

The Helen Carswell Chair in Community Engaged Research in the Arts

Final Reports - 2021

Sankofa Beatzz

Testing the Efficacy of the Funds of Knowledge Strategy for Music Education

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What is this research about?

This research is about the Funds of Knowledge (FKN) strategy (Moll, 2005) that shows teachers how to build on inclusivity at the Regent Park School of Music (RPSM). The FKN strategy scaffolds students' interests to include racialized families and their cultural backgrounds. Teachers asked students:

- 1) if they see themselves reflected in the music they are being taught?
- 2) what kinds of music reflects their interests, races, and cultures?
- 3) how their family culture can be reflected in music learning?

What did the researcher do?

The researcher conducted a literature review of twenty-five research projects that used FKN across America. In each case FKN was adapted to the context. In every case, teachers collaborated to find out how to include racialized community knowledge into the classroom. Some examples of FKN are political knowledge (Gallo & Link, 2015), how to obtain passports (Moll et al. 2005) and use social media for social justice (Cammarota, 2008 as cited in Moll 2015). In this study, collaboration was limited due to COVID. It was not possible to meet in person and discuss lesson plans. However, like the other 25 studies, FKN as a strategy was adapted to the needs of the Jane and Finch community for music learning. The researcher showed the participants how to try to include racialized musical artists into the curriculum, especially female singers that reflect the students' cultural and racial background.

What did the researcher find?

The primary participants in this project were three music teachers from RPSM who were racially diverse: one Asian, one Black and one White teacher. While all three teachers were concerned about diversity in their teaching methods, one teacher in particular was previously attuned to race issues as a result of their own racial background and culture. Two teachers cited personal creative expression, individuality and asserting an identity in artistic practice as top priorities. Parents were also revealed as an important stakeholder in music education.

What you need to know

Sankofa is a concept from the Akan people of Ghana. It means to go back and get that which was lost. In this case, the idea is to preserve the culture of immigrant and racialized parents.

Music education, from sources like the Royal Conservatory of Music have traditionally focused on White male European composers. In the context of an increasingly globalized and multicultural world, racialized music students need to see themselves in the music they are learning. There is a racial and cultural gap among the curriculum, teachers, and students. For these reasons, students may never fully engage with their learning and eventually lose interest in music education.

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Further, the importance of administrative support was also revealed from the study. At first, the professional development (PD) was given only half an hour of time. However, the researcher reiterated the importance of holding three PD sessions and supporting teachers' efficacy in utilizing FKN as a strategy for learning and teaching music. In the end, teachers received enough time to learn to how to incorporate FKN into the music classrooms. It was important the teachers receive the full PD because of the sensitive nature of asking for racial inclusion.

However, due to the small number of participants, it may be difficult to generalize the findings.

How can you use this research?

The Funds of Knowledge (FKN) can be used to foster more racial inclusion. Given the recent discovery of mass graves of residential school children, involving communities in educational institutions has risen to the forefront. Education is often seen as a way of emancipation. Rarely is the negative impact on racialized communities acknowledged. Even more rarely is the impact on racialized parents examined. FKN demonstrates how music teachers can develop respect for racialized mothers and fathers. When parents' cultures are included in the music classroom, education can strengthen ties to the family and community rather than committing cultural genocide as in the case of the First Nations lands that were colonized. FKN can be an antidote to the mistakes of the past and demonstrates the importance of decolonizing education.

About the researchers

Munjeera Jefford is a PhD student in Social and Political Thought at York University. Her research areas are decolonizing education management.

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Citations

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