Key Concepts in Multicultural Music Education

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> A man saw Nasrudin searching for something on the ground.
> 'What have you lost, Mulla?' he asked.
> 'My keys,' said the Mulla.
> So the man went down on his knees too, and they both looked.
> After a time the other man asked: 'Where exactly did you drop your keys?'
> 'In my house,' said the Mulla.
> 'Then why are you looking here?'
> 'There is more light here than inside my house.'
>   – I. Shah, *The Exploits of the Incomparable Mulla Nasrudin*

Most discussions of multicultural music education tend to focus where the light is best: on the elements of world musics; on the cultural contexts of musical 'objects'; on curriculum planning and implementation. As a result, several key concepts in multicultural music education remain hidden in the darkness of critical neglect.

My purpose in this paper is to shed some philosophical light on several assumptions that are often attached to our concepts of music, music education, and 'multiculturalism' itself. The paper begins with a brief reflection on what music is, including a critique of today's most common way of saying what music is. Next, I give serious consideration to the concept of music education *as* culture, instead of assuming from the outset (as North American music educators often do) that music education is an isolated activity *within* a culture. The remainder of the paper is concerned with saying what 'multiculturalism' is, and with examining the several forms 'multiculturalism' can take in the context of music education.

What Music is

Every culture we know has 'music'. Yet, contrary to popular understanding, music is not a universal language: people do not immediately understand, appreciate, or enjoy the musics of other cultures. More accurately, people within cultures and between cultures often speak of 'our music' and 'their music'. Indeed, it is not uncommon for people to identify themselves by means of particular musical styles. In North America, for example, many young people proclaim their life-style preferences via the blasts of portable stereos. They wear their music like a bold team badge or a t-shirt slogan. Other people go even further: they actually live the life of their music. Indeed, for many country and western music 'fans', 'country' is not just a 'style of sounds' to which to listen. Rather, country music is a way of life; it includes a preference for particular clothes, cars, sports, food, expressions, holidays, rituals and 'personalities'.

Our tendency to use music to separate ourselves from one another is underscored by Bruno Nettl's observation that in some cultures musical 'secrets' are actually guarded from outsiders; in others, music is considered to be owned by individuals, clans, or tribes (Nettl, 1983, p. 293). Indeed, ethnomusicologists conducting field research frequently encounter strong resistance to their questions and their microphones. In sum, musicians around the world do not automatically

relish the opportunity to share the history, the techniques, or the meanings of their musical traditions. Many resist disclosures for fear that outsiders will fail to understand and respect the uses, functions and subdivisions of music in their societies. They fear that outsiders will not understand and respect *them*. In short, because music is, in essence, something that *people make* or *do*, a people's music is something that they *are*, both during and after the making of music and the experiencing of music. Two important points follow from these observations.

First, it is common to overlook the fact that, before anything else, music is *a human practice*. All over the world, the human practice of making sounds to which to listen (and dance, and celebrate, and glorify) inevitably leads to the codification of skills and understandings, the specification of standards of performance, and the establishment of institutions for passing on musical skills, understandings and standards. Such a linked body of practical principles is what the Greeks first called an 'art', in the sense of 'ars' or 'techne' (Sparshott, 1982). It is a major weakness of the modern philosophy of music education that this sense of 'the art' of music has been overlooked.

Indeed, I suggest that it may be both philosophically and practically unsound for music educators to assume that music is prima facie an 'object' that exists primarily to serve 'distanced contemplation'. This 'aesthetic' or 'fine art' notion of music has only been in place in the West since the eighteenth century. The last thirty years have seen it institutionalized in North American music education as the 'philosophy of music education as aesthetic education' (Leonhard and House, 1959; Reimer, 1970). Several countries outside North America have embraced this formulation more recently.

