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REFLECTIONS ON NORTH – SOUTH - SOUTH COLLABORATION IN MUSIC EDUCATION

1. Background

MECI network, coordinated by the Department of Music of the University of Jyväskylä (JyU), has its roots in North-South Higher Education programme (which existed between 2004 -2007, funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Finland)) with University of Pretoria (UP) as the only partner institution then. However, the first seeds of collaboration between JyU and UP in music education dates back to 1998, when the ISME World Conference was held in South Africa. Initially, prior to North-South-South (up to 2007), means of collaboration existed only between the universities of Pretoria and Jyväskylä.¹ From the very beginning the collaboration has included staff and student exchanges, and some joint intensive periods. During the first years of collaboration staff members and students from JyU did participate in outreach projects in which also the UP Music Dept people were involved. Such activities included, among others, Arts & Culture teacher training in rural areas of Mpumalanga province. Furthermore, the UP Music Dept's involvement with projects such as teacher training in the Sekhukhune district (in Limpopo province) and the former STTEP (State Theater Educational Project) orchestral outreach project for children living in various township areas of Pretoria.

Since autumn 2007 the overall title for collaboration projects has been North-South-South Higher Education Institution Network Programme (furthermore funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and administrated by CIMO – Centre of International Mobility). In order to bring more focus to South-South axis, JyU invited University of Pretoria (UP) together with the following new partner institutions to join the new phase of the project:

- North-West University (NWU) - location: Potchefstroom (South Africa)
- Kenyatta University (KU) – location: Nairobi (Kenya)
- University of Botswana (UB) – location: Gaborone (Botswana)
- University of South Africa (UNISA) – location: Pretoria (South Africa)

Up to 2011 the collaboration project included the above mentioned five African universities plus JyU. The overall title of the project then was “Music in Strengthening Cultural Identity in Southern Africa”.

Since 2011, Africa University (location: Mutare, Zimbabwe) has been a partner institution in this project which was then renamed MECI ('Music, Education and Cultural Identity').The activities within the MECI project have aimed:

¹ During the North-South phase collaboration existed only on bilateral basis (in our case between University of Jyväskylä and University of Pretoria.) Since 2007 the overall title of the network has been North-South-South, thus denoting both the importance of getting more partners involved and attempts to strengthen collaboration between partner institutions in South.

- a) to explore notions of cultural identities through music
- b) to make African and Finnish students and teachers of music / music education /cultural education aware of the benefits and challenges of multicultural/transcultural teaching
- c) to improve learning and teaching skills of African and Finnish music and culture educators (including the classroom teachers), aiming for in-depth exchange of approaches and ideas
- d) to boost cultural identities of music teachers in Africa and in Finland
- e) to improve the overall quality of music teaching and cultural education in South-Africa, Kenya, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Finland
- f) to increase the cooperation between different actors and organizations in the fields of cultural education, music and music education in South-Africa, Botswana, Kenya and Zimbabwe (and thus strengthen the South-South axis within the project)

The planning concerning the contents and strategies of the MECI-project has been done in joint collaboration between partner institutions, taking into account both the positive and negative experiences from the past. The project phase 2011-2013 has involved, in addition to staff and teacher mobility, various forms of collaboration in the fields of music education pedagogy and research, music technology and its pedagogical and research application possibilities (e.g. in teaching various indigenous musics) as a new area.

This article is based on the results gained from a survey that was carried out during the 2012 Intensive Course, hosted by UNISA. The main reason for our survey was to collect data from course participants related to their experiences and perceptions of activities (both past and present) within the MECI project, contents of the course programme dealt with topics related to the title of the project – ‘Music, Education & Cultural Identity’ and its proposed aims included. Intensive courses, for which each partner institution contributes from their areas of expertise (cultural, pedagogical, research), together with student and staff mobility, are an integral part of activities in all North-South-South projects.

