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The Role of East Asian Mothers in Their Children's Musical Lives

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Abstract

This qualitative study is undertaken to understand East Asian mothers' roles in their children's musical lives, and is a continuation of fieldwork done at the Petit String Orchestra and Junior Youth Orchestra located at the University of Florida. Field observations provoked the researcher to consider the following: "Why are eighty percent of the orchestra players Asian children?" "Was it a coincidence or culturally constructed?" "Why do mostly Asian mothers occupy the chairs behind the orchestra every Sunday?" Data was collected using interviews and subsequently analyzed with the narrative method. The selection of participants in this study was based on a criterion sampling. All of the participants were Chinese and Korean mothers whose children (between the ages of 7 and 9) attend the Florida String Project. Narrative inquiry offers different ways of understanding individual, social, cultural, and historical factors that influence how identities are constructed and/or understood by others. The purpose of this narrative study was to understand and explain the roles of mothers in their children's musical lives, and to consider these roles in the framework of culturally responsive music education. This study differs from the positivist approach by giving voice to the mothers, and allowing them to discuss their roles in their children's musical lives. This study documents the practice of meaning making as it pertains to the youth orchestra environment.

Key Words: culture, string education, Asian role models, narrative analysis

Background of the Study

In the fall of 2005, I worked at the University of Florida String Project. I was teaching at the Petit Strings and Junior Youth Orchestra. The orchestra met every Sunday between 3:00 and 5:15. In the Petit String Orchestra, there were ten students: eight of them were Asian, one was African American, and one was white. The ages of the children were between 7 and 9. The parents always sat behind the orchestra, waiting eagerly to hear the first tunes from their children. During the rehearsals, I tried sometimes to focus on the parents' reactions to the overall experience. I tried to search for some specifics. For instance, Jane's mother, Sally, seemed to be very engaged in the experience. Sometimes she walked away from her chair, went behind Jane's chair, and listened closely to how she was playing.

After the rehearsal, I caught them in the hallway and talked to Jane first, and then to her mother. I congratulated Jane for her first time playing in the orchestra. She said she really enjoyed being there. I asked her when, where, and why she began studying violin. Her mother said Jane studied violin for 3 months in Korea and two months in Gainesville. Jane said she chose to play the violin because she wanted her parents to be proud of her. Her mother also told me that when she watched Jane or her son John playing in a concert, she always felt very proud.

Jane said that her brother influenced her because he also the plays violin. She was taking a private lesson once a week, and she practiced every day. When I asked her if she had any problem with practicing, she said, "my mom always asks me to practice." Jane asked me to leave because she wanted to play with the other kids, and I said yes. Then I walked away and struggled with some questions that I wanted to investigate further: (1) Why are there many Asian students playing in the orchestra? (2) What is the role of mothers in their children's musical lives? (3) How do mothers perceive and describe their relationships with their children as it is influenced over time by strings practice and performance?

Literature Review

For the last three decades, Asian children and youth have been known as a good "minority model" in classrooms. Scholars have explained the educational success among Asian American students with the role of their culture and how their culture shaped parenting behaviors and practices. Asian-American unique home environments and educational activities pass on the cultural traditional values from parents to children and at the same time help children to excel and to be resilient (Peng & Wright, 1994). In most research and academic discourse, these children are described as hardworking and competitive students who excel in math, science, and arts (Lee, 1996; Kao & Thompson, 1995). This phenomenon was often cited as the "Asian effect" (Kao, 1995). Sun (2011) states that although a large body of research on human intelligence has concluded that the observed racial differences in children's IQ scores are due to "environmental factors," the role of genetic factors in explaining such differences has never been completely ruled out.

Advocates of a parental resource model attribute the educational success among Asian American students to their advantages in various parental resources. It remains to be investigated whether such advantages in family resources are also responsible for the potential cognitive (and/or artistic and musical) advantages among Asian American children (Sun, 2011). Schneider and Lee (1996) stress that Asian American students have different home environments than their Western counterparts. Their parents are more supportive of learning and provide them with greater learning opportunities, assistance, and pressure for learning. Lin (2008) writes in an article published in *Philadelphia Inquirer* (cited in Huang, 2011) that fifty million children in China study the violin and that "Chinese parents urge their children to excel at instrumental music with the same ferocity that American parents push theirs to perform well in soccer or Little League" (p. 162). Most research recognized the importance of parental involvement and guidance in the development of their children musical (or other

academic) behavior (Moore, Burland & Davidson, 2003; McPherson & Davidson, 2002; McPherson, 2009). When children have supportive, caring and capable parents, building and developing musical skills are not difficult.

McPherson (2009) points out that "in many areas of learning, including music, there has been much discussion on the tendency of Asian descendent children to outperform their American Caucasian peers. To examine this relationship, a number of studies have focused on the similarities and differences between the practices of Asian and American parents" (p. 103). For instance, as stated by Lee (1996) Asian parents "teach and motivate their children to work hard in school in order to uphold the family honor, and most Asian children work hard to please their parents and to avoid the shame and guilt associated with failure" (p. 53). Zhang and Carrasquillo (1995) also assert that Asian students (especially Chinese students) work very hard to meet their parents' demands and expectations for doing well academically. According to Schneider and Lee's (1990) study, East Asian parents are more willing than other ethnic groups to sacrifice for their children's education. They often work long hours to save money to send their children to college.

Research has also demonstrated that academic achievement of students in East-Asia attributed to Confucianism (Hue, 2008; Huang, 2011). According to Confucianism, every individual inherits "natural tendencies" from birth. "This gave them the potential to become complete persons if they put effort into achieving this" (Hue, 2008, p. 307). Hue writes,

> In Confucianism, education was intended not only to acquire knowledge, but to help students explore their instinctive potentials and transform their natural tendencies through various helping strategies, which were depicted as 'the way.' It was assumed that 'the natural tendencies' of students could be improved and transformed through 'education.' (p. 307)

Huang (2011) writes that music education has been valued in East Asia as a way of harmonizing human beings into well-ordered Confucian Society. In Huang's article, Confucius is quoted as saying:

> Music produces pleasure which human nature cannot be without. That pleasure must arise from the modulation of the sounds, and have its embodiment in the movements of the body—such is the rule of humanity. These modulations and movements are the changes required by nature, and they are found complete in music. (p. 167)

As Lee (1996) cited from Suzuki (1977), there are several cultural and historical explanations for Asian American educational success. According to Suzuki, "early Asian American immigrants, excluded from labor unions and forced into self-employment, pushed their children toward education in the hopes that they would have better lives" (ibid., p. 54). Bourdieu argues that, beyond economic factors, "cultural habits and […] dispositions inherited from the family are fundamentally important to school success" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979, p. 14). Bourdieu (1977) points out that parents can make cultural investments by teaching their children the right kinds of cultural values and norms that the current school system (and dominant culture) favors and rewards. Throughout my interview experience, I observed one particular feature among my participants (Asian mothers): they often linked playing an instrument and studying music with the activities of high and privileged social classes. In their view, building cultural capital is a tool for access for further academic improvement (for example, networking and access to good universities with the help of art scholarships) and social mobility. According to Huang (2011), Western classical music is still perceived as a tool for personal or business advancement for many ambitious Chinese.

