STUDENTS' ACTIVE VOICES AND STUDENT-CENTEREDNESS IN SCHOOL MUSIC EDUCATION

May KOKKIDOU
University of Macedonia, Greece
Kryovrisi, Eordaia, Greece, 50200
email: ugenius@otenet.gr

Abstract

Students, even the younger ones, have a lot to say about their meaningful experiences in school as a whole. However, the school system and teacher-directed pedagogies fail to cater their individual needs and existing interests. In school music education, students' perspectives and expectations have been almost overlooked. At what degree do we know students' standpoints regarding music lessons and teachers? Understanding their highly significant expressions is a valuable key to reform the music educational issues and policies. In this paper, the author look at the recent literature on students' views and student-centered approaches, focusing on the vantage points of music teacher-learner interactivity. In reseacher's opinion, more educational study is needed to further explore the importance of students' voices in school music education.
Throughout this article, the usage of "we" refers to us as music educators.
Keywords: *student-centered approach, children's rights, music education*

Introduction

Education develops the identity and consciousness of human beings, preparing them for prosperity and welfare, by empowering and enriching skills, knowledge, creativity, and physical, personal, cultural, social, mental, emotional, ethic, and aesthetic values. It does not exist as a monolithic concept or a goal per se, nor as a linear path. It opens minds. It is a practice of trials and errors, productive inquiry and exploration, with the stakes being the future of a society, its demands, and opportunities.

Learning is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon, a necessary condition for social growth. Meaningful learning has equivalents in creative change and critical transformation. It is a way of thinking, doing, relating, being, and becoming. It occurs best in a connected and trusting environment that contains helpful communication and interactions in which the students feel appreciated and respected. Individuals can live in a culture of peace with dignity, acceptance, tolerance, responsibility, and social justice, with a dislike for violence, mistreatment, and exclusion. Students interact to ascribe meaning to certain experiences. This argument positions educators as co-constructors of knowledge. Embracing the student experience is the starting point of education and the focal point of the curriculum.

Article 12 of the UNCRC (United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, 1989) states that children have a basic right to participate in all matters affecting them and to voice their opinions up to the age of 18 years. Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance

with the age and maturity of the child. Children have the right to freedom of expression (UNCRC, 1989, Article 13) in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, gender equality, and friendship among ethnic and religious groups (UNCRC, 1989, Article 29). Supporting the student's personal experience is a tool for student-centered processes. Really careful listening to and understanding students' voices and analyzing data on their experiences, behaviors, beliefs, ideas, values, and ideals open windows into their thinking (Kokkidou, 2017).

Student-centered approach has been used *"to signalize an important shift in education from that which is teacher-centered"* (Tang, 2023, p. 72). When students' voice is taken seriously in the co-design of learning, positive skills are likely to emerge, such as: safety, autonomy, confidence, communication skills, identity exploration, engagement, self-determination, responsibility, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2013; Chang & Hall, 2022). In the present article I focus on the vantage points of music teacher-learner interactivity in school music education. Fostering students' voices in school cultures might need willingness to listen to their music concerns, opinions, and hopes.

Research Concerning the Effectiveness of Student Voice and Student-centered Practices in School

Students' voices and student-centered approaches present a promising pathway for redefining education. Quaglia and Fox (2018) designate student voice as a procedure that *"involves sharing thoughts, ideas, beliefs, and opinions in a safe environment built on trust and respect"* (p. 14). The range of student voice, according to Toshalis and Nakkula (2013), focuses on motivation, commitment, compulsory curriculum, dedication, and academic achievement. It is the right of students to actively participate in educational decision-making processes (Quaglia & Fox, 2018) in the feedback of school practices and in a democratic vision (Charteris & Smardon, 2019). For Dewey (1916), the public nature of dialogue is at the centre of democratic practices. According Greene (1995) writes that democracy *"means a community that is always in the making"* (p. 39).

Schools' institutional structures have remained locked in hierarchical patterns (Charteris & Smardon, 2019). The tension of power often suppresses student voice advocacy (Flores & Ahn, 2024). If the children's interests are not at the forefront, the children will feel rejected, frustrated, and unsupported (Mitra, 2018; Pearce & Wood, 2019). Pressing this point a bit further, there is another caveat with some misconceptions. To be specific, *"student-centered approach is not without drawbacks"*; it could result in a lack of control and the classroom could become *"noisy and disorganized"* (Tang, 2023, p. 73). Many educators claim to implement student-centered learning in practice but, in reality, this is not the case (Charteris & Smardon, 2019). The risks involve the loss of teachers' authority. Teachers tend to listen only to the students who will say what they want to hear. Several voices of student population are not even acknowledged. This can be seen as a sign of authoritarianism in an insidious way.

