

“Music of Sound”: Using Existing Sonic Environments to Develop Inclusive, Experiential, and Collaborative Pedagogy in Malaysia

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Abstract: Music of Sound (MOS) pedagogy promotes the learning of musical concepts and creative expression using everyday objects, body parts, and one's voice. The authors discuss the experiential, collaborative, and place-based approaches they have developed in MOS projects for schoolchildren of different ethnic, religious, and social backgrounds in Malaysia over the last two decades. Ensemble work in skill training, field research, and collective composition resulting in site-specific workshop performances enhances interethnic cohesion among children. Tertiary students who are involved in facilitation experience multiple kinds of musical knowledge and the potential of collaborating with multiethnic communities of practice.

Résumé : La pédagogie de la « musique du son » (MdS) consiste en l'apprentissage de concepts musicaux et d'expression créatrice à partir d'objets du quotidien, de parties du corps et de la voix individuelle. Les auteures discutent des approches expérientielles, collaboratives et ancrées dans le lieu qu'elles ont élaborées dans le cadre de projets de MdS pour les écoliers de différentes origines ethniques, religieuses et sociales en Malaisie au cours des deux dernières décennies. Le travail en ensembles musicaux, avec l'acquisition de compétences, la recherche de terrain et la composition collective résultant en représentations lors d'ateliers locaux, accroît la cohésion interethnique chez les enfants. Les étudiants universitaires qui s'impliquent dans l'animation font l'expérience de multiples types de savoirs musicaux et du potentiel qu'offre la collaboration avec des communautés de pratique multiethniques.

The streets in the old part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of George Town, Penang, are filled with the sounds of children of different ethnicities chanting and singing in various languages. These young people are making music using *gamelan* gongs, Chinese and Malay drums, and have transformed tin cans, bottles, pots and pans, and other objects found in the streets into musical instruments. The young dancers among the children create rhythms and dance in the clogs and shoes they are wearing; they play traditional games with their footwear, tin cans, and stones. The children imitate the movements of people walking the streets and bargaining with vendors as well as the soundscapes they have encountered. A large crowd from different racial and class backgrounds has gathered to watch the children perform their stories about the lives of the people and their trades in these streets. In addition to making music with everyday objects, body percussion, singing, and traditional instruments, they have been interviewing people and absorbing the soundscapes of people conducting business and chatting at the coffee shops in the city. For the young people, this street performance is the climax of months of skill learning, research, ensemble work, playing games, and having fun.

This is one of the Music of Sound (MOS) or Muzik Bunyi-Bunyian (in Malay) projects entitled George Town Heboh – Streets Alive (2012) that aims to create awareness about the living heritage of the UNESCO heritage site. MOS is a type of community music that encourages young people of diverse ethno-religious backgrounds to experience and learn about the histories and cultures of multicultural and multireligious Penang through research and interviews with local residents and traders. They co-create and perform music and movements using everyday objects, chants and songs, sounds, and conversations they find and hear at the site (Tan 2018, 2019). By doing so, they embody a sense of place that has largely been lost due to modernization and gentrification of the city. The young participants in MOS projects also interact with people of other racial backgrounds, cross ethnic boundaries, and learn to respect differences that contribute to interethnic peace building.

This article looks at the development of MOS's bottom-up methodology over the past two decades, focusing on how it has enhanced the learning of musical concepts or elements, creative expression, social cohesion, and a sense of place among schoolchildren from different ethnic backgrounds. An important assumption is that harmonious coexistence occurs when people of different races begin to dialogue and cooperate with one another. In this sense, the MOS workshop provides a platform for the participants to address racial issues through strategies that promote cross-cultural interaction and ensemble work. At the same time, audiences are able to see and experience the interactions that are being enacted in performative street spaces. MOS can be



Fig. 1. Children performing a dance with rhythms made with clogs that are worn to the wet market in Opera Pasar (Market Opera). The community audience watches from all sides. Photograph by Tan Sooi Beng.

seen as a form of musical intervention that leads to social transformation; it promotes racial integration in multiethnic and multireligious Malaysia. This type of musical intervention involves the development of pedagogic approaches that emphasize collaboration, inclusion, experiential learning, and negotiation through dialogue at workshops run by facilitators (Bartleet and Higgins 2018).