Individuals can be mapped in various fields in social life (Bourdieu, 1986). These fields are the places where they perform various actions consciously or unconsciously. In social life, their resources dictate their locations and impact how and what kinds of cultural capital they acquire. Bourdieu (1986) suggests that these resources take the form of wealth, privilege, and cultural and social capital. He also believes that the dominant groups control

these resources (Bourdieu, 1986; Harker, 1984; Johnson, 1993). Johnson (1993) comments on Bourdieu's important notion of "cultural capital" as "a form of knowledge, an internalized code or cognitive acquisition which equips the social agent with empathy towards, appreciation for or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artifacts" (p. 7). If knowledge is power and cultural/social capital as form of knowledge is controlled by the dominant group, then children who are socialized within the dominant cultural values and norms at school and/or in the family will most likely be more successful than children who are not socialized within this culture; this should force us to consider knowledge as power in cultural production.

The purpose of this study was to understand and explain the role of mothers as it relates to their children's musical experiences—as a way of measuring the potential for socially and culturally responsive music education. In this research, socially and culturally responsive teaching refers to reflective and critical practices that aim to build connections and dialogues among the subject to be taught, and the historical, cultural and social realities and identities of the learners and teachers. Valuable teaching in any field is dependent on bringing the larger cultural, social and historical contexts into discussion. As Pollock (2008) stated, "good educators (like good anthropologists) never rest satisfied with broad-stroke descriptions of how groups learn or feel or act toward schools or in schools. Instead, they seek to learn about specific practices and experiences that specific children and adults actually come to share, and they consider those experiences' consequences for children's school achievement" (p. 378).

Without falling into the "minority model" stereotype—because most low achievement Asian students are invisible and wait to be addressed—I tried to understand this phenomenon from a local perspective so that I could translate and connect it to a more global educational reality with the help of alternative research findings. East-Asian families and children might

have to be understood in specific and unique social and cultural contexts. For instance, in an article by Li (2003), we read the counternarratives of the Liu family. The research provides us an insight into the daily struggles faced by this minority Asian-Canadian family and their children's difficulties with schooling, which are seldom known to educators and policy makers. Li's (2003) research offers a critical understanding of the lives of underachieving minority children, especially those who are overlooked because of public stereotypes. Zhang and Carrasquillo (1995) demonstrate that some Asian-American students are still "facing adjustment problems of discrimination against Asian-American groups, as well as in economic situations" (p. 2).

After reviewing the literature on academic achivement and the music making experiences of Asian American children, I wanted to focus on this specific research question: What is the role of East Asian mothers in their chidren's musical lives?

Theoretical Orientation

While various theories guide research in music education, this study was guided by the theoretical perspective offered by social constructionism, according to which "[I]ndividuals create meaning through their interactions with each other and with the environment they live in" (Kim, 2001, para. 11). Social constructionism is based on constructionist epistemology. As Crotty (1998) points out, there is a tendency to use the terms "constructivism" and "constructionism" as synonyms; however, he continues, "it would appear useful to reserve the term 'constructivism' for epistemological considerations focusing exclusively on 'the meaning making activity of the individual mind' and to use 'constructionism' where the focus includes 'the collective generation (and transmission) of meaning" (p.58). "Constructivism and social constructionism look at human knowledge or rationality as a byproduct of the socius…in both cases, the relationship precedes the individual" (Gergen & Wortham, 2001).

Social constructionism views the role of culture and context "in understanding what occurs in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding" (Kim, 2001). In other words, knowledge is produced in the social context and individuals actively and creatively produce and construct meaning and reality through interactions with each other.

According to social constructionism, the interaction is the unit of analysis, and individuals blend their roles, realities and meanings to create new roles, realities and meanings. They construct reality socially, and the process is fluid, changing, ongoing and dynamic. Gergen and Wortham (2001) state that all meaningful propositions about the real and the good have their origins in relationships. They also quote from Wittgenstein (1953): "There is no private language (a moment prior to relationship in which the individual formulates meaning); rather, language (and other actions) gain their intelligibility in their social use, as they are coordinated with the actions of others. Individuals in isolation do not thereby cease to be intelligible; however, this is to trace the intelligibility of their private actions to a preceeding immersion in relationship" (p. 119). This study is framed by social constructionism because it involves learning through discourse and conversation, and takes into account the changeability of subjects' attitudes and perceptions in the course of those conversations.

Research Methods

Participants

The participants of this study were four Asian mothers who lived in northern Florida. The participants were selected through criterion sampling and their willingness to participate. Criterion sampling involves selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance (Patton, 2001). All of them were East Asian mothers whose children attended the Florida String Project. Two of the participants were originally from China (Mary and Susan),

and two were from Korea (Amy and Sally). For ethical concerns, I did not use participants' real names in the text.

All of the mothers were fairly well educated, and their husbands all worked in the fields of engineering or medicine. Mary and Susan were in their early forties and Amy and Sally were in their mid-thirties. Mary studied nursing and had two children; her son was 9 and her daughter was 13. Her son was learning the violin since he was 7. Her daughter was four and a half years old when she began studying the piano. When she turned 9, she started taking violin lessons. Susan was an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teacher at an elementary school. After taking care of her children for nine years, she decided to go back to work. She also had two children, a son and a daughter. Her daughter began studying the violin when she was 7. She is 15 now. Her son, who is 9, has been studying the cello for two years. The Korean mothers, as opposed to their Chinese counterparts had less experience in their children's musical lives simply because their children were younger. Amy and Sally were in their early thirties. Amy studied social work and had a son who was 8, who was studying the violin for one and half years. Sally who studied banking had two sons. Both of her sons were learning the violin for a year.

Data Collection

The data were gathered through interviews, all of which were conducted in the winter and spring of 2006. The researcher explained the purposes of this study to each participant in oral and written forms. Individual interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Each of the open-ended interviews for individual participants lasted approximately one to one and a half hours. The interview guide contained 15 questions. The questions addressed and helped to uncover the details of Asian children's musical lives, and how their mothers perceived and described their relationships with their children as it was influenced over time by string practice and

performance; the questions provided the groundwork for an analysis of the role of their mothers in children's music making experiences.

The starting point for the social constructionist interview did not begin with individual subjectivity but rather was centered on cultural relationships as they actively and constantly create language and understanding (Gubrium & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005). In a research case, even though the researcher and the participants come to the interview with their own culturally and socially created meanings, these meanings are not fixed and unchangeable; rather; they are active and changing. Because interaction is the main activity throughout the interview, this social context of the interview shapes the ways the researchers and participants make meaning and use language within the interview. For this particular research, the researcher was aware of this transformational and reflective aspect of the interviews. Even though I understood the obstacles of speaking in a second language, throughout the interviews I had some difficulties interpreting and understanding some of the participants' expressions. They often prefer to express their ideas using a third person or with circular reasoning patterns. After transcribing the interviews, to clarify the participants' responses I consulted an American professor who had experience in teaching English to East-Asian college students.

Narrative Structure as Theoretical Framework

For both the researcher and reader of narrative research, it is an exciting journey to enter into another's story. The knowledge a person gains about another person or a phenomenon is developed into further narratives when conveyed to others. When stories are told to others continuously, they become a form of social interaction. In this research, I explored (1) Asian mothers' strong interest and role in their children's musical lives, and (2) how they perceive and describe their relationships with their children as it is influenced over time by instrument practice and performance. I wanted to hear their stories based on their experiences. Their

stories will be represented and extended into further narratives when conveyed to others, and will be reproduced in various musical and social interactions.

