

Experiences and understandings: Student teachers' beliefs about multicultural practice in music education

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Abstract

In this time of national curriculum re-thinking, tertiary institutions are positioned to create opportunities amongst pre-service teachers for the cultivation of knowledge, skills and understandings concerning cultural diversity in music education. The demographic profile of the State of Victoria is the most culturally diverse in Australia and the curriculum framework for schools, Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS), mandates multiculturalism as an integral part of the education. The Arts domain offers a range of suggestions as to how school students might develop an awareness of aesthetic and critical aspects of arts works from varied cultural, social, and historical contexts. In preparing pre-service teachers to embrace these ideas and understandings, tertiary educators continue to face a mismatch between curricular expectations and the realities of the school music classroom. In 2005 we began a research project that sought to explore fourth year pre-service music education students' understandings about curriculum constraints and classroom practices in music education. This article focuses on the data collected in 2008 and 2009 from students from Deakin and Monash Universities. The semi-structured interviews were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The findings revealed a disjuncture between VELS and what our students found during their school placements. This study reports on two themes: perceptions of multiculturalism and the teaching and learning of multicultural music in schools. As tertiary music educators, we endeavor to encourage our student teachers to examine their own experiences and understandings in multicultural music.

Key words: Australian curriculum, Multiculturalism, Multicultural music practice, teacher education

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Introduction

In Australia in 2005, the National Review of School Music Education (NRSME) reported that music was poorly resourced and often neglected. The NRSME found that "there is a need for immediate priority on improving and sustaining the quality and status of music education" (DEST, 2005, p. v). Four years later the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) announced that music will be included

as one of the arts in the second phase of the National Curriculum (ACARA, 2009). Curriculum review and reform is an ongoing global phenomenon from which Australia is not exempt. Tertiary teacher educators should respond to the societal contexts and expectations in which future teachers will find themselves situated. Baldwin, Buchanan and Rudisill (2007) point out 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). Part of this complex task must consider the cultural diversity that currently exists in Australian classrooms. As culture is expressed through music, future teachers should have engaged, explored and experienced a variety of musics in their pre-service education. Jeanneret and Forrest (2009) confirm that there has long been debate about how and what musical understandings and skills should be present in teacher education and that there continues to be too little time and resources allocated to music education. They acknowledge that "there is little in the way of concrete recommendations" for hoped for improvement (p. 208).

This article focuses on one Australian state, Victoria, and the inclusion of music in both curriculum and in teacher education. In 2004 the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) was introduced. VELS is a curriculum framework for schools (years Preparatory to 10) that is organized under three learning Strands (Physical, Personal and Social Learning; Discipline-based Learning; and Interdisciplinary Learning) (VCAA, 2009). Each Strand is divided into Domains and the Arts are considered under the Domain of Discipline-based Learning. In VELS there are five mandatory levels and one additional optional level for extension. The Levels each cover one to two years of schooling. Levels 1, 2 and 3 comprise Preparatory, Years 1 to 2, and Years 3 to 4 respectively. Levels 4 and 5 encompass the middle school years, Years 5 to 6 and Years 7 to 8. Level 6 (Years 9-10) offers a curriculum framework that may be employed although at this level of schooling, it is common that program content is determined by the final years' curricula in which students specialize. It is only to be expected that school music educators would look to the requirements of the final year 12 external examinations to determine prerequisite knowledge and skills to be acquired in the elective years (years 9 to 12). Within Discipline-based Learning, the Arts curriculum framework offers, according to

Southcott and Hartwig (2005), scant guidance for music teaching, with only "generic language with little real information to guide the teacher" (p. 147). It is acknowledged that VELS only offers a framework not a syllabus but, particularly in primary teacher education where generally there is little time allocated to music education in courses, more details would be helpful. With little direction, it is challenging for both teachers and tertiary teacher educators to develop effective inclusive classroom curricula. Further the issue of multiculturalism was not initially discussed in any detail in VELS. Australia has used the term 'multiculturalism' as part of official federal government policy since 1973 (Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, Australian Government, 2005) and continues to do so (Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2008). More recently in 2009 the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority (VCAA) (2009) added that, "multiculturalism is an integral part of VELS and covers a range of knowledge, skills, values and behaviours". VCAA acknowledges the diversity of Australian populations and the importance of intercultural understanding in a social context where there is a wide range of cultural variation. Further VELS emphasizes the importance of developing culturally appropriate values, responses and behaviours particularly through the exploration and creation of various forms of cultural expression (VCAA, 2009).

