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Cultural Diversity and 21st Century Music Teacher Education

In this brief document¹, I share some thoughts that have crowded my mind in the recent past with regards to music education in our rapidly diversifying cultural space. The question of what culture is, and subsequently music education in and for that space will, I believe, occupy much space in our planning for and implementation of music teacher education.

If culture is a mental disposition, it impacts on what we do and how we do it, the relationships we have and how we sustain them, the way we see the world around us and how we relate to it, thus how and why we do what we do, when we do it, and with whom. For much of the global south, we have multiple layers of perceptions and relationships. We have our 'pre-colonial' existence which subtly influences how we see people and do things.

We have subsequently been exposed to civilizations with their religious and social ideals and preferences through the socialisation methods embedded in educational and religious practices. These have tinted the lenses through which we view the world around us, transforming our vocabulary of experiences and pertinent expressions. We express our worldview overtly and covertly: the rules that govern our relations, the policies in place for education, the statement of our ethos and values, in the constitution, development plans, philosophy of education etc. These are ways in which we document and articulate what we think life is about and should be.

Music is one of the expressions of culture. Through a people's musical expressions, we get to see them, hear their story and view their relationships in the song and dance forms, styles and performance practices that often depict that which is core to them, their organisational structures and experiences (Akuno, 2016). Through much of our (folk) music, we 'document' what is significant in our history (e.g., songs about drought) and what is in the environment (children's songs for learning technical

¹ This is derived from a presentation made at the Online Chile Music Education Symposium 05.01.2022.

things). We have songs/music for every stage of our development, and so music accompanies us through the significant and not-so-significant events and phases of our existence.

Music, as a cultural emblem, is a tool in the hands of the community towards cohesion and socialisation. Enabling members to participate in corporate events, it is practised in ways that allow members of the community to participate and is hence a pertinent component of our culture (what we do and the way we do it). A communal-participatory phenomenon with significance to those who participate in it, its definition and application is determined by those who engage in it, who find meaning in its making and who lend significance to it because of the way they engage with it. Music's presence in human interactions is its ticket into the curriculum, bearing in mind the interconnection between its context, content and process. The context determines the content if it is to serve a communal need. This content shapes its processes, that is, the internal structures and materials that make it up and the way the different parts relate to each other to create it. Subsequently, the processes articulate how we apply it in practice and in education.

Music Teaching must then derive from what music is – or might be – in the community. Is it an open-access provision for all or a closed, specialised privilege for a few? In societies where music's concepts and skills are required by everyone towards fulfilling certain roles in activities, music education is required for active participation in community events. Music education should really be a right for everyone in the community. I believe that cultural literacy is a basic literacy, just as is reading, arithmetic and language. Indeed, without the ability to perceive and work in and with culture, reading, writing and spoken language have no context of application. That means that cultural education is the setting up of a platform for all kinds of engagements. To me, that is how significant music learning and teaching are, because music is an expression of that culture.

Cultural Diversity is a phenomenon that education has had to grapple with over the past several decades. Travel and immigration (voluntary and forced) have brought people of diverse cultural origins and practices into the same space. They interact with one another, lending to and borrowing from each other items that are crucial to their own existence. The diversity of our culture might be a consequence or question of the materials that have been present in our environment as we grew up. These materials provide concepts for which we craft terminologies. The processes that utilise these materials contribute to what we do and how we do it, thus, to culture. The diversity of our global culture becomes crucial when we interact with each other, as communication towards exchange of ideas and peaceful co-existence are both informed by what we do and know. Successful existence in such a multicultural environment demands a level of cultural intelligence, the ability to function effectively in an environment of diverse cultures. A musician is a prime candidate for the development of

cultural intelligence through exposure to types and forms of musical expressions that fulfil social, cultural, spiritual and intellection needs of diverse cultures.

Teacher Education should then equip gurus and coaches who make music significant in people's lives. If each student-musician passing through our hands as educators is to honour and respect the music of 'the other', then teacher education needs to equip music student teachers with competences, skills, attitudes and knowledge to first acknowledge, respect, and value the music of 'the other'. It is not easy to value what we do not understand. That means teacher education needs to lead student teachers to a position where they can gain meaning in the presence of the music stimulus of different cultural origins, i. e., where they can understand the music of cultures other than their own. Much of this understanding is developed through exposure to, participation in and working with the cultural product. Sometimes as educators, we must go out of our way to access events that allow us such experiences.

Bi-musicality is a situation that exists in many former colonies. There is a generation of African music educators who were trained through Western classical traditions but have roots in their local musical culture(s). In several parts of Africa, scholars are working on ensuring a presence of the local cultural music in the education programme, a search for cultural identity (cf. Ereu-Ekadu, 2019; Herbst, 2019; Kidula, 2019; Nzewi, 2019; Olorunsogo, 2019; Otchere, 2019). Teacher education grapples with this, to equip individuals with the knowledge and skills that they are expected to pass down to learners.

The concept of teaching plays a role in determining what happens in teacher education. The notion of education as being more than acquiring knowledge and developing skills is central to many African indigenous education systems. Viewed as socialisation, education prepares the individual to exist in society in a productive way. Attitudes and ethics are among the values that one strives to inculcate in learners through teaching. Music teacher education needs to capture this, so that the music teacher uses music to teach, and teaches individuals to apply music's values and processes in diverse circumstances. In this cultural space, music teacher education will engage learners with:

- Concept of music – the philosophy, the rationale, the objectives, the function/place of music in society;
- Content – the music concepts (*technical* information – song, dance, instruments; the *cultural* information – social constructs, cultural engagement, activities, relationships, tool for negotiation), *skills* for making music and for utilising the information;
- Process – acquisition and transfer of knowledge and skills; the development of competencies that enable engagement with music as a technical and cultural entity.

That way music teacher education can benefit from cultural diversity as experienced in the 21st Century Africa.

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