

Preparing Global-Ready, and Interculturally Competent Graduates for the Music and Entertainment Industries

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Abstract

This paper investigates the impact of an international study tour abroad on Australian music and entertainment students. The study focuses on how an international music industry project impacts international, global, and intercultural perspectives of the student, and facilitates professional growth and personal development.

This study follows an engagement project between Queensland University of Technology (Brisbane, Australia) and the KM Music Conservatory (Chennai, India) since 2015. The project combines tertiary, industry, production, and a delivery model that plugs students directly into industry and exposes them to diversity and real-world learning in diverse intercultural environments. Australian and Indian students have the opportunity to develop skills in areas such as event management, marketing and promotion, administration, recording, performance, song writing, and production.

This paper focuses on the challenges, experiences, and outcomes of the project, and investigates what intercultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills Australian students develop through their study-abroad experience. Our findings suggest that study abroad experiences offering a professional lens as opposed to a tourist lens, provide transformative learning experiences for students. Deep immersion and a short time frame for delivering a successful project, was both confronting and rewarding for students, revealing how they adjusted their perspectives to operate both effectively within themselves and in interaction with others.

Keywords: music education, music industry education, intercultural competency, experiential learning, Queensland University of Technology, KM Music Conservatory

Introduction

Over the last ten years, researchers have studied music industry environments to assess the skills and knowledge required of graduates to transition into successful careers. These include emotional, social, intellectual, and musical competence (Chase and Hatschek 2010), and the ability to interpret the nuances of the industry, to be collaborative, productive, and adaptive (Bruenger 2015). These skills are particularly crucial for students looking towards music industry careers, not only because it is in a constant state of flux due to rapid technological changes, but also from a sociocultural perspective where the music industry, particularly in recent years has been called to address gender, racial, and class disparity.

Prior to the digital era, higher education's role was to prepare graduates for the local and regional economies, but now with a click of a mouse, the local workforce has become global. The focus in education has now shifted to preparing students to vie competitively in the global marketplace, thus preparing global-ready graduates who are flexible, adaptive, and interculturally competent people. The higher education sector's "internationalization" agenda recognizes that globally-focused experiences and literacies are central to developing culturally competent professionals, capable of operating in diverse communities and environments, both internationally and locally. According to Goldstein et al. (2006) students are demanding study abroad that offers greater scope for exploring broader international career possibilities while developing greater cultural awareness, personal growth, and intercultural communication skills.

While higher education music and entertainment courses are acknowledging the shifting requirements for graduates entering creative careers, (the development of both professional and intercultural competencies), there are few empirical studies offering international, project-based learning, which addresses the gap for how to build international pro-

cesses in the curriculum.

This paper aims to gain insights into the experiences of both musicians and music industry students involved in an intercultural music project (Australia-India) that begins with a semester-long virtual collaboration, culminating in an immersive two-week program in Chennai, India. Through insights gained, the research goals focus on whether project-based study tours can assist students to:

- develop the skills and attributes required for transitioning into successful music and creative industries careers, and;
- develop intercultural competency and awareness, while developing the ability to critically reflect on numerous issues in their own society.

What is Intercultural Competency?

There are myriad definitions of intercultural competency, however consensus across researchers in the field describe it as a set of skills and desirable educational outcomes for students in working towards a healthy and just world community (Dimitrov, Dawson, Olson, and Meadows 2014). In a more practical sense, Bennett's (2008) definition can be useful for the purpose of this paper, summarized as "a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction a variety of cultural contexts" (95). If Paracka and Pynn (2017) argue that intercultural competence goes beyond a superficial binary of similarity and difference, to find deep, meaningful relationships, then this is a key goal for students entering the professional, local and global music communities.

This rings true for Australian students who live, and will mostly likely work, in a country rich in cultural diversity, a country home to the world's oldest indigenous culture, together with another 270 ancestries from around the world (Australian Human Rights Commission 2014). However, this does not automatically make for interculturally competent students, and requires intercultural training to give students the opportunity to appreciate the complexity of another culture, in order that they might have a greater understanding of their own culture. In this way, awareness of others increases self-awareness, leading to the development of skills needed to understand cultural difference and engage effectively and appropriately (Paracka and Pynn 2017).

Research into the Australian music industry revealed that male advantage is a pervasive feature, with radio playlists, festival line-ups, industry awards, peak bodies, and major industry boards dominated by male voice (Cooper et al. 2017). It has also been highlighted the critical role Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists play in Australia's mu-

sic identity (Australian Government 2020), however First Nations music is rarely heard on Australian commercial radio. In 2015, only two percent of works programmed in contemporary music, theatre, and dance across Australia comprised First Nations performing arts (2016). Now, more than ever, we need graduates who are socially engaged and connected musicians and industry workers, with the knowledge and skills to drive the Australian music industry forward in equitable ways.

