

# Conference Proceedings

**CIVAE 2021**

**3rd Interdisciplinary and Virtual  
Conference on Arts in Education**

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Edited by

**MUSICOGUIA**

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## History of Ethnomusicology: some aspects of remodelling a MA seminar

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### Abstract

There is a growing trend to use storytelling techniques as a research and teaching tool. In the case of Anthropology and Ethnomusicology, one can say that storytelling is an integral part of ethnography itself, not only regarding the activities carried out during fieldwork but also in writing a thesis and a book. At the most basic level, the idea of “telling a story” can convey ideas and help people make sense of personal or collective experiences. Aiming for a comprehensive understanding of the way a musical culture “is learned and the materials used to teach it” (Nettl 2015), I will explain how I managed to adapt storytelling techniques to my teaching experiences at NOVA-FCSH. To that end, I will detail the remodelling process of an MA seminar entitled “History of Ethnomusicology”, focusing on the period from 1870 to 1990. How to engage MA students to identify and understand historical processes related to the study of music and Ethnomusicology? I found answers not necessarily in changing the content – which mostly remained the same – but in adopting new teaching techniques, most notably focusing on storytelling practices and the adoption of a three-part structure: I. cold open, II. Exposition, III. Discussion.

*Keywords:* Ethnomusicology, Applied Ethnomusicology, Storytelling, Teaching, Music, Expressive culture.

### Historia de la etnomusicología: algunos aspectos de la remodelación de un seminario de Máster.

#### Resumen

Existe una tendencia creciente a utilizar técnicas de narración como herramienta de investigación y enseñanza. En el caso de la Antropología y la Etnomusicología, se puede decir que la narración es una parte integral de la etnografía misma, no solo en lo que respecta a las actividades realizadas durante el trabajo de campo, sino también en la redacción de una tesis y un libro. En el nivel más básico, la idea de “contar una historia” puede transmitir ideas y ayudar a las personas a dar sentido a las experiencias personales o colectivas. Con el objetivo de lograr una comprensión integral de la forma en que “se aprende una cultura musical y los materiales que se utilizan para enseñarla” (Nettl 2015), explicaré cómo logré adaptar las técnicas de narración a mis experiencias docentes en NOVA-FCSH. Para ello, detallaré el proceso de remodelación de un seminario de maestría titulado “Historia de la etnomusicología”, centrado en el período de 1870 a 1990. ¿Cómo involucrar a los estudiantes de maestría en la identificación y comprensión de procesos históricos relacionados con el estudio de la música y la etnomusicología? Encontré respuestas no necesariamente en cambiar el contenido, que en su mayoría permaneció igual, sino en la adopción de nuevas técnicas de enseñanza, principalmente centrándose en las prácticas de narración y la adopción de una estructura de tres partes: I. Cold open, II. Exposición, III. Discusión.

*Palabras clave:* Etnomusicología, Etomusicología aplicada, Storytelling, Docencia, Música, Cultura expresiva.

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## Introduction: teaching paradigms and applied ethnomusicology

Ethnomusicologists have been looking for alternatives to teaching models that rely on a non-interactive exposition of contents to heterogeneous classes. Although most literature deals with teaching in world music ensembles (Solis 2004), there has also been a great emphasis in deconstructing Western classical music's predominance on schools and conservatories (Blacking 1973; Kingsbury 1988; Nettl 1989). More recently, the influence of Ethnomusicological theory and method on more practical aspects of music education has been notably effective in cross-cultural studies related to music cognition and children's music cultures (Campbell 2003), and general performance-related behaviour and creative production at school (Côte-Real 2011). Indeed, most of these studies focus on music's role to promote equality, tolerance, and diversity in the classroom.

These latter perspectives on music education are generally interrelated with a new sub-area – "Applied Ethnomusicology" –, defined by principles of social responsibility, and channelling academic knowledge and influence to solve specific societal challenges outside academia (Pettan 2005). This trend's alleged novelty can be easily questioned when we take a broader look at the discipline's history. For instance, since most North-American Indigenous groups were at risk of decimation in late-19th-century, weren't the scholars interested in their language and music doing an early version of "applied ethnomusicology" way before the name of the discipline was even coined? Sure, their outputs were markedly academical, but still, were they less "applied" for this reason? A Professor teaching in a classroom is less "interventive" than a scholar in the field? These examples elucidate my position on this matter: I believe that all ethnomusicological work is politically and socially engaged. Assuming that all research practices reflect social relations and have cultural and political consequences, then they are in essence, always "applied". As teachers and researchers, it is our responsibility to safeguard the fundamental values and freedoms of the human groups we are studying. Hence, the general principles that guides "applied Ethnomusicology" are not new –, they always existed.

