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## **SOCIAL JUSTICE AND MUSIC EDUCATION: TOWARD A MULTICULTURAL CONCEPT OF MUSIC EDUCATION**

### **Abstract**

One of the primary goals of multicultural education is to change the current structure of the educational system and to bridge the widening gaps between students of different background. Similarly, multicultural art curriculum fosters the formation of attitudes and perceptions that help people confront their sociocultural biases. The aim of this article is to clarify the terminological issues related to multicultural (music) education, to present the ways of performing world musics in school and to show how multicultural music education can be used as a tool for expanding students' cultural knowledge and tolerance.

Key words: music education, multicultural music education, world musics

### **Multicultural education**

Multicultural education is infiltrated in almost every area of American and European educational system. It can be portrayed as a multifaceted, change-oriented approach that emphasizes equity and intergroup harmony. Multicultural education is "a belief and a process whose major goal is to transform the educational structure in our schools" (Boschee et al, 1997, p. 217). It is "an idea stating that all students, regardless of the groups to which they belong, such as those related to gender, ethnicity, race, culture, social class, religion, or exceptionality, should experience educational quality in the schools" (Banks & Banks, 1993, p. 25).

Multicultural education emerged in the early 1960s out of the Civil Rights Movement. The main goal of the multicultural education was to improve educational achievement for ethnic students who were being disenfranchised by the educational system and to promote respect for a wide range of cultural groups (Banks & Banks, 1993). It has the potential to help bridge the widening gaps between people of different background and includes three important dimensions: (1) the inclusion of multicultural content, authentically and respectfully presented, (2) addressing cultural perspectives, biases, and stereotypes, and (3) equity in the teaching-learning process for students from diverse backgrounds (Banks & Banks, 1993).

Sleeter and Grant (1987) explain and categorize the range of what they identify and define as multicultural education. They report five approaches to multicultural education:

1. *Teaching the culturally different.* This approach maintains teachers' responsibility as the preparation of "students of colour, special-education students, white female students and low-income students to fit into the existing classroom and later into adult society" (Grant & Sleeter, 1989, p. 50).

2. *The human relations approach*. It defines the major purpose of schooling as helping students of different backgrounds to get along better in a world made continually smaller by modern technology and mass media.
3. *Single group studies*. When using this approach, teachers construct courses based on the contributions and perspectives of one particular cultural group (Sleeter & Grant, 1987).
4. *Multicultural education*. Multicultural education may be understood as a “cultural democracy” approach, for it “promotes cultural pluralism and societal equity by reforming the school program” (Sleeter & Grant, 1987).
5. *The education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist*. This approach prepares students to challenge social, structural inequality and to promote the goal of social and cultural diversity (Sleeter & Grant, 1987).

Gollnick and Chinn (1990) stated that a multicultural curriculum should promote strengthening and valuing cultural diversity, human rights and respect for differences, alternative lifestyle choices, social justice and equality, and a just distribution of power and income.

Despite differences in descriptions and definitions of multicultural education, all the authors agreed that one of the primary goals of multicultural education is to change the current structure of the educational system.

### **Multicultural music education**

Trying to define multicultural music education, Campbell stated that “multicultural music education is the study of music from groups distinguished by race or ethnic origin, age, class, gender, religion, lifestyle and exceptionally” while “a music program that focuses in greater depth on a representative and prominent musical style of a group of people united by national or ethnic origin is a model of ‘multiethnic music education’” (1993, p. 15).

Walker suggested that the main focus of multicultural music education should be “the culture-specific qualities of any musical practice” (1990, p. 81). Blacking (1987) was critical of multiculturalism because he believed that it promoted discrimination and segregation so he questioned the goals of incorporating world musics in music education.

Shippers defined *world music* “not as a form of music, or even a wide variety of different musics, but as the phenomenon of music instruments, genres, and styles establishing themselves outside their cultures of origin” (1996, p. 17). Campbell suggested that *world music education* “features the study of musical components as they are treated in various musical styles across the world” (1993, p. 16).

A multicultural art curriculum in general fosters the formation of attitudes and perceptions that help students, teachers, and the community confront their sociocultural biases. Although the question of curriculum development for the multicultural art classroom is very important, it has been largely neglected both within art education literature and in practice. There are six position statements for teaching art in a multicultural classroom (Wasson, Stuhr & Petrovich-Mwaniki, 1990):

1. We advocate a socio-anthropological basis for studying the aesthetic production and experience of cultures, which means focusing on knowledge

- of the makers of art, as well as sociocultural context in which art is produced.
2. We acknowledge teaching as cultural and social intervention; and therefore, in any teaching endeavour, it is imperative that teachers not only confront, but also be aware of, their own cultural and social biases.
  3. We support a student/community-centred education process in which the teacher must access and utilize the students' sociocultural values and beliefs and those of the cultures of the community when planning art curricula.
  4. We support anthropologically-based methods for identifying socio-cultural groups and their accompanying values and practices which influence aesthetic production.
  5. We advocate the identification and discriminating use of culturally responsive pedagogy that more democratically represent the sociocultural and ethnic diversity existing in the classroom, the community, and the nation.
  6. We want to focus on the dynamic complexity of factors that affect all human interaction: physical and mental ability, class, gender, age, politics, religion, and ethnicity. We seek a more democratic approach whereby the disenfranchised are also given a voice in the art education process; and the disenfranchised, as well as the franchised, are sensitized to the taken-for-granted assumptions implicit in the dominant ideology.

