

Differencing music education*

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This paper is the pedagogical embodiment of accumulated understandings drawn from discussions of postmodern and poststructuralist theory and suggests some forms that an ethical music education might take. Music education in the postmodern era calls for and revives an attention to the relations between music and cultural narrative. Students bring diverse locational and historical narratives to the classroom. Bearing this in mind, this paper examines difference in the context of a music education that is now charged with both obligations as a result of internationalism, and with a role in resistance to the homogenising forces of globalisation. It suggests music education as a possible site for a critical concept of knowledge and as a dynamic site of cultural narrative.

Introduction

The intention here is to raise some questions for professional interpretation by classroom practitioners and those involved in music education at different levels. I am suggesting a *way of thinking about* music education. A portrayal of the history of music and art education in New Zealand, while beyond the scope of this paper, enables a more comprehensive understanding of curriculum and unearths connections with what Lyotard (1984) described as ‘grand narrative’ used to legitimate knowledge claims and practices at certain historical moments. Such histories chart the progress of European civilisation within the local context. *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2000) curriculum document both disguises and rehashes the ‘master narrative’ of universal rationality and artistic canons and is unlikely to work towards revitalising or protecting local cultural identities, though not, it should be said, through lack of intention. ‘The arts’ as reduced concepts of knowledge are sites of political construction within the contexts of neo-liberal ‘reforms’ which New Zealand education has been subjected to as part of the ‘neo-liberal revolution’. These, Olssen (2000: 10) argues, have affected OECD countries over the last 30 years (see also Codd, 1990; Peters, 2000; Peters & Marshall, 2000).

New Zealand, now post-colonial or post-imperialist, both bicultural and multicultural, is situated on the south-western edge of the Pacific Rim. Culturally, it includes Maori, Pacific Island, Asian and new immigrants, as well as people of European descent. This therefore necessitates practices which, far from promoting a set of universal principles for the appreciation of art – one canonical rule or ‘standard’ – recognise and reflect cultural difference. Merely admitting cultural difference is inadequate. Modernism is characterised by deeply held ethnocentric assumptions. Its selective traditions relate to ‘practices,

meanings, gender, “races”, classes’ (Pollock, 1999: 10) and its universalising aesthetics concern beauty, formal relations, individuality, authenticity or originality, and self-expression, of ‘negativity and alienation, and abstraction’ (Huysens, 1986: 209). By working away critically at these, it is possible to begin to understand the theoretical task of articulating difference with regard to aesthetics.

I suggest that curriculum policy in the arts in the new millennium has a role in mediating and intervening in the dialectical processes between the global and the local. It must provide spaces for resistant and diverse expressions of music, to nurture the ‘polyphonous “oppositional consciousness”’ (Lippard, 1990: 14). Reading and writing culture on multiple levels, ‘look[ing] from the outside in, and from the inside out’ (bell hook, cited in *ibid.*), becomes part of the epistemological task for music education and involves both a reconstructive and a deconstructive dimension. In the postmodern context, it needs to register its involvement in reconfiguring the modern paradigm, for modernism, as suggested above, had difficulty in dealing with difference. I felt that Lippard’s statement that ‘the last thing we need is another “universalist” concept that refuses to come to grips with difference’ (1990: 17) was a challenge for this project.

Multiculturalist and pluralist theories allowed for difference at the margins only, rather than at the centre. *Differencing music education* at the centre calls for an attention to the relationship between music and cultural narrative. Music education underpinned by what I have termed an *aesthetics of difference* is proposed to create a pedagogy that both embraces and gives authority to excluded and marginalised groups. To acknowledge the diverse narratives of history and location in the construction of curriculum might disturb the central ideological assumptions underpinning much current and past practice in music education.

Our attempts as classroom teachers and theorists to difference the musical canon raise questions of cultural authorship. We must question whether the *values* that prescribed music and music education’s boundaries within modernism will be those that prescribe these parameters in the postmodern context. What sub-categories inform university ‘music’ departments as disciplinary sites and what will now inform music *education*? Will these be the same? The rise of ‘cultural studies’ and the insights generated have implications for the breaking down of binaries between canonised ‘music’ and that which is largely excluded. ‘Music *education*’ departments are charged with the education and training of teachers for multicultural schools and communities. The boundaries delineating Western art music and music history are not exempt from the challenges invoked by ‘cultural studies’ to disciplinary boundaries in general. Indeed, the interpretive terrain has changed. As teachers in schools or tertiary sites, we must now ask of music education what the contemporary contributing categories of knowledge will be as disciplinary boundaries are crossed. This may herald unprecedented opportunities to use ‘difference’ as a principle of organisation within pedagogy.

