

Music Education without Borders – a Common Language for Residents and Refugees

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Abstract: During the process of stabilization and institutionalization of music education arrangements for refugee children and adolescents, the author detects a wide range of musical and pedagogical expressions on the part of music educators, among them many musicians with migration backgrounds themselves, as well as, on the part of participants, of educational interventions, for both refugees and residents. Academic supervision and beginning the documentation of specific projects has led to a research project on music education in transition processes. Herein, biographical interlacing between refugees and musicians is one missing link to be reconstructed. The multicultural environment of music education serves as a paradigm for migration societies themselves. Hence, the author specifies broad experiences of the preliminary assessment pointing out research questions and limitations for the sake of a relevant contribution to the development of a methodology of Artistic Research into the aesthetic and vigor of musical languages in multicultural encounters such as refugee music projects.

Keywords: music educational projects, refugees, multicultural environment, methodology, artistic research

Introduction

In 2015, students of Music Education and Musical Arts started to ask me for supervision of the music projects for refugees for which they were volunteering. They were looking for a forum in which to discuss their work with colleagues and fellow students. They found this in my seminars.

For some refugees, it took more than a year to come to Germany. Families and children who finally managed to arrive are discombobulated, separated not only from their home and culture but also from their loved ones and daily routines. Their state of emergency began a long time before their escape, which, finally, made the exodus necessary.

Arriving in Germany, refugees report overwhelming conflicting emotions. On the one hand, they feel safe from danger, on the other hand, they “want their lives back.” Most of all, refugees in registration camps are exhausted.

After registration in the camp nearest to the border, the refugees are distributed among the 16 German federal states. They receive accommodation in a reception facility or move on to collective or private accommodation.

A lot of my students are deeply concerned by the situation of the millions of refugees who have entered Germany during the last years. They have tried to help through what they are best in: music. They asked me to help them prepare for the workshops. Being aware of the potential of music as a universal language, the students are looking for appropriate methods of musical communication. However, some of the refugee children in the reception facilities are not yet ready to take part in group lessons. Either they disturb the classes, or they do not respond at all.

At this point, some music students started to question the music courses. “What am I doing here?”, “What is the purpose of the music courses?”, “Am I acting professionally?” Meanwhile, other music students of Music Education or Childhood Studies in our cooperative seminars were not at all surprised by the children's' behavior.

Together, we explored the different aspects of family life in the early stage of the asylum procedure. The families in the reception facilities have just arrived in Germany. The parents are worried about the complicated asylum procedure. At the same time, they are looking back and waiting for news from home. Suddenly, after a long and dangerous escape, thousands of kilometers of traveling, the adults have become passive, waiting for bureaucratic decisions beyond their control - for example where they will live. The technical term is ‘passivation.’ Refugees in this situation often find it difficult to parent their children. In some German states the children are placed in kindergartens and primary schools immediately, which seems good for them. They learn German quickly and profit from a daily routine and new friends. However, not every child is ready to integrate from the first day on. In addition, not every institution has patience with them or is able to give them individual attention.

In music courses in reception facilities, student-tutors face a pedagogical challenge because individual refugee children do not show up on a regular basis, and those who do show up are of different ages. Due to a lack of continuity, the students feel that they cannot teach the children musical repertoires or skills - at least not cumulatively. The preparation of the courses is becoming more difficult. The results in classes are not measurable in a way we are used to. By giving up any functional idea, even the objective of fluency in German which is obviously useful to the young refugees, the students inquire, together with the children, qualities such as listening, awareness or improvisation. The children have time to participate in their own way and get space to develop their own preferences.

Kairos – moment of contingency and achievement

Students and young music professionals themselves started many of the refugees’ music projects informally. Hence, they are being supported officially by cultural and social programs of the federal states, communes, music colleges and music schools.

Corresponding to the fluency of transition processes in flight, arrival and integration, the concept of Kairos serves as a first guideline. According to Jonas Helbig, in ancient Greek mythology and philosophy Kairos was not only identified with a God-given or nature-given point in time and space promising achievements to those who were able to recognize the value of the moment, but also indicates the right measurement and midway, in other words, the aesthetical and ethical principle of 'not too early,' 'not too late,' 'not too much,' and 'not too little.' (Helbig 2015: 14-15) Following the traces of 'important' and 'right moments' from the perception of the actors including refugees, residents as well as music students and professional music educators, I will seek to detect musical tools and appropriate methods for further investigation.

