

Creating Emotional Intelligence Opportunities for General Music Students in the Keyboard Laboratory



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ABSTRACT

Many educational research papers and government curriculum documents are calling for the inclusion of learning activities which promote student well-being through emotional and social learning. This paper explores the importance of fostering emotional intelligence in schools and in particular looks at a methodology specific to music education. Michael Griffin has designed a new modern keyboard course and delivers it to every Key Stage 3 student at Dubai British School. Using recent national music education research papers from the U.K and Australia for guidance, as well as the educational philosophies of Elliott, Gardner, Goleman and Csikszentmihalyi, the course has been particularly successful creating a great deal of enjoyment and satisfaction for both teacher and students. The keyboard course consists of achievement based challenges, incremental in complexity and contextual with relevant theoretical, aural and listening –response activities. The practical framework of the lessons increases students’ curiosity for musicianship, and hence provides a medium for the introduction of the more abstract theoretical and aural concepts. The result is multi-dimensional, whole-brain music learning experiences. Although the focus of the course is on developing musical skills and creativity, explicit procedures are in place to promote emotional intelligence skills based on Howard Gardner’s definitions of interpersonal intelligence and intrapersonal intelligence. One of the course features is in the assessment and evaluation techniques where students learn simple meta-cognitive approaches leading to self-evaluation and in turn peer-evaluation. The course also provides many opportunities for group work incorporating improvisation and performance. Action research following this course of instruction has been positive. In a survey of 100 students of which 62% had never played a keyboard prior to this course, 72% reported a growing interest in music and 45% were considering taking private lessons in the future. Being an achievement based course, it allows students to progress at their own rate. 91%

of these middle-school students found the level of difficulty appropriate for them and 89% were pleased with their progress. The survey also collected data on non-musical skill acquisition. 73% reported improved concentration skills; 70% improved co-ordination; 70% are better at working alone and 67% improved their group work skills. 42% indicated a possibility that they had improved in other subject areas, although this piece of data was less specific. In conclusion this course fusion of social and emotional but always musical learning has been successful in this workplace and continues to develop with new learning materials, creative music challenges and stimuli from new technologies such as YouTube. For the students, they take increasing responsibilities for their learning, evaluation and assessment. Through enjoyable music learning, seeds are sewn for increased future musical participation and on the personal level an increase in self-esteem, self-growth and self-knowledge.

KEYWORDS

emotional intelligence, SEL, keyboard laboratory, group keyboard, KS3 music, general music, middle school music.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of emotional intelligence education is gaining momentum around the world. Since Howard Gardner put forward his theory of multiple intelligence (Gardner, 1984), researchers such as Daniel Goleman have asserted the essential value of emotional intelligence, also known as EQ. It is increasingly being acknowledged that EQ may be the most significant and important domain of intelligence in the overall success of our lives. Consequently, many schools around the world are including EQ as a core subject in their curricula or, at least, encouraging the integration of EQ learning within traditional subject pedagogy. The workforce, an ever present driver in educational policy and curriculum content, clearly understands the value of the emotionally intelligent person, which adds

to this demand for education to renew pedagogy and include a focus on EQ.

The 21st Century worker requires new competencies based around emotional intelligence. Technical skills are not enough, life skills are required (Microsoft, 2003).

One of the greatest additional benefits in the integration of music in learning environments is the enhancement of emotional intelligence. I say *additional* because the primary aim of music education is in the education of musical intelligence. However, at the same time, music educators would do well to realise the unique and numerous opportunities for the integration of good EQ practice.

THE GROUP ADVANTAGE

Group teaching plays a prominent and very successful role in educational settings. Benefits include the social context created, the opportunity to observe others, and the opportunity to engage in performance assessment. Many students find group work more stimulating and fun than independent learning. Group learning activities have a strong effect on school achievement and students enjoy the opportunity to strengthen relationships with one another. There is a shared power within the group lessons, which puts the students in a stronger position with a more dynamic interaction. Students want and need work that will enhance their relationships with people they care about. This drive towards interpersonal involvement is innate. There is an excitement about learning with others, making discoveries with others, enhancing relationships, and accepting different roles within those relationships. Students learn from each other, not just from the teacher. Group work has been found to significantly improve student motivation.

Music Offers Unique Prospects for Group Work

With ensemble activities, students need one another's knowledge and skills. Not all school group work demands this. Student relations play an important role in the development of musical expertise as students often take on formal and informal coaching functions for and with their peers. This kind of group learning environment promotes an awareness of the distributed nature of expertise, which is the foundation for successful collaboration in all domains. Students can be provided with multiple roles while solving musical problems. In fact, students who participate in regular and structured group learning environments implement many of the same strategies as teachers. Group work encourages constructive peer competition. Some

individuals are motivated by the spirit of competition. The incentive to 'keep up' with the group promotes practice and better preparation. This occurs naturally within the classroom. A group teacher understands how to use the elements of competition in a healthy way and to use the natural elements of a personality.

