CREATIVE HEALTH THROUGH MUSIC PEDAGOGY: CASE STUDIES IN IDENTITY, LISTENING, AND CULTURAL BELONGING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how music education can facilitate creative health through pedagogies emphasising personal identity, deep listening, and cultural belonging. Using a practice-as-research design with narrative inquiry and thematic analysis, three anonymised graduate projects in Singapore (2024–2025) were examined: integrating heritage repertoire into ear training, mindful listening and soundscape composition, and intercultural ensemble collaboration. Data from observations, student reflections, and field notes indicated that culturally grounded music activities enhanced self-concept, cultural pride, and confidence; mindful listening improved focus, emotional regulation, and stress relief; and ensemble work fostered empathy, social connectedness, and belonging. Findings suggest that identity-affirming and listening-centred pedagogies can yield health-promoting benefits, positioning music educators as cultural facilitators and contributors to public health promotion.

Keywords: creative health; well-being; identity; cultural belonging; music educator

1. INTRODUCTION

Creative health refers to the use of arts, creativity, and cultural engagement as public health tools to improve individual and community well-being. Public bodies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) have endorsed arts-based interventions as low-risk, cost-effective strategies with broad social impact (Fancourt & Finn, 2019; All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing [APPG], 2017). A 2019 global review synthesised over 900 studies demonstrating how the arts, especially music, dance, and visual arts, can support stress reduction, social connection, pain management, and recovery from chronic illness (Fancourt & Finn, 2019). These findings have helped integrate creative practices into public health models, including social prescribing, education, and community-based initiatives (Reynolds, 2023).

Music education, particularly within higher education, represents a critical but underutilised context for advancing creative health. Studies have shown that active participation in music, through listening, performing, or composing, enhances emotional regulation, resilience, and cognitive flexibility (Ilari & Cho, 2023; Conti & Sloan, 2023). Music can act as both an expressive outlet and a form of emotional processing. Studies highlight its ability to support identity formation, build community, and improve quality of life. For students in tertiary education, the pressures of performance-focused curricula and institutional expectations can significantly impact their mental health. Music classes that foster expression, belonging, and cultural recognition may offer protective benefits (Heard & Bartleet, 2024).

Crucially, these outcomes depend on pedagogy. Performance-driven or rigid instructional models may not activate the same benefits as approaches that validate diverse identities and facilitate personal expression. Studies show that pedagogies grounded in empathy, listening, and cultural responsiveness yield better alignment with well-being outcomes (Kirmayer et al., 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995). When students see their heritage and lived experiences reflected in the curriculum, they often demonstrate stronger engagement, self-esteem, and social connection. Inclusive music education can affirm cultural identity, which research continually recognises as a protective factor in mental health promotion (Kirmayer et al., 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Listening plays a key role. Intentional musical listening, whether through guided exercises, ensemble rehearsal, or reflective soundwalks, can foster mindfulness, empathy, and emotional self-regulation (Oliveros, 2005; Conti & Sloan, 2023, Finnerty et al., 2023). In group contexts, listening becomes a relational act, supporting students' capacity to feel

heard, understood, and connected (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2025). These dynamics align with holistic models of well-being and support the emergence of music education as a health-promoting practice (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023).

Belonging completes the triad. Society increasingly recognises social fragmentation and loneliness as public health risks (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2014). Music environments that promote peer validation, intercultural respect, and collaborative creativity can serve as preventative spaces of community building. Intercultural ensembles, in particular, allow students to share repertoire, negotiate identity, and develop mutual trust, supporting both personal and collective well-being (Heard & Bartleet, 2024).

This study is situated at the intersection of music education and public health, drawing on the author's dual positioning as a music educator and curriculum theorist. Between 2024 and 2025, the author supervised a series of postgraduate capstone projects at a tertiary music institution in Singapore. These student-led initiatives explored pedagogical strategies to support well-being, cultural engagement, and emotional development. Concurrently, the author's doctoral research, completed in 2024, examined the use of world music concepts in aural skills education (Seow, 2024). Framed as a narrative inquiry, that project sought to "augment aural skills education with cross-cultural perspectives" and normalise non-Western musical knowledge in the curriculum. This convergence of practitioner supervision and doctoral reflection offers a robust lens for exploring how teaching itself can function as a form of practice-as-research in creative health.

