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The Influence of Informal Music Education in Teacher Formation: An Autoethnography

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Abstract

In this paper I explore how my musical background, teaching skills, understanding and knowledge as well as music-making abilities and skills, have formed my current self as musician, teacher and researcher. An autoethnographical method is used to investigate my background, including the different modes of music education I received. From this qualitative study, it was possible to find that my interests along with the methods of interpretations I practice in the field of multicultural music are influenced by and formulated through my appreciation and understandings of and beliefs gained from education. Most importantly, they are shaped by the social context, cultural placing, and life experiences.

Keywords

Respect, Identity, Formal and Informal Music Education, Musical Background, Multicultural Music, Autoethnography

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The Influence of Informal Music Education in Teacher Formation: An Autoethnography

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In this paper I explore how my musical background, teaching skills, understanding and knowledge as well as music-making abilities and skills, have formed my current self as musician, teacher and researcher. An autoethnographical method is used to investigate my background, including the different modes of music education I received. From this qualitative study, it was possible to find that my interests along with the methods of interpretations I practice in the field of multicultural music are influenced by and formulated through my appreciation and understandings of and beliefs gained from education. Most importantly, they are shaped by the social context, cultural placing, and life experiences. Keywords: Respect, Identity, Formal and Informal Music Education, Musical Background, Multicultural Music, Autoethnography

Asmus (2005) noted that “there is very little research on the impact of music education in the home, school, and community” (p. 6.11). Furthermore, he argues that enquiries should be focused on the outcomes of music education rather than the actual teaching and learning of the discipline *per se*. Asmus suggested that this “would give insights as to how music education could better serve its broader constituencies” (p. 6.11). This present investigation responds to this call *via* a single (self) case study. Willingham (2009) advocated that “we teach who we are” (p. 59) so it is important to explore the background that formed “who I am” now, including the different modes of my formal, informal, encultured and immersion music education and the influences which shaped my music learning and teaching practice. My research question is, “Who am I and how did I become this present musician, teacher and researcher?”

The Researcher

I am a doctoral candidate in music education, a studio and school music teacher, and a performer in music and theatre arts. This study explores the influences that have shaped my musicality and the teacher I have become. Rodriguez (2009) explained, “how one conceptualizes musicality shapes everything else one does in the profession” (p. 37). Rodriguez (2009) defined musicality as “quite a bit more from decoding/encoding notational skills” and that “it encompasses a broad range of traditional and emergent skills and sensitivities” (p. 37). Therefore, it is important to understand the place that music holds in my life in order to illuminate the reasons behind my motivation to investigate authentic practices in school music programs in state schools in Victoria, Australia. This includes visiting multicultural artists, an aspect of my doctoral project. The definition of authentic practices in music programs are the use of proper teaching material and pedagogical approaches, including traditional methods of transmission (teaching and learning) that belongs to a particular culture (Campbell &

Schippers, 2005). Most importantly, this article will influence the intended presentation format of my doctoral thesis. Additional potential benefits of this study for stakeholders such as identification of different approaches to learning and teaching (multicultural) music will be discussed throughout this article. This paper also offers insights into how cultures, contexts, and teachers can influence students.

