1-1-2011

Class Music Learning Activities: Do Students Find Them Important, Interesting and Useful?

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ABSTRACT

Retaining students in elective class music programs is an issue in many secondary schools. Retention is particularly problematic among lower secondary students. Eccles (2005) states that the subjective task values students attach to learning activities in any elective subject are key indicators of future enrolment decisions. Accordingly, this article reports on a study which utilised subjective task values as a theoretical foundation for investigating why many students drop out of elective class music programs at this early stage. Specifically, the article reports on a study into students' valuing of class music learning activities in Western Australia. Participating students were in their first year in secondary school (age 12 - 13), and their values for class music learning activities were measured at the start and end of the academic year. Findings revealed a decline in all values components, particularly situational intrinsic value, mirroring declines reported across other subjects among students of this age. Given criticism of the theoretical frameworks and methodologies associated with much past research into retention in music education, this study promotes subjective task values as a valid and reliable framework for progressing research in the field of class music. The article briefly synthesizes recommendations for enhancing student task values, drawn from the general motivational literature with the finding of this study, and concludes by considering issues and possible directions for future research.

KEY WORDS
class music, motivation, retention, secondary school, learning activities, subjective task values

INTRODUCTION

The end of the first year of secondary school is a time when many students drop out from elective school subjects and programs (Wigfield & Wagner, 2005; Downs, 2003; Bandura, 1994; Harter, 1990), and class music is not immune. While exact figures relating to on-going enrolment rates in class music in lower secondary school are difficult to isolate, the impact is evident in the numbers of students who elect to take music as a subject in the senior years of secondary school. In the UK, Bray (2000) reports enrolment rates of around 2% while Walker (2003) reports rates of around 5% for the USA. In Western Australia, only around 3% of the total state cohort undertakes music as an examinable subject in the post compulsory years (Lowe, 2008).

Music educators in the past have often struggled to agree on appropriate frameworks for examining why students drop out from class music programs (Handford & Watson, 2003; Sloboda, 2001; Ross, 1998; Plummeridge, 1997; Ross & Kamba, 1996; Gammon 1996; Ross 1995; Hannam, 1992). Further, the majority of research in this field focuses upon instrumental music students (Bruenger, 2009;

Baker, 2009; Williams, 2007; Droe, 2006; Cassell, 2003; Sloboda, 2001). A review of the general literature suggests that a primary reason for students drop-out from class based subjects in lower secondary school is a poor fit between learning activities and emerging student achievement-related needs for empowerment, relevance and stimulation (Wigfield & Wagner, 2005; Urdan & Turner, 2005; Bandura, 1994; Eccles & Midgeley, 1989).

This study set out to examine the relationship between class music learning activities and the achievement-related values students place on them. It utilised subjective task values from expectancy-value theory (Eccles, 1983) as a theoretical foundation because this theory assumes that the incentive values students place upon learning activities are determined by the learning activities themselves, through their perceived importance, intrinsic value and usefulness to students (Eccles, O'Neill & Wigfield, 2005). Further, subjective task values have been utilised in English, mathematics, social studies, science and instrumental music, and been found to be accurate predictors of students' future enrolment decisions (Eccles, 2005). This study examined the values 222 Year 8 students (aged 12 – 13) in their first year of secondary school attached to their class music learning activities in Perth, Western Australia. The article presents findings on student values measured at the start and end of the Australian academic year before re-examining the general motivational literature for recommendations on enhancing student values for application in class music. The study was carried out in the knowledge that students dropping out at this early stage are missing out on the considerable mental health benefits of a sustained music education.

BACKGROUND

Young people and class music

The importance of music in the life and culture of young people is well documented. Zillman and Bhatia (1989) state that young people in Western societies identify with specific types of music ('taste cultures'), and activities involving music occupy a high percentage of young people's leisure time (Lowe, 2007; Wigfield, O'Neill & Eccles, 1999; Fitzgerald, Joseph, Hayes & O'Regan, 1995, Frith, 1981). However, young people's interest in music does not always translate into participation in class music programs. In the past, Sloboda (2001), Swanwick (1996), Hargreaves (1986) and Rainbow (1985) have attributed high drop-out rates from school music programs in the UK to the lessons themselves, citing:

- methodological confusion, with competing teaching approaches ranging from Kodaly to Orff and Dalcroze
- a narrow curriculum still largely centred on the Western canon

