Malay Gamelan: Approaches of music learning through Community Music

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Abstract

This paper looked into the role of Rhythm in Bronze (RiB), a local music group in Malaysia, in community music work practices that uses Malay gamelan as the medium. The research delved into the different aspects of the approaches used to enhance music learning through community music; particularly the activities used and how they relate to Vygotsky's theory of socialization in learning. Community music gathers people from different backgrounds. Experiences and knowledge shared helps the community through the development in terms of personal growth, self- esteem and self-confidence. These terms are just some of the aspects that community music promotes, apart from music making. Along the process of community music, creativity and expression are important in music making, as this will further develop creative thinking skills among musicians. Qualitative approaches such as observation, interview, and group's past work were used in this research to gather information and data on how music has been taught to children through community music. Social interaction has certainly shown a big role in developing children thinking and perceptions through the activities implemented. In the other hand, Zoltán Kodály, Carl Orff, and Émile Jaques-Dalcroze approaches identified through data analysis as it has helped the children to have more fun and always looking forward to the sessions. This documented writing will certainly help people to understand between the whole concepts of community music in the context of Rhythm in Bronze.

Keywords: Community music, Rhythm in Bronze (RiB), Malay gamelan, Music learning, Vygotsky

Introduction

Through the hands of the musicians and practitioners, the love of sharing music through teaching and learning will eventually start to flourish. The act of talking together, improvising,

leading, and playing emerges the sense of creativeness. As Higgins (2012) mentioned, community music is the expression of cultural democracy where musicians create music together. There are three main characters identified through community music by Koopman (2007). They are 1) collaborative music making; 2) community development; and 3) personal growth. Based on this, people in the community music learn to grow not only by themselves but it ultimately shaped them to learn and interact with each other. Hedegaard in Pui Ling and Fleer (2012) mentioned that children learn and develop every day when they play music and taking parts. Vygosky also believes in the importance of communication in a society where children learn to be able to socialize and interact among themselves.

In the perspective of Malaysia setup, community music focuses more especially in performing arts area with a long history. There were researches conducted to educate the local about the importance of it. Unfortunately, in the academic field, these documentations received less attention. There are works and researches on community in performing arts by Tan Sooi Beng, Janet Pillai, Mark Teh, and Rhythm in Bronze (RiB) where they had contributed to a tremendous outcome to the society. As Pillai (n.d.) mentioned that community normally used as a platform to gather people with different age group and different thinking skills. She furthered mentioned that these 'site' and 'community' are used as a platform for intergenerational interaction and creative arts is used as an enabler to engage young people with living culture.

This study has looked into the relationship of community music with the social interaction between the children with Vygotsky theory. It sets to 'unpack' and interpret the development of community music through gamelan learning and briefly discussed Vygotsky's theory based on his perception on social interaction.

Statement of Problem

Community music has seen to be the saver for the decreasing of music subject's time allocated in the Malaysian public schools. Children were always been given minimal chances to do music, especially in schools in Malaysia public schools (Wong, 2013). Kamplyis & Berki (2010) and Russel-Bowie (2009) in Wong mentioning that many countries in the world are still giving less priority to subjects such as music also support this. As the current implementation of Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah (KSSR) or *Standard Curriculum Primary School*, the previous one-hour allocated lesson time for music has been shortened to only half an hour (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2012). The implication of this was also partly because of the latest implementation of Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) in schools where some of the classes for face-to-face learning are turning into virtual learning. This has indirectly affected music classes. Children needs to be given extra time for them to find their musicality during their music classes time in the school. Only by the time given, they are able to gain the purpose of learning experiences (Beegle, 2010). This is further supported by Chan and Kwan (2010) mentioning that the importance of children being offered with plenty of opportunities in learning through music classes in school.

Objective of Research

The following two research questions were established to guide this research:

1) What are the music approaches used to enhance music learning in community music?
2) How is community music able to encourage music learning among children?

Literature Review

Vygotsky Theory

Vygotsky (1978) was a famous theorist in the field of cognitive development specified in fundamental of social interaction. He believes that an exploration of social development in an individual is crucial. Vygotsky's approaches seen in the development of children's meaning-making processes in social and cultural context (Mahn, 2012). Vygotsky (1978) in McLeod (2012) mentioned that the process in "making meaning" plays an important role in the community. An "everyday concepts" or day-to-day experiences are what Vygotsky believes on (Au, 2007). The impact of this theory through culture, development, learning and education remains in the 21st century (Hedges, 2012). Children's senses in making and thinking connects through their new learning experiences as well as understanding. These known as working theories where children are believed to find connections with their everyday life experiences and learning process. Hedegaard (2009) mentioned that children learn and grow by being involved in their everyday activities in the community.

