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Authenticity of United States and Canadian Folksongs Represented in Elementary Music Textbooks

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In an era of globalization and instant communication, the world is only an Internet search away. Music teachers attempt to bring the world into their classrooms by including songs outside of the European art tradition in their curriculum. This growing multiculturalism documented by researchers “is not an isolated, contemporary event but a reflection of macro- trends across time” (Volk, 1998, p. 9).

Numerous pictures, recordings, and pronunciation guides (Abril 2006, Demorest & Schultz 2004, Volk 1998) are available to music teachers as they choose song literature from other cultures to share with their students. The amount of information available through the Internet, textbooks, and other resources is overwhelming, especially when it is conflicting. The same melody may be found with two different songs having very different texts and labeled from two different cultures. For example, African-American songs have been mislabeled and grouped into the larger culture of United States (Mason, 2010). How should the concerned music teacher determine the correct version? What does it mean to have the “correct” version? The authenticity of multicultural songs can be difficult to ascertain when the music educator may not have knowledge of that culture.

North American folk songs come from a rich oral tradition, passed down from one generation to the next. In this era of instant communication and globalization, these songs are becoming extinct as older generations die. Effort has been made to collect and preserve these songs, but they are often changed when reproduced and placed into school music textbooks. Change is an essential element of the oral tradition; however, the changes made by textbook publishers are more didactic in nature and affect the folk flavor of the music (Palmer, 1992).

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to provide a content analysis folk songs from the United States and Canada found in two major elementary textbook series, McGraw Hill’s *Spotlight on Music* (2005) and Silver Burdett’s *Making Music* (2005). The songs will be evaluated on their authenticity in order to determine the quality of North American folk literature included in the two major textbook series.

**Need for Study**

North American folk music comes from a rich oral tradition, where music is passed on to subsequent generations. Children deserve to have a music curriculum that is authentic to every culture. As music teachers strive to be sensitive to the music of cultures outside the Western art tradition, that same perspective should be applied to North American folk music. By evaluating the authenticity of songs included in textbooks, a music educator will be able to determine whether to include these songs in their teaching or if they need to find alternative resources.

**Definition of Terms**

*Authenticity*- The measure of how close the music approximates absolute

authenticity and is not compromised past the point of being unrecognizable

by its cultural traditions (Palmer, 1992).

*Absolute authenticity*- A performance presented by the culture within the cultural

context intended for the music. This includes the specific cultural artistry,

instruments and language (Palmer, 1992).

*North American Folk Music* – In this study, music from the oral traditions of Canada

and the United States will constitute North American folk music. Due to the

colonial history of these countries, songs whose melodies originated

elsewhere but have been assimilated into the folk tradition and thus have

been changed into a new song will also be included. Indigenous music of

Native Americans will be excluded for the purpose of this study because it is

more related to Nonwestern than Western folk music.

**Research Questions**

I will examine the following questions in the course of this research: (a) How many examples of various types of Canadian and United States folk music are included in the two major elementary textbooks, McGraw Hill’s *Spotlight on Music* and Silver Burdett’s *Making Music*? (b) How has the folk music of North American been changed from the living oral tradition to a static existence printed in textbooks?

**Limitations**

Although the questions of authenticity can be applied to multicultural music and music outside the Western art tradition, this study will focus solely on folk music of the United States and Canada. Popular styles and music of other cultures will be excluded. Many immigrant and culture groups have influenced the music of North America and it can be difficult to trace all of the different cultural characteristics. The process for determining authenticity for North American folk music may not directly translate to determining the authenticity of music from other cultures.

**Chapter 2 - Review of Literature**

There has been much recognition that multicultural and world music deserves a place in the music curriculum alongside Western (European) art music. Researchers have documented this push for multiculturalism as a “reflection of macro-trends across time” (Volk, 1998, p.9). Mason’s (2010) content analysis of two elementary textbook series showed over 100 countries represented in each series and that this number increased with succeeding editions. Although there has been an increase in the number of countries represented, the United States followed by African-American culture, England, Germany, and France are the most frequently represented countries. Despite a general acknowledgment of the inclusion of world music there does not seem to be an equal merit given to it. Ideally a music educator would present all music equally without bias; however, the structures of music education present a Eurocentric way of understanding music (Drummond, 2010).

Koops (2010b) found that children in The Gambia learn music by listening, observing and then doing. This style of immersion is different than “the concept approach” of Western art music experienced by many music educators that privileges “an education system, reinforced in their teacher-training, which tends to acknowledge only one learning paradigm” (Drummond, 2010, p. 119). This style of teaching and learning is inherently biased against students from other cultures and their musical traditions. Music teachers are unknowingly committing a cultural *faux pas* by teaching music from other cultures using a method completely foreign to the culture.