I have adopted the active verbal form ‘differencing’ from Griselda Pollock’s book *Differencing the Canon* (1999). Pollock stresses an active revisioning and ‘reworking’ of the spaces of authorised musical representation to enable a voice and a visibility for the repressed and excluded. What does Lyotard’s (1984) preference for small narratives rather than master-narratives mean for music educators? How can the challenge of a multiplicity of logics and diverse value systems, the justice of what Lyotard called the *differend* – the

multiple meaning systems – be expressed in music education? Examining difference in the context of music education means imagining how the ‘bristling militancy of marginalized groups’ (Fehr, 1994: 216) may be both embraced by and central to an inclusive pedagogy. I explore the idea of music education as a critical concept of knowledge and as a dynamic site of *cultural narrative* by taking African-American music to exemplify and articulate this notion. This particular musical cultural narrative might lift the veils of obscurity from ‘issues of disadvantage and discrimination in the politics of ethnic formation’ (Rizvi, 1994: 60). In this vein, Bernice Johnson Reagon suggests that we ‘accept the premise that cultural products can provide a guiding and monitoring device through which one can follow the development of a people under new and changing conditions’ (1992: 11). The ‘transcendental signifiers’ of harmony, pitch, melody and rhythm etc. around which the *meaning* of ‘music’ – its defining categories – have turned are interrogated.

What can music educators learn through recognising the musical knowledges of traditional non-Western cultures? Music education underpinned and informed by an aesthetics of difference would entail an exploration through music *practice, procedure* and *composition*. It would involve recognition of when cultural appropriation and commodification of cultural property has occurred and in whose interests it has occurred. Thus, a radical and critical music education as *cultural narrative* necessarily involves the study of music within a broader praxis informed by cultural studies and cultural investigation. It would identify the dislocation and displacement of the traditional disciplines and play its part in upsetting granite-like indisputable bodies of knowledge that have confined and disciplined the meaning of ‘music’ and its subjects.

The student whose voice creates ‘new lines [that] leap out of the chord with bluesy musical curlicues’ (Johnson Reagon, 1992: 14) would be celebrated in the process of a music education that embraced a ‘heterogeneity of rules’ (Lyotard, 1984: 66). Questions would be hurled at criteria for judgement. Musical forms located within cultures whose ‘voices’ have been silenced in terms of access to curricular time and space, which yet provide the foundations for contemporary popular songs and musics, would be both acknowledged and *practised* in confrontational musical counter-narratives. Asserting the positive, often unacknowledged influence of an African-American cultural aesthetic, Maultsby describes the particular metre ‘(known as common metre in the Church of God in Christ) and the triplet note pattern associated with this metre’ (1992: 30). She suggests that such ‘structures as well as the rhythms that accompany the “shout” [religious dance] provide the rhythmic foundation for many contemporary popular songs’. Maultsby describes the ‘infectious rhythms, melismatic melodies, complex harmonies, call-response structures, [and] compelling character of this music [that] permeate the vinyl of various popular music styles’ (Maultsby, 1992: 19). Gospel music, claims Johnson Reagon (1992: 21), ‘penetrated every artery of American life, linking the sacred and the secular domains of the African American community, breathing life into new secular forms, and bringing flair and distinction to the American stage of entertainment’.

A critical musical pedagogy underpinned by an aesthetics of difference that acknowledges a politics of representation would promote student awareness of, for instance, the ‘exploitation of gospel music as an economic commodity and [the ways in which] the cultural aesthetic of gospel music was subordinated to the money-making interests of the music industry’ (Maultsby, 1992: 20).¹ Such a pedagogy would include an understanding

of *when* and *how* the commodification and subordination of a cultural aesthetic had occurred. Radical music education might include ethical discussions which reveal the sources of expressions, performance traditions and aesthetics that have become commodified and have operated as phenomena far 'beyond entertainment categories' (Johnson Reagon, 1992: 4).² Where and when the notion of 'entertainment' acts to subordinate the contingency of aesthetic traditions *is* the business of a radical and critical music education that seeks to expose the history and politics of musical representation. The autonomy of modernist aesthetics ensured that students remained ignorant of the sources of traditions. In this case, 'entertainment' suppressed the contingency of a Black African-American aesthetic nurtured in slavery.

