

Inclusive socio-musical spaces for newly arrived migrant children in a Norwegian primary school: Teacher and school leader perspectives

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journals.sagepub.com/home/ijm**Felicity Burbridge Rinde** 

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Abstract

This ethnographic case study investigates how teachers and leaders in a Norwegian primary school perceive and promote an inclusive school environment for newly arrived migrant children through music. The analysis draws on two aspects of inclusion. The first is on whose terms inclusion takes place and whether newcomers have the opportunity to transform the existing social order. The second is the boundaries of inclusive practices: inclusion and exclusion are seen as processes separated by a boundary that, once crossed, can result in exclusion despite good intentions. The case is a primary school with a dedicated introductory class for newly arrived migrant children. The data collection instruments were participant observation, interviews and field conversations over a period of 10 months. There was a participatory element to the fieldwork in connection with the school's ongoing development work to create an inclusive environment. Three socio-musical spaces were identified. The findings suggest that inclusive music practices face obstacles at individual, organisational and discursive levels. Fields of tension are identified relating to boundaries around what cultural expressions are welcomed and represented in the school; visibility and performance of home cultures; and exclusion and self-exclusion through musical markers of belonging.

Keywords

Inclusion, intercultural music education, music, newly arrived migrant children

Introduction

The increasing number of migrant children arriving in Norway in recent years has posed challenges for Norway's primarily monolingual and highly unitary school system which forbids streaming according to ability, gender or ethnicity. In response to increased migration, the Education

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Act was amended in 2012 to allow various models of post-migration education. The model represented in this study uses dedicated introductory classes at some mainstream schools to offer intensive language tuition to prepare newly arrived children for transition to their local schools.¹ This model is thus based on short-term exclusion, albeit within a shared space, with the aim of promoting inclusion in the long term.

This article investigates teacher and school leader perspectives on the potential of music activities for promoting an inclusive school environment for newly arrived children in one such introductory class (IC) for 7 to 13 year olds, at Greenwood primary school.² It also explores obstacles to realising aims of inclusive music practices, and exclusionary effects in some music activities. During the fieldwork, prompted partly by the researcher's presence, the school carried out development work on creating a more inclusive environment for IC pupils, primarily through trying out music workshops as a tool for inclusion. One of the socio-musical spaces in this article relates to this development work, in which I as music teacher/researcher offered my services as accompanist and co-leader. The ethnographic methodology thus incorporated a participatory element.

The children in the introductory class come from widely divergent cultural, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds. The only thing all new IC pupils have in common is that they do not yet speak Norwegian. They typically attend the mixed-age class for one to two years, spending most of that time in the IC classroom. However, the co-location of introductory classes with mainstream schools in this model is meant to ensure social contact with Norwegian-speaking children. Municipal guidelines recommend that after a while, IC pupils join age-appropriate regular classes for some subjects, particularly practical ones like music.

In a previous article I explored IC pupils' musical participation at Greenwood as a potential path to belonging (Rinde & Kenny, 2021). The focus for this article is teachers' and school leaders' perspectives as they aim to create an inclusive environment for newly arrived migrant children, both within the IC classroom and in the wider school community. The article addresses the questions *How do teachers and school leaders in a Norwegian primary school perceive the potential of music activities for promoting inclusion of newly arrived migrant children? What inclusive socio-musical spaces do they facilitate?*

Background and previous research

The number of migrant children arriving in Norway surged after 2000, peaking during the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis. It had since decreased somewhat due to several factors including the EU/Turkey Re-admission Agreement, stricter border controls in many European countries and new, more stringent regulations in Norway (Lidén, 2019). However, following the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Norway is now receiving unprecedented numbers of school-aged refugees.

Since UNESCO's Salamanca Statement in 1994, there has been broad international focus on the concept of inclusive education. Inclusive education is characterised by social inclusion, integration and system-wide measures geared to responding to all kinds of diversity.³ UNESCO (2009) problematises the individualised *deficit model* that attributes educational difficulties to sources within the child, where the onus for change is on those entering mainstream schools. They propose an alternative *social model* which sees barriers to learning as existing in the attitudes and structures of schools and society, and where it is consequently up to mainstream schools to adapt to accommodate greater diversity.