Through the observation of music education projects with refugees, new aspects of an extended terminology are emerging. The concepts of participation and (musical) self-expression in particular need clarification in practice. Regarding the following practical examples, refugees and residents appear as subjects of their musical courses and rehearsals. We see them as expressive actors able to decide on their degree of participation and expressivity. A key aspect of attention is the perception of transparent processes in musical practice resulting in artifacts.

According to the principles of communication and openness, authentic reception and understanding of complex situations arise in open-minded contact. To quote Christa Hoffmann-Riem:

"The principle of communication says that the researchers generally get the access to the meaningful data if they start a communicative relationship with the subject of the research and allow the communicative rule system of the researcher's subject to be accepted. [...] The principle of openness says that the theoretical structure of the research object should be postponed until the structure of the research object emerges through the research subject." (Hoffmann-Riem in Bohnsack 2014: 23-24)

Paradoxically, controlled understanding of complex cases increases with closeness and openness. Furthermore, participant observation demands a culture of auto-ethnomethodology (vulgo: self-observation), which enables researchers and music educators to identify their personal conditions. The subject which is allowed to unfold its inner world is, to a certain extent, self-reflecting. In musical arts and education, the subject

is enabled to project its inner world and to set marks in the form of artifacts. Allowing refugees to set footmarks after a long journey on obscure escape routes is an aim in itself. Although many of the projects of this period are going to disappear, it is important to trace their paths.

Coming back to the questions of young musicians who volunteered in music educational encounters with refugee children and juveniles during the recent period of massive arrival in Germany, a so-called ‘wave of refugees’, professional structures and teaching materials are helpful in comprehending how to build professional music courses and rehearsals. Concerning psychological comprehension of escape routes and narratives, the general attitude is central. The medium of understanding seems to be the music itself, which offers a wide range of appreciation and closeness with the option for the music educator “achieving the status of a trusted person.” (Glesne quoted by Schulte 2013: 2)

Advanced training courses that consider the mental state of refugees, offered by governmental and non-governmental organizations, were less frequented by professional music educators than expected. On the other hand, professional musicians do not stop to emphasize the flow of artistic exchange they experience in multicultural musical encounters.

In the field of "ero-epic conversations" (Girtler 2009: 66) musicians unfold the personal background of their educational thinking. Being a musician and music educator myself, depending on the situation, my participant observation comprises conversation, playing and singing with the group. Observation journals of music lessons and ensemble rehearsals disclose communication strategies and spontaneous interaction. Sound recordings facilitate accurate musical analyses. The data of this first period from October 2015 - May 2017 do not have the characteristics of research themselves. They lead the way to an artistic research project.

Moments of practice in music education projects with refugees

I have chosen different locations to discuss: the reception facilities in Darmstadt as mentioned above, one music school in the Ruhr region, a primary school in Hesse, a youth center and a communal meeting place, both in North Rhine - Westphalia. The locations correspond to different stages of the asylum procedure, and more importantly to different groups of participants: children of kindergarten or primary school age, teenagers, and families.

After a period of self-initiated courses in reception facilities, music schools are organizing cooperative projects with reception facilities and international classes in primary schools. Music school teachers are offering instrumental lessons, ensembles and

workshops to refugee children in many places. Hence, many music students could continue their initiatives as music school teachers or project leaders.

For this reason, I consider music students and young musicians as professional musicians. In parallel contexts such as concerts or instrumental tuition, music students and accomplished musicians are working together on an equal footing. Refugees and residents participating in music courses and ensembles are musical amateurs.

The project started with reflections about the music courses in a reception facility in Darmstadt, where students of the Darmstadt Music Academy are running music courses for refugee children. The courses in reception facilities are open to all children in childcare. As most of them do not go to kindergarten or school, the age varies from baby to twelve years old.

