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Relating to the 'Musical Homes' of my Diverse Music Theory Students: An Autoethnography

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Abstract

As a Western classically trained music theory lecturer teaching students from different African cultures and backgrounds, I often struggle to relate to my students on a musical level as I experience that our 'musical homes,' as described by Odendaal (2021), are different. In this article I adopted an autoethnographic research approach by drawing on my journey and story as a music theory lecturer. The research question guiding this research was: How can reflection on my music theory teaching journey help me to relate better to the musical homes of my diverse students? The findings indicated that creative work and cooperative learning were useful in relating to the musical homes of my students and also helped the students to satisfy the three psychological needs for intrinsic motivation – competence, autonomy and relatedness

– as addressed in self-determination theory (SDT) and lead the way to academic success.

Introduction

In this autoethnography, I describe my journey and experiences as a Western classically trained musician teaching music theory at university level in South Africa. The study was inspired by my struggle to relate to the musical homes of my music theory students as I experience our musical homes (Odendaal, 2021) as being different. According to Westerlund (2019), music teachers in the 21st century are expected to make music in many diverse styles and, according to Odendaal (2021), this creates a point of tension for music teachers between what they regard as their musical "home" (p. 93) and other types of music they encounter that may be more foreign to them. In his chapter in the book *Ritualised Belonging* (Chapter 5), Odendaal (2021) defines the concept of a musical "home" as representing the way that "a person or a group can have music that belongs to them and which they in a sense also belong to, music that is repeatedly returned to for a sense of safety, belonging or orientation" (p. 98). My musical home, where I feel secure, is Western classical piano and orchestral music, but that is not necessarily the home of my music theory students. The problem becomes more complicated as the students in my class are from a different generation than I am and speak a range of languages (Xhosa, Zulu, Tswana, Sotho, English and Afrikaans) and thus, from my experience in class, have many different musical homes (for example, opera music, popular music, rap music, more traditional African music). Their diverse musical homes pose a unique challenge as I seek to understand and affirm the musical preferences of all the different students in my class. I felt that if I could understand and affirm their musical preferences, this would give the students a more positive experience in the music theory class, which would in turn improve their motivation.

Autoethnographic investigations into the lives and training of musicians in South Africa have been undertaken, for example, in the studies conducted by Holtzman (2020), C. Lewis (2022) and F. A. Lewis (2019). Holtzman (2023) and Lewis (2019) delve into their personal narratives and experiences as black or coloured music students within academic music departments in South Africa. In contrast, Lewis's (2022) autoethnography centres on her piano training and the process of rehabilitating her technique following post-traumatic stress. These autoethnographies provide an intimate perspective, detailing the authors' personal life experiences, with a specific focus on their journeys as students rather than highlighting their roles as educators.

Two autoethnographies undertaken in Singapore focus on music theory teaching. Costes-Onishi (2013) writes an autoethnography on the pedagogical issues and challenges related to

'A' levels (a Western grading system) in a non-Western music curriculum. Chong (2013) examines his experiences in revamping music theory for the 21st-century music teacher in Singapore.

In a South African context, three autoethnographies on music teaching were published in the book *Ritualised belonging: Musicing and spirituality in the South African context* (Boyce-Tillman et al., 2021). Two autoethnographies centred on piano teaching (Drummond, 2021; Weyer, 2021), while the third revolves around Meyer's (2021) experiences as a community musician at two primary schools. No autoethnographies that I am aware of were written on teaching music theory in a South African context.

This study could be of interest to other music theory teachers or students who must teach music theory to a diverse range of students. Hence, the question guiding this research was: How can reflection on my music theory teaching journey help me to relate better to the musical homes of my diverse students? The purpose of this autoethnography was to reflect on my music theory teaching journey to help me better understand and relate to the musical homes of my diverse theory classrooms.

Research Design and Approach

In this study I employed a qualitative research design, which prioritized detailed descriptions and interpretations (Creswell, 2013). As Hennink et al. (2015) suggest, qualitative research enables the exploration of issues through the lens of study participants, helping to grasp the meaning and interpretations they attribute to their behaviours. In this study, I served as the primary participant, using an autoethnographic approach to gain insight into my perspective and experiences on my teaching journey, particularly in my attempts to relate to the musical homes of my diverse group of students.

