

## **Motivation in the classroom: *Insights into beginning teachers beliefs to teach music and the arts for students aged 9-15 years***

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### **ABSTRACT**

In 2005, a National Review of School Music (Centre for Learning, Change and Development, 2005) raised a number of questions in relation to the teaching of music and the arts in schools. Recommendations included increasing the school hours dedicated to the arts, resources available in school and an increase in the duration and nature of pre-service teacher education courses. While the review provided some insight into teacher development, greater exploration of teacher beliefs about music is necessary, especially as they begin teaching careers. According to self-efficacy theory, the beginning years of teaching are crucial to future teaching practice as beliefs are developed and formed (Bandura, 1997). Once this period is over, theory further suggests that beliefs are resistant to change (Bandura, 1997). This paper seeks to explore beginning teacher beliefs about the teaching of music and arts education, by investigating self-reported motivators of beginning generalist teachers from a beliefs perspective.

In 2008, I collected 201 questionnaires from beginning teachers throughout Queensland (years 4-9), focusing on their beliefs about teaching music and arts education. Questions focused on what currently motivates beginning teachers to teach music and the arts and what would motivate beginning teachers more. Findings suggest key areas that motivate and de-motivate beginning teachers towards the arts; for example, student enjoyment and personal learning. Findings provide key messages for schools, administrators and policy makers about motivational beliefs of teachers of their own and their students' engagement in music and the arts.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Music and the arts are an integral component of education within Australia. Within Queensland, it is considered a mandatory part of the curriculum, usually forming part of the responsibility of the generalist teacher. Research suggests however, that the generalist teacher may have little confidence and competence in teaching music and the arts (Temmerman, 1997; Centre for Learning, Change and Development, 2005; Russell Bowie & Dowson, 2005).

Eisner (1997, 2002) in the United States and Holt (1997) in the United Kingdom argue that values, attitudes and beliefs are fundamental to the role and purpose of music and the arts in education. Eisner (1997) suggests, "we are

expecting [generalist primary] teachers to teach what they do not know and often do not love" (p. 17). This lack of value and support for music and the arts in learning at a systemic level can perpetuate already low levels of self-efficacy beliefs for music and the arts amongst teachers.

In 2005, a *National Review of School Music Education* was conducted, reinforcing earlier findings from the Senate Inquiry. In particular, the review found a decline in hours given for generalist primary pre-service education courses for teaching music in schools (Centre for Learning, Change and Development, 2005). Previous research has shown that on average, pre-service teachers receive only 23 hours of music training in their entire teacher education (MCA, 2003). The review (2005) recommended that for improved music teacher education:

- The Australian Government explore ways to encourage universities (and other providers of teachers education) to provide more time for music education for pre-service teachers (p. xvi).
- Universities and School of Education enhance or transform courses for generalist classroom teachers to ensure that there is dedicated time to music education and that student teachers develop and demonstrate knowledge, understanding and skills in their own music making as well as teaching music (p. xvi).
- Graduation and beginning teachers demonstrate the currency and relevance of their knowledge, understanding, skills and values about music education (p. xvi- xvii).

While the review recommended teacher education programmes as a key aspect of improving the overall quality of music education, it did not explore beginning teacher beliefs to teach music and the arts.

Teacher self-efficacy beliefs are still forming in the beginning years of teaching and once developed are resistant to change (Bandura, 1997). It is seen as a time when teachers create their own self-knowledge as they reflect on their own teaching practice (Bandura, 1997). On this assumption, the self-efficacy beliefs of beginning

teachers are important for investigation and recognition of confirming and disconfirming experiences that shape this motivational construct. I speculate that beginning teacher beliefs are crucial to future teacher practice in music and arts education, as they develop and form over the beginning phase of teaching.

Self-efficacy is developed through the interaction between an individual's judgment of their teaching practice to perform a task and their perception of the actions required to perform that task successfully. The interaction between perception of capability and execution of actions is defined by Bandura (1977, 1986, 1997) as self-efficacy. Teacher self-efficacy influences the level of motivation and amount of effort the individual brings to the task of teaching.

Strong self-efficacy in a specific context (e.g. music teaching) may predispose an individual to try harder and persist longer with the task to achieve a desired outcome. A teacher who demonstrates strong self-efficacy has a greater chance of performing the pursued activity successfully. Alternatively, low self-efficacy may result in avoidance of the task or an unwillingness to accept the challenge. Teachers are likely to put less effort into planning and teaching, even if they know of strategies that could help students. From this perspective, "beliefs are far more influential than knowledge in determining how individuals organise and define tasks and problems and are stronger predictors of behaviour" (Pajares, 1992, p. 311).

## 2. METHOD

In order to study the relationship between a teacher's belief system and their execution of action for teaching music and the arts in classrooms, this research was designed to identify current and future motivational beliefs of beginning generalist teachers. It attempts to capture influences that motivate and de-motivate the teaching of music and the arts.

