

The Value and Implementation Countermeasures of Introducing Music Therapy into Primary and Secondary School Music Education Under the Guidance of Core Competencies

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Abstract: As an interdisciplinary field integrating psychology, medicine, and musicology, music therapy employs systematic interventions to improve individuals' psychological states and enhance emotional expression and social adaptability. Its core mechanism is to leverage music's nonverbal communicative nature to stimulate individuals' internal emotional resources within a safe, accepting environment, thereby achieving therapeutic goals such as emotion regulation, cognitive reconstruction, and behavioral improvement. These disciplinary characteristics give music therapy inherent potential to intervene in educational settings. Against the backdrop of deepening basic education curriculum reform, cultivating students' core competencies has become a central proposition of educational transformation, and primary and secondary school music education has been entrusted with richer educational expectations that transcend mere aesthetic experience. When the concepts and methodologies of music therapy are organically integrated into school music teaching, its inherent psychological support functions can precisely address the increasingly prominent demands for emotion management and the interpersonal dilemmas arising from adolescents' growth. It also provides a new practical path for implementing the core competencies of the music discipline. Based on this understanding, this paper elaborates on the connotation of music therapy, systematically demonstrates its educational value from three dimensions: students' psychological development, expansion of disciplinary functions, and cultivation of socially competent talents, analyzes the contemporary challenges confronting primary and secondary school music education, and finally puts forward four implementation countermeasures covering concept renewal, space construction, method integration, and faculty development. It aims to offer theoretical support and practical references for the in-depth integration of music education and psychological nurturing.

Keywords: Core competencies; Primary and secondary school music education; Music therapy; Mental health education

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1. Introduction

Contemporary adolescents live in an era overwhelmed by excessive information and fierce competition. The growing academic burden, complicated interpersonal relationships, and constant adjustment of self-perception have exposed a considerable number of primary and secondary school students to varying degrees of psychological distress. Relevant surveys reveal that the detection rates of emotional disorders, social anxiety, and attention deficit among adolescents have been rising year by year, which creates an urgent demand for corresponding responses from school education. Nevertheless, school mental health education has long relied heavily on traditional models such as psychological counseling and moral education guidance, which display obvious limitations in mobilizing students' emotional participation and breaking through verbal defense mechanisms. Working with sound as the medium and emotion as the core, music therapy effectively complements the aforesaid deficiencies. In terms of the essential nature of music education itself, it is inherently rich in emotional experience functions and interpersonal communication values, forming an in-depth logical consistency with the fundamental philosophy of music therapy ^[1].

2. Multiple values of integrating music therapy into primary and secondary school music education

2.1. Cultivating students' emotion regulation capacity through aesthetic experience

For individual students, the most direct benefit brought by the introduction of music therapy concepts resides in the cultivation of emotion regulation abilities. Music itself serves as a language of emotion; the ups and downs of melodies, the tension and relaxation of rhythms, and the depth and subtlety of harmonies all resonate profoundly with fluctuations in human emotions. When students project and release their emotions in musical activities, those ineffable inner feelings gain a safe and natural outlet. Frequently adopted music therapy techniques, including improvisational performance, rhythmic response, and songwriting, enable students to perceive their own emotional states in a threat-free setting and gradually master basic strategies for emotion regulation through the expression and externalization of music. Such an emotion-nurturing approach carried by aesthetic experience boasts greater internal persuasiveness than simple reasoning-based education, for music acts directly on human emotional centers, bypassing rational defense to reach the depths of the soul.

2.2. Expanding the functional boundaries of music education via interdisciplinary integration

From the perspective of the development of the music discipline itself, the introduction of music therapy injects new vitality into the expansion of music education functions. For a long time, primary and secondary school music education has been narrowed down to vocal skill training and music theory instruction to a certain extent, with its profound value of emotional nurturing insufficiently manifested. Curriculum reform guided by core competencies explicitly stresses the comprehensive development of students' aesthetic perception, artistic expression, and cultural understanding, offering policy-level support for music education to return to its authentic mission of humanistic care. The core philosophies upheld by music therapy, such as unconditional positive regard, a non-judgmental, accepting atmosphere, and participant-centered interaction modes, share inherent consistency with the student-centered educational spirit advocated by core competencies ^[2].