Testimony to the aptness of description of music as *cultural narrative* is Johnson Reagon's (1992) configuration of gospel music. She argues that African-American gospel song remains a robust community-based tradition with proliferating influence on the larger music culture. She states:

Into our songs, we African Americans have worked the full range and intensity of our legacy in this land that made us slaves. Into our singing, we have forged the sounds of a people of resolute spirit and fortitude in this land that debated our worth as human beings. Our singing announces the presence of our community. It is a way in which we nurture and heal ourselves. It is an offering to the celebration of life and the lifting of spirit. (Johnson Reagon, 1992: 18)

Studying music in context as a cultural narrative might mean taking lessons from ethnomusicologist Mellonee Burnim's (1988) conclusions on gospel music:

Gospel is not just a musical exercise; it is a process of esoteric sharing and affirmation. It is more than the beat; it is more than the movement; it even embodies much more than text, harmonies or instrumental accompaniment. All these factors intertwine to produce a genre which represents a uniquely Black perspective, one which manifests itself in a cogent, dynamic, cultural philosophy or world view. (Burnim, cited in Maultsby, 1992: 20)³

For Burnim, melody, harmony and rhythm as elements of music do not suffice as aesthetic categories for grasping Black African-American music. Neither, she argues, can we see the complete picture by pursuing a strictly sociological discussion of the music's function and the ways in which it reflects the world view of its creators. Understanding Black African-American spirituals requires a combined approach. One must study performance styles, musical qualities and social function (Johnson Reagon, 1992: 13). Through music-making, we learn aspects of the cultural narrative. However, more is required.

Stock (1994: 14) importantly emphasises that it is only 'through acquiring some familiarity with the way in which a form of music is conceived, produced and received in its original setting that we can begin to understand the sound structures themselves'. However, there is some difficulty in obtaining access to 'authentic' music from non-Western cultures through 'world music' sources because of the increasing homogenisation of musical culture with the forces of globalisation. Anglicising and Americanising of musics from non-Western cultures have forced such music in the direction of Western culture.⁴ For Palmer,

when a music is transferred out of its original culture, it loses some of its essential qualities. All teachers . . . are confronted with matters of authenticity and compromise . . . The primary

question is to what degree compromise is acceptable before the essence of a music is lost and no longer representative of the tradition under study. (Palmer, 1992: 32)

Losses through 'substitutions and omissions' – 'different tunings, timbres, language and music expressions that make it a unique representation of a particular culture' (ibid.) would be problematised in this radical cross-cultural reflection of music education practices. Insult and destruction to the sounds from beyond Western traditions result from attempts to fit them into a 'rationalised' Western paradigm. Patricia Shehan Campbell's work has demonstrated these points. In a workshop held at the Auckland College of Education in 1997, Sheehan Campbell played a North American Indian song ('Jo-Ashila') to workshop participants.⁵ A group of indigenous people in their local cultural context sang the first taped version. This sounded delightfully pleasing to the listeners, despite 'discord', 'dissonance' and the sliding of voices between the notes, and what sounded like 'quarter tones'. In Leonard Meyer's (1971: 271) terms, the mode of the song 'Jo-Ashila' in its original indigenous form was experienced 'as a set of subjectively felt tendencies among tones'. However, when 'rationalised' and translated into written Western notation (the system of equal temperament which includes semitones and whole tones) and Western harmony with its often stable harmonics based around the tonic, the piece completely lost its soul and culturally defined meaning. That is, the mode of the song could not be re-experienced in its 'rationalised' written form.

Palmer acknowledges that 'music is a dynamic phenomenon – as much process as product' (1992: 32) and points to Nettl's (1992) suggestion that 'Native American music is still taught as a static, unchanging phenomenon, while in reality, dynamic processes are continually present and the music is constantly in flux'. Swanwick, too, admits that music is not something to be merely preserved or perpetuated but is constantly being 're-fashioned; re-interpreted; transformed' (1988: 8). Derrida (1981, 1982) suggests that music's meaning is deferred or unfinished.

Palmer is concerned with 'the attempt to retain sufficient content of the original to serve its purpose as representing a group of people in time and place that gives a music – in all its specificities – meaning' (1992: 32). He defines the meaning of 'absolute authenticity' as follows:

1. performance by the culture's practitioners, recognised generally by the culture as artistic and representative;
2. use of instruments as specified by the composer or group creating the music;
3. use of the correct language as specified by the composer or group creating the music;
4. for an audience made up of the culture's members; and
5. in a setting normally used in the culture.