- an over dependence by teachers on non-contextual skill acquisition
- a lack of understanding by many teachers of the creative process in music

These issues were also identified in a stinging criticism of UK music education practice by Ross (1998; 1995), who claimed that problems persist despite significant curriculum reform. Sloboda (2001) went further by questioning whether students fundamentally enjoyed a formal approach to the study of music as found in many schools. He stated that: 1) students choose music to meet their psychological needs and these are not always compatible with the choices teachers make, and 2) many classically trained music teachers lack the skills to create learning activities relevant to students. Whereas Handford and Watson (2003) vehemently refuted many of Sloboda's arguments, they did agree that a radical rethink of class music teaching practice was required. In Australia, where class music is based upon the UK model, Rosevear (2003) has examined the dichotomy between upper secondary students' valuing of music and their attitudes to school music. However, I could not find any formal studies involving lower secondary school music students despite a Federal Government report (DEST, 2005) identifying retention as a priority area.

Past research
Much research surrounding student motivation for class music has been criticised on the grounds of its conceptualisation and methodology. Ross's provocative research, in which he described class music as a failing subject, used a league table methodology whereby students were asked to rank school subjects on a popularity index (Ross & Witkin, 1971; Hannam, 1992; Ross & Kamba, 1996). Low-ranked subjects such as music were assumed by Ross to be failing, despite achieving student popularity ratings of up to 70%. Sloboda's (2001) comments were largely directed towards instrumental teaching practice. Both Handford and Watson (2003) and Gammon (1996) noted little delineation between class music and instrumental music in either Ross or Sloboda's assessments. Whereas there is a wealth of ongoing research into motivation and retention in instrumental music (Bruenger, 2009; Baker, 2009; Williams, 2007; Droe, 2006; Cassell, 2003; O'Neill, 1999; O'Neill, 1996), care needs to be exercised when transposing findings to class music because of fundamental differences in the ways class music and instrumental music programs are structured and delivered.

Research assessing student attitudes as a foundation for explaining low retention in class music can also be questioned because of difficulties surrounding the construct of attitudes. Weston, Burton and Kowalski (2006) note that there is still no standard definition of attitudes, and that research is often based around vague affective definitions relating to 'interest and enjoyment', measured on narrow continuums of like – dislike. These definitions often ignore a cognitive element, which can

run contrary to affective assessments (Schlegel & DiTecco, 1982). Thus, students may undertake a subject in secondary school because they see it as important for their future career, and not because they necessarily enjoy it. Stahlberg and Frey (1988) state that students' attitudes are difficult to assess, are unstable and can change rapidly. More importantly, Weston et al (2006) and Huitt (2001) note that the ability of attitudinal disposition to consistently predict resultant behaviour, such as future enrolment decisions, is yet to be confirmed.

Despite problems identified in past research in this field, the constant in the music education literature is the link between classroom practice and student retention (Rosevear, 2003; Handford & Watson, 2003; Sloboda, 2001; Ross, 1998; 1995; Swanwick, 1996; Boswell, 1991; Pogonowski, 1985). Learning activities are the manner by which purposeful interaction between teachers and students are initiated, and includes content, strategies and methods, and evaluation (Smith & Ragan, 1999). Learning activities stimulate thinking and feeling (Weston et al, 2006; Zimmerman, 2000; Schiefele, 1999). Smith and Ragan (1999) state that thinking and feeling embeds itself in global student beliefs revolving around whether activities are worth doing and whether they can do them. Thus, learning activities impact student values and competence beliefs. Eccles (2005) states that the values students attach to activities help determine future enrolment decisions, whereas competence beliefs are more predictive of future effort. Comparative research into instrumental music has demonstrated that there is a correlation between declining values for playing and decreasing enrolments (Eccles, O'Neill & Wigfield, 2005; Sloboda, 2001; O'Neill, Ryan, Boulton & Sloboda, 2000; O'Neill, 1999). Accordingly, investigating student valuing of learning activities would appear to offer an appropriate framework for investigating why large numbers of students elect not to continue in class music programs in lower secondary school.

Subjective task values
Grounded in the research area of achievement motivation, subjective task values form half of Eccles (1983) expectancy-value model, originally developed to explain adolescent motivation for mathematics. Task values can be though of as 'Why should I do this task?', and Eccles (2005) differentiates them into attainment (importance), intrinsic (interest) and extrinsic (usefulness) components. Task values are determined by characteristics of the tasks themselves and are informed by the personality traits and needs of the individual, and by previous experience, hence their subjective nature. These three positive constructs are, in turn, mediated by the negative physical and personal cost of involvement.