The two authors of this article have been engaged in MOS projects in Penang, where they both live and work, for the past two to three decades. Tan elaborates on the pedagogic strategies in MOS that she pioneered in the 1990s, specifically the use of everyday objects, body parts, and the voice in collaborative, experiential, and place-based music-making to promote social engagement and interethnic harmony. These workshops culminated in several street performances produced by the artist collective Ombak-Ombak ARTStudio in Penang (of which Tan is a founding member) and ARTS-Ed's Anak-Anak Kota (Children of the City) programs. ARTS-Ed is a nonprofit organization that runs community-based arts education projects for young people in Penang (see <https://www.arts-ed.my/>). Toh draws on her many years of facilitating the Ombak musical theatre projects with Tan to illustrate how she has introduced

the projects to schoolchildren since 2008 and adapted the MOS methodology using multiple intelligence pathways in the Institute of Teacher Education since 2015. MOS projects have enhanced musicality, creative expression, the learning of musical concepts, and intercultural interactions among students.

Decolonizing Music Learning in the 1990s

The term “Music of Sound” is a play on the title of a film, *The Sound of Music*, popular among Tan’s generation. Tan wanted to interrogate the term “music,” which suggests Western classical music specifically in many postcolonial countries such as Malaysia. Until the 1990s, music teaching at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels was based on Western models. MOS sought to decolonize the concept of “music” and show, first, that anyone can make music from everyday sounds and objects, that expensive Western instruments are not necessary, and second, that making music can also be fun.

Tan collaborated with her university students to experiment with the methodology. These were mainly theatre students who were musical but did not have the means to learn Western instruments or music theory. Tan introduced the elements of music — such as rhythm, pitch, timbre, tempo, and dynamics — to the students by using everyday objects: the voice, body percussion, and traditional instruments. She took the students on field trips outside of the university to observe and collect sounds from such sites as busy streets, shopping malls, dirty beaches, children’s playgrounds, and other places they could listen to different types of sounds. Tan worked with the students to create short MOS musical pieces that drew on both their new knowledge of the elements of music and the sounds, conversations, and movements they had collected. We then took the interactive performances to various schools, including schools for the visually impaired, and ran methodology workshops for schoolteachers. These projects focused on the learning of the basic elements of music through creativity and building on the sights and sounds of the environment.

Socially Engaged Arts after 2000: Approaches to Social Cohesion

After 2000, Tan began to develop MOS as a socially engaged or participatory arts practice, a kind of public art where participants and artists work with community groups with the aim of bringing about social change (Boal 1993). Emphasizing the processes of making art through collaboration between young participants and university students and community members in the city,



Fig. 2. Music of Sound ensemble, 1990s.

socially engaged arts promote the recovery of cultural values, local knowledge, and a sense of place (Pillai 2006). The approach is place-based and experiential; participants conduct research about the living cultures, soundscapes, and economic and cultural activities of the local people at specific sites. Through observation and interaction with people of different races and walks of life, they begin to understand and appreciate the cultural diversity that reinforces interethnic cohesion.

Socially engaged arts methodology is inspired by the critical pedagogy of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1970). Freire criticizes the “banking concept of education,” where the student is seen as an empty container to be filled by the teacher, which, he argues, leads to the control of students’ minds and the inhibition of creativity. Through the process of dialogue, students become “conscientized” and gain the means to challenge dominant national narratives; dialogue activates students to struggle for social justice and transform their own societies.

MOS builds on recent trends in critical pedagogy, highlighting community music approaches that can enhance the engagement of children of all races and social backgrounds with various types and practices of music. Community music encourages inclusivity and diversity through participatory approaches created by facilitators and transmission methods used by local heritage bearers (Campbell 2018). Community music facilitators emphasize active participation,

responses to the surrounding environment, and accessibility to musicking. Activities promote music-making through experiencing, listening, improvising, creating, and performing. The facilitators believe that everyone, including the disadvantaged and minorities, has the ability and the right to make music. They prioritize the social well-being and development of the participants involved in each project (Higgins and Bartleet 2012).

Tan was also motivated by the democratic arts movements that challenged autocratic regimes in Southeast Asia in the 1970s and 1980s. In particular, she had the opportunity to attend the PETA (Philippines Educational Theatre Association) method workshops that were conducted in Malaysia and other parts of Southeast Asia in the 1980s. In these workshops, PETA shared the concept of local and integrated arts that artists had devised to enlist the disadvantaged and oppressed in the struggle for change in the Philippines under the rule of Ferdinand Marcos. In their co-created plays, workshop participants experienced different ways of combining dance, drama, music, puppetry, and visual arts found in Asian traditions. Tan was also moved by the liberation theatre MAYA's use of puppets and other local arts for social mobilization and education in the rural areas and slums of Thailand (Van Erven 1992; Tan 2019).

