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EXPERIENCES FROM A HIGH SCHOOL PROJECT IN COPENHAGEN

Reflections on Cultural Diversity in Music Education

A SHORT INTRODUCTION

How we see the world and its many musical expressions is all a matter of perspective: Do we primarily or exclusively look at our own tradition, and occasionally add direct inspirations from the world around? Do we look at historical or more recent diversity in our own region? Do we look at cultural exchanges, relations between regions and traditions? Or do we look at the world from a distance, as if from a space shuttle, whereby the attention to specific local traditions is replaced by an attention to patterns and lines?

CROSS SECTIONS IN MUSIC – A PROJECT

This is a story about a specific project[1] – *Cross sections in music* – whose goal was to develop a culturally diverse learning space for music classes, which was culturally inclusive, which could embrace and include all students regardless of their cultural background, which was equally relevant to all from a broad learning perspective based on musicological professionalism and diversity.

1 The project, which was originally named *Music across – a world in musi*c, ran in four high school music classes in Copenhagen, from autumn 2005 to summer 2007. It was financed by the *Egmont Foundation*. The experiences from the project and the musical and pedagogical material will be published in a textbook during 2008/09.

It was important in the development of the project that the presence of immigrants, whether first, second or third-generation ones, did not play any direct role in the choice of subjects, and that ethnic representation was not part of the project's explicit argumentation. The 'ethnic' aspect was neither supposed to be exotic (in the form of food/music/belly dance events) nor demonising (through an ongoing connection to the problematic discussions about immigrants in the media). Music from around the world was to be included on a par with western music.

The project was formed as a co-operation between the ethnomusicologist and a group of music teachers. The teachers, experienced as they were in teaching and with a large knowledge about especially western music history and theory, were introduced to the basic idea and to non-European material, and received coaching around the ethnomusicological material.

This study refers exclusively to the Danish situation, but it is possible to draw parallels especially to other Scandinavian countries (Skyllstad 1993; Knudsen 2007; Thorsén 2002, 2003; Sæther 2008; Fock 2007).

Before discussing the idea further, let us take a look at three of the specific courses.

Example one: Court music

The four groups of students in *Frederiksberg Gymnasium*, one of the four high schools involved, were sweating over hard-core analysis and unfamiliar sounds: One with *gagaku* from Japan, one with the Central-Javanese *gamelan*, one with a piece by Haydn from Vienna and one with a *nouba*[2] from the ancient Andalusian tradition.

Prior to the group work, the students had received a general introduction to five musical traditions that were part of the court music course from their teacher (the Persian *radif* was the fifth tradition presented). Occasionally, visiting musicians and practical lessons gave the students 'hands-on'-experiences. All in all, they tried to understand and analyse the music, combining the basic information originating from both the general introduction and a compendium, including some kind of notation or form skeleton, with the other presentations and with the music itself. The method of 'intense listening' designed by Erik Christensen (Christensen 2005) was used in this part of the process. To focus their analysis they were asked to work with only one of four specific elements: Form, instrumentation, rhythm, and melody.

The group analyses were presented in the classroom. In this way, the students were constantly exposed to a diversity of traditions and elements,

2 Nouba is a suite form within the classical Andalusian music tradition.

not just to the one they had worked with themselves but also to those of the other groups. Recognition went hand-in-hand with frustration, when both local and more general terminology was used to capture the different phenomena. For their final exam, they had to analyse unknown but similar pieces from two of these traditions, comparing the elements they had worked with.

In this way, the students learned about other elements from the same tradition and about the same elements within other traditions. Thereby a broad, basic knowledge about form, instrumentation, rhythm and melody was created, without going too much into depth in each tradition.

In addition, a short history course about courts was included in the project. The central parameters used for this analysis were religion, ethnicity, relation to the surrounding world, and power.

Example two: Physics in music – music in physics

The physics students at *Frederiksberg Gymnasium* ran in the corridors, building instruments, trying out sounds, and recording the sounds for further analysis. This course was about the relation between sound from a physicist's perspective, instruments as practical workmanship and as organology, and function or aesthetics – a triangle where the one influences the other. But what are the characteristics of this relationship?

After being introduced to the four basic instrumental categories within Sachs-Hornbostel's organology-system (Sachs 1949), and the basic physics of sound, volume, duration and tuning, groups of students were asked to develop instruments according to one of the categories. Through working within one category, it became possible to have students not only develop one instrument but also afterwards to modify it. The challenge might be to change the sound, the volume, the tuning (ambitus) or the duration in a specific direction. The discussion could also be a change of function or context because the sound of indoor instruments is different from the sound of outdoor instrument, or because music for few is different from music for many, and so on. For this, they had to use their knowledge of physics. It was also great fun.

