

Building a home for each of us. Music education as a homing practice.



Keynote for the XVIII Encontro Nacional da APEM 2024, October 26 2024, Lisbon (P), with the theme 'Música na Educação: A arte de selecionar repertório' ('Music in education: The art of selecting repertoire').

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Abstract

Thinking about the music we use in our music teaching is crucial. The meaning of music is relational, arising from the entanglement between the music and the person, the 'musicker' as Christopher Small would say. The idea of entanglement gives rise to many interesting questions about musical repertoires, ranging from the operational question who chooses the music to the fundamental question about the ultimate goal of music education. In my talk, I will cover a broad range of questions about musical repertoires in education, using ideas from Donna Haraway (entanglement), Gert Biesta (subjectification), homing (Paolo Boccagni) and myself (idioculturality) as an inspiration.

Introduction

I was invited to speak to you. I am, of course, extremely honored. At the same time, I am very aware of the restrictions of such a talk as this.

For one, there is the language. You speak, read and think in Portuguese, I presume. I do so in Dutch. These days, we choose English as a sort of neutral middle ground. But I know nothing of your abilities to listen to or speak in English. And you know nothing about mine. That is a severe restriction in communication.

But it is as it is. I hope my English will be clear enough for you. I try to speak not too fast. I have written down what I want to say to you. Not because that leads to a more inspired talk, although I will do my best. But at least, I can pay attention to the words I choose. To the sentences I make. I will make sure that the text will become available afterwards. If you suspect there may have been an interesting point in my talk, you can check later.

Another restriction is, simply, our differing contexts. My context is The Netherlands. Your context is Portugal. We know systems of music education differ. We know we have our own traditions, our own histories. Even the content of words may be different between countries.

And then there is this setting. A hall, a pulpit, a microphone. Me speaking, you listening. I do this regularly, and always am nervous beforehand. Is what I have to say valuable to you? Is it valuable anyway? Is it really me, speaking here?

I wish I could make an appointment with each of you. I imagine the two of us walking and talking. I wish I could take you home and show you the places I love. The fields. The lake. The sea. The birds. The windmill. The church. The town.

I wish you could show me the places you love. And that we could have a talk about 'Life, the Universe and Everything'.

So yes, this talk is one-sided. It is me sending and you receiving. But that is not a sign of my words being more important or more valuable than your words. It is just this particular setting.

In this talk I will not be solving any of your problems, or mine. My main aim, in my work generally and here too, is to ask questions. To develop a line of thinking. To use and, sometimes, to develop concepts. Words which may help us to look at our practice from a slightly different perspective.

What the value of my concepts and my line of thinking is, is completely up to you. That line of thinking is far from straight. Today, it will lead from my first violin lessons in the beginning to the metaphor of mirror, window and canvas in the end. And in between is all kinds of other stuff. In 45 minutes from here, I guess everybody may be at least just as confused as before. And just as confused as I am myself. I hope for the best. As long as we can say at the end of the day that we are still confused, but on a slightly higher level, I am happy.

The art of selecting repertoire

Experiencing the mainstream ‘art of selecting repertoire’

When I was six, I got my first violin lessons. My teacher was a young woman. I probably thought of her as just ‘a woman’ at that time. She clearly liked teaching young kids. I think to her it was very clear what it meant to be a violin teacher, and to teach young kids. It certainly meant that you used a violin method. In my case the books of Dutch violin pedagogue Louis Metz and of Belgian violin pedagogue Mathieu Crickboom.

‘The art of selecting repertoire’ was, for her, probably not much of a question. Or maybe, it was a question, but it had been answered by Metz and Crickboom. Or maybe her own teachers had told her that Metz and Crickboom had answered the question.

And who would doubt answers from such great men? The one a viola player in the Amsterdam Concertgebouw Orchestra and a teacher at the Amsterdam Conservatoire. The other a violinist who took lessons with Eugène Ysaye, played with Pablo Casals, and taught at the Brussels Conservatoire. Who would question that such great and refined musical artists would also be great teachers? Would know what beginning violinists needed?

And jumping to today: if one would fill a hall with music education specialists, who would question that those specialists would know what music education is about? Including how exactly ‘the art of selecting repertoire’ works?

Apparently, some questions are left open. Otherwise, we wouldn’t be here, discussing the topic. A topic with which I have been confronted in the process of my own music education, my musical socialization, again and again.

My instrumental teachers from my youth fed Ottokar Sevcik to my violin and Emilio Pujol to my guitar. Their teaching materials were ordered in such a way that I would pass my ‘A examination’. Followed by my ‘B examination’. And then my ‘C’ and my ‘D’. Which then lead, with some extra knowledge and skills, to the required level of an entrance examination for a conservatoire.