Narrative approaches offer different ways of conceptualizing cultural/institutional and individual perspectives for developmental research, and address the challenge of integrating culture, person and change. Narrative approaches also help researchers understand complex and diverse life systems in the educating of young people and advance the possibilities of understanding individual development within sociohistorical context (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004).

Muller (1999) defines four dimensions of narrative, based on how the structure of narratives creates meaning: (1) Narratives are based on assumption that people like storytelling. They organize their significant experiences in terms of stories, and the telling of stories is a way for people to make meaning of events in their lives, (2) Narratives have structural properties of time and plot, and plot links events together, (3) Narrative has power to shape human conduct as well as to reflect an individual's life experience, (4) Narrative has contextual focus. Narratives do not arise by themselves; they are nested within a cultural context (pp. 221-238).

One general and common approach exists for studying narrative structures, and it is based on the linguistic features of the text. Labov (1972) describes the overall structure of the "fully-formed" narrative as following: (1) abstract is a summary of the story offered at the beginning; (2) orientation provides information by identifying time, place, persons and their activity or situation; (3) complication action is the sequence of events that changes the planned direction; (4) evaluation is the significance and meaning of the action; (5) result or resolution is about the outcome of events and describes what happened at the end; and (6) coda returns the speaker to the present moment (Labov, 1972). I analyzed each narrative based on Labov's approach to narrative structure. Before analyzing each of the narratives, I

did thematic analyses to decide which stories I would focus on and analyze. The stories were based on the research question: What is the role of Asian mothers in their children's musical lives?

Results

"Mothers' Role as Decision Makers: The Early Bird Catches the Worm?"

Before presenting the data and citing examples from the participants, I would like to share some commonalities that I found among the participants' responses. Each of the mothers had very little musical experience. They made clear that they had limited musical opportunities in the past. If given greater opportunities, they would have studied music more seriously. For instance, Susan tried to play the guitar and sang in the school choir. Amy played the piano. Sally sang in the choir.

All of the mothers believed that children should be exposed to various experiences, like music, at an early age. For instance, Susan explained, "they are too young to make that decision." Mary said, "when they were young, I want them to try everything because there is not much academic burden on them… This is why I want them to study music, soccer or gymnastics…" Amy also added, "but they are little bit older, like 7 or 8, we want them to stick with one thing such as playing one instrument and maybe doing one sport." Sally said, "my first child was a girl. I always thought that a girl should learn music. I have a friend playing in an orchestra. He said the best time for a child to start music education is 4." Mary said that "most Asian parents spend a lot of money, energy and time to push our children because we feel that our children should compete with other Asian children. We expect a lot from our children. Later children don't have passion. When they become a teenager, they want to be themselves. They stop and they hate it. We want them to be the top scientists or get into the best universities."

Amy also struggled with the pressures of raising a musical-oriented child as stay-at-home-mom. She said, "I pushed my first child. I didn't have so much experience then. She studied the piano and the violin. She won a piano competition in Canada. I worked too much. I helped her practicing, counting…After coming to America I adopted myself to American culture more. Americans want to have fun. I got this. We, most Asian parents, 'you have to do it' even the children suffer…I read Suzuki's book about value of music and violin. My daughter began to study violin. Her teacher has a gentle approach. She plays in the Youth Orchestra now." Susan said, "I don't push them too hard but I do it consistently. Some Asian mothers are not only very strict in music education the are also very strict in academics and homework. In our culture, life is very competitive. I understand that a lot parents have to be good. They have to be good in order to get into the good universities or good jobs. That happens a lot especially people from mainland China. They have to be really good in order to come to the US."

"Mothers' Role as Future Builders: Music as Social and Cultural Capital"

All of the mothers emphasized the connections between good education and prestige, and support educational environments that they believed produces better human beings. Susan was aware of her socio-economic status and she wanted to use this power to build a better education for her children. She knew some friends and they helped her contact some violin teachers. First, she took her kids and observed others' private lessons, and tried to understand if children liked the experience or not. Susan also took her children to her friend who played the violin and made them listen to violin music. Amy said, "Because my husband is a professor and I'm educated, if you have this kind of status, you can give it to your children…We lived in Canada. When we were students there, we lived in the apartments for married students. So, in the whole building everybody had a piano. Most of us had kids. Every Korean and Chinese family in the building, even with little money, took private lessons

for our kids. The superintendent was surprised. She thought it was a strange thing…but we look at music differently."

Mary believed that since ancient times Chinese culture especially has valued education (music education) because "music education makes people noble people." She thought in the feudal system people were selected to get jobs based on their skills and educational background. If you're good at calligraphy, poetry, chess or music you have good education and better chance to get a job. She said, "there is a Chinese saying. It means education is the most important thing…now it is the same in our generation." Susan also believed that historically "in China, education is limited to rich people. If you don't have good education, you are less valued."

Susan had a very clear rationale as to why she never let her children give up studying music. Even though she stated that music was not a promising career in her country, Susan saw various benefits of playing an instrument. These benefits were mostly extra-musical. For example, Susan explained that playing an instrument helps her children to build habits of practice, discipline, stability, good eye and hand coordination, and memory. Furthermore, her children, Susan felt proud of themselves and confident because they had a unique talent. She thought her children had learned how to focus and this helped them to be successful in other academic areas.

Mary said, "I see that most children are high achievers. They have opportunities. They started studying music at a very early age. But Asian culture in general not many parents really support their kids to do music to become a musician. Because in China becoming a professional musician is not an advantage. Unless you want to do a teaching at a university…But I think studying music will give them a rich life in the future. They will be more sensitive and kind. They will have a unique personality." Sally thinks, "Kids who play instruments, they meet with a lot of friends. They make a good circle. I know kids playing

violin or piano, they do things together. These things never make bad people. Kids playing music are always best kids, at the universities or anywhere."

"Mothers' Role as Home Teachers: Committed, Supporting and Providing"

Mary described her role as a committed and supportive mother. She had been involved in her children's music education since 1997. She said "being talented is not enough. You have to work hard. If you play an instrument perfectly you have to improve yourself. I wanted my children perfect at their instruments. I worked with them. I sat besides them, I went to the lessons with them. I helped them with their assignments like theory or sight-reading. My daughter plays piano and violin. My son plays violin. I was pushy with my daughter. My son is more difficult to help now. Sometimes he doesn't want to practice. I want him to follow everything what his teacher says like dynamic details, good posture, counting the beats. He refuses to use the metronome. I sit besides him. He doesn't like it because I cannot stop myself and I say 'This is wrong. That's wrong…'''

Mary also stated that she monitored her children practice everyday. She said, "my second child Derek refuses me to remind him the practice time. He is more independent. He has more character. Sometimes he says, 'No, mom. I don't want you to sit beside me.' My husband and I argue sometime. He doesn't want me to open Derek's case and rosin the bow. He says, 'you do this too much. He will think, he works for you to please you. Let him practice for himself.'"

