


## Chapter 5

### **Here, alive and accessible: The role of an inquiry-based fieldwork project in changing student attitudes to cultural diversity in music education**

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The international concern with teachers' approaches to cultural diversity in the delivery of music programs has been well documented in recent years (Biernoff & Blom, 2000; Campbell, 2004; Campbell, Drummond, Dunbar-Hall, Howard, Schippers & Wiggins, 2005; Dunbar-Hall, 1997, 2000; Hookey, 1994; Klinger, 1994; Lundquist, 2002; Lundquist & Szego, 1998; Reimer, 2002; Schippers, 1996; Solis, 2004; Standley, 2000; Teicher, 1997; Walker, 1996). Such challenges for music educators are particularly evident in a culturally diverse nation such as Australia, where the population is drawn from more than one hundred ethnic groups, including Anglo-Australians, immigrants and their descendants, and Indigenous Australians (Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders). This chapter discusses issues associated with teaching multicultural music education to music teacher education students in Sydney and outlines the results of a research project that investigated changes in student attitudes to the teaching of multicultural music in schools as a result of an inquiry-based approach to the delivery of subject content. In particular, the effectiveness of an inquiry-based fieldwork project in changing pre-service teacher education students' attitudes is examined.

During the last decades of the twentieth century, there have been major changes in government and educational policies relating to cultural and linguistic diversity in Australia, with concepts of assimilation being superseded by ideologies of multiculturalism, cultural pluralism and the need for equal educational opportunity and self-determination for members of Australia's immigrant and Indigenous peoples (Allan & Hill, 1995; Jamrozik, Boland & Urquhart, 1995). In the state of New South Wales (NSW) such ideological shifts have been reflected in policies that have been developed to meet the needs of its multiethnic population.

In NSW, educational policies stipulate that multicultural and Aboriginal perspectives should be included in all curriculum areas and that all students should be informed by these perspectives. Music education curriculum documents at primary, junior secondary and senior secondary levels delineate the need for all school students to study music from a range of cultures in order to explore varied forms of cultural expression and the pluralistic values, beliefs and identities that exist both within and beyond cultures represented within Australia. Enhancement of feelings of self worth in individual students and cultural maintenance within school communities are also goals of this approach.

However, despite the acknowledgement of cultural diversity in current NSW music curriculum documents, guidelines in these curricula regarding the inclusion of a multicultural perspective in music programs have been limited. Consequently, in NSW, there has been little emphasis on the principles of multicultural education policies in the implementation of music programs within schools. In music programs, involvement of members of ethnic or Indigenous communities as owners of musical and cultural knowledge and co-participants in the teaching and learning process has also been limited, mainly occurring in schools which have a high population of immigrant or Indigenous students (Dunbar-Hall, 1997). In incorporating a 'multicultural perspective' in their music programs, teachers have frequently used inappropriate examples of music

out of context, examples derived from publications which bear very little relationship to the manifestations of music within the Australian community, in direct contravention of the multicultural education policy focus on the Australian multicultural experience.

Given that both human and published resources are available, it seems that insufficient resources or musicological understanding do not account entirely for teachers' lack of confidence to implement multicultural music programs. Rather, it would appear that this lack of confidence reflects the fact that, in their pre-service training, many teachers have not acquired an understanding of the necessity of such programs (Lundquist, 2002). In attributing this to the 'Eurocentric approach in which they were trained' Teicher (1997, p. 416) also indicates that teachers perceive that the inclusion of multicultural materials is too difficult to manage within an already 'full' curriculum.

Another problem appears to be the inability of many teachers to view music or behaviour related to a particular culture from an 'insider's' perspective, relevant to their own lives and those of their students. In some ways, published music education materials relating to world musics have contributed to the distancing of the teacher and cultural 'other' by emphasising the differences between musical cultures and by placing music firmly in a geographical context which is removed from the lives of teachers. Some more recent publications have endeavoured to overcome this difficulty by foregrounding the role of music in the lives of real people who have bicultural experiences as members of a multicultural society (Campbell, McCullough-Brabson & Tucker, 1994).

