

THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN STRENGTHENING CULTURAL IDENTITY IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Coordinator: University of Jyväskylä, Finland

Partners: University of Pretoria, North-West University and University of South Africa, South Africa; Kenyatta University, Kenya; University of Botswana, Botswana

Study areas: Art and Design, Education, Teacher Training



Intensive Course in South Africa. Photo from the archives of Tuija Koponen.

What are the main aims of your network?

The main objectives of the network are to boost the cultural identity of music teachers in Africa and to improve the overall quality of music teaching and cultural education in all the universities and local schools cooperating within the network. Furthermore, the network aims at improving the multicultural teaching skills of both the music education students and teachers.

On a more general level, the network explores the notions of cultural identity through music and increases the cooperation between different actors and organizations in the field of music. The results of the project will help improve the level of music teaching in educational institutions of various levels, including rural schools of South Africa. The cooperation carried out with local school districts, authorities and teachers will help disseminate the results of the North-South-South project and contribute to the sustainability of the reached results.

What kind of activities are there in your network?

The cooperation between University of Jyväskylä and University of Pretoria dates back to an international music education congress in South Africa in 1998. The contacts created there



resulted in a successful development cooperation project, funded by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The universities concluded a bilateral cooperation agreement in 2001, and set up a North–South project in music education in 2004. To include a South–South aspect to the network and to increase the element of distance learning and community outreach projects University of Jyväskylä invited 4 new partner institutions to join in the project in 2006.

The project activities include student exchange, teaching visits, joint intensive courses and network meetings in the fields of music and music education. Teaching is closely linked with ongoing research projects related to multicultural music teaching, music pedagogy and musicology. In addition to attending lectures, exchange students have given lectures and/or workshops on their own musical culture and traditions and visited local schools to learn about the many different ways of implementing music education. Furthermore, students from the University of Jyväskylä have had a possibility to carry out teaching practice in local music schools. Similarly, teachers have had a rich and varied programme during their visits, including opportunities to train music teachers of local schools, visits to educational institutions of all levels and meetings with choirs and orchestras of the host town.

What sort of successes and challenges have you encountered during your project?

During its North–South phase, the network exchanged 2 students per year for one-term periods and carried out an active teacher exchange programme with 2–3 teaching visits both ways annually. Similarities in curriculum structure and in the characteristics of music studies within the network have facilitated successful credit transfer. However, the areas of special expertise of network universities in music and in multicultural music education are different, which gives students a richness of topics during their study period abroad.

The feedback of students and teachers participating in the exchanges has been extremely positive. Finnish students have had a unique opportunity to gain teaching experience at township schools and to participate in other activities that increase understanding of the cultural diversity of South Africa. University of Jyväskylä staff members have had an opportunity to become familiar with school environments both in suburbs of Pretoria and in some South African rural areas. Similarly, incoming students and teachers have been able to compare practices in educational institutions and become familiar with a wide range of music activities in Jyväskylä. The network has also promoted research activities, including joint conferences, shared research material and joint articles in journals and scholarly books.

The administrative visits carried out in 2007 were crucial for the successful implementation of the first joint intensive course in South Africa in February 2008. The joint intensive course included various topics ranging from music & wellbeing, choir singing as didactical tool, and the comparative issues of music curriculum to research methods in the field. 13 university teachers, 18 music students and more than 30 local school teachers took part in the intensive course. The course turned out to be a great success from the cultural, multicultural, pedagogical and academic points of view.

Building up a properly functioning educational and research network between institutions from very different cultural, historical and financial backgrounds is a slow process. One problem stems from the uncertainty of the continuation of the funding. Building confidential relationships with the school administrators and contact persons (teachers, local chiefs etc.) in rural areas of Southern African countries is endangered if Finnish participants are not able to estimate the duration of financial support. Also, coordination of the arrangements of the joint intensive course that took place in 2 separate locations, more than 200 km apart, was an administrative challenge and decreased the number of South African student participants.

Your advice to forthcoming networks

Try to create contacts with and involve also local organizations and actors outside the sphere of higher education.