Once in the conservatoire, my music pedagogy teachers explained to me what children were able to cope with at certain ages. Knowing about the stages of musical development was an important element of my music teacher training. And when I became a music teacher in

secondary education, I therefore used a music textbook which selected on a weekly basis the repertoire I could feed my pupils.

Experiencing alternative arts of selecting repertoire

I feel very old, telling you this. And of course, I am exaggerating. People are not fools. Including the music teachers I had. They checked if the repertoire they were using was fit for me, this specific boy. They included extra repertoire on their own initiative. They experimented. As, I hope, we all did and still do.

Quite early on in my development, however, I encountered alternative practices of selecting repertoire. When I was 14, I bought a bass guitar. And on the basis of my judgment of what I actually could play, I simply started playing in a band. And, without thinking too much about levels or next steps, I improved, step by step.

Two years later, I switched to playing Irish folk music. Learning to play the fiddle was again a different experience. No books, and also no band to rehearse with and to grow together. I took my fiddle and went to folk music sessions. I sat down, unpacked my fiddle, and tried to play along with the experienced musicians. No-one slowed down for me. No-one said: “Let’s try that again”. No-one explained how timing or ornamentation, so crucial in Irish fiddling, worked. I just tried to fiddle along, and was tolerated. And as I fiddled along, at some point the fiddling apparently was good enough to shift from being tolerated to being accepted as one of them.

When I studied ethnomusicology, I had to play the gamelan for a year. The teacher, a Dutch gentleman, did some explaining in jargon. Colotomic structures, core melodies. But sitting there and learning to play mostly was something of a combination between being in a rock band and being in an Irish session. Yes, we rehearsed. We repeated difficult stuff. But most of the time we simply learned by playing along. And along. And along.

Maybe you think I am going to repeat here what we already know. That teaching an instrument can be done in different ways. That learning an instrument can be done in different ways. In formal and informal settings, for example. That teachers working in formal settings can be inspired by what happens in informal settings, as Lucy Green has shown. That, in fact, so many aspects of teaching and learning can be considered as variables, as Huib Schippers demonstrates in his ‘Twelve Continuum Transmission Framework’.

I will, however, not be going into that today. The main reason is that this may lead to me telling ‘how to’-stories. How to learn to play an instrument. How to teach an instrument. How to select repertoire. And I want to switch to different questions. Because you probably know the answers to those ‘how to’-questions far better than me.

On questions of how, what and why

The dominance of ‘how’-questions in current music education

Music educational discussions today in the Netherlands are focused largely on ‘how’-questions. How to teach a song. How to use AI in the music classroom. How to motivate your students. How to foster creativity. I do not know if this is also the case in Portugal. In the Dutch context, I characterize this as a didactization of the debate. This didactization is found amongst music teachers. It is also found in our training programs for future teachers.

I would like to take a step back from these ‘how’-questions. That gives us room to think about two more fundamental questions. One is: what? What exactly is it that we teach? This includes the repertoire-question. And the other, even more fundamental: why? Why do we teach music at all in school? In my terms, these questions of ‘what’ and ‘why’ are the pedagogical questions that precede the didactical ‘how’-questions.

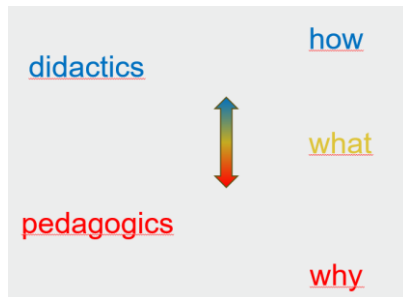


Figure 1 How -what – why?

I witness on a daily basis what happens if we neglect the more fundamental ‘what’- and ‘why’-questions. It is not that we do not answer them. How could we teach without having at least a beginning of answers to these questions?

If we neglect those questions, we answer them implicitly. In these answers, we are using two sources. One: our own personal intuitions based on our very specific experiences in our very specific circumstances. And the other: the taken-for-granted ideas from dominant societal and music-educational discourse. The truths we accept simply because we think they are truths.

That leads to answering the ‘what’-question in my country with for example: music performance; playing an instrument; staff notation; classical music history; pop and rock songs. And the ‘why’-question: because music is good for the brain; because music makes you social; because music makes you creative; because music helps you to express yourself. Music education, these days in the Netherlands, must be good for something else than music. We do not have a strong story about why music in itself might be important.

If you think I am exaggerating, let me just give you one example. The association called ‘More Music in the Classroom’ is a very influential association in my country. It is funded by our government. It has as honorary chairperson the queen. It cleverly uses ambassadors - a very successful cultural entrepreneur; a professor in neurosciences with a huge public profile; and many well-known musicians and music educators.