Example three: The wedding as ritual, narrative, and aesthetic event

At *Copenhagen Open Gymnasium* in Valby, all students of the first year, approximately 100 in total, were involved in a one-week project about the wedding, analysing, listening to lectures, watching movies and finally arranging a huge wedding party where they presented their works as theatre, concert, painting, PowerPoint-presentation, or whatever form was accepted. Only a few students actually attended a music class, while others had drama,

arts or film as their creative/aesthetic discipline, though they could all look at the wedding from their perspective and relate it to social science.

Through analysis of weddings from around the world, it is possible to take a closer look at those parts of the ritual that involve music, to look at the function of the music in the different parts and to hear different sounds. In this way, students become aware of how music is used in and around a ritual, they see that some elements stay while others change, and they can see how, for example, a transitional ritual as the wedding integrates other functions, as a pact, an aesthetic event, or a narrative with a storyboard.

As in most cases we do not have complete wedding scores or other strict musical storyboards, the analyses are different from the analyses of court music. Here we have to rely on our ears. One way is to listen to the soundscape of a wedding, note the differences and patterns, understand the different roles or functions, and find out what characterises the music in each case. Furthermore, it is possible to read or hear about added symbolic meanings.

Another approach to the subject is to analyse a wedding as a narrative with scenes and acts, expressing different feelings. From there, it is possible to work with composition, letting students compose a suite that reproduce the feelings of a wedding, and the changing meanings.

As many of the students from this school had a minority background, there was no clear common wedding reference (apart from what they might have seen in American movies). For their own analysis, some chose to analyse a wedding they knew from home (whether Danish or Arabic), while others chose to compare different traditions or to look into something unknown.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE CLASSROOM

One might ask whether we can defend this relatively superficial approach to the great traditions of the world. I would like to turn the question around and ask about the alternative.

"What music do you like, Faiza?"

This question is well-known to many youngsters with immigrant backgrounds. Zadie Smith presents a very colourful description of the situation in her novel *White Teeth* (Smith 2000: 135). Here the teacher shows her disappointment when Millat, an Indian boy, answers first Bruce Springsteen, then Michael Jackson, to her question about his musical preferences. Clearly children with immigrant backgrounds are not supposed to answer this question with either 'Mozart' or 'Michael Jackson', even if

this is what they like. Often teachers have special 'ethnic' expectations concerning the musical taste of these pupils, and consider their presentations as a way to bring exotic music into the classroom, more than a way for them to present their favourite music.

No one can object to situations where students bring material from home into the classroom, nor can one object to students bringing the music they like and identify with. But unfortunately, here the music lesson apparently gets interwoven with ethnic representation, which is problematic. In 1997, 42 % of the students at two large high schools in Copenhagen answered that they had been introduced to non-western music in the classroom, mostly in the form of African and Latin-American folk and popular music. Only 10 % had been introduced to music from the immigrant cultures, always on the initiative of a student from that specific area, not on the initiative of a teacher (Fock 1997).

One important problem here has to do with this element of representation. The students run a risk of becoming cultural hostages, if they alone carry the responsibility of presenting music from these parts of the world in the classroom. Whereas western music is generally considered 'real and serious' music and as such is included in the main programme of music lessons with music analysis and theory, music from other parts of the world is generally only presented by students, and only as a personal identifier.

Then why include 'ethnic music' in school programmes? And what music should be chosen? As professional cultural and political evaluator, I have over the years experienced how easily the central goals of a project are forgotten or never really formulated (Fock 2003, 2004). In this way, projects become unfocused, and consequently the goal-method-result relationship is blurred. For example, we find a tendency to present African music in the classroom of Danish music classes when attempting to include and engage youngsters with immigrant backgrounds in musical activities. This is interesting because almost none of the immigrants in Denmark come from Sub-Saharan Africa. They originate from the Middle East, where many consider those parts of African culture primitive. Consequently, many of the youngsters feel uneasy with the rather extrovert body culture found around African music (Fock 2007). Another example of this misinterpretation is the expectation that youngsters with an immigrant background prefer their parents' music, while the general expectation to most youngsters is the opposite.

It is necessary during the planning of any musical course to decide what the students should learn. In the same way, it is necessary to realise why cultural and musical diversity should be introduced in the classroom.

