

Identity, Relationships, and Function in Higher Music Education: Applying an Analogy from Ear Training to Student Wellbeing

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Abstract

This study theorises implicit support for student wellbeing in a contemporary higher education music curriculum. Written from the perspective of a practitioner, specifically a music lecturer and teacher trainer, it synthesises themes common to music education and social science using analogy as a methodological tool. The paper begins with solfège systems for musical ear training and focuses on three distinct learning objectives: 1) perceiving the identity of a note, 2) understanding the relationships between notes, and 3) determining the function of a note. It then pivots toward recent research on the sociology and psychology of student experience, highlighting three wellbeing objectives analogous to the musical ones: 1) nurturing the student's sense of self (i.e., identity), 2) facilitating the student's sense of connection (i.e., relationships), and 3) unearthing the student's sense of purpose (i.e., function). The paper concludes by discussing real-world implications and offers practical prompts to help music lecturers view their students through a wellbeing lens.

Keywords: ear training; solfa syllables; solfège systems; student experience; wellbeing.

1 Introduction

1.1 *Wellbeing and the Music Educator*

Wellbeing in higher education has been foregrounded in challenging ways in recent years. The *University Mental Health Charter* (UMHC) in the UK calls on the sector to 'consider the role of academics and the curriculum in supporting good mental health and wellbeing' (Hughes and Spanner, 2019: 26). This raises the question, how might a university music lecturer 'support student mental health and wellbeing through good pedagogic practice' given that their expertise is in education, not therapy? (Hughes and Spanner, 2019: 27). I began addressing this question during the Covid-19 pandemic by convening a conference panel of colleagues from performance studies and health sciences to examine the nature of student wellbeing in conservatoires (Davidson, Maxwell, and Shergill, 2022). We started with Aristotle's concepts of *hedonic*

wellbeing as 'happiness, positive feelings, and the satisfaction of desire', and *eudaimonic* wellbeing as 'a meaningful life and self-actualisation' (Disabato, Goodman, Kashdan, Short, and Jarden, 2016: 471). However, our subsequent publication found that wellbeing and resilience in higher education are too narrowly defined. For example, university guidelines often emphasise access to mental health professionals on campus but overlook the broader benefits of wellbeing strategies integrated into everyday learning and teaching (Davidson et al, 2022: 42). Therefore, I sought out more expansive definitions of wellbeing as 'a state of equilibrium or balance that can be affected by life events or challenges' (Dodge, Daly, Huyton, and Sanders, 2012: 222), and resilience as 'the capacity of individuals, organisations and complex systems to "bounce back" to a state of stability following a disturbance' (Ames and Greer, 2021: 1). In light of these definitions, I asked: how does music itself respond to events and challenges in its quest for equilibrium and balance, and what is the musical equivalent of bouncing back to a state of stability? The tension and resolution of tonal harmony offer a clear parallel. Such thinking about musical experience reframed my thinking about student experience, revitalising my work as a music lecturer and a wellbeing advocate in higher education. This paper documents that reflexive process.

1.2 *The Structure of the Paper*

This paper makes an analogy between ear training and student wellbeing in order to theorise implicit support for student success in higher music education. Section 1 considers the use of analogy as a methodological tool and reviews the literature consulted throughout the paper. Section 2 provides historical context for teaching musical pitch with sung labels and proposes that all solfege systems can be categorised based on three learning objectives: 1) perceiving the *identity* of a musical pitch, 2) understanding the *relationships* between musical pitches, and 3) determining the *function* of a musical pitch. Section 3 draws on my lived experience as both a student and a teacher of a range of solfege systems, defining and examining identity, relationships, and function as I use them in the context of my own music classroom. Section 4 pivots the discussion toward student experience and considers three wellbeing objectives that are analogous to the musical objectives outlined in the previous sections: 1) nurturing the student's sense of self (i.e., identity), 2) facilitating the student's sense of connection (i.e., relationships), and 3) unearthing the student's sense of purpose (i.e., function). Section 5 concludes with a series of practical prompts to help the music lecturer view their students through a wellbeing lens. It also offers some considerations for future research.

1.3 *Literature*

Constructing an analogy requires the researcher to consult the literature in the two disciplinary domains of the source case (ear training) and the target case (student wellbeing). Addressing the source case, I consult studies on the historical and pedagogical evolution of solfege systems for ear training (Smith, 1991; Hughes and Gerson-Kiwi, 2001; Sagrillo, 2016; Andrianopoulou, 2020). I draw on scholarship in specific methodological approaches, including Dalcroze Eurhythmics (Ristow, Thomsen, and Urista, 2014; Greenhead, 2015; Urista, 2016; Stevenson, 2021) and the Kodály Concept (Choksy, 1974; Papp and Spiegel, 2016), as well as generic approaches that I refer to as General Musicianship (Prosser, 2000; Aldwell and Schachter, 2003).

The target of the analogy is in the domain of the social sciences, specifically the sociology and psychology of student experience. I examine Brooks and O'Shea's (2021) five 'dominant constructions' of student identity in a review of the sociology literature. I discuss Gravett and Winstone's (2022) notions of 'authenticity and

alienation' in their qualitative study of the connections between students, peers, personal tutors, lecturers, and institutions. I explore Pfund, Bono and Hill's (2020) three 'pathways to purpose' proposed in their review of psychological research in higher education. Finally, I align the three objectives introduced above with Meehan and Howells' (2018) concepts of 'being, belonging, and becoming' to further demonstrate how a subject-specific lecturer can support their students' future career and calling.