Setting the Scene

In 2015, I was awarded an internal grant through the Queensland University of Technology to pilot a project in India informed by an existing experiential learning model and research project, the Indie 100, which previously ran for seven years. The Indie 100 is a large scale recording project that records and promotes 100 songs in 100 hours. It brings together local and national industry figures, three-to-five hundred local musicians, and around seventy students from music, entertainment industries, management, marketing, and law. It served as an intensive "classroom" for students and brought them in contact with professional producers and local artists, inducting them into the intensity of a commercial production environment (Graham et al. 2015).

The singer/songwriter rock tradition in India is very young. At the time of its emergence perhaps thirty years ago, the industry was predominantly focused on the Bollywood industry, leaving the independent scene to emerge underground without the affordances of a music industry structure we know in the West (Kelman and Cashman 2019). The internal funding received in 2015 provided an opportunity to partner with Earthsync (an Indian independent music and film organization) to stage a mini Indie 100 event at their IndiEarth XChange conference and tradeshow event (the Indian Ocean region's answer to events such as SXSW and BigSOUND) that might help to unearth and expose Indian independent musicians and filmmakers. The first Indie 100 India album was released, attracting further funding through the Australia-India council to continue the project the following year. The project expanded to include the KM Music Conservatory, a higher education institution based in Chennai, India. In 2015-16, we were a team of two Australian and two Indian producers, two QUT Music production students, and a group of interested KM students wanting to learn more about recording and production. In 2018, I was awarded a mobility grant through the New Colombo Plan to fund twelve students' participation on the project in India. In 2019, without mobility funding, the project still attracted 14 students who self-funded the trip. The project is now sustainable through a study tour program.

How it works

The study tour has two components:

Part One: Creative collaboration, performance, and recording between QUT and KM music students.

Music-making collaborations start online in July each year and are realized and refined in person once the students arrive in Chennai in November. Students also find new collaborators upon arrival, and so begins a buzz of creative synergy, learning, and the formation of lifelong friendships and networks. QUT and KM music production students work together to produce and record the works, and the QUT and KM music business students capture the collaborations through the creation of short-form content posted through various social media channels, as well as staging four live events in venues across Chennai while engaging local press and radio.

Part Two: Indie 100 India

The music business team works together to curate the Indie 100 India event. This starts a few months before the actual trip. This involves calling for applications from independent artists across India, scheduling and organizing the event in Chennai, capturing the event through social channels, engaging press and radio, staging of a live showcase event, data wrangling, and administration. As a side note, in the following year, a new student team from QUT will finalize, promote, launch, and distribute this album before commencing the next Indie 100.

Music production students become assistant producers during this part of the study tour, and music students continue to work on their own collaborations but are also available to work as session musicians for the Indie 100 project where needed.

During the study tour, students are also offered opportunities to attend any classes at KM, and special workshops on Hindustani music are included on the official schedule. Aside from these workshops and the first meet and greet session, the students quickly organize their own timetables for the two weeks. No official sight-seeing tours are organized, however before the trip commences, the students post activities or onward travel they might be interested in doing in their Facebook group. Each year, the students have been highly absorbed in their work, rehearsing with their collaborators around the clock, performing in live events, and socializing with their new friends. In both years of the study tour, there has been little to no interest in tourist activities.

Berg et al. (2012) found in their research that short-term study abroad programs do not improve intercultural competency, while Rennick (2015) cited highly successful examples due to instructors designing experiences around learning goals rather than simply putting a student in a new

place. While there is reason to be skeptical that deep cultural adjustment and the development of meaningful relationships could happen in two weeks, this project seems to turbocharge this due largely to the fact that music is the facilitator of intercultural training, and high-stakes, risky, real-world outputs are the goal.

Methodology

Similar to Budge and Butt's (2010) approach to understanding the experiences of international study and fieldwork, this paper has used a qualitative approach inviting participants to complete a structured, post-travel questionnaire of fourteen open-ended questions. These questions have been designed to allow students to reflect on their experiences, in particular on their cross-cultural encounters and personal transformation. More specifically the questions gave students the opportunity to reflect on their personal assumptions before and after the trip; learning about culture and one's own culture, beliefs and values; approaches to creative collaboration in intercultural contexts; challenges faced while on the trip; the preparation for, and length of the trip; and making connections between what they learned on the trip in the context of their career aspirations. Over the years 2018 and 2019, 26 students from Australia participated in the study tour, and 24 students completed the questionnaire. Anonymity has been applied throughout the presentation of findings in this paper.

