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Developing Identities in Music Teaching and Learning for Non-specialist Students in Higher Education (大學音樂通識教育--- 探究高等教育非音樂系學生對通識音樂課程學習之特質與態度)

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DEVELOPING IDENTITIES IN MUSIC TEACHING AND LEARNING FOR NON-SPECIALIST STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

The notion of “musical identities” may be helpful to understand the basis of the “problem of junior and senior high school music”, which seems to be specifically deceive in the relevant educational system in Taiwan. Students’ musical identities are strongly bound up with the significance of varied music outside school, and the distinction between “music in school” and music outside school” may be important for them as well. This study is an investigation with music teaching and learning for non-specialist students in higher education. The literature related specifically to this study involves: a) non-specialist students’ music background, preference and its relationship to their attitudes towards learning music; b) non-specialist students’ past musical experience or former instruction and their attitudes/expectations for current musical learning; c) to identify prominent changes(influences) on students’ attitudes over a programme of study. Therefore, the hypotheses were emerged into: 1) The non-specialist music students can be characterized in terms of their musical backgrounds, experiences, preferences; 2) The non-specialist music students’ attitudes towards music can be changed over a course of study.

The design of the study was organized into two phases: a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview study which were developed from both quantitative and qualitative paradigms. The findings from both of the preliminary and main pre- and post-test study data illustrate the changes over the course of study towards students’ musical preferences/expectations/attitudes, and show how the concept of musical
identities enable teachers to understand students’ musical thought “from the inside”, as well as in developing broader conceptions of the scope of music teaching and learning in higher education.

Keywords: Musical background/ preference/ attitude; Non-specialist music student; Musical experience

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1. Introduction

This study is an investigation concerned with music teaching and learning for non-specialist students in higher education. It is an attempt to understand the relationship among musical backgrounds, preferences, experiences, attitudes, and learning variables in young non-specialist students in musical learning. The literature related specifically to this study involves: a) non-specialist students’ music background, music preference and its relationship to their attitudes for learning music; b) non-specialist students’ past musical experience or former instruction and their attitudes/expectations towards their current musical learning; c) to identify prominent changes(influences) on students’ attitudes over a programme of study.

This study presents an overview of young adults’ musical development, in particular their participation in music, and the learning process undergo respectively. Therefore, the investigation described in this research focused on three factors contributing to musical learning: preference for music, past musical background/experience, and musical learning attitude.

2. Literature Review

---- Perspectives on Non-specialist Students’ Musical Learning

2.1.1. Philosophical perspectives

"The nature of a course is largely determined by the professor who designs and implements it" (Burton, 2002). Teacher-based inquiry from an interpretive perspective is the foundation for this research. Anyone who attempts to develop an instrument (a questionnaire design) for measuring the change of attitude in music learning enters a novel area within general music education in higher education, especially the Technological University, Elliott stated that a vital instrument among the types of inquiry is the teacher-reseârchér (2002). Thus, the author as the teacher in this study deserves some acknowledgement regarding her courage in undertaking such a study.

2.1.2. Psychological perspectives

"American adults now outnumber those younger than 18 for the first time ever" and the education has been accumulated more years and are more culturally and ethnically
diverse (Coffmann, 1996). Due to the educational system in Taiwan was mostly adopted from U.S., the tendency has been obviously seen and interested by progressive researchers as well. In higher education, the young adult students (about the age 19 to 25) balance family and work with education in a vocationally focused environment.

The Technological Universities under TVE, like schools, have become true learning communities where diverse age groups are intentionally accommodated (Hong, 1996). One of the distinctive characteristics for the youth in TVE system is that the learning and education has been viewed as a process of continuing change, affected by life experiences, personal, social, and cultural variables. The interplay between life experience and structured learning has been of certain interest. (Mayer, 1995). More specifically, the young adult students generally and consciously bring their accumulated prior experience in developing new perceptions. Hence, they are more effective, intrinsic motivation, meaningful, and conscious of their own learning styles into educational process, and at pursuing self-guided learning (Merriam, 1987; Mayer, 1995). As a result, while a great deal of music researchers have evaluated young adults education and developmental theories in building the context for their studies, what to know about the youth's cognition and motivation becomes essential for creating adequate educational goals and methods.

2.1.3. Musical backgrounds and musical preferences

It should be remembered that subjects in this study were college nonmusical majors. At the time when these students were in music classes at the primary and secondary levels, they had very limited music knowledge, such as music theory and history. A lack of confidence in musicianship results in pre-college non-specialist students' fear of failure in general music course (Chien & Ho, 2003). A related research by Richards (1999), those in-service elementary educators' music backgrounds and their pre-service education could devote to confidence levels. In Coffman's investigation, musical background is very influential to the interest of non-specialist elder students' musical learning and participation (1996).