1.4 Methodology

Analogy and analogical reasoning are methodological tools used to discover, categorise, solve problems, and make decisions. Analogy shapes theoretical and philosophical arguments by identifying commonalities between known and unknown entities or situations. Analogical reasoning 'involves identifying a common relational system between two situations and generating further inferences driven by these commonalities' (Gentner and Smith, 2013: 130). In other words, if two things are alike in some respects, they are likely to be alike in other respects as well. Analogical reasoning is acknowledged as 'a fundamental aspect of human cognition' (Gentner and Smith, 2013: 130). In the realm of analogical thinking, commonalities need not contain 'concrete property matches' between one thing and another; instead, 'what is necessary is overlap in relational structure' (Gentner and Smith, 2013: 130). Hence, this paper uses analogy as a structural bridge between musical ear training and music student wellbeing.

Sowa and Majumdar (2003) explain analogical reasoning in Artificial Intelligence. Using 'cat' and 'car' as examples, they demonstrate how two seemingly unrelated concepts can be drawn into an analogous relationship. Over several iterations, different aspects of 'cat-ness' and 'car-ness' are considered. For instance, the aspect of function:

Some of the corresponding parts have similar functions: fur and paint are outer coverings; heart and engine are internal parts that have a regular beat; skeleton and chassis are structures to which other parts are attached; paw and wheel perform a similar function, and there are four of each.

(Sowa and Majumdar, 2003: 23)

This example demonstrates probabilistic conclusions inspired by analogous thinking. It engages the researcher in pattern recognition which draws inferences based on similarities. Analogy is suited to reflexive, practice-based research in that it provides a level of creative flexibility that is essential to addressing a qualitative question.

Renkl (2023) describes the process of analogical reasoning in four stages: drawing on a source, identifying a target, making a concept map, and constructing a schema (Renkl, 2023: 612). I followed these stages in the development of my ideas for this paper. First, I read widely on the source of the analogy in my own field, music education. Second, I read widely on the target of the analogy in a field outside my own, social science. Third, I mapped key concepts from the source case (ear training) onto the target case (student wellbeing). Fourth, I developed what is known in case-based reasoning as a schema: a way of organising knowledge, guiding thinking, informing behaviour, and predicting outcomes. My schema has a three-part structure common to the music objectives and the wellbeing objectives being analysed, namely: identity, relationships, and function. This three-part structure is evident in the three columns that appear in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

2 Historical Context

2.1 *Solfège Systems*

In western culture, the convention of solmization, singing syllables that label musical sounds, can be traced to the eleventh-century Benedictine monk, musician, and educator, Guido of Arezzo. Guido's motivation for developing solmization from its ancient Greek roots was 'pedagogical, rather than theoretical' in that he sought new knowledge for the purpose of improving his teaching practice (Andrianopoulou, 2020: 8). Guido famously adapted a tune which was a setting of the Latin text, *Ut queant laxis*. Each phrase of this hymn began one note higher in pitch than the preceding phrase. He used the first syllable of each phrase to conveniently, if arbitrarily, label the ascending notes of a scale as *ut-re-mi-fa-sol-la*. Along with a few modern adjustments, Guido's work remains the basis of contemporary Western solmization. The syllables have been referred to variously as *solfa*, *solfatío*, *solfège*, *solfeggio*, *solmifatio*, etc. Such names reveal the variety of lineages that have evolved over time with shared etymologies (Hughes and Gerson-Kiwi, 2001). Here, I use the Anglicisation 'solfege' to refer to these systems as a whole.

2.2 *Movable 'Do'*

In the Nineteenth Century, English music education pioneer, Sarah Glover adapted Guido's system in what came to be known as Norwich Solfa (Bennett, 1984: 52). One of her significant innovations was to substitute *si* with *ti*, establishing a neat shorthand in which all seven syllables have a unique first letter (*d-r-m-f-s-l-t*) (Bennett, 1984: 53). John Curwen (2020 [1893]) adopted Glover's ideas, with some alterations of his own, to develop Tonic Solfa. In the Twentieth Century, Hungarian composer Zoltán Kodály inherited Curwen's work in establishing the Relative Solfa system which underpins the Kodály Concept of music education (Dick, 1996: 41). Each of these practitioners followed Guido's original intention for the syllables to be sung from any chosen pitch. This system provides a flexible and efficient way to transpose a tune into a comfortable vocal range while maintaining the relationships between all notes in a given context, from adjacent to distant intervals.

2.3 *Fixed 'Doh'*

Sagrillo (2016) provides a non-Anglophone perspective on how this movable practice became fixed. He observes the historic controversy in Italy regarding 'the primacy of instrumental music over singing, or vice versa' and concludes that this struggle 'determined the discourse in music pedagogy' (Sagrillo, 2016: 117). Making use of all possible resources to establish the voice as a professional musical instrument, Italian singing teachers adopted Guido's syllables not for the purpose of training pitch discrimination but to assist the vocalist in producing a beautiful sound. Smith explains that 'During the *bel canto* period, singers adopted the syllables of solmization ... and used them to construct vocal exercises – called *vocalizzo*, or *solfeggio* This led to the consistent association of certain syllables with fixed registers' and, by extension, fixed pitches (Smith, 1991: 7).