This 'authenticity continuum', which Palmer claims is a 'construct that is not an either–or proposition but rather a continuum on intra–intercultural levels with relationship to chronological periods and geographical locations' (1992: 33), places 'absolute authenticity' at one end and 'compromise' at the other. This 'construct' demands poststructural deconstructive criticism. Palmer's discussion is steeped in talk of 'original values' and references to the 'chances that authenticity will be in jeopardy' (ibid.). Palmer *appears* to

be defending the cultural values embedded within the music of the transplanted music when he states that

because the classroom is at least once removed . . . from the original experience . . . questions of authenticity [are] matters of no small importance [and] a classroom experience can so misrepresent a musical tradition that its musical traditions are seen as boring or uninteresting, or poor quality in substance or performance, incoherent in structure, simple-minded because of didactic simplifications, lacking in cultural values, and laughable in its pretence at being 'music'.

In fact, however, he still implies a Western aesthetic against which the sonic organisations of the other culture should be measured and 'liked' or 'not liked'. His discussion assumes 'presence' and an 'essence' and 'purity' of a culture's musical representation, and that musical meaning is final. For a poststructuralist such as Derrida there is no such thing as 'essence' that is implied in the notion of 'authenticity'. In a personal communication to the author, Christopher Small has said that we are all 'hybrids' carrying around with us 'innumerable strands of experience which weave themselves into . . . unique ways of perceiving, feeling and thinking that we call a culture'. Given this affirmation, and given, too, Small's suggestion that *in* such immersion in the culture of others we hope that some of this will 'brush off on us', we may better appreciate poststructuralist insights when applied to music education and composition. That is, departure and deferral are located within everyday practices of music and mean the affirmation of that practice. Poststructuralist argument would reject the notion of 'compromise' by stating that all meaning undergoes deferral and affirmation at any one time, so where is the compromise? Compromise is not an issue for Derrida. To bring the music of other cultures into the classroom with a concern about the 'compromise' of 'authenticity' is hardly a problem in that there is no 'pure' music or 'pure' cultural representation through music. Again, where is the compromise? The temporality of that practice is affirmed immediately through deferral. This idea also resonates with Lines's (2001) pedagogy and notion of the 'first musical space', which celebrates the music of the moment produced in composition and performance in school or community.

Again, Palmer argues that 'we need to consider whether musical experiences lacking in authenticity are also, to the same degree, lacking in meaning' and that 'music gains meaning by having its uniqueness defined and featured' (1992: 36). Derrida would be likely to disagree, arguing that the question presumes that it takes 'authenticity' as a given, as though musical meaning had 'originality', 'purity' and 'truth'. Music education must involve recognition of how imposed structures of representation within music as a cultural narrative interact with a hybrid musical presence. The music teacher who allows *difference* to flourish at the centre rather than at the margins would encourage, for example, patterns of rhythmic expression from students of cultures other than the mainstream, in an interaction with imposed structures of musical representation. Divorced from the idea of 'a single, absolute, transhistorical artistic value' (Pollock, 1999: xiii), hybridity becomes accepted and fruitful in musical composition, performance and appraisal.

Bearing in mind the socio-cultural and context-specific nature of aesthetic experience (that is, its basis in 'difference' and a politics of difference) and the 'procedural' nature of music (Elliott, 1995), I wish to argue for a pedagogy of music as cultural production,

cultural narrative and cultural investigation. The arguments seem to lead towards a 'cultural studies' approach, which teaches Western music as cultural production and as one of many expressions of what Lyotard (1984) referred to as 'local narratives'.⁶

Pitch, harmony, rhythm, and so on have been defining yardsticks against which children's musical 'development' has been measured in the past. The binary logic embedded in the imposition of these categories within 'music' curricula and their application across the board must therefore now be interrogated, if difference is to be 'constitutive of pedagogic relations' (Rizvi, 1994: 59).⁷ For within these categories is an implicit subscription to a grand narrative, and, in Walker's (1996: 6) words, 'a view that Western consciousness follows a linear development of ever more penetrating understanding of truth' (about music, e.g. about harmony). However, while Walker poses this question, he seeks, himself, to explain the 'truth' about 'music'. He argues that the quintessence of music 'qua music, as historically defined in Western thought, concerns pitch, unambiguously periodic sounds rich in stable harmonics and therefore susceptible to combinations in Western practice of harmony and counterpoint' (ibid.: 9). He thus reasserts the essentialism and binarism of modernist philosophies of music education.