When we teach about the groups we study, we become deeply connected to them and to their stories. That was the main reason for the initial development of Ethnomusicology: to understand musical practices of peoples excluded from historical narratives, outside the realm of the almighty and self-validated "western art music". In other words, Ethnomusicology and its lesser-known predecessor, Comparative Musicology, studied what was then understood – from a late-19th century western point of view – as "the rest". Primarily, it focused on non-western and "folk music"; from the late 1970's onwards, popular music, once too an outlier, also joined the discipline. Although nowadays Ethnomusicology studies "everything produced in culture or nature that could be conceivably called music" (Nettl 2015), this firm commitment of giving voice to "otherness" is still central.

There is a growing trend to use storytelling techniques as a research and teaching device. They are, indeed, useful tools for presenting and explaining content, values and ideas. In the case of Anthropology and Ethnomusicology, one can say that storytelling is an integral part of ethnography itself, not only regarding the activities carried out during fieldwork but also in writing a thesis and a book. At the most basic level, the idea of "telling a story" can convey beliefs and help people make sense of personal or collective experiences (Dyer 2001). Given the necessity for a comprehensive understanding of the way a musical culture "is learned and the materials used to teach it" (Nettl 2015), I will now explain how I managed to adapt storytelling techniques to my teaching experiences at NOVA FCSH since 2010. For that end, I will detail the remodelling process of an MA seminar entitled "History of Ethnomusicology", taking into account its goals and contents.

### Remodelling the seminar “History of Ethnomusicology” (NOVA FCSH)

The seminar “History of Ethnomusicology” is part of NOVA FCSH Master’s Program in Ethnomusicology. For almost thirty years, this discipline was taught by the now Emeritus Professor Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco, responsible for the institutionalization of Ethnomusicology in Portugal (since 1982), and the foundation and presidency of *Instituto de Etnomusicologia: Centro de Estudos em Música e Dança* (INET-md) from 1995 until 2020. Presently, and since 2013, Castelo-Branco also assumes the Presidency of the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM). In 2019, I taught this discipline with Professor Castelo-Branco, and since her retirement in 2020, I became responsible for teaching the seminar as a Visiting Professor. During our team teaching experience, Professor Castelo-Branco presented me with the challenge of reorganizing the seminar and finding new methods and resources to conduct the sessions. Therefore, I was faced with a compelling question: how can I reconfigure a paramount discipline and adapt it to the profile of the contemporary students while endorsing Professor Castelo-Branco’s impeccable legacy?

The seminar has the following objectives: to identify the major research questions, concepts, theoretical perspectives, methods, techniques, authors, and publications, that marked the historical trajectory of the discipline; to acquire the conceptual tools for developing a critical perspective on the focused literature; to develop the ability to relate political, social and musical processes; and to apply the acquired knowledge in the preparation of many outputs including an annotated thematic bibliography, a book review and an essay.

Due to its historical character, focusing on the period ranging from 1870 to 1990, discussing some of the early literature can be considered challenging for students who, at first glance, don’t understand the relevance of studying historical writings. Even the recording technologies and formats addressed in this seminar, such as the phonograph, magnetic tape and vinyl records are now widely seen as obsolete. Indeed, they are a long way from the digital formats and streaming processes that are now common place in the contemporary world. Nevertheless, how to engage young students to identify and understand historical processes in music? I found answers not necessarily in changing the content – which mostly remained the same – but in adopting new teaching techniques, most notably focusing on storytelling practices. I adopted, for every session, a tripartite structure: I. *Cold Open*, II. *Exposition* and III. *Discussion*. Every session has a media projector (PowerPoint) and a dedicated sound system.