Socially Engaged MOS Methodology

1. Preliminary Issue-Based Research

Before any project begins, we recruit facilitators and artists who represent different ethnicities, genders, and ages. Facilitators research the issues and problems affecting music learning among schoolchildren at the time of and site selected for the project. At the turn of the new millennium, this research identified three main issues in Malaysia: rising housing costs, a lack of attention to creative expression in school music education, and increasing ethnic polarization in schools. Due to the repeal of the Rent Control Act, as well as urban development and gentrification catering to tourists, rental costs of shophouses — terraced houses where families conduct businesses on the ground floor and live on the first floor — have skyrocketed. Many residents cannot afford the high rents and have moved out of the heritage city and brought their living heritage with them. Young people who no longer live in the city have lost their sense of the place and connection to its multiethnic living cultures.

Moreover, creative expression, which is crucial for music learning, is missing in Penang's schools. An initial survey demonstrates that of the aspects of music taught in northern peninsular secondary schools in Malaysia, creative

expression is the least nurtured. Most music teachers who do not have formal music training do not encourage students to create musical compositions using a combination of non-musical objects, voice, and body parts. Instead, the common instructional strategies used by most school music teachers in creative expression are writing lyrics (33.4 percent) and writing rhythmic patterns (40 percent) (Toh 2012).

Further, ethnic polarization has increased in the schools of Malaysia. Most ethnic Chinese and Indian students are enrolled in primary vernacular schools, which employ Mandarin and Tamil, respectively, as their main medium of instruction. The majority of the Bumiputera (ethnic Malay and native) students attend the national primary schools, where lessons are conducted in the Malay language (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia 2013: E-7). Students are thus not exposed to different cultures in these homogeneous ethnic environments. When students of different ethnicities and cultures converge at the national secondary schools, there is a tendency for the students to associate more freely with students belonging to their own ethnic groups.

With these concerns in mind, facilitators discuss how to apply various components of MOS, following the agenda of the project. We identify a specific site or streets in the city where the multiethnic community stakeholders can provide spaces for rehearsals (such as clan association buildings), interviews and research materials for the workshops, as well as an open space for the workshop performances. The site chosen for each project is based on the preliminary knowledge-based research. We then audition schoolchildren (ten to nineteen years of age) from diverse ethnic, class, language, and gender backgrounds from the different language-medium schools and the communities in the city for the MOS workshops. MOS workshops are open to anyone who is interested.

2. Basic MOS Method

Facilitators run the workshop with both participants and community members from the site. All workshop phases begin with theatre games to break the ice, to help participants get to know one another and gain self-confidence, as well as to encourage teamwork. Warm-up exercises promote vocalization and movement and stimulate the imagination (see <https://www.teachstarter.com/us/blog/drama-games-for-kids-years-4-7-us/> for some examples). Video examples of the four MOS workshop phases described below can be accessed in Tan's virtual presentation for the Workshop on Anti-Racist Pedagogies organized by the Centre of Sound Communities in November 2021 (<https://youtu.be/5CST-RrTHMk>).

Phase 1: Skill learning. Workshop participants are introduced to the basic elements of music and taught how to produce different pitches, rhythms, dynamics, timbres, and tempos using everyday objects and sounds found in the space where the project is hosted as well as their voices and body percussion. They create short rhythmic patterns with different pitches and timbres and play their individual patterns as an ensemble using different tempos and dynamics. These patterns are repeated using their voices and body percussion.



Fig. 3. Making rhythms with everyday objects, *The Story of Botanical Gardens*, 2011.

Phase 2. Skill learning of traditional instruments, chants, and local music genres with heritage bearers. Our projects use the Malay *gamelan* (gong ensemble), shadow puppet theatre or *wayang kulit*, vocal and theatrical forms such as *boria* and *dikir barat*, and social dance music such as the *joget* and *inang*. Chinese instrumental music, chants and lion dance drumming, and Indian harmonium music and drumming are also incorporated (see Matusky and Tan 2017 for further information about the various genres).

