

The Impact Music Education Has On Children In Underserved Communities

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Background and Context:

I was born and raised in Boston Massachusetts. Having access to music education in school was a privilege that I did not have. Schools simply did not have the funding to sustain a music program, and teachers focused on the safety of their students. During the early 90's, Boston's youth homicide rate had skyrocketed to an all-time high. The murder rate in Boston, propelled by street gun crime, rose by half that year, from 100 to 152. While the high was reached in 1990, the problems continued. Youth homicide rates remained at historically high levels and 15 percent of the survey of Boston junior high school students said they had missed school in the past month because they were scared. Communities were falling apart and Boston's youth were shut in and isolated (J.A, 2001).

In 1991, a woman named Madeline Steczynski could no longer sit back and watch this happen, so she took a huge risk and opened up her home to kids from the community and began to teach them music. As with many positive ideas, ZUMIX developed in someone's living room. Executive Director, Madeleine Steczynski founded ZUMIX as a response to the worst epidemic of youth violence in Boston. ZUMIX began as a summer songwriting program with 24 teenagers, \$200, and the simple premise that giving youth something to be passionate about will transform lives and improve community relations (ZUMIX, 2020). She felt that music could connect Boston's youth and keep them safe and off the streets, with a goal that they would have music as a resource to help bring the community back together. At the end of that summer, she had asked the students to name the program, and they came up with the name ZUMIX. Then, she proceeded

to ask them what ZUMIX meant to them and they said “ ZUMIX is a family and that music should be crafted and shared by everyone” (ZUMIX, 2020).

Over the years, the program grew in size and more and more students came to Madeline’s door. She created a safe space for them and encouraged the values of community and bringing people together. By 1993, they created a free outdoor Summer Concert Series to help rebuild the community. Today ZUMIX is a large part of the East Boston community and is now a larger non-profit organization with the goal of giving youth access to music and self-expression through the arts.

I joined ZUMIX back in 2001 when I was 4 years old. ZUMIX gave me access to music and provided me with a second family. They built me up and inspired me to be creative, innovative, and reach for my goals. They helped me believe in myself and helped me achieve my goals, and provided all of the resources I needed. ZUMIX helped me attend my dream college, Berklee College of Music, by connecting me to the Berklee City Music Program. “Berklee City Music enables youth from underserved communities to develop musically, academically, socially, and emotionally, primarily through the study of contemporary music...Berklee City Music provides the tools and support needed to help it’s students reach their fullest potential through theory/musicianship classes, ensembles, one-on-one instruction and mentoring, and performance opportunities. Students have access to expert faculty and a comprehensive curriculum in popular and contemporary music, they will not only emerge as a better student and musician but also as a more confident and well-rounded individual ready to shape your world.” (Berklee, 2020). City Music provided me with a scholarship to attend Berklee’s 5 Week Summer program in the summer of 2014 and 2015. I am so thankful to have received a full-tuition four-

year scholarship to Berklee through the City Music Program. Berklee City Music is a nonprofit program that provides music education to 4th through 12th graders in underserved communities (Berklee, 2020). "With more than 20 years of music education programming in the Greater Boston Area, Berklee City Music Boston is the founding site of the Berklee City Music Network. City Music is an out-of-school time, student-centered organization with a holistic approach for training musicians by building leaders and fostering community." (ICA, 2014). ZUMIX and City Music changed the course of my life, and not only allowed me to flourish musically but socially and emotionally as well. When conducting my research using work by Miksza, Küpana, Burrack, Payne, Bazan, and Hellman two key ideas surfaced: Social and Emotional Learning and Access. Hence, in this project my goal is to answer the question: How, if at all, can having access to music education affect a child's social and emotional development in an underserved community?

A popular trend has emerged far in my work that the arts and music programs in lower SES communities have little or no funding and are the first services cut from schools. In the city of Boston, when looking at non-profit organizations their mission is to provide access to music for students in low SES areas. Their goal is to provide a creative outlet for students while strengthening ties with the community. Would access to a creative outlet affect the social and emotional growth of a child? If it does, how could these non-profits expand their outreach? Sadly, not all students in these areas have access to these resources. There are more students in need than staff, resources, and spaces available, which creates a high demand and low supply in these programs. What more can these non-profit organizations be doing to promote more social

and emotional learning opportunities in their programs? By coming up with some solutions to these problems, it would benefit the children in low SES communities like East Boston.

Literature Review:

Access and Achievement

Academic Achievement

Research has shown, that not only does having access to music in schools and community-based organizations have an impact on brain functioning, but it also enhances the academic trajectory of students in low SES areas (Kase, 2013). Music can change the trajectory of these students lives, but it is taken away from them. This is a huge issue and there needs to be more conversation about this topic, and action has to happen so that it does not remain an issue. In a study conducted by Miksza, they found that “Music participants’ mean scores on academic achievement were constantly higher than those of students who did not participate in music for each academic area at each point in time” (Miksza p.46 2007). Meaning that students who participate in music programs show more academic success than those who have not been exposed to, or participated in music programs.