For some music teachers, ensemble work with general music students is problematic. For one thing, many of these students do not learn an instrument and consider tuned percussion or recorders alien to the musical experiences they seek. I teach general music students in a keyboard laboratory and have found group keyboard tuition an excellent vehicle in providing EQ learning opportunities for children. A thoughtful pedagogical design can incorporate:

- Students learning how to work independently
- Students working in pairs and small group ensemble
- Students taking on roles as teachers and assessors
- Students learning meta-cognitive and reflective practice
- Students exploring their inner selves through emotional response to music studied.
- Opportunities for student leadership and development
- Greater variety of activities compared to the traditional classroom
- Stimulating and enjoyable learning through a strong social environment
- Creatively and aurally diverse group activity

Whenever possible, artistic learning should be organized around meaningful projects, which are carried out over a significant period of time, and allow ample opportunity for feedback, discussion, and reflection." (Gardner, 1993, 142).

EVALUATION

Evaluation is one of the features of a group keyboard course that can exploit the range of possibilities available for formative and summative feedback. Regular feedback is important to keep students suitably engaged and challenged. With the students working on individual challenges (and with the headphones on), the opportunity presents itself for the teacher to see to every student in the class and give individual attention and immediate, positive feedback. In the example below from Music and Keyboard in the Classroom Book One -The Fundamentals (Griffin, 2007), you will notice that the learning challenge requires that both teacher and student sign a statement similar to the one below:



This piece has been played successfully.
 Student signature.....
 Teacher signature.....
 Date.....

Figure 1: (Griffin, 2007, p. 27)

By having students sign their work when they think it is played correctly, students learn how to assess their own level of musicianship and, by this self-assessment, gain confidence in their increasing competence. Students require regular opportunities to reflect on their musicianship (and that of their peers), and become knowledgeable, independent judges of musical excellence. The process of comparing their own judgments with those of a teacher will move them closer to this goal of valuing their own judgment.

When the student has signed an exercise, a teacher should then listen to the exercise. If judged as successful, it can be signed by the teacher and dated. If it is not satisfactory, one way to reveal this to the student is through a discovery method. Telling the student what is wrong with their playing without giving them an opportunity to discover it for themselves deprives students of a learning opportunity.

Creative questioning leads to a discovery of the problem. For example:

T: Good. You played it fluently, and it was almost note perfect. (Commenting on what was good about it, not just “that was good”)

S: Almost? What was wrong with it?

T: (Pauses, allowing the student to ponder and start the exploration. Sometimes, this alone will be enough, but if more prompting is needed) Are these two bars the same?

S: Yes. No!!

The student has discovered the error.

Another valuable self-evaluation technique is to verbalise the thinking process. This meta-cognition often gets to the source of misconceptions. With keyboard class sizes of up to twenty students, it is demanding for a teacher to evaluate every piece played by students. This can be solved using two initiatives that, in addition to increasing teacher observation time, produce better learning outcomes for the students.

First, students do not need to summons the teacher for evaluation. Once a student signs an exercise, the student can move on to the next exercise. Students need to learn to trust their own judgment until the teacher has the time to see them. Self-evaluation encourages self-reflection and honesty. Traditional feedback focuses on what the teacher can observe that is unknown to the student, whereas a more complete perception implies a unity of self-perception and other perception. Now, the teacher can now get around to all students without interruption, and the process puts more responsibility on the student to make decisions regarding their progress.

Second, for the purpose of signing exercises, capable students can be granted teacher status. This allows the student ‘teacher’ to browse the class and assess others. In my classes, this has been very successful. All students understand the following:

- Student ‘teachers’ are to be respected and treated like normal teachers. Students who do not respect this process will not get an opportunity to become ‘teachers’
- Student ‘teachers’ may have their rights revoked if they are too lenient (or too harsh) in signing student work

Students enjoy this type of assessment because it gives them a new perspective on the educational process. This creates opportunities to learn at a higher level and, for the adult teacher, to observe student interactions more closely. One should aim to give every student the opportunity to be a student ‘teacher’ and thus create opportunities for them to develop student leadership and responsibility. Students tend to model the teacher’s style of instruction. I have observed my student teachers’ using progressive questioning techniques to help their pupils discover performance problems. This provides us with an excellent opportunity to commend the student on their teaching and even to encourage them to consider music teaching as a career:

I like the way you’re teaching, Susan. You use questioning rather than just giving them the answer. Anyone would have thought you were doing it for years! We need good teachers. Maybe one day, I could hire you as a music teacher!