Research Approach and Methodology

Autoethnography is employed as the methodological approach in this research study. Mallet (2011) defined autoethnography as a form of autobiographical personal narrative that explores the author's experience of life. Antikainen, Houtsonen, Huotelin, and Kauppila (1996) emphasize the importance of autobiographical awareness as well as a person's understandings of his or her identity and background. My work draws on personal lived experience (Morse, 1994; Van Mannen, 1997) through autoethnography (Heewon, 2008). Reed-Danahay (1997) described "autoethnography" as a genre of writing and a research method that connects the personal to the cultural, placing the self within a social context. In this study, I apply an exploration of self-image combined with a presentation of societies and cultures that I have encountered. Karpiak (2010) explains that "writing their stories motivate students to consider what they have gained and what they have come to know, either about themselves or others" (p. 54). In this case, as a student who has learned and continues to learn music from various sources, I exploit this autoethnography as an educational process to improve my own knowledge and understandings including pedagogical practices and to share those experiences, motives, and achievements with others. The other goal of this autobiographical research is to explore how such lived experiences reflect on "the social and cultural aspects of the personal" (Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2008, p. 24). This study investigates the formation of my identity in the fields of music and music education as a student, performer, and teacher (Nethsinghe, 2011) and as a novice researcher and academic. As an educational process, this self-awareness will advance my self-knowledge and personal development (Britzman, 1998). Roberts (2004) defined this process as researching "identity construction" or searching for "who is he (or she) and how did he or she get to be that person" (p. 3). A few researchers (Nketia, 1988; Nethsinghe, 2012) have investigated the influence of music education on students' identity construction. Temmerman (2005) pointed out that learning different styles of music is "closely linked to young people's sense of developing personal identity" (p. 115), something which has occurred throughout my life. Furthering this experience of learning different types of music through different educational modes underpins my explorations of the identity construction of musicians and music teachers. Autoethnography is the study of identity construction that Eakin (2008) confirms as the ongoing process of identity development. Thus, autoethnography is the most appropriate method to employ in my discussion of my own identity formation.

This paper also explores how my musical background, understandings, learning, music-making abilities, and skills have formed my present identity as musician, educator, and researcher. Tenni, Smythe, and Boucher (2003) pinpoint that "research questions pertaining to one's own professional practice or personal experience clearly require the researcher to study themselves" (Introduction, para. 3) in order to discover the reasons

underpinning professional practice. Mezirow (2000) pointed out that “our understandings and beliefs are more dependable when they produce interpretations and opinions” (p. 4). This life story retains characteristics of a reflective qualitative report rather than a narrative (genre) in which autoethnographical works are commonly presented. As a “critical reflective practitioner” (Quicke, 2010, p. 239), the method of autoethnography which I have employed in this study can be recognized as the most appropriate method that could have answered my personal research question. Autoethnography has been successfully used in many studies (e.g., de Vries, 2010; Mercer & Zhegin, 2011). In their book *Music Autoethnographies*, Bartleet and Ellis (2009) provide examples of autoethnographic narratives written by researchers in the field of music regarding their personal experiences of composing, improvising, interpreting, performing, learning, teaching, and researching music and musicianship. This work and *Music Informal Learning and the School* (Green, 2008) mainly influenced the writing of my autoethnographic narrative.

For this study, I gleaned information from personal journals, photographs, performance programs, and records of achievements including certificates, newspaper articles, and information collected by talking to family members. Tenni et al. (2003) pointed out that in an autobiographical enquiry “we must write about what we really prefer not to write about” (Creating Good Data, para. 1). Writing this autoethnography was one of the most difficult tasks that I have encountered, as I felt uncomfortable articulating my personal achievements. Culturally it feels inappropriate to display myself in a good light as this sound like boasting about personal achievements. It was also hard to discuss some conflicts I faced as a school student, but the findings of this study presented at the end of this article provided me with some valuable insights about what shaped my professional practice and beliefs.

My Roots

I was born on an island called Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), which was colonized by a few different European nations. I lived in a coastal town called Moratuwa near the capital of Colombo that was popular for its, fishing, and furniture manufacturing. People in this town were descendants of the Dutch, Portuguese, Tamil, Moors (Muslims), and Sinhalese cultures. These people followed Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic religious faiths. When I trace my family roots, it is possible to find a mix of Dutch, Portuguese, English and mainly Sinhalese heritage. My religious background is influenced by two main religions, Christianity and Buddhism. Most of the population living in my home area were Christians and they were known to be partying (singing, music-making), “jolly good” people. Similar to Peters’ (2009) description of his musical background, my musically rich environment also was “a product of the cultural beliefs and values embedded in the ethnic/religious group that my family belonged to” (p. 199). This environment was a common and shared experience for most people who lived in this area. Many popular Sri Lankan artists and skilled musicians came from or lived in my hometown (known as the most musical town in Sri Lanka). Most importantly, a musical style called “Vaada Baila” (a sort of Baila with a debate in lyrics) began in this area. The Baila, also now known as 6/8 among local musicians, is the Sri Lankan equivalent of Kaffringha Baila (a Portuguese folk music style) that is similar to the Mauritian ‘Saga’,

which also has the same Portuguese musical roots. Another unique type of music practiced in this area called the Sri Lankan “Sinhala Calypso” seems to be related to Spanish music. Spanish acoustic guitars are the main instruments used in the Sinhala Calypso while percussion instruments accompany the singing. A “tea chest bass” (an upright bass made out of an empty wooden box with a stick on top attached to a single string) plays the bass line. This town and its (musical) people have strong links to multicultural music performances. This directly influenced my desire to learn music, especially popular compositions, from other countries. Among these local people were talented musicians who sang and played with different professional musical ensembles and bands in Sri Lanka.