Eccles (2005) defines attainment value as the personal importance of doing well, including the challenge and relevance of the task to the individual. Attainment value is closely linked with identity, and tasks have a higher attainment value if they conform to student beliefs about the subject. Learning activities provide an opportunity for students to express or confirm aspects of self, and in the broader sense are enhanced when learning activities fulfil basic student needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Eccles (2005) acknowledges a link between attainment, competence and goal orientation (Ames, 1992) whereby success enhances perceptions of competence leading to feelings of pleasure.

Eccles (2005) states that attainment value is enhanced by the ability of learning activities to fulfil a whole array of personal needs. Thus, attainment value is linked not just with goal orientation (Elliott & Dweck, 2005; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Dweck, 1999; Nicholls, 1984), but with 'within-person' affective goals such as happiness, and intellectual curiosity (Ford, 1992). In practical terms, attainment value can be described as whether learning activities challenge students to succeed at the activity and are relevant to generating 'within' person goals such as happiness and curiosity.

Intrinsic value is defined as the inherent enjoyment received from undertaking the task, and the subjective interest in the task, and is free from extrinsic coercion (Urdan & Turner, 2005). It is the reported to be the strongest of the values components and has two states: individual interest, whereby students ascribe stable feelings towards a subject area; and situational interest, which is an emotional state generated by interest in the material of specific learning activities (Renninger, 2000; Hidi & Harackiwiewicz, 2000). Thus students may like a subject but not enjoy a particular activity, and the reverse can be true. Because feelings associated with situational interest are reinforced through repeated experiences, cumulative situational interest must ultimately impact on individual interest in any subject.

Whereas little is known about the origins of interest, except that it is linked to temperament, personality, motivational orientation and past experience, there are reported empirical links between learning activities, situational interest and deep-level learning (Eccles, 2005). The characteristics of situational interest can include personal relevance, familiarity, activity level, and comprehensibility. In practical terms, intrinsic interest can be summarised as whether students find learning activities to be enjoyable, comprehensible, relevant, familiar and appropriate to their needs. It could be reasonably surmised that given young people's interest in music, individual interest in class music should be strong.

Eccles (2005) defines extrinsic value as how well tasks conform to current and future goals, and relates to extrinsic factors, including short-term goals. Thus, extrinsic value is concerned with means to an end rather than the end itself. Eccles notes a link with attainment value in that the usefulness of activities relate to student identity and needs. Extrinsic value has both long-term and short-term dimensions. Long-term dimensions relate to career and lifelong involvement, while short-term dimensions relate to current needs, such as assessments of the value of learning activities in learning about the subject, and application of activities to daily life.

Cost is defined as what an individual has to give up to undertake an activity. When the perceived cost of engagement in an activity outweighs the perceived benefits, task values decline.

This study employed subjective task values as its theoretical foundation because of the closely reported connection between students' incentive values and tasks. Eccles' three positive task value components are well established constructs; factor analysis reported by Eccles, O'Neill and Wigfield (2005) reveals at least two of the three values components to be differentiated among students from as early as Year 2, (age 6) and all three by Year 5 (age 9) across a range of different subjects. They report the three constructs to be consistently and empirically distinguishable among students of the age involved in this study. Subjective task values then have the potential to provide a reliable and valid foundation for examining the links between class music learning activities and student retention rates.

METHOD

This study asked the following research question: "How do class music learning activities impact student achievement-related task values over the course of Year 8?" The question implied a test / retest methodology, and a survey instrument was employed.

Sample

According to the Education Department of Western Australia, approximately 4000 students enrol in Year 8 class music each year. A published table was used to determine an appropriate sample size (Israel, 2003). According to the table, a sample size of over 194 based upon a total population of 4000 would yield a generally accepted level of precision of plus/minus 7% and a confidence level of 95% (p=.05). Since class sizes in Western Australia are usually between 25-30 students, it was determined that at least eight schools would be required for this study.

The eight participating schools were selected using a random sampling technique based upon school districts to ensure a degree of representativeness across the Perth metropolitan area. As some of the selected schools had more than 25 students enrolled in Year 8 class music, 276 students eventually took part in the initial pre-test. However, only 222 students took part in the post-test because one school was unable to schedule a retest time. All students in this study had elected to take class music, but not all played instruments. Thus, participating students reflected a range of ability levels, but all had a common interest in electing to take class music in Year 8.