The association focuses on the ‘more’ of ‘more music in the classroom’, especially in primary schools. It does so mainly by offering all kinds of ‘how to’-support to teachers. Didactic materials. Inspiration sessions by professionals showing how things may be done.

When it comes to the ‘what’- and the ‘why’-questions, the thinking within the association is rather thin. The literal translation of the message on their website is:

Singing and making music not only gives children pleasure, it also helps them in their development. They learn to cooperate better and to listen to others. And through music they can express their own feelings and thoughts better.¹

In this quote both the ‘what’- and the ‘why’-question are answered. What? Singing and making music. It is presented as straightforward that music education in schools should be about music performance. And why? Because, apparently, performance gives pleasure, makes you more social, and allows you to express yourself. Music performance - good for something else.

My work in the past years has been to develop an alternative for this type of music educational discourse. An alternative that explicitly answers the ‘why’-question. An alternative that, for once,

¹ <https://www.meermuziekindeklas.nl/richtingen/muziek/>, consulted 27-9-2024; translation EBB.

does not focus on the ‘how’-questions. I try to answer the question Dutch educational philosopher Gert Biesta asks us. What exactly do we mean with ‘good music education’?

Revisiting the why-question

Why music?

So let me give you some insight in my explorations of the ‘why’ of music education. Starting off with the question: why music. Why is music so important? And what is music, actually?

I adopt ideas expressed by Christopher Small as well as David Elliott already 30 years ago. Both stated that music is not so much a thing. A piece. A work. A song. Rather, music is something people do. Music is music(k)ing – Elliott wrote it without a k, Small with a k.

Both Elliott and Small were restricted in what they saw as musicking. Elliott stated that musicking is performing, improvising, composing, arranging and conducting. For him, listening was not musicking. Nor was dancing. Small went a step further. For him, musicking means: to take part in a musical performance. That includes performing, rehearsing, composing, but also dancing and listening. And even selling tickets at the door.

Elliott	Small	Bisschop Boele ☺
Performing	Performing	Performing
Improvising	Improvising	Improvising
Composing	Composing	Composing
Arranging	Arranging	Arranging
Conducting	Conducting	Conducting
	Rehearsing	Rehearsing
	Listening	Listening
	Dancing	Dancing
	Selling tickets at the door	Selling tickets at the door
		Watching music on TV
		Talking about music
		Collecting record sleeves
		Singing under the shower
		Stealing music
		And what have you

For me, musicking is even broader. Music is so much more than Elliott’s production or Small’s performance. Musicking is any form of behavior of human beings which includes something they might call music. Musicking includes watching a music show on television. Talking about that music show. Collecting record sleeves of Johnny Cash. Or illegally downloading music from the internet. Musicking is simply anything people do with music.

Figure 2 Three concepts of musicking compared

If you would draw up a list of what people do with music, that list is endless. But there is more to say about it. There certainly is an endless list of musicking, of what people do with music. But the list of the reverse, of what music does for people, is really short. I have found out that musicking basically has three functions. Musicking leads to an affirmation of the self. To connection to the world. And to regulation of selves and others.

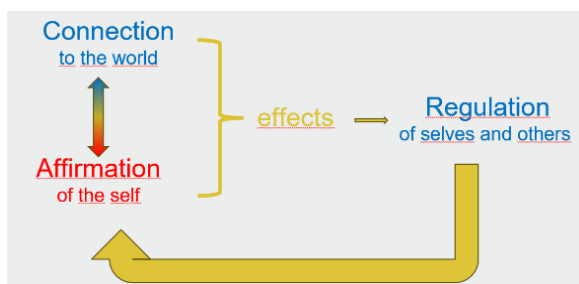


Figure 3 The three functions of musicking

Affirmation: through their musicking, people give themselves a sense of who they are, musically speaking. Connection: through their musicking, people connect as a musical person to the world around them. To other people. To spaces and places. To past, present and future. To God or the inner self. And regulation: all this musical affirmation and

connection leads to effects. And one can use these effects to influence oneself or others.

Thanks to those three important functions of musicking, it is valuable for people. Otherwise, we wouldn't do it. So valuable, that it is actually nearly impossible to find someone who is not 'musical' in the broad sense. The sense of being a musicker. Being someone for whom music plays a role in life. Which role that is, differs from person to person. But I still haven't found a non-musical person.

Within their lifetime, every person is constantly building up their relationship with the musical world. Often unconscious, sometimes very conscious. Every person is constantly learning. This learning is an active process of intake. Consisting of constantly interpreting the world from the experience a person has build up earlier. It is, in that sense, thoroughly relational and thoroughly biographical.