Motivation. In supervising three practice-led projects across 2024–2025 (heritage-informed aural skills, mindful listening with soundscapes, and an intercultural ensemble), recurring classroom needs became visible: explicit validation of students' personal/cultural identities, structured listening to support self-regulation, and intentional designs for social belonging.

Purpose. This paper documents those implementations and examines their effects across three cases using qualitative materials (observations, student reflections, short notes/surveys). It asks how identity-affirming and listening-centred pedagogies shape students' confidence, well-being, and cultural belonging, and how the educator's facilitative role can be understood as health-promoting practice in music education.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aim and Research Questions

This study examines the impact of reflective, practice-led interventions in music education on student well-being and cultural belonging. Two questions guide the inquiry:

1. In what ways do pedagogical interventions focused on identity (e.g., culturally relevant curriculum) and listening practices influence students' sense of self, community, and well-being?

2. How can the role of the music educator be reconceptualised as a cultural facilitator and health promoter in the classroom?

By examining real-world educational contexts, the paper draws connections between micro-level teaching strategies and macro-level public health outcomes related to inclusion, resilience, and mental wellness.

2.2 Design and Approach

This study employed a qualitative practice-as-research (PaR) design, in which music teaching itself functioned as both subject and method of inquiry. PaR treats creative practice as a valid mode of generating knowledge, particularly in contexts where lived experience, reflexivity, and improvisation are central. Here, that practice was the author's pedagogical work as a music educator and capstone supervisor at a private tertiary institution in Singapore. Grounded in Schön's theory of reflective practice (Schön, 1983), this study positioned the author as a practitioner-researcher iteratively designing, observing, and reflecting on teaching interventions shaped by creative health principles. Rather than testing a hypothesis, the process was emergent and cyclical, relying on feedback loops between classroom actions, student experiences, and reflective analysis.

This researcher selected three postgraduate projects from the 2024–2025 academic year as instrumental case studies. The author supervised each project and addressed themes of identity, listening, or cultural belonging. Together, they formed a multiple-case study design (Yin, 2018).

2.3 Case Selection and Description

The study omits all names and specific programme details for anonymity.

Case Selection. Cases were chosen through purposive, instrumental sampling to maximise transferability rather than representativeness. Inclusion criteria were: (a) coverage of the study's three foci—identity, listening as a well-being practice, and belonging; (b) availability of multi-source documentation (e.g., student journals/reflections, brief surveys, observations/field notes); (c) ethical and logistical feasibility within institutional parameters; and (d) diversity of settings (tertiary aural classroom; secondary general music module; intercultural ensemble) to examine how creative health benefits emerge across contexts.

Context and Participants. To balance anonymity with thick description, a non-identifying context is given. The tertiary cases occurred in a private higher-education programme in Singapore. Case 1 was an undergraduate aural class. Case 2 was a local secondary music module (approximately 16-year-old students). Case 3 was an intercultural ensemble of tertiary-level students (late adolescents/young adults) from classical, jazz, and ethnic streams. Activities unfolded over term-length modules or weekly rehearsals. The author served as supervisor in all cases.

Case 1: Heritage Music in Ear Training

A graduate student redesigned an undergraduate aural skills class to include repertoire from Malay, Indian, and Chinese folk traditions, interwoven with Western material. Activities included folk rhythm sight-reading, raga analysis, and peer-led demonstration—data sources: student journals, focus group notes, and the author's observations.

Case 2: Mindful Listening and Soundscape Composition

This student developed a module for a general music class in a local secondary school (approximately 16 years old), incorporating soundwalks, breathing exercises, and personal soundscape creation to promote emotional awareness. Data sources: stress surveys, journal entries, and the author's field notes from an observation visit.

Case 3: Intercultural Ensemble Initiative

A community ensemble comprising students from classical, jazz, and ethnic music streams underwent weekly rehearsals, culminating in a collaborative performance. The ensemble served as a site for cultural exchange and peer learning. Data sources: session recordings, participant surveys, and supervisory notes.