How and Where It All Started

“Is that the original tone? Is that the register it’s being played?” These are some of the questions/discussions I often heard from musicians learning and practicing cover songs aurally in search of that particular sound in which a piece of music has been originally recorded. Green (2008) pointed out that copying music by ear is a common and very important learning practice for most popular musicians across the world. When I was a toddler, my next-door neighbour owned one of the largest musical and sound equipment rentals and recording studios in Sri Lanka. I often heard musicians practicing next door, many of whom were very popular performing artists in Sri Lanka. When they used sound amplification I could clearly hear from my home the music and subsequent comments as well as when they corrected themselves in order to find the proper notes, chords, tones, styles, and other qualities of music that they played. These musicians wanted to be perfect in all aspects of the music they played. This influenced my practice and desire to research the most accurate and musically authentic recreation of the works they performed. When my parents had time, I asked them to take me next door to observe the Sri Lankan musicians.

When I was about four or five years old, I was allowed to go there independently. I spent most of my time watching these musicians practice. There I saw many other musicians gathered round to watch and listen to these artists (popular musicians) practicing, which I now recognize as informal learning by observation. Green (2008) found that “different band members will demonstrate learnt or original musical ideas to each other” (p. 7). She further explained, “these informal practices continue to form the essential core of most popular musicians’ learning” (p. 5). In my town, the observers hardly had the opportunity to talk to those busy performers, yet they waited anxiously to ask questions during a short break through the tiny gap of the half-opened door in case these artists agreed to explain things. This recording studio was a small room packed with musical equipment and instruments with very limited space with one’s gear assembled for rehearsals. It was hard to accommodate more than six musicians at a time in this room. Green (2008) found that young musicians learn from a community of peers, explaining that “pupils unconsciously or semiconsciously pickup skills and knowledge through watching, imitating and listening to each other” (p. 126). Wanger (1998) identified learning as social participation, where learners (amateur musicians) in this instance construct their identities (as musicians) in relation to communities of practice (musical groups/artists).

As our neighbour owned the studio next door, I was allowed to go in the studio and watch the musicians, but my mother did not like me going inside as most of the musicians smoked cigarettes. My parents did not want these musicians to influence me. They were afraid I might become a musician. Most parents in Sri Lankan society want their children to become doctors, lawyers, engineers, or accountants. My parents were no different and they expected me to follow the traditional occupation of our family, which was accountancy. In Sri Lankan society at that time, some performers were believed to be people who misbehave, sometimes ruining their whole lives getting into trouble due to the consumption of alcohol and various drugs. Despite my parents' concerns, I managed to observe the musicians next door two days per week and heard them practicing every day. This early informal and immersive music learning later played a major role in the selection of my future career – music education. In a research study, Smilde (2008) found that this kind of informal music learning played a significant role for most of his participants. Rodriguez (2009) identified the value of informal music learning, stating, “the more familiar I become with informal learning, the more I see formal qualities in it” (p. 37). Many researchers consider the value of informal learning to be in engendering music transformation. Blacking (1973) stated that participatory communal learning is a successful way to promote musical authenticity. Green (2008) noted the effectiveness of learning by engagement, copying, playing music by ear (improving aural skills), and experimentation in informal settings. She also highlighted the value of enculturation in some learning practices. Bartolome and Campbell (2009) discussed the importance of learning through participation outside of formal institutions such as community bands, choirs, and orchestras. Most importantly, Paul and Ballantine (2002) argued that “much of an individual's music education, in fact, informal in nature” (p. 566). I agree with this, due to my own music learning experiences, and also note the significant contribution made by the home musical environment.

