

**Music as engaging, educational matrix: Exploring the case of marginalised students
attending an ‘alternative’ music industry school**

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Abstract

Harmony High is an alternative school where music functions as an educational magnet to attract marginalised students who have disengaged from the mainstream. Through an investigation of the student perspective, we discover that while acting as a magnet, music also becomes the educational matrix or ‘heart and soul’ that helps to create a school culture with a positive spirit of connectedness and community working to motivate and inspire active learning. Thus *Harmony High* demonstrates a model highlighting the need for alternative education contexts that adapt to the needs, voice, interests, and experiences of disaffected students. This becomes increasingly important in order to offer alternatives to current neoliberal agendas that focus on the standardisation of education in order to meet economic political and market ideals. These agendas provide little concern for the interests of students, leading to an avoidance of responsibility for alarming dropout rates.

Keywords

alternative education, engagement, marginalised students, music education, senior schooling

Introduction

Standard high school! The system didn't work for me. They weren't very accommodating. They just let me slip through the cracks because there is like 2000 students in the whole school. So, if you weren't doing very well, they wouldn't help you. They would just let you float on. (student pseudonym, interview/focus group session/survey response, Month Day, Year)

*Harmony High*¹ is an accredited, non-government school offering Queensland Certificate of Education courses for Year 11 and 12 (pre-tertiary) students. While satisfying mandated accreditation standards, the curriculum outcomes are achieved through suites of courses that are based on music and music industry-related topics. While offering an alternative to the current Australian mainstream education system this *boutique*² school works to meet the needs of disaffected students who have disengaged from mainstream schooling. In achieving this aim the school has artfully enhanced accreditation standards in order to both “work within and against the grain of policy simultaneously” (Thomson, Lingard, & Wrigley, 2012, p. 4).

The school attracts students who are passionate about music and music-related fields, but who have felt marginalised, disengaged and ‘turned off’ in prior, mainstream school contexts, both public and private; and they seek refuge in the school as a way to both satisfy their passion for music and to successfully complete a high school education. With a philosophy based on authentic education, a promotional brochure describes Harmony High as a ‘music industry college’ that offers an educationally integrated, ‘real interest’ program and the opportunity to graduate with a Queensland Certificate of Education suitable to proceed to university, further technical vocational study or the workplace.

¹ Pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of the school and participants.

² This is how the school principal, Neil, referred to the school.

This paper documents one part of a larger project that seeks to explore different viewpoints and perspectives of Harmony High. The intention is to develop a comprehensive portrait that will include the perspectives and experiences of staff and students, the curriculum, and report on various political issues and values that underpin the school. Initially the aim of the broader study was to examine the principal's personal philosophy and foundational vision for the school (Riddle & Cleaver, 2013). The focus of the current paper is the experience of students and the factors that help them to meet their musical and educational needs and goals. This aim aligns with those of Smyth (2006) who, when discussing the need to more deeply understand the realities of 'dropping out' and disengagement from schools, argues for more investigation into "the existential experiences of young people" (p. 288), in order to "begin to construct more feasible reform platforms from which to pursue forms of school organization, culture and leadership that acknowledge those important realities" (p. 288). The principal and school committee granted permission for the research project to be conducted and the University ethics committee approved the project after all details had been formally submitted for scrutiny. Importantly, consent letters were sent out and students and their parents gave approval to participate in the project. The fieldwork at Harmony High has involved regular visits in order to conduct contextual observations, hold focus group meetings and also individual interviews with students and teachers. These data have formed the basis of several analyses around the themes of community and culture, curriculum connectedness and commitment that we explore here and elsewhere (Riddle & Cleaver, 2013).

From our first impressions and initial analysis we noticed how music is central to the whole of school life, underpinning student motivation, self-determination and positivity towards broad educational achievement. Notably, the students regard music and the Harmony High experience as keys to the fulfilment of their interests, needs and futures. Perspectives about music surfaced at an initial focus group meeting with the Year 11 cohort. When a question about the value of music in their lives was posed, four students responded with the following.

