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Shaping imagined communities through music: Lessons from the *School Song* practice in Nepal

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Abstract

This study attends to the global need to rethink how music education could provide opportunities for shaping imagined communities in times of intensifying societal complexity and diversity by exploring the practice of singing 'school-specific songs' in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. The methodology combines educational ethnography with Appreciative Inquiry, whereby individual interviews with school administrators, musician-teachers, a school founder and a composer were analysed and reflexively interpreted. Countering previous critical research on school-specific songs, this study shows that although the school-specific song practice originates outside Nepal, the songs are tailor-made to canonise each school's unique vision and mission, and for teaching values and character, and were thus considered to be local. Through considering the new ideas and practices that emerge through a reflexive interpretation of the school-specific song practice, we discuss five perspectives that arose from the Appreciative Inquiry process: the universal right to aspire; developing reflexivity; the pedagogical paradox of rituals; a continuum from individual to collective goals; and a constantly changing 'we' in diversifying, complex societies. The study suggests that rituals in schooling, of which school-specific songs are a part, should be applied reflexively and subject to ongoing critical reflection and constant revision.

Keywords

Collective values, community, imagined community, music education, rituals, school songs, Nepal

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Introduction

This study attends to the need to rethink how music education could provide opportunities not only for fostering individual growth, but also for shaping a sense of community and collective values in times of intensifying diversity and uncertainty. We interrogate the singing of 'school-specific songs,'[1] a practice introduced to us during our visits to Kathmandu Valley private schools, against the previously well-acknowledged but currently hidden, or randomly recognised, potential of music in schooling in contemporary western music education research. Hence, we ask whether the epistemological silence about collective values in the era of post-nationalistic contemporary music education has constructed what Bauman calls 'value indifference' and 'moral blindness' in terms of who we want to be and how we treat each other (Bauman & Donskis, 2013). As societies face increasing diversification and 'diasporization' (Bauman, 2017, p. 16), our educational visions risk pairing 'a "we" against a "them"' (p. 19). We therefore propose that there is a need to re-consider the kinds of imagined communities and collective identities that are constructed in and through music in schooling (Westerlund, 2017; Westerlund, Partti & Karlsen, 2017).

Little international research on school-specific songs exists, and this literature either provides a description of the songs (e.g. Butcher, 1951 in England) or of composing them (e.g. Bolden, 2006 in Canada; Edwards & Dendler, 2003 in the USA). In some instances, literature on other subjects includes reference to the songs (e.g. Lum, 2009 in Singapore; Ochiagha, Acheve, & Iloeje, 2015 in Nigeria). None exists in Nepal. This literature often pairs school-specific songs with collective practices in school rituals, such as singing the national anthem. Such songs represent what British sociologist Basil Bernstein (1977) called the *performance ritual of schooling*; they themselves form the ritual, or are part of regular rituals, and thus contribute to the 'macro rituals' of schooling (McLaren, 1999, p. 81). In recent years, school-specific practices and 'methodolatry' (Regelski, 2002) have received criticism by many music education researchers.

The most prominent critical study on school-specific songs was carried out by educational researcher and postcolonial theorist Cameron McCarthy in the 1990s. In his analysis of the British influence on schooling in the Barbados, McCarthy (1999) argued that school-specific songs are 'an apparatus of social normalization' (p. 153) – 'a borrowed or imposed tradition' (p. 156) that has been 'handed down … during the extended period of British colonization' (p. 153). He further argued that school songs are 'a special form of musical high kitsch' (p. 170) that embody paradoxes. They not only promote 'individual school definition' (p. 158) and foster 'school solidarity, consensus, and group identity' (p. 157), but also 'a constructed loyalty to empire' (p. 170). Furthermore, he found that school songs fabricated the class divide. Whilst the songs of the 'inferior' (p. 166) primary and comprehensive schools emphasised hard work and industry for working-class children, the songs of middle-class grammar schools promised a better social future with 'no explicit reference to work' (p. 166) also situating the child 'as an autonomous agent' (p. 166). Consequently, school-specific songs 'embody ideas of ownership of knowledge, ownership of fate, [and] emancipation through learning' (p. 170). This emancipatory purpose of schooling has also been identified by Benedict Anderson (1983) in '*Imagined Communities*', where he argues that schooling is not simply for knowledge of different disciplines, but also about character building and learning societal values–ideals of future citizens. In this way, schools are constructed around particular ideas of imagined communities, community values and morals.

