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Programme & Intake: Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in
Double Major – Music and
Education, 2021

Project Title: Music & Context in the Primary School
Classroom

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MUSIC & CONTEXT IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM

Purpose: To argue the place and relevance of **providing musical context** to music repertoire in teaching and learning music in the primary school classroom.

Research questions:

- What is the **importance of introducing context** into the teaching and learning of music in the primary music classroom?
- How does context play a **role in music education** especially in a primary music classroom?
- How effective has the **Experience-Concept-Application (E-C-A)** model of teaching music in primary classrooms been in relation to previous syllabuses (GMP 2008:2015)?

Methodology: Literature review of Singapore's current **GMP 2023** (General Music Programme) as well as **other countries'c** (mainly: **Australia, USA, Namibia and Ireland**) curriculum, and the link between **humanity and music**.

Findings: GMP2023 places importance on **values education**, hence the need for context when listening to music. The word 'context' is a keyword within the GMP2023, appearing **fifty-seven** times, in 26 out of 67 pages of syllabus.

Case Study: A study of **Chan Mali Chan**, an Indonesian folk song that is integral to our music core repertoire, shows that it was integrated in the 1980s during the Singalong Operation in the music syllabus at that time. The lyrics were adapted to the song we now know and its appearance can be traced from the 1960 Singaporean film to the attempts to popularise the song in the 1980s.

Discussion: Context matters in music because it gives the audience and listeners the background information of a piece of music. Dettwyler (2011, p.298) mentions that the audience can still enjoy and take pleasure in the medium they are experiencing, however there is a fundamental difference for those **"in the know, compared to someone who is not"**. For one to fully understand the piece of music or art, "one must know the cultural context" (Dettwyler, 2011, p.306). Pilot & Bulte (2006) have also mentioned that the use of context as the basis of a curriculum allows for not an overload of content but rather a representative curriculum.

E-C-A frames the way music is learnt in the classroom. This framework approach to learning begins first through experience, then the musical learning is conceptualised to the student with the aid of experience by revisiting, and lastly application of the concept with creation and more. If a musical concept has **its roots in tradition and culture**, would simply knowing the context be enough to call it 'Experience' and a form of authentic learning for the students? It is through the learning of the repertoires that **students shape their own context around what they learn**, and even with knowledge of the authentic context, personal experience is what is most important in the child's learning.

Conclusion: Context is important to the **generalist public-funded primary music classroom**, where students are not expected to have any prior knowledge in music and music making. With students aged typically 7-12, it is important for students to **internalise the context and understand the circumstances** as music education as a form of values education which is further emphasised in the GMP 2023