This lifelong and lifewide process of biographical learning leads to the building of a musical personality which is different for each person. Each person lives their own musical life. At the same time, this life is lived with others. Experiences are shared with others.

For that reason, I consider each person to be a musical idioculture. That musical idioculture is at once thoroughly individual and thoroughly social. It is based on all the musical experiences one collects over a lifetime, starting in the womb. It is at once very personal - very idiosyncratic – as well as very social.

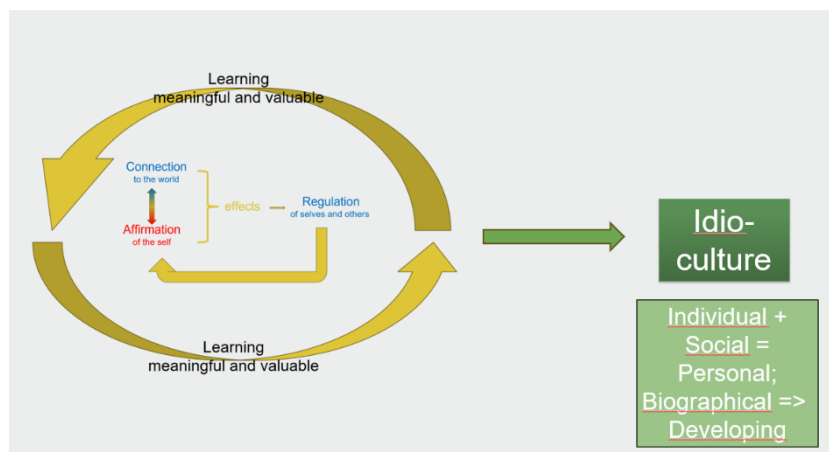


Figure 4 How to develop your musical idioculture (simply by musicking)

Summarizing in reverse

order: every person is a musical idioculture. That musical idioculture is at once social and individual. It is based on lifelong and lifewide biographical learning processes. In these learning processes, the individual relates meaningfully through their musical behavior to their musical surrounding. Musicking is valuable, because the individual affirms itself as a musical person, connects itself to the world, and regulates its own life and that of others through using the effects of all this musicking.

The point of these ideas about music as musicking is to draw attention to the fact that each individual has its own musical idioculture. That music is always already meaningful and valuable to people, often in deep and deeply personal ways. Also to our pupils. And that people learn and develop continuously, by engaging on a daily basis in so many different ways with music.

I find this a miracle.

Why music education?

But if every person always already is a musical person, then why would we offer music education in school? For me, the key here lies in Gert Biesta's ideas about subjectification.

Gert Biesta proposes that school does three things: qualification, socialization, and subjectification. Qualification is, roughly speaking, about knowledge and skills. Socialization is learning what it means to belong to a group, or to a society. Subjectification is about finding your place in the world.

In music education, each of these three can be central. Music education can be about qualification. About learning knowledge: music history, music theory. About learning skills: playing an instrument, singing, reading staff notation, talking in a technical-analytical way about music.

Music education can also be about socialization. About learning a canon of music. About learning how to appropriately behave during a concert. Don't clap after the first part of the solo concerto.

And music education can be about musical subjectification. About how you want to be musical in this world.

My suggestion is that musical subjectification might be the central aim of music education. It is my answer to the 'why'-question. A music-intrinsic answer – music education is done to support musical subjectification.



Figure 5 Musical subjectification as the 'why' of music education

Earlier, I said that musicking enables individuals to affirm, connect and regulate their lives musically, thus shaping their musical idioculture. This is, I argue, nothing more than musical subjectification. Music education supports pupils in developing their musical idioculture.

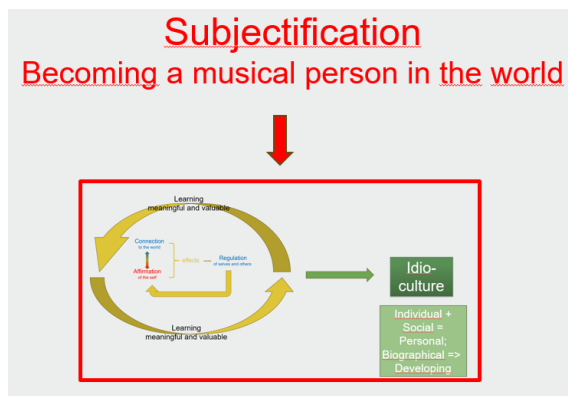


Figure 6 Subjectification is developing your idioculture

To do that, I propose that music education has to do three things. Music education has to acknowledge the pupils as the musical idiocultures they already are.

