Preservice Elementary Education Teachers: An International Approach to Music Methods Coursework

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BACKGROUND

This study on preservice elementary education majors’ confidence to integrate music into their classrooms using an internationalized approach to instruction developed as a result of my experience teaching music in a diverse international school in Germany. Upon returning to the US, I began teaching the required music methods course for preservice elementary classroom teachers at the University of Minnesota. Observing preservice teachers plan and teach music lessons that appeared to primarily encapsulate western perspectives suggested the need to address some of the ethnocentric issues I experienced in Germany.

The research question: To what extent do pre-service elementary classroom teachers feel they can confidently integrate music using an internationalized approach in their instructional content and pedagogy, and how does confidence develop during their music methods coursework?

The Purpose: An internationalized approach to music and integrated music instruction within the classroom will enable classroom teachers to confidently incorporate music, particularly from an internationalized perspective, within their classroom content and pedagogical approach to teaching. The purpose of this study is to discover the extent to which the development of an internationalized approach to integrated music instruction will enable pre-service elementary classroom teachers to confidently integrate music from an international perspective into their instructional content and pedagogy.

DESIGN AND METHOD

Participants (N = 78: experimental group N = 53/control group N = 26) are students at a university in the upper midwest in the United States. All the students are working on a Master’s Degree in Education, and each is completing methods coursework and student teaching in preparation for teacher licensure.

A mixed-methods approach (triangulation model) to research was employed. Participants responded to pre- and post-test questionnaires, which included five sections: demographic information; curricular components participants evaluated according to their practicality using a Likert-type scale; the same curricular components rated according to level of confidence to integrate music using an internationalized perspective, also using a Likert-type scale; four musical skills participants evaluated according to their difficulty using a Likert-type scale; and six open-ended questions for participants to respond to regarding their prior intercultural/cross-cultural experience, what they understood about internationalized instruction, their intentions regarding internationalized instruction, and specifics about projects and curricular components. In addition, data was collected from pre- and post-test interviews, class discussions, participants’ written reflections, and field notes from observations of participants’ microteaching lessons.

For the experimental group, instructional content and pedagogy throughout the class was framed within an internationalized approach. In addition, student discussions, reflections, lesson planning, and microteaching required students to examine and implement an internationalized approach to instruction.

The control group read the same articles, but they did not discuss them until after the post-test questionnaire. They taught the music lesson from their microteaching plan as simply an integrated lesson, not one affected or framed by an internationalized approach to instruction. Finally, the instructor intentionally fashioned the content and pedagogy omitting an internationalized approach to instruction.

CONCLUSIONS

Confidence Development: The experimental group’s confidence to integrate music using an internationalized approach to instruction increased significantly on all thirty-nine variables. Their pre-test ratings indicate they were only confident to integrate music using an internationalized approach to instruction on one (7%) variable, “reflecting on lessons/learning.” By the post-test, however, they indicated they were confident to integrate music using an internationalized approach to instruction on 89% of the variables, a marked difference after class readings, discussion, and microteaching experiences. The control group’s confidence grew from 3% of the variables on the pre-test questionnaire to 77% on the post-test questionnaire, three more curricular components than the experimental group. Interestingly, the groups indicated a greater amount of growth on different variables, likely reflecting the difference in content and approach between the control and experimental groups.

Unlike the quantitative results, however, the responses on the open-ended questions of the post-test questionnaires reveal a substantial difference between the confidence to integrate music using an internationalized approach for participants in the control and experimental groups. According to the frequency and degree of confidence in their comments, the experimental group is far more confident to integrate music using an internationalized approach to instruction – 87% of the experimental group said they were “moderately” or “much” more confident at the end as opposed to only 23% of the control group who said they were only “moderately” more confident. Only 6% of the experimental group indicated they were not more confident at the end of the course, but 45% of the control group said they were not more confident. Confidence in the control group was largely linked to integration separate from internationalizing (35%), whereas only 7% of the experimental group made that distinction. Because the control group’s focus was solely on integration and not on an internationalized approach to instruction, their comments affirm their confidence to integrate, but not in an internationalized fashion. Furthermore, however, could clarify participants’ confidence related specifically to integration separately from confidence to integrate using an internationalized approach to instruction.

Unlike the comments from the control group on the open-ended questions, the comments from the experimental group corroborate their confidence ratings. Eighty-seven percent of the experimental group members indicated they were more confident to integrate music using an internationalized approach to instruction at the end of the course than they were at the beginning of the course. Only three participants (6%) indicated they were not more confident, and only four comments (7%) suggested participant confidence was linked only to integration and not to internationalizing. Their comments also indicated their growth in confidence was largely due to the integrated/internationalized unit they created and from which they taught.

The qualitative data were separated into two main categories: 1) factors that encourage or motivate and 2) factors that create barriers to confidence to integrate music using an internationalized approach to instruction. See Figures 2 and 3 for the subcategories and attributes. Interpreting, all eight characteristics of an internationalized approach to instruction were cited as “student benefits.” Participants indicated each of these components were beneficial to students, thereby motivating them to use an internationalized approach to instruction. In addition, they also indicated using musical activities not only made internationalizing easier; it also enhanced the learning in all content areas.

Perhaps most significantly, as their instructor, it became clear how integral the internationalized/integrated unit was to their personal growth. The discussions and reflections of the control group did not afford any of the confidence demonstrated by the experimental group, either before or after their micro-teaching experiences. Simply integrating instruction and reading an article about internationalizing did not give control group members the confidence demonstrated in the responses, revisions, and reflections of the experimental group members. The internationalized philosophy about the content is critical, therefore, in the preservice music teacher’s decision to use an internationalized approach to instruction. This indicates the instructors of music methods courses must intentionally teach using an internationalized approach to instruction to enable their students to do likewise. Allowing pre-service teachers to create internationalized lesson plans and teach from them was integral to their understanding of how to internationalize, their enthusiasm to do so, and their intentions to utilize an internationalized approach in the future.

Addressing the research question: To what extent do pre-service elementary classroom teachers feel they can confidently integrate music using an internationalized approach in their instructional content and pedagogy, and how does confidence develop during their music methods coursework?

A mixed-methods approach to address the research question indicates there is a significant growth in confidence on all thirty-nine variables. Descriptive statistics and frequencies indicate pre-service teachers feel confident to integrate 89% of the curricular components using an internationalized approach to instruction in their future content and pedagogy. Control group members are confident to integrate music into their content; however, their comments indicate they are not confident to do so using an internationalized approach to instruction. Experimental group members, questionnaire ratings and responses both indicate they feel confident to integrate music using an internationalized approach to instruction.