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Many Layers of Meaning: Multicultural Music Education in Victoria, Australia

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Abstract: This paper explores music education viewed through lenses of cultural identity and the formation of personal identity in contemporary, multicultural Victoria, Australia. The people of this state come from more than 280 countries, speak more than 240 languages and follow more than 120 faiths. Our population diversity is constantly changing which challenges music educators to respond to classroom demographics and as tertiary educators we prepare our pre-service students to become culturally responsive teachers. As music educators, we occupy and are situated in multiple identities that shape the ways in which we experience and understand music and its transmission. As Australian tertiary music educators, we explore pre-service teacher cultural identity, attitudes and values about the inclusion of multicultural music in the classroom where cultural dialogue provides a platform for the construction of meaning. While marginalization and diversity occurs within multifaceted forms, we question: What music do we present in contemporary Victorian schools? Why do we make these choices? How do we present this music? This consideration, contextualized within the curricular framework, addresses issues of access, equity and community engagement. The making of meaning in shared cultural experiences contributes to the formation of identity which is a fluid and multilayered construct.

Keywords: Music Education, Multiculturalism, Cultural Diversity, Australian School Music, Teacher Education

Introduction

In the nineteenth century, Australia primarily perceived itself as a replica of British society and a bastion of the British Empire. Since then, Australian understanding has moved from assimilation, through integration and multiculturalism, to the contemporary position of valuing cultural diversity (Joseph & Southcott, 2007). In the most recent census data (2006) Australians reported more than 250 different ancestries, with many people claiming two ancestries, approximately 280 countries of birth, 240 languages and 120 religions (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009). Australia is made up of six states and two territories. One state, Victoria, is the locus of our research. According to the Victorian Multicultural Commission (2010) this is the most culturally diverse state in Australia with a population from more than 200 countries, who speak more than 230 languages and dialects, and follow more than 120 religious faiths. Such population diversity impacts on school demographics and must therefore affect the education of student teachers. This challenges us as tertiary educators to prepare our pre-service students to become culturally responsive teachers.

Over twenty years ago the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia (Office of Multicultural Affairs, 1989) defined 'cultural identity' as the right of all Australians to express...
and share their individual and cultural heritage (race, ethnicity, language, culture, religion, and gender) to overcome perceived multicultural barriers. This sharing of diversity takes many forms, such as the national celebration of ‘Harmony Day’. Begun ten years ago, the Australian federal government Department of Immigration and Citizenship Harmony Day “celebrates the cohesive and inclusive nature of our nation and promotes the benefits of cultural diversity”. The key message promoted is that, “Everyone Belongs. It’s about community participation, inclusiveness, respect and a sense of belonging for everyone” (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2009). Similarly diversity is celebrated in both communities and schools in a variety of ways. Many of these involve the musics of the diverse cultures represented. This range of musics can enhance the provision of inclusive, rich, multicultural, and multi-musical programs in communities and schools. As tertiary music educators we consider the inclusion of multicultural approaches as essential in all music education programs. Baldwin, Buchanan and Rudisill (2007) concur that teacher educators are “charged with the complex task of preparing a teaching force with the skills for teaching to high standards while meeting the needs of all the learners in the classroom” (p. 325). This imperative makes it impossible to retain a single perspective or a limited understanding of what consists an affective music education program. Within our tertiary music education programs we respond to policy directives, the reality of the culturally diverse students in our classes and in our schools, and our own beliefs about providing our future teachers with the understandings and skills to become culturally responsive and inclusive teachers. As music educators we, and our students, occupy and are situated in multiple identities that shape the ways in which we experience and understand music and its transmission. This article argues for cultural dialogue that provides a platform for the construction of meaning. This consideration, contextualized within the curricular framework, addresses issues of access, equity and community engagement, as part of becoming culturally responsive.