To encourage pre-service students to take a more active and personal approach to understanding and teaching the music of an unfamiliar culture represented within a pluralist Australian society, I have explored the potential of fieldwork research. The ethnomusicological model discussed by Titon (1997, pp. 91-92), in which there is 'an emphasis on understanding... the lived experience of people making music' seemed particularly appropriate. In this approach, fieldwork is 'defined as "knowing people making music", an experiential, dialogic, participatory way of knowing and "being in the world"' (Cooley, 1997, p. 15). The importance of interpersonal fieldwork relationships in developing musical understandings is further explained by Titon (1997, p. 94): 'When I see that I and others are making the music that I hear, I want to know these others... If you were an object I might come to know you as other objects. But you are a person making music and I come to know you as a person... We seek to know each other through lived experience'.

This chapter discusses the efficacy of an inquiry-based fieldwork project in creating forms of 'lived experience' of music making in which students could engage with 'knowing people making music' as a way of effecting attitudinal change in relation to the teaching of musics representative of the Australian multiethnic population. The project operates through a form of cultural immersion that takes place within the relatively invisible context of music making of diverse ethnic groups in a large Australian city and entry into the immersion process is the responsibility of individual students. Investigation of the outcomes of this project has been made on an ongoing basis since its inception.

### **The project context**

The inquiry-based fieldwork project has been undertaken on an annual basis by students majoring in music education at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, University of Sydney, in the years from 1998 to the present. The project constitutes a key component of *Multicultural Studies in Music Education*, a core fourth year subject of the Bachelor of Music (Music Education) program. Students within this program have had many years of formal music training but the majority of these students indicate that training has been almost entirely within the Western music tradition, despite a considerable level of diversity in their personal cultural backgrounds. The few instances of music education relating to world music which students have experienced in a school context, either in their own previous schooling or during teaching practicum sessions, are reported as being reliant on information derived from books, decontextualised, and therefore relatively meaningless. There has been a similar lack of exposure to music from outside the western tradition in their previous university training and, with few exceptions, previous assignments have exclusively involved library and internet research. However, since 1999, students' experiences of music beyond the western tradition have been expanded by participation in an additional core subject involving the learning of Balinese or Javanese gamelan. This subject is undertaken during the same semester as *Multicultural Studies in Music Education* to encourage the transfer of understandings gained through both of these subjects.

The project involves students in the recording and transcription of a number of musical items, including a song, performed by a non-Anglo-Australian member of the community. From its inception, students have contacted and recorded a wide variety of performers, ranging from professional musicians to community-based amateur groups, relatives and friends performing at backyard gatherings. By interviewing their informant/s and through further research, students have developed not only an understanding of musical characteristics but also background information on the recorded music in relation to cultural and performance context, individual and social meanings. These understandings have then been used to formulate a school music program, aspects of which are used to enliven student presentations on their projects to other participants in the university class. Students are also asked to reflect on the process of their learning in their written assignments.

### **Investigating the project**

As a form of reflexive practice, I have investigated the outcomes of this project utilising qualitative research methods. These include observation of student presentations, document analysis of students' written reflections in assignments and semi-structured interviews with students. This investigation was initially formulated and conducted in 1998 as a formal project with seed funding from a faculty research grant. The research project was designed as a multi-case study (Burns, 2000), with individual students constituting each case. A purposive sample of 10 students (approximately one third of the cohort) was selected on the basis of thoughtful remarks relating to changed understandings or attitudes, which were described in students' presentations or written reflections. Following the completion of the subject, these students were interviewed in order to further explore these reflections and the implications that the project had for students' attitudes towards incorporating such forms of learning in their future music programs. Semi-structured interviews enabled students to attain a level of

discursiveness in their responses, so that issues could be probed in a way that was most meaningful to each student (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). Interviews with individual students were audio recorded, then transcribed and coded using grounded theory principles (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The initial 1998 cohort of students was predominantly Anglo-Australian in ethnicity. Because notions of multicultural education were almost entirely new to the majority of these students, the outcomes of this project were variable. Generally, however, there was a shift in disposition of many of the students towards the implementation of a more pluralistic approach to music programs, particularly those directly involving members of local ethnic communities. Over a number of years the sociocultural backgrounds of student cohorts varied considerably, with concomitant variation in the outcomes of the fieldwork project. Without funding, I continued to investigate the attitudes of a more limited number of students, particularly those with non Anglo-Australian ethnicities, using the same research strategies employed in 1998. In recent years (2003 and 2006), email and telephone correspondence with former students has also been included in the data for analysis. Outcomes of this analysis can best be discussed by examining changes in understanding and attitudes of several groups of students whose differing patterns of change are outlined in the following sections.