Instrument construction

The study employed a researcher designed survey instrument. Instrument items were based upon Eccles task values constructs, namely the attainment, intrinsic and utility values components. The study took a broader view of each construct by testing for dimensions within each construct as proposed by Eccles (2005). Thus, attainment value items sought to measure goal orientation (challenge) and within person (relevance) values. Intrinsic value items sought to measure the situational interest associated with activities and the individual interest associated with class music as a whole, while extrinsic value items sought to measure dimensions of long term and short term usefulness. To ensure coverage of the dimensions within each construct, four items per values component were employed, making a total of twelve items. The survey instrument asked a series of closed statements to which students ranked their responses on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Given the age of the students in the sample, the wording of each item was kept relatively simple to aid student comprehensibility and to avoid misinterpretation. The wording and orientation of each item is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1 *Survey instrument items and orientation*

Values Component	Orientation	Item
Attainment value	Goal orientation 1	I think that it is important to try my best in all class music activities.
	Goal orientation 2	I think it is important to get good grades in class music.
	Within person 1	I think that the activities I do in class music are relevant to me.
	Within person 2	I think that the activities I do in class music make me curious to learn more about music.
Intrinsic value	Situational interest 1	I think the activities I do in class music are enjoyable.
	Situational interest 2	I think the sorts of activities I do in class music are interesting.
	Individual interest 1	In general, I find class music fun.
	Individual interest 2	In general, I find class music interesting.
Extrinsic value	Long term useful 1	I think the activities I do in class music will be useful when I leave school.
	Long term useful 2	I think the activities I do in class music will be useful for getting a job.
	Short term useful 1	I think that the things I learn in class music are useful in my daily life outside school.
	Short term useful 2	I think that the activities I do in class music are useful in helping me learn about music.

Piloting

The instrument was piloted with 40 Year 8 music students at a school not involved in the research. It was administered in November of the year preceding the main study by the researcher, and results were subjected to exploratory factor analysis to firstly determine whether the twelve items loaded into Eccles three values constructs. Secondly, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated on each item to test for internal consistency.

Results for the Cronbach's alpha statistics ranged from .90 to .95, with an average of .92, and the twelve items did load against the three values constructs. However, due to the relatively small numbers involved in piloting, further factor analysis was undertaken on data from the main study. Minor adjustments were made to clarify item wording, based upon verbal feedback from students involved in the pilot study.

Procedure and data analysis

The instrument was administered by the researcher in February at the commencement of the academic year and again in November at the end of the academic year. Students completed the questionnaire during normal class time to allow minimum disruption to normal school activities. Data for each item was entered onto SPSS Base 14 software, and initial frequencies and means scores calculated. Given the higher numbers of participants involved in the main study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were again calculated to confirm the internal consistency of the questionnaire items, before a series of paired sample *t*-tests were then undertaken to measure the significance of any differences between pre-test and post-test data.

Because the instrument examined dimensions within each values construct, each item is reported separately in the results section under its values umbrella, rather than as combined values scores. While acknowledging that more manipulation can be undertaken with this data, the focus of this article is to report against the research question, and make an assessment of the potential of the dimensions within subjective task values as an area for future study.

RESULTS

Cronbach alpha coefficients were again high, and ranged from .88 to .89 across all items at pre-test, and from .87 to .90 at post-test. Factor analysis again revealed three factors aligned with Eccles values constructs, with each item loading against its appropriate values construct. Table 2 presents the results of the values dimension as percentages of frequency.

Table 2. Levels of agreement with task value items (row percentages)