Barriers to inclusive education have been identified as attitudinal; language and culture-related; physical and environmental; training-related; systemic and organisational; and curricular (MEDE, 2019). Migrants' access to education is often restricted by the structure of education systems, and

initial segregation of newly arrived children is often legitimised by expectations of enhanced opportunities for learning and social inclusion once these pupils join mainstream education (Bunar & Juvonen, 2021). However, educational exclusion of migrant children can also occur through internal differentiations in systems based on an inclusionary approach (Hilt, 2017) such as the model at Greenwood. Inclusivity of all kinds of diversity in schools needs to permeate the entire school environment, encompassing not only physical and social dimensions, but also the psychological dimension of experiencing being included in all school-related activities (Azorin & Ainscow, 2020; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018).

Recent years have seen much research into how musical participation may mediate experiences of belonging in new settings, with music conceived as a means of welcome and inclusion for migrant children (for instance Crawford, 2017; Gustavsson & Ehrlin, 2018; Kenny, 2018; Marsh & Dieckmann, 2017; Ritchie & Gaulter, 2020; Skidmore, 2016). Approaches to the role of music education in meeting cultural diversity in schools over the past decades have drawn on principles of, for instance, multicultural education (e.g. Banks & Banks, 2019), culturally responsive pedagogy (e.g. Abril, 2013; Lind & McKoy, 2016) and intercultural education (e.g. Portera, 2008; Portera & Grant, 2017).

In this article I place inclusion against a background of intercultural education. The focus in intercultural education is on dialogic aspects between groups and intersubjectivity without reference to ethnic categories or other such labels; a fluid understanding of culture; self-reflexivity and resource-oriented pedagogies (Portera, 2020; Rinde & Christophersen, 2021; Solbue, 2014). Much recent music education research on cultural diversity has centred around developing (inter)cultural competence⁴ in music teacher education (for instance Culp & Salvador, 2021; Gunara & Sutanto, 2021; Miettinen, 2021; Sæther, 2020; Westerlund et al., 2022). Some scholars (for instance Dolloff, 2020; Yoo, 2021) prefer the term ‘cultural humility’ to cultural competence, since the latter suggests mastery of a finite body of specific knowledge or skills which is high impossible, as well as emphasising the Other in a way that could be said to reinforce the status of the dominant group. Westerlund et al. (2020) describe how intercultural encounters between fluid cultural entities, combined with critical self-reflexivity, can drive transformational process at the individual and institutional level in education. Rinde & Christophersen (2021) suggest that intercultural approaches to music education might create inclusive, dialogic spaces in culturally diverse classrooms.⁵

Inclusion as a conceptual framework

Bunar and Juvonen (2021) note that despite an inclusion ‘turn’ in international research on the education of newly arrived migrant children, it is not always clear what is meant in practice by inclusion. As a result, both ‘refugee-only’ schools and schools with direct immersion models are presented by their proponents as examples of inclusive education. The analysis in this study draws on two aspects of inclusion. The first relates to on whose terms inclusion takes place. The concept of inclusion may in itself at times be a barrier to inclusion. Inclusive efforts stem from exclusionary thinking about ‘who’ on the outside ‘we’ on the inside need to include, with greater focus on discrete groups than on commonality (O’Brien, 2020). Biesta (2009, 2015), too, calls out the implications of regarding inclusion as a process through which those on the inside of an existing social order include others into their sphere. He points to an inherent asymmetry in the language of inclusion that suggests that someone is setting the terms of inclusion, which those who wish to be included must meet. Biesta (2019) suggests that social justice is less about recognition of identity and more about democratic political agency and living together in plurality. An important question is whether newcomers are able to transform the existing social order.

The second aspect relates to the boundaries of inclusive practices. Hilt (2017) sees inclusion and exclusion as processes separated by a boundary. Crossing this boundary can result in processes of exclusion despite good intentions. As such, inclusion can be identified with the conditions for participation set by any given system: whatever remains unmarked when conditions are set is excluded as a 'logical shadow' of inclusion (Hilt, 2017, p. 587). For instance, when schools focus on certain skills or competences as requirements for participation, while other are not valued or made relevant by the system, all skills that are not regarded as relevant are excluded.

Methodology, case and analysis

This study is an ethnographic case study (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). The unit of analysis is all settings in the school that involve IC pupils. While ethnographic research does not traditionally include participatory or interventionalist elements, recent years have seen an increase in activist, engaged, participatory and collaborative ethnographic methods (Seligmann & Estes, 2020). In this study the ethnographic methodology was combined with a participatory element using my specific skill set as a music teacher/researcher as part of the data collection toolkit to support the school's ongoing development work on inclusive practices. This included trying out, in collaboration with the teachers, a new way of bringing IC pupils together with other pupils in music activities rehearsing for a joint assembly.

