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TRANSMITTING MUSIC THROUGH CULTURE: A WAY FORWARD TO HARMONISE A DISCORDANT WORLD

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Abstract

This paper situates itself in an Australian society that has become increasingly globalised and cosmopolitan. It is concerned with the implementation programs and policies that reflect a context of diversity as one that promotes respect for a multicultural society and one that promotes respect for diversity across the community. Considering the contradictory and ambivalent understandings that underpin these discussions and their implications for the conceptual and material conditions that structure the debate, the authors explore the use of teaching African music at tertiary level as a pathway for change. The authors further reflect whether such a diffusion of intercultural dialogue through music can promote cultural tolerance and diversity in our changing world.

Background

As part of its institutional vision, Deakin University supports the integration and infusion of international and intercultural dimensions and content into teaching through a wide range of activities and strategies as the means of achieving an internationalised curriculum. The inclusion of an international and intercultural curriculum Sadiki (2002) asserts should be seen as a multidimensional form of enrichment and not be viewed as a mere "window of opportunity". As such, the incorporation of a new musical genre like that of African should be viewed as "a process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into teaching" (Knight & de Wit, 1995, p. 17) where music may be seen as an arena for the dynamics of what Thorsén (2002b) calls 'international togetherness'. The transmission of promoting such togetherness in a multicultural society is a step forward to promote respect for diversity and the notion of other.

Since 2001, Dawn taught both music and education studies at Deakin University, Faculty of Education, Melbourne, Australia. In both her undergraduate and post-graduate music courses during the years 2002-2005, African music was introduced as a non-western musical genre for a number of purposes. Ruth is teaching intercultural and language education at Deakin University and has been a teacher in Australian schools for nearly three decades. These are classrooms which have become diverse and which take place within the confusion of discourses emergent within a post September 11 and increasingly globalised world context. With demographic changes in our classrooms, catering for and taking advantage of individual and cultural differences in learning is crucial in the development of effective pedagogies. In question were the ways that African music could be used within classrooms as an effective platform to transmit and promote cultural understandings (harmony) in a society and world that is constantly challenged and shifting (discordant). The development of programs and policies that bring about accord and unity within communities is always a contradictory and ambivalent process caught as

it is within shifting but nevertheless pervasive material and conceptual logics that mediate their process.

In the main, it may be argued that African music served as a 'level playing field' for all participating students regardless of their musical background. Dawn undertook research at Deakin University with teacher education students (2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005) into the use of African music (students were in their fourth year of study of the Bachelor of Education Primary degree). The project called "Masakhane: Music in the making" included the teaching of the recorder, classroom instruments as well as African instruments (djembes, bells and rattles). The term *Masakhane* (let us build together) is an Africa term taken from the *Nguni* people. The Nguni peoples are classified into three large subgroups, the Northern Nguni, the Southern Nguni, and the Ndebele. The Zulu and the Swazi are among the Northern Nguni. Repertoire from these tribes and those from the Xhosa, Pedi and Sotho were used in teaching action and work songs. Findings from questionnaire and interview data (see Joseph 2002, 2003a & 2003b) show a shift in students' attitudes, beliefs, competence and motivation. By incorporating another type of music cultural and pedagogical understandings improved and was also broadened in generalist primary teacher education students. This 'new', 'interesting' and 'different' type of music provided greater motivation for learning and proved to be a successful model for teaching practical activities and learning of 'the other'. However, the teaching of African music to a greater extent served as an impetus for the understanding of other cultures and music. We reflect upon a few observations regarding the notion of transmitting the 'other' (African music) to 'our' Deakin University students.

Theoretical perspectives
The notion of 'other'

Central to our approach is the employment of African music not only to teach content but also pedagogical and cross-cultural understandings. It is hoped that through the teaching of African music, the process of transmission would became an effective means and a way forward to learn, understand and appreciate the 'other'. As educators, we are challenged in preparing students to be culturally responsive and be inclusive of the 'other'. Moreover, recent multicultural documents such as those in the state of Victoria demand that programs are consistent with the principles of 'community accord' which includes respect for all communities, opportunities to work together to reaffirm similarities, the elimination of racial and religious intolerance and the rejection of racial vilification, harassment and discrimination (Victorian Multicultural Commission, 2006).