Music is an extension of culture; it is not “an isolated sonic event” but rather a “meaningful human practice” (Koops, 2010a, p. 23). Teaching music from a cultural context requires knowledge of the practices, language, and instruments of the culture creating the music. Pedagogy is removed from its natural cultural context in the music classroom and presents issues of authenticity. When it is no longer performed with an understanding of cultural context and musical practice, it has merely become an object of study for the classroom and looses some of its essence.

Palmer (1992) notes that there are many examples of songs from around the world included in music textbooks that have been altered by adding piano accompaniment, translating texts, or altering the melodic or rhythmic content. He attempts to define what authenticity means, while acknowledging that a truly authentic performance may not be possible with the limited resources, language, or cultural differences. While compromise is inevitable, too much compromise sacrifices the essence of the music and no longer represents the culture accurately.

Palmer views authenticity and compromise as a continuum. Some pieces have absolute authenticity, which is defined as a performance,

…by the culture’s practitioners, recognized generally by the culture as artistic and representative, the use of instruments as specified by the composer or group creating the music, the use of correct language as specified by the composer or group creating the music, for an audience made up of the culture’s members, and in a setting normally used in the culture. (1992, p. 32-33).

When a piece is taken out of its cultural context, it can no longer have absolute authenticity. The opposite end of the authenticity spectrum is a piece of music compromised to the point where it has lost its entire characteristic flavor; it no longer represents the culture. Most pieces fall somewhere along this continuum and the goal of the music educator should be to accurately represent the music as close to its absolute authenticity while making compromises that do not alter the piece past the point of being representative of the culture.

Koops (2010a) explores other models of authenticity in addition to Palmer’s continuum. Another strategy for justifying musical decisions related to authenticity is a Historical/Personal model. Koops references Peter Kivy’s description of historical authenticity as the intent, sound, and practice of the original music, while personal authenticity is the interpretation and expression of the performer. Koops also mentions Aron Edidin’s view that “authenticity resides both in the musical object and in the act of performing” (p. 25). This historical/personal model requires knowledge of the intent of the composer and performance practices as well as period or cultural instruments. This method assumes that there is one true historical performance aesthetic for a piece of music and this assumption is unrealistic for the study of folk music. Folk music changes and evolves over time and there are many different aesthetics that have validity.

Another model for authenticity that Koops (2010a) presents in her article is the Reproduction/Reality/Relevance approach. Koops cites Swanwick’s description of reproduction very similar to the historical authenticity of Kivy; it is the performance exactly as it was first created. This is also very similar to Palmer’s definition of absolute authenticity. Swanwick’s reality “reflects an actual musical practice in the world, and not just for the music classroom”, while relevance “refers to generating individual meaning in the act of music making”(Swanwick, 1994, as cited by Koops 2010a, p.25). In this model, music exists as experiences not as objects. While the relevance for a piece may be different for students than in the culture that it exists, it provides a vehicle for teaching about cultural context.

The final method that Koops (2010a) explores is Beyond Authenticity. Several scholars have rejected authenticity or choose to ask different questions outside of the authentic/inauthentic dichotomy. Ramon Santos rejects authenticity on the basis that musical practices are not static and that there is not “one true version” that exists. Santos still recommends that music educators pay attention to “indigenous music making and pedagogy” (Santos, 1994, as cited by Koops, 2010a, p. 26). This point aligns with Drummond’s description of the inherent bias teaching multicultural music from a formal Western music structure.

Sherry Johnson (2000, as cited by Koops, 2010a) wants to move beyond the authentic/inauthentic question and instead ask questions with the intent of improving classroom performances. Questions like, how is this music produced? By whom? For whom? In what context? For what purpose? And with what influences? In the same way that Drummond (2010) wants to rename Western art music with a descriptive name like North-west Asian court music to erase the inherent privilege of that music over traditional folk and popular music, Regina Bendix wants to explore how authenticity has been used to elevate some types of music over others. Bendix writes that authenticity is used to understand the past rather than accepting that culture changes over time and thus “’authentic’ practices are not an accurate way to understand the past or present” (Bendix, 1997, as cited in Koops, 2010a, p. 27).

Abril (2006) recommends that music educators consider authenticity on three levels, the music, the meaning, and the behaviors. He considers authentic music as all the properties of sound, including instruments, timbre, and phrasing of a culture’s music. Authentic meaning is the context for the piece of music and authentic behaviors are the processes of teaching, learning, and performing the music or the pedagogy of that culture. Abril aligns himself with Palmer’s view of an authenticity continuum, asking teachers to determine cultural validity that is free from bias and practical for their teaching situation. Abril states, “the musical experience should be typical or characteristic of that culture” which will “serve as a culturally valid representation, not a definitive version, as is implied by the term ‘authentic’” (p. 40). This demonstrates a perspective more along the lines of Koops (2010a) “Beyond” model of authenticity.

