

# From / to *International*

## Toward International-Mindedness through Interdisciplinary Music Instruction

**Abstract:** International-mindedness is defined in many different ways in education discourse. Some of the definitions include the ability to be open-minded and respectful of cultures and peoples or having an awareness of the interconnectedness of people not only intellectually but also with growing empathy. Do music educators have any role in helping students acquire and develop international-mindedness? We would like to suggest it is an essential part of music education and an exciting way to teach/learn about cultures and music. We describe eight strategies of an Internationalized Approach to Instruction (IAI) that can make learning cultural musics more meaningful, accurate, and exciting for teachers, students, and the community.

**Keywords:** culture, diversity, ethnic, interdisciplinary, international, Internationalized Approach to Instruction, multicultural

As the world becomes more interconnected through technology, business relations, and economic and political ties, the need for international-mindedness continues to grow. The generation of children currently sitting in classrooms around the world is entering a future unlike that of any past generation. These children will connect socially and professionally with people and organizations in every corner of the globe throughout their lives. How will these children get prepared to interact in an international society? What skills will they need? How will they learn how to creatively

and respectfully connect with people of a variety of cultures as they enter the workforce and become the leaders of families, organizations, and nations? How can our music education classes enhance children's development of international-mindedness?

The notion of international-mindedness figures prominently in the education discourse of international schools and the Swiss-based International Baccalaureate (IB) program. According to the IB deputy director general Ian Hill, an integral part of an internationally minded education includes understanding that people

*In an increasingly interconnected world, students need tools to help them deal with a wide variety of people and cultures. World musics can help them do this.*

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of different backgrounds hold different views, and students need to learn how to appropriately examine why they believe what they believe. This is what leads to understanding and respecting another point of view without necessarily adopting it. Furthermore, “mindfulness” in international-mindedness is about empathy, not just knowledge.<sup>1</sup> It is not something that can be taught in a particular class; instead it should be embedded in a whole curriculum.

Teachers have the opportunity to open the minds and hearts of their students to a variety of perspectives and ideas. According to International School of Milan headmaster and leader in international-mindedness development Terry Haywood,<sup>2</sup> international-mindedness has five characteristics that all children need, including: (a) a curiosity and interest in the human and physical geography of earth, (b) an openness to different cultural approaches (tolerance), (c) a scientific understanding that the earth is valuable and common to everyone, (d) awareness that people are interrelated, and (e) respect for differing cultural backgrounds.

Joelle Dale Rodway’s<sup>3</sup> thesis from University of Toronto on international-mindedness suggests that the most influential factors on the development of international-mindedness are travel, family, and education. Travel experiences are most significant when the traveler is immersed into the local culture in a foreign environment. Ideally, it would be best to provide our children with opportunities to travel and study abroad. Realistically, however, it is a not a common practice in American education. Families are also very influential in the development of international-mindedness, especially those who have lived abroad and families that are representative of recent immigration to the United States. According to Rodway’s findings, people who grow up in rural communities often have limited experience with people of different cultures. Education is also an influential factor and could be the only one, especially for students growing up in a monocultural environment. This is where the influence of

**FIGURE 1**  
**Strategies to Internationalize Instruction**

<b>Strategies to Internationalize Instruction</b>
<b>1. Local to Global/Global to Local</b>
<b>2. Contextualize Content</b>
<b>3. Present Multiple Perspectives of Content</b>
<b>4. Use authentic materials and practices as often as possible</b>
<b>5. Learn about connections and similarities, not only differences</b>
<b>6. Address multiple learning styles</b>
<b>7. Integrate across curriculum</b>
<b>8. Go in-depth into one culture before moving on to another</b>

teachers and schools is critical. The cultural exposures during school years, as well as international content, become powerful tools in the development of international-mindedness. Results of a Holmes and VanAlstine’s study indicate that even during a short period of instruction (a six-day summer choir camp), when middle and high school students study and perform world music, their international-mindedness grows and they develop more positive attitudes about world music and the cultures from which they come.<sup>4</sup>

Considering these findings, how can music education enhance the development of international-mindedness in children, or is this solely the work of the parents and classroom teachers? The answer to this question is certainly a resounding “We can do it!”—and we should do our best.

