Music in the school life of newly arrived migrant children: potential paths to participation and belonging

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses migrant children's entries into new education systems from the vantage point of musical participation. Through an ethnographic study of one Norwegian primary school, it investigates what scope for musical participation is available to newly arrived migrant children in a dedicated introductory class, and how their engagement with music contributes to a sense of belonging. Four themes emerged: (1) Self-presentation and creativity; (2) New roles; (3) Memories of family and home; and (4) Belonging. The experiences in this study highlight that intercultural music education is about far more than content. The importance of relational competences developed through group musical activity and social interplay was continually to the fore, as well as the need for teacher reflexivity over the lack of neutrality of (musical) knowledge and skills in the classroom. Musical participation in schools then requires the fostering of intercultural competence among teachers, pupils and the entire school culture.

Introduction and background

This article addresses the role of music in the school life of newly arrived migrant children, investigating the potential of music as a path to participation and belonging. It reports from an ethnographic study of their musical engagement in school. While music education is often seen as a vehicle for engaging with diversity and building community in schools, certain music practices in culturally diverse classrooms may also have negative effects related to power, exoticism, cultural labelling and exclusionary paradigms for marginalised groups (Kallio et al. 2021; Westerlund and Karlsen 2017).

Newly arrived migrant children are far from homogenous; their experiences range from voluntary relocation to forced migration, and the intersectionality of factors in their situations requires a high level of adaptation in classrooms. Some arrive seeking only skills in a new language to resume their schooling, while others arrive with no formal education and low literacy levels. Common to all are challenges of resettlement: adapting to a new country, culture and language, and often dealing with a degree of social isolation. Our study focuses on the transitional stage of resettlement in a new school community, which may lay foundations for integration into the wider host society.

Pinson and Arnot (2020) note that young migrants' access to education is often restricted by the structure of the education systems they enter, with knock-on effects for future occupational destinations. In some countries language is regarded as an absolute barrier to direct enrolment of

migrant children in mainstream schooling. However, educational exclusion of migrant children may also occur through *internal* differentiations within systems that espouse an inclusionary approach (Hilt 2017). A holistic model in refugee education is one which recognises children's learning, social and emotional needs and has an ethos of inclusion and caring, celebration of diversity, and welcoming attitudes to refugee students (Arnot and Pinson 2005; Taylor and Sidhu 2012). This also requires awareness of the culturally bound nature of educational practices.

Our study explores migrant children's entries into new education systems, schools and classrooms from one vantage point – that of their musical participation. It is an investigation of the role of music in one Norwegian school during newly arrived children's resettlement period. Through in-depth exploration, the research seeks to address two questions:

(1) What scope for musical participation is available to newly arrived migrant children in a dedicated introductory class?
(2) How does the children's engagement with music contribute to building a sense of belonging?

Theoretical framework

Our study draws on lenses of musical participation and belonging. Stige (2010) distinguishes between five forms of musical participation as styles of self-presentation used in the co-creation of a social space: (a) non-participation, where the participant is physically but not socially present; (b) silent participation, being socially present, but not joining in; (c) conventional participation, joining in without standing out from the group; (d) adventurous participation, joining in in a way that stands out, with deviation that transforms group activities; and (e) eccentric participation, going against what is happening in the group musically, establishing new activities. All five forms are defined by Stige as mutual processes where other people's witnessing of participation is central to the co-creation of a social space.

It is possible to see the introductory class as a potential community of musical practice, a concept coined by Kenny (2016) in extension of Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice. Kenny applied the analytical lenses of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire to group music-making to provide deep understanding of these practices. She found that a community of musical practice was created through musical engagement with attendant rules, roles, identities and ways of being, where community members engaged in collective processes that were at once musical and social, in which relationships, a sense of belonging and collaboration are central to the group.