I can't explain it. It's like everything. It's like my whole life. (student pseudonym, interview/focus group session/survey response, Month Day, Year)

It's like life. It's like my other friend that I had because I didn't really talk to people so kind of grew up with music and that's what I focused on, instead of talking to other people I just chilled and played the piano or guitar. (student pseudonym, interview/focus group session/survey response, Month Day, Year)

It sort of helps you cope through things that happen in your life. (student pseudonym, interview/focus group session/survey response, Month Day, Year)

I think music is like having an appreciation of all different types of music and being able to listen to heavy rock and appreciate that it's still music and notice all different types, when you listen to it – it's hard to explain. You're like wow, that's so cool. (student pseudonym, interview/focus group session, Month Day, Year)

The Setting

The school is located in a busy, inner sector of a large Australian city and the cityscape and constant sound of traffic create a metropolitan vibe. Low levels of funding mean that the space is not purpose-built. A Police Citizen's Youth Club with a basketball court and a public gymnasium are located in the same building. The school occupies the top floor and other rooms around the building and there is an ad-hoc feel to the teaching areas. Movable screens are a feature and these are used to re-shape venues and alternative spaces when the need arises. Musical instruments, lighting stands, computers and cameras, a stage area with drum kit and public address system indicate the centrality of music and music production. At each visit, we were welcomed into the informal atmosphere of the school by the principal and staff. The students dress casually and in ways that express individuality and freedom. They seem relaxed and apparently unmindful of our presence although we always tried to remain as unobtrusive as possible when in teaching areas. In this context, 'learning area' is a more appropriate reference than 'classroom' as learning was observed to take place in corridors, hallways and recreation areas where group-discussions, laptop work and music

instrumental practice regularly occur. The students are motivated to continue working outside of formal set classroom times and self-driven informal learning practices (Green, 2008) break down the barriers of teaching and learning space and time, which are often clearly demarcated in many mainstream schools. Harmony High students collaboratively continue with projects that are built around their shared interests and passions.

Methods

Our first data collection procedure included a survey administered to volunteer students and their parents. At this time, we also conducted focus group meetings, one with Year 11 students and a second with the Year 12 cohort. In these sessions we aimed to have a congenial and open discussion that would develop from the opening question, ‘Why are you here?’ Next, to further investigate the experiences and perspectives of the students, we conducted a series of two interviews with three volunteering students. The first interview series encouraged the telling of personal histories, perspectives and narratives of past experience. The second focussed on current experiences and future expectations. Data also included video recordings of daily school life (assisted by participating students who carried video recorders). These informed the report and descriptive component of the paper and acted as springboards for further commentary.

On entering the school setting with the purpose of understanding the lifeworlds of the students, we had respect for an ethnographic attitude that Bochner (2001) refers to as “empathic witnessing” (p. 142) and van Manen’s (1991) notion of “crossing the street to the lifeworld of the student” (p. 154). These are important elements in a narrative as researching others’ lives requires phenomenological sensitivity. When identifying themes, participant responses were regarded as ‘real life’ narratives of experience that offer heartfelt descriptions about both general and music education issues. In this regard they served to highlight the under-represented student voice. These voices, together with our critical analyses and commentaries, are designed to contribute to the ongoing debate about educational standards and the place of alternative schools in current educational climates.

As researchers, we share a number of background commonalities, both having had formal, conservatorium music and teacher training experience and also informal learning and experience as members of garage and semi-professional, touring rock bands. Academically, we share interests in narrative research as well as a common political lens that seeks to find ways that new visions for schooling can respond to the educational mainstream (Thomson, Lingard & Wrigley, 2012). We harbour a concern that many educational climates are becoming increasingly dominated by neoliberal agendas, with “the outputs of education systems hav[ing] become so inextricably linked to national economic prosperity, that opposing views about the nature and purposes of education have been silenced and/or marginalised” (McGregor & Mills, 2011, p. 3). This situation is leading to an increased avoidance of the interests and needs of students and the suppression of teacher autonomy. Importantly, it is these personal experiences, influences and political interests that underpin our biases and colour the particular lens through which we have viewed Harmony High. In addition to giving voice to the students, our purpose is to look at Harmony High from their perspective in order to be able to comment on educational approaches that promote their success. We consider Harmony High as an example of alternative education sites and flexible learning centres that can assist marginalised students (see McGregor & Mills, 2011) while also connecting them to their musical interests.

The direct quotes from the students are selected from the two focus group sessions, the six interviews with three participants, and the comments placed in the ‘open response’ section on the individual survey forms. For the interests of anonymity and confidentiality, pseudonyms are used for the school, the principal and all student participants. From an initial review of the data we identified three themes that emerged as important keystones in the philosophical architecture of the school: curriculum connectedness, community and culture, and commitment. With this paper we acknowledge how music, as the matrix that envelops the school, contributes to these three themes.