Phase 3. Site-specific research and experiential learning. Participants undertake fieldwork to observe and collect sounds from the environment. They conduct interviews with members of the multiethnic communities and observe the activities, trades, and places where people interact at the selected sites. They

request songs and chants that are popular within the communities. In *Kisah Pulau Pinang* (The Penang Story), participants learned how people pray at such religious sites as the Indian temple, the Goddess of Mercy temple, and the Anglican church; the history of migration through oral interviews with their great-grandparents and other older relatives; why conflicts occurred between racial groups in the past through historical *boria* song texts; different kinds of trades and cultural festivals celebrated in the selected streets; and spaces where interethnic interactions take place. The MOS team's projects — such as *Kisah Pulau Pinang* (The Story of Penang, 2008), *Ceritera Botanik* (The Story of Botanical Gardens, 2010), *Ceritera Lebuh Carnavon* (The Story about Carnavon Street, 2011), *George Town Heboh - Streets Alive* (2012), and *Wayang Time!* (Puppet and Theatre Time! 2015) — convey the historical significance and living heritage of particular sites and streets.

Phase 4. Collaborative creative work and composition. Music and movement creation is based on the materials, stories, sounds, songs, and musical genres and instruments participants learn of during research and interviews. Divided into groups, participants devise their own stories, music, or dance, and collectively create a final sequence for performance. Creative processes — including games, improvisations, and brainstorming — are used as tools for investigation, expression, or reflection. Involving participants in the activities and



Fig. 4. Using new multiethnic characters in the Malay Shadow Play to communicate stories and memories of the communities, *Wayang Time!* 2015.

contribution of ideas, and encouraging them to reflect, interact, and improvise, paves the way for ownership over the content. The workshops culminate in site-specific workshop performances, with the communities (interviewed and observed), families, friends, and the public as audiences. These musical theatre projects investigate people's histories not found in school textbooks, drawing attention to issues such as the gentrification of heritage buildings and markets and other emergent problems, for instance, at the heritage site of George Town.

MOS in the Institute of Teacher Education Malaysia and Schools: Using Multiple Intelligence Pathways

The pre-2015 iterations of socially engaged MOS projects usually lasted between three and six months, enough time to allow participants to engage in the whole process of learning musical skills for composition and performance. These workshops were held during weekends and school holidays; children were brought to neutral spaces outside of their schools where they could interact with one another and with members of urban communities. However, more recently, projects have had shorter durations because children were not able to commit to long workshops due to other obligations, including supplementary classes taken outside of formal education, and other online activities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, no outdoor activities were allowed, and thus teaching schoolteachers the MOS methodology and having them bring MOS to the schools seemed to be a sustainable alternative to the community workshop model.

As a lecturer and music reference expert at the Institute of Teacher Education Malaysia, Toh has, since 2015, introduced the MOS methodology to all student teachers in the Arts Education module in the Bachelor Degree Program in Teaching in the twenty-seven Institute of Teacher Education campuses in Malaysia. In 2018, MOS was incorporated into the course Creative Activities in Music Education, an elective designed for and open to all student teachers. Since 2010, the methodology has also been adapted for Malaysian Music Appreciation classes offered by the Institute of Teacher Education, Penang.

The key phases of the MOS methodology were adapted for creative expression classes at the Institute of Teacher Education in the country, including skill training in the basic elements of making music using everyday objects, voices, and body parts and in local music traditions; research and observation of the environment using cognitive thinking skills; and the application of creative thinking skills in musical composition using the materials gathered through participatory, experiential, analytical, and collaborative approaches.

In this setting, participants are introduced to creative ways of creating short compositions from the musical sounds they have gathered before performing their understandings of the culture, community, or subject in a workshop.

This pedagogy incorporates ideas and practices from a variety of sources. Toh incorporated the participatory learning approaches, such as experiential learning and collaborative ensemble work, emphasized in MOS. While the experiential approach encourages participants to explore and interact directly with materials that convey a concept in concrete form (Gardner 2006), the collaborative approach fosters joint intellectual efforts, the sharing of authority, and acceptance of responsibility among group members through discussions, clarifications, and evaluations of one another's ideas. As highlighted in Clifford (2020), working as an ensemble also allows individuals to attain higher-level thinking and to preserve information for a longer period of time.

Student-centred strategies to engage participants in creative expression from multiple entry points (based on Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences [Gardner 2004]) were adapted to develop an individual holistically. These strategies include dramatic narrative, logical thinking, and musical experience in creating soundscapes of the environment. More specifically, students developed skills playing gamelan and other traditional instruments; experiencing the natural world through field trips; and making aesthetic presentations through visual arts, music-making, movement, and local art forms performed collectively (Toh 2019).