Fieldwork started in May 2019 and lasted ten months. The primary data collection instruments were eight recorded interviews with the head, deputy head and three IC teachers, (individually and in pairs) and participant observation, averaging two days a week over ten months. Observation took place primarily in the IC classroom and in joint activities with other pupils, including six assemblies, a summer festival, a Constitution Day event and 11 lessons in which individual IC pupils attended mainstream classes. This totalled roughly 240 hours of observation. The interview and observation data were supplemented by field conversations with staff throughout the school and 18 weekly meetings of the IC team led by the head. In addition, I led 14 music sessions in the IC classroom and helped lead and accompany sessions that brought pupils from mainstream classes into the IC classroom to rehearse for a school assembly. The mixture of different data sources in the analysis generated complementary types of information that combined to give a rich picture of the problem area.

The analysis involved an iterative process between different data sources, theory and previous research. Following Kvale and Brinkmann (2017) it is possible to distinguish three levels in the analysis, though these are interwoven in this article. These are (a) participants' self-understanding; (b) the researcher's critical common sense understanding; and (c) a theoretical understanding, drawing on the framework described above. The theoretical understanding shaped the interview guides and helped focus a gradual narrowing of observation. I also analysed the interview and observation data for common themes arising inductively.

The study was registered with the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) and carried out in accordance with Norwegian research ethics guidelines (NESH, 2016) and data protection regulations, with careful attention to informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality. Additional quality control in the analysis was sought through a critical friend technique (Solbue, 2011). This involved a colleague reading interview transcripts and challenging me on my interpretations and hidden preconceptions, spurring me to the high level of reflexivity and positionality so necessary in ethnographic studies. Given the danger of bias in participatory ethnographic research (Seligmann & Estes, 2020), a key element was discussing the relationships I built with different participants, leading to greater awareness of how these relationships might affect what I was able to see in the empirical material.

Inclusive socio-musical spaces

This study looks at how music is perceived by teachers and school leadership at Greenwood as one means of achieving an inclusive school environment, through the creation of socio-musical spaces. Three distinct spaces were identified: (i) inside the IC classroom; (ii) joint music activities with other pupils in general; and (iii) one specific joint assembly led by the introductory class augmented by pupils from other classes. The descriptions illuminate complexities in the setting, and pinpoint obstacles to inclusive musical practices. The descriptions of the first two spaces are reported as exemplars of the findings. They build broadly on the participants' self-understanding, as is central to ethnographic research. The third space came about as a result of ongoing development work at Greenwood, initiated by the school leadership to meet some of the challenges we had identified together. The idea was to tailor a socio-musical space that addressed some of these challenges through an inclusive, intercultural approach.

Music activities in the IC classroom

Inclusion within the IC classroom was linked by IC teachers to building self-esteem, mainly through opportunities to perform for others and having cultural expressions from home acknowledged. This is in keeping with research that pupils' self-esteem increases when given opportunities to build confidence through school-based arts education about the contribution they can make (Bryce et al., 2004).

I would say it is an inclusive way of working because it is good for the children's self-esteem. They bring something of their identity, and they learn about new cultures through music and singing. (Teacher)

The teachers invited and were encouraging of all musical contributions in the children's first languages, creating an inclusive space where 'mistakes' were welcomed.

When singing Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes to learn names of body parts, the teacher asks if anyone knows the song in their first language. Several children volunteer. Some remember the whole song, others only snatches. Some sing with confidence; others falter into silence, saying I don't remember it. All contributions are welcomed with equal enthusiasm by the teachers. Observation log

Through observation and reflection with the IC teachers, I identified a number of inclusive principles they adhered to. Firstly, the teachers modelled and cultivated a safe space with respectful listening and turn-taking, in which each child could enter the spotlight in turn. The teachers showed that they appreciated contributions through dancing, clapping along and smiling. Secondly, they were attentive to social dynamics, trying out different combinations of pupils in music activities so that all pupils might feel at ease to take part actively. Thirdly, they initiated dance activities that facilitated synchronised group movement, paving the way for behavioural synchrony, a powerful uniting force. Fourthly, they created an inclusive sonic space through inviting the children to share music videos of their choice. Videos the children shared were invariably in their first language. The teachers were attentive and often initiated or joined in spontaneous dancing to these videos.

