Exploring Community: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Community plays an essential role in many aspects of life. Community can be a defined group, a location, or a psychological concept. This review of literature explores the definition and meanings of the construct of community in relation to its role in music education, Specifically, how community may exist and thrive in the setting of secondary music classrooms. Additionally, connections are drawn to significant philosophies of music education and implications for future practice.

Keywords: community, music education, belonging, instrumental music

Exploring Community: Evidence and Implications of Community

in Secondary Music Classrooms

In the 17th century, the poet John Donne stressed the importance of interconnectedness: "No man is an island entirely of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as any manner of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind" (Donne, 1623). The construct of community has many applications, implications, and citations that go back thousands of years. The purpose of this literature review is to explore aspects of community as they relate to and exist in secondary music classrooms. This exploration will include: definitions of community in various contexts, a psychological overview of the need for community, theories of the structure and/or function of community, and how community may exist in the secondary music setting. Additionally, implications for integrating community into teaching practice will be discussed.

What is Community?

Ferdinand Tönnies (1887) stated that social relationship or bond implies interdependence, and it means that the will of the one person, influences that of the other. In the same way as a person can be linked with another person, he can be united with many persons, and these can be connected to one another. Thus, the will of each single person who belongs to a group is part of and at the same time conditioned by the group's collective will, making him dependent on it. Such collective will can take various forms determined by the number of persons involved, its own character, and the mode of its existence, that is, the way in which it is expressed.

Almost 100 years later, McMillan, Chavis, & Newbrough (1986) published a foundational article entitled *Sense of community: A definition and theory*. The authors reviewed the previous definitions of community in the literature and proposed a distinction between the territorial nation of community (neighborhood, town, etc.) and a "relational" notion, concerned with quality of character of human relationship, without reference to location. The latter they deem "sense of community", which was operationally defined as a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together.

Psychological Overview: The Need to Belong

The need to belong has been seen by many psychologists and sociologists as central to human wellbeing. Maslow (1943) described a hierarchical set of "basic needs" that fuel human motivation. At the bottom of the hierarchy are the "physiological needs" that include food and shelter, followed by the need for safety. After that, Maslow describes the "love needs," which include love, affection, and belongingness. "[A person] will hunger for affectionate relations with people in general, namely, for a place in his group, and he will strive with great intensity to achieve this goal. He will want to attain such a place more than anything else in the world and may even forget that once, when he was hungry, he sneered at love." (Maslow, 1943, p.). Further, it is posited that in our society, the "thwarting" of these needs is the most common denominator in cases of maladjustment and more severe psychopathology.

McMillan et al. (1986) proposed four defining elements of a sense of community: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. Membership is the feeling of belonging or of sharing a sense of personal relatedness. The second element, influence, is*,* a sense of mattering, of making a difference to a group and of the group

mattering to its members. The third element, reinforcement, refers to the integration and

fulfillment of needs. This is the feeling that members' needs will be met by the resources

received through their membership in the group. The last element consists of shared emotional

connections, meaning the commitment and belief that members have shared and will share

history, common places, time together, and similar experiences.

Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky & Bouwsema, (1993) described an emerging theory of

human relatedness that centered on the pervasive human concern to establish and maintain

relatedness to others, objects, environments, society and self. This theory views relatedness as a

functional, behavioral system rooted in early attachment behaviors. Using a sample of 379

community college students, Hagerty et. al (1993) examined sense of belonging in relation to

social support, conflict, involvement in community activities, attendance at religious services,

loneliness, depression, anxiety, history of psychiatric treatment, and suicidality. Results indicated

that sense of belonging is closely related to indicators of both social and psychological

functioning, which corroborates the theory presented by Maslow. These relationships were

generally stronger for women than for men. Furthermore, the authors identified that individuals

move through different states of relatedness including connectedness, disconnectedness,

parallelism and enmeshment. Social processes that are said to contribute to this movement are

sense of belonging, reciprocity, mutuality and synchrony.

In 1995 Baumeister, Leary, and Steinberg developed the Belongingness Hypothesis. The

authors acknowledged that the need to belong has been observed and documented for decades,

but they concluded that not much empirical research had been conducted. The belongingness

hypothesis states that human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a

minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships. Satisfying this

drive involves two criteria: first, a need for frequent, affectively pleasant interactions with a few other people, and second, a temporally stable and enduring framework of affective concern for each other's welfare. Baumeister et al. came to this operational definition after a strenuous examination of the existing literature, in which they gave credit to the plausibility of an evolutionary basis (e.g. safety in numbers for survival, reproduction) and similarities of developmental attachment theory (e.g. mother and child interaction). The authors distinguish the need to belong from the need for mere social interaction by noting that strangers or acquaintances do not satisfy this need.

