

# The Functions of the Student Voice and Student-Centered Teaching Practices in Classroom-Based Music Education

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**Abstract**—The present context paper aims to present the important role of ‘student voice’ and the music teacher in the classroom, which contributes to more student-centered music education. The aim is to focus on the functions of the student voice through the music spectrum, which has been born in the music classroom, and the teacher’s methodologies and techniques used in the music classroom. The music curriculum, the principles of student-centered music education, and the role of students and teachers as music ambassadors have been considered the major music parameters of student voice. The student-voice is a worth-mentioning aspect of a student-centered education, and all teachers should consider and promote its existence in their classroom.

**Keywords**—Student’s voice, student-centered education, music ambassadors, music teachers

## I. INTRODUCTION

STUDENT voice as a term includes by itself two more submissive terms, the student, and the voice that without doubt are noteworthy. The student voice in music education has been linked with the performativity and participation inside and outside school, which generally means that students have opportunities to elicit their voices, interacting with the other students and the teachers in the music classroom. “The pupil voice represents a new departure because it is based on the premise that schools should reflect the democratic structures in society at large” [1].

Specifically, pupil voice means that students can express their ideas, enhance the collaboration, frustration and their experiences in teaching and learning in the music classroom. As a result, pupil’s voices can transform teaching to a commitment to music learning and progress inside and outside school. According to McIntyre et al. (2005) the main proposals to be considered as to create a more student-centered music education to promote the student voice should be (a) the ideas that pupils have to offer inside the music classroom, (b) if the teachers are able to include and consider those ideas to change their teaching in ways that pupils will see as improvements, (c) if the changes they made are effective in a positive way to promote and develop student’s needs, so as to sustain in a stable way of teaching [2]. In this case it is essential to focus on the principles of student voice.

## II. PRINCIPLES OF A STUDENT-CENTERED MUSIC EDUCATION

According to the ‘Plowden Report’ about the music education curriculum, music was strongly linked with creativity which appeared two aspects extemporization-composition and performance-interpretation. In this way, students had the opportunity to improvise and develop musical skills, performing songs coming from the 17<sup>th</sup> century in school festivals [3].

Student voice principles contributed to the functions of the student voice in the music classroom. Respect, reciprocity, engagement, autonomy, empowerment, community, democracy, and dialogue developed by the students and played a significant role in the improvement of music teaching and learning. The student voice characterized as a *crescendo*, as it enabled both students and music teachers to build a ‘dynamic schooling’ where students could appear as researchers, leaders or mentors promoting the functions of the student voice like the dialogue, the student consultation, and the participation in the music classroom.

However, the role of the music teachers as “facilitators” seemed extremely important as they should promote students’ creative thoughts and feelings eliciting their voices in a more student-centered music environment, not other than the music classroom [4]. The term ‘student voice’ was born in terms of the National Music Curriculum of 1992 which identified the important role of student’s expression including performing, composing, listening, and appraising as learning techniques at Key Stage one, two and three [5].

Furthermore, it is important to refer into the parameters of music education before focusing more on the student voice. C (L) A (S) P, for short means composition, literature studies, audition, skill acquisition and performance. Music teachers should incorporate these parameters to their teaching to give their students potential musical experiences to become active members in the music classroom and later in the community [6]. Similarly, Swanwick recognized as principles of music education, the care for the musical discourse of students and the fluency first and last. The music manifesto which without doubt served the functions of the student voice as aimed to provide students with opportunities to broaden their music experiences and skills developing a *world-class workforce* and finally improve the supporting methods for student’s music-making

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[7].

The curriculum was the 'heart of teaching and learning' and it determined all the policies for arts and music education where music educators' role was to organize their teaching according to its borders [8]. The National Curriculum of 1999 identified as essential principles of the student voice, the setting of right learning challenges, the responding to all students' needs and the overcoming of possible learning barriers [9].

The National Curriculum of 2000 promoted "an understanding" of the students' needs. In this way teachers must provide equal opportunities to all students regardless of their gender, religion, culture, or any disability, to develop their own passions and become more creative in the music classroom. This kind of curriculum served the functions of the student voice and became the path of a more student-centered music education [10].

Finally, the Government published a 'National Plan for Music Education' extended to 2020, which offered a high-quality music education and equal opportunities for instrumental or singing lessons to all students [11]. Especially, singing in UK schools characterized as the major element by the National curriculum while Howard Goodall highlighted its importance as a learning process where students literally elicit their voices [12].

