

Developing 21st Century Competencies through Band An Exploratory Study of the “Four Cs”

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KEY IMPLICATIONS

- Performance, Peers, and Patience emerged as specific enablers of the school band to develop 21st Century Competencies (21CC).
- Participants’ accounts of their performance experiences resemble Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) notion of “flow.”
- The joy of learning may be enhanced through some concrete strategies to facilitate flow in band rehearsals.
- “Performance” refers to the nature of band as a performing arts ensemble. Through the processes of practising, rehearsing, and performing, a number of 21CCs were developed.
- “Peers” refers to fellow members of the band. In particular, “senior-junior” relationships emerged as a strong enabler of 21CC.
- “Patience” refers to a disposition to refrain from acting on impulse. It also connotes a willingness to carry on doing something in the face of challenges or boredom.

BACKGROUND

The Ministry of Education emphasizes the importance of developing 21CC through Co-Curricular Activities.

FOCUS OF STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine the development of 21CC through the school band. To achieve these goals, two high performing school bands were examined over a period of one year.

KEY FINDINGS

Three interrelated themes emerged as specific enablers of the band to develop 21CC: performance, peers and patience.

These three enablers intersect in fascinating ways in the band students’ lived experiences. For example, *peers* collaborate and work together towards *performances*. During peer-directed sectionals, seniors put on their creative and critical thinking hats as they think of ways to teach and communicate their ideas to their juniors. As juniors need time to learn, *patience* is often needed as seniors guide them. In the process, students learn relationship management skills.

Importantly, when recollecting their performance experiences, participants’ responses resonated with Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) notion of “flow”: they were immersed; clearly enjoyed making music for the audience, and time flew quickly.

This was strengthened by data from the self-report measures that found that students experienced higher levels of flow during performances compared to rehearsals. Flow was also linked to adaptive 21st Century dispositions like communication, collaboration, and commitment.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

Implications for practice

Flow is a state when one is deeply immersed doing something enjoyable. One is intrinsically motivated, no longer self-conscious, the challenge of the task is optimally matched by the skill level, and time seems to fly. Given the value of flow for 21st Century education, it is perhaps timely to optimize it for band students. Here are three practical strategies:

1. During a two-hour rehearsal, a couple of minutes are set aside for the trumpet section to perform for their peers. This may be a section of the piece they are already learning. Their peers applaud, the trumpet section takes a bow, and the short performance begins. No additional time or workload is imposed on the students or teachers; yet, this simple activity develops students' confidence and other 21st Century dispositions in an authentic manner.

2. Flow may also be enhanced by intentionally making time for brief moments of "play-throughs" i.e., "simulated performances" of sorts.
3. Select music at the appropriate level of difficulty ("challenge-skill balance").

Proposed Follow-up Activities

To further examine how flow may be facilitated and optimized for the 21st Century Band Curriculum.

PARTICIPANTS

There were two participating bands (one Primary, one Secondary). Participants comprised 190 band students and 19 band teachers-in-charge and instructors.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Data collection comprised observations of band activities, video and audio recordings, material artefacts, interviews, and field notes. Self-report questionnaires were also administered to volunteers from the two bands.

REFERENCE

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.

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This brief was based on the project OER 17/15 TYC: Developing 21CC Through Band: An Exploratory Study of the Four Cs.

How to cite this publication

Tan, L., Dairianathan, E., Onishi-Grace Costes, P., & Tan, J. (2018). *Developing 21CC through Band: An Exploratory Study of the "Four Cs"*. (NIE Research Brief Series No. 18-012). Singapore: National Institute of Education.

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