



# Melbourne Disability Institute Community-Based Research Scheme

In partnership with Keys of Life

## Research Report

“Enabling students with disabilities and their families to access and benefit from instrumental music lessons.”

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## Table of Contents

<b>Project Summary .....</b>	<b>3</b>
1. The Literature Search .....	3
Process .....	4
Identified themes from the literature scoping review – interim summary .....	4
2. The qualitative interview study .....	8
(a) The teachers .....	8
Teacher interviews .....	8
Themes and subthemes.....	8
Discussion .....	10
Shared values and philosophies .....	10
Practical considerations affecting delivery of learning .....	11
The experience of teaching .....	12
The benefits of KoL training .....	13
Summary points .....	16
(b) The Students .....	16
Student interviews.....	16
Themes and subthemes.....	17
Discussion .....	17
Shared interests and perspectives .....	17
Practical considerations affecting learning .....	18
The experience of learning.....	18
The benefits of KoL learning.....	19
Summary points .....	20
3. Similarities and differences between the literature review themes and teacher themes .....	21
Musical benefits.....	21
4. Conclusions/future directions .....	22
Appendix 1 – Literature review themes .....	25
Appendix 2 -- Teacher themes .....	29
Appendix 3 -- Student Themes .....	42
Appendix 4 – references included in the literature review study .....	47

## Project Summary

Keys of Life (KoL) is a not-for-profit organisation that provides music lessons, performance and participation opportunities for students with disabilities, their families and their teachers, including professional development for teachers wishing to learn about KoL's PRO method of teaching. KoL proposed a research collaboration with the Melbourne Disability Institute to document how students and teachers experience their unique approach to music education. KoL was motivated to seek this collaboration to better understand how to address the unmet needs of disabled students currently experiencing barriers to access the services of appropriately trained music teachers. They sought to gain insight into the current literature, understand the experiences of teachers who undertake professional development training with KoL, and to seek the perspectives of students taught by KoL trained teachers. This project therefore focused on the dual outcomes of providing information to parents and teachers explaining the possible benefits of their model of learning. In addition, the project sought to understand any challenges or barriers to specialist music education training that might exist. KoL anticipates that this information will provide them with insights into how they can continue to improve and develop their training opportunities, encourage more parents to incorporate music education into their children's lives, and to support teachers to acquire the skills to support the learning needs of diverse learners. Further, the findings are likely to be relevant to other music teachers seeking to improve accessibility and reduce barriers to learning instrumental music.

The project consists of two sub-projects:

- (1) A narrative synthesis of the literature
- (2) A qualitative interview study of
  - a. Teachers who have attended KoL professional development
  - b. Students taught by KoL teachers

### 1. The Literature Search

A narrative literature review was undertaken to identify current approaches to instrumental learning for students with disabilities. Undertaking this review assists researchers to situate KoL's approach within contemporary practice. Although KoL's original proposal referred to "disability", it was suggested during the application process that "autism" would provide a tighter focus for searching existing literature. It was considered an appropriate focus because KoL provides training specifically relating to this diagnosis. Some of the literature refers to other forms of disability and has been included if it provides relevant information about the research questions.

The primary research question guiding the literature review was:

What are the perceived barriers to and enablers of access to studio-based instrumental lessons for autistic people, or disabled people more broadly?

In addition, two sub-questions were asked:

Sub-question 1: What types of benefits of music education for disabled people are described in the literature?

## Sub-question 2: What values and philosophies inform music education for disabled or autistic students, as described in the literature?

The analysis of the literature according to these questions was intended to identify salient considerations relating to music education for students with autism and disability.

### *Process*

We conducted a scoping review, which, as the name indicates, is an exploratory evaluation of literature relating to emerging fields, or topics that have attracted little formal research. Criteria for inclusion were a focus on studio-based rather than classroom-based music lessons, and studies that focused on students who are neurodivergent or autistic. The literature included in the scoping review reported outcomes for students who were mostly, but not exclusively, children. As the age of the students varied, we will refer to them as ‘students’ throughout this report. The literature included either needed to report data (e.g., surveys, interviews, quantitative analysis or case studies) or provide protocols for teachers (e.g., “how-to” manuals, strategies, methods, synthesis of life work). The literature further needed to be peer-reviewed, in English, and published since 2005, as this was a time where many countries adopted antidiscrimination policies for people with disabilities. We searched a range of EBSCO databases through the University of Melbourne, as well as ProQuest and PsychInfo databases, and Google Scholar. Search terms varied considerably according to the databases used, but generally related to autism, neurodiversity, disability, studio music lessons, special educational needs, music teacher training, skills and methods, student perspectives, desired outcomes, values and philosophies and methods and frameworks for teaching diverse learners. Sixty-three potentially relevant studies were retrieved. After screening, fifteen were found to be relevant to the research question and met the criteria for inclusion. (See Appendix 4 for a list of included studies.) The identified themes are summarised in the next section. A comparison of the main similarities and differences between these findings and the themes identified through interviews with KoL teachers and students is given after the interviews section.

### *Identified themes from the literature scoping review – interim summary*

For each of the literature items, we extracted data related to the following themes:

- teacher values and philosophies
- barriers and enablers to access to music education
- musical and non-musical benefits associated with studio or similar lessons
- the methods, models, and strategies used by teachers
- attitudinal factors
- environmental considerations
- student feedback
- family feedback

Many of these categories showed a broad division between teacher values and approaches within music education. We found that teaching approaches could be loosely be grouped together as either *student-centred*, where music teachers emphasised the need for flexibility and customisation, or those which were more *disability-centred*, where music teachers saw the students’ condition or behaviours as being a problem and promoted less-flexible and pre-determined ideas about teaching music to disabled students. These two stances identified in the

literature will be elaborated below. Appendix 1 provides the full list of themes and subthemes extracted from the literature review.

***Student-centred values or philosophies*** were associated with positive teacher attitudes towards disability and a commitment to inclusion. Some studies connected these values to a belief that music is an innate aspect of human experience; teachers who focused on the child's strengths and their inclusion in musical activities considered themselves to be supporting their students at a fundamentally human level. Such values display a spirit of advocacy, where teachers take an ethical stance on providing access to universally valued experiences.

Within the student-centred approaches, values, enabling and attitudinal factors as well as strategies were closely interconnected. The common themes of following the child's lead, and making meaningful connections with students, were indicative of this closeness. Approaches that positioned disability as a problem also showed some consistent thematic interconnections, but they were not as strongly delineated as the strengths-based examples.

A prominent enabling factor associated with student-centred values was music teachers taking responsibility for the learning environment. These studies highlighted that music teachers must recognise and cultivate the skills to communicate with and adapt to the needs of their students; identify the student's strengths; as well as understand how the student learns and discover what was motivating for them. For successful enactment of these factors, other enabling elements needed to be in place, such as supportive institutions, policies, training, access to resources and communities of practice. The role of parents in music lessons and education was less clear; both parental interference and lack of family support were positioned as barriers in different studies.

The values and enabling characteristics of music teachers were further broken down into personal attributes and attitudes; positivity, enjoying challenges, intuitive responses, and, especially, flexibility and patience were seen as advantageous. Teacher self-awareness was described as valuable, including working consciously to challenge limiting assumptions around disability. A teacher's effectiveness can also include proactively seeking appropriate contact with others, including allied health professionals and parents, as well as openness to self-education.

Specific teaching strategies conformed to the principles of knowing the child and working with their capabilities. Breaking tasks down into achievable components and adjusting the pace of teaching as required were common, and sometimes explicitly linked with ensuring that tasks were meaningful or achievable. Alternatively, prioritising meaningfulness and achievability resulted in appropriate adjustments. Standard methods and music curricula were also adapted to meet the autistic student's learning needs. Teaching in a holistic manner that is responsive to a child's sensory and motor profiles was also encouraged. Other strategies included extrinsic motivations of praise, encouragement, and rewards. Routine, repetition, and consistency were also widely recommended. Seeking evidence and expertise was encouraged to a lesser degree. Two studies considered parental involvement to be important ("critical" and "integral"). A range of specific strategies was mentioned as well.

Unsurprisingly, communication featured in considerations of various music education strategies reported in the literature. These discussions were concerned mostly with the music teacher's options for delivering information to the autistic students (which often identified the use of visuals and/or minimal or clear and specific language). Some identified the need for

music teachers to have an expansive way of understanding their disabled students' communications, especially those that did not involve language. Some literature connected the quality of interactions with the development of a relationship between student and teacher. More student-centred approaches positioned teaching as a form of identity, or teachers as tools in the teaching process. Developing rapport and meaningful connection with autistic and disabled students was part of the process of teaching effectively. Less flexible, deficit-focused approaches positioned teachers more as providers of strategies that students needed to adapt to.

In contrast with the student-centred orientation associated with enabling factors, barriers tended to be grouped around *deficit-oriented* ways of thinking about autistic students, including the circumscribed production of the disabled student as a curiosity. Preconceptions or lack of awareness about disability, child development and learning processes were associated with a lack of dynamism in the teacher and the learning environment, resulting from or compounded by inadequate training, professional development, teaching methods, expectations, and resources. A negative view of autistic children was expressed through concern about behavioural and emotional problems and deficits, resulting in the child being broadly described as 'difficult to teach'. This *disability-centred* view of the child was associated with a lack of adaptation of music lesson formats and strategies. Sometimes a lack of education about autism resulted in music teachers misunderstanding their students' responses and behaviours; teachers sometimes felt discomfort or even fear of disability. Without the student-centred ethos, there was more of a tendency for teachers to adhere to preconceptions about autism and hold lower expectations for their progress in developing music skills.

The analysis of the literature suggests that there were commonplace musical benefits for diverse learners having instrumental lessons. These musical benefits were no different to other learners, and included instrumental and/or singing skill development and mastery, music performance skills, acquiring general musical knowledge (including music theory), and skills in musical creativity.

The literature reported various non-musical benefits which included improvements in the sensorimotor, cognitive, communication, emotional regulation and social domains. There was a cluster of inter-related themes involving wellbeing, quality of life, inclusion and participation. Participation, or being included, was implicitly associated with wellbeing and quality of life. Few studies discussed what they meant by inclusion, but performance and social interactions related to instrumental learning were sometimes offered as examples. This general attention to quality of life was sometimes broken down into the areas of pleasure, enjoyment, self-expression, relaxation, independence or autonomy. These broad terms were often associated with the philosophy of music engagement being an innately human activity.

The wide range of methods and models used for music teaching ranged from established systems and curricula to highly improvised or customised approaches. Choice of method and forms of adaptation were closely associated with the student-centred factors described above, tending to be modulated by a music teacher's dynamic engagement with a student.