My Domestic Musical Environment

The other most important factor that influenced my musical background was music that we played at family gatherings and that I listened to at home on the radio. My father's collection of records, including The Ventures, The Shadows, Santana, Kenny Rogers, Jim Reeves, Engelbert Humperdinck, Cliff Richards, Elvis Presley, and The Beatles all played an influential role in my life. One of the most influential factors on student learning in school is the home environment (Garber & Ware, 1972; Shapiro & Bloom, 1977). Oslon (1984) also noted the influence of parenting and home environment on student achievements. Asmus (2005) agreed that “the home environment and its associated factors are the primary determinants of student learning” (p.6.10). My father was a talented amateur musician who played harmonica, Hawaiian guitar, piano, and percussion instruments. At least once a week we used to have singalong parties) where I played different instruments by ear from a tender age. Local musicians identified artists with the ability to play an instrument by ear as talented, while young people with musical abilities were “talented chaps.” Brand (1986) agreed that the home musical environment was strongly related to musical achievements, specifically parents' appreciation of music, shared participation in musical events, and the parents' ability to play an instrument. The informal learning of my home environment provided me with the confidence to perform

publicly and enhanced my formal music learning later in life. For example, I could play many chords before learning them formally both on guitar and keyboard. Green (2008) explained that through inclusion in music-making children grasp musical skills such as performing, creating, and listening “in ways that are similar to how they pickup linguistic skills” (p. 5). Listening to recorded music is another important factor that influenced my appreciation for music.

Music broadcasts on the radio played an important role during my childhood. Radio Ceylon (now the Sri Lankan Broadcasting Corporation) used to play popular songs from many different cultures and languages. These included songs such as *Lasciate Mi Cantere*, *Malaika*, *La bamba*, *Guantanamera*, *Pepito mi corazon*, *Sayonara* (both in English and Japanese), *Rasa Sayang Day* and Hindi songs (Indian classical music such as Raga, including Karnatic, Bhajan, and popular Bolliwood songs), all of which influenced my later interest in multicultural music. The English language radio channels played popular Western radio shows including *Pops in Germany*, *British Top Ten* and all the American *Top Hits*. There were other channels that played Western classical music, but as I remember, it was a rare experience to hear jazz music on Sri Lankan radio. There were channels that broadcast traditional, folk, modern, and popular Sinhala and Tamil music. Sinhala and Tamil are two official languages spoken in Sri Lanka and English is the main foreign language spoken by locals. At home, we would listen to our favorite musical programs presented on a variety of these radio channels in different languages. As a result, I could memorize lyrics and sing most of those songs (in foreign languages) just by listening to the sounds and imitating words without knowing the proper pronunciation or the meaning. This was a common practice in our community as we sang most of these popular songs at social gatherings. In professional venues such as clubs, halls, and hotels where tourists stayed, professional local cover bands played a range of popular music from different languages. These were very competent performers with up-to-date equipment and instruments. There was a competitive environment among Sri Lankan musicians who tried to sound as close to the original recordings as possible. I grew up surrounded by all these musical experiences until I started school.

School and Formal Music Education

From the beginning of my schooling to grade five (at eleven years of age) I concentrated on academic studies (mathematics, general knowledge, and languages – Sinhala and English) as I had to sit for the state scholarship examination (in grade five) in order to attend one of the best selective schools in the city of Colombo. These prestigious schools only select pupils with highest scores and possess more facilities and educational resources than other schools in the country. Students from different cultural and religious backgrounds attended this new school. Based on my success in the competitive entrance examinations, I placed in grade six of this new multicultural school. I studied both Western and what was termed ‘Oriental’ (a mix of Indian Classical and Sri Lankan Folk) music and took private piano lessons from a Western ‘Classical’ trained teacher from grades six to nine. During this four-year period, I attended workshops provided by traditional Sri Lankan ‘low country drummers’ where I experienced a type of music learning explained by Green (2008) as “guru-shishya” or “master-apprenticeship” training (p. 5). In this format, music is “learnt by enculturation and extended immersion

