So much to do, so little time: Multicultural practices in Australian school music

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Abstract
In this paper, the authors are concerned with the challenges, dilemmas and choices that teachers face when teaching multicultural music in classrooms in Australia in an already overcrowded curriculum. This paper considers the notion of changing and shifting cultures, looking at how teachers can break out of the familiar paradigms in which they were trained. There will be a consideration of the notion of cultural ownership questioning whose music is to be taught, how is it to be taught, and by whom. A discussion of how music is embedded in the culture that creates it is undertaken in relation to the concepts of authenticity and transmission. The authors contend that the exploration of other cultures enables the making of connections within and without the classroom and beyond the school into the local, national and global arenas. It is our position that teachers should not hesitate to explore other musics and cultures. It is noted that teachers need support to do this which can only enhance both their teaching and the learning of their students even though there is so much to do in so little time.

Introduction
Teachers wishing to implement multicultural practices in Australian school music programmes are faced with a number of dilemmas, challenges and choices. It is our intention to identify a number of these issues and explore how decisions can be made so that we can move forward. Often the range of curricular possibilities is both dauntingly wide and simultaneously limited. We can find that there is so much to do, but so little time, opportunity and support with which to achieve our multicultural aspirations. This paper poses questions about what can teachers teach, how can they teach it and why do they make such choices given that the very notion of what is multiculturalism remains debatable. The authors understand multiculturalism to be associated with the ever changing nature of teaching and learning that aspires to create suitable learning environments for both students and teachers from diverse cultural backgrounds (Joseph & Southcott, 2006). As will be discussed, the borders between cultures, communities and societies are continually blurring. Music and multiculturalism cannot be divorced from society per se. Solbu (cited in Herbst, Nzewi & Agawu, 2003, p. ix) concurs, arguing that, ‘music creates and confirms identity, and challenges cultural and communal borderlines. Music establishes home ground, and builds roads to follow into the interior of unknown lands’ (p. ix). Travels in unknown regions often require a guide. Further, at every fork in the road decisions must be made. These travels may be challenging but they are necessary to fully implement a school music programme. Van Aswegen and Potgieter (2006) offer reasons for the inclusion of other musics in the school curriculum. These include expanding musical horizons, demonstrating the value and significance of indigenous musics from other cultures, and educating students about other cultures. In a culturally diverse country like Australia it can also be argued that the inclusion of music from other cultures strengthens national cohesion and, possibly, builds national pride and tolerance.

Breaking out of the paradigm square
The authors contend that most music educators in Australian schools have a background in Western music paradigms, either classical or popular. Current curricular expectations are that teachers will include multicultural practices in their classrooms. This can create a major dilemma for those teachers whose previous experiences are largely monocultural. Increasingly, Australia purports itself to be a diverse, multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-faith, multi-language society. However, despite living in a society that we proclaim to be so diverse, it is still possible to remain largely untouched by other cultures, confined within a cultural square.

Culture is a complex concept and one that is inextricably linked to language and social practices. The notion of culture not only encompasses beliefs, values and attitudes but also includes behaviours and customs. Paterno (2001) points out that customs and behaviours can be easily acquired but that changing values, attitudes and beliefs requires a deeper and more fundamental awareness and change. It must also be acknowledged that individuals do not fit easily into discrete cultural groups – the location of cultural identity is complex and constantly evolving. As such, culture then can be viewed as a hybrid in which difference is entertained ‘without an assumed or imposed hierarchy’ (Bhabha, 1994, p. 4)

Further there are three types of culture: archaic, residual and emergent. Archaic culture carries past-historical value, residual culture is the lived, current patterns of behaviour, and emergent culture contains the possibility of change and negotiation (Lo Bianco, 1999). It is this latter, emergent culture, that should be the aspiration of music educators. Lo Bianco (1999) talks of a sense of culture possessing both solidarity and fluidity. This underscores the dilemma for the contemporary teacher. Where is solidarity to be found and from that, how can fluidity be attained? Teachers and curriculum planners must recognise this in the choices made in design, presentation and evaluation of learning episodes. Sands (1993, p. 18) agrees and asks ‘What lacks sufficient importance and can be sacrificed for more crucial content? … [and] what content or experiences will benefit our students most?’. In her (ibid.) opinion, ‘multiculturalism in music is the integration of the musics of various cultures and ethnic groups in the music curriculum at all levels and in all areas’. This is an ideal.

