



Education

A tale of two case studies that researched on learning and teaching of multicultural music in Victoria, Australia

An abstract, colorful background with various shapes and colors including purple, green, blue, yellow, and red, creating a vibrant and artistic effect.

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Importance of Multicultural music education (Research literature)

Blacking (1973/1995) has precisely highlighted the importance of acquiring knowledge of a music and its cultural practice through studying multicultural music.

Confirming this Chen-Hafteck (2007) claimed that 'an in-depth study of an unfamiliar culture brings novelty to classroom subject matter and motivates learning' (p.227) and music education has been identified as one of the most effective subjects in this process (Forrest & Watson, 2010). Gay (2002) explained that music education is a good learning environment for cultural inclusivity.

Importance of Multicultural music education (Research literature)

Many researchers have recognized the increasing importance of multicultural music education and the evidence can be witnessed in the number of recent specialized written material including research reports (Campbell & Schippers, 2005; Klopper, 2005; Nzewi, 2003; Reimer, 2002).

Exploring music from other cultures can also broaden the understanding of our own culture (Blacking, 1973/1995; Blair & Kondo 2008; Nketia 1988).

Why multicultural education is important to Australian/Victorian context

In the forward of *The people of Australia: Australia's multicultural policy* document, the Honourable Julia Gillard MP (The Prime Minister of Australia) has stated that “Australia is a multicultural country” (Bowen, 2011, para. 1). Therefore the Australian State and the Federal Governments have introduced a set of regulations and policies to support nation's multiculturalism through the enhancement of cultural traditions and multicultural education (DEECD, 2009, p.6).

Why multicultural education is important to Australian/Victorian context

In 2005 the National Review of School Music Education (NRSME) which investigated the provision of music education emphasized the importance of music education in the “transmission of cultural heritage and values” (p. v).

Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) (2010) suggests the engagement of students learning music in schools, ‘with the multiple and culturally diverse practices of music, locally, nationally and globally’.

Why multicultural education is important to the Victorian context

Victoria is identified as the most culturally diverse state with a population that comes from more than 230 countries, speaking more than 200 languages and dialects, and following more than 120 religious faiths (Victorian Multicultural Commission).

All Victorian Government schools must prepare students for global and multicultural citizenship. Thus the promotion of multiculturalism especially in educational intuitions is seen as essential in the development of future Australia (A strategy for Victorian Government Schools, 2009-2013).

The Victorian Essential Learning Standards(VELS) (current curriculum guidelines in Victoria) and the shape paper of the Australian National curriculum mandate multicultural education for school students in many areas including in the field of Arts/(Music) education (ACARA, 2011; VCAA, 2008).

The first research study

Both studies were conducted employing Phenomenology.

Smith (2008) defines phenomenology as a study of 'phenomena', which includes the ways in which we experience things and the meanings things have for us in this experience.

The first phenomenological qualitative case study explored my own music teaching practice and how Sri Lankan/Australian students use music in their construction of self-identity in multicultural Australia. The research participants were ten Victorian secondary school students who take private music lessons from me during the weekends.

The first research study

- All student participants are engaged in varieties of community (Arts) events carried out by the Sri Lankan community (artists) in Melbourne including the Sri Lankan community theatre. These workshops are conducted by specialists like myself in the community, helping the children to learn their cultural heritage.
- Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data that were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Three themes were identified as significant to the understanding of the participants concerning multicultural music studies. These themes are: **Development of respect**, Construction of self-identity and **tolerance through appreciation of multicultural music** and **Benefits of community music making** for school students.

Related claims of some participants

Replying to a question whether it is good to learn music from other cultures, a student said, 'It's quite interesting to learn different music styles. It makes you open minded about what's out there and if you get interested you even can learn that style of music'. Another student mentioned 'in a situation where there is different music, you won't be able to enjoy it because you can't grasp that music, so it is important to understand and respect music from other cultures. This understanding will lead to make friends with people with different tastes [of music]'.

Drummond (2005) pointed out that 'the emergence over recent decades of intercultural and transcultural musical practices certainly reflects a growing respect for cultural plurality and much of the intercultural music-making that takes place, models relationships' (p.9).

