

# Evidence Brief

## Five Promising Practices for Music Education Programs to Impact Social & Emotional Learning

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### How Did We Compile This Evidence?

We searched YouthREX's online Knowledge Hub, Google Scholar, and Google using the following key terms: "music", "programs", "education", "marginalized", "racialized", and "youth".

### Summary of Evidence

#### A) Benefits of Music Education for Marginalized Youth

There are few studies that examine the impacts of music programming on racialized youth; however, some studies address the experiences of marginalized youth, many of whom are racialized.

Youth who participate in music education programs in disadvantaged schools and neighbourhoods report improvements across **the five Cs of Positive Youth Development**, a framework that focuses on youth's strengths and the supports they need (Barrett & Bond, 2015; Hospital et al., 2018; Travis et al., 2019):

- Competence (social and academic)
- Confidence (a sense of self-efficacy and positive self-worth)
- Connection (positive bonds with people and places)
- Character (respect for societal and cultural rules, integrity, and a sense of right and wrong)
- Caring (a sense of sympathy and empathy for others)

There is some evidence that music programming contributes to improvements in **communication, collaboration, and leadership skills** (Barrett & Bond, 2015). Participation in music education programs has also been linked to **improved health and wellbeing outcomes**, including reduced anxiety and depression (Cain et al., 2016; Travis et al., 2019).

#### B) Five Promising Practices to Impact Social & Emotional Learning

##### 1. Integrate culturally-relevant approaches to teaching.

Evidence suggests that culturally-relevant pedagogy is critical to the success of music programs for marginalized youth (Cain et al., 2016). A culturally-diverse repertoire can **affirm students' cultural identities and expand their musical horizons** (Shaw, 2016), as well as **foster long-term engagement with music** (Krause & Davidson, 2018).

Music educators should go beyond traditional Western repertoires to teach a wide range of genres, incorporating different notational practices and instruments. Make sure to place all music in a sociocultural and sociohistorical context, including Western music, as presenting classical music without context naturalizes it (Hess, 2018b). Consider consulting culture bearers in order to make connections between musical and lived experience (Shaw, 2016). Some music educators work to disrupt Whiteness in the classroom by centering music with marginalized roots and bringing in discussions of oppression and racism (Hess, 2018b).

## **2. Foster a student-centered environment.**

Programs that are responsive to young people's needs may **encourage participation and lead to improved health and wellbeing outcomes** (Cain et al., 2016). Effective programs focus on student motivation and engagement rather than simple curriculum delivery (Krause & Davidson, 2018); they acknowledge students' expertise and embrace their interests to create engaging and relevant pedagogy.

Educators should recognize the cultural capital that grows out of students' unique sociocultural landscapes, and incorporate genres that resonate with their lived experiences (USC Thornton School of Music, 2019). For example, some programs have effectively incorporated hip-hop into pedagogy in order to promote student engagement, raise consciousness, and make school more meaningful (Gosine & Tabi, 2016; Travis et al., 2019).

## **3. Include group activities.**

Group learning opportunities, such as ensembles or group classes, promote natural mentorship, foster collaboration skills, and build community (Crooke & McFerran, 2014; YouthREX, 2019). Evidence shows that orchestral and community-focused music education **contributes to positive youth development outcomes** (Hospital et al., 2018). These programs involve peer mentoring, high levels of shared responsibility, and social cohesion among the orchestra (Hospital et al., 2018).

Organizations should try to make space for informal peer mentoring in music programming. For example, the Buffalo String Works Practice Club functions as an informal space in which youth can come together to work on their musical skills in a collaborative setting (YouthREX, 2019). Similarly, Ottawa-based OrKidstra schedules classes with some overlap in order to encourage students at different skill levels to play together and learn from each other (YouthREX, 2019).

## **4. Make space for creative self-expression.**

Some evidence suggests that making space for creative self-expression in music programs is key to improving wellbeing (Cain et al., 2016). Creating a musical product can **create a sense of**

**ownership and promote feelings of self-efficacy** (Crooke & McFerran, 2014). Organizations should consider incorporating music-making activities that allow young people to reflect on their experiences and create powerful, empowering counternarratives through songwriting (Cain et al., 2016; Hess, 2018a).

## **5. Recognize the value of the musician-teacher.**

One of the factors that contribute to the success of music programs is young people's respect for educators, especially in regard to their training, dedication, and connections with the music community (Cain et al., 2016). **Ideal music educators are both talented musicians and inspirational teachers.** They can act as positive role models for youth by modelling musical as well as social and emotional skills (Barrett & Bond, 2015).

Effective musician-teachers draw on their personal experiences as musicians to engage with young people's interests; for example, by sharing their knowledge about what it takes to plan a concert, collaborate with other musicians, deal with the business side of music, or produce a home recording. When hiring and training musician-teachers, organizations should ensure that educators understand the community-building aspect of teaching music (YouthREX, 2019).

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