

World Music and Cultural Intelligence in the Classroom

Common Practice Music and World Music are both vital to fostering cultural intelligence in Calgary (and Canadian) classrooms.

Teachers meet the challenges of teaching World Music with ingenuity and passion.

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In a Calgary school, Liyana rushes to pick up two tī rākau sticks from the instrument basket. She and a friend sing the stick-game song they learned in the last music class, which reminds them of their friend who visited New Zealand over Christmas, a Polynesia neighbour, and the movie about a girl learning to paddle a Hawaiian outrigger canoe. A ringing tone fills the classroom from a brass bowl their teacher holds in her hands. As she circles the bowl with a wooden stick, Liyana and her classmates respectfully place the tī rākau sticks in the basket and gather around. What does Miss Deborah have for them today?

Miss Deborah represents Calgary school teachers¹ introducing their students to World Music beyond the Common Practice, beyond playing “foreign” music over the speakers or singing a folk song in the choir for the “winter” assembly. These teachers recognise the benefits of exposing students during their impressionable years to a wide variety of musical styles, languages, and transmission methods.

These teachers are responding to challenges, like limited exposure during their accreditation training, limited and scattered resources, and prejudiced student attitudes with ingenious solutions. Their passion for developing cultural intelligence in their students spurs creativity and more importantly, the growth of globally minded citizens.

What is World Music? What is the Common Practice period? What is cultural intelligence?

Why are globally minded students vital to the 21st Century? Clearly defining these concepts

¹ Melissa Cain and Jennifer Walden. “Musical Diversity in the Classroom: Ingenuity and Integrity in Sound Exploration.” Cambridge University Press 13 June 2018. Pp 1.

will facilitate the discussion about the growing World Music movement in Calgary classrooms.

World Music is a combination of sonic events, sociocultural contexts, geographical origins, performance practices, and teaching methods². Humans are infinitely adaptable, and music is a fundamental way of expressing this. The reasons music is made, the places, the tools, the way it is passed down from generation to generation as well as the way it changes from generation to generation all contribute to the disciplines of ethnomusicology and World Music pedagogy. Technology has expanded our access to music from all around the planet. We are more aware of each other, and we need to grow cultural intelligence to get along on our small chunk of rock perfectly positioned in the Solar System.

Cultural Intelligence is defined as an individual's capability to function effectively in situations characterised by cultural diversity.³ For instance, in Southeast Asia, I would be careful not to step over any musical instruments⁴. I would be observant and respectful of local customs.

Therefore, cultural intelligence grows empathy and curiosity and leads to more ready acceptance of others, but it must be taught early to be most effective. Though infants at 6 months of age show no encoding for one rhythmic system, by the age of 12 months they

² This is my own definition combining all I learned from my research.

³ Soon Ang and Linn Van Dyne. *Handbook of Cultural Intelligence, Theory, Measurement, and Applications*. Routledge London and New York, 2015. Pg xv.

⁴ Dr. Jennifer Walden (World Pedagogy instructor for Smithsonian Folkways) in discussion with the author. November 13, 2024.

do.⁵ This “enculturation”⁶ can be reversed in two weeks at that age, but children entering the classroom at age 5 years bring less malleable preferences for the music they have heard at home⁷. In Calgary those preferences often are based in Common Practice music.

Common Practice, the dominant music system taught in North American schools, refers to music composed in European countries and their colonies between 1700-1900 using a diatonic system and syntax⁸. It is important to state that Common Practice is vital and should never be thought of as detrimental to children or culture. It simply has neighbours who are equally vital, logical, beautiful, and cultivating of highest human potential. “It is all music, and it is all people⁹,” Dr. Jennifer Walden stated in an interview. Making distinctions and leaving out one system or the other based on ignorance or prejudice is detrimentally limiting. Knowledge of the music and people of the globe is a growing necessity in the 21st century.

Globally adroit citizens are steeped in “21st Century skills”: multicultural literacy; humanitarianism; civic, ethic, and social justice; oral and written multilingual

⁵ Erin E, Hannon and Laurel J Trainor. “Music Acquisition: Effects of Enculturation and Formal Training on Development.” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 11, no. 11 (2007): <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2007.08.008>. 469.

⁶ The process by which individuals acquire culture specific knowledge about the structure of music through everyday exposure. Hannon and Trainor. 466.

⁷ Gaye Soley, and Erin E Hannon. “Infants Prefer the Musical Meter of Their Own Culture: A Cross-Cultural Comparison.” *Developmental Psychology* 46, no. 1 (2010): 286–92. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017555>. 290.

⁸ Justin London. “Building a Representative Corpus of Classical Music.” *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 31, no. 1 (2013): 68–90. <https://doi.org/10.1525/mp.2013.31.1.68>.

⁹ Walden in discussion with the author.

communication; public speaking; and listening to understand¹⁰. They actively seek a more connected world, peaceful existence between nations, widespread prosperity, and dignity for as many as possible. Students from Calgary are gaining these skills in their classrooms partially by engaging in music from around the world. But first they need trained teachers to provide the lessons.