I observed a marked difference between the 'soundtrack' of the IC classroom and elsewhere in Greenwood. While sharing music 'from home'⁶ was actively encouraged in the IC, the music heard in other classrooms, at assemblies and school events was predominantly Norwegian and international pop, traditional songs and typical 'school music' from online resources such as *Kor Arti*.⁷ Since previous research (Phelan, 2017) has shown that the sonic space may signal belonging or

alterity, this is an important finding about musical markers of belonging inside the IC classroom versus elsewhere in Greenwood.

The interviews highlighted dilemmas in the IC teachers' desire to be musically inclusive, for instance balancing individual children's need for self-expression through music against the needs of the group as a whole. On occasion musical participation appeared to have therapeutic effects for one pupil, but at the cost of losing the attention of others in the group. Musical engagement in the classroom played out in positive and negative directions. One teacher described how music acted as a highly charged emotional trigger for some pupils, sometimes sparking behaviour that was difficult to manage, which led this teacher to be reluctant to use music activities in class at all.

Similarly, IC teachers described concerns about allowing musical exuberance to tip over: some children monopolised the common space with 'exaggerated' dancing and singing. At times teachers felt unsure whether some children exploited the freer space opened up by music activities, or whether they were participating in all seriousness. Since one aim of the introductory class is to teach 'how to be a pupil in Norwegian schools', one teacher worried that being overly accommodating in the musical space in this classroom could cause confusion elsewhere in school about when it was permissible to jump up and dance, and when pupils were expected to sit at their desks despite music being played.⁸ This created a tension between teachers preparing the IC pupils for behavioural norms in mainstream classes and their desire to welcome spontaneous physical responses to music as a positive contribution.

This might be seen as an example of teachers unquestioningly interpreting the children's ways of relating to music from the standpoint of the majority culture. In some cultures, singing, instrumental accompaniment and dance are inseparable and not conceived as discrete entities. This may point to the need for teachers to reconceptualise movement to music in the classroom not as a behavioural issue but as an absolutely necessary component of music making in the cultures of some of their pupils. At Greenwood there was no discussion of whether such physical responses to musical stimuli might be one way in which these children could, as Biesta (2019) puts it, transform the existing social order in the school.

Music activities with other pupils

Greenwood aims to use music activities to build community and include all pupils in the wider school environment, mainly through an annual cycle of events including International Mother Language Day, a summer festival and monthly assemblies. This aim was not stated explicitly but participants described assemblies for instance as offering shared experiences, with communal singing and opportunities for pupils to perform for each other. Assemblies sometimes included a school song adapted from a well-known Norwegian pop song. This song was cited by one IC teacher as an example of music for inclusive purposes:

In class we practise the school song and other school-related songs. If you work on the songs beforehand it's easier, because the children recognise them. The school song's always been a big hit with IC pupils!
(Teacher)

However, observation showed that the current IC pupils did not recognise the song and looked on passively as others sang. This also happened with other songs. The IC teachers explained that songs were seldom distributed in time for them to practise. Following Hilt (2017) and Kenny (2016) one might say that each time school events use repertoire familiar to the majority yet unfamiliar to a minority, the group singing that is a musical marker of belonging for those *within* the boundary of inclusion marks outsider status for those *outside* that boundary. This tension was

compounded by lack of clarity about whether IC pupils were to perform with their respective year groups at assemblies:

- Head: *I was in the classroom when the oldest IC pupils joined their year group to rehearse for UN Day. It worked well.*
- Researcher: *But they didn't take part in the actual assembly? They sat watching.*
- Head: *That's odd. They were definitely at the first rehearsal. Something must've gone wrong along the way.*
- Researcher: *Is there any pattern to when they join year groups for these events?*
- Head: *It depends mostly on the teachers, and how well people cooperate.*

The head defaults to an explanation of individual teachers' ability to cooperate and communicate, but the findings also point to obstacles at an organisational level, namely unclear or unenforced guidelines for such occasions.

