Rachel Lipski

Music Education Pre K-12

Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania

rlipski94@gmail.com

**The Great Musical Melting Pot: Analyzing the Role of Contemporary American Folk Music in Pennsylvania General Music Settings**

**Abstract**:  
   
   
 American music educators commonly use folk music of the early 20th century to teach concepts in their general music education classes. These folk songs encompass both American, European, and “world music” songs with cultural significance to specific populations. While these more primitive folk examples play a significant role in American music education, thorough review of the literature reveals a lack of modern folk music in the music education curriculum (Binkowski, 1967; Public Broadcasting Station American Roots Music, 2001, ). This shortcoming may prevent the student from fully understanding the scope of American folk music and it’s connection to society. The limited use of modern folk music in current music education adds to the decay of cultural and historical understanding as well as knowledge amongst modern American students. This study examines the use of contemporary folk music to include the songs from the American folk revival beginning in the 1950’s in music classrooms throughout Pennsylvania. The purpose of this quantitative study is to examine the role of mid to late 20th century American Folk Music in the modern Pre-Kindergarten through sixth grade music education setting in the state of Pennsylvania, and to better understand how this music is utilized in classroom music education. The questions guiding this research are: (1) How do music educators incorporate mid to late 20th century American folk music in the Pre-Kindergarten-sixth grade music education setting? (2) Does 20th century American folk music lack a significant presence in the Pre-Kindergarten through sixth grade music education setting? and (3) If 20th century American folk music does lack a significant presence in the Pre-Kindergarten-sixth grade music education setting, then why is it seemingly less important to music educators than other types of American folk music? In order to determine the answers to these questions, a 15 question electronic survey will be emailed to (N=100) randomly selected Pre-Kindergarten through sixth grade music teachers throughout Pennsylvania. Once data has been collected, a T-test will be used to determine whether the findings are statistically significant.

**Discussion**:

American folk music is an aspect of the United States’ cultural heritage that is truly a melting pot of ethnicities, social norms, stories, and ways of life. The deep repertoire of folk music in America contains songs from Africa, Germany, Ireland, Jamaica, Mexico, France, and other countries from around the globe. These are the songs of immigrants in search of a new life; the songs of those brought over against their will. The certainty in this is that all of these men and women helped build and shape America in one way or another (Gold and Revill, 2006).  
 Folk music allows people to remember and keep their cultural identity. As teachers, especially as music teachers, we must be sure to teach in a well-rounded manner that includes and differentiates for all of the students’ needs. We must be all-encompassing in our song choices. By teaching the rich ethnic heritage of our students, we may be able to help students find a connection between their own experience and the music history of our nation.   
 The purpose of this research is to determine what (if any) late 20th century American folk music is being used in the PreK-Sixth grade music classrooms across Pennsylvania. This research is in process. The researchers have used an HP laptop computer and a MacBook Pro laptop computer, using Google Chrome and Internet Explorer. These browsers were used to identify potential participants (N=100) who, upon approval from the IRB, will receive a 25 question survey via SurveyMonkey.com. Participants are being identified by perusal of school district websites and searches via “google.” Because folk music is most often taught as part of the general music curriculum, the researchers will focus their participants to those currently teaching Pre K-Sixth grade music in the state of Pennsylvania. Once data has been collected, a T-test will be used to determine whether the findings are statistically significant.