

**Multi- and intercultural music arts education in integrative themes of the new national core curriculum of pre-school and basic education explored by the students**

**Abstract**

The Finnish national core curriculum for pre-school education (2000) and basic education (2004) includes the idea of integration and cross-curricular themes. The objective of integration is to guide pupils in examining phenomena from the perspectives of different fields of knowledge, thereby elaborating themes and emphasizing general educational goals. Integration needs co-operation between subject specialists and generalists, as well as between schools and the cultural environment. The aim of this presentation is to study the new educational challenges of our time which are met in the new curriculum especially through the arts. This research is a case study of (N=18+18) university students of kindergarten, classroom, and music teacher education, who were asked to reflect on the new curriculum to find the integration of music and arts in educational themes and to find new ideas to develop co-operation between schools and other cultural institutions. The research methods used were open writings and group interviews of students. The thoughts and experiences of students about the new curriculum and its' integrative themes are introduced especially through a focus on multi and intercultural arts and music education. The co-operative ideas of students when planning integrative arts education are introduced. The personal growth of pupils with respect to their cultural identity and internationalism are also focused on through the students' experiences of this new curriculum. Pluralism and creativity of the students' artistic thoughts in multicultural integrative education were found.

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# **Multi- and intercultural music and arts education in integrative themes of the new national core curriculum of pre-school- and basic education**

## **Introduction**

The Finnish national core curriculum for pre-school education (2000) and basic education (2004) includes the idea of integration and cross-curricular themes. The objective of integration is to guide pupils in examining phenomena from the perspectives of different fields of knowledge, thereby elaborating themes and emphasizing general educational goals. Integration needs co-operation between subject specialists and generalists, and between schools and the cultural environment. The National Board of Education has confirmed that the Core Curriculum for Pre-school Education 2000 is to be observed until further notice. The education provider shall prepare and approve a curriculum for education in compliance with the provisions of the Core Curriculum. The quality of education is evaluated at national and local levels. Because there is little or no comparative aesthetics or multicultural focus in the arts education curriculum of schools, we have started to consider these issues in the arts pedagogy of teacher education. During recent years the arts have had a difficult time in schools and in teacher education.

The number of arts lessons has been decreased both in pre-schools and basic schools, and in kindergarten teachers' and classroom teachers' education. Dance is not even taught in most schools and drama is often only an extracurricular activity. Nikitina (2003) emphasizes the significance of integration, for example in physical education, where both social and academic skills can be developed. According to Eisner (2000) during the past twenty years there has been an accountability movement and the fear (in the arts education community) that schools feel pressure to divert instructional time and resources toward tested areas of the curriculum, such as math and reading. This has happened recently in Finland also. At the same time, Finnish society has been rapidly changing towards a more multiethnic society where people of diverse cultures strive to maintain their individuality. Thus the new challenges and possibilities in music and arts education in Finnish schools and teacher education need to be discussed.

## **Theoretical basis for the study**

In education we must underline that understanding differences enables one to appreciate and eventually to understand others. In multicultural arts education there is a discussion about a universal aesthetic that assumes that all people respond to art or beauty in the same way because the arts are a universal language. The arts need to be understood within their original context (Chanda 1992; Lieberman 1999). On the other hand, when our culture reaches out suddenly from its old bounds and makes contacts with other cultures we become interested in new possibilities of feeling and being. Arnheim (1969, 113-114) writes about holistic intuitive cognition where the components of intuitive thought processes interact within a continuous field and there comes a point when the 'beauty' of exotic art becomes apparent to us and we grasp the humanity of another culture, not theoretically but imaginatively. In arts education we must change our philosophy about the arts and how they should be taught, listened to and viewed.

Music and arts integration is a theme of many meanings and contexts and arts educators do not have a universally shared agreement on what arts integration is or if arts integration should be a goal of arts education (see Mota & Costa 2004). There are many possible meanings of arts integration: project-based learning (Ruismäki 1999), thematic learning, multiple intelligences (Gardner 1983),

the use of arts in studying academic disciplines, interdisciplinarity among different art forms (such as music and painting) (Ruokonen and Virkkala 1997, Ruokonen 1998), and transfer of knowledge across artistic and nonartistic disciplines (Mishook & Kornhaber 2006).

