

Aweng Timek, Garaw (Sound, Voice, Movement): Culturally Responsive and Mother-Tongue Based Music Education in the Ilocos Region of the Philippines

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Abstract

It has been almost a decade since the Philippines implemented the mother-tongue based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) approach in teaching, together with the reform of the basic education curriculum, within the K-12 program. These reforms established the teaching of music as a subject area for early grades, together with the use of the learners' mother-tongue.

Studies show the benefits of the use of culturally responsive materials and utilizing learners' mother-tongue inside the classroom, especially for colonized countries. Students learn using the language that they understand and this fosters participation, longer attention span, and multifaceted development. Furthermore, education that is culturally responsive doesn't only provide enculturation, but it also enhances the learning process.

This article considers a pre-service teacher training project that proposed the development of a worktext for teachers and students that incorporates documented and undocumented local songs, dances, rhymes and games from the Ilocos region through archival and field research. It included specific objectives, teacher-facilitated and student-independent activities, and culturally related tasks using a developed spiral curriculum. Findings from the implementation show that it presents fluid learning experiences for cognitive and psychomotor domains, as well as positive engagement with local music. This article argues that these are positive implications of mother-tongue and culturally responsive music education.

Keywords

music education, culturally responsive pedagogy, mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB MLE), materials development

Introduction: Context of the Project

In the University of the Philippines, the final requirement for undergraduate music education studies is the development of a problem and solution based special project which serves as a pre-service teacher's contribution to the education needs of their communities. As the synthesis and final test of their music education training and paradigms, each student works on specific projects that are proposed then developed, implemented and performed in public.

The proponent and one of the authors of this article – Jesher Perez, of the project *Aweng, Timek, Garaw* (Sound, Voice, Movement) – comes from the northwest region of the country, the Ilocos Norte, which has a wide repertoire of local music that uses the Ilocano language, the lingua franca of the region.

The Ilocano language is one of the eight major languages on the list of twelve Philippine languages that have been utilized in classroom teaching since the academic year 2012-2013, as per the Department Order no. 16, series of 2012 or the “Guidelines on the Implementation of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education”. In addition to this, there was the release of the Republic Act no. 10533, also known as the “Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013,” which was supplemented by the D.O. no. 34, s. 2013, commonly known as the K-12 program — a modification of the basic education curriculum.

These reforms established the teaching of music as a separate subject area and the incorporation of the MTB-MLE approach in teaching learners at primary level. However, they also presented the need for material(s) in the local language, and materials for teachers with both a music and non-music education background to use (Rodriguez-Carranza, 2016).

Contextualizing the perceived needs into the proponent's community, in line with the current reforms and empirically identified lost¹ traditional local music, led to the proposal and development of a textbook for teachers and students, which is a collection of Ilocano songs, dances, rhymes and games for Grade 1.

In this article, the authors will discuss the considerations and methodologies involved in the project. First, the gathering of local music materials; secondly, the writing and design of the worktext itself which includes a developed spiral curriculum, subject-integrated tasks for students, and suggested classroom activities for teachers; and finally the implementation of the material with learners whose mother-tongue is Ilocano, all in light of culturally responsive pedagogy and MTB-MLE.

Culturally Responsive Music Education in the Mother-Tongue

Music education, and education in general, in colonized countries such as the Philippines is greatly influenced by western forms of schooling: western modes of instruction and repertoire of materials are mainly drawn from western classical music (Green, 2003; Borommeo, n.d.). This scenario invites

¹ Informal interviews together with the proponent's experiences identify the lost of their traditional local music, as these are almost no longer sang/performed and passed on by the members of the community aside from two popular ones — Manang Biday and Pamulinawen.

reconsideration of what materials are to be utilized for non-western learners and what are the approaches in education for culture and identity deprived communities, wherein enculturation is necessary (Green, 2003; Shaw, 2012; Kalinde & Dorette Vermeulen, 2016).

Kramer (2012) emphasized education as a key part of a specific culture. Education can also be defined as the transmission of cultural knowledge into which there is the understanding of the way of life in which human beings learn and the types of instructional processes that foster learning. In connection with this, culturally responsive pedagogy is presented by Gay (2002) as based on the assumption that the learned knowledge and skills in school are contextualized within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, and it uses the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students. VanDeWeghe and Scherff (2005) provided a framework for CRP wherein, (a) the students are placed at the centre of teaching and learning, and minority students experience a sense of membership, belonging, and ownership; (b) multicultural education is a central component of the curriculum; (c) teachers strive to promote multicultural education at the highest levels; (d) teachers feel an obligation to address real world issues; and (e) teachers feel responsible for their students' cognitive academic, and affective well-being and respond accordingly.

