

ALIGNING PERSONAL VALUES WITH MUSIC EDUCATION: EVALUATING GROWTH AND EXPRESSION

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Summary

The present paper discusses the importance of aligning personal values with music education as a foundation for meaningful artistic growth and self-expression. The present paper explores how value-informed learning can enhance student motivation, engagement, and identity formation in music, drawing on current pedagogical approaches and reflective educational practices. The paper presents conceptual frameworks and workshop-based strategies that encourage learners to articulate and integrate their values – such as creativity, perseverance, or cultural identity – into their music practice and educational goals. The role of self-assessment, reflective journaling, and value-based goal setting as tools for evaluating personal and artistic development is emphasised. The approach advocated herein is predicated on the fostering of a more profound connection between the learner's inner world and musical experience, to engender a holistic and student-centred music education. The paper makes a significant contribution to the current discourse on personalisation in the arts by offering practical insights for educators seeking to support authentic growth and expression in music learning contexts.

Keywords: personal values, music education, student evaluation, growth and creativity, self-expression

Basic Approaches to Teaching Students

In higher education, student learning is composed of both formal and informal experiences. Formal learning occurs because of classroom activities or other structured learning opportunities designed by teachers and/or other educators to help students achieve specific cognitive or other objectives. Informal learning encompasses all other outcomes of students' participation in higher education. In both cases, the more extensive the experience, the greater its potential effect. Employers also have specific requirements of education and skills systems, such as ensuring that school and college graduates have the necessary skills, behaviours and attributes to be productive members of an organisation (Staiculescu et al., 2021). Meaningful and high-quality qualifications are essential for obtaining skilled work (Blomqvist et al., 2012).

In the early 1970s, the predominant approach to teaching and learning was the behaviourist model. Developed by B.F. Skinner and others in the 1950s, this model con-

sidered stimuli such as events or training activities and students' responses to them, as well as the consequences or contingencies based on these responses. The basic proposition was that learning occurred when desired responses were elicited by stimuli. The work of Robert Mager on operational instructional objectives (precise statements of intended behaviours alongside measurement criteria) and the taxonomies of objectives developed by Benjamin Bloom in 1956 (classification schemes) were major influences on how student instruction was designed and delivered. The taxonomic levels are knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Although behaviourism has largely been replaced as an educational theory, the importance of clear objectives, appropriate measurement criteria and specifying different types of desired learning remains a key foundation for designing effective instruction.

The cognitive theory of learning, which posits that new stimuli are associated with existing concepts and categorisation schemes, witnessed a resurgence in support during the 1970s and has since undergone further development in its applications.

While these perspectives remain valuable, their relevance to music education becomes most meaningful when linked to the ways in which students' personal values inform their engagement with learning. For instance, motivation in music practice is strengthened when learners connect their goals to values such as creativity, discipline, or collaboration. Similarly, metacognition – understood as the process of “thinking about thinking” (Fisher, 1998) – not only fosters problem-solving skills but also enables students to evaluate their progress in relation to personal aspirations and artistic growth. Svinicki (1999) proposes that educators should exemplify and articulate their own cognitive processes when engaged in problem-solving and other activities that facilitate the practice of thinking skills. The implementation of effective problem-solving strategies has been demonstrated to enhance performance, thereby engendering a concomitant motivational effect (Diani et al., 2023; Ndawo, 2021). This additional benefit is evidenced by an elevation in students' expectations regarding the successful completion of their work, concomitant with a reinforcement of their beliefs concerning their own capabilities in this regard (Bong & Clark, 1999). In the context of music education, aligning motivation with students' personal values can lead to deeper engagement and persistence in learning.

To frame this discussion, it is necessary to clarify three key concepts. Personal values are guiding beliefs and principles that shape individuals' decisions, goals, and behaviours (Schwartz, 2012). Within music education, these values influence how learners approach practice, performance, and self-expression. Alignment refers to the process of connecting students' values with their musical practices, thereby creating coherence between personal identity and educational goals. When such alignment occurs, music learning becomes more meaningful and sustainable. Closely related is musical identity, the evolving sense of self that emerges through one's engagement with music as a listener, learner, or performer (MacDonald et al., 2017).

In the context of music education, aligning motivation with students' personal values can lead to deeper engagement and persistence in learning. Personal values shape

the choices students make in their practice and performance, while alignment ensures that these values are integrated into their musical activities and goals. In turn, this process contributes to the development of a musical identity, where learners not only acquire technical skills but also construct a sense of who they are as musicians. By grounding motivation in values and linking it to identity formation, educators can create learning environments that are both personally relevant and educationally rigorous.