This means that music can shape a child’s academic trajectory in a way that can help them move further throughout their academic careers, this can mean low rates of high-school dropouts in low SES communities and higher rates of students applying to college. There are mass amounts of research that show that music plays a huge role in a child’s development, communication skills, sense of community and self-expression as well as their ability to understand social justice issues with a worldly perspective (Kase, 2013). “There are significant

advantages for arts-engaged low-SES students in college going, college grades, and types of employment, e.g. jobs with a future—and strong advantages in volunteerism and political participation as well as that low-income and ELL students do better in arts-rich vs. arts-poor schools; provides documentation of the qualities of arts-rich schools that may matter.” (Catterall p.1 2009).

Personal Experience: Coming From A Low SES Area With Access To A Music Education

Growing up in East Boston, I have personally witnessed this tragedy of not having access to a music education in school. If programs like ZUMIX and City Music did not exist, I would have never had any access to a music education. My life would be completely different, I would not be the person I am today and I think without the support of music through ZUMIX and City Music I may not have attended college. Unfortunately, students who live in lower SES areas are more likely to have little to no access to a quality music education program. It is extremely alarming, when shown the differences in availability and access to music programs in high-poverty vs. low-poverty schools (Kase, 2013).

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

What is SEL?

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a mechanism in which children and adults understand and control feelings, set and achieve positive goals, feel and express compassion for others, develop and sustain supportive relationships, and make rational decisions.

SEL In The Music Classroom

Music learning and SEL naturally fit together and show a lot of common features. Music can be used as a sensory stimulator. Previously recorded music can be listened to, and its emotional

qualities can be debated. This practice can be used to improve students' vocabulary of emotions, and their ability to express their emotions (Nevra 2015). Music may be used as an esthetic experience. This experience can be described as an interaction between vision, meaning, imagination and awareness, understanding and feeling. This engagement enables students to explore their inner world, create clear ties with works of art, and develop new views of themselves and the environment. Making music can be a means of self-expression. The act of making music not only applies to self-expression but also has the therapeutic effect of calming internal tensions (Nevra 2015). Music can be used for image and relaxation. Slow and soothing music will reduce the stressed emotions of the students and therefore ensure an emotional arrangement. Creating music can be a way to have a collective experience. Creating music together strengthens relations between musicians (Nevra 2015). Music naturally supports and strengthens what SEL aims to do in the music classroom. The goal of social emotional learning is to develop social emotional competence and self-control, self-regulation, social understanding, relationship management and rational decision-making. (Nevra 2015).

Music is essential in a child's development, yet it is still being cut out of schools. Thus far, in my research there has been no solution happening in schools with budgeting. So far, everything I have ready about states the problem that music is being cut from schools without providing a solution for this issue. There are mass amounts of research that show that music plays a huge role in a child's development, communication skills, sense of community and self-expression as well as their ability to understand social justice issues with a worldly perspective. There are major musical benefits for low-SES students in education and employment (Catterall, 2009). Music is needed in these underserved low SES areas and there are not enough solutions

out there to help all of these students. Everyone should have access to a music education, no matter their background, location, or financial status.

Results:

Having access to music education does affect a child's social and emotional development in these underserved areas. By having this access, students in these communities will naturally give them tools to process and understand their emotions. Music involves emotion in many ways, and by listening to music, and understanding how it makes us feel, allows us to compartmentalize these emotions. Music is also a very social kind of art, that involves group participation as well as the ability to work as a collective unit. These are tools that students can use in their everyday life that can allow them process social interactions as well as socialize. Social and emotional learning is a mechanism that includes and enforces information, skills, and attitudes effectively to help a people to understand and control their emotions, achieve positive outcomes, sense other people's feeling and empathy, develop healthy relationships and make rational decisions. They are the core elements of social and emotional learning. Both interpersonal and interpersonal abilities can be thought about and calculated. (Nevra 2015).

Problems of Practice and Solutions:

How, if at all, can having access to a music education affect a child's social and emotional development in an underserved community?

Funding

In underserved areas there can be a lack of funding through programs related to arts and music. These cuts tend to happen in areas where there are high minority populations even though

there are studies that prove that having access to a music education can produce higher graduation rates as well as college acceptances. Researchers suggest that African-American and Latino students perform better at school, have higher graduation rates and a greater chance of attending college when they are consistently exposed to music education in K1-12. But budget cuts and program changes mean that many students in minority and underserved communities have less exposure to music education (CM-Workshop 2013).