If we were to take music as a *text*, assuming this also refers to *written musical text*, and subject it to poststructuralist analysis, musical meaning would not be fixed. Using poststructuralist analysis, musical meaning is neither fixed nor centred because, like linguistic text, it too is caught in a play of references between musical phrases and motifs, etc. where musical texts only *sound* stable (that is, give the appearance of stability through stable harmonics, etc.) but have no centre, no transcendental signified, no transcendental meaning.

Walker allies the West and its 'music' to a dynamic process of change, 'from monody to polyphony, from vocal to instrumental, from diatonic to chromatic, from a language of dissonance to one of consonance' (1996: 8). He argues that 'within this dynamic process the term "music" acquired its significance'. His suggestion that 'in Balinese culture the term "gamelan" does not signify similar dynamic processes of change and shifting emphasis' is a trifle Eurocentric in that he is defining *for* Balinese culture the meaning of the 'processes of change and shifting emphasis'. He reduces the instruments of 'the other' to 'a collection of instruments of ritual, not of concerts' as he simultaneously acknowledges that they are 'integral to particular socio-cultural imperatives of Balinese Hindu beliefs' (1996: 8). He continues by arguing that 'the fact that Westerners can impose pitch on most quasi-periodic sounds does not make them all music by Western definitions' (ibid.).

Walker reasserts the fixed meanings associated with modernist definitions of 'music' and thus invests them with authority. In 'music', meaning, for Walker, is fixed by appeal to the 'transcendental signified', and he assumes that meaning has a structure and a centre emanating from the stability of the tonic and stable harmonics. His argument is tantamount to saying that 'music' *means* harmony, melody, stable harmonics, pitch, etc. Thus he is reinvesting these categories with the status of the 'transcendental signified'. For Derrida, however, meaning is scattered and deferred in time, suggesting that 'structures of meaning' (which must include, for instance, the stability of the tonic) are but illusions. *Différance* performs a destabilising or decentring function. The destabilising of the tonic – the structure and stability of the tonic or its balancing organising structure – allows, through deferral of meaning, the *play of différance*.

The idea of development of music from simple to 'sophisticated' (12 equal-tempered tones, semitones harmony and Western instruments) is Eurocentric, denying an aesthetics of difference and implying binary opposites and universal truths (music/non-music, harmony/discord, rhythmical/non-rhythmical, etc.). Stock (1994: 7) argues that 'because people define music differently and use it for contrasting purposes at different times and in varying cultural contexts, it seems highly likely and somewhat ethnocentric to believe that all music is developing from simple, unaccompanied melody along parallel tracks towards complicated harmonic music'. Putting harmony 'in its place' or 'cutting harmony down to size' might involve a recognition that in Western polyphony there is some loss of ability to improvise because the individual voices must fit into an overall rhythmic structure. Western music sacrificed melodic subtlety for the sake of fitting into the polyphonic overall texture. Asian flute music, for instance, has many grace notes and rhythmic freedoms, but with Western polyphony there is some loss of the ability to improvise. Asian flute music improvises around melody in a much freer manner. But Western madrigals, for example (a number of voices in part-harmony), demand the singing of particular pitches and rhythms and one cannot improvise in the same way. In some ways, the Western concept of melody is less sophisticated. For voices to sing together, they have to be rhythmically fixed to compromise the individuality of voices because in singing, one is often making concessions to the melodic line for the sake of complete harmony. Asian flute music is much freer but less able to be put together and 'harmonised'.

Stock (1994: 9–13) uses an examination of melody and space in music to highlight cultural difference in musical representation. An aesthetics of difference is embedded within differing musical subdivisions of time and space, differing 'modes and scales' and the instruments to which a culture has access. It is built into 'the moments of repose' that 'punctuate . . . music' and into the 'pauses' or 'breaths' (ibid.: 8) that occur within culturally defined styles of music-making as groups of people 'represent and present themselves'. Cultural groups will differ in the way they practise the arrangement and subdivision of time in music (tempo, rhythm and metre).⁸ If 'difference' is actually to constitute pedagogical relations, students in practice, composition and performance must experience these elements.⁹

The examples Naughton (1998) gives of students' reactions to the 'free samba' reveal the musical subject as the site of intersecting, conflicting and multiple realities. As students in this project referred to 'listening and maintaining a better sense of pulse and being able to cope with more complex cross rhythms [through] samba on Latin percussion instruments' (Naughton, 1998: 289–90), hybridity was celebrated as the play of difference. In questioning whether the mere *experience* of music of another culture is sufficient, Naughton (ibid.: 293) also questions whether it is enough just to 'empathise'. He suggests that we should teach the cultural context of the music through music and the humanities working together. He argues that 'there is much to be done if the gap is to be narrowed between what the educators and the ethnomusicologists say should happen and what teachers and lecturers can reasonably be expected to achieve' (ibid.: 293).

