

A Sense of Belonging: Music Learning and School Connectedness

Authors : Johanna Gamboa-Kroesen

Abstract : School connectedness, or the sense of belonging at school, is a critical factor in adolescent health, academic achievement, and socioemotional well-being. In educational research, the construct of the psychological sense of school membership is often referred to as school engagement, school bonding, or school attachment. While current research recognizes school connectedness as integral to a child's mental health and academic success, many schools have yet to develop adequate interventions to promote a child's overall sense of belonging at school. However, prior researches in music education indicates that, among other benefits, music classrooms may provide an environment where students feel they belong. While studies indicates that music learning environments, specifically performing ensemble learning environments, instill a sense of school connectedness and, more broadly, contribute to a student's socio-emotional development, there has been inadequate research on how the actions of music teachers contribute to this phenomenon. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between school connectedness and music learning environments with middle school music students enrolled in a school-based music ensemble. In addition, the study aimed to provide a descriptive analysis of the instructional practices that music teachers use to promote an inclusive environment in their classrooms and an overall sense of belonging in their students. Using 191 student surveys of school membership, student reflective writings, 5 teacher interviews, and 10 classroom observations, this study examined the relationship between 7th and 8th-grade student-reported levels of connectedness within their school-based music ensemble and teacher instructional practice. The study found that students reported high levels of positive school membership within their music classes. Students who participate in school-based orchestra ensembles reported a positive change in emotional state during music instruction. In addition, evidence in this study found that music teachers use instructional practices to build connectedness through de-emphasizing competition and strengthening a student's sense of relational value within their music learning experience. The findings offer implications for future music teacher instruction to create environments of inclusion, strengthen student-teacher relationships, and promote strategies that enhance student connection to school.

Keywords : music education, belonging, instructional practice, school connectedness

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