ARTICLES

'We must eradicate the fear of the differences': Tertiary Spanish students' perceptions about multicultural music

"Debemos erradicar el miedo a las diferencias": percepciones de estudiantes universitarios acerca de la educación musical multicultural

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Abstract

Collaborating across borders in higher education has been shown to have myriad benefits. In this case study, drawing on small group discussions, whole group discussion, and anonymous written student feedback, the authors from different places across the globe explore preservice teacher's perceptions of learning multicultural songs in an online environment. Using thematic analysis, data were coded and analyzed into six overarching themes. Findings indicate students broadened their musical spectrum and developed music knowledge and skills and an understanding about educational models that can enhance the cultivation of a global mindset. While online delivery cannot fully replace face-to-face teaching, the study indicates that the online environment can open up new windows of opportunities for students to engage with cultural bearers around the world in real time.

Key words: Music Education; Multicultural Education; Online learning; Cultural bearer.

Resumen

La colaboración transnacional en la educación superior ha demostrado tener innumerables beneficios. En este estudio de caso, a partir de reflexiones en grupos pequeños, grupos de discusión y comentarios escritos anónimos del alumnado, los autores de diferentes lugares del mundo exploran las percepciones del profesorado en formación sobre el aprendizaje de canciones multiculturales en línea. Utilizando el análisis temático, los datos fueron codificados y analizados en seis categorías. Los resultados indican que el alumnado amplió su espectro musical y desarrolló conocimientos y habilidades musicales, y comprensión de los modelos educativos que pueden mejorar el desarrollo de un pensamiento global. Si bien la educación en línea no puede reemplazar por completo la enseñanza presencial, el estudio indica que el entorno virtual puede abrir nuevas ventanas de oportunidades para que el alumnado interactúe con mediadores culturales de todo el mundo en tiempo real.

Palabras claves: Educación musical; educación multicultural; aprendizaje en línea; mediador cultural.

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1. Introduction

The use of music to enhance cross-cultural understanding is an area of study with a long tradition (Volk, 1993). Specifically, in the field of multicultural music education (Campbell, 2018), different research has analyzed students' and/or teachers' perceptions of the benefits of knowing and participating in multicultural musical experiences (Legette, 2003; Westerlund *et al.*, 2020). Specifically, in the training of future music teachers, Knapp (2012) analyzed the effects of participating in culturally diverse experiences on the perception of authenticity in music and the preference for teaching music from other cultural contexts. Meanwhile, Wong, Pan and Shah's (2016) study concluded that prospective music teachers understand multicultural music education as an important part of elementary education for all people, as it helps to raise awareness of cultural diversity, while promoting improved understanding, tolerance and acceptance of other people. However, both research studies (Knapp, 2012; Wong, *et al.*, 2016) highlight the lack of training and the need to promote and analyze the effects of multicultural music experiences in teacher education. Our study focuses on this field of knowledge.

This paper is based on ongoing research that aims to promote university students' understanding of teaching songs from different countries using technology, while seeking to build a community of practice (Mellizo, *et al.*, 2023; Nethsinghe, *et al.*, 2023). The idea of collaboration and cross-border work is not a new phenomenon, and although it takes time to set up, it has innumerable benefits (Nagar, & Ali, 2003). In this article, we share our collaborative project in which we worked with students of the Primary Education Teaching Degree at the University Jaume I of Castellón, Spain, within the framework of an optional subject in the third year. In this project, the learning of culturally diverse music was promoted to future primary school teachers through four consecutive workshops.

This case study focuses on student voice in relation to their experience of learning new songs, the pedagogical approaches employed, and the transferability of this type of experience to a primary school classroom. The aim of the study was to explore university students' perceptions of learning multicultural songs through a hybrid teaching environment, combining online and face-to-face actions.

The research question that prompted the study was: how does participation in multicultural musical experiences contribute to the intercultural learning of prospective primary school teachers?