The student-centered learning concept can mean different things to different people in a variety of school contexts and structures. Although the top-down indicators, such as academic results, measurable skills, standardised, summative assessment system, test-

ing and competitions, can predict some of the future effects of education, the bottom-up factors, when children feel welcome, finding the learning activities to be authentic and engaging, can have a greater impact on their long-term development (Saltari & Kokkidou, 2024). The overbearing, controlling, authoritarian, monolithic top-down strategies, by priori mandated and forced curriculum decision, have inability to reach all students. The bottom-up pluralistic principle deals with uncertainty, diversity, and openness. The bottom-up and top-down approaches do not exist independently but relate each other in parallel, inseparable structures. They rarely operate independently. Their productive and synergistic interaction is promoted as a principle for a multitude of applications, generating collective benefits.

The change and the re-shifting of power balances are very prominent themes regarding the role of student voice in traditional teaching environments (Mitra, 2018; Charteris & Smardon, 2019). In the literature review, the key themes that emerge are children's rights, democratic education, formal and informal learning, children's out-of-school perceptions, the power dynamics between students and teachers, and well-being.

Nevertheless, students often have little or no voice, their opinions have been neither heard nor welcomed. Students' voices are seldom stimulated and amplified in schooling and in curriculum planning (Kokkidou, 2017; Quaglia & Fox, 2018; Charteris & Smardon, 2019). It is one of the most neglected aspects and lacks legitimacy, perhaps because it reveals what happens and what does not change in school life. The conformist, dysfunctional system of schooling *"is guilty for its inability to place student voice at the centre of teaching-learning procedures; it is guilty for its tendency to marginalize students who do not exhibit certain academic characteristics"* (Kokkidou, 2017, p. 311). The reason is that we do not make things ***with*** the children, ***from*** them and ***for*** them. Students are at the bottom of the school hierarchy. They do not express themselves. The curriculum is disconnected from the larger picture of students' lives.

The student-centred requirements often make an "add-on" task for teachers. It is not easy for them to say goodbye to their and authority status and move into unknown territories. This is most important in the classroom. Greene (1995) denoted that teachers and students should enter into a *"collaborative search"* (p. 23) through awareness, dialogue, relationship and wide-awakeness. In the democratic journey of the wide-awakeness, teachers must be wide-awake themselves in order to be engaged with the conflicts of the larger social fabric.

School climate and teachers' inter- and intra-personal skills is the key to understanding students' experiences (Kokkidou, 2017; Chang & Hall, 2022). Numerous studies make it clear that student voice may promote the school improvement or reform efforts and lead to advantages in the creation of democratic schools and societies (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2013; Kokkidou, 2017; Mitra, 2018; Quaglia & Fox, 2018; Després & Dubé, 2020; Flores & Ahn, 2024). In support of reform efforts (UNCRC, 1989), students are not necessarily immature and unreliable. Their language serves as a means by which the process of expressing ideas and priorities is realized. Of course, even disagreement must take place within dialectical structures of reconciliation. We have to remember that democracy meant that we have rights and responsibilities. Democracy requires boundaries, cooperation, mutual justice, ongoing support, care for the collective good, and critical awareness. Unlimited freedom is not democratic. The issue of respect and human dignity is very demanding.

It is evident that many young people experience school as oppressive because they do not have a forum to express their views or to challenge the injustices they have experienced (Hess, 2019; Pearce & Wood, 2019). Giving primacy to students' voices, *"we should be able to better understand the drivers of their discontent with respect to their schooling, and acquire a more detailed and broader picture of school problems"* (Kokkidou, 2017, p. 229). The absence of voice is more evident in students from marginalized backgrounds (immigrants, refugees, minority groups, religion orientation and fundamentalism, students with physical or cognitive (dis)abilities, LGBTQIA+ communities, patriarchy of Eurocentric high culture, economically disadvantaged students, abandoned and destitute students, harassment, bullying, gangs etc.), in instances of discrimination or bias. Many schools represent the views of the dominant culture and undervalue the voices from marginalized cultures. These are especially deep inequalities. In contrast to this standpoint, dialogue with marginalized students can promote the acceptance of differences among students (Hess, 2019; Orzolek, 2021; Flores & Ahn, 2024). On the contrary, approaches that focus on power relations between youth and adults as well as on the social dominance-avoidance dichotomy do not equate to effective outcomes (Giroux, 2001; Mitra, 2018; Pearce & Wood, 2019; Charteris & Smardon, 2019; Chang & Hall, 2022). When students feel that they are respected, they became more willing to talk openly and honestly about the difficulties they experience and their displeasure about schooling. Finally, there is a great call for smaller classes in schools. Small size enables a comfortable, social-emotional atmosphere within conditions of synergy.