This discussion explores music teacher education in contemporary, multicultural Victoria, Australia, using the lenses of cultural identity and the formation of personal identity as evidenced in data collected as part of a larger study. In 2005 we began an ongoing study, Intercultural attitudes of pre-service music education students, across two institutions, Monash University and Deakin University where we respectively teach. Trent, Kea and Oh (2008) identify the current lack of longitudinal studies in multicultural education and teacher education. Our study seeks to address this and investigates how our teacher education students engage with culturally diverse music. A snapshot of the self-perceived cultural identity of the 2009 cohort of interviewees is offered to contextualize the questions that are the focus of this article which included: What music do we present in contemporary Victorian schools? Why do we make these choices? How do we present this music? For this discussion, only the final year teacher education students undertaking music methodologies in 2009 were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews concerning their past experience and present understanding of cultural diversity in music education. The indicative findings from this research explore the layers of meaning implicit in the teaching and learning of multicultural music. Our discussion offers a snapshot of our interviewees’ personal and musical identity and the issues concerning music curriculum content and pedagogy where multiple meanings are constructed and may be shared.
The Current Position of Music in Australian School Curricula

In Australia, each state and territory has its own school curriculum or curriculum framework which vary in how detailed are their specifications for content. In our state, the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) provides only a curriculum framework for schools (years preparatory to 10) with little guidance for music teaching. According to Southcott and Hartwig (2005) this curriculum framework is limited to “generic language with little real information to guide the teacher” (p. 147). Although multicultural music is not discussed in any detail in VELS, it can provide an opportunity for teachers and teacher educators to be innovative, responsive, flexible and inclusive. Although the most recent National Review of School Music Education (DEST, 2005) identified a number of shortcomings in the provision of music in schools and presented recommendations to the federal government, there was scant reference of multicultural music. The context for the review recognized the “impact of Australia’s diverse and complex cultural factors on school music including cultural diversity, musical giftedness and talent, music and students with special needs, and gender issues in music” (p. vix) but no specific recommendations were advanced. Currently the federal government is developing a national curriculum for all Australian schools for phased introduction from 2011. The first phase will include English, mathematics, science and history. The second phase will include geography, languages and the arts. However music per se is not mentioned and the arts are only defined as visual and performing arts (Chadwick & Waldock, 2009). The arts are mooted for introduction in 2013 and music educators are presently engaged in arguing for its place in the national curriculum.

Multiculturalism and Cultural Responsiveness in Music Education

Multiculturalism fosters a balance between change and social conformity, and encourages the processes of acculturation. Multiculturalism is a social ideal that engenders dialogue and sharing between different groups to enrich all. This practice should maintain the integrity of all participants offering ascendancy to none and encourage the development of sincere respect for all (Reimer, 1993; Bradley, 2006). Brändle (2001) points out that, “multiculturalism as a social construct must be transformative” (p. 9) and encompass the pluralities of cultures. This process must be both collaborative and intentional on the part of teachers and learners. Teachers who are able to respond to multiculturalism and culturally inclusivity, “have a high degree of sociocultural consciousness, hold affirming views of students of diverse backgrounds, [and] see themselves as agents of change” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002b, pp. 27-28). Music is an affective pathway to multiculturalism (Bradley, 2006) as there are “many different but equally valid forms of musical and artistic expression [that] encourages students to develop a broad perspective based on understanding, tolerance, and respect for a variety of opinions and approaches” (Anderson & Campbell, 1989, p. 1).

Inherent in this idea of multiculturalism is the notion of polymusicality which Anderson and Campbell (1989) define as a process of developing musical flexibility by studying a variety of world musics. Such engagement should enhance their ability to perform, listen and appreciate many different musics and broaden pre-existing narrow foci. Students would thus “gain a positive attitude toward one ‘foreign’ music and … become more flexible in their attitudes toward other unfamiliar musics” (Anderson & Campbell, 1989, p. 4). A decade ago Teicher (1997) noted the importance of “teacher attitudes regarding teaching in culturally
diverse settings” (p. 425). It is imperative that in a culturally diverse country like Australia we, as teacher educators, hold flexible, inclusive understandings and encourage the same in our students. Thus our graduates will acquire an international perspective that “will prepare them to live in a global environment” (Anderson & Campbell, 1989, p. 3). Mushii (2004) concurs, stating that, “to prepare the learner for the outside complex world, teachers must consider cultural diversity” (p. 180). Such diversity is inherent in teachers and in their students who bring to the classroom their “own diversities – or multiple realities” (Hutchinson, 2006, p. 309). Similarly, in her project, Sounds of Silk, Chen-Hafteck (2007) recognized that pupils bring to the classroom varying cultural backgrounds, knowledge and skills and teachers should incorporate and celebrate this diversity. This inclusion of a variety of musics and cultures engenders cultural inclusivity. These statements hold true for both teachers in schools and tertiary educators preparing future teachers.