According to Chang (2008), autoethnography combines cultural analysis and interpretation with personal narrative details and reflection. In this article I combine my own story as a Western classically trained musician and my journey towards becoming a music theory teacher with my struggle to relate to my students who come from a variety of different cultures.

I followed an analytical autoethnographic approach, as outlined by Anderson (2006). Analytic autoethnographers aim to develop theoretical explanations for social phenomena (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008). Anderson (2006) identifies five key features of this approach: (a) Being a complete member researcher; (b) Practising analytical reflexivity; (c) Incorporating the narrative visibility of the researcher's self; (d) Engaging in dialogue with informants beyond oneself; and (e) Demonstrating a commitment to theoretical analysis. These features are also

evident in my study, where I actively participate as a complete member researcher, reflecting on my own teaching experiences. I weave my narrative through personal memory data and incorporate the voices of my students through their lecture evaluations and my observations of their work. Additionally, I analysed the data to identify codes and themes, employing self-determination theory to structure these themes, thereby conducting a theoretical analysis.

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a macro theory of human motivation, emotion, and development, and since it is interested in factors that facilitate growth in people, it is of great importance in education (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). In most SDT research, factors that facilitate well-being and self-motivation in social environments have been examined (Ryan & Deci, 2002). The three psychological needs, that are important in SDT are autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and these needs provide the basis for integrated and vital human functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2002).

I worked with the data analysis concept of abduction (Kennedy, 2018). In qualitative research, abduction can be used to examine how the data support existing theories (Thornberg, 2012), in this case specifically, self-determination theory. The significance of self-determination theory was thus not predetermined in the research, but started emerging as soon as I started analysing the data.

I employed a variety of data collection methods in my study. Firstly, I gathered personal memory data following the approach outlined by Chang (2008). This included constructing an autobiographical timeline and reflecting on influential mentors in my training and teaching career. Secondly, I collected external data through video recordings of practical activities and improvisations in my classes, as well as textual artefacts, as suggested by Muncey (2005). The textual artefacts included official documents such as lecture evaluations, conducted anonymously by students, and a teaching portfolio submitted for a university teaching award. It's worth noting that, as per Chang (2008), official documents authored by oneself are considered valuable autoethnographic data. Additionally, I maintained a self-reflective journal, as recommended by Chang (2008), which documented my thoughts and observations related to my teaching practices and the recorded class sessions.

I then analysed these data by using ATLAS.ti 23 and generated emerging and recurring themes from my personal story and my teaching journey. In autoethnographic data analysis and interpretation, it is inevitable that your focus of attention shifts between your own experiences and those of others (Chang, 2008), as both the personal and the social contexts are relevant. In my analysis I consequently divided my findings into aspects involving my teaching journey, on the one hand, and the information I gained from the students' lecture evaluations and the videos of their practical work, on the other.

Colyar (2013) claims that in autoethnographies we find expressive writing, analytical writing and abstract theorizing. Tullis (2013) agrees with this and sees autoethnographic research as undertaken along a continuum that ranges from the evocative to the analytical. In this article, I follow an analytical approach to autoethnography and include expressive writing in my own story. I combine my expressive writing with an in-depth analysis of the emerging themes and with theorizing about the implications of the findings.

As far as the ethical issues are concerned, Chang (2008) states that in autoethnographic research it is much more difficult to protect the privacy of others in your research, as your own identity is already disclosed. In my article, I talk about my students in general and do not mention any names, identities, or module codes. The videos were used only for my reflections, and it is these reflections, and not the videos, that are used in the article.

Becoming a Music Theory Teacher: My Teaching Journey

> *I could not believe what I was seeing! I could see the faces of my students light up and I saw smiles all around me. I could hear the stomping of their feet on the correct beats and clapping the correct rhythms. I was amazed and discouraged at the same time as these were my students but with a guest lecturer teaching Dalcroze Eurhythmics. I was doubting myself as a teacher as these students never seemed to enjoy my classes and could not grasp the rhythms I was trying to explain to them. I always thought I was a good teacher, but that day I doubted my ability and everything I did as a teacher. I just knew that I did not want to feel this insecure with my teaching again. I wanted my students to smile and laugh when I was teaching them. I decided that I would have to start thinking differently about my teaching. I would always have to strive to better myself as a teacher and find ways to connect with my students so that they can experience joy in my classes.*

I had this experience when I was working at the North-West University and taught general music to education students. Some of these students had no music background, which was a new experience for me as I had taught advanced music theory and piano as an extracurricular activity at a music centre before. This new experience was very challenging for me. I consulted with some of my colleagues and previous music lecturers, and it was at this point that I was introduced to Dalcroze Eurhythmics. A Dalcroze exchange student gave guest lectures in some of my classes, while I observed. This was a pivotal moment in my teaching career, as it seemed like a revelation for my students. They grasped certain concepts more readily. Witnessing this, I was inspired to delve deeper into the Dalcroze approach, recognizing its potential for enhancing my teaching approach.