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1 Early childhood educators are the adults who are most likely to use music during their interactions with children. However, pre- and in-service elementary educators typically lack depth in personal musicianship skills that they may be classified as non- music major students due to a lack of training and education (Corbin, 1988; Kritzmire, 1991). Therefore, the researcher draws out this group to investigate the related research as well.
3. Background and Research Questions

Although a number of publications offer commentary on general music and curriculum integration, the field of music teaching and learning for non-specialist students in higher education has historically not received a high priority in music research, especially in Taiwan. The importance of music at every stage of school has been degraded as other ‘national priorities’ are promoted within the curriculum (Young, 1997). That is to say, the status of music in the curriculum has always been low when compared with other subjects in the past few decades.

How have curriculum practice and research interacted in the field of music teaching and learning? In most of the research studies reviewed (Doll, 1993; Foshay, 2000; Plummeridge, 1985), classroom teachers are coached or trained by professional music educators. They have typically approached the curriculum from the perspective of music specialists with specialist musical training in areas such as the teaching of singing or music-reading skills (Thomas, 1970; Phillips, 1992), rather than in “curriculum in general or curriculum improvement across the board” (Jackson, 1992:37).

What is the impact on non-specialist (student) learning of programmes taught by specialist music teachers, and how do those students perceive the programmes? This question stimulates an examination of practice and theory in general music curriculum research, to situate this research in the context of the general curriculum field in higher education, and then to suggest implications for contemporary curriculum policy, practice, and theory. The investigation focuses on two research questions:

(1) How can non-specialist music students be characterized in terms of their musical backgrounds, experiences, preferences and attitudes?

(2) How do non-specialist students’ attitudes, expectations and preferences towards music change over a course of study?

Prior learning backgrounds and experiences significantly influence personal attitudes and feelings that student bring with them when they enter a classroom; and both teacher and student’s attitudes are crucial to the success of inclusion programs for student’s music learning. As a result, the study became linked to investigate: a) the insight of their own past
music learning experiences in school and their views and expectations of current music
learning in university; b) in different educational contexts (secondary school and
university); c) at different ages (19-21 and 22-25 years old) and d) in different genders.

4. Research Design

The design of the study was organized into two phases: a questionnaire and a
semi-structured interview study which were developed from both quantitative and
qualitative paradigms. The questionnaire study tested hypotheses and the interview
gathered descriptive data. Questionnaire data were obtained regarding the non-specialist
students’ musical backgrounds, experiences, preferences, and attitudes as well as their
changes over the course of study which were analysed using quantitative techniques. The
interview study was an exploratory study, which was aimed at finding out diverse aspects
of the young adult students’ characteristics towards their past and current musical learning.
The findings of the questionnaire and interview study are expected to help music educators
understand more clearly the significance of musical learning to the non-specialist students
at the higher-educational level.

4:1. Methodological Rationale

In this section, the methodological approaches which were selected in this thesis are
discussed. The researcher reviewed the theories and methods within qualitative and
quantitative approaches that help to establish the validity of investigating through processes
and data collection procedures. Qualitative data were collected from assignments
(theme-paper submission), formal and informal interviews with students, the course
syllabus, and course plans to inspect the research questions and the designs that might
impact the change of attitudes in the course.

Quantitative data describing respondents’ attitudes towards their past and present
learning in music were collected by questionnaire. More specifically, a quantitative
approach was used for the research questions relating to changes in attitudes towards
learning music. Paired-comparison, mean value, standard deviation, t-test and p value were
performed on questionnaire items to examine the differences between pre- and post-test
means for attitude change over the course of study. As a result, the main study combined
both qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to attain the most complete picture of
the nature of music learning and teaching for non-specialist music students.
5. Research studies to date

These questions are being investigated by means of:

(1) A Preliminary Questionnaire Study

To establish a clearly focused research question, a preliminary study was carried out in Fookin University, 2002-2003. The pilot investigation utilized a semi-structured questionnaire and open questions to ascertain the importance of general music education to the students. A questionnaire (N=197) preliminary study of students' musical preferences/experiences/attitudes, was administrated between September 2002 and January 2003. The final analysis has already been completed and this study was presented at the Symposium and Conference for Humanity and Social Science in December 2003, Cheung-Shui University, Taiwan.

(2) A Pilot Interview Study

Prior to the data collection, the researcher conducted a pilot study of twelve student participants in the 19-25 age groups at the university. Each student was interviewed individually, for approximately 20 minutes, after the music appreciation course or university scheduled courses, in the classroom or the researcher’s office. The atmosphere was natural and students participated well. The students in the pilot interview study provided comprehensive and satisfactory answers to all of the questions, and so the initial questions were reserved for the main study. The participants' responses in the pilot interview study were taken into account for the main interview study.