Environmental concerns were not strongly represented in the reviewed studies. However, the music teacher's willingness to adapt the environment was a recurrent theme, linked to the student-centred values and strategies discussed above. Otherwise, reducing distractions was the most consistent environmental recommendation, although one study advocated for a choice of instruments available to promote spontaneous engagement.

The literature described criteria for music lessons, which included informal assessments of increased musical capacities or the acquisition of specific skills; consistent with a student-centred philosophy, gains in these areas were related to the specific student rather than an external standard. Developments in extra-musical capacities were sometimes taken as criteria for success. Few studies included direct feedback from music students about their own learning outcomes. It is not clear from the literature why the autistic students' perspective on their learning was rarely sought. Students were sometimes observed during their music lessons, and gestures, expressions, vocalisations, willing participation, and motivation were interpreted as forms of feedback. Similarly, few studies sought systematic feedback from parents. Parent feedback about their child's music education experiences was sometimes noted informally, as when they reported positive musical and non-musical developments in their children, or changes that had not occurred in therapy. One study included feedback from a teacher's aide about the student's outcomes. When welcomed, parent feedback could be motivating for teachers, or result in adjustments to teaching.

Taken together, the broadly student-centred values, strategies, teacher characteristics and attitudinal factors associated with positive music learning outcomes suggested that the students were seen as unique individuals, receiving teaching approaches specifically tailored to their needs, informed to varying degrees by specific knowledge about autism or other disabilities. This is supported by the emphasis on flexibility in the forms of music curriculum adaptation, pacing, goal setting, breaking tasks down to be achievable and meaningful, adjusting expectations, and being guided by the student's engagements. This in turn was related to the kinds of benefits that students derived from learning an instrument. Development of skill in playing the instrument taught was valued across the board, but there was perhaps generally a stronger focus on music education supporting wellbeing, inclusion, creativity, and general development in autistic students.

### **Broader implications and reflections**

One study implied that having student-centred beliefs sitting alongside disability-centred practices could also be barrier to accessibility. This observation could be useful for interpreting some of the results of this review. Are the practices utilised by music teachers congruent with their student-centred values? For instance, although a student-centred approach was often explicitly recommended or implied, descriptions of communication were often unidirectional -- teacher to student. This raises the question of how the music teacher "views" the student; as "raw material" to be shaped by the external forces? Or as a collaborator, an expert in their life? In which case, how do music teachers recognise the student's expertise? For example, a study advocating a holistic style of teaching also distinguished between students who were 'ready' for learning and those who 'required music therapy' to address behavioural issues before commencing lessons, a recommendation that could be seen as ableist. The common focus on reducing distractions is intended to guide a child's participation; however, the study that advocated for a choice of instruments to promote spontaneous engagement potentially raises the possibility that such reductions may veer into the territory of constraining music student opportunities. Further, while the literature shows a strong concern with "good" teaching practices, studies generally did not seek out autistic students' experiences of their music lessons. The inconsistent treatment of parents, who were at times seen as integral to successful music learning but for different reasons, and at others, viewed somewhat negatively, warrants further investigation. One study referred to the absence of disabled students in teacher training, raising the question of whether active steps to promote a more diverse teaching community might address many of the attitudinal barriers identified in the studies.

## 2. The qualitative interview study

Interviews with teachers and students were conducted to seek their perspectives on their respective learning experiences with KoL.

### *(a) The teachers*

Ten teachers were interviewed. All but two had had more than two decades of teaching experience. Most had a bachelor's degree in music. The majority taught piano and many taught more than one instrument. All had done at least part of a KoL course between 2017 and 2022. Across their careers, they reported teaching from five to more than twenty students with diverse needs (i.e., where a formal diagnosis or parent report of a specific need was present). All had taught autistic students. Additionally, nine teachers taught students with ADHD, six taught students with learning disabilities including dyslexia, four taught students with anxiety, amongst other conditions. Many of the teachers taught private studio lessons, but some worked in mainstream or special schools, while a few worked in both environments.

For teachers, the research question was:

What do music teachers who have undergone professional development at KoL identify as important in supporting students with diverse learning needs to learn a musical instrument?

### Teacher interviews

All teacher interviews were conducted via Zoom by Melissa. We devised the following prompts to guide the discussions:

- How has professional development through KoL affected your approach to instrumental teaching with students who have diverse learning needs?
- What are the top 3 things you have learnt about teaching students with diverse learning needs?
- What does accessibility mean to you, in relation to music education?
- What do you enjoy about teaching students with diverse learning needs?
- What do you find challenging about teaching students with diverse learning needs?
- How would you describe the teacher-student relationship you have with your students who have diverse learning needs?
- What have been the most important things that students have gained through having music lessons with you?

We found nine principal themes in the participants' responses. These were further divided into sub-themes that identified more specifically their views on how KoL training affected their work with diverse learners:

### Themes and subthemes



1. Confidence to teach diverse learners is built upon having knowledge of students' strengths and challenges.
  - a. Gaining an overall awareness of diverse learning needs.
  - b. Examples of student progress helps to bring theory to life.
  - c. Good teaching of general principles is relevant to diverse learners.
  - d. Being part of an interdisciplinary community of practice is helpful and necessary.
  - e. Refining teacher observations of student readiness and responding with flexibility.
  - f. Better understanding of creating a positive learning environment.
  - g. Emphasising importance of aural learning alongside other techniques.
  - h. Better understanding of impact of anxiety on learning.
2. Quality teacher interactions with students are essential for learning.
  - a. A strong teacher-student connection helps student flourish.
  - b. Collaborate with the student to find individual approaches.
  - c. Teachers can create the environment to unlock the students' musicality.
  - d. Developing more sensitivity, attunement, and patience.
  - e. Teachers' expectations of success can foster student expectations and build self-esteem.
3. Including parents in music education is promoted as the ideal.
  - a. Collaborating with parents is integral to teaching diverse learners.
  - b. More recognition needed of challenges to parent involvement.
  - c. More training needed to collaborate effectively with parents.
4. Performance events provide opportunities for community building and sense of achievement.
5. Support is needed to use tactile approaches.
  - a. Tactile approaches can be at odds with school guidelines.
  - b. Online lessons limit tactile approaches.
6. Time pressures on teachers negatively impact accessibility.
  - a. Time is needed to build relationships.
  - b. Time is needed to build resources.
7. Financial pressures on teachers impact accessibility in complex ways.
  - a. Music tuition fees don't recognise professional development required.
  - b. Music tuition is expensive for families.
  - c. Teachers can feel hesitant to charge fees if outcomes for students are uncertain.
8. Job satisfaction is high when supporting diverse learners to access music education.
  - a. Enjoyment seeing student's musicality develop.
  - b. Enjoying the challenge of finding solutions for students.
9. Musical benefits for students are emphasised.
  - a. Fostering a life-long connection to music.
10. Providing students with a broad experience of capability and fulfillment.
  - a. Meeting students at their level of need supports mastery.
  - b. Providing diverse learners with opportunities for positive feelings.
  - c. Teachers believe that being an invested witness to the achievements of their students boosts confidence and self-worth.

See Appendix 2 for theme tables that include quotes for each subtheme.

In the following section, we have presented the interview themes and sub-themes as a narrative that aims to reflect the way that the KoL training was experienced by teachers; what was valued and why, and questions or considerations that their feedback raised concerning KoL's mission and model.

## Discussion

### *Shared values and philosophies*

"I had a dyslexic kid for a couple of years who - his whole sense of self was characterized by a complete loser and no hoper. And it took me a year in lessons to sort of get him to believe that, no, that's not how I saw him and therefore my expectations were in line with that."

The music teachers generally described themselves as providers of safe learning environments, where autistic and disabled students' achievements would be witnessed and encouraged. Negative forms of student self-evaluation, which may have occurred in other contexts, could be replaced with music learning experiences where mistakes were normalised, questions were welcomed, and diverse learners felt valued and fulfilled. These priorities were related to an often-repeated belief that music teachers need to be flexible and tailor their lessons to the student, adjusting pace and incorporating non-musical activities as needed.

Adaptations were made in response to the readiness of the student for learning at the time of the lesson; "I understand [a specific student] and I know what that is and I can give him five minutes to leave the room and just to get a drink and chill out, [...]. I sort of can read him way better." Many of the music teachers felt that empathy, attunement, patience and flexibility allowed them to develop awareness both of a disabled student's strengths, and of signs of difficulty with focus, all of which improved the lessons.

"You've got to adjust and tweak your training to teach that student the best possible way and give them the best possible chance."

"I think when you're working with kids with diverse learning needs, you have to sort of navigate your way around and understand that it's okay. I actually feel it's okay for him to be ignoring, a minim, and a semi-breve, we'll get to that, we'll get to that in time."

"It's recognizing more subtle signs of when the student's anxious and working to reduce that first before you try and teach the kids or when the subtle signs of when they are agitated or a little bit restless."

"It's all gradually just learning and understanding more about the conditions that these kids have so you can draw on their strengths and just not worry about the weaknesses."

Many of the music teacher participants reported that the work of researching, planning and adapting lessons for disabled students was actually enjoyable and rewarding. While the experience of playing an instrument was considered highly valuable, the benefits of the lessons themselves was considered to extend beyond music, offering the disabled students life skills and boosting confidence. Several of the teachers explicitly considered themselves to be learners; “I’ve learned [from KoL PD] to never stop learning, because by observing [...] I still learn.” This, as well as connecting with communities of teachers, strengthened their own music teaching practices. Many of the music teachers interviewed valued parental input in the music lessons. At the same time, there was acknowledgement that parent involvement could be challenging to implement, as parents might not always share information about their child’s learning needs -- “sometimes the parents can mean

If they’re reaching out for lessons, except for that one outlier person, typically, you have a passionate supportive parent, right. The passionate supportive parent brings this to the table. [...] “This is my kid. They’re just another kid. This is how they approach life. It’s just another kid. They can do shit. They will do shit. Can you help?” “Yup.” “Awesome. Let’s go.”

“I’ve always tried to include the parents, increasingly. But I think Keys of Life just kind of took that to a whole new level.”

well and they don’t want the teachers to perceive their child any differently” – or they do not become actively involved – “The mum just wasn’t involved. That was a long struggle. But now the mum loves it.” Some music teachers also placed importance on connecting music learning with a student’s social life through various opportunities to learn, practice and perform with peers.

“The other thing to try and get them to do music with other students [...] I’ve always been a fan of that but I really understand more now [since KoL training] how important it is for the student.”

**Reflections on the data (1)**  
It is worth noting the extensive experience of the teachers who volunteered to be interviewed for this study. We do not know whether this is typical of KoL trainees, but it may be worth considering the following:

- does KoL appeal to a subset of teachers who already value flexible practices and hold generally student-centred teaching philosophies? If so, is KoL’s mission to work with teachers with these predispositions, or does KoL aspire to broaden its reach to include teachers who may not currently prioritise these ways of engaging with students?

