

Traditional Music in the Age of Global Technology—A Virtual Project that Discusses ‘Traditional Music’ in the Americas

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Introduction

This paper discusses the creation and execution of a virtual project entitled “*Traditional Music in the Age of Global Technology*.” The project, which emphasizes music and culture, strengthens collaboration among secondary schools and facilitates the distribution of information among students and teachers throughout the Americas. It relies on the usage of software and computer technology to create a common ground for students and teachers to share researched data over the internet. It also enhances distance learning and global education, allowing students and teachers to use websites and multimedia for instruction.

Communication, Internet, and other Cultural Issues

In the 21st century communication is playing an important role in the global allocation of information; for instance, the media (news paper, television, radio, etc...) has helped us to increase our knowledge and awareness of different peoples throughout our hemisphere, consequently transforming our perspectives of the world. However, it is not until our personal involvement, through travels and studies, that we become aware of the world outside our geographical boundaries.

Recently, the increased usage of computer technology and internet to communicate information is creating a new vibrant form to engage people to share information. Computers are transforming the way people learn and use information and are becoming an essential tool for learning. The Internet continues to expand, and on a global scale, is becoming the most viable and efficient method for sharing information. Will this new dynamics affect the way we learn and understand other peoples and cultures? The answer to this question might depend on how information has assimilated or transformed into knowledge, and on our ability to process and retain that information; to actualize it.

Undoubtedly, the internet has become the validating vehicle for communication and the leading communicative method for the future. The internet and technology transform the human experience by placing people in experiences outside their own community almost instantly. This method not only allows the exchange of information, but also transforms the way we interact with other cultures. It's significantly transforming the lives of those who operate and use technology to gain knowledge. Consequently, it is changing the way people experience life, relate information, and ultimately socialize.

The Dutch Anthropologist Geert Hofstede, in *Exploring Culture: Exercises, Stories and Synthetic Cultures*, 2002 offers a broader definition of culture—one that includes all the patterns of thinking, feeling and acting, which one learns from early childhood. These patterns distinguish the members of one social group or society from another. It is important to distinguish culture, something that is learned, from human nature and from individual personality. While people from one culture may share certain customs and attitudes, individuals within the group still have unique personalities. Not as uncommon as we might think, behavior or attitudes of students from other cultures bewilder teachers; sometimes teachers attribute the puzzling characteristics to a foreign culture, when actually the characteristics may be unique to the individual or common to all humans. If a teacher finds that a student lacks motivation, he or she may presume all members of that culture are lazy. Misunderstandings such as this can hinder effective communication and delay the objectivity of the internet technology as a resource for learning and education.

It is very important to make careful distinctions between cultural characteristics and individual personality traits. Hofstede calls culture "software of the mind." His analogy suggests that culture shapes the way humans behave, think, and feel just as programming determines how computers behave. Although music is said to be a universal language that can be shared and understood by all, its meaning is not. The meaning of music is culturally bonded and linked to the culture in which it thrives. The broader definition of culture, now aided by technology, might affect the way we view our own culture, understand others, and describe ourselves. This redefinition and redirecting of the meaning of culture might imply that one individual can either have "more" or "less" culture depending on how the story has been narrated. It is also because of the

advancement of mass media and modern communication technologies that we are “rethinking” the process of sharing information, and through internet projects like this, we will be able to present concurrent explanations of people and culture in other parts of the world, while at the same time rethinking our views and understandings of them.

PGL

Approximately two years ago I learned about the PGL (Partnership Global Learning) program through Dr. Sue Legg, a colleague at the Center for Latin American Studies and the former Director for PGL at the University of Florida. PGL is an initiative, international in scope, designed to produce technologically enhanced and distributed learning on a global scale. It involves collaboration among K-12 schools and universities to conduct e-learning research applications and conduct training. Partnership Global Learning focuses on the creation of a broad-based learning community for technologically accelerated economic, social, and cultural development. The mission of PGL is to build international e-learning communities supported by tools, content and delivery mechanisms based on the integration of state-of-the art scientific learning methodologies using information technologies. It provides support for training for online instructional design, content development, and the implementation of technology. A distinctive characteristic of the program is to stimulate students and teachers to research topics of common interest, and to create a data base of information on the web. Through collaboration, faculties develop and share educational content online and participate in joint classroom activities.