The students' narratives are vehicles for their personal, social, and cultural experiences. They formulate students' own memories, thoughts, and reflections, assisting them to express their feelings and to enrich understandings of self and other. They allow students to weave their stories into the fabric of the classroom community, encouraging a culture of "we" and belonging. Their personal, descriptive stories mean the pathways they have followed and the routes they intend to follow within a cultural and social framework. The narratives of their satisfactions, dreams, insecurities, and fears critique what might not be right and consider worlds that might be better than the one they inherit. Apart from talking-listening project, students can participate through written stories, drawings, cartoons, collages or poster boards, song lyrics, poems, drama roles, videos, embodied movement, and playing with puppets. The stories that they hold, have a metaphoric expression of their learning affairs. Through their voices, observable signals and non-verbal utterances such as facial expression, body gestures and position, laughter as well eye gaze/contact, students can accept other people's ideas and will realize that others may see things differently from them.

Students recognize that the thorny, bureaucratic, outdated schooling system, which remains content-driven, is not responsive to their various needs. There is not a "one-size-fits-all" traditional model. As we have seen, students' active viewpoints, from an 'insider' perspective, are a vitally important consideration in a student-centred environment, improving students' engagement, leadership skills, motivation, encouragement, and well-being, across school years. In a culture of generosity, the hopeful, student-oriented classroom climate, and a friendly atmosphere have high priority from a pedagogical perspective. It becomes a serious means of breaking of learners' silence. Supportive, inclusive, intentional, and liberating school structures are needed to scaffold reciprocal relationships. Here again, such approach shows that schools, context, climate, class-

rooms, teacher-student and peer relationships are influenced by many factors.

Critical Pedagogy for Music Education and Students' Voice

Critical Theory has emphasized the links between culture, liberation, humanization, solidarity, equity with oppression, overwhelming control, and power. Freire (1970), Giroux (2001) and other social justice activists, advocated the revolutionary, critical pedagogy, where knowledge is liberated through intense dialogues, discourses and contemplation. Teacher and students take authority and action in a process of mutual learning and development, and call for a more pluralistic approach to the curriculum, without power imbalances. In a dialectical, commutative and empowering context, classroom dialogue should not be hindered by authoritarian practices or dominant culture. Freire (1970) proposed the pedagogical notion of *"teacher-student with students-teachers"* (p. 80), where both work with one another, continuously and reciprocally through dialogue. Critical pedagogy maintains that students are *"critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher"* (p. 81). The teacher is no longer the one-who-teaches neither the sole "owner" of knowledge. Freire, considers teaching as a social-political act where teachers and students converse, renegotiate, and co-create knowledge, becoming jointly responsible for the educational processes in which all grow. Traditional education does not form a critical consciousness because it is disconnected from life. Education is never a neutral activity.

Educators are not prepared, as Giroux (2001) has noted, to understand what is happening to youth. School's pedagogical practices discourage democratic participation. The social constructs reproduce privilege, biases, and stereotypical perception. Freire (1998) writes that *"our relationship with the learners demands that we respect them and demands equally that we be aware of the concrete conditions of their world, the conditions that shape them. To try to know the reality that our students live is a task that the educational practice imposes on us: Without this, we have no access to the way they think, so only with great difficulty can we perceive what and how they know"* (p. 58).

Critical Pedagogy for Music Education (CPME) views schools as a means of empowering students to resist and liberate themselves from structural and cultural injustices, as well as from the ideologies and imposed concepts of the dominant culture and its values (Bates, 2017). Critical thinking and action promote dimensions of resistance to oppression, dogmatism, and coercion, allowing students and teachers to engage in interactive problem solving and dialogue, and to achieve critical consciousness (Freire, 1970) and the change that occurs in the classrooms (Abrahams, 2005; Schmidt, 2005), with a more in-depth understanding and exploration of the music world (Martignetti et al., 2013; Després & Dubé, 2020). Music educators anchor critical pedagogy to their instruction and to their students' lived experiences, at an individual as well as a group level. Abrahams (2005) suggests that all critical music educators, regardless of the context in which they teach, should ask themselves the following questions: 1) Who am I? 2) Who are my students? 3) What could they become? 4) What could we become together? (p. 63). The aim of this suggestion is to serve sub-questions, such as: What biases (musical and otherwise) do teachers bring to their students? What are the realities students are bringing to the music classroom? How might teacher honor students' world? How might students and teachers engage in dialogue that demands new answers? Obviously,

there are no clear, definite, or single answers. In the context of their own situations, teachers will respond in different manners.