The web of relationships between music and people in a physical and cultural space is key to Small's notion of musicking and Turino's participatory music making. Small (1998) describes inwardly desired relationships that come into existence for the duration of a performance, exploring, affirming and celebrating who we are in relation to others, then to disappear. Turino (2008), too, notes the potential in participatory music for moments of ideal human relationships. He also describes participatory music as a mode for fashioning alternative social futures, foregrounding the interplay between the Possible (hopes, dreams and desires) and the Actual, through imagining a new future or trying out new roles.

Pitts (2016) identifies various roles of musical participation, including as a source of confirmation, an opportunity to demonstrate or acquire skills, a forum for social interaction and a way of enhancing or escaping everyday life. However, she notes that these benefits have counterparts in risks and frustrations, such as bordered groups with shared musical identities and practices that exclude others from participation.

Our study draws on research into musical participation outlined above, as well as research into musical participation amongst migrant children more specifically. Potential benefits are evidenced in the scholarship as developing forms of communication and a sense of belonging, contributing to

cultural maintenance, identity construction, stress relief, musical agency and integration in the host country, as well as providing security through routine (DeNora 2000; Howell 2011; Karlsen 2012, 2013; Kenny 2017, 2018; Marsh 2012, 2013, 2017; Ritchie and Gaulter 2020; Sæther 2008; Tillborg and Ellefsen 2021). Music programmes for migrant children have also been shown to affect acculturation processes, sometimes leading to stronger host culture orientation and adaption to mainstream culture (Frankenberg et al. 2016).

Caxaj and Berman (2010) describe how the need for belonging is at the heart of migrants' resettlement. Anant (1967) defines belonging as a sense of personal involvement in a social system to the extent that a person feels like an indispensable, integral part of the system. While experiences of belonging and community are important to healthy development in childhood and adolescence in general (Newman, Lohman, and Newman 2007), the issue of belonging is particularly pressing for migrants.

During resettlement migrants may reignite feelings of belonging to their homelands and family through engagement with music connected to their ethnic or cultural backgrounds (Kenny 2018; Marsh 2013). At the same time, musical participation may also mediate experiences of belonging in their new settings, with music conceived as a means of welcome and inclusion (de Quadros and Vũ 2020; Ritchie and Gaulter 2020). Music has been shown to promote belonging through collective identity (Bowman 2007) shared understandings and practices (Finnegan 2007) cohort identities and sonic bonding (Turino 2008), while synchrony to a common pulse can give rise to a powerful uniting force and sense of togetherness (Clayton 2012; McNeill 1995). Rituals involving music in school may also help cement feelings of belonging, meaningfulness and community (Stene 2019; Nikkanen and Westerlund 2017). However, just as musical experience *can* promote a sense of belonging, it can also feed disaffection and create spaces of alterity (Waligórska 2014), and there is no guarantee that participation in educational settings will necessarily lead to a sense of belonging (Gabi 2013; Boldermo 2020). This article seeks to examine these issues for newly arrived migrant children from distinct experiences within a school in Western Norway.

The study and methodology

Norway, like other European countries, has in recent years experienced an upsurge in the number of school-age migrant children. The way post-migration education is organised varies across Norway, but since 2012 several cities have offered dedicated introductory classes at selected schools to prepare newly arrived children for transition to mainstream classes at local schools. Norway has a strongly unitary school system, and segregation from mainstream classes requires dispensation from the Education Act,[1] which upholds all pupils' right to social belonging to a peer group and forbids grouping by ability, gender or ethnic affiliation.

Our study is an ethnographic study (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007) of an urban primary school chosen through purposeful sampling. Fieldwork (by the first author) started in May 2019 and lasted ten months. The school has a mixed-age, mixed-ability introductory class for children aged 7–13 which newly arrived children attend for one to two years. The co-location of introductory classes with mainstream schools is meant to ensure social contact with Norwegian-speaking children. After an eight-week induction period, local authority guidelines recommend that these children join mainstream classes in some subjects, particularly practical subjects.

