Conceptual Interview – What is music?

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Two students were interviewed in the past couple of weeks. Student A was a female and a sophomore in a public high school. Student B was a male and a sophomore in a private high school. Both students were asked similar questions and their responses revealed a lot about each individual. The interview was enlightening because the students had interesting point of views of themselves and the role of music in their personal lives.

Both students were asked with the same leading question, “What is music?” Both students were surprised with the question because they did not know why the interview was being conducted. As their shock diminished, thoughts started to run through their heads. Their first sentences did not feel like genuine answers. The students were more concerned about answering the correct way versus the wrong way. Both students were reminded that there were no wrong or right answers in the beginning. After the disclaimer was told to them, they both relaxed in their own way. It was interesting to see how both students reacted similarly in the beginning of the interview. A lesson learned from the first couple of minutes from the interview was that interviews will be something that students will eventually get used to. This is why researchers cannot just interview subjects once. It allows for the subjects to be more comfortable with the interview, therefore receiving more genuine answers.

As the first question was asked, both students responded with similar ideas. Music, to them, was seen as a way to express themselves to others. Subject A is a musician herself. Her reason for playing music allows her to express her identity, personality, and moods. Subject B is not a musician, but he uses music for the same reason, as an expression of himself. Their responses gave insight into their personalities. Music was felt strongly from their lives, whether it was on a first hand experience or simply enjoying others creations.
Their opinion of music was asked in the beginning of each interview. Questions allowed the students to reveal their own personal taste with music, positive and negative aspect of music, and their vision of music. Being a musician herself, subject A revealed that music depended on her mood. She lived in the present. Subject B saw music as a tool to look beyond the future. They both used music as a way to express their current status, but it also revealed a lot about their thoughts that they may not be able to vocalize without music.

As the students became more vivid with their responses, connecting it to science changed the tone of the questions. Once again, the students seemed to be hung up on providing the “right answer” since they were talking to a science teacher. Another reminded was provided to the student that their opinion was the important answer. Subject A connected it to how she played music. She talked about how her body functions in order to change tone, or pitch of her instrument. She also spoke about reading music in itself was science. Her perspective was very different from subject B. He connected music to science by talking about the psychological effects of music. It shows that each student define science differently.

The students were asked, “Does music help you learn?” Both students were on the fence with this question. They both said in their own ways. They felt that music can only help you learn when it is being used the right way. Subject A provided an example that currently happened to her where she studied with music the night before and during the test the next day she found herself answering the questions with ease. Subject B felt the same way, but he added that if music is not intently used to learn then it becomes more as a distraction. The follow-up question brought music into the classroom. Both students were indifferent about this idea. They thought that music can only be used if majority of the students will not be distracted and if the music connects well with the lesson.
The interview process was eye opening. Students need some time to get comfortable with the idea about being interviewed. Starting off with easier questions and then gradually increase their seriousness allows the students to share more genuine responses. Their response to using music in the classroom was surprising. It brings caution to the study because; will students positively or negatively react to the music in the classroom? If they do react positively or negatively, is it the style of music used or is it simply the fact that music was used? It raises awareness to the careful actions needed to prepare what music will be incorporated in the classroom. It provided an insight on what the surveys for the research needs to look like, and how my first interviews with the students need to ask.