*Practical considerations affecting delivery of learning*

The ten teachers in this study described how they contend with a variety of circumstances relating to their actual practice, including places of employment, finances, parent expectations and child safeguarding. Some participants explained that their employment conditions imposed different safeguarding measures that could affect lesson dynamics. For example, music teachers may be required to follow “no touch” rules, reducing their ability to use the KoL recommended “hand over hand” method.

Several music teachers reported that they did not take payment either in introductory lessons or in lessons where the disabled student had not been able to focus. Another teacher mentioned, regretfully, being unable to offer a no-payment option due to their own financial instability. These teachers seemed to believe they were generally trying to assist parents of disabled children manage their limited finances, with the implication being that parents might not see value in the time spent developing rapport if the music lesson itself was ‘not productive’ on a particular day, or value the music teacher’s consistent and attuned presence in the disabled child’s life. While many teachers reported positive engagement with parents, some noted that parents had threatened to withhold lessons from children as a way of enforcing discipline –“he loves coming and his parents somewhat unwisely use it as a bit of a stick [threatening to withdraw lesson]” – or, that some parents wish to ‘push’ their disabled child at a pace that the teacher did not endorse. These situations were all described as stressful for the instrumental music teachers.

### **Reflections on the data (2)**

- is it part of KoL’s mission to offer support and education to institutions and parents as well as individual teachers?
- does KoL training take into account the financial stresses that are felt by teachers working with diverse learners, and the constraints of school environments which might limit the application of KoL recommendations? If so, could appropriate modules, presentations or workshops be formulated for schools and parents?

### *The experience of teaching*

Students taught by the participants in this study ranged from kindergarten age through to adulthood. Some students were progressing through formal education such as AMEB exams and high school certification. Others were following more personally tailored goals in their lessons. The music teachers all reported enjoying the lessons with diverse learners. Teachers witnessing student joy was a recurrent theme, and, for many teachers, an indicator of success.

“I think I get a lot of joy out of seeing them enjoying what they do and they just are genuine. I feel there's never this, “I have to practice. I haven't practiced.” They love coming to the lessons. So, I get a lot out of it finding once I've taught them a little piece and we play a duet and I see a smile on their face or I see them jumping up the steps to come into my house, I think that's just so rewarding. And also knowing that or hoping that you give them something that is a safe place for them.”

“I think that's the challenge, that's the skill in the teaching is that you identify, or you create the opportunity for those successes, or you tailor-make the situation so that the student experiences that sense of success.”

Helping students to be confident and capable were also sources of satisfaction for many of these music teachers. The expression and ‘unlocking’ of music in the diverse learner was also a significant focus. Some found that their disabled students’ different approaches helped to broaden their own horizons as teachers; “They come up with different things. They notice different things. And maybe I relate to some of those things.” Most of these music teachers wanted to be a reliable and welcoming figure in the disabled or autistic child’s life and emphasised their own presence as a way of providing a safe environment. Some teachers stressed the need to provide appropriate learning challenges.

“I really think number one is to be present to them. I think that really is everything, to be completely available. You just don't know. It's like with anybody, but it's definitely heightened in these students.”

“I said to [a student I worked with for 3 years] my expectations were now starting to change. [...] I could see him getting shitty with me, but he listened, and he didn't sort of dismiss it. So, I sort of thought, well, maybe there's a good enough rapport, and he knows me well enough to know that I have his best interests first and foremost.”

When there is time to develop a relationship, teachers can adjust expectations and support students through the stress of new learning in music; Some felt that the music lesson environment provided a space for these students to escape limitations elsewhere placed on their opportunities; the focus was on teachers working with students at their level and providing a sense of achievement, or a “buzz” that they perceived may not be as available to diverse learners.

### Reflections on the data (3)

- does KoL consider itself a source of reliable expertise for teachers seeking an introduction to learners with diverse needs such as autism? How does KoL frame the information that it provides to teachers?
- where does KoL access its knowledge of research on disabilities? Are the sources optimal for its purposes?
- does KoL aim to keep up-to-date on research developments in autism and other conditions? If so, is it desirable to develop a formal process for updating knowledge and sharing these materials with teachers?

### *The benefits of KoL training*

Participants frequently cited observing Daphne working with students as informative and inspiring. Through the KoL training, they developed a stronger ability to recognise their diverse students as capable, and discovered ways to connect with them as learners. Many spoke approvingly of the practical aspects of the KoL training, including the “before and after” materials, the use of Suzuki techniques, especially the aural approach, understanding the impact of positive and negative feedback, varying the mode of delivery (e.g., use of visuals), and breaking tasks down.

“It’s equipped me with more tools to tailor my lessons for each student better;” “having those different ways of presenting the same information to them, in terms of the tune we're going to play, but you can read it off the page, or you can hear, or I can show you. There are different times, different students, different ways, and even I guess, going back to the first one, keeping the language simple.”

Teachers felt that the KoL workshops helped them to recognise diverse learners' receptiveness in the moment. The sense of community created by KoL was also appreciated. Daphne's own willingness to continue to learn was often recognised as motivating; rather than focusing on what teachers don't know, Daphne modelled a process in which they were all participating at different stages.

"I think even in one of the demonstrations, there was the looks of a meltdown in the making happening, and she was just like, okay, we step away and it's time to just back off [...]. So it's okay."

"One of the things I observed about Daphne, she's constantly second guessing herself. I'm like, 'We're all second guessing ourselves.' If you're conscientious and trying, you have these moments just like, 'Is this right? Am I doing okay?' There's no feedback. [...After training] I'm just like, 'Really? I can do that?' I saw it. I'm like, 'Oh my God. That's brilliant'."

"I always believed in it, but this really affirmed [...] the collaborative aspect [...] getting the parents to be actively involved in the learning process. And it shouldn't demand too much from the parents. They literally just have to sing and dance. And it's playtime with the kids."

For many of the teachers interviewed, Daphne's approach reduced or removed the distinction between teaching students characterised as diverse learners and those considered to be typical. Some teachers found that her approach helped them to dismantle unhelpful expectations. Daphne's incorporation of parents also gave these teachers insight into the importance of family dynamics for enhancing the student's learning opportunities. Teachers found that her perspective helped them to understand that bringing parents in actively enhances the student's learning.

A number of teachers specified the non-musical KoL modules on autism offered by Daphne's husband Joe as particularly helpful. The teachers framed the benefits of having this deeper knowledge as helping them to step back, see a bigger picture and not take student conduct personally.

"It's not just kids being challenging or difficult. So, understanding the reasons for what looks like behavioural issues, helped me be more empathetic, and I think just more patient with those issues when they came up in the lessons."

Teachers appear to have integrated this information into their teaching frameworks; for some, it seemed particularly empowering.

"You might have a certain chronology of building skills. And now you might go, 'Well, after 6 months, this should be happening, and after 10 months, this should be happening,' and so on and so forth. Well, I think you have to be continually reassessing that, and your definition of success is completely student-centred."

Most participants valued what they learned from the KoL workshops. Teachers described how they valued access to the disabled student's perspective during training; "some of the students present their side of the story or seeing how they function in the context, that kind of thing." KoL training was perceived to meet a need that was otherwise not being well addressed in professional development.

“I would say it’s [...] a holistic approach in the truest sense of the word. [...] going beyond the personal and interpersonal with the family, teacher, and students, to the practical, to the intuitive, to the physical, and [...] academic side of things.”

The prominence of the Suzuki method was generally appreciated, especially the emphasis on aurality. One participant wished for more discussion of creative examples involving collaborative composition that were used, that did not seem to draw upon the Suzuki focus.

There’s not a body to go to. In an ideal world, I could Google and find -- let’s just call it the Keys of Life Institute is the Victorian authority association on neurodivergent teaching for private students. With no body or something to go to [...], I was constantly panicking, second guessing myself, Googling the bleep out of everything. I want to get this right. I’m treading water here and making shit up, right. I was giving everything a go and working with parents. They need a body to go to or something to go to. [...] It’s just having a point of reference. That’s the most difficult thing.

The community benefits for diverse learners and their families offered by KoL concerts were also considered positive aspects of the approach.

However, these teachers also noted that the KoL approach relies on a process of selection, where parent and family commitment to their child’s music education is seen as important to success.

It’s not just for the point of having the students perform their pieces to people. It’s also giving the parents an opportunity to socialize afterwards, [...] giving them a little community to talk about their child, but in a positive light, or maybe they might mention some difficulties that they’re having.

“[KoL teaching occurs] on the basis of choosing the parents and [...] If they’re not on board, you can only expect so much.”

It was also observed by some music teachers that aspects of the approach were impracticable in their school environments; one teacher described an “enormous gulf” between what KoL offered and possibilities in their own workplace. The charitable nature of KoL perhaps created

opportunities that were not as easily replicated when financial security was factored into the realities of teaching.

#### Reflections on the data (4)

- does KoL wish to continue to work with like-minded teachers or families or expand to address learning in other contexts?
- how does KoL understand the relationship between its status as a charitable entity and the form of the education it provides? Is there any desire to consider developing or adapting the model for broader reach?

### Summary points

- Music teachers attracted to KoL training tended to have student-centred, flexible attitudes towards teaching.
- Practical issues relating to finances, work environments, engaging families and child safeguarding created challenges for delivering optimal teaching.
- Music teachers felt joy and satisfaction due to their involvement with diverse learners' progress and successes.
- Music teachers largely enjoyed the challenges of customising lessons to individual students, when the practical concerns did not make this process too onerous.
- Music teachers found that KoL training provided important education, practical tips, a better 'feel' for the diverse student, access to informative examples, useful modelling, and liberation from preconceived ideas about students with disabilities.

### *(b) The Students*

Six students with diverse learning needs were interviewed. All were aged in their mid-teens. Five were taught by Daphne and one by another KoL-trained teacher. Some students additionally discussed lessons for other instruments that they were also taking, both at school and privately. Most students had an autism diagnosis, and some had medical conditions. Some attended mainstream school and others, specialist schools.

For student/family interviews the research question was:

What is the experience of music students learning from a teacher trained in the 'PRO Method'?

### Student interviews

The interviews were conducted in person or over Zoom by Grace or Melissa. We devised the following prompts to guide the discussions:

- What do you like the most about your music lessons?
- What do you like the least about your music lessons?
- What helps you learn to play your instrument?
- What is hard about learning to play your instrument?
- How do you feel when you are playing music? *(if this question was too abstract, the interviewer asked what the student likes about playing music, or asked them to draw the feeling of playing music)*

To comply with ethical research practices, we ensured that questions for students did not directly probe for information about their teacher. We asked what happens in their music lessons, and which aspects they find easy or challenging about learning to play an instrument. We asked how their music teacher helps their learning in broad terms only.