The data collection involved participant observation, interviews and extensive field conversations. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with the head, deputy head, three teachers and six pupils – four girls and two boys from Europe, South America, Africa, Southeast Asia and Southwest Asia. The project was registered with the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) and followed Norwegian research ethics guidelines. The issue of consent was revisited throughout the year with the children in addition to securing parental consent. All names are pseudonyms, and care has been taken to preserve anonymity through avoiding clusters of information about gender, age, country of origin, etc.

Particular care is needed in the representation of vulnerable groups in terms of power and voice (Hess 2018), heightened in this study by the lack of a fluent common language between the researcher and pupils, the pupils' age and their status as a minority group. While ethnographic study aims to lift emic perspectives, this article builds to a large degree on analysis of observational data. Validation of the researchers' interpretations was sought in two ways. Firstly, through building relationships with the children across nearly a year, helping when asked, chatting, accompanying them on school outings, and making music with them. (Music making served both as a supplementary data collection tool and a way of connecting with the children non-verbally, particularly important since verbal communication took place in the children's relatively new second language.) Secondly, triangulation was sought through informal conversations with teachers and in regular meetings with the introductory team, where observations were discussed. The head and deputy head also observed some sessions and discussed with the first researcher afterwards. All who took part in these discussions were adult majority group members, requiring keen awareness of majority privilege. Reflexivity in assessing the relationships between the researcher and participants (Reeves, Kuper, and Hodges 2008) was crucial to the analysis, and peer debriefing techniques were employed to try to uncover the researchers' hidden preconceptions (Figg et al. 2009).

Through abductive content analysis (Brinkmann 2014) we investigated the scope for musical participation available to these children and how music appeared to facilitate or hamper experiences of belonging. The analysis consisted of identifying themes arising inductively, followed by concept-driven coding (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009) through the lenses of participation and belonging, two of the main themes that emerged in the initial analysis.

Findings and discussion

The children's musical participation offered opportunities to blend in with the group through conventional participation, and to stand out from the group through adventurous participation. Participation varied over time and across different settings in the school, but in general musical participation typically increased over time. Four overall themes emerged from the findings: (1) Self-presentation and creativity; (2) New roles; (3) Memories of family and home; and (4) Belonging. The themes are presented below, followed by two spotlights on specific child experiences.

Self-presentation and creativity

In music sessions in the introductory class the children were often invited to share musical contributions of their own choosing. They usually shared songs in their first language.

> During today's session, Ahmad chose to sing a pop song in his native language. Hassan and Kareem, from the same country as Ahmad, immediately joined in clapping and singing. Ahmad made silencing motions as he sang, knitting his brows, and they stopped. But as the chorus started, both jumped up and started to sing and dance in the middle of the circle, their arms above their heads. As Hassan danced, I saw his eyes darting round the room, and he espied the paper towel dispenser by the basin. Still singing and dancing, he made his way over, pulled out two paper towels and proceeded to dance with the towels as if they were silk scarves. (Observational Log (OL), November 2019)

Here, Ahmad's singing was used to present himself and his musical preferences (Stige 2010), and demonstrate his skills (Pitts 2016), but it also gave other pupils scope for participation and creativity in the co-created social and musical space. There is an inherent creativity in Hassan's actions, as well as a sense of his navigating the boundaries of behavioural norms in this setting, with a potential conflict between self-expression and following school rules and norms. It raises the question of whether Hassan was aware of norms and expectations regarding how to react to music in this classroom (he constantly jumped to his feet and started dancing any time music was played, even in lessons), but also whether acceptable reactions to music in this classroom diverged from expectations elsewhere in the school. The school has explicit rules for the use of paper towels to avoid

waste, and implicit rules about behaviour in the classroom. One bilingual teacher expressed concern about the 'unruly' way children engaged with music. The introductory class teachers, though, appeared to welcome such episodes as signs of children expressing themselves non-verbally, echoing Arnot and Pinson's (2005) reference to a holistic model in education that recognises migrant children's social and emotional needs as well as their learning needs. This illustrates one of several tensions in the data, between scope for creativity and conformity to school rules and norms.