Secondly, music education learns pupils to recognize that their musical idioculture may be different from other musical idiocultures. But that these differences do not need any form of judgement. And that behind these differences, there are similarities. In the ways we see

ourselves as musical, we connect to the world, and we regulate selves and others through music.

And thirdly, it offers pupils possibilities to develop their idioculture. Music education creates possibilities to develop in two ways. In broadening the horizons of pupils. And in giving pupils further opportunities to go deeper.

Summarizing again: I think the main aim of music education is musical subjectification. It helps pupils to discover and develop their musical idioculture, their way of being musical in this world. In music education, we therefore aim to acknowledge each musical idioculture, to recognize that idiocultures are different but equally valuable, and to give opportunities for development.



Figure 7 What music education does

Looking at the what-question

The art of selecting repertoire(s)?

We can now, finally, come to ‘the art of selecting repertoire’. Based on what I have been telling you, I would first like to make three general points.

The first one is this. Our pupils are musical idiocultures. They are always already musically involved with the world, in their own idiocultural way. The first step in music teaching then, repertoire-wise, is to become aware of the repertoire inherent in the musical idiocultures we are teaching. Pupils always are already musical. What is it they listen to? What is it they play and sing? What is it they prefer to talk about? This asks from us an interest in the pupils, an open ear. The skill to see and listen, before we talk and explain.

A second point is about shaping opportunities for musical development through broadening the horizon of our pupils. If this is important, we need to know about that horizon. Which feeds back into my first point. If we don’t see our pupils as idiocultures, we may have the tendency to see them as an abstraction. We might presume that ‘the pupil’, as an abstraction, listens to certain musics – rap and pop - and has not heard other musics – classical music, jazz, world music. And maybe we might presume that we have to broaden the horizon of ‘the pupil’, who listens mostly to rap and pop, by also getting them in touch with classical music, jazz or world music.

When we look at pupils as idiocultures, we may realize that some of our pupils indeed have a near-exclusive background in rap or pop. But that others have a near-exclusive background in classical music. Or in some type of world music. They may have heard pop in passing, but never truly listened to rap. And then it becomes our task to broaden that horizon as well – by feeding them rap, for example.

A third point is connected to the idea that development, next to broadening, also means: deepening. The question then is: in which direction can we offer our idiocultural pupils further possibilities to develop? Here, the selection of repertoire becomes, indeed, crucial. And because those idiocultures are all so very different from each other, the question of deepening may lead to even more variety in the ‘what’ of music education than the question of broadening already did.

Intermission: the ‘how’-question

I already mentioned that the focus on ‘how’-questions leads to a didactical rather than a pedagogical debate on music education. However, this may be the moment to spend some

thoughts on precisely this ‘how’-question. Because it is easily said: music education should be idiocultural. But how is that done, in music classrooms with twenty or thirty pupils?

This question is often asked to me. And I always refuse to answer it. Because I can’t answer it. Each idioculture is different. Which probably means that a highly differentiated manner of music teaching is required. We need, as music teachers, be very much ‘here and now’, or ‘then and there’. Each specific moment is a moment where specific pupils, a specific teacher, and specific music meet in a specific context. It is in precisely that moment and in that constellation music teachers decide what is asked of them. What this situation asks for.

The basic point here is that it is impossible to give general guidelines, or to develop general methods for music education ‘in the moment’. Of course, music teachers work on the basis of all their musical knowledge, their didactic and pedagogical knowledge. Armed with musical and music-educational materials as put down in schoolbooks. Armed with knowledge of previous experiences of themselves and of others, put down in books and articles and podcasts and what have you.

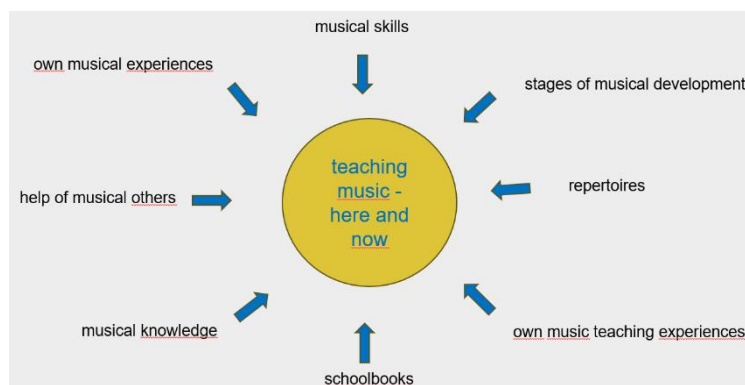


Figure 8 Teaching music - here and now

This fund of knowledge is to be used in the moment. Not as a prescription for what the next step will be. It is here that the professionalism of music teachers resides – in their ability to choose what this moment seems to ask. With no guarantee of success. An endless succession of trying, as best as you can.