Promoting the cause of music teaching and conveying to students the importance and worthwhileness of music education will be effective when the students are enjoying a teaching experience. We need to promote the status of what we do. I also ask these young ‘teachers’ if they enjoy helping their peers. Usually, they enjoy it very much, and many indicate that they do not get these opportunities in

other classes. Again, an opportunity presents itself to encourage them to consider teaching as a profession, and perhaps a few seeds are sown. At the outset, we cannot assume that students can evaluate or assess themselves as this requires higher order thinking skills that may not have been developed. One exercise that can assist in this is for the teacher to model different levels of playing and ask the students to evaluate them. The examples can illustrate work of high, average, and low standard; and students should have a copy of the music notation to which they can refer. I would recommend keeping the criteria simple and concrete, such as the following:

- Correct notes
- Fluency
- Appropriate dynamics
- Appropriate tempo

Whilst student attitudes are not necessarily assessed, they are often required to be reported. One benefit created through the introduction of student teachers in the classroom is that it allows more time for the teacher to observe student behaviour and attitude and to document comments that can be used in reporting. I make time during each lesson for this and write comments at the back of the student workbook in a designated section for this purpose. This encourages a transparent feedback process. For example:

I am really pleased with John's acceptance of other ideas in group work...

I am delighted to see Jill engage in her work with so much joy. This has a positive effect on other class members...

Not everything of value can be quantified. For some things, observation is the best provider of information, and these comments provide valuable information come reporting time.

Not everything that counts can be counted and not everything that can be counted counts. (Einstein attributed)

As well as the teacher comment, I encourage students to reflect on their learning and provide a reflection page for this purpose in their workbook. I encourage them to write one reflection per lesson on a learning experience related to a positive learning feeling. For example:

I just mastered lesson 7. I'm so pleased because it's been really difficult for me.

There's one section in lesson 8 I just can't get. I think I need to repeat it a lot.

Jessie just helped me with lesson 5. It makes more sense now.

These student-comments are simple, but they encourage the meta-cognitive process essential for independent learning. Research has shown that

musicians demonstrate acute self-awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, extensive knowledge regarding the nature of different tasks, and an understanding of what is required to accomplish that task. Music students are encouraged to learn to learn.

Interpersonal learning outcomes resulting from group work

What outcomes do we seek from our lessons? Learning outcomes are about what a student knows, understands, and can do. In a keyboard course of instruction, all three can be contextually related. The mastering of keyboard exercises demonstrates keyboard skills and the development of musicianship; but what about the implicit outcomes such as group engagement, individual learning, concentration, and helping others? These are related to the big ideas of education and its overarching aims. These are the EQ outcomes. Do we want to assess and report on these,? If so, how do we assess something like group work? This can be determined with the students by way of a group exercise. A list of EQ outcomes that a class of mine came up with is presented below:

- Listening to others
- Politeness
- Being positive
- Making contributions
- Involving others
- Helping others

In this example, students understood that these facets of their behaviour were going to be observed and reported. When opportunities arose, I would make written comments in their student book, ready for use in the school report. Working in groups is a highly complex and disciplined skill and should be encouraged and assessed. Students need guidance and practice in group work. As well as my observation, I seek the student's self-observations. By encouraging this, we improve student motivation as they are more likely to take ownership for their learning. This also enables better communication between student, teacher, and peers. Also, it provides insights into student self-perception, an essential concept in intrapersonal intelligence. Autonomous learning requires accuracy in self-perception and assessment. Self-growth occurs when external and internal perceptions grow closer together.

ACTION RESEARCH

Following on from the first draft version of the group keyboard course I now teach, I surveyed 100 students using an internet-based questionnaire site. Of those surveyed, 62% had never played a keyboard prior to this course, 72% reported a growing interest in music, and 45% were

considering taking private lessons in the future. The course is achievement-based and allows students to progress at their own rate. An overwhelming majority, 91%, of these middle-school students found the level of difficulty appropriate for them, and 89% were pleased with their progress. This is particularly important given the diversity of student experience that teachers encounter in the classroom. The survey also collected data on EQ skill acquisition. A majority of 73% reported improved concentration skills, 70% improved co-ordination, 70% are better at working alone, and 67% improved their group work skills. Although students were not asked to qualify their responses, 42% indicated a possibility that they had improved in other subject areas.

These results indicate that emotional intelligence learnings can be explicitly incorporated into a music teaching pedagogical framework. In this particular study, the course of instruction was based on the teaching of general music within a group keyboard setting.

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