

Aesthetic Education Infiltration or Superficial Sightseeing? The Predicament and Breakthrough of the World Music Course as a General Education Subject in Universities

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Abstract: *The world music course in university general education has long faced a structural predicament: under conditions of limited class hours and large class sizes, the course easily slides into the superficial “world music landscape exhibition” mode, in which aesthetic education goals are hollowed out by knowledge coverage. On the basis of diagnosing four deep-rooted problems—content “patchwork logic,” teaching “tour-guide model,” evaluation “knowledge trap,” and “expectation game” between students and teachers—this paper redefines the specific connotation of “aesthetic education infiltration” in the general education context. It argues that the core of this course is not knowledge coverage or skill acquisition, but cultural touching, embodied experience, perspective transformation, and life connection. Accordingly, this paper proposes a breakthrough path of “achieving depth through less and slow,” including restructuring the course from “traveling around the world” to “thick description of individual cases,” flipping the teaching method from “explanation first” to “experience first,” organizing content around “core questions” instead of “knowledge point listing,” and reforming the evaluation system from knowledge-based tests to reflective outputs. These measures aim to provide both a theoretical and practical framework for multicultural music teaching in the general education context.*

Keywords: World music, General education, Aesthetic education infiltration, Thick description of individual cases, Curriculum reform.

1. Introduction

In the general education curriculum system of universities, world music is usually positioned as a humanities literacy course aiming to “broaden cultural horizons and cultivate diverse aesthetics.” Such positioning points to grand educational goals: understanding world cultural diversity, cultivating cross-cultural empathy, and forming an open and inclusive cultural mindset. Music, as an embodied and affective medium, offers a uniquely direct entry point into the lifeworlds of others, potentially bypassing intellectual resistance and fostering immediate connection to distant cultural realities. Unlike purely textual or visual media, musical sound envelops the listener, resonating with bodily rhythms and emotional registers in ways that can evoke empathy before conscious judgment intervenes. This affective immediacy makes world music a particularly promising vehicle for aesthetic education in the general education context.

However, in actual teaching practice, a common predicament persists: the course typically lasts only one semester (about 30 class hours), students come from all majors with varying musical foundations, and class sizes often exceed seventy or eighty, sometimes over one hundred. Under these constraints, the course easily degenerates into a “world music landscape exhibition”—using geographical regions as clues, each week hurrying through one or two representative music genres of a country or region, supplemented by pictures and videos, and ending with a closed-book memorization examination. The pressure to cover a vast amount of content, combined with the logistical impossibility of individualized experiential learning in a large lecture hall, exerts a powerful pull toward superficial treatment. Teachers facing this pressure often feel they must choose between comprehensive coverage and

genuine depth, and the systemic incentives frequently favor the former.

On the surface, such a course is not necessarily unsuccessful: students generally find the content interesting and the process easy. Yet if we ask whether the aesthetic education goals have truly been realized—whether students have been touched by a foreign culture’s music, whether they have reflected on the constructed nature of their own aesthetic standards, and whether they have developed genuine curiosity and respect for cultural differences—the answer may not be so optimistic. The distinction between “enjoyment” and “infiltration” is critical: enjoyment can be passive and superficial, while infiltration implies a deeper penetration that alters perception, feeling, and attitude in lasting ways. A course that merely entertains without transforming may still be valuable as recreation, but it falls short of the educational ideals inscribed in its own syllabus. It is precisely this gap between stated goals and actual outcomes that constitutes the central problem addressed in this paper.

If a general education music course merely pursues “broadening knowledge coverage” while neglecting “touching the spiritual world,” it deviates from the original intention of general education to cultivate a “complete person” (Guan Jianhua 2013). The 2020 Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Aesthetic Education in the New Era explicitly calls for aesthetic education that “focuses on stimulating students’ artistic interest, developing artistic imagination and innovative consciousness, and cultivating students’ healthy and uplifting aesthetic taste and aesthetic style”. This policy mandate signals a clear shift away from knowledge transmission toward experiential and dispositional outcomes. This paper confronts the predicament directly, not by

demanding more resources or smaller classes, but by asking how, within realistic constraints, the course can be redesigned to maximize the likelihood of genuine aesthetic and intercultural learning. The argument proceeds in three stages: diagnosis of systemic causes, redefinition of “aesthetic education infiltration,” and proposal of practical strategies for curricular, pedagogical, and evaluative reform.

