

Researching Cultural Literacy: creativity, music, performance, education and their social implications



This one day research workshop took place in late February 2018 at Bath Spa University UK. It was convened by Amanda Bayley, Professor of Music and Head of the Music Research Group in collaboration with Bambo Soyinka, Professor and Director of the university's Research Centre for Transnational Creativity and Education.

Amanda is a graduate of Dartington College of Arts and Reading University. She has since emerged as a leading international expert on the ethnography of musical practice, particularly that involving the transcultural translation of musical codes, either on the part of an individual composer (Béla Bartók, Michael Finnissy) or, more recently, in the simultaneous creative interaction of musicians from different musical backgrounds. Apart from exploring the implications of conducting research into culturally mixed live performance as an investigator on several international projects, she has been working with educational networks in the South-West of England, which promote the incorporation of hybrid musical practice into educational experience.

Participants had been invited to prepare answers to four questions covering research methodology, the relationship with participant/informant populations and longer term impact/exportability of eventual outcomes.

Cultural Literacy, Cultural Studies and Creativity



Before embarking on the individual presentations by researchers, Bambo Soyinka raised two general questions. The first concerned the relationship between 'Cultural Literacy' and 'Cultural Studies'. How did the two fields differ from each other? In response, it was argued that 'Cultural Studies' as it had developed over the last fifty years was a broad church whose origins lay in the pioneering work of Raymond Williams in the 1950s. Williams' seminal study *Culture and Society*¹ had been based on an evolutionary model derived from a deterministic, dialectical view of history inspired by Marxist theory. It explained the transition from an elitist, author-led view of high culture sponsored by the western bourgeoisie to an approach which focused on the politics of cultural production of all kinds in an era increasingly dominated by mass-consumerism.

In 1964, the *Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies* had been established at the University of Birmingham by Richard Hoggart, author of the celebrated 1957 study of working class culture, *Uses of Literacy*. Under the direction of Hoggart's successor, Stuart Hall, the focus of the Centre had shifted. The study of 'culture' had focused on the interests of specific groups definable in terms of class, colour, ethnic status, gender, sexual orientation, bodily form and on their mode of representation in the media. Closely allied to media studies, such topics were lent global outreach, to the point where, in the new millennium, a centrifugal development had taken place. As succinctly described in Simon During's revised 2007 introduction to *The Cultural Studies Reader*², the combined influences of post-colonialism, feminism and queer studies, identity politics, subjectivism and the

¹Raymond Williams *Culture and Society* London: Chatto and Windus, 1958.

²Simon During (ed.) *The Cultural Studies Reader* 3rd ed. London: Routledge, 2007.

scepticism surrounding post-modernist fragmentation had exploded the early post-Marxist principles on which cultural studies had been based. According to During, the field in 2007 found itself in an eclectic state without a clear-cut disciplinary focus. Now, in 2018, the high period of 'cultural studies' had given way to the infinite pluralism of 'post-theory'. It was against a backdrop where the global power of technology, population mobility, the growth of nationalism and the awareness of diversity had superseded intellectual coherence that the concept of cultural literacy was now set.

The second question raised by Bambo Soyinka concerned the position of 'creativity' within a cultural literacy-led research paradigm. In response, Robert Crawshaw argued that creative practice was by definition an engine of culture which necessarily entailed 'literacy'. The term implied a degree of consciousness on the part of 'creators'. 'Creativity' was not a purely singular project. It straddled the space between *bricolage* and semiosis. It entailed reflexivity and an awareness of its wider significance. To become a 'cultural determinant', creativity needed to embed itself in some way in collective consciousness. It would thereby become a phenomenon which lent itself to external analysis. Cultural literacy research could not overlook issues of origin, production, process and sustainable impact. Creative artefacts were susceptible to being 'read' as lenses through which the social dynamics of particular populations could be better appreciated. In this respect, the approach echoed the hermeneutic principle that creative artefacts offered a condensed representation of the wider cultural environment.³

The current problem, however, was that in a fractured or fragmented context in which cultural norms were themselves inherently dynamically unstable, multi-layered, diverse and hybrid, structural correspondences were hard to identify and unlikely to lend themselves to coherent social action. 'Creativity' was essentially to be valued as a human characteristic insofar as it embodied fundamental freedom of expression as a counterpoint to political hegemony, but creative thinking expressed through practice and material outcomes was equally important if meaningful social impact was to ensue. Evaluating the relationship between creative expression and cognitive reflection as it applied in particular environments was the challenge which Cultural Literacy research had to meet.