Summarizing again, the art of selecting repertoire becomes based on an intimate knowledge of the musical idiocultures you work for. A knowledge which allows you to broaden as well as deepen their repertoires. The art of selecting repertoire is the art of selecting repertoires, in the moment.

Music education as a homing practice

Let’s think about the art of selecting repertoires a bit further. I do that by using a metaphor which I recently started thinking about: the metaphor of ‘home’. I will try say something about this line of thinking, which is also new to me. Of which, I must say, I am still insecure. It is tentative and very much open to questioning.

A song is not a thing

When we think about the art of selecting repertoire, we may look at repertoire as a collection of things. Musical pieces. Songs. Maybe a score. Or a book. A teaching method. A sequence of pieces.

I try to look at music, at repertoire not as a ‘thing’ out there. Music is not a thing, it is behavior. It is musicking. Let us take as an example a song. A song is not a thing. It is only a song for as far as we do something with it. A song is, actually, singing a song. Writing a song. Listening to a song. Analyzing a song. Whistling a song. Talking about a song. If music is musicking, then a song is songing.

How does a song become a song for any person, including our pupils? The concept of affordances, from Eleanor and James Gibson's ecological psychology, may help us here. They pointed out that living creatures – including human beings – relate to their environment on the basis of what they call affordances. The idea is: things are never just things. Things are things because they afford behavior. They make behavior possible. A chair affords sitting. A song affords to be listened to. Affordances are invitations to behavior. They are not located in the thing or in the human being, they are precisely in between. A thing becomes a thing, a song becomes a song, our world becomes our world when options for use are combined with needs for use.

This ties in to the concept of biographical learning I mentioned earlier. Things are the things they are through the experience of the people for who they are things. We live in a world which we know and which we trust, because we have built up knowledge and trust of that world through the affordances it offers us. In that sense, a person and the world are never separate. They are deeply entwined.

This for me connects to Donna Haraway's concept of entanglement. Haraway decenters the human being and rather thinks of human beings as fundamentally entangled with all other 'critters' (creatures) in this world – be they animals, plants, or rocks.

I find this line of thinking fascinating. Because it allows me to think of the relationship between me and a song – or me and repertoire - as a mutual entanglement. Fundamentally historical, biographical, idiocultural. And remember: idiocultural means not only 'individual', it also means 'cultural', so shared, entangled if you like; hence the idio-cultural.

Example: Lisboa

Let me give you an example of my personal entanglement with a fado song called 'Lisboa a Noite'. I probably first heard it when playing a CD in my collection. It probably was a fado sampler. Maybe it was the Rough Guide to Fado. Those Rough Guide CDs were blue, as I remember them. I bought quite a lot of them at the time, in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Music was not yet widely available on the internet. Or maybe I was a bit of a backward person. Anyway, I had a huge personal music collection at the time. An investment in my profession as a world music teacher. I am sure I owned the Rough Guide CD to Flamenco; to Australian aboriginal music; to Indian classical music. And, much to my delight, to the music of Japan. Which included a crazy reworking of the James Bond theme including the Okinawa sanshin.

But now that I think more of it, the Lisboa song probably was on another CD. One with a white cover, probably with a man wearing a hat on it. Anyway, I remember the song because we had, at the time, a Portuguese friend. Once, when I organized with my future wife a party at our home, we decided that our Portuguese friend would sing a fado. I would then in turn sing a well-known Dutch song. 'Het kleine café aan de haven'. She picked the Lisboa song. And because I had, at the time, no Portuguese guitar available, I learned a bit of an accompaniment on a mandolin. It was an old and shattered mandolin, with 12 strings rather than 8, four times three rather than four times two. I had bought it at a flea market and restored it to a barely playable state.

We played the song remarkably well. At least that is how I remember it. But when hearing that song now, I also think about much later. About how I played in a band in which we sang songs in the local dialect of the province of Friesland. That dialect is actually recognized in the Netherlands as the second official language, next to Dutch. It resembles English sometimes. Or rather I should say that English resembles Frisian, because Frisian is one of the many languages incorporated into what eventually became the English language. That was at a time when the

Frisian state was reported to stretch from the north of France to the north of Denmark, all along the coastal area.

However that may be, we reworked the Lisboa song into a song called Rotsterhaule. Rotsterhaule is a small village in Friesland, rather different from the capital of Portugal. It was the village the singer of my band came from. He was raised at a farm. In his rewriting of the lyrics, he sings about how the existence of his parental farm is threatened by the advance of the ecological movement. Meadows where cows once grazed turn into natural reserves.

