

Reflections on Music Education in Inclusive Contexts

Leslie Kent

Western University

9586L – Special Topics in Music Education: Music Education in Inclusive Contexts

Dr. Cathy Benedict

July 17, 2020

I thought I knew what inclusive meant.

Yes, there were aspects of each of the topics we covered that I was familiar with. I have lived 19 years as the advocate for a special needs child, so much in those discussions I wanted to echo, vouch for, sadly acknowledge. However, there were some aspects of the disability conversation that I felt that blooming sense of realization, especially regarding physical disabilities. My son has always been mobile, generally has had use of his extremities and control over his bodily functions. It was due to these mental pathways now open, that I realized while driving through Caledonia recently, that those “pretty” new crosswalks with patterns of different coloured, and textured bricks was likely not just to dress up the town!

Likewise, I thought I had a fairly extensive understanding of racial and cultural inclusion. After all, I’m mothering a beautiful brown child. (That’s his chosen descriptive!) We studied Jamaica for a month just so that we could actively encourage him in the knowledge of this heritage. We’ve established a warm and loving relationship with his paternal family, who live daily with the racial inequalities that are now being reported on the news, splashed across Facebook, and depicted on Instagram. I helped my parents raise two brown daughters, one who still regards me as her second mother, 19 years my junior. But something I’ve realized these past two weeks: Culture can be learned about. Culture can be respected. Cultural challenges can be empathized with. But I cannot live it, will never live it. Even if someday the treatment of my son breaks my heart, I will not live it.

Colonization was a topic I was eager to arrive at during the second week. Why? Because I had no idea what it meant. Well, of course, from a historical perspective, I knew what it meant to colonize a nation, but I was perplexed how it continued to apply to our modern context. Much in the way I discovered what systemic racism meant when I lived in Chicago, in relation to aggressive instances of

racism, colonization in this contemporary usage was bared somewhat more clearly to me. I think of it now as the river drawing the boat of systemic racism along, with perhaps the personhood of antagonistic racial acts sitting in the bow. This discussion also more clearly revealed what my position of privilege truly looks like. I know it will take an ongoing nature of awareness and reflection to continue to perceive that insidious condition, but I feel as though it may start coming more, and more easily.

Unfortunately, we did not have enough time, other than in my group discussion to get into inclusion as it pertains to the Indigenous nations. I have long had a deep seeded empathy, laced with outrage for the historical treatment of the First Peoples. While clearly, with documents like “Aboriginal Perspectives”(Ministry of Education, 2009), or “Full Circle: First Nations, Métis, Inuit, Ways of Knowing” (OSSTF/FEESO, 2012), curricular resources and encouragement to include indigenous ways of knowing are more apparent than they ever have been, I was exposed to equally powerful messages in my highschool classes, now over twenty-seven years ago. Interviews with indigenous young adults, caught between the hopelessness of remaining on their reserve, and the rejection from their families and friends if they attempted to take employment off it. Articles documenting the travesty of the James Bay reserve being flooded beyond habitability, and no one taking responsibility for it. A CBC movie, a docu-drama about the residential schools entitled “Where the Spirit Lives”, featuring a young girl captured and imprisoned in that wretched system. Her name was Ashtoh-komi. I have a binder kept in my filing cabinet with all these resources—and yet I didn’t have to get it out and refer to it; I remembered each detail that I just typed above. This is how powerfully that information affected me. My third comment submitted in our “individual issue” assignment was simply “FOURTEEN THOUSAND DOLLARS!?”, in reference to the story detailed in the Sensoy & DiAngelo (2017) chapter, “Yeah, but....”Common Rebuttals. This simply reflected my horror and disgust that residential school survivor Nora Bernard only received \$14,000 in compensation for her ravaged life at the hands of that system. Chantel’s presentation was an inspiring example that schools can move beyond shocking articles and emotional

movie depictions, and into real bridge building that is raising this generation with a holistic, comprehensive education concerning the respect for Indigenous rights.

My “Why am I here” statement (from our Voicethread video), had three points. The third read “My religious upbringing makes it difficult for me to address gender issues. I want to find the balance between holding onto my personal beliefs, and yet respecting and making each child in my workplace feel they belong”. “Rie’s Story, Ryan’s Journey: Music in the life of a Transgender student (Nichols, 2013) was a study I was aware of before this class, and yet made no effort to read. I’ve used the excuse that I was too busy reading the studies more pertinent to my capstone, but who am I kidding, I could have found the 15 minutes. But I was scared. Scared that what I would read there might bring yet again, more tumultuous mental wrangling that in raising two daughters going through the public high school system, I’ve had to embark upon more times than I wished to. But what I read there, and in the study “We are often invisible” (Palkki & Caldwell, 2018), brought to mind a verse from the Bible that many people know—only because jokes concerning it’s brevity have become the fodder of catechism classes. John 11:35 says “Jesus wept”. He was weeping because he’d arrived at the home of a good friend to find that the friend had passed away from his ailment, and was now already buried. Jesus had been informed...the family had hoped Jesus would come, but for reasons that scholars still debate, he did not, and instead arrived to find the two heartbroken sisters of his friend. And Jesus was moved by the grief of these sisters, and moved by the appearance of his friend, already placed in the tomb. And my heart broke for Rie. I determined that compassion, respect, and yes, love will be my first response. Furthermore, Andrew’s presentation awed me with his bravery; the courage to admit that he too struggled with how to stand firm in his beliefs and yet show love and respect. Again, I resolved that I will, at every opportunity I’m given, seek the ways that I can show respect and acceptance, even if my core beliefs are incommensurate (my new favourite word!) with another’s. Some may not still understand this. Some may not feel this is even logically possible.

But the greatest of these, is love.

REFERENCES

- Aboriginal perspectives: The teacher's toolkit: Aboriginal perspectives bring the curriculum to life! = Perspectives autochtones: Boîte à outils: Perspectives autochtones: Un éclairage nouveau sur le curriculum.* (2008). Toronto: Govt. of Ontario.
- Nichols, J. (2013). Rie's Story, Ryan's Journey. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 61(3), 262-279.
doi:10.1177/0022429413498259
- Palkki, J., & Caldwell, P. (2017). "We are often invisible": A survey on safe space for LGBTQ students in secondary school choral programs. *Research Studies in Music Education*, 40(1), 28-49.
doi:10.1177/1321103x17734973
- Sensoy, O., DiAngelo, R. J., & Banks, J. A. (2017). "Yeah, But...": Common Rebuttals. In *Is everyone really equal?: An introduction to key concepts in social justice education* (pp. 185-198). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Wallace, A., & Ambridge, S. (2012). *Full circle: First Nations, Métis, Inuit ways of knowing: A Common threads resource* (Canada). Toronto: OSSTF/FEESO.