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# The Practical predicaments of Implementing Inquiry-based Learning in Primary and Secondary School Music Classrooms and Teacher Support strategies

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**Abstract:** Inquiry-based learning emphasizes the experience, thinking, and inquiry of students as subjects, which aligns with the goal of cultivating core literacy in primary and secondary school music subjects, and aligns with aesthetic perception, artistic expression, and cultural understanding in primary and secondary school music subjects. It is an important way to achieve the transformation of music classrooms. In the current practice of music classroom teaching in primary and secondary schools, there are still many practical obstacles in the implementation of inquiry-based learning, making it difficult to truly exert the educational value of inquiry-based learning. Facing the actual predicament of inquiry-based learning in music classrooms and constructing appropriate support strategies at the teacher level can break down various obstacles in classroom implementation, enable inquiry-based learning to truly integrate into the music teaching process, and allow students' core literacy to develop in the long term.

**Keywords:** Inquiry-based learning; Primary and secondary school music; Music classroom; Classroom teaching; Teacher support

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## 1. Introduction

With the deepening of aesthetic education reform, music classes in primary and secondary schools are no longer merely about teaching songs and memorizing knowledge, but are more focused on cultivating students' independent perception, experience and thinking abilities. Inquiry-based learning respects students' subjectivity and guides them to actively engage in music perception and artistic thinking, which is highly consistent with the aesthetic education orientation of music education. The interweaving of various factors such as inherent teaching ideas and the actual situation in the classroom will limit the effective

implementation of inquiry-based learning and prevent its value from being fully unleashed. From the perspective of teachers, building a systematic support system can resolve various contradictions in classroom practice, clarify the logic of classroom implementation of inquiry-based learning, and lay a solid foundation for the reform of music classroom teaching in primary and secondary schools.

## 2. Practical difficulties in the implementation of inquiry-based learning in primary and secondary school music classrooms

Some students are confined to the habit of passively receiving knowledge. When faced with inquiry tasks, they do not actively perceive music, nor do they independently think and distinguish problems. Students are accustomed to waiting for the teacher to give a ready-made conclusion, and it is difficult for them to independently analyze the musical elements and experience the art. Students vary greatly in their musical foundation. Some students have a weak musical foundation and limited perception of musical elements such as melody, rhythm, and timbre. They cannot keep up well with the depth of thinking in the inquiry task, and there is also insufficient participation in the inquiry activity [1]. At the same time, the sense of inquiry and cooperation among student groups is not strong enough. In the case of group inquiry, they are prone to participation differentiation. Some students lack the courage to express their musical emotions and have difficulty in effectively communicating their opinions. Students' understanding of music inquiry is limited. They tend to equate inquiry activities with mere entertainment activities, ignore the learning needs of aesthetic thinking, and fail to elevate music experience to the level of rational cognition, thus making it difficult for inquiry-based learning to achieve the preset aesthetic education goals.

## 3. Teacher support strategies for the implementation of inquiry-based learning in primary and secondary school music classrooms

### 3.1. Transform students' learning concepts and stimulate intrinsic motivation for music inquiry learning

Teachers should, in light of the aesthetic characteristics of the music discipline, set up introductory sections that are in line with students' cognitive levels, mobilize students' subjective willingness to participate, let students perceive and think about musical works, and eliminate students' mindset of waiting for a fixed conclusion [2]. Teachers should constantly permeate learning concepts, make students understand the learning needs of music inquiry, distinguish inquiry activities from classroom entertainment activities, and help students establish a correct understanding of inquiry learning.

For example, in the national orchestral appreciation class of "Spring River Moonlit Night", instead of directly introducing the form structure and artistic conception of the piece, the teacher first plays the "Jianglou Bells and Drums" section and asks students to record their intuitive associations when listening with three to five words. The words given by the students cover multiple dimensions such as natural scenes, emotional states, and color perceptions. The teacher summarizes all the words and leads the students to compare and discover that the same melody can trigger completely different aesthetic imaginations. Then the teacher asked, "Where do these differences come from?" This leads to the role of tempo, timbre and dynamics in the musical elements in suggesting emotions. In the subsequent segmented listening, the teacher sets the rule forward: after each round of appreciation, the personal experience should be presented in the form of "I heard

(the musical element), felt (the emotion/picture), because __" without a standard answer. When a student offers a different interpretation from the reference, the teacher guides them back to the sheet music and sound to find supporting evidence, rather than simply negating. Through the cycle of "free association - contrastive collision - element retrospection" throughout the class, students gradually understand that the essence of musical inquiry is to establish a logical connection between personal feelings and musical language, rather than waiting for the teacher to announce a single conclusion. With such infiltration over a long period of time, students have shifted from passively waiting for answers to actively seeking musical evidence, and their willingness to explore in the classroom has significantly increased.