Beginning teachers were chosen, as Bandura (1997) believes that the motivational construct of self-efficacy is still forming within this period of teacher development. Beginning teachers were asked to; (1) describe what currently motivated them to teach arts in their classroom and; (2) describe what would motivate them to teach more arts than they currently do.

Beginning teachers (i.e. with between one and three years experience) who taught the middle years (4-9) in private and public schools were recruited through professional teacher organizations, at schools and at conferences for beginning teachers. A total of 201 usable questionnaires were returned by 70 males and 131 females between the ages of 21 and 45.

Questions on perceived motivation formed the last section of the questionnaire. Two open-ended questions about motivation were adapted from the work of Oreck (2001) who explored generalist teachers in the United States. These were:

- What currently motivates you to teach music and arts in your classroom?
- What would motivate you to teach music and the arts more than you currently do in your classroom?

The first question was designed to explore current motivators of beginning teachers, while the second question was designed to explore future motivators of beginning teachers.

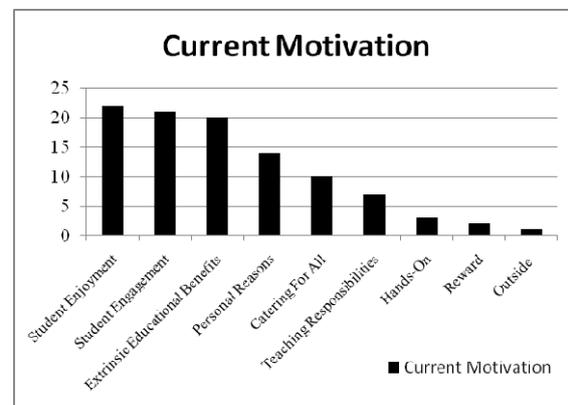
Results were analysed using content analysis to show key themes that were common across beginning teachers' perceived determinants of motivation. Content analysis is "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 2004, p.18).

An adapted version of Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran's (2003, p.171) 15 stages of content analysis (based within the constant comparative method) was used as a guide to identify key themes and meanings. This process allows newly identified themes to be compared with previously identified themes to ensure that the new theme does add more understanding about the phenomenon under investigation. Coding for manifest content (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2001) was used, acknowledging what was directly said in the interviews, as opposed to latent content which is implied. Results are discussed below.

## 3. RESULTS

Current motivation for beginning teachers appeared to be student enjoyment (22%), student engagement (21%), extrinsic educational benefits (20%), personal reasons (14%), catering for all students (10%), part of teaching responsibilities (7%), the arts being hands-on (3%), used as a reward (2%) and seeing students engage with the arts outside of the classroom (1%) (see Figure 1, below).

Figure 1: Current motivation to teach music and the arts



Examples of current motivation categories include:

- Student Engagement

*The strongest motivation would have to be the student, because I see a student succeed to the best of their ability (Respondent 64).*

- Reward

*As a reward. Students love arts lessons, so they have to complete their 'main' course work to be able to participate (Respondent 50).*

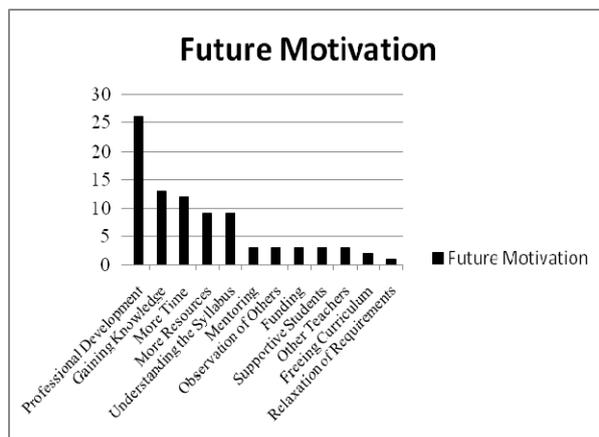
- Education Instrument

*Because I think it's important, fun and a great way to explore and express yourself. It is great to learn for 'life skills' (Respondent 13).*

Beginning teachers appeared to be motivated by their current students to teach the arts, based on their beliefs about the arts. They felt that students engaged in rich learning opportunities that provided educational and social outcomes (extrinsic benefits). These motivators however do not paint a positive picture of understanding the role of music and the arts in education. In effect, many of the beginning teachers appear to have de-intellectualised music and the arts. They suggested the subject was un-academic, peripheral, a reward, and 'good for fun and not much else' activity within the classroom.