VELS was written specifically for Victoria which is the most culturally diverse state in Australia with a population from more than two hundred countries that speak more than two hundred and thirty languages and dialects (Victorian Multicultural Commission, 2010). Sadly this did not appear to be uppermost in the thinking of the VELS designers. Even with the recent VCAA (2009) addendum concerning the inclusion of multiculturalism, music teachers are still left with little specific guidance. Likewise, tertiary music educators are faced with the

challenge of preparing pre-service teacher education students to support the changing demographics and cultures of Victorian school music classrooms. Encouragingly Erwin, Edwards, Kerchner and Knight (2003) point out that, “music educators of the twenty-first century have the opportunity to be better prepared than previous generations to teach diverse populations utilizing diverse musics” (p. 137). However, the mere inclusion of a smorgasbord of different musics does not necessarily ensure culturally plural music education. For nearly twenty years, ethnomusicologists and music educators have argued that, to counter this teachers at all levels should include cultural knowledge, understandings, and skills to make learning more relevant, effective, and authentic (Tucker, 1992; Palmer, 1992; Burton, 2002; Campbell, 2004). The meaningful inclusion of a variety of diverse musics and their cultural context can promote culturally inclusive plural music education. Teacher educators have the responsibility to prepare responsive, tolerant, respectful and inclusive future music educators. It is important the music education teachers and students understand that “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).

The ideal of inclusivity is just that – an ideal. The problem is how to facilitate this in tertiary teacher education so that future teachers are empowered to create culturally inclusive music curricula. Chen-Hafteck (2007) challenges us not only to develop musical understanding, skill, and awareness of socio-cultural context, but also to inculcate “a positive attitude towards music” (p. 229). This is the crux of the problem. How do we get future teachers to change their attitudes and perceptions based on their past, often haphazard, music experiences? Further, those

experiences in both formal and informal learning are predominantly taught from a ‘west is best’ perspective. Henkin and Steinmetz (2008) confirm that, student teachers enter tertiary education with “experiential knowledge of teaching through their own prior school experiences, and therefore, view teaching with the tinted lenses they have personally gained over time” (p. 102). The same could be said for their experiences in music. This presents a challenge for tertiary educators given the limitations of time and resources and the demands of the increasingly crowded Australian curriculum (Temmerman, 1997; Jeanneret, 1997; Russell-Bowie, 2003; Jeanneret & Forrest, 2009). Given the curricular expectations of VELS and the realities of both teacher education and schooling, how then can we approach the ideals of cultural inclusivity? This problem is not unique to Australia. In the USA, Henkin and Steinmetz (2008) reported that “by discovering what pre-service teachers know about diversity in the classroom, we can then build upon their funds of knowledge and help them teach diverse curriculum and serve diverse students” (p. 103). Further, Baldwin, Buchanan and Rudisill (2007) point out that “shifting demographics in schools toward greater ethnic and linguistic diversity require teacher education programs to teach future teachers how to be effective with all learners” (p. 315). Inherent in this process of change, student teachers should become aware of their preconceptions and be prepared to engage, as Allen and Porter (2002) suggest, “in an effective teaching-learning exchange... and reflect on their personal behaviours, beliefs, and values and how they influence their interactions with others” (p. 128).

In this article we will focus on two themes drawn from the interviews: perceptions of multiculturalism and the teaching and learning of multicultural music in schools. The data revealed that students have varying understandings of multiculturalism *per se* and recognize the importance of moving from a curriculum that

is dominated by a western musical paradigm to one that demonstrates cultural inclusivity. In practice, given the cultural demographics of Victorian school classrooms and the recent pronouncements concerning the importance of multiculturalism in schools, the students were dismayed by what they experienced during their placements.