Amy, after having a child, chose to stay at home. Because she played piano in the past and valued music a lot she wanted her children to experience music too. She had friends with children studying music. She observed some lessons and decided to do the same thing for her daughter. She participated her daughter's piano lessons. After the lessons she monitored her practices and helped her when she had difficulties. She says "music education should be about

spreading the seeds. You may spread many seeds but two of them might grow up. I want my children to learn good things, valuable things…"

Susan describes her role as a committed mother to her children, a supporter of education, and a provider. She stated, "I want to provide my children an opportunity to play an instrument." Susan's desire was to do it consistently and in a very disciplined way. She said, "In our culture, we are very disciplined because we were brought up that way. So, if we have to do something, we have to make sure doing it consistently not just for a year or two." She was aware of the difficulty of dealing with very young children and, because of that, Susan strived for them to be consistent and disciplined at a very young age. Her evaluation was that if her children learn the violin consistently, they would become successful, and if they become successful, they would start to enjoy doing it. Susan described her other role as to remind her children when to practice and the objectives of practice. Although she reminded her children when and how to practice their instruments, Susan emphasized that she was not responsible for their learning, and children should feel that responsibility for themselves.

For Susan, becoming a home teacher of her children was not easy. Susan attended each private lesson for three years, and learned the basics of violin playing. When her daughter began to take private violin lessons at the age of 7, the teacher required Susan to stay throughout the lesson. During the lessons, Susan learned how to hold the bow and violin, and to play simple pieces. She also took notes related to particular songs so that she could mentor her daughter when she practiced at home. Susan stated that participating in her daughter's lessons was very helpful for her, especially because it allowed her to empathize with the child. She said that playing violin was "really painful […] It hurts your fingers and your neck." Susan stated that she could do home teaching up to a certain point, but after a while the pieces and techniques became very complicated and she was not able to help her daughter. Over the

years her role switched from becoming a home teacher to a critical listener and audience for her children's performances.

The most common difficulty that Susan encountered in her role was to set up regular practice time, especially during the first two years. Susan states that even though her children had excuses not to practice, she made them practice every day for at least 20 minutes. Susan stated, "If you want to learn something, you have to practice in a right way and everyday." When it was difficult for her to keep the schedule straight, she sat down and discussed the rules with her children. Sometimes they had to negotiate the rules of practicing.

Discussion and Conclusion

Asian mothers' parenting goals and practices in their children's musical lives are shaped by their values, beliefs, attitudes and aspirations that were constructed in their culture. In this study, all of these mothers are strongly committed to their children's musical lives. Even though none of them had any professional musical training, they showed great enthusiasm for their children to get experience in music. Mary, Susan, and Sally chose to stay at home and raise their children. They became home teachers. As an interesting phenomenon, although they don't have any professional musical training, they became musicians of a type (enough to mentor the kids at home) with their children.

All of the mothers are certainly aware of musical training and the challenges that go into practicing an instrument. As McPherson (2009) cited from West, Noden & Edge (1998) mothers especially play a critical role in children's academic achievement. According to McPherson (2009), mothers' parenting practices, such as being present at music lessons, attending orchestra rehearsals or helping with practice, have been shown to have a direct influence on children's educational (musical) achievement outcomes. In the current study, mothers conveyed similar parenting behaviors and practices in their children's musical development.

Willing to create social-musical networks also seems like an initial motivating factor for dynamic participation of the mothers in their children's musical lives. Their musical/social networks connect children and their families to each other and to the society. Mothers have friends who either play an instrument or have children taking private lessons. As McPherson (2009) explained, with certain types of parenting practices, parents realize the socialization goals they hold for their children, such as being successful at music, playing in an orchestra or enjoying musical participation. It is not surprising that all of the mothers have a strong desire for their children to be successful, and not necessarily only in music. They believe that through learning the violin, piano, or cello, their children will always have better lives than children who don't experience music in that way. A good, rewarding life is associated with being around "successful," "smart," and "good mannered" people.

Playing an instrument serves as a kind of cultural capital that can widen their children's opportunities. For instance, in the future the children can attend the best universities because of their artistic talents. They strongly sense the power of arts in society. For instance, Mary said that her neighbors' children take private lessons, and if her children wouldn't do so she would feel "lowered." For Mary, especially, being interested in the arts and playing an instrument implies belonging to higher social classes.

Mothers' socio-economic conditions, and how they perceive them, seem to be an important factor in that experience. They emphasize that, especially in Chinese society, very few people can afford private lessons. They are aware that they are capable of giving such opportunities to their children in the United States, and they do not hesitate to do so. In the case of the Chinese mothers, there is an emphasis on relationship music education and class issues. For them, music education is as a sign of success, intelligence, and belonging to higher classes. Mothers provide their children artistic opportunities so that they can enter a better life and achieve social mobility.

Interestingly, even though they strongly believe that their children gain benefits through studying music, they do not show a great desire for them to choose music as a professional career. It is a "commonly held view that music is a subject that has high intrinsic value but low attainment and utility value" or 'in other words music is not important or useful as other academic school subjects in terms of future preparation for life and a career" (McPherson, 2009, p. 96). Mary's justification is that her children are not talented enough, and she does not push her children enough. Susan implies that music is not a promising career, especially in their culture. As a researcher, my first reaction to their strong interest in music when their children are very young is that they want to give as many opportunities as possible to them so that they can gain countless benefits from them (responsibility, discipline, consistency, focus, self-confidence, and pride). They also imply that children are more controllable when they are young. It is not a coincidence that Mary and Susan were more pushy and disciplined with their first children than their second children, providing great evidence of how their attitudes and experiences changed over the years.

Researchers argued that Asian American immigrants bring from their home cultures many pro-education cultural values and beliefs which strongly emphasize hard work, self-improvement through continuous effort, parental obligation to monitor and help with learning, and educational achievement for the sake of the family. For instance, the concept of parental commitment to improving and promoting children's education is highly consistent with cultural themes embedded in and implied by the doctrine of Confucius, which still remains influential in East Asian cultures (Sun, 2011). As has been demonstrated earlier, Asian mothers take a rigorous approach to skill acquisition, which involves vigorous parental reinforcement of a regular practice Schedule. Huang (2011) writes, "the art of self-cultivation through the application of self-discipline is valued and practiced in many Asian families" (p. 171).

According to McPherson (2009), there is a large body of literature on parental influences on children's learning of academic subjects, but very few studies on music education. This study raises important questions and opens new avenues for the research community in the field of music education. It is important for music educators learn how to examine the social and cultural histories of our students that influence their identity and musical development. In every narrative, the narrator gives a message to the listener that reveals why the story is being told in the first place. Instead of taking the "minority model" idea for granted in our classrooms, we need to understand the more complex processes of development of Asian children.

The analysis of the interviews illuminates how these families approach studying music and playing an instrument. Their approaches show us their way of meaning making and understanding the value and importance of music education in a particular cultural point of view. These children face with two different cultures: the culture they acquire at home and the culture they acquire at school (or in a music classroom). Music teachers need to be sensitive to their students' cultural backgrounds, which may be different than those of dominant society. This study provides critical observations for music teachers who work with East Asian children.