Orality and Literacy

The first presentation by Amanda Bayley focused on the cultural significance of the distinction between written forms of notation and modes of cultural transmission which were dependent on oral traditions. Musical notation could be seen as analogous to written language. It was a culturally derived, shared code which, like writing, could be removed from its immediate context of performance and re-interpreted in different environments. Like prose or dramatic script, it transcended the moment but carried with it distilled features of the cultural context in which it had originated. It could also be understood independently as a convention whose properties were not vested in a particular author yet against which authorial originality could be set. The potential physical separation between writing and the material combination of time, place and person lent it special status as a symbolic mode of representation, or '*présence*',⁴ as distinct from the iconicity of the visual image or sculpture.

³ Hans-Georg Gadamer *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: JCB Mohr, 1960).

Jeff Malpas "Hans-Georg Gadamer", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/gadamer/>.

Leo Spitzer *Linguistics and Literary History. Essays in Stylistics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015 [1st ed. 1967]).

⁴ Jacques Derrida *De la Grammatologie* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1967).



Amanda's argument was that the independent facility of transmission inherent in written notation should not detract from the cultural importance of orality. Oral traditions and practices were in a sense more immediately significant than their written counterparts in that, in the era preceding sound recording, they were dependent on the reality of collective performance. Like a liturgy, they embodied group belonging. Their language and conventions had to be known by the group if they were to be shared. They were often even a

condition of group membership. Transmission of the language was dependent on memory and, as far as music was concerned, on the instruments through which the sounds were transmitted. It also relied on imitation rather than on an act of translation from an independently written code. In addition, the oral performance would normally be framed as a ritualised event whose social significance would mostly transcend the act itself. These physical attributes of the oral tradition did not reduce their symbolic value or their underlying structural features as a 'language'; they simply implied that they were inseparable from living practice.

While transmission might take place as an integral part of the social dynamic, in many societies, musical motifs and the content of songs were preserved by specially qualified individuals: priests, cantors, singers or instrumentalists who became the guardians of the cultural legacy they represented. They might be ascribed quasi-spiritual status which preserved alive in sound the souls of forebears as a form of transcendent mediation.



The conflicting cultures of the Balkans offered an intriguing variation on the same theme. Singers known as 'Rhapsodes' extended a Homeric tradition⁵ which had become the focus of long-established historical differences. The names of the instruments and the versions of the epic songs were themselves the subject of violent border disputes, even a motive of genocide⁶. It was no coincidence that, since classical times, blindness had been a trope applied to the figure of the performer of epic narrative. Content, rhythmic structure,

tonal articulation and character were embodied by the performer and adapted to the audience with whom it was shared. What they had in common was a form of cultural literacy which was independent of the written word.

In a context in which orally transmitted music occupied a cultural position analogous to spoken language, cross-cultural hybridisation became a form of 'interlanguage' whose different codes needed to be understood before they could be merged in performance, let alone transmitted to

⁵ Albert Lord *The Singer of Tales* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1960/2000).

⁶ Robert Crawshaw 'Literature, metahistory, ethnography, cultural heritage and the Balkans: Ismail Kadare's *The File on H.*', in R.Byram and U. Kockel (eds.) *Moving, Mixing and Memory in Contemporary Europe* (Berlin: Lit. Verlag, 2006), pp.54-75.

others in their hybrid form. This was all the more pertinent for the fact that, apart from technical proficiency, performative codes: bodily movement, positions of the players in space and so on become a constituent part of collective music making. By dint of repetition, these codes became the product of the emotional and physically spatial relationships between the performers. Intercultural notation was only one element of a complex whole. As a process of discovery, it took time and reiterated practice. Its cultural significance could only be realised cumulatively in successive performances in which each was a variant of those that had gone before.