Teachers are the translators of the culture. Culturally competent teacher are individuals who: (1) Have examined and resolved personal biases and are aware of and accept their own cultural backgrounds. (2) Posses an inclusive understanding of multiculturalism and incorporate an anthropological approach to art education. (3) Are sensitive to others' cultural background and tailor their teaching to meet their students' culturally particular needs. (4) Have an understanding of the traditions of diverse world cultures. (5) Have made the commitment to continue their own education in multiculturalism and diversity (Andrus, 2001).

Music education systems around the globe have some common areas (Hargreaves & North, 2001): (1) The importance of historical, political and cultural backgrounds. (2) The structural division of music education into generalist and specialist spheres. (3) Aims and objectives. (4) Distinctions between formal and informal methods of teaching/learning, and the varied settings of music education in institutions, in communities, or in combinations of these.

American and European public school music education has been dominated by the traditional folk and art music of Western Europe, and by emphasizing the importance of Western music, educators have implied a relative unimportance and inferiority of other musical systems (Anderson & Campbell, 1989). A critique of ethnocentric and western-classical paradigms of music education has consistently featured in music education literature from 1970s onwards (Campbell, 1997; Hargreaves & North, 2001). But the inclusion of world musics in music education programs has become increasingly important in recent decades.

Performing music of another culture can give us a direct experience that listening alone cannot. If music is to function as a bridge between cultures, as performers we must be ready to move out of our comfort zones and experience

music in a completely new way. There are eight simple rules for choirs and conductors to follow in performing music of the world's traditions.

The first one is to *connect with culture* and try to make direct contact with a native of the culture who can give firsthand information about the music, language, and cultural context of the piece being performed. The second rule is to *focus of one style* at a time which means that conductor should focus on music of only a few cultures at a time, performing more music from each. The third rule is to *listen widely* which means that in the case of world music conductors need to listen to performances by several groups or styles from the cultural tradition at hand to gain a better understanding of the music performed. The fourth rule, to *provide the context*, means that background information about the piece, such as translation, circumstances of traditional performance, and accompanying movement or activity, should be shared with the performers during rehearsals and conveyed to the audience at the performance. *Seek authentic sources* is the fifth rule which concerns with the problem of authenticity in the arrangements of traditional music. The sixth rule, *learn the language*, means that one of the most challenging aspects of learning music from a new cultural tradition is learning to sing in a new language. *Teach authentically* is the seventh rule relating to the fact that encountering another musical culture provides an opportunity to learn traditional pedagogical approaches as well as new musical styles. The western model is totally foreign to most other singing cultures. And, finally, the rule *leave your comfort zone*, means that performing music of another cultural traditions demands much from the conductors in terms of study, preparation, and pedagogy. It also asks the conductor and performers to think in completely new ways, using new pedagogical methods, new languages, new ways of listening and new models of the role of the conductor (Parr, 2006, pp. 34-37).

One of the greatest benefits of studying a variety of musics comes from the expanded palette of sound possibilities that is set before children. Another reason for advocating a pluralistic study of music is to help students understand that there are many different but equally logical ways of making music. And one of the most important benefits derived from students studying representative examples of world musics is the gradual development of musical flexibility, labelled by some as *polymusicality*<sup>1</sup>. And finally, through multicultural musical experiences, attitudes are inevitably altered so that one becomes less prone to act negatively toward any music without first trying to understand it (Anderson, 1983).

In the multicultural music education the sound *per se* is the starting point for music education. Having absorbed the sounds that make up the music, children can be helped in trying to understand styles of the music itself.

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<sup>1</sup> Hood (1960) has coined the term *bimusicality* which means that some people have an understanding of, and are also proficient in, the technical requirements and stylistic nuances of two distinct musical systems. For educators, this means that it is possible for both teachers and learners to have meaningful engagements with more than one type of musical system. In a flexible application of the term, bimusicality allows us to understand different types of music-making in our society. Monson (1996) uses the term *intermusicality* to describe the phenomenon by which musicians can sometimes import specific practices and nuances from one style or performance context to other styles or performance contexts.

## Conclusion

Education today calls for a multicultural approach. The most important reason for that approach is to meet the needs of a school population rich in diversity.

The task of teaching and learning art in the multicultural classroom is a challenge and opportunity for teachers and students. They learn how to respect and value each others' experiences and ideas and to incorporate these into the art program, how to be affirmed in their own cultures and how to expand their cultural knowledge through sociocultural investigations. They gradually become open to art forms, processes, and aesthetic values that may be quite different from their own. They learn how to discover the connections that bind us to others in the world, and how to gain an international perspective. Multicultural education is an opportunity to decrease negative stereotyping based on gender, race, religion, politics, age, ethnicity, and/or physical and mental ability.

As Goodking stated: "My hope in multicultural education is to honour diversity by going into the details of what sets one culture apart from another (cultural particularism) and to acknowledge unity by examining what universal qualities all cultures share (cultural pluralism). The combination of approaches used at my school highlights the points of intersection and divergence in the rich legacy of the world's musical expression" (1994, p. 43). The role of music pedagogy and music educators is to adapt the curricula and methods to meet the cultural backgrounds and needs of a heterogeneous student population.

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