Besides developing their musicality in creative expression using diverse intelligence strengths, the MOS methodology encourages participants to cross cultural borders. A smart partnership (based on shared visions) is formed by grouping participants of different ethnicities, genders, ages, abilities, and knowledge bases to work as an ensemble. This is in tandem with some of the goals of the Malaysian Education System and Malaysian students, such as (i) fostering unity through interacting with individuals from a range of socio-economic, religious, and ethnic backgrounds to understand, accept, and embrace differences; and (ii) encouraging students to develop their knowledge and skills in other areas such as music, arts, and sports besides mastering core subjects to be equipped with a rounded general knowledge (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia 2013: E-9).

MOS Methodology Using Multiple Intelligence Pathways

What are the effective strategies for creative expression in MOS that foster intercultural interaction and employ multiple intelligence pathways as entry

points? Schoolchildren and student teachers are given the artistic freedom to re-create multiethnic local music traditions. They are encouraged to cross ethnic, cultural, and stylistic boundaries to portray related issues, stories, or themes in their specific performances. The whole process of re-creating traditions is oriented by participants' interests informed by multiple intelligence pathways. According to the theory of Multiple Intelligences (Gardner 2006), each individual is capable of designing products and solving problems through language, logical mathematical analyses, visual-spatial illustrations, physical engagements, musical experiences, interpersonal understanding of others, intrapersonal knowledge of self, and experience in the natural world. Gardner (2000, 2006) proposes project scaffolding from multiple pathways to provide an opportunity for children to assemble and apply previously mastered concepts and skills in the acquisition of new concepts and skills to develop other intelligences. Toh has included audiovisual examples of the use of multiple intelligence pathways as entry points in creative composition and the blending of musical forms and instruments in school workshops in her virtual presentation for the Anti-Racist Pedagogy Workshop (<https://youtu.be/5CST-RrTHMk>).

For Toh's project, the sample population comprised student teachers (Malays, Chinese, Indians, and other *Bumiputera* [natives] from Sabah and Sarawak), aged twenty to twenty-one, from the Institute of Teacher Education in Penang, and Malay, Chinese, and Indian Form 2 students, aged fourteen, from three secondary schools in Penang (labelled Green, Yellow and Blue schools for anonymity). Most of the Chinese and Indian student teachers and students in schools attended vernacular primary schools (Year 1-6, aged seven to twelve). The majority of the Malay and other native student teachers and students attended the national primary school. All the students from the sample population attended the national secondary schools (Form 1-5, aged thirteen to seventeen).

Participants with linguistic strengths were encouraged to incorporate their linguistic abilities in phonology, syntax, and semantics into their creative works to describe the sentiments and themes obtained from their field trips. They collectively explored and generated Malay quatrains of artistic verses against a set rhyming scheme to folk and popular melodies, raps, Chinese chants, local Malay folk genres such as *boria* and *dikir barat*. They also sung stories in multilingual form.

Through the musical and logical entry points, the students in schools and student teachers with musical competencies re-created sounds of the environment, such as construction sites, coffee shops, playgrounds, cafeterias, or their own school settings. The participants created their own music and songs, exploring the basic elements of music such as rhythm, tempo, pitch, and tone



Fig. 5. Dancing and singing Boria to a set rhyming scheme (2022).

colour to reimagine the soundscapes from their site visits or specific themes using everyday objects, voice, and body percussion. Group improvisations were employed to accompany the movements and artistic pieces performed by their friends.

From the musical knowledge and skills acquired in the Malaysian Music Appreciation classes through the musical pathway, student teachers explored and innovated in their creative expressions across ethnic, culture, and stylistic boundaries. For instance, the students collaboratively (i) improvised the theme song from Western movies and Chinese popular songs such as “Cang Hai Yi Sheng Xiao” (A Sound of Laughter in the Vast Sea), “Dang Zi Qiang” (Strive to Strengthen Oneself), and “Mo Li Hua” (Jasmine Flower) using Chinese traditional instruments such as the *erhu* (two stringed fiddle) and the *pipa* (plucked lute) in the *gamelan* ensemble; (ii) mixed Western instruments with traditional Chinese and Malay instruments in various folk music ensembles; and (iii) played rhythms using everyday objects to accompany ethnic dances, including the Chinese lion dance to demonstrate their understanding of the musical forms and rhythmic drum patterns.