Many quantitative analytical tools have been created by researchers in the field to measure intercultural competency (Bennett 1986; Elenkov and Pimentel 2008; Fink 2013; Hammer 2012) but given the small cohort of students, and the short term of the study tour, this paper does not aim to measure levels of intercultural competence, but rather aims to gain insights into the experiences of those involved as first steps towards greater cultural awareness and personal growth.

The discussion section of this paper will be guided by Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence which aims to target knowledge, skills, and attitudes that lead to visible behavior and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions.

Discussion

Across the data, the students provided rich descriptions of their learning in relation to *working in a new environment, collaboration, creativity and communication, doing things differently, and career preview*. This discussion uses Deardorff's model to provide insights into the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that students developed during their participation on the study tour project.

Working in a New Environment— Nothing Runs On Time!

A key learning that reappeared consistently across the data set were a set of assumptions around India as chaotic and disorganized. Every student recognized the differences in perception of time, in particular frustration was observed early on in the trip around most activities, rehearsals, and events running late.

Unpopular opinion: there's a surprising amount of order in what appears to the Western eye as utter chaos. What I'd previously thought was disorganization turned out to be organisation with more community focused prioritisation.

According to the Deardorff model, this excerpt reveals some sense of cultural knowledge, through the understanding of cultural differences. The student also demonstrates a disposition to be proven wrong—Deardorff categorizes this as an attitude of openness (withholding judgment), and possible skill development in critical thinking through the recognition of assumptions.

Similar reflections across the data show how students demonstrated knowledge of cultural self-awareness, applied skills of observation and evaluation using patience and perseverance, and developed a discovery attitude seen through a willingness to move beyond one's comfort zone.

The biggest challenge for me was time—India time. It was a big adjustment for me because I'm always super punctual, so going to a place where time is so fluid and everything runs really behind schedule was a challenge to get used to. Several of our sound checks began an hour or more late, which meant the gig was also late. However, I eventually just accepted it and started to just follow the rhythm of the KM students.

These types of realizations have the potential to lead to internal learning outcomes for the individual. In this case, the student learns to be flexible and adaptable through shifting their priorities and being less rigid.

Collaboration, Creativity, and Communication

Throughout the collaborations, students expressed the complexities of communication and the need to adapt quickly in order to be productive. The following shows the student articulating differences in verbal communication, and in particular, a local direct, and explicit style. These are considered in the Deardorff model as the development of sociolinguistic awareness development.

Indians are very to the point when they speak. In collaboration I quickly learned not to take criticism

personally. That was something I overcame and I felt like it helped my workflow immensely.

In fact, quite a few of the students used the term “work-flow and productivity” throughout their reflections, and this particular example highlighted the student's ability to minimize distortion and misunderstanding to enhance the efficiency of the collaboration. The following excerpt again shows sociolinguistic awareness through non-verbal communication, but both excerpts provided here identify students applying listening and observational skills and showing an attitude of respect and openness.

I learned that everyone's experiences of the same event are different. That communicating with body language can be really helpful when there is a language barrier (e.g., I noticed the “head bobble” which confused me at first, but picked up on these nuances as the trip went on).

In this last section excerpt, we can see how the developing cultural knowledges, skills, and attitudes are leading to internal outcomes of empathy, deep relationship formation, and flexibility in work style. Deardorff (2006) summarizes this as “effective and appropriate behavior within intercultural situations,” in particular the ability to adapt one's behavior to the desired objective by sparking positive and ongoing engagement with interlocutors.

It made me more aware of the importance of fun. It would have been easy to just get caught up in all the nitty gritty details, however, it was through the fun things and the relaxed moments of collaboration and conversation that really made artists/producers gel together which helped the songwriting and the performances, as well as our ability to understand how people communicate and work together. In the future, I will build on that more relaxed approach and try to ensure that whatever projects I'm working on still allow space for that sense of community and camaraderie. It makes such a difference in the overall vibe of the project through building a sense of trust within the team and stakeholders.

Doing Things Differently

Work ethic and approaches to creativity were consistent themes across the data, in particular students were very inspired by the work ethic of their Indian collaborators, leading to some personal changes in motivation and commitment from my students when they returned home—again showing how students were reflecting on their own culture and ability to integrate other ways of knowing. Deardorff refers to this as cultural self-awareness, in particular, the

ability to articulate how experience shapes one's worldview. The following excerpts also reveal how students were starting to develop skills of discovery and curiosity, asking bigger questions about their own culture and how they might adopt other worldviews:

- They all had a really strong drive and work ethic.
- It definitely inspired my work ethic, and I realise I am capable of taking on a larger workload than I thought I previously could.
- Since returning, I've begun to attend more live events and indie music events, and diversify my musical taste slightly to include more genres/artists.
- I have become interested in doing further research into how exposure to different musical styles affects peoples' ability to communicate effectively.

