

MENTAL BOUNDARIES IN TEACHERS' REFLECTIONS ON INTERCULTURALISM IN MUSIC LESSONS

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Abstract

The German-speaking discourse on intercultural music education has gained increasing prominence since the 1970s and in particular more recently as a result of asylum and refugee policies. While existing empirical studies focus primarily on the migration education perspective (see Wurm 2006, Schmidt 2015, Honnens 2017), often with respect to the role of Turkish youth, the perspectives of teachers on intercultural music instruction have received only limited attention. With the aim of contributing towards understanding teachers' views, eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with music teachers in Germany concerning the association between interculturality and music teaching. Interview data was analyzed using a Grounded Theory approach (see Strauss & Corbin 1990), methodologically extended by situation analysis according to Clarke (see Clarke 2005). In the data analysis, the core category 'Grenzen im Geist' (mental boundaries) emerged from the coding process. Subsequently, these mental boundaries, as well as intended strategies for overcoming and reducing them, were derived from teachers' reflections on intercultural music teaching. In this paper, theoretical connections will be made between the following aspects: the migration-related discourse of intercultural music education, power-critical perspectives on boundaries, and selected excerpts of my qualitatively collected data material.

Keywords

Boundaries – intercultural music education – teachers' perspective – Grounded Theory – situational analysis – migration – social belonging – postcolonial theory – power criticism

Introduction

In large parts of the social and cultural sciences, the concept of globalization is associated with the idea of the "loss of significance of space, borders, and the nation state". Simultaneously it stands for a "weltweiten Prozess der Enträumlichung, Entgrenzung bzw. Deterritorialisierung"¹ (Schroer, 2021: 57). However, scholarly discussions on boundaries are currently receiving enormous attention, especially with regard to increasing migration movements and associated pluralization of society.² Current examples also show that boundaries determine more than ever the socio-political discussions of contemporary events: Britain is separating itself from Europe, people are being pushed behind borders, refugee admissions are being limited, border areas are being violently contested by Israelis and Palestinians in the Middle East conflict, and the spread of Covid-19 calls for security

¹ Translation by AB: "worldwide process of de-spatialization, de-bordering, or deterritorialization".

² For the first time, a German-speaking handbook on boundary research provides an up-to-date interdisciplinary definition of the research field by unfolding historical, methodological as well as theoretical-conceptual perspectives (see Gerst et al. 2021).

measures through containment and increased border controls. On the other hand, boundaries are softening, e.g., between genders or cultures of origin. Boundaries are ambivalent: on the one hand, they create order and thus offer protection, security, and orientation (see Lautzas 2010: 43f.); however, if they exclude and forcibly create social orders of belonging, they can also become instruments of power (see Castro Varela 2016: 44). Another fact reflected in the data material of my empirical study is that boundaries play a central role in teachers' thinking about interculturality in music education. In this context, the core category 'mental boundaries' stands for the reflexive-mental boundaries manifested in the imagination of the interviewed teachers. These mental boundaries refer, for example, to nation-state, music-cultural or ethnic aspects. The following article provides an overview of my dissertation project, which is being supervised by Prof. Dr. Dorothee Barth at the University of Osnabrück and Prof. Dr. Lina Oravec at the University of Koblenz-Landau. For this purpose, I highlight methodological aspects, theoretical references, as well as selected findings of my empirical study.

Methodological orientation and research questions

In the context of my dissertation project, I conducted semi-structured interviews with eight music teachers in different German states about their experiences with interculturality in music education. The teachers reported on their teaching concepts, the teaching materials used, their teaching goals, and their music-related biographical experiences. I followed Juliet Corbin and Anselm L. Strauss's Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) (see Strauss & Corbin, 1990) in analyzing the data, because it is suitable for exploring little-studied research fields. Developing an object-based theory relies on the theory as a process approach. In this context, data is iteratively compared, which entails an extensive iterative approach of data collection, coding, and analysis (see Strübing 2014: 15). To open the data, I expanded my approach using situational analysis according to Adele E. Clarke (Clarke, 2005). Situational analysis represents a postmodern expansion of GTM and at the same time introduces a "neue theoretische und methodologische Ausrichtung"³ (Strübing 2018: 684). This method of analysis, which is characterized by practical work with so-called mapping strategies, represented a central instrument in my research process. Here, it was helpful to open and structure the data material. In contrast to Strauss' and Corbin's coding paradigm, which is limited to actions, situational analysis also makes non-human and implicit actors as well as silenced positions visible. The mapping procedures, and in particular the creation of 'social world maps', were especially useful to identify initial foci in the data, e.g. the central phenomenon of the 'boundary'. In the further course of the research process, this focus also led to the concretization of the research questions:

- a) What boundaries can be identified from the teachers' reflections?
- b) How are the identified boundaries related to the reflections on the teaching actions?

³ Translation by AB: "new theoretical and methodological orientation".