Patterns of accent and rhythm are defined culturally (see Stock, 1994). According to Stock, 'musicians from many parts of the world choose the pitches they use in their music from sets of notes which we call modes' and "'mode'" is often used to translate foreign terms similar . . . to our words "scale" and "key"' (ibid.: 12). He draws our attention,

however, to a number of facts and is worth quoting at length here for what we might learn about the meaning of *difference* as it might be expressed aesthetically in music:

. . . in many cultures, specific modes may also call for the use of distinctive melodic progressions, patterns of ornamentation, intonation, instrumentation, cadential stress, register and performance techniques. In the Middle East or India, for instance, each mode provides the raw material from which an experienced musician can fashion a musical performance. . . . Needless to say, different sets of notes ('scales') and different ways of organising them ('keys') are found all over the world. For example, in some parts of the world people make music from four note modes . . . These four notes need not be the same as any of our twelve equal-tempered semi-tones but even if they are, we should remember that the same rules as in our own scales and keys do not apply to their use. (Stock, 1994: 12)

The emblems of identity of different cultures are created through specific ways of valuing and combining musical instruments. An aesthetics of difference in music, within an approach to music education that emphasises *cultural narrative* and *cultural investigation*, would be informed by the moral, political, social, religious, cultural and 'practical' connections these qualities may embrace. Adorno argues that these qualities are sedimented within 'musical material' (see Paddison, 1993: 64). Elliott (1995) importantly points out that these were missing in merely 'aesthetic' approaches to music education, both present and past. The study of cultural orientation and attitudes towards musical instruments is as vital as the study of their construction and performance technique (Stock, 1994). What extra-musical associations imbue sounds with special meaning?¹⁰ An understanding of the content and function of the music of a culture may be revealed by identifying who the music-makers are. Acquiring familiarity with the way a form of music is created, produced and received within its own cultural or social setting will promote understanding of the sound structures themselves. It is in the *organisational processes* of the 'structural properties of musical works: [for example] melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre, dynamics, texture' (Elliott, 1995), expressed in, for example, repetition, variation, and so on, that vital connections will be made to differing cultural narratives in which the religious, social, moral, political and cultural are represented aesthetically.¹¹

What forums do we provide for student teachers, future 'specialist' music teachers, 'generalist' teachers and teacher educators for *music-making* defined in terms of an aesthetics of difference? What is our educational *practice* of the sonic expressions of cultures beyond the mainstream? How is sophistication in timbral and rhythmic practice defined in terms of cultural difference, and what opportunities are provided for students' and teachers' exposure to such understandings through use of the *instruments* of the 'other'? What access is provided for the command of tone and ornament in terms of cultural difference? How are free and fixed rhythms defined and articulated within differing musical traditions? How are the musical textures and flavours from the musical repertoires of Asian and non-Western cultures articulated, represented and experienced within school music programmes? How does present provision of resources fall short of being able to meet these requirements? These questions challenge pedagogy in the new millennium.

In a pedagogy underpinned by an *aesthetics of difference*, the project of which is to 'difference music education', all music would not be treated as an 'aesthetic object of "contemplation"' according to eighteenth century standards of taste and sponsorship'

(Elliott, 1989: 13). Neither would musical 'literacy' (where students play the written musical text of 'works') be privileged, as Small (1977, 1987) has pointed out, but rather composition drawing upon culture and community would be privileged and past hierarchical organisations of curricular knowledge would be replaced by radically democratic practices.

Elliott (1989) superimposes upon Richard Prattes's 'conceptual map of multiculturalism . . . "dynamic multiculturalism"' (cited in Elliott, 1989: 13–14) to 'highlight routes to a more socially responsible music curriculum'. This appears in some senses most similar to the idea of a curriculum which embraces an *aesthetics of difference* in that '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 [*sic*] to the musical cultures under study' (Elliott, 1989: 18). For Elliott, a dynamic curriculum has potential to achieve two fundamental 'expressive objectives' or ways of *being* musical: 'bimusicality' at least, and 'multi-musicality' at most. However, while Elliott (1995) talks of contextual and multicultural approaches (music in its cultural context), there is little exposition of a philosophy of difference that might include a recognition of a *politics* of musical representation. Further, his philosophy includes neither a 'politics of difference' as promoted by Peters & Marshall (1996) nor a politics of cultural formation (Rizvi, 1994) in which losses, destruction and substitutions would be studied and problematised. These are, however, concepts included in a pedagogy of music education that embraces an aesthetics of difference.