When the Paris Conservatoire was established at the turn of the Nineteenth Century, it produced *solfège* textbooks that followed the conventions of Italian *solfeggio*, thus securing the use of fixed *doh*¹ in French-speaking cultures:

In solmization, syllables were employed to teach musical structure In solfeggio, syllables were employed to teach vocal placement In

¹ Observing conventions in practice, fixed *doh* is spelled with an 'h', and movable *do* is not.

solmization the musician recognized the musical function of a pitch before giving it a name In solfeggio the singer named a pitch without considering its function, and the syllable became the agent of vocal technique.

(Smith, 1991: 7)

Having inherited this Francophone convention, the Swiss music pedagogue Emile Jaques-Dalcroze established a fixed *doh* system, also known as *solfège-rythmique*, to underpin Dalcroze Eurhythmics. In the contemporary Anglophone world, however, ear training in Dalcroze Eurhythmics has diversified to the point that both fixed and movable systems are common practice. For example, the lineage of fixed *doh* is prevalent in parts of the USA (Stevenson, 2021) while the lineage of movable *do* aligns with standards in the UK (Greenhead, 2015).

Table 1 *Systems of solmization grouped in three categories based on learning objectives*

IDENTITY	RELATIONSHIPS	FUNCTION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fixed <i>doh</i> syllables Latin alphabet German letter names Dalcroze's <i>solfège</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> movable <i>do</i> syllables Glover's Norwich Solfa Curwen's Tonic Solfa Kodály's Relative Solfa 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> scale degree numbers Hindu-Arabic numerals Roman numerals General Musicianship
FIXED	MOVABLE	HIERARCHICAL

Table 1 provides an overview of the ways in which I categorise solfège systems for ear training. Section 3, below, explains how I arrived at these three categorisations. It proposes that taking a broad perspective on solfège systems promotes a comprehensive engagement with three distinct yet interconnected learning objectives.

3 Identity, Relationships, and Function in Musical Ear Training

3.1 *Reflexive Practice*

I am an Australian based in London, UK who has had the privilege of learning and teaching music in my hometown of Sydney, my adopted home of London, as well as in Cambridge, USA, and Geneva, Switzerland. During my recent return to postgraduate study for a professional qualification², I wrote an extended paper on the ear-training pedagogies I have experienced as both a student and teacher over a thirty-year period. The following narrative is based on that reflexive practice and includes examples from Dalcroze Eurhythmics, the Kodály Concept, and General Musicianship. In each of the following sub-sections, I introduce and define the three terms that I use to categorise solfège systems for ear training: identity, relationships, and function.

3.2 *The Identity of the Note*

My musical childhood included a diet of popular classics, musical theatre songs, film themes, and jazz standards. I sang and played this repertoire at the family piano. It introduced me to the Latin alphabet as a set of musical labels. Letter names

² Diplôme Supérieur de la Méthode Jaques-Dalcroze, Institut Jaques-Dalcroze (IJD), Geneva, Switzerland.

described the melody notes on the keyboard and the printed staff (Figure 1). Chord symbols provided the bass note and the quality of each harmonic change (Figure 2). Throughout my high school music lessons and into undergraduate General Musicianship, letter names and chord symbols were in regular use.

Figure 1 *Melodic scale steps using the Latin alphabet as labels*

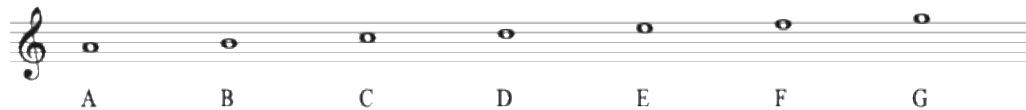
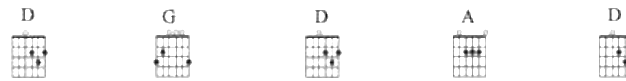


Figure 2 *Harmonic chord changes using the Latin alphabet as labels*



Years later, while undertaking professional teacher training, I was introduced to the German tradition of singing altered pitches by adjusting the alphabetic letter names (More, 1985: 16). The suffix *is* is added to the letter name when sharpened (Figure 3), and *es* is added when flattened (Figure 4). The German system of letter names offers a consistent and reliable approach to chromatic syllables.

Figure 3 *The D major scale ascending using German letter names*

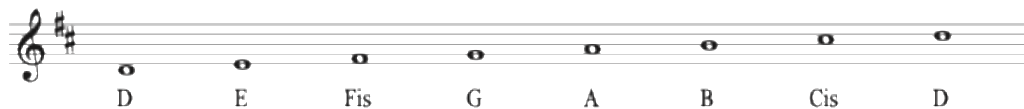


Figure 4 *The B-flat major scale descending using German letter names*



In the French *solfège* system, also known as fixed *doh*, the syllables refer to note names. I encountered this system while studying Dalcroze Eurhythmics in the USA³. By the end of my Dalcroze Licence training, I had come to associate fixed *doh* syllables with Latin letter names (Figures 5 and 6). With daily practice, fixed *doh* set me on a path toward pitch memory or, as Edwin Gordon put it, 'what is referred to as perfect pitch' (Gordon, 2008: 135). For example, I was able to retain and reproduce the absolute pitch of C3 without reference to an instrument.

³ Master of Music (Dalcroze Eurhythmics) and Licence in Dalcroze Eurhythmics Music Education, Longy School of Music of Bard College, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA.

