

# Intercultural Understanding of Music for Kyosei Living: A Case Study on Multicultural Music Education in an American Primary School

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*Music has the power to connect people of distance and differences. Music education can facilitate this process. However, it can also develop cultural misunderstanding and prohibit the acceptance of others. This chapter introduces a negative case of multicultural music education in an American primary school to make sense of an intercultural misunderstanding in music that fails to achieve kyosei living in multicultural society. A detailed case study sheds light on the ways in which a music teacher facilitated students' cultural misunderstanding by teaching multicultural music from a European viewpoint, ignoring culture-specific contexts of practicing and appreciating music. Two examples of multicultural music taught in the class were Japanese and Native American music. Each will be examined from a culture-bearer's and ethnomusicologist's perspectives. Instead of criticizing the teacher's approach, the author analyzes why and how it happened within the context of the teacher.*

## **BEGINNING**

I visit Washington Elementary school for the first time in three months. Everything looks new to me, though there has been little change. Inside the music room, Sarah is preparing her lesson for the next 3rd grade class. “I should have told you before,” she says after we exchange greetings. “We have been learning a Japanese song *Sakura* [a Japanese folk song], so I was going to ask you to play some Japanese songs.” I have already given a performance of Japanese music in her 5<sup>th</sup>-grade classes before. She expected that I could give another one for 3<sup>rd</sup> graders. Sarah continues to prepare in the music room. She carries claves and cymbals and puts them in front of the students’ seats. I look around the music room. There is a paper board on the wall, which tells stories concerning the Academy Award given to Norah Jones. Another paper tells a music concert at a middle school in the district. Next to this paper board, there are several pictures of music performers around the world including India, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Japan. These pictures show how music players and their instruments look like. At the corner of the room, I find a collection of Japanese goods including Japanese paper crafts, traditional cloths, and several books about Japanese gardens and history. I also find a Japanese song book which is written only in Japanese. It seems that Sarah has made considerable efforts getting ready for this lesson.

This case study is intended to take a closer look at music educator’s daily attempt to include multicultural music as part of music curriculum. Sarah Berghoff (a pseudonym) is a white female general-music teacher in an elementary school. Like other music teachers, she developed her expertise as a music educator through Western classical music. She has learned multicultural music at in-service teacher sessions, conferences, workshops, and through written or recorded materials. As a music teacher whose musical notion is rooted in Western music, she has challenged to expand her musical horizon to approach multicultural music. During my observation, she taught multicultural music for 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup>-graders, focusing on such regions as Japan, Mexico, Indonesia, Africa, and USA (Native American music). There were no Japanese students nor Native Americans. There were some Hispanic students, but not everyone was from Latin American countries. As a music educator and a Japanese citizen, I became interested in this topic: teaching multicultural music for kyosei.

Music has the power to connect people of distance and differences. Music education can facilitate this process. However, it can also develop cultural misunderstanding and prohibit the acceptance of others. One of the questions that I asked in this case study was “What kind of knowledge (including emotion and feeling) is communicated for cultural (mis) understanding in her teaching?” This chapter introduces a negative case of multicultural music education in an American primary school to make sense how intercultural misunderstanding in music might fail to achieve kyosei living in multicultural society. A detailed case study sheds light on the ways in which a music

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