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Music education researchers share findings in Spain

By **Dawn Pauli**, contributing writer

Oakland University's music education researchers were in the spotlight in Spain at the International Society for Music Education World Conference during July.

Robert Wiggins, associate dean of the School of Education and Human Services, and Jackie Wiggins, professor of music education in the Department of Music, Theatre and Dance, along with several students, presented research and led innovative and informative workshops for conference participants.

Teaching and learning music

In 2001, the Wiggins collected data during a sabbatical study of music teaching and learning in New Zealand primary schools.

This information provided the basis for work that was presented at the conference in a paper, "Collaborative Creating and Pre-Service Generalist Teachers' Emergent Musical Self-Efficacy," with Alex Ruthmann, doctoral candidate in music education and OU instructor.

Ruthmann teaches MTD 201, Performing Arts Experiences for Children. Drawing on the Wiggins' work and his own research, Ruthmann revised his teaching approach for the course.

"In my research, I found that the Performing Arts Experiences for Children course was not perceived as personally relevant or meaningful by a large number of the students who took the class," Ruthmann said. "It may have been caused in part by the students' lack of understanding of musical concepts and processes, like form, melody and composing, and confidence in seeing themselves as musicians."

Ruthmann extended experiences for students to compose, perform and improvise music they created in collaborative groups, implemented a reflective journaling component and introduced new curricular content taught at the level of the students' musical experience.

"Findings from the study suggest that the course revisions have made a positive impact on the students' perceptions of themselves as musicians and in the perceived relevance of the course," Ruthmann said. "There was strong evidence that students' musical confidence had dramatically increased."

Additional studies are under way to follow up on this and other related issues, Ruthmann said.

Attendees at the conference enjoyed the presentation. "The paper was very well received, sparked lively discussion, and will be published in the proceedings of the conference," Jackie Wiggins said.

Learning through sound

Jackie Wiggins and Ruthmann also presented a workshop "Learning Through Meaningful Engagement with the World of Sound," with Deborah Blair, music education doctoral candidate and new visiting instructor in the Department of Music, Theatre and Dance.

They discussed what a constructivist approach to music teaching and learning looks like in a secondary general music classroom.

Wiggins provided the theoretical framework for the presentation and Blair shared listening maps created by high school students who participated in a music workshop class. The students engaged in different kinds of interactive

musical problem solving experiences to expand their understanding of how music works across styles and genres.

Students listened to complex musical works and created graphic representations, or maps, of their understanding of what they heard in the music. They then shared these maps with their peers, enabling their peers to hear more in the music as well.

During the presentation, Ruthmann, also the general music instructor at Kingswood and Vaughan Middle Schools at Cranbrook, reviewed how his students at Cranbrook analyzed four movements of Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring," creating maps that represented their understanding of the works.

They then used these maps as springboards for composing original music that followed the same architecture. These students used looping software to create their original music.

A parallel dance class at Cranbrook studied the original choreography for "The Rite of Spring" and then, using the music created by Ruthmann's music class as a basis, created their own original choreography for the work.

The combined efforts of the music and dance classes were presented in a performance at Cranbrook. Ruthmann shared both process and product of this project with conference attendees.

"The work of both of these outstanding teachers was extremely well-received by attendees. The room was quite full and many hung around afterward to discuss the presentation with us," Wiggins said.

Teaching traditional Japanese music

The third OU presentation showed participants how to teach traditional Japanese music to Japanese or non-Japanese students through a constructivist approach. The workshop, "Knowing, Feeling, and Creating Through the World of Japanese Musical Sound," was presented by Blair and Shinko Kondo, a music teacher from Japan who earned Michigan teacher certification at OU and a Master of Music in Music Education student.

"In particular, this vision of teaching music provides opportunities for students to approach new and unfamiliar musical ideas by connecting them to musical understandings that they already hold," Jackie Wiggins said.

Blair provided the theoretical framework and Kondo led participants through a series of experiences in which they learned to sing a Japanese song, play the song on a koto, understand how to play the song on non-Japanese instruments and embellish the song in a culturally appropriate way. Participants also learned a traditional dance complete with song, chant and accompanying instruments.

"Oakland had an outstanding presence at the conference," Wiggins said. "We had a stronger representation than any other school participating. We were also the only school from Michigan whose proposals were accepted."

SUMMARY

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