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Creating, Connecting & Coping Through Digital Music

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1.0 Background

The ongoing global pandemic due to COVID-19 has been a severe disruption to most aspects of our lives. In the US, over 43 million of our countrymen have been infected, and more than 650,000 have died. At those levels, almost everyone knows someone who has personally suffered. As society has responded, norms have been upended, and stability has been replaced by uncertainty.

Beyond illness and death, livelihoods have been lost or jeopardized. Healthcare expenses including preventative measures have skyrocketed. Emotional support systems like getting together with friends for meals have been compromised. It's challenging to know what to do, how to plan, or even what to think. Many feel helpless.

That much disruption exacts a toll. In fact, the US Census Bureau has been specifically measuring that impact on families through a series of "Household Pulse" surveys that were conducted periodically from April of 2020 until August of this year. The findings show that approximately a third of the population is exhibiting signs of either anxiety or clinical depression.

When people feel down for extended periods of time coupled with a perceived improbability of near-term significant improvement, depression can result. Collectively we've been enduring COVID-19 for at least 18 months, and arguably for 22 months. That certainly qualifies as an "extended period of time." A common question is "When will the pandemic end?" Depending on the source, answers vary wildly from six months, to one year, to "COVID-19 is here to stay in perpetuity." That qualifies as a "perceived improbability of near-term significant improvement." Societal conditions are conducive to rampant depression.

Despite this, adults are much more equipped to handle COVID-19 stressors than children. Adults have access to information that children don't commonly get. Adults make decisions for households, while children abide by those decisions with little control. Adults have a maturity and perspective that comes from experience overcoming setbacks. Children by definition are inexperienced. Children unfortunately are susceptible to an unhealthy inner dialogue and outer manifestations of that dialogue.

Recognizing this in my students and desiring to embrace the "Whole Person Concept" in my classroom instruction, I organized a series of sessions that would allow students to connect with their thoughts, share them with others, and exercise an appropriate measure of control over their place within and contribution to their community. These objectives had to be rooted in Music education. I had to be intentional about advancing their knowledge of Music Theory while increasing their understanding of the usefulness of Music in their day-to-day lives.

As you will see in the pages to follow, Music is well suited to this task. It was 324 years ago that William Congreve penned the truism “Music soothes the savage beast” in his tragic play The Mourning Bride. We all have within us some beastly emotions that periodically need soothing, particularly during times of great tragedy, such as an enduring global pandemic.

I’m pleased to report that not only did my students learn more about Music, but they also became more centered, and a little better adjusted through the project *Creating, Connecting, and Coping Through Digital Music*. I sincerely hope that the results for all who adopt this project will be similar, or greater. – Dr. K

2.0 Project Description

Artists have long been inspired during times of emotional intensity to create. Traditionally these beneficial endeavors were available primarily to those who had practiced and honed artistic skills over a period of years, or even decades. Today, using digital tools, even novices are able to originate musical compositions that reflects their life experience. In the midst of a very disruptive pandemic, this project helped students to share and deal with their feelings through the creation of music.

The innovative aspect of the project is that it recognizes and responds to students’ emotional needs brought on by multiple challenges arising from COVID-19’s impact on individuals, families, and communities. The students have opportunities to create, connect, and cope through digital music creation processes. Through the creation of digital music, students will and can explore their feelings, connect with others, communicate concerns and solutions, and realize that they are not alone.

This open-ended project allows students to express themselves by learning and using 21st Century digital skills in a new creative way. Students learned how to create background music and musical compositions with the assistance of various software platforms. For this Music project, the students can use laptops provided by the school. Alternatively, teachers can use a few tablets for their classes. If allowable and available, students may use their own personal devices. Freely downloadable software can be used for the project, or full-featured professional software may be purchased.

Moreover, this project is highly adaptable, motivates students, is accessible, and realistically achievable by students. The project was developed for students adhering to a block schedule, who were meeting every other day for a few hours. It ran for an entire 9-week grading period. It could be modified to accommodate other scheduling schemes, or for a greater or lesser amount of class sessions. The project can also be easily simplified for elementary school

levels or be expanded to advanced concepts for high school levels. Teachers may lead large groups through the instructional program or facilitate students working in small groups. Students can be given the option to team up in pairs, in small groups, or to work alone.