2. Diagnosis: How “Superficial Sightseeing” Becomes a Systemic Predicament

The superficiality of the world music course is not an individual teacher’s negligence but a systemic predicament formed under the interweaving of four factors: course design logic, teaching method inertia, evaluation system orientation, and expectation game between teachers and students. These factors reinforce one another, creating a self-perpetuating cycle that resists piecemeal reform. Understanding their interaction is the necessary first step toward designing effective countermeasures.

2.1 The “Patchwork Logic” of Content and the Structural Deficiency of Depth

The most common course outline is organized along geographical regions: Week 1 introduction, Week 2 East Asia, Week 3 Southeast Asia, and so on, covering major cultural regions in fifteen weeks. This “encyclopedic” arrangement is rooted in “coverage anxiety”—teachers hope to expose students to as many music cultures as possible within limited time, worrying that omitting any region would make the course incomplete. This anxiety is understandable: every music tradition has intrinsic value, and teachers fear being accused of arbitrariness or cultural bias if they select only a few. They also worry that students will leave the course with glaring gaps in their knowledge of the world music map.

However, this good intention creates a structural deficiency of depth. Each cultural region has only one week (at most two) of teaching time, which inevitably limits understanding to the “introduction” level: displaying instrument pictures, playing one or two iconic pieces, and summarizing key features in bullet points. Under such time pressure, complex musical systems are reduced to a handful of easily memorized facts. Indian classical music, with its centuries-old theoretical treatises, intricate raga system, and spiritual dimensions, may be compressed into a brief explanation of sitar and tabla followed by a single recording excerpt. The rich social history of West African griot traditions may be reduced to a mention of the kora and a brief note about oral transmission. Students may learn that the gamelan is from Indonesia and the shakuhachi is from Japan, but they will have no sense of how these instruments function within larger musical and cultural systems.

The cognitive consequences are predictable. After one week, students move on, and previous knowledge is quickly forgotten. Cognitive psychology has long demonstrated that shallow processing—passive listening to briefly presented information without active engagement, elaboration, or emotional connection—produces weak and transient memory traces. In a course that never returns to previously covered

material, there is little opportunity for consolidation. By the end of the semester, students may retain only a hazy impression of having “visited many countries” without being able to articulate anything meaningful about any single musical tradition. The breadth of knowledge is achieved at the expense of depth of understanding, while the goal of aesthetic education can only be realized through depth. This structural contradiction lies at the heart of the “sightseeing” phenomenon.

2.2 The “Tour Guide Model” of Teaching and the Student’s Role as “Sightseer”

Accompanying patchwork content is the “tour guide model”: the teacher is the guide, the PPT is the brochure, and students are passive sightseers. The process is highly formulaic—explain geographical and historical background, show instrument pictures, play audio or video clips, summarize musical features. This model is efficient for large lectures and capable of delivering a large amount of information quickly. For orientation and overview, it is serviceable. The problem arises when it becomes the exclusive mode of instruction for a course whose stated goals include aesthetic sensibility and intercultural empathy.

Students remain in an external perspective of “observing the other,” rarely having the opportunity to perceive musical logic through bodily participation. They watch videos of Balinese gamelan but do not feel the bronze keys vibrating under their own mallets. They listen to recordings of West African drum ensembles but do not experience the physical coordination required to maintain a complex polyrhythmic pattern in synchronization with others. They hear descriptions of Tuvan throat singing but do not attempt to produce the low fundamental and high overtones in their own throats. This absence of participation is not a minor inconvenience; it constitutes a fundamental misrepresentation of the very music being taught.