Findings

Curriculum Connectedness

Music was kind of like the bait that's on the hook I guess, but we're not baiting it, throwing the hook out there, switching the bait and saying, 'Ha ha! We tricked you!' It's like music happens all the time around here.

(Neil, Principal, interview, Month Day, Year)

Some alternative school structures are systematically set-up to deal with problem students, to manage and discipline young people who have been expelled from their previous schools (McGregor & Mills, 2011). However, while seeking to re-engage, Harmony High operates with a philosophy that it is the curriculum that needs reforming, not the student. This reformed curriculum is connected to the needs and interests of the students rather than forcing or 'shoving' them (McGraw, 2011; Sizer & Sizer, 1999) into a state of readiness to receive a standardised 'one size fits all' mainstream structure. By appealing to interests and needs, Harmony High offers students the opportunity to get back on a positive track by reinvigorating a desire to learn and succeed. From the first focus group, the students openly discuss disconnection from the curriculum experienced at past schools.

I didn't really enjoy my last school. Thought it was irrelevant. The music program at my old school was very mainstream and classical based, and that's not where I want to go. (student pseudonym, focus group session, Month Day, Year)

Together with individual stories of personal disconnection, reasons particularly focused on issues of music preference.

At my old school, they just revolved everything around classical music, so if you didn't play that style of music you couldn't express yourself. But here you can do whatever you want. (student pseudonym, interview/focus group session/survey response, Month Day, Year)

At my last school, I did music as a subject but I didn't really enjoy it because I've always had lots of trouble with theory and it was all theory based. Everything was very classical so I didn't really enjoy it. (student pseudonym, interview/focus group session/survey response, Month Day, Year)

With my previous school music program, if you didn't play classical music or jazz, you were shunned from the program and if you played rock you couldn't do that in your assessment: you'd have to follow strict guidelines and it was really boring. This school has more opportunities. (student pseudonym, interview/focus group session/survey response, Month Day, Year)

These comments reveal how young people may develop strong feelings about musical preference and often the music they do prefer or engage with in daily life is not reflected in school music (Jones, 2006). A contributing factor is that the pervasiveness of music within the current technological landscape of production and consumption means that young people are enculturated into music at an early age and popular music “may be among the most powerful discourses available to students as a means by which to construct personal identity and interpret social experience” (Herbert & Campbell, 2000, p. 20). Problematically, then, classical (European art) music programs may alienate those to whom popular music is such a powerful discourse, particularly where it has gone beyond being a ‘subject’ for learning to become an inherent and deeply embedded matter of personal identity (Hargreaves, Miell, & Macdonald, 2002).

Davis and Blair (2011) also remind us that meaningful engagement with music is a deeply personal act and the way popular music is now imbued into everyday life means that it is often ‘possessed’ as ‘my music’ or a ‘badge of identity’ (Hargreaves, Marshall & North, 2003). A point still relevant today is the comment by Ross (1995) that popular music often becomes a private passion that is “inflected with deep emotional identification or group politics” (p. 190). Ari, a student at Harmony High explains,

My family were very supportive. My brother used to play in a band and I just wanted to copy him pretty much, so I started playing my own thing. But he was into heavy rock and grunge. So I started playing guitar generally, not kind of focusing in on any specific style or genre. I focused on popular songs - Beatles, Led Zeppelin, that type of thing. Now I've really gotten into a specific genre - roots and bluegrass and that's how I perceive myself as a person really. It's kind

of shaped who I am and what I believe in, not that I rely on that to be who I am but it's kind of shaped me as a person. (Ari, interview/focus group session/survey response, Month Day, Year)

The sense of a private or group identity is often accompanied by rebelliousness, defiance of authority and the need for freedom of expression (Zillman & Gan, 1997); elements that have been at the heart of the culture of popular music from the early days of rock-n-roll through all forms but noticeably in the protest song movement, punk, reggae, heavy metal and hip hop in particular. These factors promote a sense of autonomy and self-direction in the ways that the music is accessed and learned and in ways that are better accomplished through peer-to-peer sharing and informal ways of learning (Green, 2008). As counter-culture to the mainstream, popular music in school tends to become at odds with the less democratic atmosphere of the European art tradition, "with its baton-wielding conductor" (Herbert, 2011, p. 17) and teacher-centred, apprenticeship models.