These discussions on authenticity are interesting theoretically, but practically it is students’ responses to authenticity that matters to an educator. In a study of fifth graders music preferences of world music, Demorest and Schultz (2004) played an arranged version along side a more authentic version and asked the students to rate their preference. They overwhelmingly preferred the arranged version. This study reinforces Drummond’s (2010) claim that music is a part of identity and people’s natural inclination to privilege “their” music. Demorest and Schultz wondered if the arranged versions were easier to identify with since they resembled Western music in nature. If authenticity is valued, then this study has important implications for the music educator attempting to teach world and folk music to students. It only reinforces the need for teaching cultural context, that music needs to be understood within its natural framework, not as a sterile specimen for study.

Gambian children did not learn music that was broken into manageable chunks and then taught sequentially the way music is in Western traditions. Koops (2010b) draws parallels to studies conducted about playground music and the ways in which American schoolchildren learn music holistically by the same immersion approach as Gambian children. Perhaps the conservatory training/concepts approach of Western music not only is biased against other cultures, but also illustrates how adults unknowingly force their structures of musical learning on children, who learn more holistically.

In all these discussions of the issues in authenticity, one overarching principle is consistent; music is a distinctly human experience (Koops, 2010a). Music functions within a cultural context giving meaning to it. People unconsciously privilege music that is familiar to them, identifying with the music of their culture. However, it is also the human element that can untangle these issues of authenticity. A responsible music educator, aware of unconscious biases can make a conscious effort to break down these structures of privilege and teach music from a cultural context with sensitivity to other cultures. As Palmer says, “the burden of authenticity rests on the music educator” (1992, p. 39).

**Chapter 3 - Methodology**

This study is a content analysis of North American folk songs in the two major elementary textbook series, McGraw Hill’s *Spotlight on Music* (2005) and Silver Burdett’s *Making Music* (2005). I will be examining the textbooks for grades K-6 in each series and comparing them to versions from folk song anthologies known to contain material authentic to the culture. One such anthology is *150 American Folk Songs to Sing Read and Play* (Erdei, 1974). This text was compiled at the Kodaly Musical Training Institute through careful scholarship consulting many American folk collections such as the Pete and Ruth Crawford Seeger, Cecil Sharp, and Alan and John Lomax collections, as well as Library of Congress recordings, and the Journal of American Folklore, among many other primary sources. The sequel collection, *Sail Away: 155 American Folk Songs to Sing Read and Play* (Locke, 1981) follows the same scholarship using Folkways Recordings and collections that can be traced to a primary source. Under each song, Locke lists the culture from which it is taken or the person who sang it. Another American Kodaly inspired collection, *My Singing Bird: 150 Folk Songs from the Anglo-American, African-American, English, Scottish and Irish traditions* (Erdei, Knowles & Bacon, 2002), lists where every single song can be found as a primary source. *Folk Songs North America Sings* (Johnston, 1984) is a Canadian publication with an extensive bibliography of primary sources. This text also lists the source under the song and was complied by another Kodaly inspired educator. These anthologies are valuable for teaching due to the extensive indices listing songs by region, scale, melodic content, rhythms, etc..; however, they are secondary sources and in some instances the primary source collections themselves will be referenced, including *Folk Songs of North America* (Lomax, 1960) and others. These anthologies contain songs that have been collected from primary sources, usually someone from the folk culture who sings it. In some cases a recording may serve as a comparison for authenticity, when no printed copy is available.

**Data Collection/Research Instrument**

I will first identify the folk songs included in the two textbooks series; and then categorize them based on the type of folk song. I will do this for each grade level and across the whole series. Then I will find alternate versions of the songs in folksong anthologies or recordings. Once I have established variants of the songs, I will use a rubric that I have developed (see appendix) to measure the authenticity of the version found in the textbooks based on the differences between them.

**Data Analysis/Statistical Procedures**

For the first research question asking how many examples of various types of North American folk music are included in each textbook series, I will calculate the percentage of each type of folk song in each textbook series by grade level and as a whole. The percentages of each type will be shown in a table for comparison, and any large differences will be a part of the discussion chapter. I will also compare the total number of United States and Canadian folksongs with the number of folksongs in each series to see if these songs dominate the folksong material or if there is a variety from different cultures. To provide insight into the rubric analysis, I will describe the percentage of songs with changed melodies, forms, lyrics, and or rhythms. The appendix will include a rubric for each folksong found in the textbook series with a copy of the song as found in the textbook and its variants found in the folksong collections for comparison. I will need to seek copyright permissions to include these printed songs, if permission is not granted or too costly, the bibliographic information will make it possible for the reader to find the folksongs for his/her own comparison.

**Presentation/ Organization of Data**

Chapter 1- Introduction

Chapter 2- Literature Review

Chapter 3- Methodology

Chapter 4- Results

Chapter 5- Discussion/ Summary/ Conclusions

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Appendix

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**Appendix- Rubric for Comparing Changes in Folksongs**

Title \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Spotlight on Music \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Making Music \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Alternate Versions \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Melody

Mode \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Melodic content \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Rhythm

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Lyrics

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Form \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Melody \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Rhythm \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Lyrics \_\_\_\_\_\_\_