Community music practices in culturally diverse classrooms: Promoting engagement, inclusion, and lifelong learning

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Abstract

In the last two decades there has been interest in adopting community music practices that originate in out-of-school contexts and bringing these into schools to address persistent concerns with low student satisfaction with music classes. Community music practices may also contribute to realising the fourth United Nations Sustainable Development Goal which seeks inclusive and equitable educational opportunities that promote lifelong learning for all learners. A UK study investigating what engages students in school music resulted in the establishment of the Musical Futures project. Musical Futures consists of several complementary approaches and one of these, Classroom Workshopping, involves community music practices. Classroom Workshopping is student driven and collaborative, emphasising immersive, creative music experiences that are thought to promote inclusion and engagement. The larger study from which this chapter is drawn is a qualitative, ethnographic investigation that examined the classroom music programs at two schools in a low socio-economic area of Melbourne, Australia. The discussion focuses on one teacher's use of Classroom Workshopping with a group of students aged 16 years from culturally diverse backgrounds. Turino's theory of participatory music making is used to explain the teacher practices observed and how these supported engagement, inclusion and lifelong learning.

Addressing a perennial problem: Low levels of student satisfaction with school music

The fourth United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal calls for inclusive and equitable educational opportunities that promote lifelong learning for all learners (United Nations, 2015). Lamont (2011) describes lifelong learning in music as continued, but not necessarily continuous, involvement in music making. She demonstrates that providing a variety of musical opportunities and a positive experience of school music may be influential in determining whether students continue with music making. The UN Sustainable Development Goal is pertinent to music educators, as for many years in the English-speaking world there have been persistent concerns with low levels of student satisfaction with school music (Ross, 1995). At the same time, young people's engagement with music outside school is ubiquitous, primarily through listening, but increasingly as music makers in performing and composing (Lamont & Maton, 2008; IPSOS Mori & Youth Music, 2019). For teachers of students from disadvantaged backgrounds these concerns take on additional significance as studies have revealed a greater disconnect between what interests, motivates and engages these students in their out-of-school lives with what occurs in school (Munns, et al., 2008).

The Musical Futures (MF) project was established in 2003 to address student dissatisfaction with school music (D'Amore, 2008). This project developed pedagogical approaches for classroom music that originate in out-of-school contexts. The aim is to increase the involvement of young people in music making both in- and out-side school by providing them with opportunities to play music that incorporates their everyday musical cultures.

Several studies have shown that engagement increases when teachers adopt Musical Futures (Hallam, Creech & McQueen, 2011; Jeanneret, 2010). However, these studies have primarily focussed on the student outcomes; less is known about the specific teacher practices that promote engagement and inclusion.

Classroom Workshopping is a MF approach which draws on community music leadership practices developed in an outreach program by the Guildhall School in London. Used less in practice, it has been less frequently researched than the MF informal learning model. Classroom Workshopping is characterised by creative music making that is student driven, collaborative, and immersive, it includes the following community music leadership practices:

- Music making is inclusive, undertaken as a whole class;
- The ensemble incorporates any instrument chosen by the students;
- The music is co-constructed, the teacher is a facilitator playing alongside the students, and the musical material reflects the interests of both the teacher and the students;
- Aural/oral/visual learning is the starting point rather than conventional notation

Facilitating engaging musical experiences for all students irrespective of previous musical experience resonates with Turino's (2008) theory of participatory music making which is only for participation and not presentational performance. Participatory music making does not distinguish between audience and artist roles. Instead, everyone is involved in music making together; there are only participants and potential participants and the aim is to involve the maximum number of people in a performance role. To sustain the interest of all, a balance is necessary between the inherent challenges and skill level. Turino notes that people tend to return again and again to activities that produce intense concentration and enjoyment

(or flow), and as they do so, their skill levels increase requiring activities that have continually expanding and achievable challenges.

