

EQUITY
DIVERSITY
INCLUSION
CULTURAL COMPETENCE
AND
CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE
PEDAGOGY THROUGH
ETHNOMUSICOLOGY

Professional development workshops
and long term consultancy
for School Systems and Schools.

THEMBA
arts and
culture



Ethnomusicology
InAction.org

Our Services

Ethnomusicology In Action offers professional development workshops and long term consulting services for school systems and schools to help them to foster equity, inclusion, cultural competence and culturally responsive education for their Afro Descendant students using an ethnomusicological approach.

Ethnomusicology is small branch of anthropology that uses music, ethnicity, racial constructions, class and other factors to analyze societies, cultures and sub-cultures. We use research on culturally responsive pedagogy, and draw from effective models used with Afro descendant students in Botswana and in the US. We offer professional development workshops, and consulting services to schools, school systems, non-profit organizations and other institutions that serve large groups of African American and other minority children. We help schools and school systems to develop programmatic measures that address inequity, combat bias and foster cultural competence in teachers. We invite you to read through our workshop/consultancy models and explore how they might benefit your school.

Multi-Cultural Arts Based Instruction through Global Education

Using multi-cultural educational models in the arts curricula is an effective method of ensuring inclusion and diversity in the education of young learners. This approach does not simply involve an integration of 'diverse' topics into Western based learning modalities, but also involves the integration and validation of varying modes of learning based in diverse cultures. This consultancy or series of professional development workshops guides school systems, schools, educators and administrators in how to develop and implement instruction on and through diverse cultures from around the world using standard global education practices. Ethnomusicology In Action also offers curricula, and curricular development services, that adapt global education and a multi-cultural perspective to long standing arts education approaches. This consultancy results in arts instruction that well represents the cultures and experiences of diverse populations of students and trains administrators and educators to avoid biased or exclusionary instructional practices and materials.

Equity/Anti-Bias Training for School Administrators and Educators

This workshop is a forthright and comprehensive professional development that leads participating educators, administrators and staff in exploring the history and origins of racial bias in United States, evidence of how racial/color bias continues to be instilled in children and how contemporary music and visual culture reinforces racial bias against African Americans. Participants will come away from this professional development with solid understandings and tools that can be used to reverse policies, curricular models, leadership composition, staffing patterns and teaching materials that reinforce and perpetuate racial bias in school systems, schools and classrooms.

The History of Colonial Education/Decolonizing A School and School System

The history of Western colonialism is marked with the use of educational institutions as the primary means of assimilating indigenous people and other colonial subjects into Western cultural and economic agendas for these conquered lands. Reference the function of the forced boarding schools that were administered by the United States and Anglo-Australian governments to colonize Native American and Aboriginal Australian children. This workshop helps educators and administrators to recognize and identify remnants of the colonial educational agenda that remain in their schools or school systems. It equips them with the awareness and tools to uproot such colonial education patterns to benefit and empower their minority students. This can take the form of one workshop, a series of workshops or a longer consultancy.

Common Pitfalls of Diversity and Inclusion Programs and How to Avoid Them

The current trend towards equity and inclusion programs in education is inspiring. However, many are implemented with a self-defeating agenda because they fail to acknowledge the specific positionalities of the students whom they intend to serve. In the United States not all minorities are the same, nor do they have the same histories, cultures or socioeconomic standing. For example, because African American students descend from the only group in the United States that was formally enslaved and subject to biased racial laws and economic inequalities, they cannot and should not be equivocated as a group to other ethnic or social minorities. This professional development workshops leads administrators and educators to develop culturally and historically sensitive diversity and inclusion programs that truly serve the students they are intended for by considering the positionality of each group.

