

Optimization Strategies for Rural Junior High School Music Classrooms from the Perspective of Aesthetic Education

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Abstract: Rural music classes have been challenged to apply ideas about aesthetic education throughout their instruction for some time. This research discusses several of these issues. Firstly, teachers are unaware of the essence of aesthetic education. In addition, the teachers are reluctant to employ local folk music in their classes. Furthermore, the teaching methods used are very rigid. Lastly, the evaluation methods do not correspond to the goals of aesthetic education. To solve these problems, a number of measures should be implemented. The first thing is to orient all teaching on the concept of aesthetic experience and make it the basis of every lesson. The second measure is to introduce local songs and musical instruments into the curriculum. One more way to improve the teaching is to use real-life situations in teaching activities and use guiding questions. It is also necessary to implement a new evaluation system. These measures will provide aesthetic education. In reforming the class with the help of these measures, it is necessary to return to the essence of the concept of beauty.

Keywords: Aesthetic Education; Rural Junior High Schools; Music Classes; Aesthetic Experience; Optimization Strategies

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1.Introduction

Music education in rural middle schools has remained trapped in a kind of grey area for many years, where lofty ambitions for aesthetic education vie with harsh realities of exam-based education. The burden of exam stress leaves its imprint everywhere wherever kids have music classes. As a result of this struggle, nearly all music education devolves into either dry demonstrations of known songs or sheer theoretical lectures. At the same time, students are stripped off anything relevant to music as their cognitive perception becomes the only thing that matters. This is not how music education should be. In my view, the real problem lies in the structural incompatibility of aesthetic education on the one hand and exams on the other ^[1].

However, when we consider the music classroom from a true aesthetic viewpoint, the focus becomes different. It's not just about transmitting knowledge for its own sake anymore; instead, it becomes a place for the development of students' aesthetic abilities and the freedom for emotions to express themselves. In fact, there are many advantages of rural areas: their unique landscape and local festivities and music traditions. By using those resources in lesson plans, we can effortlessly solve the problems associated with poor instruments and facilities. Therefore, the paper strives to outline a strategic plan, which comprises four interconnected aspects: reformulating the aim of music education, refining the content taught, updating teaching techniques, and improving assessments.

2.The Essence of Aesthetic Education and Its Role in Rural Junior High School Music Classrooms

Aesthetic education and singing include more than just teaching how to perform musical instruments. The fundamental notion of aesthetic education is not just about teaching how to acquire certain abilities to handle music but about making a transformation in students' perception and emotions to make them aesthetic subjects. Based on Schiller's theory of aesthetic education, aesthetic education is defined as a mechanism through which an aesthetic experience overcomes a sensory reaction ^[2]. Aesthetic education starts with the very first sensible perception of sounds and moves on to aesthetic experience and feelings. As for the actual rural junior high schools, this rather

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general idea assumes a few rather specific forms. First, teachers can benefit from the glorious sounds of nature around them—be it birds singing, wind blowing, or water gurgling. Second, when they communicate local folk songs and musical traditions with the young ones, they keep local traditions in memory. Finally, through festive and ceremonial music, children develop a sense of belonging to their place of origin. What is essential here is that these regional practices bring forth an opportunity for students to get in touch with their cognitive capabilities—the essence of music comes to be understood beyond just being a subject of study, but rather as an opportunity to explore one's surroundings in both a perceptive and a creative manner ^[3].

3.Current Challenges in Rural Junior High School Music Classrooms

3.1 Misconceptions Regarding the Value of Aesthetic Education and Its Marginalization

A rural junior high school music class is positioned on the bottom rung of the educational hierarchy because of the limited mental frames used by school administrators and faculty to define aesthetic education. In a system that evaluates schools relying on entrance examination results, music is only viewed as a means of drill training or a way of reducing pressures from important school subjects, completely missing its role in building an individual's experiential perception and aesthetic identity. It has become common in certain schools to define music rooms as singing classes or listening lessons where the goal is limited to teaching students to sing a song or play a small fragment of a piece of music, failing to put into practice all necessary aspects of aesthetic education that involve emotional response and judgment. This ignorance at the level of cognitive perceptions leads to the violation of the teaching schedules and assignment of music teachers to different subjects ^[4].