Many participants spoke of the potential of including IC pupils in the school community through opportunities to perform for the rest of the school, with a resource-oriented focus. The deputy head commented after one IC pupil sang solo in his first language at an assembly:

- Deputy head: *It gives IC pupils a stage where they can show a different side of themselves most people at school haven't seen.*
- Researcher: *Show themselves to be a resource?*
- Deputy head: *Precisely. That's inclusion, too, just in a different way.*

However, keenness to provide IC pupils with a spotlight was tempered with awareness that these children had at times been put on show as representatives of 'other cultures' at Greenwood. This speaks to a major field of tension in the data, namely, how to acknowledge migrant children's home cultures without falling into tokenism or exoticism. While keen to make children's home cultures visible in school, one teacher was wary of one-way cultural encounters that focus on difference rather than emphasising commonality (O'Brien, 2020):

On International Mother Language Day, the IC pupils are expected to showcase their "exotic" cultures. It feels a really one-way process. At other times they don't get to present their backgrounds at all. There's very little two-way cultural exchange or meeting points to get to know each other's cultures, and very little reflection on difference and similarity. (Teacher)

IC teachers described obstacles to inclusivity in how preparations were organised:

The idea is that repertoire is distributed, then each class rehearses separately. But we tend to get songs far too late. It's difficult for our pupils to join in when we haven't had time to learn them. It would be great if we could rehearse together with another class that already knows them. (Teacher)

A recurring point in interviews was how the staff's intercultural competence affected shared socio-musical spaces in school. The concept of intercultural competence was well grounded in the school following collaboration with a local intercultural music project. In addition, several teachers had completed an intercultural education professional training course.

I think the level of intercultural competence in general at Greenwood has been strengthened by these measures. [. . .] Even so, a lot depends on teachers' interests and attitudes. (Head)

Nevertheless, the IC teachers felt strongly that the IC children's needs and resources were not at the forefront of all teachers' minds and reported constantly having to liaise and negotiate for their pupils to be included in the (musical) life of the school. This suggests that interculturality does not permeate the entire school environment.

I think the school needs more focus on intercultural competence. For many teachers it's a completely new way of thinking. Not for everyone, but I think a lot of my colleagues need to be challenged more to adopt intercultural approaches. (Teacher)

A recurring metaphor in the data was the picture of the introductory class as an 'island' separate from the rest of the school. This came to mind when writing up the following:

Tomorrow is 17th May.⁹ The school is practising walking in procession and there's a competition between classes with group-composed chants. The IC children are to join their year groups. A couple of the older boys run to find friends and take part enthusiastically, but most of the IC children walk quietly at the back of their year groups, separate from the other pupils. Some bewildered expressions, few smiles to be seen. Observation log

The newest arrivals had little idea what was going on, while those who had lived in Norway the previous year understood more. However, none of them had been involved in composing the class chants, and the noise level made it difficult to pick them up there and then. The competition was intended to create group identity and belonging for each year group, as well as appealing to national feeling. However, as the deputy head remarked afterwards 'The IC pupils are part of it, but they're not part of it. Physically present, but . . .' This speaks to the notion that presence is not always the same as participation (O'Brien, 2020). A shared space does not necessarily build social cohesion or ensure inclusive practices, since school structures, practices and relationships contain explicit and implicit messaging about who does and does not belong (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2018).

Once IC pupils can follow instruction in Norwegian, they may attend lessons in some subjects in mainstream classes through year group participation (YGP).¹⁰ As well as ensuring social contact with peers and supporting academic progress and language learning, the head and teachers agree that an important goal of YGP is socialisation into 'how to be a pupil in a Norwegian school'. This in itself raises Biesta's (2015) question about on whose terms inclusion takes place, and what scope IC pupils have to change the status quo. Despite several IC pupils expressing a desire for YGP in music, it rarely happened. One teacher reported mixed success in YGP when singing was the main activity:

They're often expected to join in songs totally unfamiliar to them. It's just assumed all the children know the songs; part of our cultural heritage. (Teacher)

The teacher points here to a discursive obstacle to inclusive practices signalled by the expression 'our cultural heritage' that places newcomers firmly outside the boundary of 'us' and shows teachers' lack of awareness of the culturally bound nature of traditional repertoire. The teacher suggested:

It might be better if songs were new to all the pupils; that would be a more levelling experience. We've often found it's easier for our pupils to join other classes for instrumental tuition. Guitar is very popular. Playing instruments is perhaps easier in some ways than working with songs. (Teacher)

I have shown above that obstacles to achieving the school's aim of inclusivity through music activities can be identified at the individual, organisational and discursive level. This brings me to the third space, a joint assembly that was part of the school's ongoing development work in inclusive practices, where the school sought to address some of these obstacles.

