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Student Voices: The Perceived Values of Hong Kong Primary School Music Ensembles

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Abstract

While learning a musical instrument is believed to enhance Hong Kong student profiles as suggested by scholars, it is not uncommon to see the kids in Hong Kong to start learning musical instruments since kindergarten. Although learning a musical instrument is not the main focus of the music curriculum in Hong Kong primary schools, many schools organize a great variety of music ensembles and these participate in local and international competitions. Participating in competitions is seemed to carry so much value among the students in Hong Kong. At present, research on Hong Kong school music ensembles is limited, especially from students' perspectives. The aim of the study is to investigate the perceived values surrounding Hong Kong primary school music ensembles from the perspectives of the students, the music ensemble participants. Based on the main research question, the following structured research questions have been developed: (1) What are the similarities and differences on the beliefs of music ensembles between the students of two primary schools? (2) How do these beliefs interact or conflict among the students? (3) How do these interactions form meaningful learning context for enhancing and exploring future possibilities regarding school music ensembles?

Two primary schools were invited to participate in the study through questionnaire studies (N=161) and focused group interviews (n = 10). Expectancy-Value theory was employed to construct the questionnaire and interview questions surrounding music ensemble competition and performance. Findings indicate that students are concerned about their intrinsic interest, competency, teachers and parental expectations regarding music ensembles. Some of the students value their personal achievements gained by taking part in ensemble competitions. However, the focus group interviews reveal that students in one school placed a high priority on winning other schools in music ensemble competition, which conflicts to the students interviewed in the other school.

This study reveals that students' values surrounding music ensemble competitions may highly depend on the context of the school. However, music ensemble competitions tend to be a norm for schools to participate and strike for the best result. It provides significant insight into why music ensemble competitions are so well supported from students' perspective, as well as filling a current research gap concerning primary school music ensembles in Hong Kong.