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the terms multicultural and intercultural. We use the term multicultural to broadly denote people from diverse cultural backgrounds preserving their cultural heritage, and the term intercultural to refer to the opportunity to build social cohesion and dialogue between people of different ethnicities and cultures (Meer, & Mohood, 2012). The motivation to develop the experience and analyze the effects emerges from the fact that each participating researcher comes from different countries and cultures with different backgrounds. We believe that contact with authentic multicultural educational experiences are elements that can make social and cultural heterogeneity visible and raise awareness. Thus, under certain conditions, they can have a positive impact that promotes real changes towards the construction of an intercultural society (Patiño-Santos, & Rubinstein, 2011). However, some research reports contradictory results on the effects of multicultural music education. Xu (2000) warned that improving perceptions of diversity in the classroom does not

necessarily generate intercultural understanding in wider contexts. McIntosh (1988) identified that students' improved understanding of diversity does not necessarily imply recognition and questioning of their own privilege or social injustices. In this sense, it is necessary to analyze each participant's perceptions of what impacts these kinds of musical practices can have and how they can be transformative.

Student feedback helped us to re-evaluate "what, why and how" we teach in hybrid learning environments. From this experience (synchronous and asynchronous), the *Four Step Flipped Method* emerged. It aims to contribute to the field of research on multicultural music education, specifically by focusing on the possibilities of online learning to promote intercultural understanding and creativity in students.

2. Literature review

2.1. Teaching and learning in virtual environments

Teaching in the online environment requires teachers to engage students to actively participate in the process (Bond, 2020). According to Bryson and Andreas (2020, p.9), the *Learning Management System* (LMS) platform, in our institutions commonly known as the Virtual Classroom, provides a resource bank with material tailored to teaching. In this way, real-time online encounters are intended to replace face-to-face teaching in the classroom. Teaching in the virtual space also means developing quality content for active student participation (Kamal, & Illiyan, 2021). Along with the preparation of content, there are teachers who express negative perceptions towards some aspect of online teaching, such as the work overload involved or the preconception that certain learning is diminished compared to face-to-face teaching (Iglesias-Calonge, & Rivera-Pino, 2021). In turn, there are numerous technical challenges related to poor network connectivity, time delays or inaudibility (Zamarro, *et al.*, 2022).

One of the biggest challenges of the online environment has to do with teacher presence. Some researchers point to three important 'presence components' (social, cognitive and didactic) that contribute to fulfilling learning intentions when teaching in the virtual space (Garrison, *et al.*, 2010). In relation to music education, a recent study (Berrón-Ruiz, *et al.*, 2023) analyses the perceptions of future music teachers regarding the use of technologies for instrumental training, showing aspects that students value as positive elements in the use of these technologies in learning. In turn, Merrick and Joseph (2023), in Australia, indicate that the inclusion of videos and audio recordings helps to improve their online teaching. While there are many models of teaching (Johnson, 2020), in the present study, what began as an expert-centered approach (cultural mediator) culminated in the learners' own interpretations. It sought to promote experiential learning aimed at developing cognitive learning through play and creativity (Johnson, 2020). The virtual environment creates opportunities for students and teachers to experience unfamiliar cultures through authentic learning episodes. In this case, songs from different countries were used to promote intercultural understanding and the development of cultural awareness (Achieng Andang, 2020).

2.2. Intercultural experiences in music teacher education

Over the past several decades, music teacher education programmes around the world have recognized the growing need to diversify curricula and have made significant changes in both content and pedagogy (Westerlund, *et al.*, 2021). The inclusion of repertoires and pedagogical practices from folk, popular and global traditions in teacher education alters the dominant paradigm of Western classical music, which is sometimes seen as exclusionary and elitist (Allsup, 2016). Music teacher educators in many parts of the world are exploring culturally responsive teaching strategies to connect with university students in their classrooms (Lind, & McCoy, 2016). In addition, they are forming cross-cultural collaborative networks that generate new perspectives and stimulate reflexivity (Westerlund, *et al.*, 2021). Within these networks, music teacher educators work together to provide university students with opportunities to learn not only about, but also from and with others in unfamiliar cultural settings (Westerlund, *et al.*, 2022). Researchers have found that these intercultural projects (in both face-to-face and virtual settings) can challenge prospective teachers' assumptions, attitudes and preconceived beliefs (Gibson, 2021; Lee, & Markey, 2014) about what music education should be like, to help them develop tools and strategies to navigate unfamiliar situations and promote higher levels of intercultural understanding.