If the above set of working principles had coherence as an analysis of the interaction between notation, performance and culture, that could only be said to apply for as long as the conventions themselves were relatively stable and had a degree of contextual uniformity. Organic processes of adaptation or evolutionary change: the Blues, the American folk tradition or the incorporation of Indian or Caribbean motifs into Western popular music, followed traceable ⁷ filiations which could be deconstructed and ‘explained’ in the traditional language of cultural history .

However, as soon as performative codes were deliberately mixed for experimental purposes, it was a different story. Musical cross-cultural interaction became an engineered activity, created in what could be described as a laboratory environment which permitted the interactions between performers and the musical codes they brought to the event to be studied as an object of analysis in its own right. As Amanda described it, in these circumstances, the ‘laboratory’ became a ‘forum for observation’ in which the essential skills of performative reading, listening and imitation as well as the improvisational flexibility of the performers could be tested. The music-making became literally a ‘rehearsal’ from which provisional conclusions could be drawn: a microcosm from which wider, ‘macro’ insights could emerge. While stable conventions were dependent on what Schutz described as a specific ‘stock of knowledge’⁸, situations in which the conventions were deliberately ‘de-stabilised’ through acts of cultural combination would, in all probability, have unpredictable consequences.



Implications for Cultural Literacy

The issues as far as ‘cultural literacy’ was concerned were multiple. What special attributes, technical and psychological, were required for group-led, culturally mixed musical performance to succeed? While the insights gained by the participants and the academic designers of the laboratory-led experiments were fascinating in themselves, what factors would be required for these to be conducted in ‘real-life’ settings, and if they were, what benefits might be anticipated for non-specialist populations? For that benefit to be gained, what ‘stock of knowledge’ or other form of cultural literacy would be needed?

For Amanda, the success of cross-cultural musical experimentation depended on going beyond combination so as to achieve a new generic form. This meant participants’ passing through three phases: ‘acquisition’, ‘translation’, and ‘transformation’, implying that the performers must each

⁷ see Carolyn Cooper *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender and the ‘vulgar’ body of Jamaican popular culture* (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 1995)

⁸ Christine Skarda ‘Albert Schutz’s Phenomenology of Music’ in *Journal of Musicological Research* Vol.3, 1-2, 1979, pp.75-132.

- acquire the technical knowledge to appreciate the different musical codes of the other participants;
- severally and collectively translate their own cultural code into a form which took account of those of the others;
- through negotiation and practice enable a new integrated form of musical output to emerge.

The act of music-making would then become a metonymy for wider forms of cultural interaction, a catalyst for the establishment of a ‘community of practice’.

It was not difficult to see that the human characteristics demanded by such a metamorphosis (listening, learning, imitating, creating, transforming) corresponded closely to the attributes inherent in successful cross-cultural interaction, if not in group interaction generally. Music was increasingly recognised by the media as a potent means of promoting belonging, group identity and the respect for difference. The challenge was now to translate the findings from the laboratory into the context of everyday life with all that this implied in terms of technical musical expertise, logistical organisation, leadership and time.



The potential, as well as the tensions inherent in this type of research were encapsulated in a presentation by Hyelim Kim, Research Fellow at Bath Spa and internationally celebrated Korean flautist. Hyelim described the physical links between the natural environment of South Korea, the material out of which the Korean flute was made, the formal pattern of the musical output which it produced, and the original effect of adapting music derived from western traditions for the instrument. Her live demonstration vividly communicated the properties of the traditional Korean flute and the appreciation of difference which went with it. As a specialist musician who illustrated cross-cultural hybridization through a combination of concerts, academic research and workshop presentations, she embodied the practical transmission of a specific form of cultural literacy. How such forms of performance were received by audiences and their influence on the public’s subsequent cultural outlook remained a hugely rich vein for further research.