(3) Pre-- and Post-test Instructional Questionnaire Study – The Main Study

The final version of this formal questionnaire was derived from the preliminary questionnaire study that established a clearly focused research question. The data, results, interviews, and interpretations of the study were presented in relation to the research questions and the type of data yielded. The pre-- and post-test instructional questionnaire survey aims to identify and explore non-specialist students’ characteristics through the investigation of background, experiences, preferences, and attitudes towards their musical learning.

(4) The Main Interview Study

This interview study (N=68) was specifically sought to identify and explore the
non-specialist students' of technological university (TU) regarding attitudes, perceptions, and experiences on their prior music learning in secondary school and expectations on their current musical learning in university.

A series of eighty semi-structured interviews using 'randomly chosen' students were given and completed during 2003-04. The students, aged 19-25\(^2\) are majoring in a variety of departments at Fuyouin University. Twelve of these had been used as a pilot to shape the final questionnaire, for which a sample of sixty-eight students was used at last. All students chosen had recently participated in a Music Appreciation courses\(^3\) taught by the researcher, which led to related aptitude among those who were accustomed to the teacher-researcher's teaching style, and most of the participants were used to talking to her.

6. Results to Date

(1) The findings of the preliminary study (N=197) provided evidence of the non-specialist students' musical preferences/backgrounds/experiences/attitudes, i.e. the non-specialist students' musical preferences/experiences allow them 'to relieve stress and tension' (68.5%) and 'to manage emotional needs' (56.9%) as well as fulfilling cognitive and aesthetic functions. It also provided evidence on 'students' attitudes and degree of involvement with musical activities' (Yes, 37.6%; No, 62.4%).

(2) The pilot data (N=12) from semi-structured interviews helped the researcher understand students' perspectives that benefited her from questioning, modifying, and gaining further development. Several revisions were allowed for adaptation to the next stage of study. (i) It is time-consuming, it takes time to inquire in detail and receive more specific information from the interviewees. (ii) Some of the interviewees were too reserved to speak up for themselves due to a lack of clearly formulated ideas in their minds.

(3) The results from the first stage of the pre- and post-test questionnaire study illustrate the changes over the course of study towards students' musical preferences, expectations, and attitudes, including greater appreciation and understanding of 'serious' music, increased

\(^2\) The policy of National Entrance Examination for TU in Taiwan is applicable for all the students since the students might be from different regions of Taiwan. The researcher of this study thinks that there is no need to extend the interviews to other TU so that merely select examples from her own university are used.

\(^3\) The teacher-researcher instructed different sections in a semester.
motivation, and interest in historical and theoretical aspects. For instance, “I have learnt “classical music” from my prior music classes” follows with a six-point Likert scale ranging from Completely none to Very much with the investigation of their musical experience (1=Completely none, 2=Very little, 3=little, 4=A little, 5=Much, 6=Very much), the mean (m) in the pre-test was 2.73, rising to 4.18 in the post-test.

(4) The major interview study has specifically identified and explored the non-specialist students’ in technological university level(TU) regarding attitudes, perceptions, and experiences on their music learning in secondary school and expectations on their current music learning in university. The statements that exchanged views from students drew the researcher’s concern with acknowledging the weaknesses of research and the demand to understand their points of view. From the data presented through the interview, the researcher believes to have learned something about students’ musical learning.

7. General Discussion

Once the questionnaire data had been collated and the interviews transcribed, themes began to emerge that emphasised the characteristics of non-specialist music students in terms of their musical backgrounds, experiences, preferences and attitudes, also their attitudes, expectations and preferences towards music change over a course of study. These findings are being revealed by means of:

(1) Non-specialist music students’ characteristics of musical background and preference, musical experiences and attitudes

Data concerning how to characterize non-specialist music students in terms of the variables described above were collected through a questionnaire that was administered at the beginning of the semester and again at the end of the semester. One of the obvious findings from the characteristics of youth’s musical preferences is “spending 2 to 5 hours in listening to classical music each week” were 11.4% of 114 respondents in comparison with 44.7% “in listening to popular music each week”. The findings clearly show the importance and acceptance of popular music to young adults and adolescents. In conjunction, it acts as a motivator during young adulthood, which predicts several aspects of musical learning attitude.
Based on the questions from both of questionnaire and interview study of this research study, the experience of participating extra-curricular musical activities for the non-specialist young adults is rather limited. The level of participation in extra-curricular musical activities was high and focused between the primary and junior school level mainly because most pupils were encouraged or required to participate (38.7%). However, the level of involvement declined amongst senior high school level to 13.4 %, with an especially sharp decline during university (college) level to 5.3%.