## 2.2. Stratify inquiry tasks to suit students' differentiated musical foundation levels

The teacher breaks down the entire inquiry objective, sets gradient inquiry questions and activity tasks, assigns basic perception tasks to students with a poor foundation in music, and sets in-depth analysis tasks to students with a strong ability, so that students of different levels have exploration entry points that suit their own abilities [3]. Teachers should provide appropriate groundwork and guidance to students with a weaker foundation, make up for the necessary basic knowledge of music, lower the threshold for inquiry and thinking, and prevent students from being disconnected from the classroom inquiry process due to their own lack of ability.

For example, in the comprehensive inquiry class of the opera unit "Singing Facial Makeup", the teacher broke down the inquiry task into three levels based on the results of the students' exposure to opera in the class. The basic level requires identifying the character keywords corresponding to the black, red, white, blue, and yellow facial makeup and matching them to the character names in the lyrics of "Singing the Facial Makeup", along with providing quick reference cards for the meanings of the facial makeup colors to lower the cognitive threshold. For the advanced level, after completing the identification, select any character from the lyrics and analyze how the musical style corresponds to the character setting in combination with the characteristics of dragging and enunciation in Peking Opera singing. The extension requires trying to design facial makeup color schemes for characters that do not appear in the lyrics and explaining the correspondence between the color logic and the emotional tone of the singing segment. When implemented in the classroom, teachers provide differentiated brackets for each level of students: for the basic level, there are term interpretation cards and form-filling templates; for the advanced level, there is a list of hints for Peking Opera singing features; and for the extended level, there are blank facial makeup sketches and color matching references. Teachers patrol throughout to observe the progress of each group, and open the entry to the next level to students who have completed the current level tasks ahead of schedule, allowing them to choose to go further or assist their peers in the basic level group. Stratified tasks enable students with weaker musical accumulation to complete the exploration with the help of tools, and students with a better foundation have ample room for expansion. The whole class achieves effective participation at different starting points.

## 2.3. Build a classroom collaboration framework to guide students to engage in inquiry, communication and expression

Teachers should make a reasonable division of roles within the group and define the tasks of different members in the group to avoid the division of participation where a few people take the lead and the majority watch. Set the direction of communication towards musical aesthetics, provide a reference perspective for expression, remove the obstacle of students not knowing how to express their musical emotions, and reduce

the psychological pressure of verbal expression [4]. During the group exploration, the teacher should make rounds to encourage students to share their musical experiences with their peers and facilitate the exchange of experiences and opinions among them.

For example, in an inquiry class on the Radetzky March, the teacher divides the class into groups of six, with one listener, one opinion organizer, one speaker, and one supplementary speaker in each group, and the remaining two take on the roles of timekeeper and blackboard writing assistant, rotating every two rounds. The topic of the inquiry was "How the rhythm characteristics of a march shape the sense of the marching scene", and the teacher provided three perspectives of expression - the position of the beat stress, the rule of instrument entry, and the curve of dynamic change, and demonstrated the sentence pattern: "When (instrument/voice) appears at (dynamic/speed), I feel __".During the group discussion stage, the teacher made a round of observations and found that in one group, the recorder was writing alone while the rest of the members were silent. Then the teacher prompted them to activate the rule of taking turns to speak: each person had to first orally state the discovery, and the recorder then extracted the key words. In the results sharing session, each group's representative gave a three-minute presentation, and the speakers added discoveries that were not covered. The teacher's immediate comments focused on "whether musical elements were used to support the point" rather than the conclusion itself. For groups using vague expressions such as "the melody is pleasant" or "it feels powerful", the teacher asked "where is it pleasant" and "what instruments and dynamics contribute to the power", pushing the expression from emotional description to element analysis. The triple framework transforms group discussions into structured, all-participant collaborative inquiry, effectively enhancing the ability to express musical aesthetics.

## 3. Conclusion

In summary, the effective implementation of inquiry-based learning in primary and secondary school music classrooms can transform the traditional teaching model of music classrooms, fully develop students' musical perception and artistic thinking abilities, and thus implement the goal of cultivating core literacy in the music subject in the classroom. In the future. As the reform of aesthetic education in primary and secondary schools continues to deepen, the inquiry-based teaching concept will also be further developed and improved. Strengthening teaching support and capacity building at the teacher level can continuously optimize the educational model of music classes in primary and secondary schools and help enhance the artistic aesthetic ability and comprehensive humanistic quality of primary and secondary school students.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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