Students' Voices in Music Education: Music student voice is both a process and an outcome

Music education is a physical, cultural (and subcultural), social, collaborative, creative, intellectual, emotional, ethical, spiritual, aesthetic, ideological and existential praxis. It is a constant flux tradition, changing with time and place. The ideal music education motivates students to examine alternative ideas concerning musical phenomena, and reflect on their music ideas. Music education is not cultural museum. The way we think about music and music education is closely related to how we think about people, the common good, modern society, and the multiplicity of its representations. These aspects intersect and are integrally linked.

We live in a contemporary, ever-changing musical world saturated with media messages and characterised by multiple perspectives, uncertainties and incessant change. Music in schools should reflect what students know and perceive as music in a globally-connected world. Students' strong voice operates as a vital vehicle for redefining and transforming music education. Student-centered curricula seek and value students' insightful points of view. The truly remarkable thing is that music educators should always aim to better understand their students, the nature of students' musical abilities, and their aesthetic inclinations. The worthwhile, holistic student-centered music education begins with the characteristics of the students themselves. It acts as an ice-breaker, generating a call for belonging and significant participation in their vibrant community. It is equally important when and where a student learns music.

I believe that children's views are one of the most neglected aspects of research. While the interest on the learner voice and student-centered orientations has soared currently in the field of music education, the body of literature is still relatively small with limited impact in educators, contemporary school researchers, and policymakers (Spruce, 2015; Després & Dubé, 2020; Economidou Stavrou & Papageorgi, 2021; Saltari & Kokkidou, 2024). In a more pessimistic picture, teacher makes no room for students' voice, following the asymmetrical nature of the power. Students are relegated to a subordinate position. In this case, silence takes on many forms.

The connection between learners' perceptions, conceptions, and school music education has not been studied thoroughly, in a wider context, illustrating the diversity and commonalities of the student voice in various settings. Fundamental questions are: How can learners' active voices be prioritized? What are the new opportunities and challenges facing the child learning music today, compared to previous generations? How can today teachers find who are their students, what they need and want? Do our students know about their musical abilities and potentials? What music styles and songs are meaningful to our students? Who determines what kind of music knowledge is beneficial? Does the music we choose to teach have a place in our students' living world? These questions are certainly worthy of future investigation.

Rather than a music education for "real people" and "real lives" (Bates, 2017, p. 16), formal music education tends to *"marginalize, exploit, repress, and alienate"* (p. 3) the stu-

dents. In most cases, all dimensions of the overloaded music curricula are determined and reformed without consulting the students that they are designed to serve (Després & Dubé, 2020). In other words, when music education represses students' voices, it is likely to make them feel that their own experiences have little value. The music teaching should respect students' expectations, creative potential, and freedom, should vitalize the authentic and fulfilling experiences and the thoughtful reflection (Schmidt, 2005). These acquired skills will serve them well beyond the music classroom (Green, 2008). Generally, curriculum choices *"have to be made locally, in each school, in each classroom, for and by each group of learners"* (Rolle, 2017, p. 94).

The inclusive music learning environment, in individual and group lessons, creates purposeful opportunities for students to re-engage with their music education, developing a deeper appreciation for music. Thus, the gap is bridged between in- and out-of-school learning experiences (Green, 2008; Després & Dubé, 2020; Clauhs & Cremata, 2020). Open discussion enables students to find their bearings in a confusing world of music in which judgments and assessments are called into question (Schmidt, 2005; Rolle, 2017; Orzolek, 2021). With respect to music preferences, listening and playing behaviours of most students, it seems that they are strongly correlated to the musical omnivorism movement (which do not distinguish between elite and non-elite music cultures), in our contemporary, post-modern world. For music educators is useful to be informed about the occurring trends in the current musical scene.

It is essential to note that the technologically-enriched learning in informal settings emphasizes the student's personal, musical experiences and interests. Technology is the second nature to students, in self-choice activities. Music technology provides materials that engender playfulness. Many students are enthusiastic amateurs. Digital, emerging musical resources and mobile technologies (with often expensive devices) enrich young children's learning environment. This conjecture creates a tremendous gap between the digital, music platforms students use (via YouTube audiovisual media, social media, virtual/online spaces, movies, mobile devices, music videos, karaoke, video games) and the ways in which school content is delivered. For instance, children are often unenthusiastic about school musical material, whereas they embrace, with open-mindedness, songs that are not created for them. The music technological, social arenas are based on friendship-driven activities. The technology-based music activities align to the students' genuine needs and life experiences. Students are more likely to be motivated.