We found six principal themes in their responses. These were further divided into sub-themes that identified more detailed relationships between KoL and their experiences, including contrasts with other forms of music education that they were undertaking.



## Themes and subthemes

1. Music lessons support social connections.
  - a. Group lessons, duets, ensembles, and concerts are ways to connect with others.
  - b. Seeing other students perform is inspiring.
2. The music teacher-student relationship is supportive.
  - a. Students relax and can be themselves in music lessons.
  - b. Teachers take a collaborative approach.
3. KoL curriculum is tailored to the student.
  - a. KoL adjusts to the student's pace and is accessible.
  - b. Students are supported to be their best.
  - c. Playing by ear improves accessibility.
  - d. Video and audio recordings support learning.
  - e. Sensitive and respectful physical support helps learning.
4. Learning an instrument can be challenging.
  - a. Practicing and learning new pieces is hard work.
  - b. Lessons scheduled late in the day are challenging.
  - c. Accessing specialised notation is difficult.
  - d. Learning to play an instrument takes a long time.
  - e. Playing an instrument can be physically painful.
5. Encouragement from parents is important.
  - a. Parent belief in their child's ability is important.
6. Playing an instrument has changed my life.
  - a. Music has become something I deeply love.
  - b. Playing an instrument builds a sense of pride.
  - c. Playing an instrument feels good.

See Appendix 3 for theme tables that include quotes for each subtheme.

In the next section, we present the data as a narrative to more specifically reflect the way that the KoL teacher training contributed to the students' experiences. We have further offered questions or considerations that the student data raised concerning KoL's mission and model.

## Discussion

### *Shared interests and perspectives*

The students came from a variety of family and cultural backgrounds. While they were each at different levels of instrumental lessons and music education, all found their instrumental learning personally fulfilling. All showed interest in the social dimensions of their instrumental lessons.

#### **Reflections on the data (5)**

- does KoL provide feedback opportunities for students and families who do not find that KoL meets their needs? Could KoL benefit from seeking such feedback?

*Practical considerations affecting learning*

Fitting in lessons and practice alongside school requirements, the commitments of other family members, therapies, fatigue, and a desire for time to themselves were reported as challenges to instrumental lessons for some of these diverse learners. The continuity of working with one teacher was important for some.

**Reflections on the data (6)**

- does KoL deal with practical issues on a case-by-case basis or is there a philosophy or guidelines relating to balance and perhaps wellbeing?
- How does KoL address discontinuity in parent-learner-teacher evaluations of the benefits of learning?

*The experience of learning*

These six students with diverse learning needs expressed a range of positive emotions and experiences associated with their instrumental music lessons, including joy and fulfilment. For some, this took the form of expressing themselves through their music. Lessons and practice produced states of relaxation and calm which could last beyond the playing, or they could be energising.

“It makes me feel calm playing piano. [...] Calm is like being quiet, playing piano, really focusing on the dynamics and everything else. [...] I think that's really something special about playing piano. [...] I: does it last after you finish playing piano? Yes.”

Some students actively sought out their instruments to heighten or lower their states or arousal. Many reported feeling a sense of achievement and pride which produced happiness.

“[When tired] It feels good to play.”

Some found that their music practice provided opportunities to extend their creativity, develop performance skills, and experiment with their own potential. This was framed as exciting and joyful, and could be characterised as an experience of personal growth.

The social dimensions of playing an instrument were important to all students interviewed; the social aspects of practising or learning with other students were valued. All of these six diverse music students described how they enjoyed performing. This included performing for family, school concerts, or for strangers through the Public Piano scheme, but for most, at KoL events.

“[Playing piano with other musicians] it's like so exciting.”

“[Playing in school ensemble] makes me more social.”

“When I was younger and I remembered sitting on the floor of [Daphne's] living room surrounded by her other students [...] I loved it, yeah.”

One student was inspired to consider creating an ensemble. Performances elicited feelings of pride, excitement and confidence brought about by sharing interests with other students.

“Every time after I play [the piece being learned in lessons], I get very happy and then I start dancing around my room. I get very happy inside.”

Some of the students with diverse learning needs reported that practice and learning new pieces were difficult; “I like getting help best [as opposed to learning new things].” Some specified that recordings of new pieces helped them to learn. The role of parents in maintaining practice at home was mentioned as a difficult experience – one student felt that directions to practice and complete homework was like “working all night” -- but also as a positive form of support. Pain, frustration, sadness and anger were mentioned as part of the experience of learning an instrument, but generally with awareness that these sensations pass or lessen with practice. These challenges of instrumental learning were improved through teacher encouragement, especially when the music teacher communicated to the diverse learner their belief that they were capable of doing the set task.

“I don’t have to judge stuff based on difficulty anymore. I can just play it if I like it and just enjoy the actual music.”

The role of parents in maintaining practice at home was mentioned as a difficult experience – one student felt that directions to practice and complete homework was like “working all night” -- but also as a positive form of support. Pain, frustration, sadness and anger were mentioned as part of the experience of learning an instrument, but generally with awareness that these sensations pass or lessen with practice. These challenges of instrumental learning were improved through teacher encouragement, especially when the music teacher communicated to the diverse learner their belief that they were capable of doing the set task.

“Mum: I think you really like performing, don’t you, and doing a big bow. S1: Yeah.”

“It’s fun because it adds more background noise and stuff.”

“What I like doing with piano is performing in front of people, especially my school [...] a couple of times I’ve accompanied students singing as well. [...] I: Do you enjoy that? Yeah, it’s really fun.”

“[Without KoL concerts and duets] I will be, like, I don’t know, sad maybe.”

“I want to join the [KoL] music group. Or maybe I can use it to start my own band of people.”

### Reflections on the data (7)

Given the high value placed on the social elements of learning by students...

- would KoL consider extending its teacher education to include information about the role of social interaction in child development?
- would KoL consider introducing similar workshops aimed at parents?
- does KoL have the resources to extend social opportunities for current students?
- could KoL network with other groups providing such opportunities?

### *The benefits of KoL learning*

Learning with KoL trained teachers provided valued opportunities to these diverse learners that were not always available in their school environments; Students of Daphne commented on their rapport – conversations that they participated in, a sense that their teacher got to know them over time. These students described how they felt that Daphne treated them as individuals, demonstrated by her adaptability, exploring options to accommodate specific needs, or pacing lessons appropriately.

“[Daphne] She tells me what to play and how to fix things.”

“Daphne always had a very, very open mind. She was always happy to help whoever wanted it, whoever wanted to learn music. She was happy to teach. She was happy to adapt to whatever needed to happen, which I think’s something that more teachers should be open to.”

Some students reported that “getting help” or “fix[ing] things up” was a valued aspect of their lessons; Opportunities to witness others was motivating for the social dimensions described above, but also for creating interest in trying new pieces themselves and deepening their awareness of progress by witnessing this in others.

“[KoL ensembles offer] an opportunity because [...] there’s not many people [at school] learning an instrument.”

Various students specifically mentioned the value of learning to play pieces by ear, breaking pieces down to particular pages and/or into separate hands, or using hand over hand. Ensemble pieces were often arranged by music teachers to accommodate the requirements of individual diverse learners. The sense of community that accompanied KoL performances created a sense of belonging for many of these diverse students. The sense of individual needs being addressed was described as a strong benefit.

“Frankly, even if I had to get up at 1:00 in the morning, the lessons would be worth it.”

“Every child is different and learns differently and having that adaptability’s important.”

#### **Reflections on the data (8)**

- could more support be offered to students when starting to learn new pieces, as this was reported to be the most difficult aspect of their lessons?
- as per teachers’ experiences, are there opportunities for expanding the strengths of the KoL model, and how do these relate to the charitable status of KoL?

#### Summary points

- Students with diverse learning needs described feeling joy and competence from learning an instrument and playing music.
- Students with diverse learning needs perceive that playing their instruments assisted their self-regulation and personal growth.
- The teen-aged students with diverse learning needs described important connections between their instrumental learning and their social opportunities.
- Students with diverse learning needs appreciated the range of teaching strategies incorporated by their teachers, including use of recordings, playing by ear, individual pacing of learning, and physical support when necessary.

### *3. Similarities and differences between the literature review themes and teacher themes*

The ten KoL trained teachers interviewed for this study shared the emphasis identified in the broader literature about working with the diverse learner's strengths, supported by appropriate adaptations to their music lessons. They also shared the common self-perception that effective music teachers possess the attributes of patience and flexibility, they enjoy challenges, need to equip themselves with appropriate knowledge, and must centre the student. Supporting diverse learners through creating good habits and consistency were also frequently mentioned as beneficial for learning. The research literature further identified the importance of supportive policies, training, institutions, professional development, resources, and communities of practice as enablers of quality music education for autistic students and those with disability. The absence of these qualities were often described as barriers, and KoL trained teachers interviewed for this study broadly shared these views. The theme of the importance of appropriate training was somewhat stronger in the interview data than in the literature, which is understandable given that the interviews focused on the teachers' own training experience. The ten music teachers interviewed generally appreciated KoL's strengths-based approach for understanding diverse learners, but recognised that their students were often impacted by deficit-related perceptions in other areas of their education.

#### *Musical benefits*

Accessibility was not a familiar concept to most of the teachers interviewed. When asked about accessibility, they tended to broadly identify non-musical benefits of instrumental learning, such as student experiences of achievement and happiness, or preparation for future life challenges. These non-musical benefits of instrumental learning also formed a prominent theme in the literature reviewed.

No strong recommendations for a particular teaching method or model were found in the literature. The interview questions did not guide the KoL trained teachers towards giving detail about the methods learned in the training workshops, but overall they referred to the value of the Suzuki framework as it was presented to them, and the practical tips and techniques that were offered. Several mentioned the value of breaking down tasks and adjusting the pace to suit the individual diverse learner. Lesson plans were also mentioned as beneficial, which ties in with the theme of supporting good habits and consistency that emerged in the literature. These KoL trained teachers made passing remarks about motor skills and some references to sensory preference, but their broader comments about better understanding diverse learners' experiences, such as triggers, subtle signs of anxiety and not taking student behaviour personally, suggests that KoL training improved their knowledge of diverse students' needs. KoL trained teachers spoke less about the importance of communication, and more about recognising student readiness to learn, compared to themes found in the literature. This may be a result of the interview questions we asked, or a point of difference in KoL's approach from the broader literature.

“Getting that personal insight, hearing parents, hearing from students, Daphne's experiences, really makes you a little more aware of those particular needs and why you might not get an answer straight away.”

