Music without Borders: A Research Project about the New Methodologies of Music Teaching in the Viennese Primary and Secondary Schools

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ABSTRACT

This article presents some of the results of a research project which the author conducted between 2015 and 2018. The influences of the music lessons which were offered within the framework of this research project is the main subject of this article. It shows how children with and without migrant backgrounds can improve their bi- and multi-musical identities in their transcultural spaces through these music lessons. Providing an insight into possibilities of intercultural music education in Viennese primary schools is the central aim of this paper.
It is often claimed that music can play an ideal mediating role between cultures. However, it must be considered that, similar to language, music is subject to rules, follows transmission methods, and has social functions and aesthetic specifications that are strongly dependent on the power relations within the respective society. Bi- or multiculturality is the ability to articulate oneself in diverse cultural spaces. This particular ability can make an invaluable contribution to the transmission of musics and cultures of different communities who share the same places with different cultural backgrounds. In particular, bi- or multi-musical people can disempower the cultural power relations between these communities. This article deals with the question of how the bi- and multi-musical identities of pupils with migrant backgrounds in Vienna and Austria develop and to what extent power structures play a role in this phenomenon. A research project of the Department of Folk Music Research and Ethnomusicology, and the Franz Schubert Department of Wind and Percussion Instruments in Music Education at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna on the musical identity process of elementary school children (called “Music without Borders – Multilingualism in Music – The Understanding of the Other, the Unfamiliar”) will be presented here in order to answer the question of how to reduce these hierarchical structures, which mostly lead to discrimination.

Numerous research projects have shown that children who are interested in music develop a stronger sense of self-confidence, better social skills and a greater sense of belonging and empathy within the society in which they live. In addition, the influence of making music enables them to have a better sense of togetherness.¹

At this point one may ask the following question: How does the bi- or multi-musical identity of pupils with an migrant background in Vienna manifest itself and to what extent do power relations play a role in this process? The above-mentioned research project, which is situated in urban primary and secondary schools in Vienna where around 95% of pupils have migrant backgrounds, can visualize this issue in various aspects and answer these questions.

If we consider that for centuries Vienna has not only enjoyed a high international reputation as a “city of music”, but with around 40% inhabitants of migrant background also represents an important centre of migration within Austria and the EU, one cannot deny the necessity of imparting elementary knowledge about the musical languages of migrants.²

Furthermore, it is unfortunately a fact that in Austrian schools the “problematic situation” of children with migrant backgrounds is repeatedly discussed, among other things because they frequently do not master the German language at a native speaker


level and exhibit “different” behaviour in school classes. Muslim pupils have also been criticized because of their “Islamic behaviour” such as not eating pork, wearing head-scarves and behaving more aggressively(3).

Intercultural music pedagogy has not yet been sufficiently researched in German-speaking countries, and there are still only a few publications. On the other hand, there are numerous studies and publications on the general situation of migration, migrants, interculturality and diversity that point to the need for intercultural music education in schools.4

The above-mentioned books and various conferences (e.g. “Beyond Borders: Welt-Musik-Pädagogik” Rostock, 2011; “Kulturen.Vermitteln.Musik” - organized by the Bruckner Conservatory - Linz, 2013; “musik.welt - Kulturelle Diversität in der musikalischen Bildung” - organized by the Center for World Music, Foundation of the University of Hildesheim - Berlin, 2013 and “Traditionelle Musik: Von der ’Überlieferung’ zur Vermittlung? Models and Methods”, organized by the Department of Folk Music Research and Ethnomusicology at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna) emphasize the need for greater embeddedness of interculturality in schools. The fact that it can be implemented more proficiently through cooperation between music education and ethnomusicology was often mentioned in those publications and conferences. The long research tradition of ethnomusicology – especially studies on music and minorities – on the issues of that which is “different” and “foreign” can, with its methodological tools, provide many suggestions and solutions, contribute new aspects to music education and make “being different” into a natural matter in school classes.

