

The Secret Life of Gabe: A Retrospective Case Study
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Musically active adults such as Gabe can provide valuable models for educators seeking to engage students in musical activity which may continue beyond their school years (Howe & Sloboda, 1991; Pitts, 2009). In this retrospective case study, environmental and individual factors were examined to determine how they may have influenced Gabe's motivation to learn and participate in music making activities at various points in his life. The role school music may have played in his musical development was also explored. Along with an analysis of relevant documents and observations, interviews were conducted with Gabe, his parents, brother, and a teacher at Gabe's middle school while he was a student there.

Gabe is an amateur singer/songwriter and multi-instrumentalist in his mid-30's. Since he began teaching himself to play the guitar at 17, the music of others has inspired him to write his own songs, learn more instruments, play in bands, explore new genres, and teach in the community. Gabe's formal music experience in school consisted of occasional kazoo playing and viewings of a musical TV program in elementary school, and general music in 7th grade. Findings suggested the following prominent themes:

Autonomy: With little external motivation or expectation to participate in music outside of extracurricular singing activities Gabe's mother initiated during his elementary school years, Gabe's choices to make or not to make music were largely his own.

Adolescence: Characteristic concrete thinking combined with a concern with public image (Campbell, Connell & Beegle, 2007) cause adolescents such as Gabe was to avoid associating themselves with music they don't identify with (Green, 2006).

Awareness: Once Gabe became aware that music could be made by someone like him and acquainted with the guitar, he began teaching himself to play and sing his favorite alternative rock songs. This awareness was particularly necessary given Gabe's lack of structured, required music learning opportunities.

Though Gabe is a confident learner, he is not confident in his music-making skills, and recognizes value in the guidance and support inherent in formal training. An analysis of the results viewed through the three psychological needs foundational to Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory, and through Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model (1977), suggests that if school music may be some students' only opportunity to benefit from a trained music teacher in a structured environment, it may be up to educators to assist students in making connections between their musical interests and music learning opportunities available to them in school.

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Applications

- Musical children such as Gabe was may not avail themselves of music learning opportunities in school if the music being performed in elective ensembles doesn't align with their adolescent identities. What efforts can teachers make so that more school music opportunities are compatible with more students' social images?
- It is possible that Gabe's lack of music in school contributed to his lack of awareness that playing the music he liked was indeed something *he* could do, a critical prerequisite for intrinsically motivated learning. What can we do to increase such awareness in our students?
- Many of our students may be like Gabe was, constantly receiving messages that music may not be a masculine activity, or that it may only be worth spending time and effort on it if it leads to money and recognition. Teachers in all subjects and at all levels may be in a position to mitigate these messages by addressing them directly and providing alternative models.