Figure 5 *The E-flat major scale ascending using French solfège*

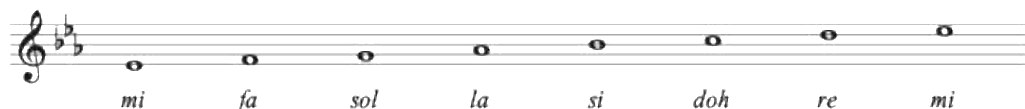


Figure 6 *The A major scale descending using French solfège*



On my return to Australia, colleagues teaching movable *do* questioned the fixed approach. Why in fixed *doh* are the syllables rarely sung with chromatic alterations for sharps and flats? If fixed *doh* intends to bring focus to absolute pitch (for example, C4, A440), then what is the rationale for singing the same syllable name for two or more absolute pitches? For example, the syllable *re* in fixed *doh* is sung for *re* natural, *re* sharp, and *re* flat. My movable *do* colleagues argued that this practice was too approximate and would lead to intonation problems. By contrast, movable *do* alters the syllable for each chromatic inflection. For example, *re* in movable *do* is sung as *re* for *re* natural, *ri* for *re* sharp, and *ra* for *re* flat. My training in the USA had not addressed such gaps in the fixed system, therefore I was unable to provide an explanation or a counter argument. At that stage of my professional journey, all I could see were gaps in movable *do*. For example, without so-called perfect pitch or reference to a written score, it seemed possible for a student to avoid extreme keys, retreating to the notion that all music is in C major because the home note is always *do*. This was a deeply naïve perception on my part. Decades later, I can attest to the fact that this ignorant misrepresentation of the rationale behind movable *do* persists with many fixed *doh* practitioners. Ironically, these same practitioners are often unaware of the gaps in fixed *doh*, to be discussed in Section 3.4.

I propose the term *identity* as the first of three objectives for singing pitch labels in ear-training pedagogy. Column 1 of Table 2 lists the characteristics of identity. The most effective forms of solmization for teaching the identity of the note are the Latin alphabet, German letter names, French *solfège* syllables, Dalcroze's *solfège-rythmique*, absolute pitch, and the practice of fixed *doh*.

3.3 *The Relationships Between Notes*

I was immersed in Relative Solfa, also known as movable *do*, while studying the Kodály Concept⁴. Movable *do* syllables were the main labelling system used across Kodály-based classes in musicianship, methodology, choir, conducting, etc: *do re mi fa so la ti*. It may seem redundant to state that Relative Solfa focuses on the relationships between notes, but in my experience until the point that I undertook formal Kodály training, none of my music teachers / lecturers had stated the obvious and explained the implications of the word 'relative'. This is the only syllable system in western practice that prioritises and maintains relationships, that is, the spaces between pitches. Traditionally, the Kodály approach is taught by preparing a robust scaffolding of

⁴ Certificate of Professional Practice in the Kodály Concept of Music Education, British Kodály Academy (BKA), London, UK.

pentatonic relationships (for example, *do re mi – so la*) within which the more sensitive notes of the tritone (that is, *fa* and *ti*) are gradually prepared, presented, and practiced. Once this seven-note structure is established, the relationships between whole-steps (tones) and half-steps (semitones) do not change. These relationships are:

- Whole-steps (tones): *do - re* | *re - mi* | *fa - so* | *so - la* | *la - ti*
- Half-steps (semitones): *mi - fa* | *ti - do*

Initially, movable *do* offers a way to locate and label ‘home’ in any diatonic major tonality. Although this is a powerful aspect of movable *do* for the beginner, the teacher should not misrepresent Relative Solfa as a system for learning function that equates with singing numbers. It is true that in a diatonic major key, *do* is number 1. But, once the diatonic major sequence of tones and semitones is secure, the teacher can proceed to the relative minor, and suddenly *la* is number 1. Having gained confidence with *la* minor, students navigate familiar relationships to construct and recognise modes in which, for example, *re* is number 1 (Dorian) or *fa* is number 1 (Lydian) (Figures 7 and 8). Singing modes from any given pitch will only be successful if the syllables have been experienced and understood as a set of relationships between notes and not misunderstood as either a list of identities for absolute pitches or a string of numerical functions.

Figure 7 *The Dorian mode on E ascending in movable do*

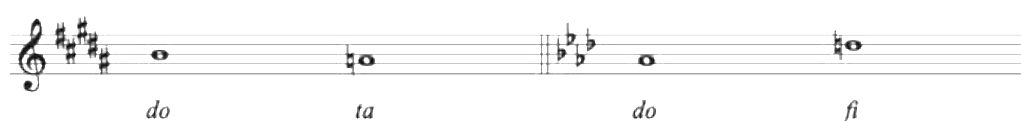


Figure 8 *The Lydian mode on B-flat descending in movable do*



In Relative Solfa, the distance between any given syllable and any other remains consistent. This builds sensitivity to the relative nature of pitch in any musical context. Aural cognition is heightened because the syllables act as analytical tools rather than as mere note names. Intervallic relationships gain clarity through chromatically altered syllables for each chromatic inflection outside a diatonic tonality (Figure 9).