In my memory, we played that song remarkably well, too. But is that important? No – not then, and actually not now. I remember us playing the song at the occasion of my 50th birthday, more than a decade ago. Family and friends were invited, and we played a short set of Frisian-language songs.

In some of those songs I later did use a Portuguese guitar. I bought one when I was in Portugal and learned to play exactly one song on it. In the same way, I learned exactly one song on the Bolivian charango I own. I bought it when in Bolivia. I remember clearly how hot it was, the day I bought it in a small shop of a renowned charango builder in La Paz. I also remember walking on the streets of La Paz and buying as a local snack some pigeon salteñas.

I do own the Rough Guide to the music of the Andes, now that I come to think of it. And I probably used the Rough Guide as a travel guide when there. I can't remember which travel guide I used when I was on holiday in Portugal, buying that Portuguese guitar. I bought it along with the Portuguese variety of the ukelele – is that called a cavaquinho? Later turning into the ukelele, so popular in Hawaii music? Also in the Dutch Indies, now Indonesia?

Which reminds me of the fact that Portugal and parts of Indonesia have strong historical ties. I was once in the Eastern Flores city of Larantuka and encountered many people called Da Silva or Fernandez. By the way, the room we sang Lisboa in happens to be also the room where we practiced playing the Indonesian, Western Javanese classical chamber music called Tembang Sunda. When hearing Lisboa, I think back to that room and to our Tembang Sunda sessions.

Music education as a homing practice

I could go on forever. But that is not the point. This example is only meant to explain how this particular song affords me a never-ending form of entanglement with my world. An entanglement with songs and pieces of music. With persons. With things such as instruments and Cd's. With rooms. With places. Even with the taste of the Bolivian pigeon salteña.

It is not only the case that I connect with this song. It connects to me, actually, through its affordances. It truly is a mutual relationship where I catch a song and am caught by the song simultaneously. And what this entanglement does is that it worlds me. And by worlding me it shapes me. As well as my world.

This is more than a personal story. From my own research and from that of others, I know that every individual story has similarities with other stories. I pointed that out earlier. I said that people use music in thousands of ways. But there basically are only three functions of music: affirmation, connection and regulation. However different we are, that is what we all do.

And recently, I came to think that affirmation, connection and regulation are basically nothing else than 'homing practices'. I first encountered this concept of 'homing practices' in a book. It

described how migrants from India literally set up their houses in Surinam in such a way that it felt like home for them. And therefore a bit like India. Homing as, literally, building a house.

Soon I discovered that homing is a concept used in biology and the medical sciences, but now is finding entry into the social sciences as well. The concept at first was very much tied to the idea of a concrete 'thing'. But soon it became much more coined in terms of behavior. First it is making a house. Then it becomes the process of making that house – of building and furnishing and embellishing that house. And in the end the material aspect kind of vanishes. Homing becomes something that is always developing, something like an attitude:

All acts, practices and patterned behaviors that are informed by a bodily, emotional, or moral disposition to move closer to spatial, material and relational circumstances that are worth calling home in a normatively positive sense (Boccagni, 2022, 596-7).

Homing is our need to feel our circumstances as home. To feel at home in the world. We are looking for that feeling of being at home.

I think we use our musicking – next to many other forms of human behavior – to create that home. The practices of musicking are practices which aim at finding ourselves a home in this world. A home where I find an affirmation for who I am. A home from where I can connect to the world. And a home from where I may regulate myself and others. Music is basically an entanglement with the world, a musical shaping of our world. Our musicking is an attempt to 'feel at home in the world, musically'.

If music might be described as a homing practice, what about education? Let us turn once again to Gert Biesta. He maintains that subjectification is one of the central aims of education. He talks about subjectification as world-centered education, rather than child-centered, content-centered, or future-centered. Subjectification, for him, aims at becoming a person in the world.

If we follow Biesta, in the core of his educational 'why', subjectification, a word such as 'world' pops up. Could we translate Biesta's idea of subjectification as basically a homing practice? A form of making, or finding, oneself a home in the world? And if the 'why' of music education is musical subjectification, as I maintained earlier, is our task then to help pupils making, or finding, themselves a home in the world?

And then, finally: if music education is aimed at helping our pupils to find their musical homes, what does that tell us about the art of selecting repertoire in music education?

A first thought is this. If music education aims at our pupils' musical homing practices in the world, then maybe our choice of repertoire should support this. Picking a song means: picking a song that may open up the world for a pupil; that affords asking questions about how that song relates to the world, and if that song could be part of a musical home somehow. About how that song may entangle itself with all this other music pupils already know. A song which may serve as a mirror for a pupil, and as a window at the same time. A mirror in which the pupil sees himself; and a window which gives a fresh outlook on the world.