1. Project Design and Aims of the Project

On the basis of these conditions, we have conceptualized this research project in order to examine the problems mentioned above and to develop possible solutions and alternatives. The project was located at the municipal schools Neue Mittelschule Köblgasse (Köblgasse New Secondary School) and Volksschule Kleistgasse (Primary School) in Vienna. In these schools around 95% of the pupils have a “migrant background”5 and that is why they are unfortunately defined by many experts, but also by the school staff, as “problem schools”.

The project combined scientifically-oriented ethnomusicological research methods with practice-oriented methods of music education. This interdisciplinary approach

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5 Unfortunately they are treated as “foreigners” in that school, although most of that pupils were born and grew up in Vienna.
represented an optimal cross section between scientific and practice-oriented methodologies in order to optimize the teaching strategies used in music lessons at the primary schools and at the music university. It also made it easier for pupils to discover and understand other genres of music, other music tradition beside Western European classical music and Anglo-American music genres and perceive them as an integrated part of the community. The project duration was from 1st March 2015 until 28th February 2017 with an extension of ethnomusicology lessons for pupils in the academic year 2017–2018.

It was a cooperation between the above mentioned departments of the University of Music and (Department of Folk Music Research and Ethnomusicology, and Franz Schubert Department of Wind and Percussion Instruments in Music Education) and Neue Mittelschule Kölblgasse (Kölblgasse New Secondary School) and Volksschule Kleistgasse (Kleistgasse Primary School).6

There were four groups of project participants: pupils, primary school teachers, ethnomusicologists and music teachers (teachers and students of the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna who have taught musical instruments at this school).

In this project, instrument education students got into contact with the “real” world by teaching their instruments in the environment of a “typical” Viennese school class, in which the majority of the children are of migrant origin. To be able to teach in a school of this kind together with their students was also a challenge for many teachers from the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, because communication with the pupils was rather different than that which they were used to. The interest and support of the pupils’ parents was also divergent here, and therefore the tasks and approaches of the teachers were different.

The instrument teachers and students of the Franz Schubert Department of Wind and Percussion Instruments in Music Education at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna had a key role in this project, both as mediators of their musical language – which was Western European classical music – to the pupils, and also as interview partners for ethnomusicological researchers, as knowers and doers helping to find answers to the following question: “Which changes are necessary if we want to optimize the curricula of the departments of music education in order to prepare our students for multicultural Viennese schools?” In order to answer this question, we conducted guided interviews with the students and teachers of Vienna Music University, with teachers at primary and secondary schools, and with pupils. These guided interviews included questions on musical socialization, instrument teaching practices, music classes, identification of issues among the pupils of these particular schools, and the issues at the schools concerning so called “integration problems”. Some questions about the potential inputs of the music university and suggestions for the introduction of new teaching concepts in the curriculum of the music university were also included in these guided and anonymously evaluated interviews. Encouragingly, the statements were quite similar. All of the project participants who were interviewed stressed the importance and necessity of new teaching concepts for intercultural music education. At the end of the project, we conducted feedback interviews with the same

groups in order to find out possible strategies and whether they wanted to be actively involved in future projects. The fact that all interview partners wanted to be actively involved in our future research work was actually the most important sign that such projects are long overdue.

The pupils who take part in afternoon supervision receive regular music instrument lessons held by the students and teachers of the music university. In this way the pupils come into contact with Western European classical music. It is now a fact that Western European classical music is increasingly rarely heard, appreciated and understood. This lack of knowledge is not only the case among children with migrant backgrounds, but also among many children without such backgrounds. The teachers and students of the Franz Schubert Institute used this opportunity in order to present Western European classical music and its “unknown” musical instruments to these pupils. The idea here was not to familiarize the pupils with the musical traditions of their so-called country of origin, but with the help of music education students and teachers to pass on “unfamiliar” and “unknown” western European classical music and create for this pupils a new leeway for creativity.

Figure 1: Students and pupils during a trumpet lessons. 2016, copyright IVE-Sağlam

Through those instrumental lessons the students of the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna got in contact with children of working class families who mostly had migrant backgrounds. This was an unusual cultural mosaic which our students were not familiar with, although it is by no means an exceptional feature of schools in Austria nowadays.

