Engaging Adolescents in High School Music

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ABSTRACT

This investigation aims to explore the attitudes of adolescents towards learning music and to gauge the extent of their involvement in the activities of playing, singing, creating and listening to music. It also seeks to determine the views of adolescents on attributions for success in various activities, including music. Beliefs about self-concept, or self-identity, and their relationships to academic achievement and musical involvement are explored.

The review of literature spans various facets of self-perception, including self-concept, self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and self-concept development, and considers the role of music in self-concept development. The impact of self-perceptions on motivation, which is central to learning, achievement and engagement, is also considered. The basic principles of learning, and their application to learning in music, provide the foundation for specific aspects of music learning, namely, music literacy, learning to play a musical instrument, singing, music technology and informal learning. The relationship between music learning and academic achievement is reviewed. The particular importance of music in adolescence, and adolescent attitudes to school music, provide a backdrop to the analysis of the wide-ranging factors involved in self-concept development, motivation and learning principles, thus leading to an overview of the various approaches which can facilitate the engagement of adolescents in learning in general, and in high school music in particular.

A researcher-designed *Survey of Musical Experiences and Self-concept* was administered to Year 9 and 10 students in three high schools in metropolitan Adelaide, South Australia. Data from the survey, along with academic results, were collected from the 282 participants in the study. The data provide background information about each participant, along with their perceptions about perceived areas of strength and reasons for success in these areas. Information about involvement in musical activities was collated for all students, with approximately half of the students not studying music at school. Measures for self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965) and perceived competence (Chan, 1993) were included in the survey. Using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods, the data were analysed in relation to the extent of involvement in

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music, attitudes to learning music, students' attributions for success, and strengths of the relationships between musical involvement, self-concept and academic achievement.

Conclusions can be drawn based on the survey data and the literature review, and these emphasise the importance of the social nature of learning and of providing opportunities for creative work in classroom activities. The most outstanding finding to be highlighted from the study was the aspect of enjoyment as a reason for achievement which appears to feature prominently in students' responses, yet it is less widely recognised in the literature.

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DECLARATION

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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