3. Context and pedagogy for an online teaching and learning experience

This experience was developed in a course called "Instrumental Ensembles", which aims to influence the pedagogy of instrumental training. In the effort to include a wide range of musical contexts, styles and forms, the promotion of multicultural musical learning is ensured through the inclusion of repertoire and pedagogical practices from local and global traditions. To this end, a series of online music sessions were delivered by Rohan, Dawn and Jennifer, who acted as cultural mediators (Campbell, 2018). Each presenter facilitated a workshop on music from their own land: Rohan taught a Sri Lankan children's song (*Rosa Male Natuwe*), Dawn a South African lullaby (*Thula Thu'*) and Jennifer a traditional song originating in the United States (*This Land is Your Land*) (Joseph, *et al.*, 2021). Finally, the students had the opportunity to participate in a final three-hour face-to-face session facilitated by Alberto and Jennifer, in which they performed in groups and freely covered the songs they had learnt in the previous workshops.

The authors used a four-step inverted pedagogical approach [(1) Asynchronous; (2) Synchronous; (3) Face-to-face and (4) Hybrid feedback]. This includes the flipped classroom approach (FLN, 2014), distance learning techniques (Koutsoupidou, 2014) and Technological Pedagogical Knowledge (TPACK) (Koehler, *et al.*, 2013), including multicultural or culturally specific music teaching methods. In the following, each of the steps of the method used is described:

1. Asynchronous: each facilitator prepared and provided relevant teaching and learning material to Alberto, who shared it with the learners via the LMS prior to the workshop. Each facilitator explained the content to Alberto so that he could respond to his learners' queries. Alberto also conducted pre-workshop preparation sessions to contextualize the experience. Setting the learning as a pre-task was consistent with the flipped classroom approach.

2. Synchronous: for three weeks, each cultural mediator facilitated his or her workshop separately online. The workshops were conducted with the help of Alberto translating into Spanish when necessary. During each workshop, students received formative feedback to improve their knowledge, understanding and skills. On a weekly basis, students reflected on different aspects in each of the workshops. These reflections are part of the data that informs our results.

3. Face-to-face: Alberto and Jennifer held an intensive workshop to give students the opportunity to rehearse and perform the three songs they had learned. They worked with their peers to cover the original songs, created lyrics and recorded the final result. The recordings of each song were shared with the facilitators to allow for informal evaluation.

4. Hybrid feedback: in the final session (week 5), Alberto provided final reflections and conclusions about the experience and each facilitator gave feedback on recordings of their performances (Jennifer in person, Rohan and Dawn online).

4. Methodology

Our study uses a qualitative approach of a descriptive nature. The research explains and interprets our observations (field notes) and students' comments (Cohen, & Manion, 1994). This case study is a useful way to describe an intervention or phenomenon that occurred in a real context (Yin, 2014). Baxter and Jack (2008) point out that there is no right way to report a case study, but state that the researcher should describe the context within which the phenomenon occurs, as well as the phenomenon itself, by telling a story or providing a chronological account.

4.1. Participants

The study included 30 students (18 males and 12 females). There were participants (13) who had formal or informal musical knowledge and most of them could play a musical instrument (piano, guitar, violin, cello, oboe or drums). The other group of students (17) had only musical knowledge learnt during Primary and Compulsory Secondary Education and did not know how to play any instrument other than school instruments (Orff instruments, recorder, etc.).

4.2. Collection of information

Data collection was carried out in four stages. First, at the end of each online workshop, students were divided into small groups of 4 or 5 people and participated in an audio-recorded online discussion about the experience. To promote this conversation, a series of open questions were asked about their previous multicultural experiences, their perceptions of the activity (positive and negative aspects), elements of the experience that could later be applied to a primary school classroom, the value of the cultural mediator in these experiences or their perceptions of

cultural diversity and its management in educational contexts. These recordings were subsequently transcribed. Secondly, at the end of the face-to-face session in which the songs were covered and performed, a group discussion was held with all the students. With the necessary permissions, both the workshop and the discussion group were videotaped. The focus group videotapes were later transcribed. Thirdly, the students' comments from the anonymous subject evaluations were collected. Finally, each facilitator took notes from their presentation and virtual meetings that informed the narrative in the discussion.

