

# SOUND LINKS

## **From Policy to Practice - Cultural Diversity in ten easy steps – a practical guide for institutions for higher music education**

In the multicultural reality of today, everyone involved in the arts has to at least determine their position towards cultural diversity. Even if it means choosing not to address it. A close look at conservatoires across Europe shows that in fact, over the past two decades, cultural diversity has moved beyond exoticism and tokenism. It has become an artistic, social and market reality that is reflected in numerous activities in higher music education.

Research in the context of Sound Links, funded by the European Commission programme Socrates, shows that in Europe alone, over 50 institutions for higher music education have already found viable approaches to this new force in the world of music. Like all new developments, this has not been realised without obstacles of a various nature.

There is no absolute, unambiguous recipe for success. But there are lessons to be learned in terms of general planning. Below, we have outlined ten crucial issues that institutions have addressed in setting up successful programmes involving world music. They deal with three basic questions:

- **why** an institute for higher music education should include cultural diversity,
- **how** it can be positioned within the organisation and wider educational/social/artistic context, and
- **what** organisational conditions are necessary or desirable.

In this way, this document can be used as a discussion document within institutions, as the basis for policies, or to support project plans and grant proposals. Below, you will find a summary of the ten points that form the basis of the 'manual' overleaf.

### WHAT TO DO IN CASE OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY ENTERING YOUR INSTITUTE?

1. Open all doors and windows: receive the new influences in the same spirit of **curiosity and receptiveness** that have been at the core of most major developments in the history of music across the globe.
2. Set realistic, tangible **aims and targets** for pilot projects or long-term initiatives, and relate them to the key motivation for including these activities in terms of artistic, personal and organisational outcomes.
3. Be aware that cultural diversity does not only refer to many musical sounds and structures, but also to a wealth of approaches to **teaching and learning** that can benefit the entire institution
4. Quality criteria are complicated within traditional conservatoire subjects; activities in cultural diversity call for an even more **flexible set of criteria**, with fitness for purpose and relevance to context.
5. The success of cultural diversity in higher music education also depends on its **position in the structure**, ranging from optional workshops to credited parts of the core curriculum.
6. Cultural diversity has been high on the cultural and political agenda for some time. Placing it carefully in the **political and funding climate** will benefit the activities and the institution at large.
7. As a new area of development, cultural diversity lends itself very well for **making connections**: in the community surrounding the institute, the national arts world, and international networks.

8. Experience shows that successful initiatives in cultural diversity centre around inspired people, well supported in the hierarchy. This has implications for **leadership, organisation and management**.
9. Cultural diversity may lead to the formation of isolated islands within the institution. Constantly involving **staff and students** in planning, process and results will help to avert this danger.
10. It is relatively easy to realise a single, successful initiative. The greater challenge lies in ensuring **sustainability** by creating a climate that will contribute to an open and inspiring learning environment.

#### WHAT IS CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN HIGHER MUSIC EDUCATION?

*The rise of cultural diversity in music education over the past two decades has caused considerable confusion in terminology. As the field is quite dynamic, there are no absolute definitions, but the approaches below are becoming quite widespread and have been our reference for the purpose of Sound Links.*

#### **Cultural Diversity**

- a neutral indication for the presence of more than one culture in any given situation. Most commonly refers to content (music from various cultural backgrounds), or to people (especially a mix of ethnicities), but can also refer to different approaches to music making or systems of transmission and learning

#### **World Music**

- generic term usually referring to music originating outside the Euro-American cultural area. In some contexts only refers to mixes and fusion, but now more commonly used to indicate both this and the numerous distinct traditions across the world. For music education, the definition 'music that has taken root outside of its culture of origin' has proved useful.

#### **Multicultural**

- in its most general use, this concept has a meaning akin to cultural diversity. More specifically, it can refer to an approach to cultural diversity where various cultures exist together without much contact between them, as distinct from monocultural (with a single, dominant cultural reference), intercultural (a voluntary meeting of cultures with a focus on product) and transcultural (a total merging of content and underlying values).