Sloboda and Howe (1991) in their study indicated that people's lifelong commitment to music can be sought out from childhood memories which embraced supportive situations for musical activities and determined positive feelings. Most of students who had the extra-musical learning experience had stronger beliefs regarding the extra-musical benefits of later music instruction. They believed that participation in music activities inside and outside of school is important socially and culturally and that music instruction leads to better performance in their daily lives. For instance, one girl from Early Childhood Education commented:

"I like playing flute and later participating in school woodwind ensemble because it is something my friends think I'm good at. I seem to see myself as a special person, talented girl or musician something like that."

The emerged result can be moved back to previous discussion—prior musical learning backgrounds and experiences significantly influence personal attitudes and feelings that student bring with them whether in the future to participate further musical activities or not. During adulthood or old age, musical activities are not merely leisure activities but rather play an important role in an individual's life as they help form identities, establish and maintain social contacts, and activate cognitive and emotional functions. Thereby musical activities contribute to a person's quality of life and well-being.

(2) Non-specialist music students' attitudes, expectations and preferences towards music change over a course of study

Data concerning whether the non-specialist music students' attitudes changed over the course of a semester study were collected through a questionnaire that was administered at the beginning of the semester and again at the end of the semester Means and standard
deviations were computed for the pre-test and post-test questionnaire items. The means of the pre- and post-test musical preferences, attitudes, and expectations questionnaire items were compared as well as the frequency distribution of the pre- and post-test musical backgrounds/experiences questionnaire items. For instance, “the music course that you had helped your personal musical understanding”, “Strongly helpful”—Pre: 17.5%; Post—51.7%; “Completely no help” – Pre: 23.7%; Post: 1.8%.

In brief summary, the researcher examined the differences between the pre- and posttest means for attitude toward music and belief in its importance. The comparison of pre- and post-test means represented a positive trend for a change in attitude for music learning over the length of the semester. As a result, the nature of those changes on students and teachers can be seen as important to music teaching and learning.

(3) The formal interview of university students' attitudes, perceptions, and reflections on their musical experiences in secondary schools

From the literature review related to students' backgrounds/experiences/ preferences/ attitudes, and expectations, and the two preliminary studies, three main points can be outlined: the importance of music to adolescents and young adults and how they actively use music to satisfy certain social, psychological, emotional, and developmental needs. Another major finding from this study was that non-specialist music students who have musical experiences (such as the ability to play an instrument or play in a band) and feels comfortable participating music activities (such as being involved in music organisations, community) are more likely to learn music better than people with limited musical experience who lack musicianship.

8. Summary

With this as the starting point, this study was made of the concept of experience in relation to music in general and what students mean by music. From the analysis of: (1) what the students take music to be (what does music mean to them?); (2) their rational and emotional experience of music (what and where does their experience of music occur?); (3) the educational structures emerges a clarification of the teacher-student encounter and the school-student encounter (what barriers as a ‘non-specialist music major’ to musical
learning would experience?). In the first case, it is a question of the students’ relation to each other in respect of educational influence and interaction, in the second case it is a question of the students’ view of, and attitude to the music in school.

The data collected for this study demonstrates that what many young adult learners have been characterized in terms of their musical backgrounds, experiences, preferences and attitudes as well as their engagement in musical learning and activities. It is to develop the self to such a manner that music becomes an essential creation for their personal identities: they are non-musicians (non-specialists), and as such they see the ‘self’ in relation to music or not. Thus, it is believed that the present study represents an crucial departure, and lays down a challenge to music teachers, educators, policy makers, scholars, psychologists, and researchers in other fields to explore how self and personal desire interact in the development of musical learning in young adult learners.

Though the students in the researcher’s classes described their views and attitudes toward music, they linked it to general values. The young adult students’ descriptions are spread through different types of value judgment. When they speak of music in evaluative terms based on their own patterns of value, and regard as property to the school and the adulthood as well. More specifically, it is a perspective of ‘their own music’ that the music they have a personal relation to. The results of this small investigation are heartening to the extent that the students randomly sampled regarded musical learning experiences and attitudes as inherently worthwhile. The reasons cited for motivating their participation to music included building personal confidence, broadening musical knowledge, and embracing new musical learning experiences. It needs implications for qualitative feedback in various teaching and the consequent promotion of students’ musical learning.

Among the process of the interview with young people indicated that their school’s world of music forms no more than a small, regulated part of their own world of music. The meaning of world is interpreted and evaluated from the students’ own viewpoint and is often different from that of school. In other words, they clarify and judge from their own points of view. In consequence of music teaching succeed in helping students towards becoming more aurally acute and responsive to the music, working towards the aim of developing ‘aesthetic awareness’, instead of being merely focus on instruction then there surely is some merits in music teaching. Consequently, education, then, will attract more people who are already involved in music.
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