Most music teachers regularly teach world music activities. However, do these efforts really deeply affect our students or make them more internationally curious, understanding, and respectful? For example, would teaching a song from an Asian culture during one lesson and then teaching elements of African drumming during another lesson be enough for the development of international-mindedness? Surely not. How much is enough, and how deeply do we need to study a given culture, so that children can build meaningful

connections and respect for other cultures?

Current music series textbooks are filled with useful resources and suggestions for teaching about world musics. According to assistant professor of music education at Ithaca College Emily Mason’s<sup>5</sup> study of multicultural music represented in music series textbooks, the Macmillan McGraw-Hill textbook series for kindergarten through fifth grade for the years 1995, 2003, and 2006 encompassed a total of 3,665 songs representing 100 countries or regions throughout the curriculum, with 46.05 percent of the songs from the United States. The Silver Burdett Ginn textbook series contained a total of 4,000 songs from kindergarten through fifth grade for the years 1995, 2002, and 2005 for a total of 107 countries or regions represented across the curriculum, with 53.12 percent of songs from the United States. Can we successfully and knowledgeably teach activities from more than 100 countries/regions? Should we be doing it?

With the goal of moving students toward greater international-mindedness, we offer eight strategies of an Internationalized Approach to Instruction (IAD)<sup>6</sup> that will assist music teachers to develop internationalized and interdisciplinary music lessons (see Figure 1). Having used these strategies to guide instruction in K–12 and collegiate music classes and ensembles both nationally

## FIGURE 2

### Local to Global/Global to Local Strategy



and internationally, we have noted students' growth in their development of international-mindedness. Furthermore, preservice teachers' development of international-mindedness has also grown as students in music methods courses have created and taught lessons using these strategies.<sup>7</sup>

Although many of these strategies are likely self-explanatory, we would like to clarify them with some greater detail. We have included some ideas and resources throughout the strategies, but these ideas are not intended to be autonomous activities. Rather, they should be part of a larger unit or as a thematic focus of a portion of music lessons across a particular frame.

**1. The “local to global/global to local” strategy** (Figure 2) is designed to bring the local and the global into relationship. Teachers can go about this in several ways. Looking at the makeup of one's classroom population and community, the educator can choose musical cultures to be incorporated and explored in the music classroom. For instance, the music of an immigrant or ethnic population in the community could become a catalyst for the music curriculum (as well as other content areas). It will help “imaginative learners”—the ones who seek meaning and integrate experience with the self.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, it would be more meaningful for students to learn about the culture

of their classmates or neighbors than a culture they have never heard about. Connecting with its global origin at that point can connect the local culture on a global scale and stimulate (or connect with) interests in other areas of the curriculum, like social studies.

Another way to design the local to global strategy is to incorporate a culture in which you, as a teacher, have special experiences, expertise, or connections. Typically, people tend to be more passionate and enthusiastic about cultures, music, and people that are part of their own heritage, family history, or individual experience. Bringing personal stories and insights about cultures in which one has had an opportunity to visit, study, or work would give extra insights, excitement, and reality to the lessons. In this manner, teachers are able to share a great deal more context and meaning from firsthand knowledge or experience rather than simply reading the materials included in textbooks as the sum total of both their knowledge and curriculum.