## **1. What's new? - curiosity and receptiveness**

Throughout the history of music, curiosity and open-mindedness have always been at the heart of major developments. Within higher music education, there are two major sources of new influences and ideas. Many staff turn out to have untapped skills and experience, which can bring musical cultures, genres, or approaches towards music making that are unfamiliar within the regular programme or structure. But it can also pay to give space and attention to new ideas and practices that are brought into the institution by students, who are often in touch with recent developments in a different way from regular personnel. An open attitude in the entire organisation will limit defensiveness about what particular factions consider to be 'theirs', leaving room for exchange and cross-fertilisation, and helping prevent *ghettos* of thinking within an institution.

Fostering the mutual relationship between understanding one's own cultural background and understanding others' helps as well. Becoming involved with other cultures can aid in identifying the assumptions and givens of your own; by recognising one's own culture as one of many, it is clearer how to approach others. Great musicians like Yo-Yo Ma and the late Yehudi Menuhin can attest to this. Students in higher music education are still in the process of finding their musical identity. In many conservatoires, musicians' identities are still formed very one-sidedly. This may stifle a core quality many of us strive for: creativity. Multi-musicality has great potential for composers and performers, and in many cases is a must for music teachers. Without losing sight of highly specialised expertise, new musicians – today's students – will benefit from a flexible, prismatic identity, enabling them to use their talents in various ways and settings, and improving their employability.

## **2. The sky is the limit - realistic aims and targets**

From the second half of the 1980s, cultural diversity has been somewhat fashionable in music education. Exciting projects sprung up. However, many were short-lived, because they were not underpinned by more than 'doing something with cultural diversity'. In order for cultural diversity to succeed in higher music education, experience teaches us that there needs to be constant reflection on aims, goals and purposes. Why do you want to offer cultural diversity? Is the institution interested in the artistic values of specific world music traditions, or will it mainly be used to support other areas? What exactly does the institution intend to achieve with cultural diversity, in terms of content, teaching methods, new markets, student profiles, staff development and institutional culture?

The key issue is that aims are defined within a realistic reach. Every new development or project has to take into account its financial and organisational limits, as well as time-constraints, available expertise, and student capabilities. For example, it is impossible to make students into West African *djembe* specialists by offering them two hours of teaching a week for one semester. Opportunities for students to develop their understanding of issues of cultural diversity need to begin early, as it takes some time for students to develop experience and confidence to deal with the issues themselves.

## **3. Showing the way – approaches to learning and teaching**

Cultural diversity is not only about different sounds and musical structures. There are also many ways of teaching and learning music. When music moves to a new context (for example a world music tradition into a 19th century style conservatoire) there is a number of choices to be made.

These choices range from rigorously retaining indigenous methods of transmission to completely adapting to conservatoire models, from analytical to holistic approaches, from written to aural treatment of the musical material. In order for students to make a certain musical tradition their own, the relationship with the culture of origin should be clear. At the same time, we need to keep in mind that ultimately the students will play, teach, and work with this music in completely new contexts.

An important success factor for impact of cultural diversity in music making, teaching and learning in institutions has been putting practice before theory: 'incorporating' musical styles or traditions by physically making the moves, sounds, and rhythms one's own. Using a more physical approach also leaves space for creativity. In that way students can add their own elements to the music, without losing sight of the integrity of the original music. Someone with these insights will be more effective in working with others – for instance composing, playing, teaching, or leading a community group.

#### **4. What's so good about it? - multiple references for quality**

Many aspects of musical quality are implicit and can not be measured, such as stage presence or interpretation. This is true for Western classical music, but cultural diversity makes criteria even less uniform. A new, flexible set of criteria needs to be developed for every situation, with fitness for purpose and relevance to context. In the evaluation and assessment, every aspect should be considered: the whole project, but also process and product. This includes 'intelligent failure': when an assignment results in a not-so-good end project, but the student has shown an understanding of the situation and is able to respond to the challenges in an informed and intelligent way.

