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Primary Teacher Training at Deakin University: An Australian Experience Learning another kind of Music

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ABSTRACT

Luckman (1996) defines experiential education as a "process through which a learner constructs knowledge, skill and value from direct experience" (p. 7). The core of such learning is practical engagement, contextualised by concepts and skills in guided experiences. This process, to be most effective, should be supported by reflection. This paper considers an experiential program in African music that is part of pre-service primary teacher education for generalist teacher trainees. As part of the Bachelor of Primary Education degree, offered by Deakin University (Australia) students can select an elective subject on African music in the final year of their four-year course. In this subject students learn African music experientially, by playing, singing and moving. These students completed a questionnaire and were interviewed at the conclusion of the unit in 2003. Data collected showed the effectiveness of using an unknown kind of music to explore musical concepts and understandings in an Australian educational setting.
INTRODUCTION

Experiential education has always been part of our culture. It has a long pedagogical history demonstrated by the famous dictum of Confucius (ca. 450BCE): “Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand” (Pickles, 2004). More recently, most exponents of an experiential approach cite Rousseau (1712-1778) and Dewey (1859-1952) as the founders of the movement (Kraft & Kielsmeier, 1995). Dewey (1916) stated that “an ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory simply because it is only in experience that theory has vital and verifiable significance” (p. 144). Admittedly, all education involves an experiential component. However, to be effective, experiential learning should be planned and the experience should be reflected upon. The quality of the experience is significant. Dewey (1938) confirmed that “everything depends on the quality of the experience” (p. 27). Experiential learning includes cognitive, personal and cultural elements in a planned sequence of engagement (Drengson, 1995). Experiential education can occur in any discipline. Southcott (2004) has already established the appropriateness of an experiential approach in tertiary music education. This present article discusses an experiential program in music at pre-service primary teacher education.

MASAKHANE: MUSIC IN THE MAKING (DEAKIN UNIVERSITY MUSIC UNIT)

This paper reports on interview findings from a research project that was undertaken with final year generalist teacher education students in 2003. The impetus for this investigation grew out of observations of a pilot study in 2001 and 2002 of students’ interest and participation in the use of African music in an undergraduate non-specialist music education unit at Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia (see Joseph 2002, 2003a, 2003b & 2004). The music unit entitled “Masakhane: Music in the making” included the teaching of
the recorder, classroom instruments as well as African instruments (djembes, bells and rattles). Masakhane (let us build together) is an Africa word taken from the Nguni people. Students in the African music program were in their fourth year of study and attended three-hour workshops for an entire semester (eight teaching weeks in 2003). The music unit utilised Western (Orff, Kodály and Dalcroze) and African approaches to music education.

The decision to introduce African music into the fourth year music elective was based on the contention that, to engage students with an unfamiliar but attractive musical genre such as African music, may enhance their understanding of music elements, song and movement and provide a platform for the making of cross-cultural connections. The basis for this contention is that use of a non-western musical genre such as African music may provide:

1) a “level playing field” for all students regardless of their prior musical background;
2) increased motivation for learning from practical engagement in a non-Western musical genre;
3) kinaesthetic reinforcement of rhythmic concepts;
4) an understanding and appreciation of African music and culture.

It was anticipated that engagement with a different and, to many, new musical genre would enhance student understanding of rhythm, song, and movement as well as develop an appreciation of African culture and language. The incorporation, in this case, of African music improved students’ levels of motivation, competence, confidence, attitudes and beliefs regarding their ability to move, dance, sing and play as non-music specialist elementary teacher trainees. It could be argued that music from other cultures and genres might have similar effects and outcomes. This paper focuses on the use of African music to demonstrate the efficacy of such practices.
AFRICAN MUSIC

The African music unit focussed mainly on rhythm, a feature common to all African indigenous music, which engages all members of a group to respond to it in a social and experiential environment. Such “coexistence of different, simultaneous rhythms conflicting and yet being in balance illustrates the dialogical pluralistic situation” (Chernoff 1970, cited in Westerlund 1999, p.97). This pluralism in turn reinforces a strong sense of community in which different elements can combine effectively. This is a highly interactive mode of learning. The shared rhythmic experience that is African music is what Oehrle (1991) refers to as something one responds to in a social situation, again identifying it as profoundly pluralistic. This pluralism, which engages different and varied elements simultaneously, is not often recognised in Western music. For example, Miller (1989) states that the cyclic nature and complex poly- and cross-rhythms of African music sound strange to the “linear ear”. This “difference of sound” was certainly experienced by the Deakin students’ “Western ears” but the act of participating in an African drumming ensemble allowed them to experience something of this musical and social pluralism.