My teaching approach did not develop overnight and over the years many different aspects have informed my teaching philosophy. When I first started teaching music theory, I mostly applied a teacher-centred approach (Raiber & Teachout, 2014), which puts the teacher in a leadership role and at the centre of the teaching process. When I started working at the North-West University, this approach was no longer working for me and that was when I was introduced to Dalcroze Eurhythmics, which has a more student-centred philosophy (Raiber & Teachout, 2014) as a basis. Student-centred (or learner-centred) philosophies encourage teachers to approach instruction from the student's perspective and are focused on meeting the student's needs.

Juntunen (2004) defines Dalcroze Eurhythmics as a "practical example of how to ground music teaching in embodied experiences" (p. 17). Students must experience the music and the concepts in their bodies and apply them practically before they learn their theoretical meaning. Students are also more actively involved in this approach and thus active learning became important in my teaching approach. I also feel it is important that students should experience the music aurally and through movement. They should immediately apply what they are learning before they learn the theory behind it. Therefore, I also base my teaching strategy on experience-based learning.

> *I felt immense joy seeing the smiles on the faces of my students. I felt so proud to think that this was in my class. The noise was overwhelming as they were singing, stomping their feet and playing drums and other percussion instruments. I was scared that we might disturb some of the other lectures, but on the other hand, I felt like this was why I was teaching. To see the enjoyment on their faces. I felt so energized. I just wanted to film them, so that I could capture this moment and this memory forever. I realised that it was not my teaching that generated this enjoyment, but rather the cooperation and creativity in the activity that I facilitated. For me, it didn't matter. I was happy and my students were happy, and they were producing the most wonderful improvisations, which meant that they understood the concepts on a practical level. I felt like I wanted to have this experience in every class.*

I had this experience with my music theory students at the School of Music, where I am currently teaching. I enjoy teaching these students immensely and since I was so inspired by teaching them, I thought that I would love to relate to them more in a musical context. I wanted to use their preferred music more often in class. I asked the students to bring me their favourite music so that I could use it in class. This, however, posed a challenge. Many students wrote down classical music or operatic arias as their preferred musical styles. I used some of these examples, but it was not really what I expected. Some students gave me names of rap songs or R&B songs which I had never heard before. Since I was so unfamiliar with

these songs, I struggled to incorporate them into my classes to strengthen the theory concepts we were practising. This made me realise that the musical preferences in my class were very diverse and it would be difficult for me to understand the students' musical homes as they were different for each student.

> *The students were singing and improvising. I always enjoy their improvisations so immensely! I was listening to the drumming pattern they performed with their vocal improvisation and watching their movements and dancing. They were having so much fun and then it struck me that they were performing in their own style. I realised then that they do get to experience their musical preferences in my class through their improvisations. I just had to give them even more freedom to do this and to improvise in their preferred styles.*

I had this experience in class when the students had to do their own improvisation on a melody in which they had to add non-chordal notes (which was the music theory concept we addressed that day). As I was sitting there and listening to their improvisations, I realised that they were taking the Western theory concepts I was teaching them and overlaying these concepts with their own unique styles in these improvisations and creative activities. I felt as if I had discovered a possible answer to my problem of relating more to the students and started exploring this aspect even more in my classes.

Improvisation is important in the Dalcroze approach. In my classes, I link improvisation with composing in music theory. I incorporate many creative activities in which they should create their own rhythms and their own melodies, and then the students perform them for each other during class. They can also make their performances more interesting by adding percussion instruments or second voices. The students have the freedom in these activities to do whatever they want and apply the concepts we learned in their own context and their own style.