4.3. Data analysis

The authors independently read the student data and viewed the videos that were securely stored in virtual environments. We employed thematic analysis (TA) as a method suitable for critically reading the complex phenomena of our participants' subjective lived experiences (Jackson, & Nowell, 2021). Willig (2017) points out that thematic analysis is a method of analysis that helps the researcher to identify patterns in the data. By re-reading the data independently, we gained familiarity with the data, which allowed us to develop emerging codes and themes (McGlinchey, *et al.*, 2021), qualitative in nature in both theoretical and procedural orientation (Braun, & Clarke, 2019). We initially familiarized ourselves with the student data and independently read and re-read the data using keywords in the margin to generate initial codes. We met several times via videoconference to discuss and revise our initial codes. The data were initially coded into two main sections: workshop data and anonymous evaluation data. The online workshop comments were coded as group reflection data (GR) and the face-to-face workshops as group discussions (DG). The anonymous student evaluation of the unit was coded as AE.

Finally, six categories of analysis emerged: (1) student experience, (2) aspects learned, (3) ways of learning and teaching, (4) applicability to Primary Education, (5) cultural diversity and (6) online learning. The results are organized into these categories (Xu, & Zammit, 2020). The main codes and categories are included in Table 1:

Table 1. Codes and categories

Experience	Aspects learned	Ways of learning and teaching	Applicability to Primary Education	Cultural diversity	Online learning
Prior knowledge	Musical aspects	Flexibility	Inclusive education	Empathy	Advantages
Meaningful learning	Social aspects	Obligations	Transferability	Acknowledgement	Disadvantages
Satisfaction		Responsibility	Professional development	Critical thinking towards diversity	
Positive aspects		Support	Sustainability	Communication with others	
Negative aspects		Teamwork		Cultural aspects	
Integral development		Critical thinking towards pedagogical approaches		Political aspects	
Personal transformation		Communication aspects		Identity	
		Creativity			
		Requirement			

In this way, we established a common thread between the exploratory intention of our study, its theoretical foundation and its data analysis procedure (Trainor, & Bundon, 2021).

5. Results

In this section we share some of the students' comments organized thematically. We use direct quotes from students to inform our findings and indicate the source of the information.

5.1. Experience

Table 2 shows the comments related to the students' perception of how they felt during the experience. They refer to aspects such as comparison with other teaching experiences they have had, highlighting why they think the experience was beneficial for them, or how they felt during the sessions.

Table 2. Comments on the experience

"This experience has helped us to form perceptions, it has been very useful for our future. We are not used to something like this, especially not at university, because until now we had not had any experience with other cultures in any subject. It has been very rewarding.	GR
"The experience helps us to get to know new music that we may never have heard before in other circumstances".	GR
"This experience has also helped us realise that we don't really know the authentic or traditional music of the United States, and we only know more commercial songs and music.	GR
"I thought I was going to be embarrassed to play in front of other people, but I wasn't. I don't normally play in front of anyone, and here I did.	DG
"I wouldn't change anything about this experience. I think the jam session was the best time I've had in class all year".	DG
"The intercultural sessions have been a very enriching learning experience that has helped me to open my mind and learn new music".	AE

5.2. Aspects learned

In this category (Table 3), we selected the comments that related the experience not only to the musical contents and practices learned, but also to some aspects related to pedagogies and learning strategies. In addition, students reported some attitudinal learning that went beyond musical knowledge.

Table 3. Comments on the aspects learnt

"We work on the originality of the lyrics, creativity, the tonality of the songs, the instrumental accompaniment and the memorization of the lyrics and melody".	GR
"For us, above all, it was the improvisation aspect: we learned the originality and creativity of the new lyrics".	GR
"The fact of covering songs or performing them, being able to introduce improvised elements, such as varying the melody or creating rhythms, can be very useful for working on rhythmic, melodic and harmonic aspects".	GR
"The experience raises awareness again of the importance of knowing how to communicate in different languages, and also of showing our pupils, from a very young age, that it is important to learn other languages".	GR
"I thought singing was going to be easier, but it was very complicated. In fact, on the second song I changed to play the cowbell".	DG

5.3. Ways of learning and teaching

Students referred to certain strategies, attitudes and pedagogies employed by the workshop facilitators. They highlighted the teaching aspects of the workshops given by Dawn, Rohan and Jennifer that were most meaningful to them. They also talked about how the face-to-face session flowed and how they felt they learned from it (Table 4).

