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Old Hat New Fabric: An African-Orff Approach supporting Values Education in Australia

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Australian Context

In this article I argue that the Carl Orff approach when applied to African music is an effective way to encourage the values, respect and equality that are described as key Australian values. Music serves as an engaging hands-on activity not only in educational settings but also in the community as an education tool/medium to learn about and get to know other musics (world musics), people and their culture. Australia, like several other countries, faces the problem of being in an 'ivory tower' in what Keller (1994) refers to as the coexistence of different cultures, large and small, that cannot anymore ignore each other as they often did in the past. The National Framework for Values Education (NFVE) set out in 2005, recognises the shared values "such as respect and 'fair go' as part of Australia's common democratic way of life which includes equality, freedom... they reflect a commitment to a multicultural and environmentally sustainable society" (Australian Government, Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005).

I do not wish to explore all these values, rather I consider a few (respect, doing your best, understandings, tolerance and inclusion, see Australian Government, 2005) in relation to how African music and the Orff approach (*Old Hat*) is a positive step in making connections to the NFVE (*New Fabric*). The notion of 'other' cultures, being aware of diversity and including others is closely aligned to African music making and the Orff approach hence—African-Orff approach. By providing some background into African music and Orff's philosophy, I make a few connections as to how this approach makes links with the NFVE and has proved to be a worthy pathway for my teacher education students at Deakin University (see Joseph, 2002, 2003 & 2004).

Background Information

Since 2001, I have taught African music to Australian teacher education students, and by adopting the Orff approach using African music, I continue to see this as a way to foster improvisation and creativity and, by extension, students learning and understanding of people,

music and culture can be enhanced (see Joseph, 2002, 2003 & 2004). By adopting an African-Orff approach in my music teaching, the process of transmission became an effective means and a way forward to learn, understand and appreciate the 'other'. However, I am aware that caution must be taken as Rattansi's (1992) suggest in his research that such pedagogy not only fails to bring about harmony between students and a respect for other cultures rather it can reaffirm students former prejudices. It is necessary then to understand that our students bring into our classes different traditions and it is important to give value to these traditions, their history and culture.

Adhering to the NFVE document we are challenged in preparing teacher education-and-school students to be culturally responsive and be inclusive of this 'other'. The NFVE aligns itself to the Victorian multicultural document which reiterates 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).

When using the African-Orff approach, the question to consider is how then are such 'transactions' of teaching and learning transmitted in our current multi-cultural settings? Campbell (2001b), rightly points out, "the study of music, the delivery and acquisition 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). She suggests "we are all biologically wired in similar ways across cultures" (p.217). The urgency for 'Values Education' in Australian educational settings is timely as we live in a rapidly growing multicultural society with many migrants. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (Migrants changing our population mix: ABS, 2006), the resident population of Australia is projected to be 20,702,959, citing just one example from the Year Book Australia

(2002) South Africans in Australia is one of the fastest-growing groups immigrating (8% per annum). One effective approach to cross music and cultural borders in a multicultural society is through the Orff approach.

Orff in Action

The Orff approach to music making has been adopted and adapted internationally and can be successfully employed to get students to participate and work together collectively. For Africans, the domain of music making is the community rather than the concert hall therefore communal learning through participation is the only way to promote the authenticity of the music whose preservation, development and protection of it are important. According to Dunbar-Hall (2000, p.64) "Orff held the strong belief in the importance of group work in the music education process, interested in "music that is produced at the moment by group participation and design" (Saliba, 1990, p.145). The Orff method as such is largely a process rather than a product-orientated methodology (Shamrock, 1986:53). Through such a process, music for Orff according to Drummond (2000) was not an expression of individuality rather an expression of community. Orff found his niche—"rhythm, it lies at the heart of his music... he had an inevitable interest in rhythmic instruments and instruments rhythmically" (p.51). He further points out that Orff recognised the potential of bringing together music sounds and physical movement in a creative way by combining activities of music and dance, ancient tradition, art and community, it was possible that a programme be developed in helping young people develop musical skills, and an awareness of self in relation to others through music (p.51-52).