Figure 9 *Falling major 2nd / rising augmented 4th from the major tonic in relative solfa*



Fixed *doh* proponents of Dalcroze Eurhythmics use *soffège* syllables to label identity and numbers to label function. However, I am not aware of a study that reveals how Francophone teachers of fixed *doh* guide their students to label intervallic

relationships with a sung system that is equivalent to Relative Solfa. Occasionally, the expression '*espace sonore*' appears in pedagogical literature (Loiacono, 2020: 128). This term translates as 'sound space' and may refer to whole steps (tones) and half steps (semitones) in fixed *doh*. This appears to be a gap in the research landscape.

I propose the term *relationships* as the second of three objectives for singing pitch labels in ear-training pedagogy. Column 2 of Table 2 lists the characteristics of relationships. The most effective forms of solmization for teaching the relationships between notes are Glover's Norwich Solfa, Curwen's Tonic Solfa, Kodály's Relative Solfa, *solfa* syllables, and the practice of movable *do*.

3.4 *The Function of the Note*

During my undergraduate training⁵, General Musicianship classes covered figured bass, keyboard harmony, chorale writing, etc. I define General Musicianship as any course of study that offers a traditional approach to musical knowledge, drawing on the repertoire of notated western music, and 'dealing with tonal organization in the music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' (Aldwell and Schachter, 2003: v). In this context, the standard label is the numeral. Labelling pitches with numbers happens in two ways:

- Melodic scale degrees using Hindu-Arabic numerals: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
- Harmonic chord structures using Roman numerals: I – IV – I – V – I

A numerical hierarchy can be relocated by selecting a new starting note and calling it number one. This offers a practical approach to teaching transposition. For example, the same sequence of numbers (functions) can be overlaid on a new set of alphabetic letter names (identities). However, a familiarity with the terrain of the key signature (relationships) is essential. Numbers develop the sense of functional pitch, and the word function refers to the role or purpose of a note or chord. For example, the home chord takes its name from the powerful sense of pull that human beings can feel toward their home, and departure, or moving away from home, implies a likely return.

I have published elsewhere on somatic sensations associated with the tension and release of musical harmony, using the term 'tonal gravity' (Davidson, 2023: 9). Tonic muscles in the body are responsible for physical stability, and phasic muscles are set in motion as the body moves. It can therefore be said that each numeric label is associated with a physical sensation that propels music toward, away from, or around the balance and equilibrium of home. Developing this sense of tonal gravity connects the student's ear to physical sensations that allow them to experience and understand functional aspects of melodic contour and harmonic dissonance and consonance. Skills range from the fundamental ability to recognise the tonic and dominant, to the nuances of inversions, chromatically altered chords, and additive harmonies. The student's capacity to feel where home is, to sense how far the music has travelled away from home, and to experience all possible roads back to home, are – in my view – essential outcomes of General Musicianship.

Numerical labels are often classified as a movable system. Due to their flexible nature, I have even heard numbers referred to as 'movable 1'. Although this may be useful for the beginner, the teacher should not misrepresent numbers as a system for learning relationships. Unlike the motivation behind Relative Solfa and movable *do*, the hierarchy of numbers is required to flex and stretch to fit the shape required of each

⁵ Bachelor of Music (Honours Class 1), School of Music and Music Education, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia.

tonality. An example is that of assigning the same numerical labels to both the major and minor scales:

- In diatonic major, numbers 2 to 3 and 5 to 6 are whole steps (tones)
- In harmonic minor, numbers 2 to 3 and 5 to 6 are half steps (semitones).

This flex and stretch in learning and teaching with numbers made me aware that when I assigned the numbers to a new tonal context, I was not bringing the relationships with me. What had served as a robust framework for the purpose of understanding hierarchical function could not also hold the shape of a relative structure. Hence, numbers constitute a highly fluid system (beyond merely movable) that is capable of shapeshifting to suit function in all possible contexts and, therefore, should not be used to teach relationships.

I propose the term *function* as the third of three objectives for singing pitch labels in ear-training pedagogy. Column 3 of Table 2 lists the characteristics of function. The most effective forms of solmization for teaching the function of the note are Hindu-Arabic numerals, Roman numerals, or any hierarchical set of labels that captures different degrees of tonal gravity.

3.5 Summary

Table 2 *Identity, relationships, and function in musical ear training*

IDENTITY	RELATIONSHIPS	FUNCTION
labels used to indicate the identity of each note and develop a sense of absolute pitch	labels used to indicate relationships between notes and develop a sense of relative pitch	labels used to indicate the function of each note and develop a sense of tonal gravity
solfege / solfeggio	relative solfa / tonic solfa	general musicianship
solfege syllables are used to indicate the names of the notes, aka identifiers	solfa syllables are used to indicate spaces between adjacent or distant notes	numbers are used to indicate hierarchy in the degrees of the scale
letter names are a fixed system to label identity	solfa syllables are a movable system to label relationships	numbers are a flexible system to label function
Examples: <i>do</i> = the letter name C <i>fa</i> = tonic of F major	Examples: <i>do</i> = tonic in major <i>la</i> = tonic in minor	Examples: 1 = tonic or home note 2 to 7 = away from home
FIXED	MOVABLE	HIERARCHICAL

Table 2 summarises the key concepts in Section 3 of the paper. The following summary statements should be contextualised as contemporary observations on the traditional form of each practice:

- Dalcroze Eurhythmics uses fixed *solfège* syllables (identity) and occasionally numbers (function), but has no system for singing relative labels (relationships).