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Ebru Tuncer Boon (PhD) was born and raised in Istanbul, Turkey. In 2001, after receiving a scholarship from the Turkish Ministry of Education, she began her graduate studies at Ohio University in Athens. Boon completed her master's degree in music in 2003, and then moved to Gainesville to begin her doctoral studies in music education at the University of Florida. In 2004 and 2006, she received the Recognition of Achievement in Graduate Studies given by the Turkish Ministry of Education. Boon is currently Assistant Professor of Music at the Yeni Yuzyil University Performing Arts Department. In addition to her music education duties, Boon directs the university's Social Science Institute. Her research interests include critical pedagogy, philosophy and sociology in music education, qualitative research in music education, movement in culture, and body music and body percussion. As a practitioner, she also teaches violin and viola to children.

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APJAE, 12(2), 25-47

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Reframing through Reflective and Reflexive Inquiry: Experiences of Singapore Music Teachers' Professional Learning Journey

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the reflective and reflexive inquiry process of one among four Singapore music teachers' six-month professional learning journey which encompasses an overseas study trip and the trialing of ideas gathered after the trip. Findings reveal that conceptual changes in music teaching will likely happen if the experience of the contextualized reflective and reflexive inquiry was personalized for the music teacher and set within a space and time which allow for constant dialoguing, processing, enacting and re-processing.

Keywords

Reflection, Reflexion, Inquiry, Teacher Learning, Learner-Centered

APJAE, 12(2), 25-47

Reflection and Reflexion: A Theoretical Viewpoint

Because creation in the arts and arts-making is often a reflective endeavor,"teaching the arts should engender reflection as a habitual trait" (Henessy, 2006, p.184). There should constantly be a felt need (Dewey, 1934) for teachers to reflect on their practice so that there can be self-development, as reflection "goes behind immediate qualities, for it is interested in relations" (Dewey, 1934, p. 243). Educators have recognised that reflection needs to lead back into action (Schön, 1987; Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998) and this notion has underpinned various inquiry processes including practitioner inquiry, practitioner research, and professional learning (Campbell & McNamama, 2010; Groundwater-Smith & Dadds, 2004; Jorgensen, 2001).

Hentschke & Del Ben (2009) suggested that arts teachers need to "mobilise different levels of reflection in order to inform their own practice" (p.46) and pointed out the need to "analyze the coherence and consistency of their constructs and their interpretive frames, identifying possible constraints of their reflective processes" (p.52). Taggart & Wilson (2005) suggested that reflective processes can be seen at the technical, contextual and dialectical levels:

> **Technical** (reference past experiences; teacher competency towards meeting outcomes; focus on behavior/content/skill; simply, theoretical description), **contextual** (looks at alternative practices; choices based on knowledge and value commitments; content related to context/student needs' analysis, clarification; validation of principles) or **dialectical** (addresses moral, ethical, or socio-political issues; disciplined inquiry; individual autonomy; self-understanding) levels (p.3).

Beyond reflection, Ryan (2005) suggests a further need for teachers to be reflexive in reflection, a process that involves "introspection". "Reflexivity", as Sandelowski and Barroso (2002 as cited in Ryan, 2005) pointed out, "implies the ability to reflect inward toward oneself as an inquirer; outward to the cultural, historical, linguistic, political, and other forces that shape everything about inquiry" (p.2).

In reflexivity, one constantly analyses one's own theoretical and methodological presuppositions and one's lived experiences. Teacher beliefs and their contextual understandings shape their 'interpretive frames' which will translate into their teaching and reflections (Hentschke & Del Ben, 2009). These 'interpretive frames' are shaped from practice to practice, their lived experiences and personal meanings they attached. Reframing through reflective and reflexive inquiries will involve the teacher to challenge his/her own assumptions, broaden his/her perspectives so as to put in place a new system or pedagogical approach.

To frame it simply, this study puts forth a theoretical viewpoint which suggests that reflection at the contextual level (Taggart & Wilson, 2005) in tandem with reflexion can lead teachers to reframe and transform their practices. This process will involve digging into teachers' personal belief systems through their pedagogies and practices.

This study hopes to examine and illustrate this theoretical notion within music education pedagogy and practice through thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of one among four Singapore music teachers' professional development journey in discovering and uncovering learner-centered approaches[1] in music teaching.

The Study

Purpose

[1] Creating a learner-centred environment is one of MOE's (Ministry of Education, Singapore) strategic thrusts to achieve MOE's vision of "Thinking Schools, Learning Nation". Through the use of appropriate learning programmes and pedagogical tools, teachers can engage and motivate students as active participants in their own learning processes. By forging close relationships with their students and by role-modelling, teachers create a whole-school learning experience for them that fosters thinking and life-long learning. This is best done through developing effective partnerships with other stakeholders in education, including parents, community and employers. In Singapore, the term 'learner-centered' is used synonymously with 'student-centered', and used to contrast with 'teacher-centered' teaching.

Jorgensen (2010) believes that there are many pressures upon music teachers and they can affect how teachers function professionally and socially. She remarked that:

> having insufficient time to reflect on our work or opportunities to cultivate the art of musical and pedagogical conversation, to read about music education and discuss our situations, and to work cooperatively and collaboratively with other music teachers only aggravate the isolation and inadequacy that too many music teachers feel in the face of many different demands on us (p. 22).

Taking on Jogensen's cue to give time (in this instance, taking time out from teaching) for reflection and dialogue, this study investigated the professional development journey of four Singapore music teachers (two primary schools and two secondary schools) who engaged in reflective inquiry as explored and experimented with learner-centered approaches in music teaching. Only one among the four teachers' professional journey is detailed in the findings to get at the richness of the reflective inquiry. Reflective inquiry is framed at the *contextual level* (Taggart & Wilson, 2005, p.4), focussing on clarifying and elaborating on underlying assumptions of classroom practice, practitioner's belief system, consequences of strategies used, and questioning of practices based on increased pedagogical knowledge and skills.

In 2011, STAR[2] opened invitations to schools to embark on an overseas study trip to Nova Scotia which would be followed up by a pedagogical inquiry through trialling of ideas gathered. Of the applications, four teachers were selected to embark on this inquiry process based on their experience in instructional leadership and possessing an open mindset. The purpose of the trip was to observe good practices in music teaching and was set out to be the start of a research project designed to examine learner-centered music pedagogies and contextualise them for the Singapore music classroom. The trip was facilitated by a program manager and program

[2] STAR – Singapore Teachers' Academy for the aRts, is "set up in 2011 to enhance the professional excellence of Art and Music teachers, and to improve the quality of art and music education in our schools" (STAR, 2011).

director at STAR, as well as a research consultant from the National Institute of Education (NIE), Singapore. The process of reflective inquiry for these four teachers was driven by the research consultant and takes on the problem of what Dewey (1933) terms a "felt difficulty" seen in this instance as a questioning and examination of a teacher's belief system matched against current views of education towards 21st Century competencies[3] (Ministry of Education, 2010) for students (in this study, the notion of learner-centeredness in music teaching). The inquiry process, which was sustained over a six-month period, lends itself well to dialogical learning.