Computing software and connected device hardware technology are the tools used to create music. They also enable the sharing of those musical creations, and spark conversation. Those conversations allow students to synergize and improve each other's work.

Ultimately, because students are addressing situations rather than seeking to survive victimization, because they are influencing their peers, and because they are communicating with potentially a global online audience, they are empowered. Because they become motivated to communicate in more meaningful ways and to be heard by broader audiences, they learn over time to improve artistic outcomes. Achievement boost self-esteem and provides a mental reference point of where a challenge was met. This in turn becomes the impetus for hope. Empowered, achieving, hopeful students will have a healthier mental state than those who are just reeling from loss and instability.

3.0 Success Framework

Cooperative Learning - Working together

Through this project students learn to better communicate. The teacher can assist in learning communication skills, promoting student-to-student interactions, and fostering the practice of asking for help, appreciating the work of peers, and/or encouraging others. Social skills are intertwined with communication skills. Students through this project learn to work together and to become more respectful toward others. The cooperative learning approach will help to achieve integration and lead to project success.

Social Emotional Learning - Coping

During the pandemic, we all are susceptible to social crises. Research data indicates that students cross the globe were negatively impacted in social and emotional aspects. Online learning environments may lack the ability to develop personal and interpersonal social skills. Students will gain an understanding of the emotional perspectives of others and develop compassion and sensitivity for those who may be dealing with challenges. Closeness promotes friendship. It grows from closeness, to interaction, to familiarity, discovered similarity, and appreciation.

Music and Self Expression - Creating

This project helps shift the focus from teacher-centered classroom to child-centered. Each child desires to grow and develop. The child is a self-developing organism that demands self-expression. Through self-expression students can reach “The self,” self-actualization, self-development, self-repair, and self-education. Moreover, this project impact mental, physical, and emotional development, which form the child as a whole.

Digital Learning - 21st Century Skills

The pandemic drastically shifted the public education to digital learning platforms. Despite many negative impacts, online teaching also provided new opportunities. This project motivated students to learn new program(s) in cooperative ways. Students experienced more hands-on collaboration with each other. This project help students to hone their digital learning skills. Benefits are: remote access to unlimited learning – research skill, easy access to information – practice with time management, educating oneself, and working with others – cooperation.

Emotional Wellness - Connecting

This project will contribute to students’ ability to experience, manage, and express feelings appropriately. Help your students think of emotional well-being as just as important as physical health. Explain that if you got sick or injured it is ok to ask for help, moreover it is good to know you can improve health by taking appropriate action. Promote emotional awareness. Help identify emotions, practice mindfulness, teach students to transition intentionally. Model coping strategies (positive thinking), allow for bounce back (positive feedback first), teach resiliency skills (constrictive feedback and positive self-talk), and teach and model meditation techniques. Students will learn through this project to encourage others, helping each other, respecting, appreciating others, caring, and not being afraid to ask for help.

4.0 Curriculum Guide

4.1 Applicable Florida Standards

MU.912. S.1.2 Compose music for voices and/or acoustic, digital, or electronic instruments.

MU.912. C.2.1. Evaluate and make appropriate adjustments to personal performance in solo and ensembles.

MU.912. C.2.3 Evaluate one's own or other's compositions and/or improvisations and generate improvements independently or cooperatively.

MU.912. F.1.2 Incorporate or adapt new, emerging, or previously unfamiliar technology to create an innovative composition, music project, or related product.

SS.912. P.15.3 Differentiate among theories of emotional experience.

SS.912. P.15.6 Explain how other environmental factors influence emotional interpretation and expression.

SS.912 A.1.2 Utilize a variety of primary and secondary sources to identify author, historical significance, audience, and authenticity to understand a historical period.

SS. 912. A.1.5 Evaluate the validity, reliability, bias, and authenticity of current events and Internet resources.

HE. 912. B. 4.1 Explain skills needed to communicate effectively with family, peers, and others to enhance health.

HE. 912. B 4.4 Analyze the validity of ways to ask for and offer assistance to enhance the health of self and others.