Music educational material such as new songbooks referring to the escape e.g. “I brought my Music with Me” (Erche & Jansen 2017) were published during the years of massive arrival. Music student-tutors use many of these and other songs. The refugee children in their ‘first house’ like them very much, especially if they have already learned them in a German school. Singing songs and telling stories helps refugees to share aspects of life in various countries and to learn German.

Additionally, some students use contemporary music tools such as soundwalks to explore with the refugee children the environment through their ears. Graphical scores make it possible for the children to create music they can share. Coming back to the aesthetics of the 1950s and 1960s in Modern Music, everyone can experience silence and sound without any pre-condition or know-how. In contemporary concert pedagogy natural sound, silence and urban noise as elaborated by John Cage or the musique concrète movement fathom a universal approach to music parameters. In this spirit, for example, the concert pedagogical program of the ensemble musikFabrik academy introduces contemporary compositions accessible to all children.

When music students bring their instruments to the music courses, they perform short pieces of music for the children, and the children respond by saying what they feel about the music. Usually, students like to play the music they are practicing at the time. As an exception, I once heard a student playing complex solo pieces for a group of small children. The student was dedicated to the music. She somehow communicated the music to the children, who responded with remarkable stories and associations. The children got a sense of what the compositions could mean to the student. It was like a mother singing a lullaby or telling a story which the baby certainly doesn’t understand. However, the child feels the warmth, the trust, the confidence in his mother’s voice. In other cases, children do not come to rest. Due to the lack of staff in the childcare and other difficult conditions, reception facilities are extremely challenging for volunteers.

Music schools in cooperation with international classes in primary schools can offer regular courses for children of the same age. Experimenting with several musical tools, musicians enjoy the power of their mastery in musical skills. Music students and professionals usually play more than one instrument. They find it easy to interrupt their playing for a ‘musical statue’, to create fluent rhythms on unfinished German words from the refugee children. Musicians are trained to accompany themselves singing self-invented songs, to keep eye contact with the children, and to make gestures at the same time. In so-called ‘parrot’ warm-ups young musicians surprise with sounds, body percussion, words and gestures to be imitated by the children. Using soundpainting gestures (Thompson 2017), musicians are capable of animating and creating instant compositions together with the children. Exploring an instrument or learning instrumental abilities communicates confidence and patience. The tutor is listening to the child. In some cases, children started to tell their experiences, in many cases, the children asked for instrumental lessons.

Being experienced in improvisation, professional musicians share the feeling of timing, and sound quality with the children as composer Sofia Gubaidulina depicts collective improvisation: “Again and again, I praise our idea to play unwritten music. It is for me today as the air to breathe“. (Suslin 2001: 46) Their improvisation is colored and diverse (Globokar 1994: 62-67) Although not all of them are singers, musicians have a modulating voice to make the children listen to the beauty of music.

I would like to investigate a spontaneous improvisation by a Syrian boy who took the cello of a professional cellist to improvise on his own. He played as a child should play. His play was undesigned, unconscious, creative. A former student of mine gave me this video picturing a remarkable scene. After her cello recital in a meeting place for German families and refugees of all ages, one Syrian boy took the musician’s instrument and started an improvisation which went on for about 20 minutes.

He is about eight years old. The chair is too high, and his feet do not even touch the ground. He does not know how to hold the bow using a fist grip. Yet still, the boy stays concentrated on his colorful playing. As he does not manage to evoke the full vibration of the C string, the little boy is dealing with partials and pizzicato effects. The way he enjoys the sparkling sounds of the harmonics shining and disappearing, the use of the left-hand pizzicato to trigger the vibration of the fundamental tone of the open string, his timing, and phrasing, as well as his devotion, reveals his inspiration by the preceding cello recital. Meanwhile, the quiet and friendly German-Arab conversation of families and young refugees is not being interrupted during the cello improvisation.

In accord with her thoughtful attitude, the music pedagogue does not correct nor compliment the young player. The boy’s experimentation and expression are supported by the presence of an independent audience following their relaxed feelings to discuss freely.

The model of the professional cellist enables the young Syrian boy to find this particular moment of contemplation resulting in a sophisticated approach to the sources of music. In the middle of escape, asylum and integration, he created his moment of arrival.

