

# Community Music Inside a School Context: Questions and Challenges for the Music Education

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In this presentation, community music is understood as the musical practices that take place outside the formal music education. These musical practices cover traditional rituals, sub cultural urban groups, and other “musical worlds” (Finnegan, 1989). It is assumed that these musical worlds are settings where teaching and learning music occur. Because of this intrinsic aspect in musical practices, community music must be an object of study of Music Education.

The proposal of this work is to raise questions and point out challenges for Music Education from the encounter of two cultural worlds - a community music and a school. Specifically, I focused the visit of a community music group to a public school located in a middle sized Brazilian city, called Uberlândia.

The data came from an ethnographic investigation carried out in that school between August 1999 to December 2001. The school is located in a working class district and the research was conducted by a music educator researcher, the author of this paper, and two undergraduate music students<sup>1</sup>. The ethic category which guided the gathering of data, their analysis and interpretation is the “social representation of music” considered from a social and anthropological view. This category is understood as a conceptual and practical form of knowledge, constructed and shared collectively within social interactions (Durkheim 1994; Moscovici 1988).

"Musical worlds" is understood as a social space, marked by aesthetics particularities, sharing values and practices, that interact with other musical worlds, promoting the transformation of their own practices (Bozon, 1984; Finnegan, 1989)

## Community Music in Brazil and Uberlândia

As many other societies, Brazil has a huge diversity of community music which only recently was thought to be part of formal music education as a valued cultural practice (Gomes, 1998; Prass, 1998; Arroyo, 1999). Depending of the region of the country there are different cultural backgrounds of community music: European, Arabic, Japanese, Indian, African and others. Uberlândia, with almost 500,000 inhabitants and a modernist *ethos*, maintain, inside their unequal social and economical conditions, a diversity of musical worlds: indigenous afro-catholic rituals, folk manifestations, other musical practices tied to urban sub cultures, media, European classical music, Brazilian and international popular music.

This diversity of musical cultures was present in the school, setting of the research, forming the musical experiences of the people there. These experiences emerged in spontaneous situations (school breaks, informal talk with children and the school's professionals, and school events) and in the musical moments inside classrooms when the researchers interacted with the children and their teachers. The presence of this musical manifestations within the school brought in some moments a strong feeling of sharing meanings; in others, I could observe conflicting meanings. The aim of this presentation is to focus in these sharing and conflicting meanings. To achieve this, I will describe the visit of a community music group, called *Tabinha*, to a school, discussing the encounter between formal and informal musical practices inside schools, as I could observe at that moment.

## *Tabinha* - an African Brazilian Group

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<sup>1</sup> The students were: Mirian Carmen Machado and Juliana Pereira Penna, interacting respectively with preschool and 1s grade children and their teachers.

*Tabinha* is an African Brazilian group consisted of 20 African-Brazilian boys from 8 to 16 years old and led by Nei, a community leader. The boys live in a traditional district of Uberlândia, Patrimônio, where community music from Afro-Brazilians background is active. So, the boys grew up listening, seeing and participating in community music as: *Moçambique groups*, a Brazilian slaves cultural tradition (since the end of the 17th century) and present today in specific places of Brazil and a *samba school*, a cultural manifestation of urban origin in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Rio de Janeiro. Both *Moçambique* and *samba* are percussive and vocal music.

*Moçambique* is one manifestation of the popular culture and *samba*, besides the fact that it was absorbed by the cultural and musical industry, it is still a expressive form of popular manifestation. Popular culture is understood, based on a Brazilian philosopher, Marielene Chauí, as "the expression of dominated people" who accept, reproduce, transform and deny the dominant culture. Popular culture is a practice that "happens inside dominant culture even if to resist it" (Chauí, 1986, p. 24).

*Tabinha* group was created to help these boys, with difficult economical situation, supported by a local phone company. With this support the group has already played in different Brazilian cities and in Portugal and they have even recorded a CD. Its repertoire is Afro Brazilian musical genres and Brazilian popular music.

*Tabinha* went to play at the school in connection with a project developed by the Music Department of the local University. The aim of this project was to promote presentations of music groups in public schools of Uberlândia.

### ***Tabinha* plays in the school**

(May, 2001, from my fieldnotes) - Today *Tabinha* comes to play in the school. Besides the fact that I am a colleague of the university professor who organized the project, I maintained myself as a researcher, trying to observe that cultural encounter: a community music represented by *Tabinha* with the school culture. I played this role recording a video.

*Tabinha* arrived and went to the stage located in the inner patio where some minutes later was occupied by almost 220 students from preschool to 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, their teachers and other school professionals. The musical group called the attention by the colored percussive instruments they carried and by their white clothes with yellow, blue and black inscriptions.

After the introduction, *Tabinha* began to play and soon called my attention the fact that the children remained almost motionless, besides the strong rhythmic music the group was playing. Setting around the two big rectangle tables or on the floor, they just watched. I thought this to be strange, because as I had observed in different situations, children's body answers to a percussive music is almost instantaneous.