In contrast to the predominantly visual orientation of Western culture and its logical extension towards the imperative for musical literacy, indigenous African music has relied entirely on an oral tradition of transmitting musical knowledge, learnt through highly interactive social events, and rituals where music is the predominant means of communication (Westerlund, 1999, p. 99). Westerlund cites Anyanwu (1987) who also asserts that, unlike European thinking that is grounded in seeing and the visual perception of reality, African culture is based in hearing and listening as an alternative way of knowing reality. Westerlund stresses that, for Africans, music signifies the social sharing and participation that actively summons a human being towards life and living. The indigenous people of South
Africa have long traditions of living continuously as organised communities with common bonds of language, customs, and other distinctive cultural traits. These people perceive music as fulfilling a central function in their lives but, for a Westerner, it can be difficult to see how music can form such an integral part of life. In the case of such musical experience, Miller (1989, p. 3) points out that, to the African, music making is to play “with someone, [rather] than for someone”. This point is also well made by Westerlund (1999, p. 97): “for Africans, music signifies social sharing and participation in the most forceful way so that the performer and the product are inseparable”.

Westerlund (1999) contends that meaning within indigenous African music only emerges in the context within which it has its being. Nketia (1962) observes that African music is integrally connected to the social structure and presumably also to the social context within which it exists. In contrast to Western culture where music is seen as an art form, individualistic and personal in terms of its appreciation, and as an intrinsically based aesthetic experience, in African indigenous life music is so integral that it represents the very act of living. According to Westerlund (1999, p. 97), African music represents a means through which people can collectively “recognise and judge what is valuable in social and personal life” (Chernoff, 1970, cited in Westerlund, 1999, p. 97). Blacking (1971) in his study on Venda people and their musics speaks of the difference of sound relating to “music making as symbolic expressions of social and cultural organizations”, which reflects the values and the past and present ways of life of the human beings who create it. Hence, to a far greater extent, African music, unlike Western music, has a dual role whereby music represents both patterns of social and cultural action and patterns of sound. Participation in African music activities, even for those from another culture, is, to a large degree, a form of
immersion in both music and its cultural context. Students were actively involved as the classes were presented in a practical way and the settings included cultural artefacts to create, as far as possible, a social and communal learning environment, typical of African community practices. Dewey (1938) asserts that it is a primary responsibility of educators that they create environments that are conducive to growth and provide the context for worthwhile experiences.

EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

Experiential education is defined as a “process through which a learner constructs knowledge, skill and value from direct experience” (Luckmann, 1996, p. 7). Brookfield (1983) has identified two meanings of the term “experiential education”. One meaning describes the type of learning in which students acquire and apply knowledge, skills and feelings in a setting designed to be relevant and, hopefully, authentic. The second meaning is education derived from life’s experiences. It is on the first of these definitions that the African music program was designed. Dewey (1938) states that experience should be a moving force, the effect of which is demonstrated in the way it moves the individual forward. As will be discussed, the African music program engendered curiosity and encouraged students to continue their journey into music of another culture. Drengson (1995) elaborates that experiential education is “the process of practical engagement with concepts and skills applied in the practical setting, through physical and practical mental activity” (p. 92). This practical setting should be carefully chosen and supported by reflection, critical analysis and synthesis (Luckmann, 1996). The African music program reflected carefully designed and extended engagement with the notion of playing with each other rather than just for each other. The teaching of African music through oral and aural instruction released students’ creativity and allowed them to apply their music knowledge.
and skills more effectively through a practical approach to music making, learning and reflection. Joseph (2003b) has discussed in detail the materials and activities included in this program.