The perception of learning to understand and appreciate the 'other' is one fraught with inconsistency. The notion of community and that of the other are concerned with contradictory and ambivalent relations that delineate the way people belong within communities. Gunew's (1994) notion is that conceptions of multiculturalism and ideas that underpin notions of community accord and harmony are two pronged notions which include all even as they essentialise some as other and different. Such discourse (see Arber, 2005) defines everyone within the nation as being within the community even as they define some as being part of other and ethnic groups.

The idea of teaching the cultures of some groups to mainstream students as a way to bring about cultural harmony is therefore fraught. Rattansi's (1992) suggest in his research that such pedagogy not only failed to bring about harmony between students and a respect for other cultures rather reaffirmed students in their former prejudices.

The other and identity
Moreover, to consider the notion 'other' is to consider the ambivalence of the stereotype. That-which-we-are, so often becomes an almost-empty category, understood through that-which-we-are-not. We know our own identity against the always-out-of-reach and not-quite-known-other. Hall's (1992,1996) position is that identity is a shifting-modern, changing, fragmented notion mediated is by the normative and conceptual processes of our time and yet reliant on normalised notions that, no matter how temporarily, position identities within and without of communities. This other, who so often appears as a homogenised category nevertheless shifts and changes to become that which we-do-not-become – more than or less than what we are ourselves. Thompson (2002, p. 16) argues, "the other is often constructed as a homogenised category, that which is "static to geographical spaces". The study of music too easily becomes an examination understood as that which is held by all those who come from over there. It comes to say all those who come from there play like this – they are like this. Fornäs (1995) claims that identity is a life long process rather than product and it is through our interaction with others that we create and reassess our identity (Björck, 2000). Hence we are constantly constructing our identity in relation to our heritage and aspirations.

One's identity is a mosaic—social class, ethnic heritage, national belonging, urban upbringing and religion (Thorsèn, 2002a). Such factors then influence and impact on one's identity. It can be argued that music fundamentally shapes who we are and helps mould the image we have of ourselves, and what we want others to perceive of us (Bumbaco, n.d.). It helps us to express aspects of our personal identity, national identity and youth identity. In the case of teaching African music, students were challenged in positioning in their identity through listening and playing African music and what eventuated was a new and blurred version. Students have their own musical memories developed through historical and cultural trajectories which are being shifted and repositioned here within a new and exciting musical genre. Mac Donald, Hargreaves and Miell (2002) draw attention to the fact that many individuals also construct identities *within* music, for instance as a performer or as teacher. Here we are aware of students rethinking their sense of identity also their sense of 'white identity' when they are emerged in another culture and music for example that African (Black music and Black culture).

Transmitting this other
It is this 'whiteness' conversation that needs to be dismantled here when teaching something like African music. The point that music, like language is not singular and prominent, does not have a particular and or western history but works within the same shifting changing process of cultural interchange. The matter of bringing African music into the classroom is to dismantle this relation in several ways. In the first, it is to as hooks (1997) argues, look at whiteness, at 'our' culture otherwise. That is, in looking at

bringing together culture a first step is to make transparent the logics that underpin multiculturalism and allow some to belong differently within communities. The second, is to account for the differently trajectories that make up what we today understand to be the world of music and understand what these are, their histories and their consequences for the music industry as a whole. It is to understand our students as musicians who bring to our classes different traditions and to give value to these traditions, their history and culture**.**

The notion of music cannot be understood as separate from the conceptual and material understandings of which they are part. In an increasingly globalised world, the ways of understanding and being part of that world we take for granted can never be understood as essentially different and are always in process of interchange and melange. Nevertheless, they are made up ways of understanding and doing things that have different histories and different futures. They are understood to belong to people and are maintained by people in different ways. The question to consider is how are such 'transactions' of teaching and learning transmitted in our current multi-cultural settings? Campbell (2001), rightly points out, "the study of music, the delivery and acquistion (teaching and learning) of music, is a cross-cultural phenomenon that is of increasing interest and importance to music teachers who strive for a broadly conceived template of pedagogical considerations that transcend cultural boundaries" (p.215). Campbell suggests "we are all "biologically wired in similar ways across cultures". She points out that when studying music transmission, we "examine the nature of music as it is learned and taught in an array of formal and informal settings, and note the similarities as well as the distinctions across learners in many context" (p.217). Hence by studying musics of another, we cross boundaries and explore new possibilities in relation to our music identity and in doing so rethink who we are as a culture and a people. We move across borderlands, which Anzaldua (1987) describes as:

> Living on border and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an 'alien' element. There is an exhilaration in being a participant in the future evolution of humankind, in being 'worked' on ... And yes, the 'alien' environment has become familiar – never comfortable, not with society's clamour to uphold the old, to rejoin the flock, to go with the herd. No not comfortable but home (p.1).