In terms of content, success is largely dependent on seeking out artistically and pedagogically excellent staff, with the same care as teachers for western music are selected. The rest depends on context. For instance: what criteria do we use in a course for West African drumming? Is it enough that students stay on the beat, or should they know at least five polyrhythmic patterns, or be able to make people dance (which is a key criterion in Africa itself), or have an understanding of settings for West African music making, or – for teacher training – be able to transmit an 'authentic' musical experience in the classroom? All of these are valid, but they should relate to the aims set for the course.

#### **5. How and Where? - position in the structure**

An important aspect in offering cultural diversity in your institution will be its place in the programme or curriculum. And what musical traditions, genres, or influences will be on offer? Apart from availability of teachers, funding, and teaching materials (e.g. instruments), the student market is also a consideration. What are (potential) students interested to learn? What will it add to the programmes already on offer at your and other institutions? Confusion often arises when cultural diversity translates into a single focus on attracting students from immigrant communities. While artistically there is a lot to gain on both sides, the traditional educational system in Western Europe is often not particularly attractive for many new Europeans. A shift in the structure of specific courses, and ultimately institutional culture and organisation may be necessary if you want to extend your target group.

There are many ways for cultural diversity to enter an institution. The most common points of entry so far have been Music Education, Pop/Rock/Jazz and Composition departments, but these are not the only possibilities. It could also be a matter of policy, such as when one stresses

the importance of cultural diversity in training for Music in Schools teachers. The next step would be to see how deeply the involvement with cultural diversity would go. We can distinguish between various stages, ranging from occasional optional events via compulsory credited modules to degree courses, and ultimately reflecting cultural diversity in the entire institution.

## **6. Finding one's place – position in funding and political climate**

Increasingly, conservatoires subscribe to the vision that an institute for higher music education is not an isolated island in society, and should be constantly open to influences from outside. Cultural diversity has been a central issue on the artistic, social and political agenda for the past two decades. It can pay to be aware of the priorities in institutional, government and funding agencies, from local to international level. They are in a position to provide support, or even funding for activities in the field of cultural diversity, which in turn will contribute to the public relations profile of your entire school.

This emphatically goes for (private) funding bodies, particularly in relation to pilots and specific development projects. In the past years, cultural diversity has been a priority area of many organisations, especially in Western Europe. Even when they are not included as a specific criterion, developments relating to cultural diversity, connecting to the wider community, and attention for new or different content and/or teaching methods can be found in many funding policies. This has already yielded substantial funds for various projects across Europe.

## **7. You are not alone - making connections**

Institutions wanting to be involved in cultural diversity are not alone. There are many connections to be made with the community: the immediate surroundings of the institution, but also a wider – in some cases global – community. The outside world is a fruitful meeting place for cultural diversity: a place for output (concerts, placements) as well as input (cultural groups, musical diversity, constant change) and exchange (networks, theoretical background).

In the case of immediate surroundings, participation by students and staff in concerts and teaching is one way of keeping in touch, but it may prove to be insufficient. Setting up meaningful outreach projects that also reach in has proven useful: being aware of the cultural and ethnic diversity outside the conservatoire walls by making artistic connections, coaching talent from other cultures, and (in teacher training) developing educational programmes aimed at multicultural classrooms.

On an international level, many institutions have been dealing with the same issues. Increased internationalisation and greater compatibility in European educational structures (Bologna Declaration) will contribute to even more collaboration across borders. The current climate is conducive for educational and cultural exchange, especially in Europe. Participation in networks and conferences will make cultural diversity visible as a strand in the overall cultural and educational web, which will provide support and political strength inside and outside your institution. Organisations such as the International Society for Music Education (ISME) and the Association de Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen (AEC), as well as the Cultural Diversity in Music Education (CDIME) network offer platforms to exchange experiences (see below for website addresses).