MOTIVES FOR DIVERSITY

There are a variety of motives for teaching cultural diversity as part of the school programme. Some have to do with national identity, cultural heritage, and cultural education, others with pedagogical tradition.

When talking about cultural diversity and the inclusion of non-western music in the classrooms, some formulations seem to pop up again and again, though some important borderlines can be observed between the old colonial powers, the old colonies, the white, Anglo-Saxon dominated nations outside Europe, the more recent receivers of immigrants from other parts of the world (e.g. the Middle East) and nations providing Europe with immigrants.

From one perspective, motives have to do with a series of considerations that in different ways promote qualities such as self-esteem, tolerance and better understanding in all groups through both musical activity and knowledge. They are often presented in positive terms, but might include a risk: Youngsters with a minority background should know their 'roots' in order to feel good but one should not be caught in this 'root' notion. The majority population should know about the culture of the minorities – and vice versa.

There is a need to provide certain populations with a musical voice, especially those absent in music education and in the music scene in general (like youngsters with immigrant background in Denmark) for a variety of reasons. We could call it a way to gain respect in society, a way to express oneself, a matter of new inspiration to the music scene or just a democratic necessity. At the same time, there is a need to educate future musicians and audiences, so-called (New) Audience Development (Boerskov 2003).

If we look at diversity from the perspective of a more general humanistic and responsible world view, music education might be considered part of a larger humanitarian project related to solidarity with the poor, and also a wish to share wealth on the cultural arena (Mannergren 2000: 100–102).

From a pedagogical perspective, diversity might represent a new inspiration. The image of ethnic music as 'bodily and expressive' makes it interesting for music teachers, and the image that some musical traditions are pedagogically and musically inspiring puts diversity on the agenda.

But diversity as such, just the experiences with different sounds, instruments, ways of making music, could also be a goal in itself, a necessary fundament for musical creation. In this way, diversity becomes a matter of widening the horizon of the students. One could call it part of general education, or just because it sounds great – both reasons have more to do with music than with demographics or history.

CREATING WORLD VIEWS

If we want to understand which of these different motives are actually used, it is necessary to look beyond music itself and instead take a look at the dominating rationales in cultural politics in general. The concept of rationale has been used by Terese Volk, an American music-education researcher. She differentiates between, first, a rationale based on changing demographics; second, one that focuses on world-mindedness, third a global rationale, and fourth, an aesthetic rationale (Volk 1998: 9). A similar rationale is also used by the Norwegian musicologist Jan-Sverre Knudsen (Knudsen 2007). The Danish cultural sociologist Dorte Skot-Hansen uses the concept in a broader cultural political context, talking about enlightenment, empowerment, entertainment, economic impact, and experience as driving forces behind cultural politics (Skot-Hansen 2005: 33). Her model has been adapted to music education with slight changes, differentiating between enlightening, socialising, empowering and entertaining (Fock 2007: 354). From New Zealand, John Drummond talks about 'justifications' instead, but with a similar meaning: "We Live in a Culturally Plural World", "Removal of Disadvantages" and "The Majority Can Learn from the Minority" (Drummond 2005: 2).

Whatever of the underlying reasons, rationales or justifications, teaching always influences our world-view, consciously or unconsciously. It does not matter if in our teaching we focus on the communication of knowledge in the traditional sense, if we focus on practical musical skills (we could talk about tools), if we focus on the creative processes or on the artistic experience. Unavoidably our world view will be influenced, both through what is included in educational programmes and what is excluded. Which world view do we want to communicate? Where is 'the world' in the curriculum? Is it on the programme at all, and if yes, in which form and in which relation to the West?

CROSS SECTIONS IN MUSIC – A MODEL

'Cross sections in music' is a model for cultural diversity in the classroom, a way of re-thinking music education rather than a course or a series of single courses that later might be repeated by teachers.

From pillars to levels

Music courses in Danish high schools are traditionally organised in themes – like separate pillars: A genre, an individual (artist or composer), a historic period or maybe a culture (fig. 1). Typical themes in high school music

classes could be: 'Mozart', 'the baroque era', 'rap music', 'reggae', 'rock music' or '*the Beatles*'. If a cultural pillar is in use, subjects like 'Jamaican music' or 'Turkish Music' could be on the programme. In this way, the material is presented through what we could call coherent systems, where the way of thinking, for example rhythm, melody, texture, or form is interwoven and self-explanatory. Furthermore, they are mostly based on western thinking, including a tonal basis, functional harmony, and metre.

