Exploring heterogeneity and diversity in higher education - perspectives from a community of music practice

MILHANO, Sandrina

Escola Superior de Educação e Ciências Sociais Politécnico de Leiria/Centro de Estudos em Educação e Inovação – Ci&Dei / CICS.NOVA. IP Leiria, Portugal

sandrina.milhano@ipleiria.pt

1. Introduction

For higher education institutions, heterogeneity and diversity are topical subjects due to several factors that includes, among others, the globalization and migratory flows as well as their own internationalization strategies. Students', teachers, academic staff, and researchers' networks create, by their own heterogeneity of backgrounds, languages, cultures, identities, experiences, roles and purposes, a community characterized by diversity and multiculturalism. These complexities are addressed through an exploratory study of participant's views in an elective music project developed in the context of an academic community, inside the framework of informal education.

2. Background

There are no culturally homogenous societies as they consist "of a web of diverse influences, interactions and exchanges" and implies a "diversity of forms of knowledge and of its sources of production" (UNESCO, 2009). For higher education institutions, heterogeneity and diversity are topical subjects related to factors that includes, among others, the globalization and migratory flows as well as their own internationalization strategies. Varghese (2013), for example, explains the changes inherent to the process of globalization and higher education, the related concepts and phases.

As highlighted by OECD (2009), higher education "drives, and is driven by, globalisation, a phenomenon of increasing worldwide interconnected ness that combines economic, cultural and social changes". In Portugal, the expansion of higher education has led to an increasing diversification of students profile and internationalization is seen as a "particularly important characteristic given the country's comparatively small size, tradition of openness and dependency on international trade" OECD (2019).

Music may contribute to address these complexities. Music is inherently ambiguous, and "is something we do with and for other people, and which through its communicate properties can provide a vital lifeline of human interaction (…)" (Hargreaves, D. J., MacDonald, R., & Miell, D., 2005).

Studies in music psychology explain how music can be seen as a fundamental channel of communication, and the biological, cognitive, social, and cultural processes which underlie such communication, since "it provides a means by which people can share emotions, intentions, and meanings". (idem)

In another approach, the work edited by Ana Hoefnagels, Judith Klassen and Sherry Jonson (2020), is an example of research grounded in ethnomusicological enquiry addressing questions of musical practice, (re)presentation, heterogeneity and identity of contemporary music practices in Canada.

In educational contexts, research discuss how music education can be an effective platform to "opening the doors to multiculturalism and cultural understanding" (Dawn, J. & Southcott, J., 2009) and show how "the seminal role of music and music education in reflecting and supporting culture can be a potent force educationally" (Walker, 2000).

3. Methods of data collection and analysis

The context-specific addressed in this exploratory study is an elective music project developed in the context of Polytechnic of Leiria, inside the "framework of informal education" (Milhano, 2012). This public higher education institution has more than 350 International Cooperation Agreements and is characterized by having approximately 12500 students, 10% of which are international students from around 60 different countries.

Individual accounts were collected in the School of Education and Social Sciences through a survey, in Portuguese /English, in which written responses were used and provided brief details of their age, nationality, genre, role in academia, language, musical background, as well as responses to some stimulus questions. It allowed some insides on the ways the participation in this informal music practice and the interactions derived from such offered participants with learning opportunities.

4. Participants

Participants were 1 teacher, 1 local musician, 1 researcher, 11 students from different programmes and representing 5 different nationalities. They reflect, to some extent, the academic network, its heterogeneity and diversity, and the inherent musical diversity of their musical backgrounds, profiles, languages, cultures, identities, experiences, roles, knowledge, intentions and meanings.

5. Findings and discussion

Participant's narratives provided insides on the ways they value and use music, on the way it fulfill their needs and interests, highlighting the significance of this informal context of music practice in academia, suggesting that it provided them with relevant cultural and artistic experiences. They characterized the project as an opportunity to learn, to make friends, and to make music, showing positive attitudes on the way they felt their own musical resources and knowledge were valued. Furthermore, their narratives emphasized how it contributed to reinforce the links of sociability within and outside academia, and provided them with a context for a safe emotional, social, cultural, and musical experience.

7. Conclusions

Findings suggests that, participant's in the elective music project developed in the context of the academic community, inside the framework of informal education, provided them with a safe emotional, social, cultural and musical context in which heterogeneity and diversity are seen as enriching factors.

8. References

Dawn, J., Southcott, J. (2009). Opening the doors to multiculturalism: Australian pre-service music teacher education students' understandings of cultural diversity. *Music Education Research*, 11:4, 457-472.

Hargreaves, D. J., MacDonald, R., & Miell, D. (2005). How do people communicate using music. *Musical communication*, 1, 1-26.

Hoefnagels, A., Klassen, J., Jonson, S. (2020). (ed). *Contemporary Musical Expressions in Canada*. McGill-Queen's Press – MQUP.

Milhano, S. (2012). Primary school children's' opportunities and motivations in music: a research in different contexts of music education, *EDULEARN12 Proceedings*, 6591-6600.

OECD -(2009). *GLOBALISATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION: WHAT MIGHT THE FUTURE BRING?*, IMHE-Info December, OECD, Paris.

OECD (2019). *OECD Review of Higher Education, Research and Innovation: Portugal*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

UNESCO (2009). *Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue – World report*. UNESCO.

Varghese, N. V. (2013). Globalization and higher education: Changing trends in cross border education. *Analytical reports in international education*, 5(1), 7-20.

Walker, R. (2000). Multiculturalism and Music Reconciled in Music Education. *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, 8(1), 31-39.