Furthermore, it is of great value that texts and other materials used by teachers are also culturally sensitive and appropriate and/or adaptable for all learners (Kesler, 2011). To ensure better learning and teaching, academic skills and content are also connected to learners' reference points and life experiences. The curriculum should therefore be aligned with ethnic and cultural diversity and experiences (Kesler, 2011). Teachers should be enabled to recognize the inherent political, social, and cultural undercurrents in all texts that constitute the curricula, since all texts (and other learning materials) derive meaning within particular interpretative communities (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Freebody & Luke 1990).

Music as a product of culture and history (Kramer, 2012), and as a form of communication together with language (Kalinde & Dorette Vermeulen, 2016), allows music education to offer an artistic academic space for learning that is not limited to musical literacy, but also provides a bridge to life, identity, and musical experiences within and outside of the classroom (Campbell, 1998; Shaw, 2016); thus the unique and powerful position of music education as an avenue for CRP (Shaw, 2016). Anecdotal studies have also shown that there is great potential for successful mother-tongue based programs that use local songs, dances, and other forms of EthnoArts to help students gain literacy skills, and for them to find identities that are grounded in the cultures inherited from their parents and ancestors. (Saurman & Stallsmith, n.d.). Lastly, music education that utilizes the learners' mother-tongue has been proven to provide better intrinsic inspiration and extrinsic output work, raise student interest in a wider range of music, and foster voluntary participation, sustained attention and multifaceted development. (Lai, 2008; Kalinde & Dorette Vermeulen, 2016).

In line with these concepts regarding culturally responsive music education in the mother-tongue, the project took into consideration the target learners' known and used languages together with lived experiences in their community as part of the rubric for the gathering of materials, worktext writing process, and the lessons completed during the implementation period.

Project Framework

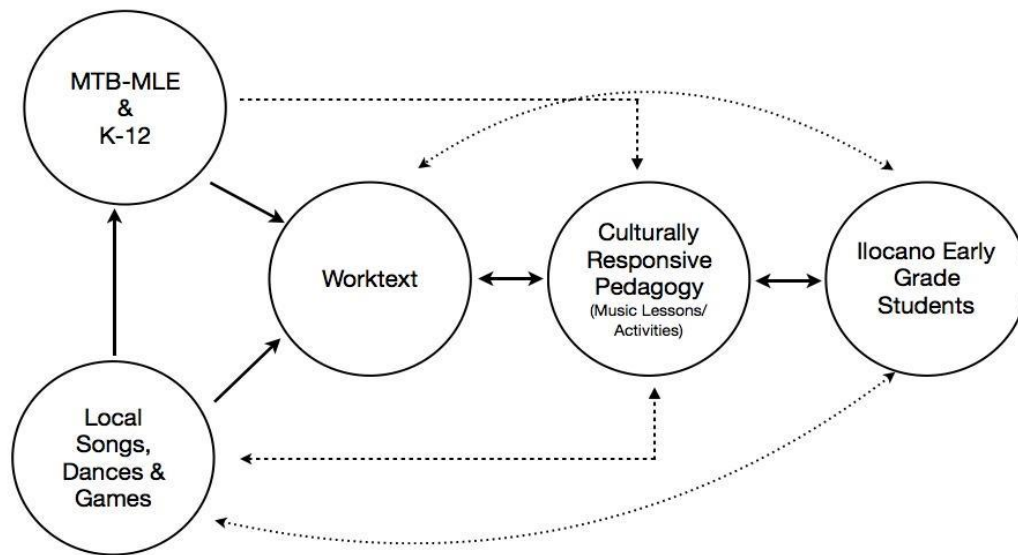


Figure 1: Project Framework

The project was grounded in the concepts of CRP together with MTB-MLE and the K-12 curriculum and considered alongside a repertoire of local music from the Ilocos Region, which were compiled and utilized while designing the worktext. It was constructed with national curriculum standards-based culturally responsive music lessons and activities, intended to be used by teachers and students with their own separate versions. It was designed and implemented for Ilocano Grade 1 students who became fellow contributors to the lessons through the sharing of experiences in relation to the materials. They were also considered contributory to the worktext through inputs such as personal insights and inquiries, manifested cultural practices, and musical improvisations. These improvisations, which took place during the lessons, had an effect on the songs and games which brought about further musical possibilities. Furthermore, within the implementation stage, variables identified during lessons were considered as possible revisions of the worktext. All of these contributed towards gaining awareness of musical elements as applied to the music of the community, as well as fostering interest in this local music as the students learned with their mother-tongue and in connection to their lives.

Project Methodology

The project lasted six-months, (August 2018 – February 2019). Processes included gathering materials, development of the worktext, and an implementation period. It culminated in a public performance under the supervision of the project adviser. This methodology drew on previous projects of a similar nature and scope.