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An “ethnomusicological” lesson was offered to pupils once a week, during which the tutor spoke with pupils about diverse music and dance genres and about their “favourite” or own or their parents’ musical world beyond Afro-American and European popular music styles. Great care was taken that the children were not compulsively confronted with their so-called “own roots”.

The ethnomusicologists carried out accompanying research by using the main methods of ethnomusicology, such as participant observation, guided interviews and audio/video documentation.

The mediating role of ethnomusicology in the music education system was necessary in this case. This function was actually the key task of ethnomusicology in this research project in order to create and simplify communication among the pupils and teachers of the primary school, the teachers from the music university and the students of the music education department.

In this context, the statement of Ellen Koskofs reflects the aim of the project very well:

_Our main responsibility as teachers is, I feel, to pass on [music] without canonizing. Instead, we should be helping our students to discover their own paths with an underlying bedrock philosophy that all values, just like all people and all musics, have equivalent meaning to someone, somewhere. What I want to be doing also is teaching them a new set of values that will enable them to know their own music well, but also to become good musical citizens in [the] world. [...] I want also to be teaching strategies for learning open-mindedness, fairness, and compassion for differences of all kinds._

The ethnomusicological aim here was to analyse the possibilities of intercultural music transmission, and to prefigure and suggest new perspectives for transmitting various musical languages without generating any type of cultural and social hierarchy among them.

The primary objective in this transmission process is to create implicitness and benefits of “otherness” as a prerequisite for achieving mutual communication, not only among minority groups but also with majorities. In order to research the “otherness” in a school class, we wanted to find some ways to show the implicitness and richness of an individual to the pupils and also the music university students. Breaking down hierarchical structures was necessary here too, especially in areas related to aesthetic assessment and judgment.

Otherness is a sociological phenomenon which helps social groups and individuals by representing/describing their own identities, because in many cases identity has no meaning without determining what the other is. So by defining itself, another person or group will take on the role of being different. In many societies, the consequence of this classification is social or legal discrimination and exclusion. This otherness can unfortunately form a very strong hierarchical structure which is also reflected in an extreme way in the transmission of the musical languages of different cultures.

Hierarchy is a social system in which persons are ranked according to their levels of importance and their power. This inevitable and sometimes even necessary social structure has, without doubt, many problematic aspects, because the “level of importance” of people in a society is a multi-faceted issue and can cause many conflicts, abuse and oppression, especially concerning the relationship between majorities and minorities, because in this case priorities are usually decided upon by the dominant culture.

Schools also have a very strict hierarchical structure. This causes many serious problems if, in this hierarchical construction, teachers have a lack of knowledge of the realities of their pupils. In our case it mostly concerns pupils with migrant backgrounds. In this case these children are doubly oppressed in this hierarchical structure: as pupils in a typical school system and as “others” because of their social, ethnic and/or religious background. Our study emphasized once again the necessity for additional training and different information sources for teachers concerning “dealing with pupils with migrant backgrounds”. This is not only the key issue of our project, but also a key problem of many Viennese schools. It must be repeated here that around 40% of the population of Vienna has an migrant background. Accordingly, there are many primary and secondary schools with pupils with migrant backgrounds. In these schools, talking about the “problematic behaviour” of those children is not only an everyday topic, but also something which is unfortunately instrumentalised and manipulated by right-wing politicians. They do not make solution-oriented statements, they want to implement a populist xenophobic policy by blaming migration for a great deal of negative events. Pupils experience this exclusion indirectly and develop ambivalent opinions, because they actually feel unwelcome and at the same time they want to

9 See also: Mullin A. Jackson, Racial and Cultural Otherness - The Lived Experience of Americans of Korean Descent (Florida: Boca Raton, 2009).

10 Mostly so called second and third generation, which are actually a part of Austrian community for more than 60 years but considered by the majority as foreigners.
follow the rules of society. As a result they also begin to exclude “others”, which must be seen as a snowball effect which leads to insoluble social conflicts such as endless exclusion and racism. A short passage from an interview we conducted with a pupil with an migrant background from this school can describe the matter much more clearly: “about refugees ... We shouldn’t accept any more refugees, because there are too many refugees in Austria.”

