Teacher–Research in a General Music Classroom

— Rethink the Value of Music (從通識音樂課程中重新思考音樂價值)

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to study the provision of value of music and examine selected variables affecting the use of music in general music course by nonmusic–major students. In order to present a comparative profile of students, their personal characteristics were considered, also their previous musical experiences and present musical ability. This study has provided a profile of the interrelated factors surrounding one subject taught in general courses of Fooyin University. Further studies could build on this information and provide a basis for the argument in favour of the expansion of general music education.

Key words: General Course; General Music Course; Aesthetic Experience; Music Appreciation
Introduction

Understanding and responding to music involves several layers of knowledge insights processes in which music education has a crucial part to play. (Swanwick 1994: 62)

In a way, the statement expresses this message—Music is multi-layered, with several aspects that reflect different contexts of life. The melody for people's singing while painting their houses; the music for adolescent's playing and listening in order to get the recognition from their peers; the work for groups or nations to arouse people's patriotic motivation or religious ethnic; and the piece for musician who composes complicated works for relieving spiritual expression is all in the domain of music. Different styles of music should represent different needs. Just as people wear appropriate dress in particular situations or locations. For instance, ceremonial dress and casual athletic shirt are not supposed to be mixed up in the same occasion in terms of etiquette.

A huge amount of work has been done over many decades on the subject of musical meaning. Each style of music has its own characteristic ways of knowing. These may differ and may result in very different type of knowledge. Therefore, the way of thinking, the inheritance of experience, the perception of value and the influence of involvement are all reflected and defined by individual's participation. The power of music to influence mood and create scenes, routines and occasions is widely recognised; and this is reflected in a strand of social theory from Plato to Adorno that portrays music as an influence on character, social structure and action (DeNora 2000).

What is meant by study of Music?

1. From To, concerts, are main performances, pupils and the teacher will tend to see what they are capable of the subject, in a vital part.

2. From teacher involvement, carefully and of musical difficulties, how to put...
1. From an Outsider’s Viewpoint

To an outsider, music may be obvious in terms of carol services, musical shows, concerts, competitions, performances, music festivals, and other relevant events which are mainly concerned with performing music, but not in terms of what is happening in the typical classroom. In performances, they are able to hear the quality and variety of music, and to witness the organization and discipline involved concerning both the pupils and the music teaching staff. As a direct result of having seen school performances, the outsider may be prone to forming the opinion that music is an "elitist" subject, in most cases, the participating students will tend to be the most musically able of the school.

Audiences will also tend to perpetuate the "elitist" idea since they often consist of relatives and friends of those students taking part and not of those students who are not involved in the performance. These people will already have the knowledge that they are seeing the results of much extra-curricular musical training which has taken place during lunch breaks and after school hours, rather than the results of work done in class music lessons. But for such people, extra-curricular music of this kind is a vital part of their child's musical education, and while watching performances they will tend to give more importance to this aspect rather than to class teaching which they see nothing of. Their concern will perhaps not extend to what music means to those who do not take part in musical performances.

2. From a Teacher’s Viewpoint

Viewing music in the classroom has to be a conscious act made by the music teacher in the light of all the other pressures, which appear to "go with the job". Knowledge of the ways in which students learn, a knowledge of pedagogy, and a carefully structured curriculum with appropriate repertoire to reflect progressive stages of musical development are all necessary. The teacher has to be aware not only of the difficulties students' experiences, but has to be able to assess the extent of them, and how to put them right.

The music teacher's viewpoint of music tends to play the role of providing class
music lessons, offering instrumental lessons for students, giving the widest possible variety of musical ensembles to cater for all the needs of the musicians in the school and opportunities for public performances. There are many other interpretations and programmes which music teachers follow, and since there is no national agreement, as yet, as to what class music course should involve, it follows that for as many people as there are teaching music, there are just as many different views on the meaning of "music teaching". Another common factor in class music teacher teaching appears to be that each class contains a wide range of abilities, with very musically-able students appearing alongside students who have little or no knowledge of the language of music.