Research questions

Based on the assumption that school songs as rituals may be used in Nepal to intentionally shape the imagined community, this reflexive educational ethnography poses the following research questions.

1. How and why are imagined communities created in Kathmandu Valley schools through the school-specific song practice?
2. What global lessons might emerge through a reflexive interpretation of the school-specific song practice in the Kathmandu Valley?

As part of the larger transnational project *Global Visions through Mobilizing Networks*, these questions became crucial during our work in the collaborative development of music teacher education in Nepal, where school rituals, such as the school-specific song practice, could be seen as reflecting how daily life in Nepal revolves around rituals.

Context

Nepal is characterised by extreme diversity, as it currently recognises 126 caste/ethnic groups, 123 languages spoken as mother tongue and ten religions (Government of Nepal, 2012). Nepal's long history of social stratification based on gender, caste, ethnicity and race fuelled a decade-long civil war (1996–2006), followed by widespread interest in 'social exclusion, inclusion, and inclusive democracy … for ending the discriminatory social order' (Bhattachan, 2009, p. 12). This can be seen in Nepal's education policy, where 'the vision of school education is to prepare citizens dedicated to promote and protect democracy and human rights' (Government of Nepal, 2007, p. 32). Moreover, one of the national educational objectives is to 'be insightful to social equality and justice and develop conduct accordingly to help create [an] inclusive society' (p. 31). In these objectives 'inclusive education means to understand and respect others, respond to educational needs and include the experiences, interests and values of children of all strata' (p. 34).

Methodology

Beginning with an anticolonial stance (Patel, 2014), we engaged in 'critical work' which 'encourages ethically laden creative alternatives to normative rationalities and normalizing practices' (Kuntz, 2015, p. 25). Combining *educational ethnography* (Pole & Morrison, 2003) with *Appreciative Inquiry* (see e.g. Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2005), we sought not to 'simply describe the world as it is' but 'to challenge it' and 'point to possibilities beyond our current constructions' (Kuntz, 2015, p. 26). We thus pursued appreciative knowledge of a local practice unfamiliar to us, to apply to 'productive critique' (Kuntz, 2015, p. 109) of a wider, global phenomenon. While the combination of critical reflexive work and Appreciative Inquiry may appear paradoxical, Kuntz (2015) argues that 'critique [is] endlessly optimistic [in] that we might locate where dominant perspectives of the world fall short and thereby make available new, previously unarticulated practices of everyday life' (p. 26).

Empirical material

The empirical material for this study was generated primarily through individual interviews guided by Appreciative Inquiry with six school administrators from five different private schools, one school founder, one composer and seven musician-teachers. As part of a larger research project, schools were initially selected that were known by our Nepali partners to offer either curricular or extracurricular music. On occasion, visits to these schools led to information regarding other schools offering music. With music as a curricular subject being in its infancy throughout Nepal, the only schools identified as offering music were private schools, which account for approximately 42% of the schools and 39% of the student population in the Kathmandu Valley (Ministry

of Education, personal communication, 14 December 2018) and 19% of the country's education system (Ghimire, 2018). It was on these school visits that we first encountered and became curious about the school-specific song practice, which we were informed is exclusive to private schools in Nepal, and that most, but not all, private schools have a school-specific song.

Because of the close tie between Nepali names and caste/ethnic identity, we use A (administrator) or T (teacher) with a number, or C (composer), to represent interviewees rather than pseudonyms. Some of the interviews were conducted by both authors and exclusively about school songs, while others were conducted by the first author only and also addressed other topics related to the larger study. Interviews were in the language of choice of the interviewee, and an interpreter was used when needed. No students were interviewed. The 30- to 100-minute interviews were based on open themes including the origins of the school-specific song practice, the rationale for having one, and descriptions of the song and its teaching, learning and performance practices. The audio-recorded and transcribed interviews were translated into English when needed. Additional material includes school song lyrics from five schools, observations and recordings of school song performances, and informal conversations between 2013 and 2016.