On the other hand, perhaps a world event may stimulate new interest in a seemingly unrelated country or culture. This could become a springboard for exploration of a culture and music that might otherwise be very unfamiliar to the students. In other words, the sequence of learning world musical cultures varies widely depending on the teacher's cultural identification,

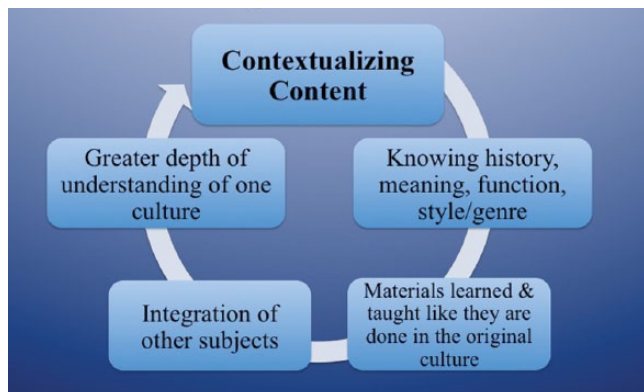
location, or a specific world event. When the tsunami hit Japan in 2011, empathy for the Japanese people spread throughout the world as we all watched the Japanese people contend with the ongoing problems associated with the devastation. This catastrophic event offered an opportunity to study the music and culture of Japan and allowed students in others countries to stand in solidarity with the Japanese people as they dealt with the aftermath of the tsunami. In this case, the global event entered the local classroom, effectively tying the two together. Depending on the circumstances, this approach may facilitate the development of greater international-mindedness.

**2. “Contextualize content”** (Figure 3) means just that. This is where visual art, dance, drama, social studies, and language arts (and perhaps other content areas as well) are intertwined with music instruction—within the walls of the music classroom. Providing context in terms of performance practices, history, genre, function, meaning, and culture requires an extensive study of the music and how it relates to the people and culture from which it comes. This requires a greater depth of understanding of one culture and its music than singing a song or two with little or no contextualizing might afford. Certainly, teaching world music as authentically as possible is a very challenging task. This includes how people in the culture learn and transmit music, notational systems, and how the music functions and is situated in traditions and actions. Teachers can look for opportunities to study music with culture-bearers (people who embody the musical culture of study as a member of the culture with musical expertise or experience) since music can best be understood through experience with the manner in which it is learned and taught.

For example, “Beriozka” (available in a textbook series)<sup>9</sup> is a popular Russian folk song commonly taught in the United States. Finding history and background of the song in English is a challenging task. However, if you can

## FIGURE 3

### Contextualizing Content



conduct research in Russian (perhaps with the help of culture-bearers) you will find the wealth of the materials. A little research can open a completely different meaning of this song. “Beriozka” (Birch Tree) is a traditional song for women. The first print version of the song appeared in 1790. The words of the song explain the pagan rite called “Semichnii obryad.” During this rite, young girls (just before the maturity birthday, approximately 18 years old) go to the woods. They find a young birch tree and break off the top branches (called “zalomati”). They decorate the zalomati with flower garlands. Finally, the girls dance the *horovod* (round dance) around the decorated birch tree. Teaching this song in an authentic context would involve teaching it orally, teaching Russian lyrics, and dancing the *horovod* in the final performance of the song/dance (the boys can play the recorder while the girls dance).

3. To “**present multiple perspectives of content**” helps students to gain greater insight into the many ways people can know and create music. Here again, exploring and creating different types of music in a culture would give students a variety of lenses to understand the music and culture. Students gain musical experience with a variety of styles and techniques as they acquire insights into the people and culture that originally created the

music. Many cultural musical pieces have “different lives.” Some songs are also famous as dances or have instrumental arrangements, and some songs have arrangements for diverse styles and genres.

For example, when learning the song “Beriozka,” students could also learn a popular folk dance by the same name.<sup>10</sup> Students could listen to the fourth movement of Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 4 featuring the theme of the song. The song “Beriozka” is also featured in the motion picture *Anna Karenina*.<sup>11</sup>