3. From an Educationalist's Viewpoint

The educationalist's viewpoint is substantially different from the outsider's viewpoint. The educationalist will be concerned with all students in the class teaching situation, and will have an oversight of the educational needs of students from the first school days to their last. Educationalist see education as being primarily about learning and acquiring skills, and as a means of providing each individual with the opportunity to grow in knowledge and to be independent in the use of that knowledge even after he/she has left school.

The educationalist having such a perspective on student's development would consider what the developmental steps were when devising any programme of learning in order to ensure that new knowledge is built on previous knowledge. Bentley (1975) recognizes the need for assessment to be built into the learning programme chiefly in order to ensure that any problems may be identified and subsequently corrected. It is also important because it affects the motivation of the students, and this is an important factor in education. As a result of looking at music from a more academic and educational viewpoint, the educationalist will have a lot to offer the music teacher by way of improving the teaching of music in schools.

Aesthetic --- Means to Make Music
In the book of A Very Short Introduction, Nicholas Cook, has made his contribution. The main message, according to Cook, is that we are really talking about a multiplicity of activities and experiences; it is only the fact that we call them all “music” that makes it seem obvious that they belong together. Music can enrich additional “space” for everyday life and is in unique in some aspects.

The first characteristic that I will introduce is the aesthetic experience of music. Appreciating music is one of the esthetic experiences that are distinguished from general experience in many aspects. There is a broad perception of aesthetic meaning, which has its foundations in the philosophical writings of John Dewey (1916, 1934). The aesthetic is an essential qualitative aspect of all those genuine experiences, which contribute to the process of personal growth, or the “experiential continuum” — “The “enemies” of the aesthetic are not the intellectual or the practical: they are the humdrum, the incoherent and the aimless” (Plummeridge 1999: 116).

The similar viewpoint was found in a report of the group appointed by the Assessment of Performance Unit to investigate children’s aesthetic development (Department of Education and Science, 1993). This group, which consisted mainly of arts educators, concluded that words associated with the aesthetic such as “beautiful”, “elegant” and “graceful” can be applied to almost any area of human activity; the characteristic feature of aesthetic experiences and judgements is that they are concerned, primarily, with the recognition, appreciation and internationalization of certain types of intrinsic values (Plummeridge 1999: 116).

Consequently, the value of musical activity is to provide people’s spiritual or aesthetic activities from perception, realization, and satisfaction that won’t be related to any practical profit. For example, people can imagine the picture of “River Rhine” where brings pleasant feeling and relaxed mood with its delightful melody while listening to the piece of “Blue Danube” composed by J. Strauss. The tempo and melody of music that arouses your listening is the aesthetic experience.

On the other hand, if people think merely of investigating or commercial business in “River Rhine” because of its popularity to the world tourists, then it is not the meaning of aesthetic experience at all. The aesthetic experience has its intrinsic pur-
pose that people will get involved with the aesthetic activities due to the value of aesthetics.

From my second perspective characteristic of music, is purely the musical experience itself. People can’t fully describe or explain a work from music or art to someone and expect that he/she will generate the same interpretation and feeling as yours. In fact, it is degraded in terms of interpreting music or play.

The musical experience is different from analysing a question of Math that has data, figure, or specific to follow and generalize it. The musical experience should not have the standard norm. Listening Beethoven’s 5th Symphony through to the last minute does not mean that the answer has been explained or resolved already. People with this intention are cheating themselves and will miss the enjoyment of appreciating music simultaneously.

However, Swanwick (1994) posits that knowledge is more than just undergoing experience. Green (1999) also addresses that “listeners’ response to and understanding of them are dependent on the listeners’ competence and subject-position in relation to the style of the music---- If the listener is not familiar, or competent with the style, few meanings will be conceived.” Therefore, there is always a risk that people might be subjective for their own personal musical experience that will lead them towards different way of thinking or “interpreting” music. It’s one of the reasons for me to emphasize the significance of music education. I will focus it more in coming paragraphs.