For the student moving between different musics is a sometimes uncomfortable, often exhilarating experience. It allows the so-called 'alien' to become familiar and to be revamped in new ways and for the student to encounter, adopt and adapt new cultural and social dimensions within their existing one.

African music and culture
In teaching African music and culture, students at large were challenged in their thinking and action to share, experience, accommodate and embrace unity where there is diversity in terms of language, ethnicity, culture and art forms. This is supported by Nettl (1992, p. 4) who believed "understanding music in turn can help us to understand the world's cultures and their diversity". It is only when we move out of our own context and into

'the other' that we begin to make the cross-cultural connections that may be invisible in the music of that which is comfortable and strange. By opening up the mind's eye and ear to 'the other' one engages and interacts with a new and different culture: "you find yourself in someone else's music" (Ray Phiri, the famous black artist, quoted in Missingham, 1998, p. 426).

Some reflections
Dawn, a non-white South Africa living during the years of apartheid, experienced its aftermath before coming to Australia. Consequently, her transmission about African music, the people and their culture has authenticated the content and experience of what she was trying to communicate to her Australian students. Although she taught generically about African music and culture, South African was cited on her teaching as an example to show how music played and continues to be a powerful mechanism in educating and restoring the people there, bringing about chords of healing of the past. In doing so harmonising and strengthening the notion of nation building as a way forward to embrace democracy and multiculturalism in that country. Hence, the use of African music in her courses at Deakin University was not only seen as empowering students' creativity and, by extension, their learning, understanding and skills but also to extend students thinking and learning about other types of music and culture (see Joseph 2002, 2003a &2003b). Nketia (1988) affirms that incorporating music of another culture assists students to assimilate new elements and experiences into their own background knowledge and experience. He further claims that, through a process of accommodation, one is also able to establish a new tolerance to the style and musical culture.

The use of African music served as a 'springboard for action' in terms of Deakin students' music learning, creativity, improvisation and more importantly their cross-and-intercultural dialogue. Although workshops were seen as an invaluable arena to model ways of *teaching* African music, it also presented a different and interesting understanding of African music, peoples' lives and culture. Having a lecturer from Africa authenticated the experience and made it more real for the students than the students just reading about African music and its people. As all students undertaking the course over a semester were Western trained in music, they were challenged in their thinking about how 'other' systems of knowledge and skills work, which in turn made them compare, contrast and confront their existing perceptions of the 'other'. The workshops represented an open forum for learning, building a sense of trust for both students and lecturer to discuss the impact of learning another music and culture. Students over the years (2002-2005) reported (through questionnaire and interview data, see Joseph 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2004a, 2004b) that their appreciation and understanding about different music and people (African) was strengthened and changed some of their stereotype perceptions of this 'other'.

Oehrle (1991) argues that, by exposing students to other cultures and musics, we also explore cross-cultural possibilities more fully, richly and critically than previously. She further states that a growing awareness of other cultures is not only more possible but also necessary (p.26). The authors believe that as global citizens we should embrace diversity and change in our teaching and Dawn found that medium through music. Her

experience as a South African now living and working in Australia was seen by her students as an effective tool to orally and aurally transmit about this 'other'. In Africa, music is inseparable from dance and culture therefore; cultural transmission is one way to effectively pass on knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. Miller (1989) affirms that understanding the differences between cultures not only opens the way to a deeper appreciation of the people who create and use that music, but it also brings a new perspective to the world of Western music.

Conclusion

This paper is concerned with the notion of teaching music as a way to encourage students to think about and to move beyond the known. By encouraging students to think beyond 'West is best practice', students are able to move beyond what is comfortable in our globalised and multicultural society and to explore diverse cultures and musics. Although transmissions of African music at Deakin University provided a useful platform for 'connecting the disconnected' in terms of pedagogy, cross-and-intercultural dialogue, the authors are aware of its limitations and students' ability or inability to process it. One question to ask is whether other teaching areas can also find pathways to transmit cultural understandings? None-the-less, the teaching of African music continues to be a small step in the direction to transmit 'this other' in Australia and challenge students' current perceptions of music and culture other than that of the mainstream. The authors argue that such a diffusion of intercultural dialogue through music can effectively promote cultural tolerance and diversity in our changing schools, society and world. Transmitting music through culture is one way the authors argue to bring about harmony in an increasing discordant world.

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