Amanda Bayley’s case study and the musical presentation by Hyelim Kim raised a number of broader questions concerning the practice of music and its relationship with cultural literacy. These included the search for a universal musical language, the politics of adaptation, the role of the individual artist as author/composer, the balance between emotion and cognition and issues of gender.

Musical universals? The relationship between music and language

Anyone who had worked in theoretical linguistics in the 1970s before the rise of discourse analysis and pragmatics was familiar with the search for universals which lay at the heart of the so-called Chomskian revolution⁹. The belief in an innateness hypothesis or ‘language acquisition device’ (LAD) which defined the uniquely human capacity to generate language from an early age was posited as universal. The challenge had then been to design an algorithm containing within itself a flexible

⁹ Noam Chomsky *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge: MIT, 1965).

function capable of generating an infinite number of rule-governed forms in different languages across the world: the paradigm known as Transformational Generative Grammar (TG). A debate had quickly emerged concerning the difference between ‘formal’ and ‘substantive’ universals, that is between the abstract rules of the algorithm and the realities of linguistic usage, both within and between languages.

Fifty years later, it can be claimed that the hypothetical relationship between formal and substantive linguistic universals has never been satisfactorily verified. While the underlying principle that human beings are biologically capable of learning any language if the structural conditions are right, the correlations between the syntactic, semantic and phonological structures of languages are much harder to establish. They have to be learned ‘bottom up’ as well as ‘top-down’ through comparative experience or etymological study. And this before the graphic representation of verbal symbols and script are taken into account. Current linguistic theory and research practice favour a more relativist position in which, notwithstanding the Chomskian distinction between ‘competence’ and ‘performance’, linguistic form is, to a significant extent, contextually and culturally determined.

The same challenges can be applied to music – with the one overriding difference that in verbal language, grammatical systems convey referential meaning, intention, and propositional logic which are not made explicit in musical sound alone. Nevertheless, musical notation where it exists, like that of grammatical description, is a form of metalanguage, represented partly in abstract symbols and partly, within the western tradition at least, in verbal language (*piano*, *fortissimo*, *diminuendo* etc.).

All the above factors came into play in a research proposal forming the basis of another presentation. This aimed to compare different musical notational conventions with a view to identifying their hypothetical common ground and even to testing their potential for collective performance based on a shared notation – a kind of musical Esperanto. The approach relied on the humanistic aspiration that ‘common ground’ – a kind of musical ‘third space’, was substantively achievable.

The terms in which the outcome of hybrid notational experimentation were to be represented had yet to be developed. Sooner or later this was a problem which would have to be confronted. In the meantime, as a feature of cultural literacy, it pinpointed the issues involved in attempting to reconcile cultural difference in a cognitively intelligible musical language which lent itself to replication. Whether this was possible remained open to speculation but this in no way diminished its importance as a heuristic.

Adaptation, cultural translation and politics

The rise of cross-cultural studies over the last thirty years has been accompanied by the growth of pragmatics: the analysis of communication in real-life, culturally determined situations. Cross-cultural studies rely equally on the comparison of national or ethnic patterns of behaviour understood in historical terms. Identifiable themes or movements characteristic of one tradition are absorbed by other cultures and modified accordingly, generally as a result of the movement of populations. A combined, ‘evidence-based’ study of history and aesthetic form enable the generic evolution of music and dance alongside other forms of collective expression to be tracked and ‘explained’ historically in causal terms. This established model of research into cross-cultural development was exemplified in the context of the Bath Spa workshop by a doctoral project which studied the integration into Paraguay culture of the Polka as a dance form.