In relation with this research, the connection between people involved in Rhythm in Bronze (RiB) projects and the social context plays an important role in the interaction process. The major theme of Vygotsky's theoretical framework is that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. Cherry (2017) added that Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is a process of contributions by the society that shape an individual. In addition, this learning process can be identified in two levels. Moreover, both of these levels come through sequence. Learning-theories (2014) mentioned that the first level known as interpyschological sees that learning comes from social interaction among people. Next, the second level known as intrapsychological oversees the individual learning which happens inside the child. Vygotsky second main aspect sees the idea of potential cognitive development, also known as Zoneof Proximal Development (ZPD). In this zone, exploration takes the lead of the whole process where children are cognitively prepared but in order for the children to perfect their cognitive thinking, help and social interaction needs to be exposed to them at the beginning. UNESCO mentioned that to facilitate intentional learning; collaborative learning, discourse, modeling, and scaffolding are needed to support intellectual knowledge and skills of learners.

Based on the observation by the researcher in Rhythm in Bronze (2004), children involved in community music grow as they learn to do and create things together into the activities led by the facilitators. The importance of this social interaction takes place during the process of developing their trust and fundamental in cooperation through activities. Most children come from different family background and they spend their time most at the tuition centered cared by a nun staying in the same building. Through music, they learned to play and interacted with each other. Most of the children's interaction among each other has proven that Vygosky theory of social interaction had occurred during their communication. Through teamwork, children are able to share their ideas, brainstorming, learning to lead, and to respect individual background. As believed by Vygosky, the community plays an important role in the process of "making meaning". He believes that the exploration of social development of an individual is important (McLeod, 2015).

Rhythm in Bronze (RiB)

Rhythm in Bronze (RiB) work in both performing arts scene as well as community work has highly been recognized by many in Malaysia and oversea. RiB has brought the Malay gamelan onto the contemporary concert stage and created their own audience with their new music.

Rhythm in Bronze, since 1997, has been the first and for a long time the only group, that has been changing the landscape of gamelan in Malaysia (Shahanum & Kamarul, 2012). This group also explored the unconventional sound of gamelan through timbres and textures brought out using different touches of the mallets and trying out other new ideas. RiB has pushed themselves in creating new music, and is continuously exploring collaborations with other gamelan genres such as Balinese, Javanese, and Sundanese. Apart from performing, RiB has ventured into community work by collaborating with Five Arts Center (FAC) to start with their community work. Few community works conducted by RiB including with children and adults.

Community Music

An activity that offers one to think beyond the individual is often connected to music (Emberton, 2013). This also supports in the founding and maintenance of any individual and group's identity. The sense of awareness and enhancing a person is thinking through learning music by ourselves or in groups can also develop motivation, active learning, interaction and cooperation. One good way of learning in a group has always been associated with community learning. As mentioned by Jensen (1964) in Smith (1996), learning in community education is the key to lifelong learning and this learning plays an important part in fighting against social exclusion. Community learning offers great opportunities in learning within and for the communities. Through the process, each individual were exposed to learning, discovering, practising, and performing when ideas were put together based on their cooperative's learning journey.

Community music among RiB group with the targeted children they had worked with, somehow created the teaching and learning processes that reflected the music performed. With children coming from different races, these learning had become a journey of knowing who their new friends with different culture, language, background and many others.

"Community music creates and performs new works for contemporary Malaysian gamelan through collaborating with musicians and artists across a variety of genres and sensibilities". (Rhythm in Bronze, 2014).

Methodology

This research used a qualitative approach whereby observations and interviews were used to gather information and data. It also looked into how music were taught to children through community music. This research also looked into various approaches used by the facilitators in their teaching and learning processes through interviews. Obtaining reports and analyzing the formal write up of the group's activities in the community were another way on how information were gathered. Secondary data collections through readings, archive reports from RiB; field work through observations, personal communication with RiB members involved were used to collect the data needed. Data were analyzed and used to answer the research questions.