Process

At the start of the journey (three weeks before the study trip), the four teachers attended two pre-trip discussions facilitated by the NIE consultant where they were asked specific questions about their personal beliefs and views about music education. The teachers were required to articulate their views in writing which painted a picture of their professional identities through their personal narratives. They discussed their personal beliefs and teaching practices in school, talked through the Singapore national syllabus requirements (GMP, 2008) and made comparisons with the Nova Scotia music curriculum documents before they embarked on a week-long study trip to Nova Scotia, Canada. The study trip included a number of classroom observations and interactions with music teachers, and attendance at a one-day music education conference. It provided a changed context for the four teachers to discuss intensely pedagogical practices while constantly reflecting on their own practice and assumptions. The guiding questions for the teachers included: i) What are the visible

[3] 21st Century competencies are defined as wanting to "nurture each child to become a confident person, self-directed learner, active contributor and concerned citizen" (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 3).

pedagogies and practices of music teachers observed on the study trip?; ii) How do these pedagogies and practices draw similarities and differences with the Singapore music teachers' classroom practices?; and iii) What are possible implications for action towards local practices?

During the study trip, group discussions (of at least two hours) were held every evening to talk through what was learned for the day, dissecting classroom observations and examining teachers' understanding and perspectives about learner-centered approaches and other pedagogies and practices observed. The opportunities for reflection on teaching and dialogue with students and colleagues were intended to lead these teachers to commitment in action and develop "habits of thought" (Jorgensen, 2001, p. 352) that can lead to practice and theory enhancing each other. According to Jorgensen, dialogue sessions also need to be "a combination of thinking about and reflecting on practice" (p.77), discussions have to be meaningful and regular and the facilitator must be able to probe teachers for further inquiry to generate a healthy 2-way communicative process (Stegman, 2007). The program director of STAR summed up the significance of having group discussions by saying:

> Taking fully the context… and then comparing our own reflections, I thought that process is important, that's why we have this focus group… sometimes, we see certain things but is limited and we see as much as our own experiences tell us to but when we kind of cross-check (respective understandings) and question each other, that's why everyone of you must ask questions in this process to help each other, you know, (our questions) help everyone clarify. So, that will help ourselves (sic) become better reflective practictioners.

The teachers were also required to write individual reflections each day from the group discussion and the field-notes they have taken during observations and informal chats with the Nova Scotia teachers. All group discussions were audio-taped and transcribed and the reflections from each teacher collated.

A month after the study trip, the four teachers selected idea(s) they wished to pursue in their music classroom and taught them in a module of lessons over several weeks based on the new knowledge and inspiration acquired. The basic questions constantly at the back of the teachers' minds as they work through the lessons include: What are we teaching? How are we teaching it? What are our underlying ideologies? (Harris, 2006). The STAR program manager also served as a sounding board for the teachers as they develop their lesson plans during the four weeks after the study trip.

After each lesson, a post-lesson dialogue was conducted between the facilitators (STAR program manager and the NIE (National Institute of Education) consultant) and the teacher "to observe and examine his or her own behavior within the classroom or school as it occurs" (Ryan, 2005, p.3). All lessons were video-taped and post-lesson dialogues audio-taped and transcribed so that the teachers were able to review and further reflect upon their practices.

At mid-point as the four teachers taught their lessons, a pedagogue from Nova Scotia who planned and hosted the group during the trip, was invited to interact with the teachers and provided feedback on their teaching after each class observation. This opened up another window of opportunity for an emic-etic dialogue as the teachers pursued notions of learner-centered music instruction. Towards the end of the lesson trials, the entire group gathered again to debrief about what was learned, sharing about successes and challenges, constraints and limitations, but more importantly, reexamining their own belief systems in the teaching of music by articulating what they felt has changed for them fundamentally.

A total of ten hours (200 pages) of audio transcripts from all the group discussion, 50 pages of written reflections, and partial video transcripts of lessons taught by the four teachers served as data for analysis. The analysis procedure

consisted of process-coding and chunking where each teacher's articulation of their teaching beliefs and talk/action/insights/reflections on teaching pedagogies and practices were highlighted and analytical memos written to link ideas, reflections and data together (Saldaña, 2010). Credibility and trustworthiness were further strengthened by returning each written narrative that came out of the analysis to the four teachers to check on accuracy of representation.

This paper presents just one of the four teachers' professional journeying and reflective inquiry process. It serves to highlight the shifts in thinking and action of the teacher over time and hope to point out contextual implications for future projects and further theoretical thoughts within reflective and reflexive inquiry.

Contextual information

Janet, the primary school music teacher featured in this study, is a generalist teacher who has been teaching music for more than a decade and is currently the music co-ordinator in her school. Like all generalist teachers, Janet also teaches other academic subjects beyond music. General music lessons are compulsory (typically once a week between half to one hour) in all Singapore government schools for the six years of primary education and the first two levels of secondary education.

Reflective and Reflexive Process of a Primary School Music Teacher

Initial epistemological beliefs and goals

Janet initially sees herself as a music teacher who is "like the conductor of an orchestra, leading the learner and learning, to create music from the notes each individual child reads and plays" (see Figure 1).

APJAE, 12(2), 25-47

Figure 1. Janet's initial drawing about how she sees herself as a music teacher

In examining Janet's personal belief system more carefully, she sees herself as the **locus of control** (indicated by her being the conductor of a Western orchestra within the drawing), **"leading" students and their learning**. Even in the creation of music (which is essentially performance-driven), as indicated, the **teacher orchestrates** the process "from the notes each individual child reads and plays." Students seated in neat rows as portrayed in the drawing was also a point Janet wanted to make about a certain level of **discipline within the music classroom** that she wants to maintain amidst the engagement and fun that she wants her students to have. This is reiterated during one of the group discussions before the study trip when Janet picked out the idea of management in a music class and states:

> This discipline thing is very much in music-making because we want our music lessons to be enjoyable. I think I want to teach students that there must be certain amount of discipline, how to sing together, you must follow the time, or to play some instruments together with the accompaniment. This management and discipline, I think is important.

Janet did emphasise however, that for her, music education is also to be "**all-inclusive**, an everyday affair…in short, an entitlement of every pupil… **a balance of knowledge and skills, underpinned by values, resulting in character-building**." Janet

returned and expounded on the idea of values during a group discussion after the study trip, mentioning that:

> (Teaching) values in music (lesson) is very important as well… based on what the new direction is in our education now is gonna be value-driven and value is to come from our National Education, culture, time, community, social aspect, environment, history, characters, all these are the value-driven education…Social maybe things like social values, social awareness? And social skills to communicate with others?... how music play a part to enable us to know our history and roots better.

Glimpses of these beliefs can be traced to Janet's implementation of her in- and out-of-curriculum music activities for students. Janet shared that in the design of her school's music curriculum, she has closely aligned with the national music syllabus (GMP, 2008). Due emphasis is given to singing (thru handsigns and note reading), the playing of instruments (including the recorder) and creating in terms of "playing instruments to a story to provide sound and create mood for the story." Listening experiences of local and Euro-American Western classical music composers are also emphasized alongside music and movement, and the introduction of local festivals to "help pupils understand the culture and music of other cultures." Outside the regular music curriculum, Janet has created opportunities for students to showcase their musical talents through a monthly mini-recital during break (recess) time where themes (such as K-Pop) are chosen to "incorporate things that are 'in' to keep it relevant (for pupils) and the pupils excited." Through these opportunities where students can showcase their talent, Janet would then be able to channel some of these students to appropriate music CCAs[4] (Co-curricular activities) to further develop their musical skills. As she remarked, "Many pupils sang their hearts out at the Recess Recital, their favourite songs as soloists, duets and a small chorale. It is the

[4] Student participation in music CCAs is by choice and CCAs are held outside curriculum time. Within curriculum time, music is a compulsory subject in all primary and lower secondary schools with up to one hour per week. Music classes are guided by a national syllabus, the General Music Programme (GMP, 2008).

accessibility and inclusivity of music-making that we look forward to and are determined to have!"