In the broader literature, there was very little mention of music teachers seeking feedback from autistic or disabled students, or their parents. When asked, some KoL trained teachers said that the interviewer would need to ask students about their own experiences; however, some

mentioned that they check in with students about lesson progress, and most cited observing student enjoyment as a reliable form of feedback about their experience of the lessons. This perspective was consistent with those reported in the literature. KoL trained teachers seemed generally confident about communicating with parents and regarded parent participation in the music lessons as important. Many were very positive about the parent-teacher-child triangle model derived from the Suzuki method. Overall, KoL trained teachers seemed to have clear ideas about the strengths and benefits of parental involvement which contrasted with the somewhat contradictory ideas about parent involvement in music lessons for autistic or disabled students found in the literature.

#### *4. Conclusions/future directions*

KoL offers learning opportunities to students and teachers that are highly valued by participants. Teachers generally report feeling empowered, whereas before the training, many had been uncertain about how to approach music lessons with autistic students and students with disability. The students consider that their instrumental learning is meaningful and a cherished part of their lives. The strengths of the KoL program broadly correlate to the existing literature on the importance of studio music lessons for diverse learners, especially those with an autism diagnosis.

The literature review study identified a lack of consistency in teaching approaches or the formulation of goals for instrumental lessons. Specifically, the themes found in the literature raise the concern that while students are being taught from a philosophy of inclusion, there is little interrogation of whether the approaches used reinforce a distinction between diverse and mainstream learners. This could be characterised in very broad terms as a distinction between teaching to the curriculum versus teaching to the child. Some KoL trained teachers were aware of this distinction, as exemplified in this quote:

“I’ve [...] had students come to me who have had, again, rigid methods inflicted upon them, that there’s no compromise on the teacher’s part, there’s no compromise really on the parent’s part. And sometimes, the child’s [un]willingness to go along with this method is seen as disrespect and the child is unfairly punished for this. They’re saying he’s disobedient when the reality is that that manner of learning is not helping them, it’s not working for them.”

Teaching to the curriculum is often implicitly the standard for teaching most students, with student-centred learning more often associated with students who are either very young or have discernible difficulties with the standard.

Some teachers in this study mentioned that the KoL training helped them with their younger students. One teacher reported that she found the training more helpful for younger students than students with disabilities. While the curriculum-centred versus student-centred binary is an over-simplified formulation, it may help to identify the possibility that teaching tailored to the individual child might become associated with lower expectations and a demarcation between mainstream and “other” learners.

“[Parents] come to me and they’re just like, ‘You want to teach the child as opposed to a syllabus.’ I’ve now got the ability to teach more. I’ve got more tools.”

Within broader Australian society, debates about inclusion and access are ongoing, and unlikely to be resolved in the near future. It may, however, be useful for KoL to reflect on its own position within these discussions. Is KoL attempting to provide a form of learning experience that is specific to diverse learners, or is this a model to be recommended for all students? There were indications in the interviews that KoL training assisted teachers to break down distinctions between neurotypical and diverse learners, as they started to understand that student-centred teaching strategies were valuable for all learners.

“Autism may have been the focus [of the training], but it influences – well, for me anyway – it made me far more sensitive to the breadth and diversity of the learning needs.”

“I’ve really understood that back to basics or being more structured is a great help for those kids. I must say I don’t find it necessary just for those children. I’m using that for a lot of other children without diagnosis as well but I found that really helpful.”

“Just let it go. Don’t flog a dead horse. Those things come up about once a year for every student no matter what your neurodivergence or whether you’re neurotypical.”

“It’s also reaffirmed that for me, my principles, I guess my approach to teaching is completely in line with what, whether a kid is neurotypical or neurodivergent, I think a lot of those principles remain constant for kids either neurotypical or neurodivergent. But certainly the training [...] just broadened my understanding of the breadth of diversity.”

*“I think like any other student, it’s getting to the point where you see that they get something.”*

The literature review study revealed contradictory expectations and experiences concerning the role of parents in learning an instrument. It is noteworthy that KoL’s guidance on parent involvement was reported by many of the teachers interviewed to be strong, clear and helpful. Taking a child’s greater network of support into account appears to be a strength of the KoL approach. However, it seems that parent support is a criterion for selecting students with diverse learning needs for instrumental lessons with KoL, which may limit access for families who do not have the resources to provide this support.

“[it’s] hard to get the parent into the lesson. But again, through the course I think I really understood how important it is to have the parents sitting in and to work like a triangle, student, parent, teacher. Without the help of the parent at home, it’s really difficult to find the continuity.”

The teachers interviewed all communicated the high regard in which Daphne and Joe’s teaching are held. We have suggested in the reflections above that KoL consider how it maintains and updates its modules on child development and disability, including the importance of social and relational aspects of child development and their impact on learning. Daphne’s modelling is also an important element of KoL’s perceived value for teachers seeking to develop their own practice. The diverse learners taught by Daphne also indicated that they find her personally supportive. The question arises as to how KoL can extend these benefits most effectively. A strength of the current arrangement is that it allows for flexibility in

education and tight control over the dissemination of the KoL approach. A limitation is that reliance on a small number of experienced personnel may restrict KoL's reach. Currently, parents and teachers predisposed to a student-centred model appear to be attracted to KoL. Is KoL content to continue to work in this way, with families whose journeys have established a broadly shared philosophy? Or does KoL have ambitions to increase awareness of its approach into other contexts? Given that some teachers raised issues around applying KoL approaches in their broader working environments, it may be useful for KoL to consider its priorities, and allocate resources accordingly.

Much of what the music teachers described as helpful relates to recognising the needs of autistic students and students with disability in the moment, sensing when they are ready for learning, and knowing how to assist them to achieve a state of learning readiness. Much of this can be characterised as promoting teacher-student attunement. While attunement can be taught at a theoretical level, and tips and techniques can be shared for promoting engagement, it is also important to have an experienced and capable practitioner demonstrate this process, a role in which Daphne appears to excel. Would it be possible, or desirable, for KoL to train and/or recognise (certify) teachers with strength in this area to extend the program's reach, simultaneously promoting recognition of the teacher-student relationship as a powerful resource? Would KoL consider liaising with non-musical professionals working with aligned philosophies to extend the non-musical aspects of education on attunement, for parents and teachers?

These are questions that we consider are raised by the themes identified in the teacher and student interviews. The suggestions and reflections made are starting-points for further consideration; they are not intended to encapsulate the possible directions in which KoL might make use of the feedback provided by the interview data, or from considering their place amongst the approaches identified in the literature review study. We have also appreciated the opportunity to undertake this project, to deepen our awareness of the excellent work that KoL is undertaking, and to contextualise KoL within the field of research focused on supporting diverse learners, especially those who are autistic, to learn a musical instrument.



## Appendix 1 – Literature review themes

1. Values/philosophy of music teacher
  - a. Child-centred
  - b. Meaningfully connecting with students
  - c. Label-free/strengths-based approach
  - d. Seeing teachers as providers of opportunity for inclusion and empowerment
  - e. Providing access to experience of music (music as part of being human) / Universal access
  - f. Addressing fears of, and having a positive attitude towards, disability
  - g. Collaborating with family
  
2. Barriers to access to music education
  - a. The students – deficit-oriented thinking
  - b. Teachers' unwillingness to adapt teaching practices
  - c. Teachers' inflexibility
  - d. Families / parents interference or lack of support
  
3. Enablers of access to music education
  - a. Institutions and policies
  - b. Special needs education or targeted professional development for music teachers
  - c. Meeting student needs
    - i. Learning environment shaped to student's needs
    - ii. Use of sensorimotor strategies (and rapport)
  
4. Musical Benefits
  - a. Instrumental/vocal skill development
  - b. Performance skills
  - c. General musical knowledge
  - d. Creativity
  
5. Non-musical benefits
  - a. Inclusion/social participation
  - b. Enjoyment
  - c. Participation in a human activity
  - d. Music is inherently human (value/philosophy)
  - e. Self expression
  - f. Emotional regulation
  - g. Cognitive development
  - h. Motor development
  - i. Sensory development
  - j. Communication development
  - k. Social development
  - l. Positivity

- m. Wider learning and development
  - n. Wellbeing – student experience (satisfaction, achievement, self expression, enjoyment, relaxation, independence and autonomy)
6. Music Teaching methods/models reported in the literature
- a. Suzuki
  - b. Sol (Sounds of Intent)
  - c. Essential Elements
  - d. Dalcroze
  - e. Errorless learning
  - f. Eurhythmics
  - g. ABA/DTT
  - h. Orff
  - i. Kodaly/Solfege
  - j. Simply music
  - k. Symbols, colours on instruments or notation (inc. texture and floor mats)
  - l. Nordoff-Robbins
  - m. National standard of Music Education
  - n. Yamaha
  - o. Piano adventures for beginners
  - p. Other
  - q. ABC
  - r. Alfred's
  - s. Royal Conservatory of Music
  - t. Clavinova playback
7. Strategies/methods for instrumental teaching
- a. Child-centred methods
    - i. Child-centred/unique individual approach
    - ii. Breaking down task to achievable components
    - iii. Meaningful/appropriate tasks/challenges
    - iv. Adapt or depart from traditional /standard methods or curricula
    - v. Adjust pace/slow down/patience
    - vi. Multi-sensory/sensorimotor and holistic awareness/approaches
  - b. Other supportive teaching strategies
    - i. Consistency, routine and repetition
    - ii. Praise, encouragement, rewards
    - iii. Focus on positive experience
    - iv. Seeking evidence and expertise
    - v. Positive behavioural strategies
    - vi. Parental involvement
    - vii. Providing parents with questions for prospective teachers
8. Communication/methods of music teaching or delivery
- a. Teacher communicating to student

- i. Reduce language / incorporate nonlinguistic methods / show don't tell
    - ii. Use visual aids
    - iii. Clear and direct communication as a successful concrete stratagem
    - iv. Language – consistent, concise terminology and explanations; clear
  - b. Understanding student communication
    - i. Utilise a broad understanding of communication (language) when trying to understand students
    - ii. Allow time for student to communicate before lesson
    - iii. Avoid overloading
  - c. Modes of engagement – interactions and communication as part of a relationship
    - i. Observation rather than criticism
    - ii. Ask questions
    - iii. Ask students to repeat instructions
    - iv. Ensure student is paying attention
    - v. Importance of teacher-student relationship
  - d. Specific activities/strategies
    - i. Game/play based strategies
    - ii. Rote learning
    - iii. Composition
    - iv. Listening to pieces being learned
    - v. Analysis and coding of music
    - vi. Homework checklist
    - vii. Broad spectrum of musical experiences
    - viii. Errorless learning and scaffolding
    - ix. Materials interesting to student
    - x. Positive behaviour support strategies
    - xi. Seamless transitions