Recognising cultural ownership
A major issue in the inclusion of other musics is the notion of cultural ownership. Solbu (1998, p. 35) asks, ‘can I share borrowed songs with others? I really don’t want to misuse what I have borrowed. At the same time, I want others to have pleasure from them. Because every song is, of course, a little treasure’. Addressing such concerns also raises the point that
Attaining cultural competence

We must ask what is involved in acquiring cultural competence so that we can offer an effective multicultural music education programme. The authors argue that cultural competence must be purposefully acquired and must be taught explicitly by explanation and conscious progression through developmental stages. Paterno (2001) suggests that cultural competence encompasses five elements: ‘awareness and acceptance of difference; awareness of one’s own cultural values; understanding of the dynamics of difference; development of cultural knowledge; ability to adapt practice skills to fit the cultural context’. This is deeper and more significant than what we usually consider multicultural practices that often are only a potpourri of artefacts, materials, songs, dances, food, festivals and folklore. Engagement of this kind is superficial, patronizing and tokenistic.

Cultural competence in education involves having understandings, knowledge and skills which are demonstrated by the integration of content from diverse groups and cultures, by the provision of equity in pedagogy and assisting students to acquire democratic attitudes, values and behaviours (Paterno, 2001). Cultural competence is respectful and acquired over time. Further, by engaging with other cultures, one also looks afresh at one’s own culture through a different lens. In this way, new aspects of one’s own identity can be enriched and greater understanding acquired. As Solbu (1998, p. 31) states, ‘the deeper a tree’s roots, the further its branches can extend without toppling it’. It is our position that even though teachers may not have acquired different cultural understandings, they should not hesitate to explore other musics and cultures. This can only enhance both their teaching and the learning of their students.

Whose music wins?

It cannot be denied that teachers enter classrooms with particular cultural biases. There they meet with students with diverse and/or similar cultural understandings and preferences. This is further complicated by curricula that suggest or direct content to acquire democratic attitudes, values and behaviours (Paterno, 2001). Cultural competence is respectful and acquired over time. Further, by engaging with other cultures, one also looks afresh at one’s own culture through a different lens. In this way, new aspects of one’s own identity can be enriched and greater understanding acquired. As Solbu (1998, p. 31) states, ‘the deeper a tree’s roots, the further its branches can extend without toppling it’. It is our position that even though teachers may not have acquired different cultural understandings, they should not hesitate to explore other musics and cultures. This can only enhance both their teaching and the learning of their students.

Authentic practice involves the use of materials that have been prepared with involvement by members of the specific community, arranged in a culturally appropriate way and with text in the original language (Tucker, 1992). There is a danger in taking authentic music into the classroom because we decontextualise the music and ‘in our removal from the place in which we heard it, we have stripped it of its cultural meaning’ (Campbell, 2001a, p. 60). There should be little or no adaptation of the music selected as, by removing music from one culture and presenting it in the symbolic gestures of another we may dilute and trivialise much of its meaning. Teachers need to be aware that the acquisition of cultural authenticity takes time and much effort. John Blacking, the renowned ethnomusicologist, after 22 months of fieldwork and a lifelong immersion in Venda music and culture, still grappled with the issues of how song, rhythm and instrumental melodies were transcribed, and performed (Van Aswegen & Potgieter, 2006). This should not embargo attempts to include other musics and cultures in the classroom. Merely, we suggest that care should be taken.

Pohojola (1993, p. 112) states that as ‘music knows no boundaries. Songs from different countries, sung in their original tongues have opened gates to the understanding of culture’. Although experiencing such other musics is a pathway to the acknowledgement and acceptance of cultural diversity. Part of this decision is a personal one – have we the right to present the music of others in the classroom if it is not a music that in which we have some degree of ownership. Kartomi (1999) asks whether a cultural group can claim the exclusive rights to their own music? Past and present commercial exploitation of indigenous musics have trivialised cultural practice. There has been a backlash against such devaluation to the point where teachers are wary of using some musics due to the notion of ownership. Van Aswegen and Potgieter (2006) suggest that it is in the global interest for musicians to be able to access, arrange and perform indigenous musics that should be respected, acknowledged and compensated. The authors agree with this but argue that teachers must be supported in their endeavours when teaching other musics.