Table 4. Comments on ways of learning and teaching

"We enjoyed contributing in class, creating our own version of the song and feeling part of the experience, getting closer to this music and culture".	GR
"It was quite a dynamic session despite being online, with a touch of humour at times which helped to make it more enjoyable".	GR
"You can tell that she [Dawn] is very happy with what she does, that it's pure vocation and she conveyed all the positivity that she was showing in the session. We felt like she really enjoyed what she was doing and made it very enjoyable, to be honest."	GR
"The methodology Jennifer has used to teach music is very interesting. She has worked on both historical and musical concepts based on a song".	GR
Student 1: "It was a very fun experience. We learned by repetition and imitation (I was imitating Miguel... hahaha)". Student 2: "[we learned] by discovering". Student 3: "We improvised". Student 4: "At the end we worked on a bit of everything". Student 5: "We worked in groups"	DG

5.4. Applicability to Primary Education

After the sessions, students were asked to reflect on the transferability of the experience to a primary classroom. As reflection is an important aspect of their future professional life, Table 5 highlights the students' beliefs about the applicability of the experience to a primary school.

Table 5. Comments on applicability to Primary Education

"To develop students' critical thinking skills, we can use the activity we did. It involved writing the lyrics of a typical Sri Lankan song. With this, the children will have to be creative, they will have to think about the lyrics and also adapt them to match the melody".	GR
"The use of the *Cotidiaphone* has been very interesting, because it teaches the pupils that music can be found in any object that is within our reach, whether by hitting, blowing or tapping, a sound can be created through it".	GR
"It is important to use traditional and popular songs from our culture and others, teaching them something about the sociology and history of our country and other countries where our students come from. We can start by explaining the history of the culture, the origin of our musical roots... include images of our instrumental variety, YouTube videos of dances, festivals and even instruments. We can involve students by playing popular songs from each country or culture we have in the classroom".	GR
"Making homemade instruments and including songs from other cultures. Use strategies for teaching a song: first the rhythm, then the melody, solfège, melody, lyrics and harmony. In other words, do not teach everything at once, but teach by musical phrases and then little by little".	GR
"A good method is the *World Music Pedagogy* that Jennifer taught us".	GR
"This is a very different way of teaching children. I could definitely see myself doing one of these songs in a future primary classroom".	DG
"Intercultural sessions are a good project to introduce pupils to discovering new cultures and getting them interested in this topic. This is a type of activity I would do every year".	AE

5.5. Cultural diversity

Table 6 highlights students' reflections on the impact of educational experiences to enhance cultural understanding and to promote social cohesion in diverse societies. They highlight the importance of inclusion and cultural diversity in their lives and in their future classrooms.

Table 6. Comments on cultural diversity

"Cultural diversity favours or enhances coexistence with society and fosters respect. Learning about other cultures can be very enriching. As teachers, we must set an example to our students of the different types of cultures that exist and the values that must be adopted in order to be able to live together in society".	GR
"We have learned that we know very little about multicultural education. We have learned that despite being in the 21st century and being in a very culturally interconnected world, we are not educated or we do not educate in a multicultural way, which is a mistake because there is more and more cultural diversity in classrooms and in all countries. Despite this, we have realised that, although there are many different types of cultures, music is very intercultural and is taught in the same way everywhere".	GR
"We must eradicate the fear of differences. We cannot educate for equality if we continue to perpetuate racist ideologies of any kind, so we need to be well informed about any form of culture".	GR
"We have learned that there is a lot more to it than the stereotypes of American country and folk".	GR
"We value having had a mediator. A person who is from a certain place will always explain better where they come from than a person who is not from that place. Dawn has told us about her country. This reaches us much more than other activities such as, for example, having done a research project on South African music; because she tells us in a more intimate, more personal way, and conveys the affection she has for her homeland. This would not have been generated in any other way. Moreover, having a person from another place come and explain things about their country or their city is much more attractive and motivates the students to listen and learn about it, about what that person wants to transmit to us".	GR

5.6. Online learning

Finally, we categorized the students' responses in relation to the e-learning experience. They reported positive and negative aspects, and shed light on possible strategies for teaching online.