9. Attitudinal factors – teachers

- a. Flexibility, patience, adaptability
- b. Teacher attitude affects success (inc. strengths-based interpretation of students)
- c. Teacher responsibility for learning
  - i. Child-centred approach (including PD and self-education)
  - ii. Understanding students and connecting them with meaningful experiences, develop good rapport, attend to enjoyment
  - iii. Positive feedback to student
- d. Teaching as an identity
- e. Know/see student as individual
- f. Active monitoring or attitudes towards disability
- g. Have no preconceptions, realistic goals and expectations, and challenge prejudice
- h. Awareness of (ASD-)specific learning needs/styles

10. Willingness to collaborate (or not)

- a. Teacher-specialist communication
- b. Teacher valuing/accepting (regular and/or intensive) parental involvement
  - i. CONTRAST: Teacher prefers parents not to attend lessons
  - ii. CONTRAST: Teacher only moderately comfortable with parent involvement
- c. Teacher-parent communication valued (but not necessarily other way round)

11. Environmental considerations in instrumental lessons

- a. Reduce distractions
- b. Teacher willingness to modify
- c. Safety
- d. Formal, out of home location an advantage
- e. Choice of instruments promotes spontaneous engagement
- f. "Whole environment" focus

**1. Confidence to teach diverse learners is built upon having knowledge of students' strengths and challenges**

Gaining an overall awareness of diverse learning needs	<p>Very simply, [KoL has] done two things. It's broadened my awareness of the varied nature in how kids, particularly with ASD, can think and can process information. So, it's completely shone a light on that.</p> <p>It gave me not only confidence, but it gave me knowledge. A sound grounding of what I needed to know, so many resources. [...] So now, I had this desire to teach to a different group of students. And Daphne's course... Without Daphne's course, I probably would have found another way, but I... Yeah, very much, very supported and knowledge and confidence and inspiration all came from Daphne's course.</p> <p>[KoL training] presented a lot of science to help teachers understand what they're dealing with when they're working with students with special needs. I couldn't digest it all in that short session, but they did provide really thorough handouts and information [...] that's really helpful. Because as musicians and music teachers, we're just so focused on just the music side of things.</p>
Examples of student progress helps to bring theory to life	<p>From the beginning, she had videos. We see the before as well as the now. That is really, really important. Otherwise, it's just words on paper. [...] You can see there's barriers there for children. You can see they're trying but there's legitimate barriers. The barriers that she has got some of her students through were just like, "Whoa."</p>
Good teaching general principles are relevant to diverse learners	<p>I think what Daphne taught me or the Keys of Life training showed me is that good teaching is good teaching, regardless of whether a kid is neurodivergent or neurotypical. And part of good teaching is having considered expectations and sensible expectations, but nevertheless, having expectations.</p>
Being part of an interdisciplinary community	<p>It did explain a few things [about a current student], and I thought other people are experiencing that, too. So it's just really helped</p>

of practice is helpful and necessary

me to think, well, I can be supported. I can call on these people or this is what's happening to other people, too. It's not just me.

[T8 would like] to be able to have ongoing learning with [KoL]. The resources we were given in the three-day training were a fantastic start, and it'd be great to have perhaps a membership-site-type approach where teachers can get on and chat with one another and ask questions of Daphne, or whatever, keep the conversation going and keep the training going. [...] I think that developing a community around what she's doing, really opens the door to getting more teachers involved, and therefore more students having the access.

Yeah. I think the network that Daphne is creating is fabulous. So, that's what I gained from having met and being in contact with other teachers who did the course. Also found it really interesting to meet so many people who have a music therapy background because most of those students when I did the course have. I'm coming from having studied music and INSTRUMENT and run a INSTRUMENT department at the school basically. Yeah. Maybe I could have a refresher course at some stage, I must say, tend to be good.

One of the things you're petrified about if you're conscientious is you're sitting there going, "God, I hope I'm not creating unintentional consequences that are negative." I don't know if I'm doing anything wrong. You know what I mean?

Refining teacher observations of student readiness and responding with flexibility

The thing that I learned most, I think, is that gauging the child's receptiveness is the most important thing. And then you can slip these things in as and when you see appropriate. And if you get that sense that, okay, it's not going to be received well, then don't, you go in a different direction. Just, yeah, it was all kind of just a general feeling of... I can't particularly think of specifics I gained from it, but it was just this feeling of yeah, I'm on the right track, I suppose.

Better understanding of creating a positive learning environment

Daphne [...] talked a lot about not giving [...] negative feedback to the student. And I suppose I've been a little bit more aware when I teach. I provide positive feedback and give really good specifics and I'd say, "Oh, let's try this again but focus on this." So I wouldn't specifically say exactly, "You did this wrong. We should have played this staccato," or whatever. So I've been trying to bring that through in my teaching with those two students but even generally.

And I think the other thing too, is actually creating the opportunity for students to experience success. I think a lot of students, certainly at school that I work with, who don't have a lot of success in the formal learnings of a classroom, you have the opportunity to set up a space in which they can feel like they're having some success.

Emphasising importance of aural learning alongside other techniques

One of the big things I think I picked up, from the way Daphne teaches and what she was telling us about these different disorders, was the need to rely on their ears a whole lot more than the way that I was taught to teach with a whole lot of... being a classical musician as I am, working from the page and the reading aspect. So, she does a lot more using the aural side of it.

Daphne's approach was, I think, she uses a Suzuki approach, which is more aural and more emphasis on memorizing. And I think, the hand-on-hand support so the kids can feel what to do next. I think she emphasized visual supports and repetition as a way of learning and more, listening to it, and playing with the kids. I think, generally, that's part of music training, anyway, in many cases.

Better understanding of impact of anxiety on learning

...especially [students] on the spectrum, [...] to understand that the anxiety is always part of it as well. So to be actually more careful with things like, "Hey, come on. Play at a lunch time concert." So I do that with a lot of students and they say, "Oh yeah, sure." And if you have a child on the spectrum, they might say yes but they [are] actually really anxious about it. So I think I've learnt from that [KoL training] to make sure they are 150% prepared and you talk to the parent as well and don't throw them in the deep end.

## 2. Quality teacher interactions with students are essential for learning

A strong teacher-student connection helps student flourish

What the training with Daphne showed is that ["low functioning [ASD] kids [and] nonverbal kids"] are very capable, and you got to find the language and find the connection that promotes that, that allows that to flourish. And when that starts happening, then you start to see the beauty in their persona and what they have to offer. So, I think that's definitely what the Keys of Life training left me with, yeah. That was very powerful. Very, very powerful.

I think when you work one on one, particularly over two, three years, and you start to build up a connection with the kids, yeah, you definitely do understand where they're coming from, and you understand what are their triggers, what are the things that make them anxious.

Sometimes, in the lesson, I get a sense there's a real yearning for normalcy, there's a real yearning to be like... He's very conscious of the fact he goes to a special school. And so, I will sometimes spend half the lesson just talking with him about whatever he wants to talk about. And I feel like that's just as important as teaching him how to play the INSTRUMENT.

I think it's important to be friendly to the children, but not necessarily be their friend. And that sounds a bit harsh, but I still believe in some distance between student and teacher... I want to be someone that they want to eventually look up to and exceed, to go past in terms of their skills.

I think we've had very good, relaxed teacher-student relationships and more like friends, but at the same time more of a mentor role with the students. It hasn't been authoritarian, the style that you'd expect at a school, a top-down approach. [...] They know I'll respond to them. If they hate a piece, I'm going to try and find a different piece for them or something, that kind of thing. They're comfortable in the lesson. It's never stressful [...] and the lessons are usually fun [...], engaging. They're learning something new. We're building on whatever skill level they're at, and moving towards whatever their goals are.



Collaborate with the student to find individual approaches

I'm very inspired by what I've learned through Keys of Life. It's inspired me to want to do more for my students as I see them, as a need-by-need basis. So with the tools I've been equipped with, I can then develop something with that student, some strategies to help them there. So greatly affected by the training that I've received from them.

Teachers can create the environment to unlock the students' musicality

[Daphne] talks about having the right environment [...] I've extended that by finding the key to unlock the musicality in the students. So that's on an individual basis with each student, seeing where they're at...

And a few weeks into lessons with [M...], I just couldn't get her to really sit at the piano. I thought, what can I do?. And we would walk down the hallway together to her lesson. [...] She was coming to a piano lesson reading a book. And increasingly, she would read this book, and I didn't know how to get her back to the piano. And so I just thought, I'm going to read the book with her. And we're going to put it on the piano stand. [...] to cut the long story short, I discovered that M loves lyrics, she loves words, in books, in music. So now we use that. We always have a song, always make sure there's something in it we can sing or a song that she knows. [...] So lots of those sort of strategies I now use by extending everything I learned through Keys of Life. [...] To unlock the music in her, [...] They all have it in them.

And he's very sensitive.... I tend not to... I wouldn't be too hard on him but I don't want to be too soft either because I think there's a need to help develop a sense of resilience and say to the students, "Look. If you haven't practiced, so be it. But I know you're capable, and that's what my expectations based on."

...for me, my goals are much more about getting people involved in music and getting the benefits of music. Learning more about how to help students of all different learning abilities, it's really very important, I guess, to the way I teach.

Developing more sensitivity, attunement, and patience

I'd say being aware and attuned to what [student] stressors are and sometimes that's not immediately apparent, that's one thing. So, being aware and attuned to their stressors.

...you have to be very, very careful around your communication with students with autism and students who are noncommunicative for two reasons. One, fundamentally, with noncommunicative. They can hear and they know. Do not talk about their disability in their presence. [...] You have to be so careful with your words because once it's locked in, it's locked in. You could lock in the wrong definition by just not thinking it through.

...you cannot inflict... I use the word inflict because this happened with me... you can't inflict a particular mode of learning upon every child. You have to adapt every half hour

...that comes back to the kind of gauging the mood. And sometimes if [the student] is in a bad mood in the classroom, or something bad is happening, or it's not a conducive environment for them that day, or social stuff's happening, they're not receptive to even coming for their piano lesson, let alone actually, when they get there, doing anything much. So there have been lessons where we've done nothing or we've just gone for a walk around the school. I've tried to kind of calm and get in the correct headspace, or not even had a lesson.

Teachers' expectations of success can foster student expectations and build self esteem

I wonder sometimes whether kids that have particularly higher end learning needs, whether they don't get... People get a buzz if someone has a high expectation of you, a lot of the time. Particularly if it's a reasonable high expectation, not a stupidly unattainable thing, but I think that's an opportunity for building positivity in a kid. And I wonder sometimes whether students who struggle... I'd like to think that they know that if they come to a lesson, there is an expectation because there's a belief that they are capable.