4. Being able to “**use authentic materials and resources as often as possible**” is an exciting way to connect culture-bearers and the classroom. Former Professor of Music Education at Boston University Dr. Anthony Palmer<sup>12</sup> provides a definition of “absolute authenticity” in the context of world music as: (1) performance by the culture’s practitioners, recognized generally by the culture as artistic and representative; (2) use of instruments as specified by the composer or group creating the music; (3) use of the correct language as specified by the composer or group creating the music; (4) performance for an audience made up of the culture’s members; and (5) performance in a setting commonly used in the culture. He suggests that authenticity be considered a continuum between absolute authenticity and compromise,

with emphasis placed on context and intent. It is impossible to reach absolute authenticity in the real classroom context; however, music educators can try to create the most authentic experiences as possible. If the music instruction begins with a local population, there are often excellent resources in terms of people who are musicians, community centers where one can meet people and learn about the music, and authentic materials in terms of songs, instruments, performance practices, context, and so on. Accessing these resources is a stimulating way to get students engaged in unfamiliar music and connecting with the culture of origin. For example, authentic resources and musicians from Russia can be accessed through Russian cultural and educational organizations in each state. Many universities have Russian clubs, and many larger cities have Russian Culture Societies or Educational Associations.<sup>13</sup>

5. “**Learn about connections and similarities, not only differences**” is an important aspect of international-mindedness. Cultures are different, certainly, but they also share things in common. Diving into music with greater depth often helps us to discover the things we have in common rather than leaving us with the sense that the music is so different, so *we* must also be disconnected or different enough to be incompatible and unrelated. When children learn new and unfamiliar music from another culture they learn it through the lenses of their previous knowledge and skills. We cannot disregard our own musical understanding, and teaching new musics through the concepts students already know is appropriate. Most of our students understand Western musical concepts such as pitch, melody, rhythm, form, and texture, so they can use these concepts when comparing the ways sound is organized in different kinds of music. Students also understand rehearsal and performance practices in the context of their own culture. Learning about and adopting the rehearsal and performance practices of another



musical culture can also be stimulating to musical ways of knowing and creating music, as well as conducive to connecting with a variety of learning styles.

For example, from the first author's experience while teaching a Russian Culture Unit it was useful to analyze the musical language of traditional songs. Russian music is based on Western musical concepts, and finding similarities in music would be an easy task. Some of the Russian songs found new life in different cultures. For example, the song "Those Were the Days" was credited to Gene Raskin who wrote English lyrics to the popular Russian lyrical song "*Dorogoi dlinnoyu*" (Long Road).<sup>14</sup> This song was composed by Boris Fomin (1900–1948) with words by the poet Konstantin Podrevskii. However, this song is well known in English-speaking countries from Mary Hopkin's 1968 recording, which was a top ten hit in both the United States and England. It would be useful to show students recordings of the Russian song and its American version and discuss how particular songs can cross boundaries to become a top hit in another culture.

Teachers can also demonstrate teaching practices that exist in Russian culture. For example, in Russia, fixed *do* solfège is the only system of teaching sight-singing. Would it be beneficial for older students to explain differences in different sight-singing systems?

**6. Learning styles, learning modalities, or multiple intelligences**—each of these characteristics emphasizes the different ways students learn best. Particular learning environments, strategies, and content will not ensure successful learning for all students just as a single shoe size does not fit everyone. We all come from inherently different learning modalities and styles, and most of us possess varying combinations in the manner in which we learn best. Each teacher's own learning style affects planning, teaching, and assessment as well as classroom management and environment. Most music teachers become experts in addressing "multiple learning modalities" in the development of many

kinds of musical skills like singing, playing, moving, and so on. An important strategy in an IAI, this is inherent in the musicing of many cultures and styles. Perhaps performance practices dictate the need to teach the music aurally. This can enhance the skills of students who are more confident in their music-reading skills and positively thrill the students whose aural skills are sharp. Perhaps movement is integral with the music, giving kinesthetic learners an opportunity to connect. Regardless, all of these possibilities give students a variety of musical experiences to enhance their musical development as well as their understanding of the music and culture they are studying. Providing learning opportunities that are reflective and active, verbal and nonverbal, concrete and abstract, head and heart knowledge will ensure that every type of learner is addressed and benefits from lessons.