2. Research methods

The questionnaire was made in Finland before the Intensive Course in South Africa in 2012, and at the end of IC the actual survey was carried out. The questionnaire contained a section for background information, profession, experience as a music educator and question of previous attendance on IC. This section was followed by seven open questions in which following items were asked; expectations on the course, beneficials gained from the course kind of ideas participants got, what were the most interesting subjects, how to develop further IC and what is the meaning of this kind of collaboration. Questions overlapped with each other in order to enable triangulation together with observation during the course (Patton 1990, 467). There was also a general evaluation rating scale (from poor to excellent) in the questionnaire. The idea of making this kind of survey was positively received by all course participants, albeit not everybody participated in it (partly due to schedule overlappings and transport issues.)

Total number of course participants was 58, of whom 30 were present throughout the IC. Eleven

teachers had attended project intensive courses more than once, seven of them working in African partner institutions. In total 27 persons (all of whom were present throughout the entire course period) answered the questionnaire: fourteen (14) of them being university teachers and thirteen (13) students. Four (4) of the teachers and eight (8) of the students attended for the first time in IC. Seven (7) teachers had attended an IC at least three times.

Table 1

Status S/U	Experience in teaching (years)	Participation in ICs (times)
S1	-	1
S2	-	1
S3	-	1
S4	-	1
S5	1	1
S6	1	1
S7	2	1
S8	6	1
S9	2	3
S10	3	2
S11	-	2
S12	-	2
S13	-	2

Status S/U	Experience in teaching (years)	Participation in ICs (times)
U1	6	1
U2	12	2
U3	15	3
U4	17	1
U5	18	3
U6	21	2
U7	25	4
U8	28	1
U9	29	1
U10	29	4
U11	38	5
U12	40	3
U13	40	3
U14	15	3

In analyzing process the answers were coded according to the participant's status (student, S, or university teacher, U), experience as a music educator in years (y) and previous attendance in intensive courses in times (t). For example S6y1t means student, 6 years of teaching experience, first time participation in IC . All answers were collected into a form of a table which made it possible to notice connections between different answers.

3. Results

General opinion of the course was positive; 26% of the participants answered excellent, 63% good and 11% ok. The answers of students and teachers were also in line.

Table 2
General evaluation of the course

	poor	moderate	ok	good	excellent
student			1	8	4
University teacher			2	9	3
Together			3 11%	17 63%	7 26%

3.1 Expectations before the intensive course

What kind of expectations did the participants have from this intensive course? Along with the rest of the questionnaire, we gathered this information after the course. The answers would probably have been somewhat different, had this been asked before the activities actually started. Despite the bias caused by the timing of this question, we felt that this information gives us a fair idea of the participants' different orientations towards the course. More than half of the respondents, in most cases university teachers, had attended on at least one NSS-program's intensive course in the past. These teachers knew what to expect, and they also had a chance to share in advance their former experiences, with the rest of the group coming from the same university.

First-timers included both students and teachers. Their orientation towards courses topics and activities varied, from having no specific expectations, to quite strong preassumptions.

"--I thought all that we were going to do is exchange ideas about our (musical) performance practices." (S5)

"I thought it would be a lot of paper presentations. Lots of academic work. Not so much workshops" (S10)

The most common theme in expectations was the possibility to share knowledge of music and music education with other attendees from different countries and cultural environments. Related to this theme but a bit more specified, participants expected to learn practical music

teaching skills. Networking and making new contacts were also mentioned in many answers as well as academic activities, including paper presentations and research feedback.

"To learn different ways to approach music education, learn about other cultures, get something practical to apply to my work." (S1)

"I expected to learn, share and experience other people's ideas and also receive feedback on my research work." (U9)

Other themes in expectations were attending and participating in musical performances, learning to play musical instruments as well as visits to local schools and sites related to music. Two answers related to attendants' commitment to the course's schedule in general, which appears to be more of a critical remark than expectation, reminding us of the fact that this question was answered after the course.

3.2 What did the participants gain from the course?

To find out what the course's participants felt they had benefitted or gained from the course, we asked two somewhat overlapping questions: "*What did you gain from this course?*" and "*What kind of ideas did you get for your work in the future?*" The participants came from different cultural and professional backgrounds, so we decided to ask two separate questions with the same focus, enabling the respondents to reflect their experiences from different angles and their answers would then complement each other.