2.4 Researcher Role and Reflexivity

The author functioned as both supervisor and co-participant. In Cases 1 and 2, they observed sessions and offered framing support; in Case 3, they occasionally joined rehearsals to enhance participant engagement. This insider–outsider role provided rich access while necessitating robust reflexivity. The researcher maintained a personal research journal to bracket assumptions and ensure analytic rigour. Participant voices took precedence in interpretation, with data triangulation used where possible to minimise bias (Denzin, 2012; Patton, 2015). Consistent with multiple-case design, the researcher functioned as the primary instrument of inquiry; participant voices informed, but did not displace, analytic interpretation. Reflexive strategies included post-session memoing, peer debriefing with an independent educator, and maintaining an audit trail of design decisions and code revisions.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

Although these were educational interventions rather than formal human-subjects studies, the procedure followed ethical safeguards. There are no identifying details. The host institution did not require formal IRB clearance for this reflective pedagogical research, as it falls under national guidelines. The study adheres to general ethical principles of respect, consent, and minimising harm (World Medical Association, 2013).

2.6 Data Analysis

Coding of the analysis leverages Braun and Clarke's model (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All textual data (journals, surveys, transcripts) were coded inductively, guided by the research questions. Codes included: identity affirmation, cultural pride, stress relief, social trust, and personal empowerment. These were iteratively refined and grouped into larger categories. To enhance trustworthiness, the coding framework was peer-reviewed by an independent educator.
As a PaR study, teaching interventions themselves were treated as analytic artefacts. The author reflected on lesson design, classroom dynamics, and observed student reactions as part of the data ecology. A narrative inquiry orientation

complemented this approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), allowing student and educator stories to drive interpretation. While the findings are not generalisable, they are transferable, offering grounded insights for others implementing well-being-oriented music pedagogy in music education contexts.

2.7 Implementation Timelines

Each project was completed within a standard 14-week semester framework, which includes 12 instructional weeks, one revision week, and one assessment week. Although the scope of activities varied across cases, all followed this schedule to ensure consistent pacing and contact time.

Case 1: Heritage Music in Ear Training

Implemented over a full semester in an aural-skills class. Weeks 1–2 covered orientation activities and baseline reflections. Weeks 3–5 focused on repertoire mapping, where students presented folk and traditional materials alongside Western examples. Weeks 6–10 emphasised integrating rhythm and melodic practice through short peer-led demonstrations. Weeks 11–12 involved consolidating learning with reflective journals and a small focus-group discussion. Week 13 was dedicated to revision, and Week 14's assessment included submitting final reflections and course artefacts.

Case 2: Mindful Listening and Soundscape Composition

Although originally a short module, it was structured within the same 14-week semester framework. Orientation and simple breathwork exercises took place in Week 1. Weeks 2–5 included guided soundwalks and personal soundscape creation. Weeks 6–10 expanded to peer sharing, iterative composition, and journaling of stress and focus levels. Weeks 11–12 concentrated on group reflection and consolidating outcomes. Revision (Week 13) and assessment (Week 14) involved capturing final artefacts plus evaluations and reflections.

Case 3: Intercultural Ensemble Initiative

Delivered as a semester-long ensemble project, the course began with Weeks 1–3 focusing on orientation and sharing repertoire from classical, jazz, and ethnic traditions. Weeks 4–6 emphasised peer teaching and sectional rehearsals. Weeks 7–11 concentrated on full-ensemble rehearsals, negotiating stylistic differences, and collaborative arranging. Week 12 culminated in a showcase performance. Week 13 was dedicated to revision, documentation, and reflection activities, while Week 14 combined performance feedback with brief participant surveys for assessment.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings are presented thematically around three key domains aligned with the research focus: (1) identity affirmation through music, (2) deep listening and well-being, and (3) cultural belonging and social connection. These themes are illustrated with case data and situated within relevant literature. The cases revealed that reflective, culturally responsive music pedagogy can foster psychological well-being, empathy, and community cohesion outcomes directly supporting creative health.

3.1 Identity Affirmation Through Music

Case 1. Integrating folk and traditional materials alongside Western examples provided opportunities for students to express aspects of their cultural identity. Reflections noted increased confidence and willingness to contribute, while peer demonstrations normalised diverse references in the classroom (Samuels, 2018).

Case 2. In the mindful listening module, students curated everyday and heritage-linked sounds to represent "who I am/where I'm from." Journals showed stronger self-understanding and ownership of personal narratives (Yanko, 2019), with group sharing validating these identities (Conti & Sloan, 2023).

Case 3. In the intercultural ensemble, student-led repertoire and peer teaching made identity visible during rehearsals. Participant feedback emphasised pride in representing one's tradition (Heard & Bartleet, 2024) and greater comfort in proposing ideas once identities were recognised.