Comparing the pedagogic approaches of different musicians who have watched the same video of the Syrian boy on the cello, all of them were surprised and attracted by the musical variety of his play as well as by his dedication to it. While some of them emphasize the inspiring input by the previous professional cello recital and the supportive environment, others are focused on the child as an actor and subject of its development. They follow the creative impulses of the children rather than leading the way. Hence, musicians of all provenance develop excellent abilities to perform and listen at the same time.

One of the music student-tutors in a national music project for teenagers, unaccompanied minors and young adults is a member of a well-known pop-music band who came to Germany from a Middle East country at the age of 12 without speaking any German. The fact that he had experienced music as a turning point in his integration motivated him to work with teenage refugees. The line between empathy and identification is one of the most critical issues to consider in our supervision of the students.

It is not only their age that explains why the students identify with the young refugees. Some of them also have a migration background. Others have experienced community outreach in music education programs such as El Sistema or FOJI (Fundación de Orquesta Juveniles e Infantiles de Chile). A few of the students' home countries are situated along or near the escape routes of the juvenile refugees.

Unaccompanied minor refugees are especially vulnerable. Most of the unaccompanied minors are male. The age at which unaccompanied refugees are arriving in Germany is dropping. After the initial screening in a 'clearing house,' a guardian will be appointed, and the residence status will be clarified. From January 2015 to July 2016, almost 9000 unaccompanied minors disappeared. (BAMF 2017) Some of them may have gone off on their own to try to find family or friends in Germany. Others were threatened by smugglers or kidnappers.

Working on youth projects in urban youth centers supported by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, the music students enter into a professional collaboration with social workers or other public employees. They are also paid a nominal amount and are required to write reports about their work.

Young musicians have an idealistic view of music education. Because the students identify so closely with the young musicians, notably those who have a migration background themselves, they develop high expectations which cannot always be fulfilled. As a consequence, sometimes the students were disappointed and even quit the program.

Students tend to attribute to the music workshops the same importance that music had for them in their lives or their integration process.

Particularly with regard to oriental or African music, the role of professional music teachers with migration backgrounds is evident. In music schools or ensembles a baglama or oud player cannot be replaced by a guitarist participating in advanced training courses for Eastern stringed instruments. Turkish Baglama is among the Eastern music instruments which have already been taught in German music schools for years. To a greater extent, music schools can offer classes in cajon, darbuka, oud, balalaika and other instruments beyond European classical music.

In mixed ensembles with young asylum seekers and residents we observe multiple conversation levels, e.g., a young Syrian kanun player who does not read musical notes gets advice from a Turkish Baglama teacher using French music terms as an element of a post-colonial school system in Middle East countries.

In some national music schools in Germany, young professional music teachers, often in team-teaching between native and migrant music teachers, lead ensembles with a wide age-range from unaccompanied minors to German seniors who manage to communicate familiarly. As a side effect, those refugees become fluent in German within a few weeks. Musically, the cross-over style is affected by instrumentation including accordion, keyboard, recorder, guitar, classical violin together with oud, baglama, kanun and oriental violin. The most remarkable ensemble I have seen was an inclusive youngster band with refugees and residents with an average age of 11 to 17, among them children with special needs. The spontaneous achievement of this group and their young teacher regarding coordination and harmony was exquisite. Language skills and residency state were not distinguishing marks in this ensemble characterized by various stages of abilities and disabilities.

Relating to Western classical music tuition, we have encountered many refugees who used to attend music classes or had already started to teach themselves piano via YouTube in Syria for example, and who asked for instrumental lessons in German music schools. By way of example, a young violin player of about 15 years from a Balkan country found it difficult to orientate himself within the music education system in Germany. As he enjoyed the music lessons, he started thinking about becoming a professional musician himself. It took some time for his violin teacher to identify the most critical differences in interpretation and technique, and to develop a curriculum. Although professional music studies are not the aim of music tuition, young musicians regardless of their civil state get support in achieving their goals.

A local article reports on a choir workshop for adult refugees and residents near Darmstadt with about 30 participants. Rehearsals were held once a week for ten weeks.