Table 7. Feedback on the online teaching and learning process

"The positive thing about being online is that we learn in a different way, we have more possibilities to learn with people from other countries and have them explain practices or musical content to us. A positive aspect is that it is not necessary to bring instruments or any kind of material to the classroom, it is much more comfortable to do it from home. The negative aspects of online teaching are that it does not encourage interaction, sometimes it becomes boring. Sound quality is lost and, in general, students' motivation decreases. Many teachers do not facilitate learning as teaching is given in a much more traditional and magisterial way and, in addition, learning processes are slower".	GR
"In class everything is more participatory. It's always good to be corrected and to see your mistakes face to face, to see examples. On the net we lose human contact, it doesn't help us to advance, or not at the speed we would in the classroom".	GR
"Online learning makes teamwork very difficult".	GR
"It was very difficult for me to understand the session. I don't speak English very well and the internet doesn't help in this regard. When I was working with Jennifer, in person, I can understand what she means. But online, you are all the time in front of the same screen and you are easily disconnected from the session. The language was a barrier, but if you are in the session, you can easily stop and ask questions, or ask Alberto to translate if you don't understand something. But you don't do this as much in an online class".	DG

6. Discussion

The online teaching experience cannot completely replace the face-to-face teaching model. Music education is particularly sensitive to this aspect (Shaw, & Mayo, 2021). The *Four Step Flipped Method* (Nethsinghe, *et al.*, 2023) proved to be a useful educational approach to generate learning situations that enable students to develop knowledge and skills related to music learning and educational models concerned with inclusion and that foster the cultivation of a global mindset in students (Mellizo, & Cabedo-Mas, 2022).

Students highlight as beneficial the incorporation of cultural mediators, who can speak from an informed perspective and contextualise history, society, traditions and cultural forms – including music– providing authentic educational experiences (Schippers, 2006). The inclusion of cultural mediators enhances respect and recognition of certain cultural practices (Burnim, 1985), which are perceived as new knowledge received from an authoritative voice (Nettl, 1964). This should be combined with a range of pedagogical strategies that facilitate the acquisition of positive experiences in the music classroom (Lee, 2013).

The application of appropriate methodologies for teaching and learning music from local and global traditions is important (Anderson, & Campbell, 2010). This involves helping students to experience contextualized music practice, to observe and understand different ways of structuring sessions and, at the same time, to reflect on the possibilities of applying certain experiences to their professional future. All of these are necessary elements to create an educational environment that overcomes possible barriers promoted by the lack of confidence that some students have when singing and/or playing an instrument, or creating music in front of their peers (Thorn, & Brasche, 2015).

We agree with Gravett *et al.* (2011), that it does not matter how well simulated experiences are designed and executed at university, or how often students 'experience' and spend time on practical work in schools. The reality sinks in when they are responsible for students in their own classrooms (Snow *et al.*, 2005). However, the data show students are interested in learning about new and different music, especially when they understand and are able to apply appropriate methodologies and pedagogical strategies. This allows them to contextualize what is to be transmitted. Students grasp the sequencing of pedagogical methods and the inclusion of useful resources. This opened up new ways of thinking about the use of authentic musical instruments, including the use of resources that teachers have at their disposal, or that can be created from everyday materials (Rodríguez-Lorenzo, 2017).

The current reality of our classrooms is undoubtedly diverse and cultural inclusion is an important aspect that needs to be addressed in curricula and teaching practices. Despite reporting that initial training has not provided them with sufficient experiences in which to experience cultural diversity and reflect on its importance and learn strategies for its management, students identify a growing need to diversify curricula, content and pedagogies (Westerlund, *et al.*, 2021). Contact with the cultural mediator helps to reduce stereotypes, eliminate fear of difference and create a sense of respect. At the same time, students can experience and value teamwork, the importance of teacher networking and the need to collaborate (Westerlund, *et al.*, 2022), both in their initial training and in their subsequent professional practice.