N = 222

	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	%		%		%		%		%	
	pre	*post*	*pre*	*post*	*pre*	*post*	*pre*	*post*	*pre*	*post*
Attainment value										
Goal orient. 1	0.7	1.4	3.3	10.4	30.8	34.7	45.3	44.1	19.9	9.5
Goal orient. 2	0.4	2.3	1.8	6.8	19.2	27.0	56.2	51.8	22.5	12.2
Within person 1	0.0	0.9	1.8	4.5	11.2	15.8	48.9	51.4	38.0	27.5
Within person 2	1.1	3.2	11.2	20.3	42.0	41.9	38.8	30.2	6.0	4.5
Intrinsic value										
Situational 1	0.7	5.9	4.0	12.2	25.4	36.0	48.6	33.8	21.4	12.2
Situational 2	0.4	3.6	4.0	12.2	27.9	34.7	50.4	41.0	17.4	8.6
Individual 1	1.1	3.6	4.0	14.0	28.3	34.2	47.5	35.1	19.2	13.1
Individual 2	1.8	4.1	3.3	10.4	26.4	32.4	53.6	45.0	14.9	8.1
Extrinsic value										
Long term 1	1.8	4.1	5.4	15.8	26.4	30.6	43.5	33.8	22.8	15.8
Long term 2	3.6	5.0	8.3	20.7	48.9	41.0	24.6	23.9	14.5	9.5
Short term 1	2.5	5.4	11.6	19.4	42.8	43.7	33.0	26.1	10.1	5.4
Short term 2	0.7	0.0	1.4	6.3	6.5	9.9	52.2	50.9	39.1	32.9

Overall, levels of agreement decreased for all four attainment items from pre to post-test. 'Within person' 2 scores relating to curiosity were consistently lower than the other attainment value items, for both the pre and post-test, suggesting a possible lack of student stimulation by class music activities. All of the four intrinsic dimension items indicated a decline in agree and strongly agree responses, and a corresponding increase in disagree and strongly disagree at the post-test stage. The four extrinsic value items produced more varied results, with the lowest overall agreement ratings occurring for long term item 2 which related to getting a job, and the highest overall agreement rating occurring for short term item 2 which related to the useful of learning activities in helping student understand music. All twelve items were then subjected to paired sample *t*-test. Results, including means, mean differences and significance, are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Means, mean differences and significance levels for task values

N = 222

	Pre-test		Post-test			
	Mean	*SD*	*Mean*	*SD*	*Mean diff.*	*Significance*
Attainment value						
Goal orient. 1	3.80	.81	3.50	.85	-.30	.001*
Goal orient. 2	3.98	.72	3.64	.86	-.34	.000*
Within person 1	4.23	.71	4.00	.83	-.23	.007*
Within person 2	3.39	.81	3.12	.89	-.27	.013*
Intrinsic value						
Situational 1	3.85	.82	3.34	1.03	-.51	.001*
Situational 2	3.80	.78	3.38	.93	-.42	.001*
Individual 1	3.79	.83	3.40	1.00	-.39	.001*
Individual 2	3.76	.80	3.42	.92	-.34	.003*
Extrinsic values						
Long term 1	3.80	.91	3.41	1.05	-.39	<.001*
Long term 2	3.38	.95	3.12	1.00	-.28	.051
Short term 1	3.36	.90	3.06	.94	-.30	.006*
Short term 2	4.27	.71	4.10	.82	-.17	.105

*Significant at or beyond the .05 level

The *t*-tests indicated statistically significant declines in the mean level of agreement for all four attainment value dimensions from pre to post-test. The decline was strongest for both items pertaining to goal orientation. Similarly statistically significant declines occurred for all four intrinsic value items from pre to post-test. The declines were stronger than for attainment dimensions items, and the two situational interest items declined more than the two individual interest items. Findings were less emphatic for extrinsic value, with statistically significant declines in only two of the four extrinsic items from pre to post-test. This suggested that the students involved in this study perceived class music activities as declining in long-term usefulness in relation to getting a job, and in short term usefulness in relation to their daily lives. While there was no statistically significant decrease for usefulness in relation to getting a job, scores for this item were low at pre and post-test, while the reverse was true in terms of the usefulness of activities in helping learn about music.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed a decline across all 12 task value items from pre to post-test. Further, the *t*-tests indicated that the decline was significant in 10 out of 12 items. While this may

trigger cause for concern, the findings are consistent with other studies which indicate declining task values for most school subjects among students of this age. Both Eccles, Wigfield, Flanagan, Miller, Reuman and Yee (1989) and Wigfield, Eccles, Mac Iver, Reuman and Midgeley (1991) reported declines in task values among students at the transition into secondary school. More specifically, Eccles, O'Neill and Wigfield (2005), and Gottfried, Fleming and Gottfried (2001) reported declines in values across specific subjects, namely mathematics, English, social studies and science among lower secondary students, while DeBacker and Nelson (1999) reported declining values among science students among students at this stage of schooling.