2.3. Fostering sound social personalities through artistic practice

From a broader social development perspective, integrating music therapy concepts into basic music education carries far-reaching significance: cultivating talents with sound personalities and abundant emotions for society. Contemporary society's demands for talents have long transcended mere knowledge reserves and skill proficiency; emotional competence, collaborative awareness, and psychological resilience have become core dimensions measuring comprehensive personal quality. Musical activities inherently feature social attributes. Collective musical forms such as ensemble and chorus require students to learn to listen to others, adjust themselves, and pursue unified harmony among voice parts—a process that constitutes substantive training in interpersonal communication skills. When music therapy concepts permeate these activities, teachers pay closer attention to each student's emotional experiences and interpersonal patterns during musical interactions and consciously help students diversify their social communication through role rotation, musical improvisational dialogue, and other activities ^[3].

3. The contemporary context for introducing music therapy into primary and secondary school music education

Basic education in China is undergoing a profound transformation from knowledge-oriented to competency-oriented schooling. The proposal of core competencies has redefined educational expectations for the music discipline. Aesthetic perception, artistic expression, and cultural understanding are no longer merely textual statements in curriculum standards but vital benchmarks for evaluating the quality of music education. This transformation urges music educators to re-examine the objectives and approaches of classroom teaching and explore more inclusive and developmental educational practices. However, social evolution never halts, and educational reform always responds to ever-changing contemporary issues. Currently, Chinese society is in a historical phase of rapid transformation and profound restructuring. Such macro-social changes inevitably exert influences on the field of basic education, bringing a series of unprecedented new contexts and challenges. Meanwhile, they render the topic of introducing music therapy into school music education more urgent in practical significance ^[4].

3.1. From the characteristics of student groups

The psychological profiles and growth environments of contemporary primary and secondary school students differ markedly from those of previous generations. The prevalence of digital media exposes children and adolescents to adult information streams at an early age. Their frame of reference for social comparison extends from surrounding peers to countless virtual figures online. The intertwining of virtual and real worlds complicates the construction of self-identity. Meanwhile, diversified family structures and shifting intergenerational relationships render the emotional support systems of some students more unstable. Students' psychological demands have become diversified and concealed. Conventional verbal counseling-based psychological support approaches reveal growing limitations when facing this generation of digital natives. As a non-verbal communication medium, music can bypass adolescents' psychological defenses and reach their inner emotions directly, granting it unique advantages in addressing the psychological needs of students in the new era.

3.2. From the perspective of disciplinary relationships

Curriculum reform guided by core competencies emphasizes horizontal interdisciplinary connections and

collaborative education, imposing broader educational expectations on music education that transcend narrow disciplinary boundaries. The music discipline is no longer solely tasked with delivering its own knowledge and skills; instead, it is required to play an irreplaceable role in broader fields, including aesthetic education, emotional education, and personality cultivation. Such expectations place higher demands on music teachers' disciplinary literacy, educational vision, and cross-field integration capabilities. How to achieve organic integration with other educational resources without weakening the internal logic of the music discipline has become a theoretical issue that music education research must tackle. As an interdisciplinary subject combining psychology and musicology, music therapy provides systematic intervention concepts and activity paradigms that serve as directly referential methodological resources for the functional expansion of music education.

3.3. From the orientation of educational values

Social evaluation criteria for basic education outcomes are undergoing a slow yet profound shift from enrollment-oriented to all-round development-oriented assessment. A growing number of educators and parents have realized that children's mental health and social-emotional competence have impacts on their long-term development no less significant than academic performance. Such shifts in values create a more tolerant social atmosphere for schools to carry out music education practices integrated with psychological support functions. At the same time, the deepening of educational equity concepts has rendered educational support for students with special needs an important indicator for measuring school operation quality. With its mature application system in special education, the popularization of music therapy in general school contexts bears social significance in responding to concerns over educational equity.

4. Implementation strategies for integrating music therapy into music education under the guidance of core competencies

4.1. Prioritizing concept renewal to establish consensus on integrated education

The integration of music therapy into primary and secondary school music education starts not with the introduction of technical methods, but with an in-depth renewal of educational concepts. For a long time, the music education community in primary and secondary schools has held superficial understandings of music therapy. Some teachers regard it as a professional activity exclusive to medical institutions or special education settings, irrelevant to general school music teaching; others worry that introducing therapeutic elements will divert music classrooms from their essential aesthetic education functions. Such cognitive biases urgently require clarification through systematic theoretical training and practical observation. When music therapy enters school contexts, it does not involve delivering clinical psychological treatment within music classes. Instead, it translates humanistic concepts embedded in therapeutic activities—active listening, emotional response, non-judgmental acceptance, to name a few—into basic attitudes and behavioral modes for teaching and learning. This transformed music therapy thinking centers on stimulating students' inherent musical potential and promoting every child's emotional participation and self-expression through music. Rather than deviating from music education's educational goals, it actively advances them.

