



Reflections on the 2025 Desert Skies Symposium

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February 20–22, 2025 | Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ

Attending the 17th Biennial Desert Skies Symposium at Arizona State University was an intellectually enriching and personally meaningful experience. Known for its emphasis on dialogue across diverse educational contexts, the symposium brought together scholars, educators, and practitioners committed to advancing music learning and teaching through inclusive, reflective, and research-informed practices.

I arrived on February 20 and attended sessions through February 22 before leaving Phoenix. During these three days, I had the opportunity to present my research titled “*Exploring Teacher Agency Through the Iterative Dimension: Implications for Intercultural Music Education*.” My presentation explored how music educators’ past experiences—what Emirbayer and Mische (1998) term the iterative dimension of agency—influence curriculum decisions and classroom approaches in multicultural settings. I argued that integrating reflective practice into teacher preparation programs is essential for fostering culturally responsive teaching and intercultural competence.

The symposium’s unique roundtable format created an ideal space for meaningful exchange. In each time slot, six to eight presenters were assigned to separate tables, and attendees were invited to join the discussions they were most interested in. This setup encouraged small-group, in-depth conversations and genuine engagement. During my session, I shared my work with fellow scholars who selected my table, which led to a rich and interactive dialogue. I received insightful feedback, including probing questions that will inform my future inquiries—particularly regarding how iterative experiences shape teachers’ decision-making. Attendees also recommended alternative theoretical frameworks such as critical pedagogy and situated learning, which I plan to explore further to expand the scope and depth of my future research.

Beyond the formal sessions, the symposium fostered a welcoming atmosphere for informal exchange and relationship-building. From coffee breaks to casual hallway conversations, I had numerous opportunities to connect with fellow researchers in a relaxed setting. These spontaneous interactions often sparked new ideas and potential collaborations, enriching my experience beyond the structured panels. One particularly memorable moment was when a group of attendees—myself included—joined in an impromptu dance as music played during a break. This joyful and unscripted moment captured the spirit of creativity, connection, and shared passion that defines the arts education community.

This symposium not only allowed me to refine my research questions and gain valuable feedback but also reaffirmed my commitment to bridging research and practice. The collegial environment underscored the collective goal of fostering educational equity and artistic representation. I left the conference inspired and eager to apply these insights to my ongoing research and teaching, with renewed passion for creating inclusive, culturally rich learning environments through music.

I am sincerely grateful to the Herbert E. Carter Travel Award and the Applied Intercultural Arts Research Graduate Interdisciplinary Program (AIAR GIDP) at the University of Arizona for making my participation in the 2025 Desert Skies Symposium possible. This generous support enabled me to present my work, engage in meaningful dialogue with fellow educators and scholars, and further develop my commitment to equity and intercultural understanding in music education.