Learning How to be a responsible Music Teacher

As a very interested music teacher in the domain of music education, I attempt to search out the real meaning of music that can be applied into everyday life. My ways of being a teacher are part of what led me to enter into a research project of this nature. Music has been considered as one of the aesthetic disciplines for a long period. People can hardly pick up a rhythm or motivation of music if they aren’t trained much from music course. After all, it is not popular as playing the basketball at school.
The importance of music is well known at each corner of this society that is used in a series of ethnographic studies, such as an aerobics class, karaoke evenings, music therapy sessions and the use of background music in the retail-sector — as well as in-depth interviews to show how music is a constitutive feature of human agency.

Nevertheless, the importance of music does not mean that music class will be valued through the recognition of students in today's school. The value of music is probably understood for everyone in everyday life, yet it does not indicate that the necessity of music education will be appreciated through the curriculum of school. People may think that music can be happily and easily learned as bicycling or playing cards in daily life.

They can be right if they think music education is merely for singing or memorizing a few easy songs. However, teaching music is like teaching science at school; we do not purely practice the addition or subtraction in Math class or the purpose of Geology is not merely for teaching people how to observe the minerals. What music education comprises is much further than teaching students singing a few songs or listening to music superficially. The young need to learn the knowledge from science and history, and they need to receive the guidance from music as well.

Another crucial viewpoint is their learning any subject, including music, needs to be provided in a systematic and designed process by well-disciplined teachers. Knowledge, in nowadays, is expanding so rapidly that no one can hardly and naturally learn it at home or from social environment. The school may not bring its function into fully play for expectation to the public, however, in a way it plays as an inevitable role to the family and the whole society. We must have an integrated educational system in this complicated environment today. For the majority of students, the place for them to learn music is the school — otherwise, they do not even have the opportunity to learn music.

The Importance of General Music Course

General Music Course forms a part of the total curriculum within the framework
of student education and cannot be isolated from this framework. Common to all subjects are certain elements such as attitudes and motivation of students, provision of a teacher, the teacher's aims and objectives and his/her expectation of students. These elements will be discussed in this study.

The term "Music Appreciation" in general music courses has been explained in many ways. For instance, Gordon (1971: 117), judging the value of Music Appreciation, writes, "Music Appreciation comprises both musical understanding and musical enjoyment. After a student acquires music appreciation readiness, he is better able to profit from listening to music for the purpose of enjoyment." Since "appreciation" implies the capability to perceive qualities, then, in order to appreciate music, a person needs to be able to form an estimate of its worth or merits. In what ways and through what techniques is this estimate formed?

One entry into the appreciation of an art form is through study of its history, literature, personalities and development through time. Another is via study of the materials and techniques, which make up the art form. Yet again, the aesthetic and emotional response could be the opening into a fuller understanding and appreciation of the chosen subject. All these are valid to the study of music.

The conceptual structure of general music course would collapse if music were not meaningful to humans, especially for the young generation. Time and effort would make no difference if music has no influence on human life. Certainly, music education needs to recognise and understand the significance of music to people and their daily lives.

The establishment of this principle is particularly important for music teachers today or the future due to numerous explicit relationships between the importance of music, the way to teach, and the content to teach. For instance, if music is merely defined as a pleasant extracurricular activity with low degree of educational value, music teachers apparently will not very much concerned with what students really gain. In contrast, if music is seem as a very vital part of the curriculum in an integrated learning process for the students' education, then music teachers will attempt hard to give every student the opportunity to skills and knowledge in music. This is the reason why the music education needs to be meaningful to students, but also that the students need to be involved in the learning of music.

With the present emphasis on the teaching of music, music teachers should not be content with imparting the students with isolated information. They must find ways to integrate the teaching of music education with other aspects of the students' education. The future of music education in the 21st century will not be judged simply by the number of students who attend music classes, but by the quality of the music education they receive.
why the music curriculum exists in school where not only offer a place of inspiration, but also lead music educators towards a bright direction.

Why people should want to sing or play would therefore seem the most fundamental question of all, yet it hardly rates a mention in the aesthetics and philosophy of music (Small, 1999). As a music teacher with years of teaching experiences, I have found unusual phenomena in music. For example, the value of music has not been discussed frequently, but people indeed sense it everywhere. The huge amount of time and money that people consume in music, such as buying CDs and tickets for concerts, are not difficult to be calculated.