In reflecting and furthering her thoughts about music education, Janet commented, prior to leaving for the study trip, that:

> I want to take a step backwards and (take) a closer look at our music programme and how it can be harnessed to bring about the 21st century competencies (Ministry of Education, 2010). I believe that to be future-ready, pupils must engage in the arts. Music (arts education) is an excellent vehicle to drive 21st century teaching and learning because it calls for a unique blending of specific skills, innovation, content knowledge and expertise to enable pupils to be always prepared for the multi-dimensional abilities required of them in the 21st century. Music allows pupils to learn how to think creatively and to solve problems by imagining various solutions, rejecting outdated rules and assumptions.

Janet also hopes to:

> cultivate in our pupils a lifelong appreciation and enjoyment of music, so that they will actively participate in music even as adults, thus fulfilling Singapore's City Renaissance Plan III (MICA, 2008). I foresee that Singapore will only get more cosmopolitan and sophisticated in the coming years and our pupils can be steered to grow up to be active contributors (and as concerned citizens) to the increasingly vibrant arts scene. If our pupils, from school-going age, have been attuned to attending concerts on a regular basis, there will be little wonder when they become future, ardent supporters of the arts in our nation, a leap towards the realization of a more cultural, albeit still ability-driven, country.

Being cognizant of governmental views (Renaissance City Plan III and 21st Century Competencies) towards arts education, Janet has indicated her agreement with (without any further questioning) and alignment of (at least a thinking towards) these goals with her school music curriculum. There are concurrences of these aforementioned views with her personal beliefs about values and character building while **dissonances** are also evident, particularly with regards to **Janet's personal belief of the teacher being the locus of control matched against the development of 21st Century competencies looking at drawing out musically creative and critical abilities of students**.

APJAE, 12(2), 25-47

Emic-etic perspectives

During the study trip, in reflecting on daily observations of classes, conversations and group discussions with teachers and members of the study team, Janet took away several learning points. It was clear that the **key learning took place for Janet while observing teachers in action.** The immediacy of seeing how particular pedagogies and practices are enacted and affect student responses convinced Janet to try out some of these ideas back in her own music classroom.

With reference to the structuring of a music lesson, Janet was particularly impressed by lessons she saw that were "fast-paced and action-packed with energy and enthusiasm." This led her to reflect on her own music lessons, "I usually planned at least two activities and/or musical concepts to carry out and teach per lesson. Now, I'm determined to plan for at least three activities and/or musical concepts to carry out and teach per lesson. It can be recorder-playing, with movement and solfege practice. It can be dance with notation and singing." In subsequent class observations during the study trip, the constant reiteration by Janet about "skilful scaffolding" of the teachers (in terms of sequencing towards particular musical goals) convinced her that it is a skill she would like to work on and further pursue in her music lessons.

It also dawned on Janet that the resource provisions (technological and instrumental) for her music classroom is healthy compared with the schools observed, which led her to humbly admit that:

> I felt my conscience pricked - by the 80 tambourines we had, not to mention a host of many other instruments, in addition to another 80 ukulele which are coming via the equipment fund soon. What can I do as a music teacher to improve the quality of teaching and learning with my abundant resources? The most pressing thing I must do is to share with the teachers and pupils how privileged we are… Then I will work on how to have them use the instruments regularly in a meaningful fashion so that the music lessons may be original, relevant, fun and forward-thinking.

APJAE, 12(2), 25-47

The character traits of teachers observed also left in indelible mark in Janet's mind, leading her to want to "emulate by application and adaptation in my classroom. These characteristics include keenness, organisation, dynamism, acumen, learner-mode (learner-centerdness) and "yes-for-the kids"." Janet recognized during the study trip that beyond the keen passion of the music teachers and their meticulously in planning for an engaging lesson, the agency given to students through learner-centered activities was a significant consideration as well.

Janet observed that students in the classroom were constantly engaged because of the teacher's ability to transmit "life's skills, exhibition of masterful questioning techniques, propagation of self-directed learning, generous communication of positive encouragement and student-centric strategies in the classroom." Beyond that, Janet saw "the lighter moments (in the music classroom)" and "want my music lessons to have jollity and fun." In reflecting on what she has observed, linking it with her thoughts about Singapore's system of education, stirred Janet into a possible mental shift in thinking about changes to her music teaching:

> Everything I have seen and heard here has provided me with much learning and un-learning… I saw there was a supply of evidence of teaching against the grain, something a "rebel" within me wishes to do too… Singapore's education system has been noted for its efficiency and efficacy. But this success, I figure, came with a price – conformity. Other reasons include long hours at school, a rigorous curriculum (does not even the word "rigorous" carry with it the sound of "stiffness"?), and drill (and kill) practices. In short, creativity has given way in our pursuit for success... Creativity is astutely observed in (the teachers) lessons, and is needful in my lessons. Bring it back – and bring it on!

Belief systems however, when deeply rooted through an affirmation of past experiences become a person's source of comparison and interpretation of any observable event. One is reminded of Hentschke & Del Ben's (2009) caution on the 'interpretive frame' of the teacher as shaped by their beliefs and contextual

understandings. As an illustration, Janet's strong belief in the advantages of note reading led her to note in a classroom observation that:

> No notation was used at his (a teacher observed) band practice, only solfege and short-hand. Seeing it from a former band member and as one who sees the practicality of note-reading, this was an unusual practice. Learning the names of notes (via Every Good Boy Does Fine and FACE) was one of the first things I learnt as a beginner in piano-playing. Notwithstanding, I'm sure any self-respecting music teacher will eventually have to teach note-reading. While jazz players' improvisation has no need for notation, for any piece of music to enjoy longevity with ease, notation is surely the easiest way to do it.

It is clear from Janet's quote that she values note-reading as fundamental to musical learning. Although note literacy is a syllabus requirement, the use of note reading as a *starting point* for music learning could perhaps run counter or be obstructive to the many possibilities of creative music making for students. It is at this juncture that we continue to question the extent to which Janet re-evaluates her assumptions for music teaching that allows her to reframe her teaching practice.

Putting idea(s) back into local practice

In thinking and reflecting upon the idea(s) picked up on the study trip and putting it into action in her own music classroom, Janet has:

> **incorporated more of the creativity** part in my music lessons. And **allow more students to make decisions in their learning** instead of telling and giving them instructions to do this and that. That's the greatest change for me…I feel that their **learning is more meaningful and lessons get more exciting** for them.

Janet's perception is confirmed through the facilitators' observations of her classes prior to the study trip as well as the progression of lessons that she conducted after the trip. Previously, Janet taught "according to the syllabus and what is in the textbook", while "students… enjoyed the lesson… it's more of them receiving from me rather then taking up the ownership of their learning." Now, "they (the students) are more

motivated, they learn on their own, find out things on their own…they are more vocal and more focused on the lesson. The students have grown in a way that they are able to do their own learning outside the classroom."