in listening to, watching and imitating the music and the music making practice” (p. 6). With my experience learning from traditional drummers, I joined a local theatre group operated by a school in my hometown and played in the orchestra for stage dramas. I was fifteen years old and studying in grade nine at school. This provided me with a variety of experiences and I gained skills in different areas of live performances. In year eight, due to a conflict with the teacher around different cultural understandings, I stopped taking Western Classical music. The teacher, who adored Western culture, believed that Western music exists for Westerners only and therefore, in front the whole class she advised me to stop attending her class and join the Eastern/Oriental music class. According to her, my skin colour (dark brown) and the main language I spoke (Sinhalese) were not appropriate for studying Western Classical music or engaging with that society. Now, this kind of vitriol is called racism and bullying, but then (about twenty-five years ago) it was considered normal behaviour in Sri Lanka. This treatment by a teacher meant that I stopped attending Western Classical music classes. However, I found other extra-curricular outlets for my music interests such as the College Cadet Band and the popular group that I played with.

This school experience motivated me to join the College Cadet Band (a Western brass band) trained by the Sri Lankan Army. In Sri Lanka, all 16 year-old year ten school students must take the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level examination in order to continue their further studies at school. During the off-study period after sitting for this examination, I joined a professional musical band that played popular music led by a Sri Lankan star vocalist on bass guitar. The issue I encountered in Western Classical Music class did not discourage me; instead, this experience motivated me to learn other types of music in different settings (both in and out of school), including popular music. This provided me with an opportunity to become an active music performer. This engagement with a professional musical band changed my destiny.

The Life-Changing Experience

Following the family tradition, my father wanted me to become an accountant (my father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and many relatives were accountants). Therefore, I had to choose commerce subjects for my General Certificate of Advanced Level studies at school. However, the experience of joining the musical group changed my whole life in a very short period. This engagement provided me with the prospects of learning skills from peers labelled as “group learning” by Green (2008): “where learning takes place through watching and imitation as well as talking about music during and outside of rehearsals” (p. 7). During this time in Sri Lanka, we rarely had access to the Internet and written music resources for popular music. We had to depend on recordings, aural skills in copying recordings, and peers, including their resources to learn the music we performed. We shared music tapes among musicians and I had the advantage of accessing much-loved jazz music recordings that were rarely played on the radio. I also had access to many video music lessons that I used for self-studying. Self-studying is described by Green (2008) as “solitary learning” (p. 6). Green (2008) explained, “copying recordings is almost always a solitary activity” (p. 7). The learning experiences I had were enriched by the valuable and rare opportunities to observe, attend workshops, jam with, and learn from world famous bands and musicians that visited Sri Lanka,

including Kool and the Gang, Osibisa, and Wailers which was a privilege that was accessible only for a very few musicians who played for top bands in our society.

In exploring the broader field of music I had the opportunity to work with many different music professionals, gaining valuable knowledge from music directors, sound engineers (during recordings and live performances), television musical program producers, and musical art directors. Eventually I was put in charge of our band's sound system and thus taking responsibility of balancing, equalizing, and arranging the sound gear. This was on the job-style learning from professional sound engineers. I had to operate the sound equipment for all events except outdoor musical concerts where a professional sound engineer was hired. It was a huge responsibility that I enjoyed carrying out and I learnt skills from being the bass guitarist of the band. Like most other bands, in addition to performing popular cover songs, we produced our own songs and video clips. We composed music as a group and engaged in a range of practices including improvisation and jamming. These gigs provided me with a lot of valuable experiences and benefits, including financial benefits. In fact, at that time I had the highest income in our family. Most importantly, I began informally helping and teaching other upcoming young musicians while playing with the group. This was when I began teaching, which was to become very important later in my musical career.

