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Applied Intercultural Arts Research

Exploring Teacher Agency Through the Iterative Dimension: Implications for Intercultural Music Education

Teacher agency, as defined by Toom, Pyhältö, and Rust (2015), refers to the deliberate choices teachers make to exert significant impact on their educational settings. This concept highlights the dynamic interplay between personal attributes and contextual factors, shaping teachers' capacities, professional knowledge, and beliefs (Donaldson, 2011; Priestley et al., 2015; Simpson et al., 2018). In music education, where diverse cultural representations are critical, teacher agency becomes particularly significant. Music educators, acting as cultural mediators, can draw on their own backgrounds to create inclusive and responsive curricula. This paper aims to explore the impact of the iterative dimension of agency on music educators' decision-making in intercultural contexts, providing insights for the development of more culturally inclusive music programs.

Emirbayer and Mische's *chordal triad of agency* (1998) conceptualizes human agency as a dynamic and an evolving force, including three dimensions: *iterative*, *projective*, and *practical-evaluative*. These dimensions enable agents to adjust their orientations towards the past, future, and emerging present situations (Tucker, 2020). The iterative dimension of agency refers to the reactivation of individuals' prior habits, thoughts, and behaviors—whether consciously or unconsciously—and their integration into current actions (Tucker, 2020). This process ultimately shapes and maintains individual identities and relationships with the surrounding environment. In music education, this iterative dimension reflects how music educators draw on past experiences to inform curriculum design and classroom management.

Teachers rely on their accumulated knowledge, shaped by personal and professional histories, to foster stability in their actions and decisions. Several scholars indicate that the iterative dimension has a strong impact on teachers' decision-making processes (Leijen, Pedaste, & Baucal, 2022; Oosterhoff, Oenema-Mostert, & Minnaert, 2020; Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015). While this reliance on familiar or habitual practices suggests that the iterative dimension brings stability, it can also present challenges in adapting to new cultural contexts. Thus, reflective practices are crucial for teachers to remain responsive to diverse classroom needs.

In the context of intercultural music education, teacher preparation programs play a critical role in shaping educators' ability to integrate diverse cultural perspectives into their curricula. By embedding reflective practices that focus on personal biases, cultural backgrounds, and prior teaching experiences, teacher preparation programs cultivate the iterative dimension of agency necessary for fostering intercultural competence. Warren (2018) suggests enhancing perspective-taking abilities through exposure to diverse texts, social contexts, and critical dialogue about emotional and behavioral reactions. Therefore, incorporating perspective-taking experiences and exercises into teacher education and professional development programs is crucial. This approach not only strengthens culturally responsive teaching (CRT) but also fosters socially sensitive methods that address a broad range of student needs (Abacioglu, Volman, & Fischer, 2020).

Interculturalism in music education advocates for active dialogue and engagement in cross-cultural communication, moving beyond the passive acceptance of cultural coexistence. It promotes collaborative learning and a collective sense of inclusion (Kastoryano, 2008). This method not only encourages educators to draw on their prior experiences but also guides them to adapt their pedagogical strategies, creating more inclusive classroom environments. As educators

reflect on their biases and engage in intercultural dialogue, they become better equipped to adapt their teaching strategies. To achieve this, teachers must develop their intercultural competencies including knowledge, values, attitudes, and critical reflection on biases shaped by iterative experiences. Studies highlight that unconscious stereotypes can hinder student progress (Alexander & Schofield, 2006ab), while culturally aware teachers can better adapt strategies for inclusive environments (Molina, 2013; Banks et al., 2005; Quintanar-Sarellana, 1997). These findings underscore the iterative dimension's role in preparing teachers for intercultural education, enabling them to create environments that celebrate diversity.

Intercultural competence, as outlined by Pastori et al. (2018), requires a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and reflective practice. Teacher preparation programs should incorporate these elements, encouraging future educators to use the iterative dimension of agency to continually reflect on and adapt their teaching practices to the needs of diverse student populations. Romijn, Slot, and Leseman (2021)'s review further suggests that a contextual, team-based approach to professional development, where reflection is guided and enactment is fostered, is most effective for enhancing teachers' intercultural competencies. By prioritizing reflective practice, cultural competence, and experiential learning, these programs can equip educators with the tools to engage with diversity through their pedagogical choices actively.

The iterative dimension of teacher agency provides a valuable framework for understanding how teachers' past experiences shape their current practices in intercultural music education, highlighting the potential for more effective teacher preparation programs. By incorporating ongoing reflection and cultural competence training into teacher preparation programs, educators can be better equipped to adapt to the diverse needs of their students. Future research could examine how sustained reflective practice during teacher preparation influences

teacher agency and explore how increased intercultural exposure contributes to more inclusive teaching methods. Implementing these insights into teacher preparation programs will be vital for fostering an education system that truly values and celebrates cultural diversity.

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