As an example, during one of the trial lessons, Janet started an activity where students were encouraged to talk about an instrument and create their own lyrics to fit within a four-beat rhythmic pattern. Students' responses were many and varied. They included rhythmic ideas like, "Piano, you're too small! You're a wooden instrument. Ukulele, you're too big. The termites like to eat you!" Janet was encouraging in allowing students' ideas to be heard and accepted the lyrics as part of the created song where all students happily sung towards the end of the class. Janet, remarked, "This is the song composed by your class. We can call it the "Magic Box of XX (name of the class). So this is your song."

Janet defined her own teaching before the study trip to be teacher-dominated, "I will be talking all the time and telling them exactly what they have to learn…they will do everything that I will do, mimick what I want them to do and …that's what I used to do all the time." A shift in her teaching approach has occurred since, "Now I would prefer to **let them discover**, to lead them in the discovery of what I want them to learn rather then just telling them what they should be learning….discover their learning through **discovery** and **meaningful activities, and scaffolding** of course**, and authentic learning**."

There is a need to qualify that Janet's idea of letting children "discover" however, is set within specific parameters guided by her stated learning objectives in her music plan. As she's articulated within the quote, "to lead them in the discovery of what I want them to learn." Clearly, Janet's thinking about student-centeredness is set within the pedagogical approach rather than the flexibility in shifting the

curriculum (given that there is still a national curriculum) towards something more generative. The point is, Janet has at least begun to think and transform her teaching practice towards ideas of being more student-centered. Janet is also moving away from just using the local music textbook, she feels that "one of the things I've learnt from the trip was to **have multiple resources**, to prepare and design your lessons and **to let students experience first before teaching the concepts**."

It should be emphasized that while the ideas (like carrying out creative and compositional activities) were already something Janet was aware of, as indicated: "In the past, I do let pupils change the lyrics and create rhythms but it felt to me like a piecemeal thing…it's a bit of here and there. After the trip, I felt that the level of confidence has grown and I felt more comfortable about doing some of the movements in class and also allowing creativity and composing in class", Janet is convinced about the benefits of these ideas and having the confidence to conduct such lessons:

> When I **saw that it can be done in the classroom,** that means it is possible and seeing it in action, **experiencing and hearing from the teachers who have done it**, the benefits that they and their students have enjoyed, gave me the kind of boost in confidence.

Janet felt that in enacting a more learner-centered approach (having more creative and compositional activities in the music classroom) within her teaching:

> questioning technique is very important. For example, I will ask like, what do you think of this, what you think you can learn from this… I try to ask more open-ended questions…I am more conscious about it (questioning) now and I will try to improve and try to ask meaningful questions. I think I need to improve in terms of my pedagogy and training and to be more aware of principles and ideas.

In the post-dialogue and classroom observations by the facilitators, it was noted that while there were more open-ended questions posed, Janet was still grappling with

how to spontaneously address students' creative responses while meeting the goals and objectives of each lesson. As she remarked, "I thought that it was very challenging, I can see a lot of this little things which I wanted to talk more about or to highlight about but…"

It seems though that thinking through the interactions and observations that Janet has had before, and during and after the trip over a six-month period, was a useful process towards reframing her pedagogies and practice. As Janet remarked:

> Everything became much clearer after I talked to [the facilitators] and when I came back and did the lessons, then I start to think about what I've seen there and everything seems to make sense and become more meaningful…doing the qualitative research, it also makes sense, we go there and record and take field notes, then everything just unpacked and became so much more meaningful to me after that.

Figure 2. New drawing about how Janet sees herself as a music teacher six months later

A final drawing (Figure 2) done by Janet when compared with the initial drawing (Figure 1), shows the shift in her beliefs in her role as a music teacher, and hence her

pedagogical thinking after an intense period of reflection and reflexion. As Janet looked intently at the drawing and explained:

> I still like to interact with my students, I like them to be around me…I like to build relationships with my students…but in the past (prior to the study trip), it's more like they looking at me and learning everything from me. I'm the source of all knowledge and I'm so powerful you know, standing there but now I feel like, these are all my students (referring to the coloured dots on the drawing) and this is me (one red dot) at **off-centre,** yet not too far off from the centre because I want my students to still regard me as their teacher and an important part of their lives and yet **giving them opportunities to take the stage** …because the **students are suppose to be in the centre**.

The multi-colored dots in the drawing represents "the variety and diversity of students, their needs and their quirkyness and everything.. Now there is **more randomness because that is life, variety, randomness, expecting the unexpected, the ambiguity**, yah (previously, Janet perceived students to be in a state of orderliness (thus the drawing of them in semicircular rows like the exact placement in the orchestra). ..Well in randomness there is order and in order there is randomness (referring to the random dots of the drawing but all kind of evenly spaced out)… Importantly. "I think the students also had **fun**!"

Implications for Professional Development in Music Teaching

As Schön (1987) pointed out, reflection needs to lead back into action so that teachers can "plunge into the doing, and try to educate themselves before they know what it is they're trying to learn" (p.1). Various levels of reflections and reflexions point to the complexities involved in understanding a practitioner's own "interpretative frames" (Hentschke & Del Ben, 2009). One of the key lessons learned in this study is that reflective and reflexive inquiry can be a rewarding experience for music teachers if they are given adequate time and space to process, enact and re-process what they have gleaned from their inquiry. The role of facilitators seemed crucial as well in

terms of acting like interlocutors, dialoguing with teachers constantly in meaningful ways to probe and question their assumptions and beliefs about their pedagogies and practices. The process would not be possible without teachers being open-minded and having a critical attitude in wanting to engage with the inquiry and being responsive and responsible enough to want to delve deeply into their pedagogies and practice to enact change towards reframing themselves for the betterment of their music teaching and the music education of their students.

Also within reflection at a contextual level, it seems from this study that the teacher can identify and subsequently adapt ideas to her own teaching practices by observing another teacher model the ideas/strategies in either an actual class setting or a micro-teaching situation. Being convinced that it can be done, moving her thinking from a theory to practice nexus is vital in reshaping and giving confidence to the teacher that she can also enact and adapt the experience in her own classroom. From an epistemological point of view, the beliefs of the teacher in this study have gone through some degrees of change because her "initial epistemological ideas can be specifically challenged to create a conceptual discrepancy in (her) mind" (Tanase & Wang, 2010, p.1247). The reason why the teacher's ideas can be specifically challenged is due to the protagonist in the guise of "learner-centered approaches to teaching" which prompted numerous group discussions on observations of other teachers' classroom practices, as well as the subsequent teaching of a series of lessons, all of which were surrounded by a constant reflection in context and epistemological reflexion about the teachers' own teaching pedagogies and practices. Yet, the process of reframing and transforming practices is a continuous and a personal journey. As we have seen in Janet's experiences, teachers may continue to hold dear to deep seated values and beliefs such as Janet's valuing of notation and note-reading in

music instruction. But with constant reflection and reflexion over a six-month period, Janet's reframing allowed her to emerge from narrow interpretations of the purpose of music education within the context of teacher-enforced discipline to embracing greater student autonomy and creativity. This study thus concludes that one of the ways that conceptual changes in music teaching can happen, is when the teacher experience reflective and reflexive inquiry that is "personalized and contextualized" (Tanase & Wang, 2010, p.1247) set within a space and time which allow for constant dialoguing, processing, enacting and re-processing.

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