The Polka had taken on the status of a national symbol of Paraguayan identity. At the most

reductive level, it could then be argued that a key marker of ‘cultural literacy’ for a given sector of Paraguayan society was knowing how to dance the Polka, albeit in a manner somewhat different from its original, Polish form. The nature of the cross-cultural adaptation which had taken place could also be studied in more concrete terms through differences in rhythm and tempo reflected in written records as much as in sound recordings: a classic musicological approach.

The proposed research, however, went further. In line with the point that notational systems often reflected the power of political institutions, the researcher planned to investigate the factors which had led to the Paraguayan adoption of the Polka and, further still, the extent to which young people in Paraguay society saw this as a political counterpoint to their own desire for new forms of dance. His research was addressing a complex set of questions, each of which would demand a different methodology. These would range from historical archives: books, scores, commentaries, sound and video recordings etc. to live contemporary data, oral and on-line, derived from fieldwork testimony, twitter exchanges and so on which would capture the current attitudes shared by carefully selected populations. If successful, the work would undoubtedly inform the interdisciplinary approach demanded by research into the relationship between performance art, politics and cross-cultural translation on which cultural literacy depended. The complexity of the methodology demanded was, however, considerable.

Emotion and cognition: ‘understanding’ through participation



It is difficult to evaluate the appropriate balance between emotion and cognition or the part played by creative impulse as a component of cultural literacy. This is particularly true in the case of music. The implications of the above debate were addressed in a further presentation on the changes in the secondary school curriculum for music. As with other subject areas, this had been heavily influenced by the examination syllabus as well as by the mode of examination (e.g. the move to multiple choice). The mastery of metalanguage (technical

terminology) and its application to musical practice remained a crucial subject of debate. Did ‘musical literacy’ demand a knowledge of key notation, descriptions of tempo etc.? A marked shift in emphasis in UK syllabi had taken place between 1999 and 2012. Less importance was attached to historical knowledge and notation and more to ability in performance. More widely, the media, led by televised celebrity competitions such as *The X factor* and its derivatives¹⁰, as well as more socially engaged series such as ‘The Choir’¹¹ (see image), was playing a key role in promoting the trend towards performance¹².

¹⁰https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&channel=mac_bm&biw=1199&bih=765&ei=e2cPXdvrBfG78gKT3pK4Dw&q=tv+singing+competitions+uk&oq=TV+singing+competition

¹¹https://www.google.com/search?q=the+choir+bbc+gareth+malone&client=safari&channel=mac_bm&source=lnms&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiRw7GEwP_iAhWIxoUKHTmRC8EQ_AUICygA&biw=1199&bih=765&dpr=1

¹² see the critical comment relating to this often cited example of promoting communal solidarity through music:

https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=18&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwi3ayZwP_iAhUKV8AKHWu2D4oQFjAREgQIBBAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.independent.co.uk%2Farts-entertainment%2Ftv%2Fnews%2Fgareth-malones-new-series-is-a-sham-says-singing-surgeon-8122435.html&usg=AOvVaw2yl97zDJ-4GiLYa8KY7x50

Research on the longer-term impact of these different aspects of musical practice was especially important if the influence of different types of music on society at large were to be taken into account. One Bath Spa project focused on an analysis of *The Truro Male Choir*. It had highlighted the centrality of language and media in communicating musical ideas: motivation, the elicitation of performance, quality of output, etc. Its position was that the formal properties of music which underpinned performance were valuable, not simply as elements of shared knowledge in themselves but as a common cultural foundation which would facilitate the communication of musical ideas and extend performance skills.

As far as education was concerned, the extent to which a prescribed 'common core' was necessary or appropriate was left open. Nevertheless, the problem of balancing emotional appeal, cognition and knowledge could only be resolved through empirically informed, political decisions about the relationship between the development of individual sensibilities, group identity and social priorities. Musical knowledge was just one example of the wider issues associated with the promotion of cultural literacy alongside the communal value of shared performance. The Truro project highlighted the twin issues of understanding and content but without proposing a clear-cut solution. Further close enquiry informed by educational research was needed.