This discussion will focus on comments from the interviews with the 2003 student cohort. These reflections demonstrated clear developmental understanding through practical engagement. The African music program not only focussed on a hands-on approach to teaching and learning (songs, movement and instruments) but, to widen the experience, albeit at second hand, students also viewed a number of video recordings on African music and dance. These videos provided a glimpse of the societal context of the music, life and culture of the West, East and South African indigenous peoples. The students observed music making as exploration, experience, creation and recreation by African teachers and artists. Such viewing was designed to inform students for their future cross-cultural dialogue about the music and its people.

Quotations from the interviews are interwoven throughout this discussion to illustrate the development of reflective thinking in the students. The academic work accompanying the workshops meant that the experiential components were made more meaningful for the students. Jernstedt (1995) suggests that experiential learning, combined with academic learning, results in more accurate and persistent learning as it engages the whole person with the intellectual content of the course (p. 369). One student observed that, “having had no previous knowledge of African music my confidence and knowledge has grown immensely...you were building up on and learning from that and moving on from that”. Another made the observation that, “particularly with the African music that was quite helpful to learn about off-beats ... I found it easy to do accents on regular beats but putting the offbeat into the movement and using the
instruments like drums on the offbeat was harder”. Experiential learning through drumming and movement gave students a better understanding of the theoretical principals about poly- and cross-rhythms. Another student alluded to this “Yeah, the drumming was really good with like helping think about the rhythms and poly-rhythms and things like that...it was another aspect of doing the theory on, it gets people moving and you have to think about it”.

Underlying the educational intentions of the African music program was a belief in the importance of linking theory to practice. Kolb (1984) postulates a repetitive cycle in experiential learning that involves four adaptive learning modes - concrete experience, reflective observations, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. These four stages form ongoing processes that begin at a point. Further, “learning, and therefore knowing, requires both a grasp or figurative representation of experience [concrete experience and abstract conceptualisation] and some transformation of that representation [reflective observation and active experimentation]” (Kolb, 1984, p. 42). The African music program was intended to facilitate such a transformation in which new experiences were added to prior understandings, including abstract principles. It is not expected that experimentation would occur in any extensive manner until the participants returned to their own teaching environ. Students kept their own personal journals to reflect upon the weekly music workshops and the interviews helped to reflect and focus students thinking on what they had experienced, experimented and learnt about African music and culture.

The course was designed to permit reflection to assist students to link theory and practice and to construct meaning from experience. Horwood (1995) suggests that “the processes that integrate past experience into the present ... [and permit] its projection onto the
future ... Mental work at this depth is needed if experiences are to be significant, memorable, and ultimately transforming" (p. 227). Reflection should involve both the cognitive and the affective. This implies the engagement of the whole of mind in such mental work. One student clearly identified the affective component in her experience: "It can't be just passive, listening and observing sort of thing, you have to be involved with it in order to better understand it. Which is why all of the approaches that of Orff, Kodály and Dalcroze are important together... and that is what the African music does, it uses instruments and its uses the voice, it uses body percussion and movement and its all put together... demonstrating how we use song, dance and playing to make music”.

**THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER**

Dewey (1938) points out that it is "the business of the educator to see in what direction the experience is heading" (p. 38). The African music unit was organized and led by a tertiary music educator herself skilled in African music and presenting an authentic “endogenous voice”. The lecturer positions herself as having a predominantly endogenous rather than an indigenous voice. According to Ntuli (2001) the term “endogenous” refers to the indigenous knowledge that is received from other sources outside the original. This received knowledge has been assimilated and integrated into the lecturer’s indigenous perspective to the point that it has become part of what Ntuli refers to as a “collective heritage” and can also be associated with Mazrui’s (1986) notion of possessing a “triple heritage”. Herbert (1995) suggests that the teacher’s role is that of guide, resource person and clarifier whose attention is on both the content and experiential learning process. The university lecturer planned both brief and extended educational experiences. Joplin (1995) identifies the importance of using original sources, using the analogy that it is preferable to climb a rock oneself than to watch a film about
rock climbing (p. 156). Activities were designed to lead the students to reflection on the academic subject matter (Reimer, 2001). As Joplin (1995) suggests, experiential learning programs have two responsibilities: to provide the experience for learning and to facilitate reflection. Joplin continues to suggest a model for experiential education which involves the “challenging action” preceded by focusing and followed by debriefing which is surrounded by feedback and support (p. 155). The challenging action can be stressful and may require the utilization of new skills. For example, this student commented:

It was challenging for me, I had to listen and apply my skills and use my taa, titi names, I had to keep my beat... I had to think about what you [the lecturer] were calling out in terms of the drumming patterns and where to place my hands, my hand would hurt that’s just because I play so hard...I got a good bass tone going.