Unfortunately, the aesthetic concept of music education (music qua 'fine art') obscures the fact that music is something that people make and do: that music is a human practice inclusive of many subpractices of listening and making music which tend to interrelate dialetically. Indeed, an 'aesthetic' perspective by definition, tends to exclude 'artistic' considerations. In addition, it labels 'unmusical' any non-aesthetic (i.e., any non-formal) considerations, including most technical and social considerations which seem to impact profoundly on the processes of music making and music listening. Indeed, if strictly followed, the aesthetic concept of music education leads one to separate music from its context of use and production altogether. It tends to encourage one to act like a musical microbiologist: that is, one is directed by the canons of 'aesthetic experience' to place the 'musical object' against a blank background and experience it through a perceptual microscope (i.e., through an attitude that is psychically distanced, disinterested, and only formally empathetic). The goal is a kind of 'immaculate perception' of the isolated musical object (or 'symbol of human feeling'). I suggest, therefore, that the aesthetic concept of music and music education ought to be approached rather critically. That is to say, it ought to be exposed to the brightest of analytic lights since several of its basic concepts are, in a word, arbitrary, in fact, any theory of music or music education founded on the 'aesthetic point of view' is normative and, therefore, implicitly reductionist.

My second point derives from the idea that although music is one of the vital organs of social organisms around the world, 'music' (including one's conception of what music is) divides people as much as it unites them. Indeed, music is *not* harmony, literally or metaphorically speaking. Nevertheless, the fact that music is a major means of distinguishing, identifying and expressing differences points to one of its major functions across all cultures: 'Music can abstract and distill the relatively unclear and obscure character of culture' (Nettl, 1983, p. 159). That a primary function of music across cultures should be its function as a 'cultural symbol' is not surprising when one considers what the word 'culture' actually means.

Culture is the man-made part of a people's environment. It consists of a society's

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customs, traditions, tools, beliefs, laws, values and goals; that is, all its expressed ways of thinking. L. A. White (1949) was one of the first to emphasize that humans are differentiated from other animals on two counts: humans have developed both language and culture. Human behaviour originates in and is distinguished by the use of symbols of various kinds. Many scholars now accept that music is a major way of expressing and organizing thinking, and that music functions as a symbol in several discursive and non-discursive ways.

What has still not occurred to many, however, is that the same holds true for the process of music education itself. That is, educational *process* is a powerful means of 'enculturation' (the achievement of cultural competency). Thus, music education is not an isolated enterprise within a culture. On the contrary, music education often embodies culture. In short, the essential values of a culture are often reflected in the *way* music is learned and taught. Three brief reflections on circumstances in Angola, Iran and North America are offered next to illustrate this critical point.

Music Education As Culture

Barbara Schmidt-Wrenger (1985) points out that among the Tshokwe of Angola and Zaïre, music (singing and drumming) and dance act as the vehicles of societal teachings and wisdom. As in music making, the goal in societal life is the achievement of balance between independent and normed behaviour. For the Tshokwe, the musical performance (the parts and the integration of parts) is the model for social life: the way the parts relate to the whole; the way the musical elements and processes balance; the way supporting roles and soloing interact to create effective dialogue. Musical processes become metaphors for life activities, and life is learned by making music.

Not surprisingly, the traditional way of learning music in Iran contrasts dramatically with Tshokwe ways, but the outcome is essentially the same: the codified values of the culture are instilled in the student. Bruno Nettl (1985) explains that the traditional way of learning Persian classical music is through the study of the radif (a repertory of some 300 short pieces) under the direction of a master teacher. Nettl suggests that through the study of the radif an Iranian student learns that there is one musical authority which one must submit to before expressing oneself as an individual through improvisation (p. 70). In addition, the student learns the importance of hierarchy, the appropriate time and place for the expression of individualism, an appreciation for the tension between the expected and the unexpected, and the virtues of slow, deliberate memorization and contemplation of materials within an oral/aural process. The radif is a means of transmitting the values of Iranian society; it is the basis and the departure point for musical individualism and, therefore, it abstracts important aspects of Iranian Muslim culture.