### **Anglo-Australian students' broadened perceptions**

For some Anglo-Australian students, the fieldwork project created an awareness of the previous narrowness of their musical and social experience: 'It makes you realise how you live your life in this very narrow corridor' (Interview, Susan<sup>3</sup>, 1998). For many of these students, the potential benefits of utilising the skills of community-based performers were evident for the first time in their years of training, the existence of these musical subcultures within Sydney having been beyond the scope of the students' previous social and educational experience. One of the major benefits of the project was perceived to be

just actually mixing with a part of society I had never had anything to do with before, because ... when I was growing up, 'ethnic' music was their own thing and I never really saw a lot of it in concerts or public performances or anything. It was always behind the doors. (Interview, Belinda, 1998)

Students outlined their previous feelings of personal distance from music of cultural 'others':

I sort of distanced - the first time I taught it on prac last year. I sort of just said, oh, this is music from other cultures. But when I did [the field project with a Papua New Guinean fusion band] I actually realised how much it does relate to us. (Interview, Jane, 1998)

This was contrasted with the personal association created by their interactions with musicians within the community. Belinda, a clarinet player who had discovered that the father of one of her clarinet students was an accomplished Turkish musician who ran a private Turkish and Arabic music school expressed this eloquently:

[N]ow I was behind the doors in this group practising their music... opening my eyes up and making me think, yeah, there are all these

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<sup>3</sup> All names of students are pseudonyms.

different sorts of music and they're here and they're alive and they're accessible and I can use them. (Interview, Belinda, 1998).

The change in knowledge and attitudes developed through contact with a lived music experience in cultural context was so intense that it was described by one student as akin to 'a hit on the head' (Interview, Paul). Students had a high level of personal engagement in the experience, leading to a greater understanding of music and culture:

When you're there, you feel like you are from the culture and you're really experiencing it ... I could write about what the culture was like when I was there but someone else wouldn't have the same feeling as when I was there. Listening to these Croatian voices, like, ringing in the room was just an incredible sound. (Interview, Jacqui, 1998)

You're going out, really - I guess you'd say living the culture ... Because I was there and was experiencing it, it was a personal experience. It was first hand and I was researching first hand what actually goes on and I think that was a lot more fascinating. (Interview, Belinda, 1998)

For a number of students, the immersion in the lives of informants also led to a much greater understanding of the personal, economic and political issues facing people within the Australian community, from recent immigrants to those of mixed descent. Perhaps most poignant were developing understandings about the lives of refugees, for whom music was a link to lost homelands and a means of maintaining identity and social cohesion amidst the sense of dispossession, economic hardship and loss.

The fieldwork project, for many students, promoted a greater commitment to a more pluralist approach to music programming in their future teaching:

... everyone is always talking about Australia is such a multicultural nation or whatever, and imagine not including that in your teaching... you've got to... And this is a pretty new perspective for me. (Interview, Annabel 1998)

Students also saw the necessity of continuing to utilise the field approach in order to increase their own knowledge and to create opportunities for school students that were similar to their own:

I think the teacher really has to have a thorough understanding and a really great appreciation for that culture and be motivated to make the kids feel the same way. I don't think it's worth doing if you're going to get into it half-heartedly, so I would say if you're going to teach any music of another culture you would need some way to experience it first before you taught it. (Interview, Jacqui 1998)

I think there is an assumption that the teacher knows everything, that the music teacher will know all there is to teach, but I certainly don't and I think that it would be a great resource to use those people within the school community to come in and teach about those things or even if I learn from them and can use them as a resource within the classroom. And also the students... [can teach] each other, if they've got different cultures. (Interview, Felicity 1998)

I found that it's the one way I could really, I guess, live the topic... So I would definitely, definitely use that with a school group for my own

purpose for finding out information for me and also having the kids maybe try something like that... I think that's such a great way for them to find out for themselves. (Interview, Belinda 1998)

For the latter student, the experience of going 'behind the doors' was an incentive to continue to engage with that culture:

[T]here is that sort of connection that makes me keep thinking that, yeah, I would like to be involved in that: be a part of somebody's culture that I've never had an experience with and they are willing to have me as part of their culture. (Interview, Belinda 1998)

Her engagement with the musical culture that had been the focus of her initial fieldwork project was continued by travelling to Turkey, her correspondence from Turkey indicating that her knowledge of the music (even in limited form) had acted as an entry point for cultural interchange in that country.