- The Kodály Concept uses movable, relative *solfa* syllables (relationships) and alphabetical letter names (identity), but rarely uses sung numbers (function).
- General Musicianship uses letter names for absolute pitches (identity), numbers for scale degrees (function), and *solfa* syllables as relative labels (relationships).

A new appreciation of the gaps and overlaps in my own learning journey has brought a fresh perspective to my work as a teacher and lecturer. These three reasons for labelling pitch offer the student access to the fundamental objectives of labelling systems:

- the name of an absolute pitch (the identity of the note)
- the relative spaces between pitches (the relationships between notes)
- the role of a pitch within a tonal hierarchy (the function of the note).

4 Identity, Relationships, and Function in Music Student Wellbeing

4.1 *Student Experience*

The vocabulary outlined above was developed through the reflexive process of examining my own pedagogic practice. While reading in the social sciences, a field outside my own, I began to pinpoint similar vocabulary in the research literature on university student life. To illustrate these similarities, Section 4 draws on three review articles in the fields of sociology and psychology. I consider the ways in which the three studies define identity, relationships, and function. I then outline how these definitions might be applied to the practice of music teaching. I emphasise that, as the ideas presented here have not been tested 'live' in a higher education classroom, the findings are primarily theoretical.

4.2 *Identity: The Student's Sense of Self*

Brooks and O'Shea (2021) describe five dominant constructions of student identity in the literature on higher education: learner, consumer, citizen, worker, and socialite (Brooks and O'Shea, 2021: 1). In a broad range of national and institutional settings, most students identify first as 'learners' and many define themselves by their chosen field of study. Such students appreciate the open-ended process of higher education and respect its rigor (Brooks and O'Shea, 2021: 1-2). Students framed as 'consumers' of a commodity assert that such a label ignores the effort invested in learning and erodes genuine exchange with their teachers and lecturers. Such students balance their bargaining power in the education market with personal responsibility as a learner (Brooks and O'Shea, 2021: 3). Students who pursue knowledge as a public good are characterised as 'citizens'. Such students develop tools for success, problem-solve with consideration for the needs of others, and find a sense of purpose in taking action. They are conceived as making an active contribution to society (Brooks and O'Shea, 2021: 4). Higher education funding policies often construct students as 'current and future workers'. For this reason, students may identify themselves as part of the labour market while studying. Such students are portrayed as making a significant financial and social investment in their prospective careers (Brooks and O'Shea, 2021: 5-6). At institutions where the revelry of campus life is foregrounded, and the rigors of study are relatively muted, students might be viewed as 'socialites'. Such students engage fully with the residential approach to higher education which provides accommodation on campus and foregrounds sporting clubs, recreational societies, and party culture (Brooks and O'Shea, 2021: 6).

How might these five constructions of student identity manifest themselves in higher music education? Below are some of my reflections:

- The student-as-learner embraces the study of music for its own sake and tends to defend their music education as intrinsically valid and satisfying.
- The student-as-consumer regards a course of instruction as a commodity purchased from a provider and views their musical training as a transaction.
- The student-as-citizen regards their formation as a musician to be a social good and focuses on artistic and educational aspirations to benefit a wider community.
- The student-as-worker views their musicianship as a craft skill, their abilities as a source of income, and their self-expression as a vehicle for a life-long career.
- The student-as-socialite understands the power of music in social interaction and values the focus that music brings to the processes of human connection.

Each of these identities is present in my music theory classroom. In addition, one, more, or all of these identities may be present in an individual student.

4.3 *Relationships: The Student's Sense of Connection*

Gravett and Winstone (2022) explore the notion of 'relational pedagogies' in higher education, demonstrating that 'meaningful relationships [are] fundamental to effective learning and teaching' (Gravett and Winstone, 2022: 360). Their study focuses on relationships characterised by 'alienation and authenticity', observing that, as students establish networks with their peers and engage in interactions with teaching staff, various forms of relational alienation cause students to report a need for more authentic connections (Gravett and Winstone, 2022: 360). Peer support between students has the potential to build meaningful friendships that recognise the student's own individuality (Gravett and Winstone, 2022: 365). The personal tutor and / or academic adviser play formative roles. They must be approachable and able to demonstrate that they value and respect the student as an individual (Gravett and Winstone, 2022: 366). Although students accept that a lecturer's invitation to attend a tutorial is an investment in their educational progress, for some, the simple act of booking a tutorial is seen as 'scary' or an imposition on the lecturer (Gravett and Winstone, 2022: 367). Drawing on the work of Jacques Derrida, Gravett and Winstone suggest that, although the concept of a student community may be a desirable attribute in higher education, it implies homogeneity which could be seen to discourage individuality and promote conformity (Gravett and Winstone, 2022: 369). A further example of alienation arises when advice given by personal tutors is quoted verbatim from policy documents. Such behaviours are perceived by students as deeply inauthentic (Gravett and Winstone, 2022: 368). The study concludes that higher education culture will benefit from increased dialogic relationships between teachers and learners, an 'attuned responsiveness' to student needs, the implementation of staff-student partnerships, and greater awareness of the situated context of all relational interactions (Gravett and Winstone, 2022: 370).

How might the notion of relational pedagogy be activated in the higher music education classroom? Below are some of my suggestions:

- Structure class work to be undertaken in pairs or groups on a regular basis. This can be a very effective way for students to establish connections, build confidence, solve problems collectively, and share in a creative practice.
- Schedule check-ins during lessons in order to ask open questions. This allows the lecturer to gather feedback, respond directly to students, and demonstrate approachability. This may also reduce individual tutorials about class content.