New roles

Sometimes musical participation was used to explore new roles in the children's new surroundings. For example, several months passed before Beatrix, who rarely spoke in class, surprised us by volunteering a song from her home country, singing confidently for her classmates, and started suggesting lyrics or movements to songs.

Another significant moment came for Kareem, whose last-minute solo at a school assembly offered him a chance to stand out:

> Kareem was not at the dress rehearsal but arrived just as we were tidying up. Seeing the microphone, he immediately asked to sing a solo. The teacher was, as ever, positive to such suggestions, and those of us still in the hall sat down on the floor, an attentive audience. Kareem found the track on his mobile and after fiddling with the amplifier, performed for us. It was a romantic ballad, sung with great delivery, his body language recognisable from music videos in the genre. After receiving our applause, Kareem said he wanted to perform for the whole school the next day. Although the dress rehearsal was over, there was no technical help available and the song was rather long for the programme, the teacher agreed. (OL, February 2020)

The next day Kareem performed the ballad for the whole school. A child who was known to other pupils and teachers as belonging to a class in a deficit position in terms of language, and with a reputation as somewhat volatile in the playground, explored through this musical activity a different role for himself, reaping tremendous praise for his performance. He self-initiated this role using music as a key tool to do so, just as Turino (2008) describes how musical participation can allow interplay between actual roles and possible new roles, imagining a new future. Kareem's performance showed a high degree of musical agency (Karlsen 2012) and challenged those who tended to see introductory class pupils as a problem rather than a resource, as witnessed by comments in the staff room at lunch afterwards. This reframing from a position of deficiency to that of acclaimed performer required others to witness Kareem trying out the new role, underlying the mutuality in the process of musical participation as self-presentation described by Stige (2010): without the entire school as his audience, Kareem's solo would not have had the same significance.

Memories of family and home

When asked about their musical preferences, several of the children spoke first about music linked to home and family, including family left behind. When asked whether music was important to her, Maria replied:

Maria:	Yes! I sing all the time! I like a song about a fish that is people … a person that is also a fish!
Researcher:	Err … Oh, a mermaid?!
Maria:	Yes! I like a song about a mermaid that my grandmother taught me!

The children often shared songs learned at home, ranging from nursery rhymes learned from their grandparents to hits by artists from home little known in Norway, tastes several of them explained they had acquired through older siblings (this echoes findings in Kenny 2018). Only once throughout observation did a child start singing a pop song from mainstream international youth culture (at which, the other children laughed, and his performance quickly petered out). The children were also encouraged to share their favourite music videos at lunchtimes. Music shared was almost always in their native languages.

Karlsen (2013) reminds us that negotiations of homeland music in mainstream classes are a complex issue: not all children necessarily want to be associated with music from their (parents') homeland in a school setting and there may be a social cost of sharing such music with peers, while others may be pleased to do so. Our findings showed considerably less orientation towards international youth culture in the introductory class than implied by some previous research. This may be in part because these children were so new in Norway that clinging to familiarity was a strategy in the resettlement process, and in part because in the introductory class setting, they had relatively little contact with mainstream youth culture. There is a hint of this in our data – because of coronavirus, Maria was not interviewed until after she had transitioned to a regular class, which added a unique perspective to the data:

Researcher:	If you could choose a music video to share in the classroom today, the very best music you know, what would it be?
Maria:	[Hybrid international rap.]
Researcher:	Have you always liked that music?
Maria:	No, I had never heard of it or listened to it when I was in the introductory class, but now I like it.

The introductory class was a space where it was 'normal to be different', and while there Maria had regularly shared music videos from her home country. Just a short time after switching to a mainstream class, Maria showed greater orientation to global pop culture through her music choices (cf. Frankenberg et al. 2016).