#### A. The Importance of Student Voice in The Music Classroom

Undoubtedly, the aim of the arts, like music, should be helping young children to develop their authentic, expressive voice. *Learning music is acquiring musical speech* [13]. In this case, the basic function of the student voice would be the cultivation of 'conversation' in the music classroom. The students not only exchanged music ideas but also communicated through singing, composing, improvising and became more interested to participate as active members to the music class [14]. Music was highly bonded with a relevant society (urban or rural) even with the children's family beliefs or musical background (preferred music). For example, people through singing or playing a musical instrument built their own identities and in parallel served their country's values, expressed their beliefs, and educated their young people [15].

#### B. Positive and Negative Aspects of Student's Voice

Noyes on his article '*Pupil voice: Purpose, power and the possibilities for democratic schooling*' agreed with Cook-Sather who defined 'student voice' as *a new vocabulary*. The positive aspects of the student voice were the student involvement through conversation, the student right to function as an active member of the music classroom, the feeling of being respected and the fact that adults should listen to their student's voices. For instance, it is noteworthy to refer into the 'Sing-Up' Evaluation program (2007-2011), which aimed at students' engagement and the improvement of their social skills and cohesion (dialogue, meet new people) through singing in the music classroom [16].

On the other hand, the negative aspects could be the uncritical-childish opinions to be exposed, which maybe lead to confusion or underestimation of the class hierarchy and as a

result, some students start using their voice against other students or teachers. Philpott & Spruce on their book "*Debates in Music Teaching*" note that according to OFSTED, students needed to "face up to their responsibilities" as to create a balanced and interactive student-teacher music relationship. In addition, the functions of the student voice varied, as it could be linked with quality control, source of information, compliance, and dialogue, identifying students as active respondents, co-researchers, or researchers. Moreover, the same authors refer that Cook-Sather suggested listening to students' voice as a student-centered practice where students became the primary authors of discussions in the music classroom [17].

### III. STUDENT VOICE AND STUDENT-CENTERED MUSIC EDUCATION

#### A. Students as Music Ambassadors

Students could appear to change agents of the school's culture and norms or as the "producers of knowledge". The major function of student voice here proved to be pupil consultation. In this way students had the opportunity to develop social competences, self-esteem, and new skills (motor, social and musical). However, there were some underlying dangers when students take a leading role, which explained why teachers characterize the phenomenon as a "toolkit for teachers". However, when students *grew* their voices, they developed a more well-rounded personality [18]. Undoubtedly, the production of values and the construction of specific "rules of art" depends on the characteristics of the children as creators [19]. Also, they have been introduced as key informants, capable of expressing their opinions about teaching, learning, and schooling inside and outside school. Teachers and students could cultivate a *communal venturing forth* where students could elicit their voices and lead to a transformation of teaching practices in the music classroom [20].

#### B. Example of a Student-Centered Music Education

This part demonstrates examples of student-centered music education. Specifically, in the United States, teachers considered 'imitation' and 'echo' as successful learning techniques and examined the music elements (pitch, rhythm etc.), promoting a more teacher-centered music education. In contrast, China followed a system which promoted rote learning and emotional expression, encouraging students to perform, which revealed a more student-centered music education. Chinese students spent more time practicing gathering higher percentages than United States where students had a more verbal interaction with their piano teachers [21].

It is crucial to note that the National Plan for Music Education (UK) has directed funding to the new music education programs so called '*hubs*', to ensure that students are able to enjoy a well-structured music education which offer high quality music education (music activities, music equipment, creative music-making, music performance, instrument in instruction). The aim of the National Plan is to support all who provide music education in schools around the

country while Ofsted does not inspect music services or hubs. According to the National Plan music professionals and specialists should be provided through the hubs (inside the school) so as to build a stronger music education environment to students who really appreciate music and are dedicated to learning the principles of music education and as a result to be able to elicit a creative voice inside or outside the music classroom.

In addition, an online video called “Musique concrete”, based on a case study with 7-year-old pupils, aimed to demonstrate to students how to use musical devices and combine environmental sounds and technology. As a result, students found themselves in a dialogic environment where they were able to implement their music ideas and creations and explain both the process and the ‘sound’ results of their compositions [22]. Some schools used music technology aimed at developing students’ critical computer skills [23]. For instance, studies focusing on the value of the DJ performance in music education proved to be beneficial for children to adopt their own music ideas. In this way, the UK aimed to create a more student-centered music education [24].