Success is [...] the smiles that we get.

[the students], they've got more joy. The kids who have unlocked [their learning] with their aural stuff - They have got so much more joy at their lessons now. I'm not saying they were miserable and depressed in their lessons before. They're just now bouncy. It's that thing of you've got to figure out how to teach. You've got to adjust your teaching to get the best out of the student. Now, I'm able to do that effectively because I've unlocked this aural stuff that, one, I didn't even know I could unlock it.

### 3. Including parents in music education is promoted as the ideal

Collaborating with parents is integral to teaching diverse learners

I've got a greater insight into the needs of the families, the need to incorporate the families within the learning sphere, and the role of the parents, the emphasis that is placed on the role of the parents and why they need to be a part of the learning process. I haven't really done that so much other than to tell the parents to be mindful of the children practicing.

I think I'm getting a bit more into it now, accessibility. [...] If you can get the parent onboard, and you get that triangle of the teacher, student, parent engagement, it is incredible the fruits of that.

More recognition needed of challenges to parent involvement

I guess my feeling after doing the course, it was wonderful to see what Daphne does, and she's a very inspiring woman. But the circumstances in which she teaches are absolutely ideal. She's got this lovely studio. She's got very supportive parents. And it's not like that in the real world. It really isn't... And it's wonderful for those kids that they do have the supportive parents. But yeah, average parent of a child with those needs has to go to work and can't spend all day taking them to music lessons and stuff. And it's really hard. And just, it's... I don't know. But that's... It's just different.

It's so much easier in the private practice, I must say. When I did that course with Daphne and the parents were always in there. Maybe the fact that she started it, and I think she might still be doing like that, to not charge those children because she had another day job as well, makes the parents more, "Oh, I've got this privilege. I have to really put in myself." And I think that's where maybe the difficulty lies as well - if you want to establish a network of teachers like that across Victoria or Melbourne and country because we can't all teach for free. That's the problem.

More training needed to collaborate effectively with parents

Honestly [for this child], ... I think it's the [parent] that causes more problems more than anything. [The parent] is often in lessons [and] has been anxious...[saying], "You need to do it again. Try it again." And kind of talk over me to force her kid to play that bit again to get it. But I guess as a teacher in my experience I can see students and sometimes you're working on something small. They've had enough. You have to leave it and move onto something else. And that's frustrating just for me in trying to navigate. I can't really tell this parent off, but I can see that's not good for the student.

#### 4. Performance events provide opportunities for community building and sense of achievement

Performance opportunities are empowering

She organizes concerts at her home. And it's not just for the point of having the students perform their pieces to people. It's also giving the parents an opportunity to socialize afterwards, because they might only...they might not get to do that. Some might not ever really go to school a lot. So they've got this child with a learning disability and they're not...they might not connect with other parents. So giving them a little community to talk about their child, but in a positive light, or maybe they might mention some difficulties that they're having. So that triangle is very important. And Daphne really focuses on that a lot, as well.

These things flow over into many other areas of their life. And it's outside of school, it's outside of family. And they can learn these skills and gain confidence. Introducing [their piece] if they can speak their pieces, walking to the...for a concert, walking to the piano. Some of them, that's even difficult. Walking, sitting down, playing. I think that they receive a lot of, what's the word, I think they...it's very beneficial.

So, at the end of the day, I want them to be confident. [...] They walked in there [to exams], they were able to just sit in front of a stranger in a strange room under a pressure situation and play well enough to pass with something. And to me, that's confidence. And that's what I want all the kids to do if they step up in front of an audience at the school concert, especially the kids with diverse needs. [...] So, that's just what I want for them, to walk out and not

only be confident of their music but to be confident in their decision-making, whatever they do, wherever they go in life...

## 5. Support is needed to use tactile approaches

Tactile approaches can be at odds with school guidelines

Another thing that I observed, but I haven't really been able to put into practice is that [Daphne's] methods are very tactile, but at school, we're told not to touch the children. So I've struggled with that, because there are times when you...and I do, I do actually, even though we've been told not to, I do say, can I touch you, I just want to correct this. Yeah, so that was something that, oh, how do we handle this? And that's been my way of handling it. It's been okay so far.

Online lessons limit tactile approaches

I know that Daphne, she'd often reach over the student and would demonstrate right in front of them and adjust fingers. I obviously can't do that but I have got different webcams, one that shows the keyboard. So I switch. It's a I play, you play, I play, you play so they can get lots of demonstration from that. So side view of the keyboard and an overview. And ideally the parents like I guess the Suzuki families when they got little ones, they need to know how to play. So they need to know what the fingers are and all of that stuff so they should be able to adjust the child's fingers as needed. So, it's kind of a teamwork effort and I find for the Suzuki parents that it makes them a better parent when they're able to... we work together in a lesson to make it all happen. But I guess in some sense it's not the teacher doing it all. So it might make things a little bit more different.

## 6. Time pressures on teachers negatively impact accessibility

Time is needed to build relationships

Time to build relationships with key people, time to explore what their strengths are, time to grow in their own way. And unfortunately, our mainstream teaching education in mainstream schools, that is the one resource that they don't have is time equals money and education doesn't have money. So, that's sort of, yeah, that's what I would interpret as accessibility.

Time is needed to build resources

There's a prevalence of a reasonable number of teachers [who say]... This is what I teach.... If you're grade one, I will teach you these three songs. This is what you will learn. If you're this grade, I will teach you these things. These are the only pieces you will learn. You will follow what I do, and you will do what I say. You will sit the exam and you will get this result. It's almost mechanical and robotic.

## 7. Financial pressures on teachers impact accessibility in complex ways

Music tuition fees don't recognise professional development required

I think there's two problems in the system[...]. One is music therapy versus music teaching. He doesn't need... \$180 to \$250 an hour music therapist for that stuff. I think that's a crying shame. [...] I would love to go out at \$40 an hour and open it up. I need to survive in CITY NAME. [...] you've got two issues. One, the cost in the first place. Two, what's not available through NDIS [...] I think there needs to be another bracket of what can be claimed under NDIS by qualified trained people. [...] Then somehow get another regulation that's something between a private music teacher specializing and has to do CPD around neurodivergent children. Whatever it is. There's another answer other than just needing therapy.

Music tuition is expensive for families

... instrumental music education is ...attached to a fee. So, again, only the privileged amongst any sort of student can afford it [...] and often there's a big group that we can't reach. So, maybe something like I know that Daphne's working on establishing a choir, like something where we can reach more in an hour than just one person. Maybe we can reach 30 kids instead of one and if there was some form of funding it wouldn't cost the parents anything.

I haven't been in a position where I can offer scholarships or anything to make it financially cheaper, but I accept students of all ages and all abilities and lots of different instruments as well. So, I'm not excluding anybody based on pretty much anything.

Teachers can feel hesitant to charge fees if outcomes for students are uncertain

Yeah. I think the first few lessons, I just don't charge. And I say to the parents let's see how it goes and whether Jonny is really enjoying the lessons. And if it works well with the three of us, the parents always come into the lesson, then... I haven't come across the moment yet where I have to say I've got to charge you now. It's usually the parent who says let me know when you start charging. How do I make that call? It's usually sort of maybe half a term that we have some trial lessons. Yeah.

I always felt guilty, like I'm not delivering the lesson that the parents have paid for. But... In fact, one parent, it got to the stage where I felt guilty and I said to her, look, how about you only pay for the lessons I deliver, and I'll invoice at the end of the term, and if we don't do many, then you know... But I was prepared to keep going with him, because he was a musical kid, and obviously loved it when he was having a good day.

I've got a couple of kids that have the ADHD diagnosis and I find that it's really challenging, I must say. I've had a lot of lessons where it was trial and error and where I didn't charge either. And I say that to the parents. I say, look, let's just see how it goes. We'll just have a trial run. And I went online and ... [inaudible] extra ... how to teach with ADHD. So, yeah, just the sitting down and concentrating.

## 8. Job satisfaction is high when supporting diverse learners to access music education

Enjoyment seeing student's musicality develop

I love that challenge [of making music accessible to student...] all of a sudden, you have little lightbulb moments where the fingers start moving, that you see the joy in them for playing in a concert. And you know that there's music, that they're expressing something, that they're enjoying, they're being moved by their experience. So they've accessed the music in them. I think it goes back to that unlocking the music...

I enjoy it when they persevere and they learn something new. I take joy in each of their breakthroughs, even if it's something where it seems quite simple. But if they persisted at that and they get their win, I get excited with them about that.

Enjoying the challenge of finding solutions for students

I love seeing them. I love teaching them. I've learned more about teaching children who are neurodivergent than all the other teaching I've done. I just learned so much from teaching this cohort of people. It really challenges you. You got to just, "Okay, you've been doing this stuff for 30 years. There's more to pull out of the bag. Figure it out." I would never have had this learning if it wasn't for them. I just love the learning, you know. They teach me so much about being a great teacher. Sorry, a better teacher.

Satisfying to see students develop a sense of pride

I think [of] the sense of pride within themselves. You want them to walk out and be proud of themselves. You want them to walk out and feel, in no way, different to anyone else [...] I really feel that music should be a means of building up a child's esteem. Sometimes, it can be challenging.

## 9. Musical benefits for students are emphasised

Fostering a lifelong connection to music

I want to give them the skills to be able to keep enjoying piano long after they have lessons with me [...] ultimately I want them to have the skills to continue enjoying piano after they finish lessons and also to achieve their goals [...] and also be able to enjoy piano after they've finished lessons with me and keep learning by themselves.

I would hope that they had enjoyed playing and had enjoyed lessons and felt positively about piano and the experience of learning music, so that they could feel free to come back to it later in life or take up another instrument, use the knowledge for something else, just so that they can get involved in music, that it just kind of opened the door for them to have a life of their own choosing in music.

Hopefully, [students develop] confidence in their ability to learn and develop as musicians, despite whatever challenges. [...] as they moved through whatever goals they were working on, I think their belief in themselves grew.

## 10. Providing students with a broad experience of capability and fulfillment.



Meeting students at their level of need supports mastery.

For the kids with the more diverse learning needs, like the ones with autism, I think the most important takeaway was working to their strengths and working at their pace. And I felt that her use of the Suzuki approach was really good. [Benefits to students] I'd come back to that concept of experiencing success, and I think just sort of someone having expectations of you.

They have to come out of a lesson feeling good about what they've just done. Again, regardless of how long it's taken them to get to that point compared to anyone else. It's more about how they achieved something that they couldn't do before they walked in, and making it fun.

Providing diverse learners with opportunities for positive feelings.