Perestroika (The Reform)

I attended school during the daytime while playing music as a semi-professional musician mostly on the weekends. At school, I continued playing in the Cadet Band and eventually became the leader/conductor of the band. However, my father suddenly passed away at age forty-two when I was just eighteen. This tragedy turned my whole life in a different direction as it opened the path to become a musician rather than an accountant. My father had wanted me to follow in his footsteps but at the time of his death I was financially independent and earning a living as a semi-professional musician playing with a leading band in Sri Lanka. Without considering the objections of highly-educated relatives who advised against becoming a musician, I left for the USSR to formally study music after receiving a scholarship towards my music education. At the Donetsk State Conservatory, I earned a Bachelor's Degree in music. While there, I focused on learning Contemporary World Music including Jazz. During the first year, I studied the Russian language, one of the many languages that I speak fluently, and some units in music theory for the entrance exam. I passed the entrance examination because of hard work during this first year. At the conservatory, I studied among students and teachers that came from different cultural backgrounds such as Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Georgian, Armenian, Polish, German, Greek, Jewish, Tatar Mongolian, Turkish, and many other nationalities. As the conservatory was a pedagogical institute where they trained music teachers, we had to mentor/instruct the students from the immediate junior year during the four years of the course except the first year. During this period, from 1992-1996, I played in many ensembles including the big band of the conservatory, for which I helped represent the institution at national and international jazz music festivals and competitions. As these ensembles won several grand prizes, I received the honorary title of Laureate National (all Ukraine) and International Jazz music festivals in 1996. I also joined the Donetsk City Jazz Club and the Philharmonic Jazz band (called "Esth

thakoi Ostrov,” which means “There is such an Island,” named on behalf of my coming from the island of Sri Lanka). With this jazz band, I had the opportunity to perform with many leading international jazz musicians, travel and tour European countries, and participate in jazz music festivals and competitions. I continued this until my departure from the Ukraine at the end of 1999. I had graduated as a concert performer and a music teacher in 1996 and had continued my studies, undertaking a Master’s Degree in Music. Once I earned my Bachelor’s, the conservatory offered a position of an instructor. While working as an instructor, I joined the Donetsk State Russian Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet in 1996 as an artist in the orchestra. This provided me with an opportunity to compose music for a modern ballet.

In order to launch a modern ballet project using multicultural music, the theater director and main choreographer invited a few colleagues and me to join them. They preferred to use electronic equipment and a few musicians instead of a traditional symphony orchestra. We formed a musical group called *Adam’s Peak*, named after a holy mountain in Sri Lanka, to compose and perform for them. The first project was *Turangaleela*, a modern ballet based on a mythical Indian story where I used my knowledge of Indian and Sri Lankan folk/classical music in composing music with the group. This ballet won the prize for the best modern musical project in Ukraine in 1997. That same year I re-arranged Edvard Grieg’s incidental music for the verse drama *Peer Gynt*, converting it into a modern ballet. My major role was to use my knowledge of multicultural music in act IV of the ballet, where the main character (Peer) took part in various occupations as he travelled in the Middle East.

During my nine-year stay in the Ukraine my mother was working in the United Arab Emirates. I regularly visited her and was able to learn Arabic music from culture-bearers in workshops and improvisation sessions. These formal and informal lessons were very useful for the percussion and flute music in *Peer Gynt*. This ballet was selected for performance at the 2000th anniversary celebrations of the Norwegian historical capital Oslo. In 1998, as a member of the group *Adam’s Peak*, I composed music and performed a musical suite entitled *The Children of Ocean*. This multicultural musical piece won the prize for the best musical project in Ukraine. I was able to use the knowledge of world music that I learnt thorough my life. I graduated with a Master’ Degree in Music from the Donetsk State Conservatory in 1998 and accepted the position of the musical art director at the *III ROME*, a cultural entertainment center in the city of Donetsk. I also continued my teaching duties as the world music instructor at the Donetsk State Conservatory. During this period, in conjunction with the Donetsk State Theatre of Opera and Ballet, I became the musical director for Stars of the International Ballet Festival II in 1998 and III in the following year.

At the end of 1999, I returned to Sri Lanka, where I lived until migrating to Australia in 2003. In Sri Lanka, I had the opportunity to gain valuable experience by composing music for two multicultural stage dramas. The first drama was *Yerma*, written by Spanish dramatist Federico García Lorca. The script, a drama in musical verse and translated into Sinhalese, incorporated a lot of singing. The music composed for this drama combined Spanish and Sri Lankan styles. I directed music for this drama playing flamenco style Spanish guitar. In 2001, I arranged music for a drama called *Asinamali* by Mbongeni Ngema, also translated into Sinhalese. This drama incorporated African music using only voices and percussion instruments such as lunga djembe drums, shakers,

guiro and agogo bells. During this period, I also worked as a music instructor with a prominent local Sri Lankan drama research and activation foundation while continuing to perform as a bass guitarist with a local rock band called Sound Journey. I also taught music in various institutions.