Nettl (1992), taking an ethnomusicological stance, emphasises the need to see and teach a cultural context for music even if it is a little, and argues that music should be known in its diversity (cited in Naughton, 1998: 288). Walker (1996) and Stock (1994) promote teaching the cultural context of music, as do Palmer (1992), Nettl (1992) and Elliott (1995), but a satisfying and fully articulated philosophy of difference is missing. It is here, I suggest, that a philosophy of music education embracing an *aesthetics of difference* would avoid the traps of universalism and serve *musical goals* as it nurtured both hybridity and difference (see Mansfield 2001, Chapter 8).

Western 'music' and its connection with Western musical theory is terminologically, culturally and politically robust and we need not fear, as Walker does, its becoming 'semantically indistinguishable from sonic activities of other cultures' (1996: 9–10). I argue that 'difference' should embrace the term 'music' or 'musics' and colonise its power for its own ends. Indeed, given the power of language and terminology over practice, unless this occurs, it is likely that teachers may adopt the thinking that implies that 'West is best and then the rest'. In addition, the meaning of the term 'music' changes over time and becomes more inclusive, thus Walker's suggestion that the sounds embedded within different cultures should be labelled differently and not called 'music', even as it attempts to argue for respect and celebration of difference, actually works to re-inscribe the master's narrative. Here, therefore, I agree with Elliott's (1989, 1995) use of the term 'musics' to embrace sonic organisations and productions of other cultures. A philosophy of music education embracing an *aesthetics of difference* would avoid assumptions of the modernist generic aesthetic response assumed to be part of the musical subject of the past – one abstracted from its socio-cultural context.

I agree with Elliott (1989: 12) that 'any theory founded on the "aesthetic point of

view'' [as it stands] is normative and therefore implicitly reductionist'. A philosophy of music education, however, underpinned by an *aesthetics of difference* would avoid the charges of being either normative or reductive in that it would allow for the 'play of difference' and would affirm the hybrid in musical production within the educational context. Both Walker (1996) and Elliott (1989, 1995) pay attention to music as culture and the socio-cultural embedding of music. However, both approaches lack the critical and political perspective that the notion of aesthetics of difference embraces.

In contrast to Elliott (1989), Walker argues that there is nothing wrong with the aesthetic concept of music education, but with its relevance in the contemporary multicultural context. He rejects Elliott's (1989) suggestion that the aesthetic had no connection with culture, and points to the aesthetic's specific connection to Germany and actual music in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, notwithstanding his drawing of attention to the necessity of socio-cultural embedding of music in relation to the acoustic properties of instruments. However, he fails either to deal with the questions of the politics of difference and representation (exemplified earlier in Johnson Reagon's African-American music studies, where exclusions effected in the politics of cultural formation are problematised) or to recognise music education as a site of critical interrogation.

Music education is now charged with obligations as a result of internationalism, and with a role in resisting the homogenising forces of globalisation. Musical *composition* may thus be seen as the site of musical knowledge formed contingently and may be created from identities constructed in multiple, contingent and contradictory ways. Composition can be seen as a forum for creating new spaces for musical meaning and value. Music education in the postmodern condition may therefore embrace an aesthetic project that allows for the 'play of difference'. Attention to the relations between music and cultural narrative is called for in educational sites where students bring diverse locational and historical narratives to the classroom.

A radical cross-cultural reflection requires an understanding of modernism and its limitations in terms of catering for difference. At this point, it is worth reiterating Lyotard's statement that postmodernism is modernism in its 'nascent state'. The question of how music education might be revitalised by conflict and struggle in the 'search for dissent' (Lyotard, 1984: 66) is up for examination. As clashes and confrontations impact between profoundly different student realities, how might the 'search for dissent' and its 'heterogeneity of rules' be capitalised upon, interpreted musically and translated into pedagogy? If we apply to music education and to composition Lyotard's suggestion that we hurl questions at rules for '[musical] narration' (1984: 79) (i.e. rules of judgement in aesthetic criteria), this leaves us with a number of questions to research, probably beyond the scope of this article. What is it about our past practices, our hierarchies of musical knowledge, that has obstructed the expression of this dissent? How do, or how could, decoration and embellishment manifest themselves in 'difference' in the musical composition classroom? How would knowledge of the multi-layering of polyrhythms within differing cultural contexts, and diversely practised syncopation, for example, translate into practice in the music classroom? In Lyotard's terms, decoration and embellishment within musical motifs express themselves within 'small' stories or 'narratives'. How do rhythm, melody, harmony, timbre and other elements or categories that different instruments produce manifest themselves in diverse musical production? Contest and conflict represent them-

selves in competing musical narratives. How do different cultural traditions accord status to, and make use of, accident and spontaneity? How do traditions of musical interpretation indicate their contextual embeddedness and affiliations through melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre and textual and formal patterns? What, in music education, are the sites of construction, interruption and deconstruction? Composition, I suggest, is of central importance here.