This 'pillar' way of organising the material is the result of both the teacher training programmes and the material available on the market. The way of thinking becomes more or less self-supporting, as the curriculum is formed in a way that stimulates and mirrors this structure. Unintentionally this pillar thinking supports exclusion, as it becomes quite difficult to include other cultures of the world on an equal level.

One way of challenging this 'pillar' way of organising music courses is through finding out what characterises music across genre, artist, or period. Through making cross sections instead of separate pillars, it is possible to work towards a learning space that has inclusion, diversity, and professionalism as the key words. At the same time, it creates a new and logical way through the many musics of the world: 'routes instead of roots' – if we take an old expression from the British cultural researcher Ian Chambers (Chambers 1990: 75).

Absolute and universal definitions of music are rare, as they generally depend on context. The British ethnomusicologist John Blacking talked about 'humanly organised sound' (Blacking 1973: xiii). His 'definition' inspired this specific project, leading to a tripartite definition useful in this specific pedagogical context: Music as structured sound, music as organised by humans, and music as an expression that carries a meaning (fig. 1). These three levels became the guideline for the whole project, made it a model for organising multiple ideas and music, and still kept the focus.

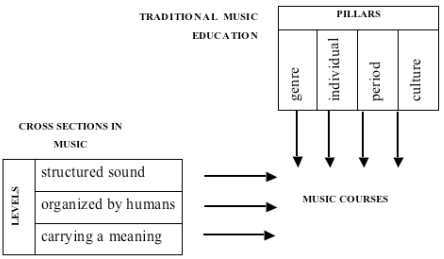

Fig. 1 – Two ways of organising music courses: The traditional way of thinking in separate pillars and the new way, with three levels that structure the cross sections.
Diagram by Eva Fock

The first level: Music as structured sound

Music as structured sound comprises a meeting place between music and natural science. At this level, we deal with the elements of sound more than its culturally defined shape:

- Sound – what is it and how is it formed, based on both the physical rules about sound, frequencies, volume, duration and practical construction experiences?
- Pulse as a fundamental rhythmic phenomenon, related to nature and body, a basis for rhythm and metre.
- How some theoretical tuning systems (the intervals) relate to natural science, not to culture – we hear and understand different notes, pitches and intervals, but what is the mathematics behind and what are the dilemmas that come with it?

The second level: Music is organised by humans

All over the world, humans organise the elements like sound, pulse, and pitch in different culturally defined systems. Sounding instruments become orchestras, they refer to different ways of organising the different musical layers and the melody (phenomena like homophony, polyphony, heterophony and interlocking). Pulse becomes rhythm and metrical patterns based on nature, human movement, language, and poetry. Notes and intervals are organised into scales, tonalities, and modalities. It is all organised into melodies, harmonies, ornaments, compositions and combined forms, such as suites.

This is the level where the traditional elements of musical analysis flourish, but in a new way. The big challenge is to formulate the questions and develop a terminology that might include fundamentally different musical traditions in such a way that we do not limit ourselves in advance, without becoming vague or unimportant.

For teachers with limited ethnomusicological knowledge, it is necessary to listen with an open mind before analysing according to a specific cultural system, and to dare include and translate different theoretical ways of thinking in order to avoid a limiting western thinking on the analysis.

The third level: Music is an expression that carries a meaning

This is one of the most interdisciplinary ways of looking at music, as meaning will always relate to something outside sound itself: Meaning as symbol, aesthetic, culture, power, religion, philosophy or function.

The sounds used in real music are mostly chosen for some practical reason, such as materials or function. But they might also have an additional symbolic meaning, related either to philosophy or religion. In much the same way, the defined scales might be explained through additional physical, mathematical, or symbolic reasoning.

The three levels

This three-level definition made it possible to find routes through the many musics of the world, across cultures, and yet establish a coherent frame, a kind of logic in both the project as a whole and the different courses, without losing the sharp focus on the music. In this way, diversity was not the project in itself, but an underlying principle – an important distinction.

The levels are not completely isolated from each other; the idea of differentiating between them is merely a way of sharpening the focus on specific elements, to make the specific routes through the material clear. They furthermore represent a notion of progression that supports the inner logic of the model. As an extra bonus, this model makes it more natural to include different dimensions of the music as a discipline (for example knowledge, practical tools, arts experience and creativity) in the courses.

EXPERIENCES AND REFLECTIONS

All three courses, and the other courses that ran within the project[3], challenged the traditional way of working of all involved teachers. The music teachers in the different classes as well as the physics teacher and the many teachers involved in the wedding course had to revise their way of presenting music if the projects were to succeed.