Turino's theory arises from diverse musical cultures in community music settings, and when successful in achieving its aim, is an example of engagement, inclusion, and lifelong learning. In addition, participatory music making aligns with studies from general education that suggest a key to engaging and including students from disadvantaged circumstances is focussing on their emotional, behavioural, and cognitive engagement facilitated through engaging, authentic, and collaborative teaching practices (Munns, et al., 2008). Turino describes the music practices that comprise participatory music making and their connection to engagement in detail, but not the musical leadership role nor how they might be facilitated.

The study

The larger study from which this chapter is drawn is an ethnographic (Creswell, 2007) investigation into what characterises engaging music teaching in a primary and a secondary school in the south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne, Australia. The schools serve a multicultural community with many students also from disadvantaged circumstances (www.myschool.com.au). The classroom practice of two teachers (Eddie and Chris) and four classes of students aged 10 to 16 years was investigated. The teachers in the study had been identified as implementing Musical Futures with indicators that their practice was successfully engaging their students. Indicators included a senior secondary music class for the first time and a large number of students participating in co-curricular instrumental music lessons. Data collection methods included participant-observation of 48 music lessons, semi-structured interviews with teachers and student focus groups.

Classroom Workshopping in action

This chapter focusses on Eddie's (a pseudonym) use of community music leadership practices with a class of Year 10 students (15-16 years old). Turino's (2008) theory of participatory music making is used to explain the teacher practices observed and how these supported engagement, inclusion, and lifelong learning. The following snapshot is taken from a lesson where Eddie uses Classroom Workshopping principles to co-create whole class music making.

> *Eddie stands comfortably and relaxed at the front of the room. He indicates for the students to choose any instrument. He says, "Okay, what I'd like you to do is to choose an instrument and set it up in this room so we can make some music together." Quickly, the students form a circle around the outside of the room. As a starting point for the whole class music making, Eddie suggests some spontaneous reggae jamming that occurred when the students first arrived for the music lesson. "I'm tempted to do a challenge and see whether within 20 to 25 minutes we can make up our own piece of music and if we were going to do that, we would start with the beautiful sort of reggae music coming earlier from Detroit and Rene." Roger, playing guitar, begins playing off-beat chords. The reggae groove is familiar, and reflects the musical interests of many of these students. Watching and listening, others join in and establish a loose reggae groove consisting of four chords, each a bar long. Those playing are engrossed, watching each other intently; learning is through visual and aural copying. Gradually, the groove ceases as students lose their place in the cycle. Eddie moves to the whiteboard and writes chords symbols and root notes, providing access for those who were not able to join in using their aural skills. The groove*

begins again, everyone joins in, and the music begins to shift and change gradually as some students embellish the chords. Eddie briefly pauses the music making, offering creative suggestions for further developing the whole class composition—improvising using the pentatonic scale. The simple four bar groove is repeated for an extended period of time. Sitting at the side of the room, I notice the intense interest, involvement and concentration on the students faces. The music making evolves as Eddie varies the texture and signals individual students to play a short improvised solo. For the less confident students, he supports their soloing. For one student playing keyboard, he shows her an idea for a solo, then signals when to play. For other confident and musically experienced students, Eddie allows them to take responsibility for maintaining and embellishing the groove which sustains their interest. Playing the same chord progression continually, the texture is dense. Everyone is playing slightly differently in response to Eddie's instruction to, "start putting your creativity in and [playing] different rhythms. Layering sounds together that sound really nice."

Inclusion

The Classroom Workshopping approach provided a flexible framework for Eddie to promote inclusion by facilitating the participation of all students. His facilitation reflects Tomlinson's (2001) contention that teachers need to intervene to support inclusion, necessary for engagement, and provide equal access to the curriculum for all students regardless of their individual challenges. This was a large group, whole class (15 students) music making experience. All students were involved together from beginning to end in joyful, creative, music making. A sense of belonging, connection, and community was created with peers and teachers, reflected in student focus group comments such as:

I enjoyed working together with everyone in the small groups and everyone together and talking to teachers.

I enjoyed playing the instruments because we got to play in a group and it really felt like we were in a band.