Issues involved in providing such beneficial education in schools

- Victorian schools are not capable of providing effective multicultural music educational programs at present as a result of many issues for example lack of (authentic) resources and experts (Rizvi, 1994; Southcott & Joseph, 2009 This includes teacher training and appropriate Professional Development (PD) for practicing teachers.
- Volk (1998) identified the importance of the educator in multicultural music education. Strengthening this, Gay (2002) advocated that teachers can make learning more effective by including the cultural knowledge pupils bring into the classrooms including musical traditions.

Recommendations

- Nethsinghe (2009) argued that ‘it is not possible for the school structure to cater for all different cultural needs of multicultural communities in Victoria’ (p.27). To address this Nethsinghe (2009, 2009a) recommends the employment of artists in residence and the use of talented culturally diverse students and their talented parents (involvement of the community) to support teachers in provision of multicultural music education in Victorian schools.
- This is already the case in many schools. Temmerman (2005) identified that ‘there is a heavy reliance of parents and community volunteers to assist in managing extra-curricular activities’ in music education in Australian schools (p.117).

Recommendations

- In the *Sound Links* project Bartleet *et al.* (2009) found that community music making “encompasses a wide and diverse range of musics, which reflects and enrich the cultural life of participants and their broader community (p. 21). In the web site they further explain that “community music supports local initiatives and musicians to work with schools and families to engage more children in music making” (About community music, 2008).
- These claims makes it clear that school students can benefit from the involvement of artists in residence.

The second case study

Informed by the initial case study an online survey was conducted (in 2011) targeting Victorian school music teachers to investigate how multicultural music is taught in schools and to generate a snapshot of the current situation regarding the provision of multicultural music education (Nethsinghe, 2011).

This survey found that, many school teachers do not possess apposite knowledge, resources and educational background and therefore as an alternative strategy, artists in residence are often invited to teach multicultural music in schools (Nethsinghe, 2011). The use of artist in residence is acknowledged by the survey participants as the most effective and authentic approach to educate students.

The second case study

To explore this further, a research study was undertaken at an urban school that employs evidently effective strategies to provide multicultural education including culturally diverse music education (African drumming).

The school principal, the artist-teacher and teachers of the school including some residential teacher trainees were the interview participants. Highly valuable range of deep data were collected through semi-structured interviews and researcher observations (including a researcher journal) and collected data were analyzed using IPA.

Findings of the study

Importance of the use of similar (authentic) pedagogical approaches used in a particular culture to teach and learn multicultural music and the effectiveness of the group work involved in playing African drums were some important findings. (for example: in overall a beat contained a mix of (at least 3) different rhythmic patterns played by many groups on different drums and percussion instruments as a combination of rhythmic patterns in unison).

All teachers and the teacher trainees highly spoke about the benefits of such group work and highly appreciated the participation of children caused by the aforementioned simple authentic pedagogical approach practised by the artist.

Findings of the study

The three trainee teachers who specialised in Physical Education (PE) mentioned that “what students learn here is very important for their coordination skills like hand eye coordination used in most games and quick thinking”. One trainee teacher specified that “they learn rhythm here and keeping up pace, in sport events like athletics and swimming this is very important” and he further mentioned “African drumming teaches you to keep timing and play a beat with a group, this is important for a sport like rowing where they have to paddle together”.

A different teacher who participated in the discussion declared something very special. She claimed that “as a result of the school’s approach to diverse education people are valued and respected here, I find in our school we do not have much problem with bullying” she continued “ I think if we learn to respect each other’s culture and what they have to offer to each other, it just means we can live in harmony together”.

Implications of findings

- Due to the effective engagement of students, the case study indicated that this type of multicultural music education can be a tool to minimize bullying, which is a huge current issue with devastating results faced by many schools in the world. Acknowledgement of the cultural backgrounds of the pupils in the classrooms can enhance multicultural understandings of students.
- These features of educational outcomes of both studies align with the Australian governmental multicultural policy expectations. The Australian federal government mandates that schools should foster teaching and learning that will create future citizens who are 'caring, tolerant fair and compassionate' (Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST, 2005, p.2).

Conclusion

- Some results of these research studies are not meant to generalize but to gain an initial understanding of the practice of multicultural music (education) in culturally diverse Victoria. Due to the uniqueness of the case studies these findings could only be considered indicative and it would be interesting to explore these results in other educational contexts.
- Finally it is important to suggest that this discussion implies that authorities and stakeholders need to develop, enhance and promote such a beneficial approach to multicultural education which will contribute to cultivate peace and harmony among people, by conducting research and by supplying more resources and funding.

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