Root-Bernstein (2001) questions, however, whether music and science are different types of intelligence, or are they two manifestations of common ways of thinking? By focusing on scientists who have been musicians and on the ways they have used their musical knowledge to inform their scientific work, the author argues that music and science are two ways of using a common set of "tools for thinking" that unify all disciplines. He explores the notion that creative individuals are usually polymaths who think in trans-disciplinary ways. Mishook and Kornhaber (2006) refer in their article to Catterall's and Waldorf's (1999) study: they carried out an effective arts integration programme with significant results and discovered the most important issues, firstly that the lesson plans should grow from the national curriculum standards in every content area and the arts and arts lessons should be of equal importance. Secondly content should be seen through more than one form and the experience should have a planned assessment. It was also important to see connections and come away with bigger ideas for working seriously in thematic learning. According to Moshook & Kornhaber (2006) the study of coequal relationships between arts and other content areas occurred most often at schools where there was a strong arts mission as well as arts-educationally experienced and committed administrators.

Banks (1989) writes about four approaches for integrating multicultural content into the arts curriculum and he qualifies these by level of effectiveness, from 'contribution' as the least effective to 'social action' as the most effective. First, is the contributions approach which encourages educators to include ethnic artist heroes into the mainstream, viewed from a chiefly aesthetic perspective.

In most examples these are infused into the curricula but without much reference to the particularities they should need. Secondly, the ethnic additive approach introduces concepts, themes and perspectives that are relevant to particular ethnic groups. Arts educational workshops might for example focus on a special arts technique that is particular to a cultural or ethnic group.

Thirdly, Banks (1989) introduces the transformation approach, where the goals and structures of the curriculum are changed to reflect different perspectives. Topics, ideas and objects are presented from several ethnic perspectives and viewpoints. For example one art object can be viewed from multiple perspectives and students might change their emphasis from a product orientation to a process orientation reflecting some traditional aesthetic perspective. The most effective integrative approach is the social-action approach. According to Banks (1989) this is the highest level of true multicultural education. In this approach students are encouraged to think critically and to participate in their own thinking process about change. This is a problem-based process and the problems usually concern moral and ethnic issues. In arts it is essentially valuable to discuss and evaluate the cultural concepts, perspectives and paradigms of various ethnic groups.

According to Ruokonen's (1999) case study of musicians from different ethnic cultures living in and giving school concerts in Finland, the musicians had many educational values in their musical presentations and reflected their musical message in three ways: to increase cultural civilization, to give more meaning to cultural identification, and to increase tolerance and acceptance in society.

The question of plural perspectives provides our teacher education students with an opportunity to understand the different ways of seeing, listening and expressing the real and imaginary.

According to Blocker and Gene (1995) the value in a multicultural study of the arts lies firstly in enriching our aesthetic appreciation of a wider range of art genres and secondly in enriching our aesthetic appreciation of a wider range of genres; it also increases our understanding and capacity to

communicate with other cultures, and finally, it helps to understand and appreciate our own multicultural diversity.

### **The case study**

Integration needs co-operation between subject specialists and generalists, and between schools and the cultural environment. The aim of this presentation is to study the new educational challenges of our time which are met in the new Finnish curriculum especially through the arts. This research is a case study of (N=18+18) university students of kindergarten, classroom, and music teacher education, who were asked to reflect on the new curriculum to find the integration of music and arts in educational themes and to find new ideas to develop co-operation between schools and other cultural institutions. Music teacher students (N=18) were asked how they could create more co-operation and integration in music education between schools and other institutes. Kindergarten, and classroom teacher students (N=18) were asked to reflect on the new core curriculum in the thematic learning of arts in a multicultural perspective. The research methods used were open writings and group interviews of students. The thoughts and experiences of students about the new curriculum and its integrative themes are introduced particularly by focusing on multi and intercultural art and music education. Qualitative analyses of student's writings and group interviews were made. The kindergarten and classroom teacher students participated in multicultural studies and planned in small groups an artistic project with a multicultural theme; their works were also observed and analysed in reflective group discussions with peer student groups.

