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Learning in the 21st Century: A Qualitative Examination of a Psychological Skills Programme for Secondary Band Students

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Abstract

The importance of psychological skills for optimal performance has been well-examined in the sports domain (e.g., Wang et al., 2004; Weinberg & Williams, 2006); however, these skills have remained relatively understudied in music education contexts, such as Secondary school students making music together in large ensembles (e.g., the school band). Given that these skills aim to develop independent musicianship and adaptive learning dispositions, they might contribute to 21st Century learning through the development of key 21st Century Competencies (21CCs; e.g., Voogt & Roblin, 2012).

This paper reports preliminary qualitative findings from an ongoing study that examines the effectiveness of a psychological skills programme designed specifically for Secondary Band students in Singapore, focusing in particular, on how these skills contribute towards the development of 21CC. The specific research questions are: (1) Based on the literature from the educational, sports, and music domains, what would a psychological skills workshop specifically conceived for the school band (Secondary level) consist of? (2) How might the skills taught in this workshop contribute to the development of 21CCs through band?

The initial phase of this study comprised a comprehensive survey of extant literature to curate the workshop; this was followed by the actual intervention study where the skills were taught to Secondary school band students in Singapore. Data collection comprised focus group discussions/interviews with the student participants, their band directors, and teachers. The qualitative data were then transcribed and analyzed with codes guided by extant 21CC frameworks (e.g., Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

Based on the survey of literature, the research team found that skills from the sports literature (e.g., Wang et al., 2004) that may be adapted for the school band include goal setting, mental practising, talking to oneself positively, and imagery. Importantly, the skills taught in the workshop have the potential to contribute to the development of key 21CCs such as collaboration and communication. Based on the findings, implications for the practice of music education will be discussed in this presentation, highlighting how in particular, psychological skills may be interwoven effectively into instrumental music education programmes.