People value the majority of musicians as a refined position with respectable manner, yet without strong intention of learning and serious attitude of receiving musical knowledge while studying at schools. From personal point of view, I realized that the importance of music could be presented into multi-layered aspects. Because of its over disseminated out in life, such as background music heard in every movie and TV program, supermarket, commencement, or inauguration, the existence of music is easily neglected.

Teaching and learning music will become no meaningful if music is not important to people. Thus, the necessity of existence in music education will be drawn away. It is one of the most important reasons to urge me searching out the essence of "musical meaning" of teaching music.

Non-music Major Students whom I teach

Non-music major students frequently declare low confidence in their musicianship. Fortunately, the school offers flexible arrangements of the curriculum to me so that I am able to develop and design the context and methods for the music courses. Further, students are self-motivated and enjoy the class, which often has a harmonious atmosphere. I usually ask for students to take musical placement test and wish them to fill out the investigation of musical preference for the first class that they attend in. Even though most of the pupils are incapable of replying the answers and
reasons for them to appreciate what music is, they intuitively sense the feeling and naturally stay with it from their facial expression and feedback of discussion with me after the class.

The vast majority of parents think that it is an appropriate activity when they are listening groups of young generation performing music together regardless of their musical profession. They think that young people can be urged by participating in musical works and aroused their motivation and encouragement. Therefore, regardless of the real factors, most of the adults hope that the next generation can be well educated from integrated disciplines, certainly including music education.

According to the Statistics from the Educational Department in Taiwan, numerous schools have set up prosperous music curriculum for students and varied organizations or consortiums in the society, such as concert series, periodically sponsor some musical activities. My central thought to support music education is not how to strive for providing more music programs in school, but to map out an integrated scheme of good quality for music education.

The purpose of this course intends to present the factors influencing musical learning and achievement of undergraduate non-music majors with effective teaching approaches. The music course is probably the best possibility and the only opportunity for these students who expect to absorb and receive systematic instruction in music. Considering of the numerous factors affecting learning and achievement in music has been interested to music educators for years. Much research, such as the authorities and researchers form several of journals, publication, books, and conferences and so on. Their contributions are disseminated into the investigation of such variables as musical aptitude, musical experience, personal achievement and academic ability as predictors of success in music study and course work.

Knowledge of the factors that affect learning and achievement in music course work of all students at all levels is demanded if we are to clarify individual differences and other variables on musical learning. We also need to investigate the interrelationship between and among such variables as musical approach, musical experience, and academic ability if we are to better comprehend the complex nature of our discipline.
Summary

Small (1999) states, "what we really need is to be involved with actuality of music". Through educational opportunities, we will develop open-minded attitude to many different kinds of music and an awareness of relationships that music generates.

Students who have these musical experiences may be more likely to continue to contact with music in their lives because of personal pleasure and satisfaction. At least, attempting to make some small changes that have positive effects on their respective classroom, school, home, community, and to the whole society.

I wish to tell a story happened in the year of 1961. S. Suzuki, the great music educator in late 20th century, had approximate 400 children play simultaneously in Kokaido, Tokyo for the purpose of welcoming P. Casals, the great musician at that time. The opening concert was performed by the age between 5 to 6 year-old children playing numerous Vivaldi, Bach, Mozart and Beethoven’s works with eminent and perfect performance. Casals held Suzuki tightly in the middle of concert with tearful eyes. He walked up to the platform and gave a speech right after the performance and he started to say: "Music is not exclusively a sound----- " and there were a few words, which were strongly carved into deep insight of Suzuki’s heart:

"Maybe, music can save the world ".

Suzuki referred these words frequently while presenting and giving speeches later on his trips. He said: "Music might be able to save the world, if we go towards the target with whole-hearted dedication".

Even though I never be able to listen his speech in personal, I wish to stand up with earnest applause. In closing, I would to draw the attention to a brief statement made by Chi-Mo Shu, one of the most well known Chinese poets in last century.

"Music is the essence of the universe and life --- the solely music, and the exquisite music ". I wish to search for the truthful value of music through developing a supportive environment and discovery of research that leads to a lifelong involvement
and enjoyment.

REFERENCE