Most common themes found in these answers were networking (2xS, 10xU), diverse resources for practical music education (10xS, 8xU), research skills (8xS, 9xU) and cultural understanding (6xS). From a Finnish viewpoint it seemed that some of the presentations handled culturally, historically and even politically sensitive issues in the context of past and present musical practices in Africa.

"I got to know to many lovely people, saw many different ways to have a presentation, new ideas, approaches and influences, I understood so much more about cultural issues, how the background influences your thinking and how sensitive subject talking about different cultural groups is and the importance of everyone's cultural heritage" (S1)

"A wide knowledge of music theory, different methods of teaching as well as presenting, exposure to a number of instruments, african and western and networking as well as cultural exchanges" (S6)

This kind of intensive course with multicultural pedagogical and academic activities exposes the attendants to different cultural views. It would be ideal that these new perspectives and ideas learned on the course, along with practical teaching tools, would eventually benefit the local

community of the attendant. It would be very interesting to find out to what extent this kind of transfer actually happens, however this kind of survey has not yet been carried out.

”Article writing and teaching what I’ve learnt to my friends and students in primary schools as well as practicing the conducting, singing and composing of unique sounds and structures” (S6)

According to the answers given by the participants, a lot of useful information in the field of music education was gained. The majority of respondents (10xS, 8xU) reported of having adopted new practical methods for teaching music and ideas to be used in their future work. These methods included e.g. 1) creative approaches in music education, 2) adding movement to music teaching, 3) choral conducting and singing, 4) teaching African instruments such as mbira, marimbas, drums and percussions, 5) instructing African ensembles or pop bands and teaching hip hop music. Participants also got new material (songs, games) for their lesson plans and new insights about music education in general. Also various music education projects that were introduced during the intensive course were regarded as interesting, as well as comparing music education methods in different cultures.

Participating the IC gave many respondents a possibility to enhance their academic skills. Workshop series for writing articles was popular amongst the students, whereas university teachers found the event fruitful in terms of having ideas for research, getting encouragement, sharing ideas and engaging in academic discourses (7xS, 5xU). Also the opportunity to give a presentation was valued, as well as the possibility to see different ways of presenting a topic (4xS, 1xU).

With regard to the amount and reliability of the gathered data, there probably would have been a better time and place for answering the questions before the actual ending of the IC. The questionnaire was carried out after the last meeting together, just before the participants were about to say their goodbyes to each other. After the diverse activities during ten intensive days, it must have been quite demanding for many of us to stay focused and reflect thoroughly on all the things that we had learned about music, different cultures and each other.

”To number what I have learned would lead myself to cheating. All I can say, I have learned more than my expectations.” (S9)

3.3 What is the meaning of this international cooperation for you?

International collaboration plays central role in the MECI project. In all answers to the question “What is the meaning of this international cooperation for you?” the importance of experiences gained from collaboration and reciprocal interaction stood up. Various forms and viewpoints concerning collaboration were brought forward: in some answers focus was on cultural interaction, in others bias was in research collaboration. In some cases the emphasis was on

dialogue between pedagogy and musicianship, whereas some informants found development of one's own identity within cultural interaction as being very important.

In more than 90 % of given answers the issues of international cooperation and interaction stood clearly up and felt as being important (12 students out of 13 and 13 teachers out of 14). Under those concepts were mentioned for example share ideas and experiences (7xS, 5xU), cultural exchange (8xS, 6xU) and interacting with other musicians, music educators and researchers (5xS, 4xU). Three (3) students mentioned networking. Verbs *learn* (5xS, 1xU) and *share* (7xS, 4xU) were mentioned often especially among students.

Working together from different countries, nationalities and cultures in a way the enriches each others' practices. (U5)

Personal growth seemed to be an important issue to many respondents. 37 %, ten (10) persons out of twenty seven (27), answered that this international cooperation had to some extent affected their ways of thinking. In the answers attendees used descriptions such as "mind opening" and "opening doors and new ideology of music". The participants noticed having learnt about other cultures and similarity of people despite of different cultures (S1) and on the other hand how different people perceive music and how they value it (U14). The importance of sharing was mentioned in connection of personal growth (S6). Teachers found cultural encounters as being important in student's own growth and development; them being eye openers and giving new possibilities (U4), and having their impact to study commitment in the long run (U10).