At tertiary level Villegas and Lucas (2002b) suggest that teacher education programs should work to engender sociocultural consciousness that requires the critical self-evaluation of personal identity and the recognition of bias in educational institutions. Based on this reflection, teachers should develop an “affirming attitude toward students from culturally diverse backgrounds” (Kea, Campbell-Whatley & Richards, 2006, p.6). Further, as agents of change, teachers should develop collaborative practices with students, colleagues and community members (Abril, 2006) to enhance teaching and learning. As teacher educators we recognize that the onerous task of “preparing culturally responsive teachers is complex and demanding” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002a, p. 177). Part of this is the recognition that students in classrooms may well be ethnically, culturally, socially, and linguistically different from their teachers. Hence teachers should have “an appreciation of and respect for cultural diversity; and a willingness to teach in ways that challenge existing inequalities and promote social justice” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002a, p. 177). Culturally responsive teaching is not just about lesson content but also requires appropriate pedagogical practices to support the curriculum (Mixon, 2009). Kea et al. (2006) agree that, “effective cultural pedagogy is not just course or curriculum development, but rather a change in students’ thinking, behavior, and ultimately teaching” (p. 9). Although researchers have, for some time, recognized that cultural responsiveness is a form of transformative practice that is both empowering and emancipatory (Au, 1993; Gordon, 1993; Lipman, 1995; Pewewardy, 1994; Phillips, 1983), teachers must include the cultural knowledge that students bring to classrooms (Gay, 2000). By adopting this stance culturally responsive teachers can help their students “to be better human beings and more successful learners” (Culturally Responsive Teaching, 2005, p. 2).

Methodology

The larger project, Intercultural attitudes of pre-service music education students, begun in 2005, had two phases – first a contextualizing pilot survey which formed the basis for ongoing interviews of cohorts of final year tertiary teacher education music students. Ethical permission to undertake the research having been gained from both institutions, the on-line, anonymous survey questioned students concerning their past experience and present understandings of cultural diversity in music education. Since 2006 we have invited final year students to be interviewed. As is standard practice in semi-structured interviews, there was considerable flexibility in the posing of questions depending on the responses of the interviewees. The same research assistant has undertaken all interviews and their transcriptions throughout the
life of this project. Overall the questions addressed the students’ educational, cultural and musical background. We solicited general information such as what instrument(s) do you play and when did you begin to learn music? We then asked questions concerning participants’ understanding of multiculturalism and its enactment in schools. Students were asked to describe their prior learning of different musics and cultures, their experience of this while on school teaching placements, and the preparation they received during their tertiary teacher education. Specifically the participants were asked about their experiences of professional development for teachers and artists-in-schools programs. Students were also given the opportunity to reflect on how they thought they would teach in their future classrooms for example, What music would you present in contemporary Victorian schools? Why would you make these choices? How would you present this music? The interviews were transcribed and all interviewees were given the opportunity to edit and confirm their transcripts. This article will focus on the responses to these final questions offered by the 2009 cohort. Data collected in prior years has already been reported (Joseph & Southcott, 2009; Southcott & Joseph, 2010).