The research context

In this exploration of the inclusion of multicultural music education in both VELs and Victorian teacher education we focus on responses gathered by 30 semi-structured interviews that were undertaken in 2008 and 2009 across Deakin University and Monash University in Victoria, Australia. In the interviews we explored fourth-year music students' understandings and experiences in multicultural music, in their personal backgrounds, their university courses, and during their school teaching placements. Depending on the course, various numbers of days' placement experience in schools are mandated. This ranges between 40 and 90 days, depending on the teacher registration requirements. This research adopted a phenomenological stance and employed semi-structured interviews to explore the lived experiences of participants. The data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which is a flexible, non-prescriptive approach that offers guidelines that are readily adapted by researchers (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The use of IPA provides an understanding of participant experiences and offers researchers the opportunity to engage at an idiographic level to explore "in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 51). In IPA the participant's lived experience is coupled with a "subjective and reflective process of interpretation" (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005, p. 20). In this hermeneutic process researchers actively try to understand the participant's personal world (Smith, 2004). Across both years, the same research assistant undertook

all interviews in both universities. The semi-structured interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes and allowed a conversational flexibility while still following a set of pre-prepared questions set by the authors. These questions were selected from those already trialed in earlier years of this study (Southcott & Joseph, 2007; Joseph & Southcott, 2009) for example, "What do you understand multiculturalism to be?", "Have you learnt any music from other cultures?", "Why do you think multiculturalism is important in school music?", and "Did you experience any multicultural music while you were on teaching placement?" All interviews were transcribed and given to the participants for clarification and confirmation. The transcribed data were analyzed only by the authors in a process that involves "coding, organizing, integrating and interpreting of data" (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005, p. 22). IPA is used to generate a thematically presented narrative account in which direct quotations from the interviews are included to illustrate the discussion. No participants are identified in the discussion of the data.

Findings

The findings drawn from the interview data will be considered under two emergent themes: first, the perceptions of multiculturalism held by our participants, and second, the teaching and learning of multicultural music in schools understood by the pre-service teacher education music specialists.

Perceptions of multiculturalism

The pre-service teacher education students' understandings of multiculturalism in music education traversed a continuum that began from a somewhat naïve assertion that multiculturalism was a 'good thing' but what that might be exactly was poorly articulated. One student stated that, "I think it's important that we use different types of music in our classrooms" but did not elaborate further on why or how this might be accomplished. Another added that,

"music is in every culture and even if it's different, people can still listen to it". Participants ascribed responsibility for the inclusion of different musics in classrooms to teachers. One participant clearly stated, "I think all teachers should make every attempt to educate themselves about other cultures so they can support and understand the kids in their classrooms". Such a response only takes into account the teaching and learning environment in schools. This teacher-centered approach does not recognize the diversity within the school student population and within the wider society in which the school is positioned. A more inclusive response was offered by one student who saw learning different musics and genres as a means of inculcating an appreciation of cultural diversity which he thought "starts in the classroom". He mentioned how successful the experience of using another music in his teaching had been, describing a school and community celebration for the Sri Lankan Sinhala New Year that he organized during his practicum. This interviewee drew on his own expertise and that of his community as bearers of culture which is one way that we can be culturally responsive teachers (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Several of the interviewees mentioned that they were raised in an Anglo-Celtic Australian environment and trained in western musical genres. Nonetheless they felt it was important to challenge themselves as musicians and music educators by exploring music of other cultures. One participant said that, "I think that music is not just western music; music is made all over the world – has different meaning all over the world, therefore I think it's extremely important to actually show students you know how music can be made in different places". This is particularly pertinent, as the future teachers participating in this study may work in schools with demographic profiles that reflect the rich population diversity of this state. As Victoria is currently the most multicultural state in Australia with a history that was "forged on successive waves of migration" with new arrivals changing the makeup of society (Victorian Multicultural