Belonging

Musical participation appeared to facilitate experiences of belonging in the children's new setting through moments of connection. Two key factors in experiencing belonging and exploring relationships emerged: common repertoire, and musical sharing leading to interpersonal encounters. The following example contains both:

> I arrive at lunchtime. Kareem jumps up when he sees me, comes over with a smile, and starts singing loudly and enthusiastically a song with body percussion I'd taught them. He holds my gaze throughout. Just then his bilingual teacher comes in and greets me. We talk about how Kareem is always singing. The teacher encourages him to sing for me again, and he starts singing a song in his first language. I meet his gaze throughout. He sings confidently and tunefully, a long story-like song, with a serious expression on his face. Afterwards I ask what the song was about. He looks to the teacher for help, who explains it's a song about the desire for freedom for his people. Oh, I see. I try as well as I can to repeat a word that I'd heard several times: Is that the word for freedom, perhaps? No, that means: Listen to me! I ask where he learned the song, at home? No, he learned it in the refugee camp. And do your family sing lots of songs at home? They sing a lot, he replies, but not that song. He picks up his things to go to class. Gives me a high five on the way out. (OL, February 2020)

We see how Kareem uses a song the researcher taught him to instigate contact, thereby re-establishing a connection from previous sessions. This is possible without verbal communication through shared repertoire; a key aspect of communities of musical practice (Kenny 2016). Kareem follows this up almost immediately with sharing a song that is highly personal to him and his story. The connection explored by Kareem echoes the relationships Small (1998) describes as coming into place through music making: 'The act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies' (Small 1998, 13).

Group music making also offers opportunities to achieve connectedness through synchrony to a common pulse (Clayton 2012). Several new pupils on their first day, with no common language, shared tentative smiles and more relaxed facial expressions during dancing or drama games which they could join in by imitation and synchrony, as on Samuel's first day:

> At the end of the day they danced a choreographed dance popular in Norwegian primary schools, shown on the smartboard. Desks were pushed aside, and the children lined up in rows. Samuel caught on quickly. It was

the first activity in class he could really join in – and join in well – with his new classmates. The next day they danced it again, and the flickering of recognition in Samuel's eyes and his laughter as he danced suggested a fleeting experience of belonging in the new setting through the synchrony of the group. [OL, March 2020]

Repeated experiences such as this may lay the foundations for a more lasting sense of belonging, although as Gabi (2013) reminds us, participation does not necessarily lead to a sense of belonging. Even within the introductory class, musical boundaries were sometimes drawn up inadvertently. In musical sharing sessions pupils in the largest national group would often sing in their home language. The teachers, keen to create a welcoming environment, clapped and moved to the beat. On one such occasion looks of boredom, even discomfort, were observed on the face of some other pupils. For those taking part the activity gathered them as a 'we', but it left others with a heightened sense of not belonging musically or socially. As Boldermo (2020) notes, for some people to achieve a sense of belonging, there must be a group to which others do not belong.

Spotlights

In keeping with the ethnographic nature of the study, we supplement the four themes with subjective, individual spotlights on two child experiences.

Hassan

Hassan loves singing and dancing and enjoys attention and applause from an audience, although not necessarily as a soloist, he said (pupil interview 4). In the classroom Hassan's response to music was embodied, frequently dancing or clapping with confident body movements. Midway in a teacher-led activity Hassan would sometimes 'suggest' a different song, counting '1, 2, 3' and starting singing loudly, conducting the others with an upturned hand. This kind of participation challenged leadership, as well as affecting the group dynamic as others protested or followed his lead. The introductory class teachers showed high tolerance of such adventurous, even eccentric participation. However, given that one of the express aims of the introductory class is to learn school norms such as sitting still and raising your hand before speaking, Hassan's manner of participating could also be seen as a behavioural problem or lack of readiness to transition to a mainstream class.

In other school settings Hassan participated quite differently. In music workshops with an external instructor, he took part half-heartedly, sometimes refusing altogether, though as a teacher remarked: 'At school you can't choose, you have to join in!' He never offered musical material in these workshops, despite the children being actively encouraged to share songs or dances from their home culture. The previous year the whole class had these workshops, while now they were only for the younger pupils, sparking complaints from the older pupils. The explanation given was that there had been too much 'playing around'. It is unknown whether the playing around was wilfully disruptive or a breach of unspoken norms for participation and behavioural expectations; either way there may have been an element of culturally bound expectations not communicated explicitly.