One core insight of ethnomusicology is that the essence of many non-Western music traditions lies in “participation” rather than “presentation.” The significance of African drumming lies not in the rhythmic patterns listened to, but in the community cohesion experienced by village members during collective drumming. The wonder of gamelan music lies not in the beauty of the melody, but in the collective sense of time created by the precise interlocking of multiple instrumental parts in each other’s temporal gaps. When such participatory music is transformed into an object to be watched, its most core cultural dimension falls away (Luo Qin 2021). What students encounter is a sound specimen stripped of cultural texture, not living musical practice. The starting point of world music teaching should not be “knowledge about music,” but “experience in music” (Campbell 2004). The core challenge of general music education, including general education courses, is precisely how to transform “listening to music” into “experiencing music” (Abril and Gault 2022). This requires moving beyond the role of information provider to become a facilitator of musical encounters, designing situations in which students participate bodily, emotionally, and socially, however simplified the activity may be.

2.3 The “Knowledge Trap” of Evaluation and the Hollowing Out of Aesthetic Education Goals

The core outcomes of aesthetic education—*aesthetic touching*, attitude change, perspective transformation—are implicit, lagging, and difficult to quantify. A student may be deeply moved by a musical experience but unable to articulate that feeling in a short-answer question. A shift in attitude toward cultural difference may not manifest until months or years after the course ends. The capacity to reflect on one’s own aesthetic standards resists standardization. In contrast, knowledge-based content (instrument names, style features, region matching) is easily designed into standardized tests. A multiple-choice question about the country of origin of the *sitar* has a single correct answer; a matching question linking *gamelan* to Indonesia can be marked objectively; a fill-in-the-blank question about the number of strings on a *koto* can be scored in seconds. The very qualities that make such content attractive for assessment—its determinacy, objectivity, and efficiency—are precisely the qualities that make it pedagogically peripheral to the course’s deeper goals.

In practice, assessment often degenerates into a “world music knowledge point competition”: fill-in-the-blank questions test cultural region, multiple-choice questions test genre features, matching questions connect countries with music types. This evaluation not only fails to measure aesthetic goals but also produces a reverse effect: it conveys the implicit message that what the course ultimately tests is memorization. Students are quick to perceive this message and adjust their strategies accordingly. They do not seek out additional listening experiences, do not engage in reflective journaling, do not attempt musical activities outside class—not because they lack interest, but because the course structure signals that such activities are irrelevant to success. When evaluation focuses only on knowledge reproduction, education is downgraded from “guiding toward wisdom” to “guiding toward information” (Yob 2021). Those aesthetic touches that should have occurred, even if they appeared in individual students, are ignored because they are not within the scope of assessment. The result is a silent failure: the course passes its own examinations but fails its larger purpose.

2.4 Students’ “Easy Credit” Expectation and the Teacher’s Dilemma of Accommodation

General education courses occupy a delicate position in the university curriculum ecology. In most students’ psychological accounting, specialized courses are “must invest,” while general education courses are “for adjustment.” This perception is reinforced by institutional policies that weight specialized courses more heavily in GPA calculations, by peer culture that treats general education as a “break” from demanding major coursework, and by students’ own instrumental orientation toward university education. Investment expectations are generally low. Students attend because the course is required or fits their schedule, but they do not expect to be challenged, and they may resent being asked to do more than the minimum.

Teachers face a dilemma. If they insist on higher academic requirements, they may face declining enrollment and lower teaching evaluation scores, which in many institutions are tied

to funding and promotion decisions. If they cater to students’ “easy” expectations, they violate the educational purpose of the course. In practice, many teachers choose compromise—maintaining surface teaching norms while substantially reducing depth. They assign less reading, ask fewer challenging questions, accept mediocre work, and inflate grades. A tacit compromise forms, maintaining classroom “harmony,” but deep aesthetic goals are silently abandoned. This factor is the most difficult to address because it is rooted in institutional incentive structures rather than pedagogical theory. However, it is not insurmountable. The strategies proposed in Section IV are designed partly to make the course both more engaging and more meaningful, so that students do not experience depth as mere burden but as intellectual and aesthetic reward. When students perceive that a course is teaching them something valuable in a genuinely interesting way, their resistance to rigor diminishes, creating the possibility of a virtuous cycle.