Learning Approaches and Styles in Music Education

Students contribute a wide array of learning approaches and styles to the domain of music education, which are shaped by their personal values, experiences, and motivations (Woody, 2020). A proportion of learners adopt a goal-oriented or mastery-based approach, with a focus on precision, technique and measurable outcomes (Su et al., 2024). These students are often motivated by the desire to reach high standards, improve specific skills, and track their development through tangible results such as examinations, certifications, or performance benchmarks (Evans, 2015).

Their practice routines are characterised by deliberate and disciplined approaches, frequently incorporating repetition, targeted exercises, and self-monitoring strategies (Ford & Coughlan, 2019; Passarotto et al., 2022). This approach is consistent with personal values such as discipline, achievement, self-improvement, and a strong internal drive for excellence (Stoeber & Eismann, 2007; Sinnamon et al., 2012). Learners who adhere to this pedagogical approach frequently report a sense of accomplishment upon surmounting obstacles and attaining key milestones, perceiving each achievement as a testament to their endeavours and commitment (Simmons, 2011). Equally, others may gravitate towards a more creative or exploratory approach, where improvisation, expression, and experimentation are accorded a higher priority, aligning with values such as innovation, freedom, and emotional connection (De Leeuw et al., 2021; Brown & Krause, 2020; Lamont, 2012). Students who are influenced by collaborative values may find success in ensemble settings, where they value shared learning and peer feedback (Al-Ghazali, 2015).

Ultimately, recognizing that learning approaches are guided by personal values allows educators to tailor instruction in ways that promote engagement and authenticity. Whether driven by discipline, creativity, or collaboration, students' styles of learning reflect what they hold to be most important (Xu & Li, 2025). By acknowledging and aligning with these values, music education can nurture both technical mastery and holistic growth (Tan & Chen, 2022), supporting students as reflective and self-directed learners (Mawang, 2024). The provision of constructive and timely feedback is necessary, as it assists learners in refining their technique, adjusting their strategies, and maintaining motivation in the face of setbacks (Forbes, 2020). Importantly, when feedback is framed in relation to students' personal values – such as resilience, discipline, or creativity – it not only guides technical improvement but also reinforces the principles that shape their musical identity and growth.

Emotional Connection to Music

Students' personal values significantly influence how they engage with and interpret music, shaping not only their choices and preferences but also the meaning they derive from musical experiences. The emotional connection to music plays a vital role in shaping how students experience, interpret, and engage with their musical learning (Hallam, 2010). Music is considered by many to be more than a technical skill; it is regarded as a deeply personal form of expression that allows the individual to process feelings, communicate inner experiences, and connect with others on an emotional level (Selmani, 2024; Campayo–Muñoz & Cabedo–Mas, 2017). This connection frequently serves as a catalyst for motivation and fosters a profound sense of belonging and identity, especially when students engage with musical pieces or styles that reflect their own life experiences, personal values, or cultural heritage (Váradi, 2022; Zaatar et al., 2023). Students are more likely to feel emotionally invested and authentically engaged in the study or performance of music if they recognise themselves in the music, whether through lyrics, rhythms, themes, or instrumentation (Lomas, 2016). To illustrate this point, consider a student from a specific cultural background who may experience a sense of empowerment and validation when traditional or folk music from their heritage is recognised and examined in the classroom. Students who prioritise emotional authenticity or social justice may be attracted to music that conveys potent messages or recounts personal narratives (Chen, 2023). In such cases, music functions as a medium for self-discovery, connection, and expression.

The emotional alignment has the potential to significantly enhance students' commitment to learning by offering them a more profound and personal rationale to engage with music that extends beyond mere technical proficiency. When students perceive that the music they are studying is personally relevant to them, it can effect a transformation in which practice becomes a meaningful experience rather than a mere task. This heightened sense of purpose can result in increased persistence, intrinsic motivation, and a willingness to embrace challenges as part of their artistic development. Emotional alignment has been demonstrated to foster a more profound appreciation for diverse musical traditions amongst students, as they commence to comprehend the manner in which music carries emotional and cultural significance across various communities and historical contexts (Tanberg et al., 2025; Kalapatapu et al., 2024).