As in past years, the students in the 2009 cohort across the two universities represented the broad spectrum of cultural backgrounds that comprises multicultural Australia. Semi-structured interviews are deemed most effective in gaining in-depth understanding of sensitive issues from the participants’ perspectives. Semi-structured interviews, described as ‘conversational’ by Macionis and Plummer (2005), “encourage the respondent to participate fully and equally in discussion with the interviewer” (p. 56). The transcriptions of the fifteen interviews were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This relatively recent qualitative research approach is idiographic and underpinned by a phenomenological understanding in which there is an examination of phenomena as experienced and given meaning in the life worlds of participants (Brocki & Wearden, 2005; Eatough & Smith 2006). It should noted, that as a phenomenological study, this research focuses on the perceptions of the interviewees. Thus, the actual classroom programs experienced during the teaching placements are not central to this investigation; rather, it is the students’ perceptions that are central. IPA is an inductive approach (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005) that “attempts to understand how participants make sense of their experiences but it recognizes that this involves a process of interpretation by the researcher” (Smith, 2005). IPA can be applied to interview transcripts (Smith & Osborn, 2003), from which analysis develops patterns of meaning that are reported in thematic form (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006). The analysis initially involves identifying emergent themes. Then connections are made and a summary created that is illustrated by direct quotations.

Discussion

Our discussion focuses on two broad topics. The first concerns the construction of personal and musical identity amongst our interviewees. The second addresses the educational contexts which our student teachers inhabit, both in their own education and in the classrooms they visited during teaching placements, and the decisions they were faced with concerning what music do we present in schools and how and why is this undertaken.
Personal Identity

During 2009 fifteen interviewees describe a range of multicultural backgrounds concerning their language, ethnicity, culture, and their musical experiences. Echoing the Australian population demographics outlined earlier many of our interviewees across both institutions, self-identified as Anglo-Australian, while the cultural backgrounds described by the remainder traversed diverse cultures. These included hybrid identities that prefixed Canadian, Chinese, Indian, Indonesian, Irish, Italian, Romanian, Scottish, Sri-Lankan, Russian and Vietnamese with Australian. Some identified as migrants, others as children of migrants and a few multiple generation Australians. All interviewees bring to their teacher education and will take to their future classrooms, their diverse experiences and the attitudes and understandings created by these experiences. From the cohort we have chosen three exemplars that present the range of understandings of the interaction between personal identity and cultural diversity. For example one particular student was born to Chinese parents living in Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia. She stated that she was raised surrounded by “people with a variety of ethnic languages (Chinese, Indian, Batakinese, Javanese, Padanginese and a few European) and religious backgrounds (Moslem, Buddhist, Catholic, Christian and other beliefs). All of these social cultural aspects indirectly shaped my personality, beliefs and way of interacting with people”. This rich community diversity was sadly not reflected in her schooling. The interviewee described her school during the “Soeharto regime … made it impossible to learn Chinese language, culture and so on. The only languages permitted were Indonesian and English. The music class only allowed students to learn Indonesian and western classical music”. This student’s cultural understanding underpins her current attitude. She stated that, “reflecting on my unpleasant experience, I believe that classroom music should cover multicultural music. Music class should not be influenced by the political situation. Students have the right to learn about their own or other cultures”. This interviewee firmly believes that “multicultural music learning will not only broaden students’ musical horizons but also bring the students towards tolerance and understanding of others”. This student’s personal experience of schooling was culturally limited but she realized that there were many other cultures that could be included if only the educational system had embraced them. In Australia, she relishes the educational system where at least nominally cultural diversity is embraced and encouraged.