In conclusion, this paper – informed by the notion of an aesthetics of difference – has been concerned to examine confusions over terminology and its cultural relevance as well as to identify with an aesthetic project of radical cross-cultural reflection. It has pointed to fairer and radically democratic interpretations, which classify on the basis of heterogeneous social and cultural value systems. Such interpretations may inform a pedagogy of music education in the postmodern condition. Musical ‘knowledge’ is constituted at institutional sites through disciplinary practices. As music educators, we must be collectively conscious of *our own potential to create* generative inclusive practices at these interfaces. In so doing, we will resist the new hegemony of reductive ‘managerial’ professionalism which would contain us, and which has crept in by stealth.

Notes

- * This is an elaborated version of a paper presented at the Taonga of the Asia Pacific Rim Conference, International Society for Music Education Conference, Auckland Aotearoa/New Zealand, 1–5 July 2001.
- 1 The notion of ‘politics of representation’ is discussed in Mansfield (2001). See also Hutcheon (1991).
- 2 I do not think that the mere ‘participation’ in music of other cultures is enough, for it does not problematise movements and changes in music as part of cultural production and cultural formation. Relying on the ethics of participation alone would be tantamount to merely ‘doing’ art and ‘making’ art and leaves music education within curriculum discourses theoretically disempowered.
- 3 Vulliamy (1976) points to Pleasant’s book *Serious Music and all That Jazz* (1969), in which the suggestion is made that the twentieth century saw a musical revolution which for both historical and sociological reasons went almost unnoticed by the music establishment.
- 4 See Thwaites (1998).
- 5 This workshop (held on Monday 28 July 1997) was entitled ‘Music from first to recent Americans with Patricia Shehan-Campbell’. Workshop participants were involved in listening and recreation through participatory experiences of musical expressions from ‘first’ to ‘recent’ Americans. The song ‘Jo-Ashila’ (‘Walking together’) is cited by Shehan-Campbell in *Roots and Branches* (1994). See Campbell et al. (1994) and Manins (1996). This song was recorded in a ‘handout’ given to participants by Patricia at the workshop.
- 6 See Chapter 7 in Mansfield (2001). See also Peters (1999). One of the questions Peters asks is to what extent the traditional disciplines are dislocated or displaced by the emergence of cultural studies.
- 7 Stock’s (1994: 8) graphic description of Indonesian gamelan provides argument for an interrogation of the notion ‘pitch’ as a defining category for music and would therefore point to the need for an aesthetics of difference underpinning pedagogy. His examples reveal that fundamental principles cannot be presumed as universal ‘truths’ about music, for definitions of music imply a logic and an aesthetic system which must also be subject to Derrida’s principles of *différance* (see Derrida, 1981, 1982).
- 8 According to Stock (1994) the tempo, or speed and rigidity, of cultural prescriptions of these in a musical performance is variable between cultures.
- 9 Elliott (1995: 23) points to the fact that, first, past music education philosophy has been grounded in

eighteenth- and nineteenth-century aesthetic assumptions which had assumed that melody, rhythm, harmony, timbre, dynamics, texture were features of *all* musical works, and second, that they are *not* necessary features of all musical works.

- 10 Understanding the music of a different culture or period means an appreciation of that culture's conception of music. It involves knowing about its social situations and cultural beliefs, its instruments. Vulliamy (1976) makes a similar point when he asks who defines 'music' and challenges how 'serious' music is defined in terms of instruments.
- 11 There is some debate in music education circles over the use of different scale forms. Bennet (1992), in his investigation of musical styles, promotes composition using pentatonic, whole tone, modal and chromatic. Some music educators argue against the use of the pentatonic scale, for instance, for the limitations it might place upon children's compositional and listening skills. However, the aim of revitalising differing musical cultural traditions would require students to have access to knowledge of how melodies are constructed, and such knowledge must be partly contingent upon culturally practised *differing* scale structures.

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