The organized literature review from Després and Dubé (2020) in the field of learner voice research, into a wider framework of music education, captures a deep questioning of the modes in which our education systems operate. According to the authors' results, multi-perspective understanding of the learner voice in music is related, in order of importance, to: (1) pleasure or well-being; (2) music; (3) action; (4) learning environment; (5) people; (6) desire and (7) receptivity. The active role of students in decision-making increases their greater sense of agency, identity, and responsibility, their motivations and their ability to communicate with peers and educators. The collaborative and non-stressful environment is linked to the students' ownership over their music learning, their improved self-esteem and autonomy. In the opposite direction, this pedagogical approach can provoke resistance to everybody who find comfort in the strategies and programs that have prevailed for decades (Després & Dubé, 2020). It is

worth-mentioning that transformation does not come easy.

In the study of Economidou Stavrou' and Papageorgi (2021), the aim of self-report questionnaire of secondary schools' students in Cyprus (N = 749) was to examine students' views of their music lessons: what they value and how they would have liked lessons to be if they had the opportunity to change things. According to the results, students called for more focus on singing and to play a greater variety of instruments (i.e., drums, guitar and piano) of modern repertoire (Greek and foreign). They want to play the music they like and of their choice. They indicated the desire to do more of their favorite activities. The authors conclude that listening to students' voice and *"taking into consideration what they value as important and less important can open new pathways and new perspectives on music teaching and learning"* (p. 382).

Students are asked to tell their own stories (Hess, 2019; Pearce & Wood, 2019; Orzolek, 2021), without fear of criticism or censorship. Some of them tend to surprise us. In this regard, the student voice movement heralds the possibility of a shift from unilateral top-down direction to bottom-up participatory processes. In the bottom-up perspective, students are set as the departure point of the educational process (Saltari & Kokkidou, 2024), and teachers become aware of who their students are as individuals, artists, and learners. Teachers work with a diverse population of students, from different backgrounds, prior experiences, and cultures. Above all, we must not forget that there is no homogeneous or unified voice but numerous heterogeneous, not static voices of the students. Their particular voices are not fixed and stable, but always changing contingent on their context.

Listening to students' voices and their valuable perceptions is a philosophical position (Després & Dubé, 2020), *"the antipole of an impersonal and homogenized education, and it is a student-centred approach in real sense"* (Saltari & Kokkidou, 2024, p. 7) and a revolutionary action. As Bowman (2012) postulates, *"the ethically oriented domain"* of music education *"extends well beyond technical concerns, implicating questions like when-to, whether-to, to-whom-to, or to-what-extent-to"* (p. 33). Yet, music education often establishes a standardized, artificial, narrow, stagnant or limited music cosmos which leads to the problem of elitism. Many teachers undervalue or snub the learners' musical choices. The school music curriculum serves a certain minority of selected students, *"at the expense of the majority of other students whose musical needs, abilities, interests, and goals may be ignored or denied. From the other side, in a well-rounded, holistic character the students develop lifelong music learning and "independent musicianship"* (Regelski, 2009, p. 9). The music we decide to teach is not indisputably good *"with lasting benefits for students or society"* (Regelski, 2009, p. 11). Therefore, it seems imperative to review the role of the music teacher.

In terms of multiple dimensions in the dynamics of school change, the dialogue with the students is a starting point for the democratic, pedagogical, and social goals of music education in the 21st century (Spruce, 2015; Pearce & Wood, 2019; Després & Dubé, 2020). Differences among individuals should be seen as opportunities. From an educational point of view, the issue is not the diverse backgrounds and lives of learners (Kokkidou, 2017; Clauhs & Cremata, 2020) but the vital things that they have in common (Abrahams, 2005). Music student voice is both a process and an outcome. It also means considering the broader contextual or situational features, the reasons why music is

studied and how it makes sense of students' actual lived circumstances. The foremost, grave concern at hand is the separation of school and real life and the difference between children's learning alongside or despite their existing interests.