## **8. Creating Space - leadership, management & organisation**

Many successful initiatives in cultural diversity have been *grass-roots*, brought in at teacher or even student level. But whether the initiative comes from this level or higher up in the organisation, it is the management and ultimately the leaders of the institution who provide the space and opportunities to let it grow into a viable shape and size. By taking on a facilitatory role and creating the proper conditions for integration, this kind of leadership can be flexible without losing sight of the overall picture, and the eventual aims.

New developments are vulnerable, and need to be monitored and nurtured. More often than not, activities in cultural diversity depend on the efforts of one inspired person, who – out of personal interest, artistic vision, or social engagement – deems it an important aspect of music education. Once this one person disappears from the scene for whatever reason, his or her activities need to be taken over by other informed staff members, and supported by the organisation and senior management.

Consequently, people are absolutely vital in the success or failure of including cultural diversity in an institution. Policies supporting cultural diversity can have a wide-ranging impact on programmes, students and staff population, but there will also be economic consequences. In an environment where the total budget is limited, established teachers of, for example, classical music may resist change unless they are actively engaged with it and can see how it is of value to their practice. It is important to involve teaching staff –as well as management- as much as possible.

## **9. Involve! – students & staff**

If cultural diversity is treated separately from all other areas of education there is a danger that it will become isolated, making it a very vulnerable part of the organisation. This can be avoided by involving as many people as possible: let everyone know what is going on, why these initiatives are taken and where the responsibilities lie. Creating a pro-active task force across departments may be a valid approach. In that way, we can move towards an environment where discussions can take place based on trust and equality, and prevent representatives of particular musical traditions to be overly protective of their microcosm within the organisation. Professional development of staff and research are therefore vital for the viability of cultural diversity.

As end-users and receivers of education, students naturally come into regular contact with cultural diversity in the institution. Usually this only holds true for part of the student population, but even if every one of them is involved, the question may be raised to what extent the issues of cultural diversity are part of their learning process, and their perception of musicianship. It is therefore advisable to make sure that the courses that deal with cultural diversity also include moments of critical reflection about learning processes, the position of musicians in society, multiculturalism and for example globalisation. In order for students to become aware of, familiar with, and committed to issues of cultural diversity, you need consistent and well-planned ‘meeting points’ during the whole course of the study.

## **10. Make it last – ensuring sustainability**

Many initiatives in the field of cultural diversity have been reasonably successful, but short-lived. In order to make cultural diversity a permanent aspect of teaching and learning in your institution, it should not only be integrated into the practice but it should also be supported by theoretical and academic activity. For example, it helps to explicitly name relevant aspects of cultural diversity in curriculum outcomes. Treating it as implicit may seem laudable in terms of a vision of equality. But it will not help sustainability, for it can then be easily lost out of sight.

Academic back-up is also important: including cultural diversity into research (and development) programmes shows it as a mature educational element in higher education. This is a young field of study, and many exciting areas are still open for research.

Staff are crucial in ensuring sustainability of cultural diversity. An overall understanding and interest from senior staff is a good start and can make a significant difference. Once the initial development stage is over, key individuals may form a monitoring group with a shared sense of responsibility. Staff training and continuing professional development in the field of cultural diversity is also crucial. This is often a sensitive area in terms of funding: people involved in part-time contractual work can be reluctant to invest in continuing professional development when this does not result in immediate benefits and may lead to a loss of income through not being able to take on other work. By setting up, co-ordinating and supporting structures among groups of interested and active members of staff, it is possible to create an inspiring educational climate with a contemporary creative relevance that will reflect on the entire institute.

#### FURTHER INFORMATION

CDIME (Cultural Diversity in Music Education)	<a href="http://www.cdime-network.com/cdime">www.cdime-network.com/cdime</a>
WMC (World Music Centre)	<a href="http://www.worldmusiccentre.com/wmc">www.worldmusiccentre.com/wmc</a>
Rotterdam Conservatory, World Music Department	<a href="http://www.hmd.nl">www.hmd.nl</a>
AEC (European Association of Conservatoires)	<a href="http://www.aecinfo.org">www.aecinfo.org</a>
ISME Website (International Society for Music Education)	<a href="http://www.isme.org">www.isme.org</a>

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