Cooperative learning is another aspect I started applying in my teaching as it also plays an important role in a social constructivist approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This type of learning is described as a social process (Wiggins, 2016) and according to Wiggins (2016) "people engage in learning while interacting with other people and their ideas" (p. 51). Cooperative learning is very prominent in Dalcroze Eurhythmics and Jaques-Dalcroze intended to develop a sense of self and also a sense of sociability in his exercises; therefore, students work alone, in pairs and in groups in Dalcroze exercises (Habron, 2014; Nivbrant Wedin, 2015). These improvisations and creative work in my classes are always done in groups.

Reflections on the Findings

Four themes emerged from my analysis of the data. These themes were: fostering competence, autonomy of learners (creative work), relatedness (cooperation), and enjoyment. When I started analysing the data, I realised that many aspects of the data pointed to self-determination theory (SDT) as developed and described by Ryan and Deci (2002). I therefore organised my themes according to the three concepts that are important in SDT, namely competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2002). But I added enjoyment, which also emerged strongly in my data. The creative work led to the autonomy of the learners and the cooperative learning process improved the quality of relatedness among the students. I also felt that the creative work and cooperative learning helped me to relate to the musical homes of my students better. These two aspects are thus integral in SDT.

The three psychological needs that form part of SDT provide the basis for integrated and vital human functioning. Meeting these needs also leads to the creation of social environments that can support healthy functioning and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2002). In the next section, my themes will be discussed and reflected on in light of SDT.

Theme 1: Fostering Competence - "I am Confident in my Music Learning Experience"

According to Ryan and Deci (2002), competence is not an "attained skill or capability, but rather a felt sense of confidence" (p. 7). Competence is when you feel effective in the interactions in your social environment and competence leads people to seek challenges to maintain and enhance their skills (Ryan & Deci, 2002). This aspect is very important in my music theory courses as music theory is a skill you must master. So, it is crucial that the students feel motivated to maintain and enhance their skills to feel competent.

Through the student feedback, my reflections and the analysis of the videos, the theme of fostering competence emerged. In the lecture evaluations done by the students, many comments were made that the classes helped them understand the work better and that the explanations were clear. One student commented: "It is done in a way that is easy to understand." The students also indicated that they felt comfortable asking questions: "I did not have any problem with asking a question when I don't understand something." If the students understand the work and feel comfortable asking questions in class, it will certainly boost their confidence and give them a feeling of competence as one student indicated: "I am confident in my music learning experience and I believe I will become a skilled musician in the future."

Through my reflections and analysis of the videos of the students' improvisations, feeling confident and fostering competence emerged. The students exhibited confidence in their

performances, actively encouraging and cheering each other on. They demonstrated this confidence not only through their musical performances but also through dancing and singing. An interesting indicator of their confidence was their request for me to share these videos with them via WhatsApp after class, expressing their desire to share their work with friends. This eagerness to share suggests a strong sense of confidence in their abilities and the quality of their performances.

The student's confidence in their work can significantly enhance their sense of competence. As Niemiec and Ryan (2009) point out, fostering students' competence in a classroom setting involves introducing appropriately challenging activities that enable them to expand their capabilities. Importantly, students will engage in activities they can comprehend and master, as highlighted by Niemiec and Ryan (2009). This understanding and mastery became evident through both student feedback and my observations, indicating that they grasped the content and achieved the desired outcomes in practical activities and improvisations. Notably, in these improvisations, the students had the freedom to choose the musical style of their improvisations, providing them with a greater sense of autonomy, which leads to the next emerging theme.

Theme 2: Autonomy of Learners - "I Enjoyed the Songs we had to Make for Ourselves"

Autonomy refers to "being the perceived origin of one's own behaviour" (Ryan & Deci, 2002 p. 8). Autonomous individuals experience their behaviour as an expression of the self, and they act on the basis of their own interest, even if the actions are requested from outside sources (Ryan & Deci, 2002). According to Niemiec and Ryan (2009), students' autonomy can be supported by giving them a voice and choice in the academic activities in which they are engaged and by the lecturer providing a rationale for why the learning activities are useful. Teaching that supports autonomy is also associated with positive outcomes in the classroom (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). I decided to experiment and allow them to do activities in class in which they could improvise in their style and have a voice. This worked out well and in my own data analysis an appreciation of autonomy in developing their skills was especially evident in the creative and practical work of the students.

Observations of the creative work and improvisations of the students in the videos made it clear that the student's voices and styles were given expression. This was evident in three ways: (a) Their use of cross-rhythms, syncopated rhythms, and irregular metric patterns; (b) Their body movements; and (c) Choosing solfège.