All the performance lasted almost one hour and the first one third of this time only a few children reacted bodily to that powerful sound. At this time, I could observe some children moving their hands, imitating the rhythm they were listening to. But they remained setting!

Little by little, the music was moving people. Other children became stimulated by the sound, standing up and dancing, as well as some adults. This movement with music was taking more and more people there and a first strong moment was when *Tabinha* played round children songs with *Moçambique* rhythm. Nei asked people to form many cycles, and children and adults shared that free moment with a visible happiness.

Then, Nei asked the boys who were playing to get down from the stage and walk in the middle of the children who were at the time all standing up, dancing, running. The *Tabinha* boys made up a line. While they walked and played the children followed them. Although almost 220 children were dancing and most of them integrated to the queue, there was organization. It was very different from that organization of the beginning of *Tabinha* performance, when children remained passive. But some teachers began to worry about that situation, realizing that the new organization was a

disorder. I think Nei realized this conflict and soon asked the children to find their teachers and to return to the classrooms and so to the school order.

### **The encounter of two cultural worlds**

As it was exposed at the beginning of this paper, the proposal of this work is to raise questions and point out challenges for Music Education from the encounter of two cultural worlds: a community music and a school.

The first question which emerges from this encounter is the contradiction between the feelings: in some moments a strong feeling of sharing meanings and in others conflicting ones. Taking the scene described about the visit of *Tabinha* group to the school, the sharing meanings appear when after a passive posture, gave place a growing active one. Not only children left themselves go by the *Tabinha* performance, but some teachers and other adults too. However, when this collective moment got to its climax, the conflict arose.

In the encounter of these two cultural worlds, the meaning of "organization" was very different. In *Tabinha* performance, "organization" meant a collective moment where people are bodily, psychologically and cognitively involved; in the school culture, "organization" meant to be bodily, psychologically and cognitively controlled. Popular culture, says Chauí (1986, p.33), is "a scattered collection of practices endowed of their own logic, but a logic that is constituted *during* the performance, *during the action* (...). The logic of the school culture is predictable.

A second question that can be raised is the conception of culture that guides community music and school institutions. Those meanings mentioned above refer to a sense (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) which organizes the social reality. When we use the term "cultural worlds" in this paper, we refer to different reality sense. And Community Music and the school institution have different reality sense. Muniz Sodré, a Brazilian sociologist has something to say about this:

*"The culture is this dynamic of relationship that individuals have with the reality (...)  
But, unfortunately, the official institutions conceived culture in terms of property.  
And what does it mean to conceive culture in terms of property? It is believed that  
the idea of culture is an idea of official monopoly of ideas already conceived"  
(Trindade, 2000, p.17).*

Muniz Sodré says that the idea of culture as a property has an implicit hierarchical idea about this properties. And in colonialist cultures as Brazilian is, the European and American patterns are at the top of that hierarchy. This discussion brings to the scene the theme of valorization of cultural diversity in contemporary western societies and their school systems.

### **The challenges of this encounter to Music Education**

These two questions raised from my observations of the visit of *Tabinha* group to the school indicate some challenges to Music Education. Firstly, not always schools have all things predicted. For instance, the sharing meaning moments that I could observe in the field work took place in a organization that emerges during the action, with children and adults involved in a collective construction. But, the school pre organization system insisted in controlling the actions. How can we deal with this issue? Or, reminding the question that follows the sub theme of this Seminar, that is, "how can the experiences from community music activities ( in my report, popular culture activities) feed into main stream institutions?"

From my own experiences as music educator and from my experience as teaching new music educators, the theoretical support of the social sciences, anthropology (ethnomusicology), sociology turned out to be an important tool to prepare professional of education to deal with this musical diversity, enlarging their perceptions of the world, society and school. Gimeno Sacristán raises five school aspects that can be changed by the influence of anthropology and sociology:

- "a) the school acculturation is more that the curriculum;
- b) rupture of the academic concept of culture;

- c) recovery of culture;
- d) issues of cultural relativism: universality and differences within the curriculum;
- e) the identity as a school duty" (Gimeno Sacristán, 1999, p.173).

Another challenge is to deal with the culture dynamic. This implies that the encounter of different cultures result, as historically has been observed, in cultural changes. This issue conducted to the second question that follows the sub theme of this Seminar: "When community music activities become part of a larger institute, how does the co-existence work?". In the scene described in this paper, the co-existence showed sharing and conflicting meanings. Can we actually bring to the school system the processes of learning and practicing music in the context of the popular culture? Can the co-existence of community music and school music create another musical culture?

From my observation of the crossing of different musical worlds within school institutions (Arroyo, 1999), the different musics are transformed in the school practice, one of the characteristics of culture that can not be avoided. Therefore, the challenge is to enlarge the possibilities for music creation or to reduce them.

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