In recent years other Anglo Australian students have demonstrated their ongoing commitment to the principles established during the project, either by successfully incorporating performers in residence from local communities into their school practicum programs or by supporting inclusion of community-based ensembles after gaining permanent teaching positions in schools. One student attested to the continuing value of her experiences within the course:

I thought I'd email and let you know that I've just survived my first week as the music teacher at W Girls HS... it's overwhelming. The school as you might know... is 97% NESB with over 60% Arabic... Out of the 250 new names, perhaps 15 are Anglo ... But I'm getting there - have a lot of help as you can imagine. Glad I did Multicultural studies? ... you bet! The music department has no ensembles established though it does have a large Pacific Islander population in the school that organise their own singing and dancing. The staff are incredibly supportive and positive. I'm liking it very much. (Email, Kay 2003)

The enduring nature of the attitudinal change has been most evident in the proactive work of another graduate of the course. In the few years in which she has been in the teaching profession, she has developed multiple programs that create an interface between community-based musicians and students not only in her own school but on a regional level, providing opportunities for developing the understandings of other teachers as well as students. (Telephone communication, Calista, 2006).

### **Bicultural students' rediscovery of culture**

In 1999, Chinese Australians formed a significant proportion of the students undertaking the course. The majority of these students, having been born in Australia, had a bicultural home life but many aspects of their parents' culture had been subsumed as they grew older, as a way of reducing the 'difference' between themselves and their peers. Most of these students did not speak their parents' first language and had studied music entirely within the western tradition, though they had been exposed to various forms of Chinese music at home.

For these students, the fieldwork project, often conducted with their parents or ethnic Chinese friends or relatives, opened a different set of doors towards a rediscovery of their partially obscured cultural heritage. The reflections of one such student, Hsu Li, expressed some of the changes in knowledge and attitudes brought about by the

fieldwork experience with her mother, an ethnic Chinese woman born in the Philippines who had migrated to Australia as an adult:

I am the first to admit that I do not know enough about my own cultural heritage. I knew enough beforehand to say that I was of a strange cultural mix (my mother's influences combined with my father's childhood in Shanghai, Hong Kong and later years travelling the world). This fieldwork collection immersed me into my mother's adolescent culture and allowed me to see what things shaped her in her youth. It also gave me an opportunity to find out about Taiwan and China in a broader historical context. (Extract, Hsu Li's assignment, 1999)

Hsu Li discussed the way in which she had come to appreciate music that had previously seemed 'a hilarious blend of trashy western harmonies and mushy Chinese singing', through researching the Taiwanese popular music and Cantopop which her mother enjoyed. In so doing, she discovered the value of such personal links in creating access to knowledge:

I never dreamed of obtaining materials for teaching from such a source as my own mother. I can now say that is rather a confining view. The verbal and personal reactions and experiences of a person of the culture are just as valid as academic and formal reactions. (Extract, Hsu Li's assignment, 1999)

The experience also resulted in a greater understanding of her own personal and cultural identity:

This ... has personally allowed me to place my own family's history into the broader framework of social and political events. I have a greater understanding of why my Taiwanese relatives decided to live there, and why my family has so much cultural diversity which has been passed on to my brother and myself. Stories that I have been told about Uncles, Aunts, my grandparents fit into a larger picture of the countries' histories and I feel richer for knowing these contexts... (Extract, Hsu Li's assignment, 1999)

### **Empowerment of culture bearers**

Bicultural students in previous years had shared knowledge of their cultures anecdotally (for example, by helping with pronunciation and translation of songs in their first languages). However it was not until 2000 that a number of bicultural students drew attention to their own active participation in music from their parents' birth cultures. For these students, the fieldwork project provided a forum in which to display an expertise that was not always evident in other academic areas, due in part to difficulties with English as a Second Language.

A Vietnamese Australian student, Thuy, had learnt the piano from an early age because there was no-one available at that time to teach her a Vietnamese instrument. In 1997 she had begun to study the Vietnamese 16 string zither, *Dàn Tranh*, at a Vietnamese community music school, although she had stopped learning the instrument in 1999 because of pressures of university study. Although there was strong bicultural maintenance at home, Thuy saw her whole schooling process as assimilationist, in direct contrast to the tenets of the multicultural education policies previously discussed:

... from the education system you're just supposed to assimilate and learn what the other people are learning. (Interview, Thuy, 2000)

She had not had any previous opportunities in a school or university context either to display or explore her Vietnamese cultural identity or to research Vietnamese music. By contrast, she saw the fieldwork project as a vehicle through which she could highlight 'her music'. Thuy's success in sharing her musical and cultural expertise was evident in the enthusiastic response to her presentation by her classmates. As she demonstrated performance characteristics and encouraged other students to discover playing techniques for themselves, the students were clearly engrossed in the learning process. Her confidence in answering questions from peers was supported by the research into 'her music' which she had undertaken with the assistance of her zither teacher.