3.2 Lack of Infrastructure and Underutilization of Local Resources

Music education at rural junior high schools is characterized by a great issue of hardware shortages, as barely any schools have music classrooms; the situation is even worse than in cases of classical musical instruments and music equipment, which proves problematic in practical teaching. Though almost all schools have at least a minimal number of electronic keyboards or specific devices for audio playback, the multimedia equipment is not used effectively in teaching, as no advanced hardware is available to them (audio and video editing software, multichannel audio recording devices, and highly equipped interactive music teaching instructors) and that they cannot carry out many necessary exercises and activities. Thus, for instance, music groups, polyphonic listening, and improvisation can hardly be done. Still, hardware issues are not the biggest problem; the real problem is the local resources that may be used but are not. For instance, the great musical culture of the region which includes numerous folk songs, local opera songs, songs of labor, and songs for rituals is rich in content and distinct in style, though it has never been used in the educational process. The resources mentioned are not only available but also embody the local cultural memories known to students and can be used as a great learning source. However, teachers do not know how to use them because they lack information on adapting these resources to the curriculum and guidance regarding the teaching techniques.

3.3 Monotonous Teaching Methods, Rigid Assessment, and Lack of Student Agency

Teaching music at rural junior high schools is mostly one-way communication and following basic molds, students will only have to listen and imitate. For example, a music appreciation lesson may consist of the same sets of procedures: play the piece and ask a couple of very basic questions. Teaching of songs follows the same strict script: teacher shows, students imitate, process stops here. What is more, activities that would actually involve students, such as improvisation, rhythm games or group work, are absent from the lessons. Evaluation practices only aggravate the issue. Usually one performance at the end of term and/or one theory test serve as an overall assessment, and any emotional response or collaborative effort expressed during lessons are not recorded or evaluated. Ultimately, the process of continuous passive learning leads students to reluctance to express themselves or to try to learn music by themselves. The classroom, hence, loses its power and energy ^[5].

3.4 Structural Discrepancy Between Aesthetic Education Goals and Assessment Standards

Aesthetic education seeks to cultivate pupils' open-minded approach to beauty and their determination to express feelings via music, stimulating their connection of music with personal experience and emotional state. Aesthetic education is about processes, which are subjective qualities that cannot be evaluated in an easy way with traditional standardized tests designed for objective evaluation of students. However, assessment practices have not changed, but instead are transferring old assessment models based on knowledge-based evaluation: for example, in order to understand how well students learned music, it is enough to check how well they perform in the final singing performance or in written music theory exam. Students' energy in the class, willingness to collaborate, and produce creative ideas are mostly overlooked, although they are very important for aesthetic development of students. It is evident that the methods of evaluation do not match the principles of aesthetic education. As a result, assessment, which is present in the classroom, leads the focus of the lesson towards those aspects of musical performance that are easy to evaluate [6].

4. Optimization Strategies for Music Classes in Rural Junior High Schools from the Perspective of Aesthetic Education

4.1 Establishing Classroom Objectives Centered on Aesthetic Experience

Rather than placing primary importance on technical skill acquisition or rote memorization, the focus should shift decisively toward providing genuine aesthetic experience. In the past, succeeding at the teaching objective meant judging students on their ability to either play a particular piece of music correctly or demonstrate competency in musical theory—measurable outcomes that, while convenient for assessment, often reduced music to a mere set of executable tasks. However, the deeper mission of awakening perceptual sensitivity, nurturing emotional resonance, and fostering personal meaning-making—which in fact constitute the core aim of aesthetic education—was conspicuously missing from the picture. After making aesthetic experience the primary focal point, each individual lesson takes on a fundamentally different perspective. We start caring about how our students personally perceive music, how they emotionally engage with specific works, and what subjective interpretations they construct—not merely whether they can sing a melody in tune or reproduce rhythmic patterns flawlessly. In formulating objectives, teachers need to explicitly include provisions for students to articulate their emotional responses, offer reasoned opinions about a piece's expressive character, and distinguish between contrasting musical elements such as timbre, dynamics, and texture. Additionally, the language of objective-setting must transform: instead of writing “students will master song X,” we should frame goals as “students will explore their felt reactions to song X” or “students will connect the music's mood to their own life experiences.” This shift from operational to experiential wording is not cosmetic—it fundamentally reshapes content selection, activity design, and teaching methodology from the very outset, ensuring that every classroom moment prioritizes the lived aesthetic encounter over mere performance output.

