

MOVING MUSIC

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Here, Charlotte reports on a small-scale study that explored whether music can be used to challenge stereotypes pupils might have of distant places.

Music is moving. It is also a 'powerful carrier of cultural views' (Jones and Robin, 2008). Pupils exposed to musical influences from around the world learn that there is a 'strong link between music and place' (Scoffham, 2017). Most regions or countries have specific genres and instruments associated with them; therefore, I was interested to find out whether music could be used to help pupils 'develop an accurate understanding of diverse people and places' (DfE, 2013).

As music stimulates pupils' imaginations, it follows that if all a pupil hears of music from African countries is based on the traditional drum workshops schools often engage with, surely those pupils will develop a view of Africa based on this. If they have not had the opportunity to listen to a range of genres and styles of music from a specific African country or place, pupils are more likely to develop a limited view of that particular country. For example, in my school, following an African drumming workshop, pupils believed that everyone from African countries could play the drums. Thus, although musical experiences can open pupils' eyes to a wealth of cultural experiences and understanding, it can also contribute to their construction of stereotypical views. These views need to be challenged in lessons because 'without intervention, pupils are liable to accept' them (Scoffham, 1999).

We all know how music develops over time to both reflect and influence culture; therefore, music can enable teachers to help pupils understand the complexity of the world. Music can also give pupils opportunities to 'express balanced opinions that are rooted in knowledge and understanding of contemporary issues' (Ofsted, 2011). While we should treasure and value traditions, our pupils need to understand that countries and places change constantly. Thus, the music we use to teach pupils about places should (as my study indicates), include both traditional and contemporary music.

The study

I completed a small-scale study that explored whether music can be used to challenge stereotypes pupils might have of distant places. For this study, a stereotype can be defined as 'fixed attitudes and generalisations about other people or countries, before a person has any factual knowledge of that person or place' (after Weldon, 2004). In order for teachers to help pupils understand the complexity of the world and overcome these views, it is essential to have an understanding of how they are constructed, and the impact music experiences might have on pupils.

To start with, I played two contrasting pieces of African music and asked the pupils to draw pictures of the musicians playing. The first was a traditional piece and the second a modern piece of African music (see web panel). I was able to elicit pupils' ideas about who they thought created each piece of music through their drawings, as well as ascertaining what the pupils thought about when listening to the different music pieces. It became clear that most pupils associated the traditional music with a rural, traditional view of Africa (Figure 1), while they thought that the modern music was American – both pieces were actually Nigerian (Figure 2).

The pupils were so surprised to learn that both pieces of music were from Nigeria in West Africa, they began to question their own thoughts and ideas about Africa. I then used the life of the artist (Simi) who created the second piece to teach about modern life in Nigeria.

Music in the curriculum

The National Curriculum for Music states that pupils should be able to 'appreciate, understand and listen to a range of music from different traditions' (DfE, 2013). However, the curriculum does not specify musical genres or places of musical origin.

When talking about their views on Africa pupils mentioned their experiences of taking part in an African drumming workshop and their belief that all Africans are good drummers. Bowroski's (2011) research identified that incorporating such events into the curriculum can perpetuate such a singular view. Thus, it is important that schools provide a broad and balanced curriculum, which both develops pupils' understanding of global issues and conveys the complexity of people and places through telling 'multiple stories' (Adichie, 2009) about/from a country or place through geography and music lessons. Conveying how every country plays a broad range of music can help pupils to understand how one country's music can influence the music of another country, and vice versa. Like economics and culture, music is increasingly 'performed' on a global stage.

The globalisation of music

The recent globalisation of the music industry has had a significant impact on the types of music that are created around the world. Musicians' access to diverse styles has led them to compose 'fusion' music – i.e. music that fuses styles from different cultures.

During my study, I found that pupils do not realise the musicians they listen to employ a mix of styles and genres derived from a



Figure 1: Pupils' responses to the traditional Nigerian music.



Figure 2: Pupils' responses to the modern Nigerian music.

variety of cultures. For schools, this has led to a 'culture of western music learning in schools' (Ho, 2013). While this 'derivation' can make it difficult for teachers to deliver culturally accurate lessons about music from around the world, today's complexity of music can, in fact, help pupils to explore the inter-relationships between a variety of people and places. It has been suggested that, in a globalised world, there is 'increasing interaction of cultural traditions' (Burnard and Murphy, 2017) and music could act as a key to broadening relationships and breaking down cultural barriers.

The big question

This leads to the question of whether the music curriculum is adequate, or whether it contributes to pupils' forming stereotypical ideas about distant places.

The National Curriculum for Music may be a contributing factor to the construction of stereotypical views. However, because it does not specify the genre or origin of music used, the concern is about how the way some teachers interpret the curriculum could lead to pupils forming stereotypical views. During my study, I found that schools often teach music using traditional pieces rather than using a variety of genres or styles from one country. The result is that the music pupils experience in school does not demonstrate or help them understand the diversity within countries or places.

Challenging stereotypes and changing mind sets

In order for teachers to challenge pupils' stereotypical views of distant places, we must consider whether music can be used as an effective tool. By noting

pupils' views and thoughts at the outset, midpoint and end of my small-scale study, I was able to tackle this issue.

It became clear that after listening to two contrasting pieces of music from Nigeria pupils began to question their current knowledge. This is significant, because the conversations pupils had towards the end of my study demonstrated that they had become more aware of the cultural diversity within the African continent. As music 'moves' between countries it changes, thus it is an ideal medium to help pupils learn about the complexity of people and places.

Conclusion

Pupils can develop stereotypes of distant places based on their musical experiences, but music can shift these misperceptions. A dynamic tool, music can be used to challenge views and assumptions. Where it is not used effectively, music can limit pupils' views of distant places. Thus, teachers need to provide opportunities for pupils to experience diverse types of music and access multiple views of distant places in order to help them develop an understanding of the cultural complexity of that country or place.

References

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WEB RESOURCES

Traditional Nigerian music:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B9baR_Ks1ps&t=62s
 Modern Nigerian music 'Smile' by Simi: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwwvr5DIEUM>

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