3. Redefinition: The Specific Connotation of “Aesthetic Education Infiltration” in the General Education Context

The starting point for breaking through the predicament is to clarify what “aesthetic education infiltration” actually means in the general education context. The term is frequently invoked in policy documents and curriculum justifications but rarely defined with precision. Without a clear understanding of what the course is actually trying to achieve, any discussion of teaching methods or evaluation reform will be unfocused. It cannot be equated with skill training or systematic knowledge transmission in professional music education; general education students are not preparing for careers in music. Instead, the course should aim at outcomes appropriate to its place in the general education curriculum: outcomes that contribute to the development of the whole person. This paper proposes four concrete dimensions, each contrasted with a more superficial alternative that commonly prevails in practice.

3.1 Not Knowledge Coverage, but “Cultural Touching”

The key indicator should not be “how many world instruments students can name after one semester,” but “whether students have been touched by a piece of foreign culture’s music at some moment.” The word “touching” conveys the affective and embodied nature of the experience sought. A student is touched when a musical sound registers not merely as information but as something that resonates with their own feeling, memory, or imagination. This may occur through a particularly beautiful melody, a startlingly unfamiliar vocal technique, a rhythmic pattern that invites bodily movement, or a story about a musician that illuminates the human meaning of a tradition. The specific trigger varies, but the common element is a moment of genuine personal connection.

This touching may occur only once, but its educational effect far exceeds one hundred forgotten knowledge points. A single powerful encounter with a Balinese cremation procession accompanied by *gamelan* music may do more to open a student’s mind to Balinese cultural logic than any number of lectures about *slendro* and *pelog* scales. The moment of being

touched is the seed from which further learning grows; once a student has been emotionally engaged, their curiosity is activated, and they become willing to invest the effort needed to understand more deeply. Without that initial affective spark, cognitive learning remains inert and easily forgotten. Educators should strive to present disciplinary content in vivid and lively ways, thereby stimulating students' intrinsic interest, enriching their emotional experience, and enhancing their imagination and creativity (Tan Chuanbao, Yi Xiaoming, and Wang Hong 2023). General education class hours are only enough to sow one or two seeds; we must ensure the seeds are alive and truly planted into the soil.

3.2 Not Skill Acquisition, but “Embodied Experience”

Non-music-major students cannot learn to play gamelan or African drums within one semester, and the course should not be evaluated by performance competence. The technical demands of these traditions are formidable, requiring years of practice to achieve basic proficiency. To attempt such skill training in a general education course would be futile and inappropriate. However, the impossibility of teaching performance skill does not mean bodily participation has no place. On the contrary, there is a fundamental difference between listening to music and experiencing music through one's own body, even in the most rudimentary way.

Students can, through even one brief collective drumming activity, leave in their bodies a memory that is difficult to express in words but genuinely exists—the sensation that “my rhythm is embedded in others' rhythms.” This sensation is not trivial; it is the experiential foundation for understanding a core principle of many African musical traditions: individual musical parts derive their meaning from their relationship to a collective whole. A student who has experienced this principle bodily is far better positioned to understand it intellectually than one who has merely been told about it. This embodied experience opens a channel at the sensory level to another culture's way of cognitive understanding, which purely conceptual learning cannot replace. Sound is felt as vibration, rhythm is organized through movement, and musical expression is inseparable from the physical actions that produce it. To teach music only as an object of intellectual analysis is to miss its most fundamental dimension.

3.3 Not Value Indoctrination, but “Perspective Transformation”

The most common value trap is replacing old prejudices with a new kind of “political correctness”—for example, uniformly describing non-Western music as “closer to nature” or “more spiritual.” This merely flips stereotypes from negative to positive without changing the mode of thinking. The student who enters believing non-Western music is primitive and exits believing it is exotic and mystical has not undergone genuine learning; they have merely exchanged one set of reductive categories for another. The deeper problem—the habit of thinking about unfamiliar cultures through simplistic and essentializing categories—remains untouched.