Incorporating physical movements into musical composition through the kinaesthetic pathway enabled participants with kinaesthetic strengths to engage in creative thinking and imagination in the learning of musical concepts. The students synthesized and demonstrated their understanding of rhythm, pitch,



Fig. 6. Vocal quartet singing lyrics (in Malay, Chinese, and English languages) about the environment to the tune of the folk song “Dayung Sampan” (Row the Boat) at the Institute of Teacher Education Penang during the opening ceremony of a seminar. The song was accompanied by a multiethnic ensemble comprising gamelan instruments, the violin and pipa and everyday objects such as a plastic barrel and the paal kudum (vessel for carrying milk during Hindu rituals) (2022).



Fig. 7. Creative rhythmic movements imitating birds in the *kenyalang* (hornbill) dance from Sarawak with *dikir barat* singers seated (2022).

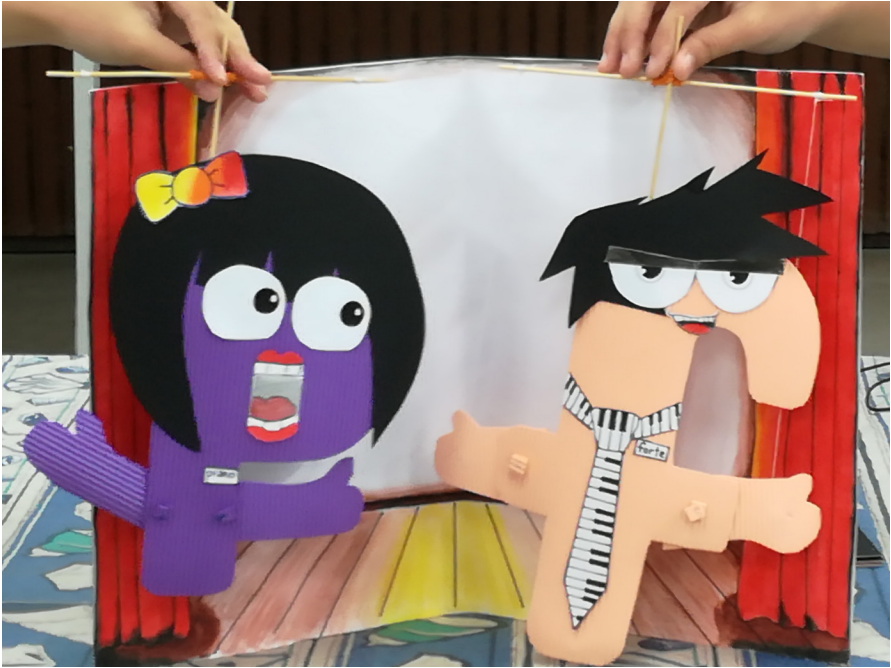


Fig. 8. Using stick puppets to demonstrate the musical expression of *forte* (*f*) and *piano* (*p*) in a musical performance (2017).

tempo, and tone colours using body percussion and movement. Through the skilled use of their body, student teachers and students in schools collaboratively transformed the gestures of people of different ethnic backgrounds and animals into creative rhythmic movements.

By way of the visual pathway, budding visual artists crafted props to both conjure mental imagery of the various themes identified during their site visits and to demonstrate their understanding of the musical concepts learned. For example, student teachers created stick, sock, and marionette puppets and performed with them to demonstrate their comprehension of such musical elements as rhythm and expression in Arts Education classes.

Evaluations: Musical and Social Impact

Feedback obtained through focus group evaluations and self-reflective appraisals is critical in MOS, allowing facilitators to see if their objectives are being met and to adapt their strategies accordingly. Here are some of the comments from

the focus group interviews carried out with schoolchildren and student teachers about understanding musical concepts and interethnic interactions.

Understanding musical concepts

The school students in the three different schools (Green, Blue and Yellow) who had no knowledge of Western music stressed that they were able to understand and remember the musical concepts better through musical experience. They expressed themselves in the focus interviews using colloquial English mixed with Malay words. One secondary student said,

Before, when our music teacher talked about the *unsur muzik* (musical concepts), it was quite hard to understand [it was quite difficult]. Music is something you study and practice.... It is easier to understand ... after teacher taught us pitch, rhythm, and when we applied it [them], I can easily remember. (C25, Green secondary school)

Students from focus group interviews also pointed out that the methodology enabled them to develop musical skills and an interest in music-making. As disclosed by a group of students from the Green secondary school about one of their friends (C34), “That fellow, he don’t [doesn’t] know how to play anything” (C11), and “I remember last time [before], he is [was] a very quiet boy, he hates [hated] music last time ... now suddenly he can play [the] *bonang* [*gamelan* instrument], I don’t know how [that happened].” (C25); “Ya lah, yalah,” all the children agreed.