Competence in inter- and transcultural communication is an issue of growing importance in our world. Understanding and using competence in transcultural communication can provide us with many new perspectives. In this context, the transmission of different musical genres offers a variety of opportunities which can serve as a communication and understanding process between different communities and between various hierarchal structures. In order to achieve suitable models of transmission of various musical genres, an in-depth understanding of their cultural values is necessary. A profound analysis of their social and economic conditions is also inevitable if we want to repair the damaged structures of many hierarchies. In this case an interdisciplinary approach can provide an optimal basis in order to analyse the situation from different perspectives and to develop new methods and ideas.

Getting to know new musical languages was intended to help eliminate mental barriers and to help pupils and their teachers to treat the otherness of each other respectfully. Pupils and teachers jointly developed sustainable concepts in order to understand, learn, identify and articulate their “own” interculturality. In order to achieve these goals via music, various musical languages were used. This also makes it easier to get into contact with the pupils, because they can and will find individual connecting factors in their bi- or multicultural identities. In addition, the intention is that pupils without migrant backgrounds should learn other, unfamiliar musical worlds and mentalities so that they no longer experience the ‘other’ as a foreign body but as a part of their own society into which they were born. An essential part of the project was that pupils bring their “own” songs or their favourite songs to class and speak about them. The idea of creating a book with a CD was one of the central goals of this project, and the project team member Wei-Ya Lin has already published this book. The book contains music from many different cultures in the world without considering them as “alien” but as a part of “us”. She gave pupils an active role in this process as singers and illustrators. This not only promoted communication and fostered their interest in ethnomusicological research; it also gave us important information about their “hidden” musical identities and those of their family members. This provided us with many answers concerning existing problems of integration in schools, and significantly improved the pupils’ success at school and gave them self-confidence. The interest, motivation and success of pupils in music lessons proved that the “problem” was not the pupils, but the methods of teaching. Actually, the main problem has been

11 From an interview with a nine-year-old pupil with a migrant background from the above-mentioned primary school. His family migrated during the Bosnian War in the 1990s.
the prejudiced approaches of schools. From the moment that pupils felt the respectful
approach taken towards them, they could show their interest, knowledge and abilities.

To be a part of research and creating an audio book together with our university stu-
dents and teachers improved the communication, conscious togetherness and research
experiences of pupils. They learned to be reflective by considering their own identities
and the identities of others.\textsuperscript{13}

With our semi-structured interviews, which we conducted not only with pupils but
also with students and teachers of University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna and
teachers of these two schools, we obtained a large amount of information, feedback,
inputs, and achieved educational progress. Consequently, we highlight three important
outputs:

1. Showing primary school teachers (who partly have many prejudices against pupils
with migrant backgrounds) the potential of the intercultural abilities of pupils and
their potential benefits for the school. Now they recognize the advantages and
consider the music lesson to be necessary.

2. To familiarize university students - future music teachers - with the “real world” by
immersing them in the environment of a ‘typical’ Viennese class where a majority
of the pupils stem from diverse minority communities. A quote from one of our
interviews:

\textit{I had heard about this kind of school since my childhood, but I never came in to
contact with them. Everything functions differently here. I think the methodologies
of music teaching which we learn at mdw (University of Music and Performing
Arts Vienna) are not accessible in this kind of environment. Our curriculum needs
new inputs. Otherwise we will not be able to get into contact with these intercultural
facets of the schools.}\textsuperscript{14}

3. New didactic concepts for intercultural music teaching must be developed in co-
operation between ethnomusicology and music education in order to facilitate the
teaching, learning and understanding of interculturality within the curricula of the
music university. Not only teachers, but also our music students of our university
recognized that ethnomusicological inputs during their education process give
them a wider perspective on the diversity of musical languages. The future music
teachers can, with the help of ethnomusicological research tools and approaches,
begin to think intensively about power structures, authenticity, ethnocentricity,
postcolonialism, globalization, discrimination and individuality, as well as ethical
issues. Learning from differences, which they will find in sufficient amounts in their
classes, and questioning hierarchical structures are also very important points.