LAFS.910.W.2.6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology's capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.

LAFS.910.W.3.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate

4.2 Learning Objectives and Outcomes

I. Social-Emotional Learning

a. Communication

   i. Exchange thoughts, messages, and information effectively through interaction

- Give and receive meaningful feedback
- Use intercultural understanding to interpret communication
- Use a variety of media to communicate with a range of audiences

ii. Use language to gather and communicate information

- Make inferences and draw conclusions
- Find information for interdisciplinary inquiries, using a variety of media
- Organize and depict information logically

II. Cooperative Learning

a. Collaboration skills

i. Collaborate with others

- Give and receive meaningful feedback
- Take responsibility for one's own actions
- Listen actively to other's perspectives and ideas

III. Digital Learning

a. Information literacy skills

i. Demonstrate information literacy

- Access information to be informed and to inform others
- Understand and use technology systems
- Make connections between various sources of information

b. Media literacy skills

i. Demonstrate media literacy

- Seek a range of perspectives from multiple and varied sources
- Compare, contrast, and draw connections among multimedia resources

IV. Music and Self Expression

a. Critical thinking skills
    i. Think critically
        - Recognize unstated assumptions and bias
        - Practice observing carefully in order to recognize problems

b. Creative thinking skills
    i. Be creative
        - Practice visible thinking strategies and techniques
        - Make unexpected or unusual connections between objects and/or ideas

V. Emotional Wellness

a. Transfer skills and knowledge among disciplines
    i. Combine knowledge, understanding and skills to create products or solutions
    ii. Make connections between subject groups and disciplines

b. Be Reflective
    i. Considering the process of learning
        - Identify strengths and weaknesses of personal learning strategies
        - Focus on the process of creating by imitating the work of others

c. Self-Management
    i. Demonstrate organization skills
        - Manage time and tasks effectively
            a. Select and use technology effectively and productively
            b. Set goals that are challenging and realistic
            c. Bring necessary equipment and supplies to class

d. Manage one's own state of mind
    i. Affective Skills
        - Self-Motivation
            a. Practice managing self-talk
            b. Practice positive thinking

4.3 Sessions Guide

Session Number	Plan	Considerations
1	Introduction to the project – addressing emotional wellness Lecture about music and emotions Survey – Check your emotions Homework/journal	Music helps with emotions. Positive and negative emotions. What is your favorite music? Which music helps you to de-stress? Share with us next class a sample of this music and explain why you find it to be helpful.
2	Introduction to cooperative work Team building activities Social-emotional well being Ways of self-expression Homework/journal	Homework check Teamwork is a good way to be productive in a short period of time Friendship, compassion, and empathy Share with us next class how you express yourself through art
3	Introduction to a digital world (brief computer history and digital music) Synopsis of musical software Team building activities Survey – My digital music knowledge Homework/journal	Homework check What are your experiences with computers, digital music, and software use Create your own team of similar experiences Share with us next class your knowledge and skills with music software, if applicable

4	Team building activities Lecture: Connect Music and Lyrics Teamwork - tutorial for software use Homework/journal	Homework check Music (chords, rhythms, melody) and Lyrics (words, language) With your team, research the tutorial for the selected software and share your findings with others What did you learn? How can you apply it? Share with us next class some samples of your work
5	Team building activities Teamwork - tutorial for software use Brainstorm ideas for self-expression Homework/journal	Homework check With your team research tutorials for software you will be using and share them with others What did you learn? How can you apply it? Work on your background music Share with us your ideas next class

6	Team building activities Teamwork – tutorial for software use Brainstorm ideas for your self-expression Homework/journal	Homework check With your team research tutorials for music software and share them with others What did you learn? How can you apply it? Work on your background music Think about how you will use this background music for self-expression Enhance new digital skills and share them with your team next class

7	Teamwork - tutorial for software use Independent work Homework/journal	Homework check Work on your background music Work on your self-expression and messaging Enhance your new digital software skills and share with your team next class Share with the teacher your work next class
8	Teamwork - tutorial for software use Independent work Homework/journal	Homework check Work on your self-expression and messaging Share your new digital software skills with your team Share with the teacher your work next class
9	Teamwork -tutorial for software use Independent work Homework/journal	Homework check Work on your background music and self-expression Share with the teacher your work and get feedback
10	Presentations	Present your work to class (if some students need more time, presentations can be done during following classes)