Even when popular music *is* included in schools it can remain "a delicate matter and one that must be approached with awareness of many obstacles" (Davis & Blair, 2011, p. 127). As a result, "the school classroom is a notorious site for the entanglement of musical meanings, values and experiences" (Green, 2006, p. 1). However, in the case of Harmony High we find no such entanglements as the students are in harmony with the curriculum, which keeps them connected to their interests, broader lived experiences of music and to the way they would actually like to learn.

Everything that we learn comes back to the music industry and I think that's really relevant for us because we're all here because we want to be in the music industry, and there is only so much that mainstream schools can teach you. It's all theory and everything, but we're really getting some good industry experience and everything is so relevant. (student pseudonym, interview/focus group session/survey response, Month Day, Year)

The curriculum at Harmony High is authentic as students develop confidence in the music industry through active work beyond the abstract and theoretical world of the classroom. The

organic curriculum design (Almau, 2005) places music at the heart of the school.

Furthermore, the school models a pragmatic approach by developing active networking and productive partnerships with a popular local concert venue that is managed and operated by the students, an independent record label that supports emerging artists, a community radio station and also a free 'street press' music publication where the students are encouraged to submit concert and record reviews.

The focus on "high-status creative projects" (Burnard, 2008, p. 72) allows students at Harmony High to engage deeply in inclusive and authentic learning experiences. They also undertake placements at related conferences and other work-integrated opportunities. These help develop awareness and readiness together with realistic expectations about the music industry. The students appreciate this connectedness and we hear of industry opportunities provided at the school:

I think a problem is that a lot of people say, I'll just do this and I'll be set. It doesn't really work like that. You have to be able to do many different things. Here we have a range of experiences. I've been the event co-ordinator for our venue, 'The Hub' and I've organised our label - Rolling Drum Records. In the past I worked at a video game conference, at a video game studio as a trainee and junior supervisor so I had to make sure all the other trainees were doing their work - that's management skills. I can also do sound tech, perform, play drums, guitar, bass and sing. It's handy to have different skills in a lot of different areas because you're not really left sitting there saying, oh well there's no jobs in this so I'm going to stay home and play music all day. I guess I can say well there's no jobs in this but there are jobs in this and I can do that as well. (student pseudonym, interview/focus group session/survey response, Month Day, Year)

A healthy awareness that the music industry is competitive, and the development of a range of options for the future, is seen as paramount by the teaching staff. The students are encouraged to be reflective about the opportunities for success and stardom and realistic expectations are treated as a positive step.

You know if my band never did anything, which I'm not relying on it to, I want to do sound engineering and this school is helping a lot with that, so yeah it's good. (student pseudonym, interview/focus group session/survey response, Month Day, Year)

Community and Culture

As we have reported elsewhere (Riddle & Cleaver, 2013), the school community and culture are shaped in part by the attitude of Neil, the Principal and fellow staff, who uphold principles of participatory democracy in all school matters, 'pedagogical tact' (van Manen, 1991), where students are agentic in their learning, and also through recognition that in the past, the need for rigid conformity had created negative experiences for many of the students. All the teachers support a climate of freedom and they accept that student autonomy and personal responsibility are outcomes when rules of conformity are not part of a hidden agenda. Problematically, the agenda for many traditional school environments is that either directly or indirectly, students are taught to conform (see van der Horst & McDonald, 2002). Cora, a student at Harmony High, offers an example when describing her disengagement from her past schools. She explains:

All my life it has been - if people tell me what to do, I just won't do it. So like, I don't conform to anything. And teachers would always demand me to do things and stuff and I just pretty much revolted against whatever they said. I just got in a lot of trouble at every school I went to. . . . Yeah, cos there's so many rules over pointless things, like you're not allowed to wear certain socks or whatever, and I'm like, pretty sure I can wear these socks cos it's not illegal and it's not going to kill anybody. (Cora, interview/focus group session/survey response, Month Day, Year)

As part of the rigid structures and behavioural expectations that form what McGraw (2011) calls "the politics of institutional shoving" in schools (p. 108), an imbalance of power and authority is caused through the upholding of impersonal relationships. However, at Harmony

High we notice how students and teachers converse in a relaxed manner and with the use of first names. When we enquire further about a comment that the school atmosphere is ‘relaxed and easy’, a student responds:

Well it’s probably mainly the teacher to student relationship. It’s kind of more like a person to person relationship than a teacher to student relationship. I guess that’s a big part of it. (student pseudonym, interview/focus group session/survey response, Month Day, Year)

A culture of mutual respect is evident when we talk to students. Later, a student remarks on the friendly atmosphere that we notice whenever we visit the school. Interestingly the comment that follows points to the importance of the unification of interest in music as well as the small size of classes.