Analysis

Our first stage analysis sought appreciative knowledge of what was to us an unfamiliar practice. We then engaged in reflexive interpretation (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009), leaning on the generative principle of Appreciative Inquiry, to consider 'what might be' and how this knowledge could 'be used to generate images of realistic developmental opportunities that can be experimented with on a wider scale' (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987/2005, p. 362). As such, we aimed 'to imagine or enable new practices that extend from newly possible forms of knowing' (Kuntz, 2015, p. 25). To this end, the empirical material was reflexively interpreted at several levels, including the complex context of Nepal and the wider context of diversifying societies worldwide, the empirical material from the whole research project, and against theory, including that of socio-cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996, 2004).

Ethical issues

Informed consent was obtained from all interviewees through verbal agreements in combination with signed consent forms. In addition, all five schools granted permission via a Research Permission Contract signed by school administrators. As this sub-study forms one part of a larger research project in which all participating schools and interviewees were promised anonymity, and due to the small number of participating schools, song examples and long quotations from the lyrics are not included. A number of school songs from Nepal can, however, be found on YouTube. Interpreters, translators and external transcribers also signed confidentiality agreements. A local musicologist verified the interpretations.

Creating imagined communities

Although the missions, visions and music programmes of the private schools in the Kathmandu Valley vary tremendously, there are some similarities in how they use their school-specific songs to construct an imagined community amidst extreme diversity and aims to diminish ethnic and caste-related inequalities. We here highlight three themes that address the first research question. The school-specific songs (a) are tailor-made for each school; (b) canonise the school's vision and mission; and (c) are means for teaching values and character.

Tailor-made

Each school song is unique and created specifically for its school. Although very few interviewees could identify the origins of the school song practice in Nepal, many suggested it was the influence of the Indian education system including the missionary schools in India, with the school song then coming to Nepal through people, such as school principals, who had studied in India. While some songs are 'made in the early days' (T2) of the school, new songs are composed all the time, as private schools without school songs choose to adopt the practice. In each of the interviewees' schools, the creation of the song began with writing lyrics, often by, or in close collaboration with, the principal and/or founder of the school. Lyrics had also been written by teachers, a famous writer or poet, and, in one of the schools by a student, after 'many students wrote and [the current song] was selected' (A3). School song lyrics were either in English or Nepali, since the practice is limited to private schools where English is usually the main teaching language. One school had one song in Nepali for the younger children and one in English for the older children.

The melody of the school song was usually composed by one of the school's music teachers, a local musician, or 'one of the famous musicians of Nepal' (A3). One musician-teacher explained, 'some schools have asked me to compose once I started working there … [The teachers] provided the lyrics. And based on that, I had to come up with the music' (T6). Similarly, the composer described being given the lyrics and instructions to make an 'exciting and catchy' song and then composing according to the age and capabilities of the students. He then recorded the songs with professional singers, providing the school with one vocal and one instrumental track. He noted, however, that most private schools do not have the budget this requires.

Although the school song practice originated outside of Nepal, most interviewees considered the songs to be local music, 'not westernized' (A3). The composer described using a 'Nepali style melody,' and how the songs 'promote' and 'reflect Nepali culture'. However, this was not always the case, as one musician-teacher explained, 'whether [the melody] is to be composed as a western melody or folk depends on the lyrics' (T6). Indeed, he perceived some school songs to be clearly western:

> *The song that was composed by the previous music teacher is played by a different group of students using Pianica.* Bansuri *and* sarangi[2] *are not used …. There is no scale matching* bansuri *and* sarangi. *It is played in a very minor scale. It is based on western melody. It does not touch my heart. So I haven't given much attention to it.* (T6)

Canonising the vision and mission

The Kathmandu Valley private schools have diverse visions, philosophical foundations, religious affiliations and tuition fees, and the school song lyrics express each school's unique set of values and principles. School songs describe 'who we are, what we do, our mission, and our vision' (A3), and since 'every school has different rules and values … [the school song] is different in every school' (T7). Indeed, administrators frequently distinguished their school from other schools, and this distinction was reflected in the school songs. One administrator described, for example, how whilst the song aligns with the school's explicit philosophy, as it is 'about students' experience … in a little flowery manner', unlike in other schools the lyrics are 'about childhood memories, our students' memories' and do not explicitly 'include the learning philosophies and the promises' (A2).