But has not every song the potential of being a mirror as well as a window? Is it maybe not so much the art of selecting repertoire that is at stake? Is what is at stake the art of treating repertoire? How does this song relate to you, as a pupil? How does this song relate to you, as a teacher? How does this song relate to others, to the rest of the world; to life, the universe and everything? I guess these are the questions I would like to ask about any song, no matter how it is selected.

Which leads to a second thought. Who is selecting the repertoire? Music education is aimed at helping our pupils to find their musical homes. But are pupils not the specialists of their own lives, their own idiocultures? Should it not be the pupil who artfully selects the repertoire?

My first intuition, and maybe your first intuition, is probably: no, that is a task of the teacher. In the words of the announcement of this conference: we want to discuss 'how musical repertoire and its selection have a purpose and, as such, constitute an essential dimension in the set of teachers' professional skills'.

However. As you may have gathered by now, I hope for music education in which not only the teacher speaks to the pupil and the pupil listens to the teacher. But where also the teacher listens to the pupil and the pupil speaks to the teacher. In this dialogical educational relationship, both parties are at once fundamentally equal as well as fundamentally unequal. Equal – it is a dialogue where both parties speak and listen. Unequal – there is a teacher, and someone being taught.

That is one of the difficulties of teaching, and of artfully selecting repertoire. Because teachers know that eventually they are responsible for what happens. Yes, the selection of musical repertoire has a purpose. But they know that what happens after that selection, however skillfully done, is very much influenced by things they are not responsible for. For example, by who are in their classroom.

It may be wise in some, or in many, instances, to let the artful selection of repertoire be something the pupil does. In other instances, it may be wise to do the selection of repertoire yourself. The choice for one of both options is a choice of the teachers. But again: informed by their knowing the pupil.

In the end, I end up with the idea of entanglement – but now, the entanglement between teacher, student and music. An entanglement which, to me, is the heart of music education.

Conclusion

I set as my goal that at the end of this presentation we would be 'still confused, but on a slightly higher level'. I hope I have added enough to your confusion. I have tried to explain that for me, music is musicking. That people form their musical idioculture by affirming, connecting and regulating through music. That this may be seen as a homing practice – a way of finding or making yourself a home in this world.

And I tried to explain that music education may, equally, be seen as a homing practice. A practice in which the teacher helps the pupil to figure out what their home might be in this world, musically. And that, when it comes to repertoire, this means that one carefully thinks about the connection between the repertoire and the pupil. And that one tries to unlock the affordances of a song to function as a mirror for the pupil, as well as a window on the world.

It seems to me that I have used many words to say little. At least when it comes to answering a question. Answering the question about 'how to select repertoire'. About how that is done artfully. About what kind of skills music teachers need for that.

It's a bit of a tragedy. I struggle to find words to say what I want to say. Which comes down to a couple of straightforward and not very new things. Look at your pupils. Consider them as musical beings, now and in the future. Keep looking at them. Don't let your plans, your skills,

your repertoires come between you and your pupils. See music education as an ongoing dialogue. Consider yourself as a masterful improvisator.

That is not much, when it comes to answers. Concrete answers from which you could immediately benefit. I am very aware of that. In a sense, it feels as if I am circling, with all these words and concepts, around the center of music teaching, without really ever being able to touch it.

Because you can only touch it, see it, hear it, when you are in the middle of it, doing it.

What I have tried to do in this talk is to propose some concepts to you which might be useful in thinking and talking about your practices of selecting repertoires. Musicking. Affirmation, connection and regulation. Idioculture. Affordances. Entanglement. Subjectification. Homing.

I hope I have selected them artfully enough. So that it may be of help to you. Maybe by functioning as a mirror of your own practice, and as a window on the world. But remember that these are no more than ideas, words, concepts. There is no truth in them. There is only truth in what this conference is about: in your practices as music teachers. If some of my words are of some help for some of you in some of your practices, I would be very happy.

Mirror and window. I recently learnt this metaphor, coming from Dutch literature scientist José van Dijck, from a student of ours (thank you, Hanneke de Man)². There is a third element in the metaphor. Mirror, window and canvas. I hope our music education will help our pupils to look in the mirror and to look out of the window. So that they can paint their musical place in the world on the canvas that is their life.

And I hope that our selection and treatment of musical repertoire helps them to do that.

On the author

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² From: José van Dijck *nieuwe voorzitter Boekenbonliteratuurprijs*. (January 13, 2024). NPO Radio 1. <https://www.nporadio1.nl/fragmenten/de-taalstaat/be6e59db-ea74-4142-a8a6-157802acfcc2/2024-01-13-jose-van-dijck-nieuwe-voorzitter-boekenbonliteratuurprijs>

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