With regard to instrumental music, Wigfield (1994) reported a decline in interest value among students in the late years of primary school. In the UK context, O'Neill et al (2000) and Sloboda (2001) also reported declines in interest value among instrumental music students at the transition to secondary school. Learning an instrument was often no longer described as fun. In addition, they reported that the importance of succeeding had also declined, suggesting that for many students, learning an instrument was no longer goal affirming. While not specifically related to instrumental music, Wigfield and Wagner (2005) report changes in goal orientation among students as they enter secondary school, with students placing increasing value on obtaining good marks over a desire to master activities.

By adding class music to the list, the findings of this study build upon the body of evidence indicating that task values decline in most, if not all subjects at the transition to secondary school. General reasons put forward to explain these almost universal declines include the dislocation students experience at the transition into secondary school (Harter, 1990), increasing student valuing of activities outside school (Sloboda, 2001), and in the context of this study, an increasingly poor fit between instructional practices and student needs (Wigfield & Wagner, 2005; Sloboda, 2001; Bandura, 1994). Both Wigfield and Wagner (2005) and Sloboda (2001) state that students often do not find topics and materials they are presented with stimulating or relevant to their developing needs, while Bandura (1994) describes lock-step instructional practices, ability groupings and competitive practices impacting fragile and newly emerging self-efficacy beliefs. Within this general context, the declines in task values identified in this study appear to support assertions of a growing ill fit between learning activities and student needs in the class music context. In this sense, the findings of this study are not new, but merely confirm existing trends reported among students at this stage of schooling.

The real value of this study, however, is twofold. Firstly, subjective task values have excellent predictive value in that they are reliable indicators of future student enrolment decisions (Eccles, O'Neill & Wigfield, 2005). The consistent reported correlation between values and future enrolment combined with the initial findings of this study suggest that subjective task values can provide a reliable and valid basis for examining the impact of class music learning activities upon students, and predict their subsequent enrolment decisions. As such, they provide a valuable tool in helping researchers frame a major reason why students might be dropping out of class music. This is important, given criticism of the theoretical and methodological assumptions of much previous research within the class music field. The findings of this study, therefore, are put forward as a way of progressing research into retention in elective class music programs.

Secondly, a decision was made in the context of this study to design a subject specific research instrument rather than use an existing generic one developed by established researchers. While design of the instrument used in this study drew heavily from previously developed instruments within the expectancy-value framework, this instrument incorporated dimensions indentified by Eccles (2005) within each task value construct. In doing so, this study aimed to burrow into task values within the class music context. While acknowledging that some of the dimensions derive from different theoretical backgrounds and are yet to be tested individually with the expectancy-value framework, Eccles (2005) notes that:

> ... as each theory becomes more complex, it becomes more similar. Being an integrative optimist, I want to interpret these theoretical shifts in terms of a developmental progression towards convergence on a comprehensive and predictively powerful set of principles of behavioural choice and motivation. (p.119)

This study represents an attempt to reconcile Eccles' desire for convergence, albeit within a substantive setting. Therefore, the overall value of this study may not lie in the somewhat predictable finding that task values for class music learning activities decline, but rather, in identification of specific dimensions exhibiting the strongest declines.

Within this study, both goal orientation items declined more than within person items. This suggested that the importance to students of succeeding in class music declined more than the perceptions of the personal relevance they attached to the activities. This may be reflective of a general decline in student perceptions of the importance of music as a school subject. Within the

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intrinsic value construct, both situational interest items declined more than the individual interest items. This suggested that it was the classroom activities which students found increasingly less enjoyable, rather than the subject of music itself. It confirmed that the activities themselves rather than perception of the subject as a whole, appear to have the biggest impact upon intrinsic values. While the results for extrinsic values were less clear-cut, items associated with long term usefulness exhibited a slightly stronger decline than the items associated with short term usefulness. In summary, this study suggests that it was becoming less important for students to succeed in class music, that the learning activities themselves were becoming less enjoyable, and that students saw class music activities as having less long term value in terms of their careers and as a life skill.

This study achieved a twofold aim. It set out to examine not just the task values of the music students involved, but the potential of a dimensional view of task values as a research approach. The item factor loadings of the instrument conformed with past expectancy-value findings, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients indicated high internal consistency for the instrument items. However, the instrument was designed for a specific setting, and a specific group of students. For example, while there was an underlying assumption that the responses of students involved in this study would load onto the three values constructs (and this was confirmed in testing), this may not apply to younger students, as construct differentiation comes with age (Eccles, O'Neill & Wigfield, 2005). The instrument requires further developing and testing before it can be presented as a tool suited to all class music situations and settings. Despite this, the framework employed offer music educators a starting point for developing pedagogical responses to address the findings of this study.