Commission, 2009), the interviewees' awareness that there are many other musics and cultures is encouraging. Continuing this idea, another respondent commented that, "I don't think that anybody should be led to believe that western music is everything and all that we should teach ... otherwise we are limiting the musical experiences and cultural understanding of the students in our classes". It can be argued that the notion that 'West is best' must be discarded so that "Australian music educators can be prepared to embrace cultural diversity in music education" (Joseph & Southcott, 2009, p. 469). One student added that this understanding demanded a "respect of each of those different cultures" and another identified the importance of upholding cultural "values, traditions, [and] everything". Bradley (2006) recognizes the importance of respecting and valuing other peoples and their musics. One interviewee elaborated on this, *music reflects the society in which it is composed ... music is an inherent part of the culture in which it is produced and the culture in which music is produced involves a whole social setting, the historical setting, the historical lead up to where the society is at the time, what's happening in the society at the time that the music is produced and it is very important for people to expand their understanding of how things came about and why.*

This understanding resonates with that of Chen-Hafteck (2007) who states that, "learning about a music without its contextualizing culture lacks both feelings and emotions, which thus denies access to both cognitive and affective learning" (p. 227). Although the students in general understood what multicultural music could bring to teaching and learning, it remains an individual decision about whether this will occur. VELS does not mandate the inclusion of multicultural music so the important question becomes, how much value does the teacher (or future teacher) place on the inclusion of diverse musics in the classroom. Across the two years of data collection, there was a consistent acknowledgement that the inclusion of multicultural music in contemporary Australian

classrooms is valuable but the strength of this conviction varied considerably. Some student responses were simplistic, for example, one stated that we should “sing a song from a different culture at least once every term”. Another extended this, saying that she would include “lots of songs and talk about the cultures they come from”. Henkin and Steinmetz (2008) also found that, “most pre-service teachers approach this issue of diversity individualistically, and their conceptual ideas about diversity are shallow and limited” (p. 102). More comprehensively, a number of students described scenarios that included music lessons where children in the class, parents and community members were involved in the teaching and learning of songs in their cultural context.

By encouraging inclusive teaching and learning of diverse musics and cultures that moves beyond the teacher as the sole provider of lesson content, interviewees recognized and described the complexity of presenting culturally inclusive school music. Interviewees pondered how it would be possible to teach in a way that reflected the rich demographic that surrounds a school where there may be many cultures clamoring for inclusion. One student posed the question, “How do you decide what to teach?” Another said, “I don’t feel I know enough about other cultures and their music as I did not learn anything like this when I went to school”. In addition, interviewees remarked that during their tertiary studies they had gained some “skills and understandings in world music but I would have liked more”. There are considerable constraints in teacher education, including the provision of culturally diverse music education which is often given a low priority (Coulby, 2006). Given the limited time and resources available for the arts in Australian teacher education, it is, as Villegas and Lucas (2002) point out, “unrealistic to expect teachers-to-be able to develop the extensive and sophisticated pedagogical knowledge and skills of culturally responsive teachers during their pre-service preparation” (p. 30). It is hoped that beginning teachers will undertake professional

development in multicultural music education that will extend their knowledge and skills.

The teaching and learning of multicultural music in schools

All interviewees were in the final year of their pre-service teacher education courses and had undertaken a number of practicum experiences in a wide range of schools which may or may not include culturally diverse teaching and learning programs. Our participants were realistic about what they saw and might want to teach in the future. Overall, only a few respondents found different musics being taught in the classrooms where they were placed. It may be that, at other times in the school year, culturally diverse music was included, although this was not sighted by our interviewees. What was observed again ranged from the simplistic to the comprehensive. One respondent described a lesson in which a song (*Shalom Chaverim*) was introduced as being a traditional song. The student said, “I was surprised because as I learnt this as a song from Israel but it was taught in English and there was no explanation about where the song came from”. Another student described a very different experience. He said:

I watched my teacher teach a song from Southern Africa called Sabunana Kusasa from an old ABC school song book. The teacher explained what the Zulu words meant and where these people live in South Africa. This was really good for the kids to know and it got even better when he gave the children drums and they performed the song in a circle. The kids really got into this song and the movements really quickly.