And what about our systems of public school music education in Canada and the United States? First, we tend to teach a very narrow slice of the musics heard and practised in our multicultural societies. Second, 'our' traditional Western music making and listening practices share several idiosyncratic features: they pivot on syntactic structures (tonal melodies and functional harmony); they value re-creation over spontaneous creation; and they emphasize the control of musical environments. Third, our prevailing philosophy of music education advises us to treat music (all music!) as an aesthetic object of contemplation according to eighteenth century standards of taste and sponsorship. In view of these characteristics, a critical question arises: What values are projected by a musical culture that insists that students play what is written; listen with 'immaculate perception'; de-emphasize a music's context of use and production; and follow the leader? At the

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very least, North American music education seems to sanction a hierarchical and, paradoxically, a rather undemocratic view of society.

Perhaps if we wish to liberate the ethnocentric musical and social presumptions of people in North America we might start by re-aligning the ends and means of music education to match the multicultural nature of our societies. If the process of music education reflects, distils and abstracts cultural values, – if music education functions *as* culture – then music education may also have the potential to change prejudicial attitudes and behaviours.

Before such action is possible, however, music education needs a clear sense of its multicultural destination. Questions like *how do we get there?* can only be answered by first deciding the more difficult question: *where do we want to go?* In his book, *Pluralism in Education* (1979), Richard Pratte provides a conceptual map of multiculturalism. Superimposed on music education, Pratte's map serves to locate ideological paths, detect blind alleys, and highlight routes to more socially responsible music curricula. The next section of this discussion will sketch Pratte's map and adapt it for music education.

Multicultural Music Education: Curriculum Models

As a descriptive term, 'multicultural' refers to the coexistence of unlike groups in a common social system (Pratte, 1979, p. 6). In this sense, 'multicultural' means 'culturally diverse'. But the term 'multicultural' is also used in an evaluative sense. It connotes a social ideal: a policy of support for exchange among different groups of people to enrich all while respecting and preserving the integrity of each. Thus a country can be culturally diverse, but it may not uphold the ideals of multiculturalism or pluralism. That is, it may not support equal legal, educational and economic opportunity for all groups. For example, although South Africa is culturally diverse, it is seldom considered a 'multicultural' society.

Pratte (1979) argues that the designation 'multicultural' is only applicable to a society that meets three criteria:

> (1) cultural diversity, in the form of a number of groups – be they political, racial, ethnic, religious, economic, or age – is exhibited in a society; (2) the coexisting groups approximate equal political, economic and educational opportunity; and (3) there is a behavioural commitment to the values of CP [Cultural Pluralism] as a basis for a viable system of social organization. (p. 141)

To earn the designation 'multicultural', then, a society must evidence a shared belief in freedom of association, competing ways of life, and the preservation of differences. Applying these criteria to Canada one might think that this nation deserves the designation 'multicultural' more than most. However, if we apply the above criteria to most music education curricula in Canada we find that while many are culturally diverse, few deserve to be called 'multicultural'. This same disparity exists in many nations. Part of the reason for this disparity may be that music educators seldom have the opportunity to build a concept of multiculturalism, or to examine the multicultural ideology they have consciously or tacitly adopted. The remainer of this paper may be of some help to music educators wishing to do such building and examining.

The chart below offers a typology of music curricula according to six multicultural ideologies originally formulated by Pratte (1979, pp. 62–85). A description and criticism of each type follows the chart. Of course, existing 'multicultural' curricula may not match these models in detail. Such fit cannot be expected. Nevertheless, I believe they address a sufficient range of possibilities and variations that I may safely claim the descriptive usefulness of all and, perhaps, the conceptual superiority of one (i.e., the sixth: 'dynamic multiculturalism').