Most of social psychology's theories of the self fail to take into account the significance of social identification in the definition of self. Social identities are self-definitions that are more inclusive than the individuated self-concept of most American psychology. Brewer (1991) proposed a model of optimal distinctiveness in which social identity is viewed as a reconciliation of opposing needs for assimilation and differentiation from others. This theory is grounded on uniqueness theory (Snyder and Fromkin, 1980) and opposing process models (Solomon, 1980). Brewer stated that "the need for de-individuation is satisfied within in-groups, while the need for distinctiveness is met through inter-group comparisons" (p. 477). According to this model, individuals avoid self-construals that are either too personalized or too inclusive and instead define themselves in terms of distinctive category memberships. Social identity and group loyalty are hypothesized to be strongest for those self-categorizations that simultaneously provide for a sense of belonging and a sense of distinctiveness. In short, humans need to feel they have individual worth, but also the ability to claim membership in an identifying group for support.

Structures of Community

Ryan and Deci (2000) proposed a framework of motivation that meets human fundamental needs known as Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Needs are defined as "nutriments essential to a living entity's growth, integrity, and health" (p. 23). The three essential needs of this theory are the need for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. According to Ryan and Deci the need for competence is fulfilled by the experience that one can effectively bring about desired effects and outcomes, the need for autonomy involves perceiving that one's activities are endorsed or congruent with the self, and the need for relatedness pertains to feeling that one is close and connected to significant others. Relatedness is of particular interest in the current line of inquiry regarding sense of belonging.

Furrer and Skinner (2003) conducted a longitudinal project examining children's motivation and coping in the academic domain. The sample was equally divided by gender and included children in third through sixth grades. The children attended elementary school in a suburban–rural school district comprised of mostly middle-class and working-class families. Analysis of the 641 self-reported student questionnaires showed that factors of relatedness predicted changes in classroom engagement over the school year and contributed over and above the effects of perceived control. Regression and cumulative risk analyses revealed that relatedness to parents, teachers, and peers each uniquely contributed to students' engagement, especially emotional engagement. This research further builds the case for relatedness as a key component of student success as proposed by Deci & Ryan. Additionally, relatedness supports the theory of belonging referenced previously by Baumeister et al. (1995).

Niemiec and Ryan (2009) presented an overview of Self-Determination Theory and

reviewed its applications to educational practice in the article "Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness in the Classroom: Applying Self-Determination Theory to Educational Practice." They suggested that teachers' support of students' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness facilitates students' autonomous self-regulation for learning, academic performance, and well- being. Accordingly, SDT has strong implications for both classroom practice and educational reform policies.

Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner founded a theory of learning known as "communities of practice." This model proposed that engagement in social practice is the fundamental process by which we learn, and by which we become who we are. The primary unit of analysis of this process is neither the individual nor social institutions but rather the informal "communities of practice" that people form as they pursue shared enterprises over time. According to the authors, the theory systematically explores the intersecting issues of community, social practice, meaning, and identity. The goal is a broad conceptual framework for thinking about learning as a process of social participation. Operationally, a community of practice is defined as a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do, and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.

Buysse, Sparkman, & Wesley (2003) examined the communities of practice concept in the context of introducing research into current teaching practice. The authors analyzed applications of this model from the previous body of literature and concluded that the shift to accommodating communities of practice involves thinking about learning as not just taking place within an individual mind but as being a process that unfolds within a participatory framework. As a result, learning is viewed as distributed among many participants within the community in which diverse people are transformed through their own actions and those of other participants.

From this relational perspective of persons and their actions within a socially and culturally constructed world, understanding and experience are in constant interaction. This coincides with Self-Determination Theory in terms of the need for relatedness.

Community in the Secondary Music Setting

The secondary music classroom is a setting unlike any other classroom. The space is often physically larger, with additional smaller rooms adjacent for instrument storage, lockers, practice rooms, etc., where students can claim ownership. Students typically spend time in this space not only during their class period, but also before and after school, independent study time, and even lunch. In most scenarios music students will participate in the music program for several years with the same group of other students and teachers with whom they are familiar. I believe these unique characteristics can contribute to a positive classroom environment that nurtures the abovementioned psychological need to belong.