Unfortunately this experience seemed to be the exception rather than the rule. As one student thought, “in schools in Victoria you will find lots of children in schools who come from other places and cultures so why not teach multicultural music?” Another participant observed that, “as schools are already culturally diverse so teachers should embrace this, especially in music lessons where it is so easy to include without being tokenistic”. Similarly, another said, “teachers

should be proactive in developing skills in other music and learning about the cultures it comes from". This exploration was seen positively. One student asked, "Why just do the old stuff that you know, why not go and learn about other people's cultures?" As tertiary music educators we feel limited in our own experiences and expertise in our ability to offer a wide range of musics in pre-service teacher education programs. In an attempt to address this we promote the many professional development programs offered in Victoria in diverse musics and practices to our pre-service teacher education students.

To explore new musics it is important to be aware of one's preconceptions. One student expressed the desire "to learn more about a new type of music, like African, as I like listening to it and I would like to teach it in my classroom". This response also highlighted a lack of understanding on the part of the interviewee who did not seem to realize that there are many types of 'African' music. Similarly, another interviewee was keen to learn more. He thought that music "is a great way to get to know about other people and their stories". This seeking attitude is commendable, given that pre-service teacher education cannot address all the needs of future teachers. The respondents did offer examples of effective multicultural teaching and learning that they observed in schools. One reported excitedly, "when I was on teaching rounds, some of the kids brought their parents in to the music lesson and they taught us all songs and stories from their country. They had recently moved to Australia from Vietnam. It was really great – far better than watching it on YouTube". One of the students who himself came from another culture offered to teach songs from his country in the classroom. He described the excitement amongst the children learning these new songs, "they loved seeing me play the bouzouki and learned the Greek words really quickly. I even managed to teach them a simple dance to go with the song". This student explained that, even after his teaching placement was finished, the class music teacher continued to invite him back to the school to work with

the students. The respondent reported that the teacher had explained that she considered this a "really authentic way to teach Greek music that was much better than watching a video or teaching from someone else's lesson plan".

In addition, students were asked about how they might teach multicultural music in the future. One interviewee suggested that it would be possible to use the local students and community as a resource. He thought that it would be possible to just "ask one student from one country to bring a piece of music and describe it to the others and by doing that share other cultures". Another respondent went further and expanded this idea. She said that she would try to "invite the parents and grandparents of students from other countries to come and teach their songs, stories and dances as they would teach it more convincingly". Villegas and Lucas (2002) point out that such practices can be very effective as teachers "not only know their students well, they use what they know about their students to give them access to learning" (p. 27). One student described an excursion that her tertiary class had taken to the Centre for Education and Research in Environmental Strategies (CERES) in Brunswick in Melbourne where they experienced Indian music and culture. CERES is a community educational centre where students and teachers can interact and "discover traditional and contemporary celebrations, customs and traditions" from a range of cultures (Centre for Education and Research in Environmental Strategies, 2010). This student thought that this would be "a great thing to do with my classes when I am teaching next year. We could learn about multicultural music, arts and crafts programs from places like India, Africa and Indonesia". Another student suggested that, "you could work with other teachers and integrate subjects and other cultures, maybe in a concert or in a play". Although the students may not have experienced a range of multicultural musics and cultures during their school placements, their ideas about their future teaching are encouraging.