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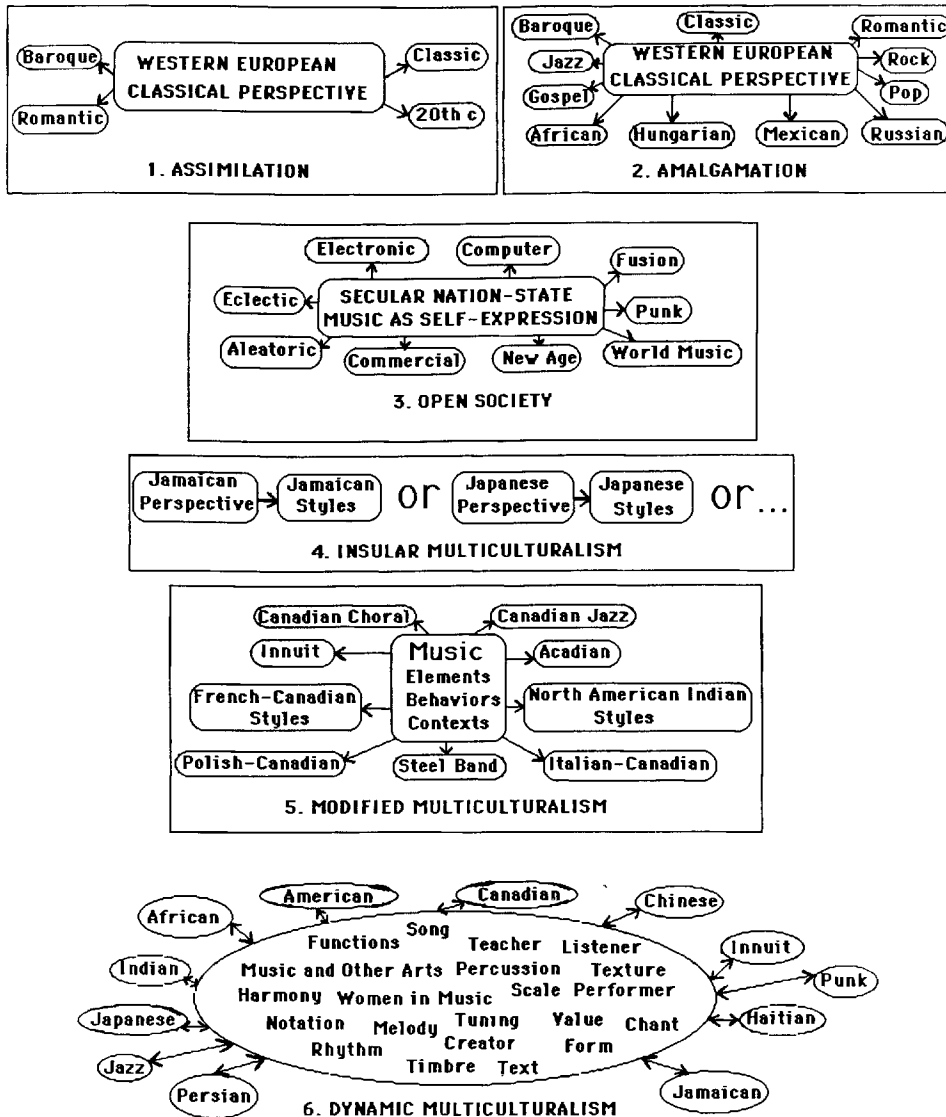
The implicit goal shared by the assimilationist, amalgamationist and open society curriculum is the *elimination* of cultural diversity toward the unification of a culture. The explicit goal shared by these curricula is the inculcation of majority values, including (of course) a majority's musical values and standards. One can see, therefore, that although these ideologies are often presented as legitimate variations on 'multiculturalism', they are not multicultural at all. They only appear to support the musical and educational equivalents of freedom of association, competing values, and the preservation of differences.

In North America, an *assimilationist* music curriculum is identifiable by its exclusive concern with the major musical styles of the Western European 'classical' tradition. The 'elevation of taste' and the breakdown of minority students' affiliations with popular and/or subculture musics are major preoccupations. The

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'classics' are considered superior to the musical products of minorities and subgroups. They are presented as the epitome of human musical accomplishment. Among other virtues, the appreciation and proper re-creation of the 'classics' is considered a sign of social and emotional maturity. Indeed, Meyer (1967) argues that such music is superior because the gratification of musical tendencies is delayed in these styles. On the other hand, assimilationists argue that a preference for popular/ethnic music is a sign of immaturity since 'sensuous' musical elements (e.g., timbre, texture, dynamics, rhythm) tend to dominate in such styles and musical-emotional gratification is usually immediate (Meyer, 1967, pp. 22–41).