#### I. “Cold Open”

“Cold open” is a narrative tactic used in television and films, characterized by jumping directly to the story at the beginning, before the title sequence or the opening credits. This technique guarantees that the audience gains interest in the program from the very first minutes. In the classroom context, I adopt this technique by presenting audio or video samples that are relevant to the focused topic. Similar to what happens in television shows, a “cold open” can recap previous sessions or provide other information that are instrumental for the current one.

After listening and visualizing a musical example, students comment on what they have just heard and seen. It is a perfect moment to test and train musical analysis “by ear”, especially when there is no score or other visual representation involved. It is also an ideal moment to deconstruct stereotypes related to expressive culture or introduce general topics such as nation-building, ethnicity, migration, music industries, among others.

An example of a “cold open” includes a comparison between two samples: a performance by [Umm Kulthum](#) and a [Quran recitation](#). After asking the students to analyse and compare both pieces, I explain that, although they have very similar sound qualities (including timbre, melodic traits and orna-

ments), the first example is widely considered “music” and the second is not. The objective is to draw attention to the conceptual dimensions and values that inform music practices and call the students’ attention to ethnocentric attitudes they may have.

I can also use the “cold open” to deconstruct concepts such as “[Civilization](#)” (Andrew Sisters & Danny Kaye, 1947), which is fundamental to understand the discourse that characterized music research at the beginning of the twentieth century, or to problematize copyright issues (“[Return to Innocence](#)”, Enigma, 1994). Some examples may come from unconventional media such as videogames (“[Red Dead Redemption](#)”, Rockstar Games, 2010), or controversial television interviews (such as [BBC’s Pink Floyd interview](#) conducted by musicologist Hans Keller in 1967).

This section can last from 15 to 35 minutes, depending on the topic addressed in that session. If the “cold open” is particularly effective and provides interesting thought-provoking discussions between the students, it can – and should be – further expanded. Naturally, that depends on the student’s level and interest in a given subject.

## *II. “Exposition”*

The transition from the “cold open” to the “exposition” is confirmed through a title sequence, with the discipline’s name and the session number. It follows an illustration indicating the focus of the session. This contextualization also aims to situate the student within the discipline’s central narrative.

The teacher is mainly in charge of this section, emphasizing and clarifying the topics covered, including references to its primary object, social need, methods and techniques, individuals and institutions. These ideas are then contextualized within the Social Sciences and Humanities theoretical paradigms such as cultural evolutionism, diffusionism (*kulturkreis*), functionalism, and structuralism. The presentation of these contents is complemented with photographs, videos, and other representations such as paintings.

For example, in a session dedicated to safeguarding North American indigenous heritage from the late nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century, I contextualize these groups’ history with paintings, newspaper articles and photographs. These historical moments include the arrival of colonizers (1492), the French-Indian war (1754-1763), the Indian Removal Act (1830), the Trail of Tears (1838) and the Wounded Knee Massacre (1890). By resorting to visual depictions of war and suffering, the students become aware of the social prerequisites behind Boasian Anthropology’s development – one of the main objectives of that particular session. Other audio-visual material, such as interviews with the authors or documentary on the focused topics, can be played if available. The time allocated to this section can vary from sixty to ninety minutes. The students’ participation will be required throughout this section.

## *III. “Discussion”*

The final segment includes presentations by the students of selected texts, including relevant articles and book chapters related to the session’s topic (10 minutes of presentation followed by 10-15 minutes of discussion). The teacher distributes these texts at the end of every session, so that the students have a week to prepare for the next one. Given this discipline’s strong emphasis on historical processes, the bibliography includes two types of publications: the first refers to “the author’s voice in its time”; the second includes contemporary analyses of the authors and issues discussed. Specific quotes can be projected for students to comment and debate upon. The objective is to ensure that students can effectively analyse the contents, relating them to the previous teacher’s exposition and, in the process, develop their critical awareness.