The first few weeks were not like that. I think nothing really sorted him [...]. And now he's really [...]. He comes in and he says I can do this and shows me. [...] I have the feeling it helps him focus and I just had another [...] boy starting [...] with an ADHD and autism diagnosis. And after the second lesson, the mum said, "Look, this is the most focused I've seen him. This is fantastic for him." So, that's just so nice to see that that works. [A student] often calls himself stupid and stuff like that in his lessons [...] but yeah. It's good to see him have achievements because he does so well by ear.

Teachers believe that being an invested witness to the achievements of their students boosts confidence and self-worth.

[A non-speaking student with autism] connects with me in his lessons, so much so that he doesn't have a lot of words, but he can say to mum, no, go away mum. I just want to...I want to just stay here. I can learn by myself.

It's different with every student. But they've all been pretty good. They've all wanted to show me what they can do and, generally, wanted to engage when we got to the room and we're all in the right headspace.

### 1. Music lessons support social connections

Group lessons, duets, ensembles, and concerts are ways to connect with others.

S1: Playing duets.[...] I: Is that your favorite thing to do? S1: Yeah [...] I: Does playing duets make you feel S1: Happy. I: It makes you feel happy? S1: Yeah [... with] Daphne.

And I like meeting other people too, other students.

Then with trumpet and voice, I suppose also it's part of being part of ensembles and choirs and stuff, which I really enjoy getting to know people. That's a big thing as well. I know with piano, especially, I learned a lot about learning by ear instead of music because it was easier at that time, which is something that's been very helpful for me in ensembles and things like that as well.

I'd say getting to know people through music is something that's very important to me as well.

...every time I talk with my friends, I think piano is the way of connecting and piano's part of the friendship that I have with my friends.

Seeing other students perform is inspiring.

Sometimes I get to watch other students playing. [...] it's good [...] And it can be impressive. Other students have gone very far. [...] I've been inspired by other students to learn certain songs. [...] Sometimes, the pieces, I want to learn.

[with KoL] we did a lot of very special performances and opportunities with that, which I think was very special. ...I think what they're aiming to do is quite inspiring, especially for kids with autism or cerebral palsy or things like that. I think they may not easily be able to learn things the same as others like I'm not always able to do. I think that's pretty amazing.

### 2. The music teacher-student relationship is supportive

Students relax and can be themselves in music lessons

Well, firstly, [lessons are] kind of chill time. [...] With school, I've got homework all the time and I'm stressed about homework all the time. And [my teacher], she... relaxes me. We play, I learn, and it is really nice because she's my teacher and I'm her student. We've known each other for [many] years now. We talk about life and is everything okay, play music. It's really relaxing.

Teachers take a collaborative approach

I'd say the teachers have to be kind of willing to accommodate a bit... We kind of learned together on the best techniques for piano. I do that with my trumpet teacher as well. I guess it's kind of just a process of finding what works and what doesn't...and I guess doing that with the teacher.

### 3. KoL curriculum is tailored to the student.

KoL adjusts to the student's pace and is accessible

I am in the school band [...] It's not the same [as KoL] because, with band, I can't keep up sometimes. I always have to ask for easy pieces just because my tremors get worse and it's hard to keep up with the speed of others. And when I play [with a KoL] concert, either I'm on my own as a solo, or other people can, I adjust to others but others also adjust to me. So, it's more relaxing.

Students are supported to be their best

It makes me feel very happy, and it gives me some ideas when I want to write my songs. [...] So then I make a tune, and I have made a tune with [my teacher], and we have called it a Waterfall Song. I want to learn the new pieces and get ahead in piano and be a good pianist.

Playing by ear improves accessibility

...as I mentioned, that I learned to do music by ear then, which I do a lot now because getting ACCESSIBLE music is really, really difficult and it takes a long time. I also learned theory as part of my piano lessons, which I use these days, especially because I'm going into VCE Music, so that will be very helpful.

Video and audio recordings support learning

S1: I know. A recorder. Mum: A recording? S1: Recording Int: Oh, being able to listen to the music. S1: Yeah. [...] Mum: So, [the teacher] will record herself and/or [S1] playing, [...] You like watching the video of you playing, don't you? S1: Yeah. Int: That's great. So, you can listen and you can watch the video, and that helps you to play the piano? S1: Yeah.

Sensitive and respectful physical support helps learning

So, in the past, [my teacher] would do hand-over-hand when I'm going over difficult sections, she'd help me with the muscle memory.

Being willing to sometimes [...] let me feel positions and things, if that makes sense... allowing me to feel that instead of trying to get me to visualize it. If [my teacher] was showing me where my fingers should be for a scale or something, she would [...] put my hands on her hands so I could feel exactly what she was doing so I could copy it. I guess, something similar to that. [...] As long as they have asked first if it's okay to touch, then it's fine. I don't like people touching me without warning.

#### 4. Learning an instrument can be challenging.

Practicing and learning new pieces is hard work

I hate having to practice because I always like to rest and do other things. And it's really annoying when Mum tells me, "[S3], you've got to practice for 20 minutes," and stuff because I want to do my own thing, especially when it's very...especially when I'm learning new pieces. It's not very motivating when there's a lot of very confusing bits, then you just have to keep going until it's perfect.

...sometimes, I forget where [...] I place my hands and sometimes [my teacher] reminds me of where my hands should be placed when I do, like, a piece. [...] Sometimes I get a little bit upset because I don't remember how to do it and then I ask, and then sometimes she sends me videos [...] and then it works like that.

S1: I get sad. [...] Mum: When it's a new piece. How do you feel when you have to try and learn a new piece? S1: Angry. [...] Dad: What does [the teacher] say when you say, "I can't do it?" S1: I can do it. I: And how does that make you feel? S1: Happy

Lessons scheduled late in the day are challenging

Sometimes, the lateness of it because I've got school. [...] I've got school, then I've got therapy, physiotherapy. So, normally, we schedule a lesson for 8 o'clock, 7:30. And while I don't go to bed those times, I go to bed at 9ish, it's still like that's my downtime, the time when I unwind. And although the lessons are relaxing, it sometimes becomes a bit of a rush, eating dinner quickly, getting ready for bed but also having my lesson in the midst of that.

Accessing specialised music is difficult

It takes months to order ACCESSIBLE music, so if people aren't prepared, I'm stuck without it for a while.

Learning to play an instrument takes a long time

...it took me a long time to actually get the hang of playing. [...] for me, it took months to be able to press the notes, years to be able to make all the notes I pressed sound. It took me a year also, I believe, to do chords. So, it was a slow process. Just normally what I play is much slower than it should be because my hands can't keep up with the pace and it just takes me longer to learn anything. Yeah.

Playing an instrument can be physically painful

My CONDITION [...] is mild, but I have pain in my back, in my hips, in my legs. So, stuff like leaning or using the pedal, as much as I enjoy it, it triggers pain for me. And also, even though my hand is stronger, one thing I have been less fixed in my life is that, when I use my hands for basically anything, my legs tense up, my entire body tenses up to be... So, I can be sitting for

hours and I will still have severe leg pain. So, using the fingers create the tension which I'm still working to get rid of.

### 5. Encouragement from parents is important

Parent belief in their child's ability is important

My parents have always believed that, regardless of what [...] the medical professionals say, websites say, whatever, as long as I do my therapy, as long as I work at it, I can get better, I can achieve whatever I want to achieve. So, in piano, the reason I started piano was to strengthen my fingers. And my parents weren't willing to let go of that because they were like, and rightly so, "No, [S4]. You need to practice. You need to get stronger. You need to get better." ... So, yeah. So, even when I through tantrums [and] wanted to go play, watch TV, whatever, they've always been there like, "No. You have to do you your piano. You have to practice every day."

### 6. Playing an instrument has changed my life

Music has become something I deeply love

...Why do I have to [learn an instrument] when it's so hard? I think the thing that changed was that my life changed. Nowadays, my life isn't as everyone's. My life isn't that fun ... My life is literally, because I have anxiety and other issues, my life is school, my life is homework. My life is thinking about homework even when I'm not doing it. ...[and now, with] the strengthening of my fingers, my ability to sightread and all that, piano has slowly turned from a therapy to a leisure activity that helps me zone out, helps me feel like I'm doing something productive even if it's not schoolwork. So, really, mentally, the way my mind has changed, the way I see the world and my ability to actually play instead of having to really work at pressing every single note, that changed into something I love.

When I play it, it makes me feel like I'm on the stage and I'm doing a solo performance, and I have lots of dreams to become a singer and a pianist and one day that will be me on the stage. And music is a lovely thing in my soul because I love music and it's very nice because then it makes my dad, my Mum, my brother happy when they say, "Good job, [S5]," when I do a new piece and it's kind of amazing feeling to have music in your life. ... I think piano is the best thing that happened in my life.

Playing an instrument builds a sense of pride

I feel happy when I play the piano. I feel very talented. [...] It makes me feel excited when I'm talented. [...] It means you are so clever at anything. [...] Because I know I'm talented.

Playing an instrument feels good	I look forward to playing the concerts. [...] I feel proud. I feel very proud of myself after a concert and my parents always feel proud too. [... parents being proud] That affects me. [...]
	I feel very excited about music, and I also feel very calm about music.
	Int: when you're playing music, how do you feel? S1: Happy.
	I feel happy when I play, especially pieces that I like because I learned Bohemian Rhapsody by Queen.
	The first thing is, I feel relaxed, firstly, because of the music, but secondly, because of the knowledge that I'm doing something productive so my brain can't blame me into thinking about schoolwork, which is a bad habit, my brain. So, it really calms my anxiety. With the pieces themselves, they help me kind of disconnect from the world. When I play or even when I listen, it helps me get lost in my own world. Sometimes I just let my fingers go on muscle memory and I'm free to think about whatever I want with the background of the music that I'm playing.[...] If I'm in a certain mood, certain pieces help me express that. I'll hear something, and then that matches how I feel right now. And I'll play it, and it will be like I'm expressing my emotions through that piece.
	...when I'm doing the piano, I'm just in the moment, and it makes me happy. Yeah. It's a good thing, it's a good life skill.
Receiving recognition feels good	There was one time I had something on in the city, and because I was near Melbourne Central, my friend and I, we stopped at Melbourne Central so I can play [...] on the piano for a little bit... After that, we just went to Melbourne Central so I can play on the piano. [...] And people would say, "How long have you been practicing for?" [...] So, I attracted a small amount of people.
Expressing yourself through music	I guess for me it's a way of expressing myself. I see it as a language, really. It's something that I think everyone has the ability to understand, a way of, yeah, expressing feelings, especially with voice. You can really express a character or a...I don't know. I think, yeah, mostly it's expression, I think.

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