Joint assembly led by the IC class augmented by other pupils

YGP was described as only moderately successful. Explanations offered were that it was difficult for teachers to remember to include IC pupils, it created extra work, behavioural problems in some classes deflected attention from IC pupils, and teachers already felt over-stretched meeting all the needs in their own class. The head and deputy head also noted many teachers' lack of confidence in interacting with IC pupils. This echoes research that has found that many teachers in Europe lack training, competences and experience with migration and diversity issues, such as teaching the national language as a second language, providing psychosocial guidance and enabling connections with pupils' prior education (Koehler & Schneider, 2019).

One class visited a museum yesterday. I asked if they had taken the IC pupil in that grade with them. They hadn't. I think they're scared it will be a negative experience since he doesn't speak much Norwegian. But I think the opposite is true: you can go along, communicate with body language, and have a positive experience. (Head)

While such examples were cited by the school leadership as obstacles at the individual competence level, it is possible that there were organisational obstacles such as the leadership not assigning sufficient resources for inclusive aims to be met.

Many teachers felt that 'reverse' YGP may make more sense, that is expanding IC pupils' sense of belonging to the school community by bringing other pupils into the IC classroom, rather than the other way around. In January 2020, as part of the school's ongoing development work, pupils from other classes were invited to join the introductory class for sessions preparing for an IC-led assembly. Previous IC-led assemblies had taken place on International Mother Language Day, with IC pupils singing in foreign languages and, as one teacher noted, being 'on show as representatives of other cultures'. The IC team discussed how this might be assigning labels from a static notion of culture and emphasising IC pupils' otherness.

This year the theme was *Friendship and Inclusion*, and the reverse YGP was intended as a form of inclusion in practice. The aim was to overcome some of the problematic aspects of YGP identified at IC team meetings, by switching the IC pupils' status to that of hosts welcoming others into their own sphere.¹¹ Rehearsals included ice-breaking activities, songs, a choreographed dance and interviews in pupil pairs. Repertoire was chosen that was equally unfamiliar to all pupils, or which the IC pupils already knew, to avoid their starting from a position of deficit (Kelly-McHale & Abril, 2015) and rehearsals took place in the familiar surroundings of the IC classroom.

This mini-project was considered a success by teachers, pupils and school leadership. IC pupils were particularly keen to lead the school in a choreographed dance all classes already knew. The IC team felt they had in a small way succeeded in creating a socio-musical space more on the IC pupils' terms, with a more relational focus. The deputy head, who had not been involved in the planning process, stated:

The joint assembly was really good. I didn't quite get goosebumps, but nearly! I observed one rehearsal, and I could see how the IC pupils were more confident when augmented by other pupils: they had more support, there was more oomph. And it gave them a stage to show off their resources. It was a visible demonstration of inclusion in practice. (Deputy head)

Sharing the stage with other pupils helped avoid the IC pupils being on show as ‘the different pupils’ as one teacher put it, or as representatives of their parents’ cultures. This small-scale pilot project only scratched the surface of the potential for creating social bonds through musical activities in school.¹² Nevertheless, it might be said to have represented a step away from mere recognition of the IC pupils’ identity at previous IC-led assemblies and towards a more interculturally founded way of ‘living together in plurality’ (Biesta, 2019).

Exclusion and self-exclusion in music activities

Although ‘inclusion’¹³ was often invoked at Greenwood, I observed little discussion of what Armstrong et al. (2009) call the underlying questions of inclusion: inclusion for whom, into what and for what purpose? The school leadership and IC teachers expressed a clear commitment to making IC pupils feel welcomed and included in the school community. However, the head worried they didn’t always live up to their inclusive aims:

At Greenwood we talk about being a ‘we school’; all pulling in the same direction as the introductory class. All staff need to work towards helping them learn Norwegian and feel valued and included in our community. But we’re a long way off actually becoming a ‘we school’. I’m not sure why. It might have to do with school culture [. . .] differences in teachers’ attitudes, experience, views on multilingualism. And not least what each of us puts into the job, and how well we work together. (Head)

Inspired by Bowman (2007), I observed usage of ‘we/they’ at Greenwood. The intention behind the phrase ‘we school’ is clearly inclusive. At the same time, there is a hint of a discursive obstacle in the expression ‘included in our community’ that resounds with Biesta’s (2015) question of who defines the terms of inclusion that need to be met.