The deep effect of aesthetic infiltration is not to make students “identify with” any particular cultural value, but to help them

realize that their own habitual auditory aesthetics are not naturally given, but products of specific cultural and historical construction. This is a much more demanding goal than ordinary attitude change. It asks students to subject their deepest musical preferences to critical scrutiny, to recognize that what sounds “beautiful” or “natural” to them is not a universal standard but the result of a particular process of enculturation. This recognition opens the door to genuine appreciation of difference. This process requires reflexivity—turning the analytic lens back onto one's own cultural assumptions (Song Jin, Han Zhongen, Luo Qin, and Guan Jianhua 2020). It asks students to step outside their taken-for-granted frameworks and see themselves as one culture among many, contributing to the formation of an intercultural self capable of moving flexibly among different cultural frameworks.

3.4 Not Isolated Aesthetic Appreciation, but “Life Connection”

Separating music from human life and appreciating it as a purely “artistic work” is itself a specific operation of modern Western aesthetics, not universally applicable. The idea of music as an autonomous art object, existing for its own sake and appreciated through detached contemplation, is a relatively recent European invention. In most other times and places, music has been deeply embedded in daily life, accompanying work, worship, celebration, mourning, and social interaction. The lullaby is not merely a pleasant melody but an act of love and a vehicle for transmitting cultural values; the funeral lament is a ritual performance negotiating the relationship between the living and the dead; the work song is a tool for coordinating collective labor. To reduce these to their sonic surface is to miss their human meaning.

Aesthetic education should not merely resort to objectified “contemplation,” but also to life-oriented “participation” and the holistic integration of life experience (Liu Yuedi 2021). In world music teaching, restoring the connection between music and life is crucial: putting lullabies back into the mother-infant gaze, funeral laments back into death rituals, work songs back into collective labor. Non-music-major students are at a critical stage of identity construction and value exploration; seeing how people in different cultures use music to mark life's important nodes may provide them with a mirror for their own lives. This is perhaps the deepest form of learning the course can offer—not knowledge about the other, but a new way of seeing oneself through the other.

4. Breakthrough Path: Achieving Depth through “Less” and “Slow”

Based on the above diagnosis and redefinition, this paper proposes a breakthrough plan of “achieving depth through less and slow.” Rather than continuously adding breadth, it is better to decisively subtract, concentrating limited class hours on a few individual cases and realizing the infiltration effect through deep excavation. This runs counter to the coverage anxiety described earlier, but it is precisely this counterintuitive move that constitutes the breakthrough. The following five subsections elaborate the components of this alternative model.

4.1 Course Structure Restructuring: From “Traveling around the World” to “Thick Description of Individual Cases”

It is recommended to organize a one-semester course (about 15 teaching weeks) into 3 to 4 cultural cases, each using 3 to 4 weeks to advance layer by layer. “Thick description,” borrowed from cultural anthropology, means refusing to settle for quick summaries and instead striving to convey something of the music’s complexity and lived reality. The structure can be designed as four progressive layers:

Layer 1: Bodily contact and sensory opening (Week 1). Begin with bodily activities—a drum circle, a folk song learned line by line, or closed-eye listening to a sustained tone—to establish a preliminary connection at the bodily and emotional level before introducing any knowledge points. This initial experience serves as an anchor for all subsequent learning.

Layer 2: Understanding the musical texture (Week 2). On the basis of established sensory experience, introduce music analysis concepts to help students understand internal organizational logic—how rhythms are layered, melodies unfold, textures are constructed—anchored in students’ bodily experience. After students have attempted to clap a basic polyrhythmic pattern, the concept of “interlocking” can be introduced by referring back to their physical experience.

Layer 3: Cultural context and human stories (Week 3). Put the music back into its original context: in what occasions is it performed, by whom, for whom, with what origin and transmission stories? The key is to let students know “specific people”—a musician, a singer, a village still transmitting the tradition—rather than abstract cultural labels. By attaching music to real human beings with names, faces, and life stories, the teacher makes it emotionally accessible.

Layer 4: Reflection and dialogue (Week 4). Return from the “other” to the “self,” guiding students to reflect on how the case touched their original cognition and what new views it generated about their own music traditions. This is where learning becomes genuinely personal.

Case selection should follow three criteria: acoustic features differ sufficiently from students’ familiar music; cultural logic is clear enough to be outlined within limited hours; and there are points of dialogue with contemporary issues. Suitable candidates include Balinese gamelan, West African drumming, Indian classical music, and Tuvan throat singing, each offering a distinctive sound world, a well-documented cultural context, and rich possibilities for engagement.