Moreover, the Office of Standards in Education conducted some case studies to understand how music education could be improved to meet the students’ needs and enhance their voices. A few studies have been included on the present paper. ‘Crich Junior School’ with Derby City and County Music Partnership in 2012 aimed to engage all students including disabled or special education needs with ensemble work. Another study examined the role of music hubs in students’ music education where schools “funded core functions” and created “The First Access program”, giving every student the chance to learn a musical instrument and “the singing strategy” so as every student is able to sing [25].

#### IV. MUSIC TEACHERS AND MUSIC EDUCATION IN THE UK

##### A. Music Teachers as Ambassadors

Music Manifesto Report 2 highlighted that it took a lot of time to music educators “listening fully and act on the views of young people themselves and develop the idea of personalized learning” [26]. Also, the major student-centered practices in a music classroom were the student’s autonomy to elicit their voices and provided them a model of a good teacher who promotes the dialogue, the cultural values and adapts the curriculum to create a more student-teacher music education. The music teacher is very important to act as a “facilitator/guide” in the music classroom. The music teacher should have been able to perform, compose, analyze, or hold a good music history knowledge [27].

##### B. The Role of Music Teachers in a Music Classroom

Music teachers who had some world music knowledge and musical competence cultivated a multicultural music environment for every student to participate. For instance, many teachers advised their students to interact with each other using international music having little or no professional background. Student voice functioned as a key element of

understanding the concept of learning and teaching at school, which was essential not only for the students but also for the teachers. Students firmly believed that a good teacher is characterized by respect, fairness, and willingness to combine the student voice with the teacher voice. Also, teachers should provide equal opportunities for musical provision and chances for performing and composing [28].

Finally, music teachers or instrumental teachers who had passion to teach their students music, usually became the most preferable and beloved teachers to their students. They were responsible for building a coherent musical environment of interaction. Music teachers need to build an interactive environment of communication where students could have the ability to interact with them effectively. Also, a good music teacher should be aware of the policies such as national music curriculum and recognize the need to integrate musical research with classroom practice in the field of music education. In APPENDIX 1 there is an example of a lesson plan suitable for a well-structured music education learning, promoting the student voice.

#### V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, according to ‘my student voice’, music teachers should hold a strong educational musical background and a holistic knowledge of the potential issues of music education like the multicultural content or other perspectives (student principles and music history). An inspection of every music education program should be implemented in every school unit, which will ensure the equal access to music for all pupils and evaluate the student’s achievements musically as a group. Schools should welcome whole class ensemble programs, worldwide partnerships so as the students could interact with multiple musical styles traditions and genres. As an extent, disabled students need should be considered as often schools had not developed specific long-term strategies and relevant music activities (the right equipment, convenient music environment) to involve these pupils.

Student voice is by itself a musical element, as voice means sound. In this case, music teachers should focus on this sound to ‘compose’ a teaching where all students will have valuable and active roles performing not only as soloists but also as a choir which seeks for the perfect maestro. It is essential for music teachers to listen to their students’ voices and try to accompany them in their music journey in case we consider the student voice as a song and the music classroom as a music stage.

## APPENDIX 1

TABLE I  
LESSON PLAN FOR MUSIC TEACHERS

Lesson Plan:		
Aims/Objectives		minutes
Music Activities and materials	1. 2. 3. 4.	
Music Activities and materials Content/Activities in order of presentation and strategies used (With rough timings) Key Vocabulary/Phrases Equipment, materials, resources (Materials to accompany the teaching procedure)		
Teaching Principles		
Group Teaching Principles Engaging Student		
Musical Learning outcomes		
Wider benefits/transferable skills		
Music Making / Learning and Understanding		
Sequencing:		
COMMUNICATION:	Specific tasks of students: Step 1: Step 2	
Student Response		
Specific tasks of students: Step 1: Step 2:		
Student Assessment:		
Feedback:		
Student 1		
Student 2		
Student 3		
Student 4		
Student 5		
Student 6		
Music Group		
STUDENT'S SCORES:		
MUSIC TEACHER EVALUATION:		
EVALUATION OF MUSIC TEACHING:		

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