She commented that the project had given her the opportunity to explore the background to 'her music' and culture in more detail. It had also provided her with the incentive to start learning the Dân Tranh again:

... when I got the chance to do multicultural music I... start[ed] playing, start[ed] learning again... When I was researching I learnt more about the music and the reason why we're actually playing the music. Before that [the teacher] used to tell us stories about the music but I never took it into consideration. I never thought it was that important... but when I did the research... that got me thinking... I thought that every piece of music... plays a special part in Vietnamese musical culture. (Interview, Thuy, 2000)

It was also clear that the form of the project had empowered Thuy to succeed in an academic field where her difficulties with written English had often prevented her from doing well. In this case the doors had not only been opened to intercultural exchange but also to alternative ways of establishing and acknowledging different kinds of expertise in what was a largely monocultural institution. It was interesting to note that her increased confidence was reflected later in the year in a greatly improved performance in her teaching practicum, conducted with aplomb in a school with a highly diverse population.

Thuy was able to generalise from her own experience as a culture bearer and to consider the implications for school students who were also culture bearers. In discussing her previous teaching practicum in a school with a large Vietnamese Australian student population, she clearly saw, in retrospect, the opportunities for empowerment of students which could be provided by inclusion of a music program utilising music of their own culture:

It would have been good because then those students themselves could have told me a bit about their music and what they know about the music and maybe I could get them to understand about the music that their parents listen to... I think they would have enjoyed it a bit more. Some children have English problems and they speak Vietnamese more fluently and maybe that would have helped them to actually enjoy music classes a bit more - something that they're familiar with and that they can teach others instead of teaching something

that they don't quite understand...they're happy to share their views [because they understand this]. (Interview, Thuy, 2000)



More recently, a greater proportion of the students undertaking the course have been empowered to draw on their own cultural backgrounds, musical skills and expertise for their projects. Greek Australian students have demonstrated songs and dances learnt in community schools, community events and Orthodox church gatherings which form part of their lives. Malay, Indonesian, Korean, Ukrainian and Maori students have acted as informants for other students' projects, confidently recording and performing songs learnt as children or (in the case of the Ukrainian student) through a lengthy training process as a professional performer.

### **Conclusion**

For the students engaged in inquiry-based fieldwork projects these modes of learning have provided avenues to 'understanding ... the lived experience of people making music' (Titon, 1997, pp. 91-92) which completely changed their approach to the teaching of music from one of monoculturalism to pluralism. These experiences are transformational, particularly in regard to removing the boundaries between 'insider' and 'outsider' knowledge and power, in a manner described by Rice (1997, p. 106) where the researcher and researched are 'potentially interchangeable' and 'capable of change through time, during the dialogues that typify the fieldwork experience'.

Students have been able to open pathways through cultural barriers which were previously seen as impenetrable and to explore the cultural and musical identities of both themselves and others, in so doing, discovering that diverse groups 'do not merely co-exist but interact' (Reyes Schramm, 1982). Through making personal connections with members of hitherto unknown or unexplored musical cultures, students have been able to broaden possibilities for future musical exchange and growth of musical knowledge and to directly establish the importance of enabling culture-bearers to take a collaborative role in implementing music education in schools.

From my own point of view, this study has emphasised the centrality of interpersonal contact between members of different cultures to the development of intercultural understanding. It has also led me to recognise the importance of endorsement of individual students' cultural backgrounds as a means of personal empowerment leading to academic achievement within an institutional setting. In responding to the results of this study, I have endeavoured to provide a broader range of opportunities for students to participate in a dialogue with culture-bearers both within and beyond the confines of the university classroom. Students with language backgrounds other than English are given flexible forms of assessment that enable them to demonstrate their musical and cultural knowledge in forms of teaching and learning interchange that emphasise their strengths. Musicians who have been recorded and interviewed by students have also been invited to perform and share their knowledge within the classroom. It is anticipated that future implementation of the course will involve school teachers, their students and performers who have been participating in successful performer in residence programs. In this way a cycle of engagement with real world experience has been established as a model to be emulated following graduation.

### **Acknowledgements**

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