Typically, the *amalgamationist* music curriculum includes a limited range of ethnic and subculture musics. The frequency of such musics in this type of curriculum is proportional to their occurrence in the core repertoire of the majority's music, or their potential for incorporation into new music composed in the majority's preferred styles and forms. In the United States, for example, jazz is 'acceptable' to amalgamationists because its distinctive musical features have been successfully incorporated by such 'legitimate' composers as Ravel, Milhaud, Stravinsky, Hindemith, Copland, Ives, Gershwin and Bernstein. Similarly, world musics are viewed in terms of their utility: as sources of new elements and formal ideas for incorporation into contemporary eclectic fine art music, jazz and pop music. By themselves, however, world musics are considered invalid. In other words, to an amalgamationist, the integrity of a subculture's music (like the integrity of a person's ethnic heritage) is best 'melted down' in the interests of a new hybrid form. And so it is that the practice of music education in many areas of North America parallels local social practice: the values of minority groups are tolerated to the extent that they offer a source of new elements for a potentially stronger, hybrid society. Here again, music education *in* a culture becomes music education *as* culture.

To adherents of an *open society* view of multiculturalism, allegiance to the music of one's cultural heritage represents an obstacle to social unity; it slows the development of a minority's loyalty to the new secular, corporate, nation-state. Under an 'open' ideology, all symbols of subgroup affiliation (music, literature, clothes, laws, religious practices) are viewed as impediments to progress. Consequently, they are labelled 'irrelevant' to life in the contemporary nation-state. This ideology manifests itself in music education as the 'now' music curriculum. It places a high value on 'musical fashion': the study of everything contemporary; the development of new musical forms as a means of 'personal expression' in the context of 'today's' life-styles. Tradition is scorned; musical values pivot on political and economic whim.

In contrast to these three types of curricula, the next three categories of multicultural music education (insular, modified and dynamic) share a common concern for the *preservation* of cultural diversity. Thus, in these curricula, the core repertoire is no longer chosen from the majority's perspective. For many music educators, the insular curriculum and the modified curriculum are often viewed as the most 'practical' solutions to the multicultural 'problem'. Once again, however, insufficient thought is given to underlying assumptions.

A music curriculum built on one or two minority musics according to the nature of a local community within a majority culture illustrates the concept of *insular multiculturalism*. In fact, this type of curriculum is not multicultural at all. It only *seems* multicultural because it offers an exotic musical flavour within a broader context of music programmes designed for the dominant majority. The present situation of a Portuguese music programme in a largely Portuguese-Canadian elementary school in Toronto illustrates my point.

The Portuguese community in Toronto supports a bicultural music programme (Portuguese and Canadian musics) in its local school within the larger music education enterprise provided by the Toronto Board of Education. This Board

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prides itself on permitting such 'alternative' music curricula, as long as they are constrained. In other words, like outstanding elements in a real mosaic pattern, different musical communities are highlighted but insulated from one another. Thus, students and teachers in this large music education community engage in 'alternative' musics by sampling them on token 'caravan' occasions: acknowledging them at contrived 'showcase' concerts; or dabbling in them at the behest of visiting 'ethnic' musicians. There is little authentic musical sharing among student communities. The social equivalent is the cultural mosaic (e.g., Canada) where various minority groups engage each other (and the majority) now and then, and only in the arena of political advocacy.

Three features distinguish the *modified* form of multicultural music education from the preceding curricula: (1) musics in the modified multicultural curriculum are selected for study on the basis of regional and/or national boundaries of culture, ethnicity, religion, function, or race; (2) musics are approached from a conceptual perspective: that is, concepts about musical elements, processes, roles and behaviours are used as curriculum organizers; and (3) musics are learned and taught as they are learned and taught in their original cultures.

More broadly, however, students in a modified multicultural curriculum study various musics with a concern for how they have been modified in reaction to, or by incorporation into, the dominant styles of the host culture. If the reader examines model five in the chart provided s/he will see that I have applied this concept in a Canadian context.