### **Multicultural learning through the arts**

The educational challenges of our time are strongly seen in students' ideas: cross-curricular themes represent central emphases of their educational and teaching work and they want to integrate numerous subjects, education and instruction. Themes should join with events and are to be manifest in the school's operational culture.

*“Children think that the subjects they are interested in should be better connected to the surrounding phenomena; we should plan more thematic learning and integrate different subjects in it.”*

*“When I see a class where there are over 10 nationalities and almost as many languages, I have to start from the elementary cultures.”*

*“We planned a multicultural theme “Our cultural heritages” for the spring time. The four minority cultures of our school children are presented during the cultural weeks through the arts.”*

The pupils' interests and developmental phases are taken into account when students are planning their multicultural arts education project. The "Growth as a Person" development of every child was the most important goal of arts education for students. Their objectives are: to create a growth environment that supports individuality and self-esteem, to develop a sense of community based on equality and tolerance, to use arts education in the recognition and handling of feelings, to discover factors influencing mental vigour and creativity, to use arts education in psychological and social growth, to recognize the importance of aesthetic experiences to the quality of life and to use arts education in various ways for cultural co-operation with others.

*“We are most of all educators and the development of every child should be most important, we have to think of how we develop the self-confidence and happiness of every individual child.”*

*“Interaction with children is the most important for us, we must recognize their feelings and ideas of their own culture.”*

*“We have to encourage children and give more space for their ideas and creative interaction.”*

According to the students cultural identity and internationalism are natural educational themes of arts subjects. Integrative arts education helps pupils to understand the essence of the Finnish and European cultural identities. Through the arts children learn to discover their own cultural identity and develop capabilities for cross-cultural interaction. Discovering and studying the arts from different cultures is the best way to come to know, understand and respect the arts as cultural heritages.

*“Through the arts we learn to understand our roots and the diversity of cultural heritages, philosophies and ways of life.”*

*“Music and art are the most natural ways of teaching multi- and intercultural issues.”*

Students planned how to integrate the arts and multicultural education in their projects. The aim of the project was to study some culture and its arts and to plan a thematic learning period or project for pre-school or school children (grades 1-6) to participate interactively in some culture and its arts. Both cultural and artistic aims were included into it and thematic planning followed a new national core curriculum. Students considered in their assessment discussion afterwards some important issues they had learned from their multicultural arts education project:

1. the variety of musical and artistic thoughts in different cultures should be well studied at the beginning of the thematic period,
2. the phenomenon of cultural change has to be taken into account when planning and in discussions with children,
3. the past and future roles of music and arts education in the transformation as well as preservation of cultural traditions are present in every culture and should be discussed,
4. authentic material is needed and interaction with the artist (of the culture studied) is valuable if it is possible,
5. interactive cultural workshops of the arts for children: learning by seeing, listening and doing is the best way to learn.

Change in the communication environment is world-wide. As well, media skills and communication are challenging our students. They want to improve their skills in expression and interaction. They want to develop children's understanding of the media's position and importance and give them possibilities to improve skills in using the media. Arts education helps them in working with the media and analysing it critically.

*“Arts education helps us working with the values of ethics and aesthetics in communication.”*

*“There is always a relationship between reality and the media world, and arts education is one way to explore it.”*

*“We want to educate children in freedom of speech and critiquing sources.”*

Students identified some important issues when planning integrative education:

- a) the learning history and the interests of pupils must be taken into account
- b) home-school co-operation is a valuable tool in planning
- c) regional co-operation with cultural and artistic fields is needed (museums, cultural centres, art centres, concerts...).