**7. Integrate the music content in an interdisciplinary fashion.** Providing greater context and in-depth instruction than the music teacher can provide in the music class opens up the possibility of integrating the music instruction with other content areas. For instance, Chinese opera cannot really be understood or undertaken if the music is studied in isolation. The drama, visual art, and text are so completely part of what Chinese opera is that they are all necessary components of any study of Chinese opera. An interdisciplinary approach to music (in the music classroom as well as with the collaborative efforts of the social studies, visual art, and language arts teachers) will enable students to understand the music as well as its context in space and time and culture.

Integrating a unit on Russian culture with other subjects can be an easy and challenging task. Russia is incredibly rich in its history, literature, art, science, and dance. Depending on the age of the students, collaborations with language arts or classroom teachers can provide meaningfully interdisciplinary learning opportunities. For younger students, Russian folk tales, especially

tales by Alexandr Pushkin,<sup>15</sup> can be a great resource for integration. For older students, famous novels of Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Anton Chekhov, or Boris Pasternak<sup>16</sup> can be a great connection to the history and culture of Russia. Russian history is also rich and unique. Collaborating with social studies teachers can bring history and context to the musics you are teaching. Teaching about the famous Russian works such as the operas *Prince Igor*, *Boris Godunov*, and *A Life for the Tsar* or the 1812 Overture is impossible without some historical context. Learning about Russian modern history can help students understand different political regimes and concepts of a totalitarian regime and democracy. In our experience, students are also very interested in learning about the communist epoch of the Soviet Union and how the regime affected music-making, composition, and education.

**8. "Go in-depth into one culture before moving on to another"** is the final, overarching strategy. This means there is not only a commitment to contextualizing, but it also means addressing a multiplicity of musical learning opportunities, including different kinds of music, culturally relevant genres, and music-making practices. In any case, cultivating the characteristics of international-mindedness needs time and depth to develop.

It is unrealistic to assume that a teacher could use all eight strategies all the time. Perhaps one could choose one culture in which to focus each school year or each semester. The time required to find authentic resources and learn how to create and teach the music in culturally or historically meaningful ways is a time-consuming (but rewarding) endeavor. Perhaps other teachers in one's school would be interested in focusing on the same culture during the same time period, so the music teacher would not need to have sophisticated cultural expertise in other areas of the curriculum. For instance, if the language arts teacher were willing to study the folk tales, literature, and poetry of

the same culture, student insights into the poetic lyrics of their songs would be more valid and exciting. If the social studies teacher was also incorporating the same culture, students could gain even more insights into the society and culture, enhancing their understanding of the musical culture and songs they are learning in the music classroom. In addition, students would get the benefit of interdisciplinary instruction throughout their course offerings. Obviously, this cannot happen with all music content. If it could happen with just one or two cultures each school year, however, students could graduate from high school having engaged in-depth into as many as twelve to twenty-four different musical cultures! How would that affect their musicianship and their development of international-mindedness? How would it affect the musical skills and international-mindedness of us, their teachers? The possibilities are truly exciting!

All of these strategies can provide a framework for music education, affecting lesson planning, pedagogy, assessment—and ultimately, student learning. When students interact with unfamiliar musics, their experience affects how they perceive the people and culture. In-depth, authentic, contextualized lessons that make use of a variety of perspectives and learning modalities will help students make connections on many levels. Their understanding and respect for the music, musical practices, and culture will enhance their understanding and respect for the people of the culture as well as the development of their international-mindedness. As students enter an increasingly international society, their willingness to work with people of a wide variety of cultures and beliefs will hinge on their prior education and experiences and have a profound effect on their quality of life. As music educators, we can use the medium we love—music—to enlighten our student and effect change in their lives, both musically and as their music study informs their worldview. Can we do it? Can we afford not to?

## NOTES

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**“You never know where you’re going to end up when you play a musical instrument.”**

—Jim Jozwiak, quoted by Wailin Wong in “The Music Man,” a 2014 feature about the Chicago company Band For Today, published in *The Distance*, <https://thedistance.com/band-for-today>