It hasn’t cliqued off into little groups at all. Everyone is just friends with everyone and so after getting to know people for a few weeks and the grade twelves coming back, it’s just been a supportive environment. Sometimes it feels like a family with such a small number of people. The staff are really supportive. With the small number of students and specific interest that we have, teachers talk to you more on a personal basis because they know you as a person and you spend the entire day around them. Because they only have twelve students in class, they can suit your unique needs. (student pseudonym, interview/focus group session/survey response, Month Day, Year)

In an interview with Cora, we ask what it is that makes her happy at Harmony High.

I think they treat you like an adult and everyone gets along. I don’t know if that’s just because it’s a small group of people but I think yeah, it’s a good environment to be in because we all have the same interests too. I think that has a lot to do with it. We’re all into music and passionate about it. (Cora, interview/focus group session/survey response, Month Day, Year)

While there are many reasons why young people might struggle with the culture of a school (McGregor & Mills, 2011), when talking with Harmony High students, what we hear is a

call for more freedom and less structure, concerned with fine detail that to them has no apparent meaning.

You can't even compare, it's just such a different environment here. I hated, everything about my last school. It was just the worst place in the world for me to be. It was so structured and things that shouldn't be such a big deal in life they made such a big deal out of - and the things that should be important they were like - you should just know how to do it – it was all of those things. (student pseudonym, interview/focus group session/survey response, Month Day, Year)

Finally, an important contributing element to the positive culture and community is the match between the identity in music of the teachers and students. For example, a particular teacher at Harmony High is a performing rap artist, whose hip-hop crew attracts a wide local and YouTube following. Another teacher is a gigging musician and recording artist who has won a prestigious song-writing award and the even the maths teacher is a bass guitarist in a surf band. These are important factors, for as Bernard (2012) argues, the match between the identities of teachers and students leads to more effective music education. Furthermore, Rusinek (2008) makes the claim that disaffected learners are able to engage more broadly in academic culture through engagement in musical culture. With music acting as the 'glue' at Harmony High, this bridging of culture is apparent.

Commitment

Well, if I was going to stick with what I was going to do if I couldn't get in here then I wouldn't be in school at all. I probably would have dropped out at the end of grade ten and, ah, went for work, tried to look for work.

Chances are I probably wouldn't have found work that soon because I didn't do any work experience back then. Ah, so I probably would have just stayed at home. (student pseudonym, interview/focus group session/survey response, Month Day, Year)

The value that students place on school and their lack of commitment to learning are factors related to academic failure and social difficulties (see Jones, 2011). When asking participants at Harmony High to describe their experiences with both learning and music we hear of a range of stories where academic and social issues were a factor in their disengagement, discontent and the dropping of commitment at previous mainstream schools:

My problems with my old school were basically that I was left behind. I was allowed to slip through the cracks because I had missed a little bit of time occasionally. . . . and the curriculum didn't really engage me, or anyone else really, there were so many people that just weren't engaged, I'm pretty sure. I remember, by about half way through there was about half the students that were there at the beginning of grade 12. I guess that's probably got a lot to do with the lack of interest but it has given me a lot of confidence being here. I feel I can actually get things done. When I left half way through grade 12 at my old school, I was freaking out and I go - I'm not going to be able to do anything, I'm screwed and I'll have to work a terrible job for the rest of my life and all that and then I found out about here, came here and I feel so much better and overall I'm a better person for coming here. (student pseudonym, interview/focus group session/survey response, Month Day, Year)

Then, when students are asked about their present experience and developing motivations, we gather comments about re-engagement and re-commitment:

Questioner's name: So you're pretty motivated by the content here?

Student name/pseudonym: Yeah definitely. In my old school I was a D, E standard student because I didn't really care. I didn't really find any of it interesting or great but here I'm getting As and Bs. The lowest grade I've had here is a C plus.