The artist composer as cultural mediator

All artists, and musical writer/performers in particular, fulfil an ambivalent cultural role. The issue of their personal creativity has already been alluded to. Equally significant is their position as culturally constructed figures, products of commercial and historical forces which have brought them to prominence, conditioning the form and content of their output, ensuring its promotion and dissemination and lending them status as personalities. The figuration of writer/performers as the products of identifiable processes, has gained in importance as a research field under the heading 'authorship', normally restricted to the field of creative writing but now applied more widely to mixed-modal forms of creation, including of course music. 'Authorship' entails not simply the traditional analysis of personal creative practice but, more interestingly, the interaction of writer/performers as cultural artefacts with audiences as actor/respondents in their own right.¹³ This is particularly relevant in the relationship between linguistic text and music. Obviously, poetry of whatever kind, music and song are intimately interconnected and find full expression in performance. It follows that the creative artist is only one element in a holistic experience involving production, *mise-en-scène* and the dynamic transaction between performer and audience. Reception is inevitably one of the main features of cultural literacy: both as an indicator of 'taste' and as a means of interpreting textual meaning.

Music, gender identity and inequality

A further presentation raised all the above issues with particular emphasis on gender identity and inequality. How these were represented had become an immediate challenge for song writers and performers, especially women. The impact of song writing in performance was changing as new forms of technology such as open microphones were facilitating co-performance, rendering creativity a more collective practice. This was a reflection of a macro-cultural development in which news-making, documentary and different forms of cultural expression were becoming increasingly dynamic and specific to a given time and space. This opened the practice of music-making, including song writing, to innovative forms of pedagogy in which both animator and learner could find forms of expression which reflected their immediate concerns – in this instance, gender inequality or other topics which a group felt were relevant and which could be negotiated. A correlation would need to

¹³ As a qualified analysis of this position, see Rebecca Braun et al. <http://www.authorsandtheworld.com/>.

be sought between differences in the forms of musical representation and the social structures of which they were the expression. It would be the task of the culturally literate researcher to demonstrate those links in negotiated experiential production involving the researchers and selected participants in a range of contextually specific projects (see Case Studies).

Puppetry and the virtual: a meeting place between creative writing, music, gaming, co-production and performance

The task set by the researcher on the particular project being presented was to reinterpret ideas emanating from a group of learners and by combining them with other materials such as folk narratives, video games, dramatic plots and so on, to create a new text. The researcher found herself by design in the role of co-operative cultural translator. She was both creator and participant. The original idea emanating from the learners could be modified and enacted by puppets created by the learning team. The activity brought together all the elements entailed by creative dramatic production, including mixing physical puppetry with digitally devised audio-visual effects. The performance could then be translated into video format. The virtue of this type of co-authorship together with collective collaboration in the creative process of 'making': scene design, mini set painting, musical track recording and so on – allowed for the richest meeting point between tradition and contemporary social concerns. It involved a stock of knowledge and its translation into an output at once physical and virtual which lent itself to easy dissemination.

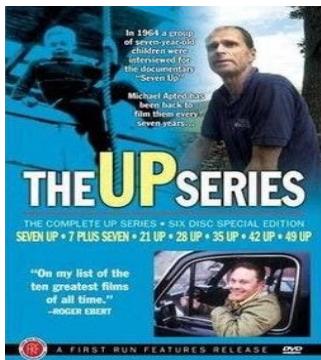
As the Bath Spa workshop progressed, it became clear that a number of overarching issues were coming to the fore. These would apply whatever form of cultural expression was the main object of analysis. Two in particular emerged in discussion: **sustainability** and **positioning**.

The sustainability issue

One of the most intriguing methodological aspects of relating group creativity and performance to longer term impact was to compare a previous experiment with retrospective analysis. The promotion of CL implied lasting change both on the part of a population who were acquiring skills through experience and reflection as well as educators whose professional responsibility it was to devise situations in which co-creative experience would lead to durable outcomes. The nature of the collective experience would not only affect the individual but would be designed to be transmissible to others within the same community at the domestic and professional levels. The verification of impact demanded reiteration and follow up.