The project ended with a concert. The title of the article – a quote from the Song of Joy by Beethoven - refers to the fact that one member of the choir proposed to sing the 'Song of Joy.' The music she brought was notated from right to left with Arab words. The leader of the choir met with a group of refugees to choose the songs that they would like to perform. One of the refugees played the keyboard and used an oriental harmonization that was unfamiliar to Europeans. Together, they translated European and oriental folksongs into German, Arabic, and Farsi. They sang songs like 'Ali Baba' in four different languages. Cultural differences led to sensitive reactions. In the end, the concert was a success. However, the preparation itself was just as important as the concert. Emotionally and musically, each participant of the development group was open-minded and competent. The keys to success were time and a symmetrical communication between residents and refugees.

Revisit of the practice

Concluding the first period (October 2015 - May 2017) of supervision and documentation of music projects with refugees at different places as a part of my university tuition related to seminars, educational conferences, and institutional cooperation, I have observed the music-tutors and the participating refugees developing a differentiated view of each others' narrative, as well as questioning their expectations. Making music is an act of awareness and attention with professional musicians as agents of a wide range of expressions and understanding. The students and professional musicians were surprised by the openness of the refugees to the repertoire they were performing. In their courses and workshops, the music students were patient, capable of listening and empathic. Alongside the musical repertoire of songs and compositions, the musical flexibility and creativity of professional musicians and music students are irreplaceable.

The specific role of musicians with migration background is to be scrutinized as a missing link regarding the biographical lacing bond with the biographical experiences of the refugees. Consolidated findings on intergeneration relationships of migration in different stages are crucial for the development of a genuinely multicultural society.

Regarding music as the preeminent medium of communication, the resulting sound needs evaluation as well as the communicative aspect. On the way to an intercultural understanding through music, crossover style and spontaneity are of particular interest for musical academics. Hence, in quality research, cross-cultural pedagogic is an esthetic expression to distinguish from stereotypical patterns. Western and Eastern scholars in Musicology and Music Theory, performers and pedagogues listen carefully to emerging modes. They appreciate being part of the ongoing history of common musical languages.

Artistic research on music in transition processes

According to Jonathan Impett, “Artistic research puts the production through artists’ practice at the center of the frame. This inevitably begs questions concerning the nature and status of that knowledge and the shape and context of the frame. Such questions may be irresolvable, but they oblige us to address a range of vital contemporary issues relating to knowledge, culture, institutions, and the individual.” (Impett 2017: 9) In music education with refugees, musical practice occurs in diverse constellations of individuals who came together for the sake of making music with a very little precondition of shared attributes such as age, musical training or preferences. For many ensembles as well as for music lessons, the activity is open to all residents and refugees.

Does kanun match with an accordion? Do 70 year old accordion players and 17 year old oud-players and violinists develop a common language in music? How does an eight year old boy enter into a world of sparkling harmonic sounds during a 20-minute session on a cello he had never touched before? How can we describe the entire world he is unfolding during his devoted play? Which signs and sounds from any homeland do we perceive in mixed ensemble rehearsals? How do we distinguish modes and rhythms emerging from the sides of several players - no matter if they are performing notes or improvisations? Is there a common language to be found in basic parameters of music as elaborated in soundwalks or graphical scores? Does cross-over music and singing songs from different countries feel relevant to the music educators and the participants? Which expressions of 'musicking' (cp. Finnegan 2007) do they enjoy? Is it meaningful to make music? Which moments let music educators and participants ask for more music rehearsals and practice?

From the perspective of the musicians, both teachers and participants considered as artists, artistic research methods seem to be an adequate approach to the questions arising from several music projects mentioned in this article. Regarding refugee children and juveniles as expressive actors and music editors as participants of musical practice and performances, most essential processes have the character of transitional musical artifacts.

Although musicians and music students are showing interest in reflecting conversation and narrative interviews, they seem to be much more consistent in exploring music. Professional musicians proudly present the results of their practice and invite interested parties to participate and listen to rehearsals, in contrast to their engagement in terms of periodical interviews. Musicians call me to share their musical experiences or send videos. They make the mental connection to recognize the significance of serendipity in musical moments.