For music educators, the biggest concern is not the finding that student values for class music decline in the first year of secondary school, but that this should occur at a time in student lives when music is assuming greater importance. Why does student interest in class music activities decline when their interest in music in general is increasing? It may be that the reasons described in the general literature apply in class music (Wigfield & Wagner, 2005; Bandura, 1994; Harter, 1990), or it may be that the music-specific reasons attributed by Sloboda (2001), Swanwick (1996), Hargreaves (1986) and Rainbow (1985), and even Ross (1995, 1998) still persist in Western Australia. Having identified declines within the dimensions of the values constructs, it is now appropriate to consider what music educators can do to reverse the trends and enhance student values.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MUSIC TEACHERS

When attempting to introduce more motivating learning activities, Urdan and Turner (2005) state that teachers in most subjects unconsciously only address the intrinsic value construct of interest and enjoyment. That is, they attempt to make their lessons more 'fun'. However, Wigfield (1994) reports that while interest is the strongest predictor of choice in younger children, by lower secondary school, attainment and extrinsic values assume greater importance as students start to think about career choices and desirable life skills. Therefore, all three values components come into play when students make elective subject choices in lower secondary school. Focusing only upon making lessons more fun potentially ignores the other values components that also influence enrolment decisions.

In general terms, Urdan and Turner (2005) state that the importance students attach to any subject is enhanced through active participation. Learning activities are described by students as being more relevant to them personally when they have the opportunity to engage practically with topics. This sits comfortably with current thinking in music education (Swanwick, 1999) that deeper understanding of what it means to be musical evolves from practical engagement. Learning activities that are practical and authentic can stimulate curiosity and other 'within person' states, while developing 'knowing in' music.

For many years, Year 8 class music in Western Australia has been based upon a music appreciation learning model involving a high degree of formal theoretical study. While recent curriculum change has seen the mandating of a more practical based curriculum, the declines reported on both 'within person' items in this study may reflect an ongoing lack of practical and authentic learning activities, and thus a failure to stimulate student curiosity. It may also reflect the slow embracing of the practical curriculum by many music teachers in WA. Understanding the motivational value of practical based-learning activities in class music may be as important in student retention as the educational value of these activities.

One of the difficulties encountered by music teachers is that many students enrolling in lower secondary class music programs lack the skills to engage in practical learning activities at a meaningful level. In overcoming skills shortcomings, Urdan and Midgeley (2003) encourage the use of cooperative learning strategies such as group work. They report a measurable improvement in mastery orientation in cooperative learning environments. Given the decline in goal orientation items reported in this study, the greater use of cooperative based small groups may help overcome individual skills deficiencies while building goal orientation.

Wigfield and Wagner (2005) also noted that students entering secondary school become increasingly focused upon their marks and less upon undertaking activities for their own sake. Assor and Kaplan (2001) state that when learning activities offer students a degree of choice and autonomy, students become more focused upon the activity by taking ownership and control. They state that autonomy predicts positive interest and enjoyment, whereas controlling learning activities predict negative student feelings such as anger and stress. Incorporating more elements of choice into learning activities may ultimately encourage greater mastery orientation among students as they are able to pursue learning activities which they perceive as being more relevant to them, a view supported by Reeve, Bolt and Kai (1999).

The general literature suggests a variety of strategies for enhancing intrinsic values. Pintrich (2004), and Malone and Lepper (1987) recommend the use of teaching practices such as the injection of humour and the incorporation of puzzles and games, while Urdan and Turner (2005) state that situational interest is enhanced when teachers demonstrate their own interest in the topics being covered. Eccles (1983) reported that students enjoyed mathematics more when asked open-ended questions, giving them the opportunity to express autonomous views. While these strategies are valuable in a general sense, addressing the general notion of 'interest and enjoyment' in class music is still a vague concept.

This study was based upon the premise that intrinsic value encompasses two states, and has identified situational interest as declining more than individual interest. Urdan and Turner (2005) suggest that because individual interest is idiosyncratic, it is impossible for teachers to cater to all students' tastes. Further, individual interest is the more sable of the two, and therefore less open to influence. Therefore they recommend focusing upon stimulating situational interest.