It has given me a broader perspective in how different people perceive music and how they value it. Despite the differences in mus.ed. policies there seems to be a lot of common ground in terms of music and mus.ed.'s importance. NSS has given me wonderful experiences that I will never forget! (U14)

Pedagogical perspectives were strongly emphasized in international collaboration. In fourteen responses (52 % of total) issues of learning, teaching or own pedagogical thinking and actions were mentioned. In the answers given by the teachers (9xU) pedagogical viewpoints were more frequently emphasized in the answers given by the students (5xS). Sharing ideas and thoughts was considered as important in developing one's own work, as well as getting concrete working tools from collaboration (U5).

Also the impact of collaboration and cultural encounters emerged as an important factor in employment process and career making. One of the participants (U4) emphasized the fact that events such as the project intensive courses give encouragement and self-confidence to people working in various fields of music education.

Great inspiration to younger scholars and something to always look forward to. (U1)

It was also enriching to realize how much positive energy there is and how many inspiring

projects are being done to promote music education (U4).

3.4 Suggestions for developing the courses

The participants had many suggestions how to improve the courses. One may argue as well that the large variety in suggestions speaks for the commitment of the participants. They consider that developing this operations model is worthwhile. The participants were asked two questions on their development ideas: “What kind of topics or approaches you would have added to this course?” “What other suggestions do you have to develop these courses?”

The biggest group of development ideas concerning the topics and approaches (6xS, 3xU) dealt with issues of practical music making and wishes to get more emphasis on that. The participants wished more activities in instrumental performance – both African and Western (2xS, 3xU), voice training (2xS) and organizing performing groups such as orchestras and choirs (2xS). One participant had an idea about practical music making that would at the same time have an impact on creating togetherness during the course:

“As participants who are multicultural, we must try to form groups and present prepared activities on the last day of the workshop e.g. forming a mass choir, playing instruments. We must have time to practice given the experts in the areas.” (S12)

The second largest group of participants (4xS, 2xU) wanted to have more topics related to music education. The educational aspects that were missed were connected to philosophy and didactics of music education (3xS, 2xU); “the easy way of teaching music” (S2), “how to teach Western instruments in African schools” (S8) and multicultural as well as interdisciplinary teaching and learning approaches (U3). Also music in overall social life and its contribution to music education was desired to be discussed (S7).

Five participants (2xS, 3xU) wanted to have more the kind of approaches that would increase togetherness or utilize the possibilities for co-operation. More co-operation was wanted inside the IP in the forms of joint research projects (fieldwork during an IP, U4), performance (forming a mass choir or an orchestra, S12, U1) and discussion (lunch time debate on a random and well-known topic, S6). On the other hand one person suggested co-operation with local schools and teachers (U2).

Some persons wished to have more topics on African music and preserving culture (2xS, 3xU). They wanted to learn strategies how to incorporate in helping societies to gather lost musical elements and encourage more people to preserve the culture in music (2xS). “Notation of afro-american rhythms” was one suggestion for a topic that would help local teachers to write down their music (U14). Another idea around this area was to add a presentation “Indigenous music through modern technology” (U6). One participant suggested that people should arrange their traditional music for purposes of teaching (U5).

Three University teachers wanted to have more approaches on music research. They wanted to maximize better the privilege of having research specialists assembled. More time could be offered for consultation on research proposals (U13) and joint research projects could be planned (U4). One University teacher called after more critical theory. He claimed that “some presentations lack critical vigour & are full of unexamined assumptions” (U8).

Other wishes for topics or approaches dealt with out of school music activities and community development (S2, U9), music therapy and the healing aspect of music (2xS), historical backtrack of the music development of the countries present (S6) and study possibilities (MA/PhD) available in each of the sister universities to share with students (U10). Three persons (1xS, 2xU) had nothing to add to the course: “I think the number of people now involved in this project guarantees a very good variety of topics and presentations.”(U12)

The most mentioned idea of developing the structures of the courses (3xS, 4xU) was to increase time that is used for discussion or rest. The ten days period was quite packed with great variety of presentations and workshops and there was only one free day in the middle of the period. Participants missed for example “room for thorough discussion” (U3), “One or two free afternoons” (U7) and less days used for course because it’s difficult to fit 10 days in participants normal workloads (U4).