The other students offered similar stories that had formed their understandings of culture and self. At the other end of the spectrum one student presented initially as monocultural. He stated, “I am from a typical Chinese family and I am educated totally within the Chinese educational system. Teachers are the absolute power in the classroom … Chinese mandarin is the medium in my schools”. His Australian tertiary teacher education forced him to reconsider his identity both as a person and as a teacher. He explained “when I came to Australia I studied totally in English, in my placement schools. Located in the western suburb … a comparatively poor area with many refugees that are mainly from Burma”. His second placement was in a private catholic college where he described the culture as “predominantly 98% are white”. Over the course of these experiences this student had to adjust to the notion of flexibility in teaching and learning in Australian classrooms. This student also enjoyed the rich diversity of the schools but found it difficult to reconcile what he perceived as informality between learners and teachers.
The third example described herself as “fifth generation Aussie” with an Anglo-European family heritage. She attended school in Australia with classmates from “migrant backgrounds of Chinese, Italian, Yugoslavian, and Iranian” ethnicities. Interestingly she did not perceive this as a range of cultures, she “knew no concept of difference or prejudice” but only recognized the notion of cultural diversity during her first tertiary studies where she realized that some students were treated differently to others. She said “my eyes were opened to the struggles of particular students who seemed to be treated differently with regard to assignment submission – given extra leeway for ESL [English as a Second Language]”. Thus it was not until she observed people being treated differently because of their cultural background that she recognized the existence of diversity. For her cultural diversity was enacted – it was the way you were treated. In her schooling she did not see people being treated differently so she did not see the differences between her and the other children in her classes who, she now recognizes, came from very different cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. The recognition of such differences impacts on self-identity. Once this had been drawn to her attention, this student sought out varying cultural experiences to challenge and enhance her own personal identity which currently is adding to her own self-perception as a teacher.

These three examples show students moving from monocultural environments that shaped their personal identities to varied multicultural experiences. These students are forming hybrid identities as they mingle with fellow students and interact with children and teachers in schools. The interviewees recognize that, within music education in a culturally diverse country, remaining focused on one particular musical genre is untenable. The creation of an hybrid identity where identity is re-formulated and restructured within the context of culture requires a transformative process on the part of the individual. This then articulates into the potential to become a culturally diverse teacher.

**What Music do we Present in Schools – how and why do we do this?**

Making decisions about curriculum is not unique to music educators who, as Schmidt (2005) points out “routinely make curricular decisions such [as] what to teach, why to teach and how to teach in their music classrooms”. Currently, in Victoria, Australia, the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) has 6 levels that cover the years of compulsory schooling (Preparatory to Year 10) (Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority, 2010). As stated, VELS is couched in very general terms with no specific suggestions for the inclusion of multicultural music, no syllabus, no textbooks either prescribed or even recommended. Teaching content is left to the discretion of the individual music teacher within the ethos of the school. In tertiary teacher education, we provide students with experience, engagement and exploration of musics from a wide range of cultures and traditions. The reality of schools is that our student teachers do not always find culturally diverse music education in action. Our interviewees described the full spectrum of what may be found in schools. Some interviewees were keen to share their own music cultural background whereas others were wanted to appear as ‘mainstream’ as possible which implied western popular or classical. The choice of what music to teach reflects the position adopted by the individual teacher and, in this discussion, student teacher.

At one end of the spectrum, current interviewees described finding little or no multicultural music in the schools they visited and felt constrained to stay within a comparatively small monocultural range. Our previous years of data show similar trends (Joseph & Southcott, 2005).
2009). However, one interviewee could clearly be positioned at the other end of the spectrum. He vividly remembers being asked to teach a series of lessons that introduced a music genre of his choice. Having an Indian background he developed and taught a unit in Indian music for year 10 elective music students. The first lesson comprised an introduction of Indian traditional instruments, using a “PowerPoint to show the pictures and videos of performance. The kids were obviously interested”. In the second lesson he played a range of Indian music that included different forms, styles and ensembles. Having the background knowledge, this student teacher was able to describe to the pupils “the context and the story behind music”. In the third and final lesson the student teacher introduced an Indian musical raga Lach'ha Bilaval which is “a happy raga which is played in the daytime and is very much like a major scale” as the basis of a compositional activity. The student brought his sitar into the class and demonstrated several ragas to the students to provide them with an authentic aural and visual experience.