4.2 Constructing an Integrated Curriculum System Combining “Local Music” and Textbook Materials

The reconstruction of instructional material systems necessitates building real connections between the nationwide educational methodology and diverse local culture resources—the connections which extend beyond being simple overlays or exchanges of content. Textbook canonical texts form the aesthetic models and the knowledge links upon which the classes are built, whereby their normative musical language and stable artistic quality ensure high classroom quality. Yet textbook content alone, by virtue of its cultural distance, often fails to sufficiently evoke rural students' sense of familiarity and willingness to participate. Folk songs, operatic arias, and festive percussion traditions that survive in living form within the community precisely possess this evocative function, bearing a natural affinity with students' everyday auditory experience. When explaining the pentatonic scale, teachers might compare local mountain song melodies with textbook pieces; when conducting rhythm training, they might employ the rhythmic features of work songs as an entry point for perception—in both cases, abstract

theoretical concepts acquire concrete, perceptible auditory grounding. Taking the teaching of the textbook piece "When Will the Locust Flowers Bloom" as an illustration: after students gain an initial perception of the mountain song style of this piece, the teacher might immediately play a short passage of a comparable local folk song from the region and guide the class in comparing the differences in intervallic leaps and ornamentation between the two melodies ^[7]. The local accent helps students feel closer to the abstract idea of "mode." The textbook gains richness from local experiences. Local materials get structure from the textbook. Without the textbook, local materials could seem random or unorganized. When we choose materials, we consider representativeness, aesthetic quality, and practicality. A good balance makes local music useful in the classroom. It does two things. It wakes up students' aesthetic perception. It also connects to their daily lives. What students learn is not just separate knowledge. It becomes a meaningful web tied to their own life experiences.

4.3 Promoting Experiential, Contextual, and Inquiry-Based Classroom Instruction

Teaching methods should change, the usual call-and-response routine is not enough. Teachers should add hands-on activities, situational tasks, and exploratory work, and these activities should happen regularly in class. The focus should be more interaction, not one-way lecturing. Teachers can design sensory settings that match the music's sound and cultural background. For labor songs, teachers can rearrange the classroom, give students different roles, and make them feel like they are working together on a real job. Students experience the music physically, moving their bodies, responding to one another, and all this occurs before any formal explanation. The setting of exploratory tasks will deepen the experience on this basis. Teachers can ask open-ended questions about the same work and ask students to discuss in groups based on their physical experiences, attempting to provide explanations from the perspectives of music organization and social function. Taking the classroom of "Chuanjiang Chuanfu Haozi" as an example, students are divided into groups to simulate the stretching movement and cooperate with the teacher to clap and superimpose the voice parts. They will naturally feel that "one leader, many people, and harmony" is not simply a singing form, but a direct projection of labor cooperation at the sound level. In the next discussion session, the students determine the causal relationship between the location of stress and the pace of labor based on their own experience and put scattered intuitive feelings into the structure of a preliminary analysis. The design of the situation gives students the opportunity to perceive while doing experiential work provides them with an opportunity to experience aesthetic stimulation and tasks direct their sensations towards cognitive comprehension ^[8].

4.4 Establishing an Aesthetic Education Assessment System That Combines Process-Based and Performance-Based Evaluation

Assessment reform does not merely refer to changing the methods of final exams; it also needs to be applied to everyday aspects of classroom education so that the assessment is a constant part of the process, not something that teachers do at the end. For instance, teachers may keep brief observation notes for every single lesson, noting how actively the students engage with the lesson, how well they communicate with each other, as well as any creative ideas that come up during singing or group activities. As time goes by, such records help to provide a more solid basis for evaluation of students' progress. Besides, there is also assessment based on performance, which has an objective that traditional paper tests fail to achieve in the context of aesthetic education. Different activities, such as improvisation performances, local song performances, or descriptions of musical impressions will require students to show their knowledge and skills through practical actions instead of words only. The daily records provide teachers with data that shows development trends, while performance assessment shows one-time results. If we look at it from this point of view, the assessment is changed from an external instrument which is mostly used for selection and classification into an embedded procedure used to deepen the process of learning and adjust the process of teaching. This ultimately gives a tangible content to aesthetic education objectives and allows them to become more than just abstract ideas ^[9].

5.Conclusion

The transformation of music classrooms in rural junior secondary schools on the basis of aesthetic education involves much more than a mere change in methods of teaching; it entails a complete overhaul of the whole educational paradigm as well as the educational environment in the classroom. With the adoption of aesthetic experience as the main pivot of classroom activities, the teaching of the cultural subject matter is no longer treated as the goal, but as a tool for achieving it, the implementation of technical skills serves starting rather than concluding purposes, and the students' emotional perception of music and the process of meaning making are protecting by the system of their institutionalization. The review of local resources breaks the urban-centered concept of textbooks' conceptualization, thus allowing the cultural identity of rural schools to be duly represented in the content of the curriculum. The shift from summative to process- and performance-oriented assessment provides the evidence of the implementation of aesthetic education goals. By combining the methods described above into a synergetic approach one can turn the music classroom of rural schools into centers of aesthetic education practices.

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