The use of cross-rhythms, syncopated rhythms and irregular metric patterns was very strong in the student's improvisations and was identified in 29 instances in the analysis of the videos. Some interesting aspects that emerged were the use of the 3+3+2 rhythms, while the melody

was sung in 4/4 time. This happened in a few examples where the melody was in 4/4 time, but the rhythmic improvisation was sub-divided differently. There was also an improvisation in 7-time where a 2+2+3 rhythm was used and in 5-time where a 2+3 rhythmic pattern was used. In one improvisation the students alternated between 4/4 time and 12/8 time. In these improvisations many syncopated rhythms were present and different instruments were playing different rhythmic patterns, which created interesting cross-rhythms. There was also an improvisation in which the 3+3+2+2 rhythm was created and used as the basis for improvisation. Students were given the freedom in these activities to create and apply the knowledge we covered in different study units, and to apply it in whichever way they wanted to. According to McConnachie (2012), African music is rich in rhythmic vitality and the two-against-three beat is very common. This rhythmic vitality and combination of two against three beats was present in the improvisations done by the students, which were thus very true reflections of their own musical styles.

Another component that was noted in many videos (22 instances) was the use of body movements. Movement was never part of the formal instruction for creative work. Usually, the instructions were to create a melody, rhythm or harmony through singing and then adding accompaniment or percussion to make it more interesting, but in so many instances the students added movement of their own accord. This is another aspect of how they expressed themselves and their preferences in the musical performance. In one exercise the students were conveying the change in rhythm very clearly through steps in their feet, while in another improvisation I noted: “In the end, they go on to a full improvised dance and rhythmic improvisation, while dancing around each other.” There was even one instance where I noted that it was not only the group performing that was dancing, but the rest of the class was dancing and cheering with them. Since body movement was not stipulated as part of any activity, this was a clear example of how they infused their own preferences into these performances and were thus autonomous agents in expressing themselves.

The last aspect in which autonomy was evident was the use of solfège in various activities, even though this was not explicitly prescribed in the guidelines for the different improvisation exercises. I observed 14 instances where students engaged in singing and vocal improvisations using solfège. Interestingly, in some cases, they improvised three distinct voices using solfège. However, when I presented them with a single melodic line in Western notation, they experienced difficulties performing it correctly.

This observation led me to a significant realization: for my students, solfège and Western notation were not necessarily interconnected. In response to this, I aimed to integrate solfège and Western notation in my teaching approach, allowing them to recognize and work with

both systems. It became apparent that in many instances, students preferred improvising using solfège, further indicating their autonomy in selecting their preferred method of expression.

According to Niemiec and Ryan (2009), strategies for enhancing autonomy in teaching situations entail giving your students the freedom to choose and to minimize pressure and control from you. Through these creative activities in my classes, the students were given the choice and freedom to improvise and create in a style that they felt comfortable with. I have to note that this style was not always in an African idiom (my assumption in the beginning was that it would be), but sometimes in the style of popular music and even Western classical music. I still felt that this was their own choice and it was interesting for me to witness the different styles emerging. They were also not expected to notate these improvisations, which enhanced their freedom of expression and minimized pressure during class. Another aspect that minimized pressure was that these activities and improvisations were always done in groups. This leads to the third theme that emerged from the analysis, relatedness.

Theme 3: Relatedness – "I Really Like that we get to Work in Groups"

In addition to autonomy and competence, relatedness plays a crucial role in the process of internalization, as highlighted by Niemiec and Ryan (2009). Relatedness, as defined by Ryan and Deci (2002), refers to the sense of being "connected to others" (p. 7) and experiencing "a sense of belonging with other individuals" (p. 7) and within the community. In an educational context, students' sense of relatedness is also associated with the perception that teachers like, respect and value them, as noted by Niemiec and Ryan (2009). Therefore, it is essential for students to feel a sense of belonging and to relate to their community or classmates, as well as experiencing respect and appreciation from their teacher.

In the collected data two levels of relatedness became evident from my perspective. Firstly, there was my own internal struggle to relate to my students' musical homes and establish a positive rapport. Secondly, relatedness among the students themselves emerged through the utilization of cooperative learning approaches during practical activities and improvisations in class.

Over the years I tried different strategies to relate constructively to my students. One year I asked them to write down their favourite musical piece. This was done in the hope that I could use these pieces as examples in class. Many students wrote down classical opera pieces as their favourite pieces and some popular music pieces. This made me realise that the kind of music my students are listening to is highly diverse and different for every student. I also asked them to bring their own musical examples of the concepts we were busy with, but I received only one example of a Western classical piece the student was performing that semester.