The problem is that not all teachers and student teachers have a deep background in the music of a different culture despite the inclusion of culturally diverse music being expected by the curriculum. Music teachers make use of a range of resources, professional organizations, community festivals, and excursions. A number of interviewees listed internet sites such as You Tube as a valuable source of aural and visual examples of music from other cultures. Professional music education organizations were frequently mentioned as providing lesson plans, musical examples and other helpful material. Student teachers sometime encounter artists-in-schools programs while they are on teaching placements. Interviewees echoed the views of their supervising teachers stating that this was a way of gaining both long and short-term on-site music experiences from authentic culture bearers. One interviewee remarked that “I have never been to Africa but having the Ghanaian music group teach about their culture, dance, drumming and singing was an excellent opportunity for me to learn something different as I am a classically trained violinist”. This participant described her personal learning as a musician and as a teacher, thus demonstrating different layers of musical meaning and understanding. Culturally responsive teaching implies an appropriate pedagogy that encompasses the cultural context of the music and the performance conventions.

In Australia music educators are exhorted to construct curricula within mandated curriculum frameworks. The VELS expects that music, as one of the arts, will explore cultural diversity (Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority, 2010). More than this, music can be a vehicle for the exploration of shared cultural understandings that reflect our complex and ever changing societal demographics. In classrooms, music provides a common ground for pupils of different cultural backgrounds to connect and communicate. One interviewee pointed out that, “as the world shrinks students need to be prepared to encounter different cultures in a tolerant and respectful manner”. Our interviewees recognized the importance of cultural inclusivity in music. One stated that, “we cannot ignore how this unique ‘culture’ of Australia has been mapped out by the countless different cultures represented by the musics we enjoy”. Another asserted that, “I feel studying multicultural music opens the eyes of students who seem complacent about what they listen to and may ‘produce’ more insightful, open-minded, creative, inclusive individuals who are more aware of their role in this world of ours”. As tertiary educators we recognize that this process of engaging, experiencing and exploring is essential for our students as they continue to construct their personal, musical and teacher identities.
Conclusion

As Australian tertiary music educators, we have discussed pre-service teacher understanding of cultural identity and attitudes concerning the inclusion of multicultural music in educational settings where cultural dialogue may provide a platform for the construction of meaning. This discussion has focused on pre-service music teacher students interviewed in 2009 as they prepare for teaching in contemporary, multicultural Victoria, Australia. As tertiary educators we too are positioned to be agents of change, who have the potential to broaden our students’ experiences and understandings of other cultures and their musics. We encourage our students to begin this journey of musical identity transformation. There are a number of ways to begin to transform oneself by immersion in a music, such as through professional development, community music making, self-study, attending conferences and music clinics (Halagao, 2006; Mixon, 2009). These are starting points but, as O’Neill (2009) points out, we need to undertake even more to “facilitate perspective transformations . . . to create a foundation for enacting principled pluralism in ways that will encourage mutual respect, intercultural dialogue, and greater diversity in our musical understandings” (p. 84). As teacher educators we encourage our students to explore the multiple meanings inherent in shared cultural experiences that contribute to the formation of identity which is a fluid and multilayered construct. Abril (2006) adds a note of caution that, when constructing personal and musical identity, we need to take into account different forms of bias.

In this discussion we have considered the important questions concerning how our students understand musical and cultural diversity both their own and that which they experienced in educational settings. Specifically we have asked: What music should be presented in contemporary Victorian schools and how should this be done? The responses gained from our interviewees demonstrate that in our pre-service music teacher education programs our students are forming hybrid personal and musical identities which is encouraging as this promotes the development of culturally responsive teachers as Villegas and Lucas (2002a) confirm. Our research has found that our students recognize the need to be socially, culturally and musically inclusive. Encouragingly in this time of educational change in Australia with the development of a new National curriculum, our current student cohorts are, we believe, positioned better to enact diverse musics in classrooms, and to address issues of access, equity and community engagement. Similarly Erwin, Edwards, Kerchner and Knight (2003), believe that contemporary music educators “have the opportunity to be better prepared than previous generations to teach diverse populations utilizing diverse musics” (p.137). As music educators we endeavor to be proactive in exploring opportunities for the provision of equitable, accessible and culturally diverse music education environments so that we both model and provide opportunities for engagement with multicultural music where many layers of meaning can be constructed.

References


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