4.2. Guaranteeing space construction to build a psychological field for safe expression

Much of music therapy's positive psychological effects stem from the safe, accepting, and non-judgmental activity atmosphere it provides. To support students' psychological development in regular music classrooms,

the primary prerequisite is constructing an equally secure psychological field within classroom environments. The creation of such a field requires coordinated efforts across three layers: physical space, interpersonal atmosphere, and institutional culture. Physically, the unified traditional seating layout of music classrooms can be replaced with semi-circular or group seating arrangements to ease students' tension. Percussion instruments and other musical media should be readily accessible to students, making musical expression a spontaneous behavior rather than a highly ritualized performance. Interpersonally, teachers ought to treat every student's musical expressions with sincerity and acceptance. Whether accurate and melodious singing or seemingly chaotic impromptu sounds deserve equal respect and response. Teachers' demonstrations in musical activities carry particular weight: when teachers themselves engage openly and wholeheartedly in improvisation or rhythmic interaction, students gain a sense of security to follow suit.

4.3. Centering method integration to design a progressive system of musical activities

The implementation of educational concepts ultimately relies on specific teaching methods and activity design.

In lower grades or initial practice stages, receptive musical experience activities can be prioritized. Teachers select musical works with clear emotional orientations and regular rhythms, guiding students to identify emotional tones of music during quiet listening and encouraging them to express inner feelings aroused by listening through verbal descriptions or painting. The core objective of this stage is to help students open channels for musical perception, establish initial awareness of connections between music and emotion, and cultivate students' concentration and inner calmness during listening activities. As students accumulate richer musical experience, recreational and improvisational musical activities can be gradually introduced. Rhythm chain games, body percussion dialogues, and simple melodic impromptu responses are effective approaches that balance fun and psychological value. In these activities, students not only mobilize musical perception and expressive capacities, but also experience listening, waiting, responding, and cooperation with others through musical interaction—substantive training in interpersonal communication. For senior students, more comprehensive, complex activities such as songwriting, lyric revision, and musical rhythm movement can be appropriately incorporated. When students attempt to weave life experiences and inner feelings into lyrics or collectively compose songs in groups, they undergo not merely a process of musical learning, but also an arrangement and expression of their own life experiences. Such in-depth emotional participation strongly facilitates students' self-awareness and meaning construction.

4.4. Rooting faculty development to cultivate teachers with professional literacy and humanistic sentiment

Concept renewal, space construction, and activity design all depend on teachers' concrete practice to translate into tangible educational outcomes. Therefore, faculty development constitutes the most fundamental guarantee for advancing the integrated practice of music therapy and music education. At present, pre-service training curricula for music education majors in higher normal universities barely cover basic knowledge of music therapy, and in-service music teachers mostly possess only conceptual-level understanding of this field. Such limitations in knowledge structure have become critical bottlenecks hindering integrated practices. Breaking this predicament requires coordinated efforts in both pre-service training and in-service professional development. For pre-service training, normal universities can add elective courses such as Introduction to Music Therapy and Fundamentals of Music Psychology to music education curricula, enabling prospective music

teachers to establish a basic cognitive framework linking music and psychology during their university studies. For in-service teachers' professional growth, flexible forms, including thematic training, workshops, and teaching salons, can be adopted to help teachers master core concepts and foundational music therapy skills applicable to classroom teaching within a short timeframe. Most importantly, such training should not merely transmit technical skills superficially; it should also focus on improving teachers' own emotional awareness and interpersonal communication literacy. The therapeutic relationship emphasized in music therapy essentially consists of sincere and profound human-to-human connection, and teachers' own emotional maturity and personal stability largely determine the quality and depth of integrated educational practice ^[5].

5. Conclusion

The integration of music therapy and primary and secondary school music education is neither a simple superposition of techniques nor an ambiguous blurring of disciplinary boundaries. Instead, it represents organic integration and functional expansion built on a thorough grasp of the inherent connections between the two disciplines. Its multi-dimensional and profound educational value manifests in aesthetic emotion cultivation, interpersonal interaction in musical activities, and all-round development within the framework of core competencies. Faced with new shifts in adolescents' mental health landscape and new expectations brought by core competency curriculum reform, music educators should adopt an open yet prudent attitude, transforming core concepts and methodological resources of music therapy into intrinsic components of music teaching. Only in this way can music classrooms evolve into fertile ground that fosters both students' aesthetic growth and psychological development.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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