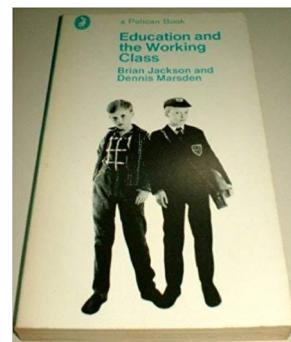
Another experiment described in the workshop was interestingly relevant to the point just made. Several years previously, invited trainee teachers had been asked by the presenter to co-compose a piece of music. The co-production process was designed as an example of creative pedagogy which they might replicate with pupils. The resulting co-composition was recorded. The research experiment which was now the object of discussion involved a new, more recent group of trainees listening to the recording years later. The trainees were invited to reflect on the changes in musical taste which had taken place in the meantime, the processes of composition, and their integration into education. The primary retrospective data of the research would consist of the recorded verbal reflections of the later generation on the design and outcome of the earlier experiment. It would raise questions concerning the pedagogical effectiveness of the teaching method and the cultural significance of changes which had taken place in the intervening period. The presenter had listened to the earlier recording and had been struck by how dated it sounded. She was inviting the group to consider in the light of her experience what might be learned about cultural literacy as an objective in musical education and how such material might best be exploited in the current climate for

training purposes.



The presentation underlined the paramount significance of longitudinal studies in musical education and cultural literacy in general. They were essential to evaluating the cultural impact of educational practice, despite the problems of implementation which they posed. Classic examples stood out: Marsden and Jackson's *Education and the Working Class*¹⁴, the still current Granada Television's celebrated documentary *Seven up*, a study of personal changes in outlook over successive decades based on successive face to face interviews¹⁵.

Although not the same as targeted investigation of specific pedagogical interventions, the potential existed for research into retrospective reflection on experimentally induced experience, one which could form key strand in the investigation of cultural literacy and its promotion through education.



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The cultural positioning issue

Underlying the discussion as a whole was the cultural specificity of the Cultural Literacy project itself. Who was asking the questions and what were the assumptions on which the questions were based? One discussant rightly argued that it was impossible to address the questions as framed without adopting a position on what cultural literacy meant for him. He needed to reflect further on the position that he would find most coherent in terms of his own cultural background. There was no obvious solution to this conundrum. As with Michel Foucault's celebrated opening to his 1970 inaugural address to the *Collège de France*¹⁶, a relative starting point (*episteme*) has to be adopted by the researcher in terms which are not simply a reflection of western-inspired post-enlightenment rationalism. Authentic ethnicity is non-universal by definition. The fragmentation of modern West European societies: the relationship between emotion, ethno-cultural identity, politics and the discursive markers which bear witness to it, are widely attested^{17 18}. These sources also point out that the globalisation of trade and the geopolitics of economic power generate a need for more diverse local identities whilst simultaneously militating against their durability. At the same time, spaces which are culturally self-sufficient are unsustainable without an adequate economic base. The impact of the global economy on local communities appears to be twofold. On the one hand, the international outreach of large corporations promotes more uniform patterns of consumption. On the other, especially for certain sectors of the disenfranchised and the elitist seekers for alternatives to unbridled neoliberalism, it engenders a increases the urge to affirm the ways of life which help to define communities' ethnic identities. Research is inevitably positioned. The only legitimate starting point is to acknowledge the forces which condition project design and methodology and, through action, to seek outcomes whose long-term benefit to particular populations can be clearly identified.

¹⁴ Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden *Education and the Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1964).

¹⁵https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&channel=mac_bm&ei=rMoVXZa4G73CgweqqLbIAQ&q=grand_a+television+seven+up

¹⁶ Michel Foucault *L'Ordre du discours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

¹⁷ See Jérôme Fourquet *L'Archipel français: Naissance d'une Nation multiple et divisée* (Paris: Seuil, 2019)

¹⁸ See also William Davies *Nervous States: How feelings took over the World* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2018)