Results and Discussion

Data collected aimed to capture the depth, richness and texture in order to get the details of the children's work. Their work in this community music learning has given a tremendous impact to them personally. Dikir Barat, storytelling, creating songs with movements or implementing movements on songs they are familiarized, sound exploration with objects, playing with bottles filled with water, visual story mapping, and sound effects implemented

were part of the activities. Based on the two research objectives raised, the researcher was able to find the outcome to support the research questions. The first research question is what are the approaches used to enhance music learning in community music. There were two types of approaches discovered through the data collected. The first approach was the type of learning implemented. The second approach was methods used during the activities.

Two types of learning identified during the work progress in community music were 1) formal learning and 2) non-formal learning. According to Mak (n.d.) formal learning focuses on organized and structured context where a curriculum is involved. Examples of this evidence were during the facilitation on Selayang Prima and Selayang Prima II and Bites of Delights activities. During Selayang Prima II, there were few facilitators invited to give the children a talk. Some of them were in the academic field and some were practitioners. They uses lesson plans to facilitate their classes. Rhythm in Bronze (2006) also mentioned that theoretical approaches on the facilitator's expertise and experiences were given to the students to help them in their cognitive thinking process. Even during the process of learning gamelan, students were not only being exposed to playing; knowledge about the history and evolution of the current and past gamelan teaching and learning were make known to them. The second learning was the non-formal learning where according to Mak (n.d), this learning contains learning involving activities of both un-plan and plan. The relation between personal learning drives and motives of the individual's learning are high. Non-formal learning is a learning which is embedded in planned activities not specifically designated as learning (this covers learning objectives, learning time or learning support) (UNEVOC-UNESCO, n.d.). Lessons were not explicitly planned but rather it was a learning based from the learner's intention. For example, children in Selayang project were asked to sing a song that they are familiar and said out their name loud in their own style at the end based on to the song (Figure 1). The purpose of the activity was to create an interaction with their new friends as well as the facilitator.
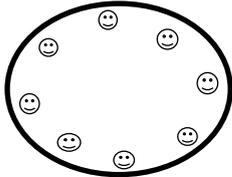
Week	Topic	Details
1	Ice-Breaker	Children's position during activities. The children would sing the song and introduce their names at the end of the song. Here's how it went: *Chorus* We will… We will… rock you We will… We will… rock you Hi kawan-kawan, *Nama saya* …………. (name of child)

Figure 1 Children's activity. Source from Rhythm in Bronze (2004)

In the second approach, learning approaches to enhance music to the children were the examples of body percussion by Carl Orff. Orff is famous with its approach called Orff

Approach or Orff Schulwerk (Estrella, 2017). This approach also consist of body percussion (producing sound through your body such as clapping, stomping, patting or snapping), rhythm learning (using words to say instead of note values) and Orff instruments that are used in teaching and learning. Figure 2 shows that children were making sound from their knee and were indirectly using words to replace the note values in 'text' section. According to Rhythm in Bronze (2004), this activity was implemented because the facilitators wanted the students to experience creating a chant. At the same time they were required to use their body (slapping their knee and clapping) while they were chanting the text.

	Beat 1	Beat 2	Beat 3	Beat 4	Beat 5
Text:	Milo	Tarik	Milo	Ais	.
Action:	Right knee slap	Left knee slap	Right knee slap	Left knee slap	Clap

Figure 2 Body percussion. Source from Rhythm in Bronze (2004)

There were activities on exploration, which is also in Orff process of learning music. The researcher found that the facilitator asked the children to bring things from home that could form sound.

"….the children were asked to bring any objects that could produce any form of sound when hit. The children then brought with them pails, *kole*, chopsticks, solid metal spoons and plastic scoopers in different shapes and sizes. This activity marked an introduction to a more structured rhythmic musical activity. The sound of each object they brought was explored as they sat in a circle" (Rhythm in Bronze, 2004).

Note that the researcher discovered that the applications of *eurhythmics* by Dalcroze used in the community music project. In both Selayang Project and Bites of Delights, movements and sound making were implemented during the activities. According to Hoffer (p.116 & 117, 1993) *eurhythmics* mean the rhythmic response to music where the purpose is to create a rhythmic sensitivity in the students by letting them to feel the musical rhythm. Evidence of this was such as children were required to act on with movement while saying aloud their name.

The children were asked to stand in a circle and say their name in an exaggerating way, accompanied by a movement (Rhythm in Bronze, 2006, p.10)

With the children standing in a circle, each had to develop the 'shakes' in one particular part of their body. Once that is fully developed, they had to 'throw' that affliction across the circle to another person (Rhythm in Bronze, 2006, p.7).