After migrating to Australia in 2003, I continued composing and arranging music for dramas. Since then I have worked with four different cultural communities (Sri Lankan, Russian, Ukrainian, and Indian) in Melbourne, developing and presenting community music and theatre events such as concerts, multicultural festivals, and theatrical performances. In 2006, I composed, directed, and performed (as a member of the orchestra) the music for *Agamemnon*, a Greek tragedy translated into Sinhalese and presented at the Moat Festival at La Trobe University, Melbourne. I put a lot of effort into researching Greek traditional music on which to base my compositions. I also undertook voluntary work with the Sri Lankan community in Melbourne, composing and directing music for cultural events such as the Independence Day celebrations and children's drama productions. Upon a request from the members of Sri Lankan community in the southeastern suburbs in Melbourne, I started private weekend music lessons for children in 2006. This move towards teaching music opened another aspect of my professional life. Even though I have been instructing, mentoring, teaching, and facilitating music learning throughout my life, this was the first time I considered becoming a professional music teacher.

Joining the Teaching Profession

As a result, in 2007, I undertook a course for overseas-qualified teachers at the Holmesglen Institute of Technical and Further Education and followed with a Graduate Diploma of Education in 2008 at Monash University in which I studied music education. Smilde (2008) noted that this professional shift (in the music field) was "the most common combination in a portfolio career is that of a performer and a teacher" (p. 243). The decision to continue my studies almost ten years after finishing the Master's Degree opened another chapter in my lifelong learning which Smilde (2008) explained as "an important conceptual framework for the improvement of people's employability and adaptability" (p. 243). This was highly applicable in my case. Finding employment as a musician in Australia had not been that successful, however, in 2007 I was recognized for the work I did for the community as a volunteer musician. I received the Excellence Award for my contributions to the field of music and cultural events from the Sri Lankan Study Centre for the Advancement of Technology and Social Welfare, which was formed by members of the Sri Lankan community in Melbourne.

When I began my Graduate Diploma of Education, I was fortunate to learn from one of the best teachers and academics that I have met in my educational journey. This music educator encouraged me to continue my studies (sharpening the hidden abilities I had) in academic research in the field of music education. After gaining this qualification to obtain the registration to teach, I started teaching in different schools as a part-time music teacher. As a practicing teacher, I encountered a few issues that I thought worthy of investigation. Such issues concerned identifying authentic approaches to teach multicultural music in schools, what constitutes authenticity *per se*, the apparent lack of professional development for teachers in multicultural music, and the pre-service

preparation of qualified teachers to teach multicultural music. As I did not have prior research experience, in 2009 I did an Honours Degree of Bachelor's of Education with a minor research thesis component that researched and reflected on my own teaching practice in the field of multicultural music education (Nethsinghe, 2012).

In 2010, I started reading for a doctorate that further explored effective and authentic practices in multicultural music teaching in Victorian schools using the knowledge I had gained from learning music formally, informally, and through enculturation. The reasons for selecting this research topic and the motivation behind it are based on past musical experiences and my cultural and general background, including the pedagogical knowledge that I have accumulated throughout my lifetime living in various places and working in different positions and with different peoples in the field of music. This awareness of my own background serves to inform and guide my research, teaching, learning, and appreciation of multicultural music, which I believe must include cultural tolerance and respect. It is now possible to see myself as a teacher, researcher, and beginning academic who is scaffolding a path in music education and attempting to contribute knowledge through academic research to improve multicultural music teaching and learning (Nethsinghe, 2011). This is important to my local context, as the state of Victoria is identified as the most culturally diverse in Australia (Victorian Multicultural Commission, n.d.). Many researchers have recognized the importance of multicultural music education for students, especially in places where there are multicultural societies (Blacking 1973, 1995; Campbell & Schippers, 2005; Klopper, 2005; Nzewi, 2003; Reimer, 2002). My ambition is to contribute my knowledge and skills as a music teacher and a teacher-researcher to improve and promote multicultural music education, or “meaningful arts education.” Joseph (2007) argues that “meaningful arts education practices in schools can enrich the cultural variety of contemporary and future society” (p. 28). Confirming this idea, Gould (2009) pointed out that “music education as an important professional space for social change” (p. xi). This autoethnographic exploration not only informs my own practice as a musician, teacher, and researcher but also offers insights into how cultures, contexts, and teachers can influence others. Without significant teachers (both positive and negative), I would not be who I am today. Without culturally open and informed colleagues, I would not have had the opportunities that I was given. The significance of teachers and culture in the formation of future musicians, teachers, and researchers cannot be overstated.

