

Recent Study Indicates Teenagers' Strong Commitment to Music and Music Making

A recently published research study by Patricia Shehan Campbell, Ph.D., of the University of Washington, reveals the meaning and importance of music participation in the lives of middle and high school adolescents, including those enrolled and not enrolled in school music programs¹. The unique contribution of this study is that it is based on the opinions and beliefs of adolescents as they engage freely in the creative process of essay-writing.

Background and Methodology

The study, entitled "Adolescents' Expressed Meanings of Music in and out of School," was based on responses by 1,155 teens who submitted student essays to *Teen People* magazine as part of an online contest inviting teens to speak out to help prevent the further elimination of music programs in schools across the country.

After organizing the essays by age and gender, the written material was reviewed for themes and a coding frame was developed that included:

- Music-specific benefits, encompassing musical knowledge/skill
- Emotional benefits that span enjoyment, expression, emotional release and control, and coping
- Music's benefits to life-at-large, including the building of one's character and life skills
- Social benefits encompassing camaraderie, the acceptance of differences, and high morale at school and home
- Distraction from vices such as drugs, alcohol, smoking, gangs, sex and suicidal behaviors and
- Music in schools, including positive and negative impressions of the program, particular courses and course content, and teachers

Insight into the values and reasoned functions of music and music education led to a data-based discourse on the relevance of music in the lives of American adolescents enrolled in secondary schools.

Findings

Throughout their essays, students expressed their thoughts toward learning and playing music and revealed that they value music making as a central aspect of their identities.

¹ This research was funded by the NAMM Foundation as part of its *Sounds of Learning* initiative, a program devoted to studying the associated learning benefits of making music. Dr. Campbell conducted the study with Claire Connell of the University of Washington and Amy Beegle of Pacific Lutheran University. The findings were published in the Fall 2007 issue of the *Journal for Research in Music Education*.

The NAMM Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to advancing active participation in music making across the lifespan by supporting scientific research, philanthropic giving and public service programs from the international music products industry.

They see music as their "social glue," as a bridge for building acceptance and tolerance for people of different ages and cultural circumstances. Music provides teens' opportunities in school for engagement as performers, composers and intelligent listeners, activities and qualities that appear to be deeply meaningful to them. For teens who are desperately seeking relevance, music education may give them the balanced experience they require.

Additional findings include that teens:

- Associate playing music with music literacy, listening skills, motor ability, eye-hand coordination and heightened intellectual capabilities.
- Spoke with the experience of eight to 12 years of schooling in their young lives concerning music's place in school curriculum, the relationship of music to other subjects, the quality of instruction and their perceived need for change to develop more relevant courses and repertoires.
- Believe music helps adolescents release or control emotions and helps coping with difficult situations such as peer pressure, substance abuse, pressures of study and family, the dynamics of friendships and social life, and the pain of loss or abuse.
- Feel that playing music teaches self discipline.
- Believe that playing music diminishes boundaries between people of different ethnic backgrounds, age-groups and social interests.
- Indicate making music provides the freedom for teens to just be themselves; to be different; to be something they thought they could never be; to be comfortable and relaxed in school and elsewhere in their lives.
- Long for more variety and options for making music in school, including the expansion to instruments and technology used in popular music.
- Are committed to their instruments and their school ensembles because they love to be involved in these musical and social groups; 20% of the respondents specified instruments as part of their musical identities, whether or not they were engaged in school music education.
- Believe that music is an integral part of American life, and that music reflects American culture and society; there were 333 mentions of the skills that music education can provide access to, including the historical and cultural significance of music in civilizations and societies.
- Described their music teachers as encouraging, motivating and acting as both role models and friends that can be trusted for listening and giving advice.

For more information on this research, please contact: Mary Luehrsen, Director of Public Affairs & Government Relations, NAMM, the International Music Products Association, 5790 Armada Drive, Carlsbad, CA 92008 or e-mail MaryL@namm.org or call 914-933-0516.