Synthesis. All three cases demonstrated that pedagogical strategies affirming students' personal and cultural identities fostered confidence, motivation, and emotional well-being. In Case 1, aural skills training allowed students to integrate their heritage music alongside Western content. Students who previously struggled in traditional contexts found their footing when invited to demonstrate musical ideas from their culture. The supervising teacher noted an observable shift in student confidence.

This observation aligns with research suggesting that culturally inclusive teaching improves self-worth and academic engagement by validating student identities (Fancourt & Finn, 2019). Professional music education has a significant influence on cultural self-acceptance and intercultural understanding (Reynolds, 2023). Case 3 echoed this: students took ownership of repertoire linked to their identity and grew more confident in rehearsal contributions. These findings align with prior studies that have linked music participation to youth development markers, such as self-efficacy and emotional regulation (Ilari & Cho, 2023).

Identity-based pedagogy addresses psychosocial health determinants by reducing feelings of alienation and fostering cultural pride. While the research used no clinical metrics, participants' reflections suggested gains in self-esteem and purpose, both protective factors against depression and anxiety (Kirmayer et al., 2003). Literature in health promotion asserts that cultural continuity and affirmation correlate with resilience, especially in minoritised populations (Kirmayer et al., 2003).

The author's doctoral work on aural skills using world music corroborates this (Seow, 2024). That study reframed non-Western traditions as foundational, rather than supplemental, thereby creating equity in classroom epistemologies. One notable outcome was the normalisation of musical difference, which contributed to feelings of inclusion among ethnically diverse students. These pedagogical shifts function as creative health strategies by supporting cultural empowerment and psychological safety.

3.2 Deep Listening and Well-Being

Case 1. Ear-training tasks that emphasised attentive listening to unfamiliar modes and metres were linked to calmer approaches to difficult passages. Student journals described reduced frustration and greater perseverance in practice (Conti & Sloan, 2023).

Case 2. Breathwork, guided soundwalks, and soundscape composition supported focus and stress relief. Students noted improved concentration (Conti & Sloan, 2023) and reported moments of relaxation (Daykin et al., 2018) during reflective listening.

Case 3. Ensemble rehearsals highlighted listening as a relational practice. Students described feeling "heard" by peers (Conti & Sloan, 2023), and rehearsal notes documented more responsive interactions across stylistic groups (Pearce et al., 2015).

Synthesis. Listening practices were explicitly shaped in all cases. Particularly, in Case 2, a four-week arc within the semester on mindful listening included soundwalks, guided breathing with ambient music, and student-created soundscapes. Post-activity surveys revealed modest self-reported stress reductions on a 10-point scale. Qualitative feedback suggested therapeutic benefits.

These outcomes mirror existing research on music listening as a tool for emotional regulation and mental health (Fancourt & Finn, 2019; Conti & Sloan, 2023). Music therapy and education literature documents how attentive listening activates parasympathetic nervous system responses, reducing cortisol and fostering calm (Oliveros, 2005). Studies increasingly recommend listening-based exercises as low-cost interventions for promoting school-based mental health (APA, 2025).

The concept of "deep listening," as advanced by Pauline Oliveros, framed this case as more than relaxation; it became a relational experience (Oliveros, 2005). When students shared soundscapes symbolising personal emotional states, classroom empathy increased. One student's busy cityscape sparked discussion on stress, while another's nature-themed piece invited calm. This result aligns with findings that group music sharing promotes social attunement and emotional literacy (APA, 2025; Daykin et al., 2018).

In Case 3, ensemble members learned repertoire outside their traditions, requiring active and respectful listening. Over time, this developed mutual trust and reduced genre-based hierarchies. Students reportedly asked more questions, showed curiosity about unfamiliar modes, and nodded appreciatively during peer demonstrations. The ensemble became a family-like group, where listening built both technical coordination and emotional solidarity. Research has affirmed that shared musical experiences generate trust and group cohesion factors linked to well-being and prosocial behaviour (Heard & Bartleet, 2024; Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2014).

Taken together, these cases support the argument that listening pedagogy, whether inward-facing (e.g., mindfulness) or outward-facing (e.g., cross-cultural ensemble work), supports creative health.

3.3 Cultural Belonging and Social Connection

Case 1. Co-constructing the aural-skills repertoire generated a sense of classroom ownership. Reflections included comments such as “this class feels like ours,” indicating strengthened belonging (Conti & Sloan, 2023).