In Hassan's language group the pupils were expected to stand by their desks, speak when spoken to and respect adult authority. One day this group invited the researcher in, and the children sang solos and in unison, mainly religious songs and songs about their homeland. The session was teacher-led, and Hassan participated in an engaged, conventional manner.

Hassan attended some lessons with his year-group class. The following notes record Hassan working diligently alongside others, without speaking to other pupils.

> At the end of the lesson, the teacher put on a dance video. Many of the boys started to dance enthusiastically. A group of girls formed rows at the back of the classroom, choreographing their movements. Hassan stood up with the others, but remained still, holding the back of his chair, watching. After a while he glanced around, saw no-one was looking his way, and slid back down on his seat. (OL, September 2019)

Despite taking cues to behaviour from the others in the lesson, when it came to dancing, Hassan did not join in. When considering why Hassan's danced so creatively in one group but not at all in

another, we refer to Stige's (2010) understanding of musical participation as a *mutual* process in a social space. The notion of mutuality highlights the question of who witnesses participation. In the introductory class Hassan was with friends who spoke his first language, whereas in the workshop few of Hassan's friends were present, and in the year group class no one he knew well. A second factor may have been teacher expectations: the pupils quickly learned that the introductory class teachers had high tolerance of adventurous participation, whereas for instance the bilingual language teacher communicated clear expectations of conventional participation.

Zaara

Zaara is one of the younger pupils, with little formal schooling before moving to Norway. Still learning the basics of Norwegian, Zaara had a reserved manner in class and hardly joined in music activities at all to start with. This changed quite suddenly one day. A teacher had brought along his guitar and was playing humorous songs, encouraging the children to sing along to the refrain:

> We sat on benches at the back of the classroom. As the teacher started to play an upbeat song, Zaara suddenly jumped up, grabbed my hand and tried to pull me up. Surprised, and aware that the teacher meant the children to remain seated and sing along, I smiled but shook my head a couple of times. Zaara's hand still pulled at mine insistently. She stood in front of me now, so I smiled and twirled her under my arm a couple of times, still seated. 'Dance!' she commanded. I made a snap decision to respond, got to my feet, took both her hands in mine and danced with her. This was taken as an immediate sign for others to follow suit, and the ensuing scene was far from the orderly activity the teacher had planned. Zaara, half my height, led me in the dance, turning, jumping, laughing, plaits flying. (OL, December 2019)

After weeks of observing Zaara's reserved manner, this dancing, with her taking the lead, appeared to be a meaningful act of musical and social engagement. We cannot know what the dancing meant to Zaara, but there was a palpable release of tension, as well as an exploring of the relationship between child and researcher, on her terms, in the dancing. In the weeks to come this new connection was reaffirmed whenever the researcher entered the classroom. Zaara would smile, sit down by the researcher without speaking, even ask for help, and she took part much more actively in subsequent music sessions. It should be noted that the perceived benefit to one child in this episode may have been at the cost of chaos in the rest of the group, and this balancing of the needs of the individual against the needs of a highly heterogenous group was a constantly recurring theme and tension throughout the fieldwork.

Zaara's journey of increasing musical participation echoes a community of musical practice model (Kenny 2016) in that it shows a shift from peripheral to core membership, based on familiarity in the setting, shared repertoire and mutual engagement. While a pattern of gradually increasing participation was typical, there were some exceptions. Samorn, for instance, only ever joined in singing almost inaudibly, and politely declined all invitations to share songs. Even after several months, when a xylophone was passed round and most of the children experimented enthusiastically, Samorn tapped pianissimo once up and down then handed it on. Most children, however, participated more actively as time passed, although sometimes inconsistently. Ahmad, for instance, sang vociferously in many sessions, and was often keen to share songs, eyes shut, apparently entering a private musical world, yet at other times he refused point-blank to join in. Interviews with pupils gave some insight into their participation. Samorn said music simply 'wasn't important to her'; she rarely listened to music and wasn't used to music being used in school (pupil interview 6). Ahmad said he loved music and enjoyed music sessions in school. When asked the reason for his widely varying participation, he blamed it on 'tiredness' that engulfed him some days (pupil interview 3).[2]