Beginning teachers were also asked to describe what would motivate them to teach the arts more in the classroom. Beginning teachers generally talked about removing current barriers to their teaching of the arts. These included opportunities for professional development (26%), gaining arts knowledge (13%), more time (12%), more resources (9%), understanding the syllabus (9%), gaining confidence (6%), supportive students (4%), mentoring (3%), observation of others (3%), funding (3%), support (3%), support from other teachers (3%), overcrowded curriculum (2%) and a relaxation of current requirements (1%). Overall, results suggest beginning teachers would be more motivated if there was a focus on their own personal learning within the arts (see Figure 2, below).

**Figure 2:** Future motivation to teach music and the arts



Examples of future motivation categories include:

- Gaining Arts Knowledge

*The knowledge and understanding that goes with the arts and the integration of KLA's more (Respondent 53).*

- Professional Development

*More professional development for how to create lessons and plan curriculum around more of these areas- music and drama particularly (Respondent 136).*

- More Time

*There is no time to do anymore than I currently do- push for national testing for high performance students in literacy and numeracy. There is less time on subjects deemed not essential (Respondent 100).*

Beginning teachers would be more motivated to engage with music and the arts if they could increase and make changes to time, curriculum, support and funding for their learning. Some beginning teachers suggested the use of modelling (observing how to teach music and the arts) during professional development as the best way to increase their personal learning in music and the arts. They felt that professional development would help improve their personal capabilities in music and the arts, leading to greater confidence about their own capabilities. This finding is consistent with self-efficacy theory, where teachers will re-assess their own self-efficacy to teach music and the arts, with greater perceived capability leading to higher levels of teacher self-efficacy towards the arts.

#### 4. FINAL COMMENTS

The above results bring to light contributing factors influencing current and future motivation of beginning teachers in music and arts education. It shows glimpses of the assessment and beliefs that beginning teachers make towards the task of teaching music and the arts. Results suggest that part of this assessment is based on prior beliefs surrounding the de-intellectualisation of music and the arts within the classroom. Beginning teachers talked about the arts as being a reward, fun, a hands-on activity and for student enjoyment, showing an entrenched view of music and arts education.

Current motivators mentioned by beginning teachers for teaching music and arts education showed that music and the arts were not recognized as intellectually demanding. Rather, beginning teachers were motivated by extrinsic benefits that music and the arts could bring to students in their classroom. These included improved student academic and social ability. Teachers surveyed did not appear to be motivated by the intrinsic benefits of music and arts education or the notion of music and arts for life. This may be due to a lack of understanding of the conceptual knowledge that underpins concepts within music and arts education. In music and arts education classes students "acquire 'knowledge how' that is, how to make or perform and understand the art form, and 'knowledge that', facts and information about the art forms" (Hofmann Davis, 2008, p.49). In this study, beginning teachers did not recognize this perspective of 'art for art's sake'.

Future motivators appeared to be based around building generalist teacher skills and knowledge within music and the arts. Beginning teachers believed they would be more motivated to teach music and the arts if they had access to professional development, opportunities to watch others teach and general support for teaching music and the arts from other teachers within the school. These contributing factors to future teacher motivation may provide guidance to improving music and arts education in schools. Beginning teachers would be more motivated if they could be supported on-site by specialist and generalist staff in developing ideas, resources, and suitable activities. This may also allow beginning teachers to develop the

conceptual knowledge of music and arts that appears to be absent within their current motivational beliefs.

Motivational changes could be achieved through greater collaboration in schools between specialist and generalist teachers. Specialist teachers could take on the role of specialist curriculum facilitators, providing knowledge, guidance and support for beginning generalist teachers. Beginning teachers could then begin to connect music and arts teaching in the specialist classroom to their own classrooms. To do this however, beginning teachers must acknowledge that they are also responsible for the delivery of music and arts education, not just the specialist teacher.

An emerging factor from beginning teachers is their current contextual barriers mentioned towards their future motivation. These were largely based around barriers that were outside of the beginning teacher's control.

Beginning teachers also mentioned current contextual barriers to future motivation. These included factors outside of their control such as curriculum, time, funding and resourcing. While these barriers have been recognized previously in music education research, it is of particular interest that beginning teachers linked these barriers directly to their motivational beliefs about teaching music and the arts. This may suggest that unless changes are made by curriculum makers and governments, beginning teachers will continue to feel de-motivated as they cannot remove or reduce these barriers. If curriculum makers and governments are dedicated to the teaching of music and arts in schools, they must provide adequate funding and resourcing and user-friendly syllabi for generalist teachers.

This paper reports results that raise interesting questions about beginning teacher self-efficacy and their subsequent perceived motivation towards music and arts teaching. It raises starting points for future investigation into generalist teachers' motivational beliefs in music and arts education. Future research will seek similar findings in other states within Australia to confirm these findings in Queensland. Such results will also provide greater direction as to the support structures needed for supporting the motivation of generalist teachers in music and arts teaching within Australia.

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