I started reading up on the teaching of African music and started incorporating African scales and different African forms and pieces into the unit on music analysis. But I did not get the sense that I was relating to the students through this, as I still think I did not fully understand their musical home. What was interesting for me through this journey was that my assumption of what I thought the students listened to (indigenous African music) was wrong. I tried to incorporate more indigenous African music into my classes, but this was a misguided assumption as that was not always the music the students were relating to. This made me realise that it will always be a struggle for me to understand the musical homes of my students, as they were so diverse and did not correspond to my assumptions. So instead of trying to get into their musical worlds myself, I decided to just allow them to do activities in class in which they can improvise in their own diverse styles. I could then relate to their musical homes through these activities, without trying to get into their musical homes myself.

My efforts were noticed by the students and in the lecture evaluation some positive comments were made about relatedness. One student wrote: "I really enjoyed the way she taught … it is such a wonderful way of teaching and relating to your students." Another student described me as approachable. So even though I was trying to relate with my students on a musical level, we did also relate on a personal level. According to Niemiec and Ryan (2009), strategies for enhancing relatedness in the classroom entail conveying warmth, a caring attitude and respect for the students, and I think this aspect emerged in this theme.

The second level of relatedness was the one between the students themselves. This was promoted through incorporating group work into all the class improvisations and activities. I even started incorporating a group practical exam, which greatly reduced the stress levels of the students; all the students indicated in class that they preferred the group practical exams to the individual practical exams. One student also wrote in the lecture evaluation that they "really like that we get to work in groups," adding that "I have learned a lot from the others, and it creates a safe environment for me to learn and try new things."

The significance of this comment became very apparent in the analysis of the video material of the student's practical work. It was so wonderful to watch the interaction within the groups. In 29 instances I noted that the group participants were smiling and laughing together, that the group members were encouraging each other, and that the individuals in the group were interacting with each other. In many instances I noted that the class was cheering for the different groups and dancing to their classmates' improvisations. These interactions were all very positive and contributed to the students connecting with one another and thus experiencing a sense of belonging (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009); this would in turn promote the internalization of the study material.

Theme 4: Enjoyment – "The Classes were very Enjoyable"

Enjoyment is not listed in SDT as one of the needs to be fulfilled, but a great deal of writing on SDT mentions that enjoyment will emerge when students feel competent, have autonomy and experience relatedness in their classes. Ryan and Deci (2000) mention that people will be intrinsically motivated when the activities are interesting and enjoyable. Intrinsic motivation is a very important feature in SDT and is what one should strive for in any music teaching and learning situation. Black and Deci (2000) also found that students who reported higher levels of autonomy and confidence in their competence also reported higher levels of enjoyment of the course material. In my data enjoyment also emerged as a strong theme in both the lecture evaluations and analysis of the video material.

The students mostly enjoyed the classes, as could be seen in some of the comments from the lecture evaluation: "The classes were very enjoyable, organised and interesting," "Everything taught in this module is enjoyable," and "The practical, it was fun, and I learned many new things." In these comments, the students also link enjoyment with interesting work and learning new things. In the analysis of the video material enjoyment also emerged very strongly and was noted in 29 instances. As already mentioned, the students were smiling, laughing in their groups, dancing with each other, and cheering each other on in many of the activities. This behaviour points toward the level of enjoyment during the classes in which these creative activities were used.

Figure 1 indicates the relationship of my four themes. I placed enjoyment in the middle as I feel that enjoyment emerges when all three basic psychological needs defined in SDT are satisfied. Therefore, for me, cultivating enjoyment is central to my teaching and it emerged very strongly in these creative activities.