Artistic research is about embodied knowledge in the process. Value is generated by knowing through doing, including the contingency of results in performance.

However, is the process transparent or measurable? Are the results valid? Is the perception transparent? Who is the subject, what is the object of research?

The diversity of the music education field for generations is an appropriate paradigm and indicator for creative integration processes. However, from my perception, it is essential to recognize that the diversity of a multicultural society, as well as the transition of ongoing massive waves of flight, resettlement, and integration, will not be measured in one or a few studies.

On the methodology of an artistic research project in multicultural music education

The development of a methodology in artistic research on music and music education in transition processes of escape and migration is a necessary part of the research process.

As in composition, where artistic research is mostly applied, the concept of an instrument is widened by the exploration of concrete material and environmental circumstances through a playful physical approach to its properties through practice and performance, artistic research in multicultural music education reveals the process of music making and perception in real situations of local coincidence under conditions of migration.

In his doctoral thesis, *The Conflict of the Faculties – Perspectives on Artistic Research and Academia*, Henk Borgdorff indicates criteria of artistic research methodology in cooperation and differentiation to empirical, ethnographic, technical and other research methods. As the third specific criterion for artistic research, Borgdorff postulates:

Artistic research is not about theory, but about thought. It is not primarily directed at ‘knowing that...’ or ‘knowing how ...’. It is directed more at a not-knowing, or a not-yet-knowing. It creates room for that which is unthought, that which is unexpected – the idea that all things could be different. This is the contingency of artistic research. (Borgdorff 2012: 214)

The attitude of exploration in practice is inherent to music education and practice. Awareness and spontaneity are critical to musical rehearsals and performances open to contingency of the moment and continuity in practice, craftsmanship and tradition at the same time. And still, the adaptation of artistic research to multicultural music education is challenging.

Ambiguous roles of teachers, participants and researchers in processes of creation and participant observation demand self-observation. Presuming that music teachers and

children are actors and artists in collaborative rehearsals, the differentiation of a teacher-student role model in performing becomes a research question. Parallel questions affect the student-professional or the researcher-participant relationship in making music. Who is giving input in musical practice? Does it matter where the first musical or pedagogical idea for the rehearsal came from? In artistic research into multicultural music education, the actor-network needs to be under investigation. “Artistic Research is a hybrid and is meant to be a hybrid.” (Impett 2017: 181). Consequently, for Jonathan Impett, researcher education needs to be a hybrid as well.

In times of globalization through migration and digital media, network structures such as those elaborated by Bruno Latour, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri at the end of the 20th century give distinction to each musician as well as to each refugee or emigrant. No matter in which cycle the European borders are opening or closing, more than 68 million of people are on escape routes globally. Many children do not have access to regular schooling for a long time. But they do have access to social media and digital tutorials which they have in common with German musicians with or without migration background. Will our categories of classical music, Western or Eastern, be sustainable? How open-minded are we for the un-thought and unexpected? Can we develop skills of differentiation and perception of valuable artistic and educational processes going on?

Those questions are not new. When Helmuth Lachenmann composed his cello solo *Pression* in 1969, the issue came up as to whether he destroys the aesthetic of the cello or reveals unique aspects of it. Liza Lim's singing woodblock triggered by a cello bow explores qualities of various composition elements. Both contribute to artistic research on a high artificial level. At the same time, as Nicholas Cook presumes: “[...] practice within a research context should be practice that has from the start been conceived within the context of reflection, debate, and critical appraisal.” (Cook: 2016: 26)

Can artistic research be effective in developing skills of perception of worthwhile musical and communicative processes in multicultural music education with refugees? Research in a multicultural society of music professionals and amateurs deals with complex participant and material conditions. Developing clear parameters means accepting the singularity of any encounter under local and personal conditions.

During a preliminary assessment of about one and a half years, the number of musical interventions increased. Many intercultural ensembles have stabilized. The focus has shifted from the accomplishment of arrival to contribution to multicultural life which will be subject to a long-term artistic research project in cooperation with empirical research departments. The process and the findings of an artistic research project aim to contribute to the understanding of the role of music in transition and arrival as well as contributing to the development of a methodology of artistic research in multicultural environments.

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