4.2 Teaching Method Flip: Experience First, Concepts Later

The core of the teaching method reform is a simple order adjustment: flipping “explanation first, then listening” to “experience first, then explanation.” Traditional teaching introduces background and features first, then plays audio for verification. The flipped process lets students participate in a simplified musical activity first, establishing a preliminary connection before concepts are introduced. The theoretical basis is that the opening of sensory channels is the prerequisite

for cognitive deepening and emotional resonance. The process of aesthetic education is not from concept to experience, but from experience to concept; the priority of sensory experience is the fundamental feature distinguishing aesthetic education from intellectual education (Du Wei 2023). When students have not yet established any anchor in their bodies, the teacher’s explanation is merely external information to be memorized; when they have left a “bodily sensation” of a rhythm, the same explanation becomes confirmation and deepening of existing experience.

This method requires the teacher to be willing to let go of some control, allowing the class to become noisy and perhaps chaotic for a few minutes. It also requires some basic equipment, but body percussion costs nothing and can be done anywhere. Even in a large lecture hall, a simple exercise of having students clap a steady beat while the teacher layers a complex rhythm on top can effectively convey the feel of polyrhythmic texture. The key is not the sophistication of the activity but the quality of engagement: are students truly feeling the music in their bodies, or merely going through the motions?

4.3 Core Question Driving: Replacing “Knowledge Point Listing” with “Common Human Inquiry”

Instead of organizing content by geographical regions and musical features, use “core questions” as the organizational center of each case. Core questions should be themes universally present in human cultures that can receive unique responses through the particular case. This approach draws on the pedagogical principle that learning is most effective when organized around meaningful questions rather than arbitrary categories. A question like “How does music connect the living with the ancestors?” identifies a genuine human concern that crosses cultural boundaries and gives students a reason to care about the answer.

For example:

“How does music connect the living with the ancestors?” —guiding the study of gamelan and Balinese Hindu ritual music;

“How does sound create bonds between people?”—guiding the study of sub-Saharan African drum circles and community construction;

“How many songs belonging to oneself does a person have in a lifetime?”—guiding comparative study of music genres in the life cycle.

This approach provides a “humanistic entry point” for non-music majors. Students may not be interested in “the slendro scale of gamelan,” but they are likely curious about “how people in different cultures handle their relationship with ancestors.” When music learning becomes a way of responding to common human inquiries, it is no longer isolated memorization but an extension of students’ life experience, achieving deeper integration with the general education mission.

4.4 Evaluation System Restructuring: Making the Outcomes of Aesthetic Education “Visible”

The evaluation system must be aligned with the redefined goals. If the exam continues to reward memorization, students will continue to memorize regardless of teaching innovations. This paper proposes replacing knowledge-based assessment with reflective outputs:

Plan 1: Cross-cultural listening journal (3 entries, each 300-500 words). After each case study, students answer a fixed question: "In this learning experience, what made me feel unfamiliar, confused, or touched? What default assumptions about 'music' or 'beauty' did this reaction make me realize I originally had?" This question forces students to attend to their own affective and cognitive responses and to use them as a starting point for self-reflection. The journal format allows for continuous assessment rather than a single high-stakes examination.

Plan 2: Mini cultural promotion (end of semester, format optional). Students use their disciplinary strengths to design a public-facing promotion—a poster, a 3-minute audio program, a graphic article, or a short video. The core requirement is to extract "one sentence that can instantly capture people's core cultural insight," rather than encyclopedic listing of information. This asks students to synthesize learning into a concise, evocative statement, requiring genuine understanding rather than recall.

Plan 3: A letter (end of semester, text format). Students choose a music inheritor they have "met" in a case study and write a letter of gratitude, inquiry, or reflection. This personalizes learning by directing it toward a specific human being, even if encountered only through course materials, encouraging empathy and recognition that music traditions are carried by real individuals.

The common feature is assessing whether students have established a personal, emotional connection and whether they have reflected on their own cultural presuppositions. The criteria do not look at "how much was remembered," but "what was reflected"; not "how accurate the summary is," but "how genuine the connection is." This shift signals to students that the course values attention, reflection, and personal growth over test performance.