Increasing student opinion does not mean that teachers will 'get out of the way', abandoning *"music education pedagogical principles to teach only what the students ask or wish"* (Economidou Stavrou & Papageorgi, 2021, p. 368), and accepting a chaotic, disruptive environment. This option is not desirable. Hearing students' voice in a collaborative discourse allows teacher to investigate and improve her/his own practice. Learners' musical preferences, capacities, and choices are part of their selfhood, emerging horizons, identity, and cultural heritage. Learners can shape the curriculum at micro and macro level, with brilliant ideas full of breakthrough and surprisingness. Music curricula can be more finely tailored to the various needs of today's students.

These pedagogically desirable transitions take time and effort because music students and teachers are not habituated to their new substantial roles. Time is an essential factor which affects the ways ideas are shared, constructed, and evaluated. In this vein, I conclude that student voice is a fundamental, yet a missing piece in school music education. More broadly, if we proceeded on what we hear from students, regardless of age, we would think, feel, and act very differently. Flexibility is the key.

Music Teacher and Music Student Voice

Committed music teachers matter in school reality, playing a critical role in educational reform. Their work is complex and difficult. Many teachers struggle to alter and overturn the dominant, conventional messages of school, rethink their personal models and philosophies. They try to escape from the cycle of music teaching in the way they have been taught. They make an effort to understand the students' cultural backgrounds, previous knowledge of music, out-of-school experiences, musical needs, values, impressions, preferences, and tastes in favorite music they enjoy to listen to and perform. The transition from teacher-centered to student-centered practices allows teachers to redefine their roles in music lessons, exploring their moral responsibility, their cultural-musical heritage and recognizing the strengths in diversity.

Mono-cultural school communities are rare today. Music educators are undeniable catalyst for helping students in the exploration of difficult issues, such as racism, colonial and patriarchal systems, oppression, cultural imperialism, and disagreement with the dominant culture. This assumption can help out teachers to re-visualize music education as a change tool based on differentiated perspectives for music learning (Schmidt, 2005; Martignetti et al., 2013; Bates, 2017; Hess, 2019; Clauhs & Cremata 2020; Orzolek, 2021). This emphasis appears to mirror the arguments made by Giroux (2001). The UNCRC (1989) recognizes children as social actors and capable participants to debates that touch and shape their lives. In this light, we need to put students (not just music) at the center of the educational process in various settings (school, community, conservatory). Teachers should help students to determine how and why music matters to them, and to take charge of their music learning (Green, 2008; Elliott & Silverman, 2015; Spruce, 2015; Bates, 2017; Clauhs & Cremata, 2020; Economidou Stavrou & Papageorgi, 2021). Allsup (2016) states that we teach children, not music traditions. He disagrees with the binary Master/apprentice system ("Master" is invariably capitalized,

emphasizing the power relations between Master and apprentice) which is a closed, hierarchical form with negative attributes. He defines music-teacher quality *"as the ability and curiosity to move skilfully and knowingly within and across closed and open domains"* (p. 39). Inspired by Freire, Greene and Dewey, Allsup (2016) articulates: Master's oppressive authority and *"love of overwhelming control"* shows *"his desire to control and silence others"* (p. 11). Music teachers should hold in high esteem, confrontational classroom negotiations because this is a prerequisite for democracy.

Our students have much to teach us. We are not the only music educators in the classroom. This relationship is often reciprocated (Martignetti et al., 2013). Music teacher is not an isolated actor or a sage-on-the-stage. The mentor-teacher welcomes, guides, facilitates, co-learns, respects, and engages students in group dynamics. She/he attentively listens to the students' choices and honour the diverse musical and cultural worldviews that learners bring into the classroom. The ethical, helpful, and supportive music teachers-as-mentors are counsellors and collaborators into a musical-interpersonal network of dialogical and social relationships. They usually fade in-and-out of classroom leadership roles (Freire, 1970; 1998; Green, 2008; Elliott & Silverman, 2015; Allsup, 2016; Orzolek, 2021; Economidou Stavrou & Papageorgi, 2021). In the direct, student-centred practices, the music educator has the skills of a good listener, focusing on giving students questions, not answers. It is more essential to find the questions than the answers.

Teachers must also reject the division and distinction between high and popular music culture, being in sympathy with the principles of adaptive, more nuanced, flexible, and pedagogical aligned curriculum. They ought to think 'outside the box' and look for signs of positive energy. As indicated earlier, co-operation is a gateway for self-discovery and co-creation of meanings, which are crucial 21st-century skills. Dialogue engenders thinking. Solutions can be constructed in co-shared processes. Considering different perspectives and notions is an ability that must be nurtured. Students can discuss their ideas in small groups, teamwork, and then in whole meetings.