Teachers and Parents both find music as a necessity in a child's developmental world but somehow it is always one of the first areas cut financially. Which then leads to the program falling apart and eventually disappearing completely. "Funding for music education, has been curtailed as the result of a recession from which the United States economy is yet to fully recover...Recent statewide surveys by school administrators and music educators revealed that music teaching positions have been eliminated at an average rate of more than one music teacher per district" (Burrack, Payne, Bazan & Hellman p.36 2014). Even though funding may be slim for these programs, the quantity of students that want to participate remains the same, and in some cases there are more students than available spaces in the programs. As the funding for these programs continues to decipate, the number of spaces in these programs will only continue to diminish. This creates a huge problem of access, and it does not support the students in these communities.

Access

In certain districts, the lack of funding has depleted programs in extreme cases has caused music programs to be terminated (CM-Workshop 2013). In a survey conducted by Children's Music Workshop, they found that 1.3 million students still do not have access to a music class.

(CM-Workshop 2013). So why is it that music is being cut back even though there is want and need for it in these communities? There is research that proves that there is a high number of reductions in the funding and support of music programs even though the volume of students participating continues to grow. Parents and teachers believe that music is essential to the social and emotional education of a child. They want more high-quality school music programs, more trained teachers and more student instruments growth. They agree that poorer schools have been lagging behind affluent schools in the qualitative and quantity of music education programs. (CM-Workshop 2015). These budget cuts limit the students's musical experiences by not supporting school trips and workshops geared to help the students professional development. The lack of support given to these music programs causes the programs to become understaffed and underfunded to a point where it undermines the whole structure of the program which can lead to its demise. (Burrack, Payne, Bazan & Hellman 2014).

Are there ways these problems of practice can be resolved?

Unfortunately, funding is a tricky problem of practice to resolve in one way, especially if different areas across the world are effected. Narrowing in this problem into places like ZUMIX and Boston City Music, how can we help this funding issue? These two organizations have a lot of private funders who support scholarships and resources for the programs. One way these two organizations could help would be to reach out to these donors and express the issues going on in the community and how funding is not only needed in their programs but in schools as well. That way, these financial resources can be more spread out throughout the community which then allows more music programs to start and flourish in schools.

If this step can be taken, the community will then be more invested into providing access to music education in their community. This idea would not only help ZUMIX and Berklee City Music but the whole greater area of Boston. It would ease the quantity of students in their programs and better distribute the volume of students in each program. This idea could also help fix the problem of access in these communities. By sparking the community to care about music, it will create a demand for a music education. Including the community in music can also help spark this need and value for music. Berklee City Music and ZUMIX try to connect with the community by hosting concerts and festivals that show off the students that come from these communities. By bringing the community into these programs, it can help flourish the musical programs as well as gain community support.

How could the students be affected by these solution suggestions?

By improving these problems of practice, the students will help students feel more supported and in some cases create a second sense of community. Many children come to school with emotional and social skills learned in their home, while many of them do not have the capacity to articulate themselves, convey demands and emotions, cope with intense feelings, control frustration at school, listen to them, share them and cooperate. These social skills and emotional management abilities that can not be gained through family can lead to interpersonal disputes and discord. Therefore, it is necessary in the school setting to acquire social and emotional abilities (Nevra 2015). By expanding the reach of their programs and helping students all have access not only in after school programs but in schools as well. By expanding music back into the school system, it should help the emotional development of the students. Music is a subject that is very emotional, but provides ways to cope with emotions. Music is a form of

expression and provides ways to process these emotions. So, by expanding the outreach of these music programs as well as providing music education in schools we are providing tools to help benefit the students. Many social emotional learning experiences are introduced in music training. Improvisation spontaneously enables students to produce music, integrating the representation of present feelings with musical performance. Through performing, singing, and by making music together, social consciousness is created. Emotion-building exercises may be used for empathizing and identifying moods associated with musical parts. In this cycle student relationships are important by providing a sense of community. (Nevra 2015). By creating more outlets for music education and expanding the reach, while attempting to solve the issues of funding, these students will have immense amounts of support from people and communities that can help positively affect the development of their social and emotional growth.

What more can places like ZUMIX do to better support their students social and emotional development?

Knowing that ZUMIX already provides a lot for the East Boston community, what more could they be doing to better support their students? Already having touched on access and funding how could ZUMIX help their students' social and emotional development? ZUMIX could implement more aspects of SEL into their classrooms by providing more time for reflection and critical thinking. For example, when learning a new piece of music teachers could provide a reflection period in class to allow the students to think about why they selected the song, what do they feel when they listen to the song, how did the artist feel when they created the song ect. This idea would promote more emotional thinking as well as time for students to understand why they are connected to certain songs. By helping the students to strengthen their

ability to reflect on music and how it makes them feel, it helps them work on their social and emotional skills. Another way to add onto this activity would be to allow students to explain why they chose certain pieces at performances so that the audience learns more about the student performing. This could stimulate friendships between students and help them build relations with one another. Which would then help further their social and emotional development throughout their time at the program.

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