\textsuperscript{13} For more information about this book and its influences on our project see: WeiYa Lin, “Representing Musical Identities of
Children with Immigrant Backgrounds - An Example from the Research Project ‘Music Without Borders’,” \textit{Musicologist} 1, no.

\textsuperscript{14} Excerpt from an interview with a student of the University of Music, 2017.
2. Conclusion – Summary of the Results

Our project finished in 2018. Thankfully the school and the teachers from University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna want to continue their cooperation. Our students and teachers see that the transmission of different musical languages at our university is necessary.

The project showed us that music education and ethnomusicology have many questions in common which cannot be answered within only one of these two disciplines. The necessity of a better embedding of interculturality, especially in primary schools, and a more competent, well-grounded and practice-oriented implementation of it through cooperation between music pedagogy and ethnomusicology was also clearly underlined. This study emphasises that in this context the central research method of ethnomusicology – field research – can offer many benefits. The integration of competent musicians from different cultures into didactic concepts and the thoughtful perception of “otherness” – without distancing oneself from it – are areas in which music education can benefit from ethnomusicology. Ethnomusicology should be open to the didactic approaches of music education so that these aspects can be implemented in the best possible way in order to achieve the highest level of teaching skills. At university level, music education students should receive more focused training so that they can better interact with internationally-structured school classes in their daily work. The fact that future music teachers become familiar with the methods and theoretical approaches of modern ethnomusicology – in order to understand the intercultural and transcultural concepts of their social environments – can offer them a broader professional perspective.

The encounter with the “foreign” with the help of experts from different music cultures and with pupils with migrant backgrounds at the primary school in the context of ethnomusicological field research can be offered as a first step here. It would be an important step towards understanding and problem-free communication that students who have grown up with two or more musical languages (bi- or multi-musical students) are given a mediating role. Ethnomusicologists can assist music educators greatly in this step: by blending ethnomusicological theories and research to establish world music education methods that can be incorporated into the music education curriculum and teaching practices. They can help music educators to find, learn and utilize the traditional methods of transmission of a certain musical culture so that they can be incorporated into lessons as an additional way of teaching music in the classroom.

Holding the lessons on different music traditions for pupils by an ethnomusicologist in order to create communication between different musical “understandings” and in order to give the pupils the possibility to discover the diversity in their environments without discriminating each others is the most and valuable result of this project.

3. About the Future

Through the results of this research project, we have realized that the students of our music university need immediate support concerning intercultural music transmission
We also questioned the current methods of music education and determined that we need new strategies of transmission and teaching which are freer of prejudice and hierarchies. To achieve this goal, we need several steps. The first and most important one is a new course in the frame of our university. We will conceptualize a field work course for music students. In this course we are planning to take the students on a “field research trip” to schools where there are a large number of pupils with migrant backgrounds, in order to show them the real world of Viennese primary and secondary schools. Additional courses on intercultural competence and on diverse musical traditions are also necessary for students to obtain an insight into a possible “non-elitist” school without viewing it with prejudices but with enthusiasm and implicitness. The efficiency of this approach was proven during our research project. This experience will also affect pupils very positively. They will get in to touch with a world with which they normally have no contact. This insight will create a genuine and close contact between future music teachers and students so that they can finally reflect on identity issues themselves. A communication basis of this kind – as we have observed during the project – creates confidence and awareness so that children can express, define, and establish their own identity instead of suffering or benefiting from it as “victims”. Better communication in school between the head teacher, teachers and pupils, a conscious togetherness instead of underlining otherness, sustainable research experiences through the pupils’ own motivation should be the tools for learning and opening up new horizons for future reflective thoughts and decisions on the part of the pupils. We are already observing several indications of progress at this school and consider it necessary to carry out additional projects of this kind at other primary and secondary schools in Vienna.

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