Balancing between visibility, inclusion and exclusion is something the IC team constantly grappled with, for instance when IC pupils were to be regarded as a separate class or to join year groups:

Perhaps there is no contradiction between the two? Perhaps in the 17th May procession the IC pupils can take part as a class with their own chant, signalling: Look, this is us! We celebrate 17th May, too, and we’re having fun! Do we have to ‘integrate’ them as often as possible? It could easily turn into a form of exclusion. Maybe on 17th May we do it one way, while at assemblies we make sure they join their year groups as full participants. Both ways are fine, but we must avoid ad hoc decisions by individuals. (Head)

This last comment referred to the previous year’s summer festival. Greenwood is proud of its festival, which showcases individual and group pupil performances in addition to classroom activities by each year group assigned by an organising committee. However, limits were drawn by some staff around what was acceptable on this stage:

My language group practised songs from home last year. They sang well and were looking forward to the festival. But when it came to it, we were told by a committee member that they couldn’t perform, since all songs at the festival had to be in Norwegian! (Bilingual teacher)

This exclusion was in stark contrast to the building of self-esteem through acknowledgement of home cultures practised in the IC classroom. This incident highlights inconsistencies as to where and when minority-group cultural expressions were welcomed at Greenwood. In the IC classroom such contributions were consistently encouraged, whereas in the wider school community they were at times welcomed (even elicited), but sometimes openly excluded. This raises the

issue of which cultural expressions are valued at Greenwood, and which lie in the ‘shadow’ of inclusion, beyond the conditions set – by some – for participation (Hilt, 2017). It also indicates a power element in the use of music for inclusive purposes – who decides how music is or is not to be used inclusively in school – that echoes Biesta’s (2015) critique of the inherent asymmetry of the notion of inclusion.

Shortly before the next summer festival it transpired that the introductory class had not been assigned a classroom activity. A committee member explained this was because ‘it is vital that the IC pupils are integrated’. However, none of the year group teachers involved IC pupils in preparations; they were silently overlooked. On this occasion, the decision to ‘integrate’ these pupils by omission was not accepted by the IC teachers, who decided to arrange an international dance workshop in their classroom. Through this small act of defiance, a new socio-musical space was created. It was deemed a success by the school leadership, since many IC mothers had had fun dancing to Arabic music in their children’s classroom. At the same time, what started out as an open activity for all parents developed into a form of self-exclusion through musical markers of belonging, since other parents appeared nervous of joining in what seemed a bounded activity. This speaks once again to the tension between minority cultures being visible versus hidden away. As the head said:

That dancing in the IC classroom was great. It was quite a happening. I think that’s diversity – otherwise they would be invisible. It’s important they’re allowed to present themselves, and that these pupils and teachers can show others: This is what we do in our classroom. Otherwise you wipe a whole class off the map! (Head)

Another example of self-exclusion through musical markers of belonging happened on the last day of term. The IC teachers had planned an open mic session. As they started, a bilingual teacher¹⁴ came in to collect her language group, a sizeable portion of the class, for their own celebration with singing, dancing and food from home. The head sees positive and negative aspects to such activities:

The IC pupils usually form strong relationships with their bilingual teachers; it gives them a welcome bit of their language, their culture, a piece of home. I think that’s positive for their identity formation. And it gives them a much-needed breathing space. But it can result in them excluding themselves from the rest of the IC class. (Head)

When such activities collide with special occasions, the head stated it is vital that everyone take part in communal activities to ‘avoid excluding themselves from the school community’. Though well intended, this celebration drew up a boundary around one sub-group, effectively self-excluding them from the rest of the class while strengthening their bond to one another through expression of their shared cultural background.

Conclusion and implications

The findings indicate that school leaders and teachers at Greenwood see a potential for creating an inclusive school environment through music activities by building self-esteem, acknowledging newly arrived children’s cultural expressions and using music for building community. They seek to facilitate inclusive socio-musical spaces both within the introductory class and in meeting points with other pupils in the school. Nevertheless, they meet various obstacles when putting their aims into action. These obstacles are largely attributable to (a) individual teachers’ attitudes and competences; (b) organisational factors, for instance how the school leadership timetables and assigns resources and (c) discursive factors that hide exclusionary practices from plain view. Inclusion is a

multi-layered issue, and multiple levels are often at play. For instance, the way school leaders talk about inclusion can restrict teachers' scope for action. And while several participants refer to teachers' intercultural competence as an important factor, a solely subjective understanding of intercultural competence disregards the importance of situational and contextual factors in how individuals act (Moosmüller & Schönhuth, 2009).