The teachers' responsibility to the present and future life of learners is about *"their wishes and interests rather than the musical past"* (Rolle, 2017, p. 94). But this can create stress for cumbersome teachers, who are likely to worry about what students will say about them and the school culture, with negative comments and judgments. The biggest fear it is due to the unwillingness and inertia of the narrow-minded and reluctant teachers to listen to students' voices. The relationships between teachers and students will be more strained. To some extent, teachers are concerned that they will be losing control and management of their instruction. Many of them may feel stressed and undervalued. Therefore, there are no unqualified answers about how students and teachers react to adversities.

Dealing with this kind of complexity, there are a number of issues that arise here. Any attempt at excluding students' voices develops a kind of blindness or a fear of anarchy. Pressing this point a bit further, the difficulty arises from the unconstrained gap between teachers' perspectives and the current experiences of students. While the development of students' interest in music is mentioned in the most European curricula I have studied (Swedish, Greek, Catalonian, Andalusian, Cypriot, Romanian, Bavarian,

Austrian, Bulgarian) this does not assume that teachers have availability to listen to the children they teach. Students have restricted influence. Students' keen points of view and reinterpretations seem to be immature, unexpected, irresponsible, uninformed, not-acceptable, incoherent, not-desired, or offensive. Students may fail to be active participants because they feel nervous or intimidated about voicing their views to teacher. Moreover, time pressures and the tyranny of a crowded music curriculum constraints make communication among students and teachers difficult.

However, teachers also bring their own entrenched mindsets, competencies, outlooks, and expectations to the classroom. They do not investigate and understand the roots of their beliefs, they do not face their personal prejudices, they are afraid to subject their positions to re-examination. Some of them neglect to recognize that they themselves must change in order to facilitate a collaborative relationship with their students. Freire (1970) argued that *"those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly"* (p. 47).

Following this line of thought, it is very important for music teachers to challenge their taken-for-granted practices, to re-examine their own praxis, and to take a brave step with purpose το become aware of the official, conservative established, manipulative educational models and the dominant ideologies to which they are attached. They have to explore their music identities and the stereotypes which have been perpetuated in them in order to become more self-aware about the impediments that exist on teaching (Martignetti et al., 2013; Orzolek, 2021). Unfortunately, music educators *"have not recognized or rewarded the approaches involved in informal music learning"* (Green, 2008, p. 3). Critical pedagogy provides a framework for music educators to reflect upon their experiences and engage in dialogue about inequality, power structures, diversity, religion, race, gender, and sexual orientation. Building from critical pedagogy, Hess (2019) argued that music educators must nurture the 'dream of freedom' and the imagination of a different possible future.

One final, determinant issue is the difficulty of the education system to address the competing forces of a groundbreaking transformation. To some extent, uncertainty and conflict in thinking and doing are natural, beneficial elements in music education. They do not amount to alienation, threat, hostility or violence. They consist a launch pad for empowerment and diversity. Controversial topics provide creative impetus for learning research in the classroom. Adversarial tensions and contradictions are healthy. Understanding is enriched by the perspectives of others. Students must realize and evaluate their own criteria and the priorities of their peers. They should be encouraged to take responsibility for their own choices. In this sense, to negotiate means to courageously overcome opposing standpoints and disagreement in a suitable manner. Besides, failure and suspicion are part of innovations and enormous changes.

Conclusions and their Implications for Music Education

Keeping in mind the above considerations, we need to know our students well and to acknowledge them through a greater recognition of who they personally and musically are. The obvious precondition has to do with the ability to implement bottom-up constructs. Music students can take on the role of an instructor, through ongoing participation in classroom reflective dialogue and co-construction of knowledge. This conviction

is not an easy task, out of obstacles and gray areas. It is not a laissez-faire attitude. It requires additional contemplation and special care, barren of 'recipes', 'successful formulas or instruction manual. As discussed so far, music teachers need much more than prompts and generalities. Without specific support it is more likely that they will continue to use conventional methods. Against the flow, music educators should be aware of how students feel and ensure that students are heard accurately (Green, 2008; Elliott &Silverman, 2015; Allsup, 2016; Orzolek, 2021).

Several relevant questions arise from the above discussion: Where do we start for a regenerative music education? How can we provide adequate time and space (both physical and virtual) for students to share their voices in music education settings, from primary through secondary schools? How do we respond to unpredictable or negative situations? Are music teachers prepared to accept these practices and review their existing strategies? We could say that the students' voice approach often lacks clear frameworks. It is a wide-ranging zone that has not hitherto attracted a great deal of attention in formal music education. Much more work is needed on these areas.