This is due to the fact that it facilitates an understanding of music that transcends the realms of sound and structure, embracing it as a conduit for cultural identity, historical memory and emotional expression (Borgo, 2007). Exposure to these traditions has been demonstrated to broaden perspectives, inspire empathy, and nurture respect for difference (Zalli, 2024). This process has been shown to facilitate the establishment of a more integrated and meaningful relationship with one's musical journey (Bunt et al., 2024). When students establish an emotional connection with music from diverse cultural or temporal periods, they begin to perceive the universal human tendency to articulate emotions such as joy, struggle, love, or resistance through musical forms. This recognition has been demonstrated to facilitate the deconstruction of stereotypes and the cultivation

of empathy (Clarke et al., 2015), as students come to recognise that music carries layers of meaning that are deeply rooted in the lived experiences of individuals and communities (Miranda & Gaudreau, 2018). Through the exploration of the emotional intentions inherent in spiritual, folk, protest and ceremonial chants, learners are able to gain insights into the values, struggles and worldviews of other groups (Harwood, 2017). By foregrounding emotional connection as a pedagogical resource, educators can cultivate learning environments that are inclusive, value-driven, and personally meaningful.

Development of Musical Identity

As students progress in their musical journey, their personal values play a key role in shaping their evolving musical identity (MacDonald & Saarikallio, 2022). These values function as guiding principles that influence how students perceive music, what they choose to engage with, and how they express themselves artistically (MacDonald et al., 2017). For instance, students who value creativity and individuality may be especially drawn to musical genres and practices that prioritise freedom of expression, spontaneity, and innovation. Genres such as jazz, experimental music and contemporary improvisation offer fertile ground for these students to move beyond fixed interpretations and explore music as a form of personal voice. In the domain of jazz, for instance, improvisation is not merely a proficiency; rather, it constitutes a pivotal expressive instrument that enables performers to reimagine melodies, rhythms, and harmonies in real time, thereby rendering each performance a unique artistic statement.

The experimental music genre has been shown to do the same, by virtue of its capacity to encourage students to think beyond traditional forms, to use unconventional sounds or instruments, and even to integrate multimedia or technology into their compositions (Robertson, 2023). These creative spaces are designed to encourage learners to question, play, and invent, thereby reinforcing their sense of agency and ownership over their musical choices. For students who place significant value on originality and self-expression, such genres function not only as artistic platforms but also as means of self-discovery and identity formation (Bishop et al., 2022). Those who prioritise self-expression frequently seek musical experiences that facilitate the communication of their inner thoughts, emotions, and personal narratives in a direct and authentic manner. For these students, music becomes a medium through which they can articulate that which may be difficult to express verbally (Borgo, 2007).

Songwriting offers an especially efficacious outlet, enabling the articulation of lyrics and melodies that reflect the artist's feelings, perspectives, and lived experiences. In a similar manner, solo performance provides a space for individual interpretation and emotional connection, where every nuance in phrasing, dynamics, or tone has the potential to convey a personal message to the audience. These learners may also be drawn to repertoire characterised by emotional richness, such as expressive classical pieces, intimate acoustic ballads, or soul-infused genres, where emotion is central to the performance. Engaging in such practices has been shown to enhance musicians' musical

skills (Martins et al., 2021) and to support their emotional well-being (Wu & Lu, 2021), as they learn to channel vulnerability and authenticity into their art. It is through this process that the subjects in question find self-expression becoming a vital part of their musical identity and personal growth. Students who possess a strong sense of cultural appreciation or a deep connection to their heritage often find profound meaning and fulfilment in studying traditional music forms, highlighting how their personal values shape the way they experience, interpret, and find purpose in their musical learning.

Practical Examples of Self-Assessment and Evaluation

Further there are presented six methods of self-assessment and evaluation of growth that can be introduced to students in a workshop, along with an explanation of why they are insightful.

Reflective journals: encouraging students to keep a journal in which they regularly write about their progress, the challenges they have faced, and what they have learnt from each practice or lesson. Reflective journaling helps students to become more aware of their learning process and to identify patterns over time. It fosters metacognition, enabling students to recognise their strengths and areas for improvement. This practice develops metacognitive awareness (Fisher, 1998) and helps learners identify patterns in their development. For example, a student who values creativity may write about improvisation breakthroughs, while one who values discipline may focus on achieving practice milestones. Such reflections allow educators to see how values shape growth and engagement (Hallam, 2010).

Self-critique using recordings: students record themselves playing or performing. They then listen back and critique their performance based on specific criteria (e.g. accuracy, expression and technical execution). This practice enables students to view their work from the perspective of an audience, thereby enhancing their ability to identify subtle details that might be overlooked during a live performance. For example, a learner might evaluate whether their phrasing communicates the intended emotion or whether technical execution aligns with personal standards. Research in music pedagogy suggests that self-recording builds independence and objectivity in performance evaluation (Forbes, 2020).