The Gathering of Materials

The first step in the research phase was the verification of available and used materials among schools in the community. Initial interview-observations showed primary classrooms limited to a 'going home' song. Available learning materials were checked in the national online portal for teachers, however the language used in these resources was considered by the authors to be hard for non-musicians, and music materials only include ones from the central Luzon region, translated to two other languages. Moreover, MAPEH (Music, Arts, Physical Education and Health) books by private publishing companies mainly use western music, and lessons were considered level inappropriate and not in line with competency standards. Therefore, identifying specific needs for music education in the community prompted the proponent's search for materials.

To gather documented traditional music, archival work was conducted with the UP Center for Ethnomusicology that has a myriad of ethnographic collections from all over the country. The proponent was given access to digitalized version of recordings that were checked for (1) age appropriateness, (2) incorporated musical concepts, (3) text, and (4) cultural integrations. Simultaneously, theses and book compilations from the UP College of Music library were checked using the same criteria. To further supplement and offer first-hand experience with the local music, field research (interviews with individuals in the community) was conducted (Rodriguez-Carranza, 2016). This involved recollection of some games with tunes which the adults used to play but are not known by the new generation. There were also interview recordings of three known traditional music singers. Finally, all the materials were rechecked, analyzed, and transcribed to digital notation, and the final list provided five to six materials per academic quarter that incorporate the concepts to be taught and the region's cultural calendar (see also Saurman & Stallsmith, n.d.).

The Curriculum

Alongside the research phase was the development of the worktext which started with the curriculum, consisting of content and performance standards adapted and modified from the national curriculum. The Philippines' K-12 curriculum uses the spiral progression approach which promotes mastery and holistic development through repetition of concepts within grade levels (Jacinto, 2019). The content of the music for the Grade 1 curriculum focuses and separates the musical concepts into four quarters: Q1 - Rhythm; Q2 - Melody and Form; Q3 - Timbre and Dynamics; and Q4 - Tempo and Texture. However, given that music in general is experienced with all these musical elements together, the proponent took the spiral approach into grade level-focused design and distributed all the concepts into the four quarters, wherein Q1 - Rhythm only, is modified to Q1 - Rhythm, Dynamics, Melody, Tempo, and Harmony. This design provides continued mastery with gradually increasing complexity throughout the academic year, thereby promoting a higher level of competence, while utilizing all possible elements within a piece of music.

Afterwards, the proponent arranged the sequence of materials and suggested strategies in alignment with the concepts and the region's cultural calendar. This ensured culturally responsive music learning activities: the materials used reflect the events happening around the community and the students' lives (Gay, 2002; Shaw, 2016). The main thematic events reflected on this sequence are Q1 - Coming to School, Self and Favorites, Family; Q2 - Animals, Farming; Q3 - Christmas Season; and Q4

- Arts Celebration and Festivals. This offered convergence between the academic and cultural calendars of the community.

Finally, assessment rubrics were also designed in relation to the curriculum and to guide the suggested classroom activities, with the competencies of (1) identifying, (2) singing, (3) rhythmic playing, and (4) tonal playing, assessed as 'basic,' 'intermediate,' or 'proficient'.

The Suggested Classroom Activities and Worktext Activities

The worktext was also designed to provide material for teachers with both music and non-music education backgrounds. There are not enough music teachers in the Philippines, so non-music graduate teachers are having to handle the subject area (Rodriguez-Carranza, 2016).

As a possible solution, the proponent developed an entire school year of suggested lesson sequences and activities aligned with the curriculum and assessment rubrics, suitable for both specialist and non-specialist music teachers. To ensure the quality of education with the language that the students understand² and for the teachers' knowledge development, the proponent sought expertise from an Ilocano educator as his language consultant.

An integrative approach was facilitated in this project by the activities within the worktext itself; there were teacher-facilitated and independent activities linked to other subjects, such as jotting down ingredients of a local delicacy, and even conducting interviews within the community. Finally, the proponent recorded a supplementary CD for teachers to access in learning and teaching the materials.

Project Implementation

The project was implemented in a rural school over one academic quarter. It included 21 Grade 1 students (11 boys and 10 girls). The weekly music lessons lasted 40 minutes with activities that included: (1) Ilocano greeting, (2) learning and singing of materials, (3) unlocking and discussions (4) reinforcement tasks, (4) rhythmic playing and movement (5) story sharing, (6) impromptu performances, and (7) accomplishing worktext integrated activities. All sessions ended with the idea designed by the authors – of having a snack with native delicacies which the students don't commonly eat.

The implementation period culminated within a performance on the 1st of February 2019, which was aligned with the city's festival. The performance offered an opportunity for the students to present the local music they had learned in front of their families, teachers, schoolmates, and other members of the community, which allowed the almost forgotten songs and rhymes to be heard again.