Now one can see that, in fact, the modified multicultural curriculum is a specific form of multiethnic education. The focus is on the adaptive processes undergone by various ethnic musics, the uniqueness of these adaptations, and the ongoing evolution of these musics and their concomitant cultures within the host culture. Pratte (1979) says: 'The goal of multiethnic education is to make students aware of the cost of being Americanized and to extoll the virtues of cultural diversity in terms of groups being modified over time' (p. 79).

Unfortunately, the modified multicultural music education curriculum has two weaknesses: (1) it is often biased from the outset by its reliance on the 'aesthetic' perspective inherent in the notion of 'teaching from musical concepts'; and (2) the musics chosen for study in this curriculum tend to be limited to styles available in the contemporary musical life of the host culture. Nevertheless, the modified curriculum comes closer than any of the preceding ideologies to meeting the criteria for a truly multicultural music education: (1) the presentation of a culturally diverse musical repertoire; (2) a concern for equality, authenticity and breadth of consideration; and (3) a behavioural commitment to the values of multicultural artistic expression as a basis for a viable system of music education. It is my belief, however, that a truly cross-cultural or 'dynamic' multicultural curriculum holds the potential for achieving even more desirable goals.

Music educators require a philosophy of multicultural music education that is conservative in its concern for preserving the artistic integrity of musical traditions, yet liberal insofar as it goes beyond particular cultural preferences to confront larger musical ideas, processes, and problems. This includes, of course, the shared concerns of musicians involved in creating new musical cultures. Drawing upon John Dewey's dictum that a great society must become a great community, Pratte maintains that we ought to educate children to look willingly· beyond special interests and tackle problems as a 'concerned community of interest' (p. 151). Multicultural philosophies often promote subgroup affiliation at the expense of individual freedom beyond the subgroup. In contrast, Pratte's concept of 'dynamic multiculturalism' emphasizes the need to convert subgroup affiliation into a community of interest through a shared commitment to a common purpose (1979, pp. 147–156). The ideals of this philosophy hold that children ought to learn how to behave in group activities which include unfamiliar values, procedures and

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behaviours. They must learn to understand practices and artefacts (including musical practices and artefacts) of all cultural varieties. The achievement of such procedural and propositional understanding may enable children to apply their talents, skills and intelligence to a variety of shared community problems.

Music education offers a unique opportunity to make the goals of *dynamic multiculturalism* a reality. By applying a pan-human perspective to a broad range of world musics, we can create a musical community of interest distinguished by a dynamism that recycles concepts and experiences in a variety of musical contexts thereby enriching these concepts and experiences. For example, in a dynamic music education curriculum for North American use, Western aesthetic concepts, technical terms and musical metaphors used to develop a student's awareness of the features and practices of music in world cultures become amended and/or replaced with concepts original to the musical cultures under study. My chart's depiction of this curriculum model tries to capture its dynamic aspect by means of arrows that go in two directions: from organizing topics and concepts to various musics, and back again. In essence, the dynamic curriculum encourages students to develop basic ideas about music from the bottom up (inductively), rather than from the top down (deductively). This is desirable because it helps to balance a teacher's conscious and unconscious tendencies to indoctrinate students with the prejudices that inhere in majority philosophies of music and music education.

The combination of the widest possible range of world musics and a world view of musical concepts separates the dynamic curriculum model from all the rest. Thus, in addition to developing students' abilities to discriminate and appreciate the differences and similarities among musical cultures, a dynamic curriculum has the potential to achieve two fundamental 'expressive objectives' or ways of *being* musical: 'bimusicality' at least, and 'multimusicality' at most.

Finally, if it is accurate to say that music education functions *as* culture more than it functions autonomously *in* a culture, then a dynamic multicultural music curriculum offers the possibility of developing appreciations and new behaviour patterns not only in relation to world musics, but also in relation to world *peoples*. I suggest that the possibility of attaining these goals is worth the time and energy music educators will have to spend to further illuminate the key concepts of multicultural music education.

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