The music making was inclusive of students with a wide range of musical experience. An open starting point, co-creating the music through a process of repetition and metamorphosis, and a loose structure enabled a continually expanding ceiling of musical opportunities. The more musically confident students largely led the music making, continually embellishing and developing what they were playing through improvisation, which sustained their interest. The less musically confident students access the music making at a level appropriate to them supported by Eddie. For some students, this consisted of playing root notes of the chords on keyboards. This experience is consistent with Turino's (2008) description of participatory music making where the aim is to involve and sustain the interest of all possible participants.

The learning was entirely aural, oral and visual. After identifying the initial starting point of four chords, some students were able to join in aurally (by listening and copying), visually (by watching where Roger put his fingers on the fret board of the guitar), and orally/visually, when Eddie told the students which chords Roger was playing and wrote the chords names on the whiteboard. This assisted less experienced students to access the music making quickly. There was no conventional staff notation used which negated any barriers to being involved that reading traditional western music notation might have presented.

Engagement

Learning was through immersion in creative music making; there was much playing and little talking or explaining. The video and audio of the lesson in the snapshot indicated that for a period of 25 minutes, Eddie spoke for about 6 minutes with the remainder involving music making. The students played the same four chords continuously. Through this process of involvement and participation, musical progress was evident as students began to listen more carefully to each other and the ensemble started to coalesce in terms of timing and balance. Participation, involvement, enjoyment, and concentration emerged as key indicators of engagement across the lessons observed.

Engagement indicators were closely connected to immersive music making. The students were passionate about playing instruments and this was verified in the student focus groups, when Alexis commented, "It's music and we came to play instruments." In the student focus group, Rene and Roger declared "jamming" with their friends the most enjoyable aspect of music lessons. Also reflecting Turino's theory where music is for playing and everyone is both artist and audience, another student commented:

> *I like it when it's just a bunch of friends and we're just playing for fun.*

Lifelong learning

Turino's (2008) theory of participatory music making arises from community music settings and is inherently connected with lifelong learning. In the music making experience above, conditions for lifelong learning were supported by a positive experience, incorporating student interests and opportunities for student choice. The students chose any instrument, provided the starting point and co-created the music making. The music making was creative and its development was shared between Eddie and the Year 10 students. For many of these

students, reggae reflects their musical interests and I often observed it as their preference for jamming which was encouraged by Eddie whenever the opportunity arose such as when they first entered the music room for the lesson.

As an ethnomusicologist Turino (2008) developed his theory of participatory music making in diverse community and cultural contexts rather than in educational spaces; it has been less frequently used in classroom settings. In this research, it was an effective means by which to explain the teacher practices which maximised the involvement of all students. The level of detail that Turino provides about the musical features and processes of creation in participatory music making are helpful to understand the Classroom Workshopping process. They are able to explain why it is successful at fostering engagement and inclusion in large group creative music making experiences.

Participatory music making as articulated by Turino does not include a teacher or even a clearly defined musical leader role. Together, Turino's theory and Classroom Workshopping provide one possible approach for music teachers to implement participatory music making experiences in classrooms. For example, we see features of Turino's theory in the snapshot such as "highly repetitive… short, open, redundantly repeated forms, [and] 'feathered' beginnings and endings" (p. 59) in the way Eddie began the music making in a loose manner involving only a few students and then other students joined in when they felt comfortable. The teacher role was to guide, encourage, and provide musical support rather than to control or polish for a presentational performance to an audience.

Conclusion

In this research, community music leadership practices and Classroom Workshopping were effective for music teachers to promote engagement and inclusion, thus contributing towards the realisation of UN Sustainable Development Goal 4. The positive experiences of school music that these students had are favourable for their continued lifelong involvement in music making. However, these outcomes do not happen by accident; what this research highlighted was how crucial a skilled facilitator is in implementing community music practices. The efficacy of community music leadership practices and Classroom Workshopping to support the engagement and inclusion of students in culturally diverse classrooms in this study contributes to the research basis for more widespread adoption of this Musical Futures approach by music teachers.

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