² One of the key concepts discussed with shared successful practices during IMMLE 2019

Findings and Discussion

Observation of students and anecdotal records showed that within the implementation period the use of the MTB-MLE approach with local music material through the worktext led to fluid learning experiences (Kalinde & Dorette Vermeulen, 2016). The content and context (lyrics or scenarios) of the materials and activities were also very relatable to the students (Gay, 2002; Kesler, 2011), resulting in their stories being shared during and after class. In relation to this, there was sustained motivation amongst most of the class and participation was very active. For example, when the class was learning the song *Ti Sidat' Mannalon* (The Food of a Farmer), the proponent allowed extra time for sharing as the students appeared eager to share local food and ingredients of a cuisine that they knew, right after listening to the song.

Having the words of the materials in their mother-tongue with the melody and rhythm being age appropriate, the students showed an increased level of singing competency from intermediate to proficient. Rhythmic and movement activities also improved from basic to proficient among 19/21 students. In addition, learning the musical concepts in Ilocano led to better understanding, recall, and performance, as the students were able to relate them to same word usage aside from music³, together with discussions done in Ilocano. Furthermore, students' final performance was also highly commended by the proponent's thesis panel.

On the positive side, the culturally responsive music education in the mother-tongue approach of the project brought about good results in terms of music literacy and enculturation of the students (Green, 2003; Shaw, 2012; Kalinde & Dorette Vermeulen, 2016; Saurman & Stallsmith, n.d.). However, the music classes also revealed some limitations of the approach in the context of some classroom realities, especially among 21st century learners.

One such limitation is that while the students were able to understand the majority of the words used in the materials, it was notable and surprising that the majority weren't familiar with farming terminologies despite the community being highly agricultural. Words for 'farmer'⁴, 'farm', and the vegetables planted in the area, for example, were unfamiliar to them. When asked, English terms popped out and the names of vegetables seen on kids' TV shows were given. This implies that the use of MTB-MLE is not only to be used as a tool because of familiarity, but also to teach the language itself to western-associated and technology-influenced learners who are unfamiliar with their mother tongue. Furthermore, it was observed that the community now rarely use some of the words in the materials due to language overlap. Thus, for future work, I advocate 'language developmental preservation': the equilibrium of fostering language development, and developing language preservation practices, through education.

Overall, the enjoyable musicking that happened when the students used their mother-tongue and experienced local music which is part of their culture had positive and promising results, but was limited due to some terminology barriers throughout the course of the implementation. On a

³ Tempo trans. as *Tiempo* [in music] the fastness and slowness of sound, as to *Tiempo* [weather] fast winds and waves to slow wind and calm tree leaves.

⁴ (trans.) farmer - *mannalon*, farmer - *talon*

personal note, the proponent regarded the public performance as an important accomplishment in his mission to revive, preserve and share his local music, language, and culture through education.

Conclusion

Teaching music with the use of mother-tongue and incorporating the music of the community is needed in the Philippine education system, and this project endeavored to address this need through developing an Ilocano music worktext for Grade 1. Implementation provided favorable findings wherein students not only gained high competence in musical literacy but that the activities also gave them an opportunity to further appreciate significant factors in their lives, such as livelihood, their local music, and mother-tongue. It is the proponent's desire that this project opens up further efforts in exploring the merging of music, language and culture educations to provide better quality learning experiences for all.

In future projects, it is recommended that materials be piloted for an entire school year for validity and effectiveness and to be implemented in public schools. It would also be helpful if experts in the field of music education, mother-tongue, materials development, and early grade teaching are present in the classroom-teaching observation, to facilitate a collaborative discussion. Furthermore, language study must be done before the actual worktext is designed, for a more efficient writing process. Additional current ethnographic studies should also be made to update collections and archives, as well as the worktext materials.

Furthermore, in using the worktext, it is highly recommended that lectures be offered to other teachers of the student's mother-tongue, or teacher-training in the form of workshops on how to use these materials. Lastly, it is strongly suggested that similar materials for Grades 2 and 3 are made, piloted and presented to the community.

I (the proponent) once wrote in a class requirement that it is my dream that in the near future, education in the country will be contextualized more in terms of our own culture and teach the students "ang sariling atin." (trans. "our own"). My professor noted that it is hard to identify what is truly ours after centuries of being torn by colonizers. However, with this project I can positively answer that we can identify and facilitate enculturation through these local songs, dances, rhymes and games into which imprints of our culture are deeply engraved and the hearts of our people are painted. As educators, we need to offer opportunities for the people of the community to know, sing, perform, appreciate and learn from their own, and to never forget local music.

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Jesher graduated as cum laude and awardee of Dean's Medal for Outstanding Research from the UP College of Music in 2019. He is currently a faculty of Emmanuel Fundamental Baptist Learning Center. He has been involved as coordinator and teacher to music workshops, seminars and performances around the Philippines and to some countries in Asia. Alongside, he is continuing his life-long project on music education in the mother-tongue in their community.

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