Specific fields of tension were identified in the socio-musical spaces related to (i) boundaries to what cultural expressions are welcomed and represented in school; (ii) visibility and performance of newly arrived children's home cultures and (iii) exclusion and self-exclusion through musical markers of belonging: musical activities in Greenwood were seen sometimes to have exclusionary effects through boundaries to what cultural expressions were allowed; through lack of awareness of IC pupils' needs or implicit messaging of who belongs; and at times through self-exclusionary processes.

The findings suggest that music activities could become more inclusive if the needs and resources of IC pupils were more central both in choice of repertoire, content and how activities are organised. Group singing was the mainstay of music making in Greenwood, as is common in Norwegian primary schools, particularly when led by non-specialist music teachers (Sætre et al., 2016). While there is nothing inherently non-inclusive about singing, singing activities require particular consciousness of the needs of newly arrived children, since songs are language-dependent, repertoire is often firmly based in the majority culture and the activity is reproductive and predominantly teacher-led.

In her study of Australian schools with a high percentage of refugee pupils, Crawford (2020) found that intercultural competence and socially inclusive behaviours were seamlessly embedded in experiential, creative, collaborative music learning activities. A key success factor was found to be teachers' specialist music education competence and substantive teaching experience. Collaborative creative music making, that is creating something new drawing on the diverse resources of the whole pupil group rather than resting on pre-existing cultural expressions, were little explored at Greenwood. As mentioned by one of the Greenwood IC teachers, greater potential for inclusive music practices might have opened up if a wider range of music education tools were used. These could include instrumental activities, creative dance, drum circles, digital composition or group songwriting. Such activities are less culturally specific and more about production of new cultural expressions, which harmonises well with an intercultural approach. This has implications for how specialist music resources are prioritised in schools and newly arrived children's access to specialist music teachers.

An intercultural approach to (music) education requires awareness of teachers' position at the centre of a hegemonic culture. Teachers' status as insiders seeking to include newcomers in an existing social order can blind them to how those outside the dominant discourses may be marginalised through curricula, pedagogies and assessment practices 'that do not take into account different kinds of knowledge, or different approaches to learning or different values and beliefs' (Allard & Santoro, 2006, p. 117). Awareness of one's own cultural identity and how it plays out in the culturally diverse classroom is at the crux of intercultural music education and inclusive music practices.

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Data availability statement

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

Notes

1. Each municipality chooses their preferred model. Other models are (a) separate introductory schools, (b) starting directly in mainstream classes with extra support in the classroom or (c) hybrid solutions whereby newly arrived children divide each school day from the outset between an introductory class and a mainstream class at the same school (www.nafo.oslomet.no/grunnskole/organisering/).
2. Pseudonym.
3. This includes disabled and gifted, nomadic peoples, linguistic, ethnic and cultural minorities, and other disadvantaged or marginalised groups.
4. Intercultural competence: ‘the overall capacity of an individual to enact behaviours and activities that foster cooperative relationships with culturally (or ethnically) dissimilar others’ (Kim, 2009, p. 54).
5. For further discussion of intercultural music education through inclusive music practices, see Rinde & Christophersen (2021).
6. It is important not to assume that children in the IC classroom identify with music associated with their religions and ethnicities more than with for instance mainstream pop, K-pop, J-pop, hip-hop, etc. However, observation and interview data indicated that the musical preferences of the (pre-teen) IC pupils in this particular study were predominantly linked to music ‘from home’ both inside and outside the classroom.
7. Backing tracks for classroom singing.
8. The children showed good understanding of different expectations in different settings in the school, see Rinde & Kenny (2021).
9. Norway’s Constitution Day, celebrated with processions of flag-waving children through the streets.
10. ‘Hospitering’ in Norwegian.
11. Similar work has been done in the Song Seeking Project in Ireland, see Kenny (2022).
12. The plan was to build on this experience with a series of joint music workshops. This was not possible due to the COVID-19 school lockdown from March 2020.
13. And integration, used synonymously.
14. Bilingual teachers provide instruction in each child’s first language as well as bilingual teaching in literacy and numeracy closely linked to learning activities in the introductory class, up to five hours a week, in groups.

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