Students from the Blue secondary school also added that the methodology developed their interest in music-making.

Before this, actually we are [were] not interested in music ... but after that [the workshop], then [we were] able to create ... new music from everyday objects, discarded materials.... [We were] able to *cipta* (create) the music ... [after] the challenge, then we began to like it. (C20)

In addition to nurturing an interest in music-making among the student teachers and school students, the strategies and approaches of MOS from multiple dimensions through collaborative and experiential learning also developed musical knowledge and skills. In the post-test evaluations (see table 1), most of the students with various intelligence dispositions from the

three schools agreed or somewhat agreed that they were able to create simple rhythmic *ostinato* and explore different pitches and tone colours using everyday objects and to demonstrate their understanding of the musical concepts learned through performance.

Table 1. Evaluation of understanding of musical concepts from the yellow secondary school

Yellow School N=26	Do not Agree	Do not quite Agree	Not sure	Somewhat agree	Agree
Pre- (Creating rhythm patterns)	72%	16%	12%		
Post			8%	32%	60%
Pre- (Creating rhythm patterns with tone colours)	56%	28%	16%		
Post			4%	48%	48%
Pre- (Creating rhythm patterns with pitches)	76%	12%	12%		
Post			16%	48%	36%

Intercultural Interaction

Children who participated in socially engaged projects in the city emphasized that they learned about and experienced the “traditional beliefs, practices, and music” of other ethnic groups during the heritage walks and oral interviews. They were also able to talk to the “different uncles and aunties working at their shops and in the coffee shops.” (In Malaysia, we show our respect to older people by calling them uncles and aunties.) For example, a Chinese girl said, “I had never entered a mosque or Indian temple before, and I was able to watch how people prayed there during the heritage walk.” A Malay boy said that he observed how the Indian uncle prepared *teh tarik* (pulling the tea), a type of hot milk tea beverage that is popular among all races in Malaysia. “To create the dance, I imitated the movements of the uncle when he poured the tea with sweet milk back and forth many times between two containers so that a thick foam is formed on top,” he remarked. Another Chinese participant added, “I discovered how the people used different languages to communicate with one another.” These experiences were new to the students who attended separate language schools and helped them to feel a sense of the city that was and still is multicultural and alive.

For the multiethnic group of schoolchildren, the MOS methodology also fostered an appreciation of diversity, a shared sense of responsibility, and

social harmony. Collective creative expression through the exchange of social and cultural ideas initiated stronger social relationships among the participants of different ethnicities. Some of the comments from the students in the focus group in the Green secondary school include, “In teams we cooperate better, it fosters unity [friends all agree...yah... and laugh], develops closer relationships [friends laugh together], that’s why it is more fun” (C28). “I learned about cultures” (C23). “The Malays mixed with Indians to dance Indian dance and act together” (C36). “We unanimously agreed, different races developed closer ties because not everyone can perform this way, we are proud.”

Constant interaction and dialogue during music-making sessions promoted interethnic mixing, respect for one another’s cultures, and willingness to listen to and exchange ideas with others. As the students from the three schools said, “Although we ... do not mix [with] Malays and Chinese before this, now we get closer” (C11, Green secondary school); “When we do some projects, then we discuss [hand gestures], then we take other people’s opinion, then we discuss, this way we developed closer ties [all laugh].” “We understand each other better, the Indians and the Malays” (C14, Yellow secondary school); “When we work together, we discuss and we take other people’s idea into consideration and then we discuss again.... It enforces our relationship with each other ... we get to understand each other ... we learn to work as a team” (C2, Blue secondary school); “I like creating fusion [music] together because we can see all the students from different ethnicities ... working together harmoniously to create a piece” (C 13, Blue secondary school).

Multiethnic student teachers and schoolchildren were also of the opinion that collaborative and experiential learning from multiple pathways developed appreciation of diverse Malaysian musical forms. A student of Chinese ethnicity (C14) declared,

At first, I think [thought]... *gamelan* is only [played by] Malays ... [other students communicate this is not the case through hand gestures]. But after we [started playing *gamelan*] together, we felt that we could cooperate with each other ... and play the *gamelan* music. I like it.

A student teacher (S1) echoed the sentiment and added,

Ensemble playing in various musical genres in Malaysia exposed me to the knowledge about the people and their ethnicity as well as their rituals and cultures. Through the exposure about Malaysian

music, I gained more understanding and developed an interest in researching more on other ethnic cultures.