- Provide opportunities for students to collaborate creatively without teacher intervention. This permits apprentice-like peer teaching, allows for personal voices within a student community, and positions the teacher as a silent ally.
- Explore diverse musical resources, encourage students to share their own musical cultures, and involve students in repertoire selection. This shows respect for individual difference and avoids unconscious expectations of homogeneity within a cohort.
- Increase dialogic relationships through anonymous questionnaires in which students can provide brief and regular feedback. This helps the lecturer monitor learning and re-evaluate their own teaching (see Brookfield, 2015).

4.4 *Function: The Student's Sense of Purpose*

Pfund, Bono, and Hill (2020) outline three 'pathways to purpose' identified by researchers in higher education (Pfund et al, 2020: 101). They suggest ways in which these pathways might be facilitated by personal tutors, teaching staff, university managers, and student leaders (Pfund et al, 2020: 102). The three pathways are: the proactive route, social learning, and the reactive path. Students pursuing the 'proactive route' are those who begin higher education with a dynamic exploration of a wide range of interests. Over time, those interests narrow in scope, favouring an ultimate direction (Pfund et al, 2020: 101). Personal tutors have the potential to empower such students to reflect on strengths, talents, skills, likes, and values; to apply this self-knowledge to coursework selection; and to pinpoint co-curricular activities in support of a life goal (Pfund et al, 2020: 102). The 'path of social learning' is relevant to students who discover a life goal through observation of a role model. Here, the teacher 'can serve as a demonstration of how purposeful individuals can impact others' (Pfund et al, 2020: 101). Positive mentorship from lecturers has been shown to 'predict [a] sense of purpose' in young people (Pfund et al, 2020: 102). Peer mentorship offers new students access to more advanced students who may have struggled before acquiring a sense of purpose. Contact with coaches who have comparable ambitions help students to feel 'understood based on their unique scenarios' (Pfund et al, 2020: 103). The 'reactive path' is incited when an epiphany or realisation occurs for the student. For example, a volunteer role, community service, or an internship may offer a formative experience that sparks a sense of purpose (Pfund et al, 2020: 104). Pfund et al conclude that 'university experience is a particularly important period for purpose development' and that 'faculty and administrators are in a unique position to support students in a purposeful pursuit that may have long-term implications for their wellbeing' (Pfund et al, 2020: 104).

How might these pathways to purpose support the higher music education students' artistic, educational, and life goals? Below are some of my observations:

- Proactive routes in higher music education are unpredictable due to their dynamism. This is the case when the student explores music within a broader arts degree. The music lecturer can point the student toward transferable skills for employability while at the same time nurturing their creative talents and vocational abilities. Such students often choose careers adjacent to music education, for example, music technology or arts management.
- Social learning through music education occurs when students have the opportunity to observe teachers teaching. This may be informal, as in a regular lesson; formal, as in a pedagogy session; or extra-curricular, as in a masterclass presented by a visiting artist. Drawing students' attention to the teaching process at key moments in their training opens a pedagogical window through which the student has an opportunity to view the teacher as a role model.

- Reactive paths to music education are also unpredictable. In general, conservatoire students view performance as a singular priority. However, when the teacher positions musical repertoire in contexts that agree with or provoke discussion about the broader values of the student (for example, diversity, gender, or sustainability), the student's impulse to investigate the educative power of music is often brought to life.

4.5 Summary

Table 3 *Identity, relationships, and function in music student wellbeing*

IDENTITY	RELATIONSHIPS	FUNCTION
the student's sense of self	the student's sense of connection	the student's sense of purpose
transition into higher education	learning and teaching through higher education	progression to life beyond higher education
personhood	sociality	achievement
the empathetic study of human character	insightful observation of interpersonal exchanges	a deep investigation of life's purpose
dominant constructions: the learner, the consumer, the citizen, the worker, and the socialite – Brooks & O'Shea (2021)	authenticity & alienation: relationships with peers, lecturers, personal tutors, and the institution – Gravett & Winston (2022)	pathways to purpose: the proactive route, social learning, and the reactive path – Pfund, Bono & Hill (2020)
BEING	BELONGING	BECOMING

Table 3 summarises the key concepts in Section 4 of the paper. In the final row of the table, I include Meehan and Howells' (2018) notions of 'being, belonging, and becoming', coined in their study of first-year university students (Meehan and Howells, 2018). Each of these aligns with my own definitions of identity, relationships, and function. Understanding one's identity is implied in the notion of 'being'. The teacher who is empathetic to 'constructions about learning' and 'orientation to learning' is better able to understand how each of these 'impacts on their [students'] views about their experiences' during the development of their personhood (Meehan and Howells, 2018: 901). Building relationships has an affinity with the notion of 'belonging'. The teacher who understands that 'creating a sense of belonging is critical to students' perceptions about academic staff in the first part of a transition into University life' can profoundly impact the student's development of sociality (Meehan and Howells, 2018: 901). Finding function or purpose runs parallel to the notion of 'becoming'. The teacher who prioritises 'having time and space to "be" whilst at the same time learning and growing to "become" and the right to "belong" in their family, school, community, and society' teaches beyond academic achievement (Meehan and Howells, 2018: 897).