Although all the interviewees' schools had a school song, its teaching, learning and performance practices varied. In some schools it was sung every day in morning (outdoor) assemblies, whereas in others it was alternated with the national anthem, patriotic and/or 'value songs'. Decisions

regarding performance practices often considered emotional factors, such as not wanting the students 'to feel bored' (A4), and health/safety, as '[they are performed] every day … but not when the weather is not suitable' (T7) and 'sometimes it's really sort of unfair to have the kids standing up in the assembly with the sun up' (A6). The school song is also sung during other occasions and events like Parents' Day, drama shows or sporting events. School songs were described as being learned not during music lessons, but informally with 'a trial and error method' (A2). One administrator stated, 'first we will sing, and slowly … [new students] will see … and everybody [sings]. In the assembly … everybody does the same' (A4). Sometimes, however, the school song was taught by senior students (T6), or with the help of a music teacher 'whenever the need arises' (A3).

Teaching values and character

Whilst earlier research implied that as 'part of the taken-for-granted life of … schools' school songs 'are often dismissed, even by ordinarily insightful school critics, as mindless school routine' (McCarthy, 1999, p. 157), in the Kathmandu Valley, school songs were not simply seen as rituals that implicitly carry values but taken as means for *consciously teaching* values and character. Indeed, interviewees articulated the importance and effectiveness of singing for socialising students into school values. A musician-teacher noted how 'most of the children … really enjoy' singing the school song (T1), while a principal described how the music and singing makes students feel 'energetic' and 'awake' (A4). Another explained that, 'when I tell the students to 'love their neighbour', they may not. But when we put it in lyrics and sing it every day, it touches … all the senses … It is more powerful' (A3).

The interviewees described school-specific songs as belonging to the category of *value songs*, songs that build local and national collectivity, and include patriotic songs, house songs, and class/grade-specific songs. Some of the school-specific songs show commitment to Nepal with lyrics like *becoming educated and obedient will develop our country* and *carrying hopes and dreams in honour of our nation*. Many praised education in general and encouraged an overarching value, 'affection' (C) and pride for the school itself. Other values promoted by the school songs included knowledge, wisdom, intelligence, and excellence; hard work, obedience and respect for teachers; and morals like 'the ability to separate good from bad' (A2), positivity, understanding, caring, sharing, kindness, strength and creativity. Moreover, unity, inter-religious value-education and education into mutual respect and solidarity was central in some schools, which had created practices, the school song amongst them, to engage with issues of diversity. As such, school song lyrics used language of belonging such as *being united, brotherhood, linking arms* and *walking together hand in hand*. Some paralleled the garden discourse that opens the National Anthem, *Woven from hundreds of flowers, we are one garland that's Nepali*. One administrator explained how the school song 'instills a sense of belongingness' by describing the school as 'a garden' and 'the students as the flowers' (A6). By contrast, one administrator not in favour of the school song practice asserted, 'You are dealing with so many kinds of people in the school … how can you put them into that little box through that song?' (A1).

As Nepali society undergoes rapid change, other value songs have changed. Class-songs in government schools 'praising the Royal family,' for example, have been 'eliminated' or replaced by 'patriotic songs' (C), and 'even the national anthem has changed' (A2). However, as the school song functions as 'the logo of the school' (A2), this logo cannot be changed without changing the identity of the school. As an accepted 'apparatus of social normalization' (McCarthy, 1999, p. 153) that reveals the '"deep grammar" of school culture' (McLaren, 1999, p. 3), the school song has become an expected feature of Kathmandu Valley private schools to a degree that those wanting to do things differently may face resistance.

Global lessons

In considering the new ideas and practices that might emerge through reflexive interpretation of the school-specific song practice in the Kathmandu Valley, we discuss five perspectives that arose from the Appreciative Inquiry process: the universal right to aspire; developing reflexivity; the pedagogical paradox of rituals; a continuum from individual to collective goals; and a constantly changing 'we' in diversifying, complex societies.