To conceptualize the project I reviewed PGL’s main web page at <http://pgl.ufl.edu/> and looked at other information resources that could help me with ideas to develop the application of my own project. I also searched the “*Departamento de Informática*” at the *Universidade de Campinas* (UNICAMP), Brazil WebPages, and the University of Florida Center for Instructional Technology and Training (CITT).

After learning that the possibilities of PGL becoming the conduit for the “*Traditional Music in the Age of Global Technology*” project, I realized that working with students from different regions of the Americas was going to be challenging and as well as, an opportunity to see how these students would exchange information and learn

from each other. The project is very attractive because all researched data come directly from the students' research of their own community. Furthermore, it is a good opportunity to explore the following issues: challenging the technical and computer technology centers to provide the necessary links and connections for students to share data, stimulating teachers and administrators to guide and coach students; supporting the students' creative process in how to present internet-based projects, and engaging students from different cultural and language backgrounds to communicate information.

The Project

The following institutions were invited to collaborate with the project "*Traditional Music in the Age of Global Technology*": University of Tampa, Florida; Universidade Estadual de Campinas (UNICAMP), São Paulo; Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio), and the Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (Mexico). The participating secondary schools were: Santa Catarina in Mexico, Colégio Estadual Fernando Magalhães & Instituto de Educação Professor Ismael Coutinho, Brazil, and Tampa-Gaither High School Tampa-Middleton Magnet High School, in the USA.

The students used their institutions in reference to connect to the web and exchanged data and information through the PGL's technical support center in Tampa supported by Bill Rook. All data and digital information, such as digital pictures, mp3 files, and media files were sent by e-mail or downloaded to blackboard. Blackboard www.blackboard.com is a web-based platform that offers customization and interoperability, allowing for the integration of information among its users. In the last week of April 2005 students and teachers from the Tampa, Florida area met for a live video conference and project presentation with the participating schools in Brazil and Mexico. They presented their researched information to each other and spoke about their personal experiences in finding information, conducting interviews, recording live music, and taking pictures.

The project is designed to guide students and teachers to investigate music and culture from their own backyard, music that represents their lifestyle and culture. The first function of music, especially in these areas, is to produce a feeling of community

connectivity by voicing social and cultural characteristics of its people. Thus, the project “*Traditional Music in the Age of Global Technology*” primarily investigates the involvement the local communities have with their music and culture. Suggestions are: music that represents a village or city; music that depicts a specific religious ritual or festival (ceremonial music); music that is performed by the local families; music that celebrates a specific holiday or cultural event. The most reliable resources for this type of research are often community leaders, ministers, priests, teachers and schools, musical families, and other local musical associations.

The goals for the project included:

- Improving student basic literacy skills by using a technology-enhanced approach to collaborative learning;
- Strengthening teacher skills in integrating media resources in their classrooms; this will focus on transferring material to the World Wide Web and integrating the Web and television resources into instruction;
- Increasing student motivation to learn by allowing students to define media-rich projects that can be published on the web;
- Improving student awareness of their own region of Brazil, Mexico, and the USA, and increasing their sense of connectedness to other regions and to the world.

Project Tasks

The tasks are a layout of information to be used as resources in the elaboration of your research design. They also can help with the organization of the data you collected. As you investigate its content, the questions should explain the music and its fundamentals. The number of participants should not exceed a maximum of 30 people (estimation) and should be divided into “class” groups of 5-7 participants, including one or more mentoring teacher per class. My suggestion is to have the tasks split by the number of participating students. For example: a group of 4 students from Brazil, USA, and Mexico looking to answer task A. They can send the information to one another for evaluation and comparison and later post the information on the Web.

