

Alternatives for Studio Class

Who is responsible?

If I need to find a word to describe the feature of private class or one-to-one instruction (out of school) in Chinese context, I would say "purposeful", which means these classes generally are outcome-oriented education. Specifically, these targeted outcomes could derive from teachers' design of one particular instrument training, parents' expectations for their children to pass the audition, or school musical activities requirements. Thus, private class instructors may be involved in a complex power dynamic in which parents, students, schools and themselves participate in the class with different intentions. For example, I provided some Korean students private violin classes for a long-time, but I rarely felt satisfied with the process. Parents told me their expectations that their children could engage in their school orchestra better from the beginning of these instructions. In other words, parents have formulated the class context and provided materials- sectional score for orchestra. As a novice teacher, I did not know how to balance these powers from stakeholders. Therefore, I submitted to their expectation and taught whatever they need. Consequently, my recognition of teacher's identity turned negative- I felt my teaching autonomy lost. In this parent-teacher-pupil interactive relationship, students' voices were ignored as well. I got many students' reflections that they did not enjoy playing orchestra scores, whereas they wanted to play some pop songs. However, I did nothing but transferred everything "good" for them, helping them survive in the school orchestra. Meeting their parents' requirements became my teaching goal. When I reflect on these experiences, I can not imagine how frustrated these students were when they were excluded in my classes.

Make Dialogues Happen

Drawing from Benedict (2021), dialogue could be a bridge to understand students' different religious faiths and include them in music education. Similarly, create space to have dialogues with parents and students should be the first step to hear different voices, then it is possible to change the situation that one stakeholder dominates.

Before I address further about how to develop dialogue, it is better to clarify children's music education in China. School education is supposed to support children's musical ability development. However, given the discourse that music, art and gym as subordinate subjects have dominated for a long time, music class is marginalized in schools. Policies and National Curriculum are trying to promote the status of music and art education. However, an entrenched grade-orientated assessment system manifests that music is meant to be marginalized- it is a subject that far more than transferring music knowledge and skills, which could be quantified by score. Music education brings changes and transformation of cognition and ideology which derive from the time-consuming endeavor, but may not bring some visible outcomes to meet grade-orientated assessment. Therefore, school music classes are easily replaced by core classes for improving scores, the sooner the better. If school music classes are not as beneficial as expected, social music class takes more responsibility to attain the national curriculum requirements.

As I mentioned above, instructors could feel helpless struggling with parents' expectations, schools' requirements and students' desire. How to be more autonomous in class is a puzzle for private class instructors. Developing relationships with class participants and having dialogues with them are educators' accountability, only if educators actively engage in the teaching process, there could be space for autonomy. As Schmidt (2014) addresses, "the conundrum, (again), lies in the lack of reciprocity between accountability and autonomy" (p. 55). Realizing the codependence of accountability and autonomy may help educators consider the conundrum in a different way. A feasible strategy is getting to know parents' expectations of tutoring and children's interest and needs before giving classes. Meanwhile,

teachers articulate their educational philosophy and pedagogy. Through the dialogue, participants with different ideas could break the traditional class model and create more space to include different voices. That should be the first step for private classes to be more inclusive. The negative attitude of reproducing classes without critical thinking and active engagement is an escape from accountability or is paralyzed by guilt. Educators need to realize that "solutions are not simple formulas that can be applied by any person in any situation; they are dependent upon the specific context and social position of the person undertaking them" (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 197). There is no universal answer for educational issues, if educators cannot actively engage in teaching process and adjust their pedagogy and ideology in different situations, music education will never echo students' different needs. Instead of waiting for a best model for teaching, educators should take risk and explore more possibilities to undertake more inclusive education.

Alternatives for Private Instructors

In terms of the context of private music classes in China, western classical music is dominant. Take the violin class as an example, it is hard to find one out of the western classical music training system, primarily based on the one-to-one model. There is no doubt that one-to-one class is an effective way to improve students' playing technique and performance under specific instruction. At the same time, it embodies implications of isolation from cultural, psychosocial and pedagogical perspectives (Burwell, Carey, & Bennett, 2019). Western classical music's dominance could prevent students from accessing diverse musical cultures, restrain teachers' perception of education and pedagogy. However, students and teachers need to think out of the box and break stereotypes of what music education should be.

DeVito, Telles and Hidalgo (2020) bring some inspiring ideas of culturally responsive education that "constitutes progression of student musical preference and engagement in the home, community, school, and onward through live international cultural exchanges" (p. 5). Every participant learns not only music but also different culture from others through an online community where musicians, teachers and students participate without hierarchical status. Everyone could share their music preference and lead to discussion. Drawing on this idea, I wonder whether private instructors can facilitate a program providing a more inclusive platform to access to more cultures, and empower more participants to send their voices. A possible model of studio class is combining private instruction and group class. Private classes could meet schools and individual's learning needs, also tender teachers develop better relationships with students. Online group classes break distance limits gathering students to a community and having dialogues with others. Instead of representing in traditional studio classes, peer-learning and group work will be the main approaches to make music- teachers as facilitators rather than instructors. Consequently, participants need to learn how to collaborate, listen to each other and reflect themselves.

Conclusively, to create an inclusive class, teachers should actively engage in the teaching and learning process with reflective thinking, create more space for dialogue and embrace more changes. It may be easier to follow teaching inertia and reproduce knowledge, but it excludes more students due to ignore their needs and voices. Take risks and challenge stereotypes to studio classes, teachers should start changing from tiny things.

Reference

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