The creation of meaningful and authentic connections between the music lesson and the daily life of the students has a starting point to the ways students live, act, interact, and reframe their experiences. Students should be continuously empowered with opportunities, time, and space which function as motivator for making valuable contributions to learning material (familiar songs, most-liked activities, favorite repertoire etc.). If music classroom settings do not reflect or ascertain the culture, interests and preferences of students, it is very likely that they will feel less positive about music learning. Student voice provides space for metacognition and the heightened transfer of music skills to other life situations. The notion of interest sparks music students' intrinsic motivation and commitment, underscoring the aspects of democracy (Greene, 1995). For this to happen, critical pedagogy can be highly helpful as a philosophy (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2001; Abrahams, 2005; Allsup, 2016).

In studio, one-to-one music lessons, there are fruitful factors for sharing ideas and interpretations. In classroom settings, however, the ability for open-ended discussions is limited. It is not easy in a general school where music educators have to teach 300 or more students each week. The class contact time is minimal. Thus, music students need to work in small groups with chances to examine opinions, detect bias, and distinguish between alternatives.

The activities that students would encounter in schools may use as a basis the: peer-directed, project-based, and enquiry-based music learning, creative bodily movement, self-expression and experimentation, authentic musical problems, critical thinking questions, choice questions, hypothetical situations (brainstorm), student-generated repertoire on performing music, improvised songs, debates, multicultural practices, informal music learning, making music with technology, transdisciplinary paths, metacognitive skills, and local community music activities. Students' interests and inquisitiveness are a driving force. Student-centered learning environments need open, fertile, and practical questions, relative to the music life and beliefs of the students. Other crucial factors are imagination ("What if ...?", "What-If-Not?", "What happens when...?"), playful situations, sense of humor, smiles, fun, and enthusiasm. Such practices are relevant for

students of all ages and enable them to be effective contributors in their classrooms culture. Students' musical, meaningful experiences beyond school (friends, siblings' and parents' music literacy, local community, audiovisual media, movies, bands) may provide a starting point for activities at school. The needs of the students are paramount.

Music education is not a monolithic, utilitarian idea or practice. It can no longer be understood in conservative terms (Martignetti et al., 2013; Orzolek, 2021). As a counterpoint to hierarchical structures (Charteris & Smardon, 2019; Hess, 2019), the facilitator music educator should be co-learner and co-investigator with her/his students, without the notion of musical-aesthetic superiority. The traditional canon in music education have focused on *what*, *how* and *why* we teach music, without next steps. But today caring music educators, for the planning of their instructional activities, should begin and investigate *to whom*, *when* and, *where* studies music, taking into account the student idiosyncratic perspective. For an inclusive ethos, a curriculum must have the student voice at its heart which adjust classroom activities. Under this prism, school cultures must change, taking into consideration the contextual forces that can overcome the pre-existing structural standards and conventional pedagogies, in order to find safe, innovative ways for students to share concerns, sensitivities, and opinions in communicative forms. Silence is not an option anymore.

The focus of students' earlier and present experience, and needs is compelling. Music curricula ought to provide teachers with a theoretical basis and practical suggestions for the development of students' interest (Quaglia & Fox, 2018; Després & Dubé, 2020; Saltari & Kokkidou, 2024). It becomes apparent that this is a prime ingredient. A renewed, transformative, critical, and inherently democratic discourse should be developed for music education. We need more empirical and longitudinal studies that assess the music teacher ability to see her/his music students as unique individuals and best meet their needs. More importantly, we have to examine the raison d'être of how we really take into account music students' opinions, pursuits, and needs, within a broader range of different positions. These features are profoundly student-centred.

Strengths and shortcomings of this orientation do not make sure that each voice is heard, valued, and validated. In a bleak view of these differences, there are no conscious potential for the reinvigoration of the music curriculum or whether we ponder the considered possibilities in the long term. Therefore, there is a necessity for more professional research about the education of pre-service music teachers, the updating training for in-service teachers, supervisors, principals, and support staff, and the involvement and participation of parents and local community. It might be possible to promote open forums and consultative workshops in a whole-school community, through a dialogue-based approach (Charteris & Smardon, 2019; Economidou Stavrou & Papageorgi, 2021). Informal conversation is a real give and take. Students and teacher, getting and working together, may revisit conceptions and misconceptions. Every well-envisioned educational reform presupposes active partners in a sustained, co-operative work. The philosophy for a balanced, multilevel framework has to be on 'us' not on 'me.'

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