

Learning Through Popular Music, Lessons for the General Music Programme Syllabus in Singapore

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KEY IMPLICATIONS

1. Learning Needs Analysis (LNA) Survey results indicate a preference to work from symbol to sound rather than sound to symbol as would have been the practice in popular music-making.
2. Teachers indicated (i) range and combination of formal through informal learning, and (ii) some level of structure and sequence in popular music-teaching and learning in the classroom.
3. All student performances—despite varying levels of quality of performance—demonstrated self-directedness towards task completion in terms of performance delivery, in relation to pedagogical strategies deployed by their teachers.

BACKGROUND

This project sought to investigate the identity, role and function of popular music within education in Singapore classrooms. Since creating, performing and responding to popular music genres serves as an apt and appropriately contemporary and relevant media of expression of an ever-shifting demographic blend of diverse cultures, commensurate strategies and tactics were sought towards more effective social integration across communities-of-practice (Wenger, 1998) engaging the cosmopolitan society in Singapore.

FOCUS OF STUDY

This study aimed to assess the identity, role and function of popular music activities in the General Music Programme (GMP) as articulated in the six learning objectives (MOE, 2008), quantity and quality of popular music activities in the classroom, teachers' perceptions, use of and for popular music in the classroom which would hinge on teacher preparation and competence in the teaching and learning of popular music in the classroom.

KEY FINDINGS

- All three teachers approached popular music activities primarily through traditional acoustic means and media rather than activities involving ICT and New Media platforms.
- Correlations between the survey and the three schools suggest that attempts to make popular music—creating, performing and responding—can be read as attempt at formalising the teaching and learning of popular music rather than relinquishing control over to the students to decide on their repertoire and working towards their own achievables; suggesting a greater reliance on control than confidence.
- Music teachers' perceptions and practices did not prevent or detract from learner

performance/s as a common deliverable. All performing groups were sufficiently motivated to see through their performances from beginning to end, albeit lapses and slips.

- All learners in these three classes across the three secondary schools were generalist learners with little evidence of formal musical training; a significant deliverable, considering high stakes examinable contexts of formal musical learnings.
- It is difficult to ignore the implications of a sense of pride and ownership of these generalist learners in their performances.
- It would have been desirable to have interviewed the students. Future studies could focus on interviews with the classroom learners as well as the teachers for better corroboration and triangulation to address the research questions.

PARTICIPANTS

- 443 teachers in Singapore schools participated in the LNA Survey

- 15 teachers (10 secondary school and 5 primary school) participated in the Popular Music workshops
- 3 secondary school teachers participated in the fieldwork
- 17 students in these 3 secondary schools participated in the Popular Music programme run at their respective schools.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The primary data was derived from Phase 1 online LNA survey for Music teachers and Phase 2 was a classroom intervention programme.

REFERENCES

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