Adderly, Kennedy, and Berz (2003) explored the environment of a high school music classroom. Specifically, they examined motivations to join music ensembles and remain, perception of the musical groups by their members and by the school community as a whole, the meaning and value that music ensembles engender for their participants, and the social climate of the music classroom. Using structured interviews, the researchers gathered information from 60 students in a Northeastern, suburban high school: 20 students each from the band, choir, and orchestra programs. The findings suggested that students participated in school music ensembles for a variety of reasons, such as family influence, enjoyment of music, performing, and social benefits. Students perceived music-making and performing, as well as the acquisition of musical skills and knowledge, to be meaningful. Also, the students felt they gained psychological benefits from their involvement in music groups; benefits included increased responsibility, self-

discipline, personal growth, opportunity for emotional outlet, and a comfortable classroom

atmosphere. All three of Self-Determination Theory's basic needs can be seen in these findings.

The opportunity for personal growth and self discipline are congruent with autonomy; musical

skills, musical knowledge, and increased responsibility are examples of competencies; and

finding meaning in music-making and using the group as an emotional outlet exemplify the need

for relatedness.

Morrison (2001) observed the unique culture in the music classroom in his article "The

School Ensemble, A Culture of Our Own." He explains that "school ensembles are not just

classes or performance groups, but guardians of their own specific culture, a culture that informs

and enriches the lives of their members" (p.1). He examined the group dynamics, individual

psychological benefits, and various roles within the culture. Notable ethnomusicologist Bruno

Nettl (1995) suggested that one significant way to comprehend a culture is to find dominant

themes that exhibit themselves in a variety of cultural domains and behavior patterns. Morrison

(2001) identified the following dominant themes in the ensemble setting: identity, transmission,

social dimensions, practical and personal boundaries, organizational hierarchy, traditional

practices, and diaspora.

Music students do not just take band class, they are "band kids", and they take pride in

identifying with other band kids. Similarly, the students who play trumpet may just be referred to

as "Trumpets." At the same time, there is an element of competition or distinction. This speaks

to Brewer's theory of optimal distinctiveness: students want to be part of the band, or even pride

themselves for being part of one section over another, but they also want to be known as "the

trumpet player who can play a double high G," or the "flute who made state." Interestingly, the

latter statements of achievement do not hold any weight if the students are not part of the general

band community that recognizes them as an accomplished member. Through a cultural lens, Morrison described the social construct that inevitably emerges in the music setting. He suggested that there will always be different cliques within an ensemble, but the bond created through their musical experiences is a valuable element of relatedness.

Many of these themes provide opportunity for Baumeister's two qualifying criteria for the belongingness hypothesis (the need for frequent, affectively pleasant interactions and interactions that take place in the context of a temporally stable and enduring framework of affective concern for each other's welfare). Music ensembles offer the unique experience for students of varying ages and abilities to learn side by side. This facilitates a mentor-mentee relationship with newer members and more distinguished members (affective concern for each other's welfare). As previously mentioned, students in music ensembles often engage in music activities in and out of school. The amount of time students spend with each other working towards a common goal (frequent affectively pleasant interactions) facilitates the formation of a strong social structure. Band kids will prefer to hang out with other band kids, even when it's not a music function or required event.

Implications

Literature from a range of domains (social psychology, child development, education) suggests that sense of belonging is a fundamental psychological need. This underscores the value of community in secondary instrumental music classrooms. With thoughtful consideration and careful planning, it is possible to craft an atmosphere in secondary music classrooms that not only accommodates, but also nurtures the formation of community. In light of the literature reviewed, the following teaching tools are suggested strategies for developing and encouraging community in the music classroom:

- Student-led small ensembles (of all genres) to allow students to have voice and build relationships of relatedness in a smaller setting.

- Student-directed rehearsals to build leadership skills and enable optimal distinctiveness. Small and large group discussions (during class, or electronically) to build communities of practice while also fulfilling the psychological need to belong.

- Writing reflections with peer and/or teacher response to shape a culture of relatedness and underscore the focus of the community of practice.

- Compositional opportunities (using traditional notation, original notation, or technology based creation) to allow for optimal distinctiveness and expression.

- Group decision making to build relationships and nurture the need to belong.

- Clear and consistent expectations coupled with strong communication are key to developing a thriving community for students within the program, the school environment, and society at large.

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