As a starting point, the above connections can be made through speech patterns as we cross cultural and musical borders. According to Orff, music education should begin with rhythm, which he regards as the simplest musical concept from speech patterns to rhythmic activities and then song. For Orff, speech is inseparable from movement and, this experience is gained through direct involvement with the elements and "the natural behaviours of childhood—singing, saying, dancing, playing, along with improvisation and creative movement" (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 1995, p.54). Speech patterns are subsequently transferred to his instruments which allow students to state their musical ideas less self-consciously than by singing. The xylophone as we know it today has its

origins in Africa and was presented to Orff as a gift from which he subsequently added to his Studio 49 range.

In the Orff approach, singing and playing are not dependent on musical scores. Playing from memory at an early stage frees students from the demands of reading notation concurrently with playing and co-ordinating their performance. Students are initiated into improvisation, imitation and other creative techniques before reading notation. Dachs (1989) holds the view that "Orff's philosophy is similar to that of integration in general, as topics for speech patterns, movement, and creative work can be drawn directly from other areas being studied simultaneously by children" (p.29). This approach allows the teacher to present music education in a more holistic way that is concerned with the interactions of groups of students improving their inter-and-intra-personal skills, knowledge and understandings. When using the Orff approach, Shamrock (1986) adds "teachers have the flexibility of being able to select and develop materials according to the needs of particular classes and situations" (p.44). Birkenshaw-Fleming (2000) firmly believes "it would be impossible to teach a viable program to students of different abilities without using the tools that are the legacy of Orff" (p.15). Hence the Orff approach is adaptable to all learning environments, like that of African music, it is able to reach all learners where music is made together and not just for a few privileged performers. Similarly, African music focuses on engagement and interaction through which other life skills can be taught.

African music and culture

There is no single way to describe African music, "it is best understood not as a finite repertoire but as a potentiality of numerous repertoires of song and instrumental music that originate in specific African communities, performed regularly as part of play, ritual and worship" (Agawu, 2003, p. xiv). Hence, African music can be conceptualised in terms of musical and extra-musical purposes forming a significant socialising aspect to the music. This view is supported by Nzewi's (2003) notion that African music is "formulated to perform differentiated tasks in the social, religious, political, economic and health systems (p.15). Music in African societies is not different to other societies. It has an aesthetic significance with long traditions and values that are associated with the people and represents part of their identity. Within African societies, "music is life, it permeates

all daily activities” (Aduoum, 1980, p19). As Australia is a pluralistic society, it seems essential to be familiar with music of ‘others’ in order to understand what it is to have an Australian music identity because “the need for identity, which is the need to distinguish oneself, exists only with respect to other” (Civilization Corporation, 2001).

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 Western musical world. In Africa ‘music’ as a concept is commonly referred to as a verb rather than a noun, supporting the notion of ‘music as making and doing’, Elliot (1995) refers to it as “*musicing*” and Small (1998) uses the term “*musiciking*”, describing the idea of *any* activity that relates to music.

Orff firmly believed in group work where students participate making music through improvisation and creativity, here a strong parallelism is found with African music. Through collectively making music, the concept of *Ubuntu*¹ exists. I do not wish to address the concept of Ubuntu rather I see its connections towards Orff’s approach to music making which has a strong bearing on some of the values in the NFVE document. It is argued from a sociological perspective that using the African-Orff approach as something new and different, may shape and contribute in the creation and recreation of an individual’s perception, understanding, respect and tolerance of another music, culture and identity. Through musical and cultural change “we understand that music is never frozen or static and that it changes as it is traded and shared” (Campbell, 2001a, p.61) a discourse I will not pursue in this article.

Old Hat New Fabric: African-Orff nexus

African music and culture are inseparable and in African societies, it is through songs and dances that children and young people receive instruction about traditional customs and practices, obligations and responsibilities

¹ The word *Ubuntu* is a sub-Saharan African ethic or ideology focusing on people’s allegiances and relations with each other. The word has its origin in the Bantu languages of Southern Africa. Ubuntu is seen as a traditional African concept—“humanity towards others,” or “I am because we are,” or “A person ‘becomes human’ through other persons”, or also, “A person is a person because of other persons”. Another translation could be: “The belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity” (see Ubuntu, n.d.).