In this study, students valued the online environment as a way to open new windows of opportunity to interact with cultural mediators in real time (Nethsinghe, *et al.*, 2023). While there are myriad benefits and disadvantages of online teaching and learning, the authors point to the *Four Step Flipped Method* as a possible model for delivering transnational collaborative teaching in hybrid environments. Some of the difficulties of online learning reported included the difficulty of delivering dynamic sessions, the advantages of sharing space with faculty (Nage-Sibande, & Morolong, 2018), the difficulties of teaching in other languages and, for some students, internet connectivity. In the combination of online and face-to-face experiences, the host teacher has an important role to play in maintaining the flow of conversation and providing a positive learning environment (Ng, *et al.*, 2022).

7. Conclusions

In exploring prospective teachers' perceptions of multicultural song learning through an online teaching environment, we recognize that this brief experience can be considered a sample and was not sufficiently sustained to confront and challenge musical ideas, processes and social changes. We took a risk with the expectation that the workshops would be well received by the students, as we had the support of the host teacher, Alberto. Since some of the authors (Rohan, Dawn and Jennifer) were not aware of the students' assumptions, attitudes and preconceived beliefs, we did not always anticipate pedagogical aspects and strategies to create a more effective learning space, such as actions to improve attention, communication or encourage participation.

In answering the question of whether multicultural songs can contribute to students' intercultural learning, we conclude that it is possible to do so through the online environment. Depending on the pedagogy and the facilitator, we find that students can acquire new understandings and perspectives on music and culture from different lands in a short period of time. We recognize that processes that impact personal aspects such as preconceptions or values, and on social aspects, require sustained time for action and reflection (Emmanuel, 2005). At the same time, we understand that knowing diversity does not necessarily imply reducing inequality (McIntosh, 1988). However, we consider that any action that promotes the improvement of intercultural understanding has to start from an interaction based on an open and respectful attitude towards new knowledge. We insist on the value of collaboration with cultural mediators in learning new music (Bond, 2017).

Online teaching had its disadvantages, as Rohan, Dawn and Jennifer were unable to establish a relationship with the students. The online environment removes the sense of teacher presence. As facilitators, we relied heavily on Alberto to translate and monitor student learning. The students felt that they had less connection with the facilitators in the online space than in the face-to-face sessions. This study therefore highlights the importance of close collaboration and fluid communication between teachers and cultural mediators, especially when working in hybrid environments. It was reflection on these issues that gave rise to the *Four Step Flipped Method*.

From our study, we recommend fostering local and international collaboration between cultural mediators and music educators in all teaching settings to promote intercultural understanding. The research provides notable implications for higher education professionals preparing teacher trainees to be culturally responsive teachers. The results indicate the willingness and openness of students and teachers to participate in the hybrid initiative. Our intention was to allow conversations to emerge in order to think beyond familiarity with non-Western music, and

to tap into the creativity of the students. Such intercultural learning experiences can serve as 'awakenings' that allow future teachers to see their professional work from multiple perspectives (Westerlund, *et al.*, 2022, p.392) and challenge their preconceived notions of what music is and what music education should be.

International networks and collaborations make it possible to access the figure of the cultural mediator. To counteract some of the limitations that cultural mediators imply (Bolden, & O'Farrell, 2019; Vaugeois, 2009), especially when there are language barriers, we suggest three elements that facilitators should focus on. First, providing the correct contextualization and a rationale for the importance, significance and transferability of the action to be developed. Second, the process needs to be accompanied in a way that is respectful and, at the same time, attentive to the needs and interests of the learners. Thirdly, the need and importance of a final reflection process that facilitates the evaluation of the experience, linking it to the learning obtained, both in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes, and discussing strategies for its transferability and application to other contexts.

This study allowed us to reflect on our teaching practice and gave us the opportunity to collaborate in online teaching processes and obtain feedback from students, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the experience and also of the *Four Step Flipped Method* as a way of facilitating multicultural music experiences. In a recent study, Westerlund, Kallio and Karlsen (2022, p.381) identify that there is a lack of opportunities not only for prospective music teachers but also for their teachers to learn from each other and form learning communities at institutional level that promote, among others, the development of intercultural competence. We agree with one student's comment that calls for "eradicating the fear of differences" and adopting new ways of fostering multicultural music practice. While this is a stimulating field of research, this research opens up new possibilities for further studies in the field of multicultural music education.

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