling, ways. Through a pedagogy of respect, RRA brings relationships to the forefront of teaching and creates a secure and supportive environment in which youth are inspired and encouraged to step into a learning process that results in a sense of ownership and independence of thought and spirit. Rock and Roll Academy provides an adventure in education and student potential that enlivens classrooms, schools, and communities.

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