4.4 Sample Grading Rubric

Skills	4	3	2	1
Background Music Focus	Virtually no errors. Critical and creative thinking is obvious. Music has 4+ intended elements (genre, rhythm, timbre, e.g)	Few errors, but critical and creative thinking is present. Music has 3+ intended elements (genre, rhythm, timbre, e.g)	Frequent errors, critical and creative thinking is not obvious. Music has 2+ intended elements (genre, rhythm, timbre, e.g)	Repeated errors. Critical and creative thinking is not present. Music has 1+ intended elements (genre, rhythm, timbre, e.g)
Media Literacy and Cooperative Work	Student put in obvious time, very well prepared, and eager to share the Information	Student put a good time, well prepared, and ready to share the Information	Student put some time, some way is prepared, and some share the Information	Student put little time, is not prepared, and doesn't share the Information
Lyrics and Self Expression	Lyrics use figurative language to expand theme and very creative	Lyrics focus on a theme and creative	Lyrics mostly focus on theme, but stray with little creativity	Lyrics do not focus on theme and are not creative
Communication and Collaboration	Always cooperate, has a positive attitude, anticipate and suggest ideas, voluntarily help others	Often cooperate, has a positive attitude, help others, anticipate and suggest ideas when asked	Usually cooperate, has a positive attitude, anticipate and suggest ideas, and help others only after asking twice or more	Does not cooperate, has a negative attitude, do not suggest ideas or help, passive
Self-Management and Motivation	Never complain or be critical of the wok process, demonstrate self-management and positive thinking, and reflection	Rarely complain or be critical of the wok process, demonstrate self-management and positive thinking, and reflection	Occasionally complain or be critical of the wok process, demonstrate self-management, positive thinking, and reflection	Complain often or be critical of the wok process, doesn't demonstrate self-management nor positive thinking, doesn't reflect

5.0 Resources

5.1 Software (free and/or paid)

- **Sound Trap -** online cross-platform digital audio workstation that allows users to create music and podcasts.

- **Audacity –** digital audio editor and recording application software. It can be used for post-processing of all types of audio, including effects such as normalization, trimming, and fading.

- **GarageBand –** allows users to create music or podcast. Its creation system enables users to create multiple tracks with pre-made loops, instrumental effects, and voice recording.

- **Quaver Music –** features a variety of composition tools. It allows to create different grooves, melodies, and accompaniments by dragging loop tiles.

5.2 Digital devices

An internet connection and any of the following devices are necessary.

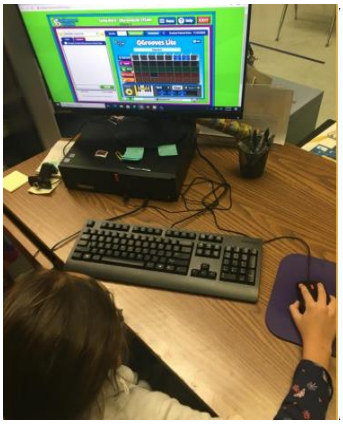
- Desktop computer
- Tablet
- Laptop
- iPhone
- Smart mobile telephone

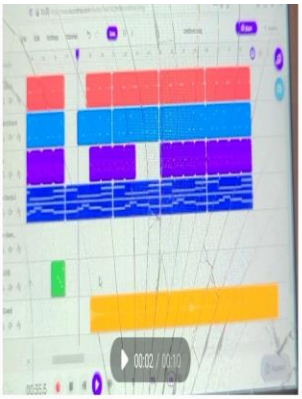
5.3 Materials

The following materials may be used by students to document their thoughts and organize their work.

- Paper
- Pencil
- Ink pen
- Notebook
- Binder
- Markers

6.0 Students' Work





7.0 Contact Information

Together we're providing the best possible education to enable our students to realize the best possible outcomes. I am always willing to work collaboratively. I may be reached at:

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