Progress tracking charts: creating charts or graphs showing weekly or monthly goals and progress in different areas (e.g. scales mastered, pieces completed, tempo improvements). This method resonates with values such as achievement and perseverance, as progress becomes visible and measurable. A visual representation of progress helps students to see their development over time, which reinforces their motivation and helps them to set realistic, incremental goals. For example, a weekly practice log might chart improvements in sight-reading fluency, offering students a tangible sense of accomplishment and motivating persistence (Passarotto et al., 2022).

Peer Feedback Sessions: pairing students up to give each other constructive feedback, using structured guidelines to ensure the feedback is objective and focused. This

practice reflects values of community and mutual support, as learners engage in dialogue about performance strengths and areas for improvement. Receiving and giving feedback helps students to develop critical listening skills and to learn how to evaluate performance objectively. It also fosters a collaborative environment in which students support each other's development. For example, after a rehearsal, peers might comment on clarity of rhythm or emotional impact, providing feedback through agreed criteria. Such exchanges build trust, critical thinking, and empathy in the learning process.

Incorporating value-based goals: guiding students to set music-related goals that reflect their values. For instance, a student who values collaboration might aim to participate in group performances, while a student who values self-improvement might focus on mastering challenging pieces. For instance, a learner who values collaboration might aim to participate in ensemble projects, while another who values self-improvement might focus on mastering challenging repertoire. This approach combines the SMART framework (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound) with personalisation, ensuring that evaluation is tied directly to what matters most to each learner (Evans, 2015).

Goal Setting and Reflection: teaching students to set SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound) goals and encourage them to reflect on their progress at regular intervals.

+This method encourages strategic thinking and self-motivation. Students learn to break down long-term objectives into actionable steps and assess their achievements, building a sense of ownership over their learning in the process. For example, a student may reflect on how resilience helped them persist through a difficult performance task, or how cultural appreciation shaped their interpretation of folk repertoire. This cycle of setting, acting, and reflecting fosters sustained growth and self-awareness (Bong & Clark, 1999).

Together, these methods demonstrate that evaluation in music education is not limited to external assessment but can be an ongoing, student-driven process. By linking self-assessment tools with personal values, educators can help students cultivate reflective habits that deepen engagement, reinforce identity, and support authentic artistic expression.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper emphasises the pivotal role that personal values play in shaping meaningful music education experiences. When students are encouraged to align their individual beliefs and cultural identities with their musical learning, they engage more deeply and authentically with their practice. By examining learning approaches and styles, the emotional connection to music, and the development of musical identity, it has shown how students' values – such as discipline, creativity, authenticity, and collaboration – directly influence the ways they engage with musical practice. The integration of reflective practices and value-based goal setting within educational set-

tings has been demonstrated to engender environments conducive to the exploration and articulation of learners' unique identities through the medium of music. It is evident that workshops, self-assessment tools and expressive performance opportunities function as effective instruments for students to reflect on their progress and establish a correlation between their musical journey and their core values. For educators, adopting a values-informed and evaluative framework transforms music education into a holistic process that fosters both musical proficiency and personal development. When learning environments encourage students to articulate and align their values with their musical activities, they promote deeper engagement, resilience, and authenticity. In this way, music education becomes not only a site for skill acquisition but also a pathway to self-discovery, identity formation, and lifelong artistic growth.

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УСКЛАЂИВАЊЕ ЛИЧНИХ ВРЕДНОСТИ СА МУЗИЧКИМ ОБРАЗОВАЊЕМ: ПРОЦЕЊИВАЊЕ МУЗИЧКОГ РАЗВОЈА И ИЗРАЖАВАЊА

У раду се разматра значај усклађивања личних вредности са музичким образовањем као темељем за смислени уметнички развој и самоизражавање. Истражује се како учење засновано на вредностима може унапредити мотивацију ученика, њихову ангажованост и формирање музичког идентитета, ослањајући се на савремене педагошке приступе и рефлексивне образовне праксе. Рад представља концептуалне оквире и стратегије засноване на радионицама које подстичу ученике да артикулишу и integriшу своје вредности – као што су креативност, истрајност или културни идентитет – у своју музичку праксу и образовне циљеве. Посебан нагласак стављен је на улогу самоевалуације, рефлексивног вођења дневника и постављања циљева заснованих на вредностима као алата за процену личног

и уметничког развоја. Приступ заступљен у овом раду заснива се на неговању дубље повезаности између унутрашњег света ученика и музичког искуства, са циљем остваривања холистичког и ученички оријентисаног музичког образовања. Рад даје значајан допринос савременом дискурсу о персонализацији у уметности, нудећи практичне увиде педагозима који теже подршци аутентичном развоју и изражавању у контексту музичког учења.

Кључне речи: личне вредности, музичко образовање, евалуација ученика, развој и креативност, самоизражавање