African American students have been historically marginalized in United States education. However, in Botswana, the culture and experiences of Afro Descendant children are placed at the center of the country's educational system. What can we learn to better serve our Afro descendant students? This workshop extrapolates strategies used in Botswanan primary schools to deliver arts-infused cultural education to their students that instills a strong sense of cultural identity and traditional Setswana values through a cultural studies curriculum, classroom tangibles and staff composition that reflects the student population. Ethnomusicology In Action has adapted the model used in Botswana for African American students that is integrable in any arts curriculum, including music, visual art, dance, in addition to subjects like social studies and other content areas. The consultant services offered helps to guide educators and administrators in how to create a culturally responsive school climate, school culture and curricula in all subjects for institutions with a majority African American enrollment using the Botswanan model. This can take the form of one workshop, a series of workshops or a longer consultancy.

Teaching Africa to Multi-Cultural Student Groups

The misrepresentation of the cultures and peoples of Africa has been a primary focus of Western bias against, and the historically inequitable treatment of Afro descendants in the United States. Students from all backgrounds are affected by degrading and exoticized images of Africa (reference the Tarzan movies made for each generation), coupled with the unbalanced instructional focus in United States education that historically omits or limits instruction about Africa in favor of an uneven focus on instruction about Western Europe and Euro-American societal contributions. The result in multi-cultural student groups is a negative view of Africa (often viewed as 'undeveloped' compared to the West) and an often unconscious or unwanted diminished view of Afro descendants. The robust and accurate teaching of the cultures and histories of the African continent through global learning and multi-cultural education models helps students to adapt a well-informed view of Africa, Afro descendants and a balanced view of the West. Teaching Africa promotes and facilitates equity. This Teaching Africa to Multi-Cultural Student Groups professional development workshop or long-term consultancy guides school systems, schools, educators and administrators in how to integrate instruction about the African continent into all aspects of the curriculum, and how to develop specialized courses for students at the middle school or high school level. It also draws on approaches used in the discipline of ethnomusicology to detail how to sidestep the common pitfalls in Teaching Africa, like avoiding essentialism, depicting cultures as homogeneous and unchanging and how to recognize issues with educational products on Africa that are available through the commercial market.

If a student of African descent has not received a culturally responsive education during their elementary school years then historical research demonstrates they are highly likely to have developed a sense of alienation from their African identity, coupled with an unintentional bias towards Western centered culture and values. This results in lowered self-esteem, a limited view of their life options and often a cultural identity that is conflated with a lowered socio-economic status. Our ethnomusicological research focuses on developing models of culturally responsive education for African American students. Through a Fulbright research fellowship and field work conducted in culturally responsive classrooms, Maya Cunningham examined how Botswanan primary schools (which extend into the seventh grade) use arts-integrated cultural education to instill in their students a healthy cultural identity using a variety of methods, including a culturally responsive social studies curriculum. Through her research Cunningham has adapted the model used in Botswana for African American students that is integrable in any arts curriculum, including music, visual art, dance, in addition to subjects like social studies and other content areas. This consultancy or series of professional development workshops helps to guide school systems, schools, educators and administrators in how to create a culturally responsive school climate, school culture and curricula in all subjects for institutions with a majority African American enrollment using the Botswanan model.

Teaching Africa to African American Students (The Culturally Responsive Approach)

The misrepresentation of the cultures and peoples of Africa has been a primary focus of Western bias against, and the historically inequitable treatment of Afro descendants in the United States. The misrepresentations of Africa, which include degrading and exoticized images in United States visual culture and literature (reference Tarzan), project racially biased attitudes towards African Americans that dictate United States educational policies that exclude the robust teaching of Africa in the classroom. In addition to African American history, it is essential for African American students to receive robust and accurate instruction on the cultures and histories of the African continent that emphasize cultural connections to African America and the African Diaspora. Such instruction counters potentially harmful and internalized self-stereotypes, cultural alienation and low self-esteem. This Teaching Africa to African American students professional development workshop or long-term consultancy guides school systems, schools, educators and administrators in how to integrate instruction about the African continent into all aspects of the curriculum, and how to develop specialized courses for students at the middle school or high school level. It also draws on approaches used in the discipline of ethnomusicology to detail how to sidestep the common pitfalls in Teaching Africa, like avoiding essentialism, depicting cultures as homogeneous and unchanging and how to recognize issues with educational products on Africa that are available through the commercial market.