In the teacher certification programs of Alberta universities, there are options to concentrate in teaching music. However, of the 60 music courses offered by the University of Lethbridge¹¹ and the 17 offered by the University of Calgary¹² for a music education minor, few cover World Music. No course on World Music is required for school music teacher accreditation. Instead, potential teachers learn conducting and arranging for western based music.

Walden and Talbot agree that a high priority is placed on concert band and choir as optimal for school music programs¹³. Only students who are familiar with western notation are admitted to music education programs¹⁴. Education from other traditions is seen as inadequate and possibly a threat to the quality of music¹⁵ even though students from these

¹⁰ J. Christopher Roberts and Amy C. Beegle. *World Music Pedagogy Vol 2 Elementary Music Education*. Routledge World Music Pedagogy series. New York NY. 2018. 11.

¹¹ University of Lethbridge. "Music Education Minor Course List." Undergraduate calendar (2024/2025), 2024. https://www.ulethbridge.ca/sites/ross/calendar/ug/topic.htm#t=Topics%2FFaculty_of_Education-Education_Minors.htm%23XREF_Music_Education.

¹² University of, Calgary. "Music Education Minor Course List." The University of Calgary, 2024. <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/archives/2023/music-education.html>.

¹³ Jennifer Walden. "What We have Works....Doesn't it? Cultural Diversity in the Canadian Music Curricula and Resistance to Change." *The Canadian Music Educator*, Edmonton Vol 56. Iss 2 Winter 2014: pg. 9.

¹⁴ Brent C., Talbot. ed. *Marginalized Voices in Music Education*. 1st ed. New York; Routledge, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315225401.pg.4>.

¹⁵ Walden. 2014 pg. 10

traditions are the most able to introduce non-western ways of teaching and learning to diversify student experiences.

The government-issued Alberta school curriculum¹⁶ states that music is fundamental to complete an individual, should begin at an early age, and continue throughout life. The curriculum lists concepts, skills and an attitude of lasting delight as its goals. Wording around music from sources other than the Common Practice expresses feelings about holidays, country, and cultural heritage¹⁷. The government hopes students will be “aware” of “ethnic” music¹⁸. The different styles listed for teachers to explore with their students are blues, jazz, rock, reggae, country and western, and classical¹⁹. There is no mention of Peking Opera, Bachata, Gamalan, Zimbabwe Marimba, Bollywood, or any other world styles.

Teachers with a passion for World Music must educate themselves. Reyes notes that teachers are often intimidated by something they are not familiar with; they struggle with lyrics in languages other than their own; they find it easier to quantify progress in western music since it is based on notation; and they are intimidated by the issue of authenticity²⁰.

¹⁶Alberta Government. “Subject Guides: Teaching Music: Alberta Curriculum.” Alberta Curriculum - Teaching Music - Subject Guides at University of Alberta Libraries, 1989. <https://guides.library.ualberta.ca/teaching-music/alberta-curriculum>. Pg. 1.

¹⁷ Ibid. pg. 6.

¹⁸ Ibid. pg. 7.

¹⁹ Ibid. pg. 6

²⁰ Francisco Reyes. “Multicultural Music Education in North America: Achievements and Obstacles,” The Canadian Music Educator; Edmonton Vol. 59, Iss. 2 (Winter 2018): pg. 14.

Walden suggests recontextualization is a better approach than authenticity²¹. She encourages teachers to see music as a living art, changing and growing according to its immediate context. Abril quotes ethnomusicologist Bonnie Wade as saying authenticity lies within the perceptions of the individual²². Abril argues that music is always authentic to its performer of the moment. Creating an environment where the music is only performed by members of the original culture, with original instruments and languages is impossible and impractical in the classroom²³. If the music is not diluted, or modified to deride another culture its inclusion in the curriculum can build the lasting delight recommended by the Alberta curriculum, and the cultural intelligence desirable for making the world more harmonious.

Authenticity remains an issue once a teacher has educated themselves through private lessons, engaged in courses like the Smithsonian's Folkways World Pedagogy Course²⁴, and/or attended conference workshops that present aspects of World Music. To teach World Music in their classrooms, teachers must search out the best instruments, scores, culture bearers, and representative performances often using teachers' personal time and funds. Resources are not catalogued and concentrated in one place, therefore teachers arrange, interpret, and apply their research to create practical lesson plans²⁵.

²¹ Walden. 2014. pg.12

²² Carlos R. Abril. Selecting Music with Integrity. *Music Educator's Journal* Vol 93 No. 1 Sept 2006; pp 8.

²³ Ibid. pp. 9.

²⁴ Smithsonian Folkways Recordings. "World Pedagogy Course." Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 2024. <https://folkways.si.edu/world-music-pedagogy-courses>.

²⁵ William M. Anderson, and Patricia Shehan Campbell. *Multicultural Perspectives in Music Education*. 3rd ed. Lanham: R&L Education, 2011. pg. 1.

Talbot argues that diversifying the lesson plan content is not enough to make World Music an equal partner with Common Practice in the classroom²⁶. Teachers must balance systems of learning: the informal with formal, notation with aural, holistic with analytical, and tangible with non-tangible²⁷. Most non-western music is transmitted aurally²⁸: a teacher plays, and the student imitates. The teacher comments on the student's effort and the student makes corrections. This is costly in time and attention. In a classroom of twenty to thirty students peer mentors become important. Students who are culture bearers are leaders and gain status for their identities as well as their knowledge²⁹.