Renninger (2000), and Hidi and Harackiwiewicz (2000) suggest that situational interest is influenced by the relevance and familiarity of materials to students, as well as its comprehensibility. Familiarity and relevance for students in class music will apply to the type of music chosen for study, as well as the methods of delivery. Therefore, repertoire choice can assume great importance in generating situational interest, because students consciously identify with specific types of music, identified by Zillman and Batia (1989) as 'taste cultures'. Appropriate repertoire choice can then generate relevance to students by linking to their personal lives, and familiarity by tapping into their music of choice. Further, given that music occupies a high percentage of student's leisure time outside school, understanding how students engage with music beyond the music classroom can ensure a degree of

comprehensibility as classroom activities conform to real life musical experiences. It may well be that Slododa's (2001) call for a less formal approach to the teaching of music in general has currency in building situational interest in the music classroom.

In this study, the two items relating to the long term extrinsic value of class music learning activities declined more than the short term items. This indicated that while students saw the types of learning activities undertaken in class music as having some use in helping them learn about music, they saw increasingly less value in class music learning activities in relation to their lives upon leaving school. The connection between music learning activities and student perceptions of them as essential life skills is a potentially rich area for study. While music education is focused upon the notion of the lifelong learner - that music learning does not stop at the end of formal schooling - this study raises questions about how this aim is to be achieved. It may be that long term extrinsic valuing relates back to notions of relevance and familiarity, and the ability of teachers to design learning activities which have relevance and ongoing real world application for students.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the problem of student retention in lower secondary class music programs. Over time, various reasons have been put forward for why this might be happening (Sloboda, 2001; Ross , 1998; Swanwick, 1996; Ross, 1995; Hargreaves, 1986). However, there has been little agreement on appropriate mechanisms for investigating the problem. While there is acknowledgement that a retention problem exists and the effects are evident in the numbers of students enrolling in elective class music programs in the senior years of secondary school, a consensus has not been reached on an appropriate framework for investigating the problem.

There does appear to be general agreement of the link between learning activities and student retention, namely through the incentive values students place on learning activities. This study utilised subjective task values as a framework for investigating this link. As such, it puts subjective task values forward as a valid and reliable framework for progressing research in this area. This study has also attempted to broaden the values constructs, by testing for dimensions identified by Eccles (2005) within the research instrument employed in this study.

The study found that student values for class music did rather predictably decline over the course of Year 8, and the decline was significant in 10 out of 12 items. While the overall declines in the values constructs mirrored previous findings for students of this age across other subject areas, the

strength of this study was the identification of higher rates of decline within specific values dimensions, namely goal orientation, situational interest and long term extrinsic value.

The study also attempted to synthesize briefly some recommended teaching strategies for enhancing values, drawn from general motivational research, with the findings of this study. But, as Urdan and Turner (2005) state, to what extent can theoretical perspectives match reality? Can the strategies and approaches recommended in this article actually be implemented in the music classroom? Student interests can be varied, so finding common topics that are meaningful and relevant to all students can be problematic. If motivation principles are to be applied, music teachers have to endorse them. For example, many music teachers may simply not believe that offering Year 8 students a degree of autonomy is practical. They may also struggle to introduce more practical learning activities into their classrooms, believing that Year 8 students lack the skills for meaningful practical engagement. When students exhibit avoidance behaviours, many music teachers simply dismiss students as unmotivated. They see motivation as the responsibility of the student, not the teacher (Urdan & Turner, 2005). The recommendations of this article need to be validated in targeted field studies, including observational, interventionist and qualitative studies, and the results converted into practical and workable practices and strategies.

Much motivational research in music education has focused upon student competence beliefs, which is particularly valuable in instrumental music research where beliefs associated with the acquisition of highly precise skills are fundamental. However, this study indicates the importance in the lower secondary music context of investigating factors such as the learning material itself and its tangible impact upon dimensions such as students' situational interest. Do declining values for class music revolve around the selection of material, the manner of presentation, or a combination of both? In the end, it might be the teacher's own demonstrable interest in the learning activity that helps students see its value and relevance, rather than the learning activity itself. Whatever the reasons, subjective task values can offer music educators a valid framework for understanding the impact of learning activities on students' motivation to continue class music. This, in turn, provides a suitable platform for further investigation of the ongoing issue of student retention. Meaningful application of this knowledge in the music classroom, however, remains the big challenge facing music education.

CODA
Of the 276 students who participated in this study, 141, representing just over 50%, elected to continue class music in Year 9, the following academic year.

WORD COUNT

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