Findings, Continuation, Conclusion

Autoethnography, the method used in this study, “is presented as a vehicle to operationalise social constructionist research and practices that aims to establish trustworthiness and authenticity” (McIlveen, 2008, p. 13). In my search for authenticity in my music and music education, this self-awareness studied through autoethnography continues to play a vital role. This autobiographical study explores the reasons behind my motivation for researching the field of multicultural music education. Further, it explains my desire to improve my own professional practice as a student, teacher, and researcher and most importantly share my experiences and knowledge with others. In this case, it is possible to recognize my interests along with the methods of interpretations I practice in the field of multicultural music, including transformational methods of teaching that are

formed by my appreciation, understandings, and beliefs gained from education. Most importantly, they are shaped by the social context, cultural placing, and life experiences. Describing this phenomenon further, Smilde (2008) advocated that “significant parts of a life story actually form a musician’s (professional) identity, within the concept of lifelong learning, personal and professional development is closely interconnected” (p. 224). I never regret the decision that I made taking this career path to become a musician followed by a music teacher, researcher, and academic. I managed to gain a wealth of musical, professional, and personal knowledge and valuable experiences and skills including opportunities to travel combined with the experience of meeting and working with different people and making friends by choosing this career path as a musician. There are many different career paths related to the field of music in case a change is necessary. My experiences as a musician gave me the opportunity to share my knowledge of becoming a teacher at a later stage. Therefore, in my teaching, it is possible to employ pedagogical practices described as “traversing a continuum of immersion that ranges from the experience of a born culture bearer to that of a tourist” (Joseph & Southcott, 2010, p. 76). Upon reflecting on my experiences, it is extremely important to mention the influence and the guidance of experienced professionals and brilliant teachers from diverse cultural backgrounds who know not only the subject and field but also practice effective transmission methods and strategies. In other words, I continue to be fortunate enough to have the guidance of outstanding, skilled people identified as educationalists, instructors, lecturers, mentors, tutors, facilitators, elders, and “gurus” (the latest popular word borrowed from Sanskrit, a historical Indo-Aryan language; Nethsinghe, 2011), all of whom have helped me become who I am today. The respect that I have accumulated towards music education, peer musicians, and teachers played a major role on the outcomes of my learning process. O’Neill (2009) cited Barack Obama’s speech during the 2008 United States presidential campaign stating that “music education is upheld as a way of teaching mutual respect and intercultural understanding” (p. 71) which is the case in my situation. Today, more than ever, children in many countries interact with peoples from diverse cultures, ethnicities, and religions. For students from a rich blend of cultural traditions in contemporary classrooms learning tolerance is vital and this life story may contribute to the improvement of knowledge and understandings of multiculturalism and tolerance. Furthermore, this articulated autoethnography will be useful for stakeholders to improve their knowledge and practice of teaching and learning multicultural music formally and informally in different environments. This study also contributes to a greater understanding regarding the authenticity in multicultural music, which is an important current issue in the field.

This study provided important insights into the way I experienced music and the way music has impacted my life from my own point of view. It is necessary to mention the foundation beneath my self-discipline is the way I grew up, the home (musical) environment, and my own cultural background, including the influence of diverse cultures that I came across in this life journey. Therefore, I hope it is possible for me to fulfil my professional obligation as a music educator “to provide students with music programs that are intellectually honest, personally enriching and communally compelling” (Countryman, 2008, p. 24). Finally, it is important to mention this whole life experience cultivated a strong empathy in me: I believe that learning is an ongoing,

lifelong process and no matter how good you are, it is always possible to learn new things and improve existing skills.

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