Lesson 1: the universal right to aspire

Whilst it could be argued that the Kathmandu Valley school-specific song is a colonial practice (e.g. McCarthy, 1999), our inquiry suggests that it condenses local values, both national and school level, and has therefore become 'vernacularized' (Appadurai, 1996), in the same way as cricket has become a characteristically Indian sport. As already discussed, Kathmandu Valley school songs are tailored specifically for their particular school and written and composed locally. The school-specific songs in the Kathmandu Valley therefore remind us that knowledge-creation is always a dynamic play between what already is and what might be, and thus the social and cultural capacity to aspire (Appadurai, 2004) should be nurtured in *all* music education contexts, including the *majority world*.[3] Indeed, Appadurai (2004) argues that 'culture is a dialogue between aspirations and sedimented traditions' and thus 'by looking at aspirations as cultural capacities, we are surely in a better position to understand how people actually navigate their social spaces' (p. 84).

Importantly, the school-specific songs also remind us that people in the majority world have the same right to be influenced by cultural flows as those in the west. Appadurai (2004) contends that 'no culture, past or present, is a conceptual island unto itself, except in the imagination of the observer' (p. 62), but rather that 'the boundaries of cultural systems are leaky, and that traffic and osmosis are the norm, not the exception' (pp. 61–62). As earlier practices in Nepal strongly aimed to prevent cultural exchange, internally through the caste system, and externally through 'a policy of *selective exclusion*' (Liechty, 1997, p. 7), even sharing music with people of other caste/ethnic groups is a relatively recent phenomenon. Instead of encouraging change through cultural exchange and interaction, however, music education research and global policy (see e.g. UNESCO, 2003) commonly, and sometimes solely, promote the preservation of the musical practices of traditional communities and those in the majority world. Rather than focusing only on preservation and imposing ethnic musical labels on musics and students, music in schooling could also aspire to nurture inclusive, collective values and imagined communities. Thus, instead of over-emphasising the importance of knowledge and meanings from the past or from fixed cultural systems, there ought to be space for music education in *all* contexts to strengthen visions for novel, perhaps more democratic, collective musical meanings (Westerlund, 2017); meanings such as those of the Kathmandu Valley school songs, which are directly related to the local context.

Lesson 2: developing reflexivity

This study, as part of the *Global Visions through Mobilizing Networks* project, is based on collaboration across cultures and countries through dialogue. As already mentioned, we approached our work in Nepal from an anticolonial stance, and aimed not to erase local knowledge and practices to be replaced by our own (see Patel, 2014). This said, philosopher Amartya Sen (2009), while acknowledging the 'undoubted importance of "local knowledge"', argues also for the value of global knowledge in contributing to 'the debates on local values and practices' and in '[making] us reconsider our own understandings and views' (p. 407). Importantly, he stresses that listening to

'distant voices' does not require that we accept or even respect every argument or proposal from abroad (p. 407). However, this study has reaffirmed how researchers, through the power attributed to their position, may affect the context in question in unexpected and unintended ways. Indeed, Appreciative Inquiry recognises that inquiry *is* intervention. As Watkins, Mohr and Kelly (2011) argue, 'the seeds of change—are implicit in the very first questions we ask' (p. 73). In other words, 'the first question we ask is fateful in that the organisation will turn its energy in the direction of that first question, whether positive or negative' (Watkins et al., 2011, p. 73).

As we met with administrators from the private schools to ask, among other things, about the school song practice, our questions stimulated reflexivity not only in us but also in the interviewees. One of the school administrators noted that the school song had gone out of practice in their school but that they were thinking of re-implementing it after we raised the topic during our previous visit. Having done their 'own research here' following our initial questions, we were told 'you appreciated it, so we realised that it's a good thing to have a school song. So maybe it should be revived' (A5). Our initial response to this was one of concern, as we had not aimed to legitimate the practice through our work, only to pursue understandings of it. As such, it was a reminder of not only the productive power of research, and the questions we ask, but also the power carried with us as white researchers from a foreign university. Similarly, in another school when we asked if the school song had always been the same, the principal of this progressive school reflected that maybe they should revisit their school song to check if they still agreed with its message. He acknowledged, 'it's not that we never discuss this, but then we don't have a structured, formal way to talk about it … But then that's a good idea' (A2).