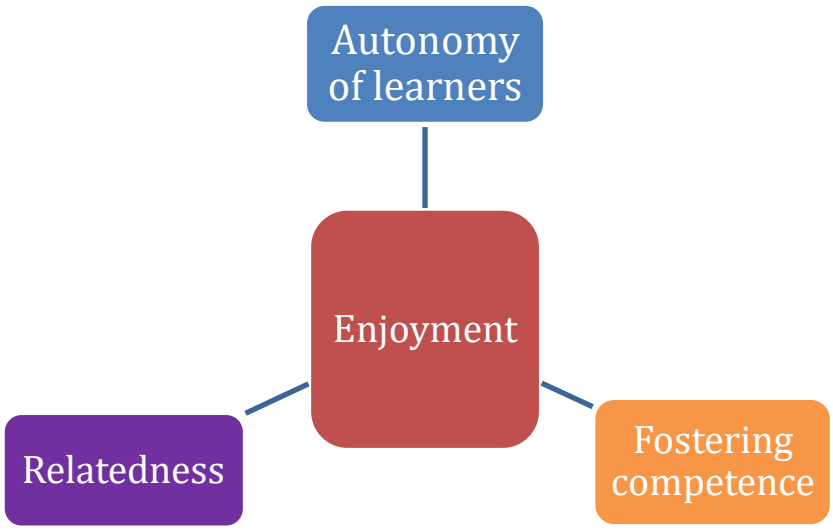

Figure 1. Emerging Themes from the Data Analysis

Limitations and Recommendations

In order to maintain a realistic perspective on music theory teaching in general it is necessary to acknowledge the limitations of my teaching approach, based on my reflections. While incorporating more creative elements into my classes helped me to relate better to the musical homes of my students, it didn't entirely resolve all issues related to understanding music theory. Some students still faced challenges with specific theoretical aspects like reading notes and rhythms, even though they excelled in practical work. They occasionally struggled to bridge the gap between practical experience and notation. In the future I intend to focus more on linking these practical aspects with the theoretical components of music theory.

Regarding self-determination theory (SDT), there were instances in the classes where competence was not consistently present. When we delved into more theoretical concepts on paper, some students didn't always feel competent, leading to visible confusion. Additionally, during practical activities, some students encountered difficulties in singing or creating rhythms, affecting their confidence levels. In the future I could consider placing these struggling students in groups with more skilled students. This might help them to feel more confident in their performances.

Concerning the creative work, not all improvisation activities yielded successful outcomes. However, these instances often produced laughter and enjoyment, with group members

assisting each other in dealing with challenging aspects. This collaborative atmosphere was a positive aspect of the creative work, even in less successful moments.

Conclusion

SDT helped me to make sense of the data that I gathered during the reflection of my teaching journey. Through reflection on my teaching journey, it became apparent that my (initially misguided) attempts to relate to my students' musical homes led me to the use of creative work and cooperative learning, which in turn ultimately satisfied the three psychological needs for generating motivation.

According to Niemiec and Ryan (2009), intrinsic motivation is important for positive academic outcomes in a classroom. In an education setting, however, intrinsic motivation does not occur naturally as external motivation and external prompts (having to pass the module and get good grades) are often what motivate students. Therefore, it becomes important to understand how to facilitate internalization in a classroom (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). SDT suggests that when students' need for autonomy, competence and relatedness is met in the classroom, their motivation is likely to become more internalized and they will become more engaged in their studies (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). The study by Jang et al. (2009) also found that the student's learning experience was more satisfying and academic achievement greater when the three psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness were satisfied. My data suggested that all three of these basic needs were satisfied in my classes and that the students experienced competence, autonomy and relatedness. This suggests that the students experience a stronger sense of intrinsic motivation, which will hopefully lead to greater academic success.

However, the question guiding this research was how reflection on my music theory teaching journey could help me to relate better to the musical homes of my diverse group of students. In my journey to address this question, I realised that my assumptions about their musical homes were wrong. I also realised that incorporating creative activities, free improvisations and cooperative learning in my classes helped me to relate and understand the musical homes of my students better. They were given the opportunity to apply the music-theoretical concepts we learned to their own contexts and perform their own creative improvisations and 'compositions.' According to Niemiec and Ryan (2009), the way that teachers introduce learning tasks also impacts students' satisfaction with the three basic psychological needs, thereby "allowing intrinsic motivation to flourish and deeper learning to occur" (p. 136).

I felt that these creative activities provided a musical home for my students in my classes in the sense that they could create music that 'belonged' to them and that made them feel 'safe' (Odendaal, 2021) in a musical context. In this sense, instead of relating to their musical homes

during classes, I created a context in which they could create in their own musical styles and thus feel safe and familiar in their own musical homes during classes. The wonderful thing about these creative activities was that they also led to more autonomous and competent students who could relate more effectively to each other and to me, and that they could foster intrinsic motivation, which is such an important dimension of academic success.

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