Conclusions, questions and implications

In this article we have looked at what scope for musical participation was available for these pupils, what kind of participation was expected and valued in the school, and what obstacles to participation there were, not least due to culturally bound ideas of music in school. We identified tensions

between the norms of the introductory class and mainstream classes, between balancing social, emotional needs and learning needs of these children, between the needs of the individual and the group, and between creativity and classroom norms. Teaching in such a complex, heterogenous class requires a high level of intercultural competence and culturally responsive teaching, including reflection on and acknowledging of the culturally bound nature of educational norms.

Firstly, we found challenges relating to expectations of how pupils should engage with music. We know that cultural expectations of pupil/teacher roles vary, as do culturally appropriate ways of engaging with music, and there are many unwritten codes of expected behaviour and participation in schools. Teachers in the introductory class were far more accommodating of 'chaos' than other classes, seen for instance in the way teachers would sometimes join in with spontaneous dancing. In contrast, the deputy head and head on observing rehearsals for the whole-school assembly were full of praise for the orderly rehearsing: is only conventional participation therefore to be praised by school leadership? The assembly project was 'successful' in part through their eyes in assimilating the introductory class pupils to normal modes of musical engagement and behaviour in this school. However, is it possible that different ways of engaging with music as seen in the introductory class (particularly the more free embodied reactions), could contribute to challenging norms and expectations? Is the socialisation of newly arrived migrant children a one-way process of assimilation to a more-or-less canonised repertoire and fixed practices, or a mutual process? Do newcomers have the opportunity to bring changes to the majority group?

Secondly, what socio-musical space is available to these children, and what do they claim for themselves? Is asking for musical contributions from their homelands (show us your treasures) enough of a welcome? Or is it forcing new content knowledge into the same modus operandi already there, potentially leading to stereotyping and assumptions? What the child experiences in this article have highlighted is that intercultural music education is about far more than merely content. It is about relational competences developed through group musical activity and social interplay coupled with a reflexivity over one's own cultural position. In short, this requires the fostering of intercultural competence among teachers, pupils and throughout the entire school culture.

Addressing these points together, implications for school settings emerge when leaving behind a deficit approach to migrant education and embracing a model of inclusive migrant education that permeates the entire school culture – including musical participation. In doing so, the hope is to challenge not just the structures but also the attitudes that create barriers to participation and learning. This is a complex issue. One important step appears to be identifying 'newness' as a contribution rather than a problem, learning to value competences we ourselves may know little of, and understanding the lack of neutrality in all (musical) knowledge and skills in the classroom (Westerlund and Karlsen 2017). It also requires making explicit the implicit, ethnocentric frames of reference we hold as music educators.

The findings in this study have also highlighted the need to raise awareness of teachers' roles in promoting experiences of belonging through music. While sonic bonding and behavioural synchrony can be powerful uniting forces in the classroom, they may also inadvertently have exclusionary effects if the borders to inclusion are drawn up without care for those not defined as 'we'. By seeking to facilitate socio-musical spaces or communities of musical practice (Kenny 2016) in the classroom through approaches that are more about collaborative creative processes than existing musics, the ground is ripe for meaningful musical encounters that can facilitate experiences of belonging.

Notes

1. Norwegian Education Act, 1998, §8–2 (accessed 31.05.2021),
2. Teachers suggested trauma from Ahmad's pre-migration experiences as a potential explanation.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Data availability statement

Due to the nature of this research, participants in this study did not agree for their data to be shared publicly, so supporting data is not available.

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