Whenever possible, debriefing began almost immediately after the classes and continued throughout the experience to assist the students’ assimilation of new understanding. Students often found activities to be musically challenging but ultimately rewarding. One student commented:

Very challenging. I had trouble when people were playing other rhythms, trying to keep mine was hard... because I have trouble hearing the beat and rhythm and finding that... also language was a challenge singing the songs and moving to it.

The university lecturer brought varied personal knowledge and experience to the program – both as a skilled educator and as musician drawing on her own collective and triple heritage and taking into account the new teaching context she finds herself in working with predominantly Anglo-Saxon Australian students. Luckmann (1996) states that “educators strive to be aware of their biases, judgments, and
pre-conceptions and how they influence the learner” (p. 7). It may be that enthusiasm was communicated through the lecturer's teaching as students commented “I think that you were very enthusiastic about it and you were passionate about it 'cause it was something that was important to you and you could relate your personal experience from there so it added that real aspect to it”. One student said “Your enthusiasm would definitely be the first thing that I'd picked up in terms of music, I think the way you got us to move...got us to dance and have a go and just try”. Another student stated:

*It makes a real difference having someone come from Africa...it means more [the experience] coming from someone who knows the things they are talking about and I could read all I ever want about Africa but I couldn't teach it with that same passion I guess that you could show.*

THE ROLE OF THE STUDENT

It is a principle of experiential education that students are actively involved in their own education and that “experiences are structured to require the learner to take initiative, make decisions, and be accountable for the results” (Luckmann, 1996, p. 7). Students, it is hoped, become “active participants in their own education” (Carver, 1996, p. 10). This active engagement of the learner in his/her own education is one of the basic tenets of experiential education. This implies both a mental and/or a physical engagement on the part of the student—in African music, singing, moving and playing all become part of the music experience hence learning occurs through physical response to music, which is accompanied by often rigorous mental activity. This was exemplified by the following student comment:

*Personally, it was the first taste of something like this, just a different rhythm and beat pattern, it was really nice to explore a different*
culture, something that we've never looked at before and something that you we don't hear on the radio.

According to Luckmann (1996), the mental engagement of the experiential learner can be extensive. The process may include questioning, investigation, experimentation, curiosity, problem-solving, assuming responsibility, creativity and the construction of meaning. One student clearly stated this:

Being able to see it on the board is one thing but having the opportunity to be part of it and sort of contribute your body in different ways and some of the songs we used we could.... I feel quite confident to do that.

Another student commented that:

I read about it at the start of the semester, I've got an idea of what the theory was now that I'm involved I understand it ... before I couldn't visualise it ... so doing the examples like that, the movements and things we did to the music it definitely gave me an understanding of how the approach is used and how to use it.

As Joplin (1995) points out, both the process and the product is important in such programs and should be "student based rather than teacher based" (p. 157). They should begin with the students' perceptions, and develop these perceptions at a pace suitable to the individual.

ADDITIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

Several other characteristics of experiential education were identified as significant during the teaching semester of the Africa music program.
Authenticity

Experiencing original sources, rather than observing reproductions or reading descriptions or translations, is vital in determining the quality of the experience. (Joplin, 1995, p. 156) Such authenticity is emphasized in experiential education. By taking part in classes offered by the lecturer on African music, especially djembe drumming, students felt that they had engaged with the authentic approach to learning. The following statement illustrates this:

I explored new things definitely because we were all mimicking you ... we took your opinion [teaching] as authoritative because you had had the experience and was from there... when I learnt music I taught myself by playing by ear... or we would sit there and listen to a whole album and not even move or play where as with you ... you know the African music.

One student remarked: “Yeah to hear it done professionally and authentically was... just made it a lot easier than just having an example of it when listening to a CD”.