Case 2. Group listening and sharing in the soundscape module prompted recognition of one another’s sonic choices. Students reported feeling included when their contributions were acknowledged and validated (American Psychiatric Association, 2025).

Case 3. Participants highlighted belonging within the ensemble and noted friendships and collaborations that extended beyond rehearsals. Post-project feedback emphasised the ensemble as a supportive social space (Heard & Bartleet, 2024; Pearce et al., 2015).

Synthesis. The most substantial evidence for belonging emerged in Case 3’s intercultural ensemble, though the study also observed elements in Cases 1 and 2. Case 3 brought together students across genre silos to co-create performances. A post-project survey showed unanimous agreement on feeling a sense of belonging in this ensemble.

This observation aligns with Heard and Bartleet’s (2024) case study on community music, which found that ensemble participation fosters joy, agency, and healing while promoting health equity. The researcher notes similar principles in this study: participation boosted marginalised students, forged cross-cultural friendships, and dismantled preconceptions. A classically trained student who had previously dismissed pop musicians admitted to learning from them and later collaborated outside class. This discovery highlights music’s ability to transcend perceived hierarchies and foster mutual respect (Heard & Bartleet, 2024).

In Case 1, students claimed ownership of the curriculum, stating that the class felt like their own. This co-construction of knowledge fostered a sense of collective safety. In Case 2, group listening sessions fostered vulnerability, resulting in more open peer dialogue. Students shared emotional responses to sound and felt heard, both literally and socially.

Public health research has linked strong social ties to a reduced risk of depression, improved immune function, and increased resilience (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2014; Pearce et al., 2015). In a post-pandemic world, where youth loneliness has spiked, the music classroom becomes not just a place of learning but also a place of healing. These findings support calls for integrated education-health strategies that utilise the arts as catalysts for social connection (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023).

Notably, the sense of meaning also emerged. Students expressed pride in contributing to shared goals, whether it was a concert, a collaborative composition, or simply a lesson where their heritage music was valued. This behaviour aligns with the “Meaning” dimension of Seligman’s PERMA model of flourishing, where contributing to something larger than oneself promotes well-being (Seligman, 2011). Music education, when reframed as community-building, affirms this model.

3.4 Educator as Cultural Facilitator and Health Promoter

One of the strongest takeaways is that the music educator’s role can extend beyond imparting musical technique or knowledge; the educator can act as a facilitator of cultural expression and a steward of students’ well-being. In all cases, the author/supervisor and the graduate student teachers assumed responsibilities akin to those of a facilitator or guide, rather than those of a strict instructor. The researcher supports this approach by pedagogical theories such as constructivist learning and culturally responsive teaching, which emphasise student-centred learning and respect for learners’ backgrounds (Hammond, 2015).

The educator created a framework for activities (like the ensemble or listening exercises) but allowed students to bring themselves into the process. By doing so, the educator helped co-create a nurturing learning environment. This scenario is akin to a public health intervention, where the teacher actively works to improve protective factors (such as social support and self-esteem) and reduce risk factors (like stress and cultural alienation) among students through classroom design (Fancourt & Finn, 2019; Heard & Bartleet, 2024). As creative health gains traction, educators (especially those in the arts) should ideally be familiar with mental health first aid, cultural competence, and facilitation skills so they can confidently implement such practices (WHO, 2023; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023).

3.5 Integrating Well-Being into the Curriculum

A significant discussion point is how educational institutions might formally integrate well-being and creative health outcomes into their curricula. The projects described were somewhat special, born out of individual initiative and a supportive supervisor. To scale such an impact, systemic inclusion of creative health in educational objectives could be

beneficial. In recent years, there have been calls for education systems to adopt Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) frameworks, and arts education is often highlighted as a natural platform for SEL (OECD, 2021; Daykin et al., 2018).

Our results add weight to that argument: music classes can achieve SEL goals (such as self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship skills) while still meeting artistic goals. This observation aligns with the concept of "healthy musical identities" as discussed in some contemporary music education literature, where the aim is to develop musicians who not only excel in music but also thrive personally and socially (Ilari & Cho, 2023).