"….. sung with the kids in a circle, facing inwards, with stamping and clapping accompanying the main beats of the tune. It was an instant hit with the children because of the accompanying movements" (Rhythm in Bronze, 2004, p.6).

Based on the researcher's observation in 2012, while children were playing the gamelan or acting during rehearsals, they were required to use their full body to fill the

rhythm played. During the acting mode, the director asked the cast to do theatre exercises that were physical in nature (Ooi, personal communication, February 15, 2016).

Singing had been the major activities besides movements and playing the instruments. Children were taught to sing before they could play on the instruments. Note that, at times the facilitators will sing a short melody followed by the children whom will repeat what they heard. This process progresses to the longer melody once they could sing the melody. As Houlahan & Tacka (p. 69, 2015) mentioned that Kodaly believes that "voice is the most accessible musical instrument regardless of social or cultural background, ethnicity, or musical ability". In addition, Kodaly believes in the using of hand sign.

"Pitching was a problem in this exercise but we did not emphasize the accuracy of pitching in this activity…. In order to help them see the link between different pitches, we introduced hand movements to the singing exercise – at higher pitches, our hands moved higher in the air, and vice versa" (Rhythm in Bronze, p. 8, 2004).

In the second research objective, the research looked at how community music able encourages music learning among the children. Vygotsky believes that the major theme in his theory is that social interaction plays an important role in the development of cognition (UNESCO, 2015). Learning comes in two levels: 1) interaction and 2) incorporating learning into the individual's mental structure. Children who went through community music conducted by RiB were trained to work together in groups. Carl Orff believes that playing in an ensemble improves the ability of the students or children to work with others and taking responsibility for an individual part (Goodkin, 2005 & Powell, 2015). As per discussed in literature review, interpyschological and intrapyschological levels were important to develop social interaction. All the activities implemented to them had an objective, which was to train, lead and exposed them to interact with others. These levels seen to be helping the children in their activities. According to Rhythm in Bronze (2006) during the cooling down exercises children were challenged to listen to the music played and move according to how they will react if they were a seed growing to a plant. Each individual explored own inner feeling through music played.

During the rehearsals, session children were going through the process of creating and exploration in finding ideas for the task given (Rhythm in Bronze, 2012). This is liaison with what Vygostky had mentioned previously that learning comes through interaction. The researcher also noticed that most of the activities implemented were in a circle. The rationale of this is to make the children facing with each other. When they connect, their social interaction happens naturally. RiB facilitators indeed had encouraged learning music among the children in groups or even individuals for them to be able to voice their ideas out. According to Higgins (2012), facilitation in the community does not refer to controlling the group or surrendering all responsibility; when we lead, there will be a strong sense of setting towards the beginning, middle, and end of the activity.

Based on the interviews conducted with the facilitators, problems seen by the children were that they could not express themselves well. They were shy and was not sure what and how to react when a task given such as creating movement, shout out a note, or to act like one was given. Eventually at the end of each session, children gave themselves a chance to explore and play along where it eventually comes up with a project based on the activities process

Conclusion

Community music is a platform where people to another group of people are centralizing the work for music informally. This process of learning known to be informal and not documented. This study has looked into the approaches used by Rhythm in Bronze (RiB) group into enhancing the learning through community music as well as how community music is able to encourage music learning among children. It justifies the current state of this group and the amount of work conducted.

There are other community music works conducted by other groups that can be used to conduct a research. By collecting these resources, audience can identify the problems and the actual situation of community music in Malaysia. Community music research can also be widely extended to the hospitals and shelter homes. Based on the researcher's observation, music has been a platform for the children to ignite their mental development. It helped them to express their feelings and ideas in musical activities. Based on the music curriculum in Malaysia public schools, some secondary schools are currently offering gamelan learning but not the elementary school students. It will be a good opportunity for the elementary students to learn gamelan through existing various community program.

Although gamelan is an ensemble consisting of big sized instruments, pots from *bonang* and other smaller sized instruments can be utilized in music activities conducted. As mentioned by Carl Jung (1875-1961) "The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the play instinct acting from inner necessity. The creative mind plays with the objects it loves."

It is hope that RiB's work will be used as a platform for another performing art groups to educate the public regarding the importance of community music learning.

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