Lesson 3: the pedagogical paradox of rituals

Recalling the centrality of rituals in daily life in Nepal, Kathmandu Valley school songs remind us to consider contextual matters when envisioning music education. If school is a critical microcosm of society, as philosopher John Dewey argued (Dewey, 1986), then it is logical to think that rituals should also be central in Nepali schools. Moreover, if we accept that rituals express emotions and relationships, and that they create community through playful elements, as anthropologist and education researcher Christoph Wulf (Wulf et al., 2010) has argued (see also, Nikkanen & Westerlund, 2017), rituals should be seen as quintessentially important in schooling in general. Wulf contends that through rituals, 'we enact who we are, how we understand our relationships to other people and the world and the implicit knowledge that guides us in an embodied way' (Wulf et al., 2010, p. 157). Although the songs and rituals in Kathmandu Valley schools are not part of the curriculum, they are consciously used to crystalise the values of the school, and although they are not necessarily considered part of formal music education, often relying on peer-learning, they involve regular, if not daily, music making.

As Nikkanen and Westerlund (2017) demonstrate, however, rituals in schooling involve a 'pedagogical paradox' in that they both conserve and transform society (p. 119). Indeed, Appadurai (2004) describes rituals *not* 'as the meaningless repetition of set patterns of action, but rather as a flexible formula of performances through which social effects are produced and new states of feeling and connection are created, not just reflected or commemorated' (p. 81). Nikkanen and Westerlund (2017) warn that school rituals and their music 'are in constant danger of being canonised, unchanged, and unreflected' (p. 122). Indeed, even though the Kathmandu Valley private schools often try to transform society by, for example, introducing more progressive teaching approaches, the school songs do not change over time and thus act to conserve the schools' values. In a majority world context such as Nepal, it is perhaps even more clear than elsewhere that developing schools and music education goes hand in hand with attending to the fast pace of change,

necessarily foregrounding 'the future in our understandings of culture' (Appadurai, 2004, p. 62). Thus, in all contexts, we ought to 'critically re-evaluate the underlying values of the music in the rituals' (Nikkanen & Westerlund, 2017, p. 123).

Lesson 4: a continuum from individual to collective goals

While recognising both the importance of rituals in schooling and the necessity for their constant reevaluation, the school songs remind us of the need to problematise the dichotomy between the individual and collective, a recent construction of the western academic world. Although schools in Nepal do need to think about how to bring individual knowledge creation into the curriculum and classroom practices, there is no need to repeat the history of western music education that dramatically wiped out the goal of imagining communities from academic discussion and interests. Policy makers in Nepal could avoid making the journey other countries have made to extreme individualism and the purely musical, only to return decades later to rediscover the power of communities and peer-learning through socio-constructivism or theories of informal learning. In Finland, for instance, the new national music curriculum for general education has seen a return of rituals, festivities and collective experience with music playing a powerful part. Indeed, music education globally could be built on a continuum from individual cognitive to collective goals at the same time as it constructs the collective identity and the school community *in* and *through* music.

Collective performances are one site for rethinking how music education could provide opportunities not only for fostering individual growth but also for shaping a sense of community and collective values. Performances in Kathmandu Valley private schools, for example, were found to contribute to the legitimation of music's place in the schools (Treacy, Timonen, Kallio & Shah, in press). In some cases, this caused concern as one of the interviewed administrators lamented 'A lot of schools are not really imparting good music education … it's always centered either around the program or some show or event' (A6). However, considering a 'good music education' in terms of a continuum from individual to collective goals means that performances could be more than 'pleasant but relatively trivial entertainment' (Reimer, 2000, p. 26) to please paying parents or serve as publicity for the school. They could also be more than opportunities to demonstrate student learning, and teachers' teaching. Indeed, collective performances could be imagined as belonging to the more general benefits of joint activities, benefits that have been largely overlooked in education (Bruner, 1996, pp. 22–23). As such, these performances, and the preparation for them, could emphasise peer-learning and the quality of student experience, aiming at music making that not only develops skills and abilities, but also provides a sense of enjoyment, pride and identity from participating in community events. The intellectual tradition that disregards the socially oriented and collective features of music experience on behalf of extreme individualism may have come to its end, but there is still a need to acknowledge that there may be a variety of imagined communities that can shape today's music education and vice versa. A more holistic view is needed for reflecting critically on educational practices.

