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Tuning into the Future: Informal Learning and Music Education

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THE PROJECT

When adolescents are engaged in learning, research has shown a decrease in alcohol and drug use, higher retention rates and fewer failures throughout high school, lower rates of depression as well as lower rates of anti-social and criminal behaviours. Attention to student engagement with a priority on 21st century learning skills requires the examination of various pedagogies, including using informal learning practices as the foundation for instruction with adolescents in schools.

This pilot project targets Grade 7 to 10 students in two school settings where adolescent engagement is a priority; it examines the viability of implementing informal learning practices within the Canadian context.

To introduce informal music pedagogy (IMP), researchers are retraining three teachers; collaborating with teachers in lesson planning; observing and evaluating the effects of IMP in relation to learning outcomes over a four-month period. Data gathered through interviews with students, teachers and school administrators; audio-video recordings; and observation are being analysed to measure outcomes before engaging in a large scale Canadian research project.

The evaluation of IMP in Ontario schools has the potential to challenge current instructional methods, teacher education programming and will address adolescent engagement and success in learning, using music as the foundation of the model. Pedagogies that reach more students through music should enable youth to see connections among school, daily life, and their future.

WHAT IS MUSICAL FUTURES CANADA?

If adolescent students won't learn the way we teach, can we teach the way they learn? Musical Futures Canada, building on the results of MuFu UK, believes learning works best when young people are making music, & when their existing passion for making music is reflected in the classroom. MuFu is an approach to teaching & learning that effectively utilizes the Creative Process in Arts Education (Ontario MoE). It is a new way of thinking about music making in schools that brings non-formal teaching & informal learning approaches into the formal context of schools. Research indicates that MF:

Increases student motivation
Engages all in music
Helps students to confident with & raises self-esteem;
Engages previously disinterested students to (particularly leadership independent) & demonstrates potential; progression
Improves behaviour, focus and attendance & has a positive impact on students' attitudes towards music in school; Improves performance skills & develops student understanding of a range of musical genres; Increases numbers of students electing to continue with music making outside the classroom; Has sustainable impact on teachers own practice & changes the way teachers teach. A documentary film, and journal articles including key data and findings, will be produced for research and dissemination.



LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been much debate within the academic community regarding the various types of learning that are effective for student engagement, including formal, non-formal and informal learning. The latter in relation to this project represents non-linear, cooperative learning, controlled by a social group rather than by an individual (Feichas, 2010). Informal learning can also be understood as an immersion in intense situations of non-formal learning, which creates non-traditional social learning environments that combine interactive and self-directed processes (Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010). Informal learning is thus translated into a pedagogy by locating the production and development of musical knowledge with students themselves (ibid.). For Green (2008), classification of informal learning is identified by five principles: learners choose the music they will learn; learners copy recordings by ear; learning can take place alone and alongside friends; the skills and knowledge are assimilated in a haphazard, idiosyncratic and holistic way; and deep integration of musicking activities such as listening, performing, improvising and composing emphasize personal creativity. While many situations advocate for the exclusive use of one learning practice, the presence of informal and formal learning can exist simultaneously across various learning environments. In fact, a unique characteristic that sets music apart from most other educational activities, "is the occurrence of informal learning outside the formal system" (Cope, 2002, p. 93).

The location of learning becomes significant when studies indicate that the music students in school want school music to resemble the musical activities and learning that take place outside of school (Green, 2008, Ericsson, 2002). Children develop informal concepts outside of school that can often be related to academic knowledge obtained in school. This knowledge can serve as a scaffold for what is taught in school (Vygotsky, 1978) in order to take learning in classrooms to the next level. The concern for educators is that the majority of the population around the world is involved in musicking activities largely through listening and playing, however, the majority of the populace in the school environment is not participating in music education. Research indicates that a number of students do not see a connection between music in the 'real world' and school music and therefore choose to exclude themselves from it (Hanley, 2000). At the same time, teachers who have been immersed in the traditional, formal canon of teaching music, express anxiety about bringing popular culture music into their classrooms and adopting informal methods and losing control of the classroom setting (Beynon, 2012). This study has the potential to impact the current knowledge base in teacher education programming for music educators.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are Ontario adolescents' perceptions of the music learning process in formal and informal settings? And do these perceptions affect engagement to music in school and other settings?
- What are teacher and administrator perceptions of IMP on student engagement, motivation, behaviour, and achievement in music and in school in general?
- What are student perceptions of the effects of IMP on their engagement, motivation, behaviour, and achievement in music specifically, in other subjects, and in school in general?
- What are researcher observations of the effects of IMP as noted above?
- How do results compare to findings from the UK and Australia IMP projects?
- What are the implications for developing curricula in 21st century classrooms in Ontario?



RESEARCH DESIGN

The study follows a qualitative methodology implementing a dual/comparative case study design. The pilot project involves retraining of teacher practices and pedagogies, curriculum development and student instruction; and assessment. The project introduces informal music pedagogy (IMP) to Grade 7 to 10 students in two Canadian schools in two school districts. The teachers, researchers and research assistants began their professional retraining by travelling to the UK where they took part in informal music pedagogy continuing professional development (training) alongside UK teachers offered by the Musical Futures project, a Paul Hamlyn Foundation sponsored music programme of which Green's (2008) original research was part. The Canadian group visited schools which have been using IMP for an extended period (5 years or more), met with teachers experienced in IMP and visited the University of Greenwich, London, UK where they attended a research symposium on IMP. Teachers and researchers together are planning a series of IMP lessons for pupils in each school. Researchers/research assistants are assisting in delivering the series of lessons in each school; are video and audio recording lessons, and keeping field notes. Analysis of video has been ongoing from the beginning of video data collection and inform further action and data collection. Semi-structured interviews scheduled at the conclusion of the IMP lessons are being developed from the research

questions and from the program as it unfolds.

OUTCOMES

- implications for:
- Preservice education & teacher re-education
 - Student learning and engagement in music education
 - Student learning and engagement in other school subjects
- Impact on student engagement with disaffected youth

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THE CREATIVE PROCESS