About Ethnomusicology In Action

Ethnomusicology In Action is a program of Themba Arts and Culture, a non-profit organization that has the purpose of empowering African American children through cultural programs. Ethnomusicology is an academic discipline that studies music as culture. Our programs put academic research in this field to action by using research on African and African American culture and music to instill in African American children a strong and historically rooted cultural identity.

Our Rationale

There is no federal mandate to address Black student's specific need to receive education about their culture: a minority African – American culture that has been historically misconstrued through minstrelsy, attacked through mass media and largely ignored by school systems, except for the recent advent of 'Black History Month.' Consequently, African – American children are largely alienated from themselves, and hold a diminished view of their image, history and traditions. Reference the well-known Racial Identity and Preference psychological tests used to argue the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education school desegregation case. In the 1940s, psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark designed and conducted this series of experiments, popularly known as the "Doll Tests," to study the psychological effects of segregation (read Black subjugation) on African-American children. They used four dolls, identical except for color, to test children's racial perceptions. Their subjects, African – American children between the ages of three and seven, were asked to identify both the race of the dolls and which color doll they preferred. A majority of the children preferred the white doll and assigned positive characteristics to it. When asked to identify the doll that looked most like them, many of the children chose the white doll and many refused to answer, bursting into tears. The Clarks concluded that "prejudice, discrimination, and segregation" created a feeling of inferiority among African-American children and damaged their self-esteem. The test was conducted with Black American children recently in 2010 by CNN, and in 2012, with the same results.

Educators Peggy McIntosh and Emily Style, who direct the National SEED Project (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity) state the following: "the curriculum is a structure that ideally provides windows out into the experiences of others, as well as mirrors of the student's own reality. In other words, schools should be spaces where kids explore the unfamiliar, but also see their own lived experiences validated and valued. For students whose racial, cultural, linguistic, or economic backgrounds differ significantly from that of the mainstream, the "mirrors" part of the metaphor can be particularly powerful." These 'mirrors' are not only powerful, they are essential. Our work is to put the discipline of ethnomusicology in service of creating these essential 'mirrors' and 'windows' in the education of marginalized students.

About Maya Cunningham, Director

Maya Cunningham is the ethnomusicologist, veteran arts educator and cultural activist who founded and directs Ethnomusicology in Action as a program of Themba Arts and Culture, Inc and an imprint of the Diaspora Institute, LLC, a consultancy/curriculum development agency. Cunningham is completing an PhD in Afro American Studies and Ethnomusicology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Cunningham received a Bachelor of Music in jazz studies from Howard University and a Master of Arts in jazz performance from Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College. Cunningham is an African – Americanist / Africanist scholar who has presented her research at academic conferences nationally and internationally, and has served as a consultant for schools systems, colleges and universities.

Her academic research focuses on African-American and Southern African traditional music and identity. In 2017 she received a Fulbright fellowship to research how traditional music is used to teach national identity to primary school students in Botswana. Cunningham is also a two-time award recipient of the National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Scholar fellowship to study African American Gullah culture, as well as African American culture and blues traditions in the Mississippi Delta. In 2016 she received a Teachers for Global Classrooms fellowship and a Fund for Teachers fellowship to research traditional music in Ghana and India. She launched the Ethnomusicology In Action in 2017 with funding from the University of Maryland that uses research in Black music and culture to empower African American children with robust music education curricula that teaches them about their history, culture and traditional music.

Cunningham has eighteen years of experience in music education and directing community based arts programs for African American and Latinx children, including the Little Lights Children's Arts Workshop, the Hephzibah Program for Girls and the Summer Success Program. She is former Program Director of the Roberta Flack School of Music and Creative Arts Director at the Salvation Army in Astoria, New York. She has in depth experience in teaching music and writing culturally responsive music education curriculum and developing professional development models for public schools, charter schools and non-profit organizations.

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