4.5 Leveraging Student Diversity: Turning Cross-disciplinary Perspectives into Classroom Resources

The fact that general education students come from all majors is often regarded as a difficulty, but it is also a unique educational resource. Rather than treating diversity as a liability, teachers can design projects that allow students to bring their disciplinary expertise to bear on musical and cultural questions. This validates students' existing knowledge, fosters intellectual community, and enriches the course with perspectives the teacher alone cannot provide.

Law students can analyze copyright disputes or "cultural appropriation" cases of traditional music, exploring the protection dilemma of indigenous music within current intellectual property frameworks. Foreign language students can transcribe and translate a ritual song, analyzing untranslatable cultural concepts and their implications for understanding the worldview of that ethnic group. Sociology

students can study a diasporic music community using interviews or participant observation, describing how its music practice balances cultural identity and adaptation to local society. Documentary students can develop a film proposal reflecting on the ethics of representation and the relationship between filmer and filmed. When perspectives from different disciplines converge, the music culture gains multidimensional understanding, and the course becomes a workshop in interdisciplinary inquiry that resonates deeply with the ideals of general education.

5. Reflection and Boundaries: The Realistic Anchor of an Ideal Course

It is necessary to honestly acknowledge the tension between an ideal course and real-world conditions. Large class sizes limit one-on-one feedback; ordinary classrooms lack ideal space for bodily activities; teachers' knowledge structures make equal mastery of all cases impossible. These constraints are real and cannot be avoided with idealized rhetoric. No amount of pedagogical intention can transform a 200-seat lecture hall into an intimate seminar room or give a teacher with no training in African drumming the confidence to lead a drum circle.

However, being aware of constraints does not mean giving up effort. The realistic strategy is to hold the bottom line under imperfect conditions: not "all students are deeply touched," but "create conditions that make touching possible"; not "systematically mastering a culture," but "ensuring at least one sincere deep encounter." A teacher who can create one moment of genuine connection—one class session in which students are truly present and engaged—has already achieved something valuable. The core value of multicultural music education lies not in comprehensive mastery of knowledge, but in promoting cultural self-awareness of "reflecting on the self from the perspective of the other" through concrete musical experience (Song Jin et al. 2020). Effectiveness is not measured by breadth, but by whether students undergo profound cross-cultural reflection within limited cases.

The teacher's own positioning also needs adjustment. The teacher of this course is not an "expert" on all world music traditions, but a "guide." This shift frees the teacher from the burden of omniscience and allows modeling of humble curiosity. When the teacher admits uncertainty and expresses genuine wonder, students learn that intellectual humility is not weakness but strength, and that engaging with cultural difference is not about mastering the other but about opening oneself to being changed. Many of the proposed strategies can be implemented incrementally within existing constraints: replacing one week of survey with a focused case study, adding one experiential activity, or redesigning one assessment task. The transition need not be abrupt; what matters is the direction of change.

6. Conclusion

The world music course as a general education subject faces a fundamental existential choice: either degenerate into refined cultural consumption through superficial sightseeing, or become genuine aesthetic education practice through deep infiltration, planting seeds of curiosity and respect. The choice

is renewed in every teaching decision, every course outline, every classroom activity, and every assessment task.

The analysis suggests that the predominance of the “sightseeing” model results not from individual failure but from systemic pressures toward comprehensiveness, passivity, and objective assessment. The path of resistance is to teach fewer things in greater depth, prioritize experience over explanation, organize content around human questions, assess reflection rather than recall, and turn student diversity into a pedagogical asset. These choices are within the power of individual teachers, even without institutional reform.

In 2020, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council issued the Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Aesthetic Education in the New Era, calling for aesthetic education that stimulates artistic interest and cultivates healthy aesthetic taste. To realize this vision, we should not rely on increasing content or raising difficulty, but have the courage to subtract—pursuing “precision” through “less,” waiting for “depth” through “slow,” and creating infinite possibilities within finite constraints. This is the most difficult and most valuable educational proposition of the world music course in the general education context.

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