However, integrating such goals raises practical questions. Time is limited in curricula; academic pressures and performance metrics often dominate. Advocates will need to produce evidence (such as this study and others) to convince administrators that dedicating time to activities like reflective listening or intercultural exchange in class is not a frill, but rather foundational to student success and well-being (Fancourt & Finn, 2019). Notably, the WHO and other health authorities have begun to articulate the cost-effectiveness of the arts in health, a language that educational policymakers might resonate with if reframed in an academic context. This study's qualitative evidence of improved engagement and class cohesion can complement quantitative analyses, such as those linking music education to lower dropout rates or improved mental health in schools.

3.6 Challenges and Considerations

While the cases were largely positive, it is essential to discuss potential challenges associated with this approach. One challenge is generalisability. For instance, Singaporean students might be especially receptive to multicultural content because multiculturalism is a national value; in a more homogenised context, introducing foreign musical material might not have the same immediate positive effect.

Another challenge is ensuring that creative health activities do not become superficial add-ons. The success in Case 2 was due to it being part of a larger pedagogical arc and accompanied by reflection and discussion; it required effort from the teacher to frame it properly (Oliveros, 2005).

Additionally, one must consider assessment. Societies drive traditional education through assessment, and activities aimed at well-being or identity are often difficult to grade. In our cases, because they were part of research and exploratory studies, formal grading was minimal or qualitative (e.g., participation marks, reflective journals). Encouragingly, there is a trend in arts education toward valuing process and reflection, not just performance output (Ilari & Cho, 2023).

3.7 Linking to Public Health Outcomes

Connecting these findings to public health, the theory of change suggests that if many educators adopt such practices, a generation of students will emerge with more culturally tolerant, emotionally resilient, and socially connected qualities that are protective at the population level (Kirmayer et al., 2003; Fancourt & Finn, 2019). While this study cannot prove such long-term effects, it aligns with the premise behind national creative health movements.

For example, the UK's All-Party Parliamentary Group report "Creative Health" (APPG, 2017) advocated for embedding the arts into health and social care to address loneliness and mental illness in communities.

It is also notable that creative health approaches, such as those presented in this paper, can complement clinical interventions. There is growing interest in "social prescribing," where doctors recommend that patients join community art or music groups (Sonke et al., 2023). If educators already cultivate those interests and skills in young people, they might be more likely to engage in such healthy practices throughout their lives. In effect, education can be considered an upstream public health measure. This realisation supports a preventive paradigm; we are not waiting to treat mental illness; we are fostering mental wellness from an early age.

Ultimately, this research reinforces that creative health is not abstract but rooted in everyday classroom practice. The graduate projects highlighted here demonstrate how music educators can have a meaningful impact on students' feelings, connections, and self-understanding. These are not peripheral gains; they represent core outcomes of a healthy, humanising education. The cumulative impact is not just better musicians, but more resilient and connected communities.

4. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate how a creative, reflective approach to music teaching, one that emphasises identity, listening, and cultural belonging, can improve aspects of health and well-being among learners. Through three

postgraduate case studies and the author's practice-as-research, the findings provide compelling evidence that music education can serve as a tangible vehicle for creative health in public health contexts.

When music classes validate personal and cultural identities, students are more likely to develop self-esteem, resilience, and a sense of purpose — psychosocial outcomes that align with improved mental health and deserve recognition as educational objectives in their own right. Incorporating deep listening and mindfulness techniques into pedagogy further strengthens this impact, offering students low-barrier tools for stress regulation and emotional attunement.

For such benefits to be more common knowledge, educators must equip themselves not only with pedagogical expertise but also with cultural competence and a foundational understanding of mental health and social-emotional learning. The study also highlights the need for stronger intersectoral collaboration, as education and public health share overlapping goals, and schools are critical frontlines for implementing preventive strategies.

Ultimately, this research reinforces that creative health is not abstract but rooted in everyday classroom practice. The graduate projects highlighted here demonstrate how music educators can have a meaningful impact on students' feelings, connections, and self-understanding. These are not peripheral gains; they represent core outcomes of a healthy, humanising education. The cumulative impact is not just better musicians, but more resilient and connected communities.

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DEFINITIONS, ACRONYMS, ABBREVIATIONS

Creative health: The use of arts, culture, and creative engagement to support and improve health and well-being outcomes.

Practice-as-research (PaR): A research approach in which artistic practice is both the method of inquiry and the means of generating knowledge.

Narrative inquiry: A qualitative research method that uses storytelling and personal narratives to understand lived experiences.

Culturally responsive pedagogy: Teaching that recognises and incorporates students' cultural backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences into the learning process.