(Joseph 2002). The basis of music education for African communities is an oral tradition (Okafor, 1988, 1989 in Kemp & Lephred 1992) which includes vocal and instrumental music interwoven with dance. The Orff pedagogy is similar to the African oral/aural tradition and the teaching of rhythm through non-melodic instruments. In a similar fashion Amoaku (1982) contends “the essentials of [Orff] Schulwerk which include speech, rhythm and movement come rather close to the traditional African concept of music making, notwithstanding that Schulwerk is associated with tuned percussion” (p.118).

African rhythm is exemplified by drumming which plays a foundation role in African customs and traditions (Vulliamy & Lee, 1982). The symbol of African music is that of the drum, the ‘talking drum’ as it is commonly known, used to transmit messages. According to Jeter (n.d) “Orff gave great importance to the drum in all its varieties of size, shape and sound”. As rhythm plays a fundamental role in African music, and is seen as inseparable from movement, Orff, also believes that music education should begin with rhythm, which he regards as the simplest and fundamental musical concept. Through the use of African action songs and drumming I adopted the Orff approach to foster improvisation, expression and musical form when teaching my students at Deakin University (see Joseph, 2004). Through this approach I also taught cross-cultural understandings of the ‘other’.

By using the Orff approach, students’ awareness of ‘call and response’ as being fundamental to the teaching of rhythm became apparent such a parallelism is also seen in African music as music is taught through imitation and rote learning not through notation. For example, when teaching a call and response song *We! Majola*, (Zulu work song), I would first clap the rhythm and students will imitate as we clap, click or stamp. Using drums or any other non-melodic instruments we learn the rhythm of the song through imitation by saying the words of song before we learn the melody. Lastly, I sing the melody and students rote-learn the song as a call and response song having mastered the rhythm and words first. Campbell & Scott-Kassner (1995) point out that “spoken language is the natural gateway to musical rhythm as words and word phrases provide students with every component of rhythm—from the basic pulse to the multi-layered complexity of poly-rhythms” (p. 76). When participating in African music there is a sense

of communal music making together, hence you play with each other and not for each other unlike in Western music. The emphasis on improvisation and creativity is core to African music and the Orff approach.

I called this section *Old Hat New Fabric* as there are many cross-cultural connections and similarities in the ways Orff Schulwerk could be used in teaching African music. The oral/aural transmission, the pentatonic scale, the sense of community music, the transfer of elements of Schulwerk to educational settings and the notion of cultural exchange is fluid where diversity and “valuing difference means reflecting not only diversity but also respect, for music is closely bound up with cultural, sub-cultural and community identity... respect for someone else’s music is an important part of respecting the group that owns it; similarly respect for my music is a mark of respect towards me” (Drummond, 2000, p.53-54).

Conclusion

In the multicultural, multilingual, multiethnic and multifaith society we live in, it is possible that a variety and range of music traditions can be brought together through the Orff approach. Drummond (2000) cautions us “not to become cultural magpies, borrowing music and using music from other cultures for our own purpose” (p.56) rather we should respect cultural diversity by recognising the existence and the musics that surround us ... in recognising our own preferences we can acknowledge that others have preferences too... allowing ourselves not to be teachers but learners again and be willing to acknowledge the ownership that others have of their music” (Drummond, 2000, p.56).

This article has articulated some benefits of the African-Orff approach which resonates with many of the ‘values’ set out by the Department of Education, Science and Training (2005). By the engaging in African-Orff approach students learn not only about the ‘other’ in terms of cultural transmission and exchange, they also learn about: team work, group dynamics, respect and discipline. They develop their inter-and-intra-personal skills, self-esteem and perseverance when listening when playing with others. More importantly they learn to do their best and have a greater understanding of the wider society we live in, being tolerant, inclusive of others, their culture and music can only make this world a better place to live and work in.

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