Three participants thought that the topics of the course should be organized according to themes (1xS, 2xU) but on the other hand three persons said that there should be more variation in presentations (1xS, 2xU). One of them underlined that offsetting presentations with other activities would provide a valuable variety of learning experiences (U10), another wanted to alternate western presentations with African ones on the same day (S3) and one thought that there shouldn’t be too many presentations by the same persons (U4). In addition to these people two others wanted to have more practical workshops and demonstrations (S13, U14).

Four persons wished to have more shared material and networking (2xS, 2xU). There was a suggestion to make a booklet about the presentations that could be sent to members (S2). On the other hand sharing could happen using a website for NSS MECI program (S7). Also shared mentorship between the universities and follow ups for younger scholars were called after (2xU).

Six people had ideas/suggestions/opinions on participation. One teacher wished for more participation of students (U9). On the other hand two students suggested that there should be competition sort of activities in order to motivate the participants and encourage those who are not fully taking part (2xS). Two students and one university teacher called after more equally balanced contributions from all partner institutions (2xS, 1xU). They hoped that everyone could attend actively to the whole course or that there should be balance on presentation from all the participating universities.

To sum up survey results, it seemed to be evident that kind of collaboration practiced in the

MECI project so far has been rewarding to everyone involved, and that collaboration activities have been efficient and beneficial.

4. Conclusion

As can be noticed from above, the project activities have played a significant role in participants' lives. To general comment, already referred to above ("Participating in NSS programme changed my life in very fundamental, but extremely positive ways."), one could add many more examples on how both students and teachers have experienced the project activities in the past, and how they have applied what they have learned from the project in their own lives and career building.

Regarding what the project has meant for students, it has made an immense contribution towards expanding their views and perspectives. The MECI intensive course, held in Pretoria during 2012, where all the participating countries joined and shared ideas, was also a very valuable experience to students. Opportunities were created where they could share in music making, and also where they could take part in critical discussions and seminars with researchers – both experienced experts and young scholars - from Africa and Finland.

The participants joined the course with very different - even opposite - orientations. In the end everyone had gained something important from the period, so obviously the variety of topics was wide enough. Maybe there was already too much programme since many wished for more free conversation or time to rest. In the future it should be remembered to give sufficient time for networking in both ways: through conversations and music. Informal action promotes as well the overall aims of the MECI programme - collaboration, networking in the areas of research and education as well as deeper understanding and learning. During previous courses good experiences have been gained for example from centered boarding. It should be remembered as well to utilize the possibilities of joint musicking in creating trust, networks and interaction.

MECI IP courses are valued in the field of increasing equality. For many students and teachers they give a possibility of joining an international academic conference in spite of their economical situation. The collaboration has led into many joint articles and it has been a great inspiration for writing a master's thesis for many. It has been seen as well as an important act of becoming employed.

The fact that collaboration of this kind was experienced important from the perspective of personal growth by many participants (37% of the total) can be regarded as being considerable. This can be understood so that when people representing different cultures meet during courses such as this, sustainable development is created - some essential growth in self takes place and gets new meanings. Since nearly all participants were either (music) teacher educators or (music) education students, all this will be transmitted to generations to come via school education in participatory countries, and hence its importance can not be underestimated.

To conclude with: we, the authors, have experienced the MECI collaboration as a long-enduring developmental project. The continuation of this project is currently not guaranteed; yet we wish that our experiences could encourage others to take up similar kind of multicultural collaboration projects in different fields of music and music education. As mentioned in the first chapter, the main reason for our survey was to collect data from course participants related to their experiences and perceptions of activities (both past and present) within the MECI project, contents of the course programme and proposed aims of the MECI project. We found the results most encouraging and live in hope that there will be continuation to our collaboration efforts in future, since it seems that there is need for music and music education projects such as this.

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