Conversely, it can be argued that, by teaching music from an unfamiliar culture, a teacher can avoid stereotypical responses and the perception of favouritism. For example, should a class of thirty students predominantly from South America learn Inuit songs, further, which Inuit songs should be selected? Campbell (2001a) asks, with so many musical choices available,
which particular music will best represent a whole culture? For example, teaching one African song, perhaps *Thula Thu* (a Zulu song) as a representation of all African music is preposterous. This is a lullaby, there are many other song forms in Zulu culture. Further, one Zulu song does not offer an immersion in the 56 countries that comprise Africa and the many cultures that exist within each of those countries. Even if the inclusion of this song is an attempt to offer a multicultural range within the culture, it raises the questions of how to select the one song, or should one choose several songs, from one or more cultures, and so forth. Ultimately we return to our original dilemma: so much to do, so little time.

**Help is at hand**
For the teacher, at any stage in their teaching career, many different paths lead to effective multicultural practice. The chosen path must meet the needs of the particular cultural and ethnic groups in the wider school community. There is always room for creativity particularly in partnerships with local community members who have the cultural competencies necessary to support a successful, inclusive music programme. As Biernoff and Blom (2002, p. 23) point out, ‘Musicians from other parts of the world come to Australia to live…bringing with them their musical knowledge and skills as performers and teachers, their approaches to education, and their cultural heritage’. These people are now members of our community and provide a rich resource.

Currently schools are employing artists in residence as community partnerships to teach both students and teachers about a music and culture they may not be familiar with. Joseph (2005) in her research into the use of African music in schools explores issues of change and how artist in residence and professional development have helped both students and teachers when teaching a new or different genre like that of African music. Joseph (2005, p. 131) has also found that, ‘having an artist in residence authenticated the experience’. Such encounters Fung (1996, p. 60) suggest serves ‘as a gateway to transmit world musics’. Joseph (2005, p. 131) also points out that ‘the inclusion of so called outside guests is a positive move of systemic change and ongoing development’. The authors suggest help is at hand in terms of resources of every description to teach a broader music curriculum than that in which one is merely trained. There will always be the argument that teachers do not feel that they are culturally competent to teach that which they do not know. However, Sleeper, Torres and Laughlin (2004) suggest we learn from each other and we learn for ourselves.

Teachers need to be proactive in seeking other musics and attaining cultural competence. Such teachers will value diversity, conduct cultural self assessment, be conscious of and manage the dynamics of difference, and adapt to fit the cultural diversity of the community served (Paterno, 2001). We are all aware that it is impossible to do this without assistance. There is a significant role for teacher training, professional development and community partnerships in assisting teachers acquire cultural competence. As Paterno (2001) states, ‘cultural competence depends on social institutions, organizations, agencies, and working groups, as well as individual professionals’ The authors believe that cultural competence is the responsibility of the whole education system, in its broadest interpretation.

**Summary**
Music educators at all levels should be receptive to the inclusion of other cultures in their teaching. We should retain a sense of curiosity and a desire to learn new things that can be shared with our students. Cultural diversity does not only refer to the materials that we teach but to how we teach them. As we have discussed, music is embedded in the culture that creates it and so to retain some authenticity it is important to recognise the different ways in which cultural traditions are transmitted. The exploration of other cultures enables the making of connections within and without the classroom and the school. Institutions do not exist in isolation but in the context of the community both local and national.

Nearly two decades ago, the Washington Symposium on Multicultural Approaches to Music Education made a number of resolutions. These included the incorporation of multicultural musical experiences into the very earliest years of education, the study of other musics within their cultural context, and that multicultural music education should be an intensive not superficial experience (Anderson & Campbell, 1989). Despite the valiant efforts of some, this remains a tall order given the paucity of multicultural music in all education sectors in Australia and the overcrowded curriculum we faces daily.

Effective multicultural practice recognizes and accepts difference in people and views differences from a strengths perspective. Teacher education programmes must take into account contemporary, diverse Australian society and prepare future teachers to be responsive, tolerant, sensitive and culturally literate. Nieto (1992) rightfully argues “we do our students a disservice when we prepare them to live in a society that no longer exists” (p. 281). As Australians are becoming increasingly aware of our ever-expanding ethnic diversity, curricula in all domains are being enhanced by the inclusion of broad and varied cultural perspectives. Diversity should not be a liability, but rather it should become our strength.

**References**