Discussion and Conclusion

This article has outlined the perceptions of final year music teacher education students regarding their understandings and beliefs concerning multiculturalism *per se* and the inclusion of multicultural music in schools. The curriculum framework in which they will be working (VELS) expects schools to use the arts to “reflect the cultural diversity of students and school communities and ... recognize the multicultural world saturated with imagery, sounds and performances that students inhabit” (VCAA, 2009, p. 31). The interview data presents a snapshot of what our students saw and understood during their teaching placements in 2008 and 2009. What they described show that there is comparatively little cultural diversity present in the music classrooms where they were placed. This discussion is not a discussion of all schools, just those that were visited but this still presents a concerning picture. Our students appear to be well aware that multiculturalism should be an integral part of schools but this was not apparently enacted in school music classrooms they observed. VELS does address ideas of cultural inclusivity. For example, VELS Level 4 (VCAA, 2009) specifically states that students are expected to:

Develop skills and behaviours for connecting with a variety of groups, including peer and community groups. Students participate in a range of classroom activities where they explore the similarities and differences in the values and beliefs of a range of individuals and groups. They begin to reflect on what this may mean for themselves when building and maintaining relationships with a diverse range of people. They explore and discuss behaviours which demonstrate sensitivity to cultural differences in their interactions with others. (p. 19)

In this students should consider
*...the experiences of diverse cultural groups
 ... and their contributions to Australian
 identity. They consider the values important
 in a multicultural society such as respect and
 tolerance” (VCAA, 2009, p. 28).*

The VELS expectations although positive and encompassing, offer little real guidance to classroom music teachers in whose classrooms, students are expected to “learn about ways to design, improvise, represent, interpret, make and present arts works that communicate feelings and their interests and understanding of themselves, their relationships and other people ... incorporating influences from their own and other cultures and times” (VCAA, 2009, p. 35). This is a tall order for music teachers but the pre-service teacher educators interviewed in this study were cognizant of the many potential benefits and challenges offered by the inclusion of multicultural music in schools. Our interviewees were well aware that the responsibility for change begins with them. Heard (1999), writing specifically about multicultural teaching, says that teachers should be encouraged to “change themselves and the ways they teach” (p. 464). Gorfinkel (2010) points out that this is not always straightforward and there remains a challenge when integrating diverse music and culture into the classroom to “move beyond a simplistic crusade” (p. 47). She recommends that students may be guided and encouraged to explore more deeply the music of their own and other cultures and the connections that might be made between them. To move from a monocultural and somewhat insular perspective to a broader, inclusive and potentially global position, beginning teachers should explore cultural differences in both the classroom and society (Mushi, 2004). Through this meaningful rather than tokenistic inclusion of diverse musics we can promote culturally inclusive music education. Unfortunately our interviewees described schools where multiculturalism was only represented in music programs by tokenistic smatterings of songs from other cultures.

O’Hagin and Harnish (2006) point out that, one way to develop more effective “multicultural music programs in our schools is to improve our teacher education programs at the university level ... to educate and sensitize our students

who will be future teachers" (p. 57). Both authors, like other Australian tertiary music educators, are restricted in both time and resources when presenting teaching and learning of multicultural music and its pedagogies. At Monash University, in the final year of secondary teacher education students undertake music methodology units but only one workshop is dedicated to multicultural music *per se* as there are so many other issues to be addressed. At Deakin University, the students are more fortunate, undertaking a series of workshops that focus on the music and culture of sub-Saharan Africa. The students also undertake an excursion to CERES as described by one of the participants. As tertiary educators we acknowledge that we are not doing enough but this is all that we can manage in a crowded curriculum, particularly when students undertake extended school placements. At best, we can only introduce topics that we would prefer to explore in depth. Nonetheless, both institutions offer students support in the form of extensive readings, direction to a range of informative audiovisual materials, and information about websites and professional development opportunities that they are encouraged to pursue.

There appears to be significant disjunctures between school music, VELs and pre-service teacher education in multicultural music in Victoria. This research project, across two Victorian universities, has demonstrated that our students understand that, to be culturally responsive teachers they need to develop socio-cultural awareness, embrace the concept of inclusivity and recognize cultural diversity. We hope that these future teachers will become educational agents of change. The findings of this study are not generalisable across all Australian tertiary institutions and schools but they do illuminate the gaps that exist in what we do and what we should be doing. The authors agree with Mushi (2004) who asserts that teacher education programs must take the lead in preparing culturally literate and responsive teachers. The beliefs and understandings that underpin current

teacher education students' thinking are vitally important in creating future teachers who can offer inclusive and culturally diverse school music education programs.

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