5 Conclusions

5.1 Contributions

This paper contributes to research in music pedagogy by proposing a novel way to embed implicit wellbeing support in a music curriculum. It was developed through my professional practice as a music lecturer and music teacher trainer. Using analogy as a methodological tool, this theoretical research synthesises themes common to music education and social science. The paper has provided historical contexts for

solmization, including the solfege systems of movable *do* and fixed *doh*. It has noted the impact of these systems on Dalcroze Eurhythmics, the Kodály Concept, and General Musicianship. It has gathered together a variety of traditional approaches to ear-training pedagogy and presented a revised set of objectives for singing musical labels, namely, the identity of the note, the relationships between notes, and the function of the note. It has consulted research in the social sciences to suggest an analogous set of vocabularies relevant to the student's sense of self (identity), the student's sense of connection (relationships), and the student's sense of purpose (function).

5.2 *Limitations*

It is important to note the limitations of analogy. Human selfhoods, connections, and purposes are inherently multifaceted. Certainly, it is problematic to make a literal association between the concept of identity and the notion of being 'fixed'. However, in the current political climate, students navigating 'being' and 'becoming' are not guaranteed respect or ethical care. Thus, the findings offer a space for identity formation as part of an educational philosophy rather than a prescription or formula. Similarly, the elements of music and the life of a student operate in two different contexts. Music theory has long-standing conventions and strategies, whereas human behaviour is influenced by a range of dynamic and unpredictable social and environmental factors. Additionally, there is the risk of reducing complex psychological aspects of student life to three explicit categories, which may lead to an inadequate appreciation of the depth, breadth, and nuance of student experience. However, as stressed in the introduction, this paper seeks to observe healthy boundaries between the role of a wellbeing-aware music educator and the role of a qualified therapist. Even if the proposed analogy appears reductive to a mental health professional, it offers a practical signpost toward student success that avoids detours into amateur psychology. These potential limitations do not necessarily undermine the value of the analogy. Rather, they highlight areas for careful consideration and further exploration in applying this novel approach to student wellbeing in higher music education.

5.3 *Implications*

While pondering actionable recommendations from the findings, as well as avenues for future research, I return the reader to the challenge posed by the UK's *University Mental Health Charter* (UMHC) regarding the 'role of academics and the curriculum in supporting good mental health and wellbeing' (Hughes and Spanner, 2019: 26). I invite the reader to look with fresh eyes at the ways in which wellbeing might be embedded in their own teaching practice. It is important to reiterate that this is not a call for educators to upskill as therapists, nor for students to avoid the rigorous demands of a high-quality education. As this paper demonstrates, widening the definition of wellbeing and allowing for analogy can assist the higher music educator to facilitate student-centred, holistic, and healthful classroom strategies. While the paper offers a novel perspective, its practical application may prove challenging. Translating theoretical ideas into effective teaching requires more than conceptual alignment. For this reason, I offer a series of practical prompts below to stimulate professional development in the self-reflexive reader.

On the theme of identity, how might your teaching practice develop the student's sense of self, draw out their emerging personhood, and bolster confidence in their unique being? As the UMHC states, 'Imposter syndrome, perfectionism and academic anxiety can reduce learning and performance, while confidence increases students' ability to engage in active, higher level learning' (Hughes and Spanner, 2019: 27). The teacher who fosters the student's sense of self will offer strategies to alleviate

performance anxiety, to moderate perfectionism, and to disrupt the binary oppositions of imposter syndrome that perpetuate inequities around identity, including gender, race, and class (Smith, 2023). Any system that devalues individual difference will only serve to disempower the student. When we suspect that a student has entered our class from a system that has broken down (for example, family, community, workplace), how might we create a more sustainable system in the room that permits, allows, and accepts?

On the theme of relationships, how might your teaching practice nurture the student's sense of connection, unfold their sociality, and boost their feeling of belonging? The UMHC advises that 'collaborative classrooms, in which students are encouraged to support each other's learning, improve the learning and wellbeing of all students. However, competitive classrooms reduce performance and wellbeing' (Hughes and Spanner, 2019: 27). The teacher who enlivens the process of connection will devise opportunities for each student to find their niche within the social ecology of the classroom. This teacher will establish a safe and supportive learning environment that guides the student group toward cooperation and earned trust over time (Hendricks, Smith, and Stanuch, 2014: 38). Beyond social ecology, the student who campaigns for sustainability in music and the arts will be highly attuned to human impacts on the natural environment. How might we harmonise the relationship between a life in music and the life of the planet?

On the theme of function, how might your teaching practice awaken the student's sense of purpose, sustain their appetite for achievement, and accompany their process of becoming? The UMHC cautions that 'surface learning places the focus on extrinsic motivators, such as grades, and denies the opportunity to gain meaning and understanding' (Hughes and Spanner, 2019: 27). The teacher who perceives that a student is driven by externals (for example, celebrity, salary) will gently disrupt the hierarchies that deny that student access to understanding their inner nature. This teacher invites the student to discover not only a job, or even a career, but ultimately their life's purpose. The UMHC endorses 'deep learning' which 'allows students to gain meaning and fulfilment from their academic study, focusses their motivation intrinsically, and develops their ability, and therefore can benefit wellbeing' (Hughes and Spanner, 2019: 27). In adopting a whole-student definition of wellbeing, how might we advance our potential to inspire human flourishing?

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