Student teachers also agreed that the methodology enabled them to develop a deeper understanding of the different folk genres, such as *boria*. S13 (of Chinese ethnicity) said, "Before this, I did not know anything about *boria* but after I took part in the dance, read about it, watched videos and composed songs, I got to know *boria* in more detail."

Concluding Remarks

MOS projects stress the need for university, institute, and college music students to participate in research projects outside academia and in collaboration with communities of practice, NGO activists/artists, and schoolteachers and schoolchildren. Tertiary students who have been involved as facilitators in the MOS projects have been able to experience multiple kinds of musical knowledge, social concerns, and histories from below, as well as the potential of collaborating with nonacademics of different races on projects that are inclusive.

From project participants' evaluations, we have shown that the MOS methodology promotes the learning of musical concepts through creative expression as well as intercultural interaction among participants. Experiential and collaborative learning approaches in MOS help school students who have no Western music background to develop knowledge of musical concepts as well as musicality and creativity in making their own music. The participants also gain self-confidence as they can enter and learn from multiple pathways.

Additionally, the experiential and collaborative methods in MOS assist in bridging ethnic divides as participants, artists, and facilitators from different ethnic, religious, and class backgrounds interact intensively with each other during all project activities: heritage walks; research and interview sessions; dialogue in the creation of song texts, music, and movements; and rehearsals for performances. The experiential and collaborative strategies in MOS also encourage students to learn diverse local music forms and blend Malay, Chinese, Indian, Eurasian, and other cultural elements in their movement, music, and creation of props and costumes. Participants recover chants and folk songs and learn the musical instruments of various ethnic groups. As they experience multiple perspectives and cultures other than their own, participants cross ethnic barriers and learn to recognize and honour cultural differences. They begin to appreciate that intercultural mixing occurs on the ground and to dismantle their preconceived notions of one another. Even though they return

to their homes, schools, and daily routines after the workshops, the participants often continue to stay in touch with their friends from different ethnic groups through social media; they visit each other's homes during festive occasions.

Correspondingly, the open-air, site-specific performance spaces in the city allow for various types of border crossings and cross-cultural exchanges and dialogues. Participants mix Malay, Hokkien, Cantonese, English, and Tamil words, just like they hear in everyday conversations on the streets; they blend song styles, instruments, and movements and capture intercultural mixing in everyday interactions in the stories and lyrics they create. This is also a space where performers and audiences of different races can come together and share their common concerns, experiences, histories, and traditions. The performances bring together multiethnic residents in the city, who share their memories, stories, and cultures with the children as well as with other audiences who watch the shows. By re-creating the local forms of music and dance belonging to varied ethnic groups and giving them a contemporary transethnic spin, participants demonstrate that Malaysian identities are hybrid but cultural particularities are maintained.

Finally, the place-based approach in MOS that emphasizes heritage walks, the collection of folk songs and chants, sounds of everyday life, stories of ordinary people, and memories of moments in history that are site-specific can create an awareness of place and help participants reflect creatively on the past and present regarding relationships between different ethnic groups, cultural heritage, and environmental issues affecting them. A good sense of place can aid in fostering a positive emotional attachment to place and bring disconnected participants and communities of practice together. 🌸

Notes

1. Dikir barat is a secular entertainment form popular among village Malays in Kelantan and the southern Thai provinces. It features four-line Malay verses sung as a call and response between a solo singer and a chorus. While singing, the chorus members move their arms, hands, and upper torsos rhythmically to the music (Matusky and Tan 2017: 332–40). Boria is a type of popular syncretic theatre and music in Penang comprising two segments featuring the same story or theme. The first segment consists of a comic sketch while the second includes a song and dance routine performed by a solo singer and a chorus. The solo singer, accompanied by a band, sings in a set rhyming scheme (a, a, a, a) as the chorus simultaneously performs a dance routine. When the solo singer finishes, the chorus dances and repeats the lyrics and melody of the verse (Matusky and Tan 2017: 77–81).

2. See Tan (2008, 2018, 2019) for detailed analyses of the various MOS workshops and performances. Participatory or process theatre in Asia and racial segregation in Malaysia are discussed in Tan (2019). The video clips of the MOS methodology and some of the MOS workshop performances can be seen in the video presentations by Tan and Toh for the virtual Anti-Racist Pedagogy talks organized by the Centre for Sound Communities, November 20, 2021 (<https://youtu.be/5CST-RrTHMk>).

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