### **Music teacher students' ideas of developing co-operation between schools and the cultural environment especially in music education**

At the moment, there are some 150 music institutes in Finland, with a total of about 50,000 students. There are also numerous private music schools, particularly music playschools. Finland has eleven conservatories, and the Sibelius Academy provides higher education in music. The extensive network of music institutes in Finland has given the country an exceptionally receptive audience, since the majority of families have personal experience of making music, either with instruments or by singing in a choir. Unfortunately at the same time, the democratic idea that ‘music belongs to everyone’ is missing in the curriculum of basic education and classroom teacher education. We can say that the aims of music instruction in comprehensive school first support the development of the pupil’s musical thinking and aesthetic and cultural awareness, and secondly create the musical learning environment in which pupils can develop their own musical expression and social musical activities in praxis. Teaching groups in basic education are formed according to grades. During the first six years, music instruction is usually given by the generalist, a class teacher, who teaches all or most subjects. Instruction in the three highest forms is given by a specialist, a music teacher. Basic education also includes pupil counselling and, if necessary, special education. In the new curriculum integrative studies at all levels invite teachers to co-operate with others or with cultural institutions or museums during integrative learning themes or projects (Ruismäki & Ruokonen 2006).

According to Siponen (2005) generalist teachers integrate music with other subjects and of such many teachers have pointed out the importance of practical and art subjects especially during the first school years. It is understandable that the generalists also need integration with subject teachers and cultural institutions to have specialists in the classroom in order to enrich teaching in the arts. What do the subject teachers think about integration?

In this study the subject teacher students of music education were asked to plan new ideas on how to develop integration in school music. Integration ideas were requested for every possible level, for example curriculum, contents, institutional level, teaching, materials etc. Subject teacher students created many ideas for integration. The students also discussed the situation concerning school music and the positions and roles of music teachers in Finnish schools. They compared the situation of very effective integration to the Swedish model where music teachers of the music institutes are nowadays also working at the schools and the positions of school music teachers are vanishing. The balance in the integration and the best ways to co-operate in every individual case should be taken into account. First of all are the pupils and their individual needs for music education in their everyday life. Every child has right to a good and encouraging music education. The following list was compiled of the possibilities of developing

integration between schools and music institutions according to students' discussions and writings:

1. to create common projects (musicals, concerts etc.),
2. to develop flexibility (concerning buildings, equipment, materials and teaching),
3. to build up co-operation in in-service training,
4. to create co-operation in special education,
5. to create co-operation and more development possibilities for musically gifted pupils,
6. to develop co-operation in multicultural arts education,
7. to co-operation in planning and evaluating music education in schools and music institutes,
8. to share the common curriculum goals in music theory, history etc. at municipal school music education level,
9. to develop common learning materials,
10. to share specialists in teaching,
11. to develop weekly schedules of the students more flexibly between schools and other institutes.

## **Conclusion and discussion**

Music and the arts are useful tools for learning about, understanding and accepting other cultures. This is why it is essential to sing, play, paint and dance in the styles of different countries and continents. Ethno-musicological or multicultural approaches help students to understand their own culture, history and other societies through the arts. One important aim is that the multicultural arts are learnt as much as possible through live performance. The music and arts that children and young students appreciate outside school is also given serious attention. A pluralism of artistic thoughts in multicultural integrative education was found in this case study. The determinants of artistic concepts like natural environment, religion, folklore, history, social organisations, gender, traditional styles of performance, and modes of transmission were present in planning multicultural arts education. We found arts educational visions, firstly to achieve results in the spirit of authentic and meaningful cultural transmission, and secondly to describe the phenomenon of change in the world's cultures for our students as well as pre-school and school children.

A creative attitude is needed in integrative arts education, as our students summarize:

- don't kill creativity,
- don't steal the happiness of your friends,
- respect all differences,
- give children daily experience and enchantment,
- forgive those who don't respect your creativity,
- don't look for your dreams or lost creativity through your children, let them have their own dreams and find their own ways to create,
- remember to have your free moments,
- don't stress yourself or others,
- don't give up – you can learn in every situation.

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