Lesson 5: a constantly changing 'we'

John Dewey argued that a community is not only what we see around us, but also what we want to become part of and develop together with others (Dewey, 1984; Westerlund, 2002) and that '"we" and "our" exist only when the consequences of combined action are perceived and become an object of desire and effort' (Dewey, 1984, p. 330). As already described, in the school songs we see the collective power of music being used consciously for building the imagined community, through canonising the school's vision and mission, and consciously teaching values and character. The school song thus reminds us that schooling is not neutral, nor can it morally be just about anything. Rather music in

schools is political, both in and out of music lessons. Acknowledging this can allow schools and teachers to critically reflect on the visions, missions and values of music education in diverse and complex societies. Furthermore, if rituals condense the values of societies, then we ought to pause and consider the kinds of rituals we have and what their underlying values are in relation to societal change.

This kind of reflexivity has become sought after by policy makers as the European Union, for instance, has recently called for action focused on integration as a response to the current situation of 'anxiety about rapidly changing communities and the perceived effects this change has on national and cultural identities' (Vision Europe Summit, 2016, p. 54). EU policy now calls for countries to 'move away from narrow concepts of integration and community cohesion, and towards a richer and more inclusive, yet perhaps more realistic, objective in which a constantly changing "we" creates ever more robust and resilient communities' (p. 65). This objective is equally pertinent in Nepal, a post-conflict state characterised by extreme and highly complex diversity (Hangen, 2010) and persisting informal discrimination (Lawoti, 2012). It is also highlighted in the inclusive values written into educational policy (see Context above); inclusive values, which may require that some aspects of tradition be left behind. In this sense, we might take another look at rituals, and in particular the 'creative, productive, generative quality of ritual' which Appadurai (2004) identifies as 'crucial to consensus building' (p. 81). As a whole, this may require 'a culture of dialogue as the task of education' (Bauman, 2017, p. 24).

Concluding thoughts

While our starting point for this study was the need to better understand how contextual issues in Nepal frame both schooling in general and Nepal's emerging formal music teacher education, our curiosity about an unfamiliar phenomenon – the singing of 'school-specific songs'– led us to critically rethink our own contexts. Hence, we are not arguing that this practice is either good or bad, rather that it is one example of a paradox requiring critical reflection. Indeed, this paradox reminds us that *all* of our taken-for-granted practices ought to be subjected to ongoing reflexive rethinking. This requires music teachers and music teacher educators to constantly engage their capacities to aspire and inquire into not only their own practice, but also the practices, long-standing or recent, in their schools. This is particularly important as, although various rituals such as school songs may be absent from official policy documents, they likely remain in practice. While school songs in the Kathmandu Valley demonstrate the use of music for shaping 'we' through community building and creating an imagined community, in learning from the practice we should also remember that such practices must be applied reflexively, and open to constant revision, perhaps welcoming increased community-wide participation in this process. If music educators are indeed to respond to the current quest posed by policy makers, we must give space for ongoing dialogue and re-negotiation towards 'a constantly changing "we"' (Vision Europe Summit, 2016, p. 65) so that our rituals and repertoire do not become focused on a fixed, and imposed, vision of who 'we' are, or once were.

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Notes

1. We use the term 'school-specific songs' to refer to those songs used by schools as a school anthem or alma mater song, not to refer to a repertoire of music used in school music lessons, sometimes also called school music.
2. The *bansuri* is a bamboo flute and the Nepali *sarangi* is a bowed string instrument.
3. The *majority world* is a concept used by Dasen and Akkari (2008) to challenge western ethnocentrism and recognise that the rich, industrialised nations of the west and north actually form the minority in terms of global population.

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