Another behavioral skill fundamental to the development of intercultural competence is empathy. Calloway-Thomas et al. (2017) define empathy as the ability "imaginatively" to enter into and participate in the world of the cultural "other" cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally (33). This particular excerpt below shows that through the collaborative process of music-making, a student was able to develop empathy, in appreciating the struggles and realities of another person's situation.

On one hand I want to be more relaxed and create without consequence, embrace curiosity and play, try to recapture the childlike wonder that comes in the early days of music...this is coming from seeing people follow music from their love of it, in the face of dire opportunities.

Empathy has been considered the moral glue that holds civil society together (Calloway-Thomas et al. 2017, 32), and is an attribute or skill that we seldom identify in our lists of student attributes or graduate capabilities. The opportunity to develop empathy in different cultural situations is considered a fundamental skill for graduates in our program who we aspire will move into music and entertainment careers, conscious of stereotypes and prejudices, and cultural differences.

Career Preview

The context of this real-world project required students to collaborate both in intercultural and interdisciplinary

ways and meet a set of industry outcomes in the form of live events, recording and production, and music promotion and distribution. This created an intense and productive environment. While students were stressed and exhausted at times, they valued the experience and considered what the experiences meant in terms of their own emerging careers. One student commented, "Learning how to work with other people in unfamiliar environments was a valuable skill to learn", another student explained that the experience had, "given me insights into how I might adapt to different and changing conditions," while another student explained the potential benefits of such an experience as, "being able to apply this new knowledge and tolerance in future situations." In terms of Deardorff's intercultural competence model, these insights show students' attitudinal development of discovery—that is the ability to reflect deliberately to eke out multiple meanings. This is particularly pertinent to today's graduates. While the world is more complex and interconnected, and diversity forms the fabric of modern society, Eswaran (2019) reminds us that there is also a growing polarization fueled by identity politics and the resurgence of nationalist ideals. Experiences that shape our students' perspectives have the potential to see them create healthy workplaces in the future that promote and support diversity and inclusivity.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that a study tour, which adopts a professional lens as opposed to a tourist lens, with offerings of real-world, industry experience, through creative and interdisciplinary collaboration develops musicianship, business skills, and intercultural understanding. The nature of this particular study tour required deep immersion and a short time frame for delivering the project deliverables, and the data revealed how students adjusted and adapted to operate effectively within themselves and with others.

While the cohort size was small, and the duration of the study tour in Chennai was only two weeks, it is difficult to claim that students developed intercultural competence, however, there were clear indicators across the data of students articulating cultural difference, demonstrating empathic, adaptive, and flexible behavior, and affective attitudes of openness, curiosity, discovery, and respect.

The creative vehicle of both music making and music industry could be seen as the facilitator that turbocharged this process of intercultural awareness. Kinship, friendship, shared interests, love of music, and a two-way flow of inspiration between the Indians and the Australian students made the process of coming together to produce a body of expected project outputs faster and more efficiently. Godwin (2019) in her study of immersive, cultural programs for musicians, acknowledges that offering time and space for

relationships to develop can foster a deepened sense of intercultural awareness and responsibility essential for ethical encounters with difference. This was an important feature of the Australia-India study tour, ensuring that students had ownership over the project, with complete flexibility to organize their own itineraries in conjunction with their Indian collaborators. In other words, to adjust to, and operate within, India time.

At the time of writing about these intercultural experiences, which have been afforded by travel and student mobility funding, we are now faced with a period of time (the COVID-19 global pandemic) whereby international travel is not possible, and even mobility within one's own state or country is restricted. Questions arise around how we might facilitate the development of intercultural competence and facilitate encounters with difference within our own music and creative industries programs without the need for funding or travel. This year we are running the Indie 100 India project as a virtual program, and while this is experimental, the music business students are encountering similar experiences to previous students (albeit slower) as they collaborate online to produce and release new music.

In January of this year, Cheryl Guerin, Mastercard Executive Vice President, spoke at the "Designing a Better Music Industry for Women" event. In her discussion of workplace inclusivity and diversity, she simply stated, "We all do better when we surround ourselves with diversity of thought" (Garcia 2020). The overarching goal for the inclusion of project-based study tours in our program is to develop graduates who are culturally competent professionals capable of operating in diverse communities and environments, both internationally and locally. Importantly, in Australia, we aspire for our graduates to be socially engaged and connected creative professionals who will drive the industry forward in equitable and just ways.

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