Culture bearers can be found in the school community or brought in from the wider community³⁰. Putting the word out and then interviewing people to validate their possible contribution would all be done on the teacher's own time. Once a culture bearer is found, teachers try to retain this resource as long as possible.

Administrators who see the value of a multicultural music program allocate funds for training, scores, equipment, and for culture bearers to enter the classroom. Room in the school schedule for ensemble practice and performance is a sign of support. Other teachers can provide parallel units to study aspects of the cultural origin of the music the students are playing. This cross-curricular approach helps students overcome their prejudice with curiosity because they see the greater context of the music.

²⁶ Talbot. Pg. 5.

²⁷ Walden, 2014. Pg.11.

²⁸ Ibid. pg. 9.

²⁹ Sara E. Delgado. What Can Music Education Teach Children about Cultural Diversity? The Canadian Music Educator; Edmonton Vol 62 Iss 4 2021: pg. 50.

³⁰ Abril. Pp. 24.

With a passion-inspired research-directed lesson plan, scores, instruments, culture bearers, and colleague support behind them, teachers who wish to introduce World Music into their classrooms must win the hearts of their students. Calgary now has a diverse population. We are impoverished, affluent, indigenous, multigenerational Canadian, first generation Canadian, immigrant, expat, etc. Some children encounter in their Calgary classroom classmates whose nation is on the other side of wars in their home countries. Their parents teach them to reject the “enemy” music. Some are raised with prejudice against certain music styles based on socio-economic biases³¹. Most bring a cultural experience with music based on what their parents listen to³². They form strong opinions unless their parents have purposefully brought variety into their environments. A teacher must work to foster interest, curiosity, attention, optimism, and passion for different sounds³³. They must consider student age, development levels such as skill with reading and manipulating instruments, and what students are accustomed to³⁴. Abril recommends growing tolerance through sensitivity to where students begin their experience with World Music and gradually expanding their repertoire³⁵.

The five dimensions of World Music pedagogy³⁶ gradually lead students through listening attentively to a piece of music, participating, recreating, composing in the style of, and finally integrating the music into greater knowledge of the culture. It helps to incorporate

³¹ Walden in discussion with the author.

³² Soley and Hannon. Pg. 290.

³³ Cain and Walden 2018. Pp. 1.

³⁴ Abril. Pp. 38.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Roberts and Beegle. Pg. 3

new sounds into familiar settings and activities before branching out³⁷. Teachers should take advantage of the human preference for a fast, consistent beat and stable tonality³⁸ and then slowly expand the class's acceptance of the unfamiliar. However, sometimes the familiar is too influential. The most pervasive obstacle to students engaging with World Music may not be home influence but the commercial music industry.

Music education is the combined effort of the interlocking values of families, governments, and increasingly, marketing strategists³⁹. Performers and presenters on the screens and speakers at home and school want dedicated attention which leads to narrowed cultural experiences⁴⁰. Children are taught to be consumers instead of seeing music as a way of knowing the world or as an art available to all⁴¹. They come into the classroom plugged into their earbuds and grow resistant to group participation. They are taught by industry to demand that music be fun, sensational, simple, new, constantly changing yet the same, fast, easy, loud, and listener centred⁴². How can a teacher compete?

Cain and Walden interviewed three Calgary school music teachers succeeding at making World Music an integral part of their classroom experience⁴³. They found seasoned teachers who made allowances for their students' needs, preferences, prior knowledge,

³⁷ M. Cain, S. Lindblom, and J Walden. (Initiate, Create, Activate: practical solutions for making culturally diverse music education a reality. Australian Journal of Music Education. (2). 2013). pg. 88

³⁸ Roberts and Beegle. Pg. 18.

³⁹ Richard Colwell and Carol Richardson, editors. The New Handbook of Research on Music Teaching and Learning – A Project of the Music Educators National Conference. Oxford University Press New York. 2002 Pg 5.

⁴⁰ Ibid. pg 13.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid. pg 9.

⁴³ Cain and Walden. 2018

and tastes⁴⁴. They gave their students choices and got them asking questions⁴⁵. They created their own notation⁴⁶, brought cultural artifacts from home and from their travels⁴⁷, and gave opportunities for students to create their own interpretations instead of imposing a static representation of the music⁴⁸. Rehearsal was not only a time to “do what the composer says,” but a time for discussion, listening, experimentation, and improvisation⁴⁹.

These teachers and their colleagues are overcoming the challenges of their training, the difficulties of resource management, and student prejudice to teach both World Music and Common Practice music in Calgary classrooms. Their passion and resourcefulness are propelling students like Liyana into cultural environments in music that mirror the environments they encounter in everyday life.

⁴⁴ Cain and Walden. Pp. 11.

⁴⁵ Ibid. pp. 25.

⁴⁶ Ibid. pp. 15.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid. pp. 9.

⁴⁹ Ibid. pp. 18.

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