For the schools in Mexico and Brazil where English is not their first language, an English teacher should be available to facilitate the exchange of information, and later to aid in the final video conference. It is also important to be creative in developing and narrating your own story. That means take advantage of technology and digital information, such as music files, digital pictures, and do narrate your story. It is not necessary to follow the tasks in the order I propose below.

Research Tasks

- A. Geographically show and describe your school, city, and region. This “show and tell” should reveal aspects of the region such as geography, types of population, ethnic background, and colonization. Ideally, this information should steer the reader to identify and to differentiate the regions.
- B. Define your topic “traditional music” within the scope of your research. Interviewing community leaders or local composers can provide insightful information for your topic. Use audio or video examples to illustrate your research. Perhaps your informant (s) will be willing to play or sing a composition of their own.
- C. Elaborate on how and why your “traditional music” is important for the music makers (musicians, singers, composers) and people (audience) of your region, state, and country. What does it stand for in your community? Who is affected by this music? How?
- D. What are the musical instruments or voices used in the music making process? Do the participants make their musical instruments? If so, explain. Do the musicians and composers have a preference for a musical instrument? Why? Is gender important to the music? Explain.
- E. How do the members of your tradition learn to play their musical instruments? How are the songs composed? Are they improvised?
- F. What is the singing text about? Translate a song text and illustrate your answer.
- G. Who are the musicians, singers, and composers of your music?

- H. Is religion part of your research topic? Why? Does religion affect the way music is performed or how the community relates to music?
- I. Is the music performed indoors or outdoors? Who are the listeners (audience)?
- J. Does music mediate personal relations among the music makers and performers? How?
- K. Closing Statement: Synthesize your researched topic and why it is a true representation of your traditional music.

Musical Project

This is the music itself. These tasks are intended to focus on the musical aspects of a performance. It should include a music teacher. The purpose of the musical project is to enhance and to back up the researched project with examples (transcription, translation, musical recording, etc.) Types of tasks:

- A. Transcribe (notate) to sheet music an example of melody used by your informant;
- B. Explain and notate the type of harmonic accompaniment used for your “traditional music” (musical instruments, singing);
- C. Analyze and write the vocal and instrumental lines (who are the singers or instrumentalists in the recorded melody); who plays the accompaniment?
- D. Define the structure or form of a traditional song: melody, harmony, and rhythmic accompaniment.

Supporting Information

This is complementary information that could be used on the final webpage, giving the students another dimension of their researched topic.

- A. having music recordings available to download (mp3 files);
- B. providing digital pictures of music instruments and groups as they perform;
- C. linking your topic of research to other similar webpage;
- D. discussion list (What are people saying about this music);
- E. traditional music events (concerts and performances in general) associated with your researched topic.

Closing Statement

Access to educational technology for children and adults from all socio-economic backgrounds is still limited. But a combination of media formats (TV and Internet) offers a low-cost high-quality approach to student learning. Engaging students in learning through media activities and programs like PGL is not only exciting, but has the advantage of relating basic education to the development of more advanced technological skills. Converging technologies are the future, and it is now possible to experiment with this integrated delivery system in the schools and universities, thus reaching a wide audience. The project “*Traditional Culture in the Age of Global Technology*” is another way to tell stories about culture and to teach about music; it is a training ground for future projects and an opportunity to educate students about music and culture from their classroom. I cannot imagine that the future of Internet communication is limited solely to information, or to shared news or music. The new directions for the internet and international collaboration levels the field of information by connecting distant peoples and setting up the ground for new methods of teaching, which can incorporate international education as part of the curriculum.

REFERENCES

Gert Jan Hofstede, Paul B. Pendersen, and Geert Hofstede, 2002. *Exploring Culture: Exercises, Stories and Synthetic Cultures*. Intercultural Press.