Unpredictability of outcomes

Another of the tenets of experiential education is that outcomes cannot be totally predicted. According to Luckmann (1996), the educator and student “may experience success, failure, adventure, risk-taking and uncertainty” (p. 7) and “all thinking involves risk. Certainty cannot be guaranteed in advance” (p. 148). Several of these components are present in the African learning and teaching experiential program. This was succinctly summed up by a student “I’d done the recorder for 5 to 6 years... so I vaguely could remember the letters, notation, that 4/4 is different to 6/8 but poly-rhythms was new at the end I felt a bit more comfortable hearing the main rhythm and hearing my own”. Another student stated:
To get your tongue around the words of the African songs was challenging...I could not concentrate on the pronunciation and sing the tune at the same time that was hard...it was new and different.

Another student noted her surprise:

I found it really hard because I had a western music background and I found it was harder to improvise on the drums ...especially when you had to just go for it and play whatever you want... I'm use to reading music...I was self conscious to improvise with other people around me...even the songs, the words were easier to say once you wrote it down it was really easy after that, but at first it was ok! This is really daunting, we can't do this, but then after that I said that I think it was really easy.

Experiential learning programs recognize the importance of spontaneous opportunities for learning, whether these unplanned moments derive from mistakes or successes, or just from the natural consequences of the learning process (Luckmann, 1996, p. 7). Further, teachers “must recognize that they do not have ultimate control over the outcome. The learner is actively engaged in his or her knowledge construction” (DeLay, 1996, p. 80). Although the African music program was intended to present a series of sequential and planned experiences, the students were encouraged to explore, internalize and conceptualize the theories and experiences within their own frames of reference through drumming, moving, singing and making music through story telling.

Holistic engagement

Another important characteristic of experiential education that Carver (1996) suggests is that it involves not only the cognitive but also any combination of the senses, the emotions and the physical (p. 9). One student specifically identified this:
I would like to teach through movement, that kind of thing. I have the confidence to do that now...getting them [the students at school] to move with the beat so that could learn about beat...maybe stepping and clapping and those types of things so they can feel the different beats and ascertain the difference between beat and rhythm.

The reflection of another class member identified the ways in which all these facets of experience combine to make a holistic educational experience, and reflected on how these might be applied to her own educational practice:

You gave us a bit of background to the songs, that was all about their daily chores they went through so that was good to get a feel of the mundane sort of movements that they go through as labourers...what they do in everyday life and put it to music to make it fun...it gives you an understanding of their culture and way of life, now I can put the words to the song together with the movement and add instruments to it...I will try it when I teach.

Most students in the African music program saw how it was possible to integrate other learning areas using African music. One student stated “In so many ways you can include music especially when teaching Literacy, Maths, SOSE (Social and Environmental Studies) and Physical Education...through movement and songs and story telling”. As Joplin (1995) points out, such education is a very personal experience in which the affective and the evaluative are stressed (p. 157).

CONCLUSION
The African music unit meets all the criteria of effective experiential education as given by Luckmann (1996). The students who took part demonstrably constructed knowledge and skill, and built on established understandings from the direct experiences
provided at Deakin University. Further, the reflective interviews provided an opportunity for critical reflection that deepened the perceptions of the learners. From the comments, it is clear that the students engaged fully with the experiences, integrating it with their established understanding and skill (Drenson, 1995). The following quotation exemplifies this:

*I’ve tried out a few different things actually with my own students, different ways of teaching music as well which has been really good for them, just given me more ideas and I enjoyed doing the assignment as well because its relevant and because I can use that sort of thing in the classroom and you can see how you can use lesson progressions and things like that which is really good, its not just a one off, its something that you work through.*

Dewey (1938) noted that the benefits of experiential education depend on the quality of the experience itself. Further, to have meaning, experience must be combined with thought (Dewey, 1916). As one student reflected: “After seeing the African music unit in action, working with the lecturer and others in the class and reading about it, I can see how all of the parts fit together.” Experiential learning can and should occur at any age, and educational stage. The principles of experiential education should be applied to all disciplines, and in the widest range of educational environments. This practical engagement with music, specifically African music, embodies the principles of experiential education and clearly demonstrates its effectiveness. As music educators all our classes should strive for such engagement with authentic and meaningful learning experiences to empower our students.
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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