**MUSICOLOGIA COMPARADA**  
**Citações de Hornbostel (1905)**

“In a sense we may perhaps use the melodic range as a criterion for the quality of musical culture. The melodies of primitive peoples mostly move within narrow limits - like our children's songs” p. 254

“Flutes and pipes have largely proven to be useless for acoustical study; primitive instrument makers are generally guided by non-musical principles; the finger holes are spaced equidistantly, or in symmetrical groupings, or approximately halfway between the natural modes of a bamboo tube”. p. 257

“We may draw parallels - if with some caution - between the condition of “primitive” peoples and earlier stages of our own culture. We would then have to seek analogies in primitive music to the music of our ancestors” p. 268

“It is high time, however, that the genuine musical products of foreign cultures be collected, before they become irretrievably spoiled by Europeanisms”. p. 262

“One must take into account the often considerable fluctuations in intonation which must be corrected through comparison of a large number of pieces by the same or various other singers”. p. 258

**“However, our ambitions aim higher still: we would like to uncover the remotest, darkest past and unveil, in the wealth of the present, the ageless universal in music; in other words: we want to understand the evolution and common aesthetic foundation of the art of music”. p. 268**

Figure 1. This slide exemplifies some of the quotes the students are asked to comment upon

Some questions that are common to all presentations can then be asked: Why did this perspective make sense at a given time? Why was it adopted to the study of expressive culture, including music and dance? Can we embrace it nowadays? Why? The main objective is to familiarize students with the historical trajectory of the discipline. The session ends with a quick recap of ideas, including all the dimensions mentioned above to clarify the (particular) argument of that session within the (general) scope of the discipline. The following scheme summarises a session:

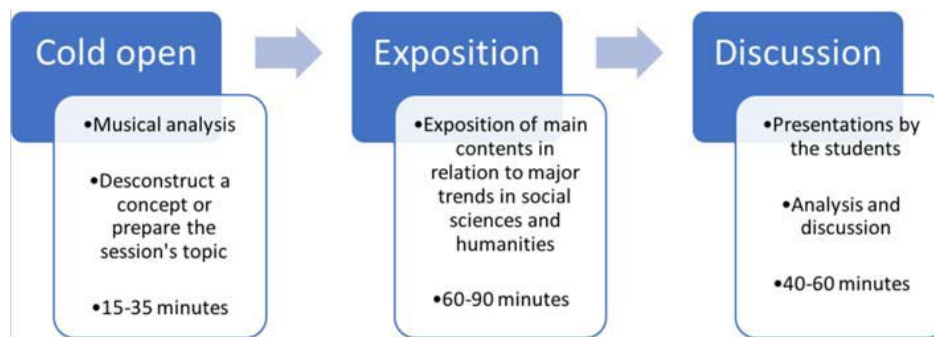


Figure 2. The tripartite session structure

Finally, the evaluation process is comprised of four elements: 1. Oral presentations of texts presented in each session in the “discussion” section (25%); 2. A book review (c. 1500 words) (25%); 3. An annotated bibliography on a topic (c. ten publications) (20%), 4. An essay on a concept, theme or theoretical framework (c. 3000 words) (30%). The teacher provides the necessary accompaniment to guide the students towards their goal, helping them to choose the appropriate publications to comment and, most importantly, explain their relevance. Every document will be sent back to the student with a classification form, including clear suggestions for improvement.



## Conclusion: some preliminary results

During the period I taught the discipline “History of Ethnomusicology”, I noticed that with every session, the students shifted their conceptions about expressive culture and their critical perception got more refined. The stories told during the “cold open” had surprising effects on students, especially those that focused on social problems or injustice. In some cases, their effectiveness was such that some students completely changed the focus of their master’s dissertation. This is the greatest compensation for a teacher: to be able to inspire a student to go beyond a linear path, to think “outside the box”, and to find interest in socially relevant themes.

The contents taught provided students with the necessary conceptual tools to trail their academic paths while the individual meetings helped to clarify and discuss their work. This one-to-one approach, similar to thesis supervising, has been highly appreciated. Finally, it is relevant to mention that in the anonymous evaluations made by the students, their satisfaction with the discipline was extremely positive in all parameters (contents, organization, clarity, evaluation process and teacher’s performance), achieving a classification of 5.4 out of 6 in 2019-2020 and a perfect 6 out of 6 in 2020-2021. I had brilliant teachers that inspired me to follow this career and my mission is to make sure my students feel as inspired as I once felt. I believe that a university education should not be merely seen as a path for obtaining a degree: it should be a transformative experience that should impact upon students’ lives as socially responsible human beings. At the end of the day, that is the noblest goal of all.

## Acknowledgments

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