Questioner's name: So what's the reason? Connection to what you are studying?

Student name/pseudonym: Yeah because it's interesting. I actually want to do well and also because it's fun. I can actually relate to the subjects and I can relate pretty much everything we do to real life whereas at my old school I wasn't really able to do

that because it was all kind of redundant. What's the point of doing this, it's not going to actually help me whereas stuff here - I could apply everything to real life.

(Interview/Focus group session, Month Day, Year)

The (re)commitment gains made for the Harmony High students who talk to us can be linked to the appeal of the content and also the policies and structures that work to develop a sense of value about being at the school. This, we conclude, results when respect is shown for personal identities, not only *in* music but the identities of the young as autonomous freethinking people. Narratives of past disaffection to present commitment and engagement offer us a sense of how this alternative school exists as a model that works in the best interests of the students and the success that is afforded by an educationally democratic environment. After telling us how she "just got in a lot of trouble at every school I went to" Cora offers an explanation of her re-engagement.

Here it is a lot more accepting of who you are, and you are not judged for your individual interests because we're all so different - but the same I guess? And yeah, there's a lot more acceptance. And it's fun to be here. It doesn't feel like school.

(student pseudonym, interview/focus group session/survey response, Month Day, Year)

Discussion

The fundamental purpose of Harmony High is to attract students who have dropped out of mainstream schooling but who are passionate about music, music industry related areas and also the social and professional culture that surrounds popular music. For many of the students, problems began with feelings of disaffection with mainstream schools and they felt mis-identified as uncaring or unmotivated. In their new context, the power of music has helped to unify a community of learners and promote conditions of inclusion. In addition, an important catalyst is the democratised social conditions and this is important because the changing of the social conditions of school life has the effect of changing the learning realities of the students (Burnard, 2008).

The first philosophical step taken by Harmony High to enact re-engagement has been to recognise that not everyone can learn in traditional or mainstream settings. The issue we note is that the students at Harmony High, like many young people today, have strongly formed identities in music and these had clashed with the expectations of their previous schools. This scenario is identified by Smyth (2006) who states that, “succeeding at school, for many students, means having to suppress their own identities and act within a narrowly defined and institutionalized view of what it means to be a ‘good’ student” (p. 290).

At Harmony High it is acknowledgement of student identity together with the upholding of a democratic learning community and respect for the needs, interests and prior learning that contributes to the success of the school. As Giroux (2003) reminds us, “schools should provide students with possibilities for linking knowledge and social responsibility to the imperatives of a substantive democracy” (p. 9). Everything is necessarily connected to everything else at Harmony High, where students and teachers work collaboratively in a radically progressive pedagogical space.

Harmony High has incorporated contemporary ideas of music pedagogy that place self-identity at the centre of music education outcomes (Hargreaves, Marshall, & North, 2003) rather than the approach where the teacher comes armed with a gold standard, non-negotiable curriculum and with the assumption that the student should serve music rather than music serving the student. The school provides a focus on musical creativity through stimulating and challenging young people in musical environments that foster the development of both creative processes and products (see Odena, 2012).

D’Angelo and Zemanick (2009), while commenting on the situation in the USA, state that “in many cases, the way children are educated is reflective of the way things used to be and not the way they currently are” and that schools “still have a tendency to operate in the mode of ‘one size fits all’ and ‘This is how we do things, you either get it or you don’t’” (p. 211). However, if we recognise that a one size fits all education system based on official rather than personalised knowledge (see Finney, 2003) does not work for all, then alternative

schools like Harmony High serve to provide real world validity that will help reduce dropout rates from schooling.

We agree with McGregor and Mills (2011), who state that “there is much that mainstream schools can learn from alternative approaches to teaching so as to provide an education that is more inclusive of a diverse range of students” (p. 2). While many teachers working in mainstream school environments do work with inclusive and engaging pedagogies, there are systemic concerns that continue to operate in damaging ways against teachers and students in many schools (for example, see Francis & Mills, 2012). Music can act as a democratic praxis of informed and committed action (Philpott & Wright, 2012) for school communities, in order to reconfigure schooling in ways that better meet the needs of all students, including the marginalised and disaffected.

While music is initially the ‘bait’ that lures the students by appealing to their interests, eventually, as the essence at the inspirational heart of their lived experience, it becomes the educational matrix that suffuses life at Harmony High, and is leading them toward enrichment and fulfilment.

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