The court music course described earlier dealt with genres representing some of the world's great court traditions, all theoretically complex but with a theoretical frame that was thoroughly described. Here theoretical systems from Europe, Asia, and the Middle East were put together, challenging a traditional, mono-cultural way of thinking. The idea behind the subject was not to turn the students into specialists of the different traditions, but to make them familiar with unknown and unfamiliar soundscapes and thereby aesthetics, and at the same time confront them with a variety of cultures and historic periods. Furthermore, the course trained their analytical abilities in general, so that they would be able, through listening, analysis, and discussion, to understand the overall principles of the music. Finally, it was the intention to show the students that not only western classical music is theoretically complex.

But is it possible to do all this? It depends on the level of ambition. At a specialised level it is of course impossible, but at least the students left the classroom in Frederiksberg with broader minds than when they entered. It

3 The other subjects were: 'ornament in sound and image', 'the human voice' and 'rhythm – from body and language'. Courses about the subjects: 'organisation in music', 'music and censorship' and 'film music' were planned but not realised in the classroom.

is certainly both a musical and pedagogical challenge to work in this way, but it has to be done radically, introducing aspects of different traditions at the same time, if we want to avoid to be trapped by tradition.

The course about 'physics in music – music in physics' in much the same way challenged the traditional way of working with both music and physics in the classroom. Jumping between three different perspectives – physics, organology/workmanship and aesthetics/function – was a difficult balance: to avoid music as 'just' an entertaining note in the physics class, that physics is brought in as a way to legitimise a creative discipline, and to ensure that dealing with workmanship could be both structured and professionally relevant to both disciplines.

It is obvious that the students had fun when they tried to build instruments. Inventive students had a chance to step into the foreground. But at the same time both the introduction to organology and the practical part made the students reflect about both music and physics in ways they had never done before. The biggest challenge was to keep the project sufficiently tight and to clearly formulate questions to the students so that they obtained the desired systematic thinking.

Within the wedding course one of the first challenges was the encounter between disciplines. But more importantly the course offered a musicological challenge: how do we work in a strictly musicological way with this unnotated primarily functional music? At the same time, this is an interesting part of the project, as we hereby have to look for analytical methods that leave the scores behind and force us to listen and relate the music to the context in a new way.

CAN IT BE DONE?

Can we defend this relatively superficial approach to all these great traditions and big subjects? It is and will always be the art of limitation and compromise. The teachers probably do not know all the different traditions as well as western music. The question, then, is whether they must. If they do, if they need that knowledge, we will never be able to change the pattern and create cultural diversity. From the experiences here, the most important condition, next to an openness for listening and reading about the music, is to find clear routes through the material, routes that provide a logic for the involved teachers, and that contain the necessary musicological professionalism.

Some might want to ask if it worked. Three keywords characterised the project: Diversity, inclusion, and (musicological) professionalism. It is easy to say something about diversity and professionalism, for musical diversity was certainly obtained during the course of the project. A great deal of

musical traditions and cultures were part of the project, including the great classical traditions, traditional folk music and popular music, with both western traditions and other parts of the world on an equal level. But it is questionable whether this diversity is the standard in the long term. Apparently, only very few of the involved teachers continued the work after the project finished. Turning things upside down is easier with a coach at hand than when you are on your own.

The professionalism was harder to secure. In some cases it came easily, but when the projects became interdisciplinary it proved to be quite a challenge. There is no doubt, though, that it is possible but it definitely does take more than a single course to develop a new tradition for interdisciplinary cooperation in schools. This is a structural challenge, as is the whole idea of turning everything upside down and teach cross-culturally instead of pillars, and one where some teachers need a lot of time.

Did the project succeed in creating inclusion? This is more difficult to answer, but we do have some experiences: some students with immigrant backgrounds engaged enthusiastically in activities where the music came from other parts of the world, because their musical (or language) knowledge suddenly seemed relevant. In these cases, the music was included in larger musically (not culturally) defined example packages about for example 'the human voice' or 'rhythm'. We also had examples of students with immigrant background that were 'disarmed' in their protests. Some of these youngsters might have reacted negatively to what teachers introduce, referring to some kind of Eurocentrism or Orientalism. In these courses they could not find any arguments for that kind of discussion.

While the final knowledge level concerning the different musical traditions would vary from student to student, they all left the project richer in experience – they had all been exposed to new sound impressions, new and 'strange' kinds of music, different ways of making and understanding music. Although multicultural in spirit, this project did not deal with multicultural music education, but with music education.

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