Theoretical Background

Systematic aspects in the (German-speaking) discourse of intercultural music education

In the last twenty years, the discourse on intercultural music education has developed along two thematically definable lines (see Buchborn, 2020: 11). As early as 2000, Dorothee Barth for the first time systematized three ways of looking at culture, arguing that they are associated with different objectives, methods, and approaches (see Barth 2000: 28, 33). In her later work, she differentiates between an examination of the ‘Musik(en) der Welt’ (music(s) of the world) on the one hand and the musical-cultural situation of people in immigration societies, named ‘Musik und Migration’ (‘music and migration’), on the other. Based on this differentiation she elaborates two central, content-related lines for the intercultural music education (see Barth, 2008, 2012). These lines are further endorsed by Thomas Ott, who distinguishes between a ‘migrationsbezogene’ (migration-related) and a ‘musikkulturelle’ (music-cultural) perspective (see Ott 2012: 115 ff.). With increasing migration movements, interest in music education has changed as well: theoretical discussions on how to deal with heterogeneity and diversity have increased in recent years and so have empirical studies, especially on the so-called ‘migration-related perspective’. In empirical studies, mainly the perspectives of (among others, Turkish speaking) students have been investigated (e.g. Wurm, 2006; Schmidt, 2015; Honnens, 2017; Völker, 2020). While the teachers’ perspective has remained largely unexamined in the past (except for Dannhorn, 1996), several projects are now addressing this research gap from different methodological perspectives (see Bubinger, 2020, 2021; Buchborn, 2020; Tralle, 2020). In particular, the work of Anna Magdalena Schmidt and Johann Honnens focus on recognition-theoretical issues in dealing with origin-cultural identities within the intercultural music education. At the same time, they reopen the question of boundaries in migration-related contexts (cf. Honnens, 2017; Schmidt, 2015).

Dealing with Ethnicities from the Perspective of Recognition Theory

Johann Honnens reemphasizes the idea of recognition for intercultural music education. In his view, the balance between deconstruction and recognition of origin-cultural identities has become unbalanced in the discourse (see Honnens 2018: 6). Because a deconstructionist-motivated non-perception of ethnic cultural categories can quickly produce social exclusion, he sees a greater consideration of recognition theory perspectives within the discourse as necessary. On the one hand, social category systems such as ethnicities are necessary, he argues, referring to Judith Butler’s recognition theory, “um Leben zu können”⁴ (Butler 2012: 327); on the other hand, they are inherently ambivalent because they come with the danger of being “in Weisen gezwungen zu werden, die uns manchmal Gewalt antun”⁵ (see *ibid.*). To relate the concept of boundaries to these thoughts, it should be noted that boundaries between ethnicities of origin or musical cultures, for example, are necessary for developing stable identities. Consequently, in music lessons, students could decide for

⁴ Translation by AB: “in order to live”.

⁵ Translation by AB: “forced into ways that sometimes do us violence”.

themselves whether they feel they belong to musical cultures in whole or in part, or whether they distance themselves from them (see Barth 2013: 50). Yet boundaries can also become instruments of power if they expose subjects to certain orders; for example, if ethnic attributions lead to students being reduced to an ethnic affiliation. As a result, they are treated as ‘not really belonging’ and are “(zuweilen auch positiv) rassistischen, ethnizierenden, ausgrenzenden Zuschreibungen ausgesetzt”⁶ (Barth & Honnens, in prep.). This is problematic when such experiences are taken as a central moment of self-description and transformed into ethnic self-presentations (see *ibid.*). Recognition of so-called ‘natio-ethno-cultural’ identity components and thus also recognition of boundaries is considered meaningful in music lessons; however, this recognition requires a power- and representation-critical perspective in dealing with ethnicities. According to Honnens, in classroom communication two aspects must be considered: a constant balancing between positive-affirmative and deconstructive ways of dealing and a careful reflection on the recognition mechanisms that are at work in the respective situation (see Honnens 2018: 10). As the phenomenon of the ‘boundary’ appears in my data material primarily in the context of migration-related statements, boundaries will be unfolded in the following from both historical and power-critical perspectives with a view toward questions of migration and social belonging.

Systematic and power-critical perspectives on boundaries, migration, and social belonging

In the historical-political context, borders were primarily used for military protection and were initially attempts to establish (political) orders (see Lautzas 2010: 42f.). In this context, they were initially defined less as a personal bond between people than a disposal of territories (see *ibid.*) With their solidification in the 19th century into borderlines, new spaces developed with the border areas, which were not infrequently regarded as a yardstick for political relations. The fact that these were humanly constructed spaces shows that borders are not natural phenomena but historically evolved and socioculturally constructed entities (cf. *ibid.*). The history didactician Peter Lautzas differentiates between two types of borders, which differ fundamentally in function and nature: **territorial borders** moved and were correspondingly permeable in the course of history with its socio-historical development; **mental boundaries** are also based on historical legacies, but are less permeable and still perceptible, even where borders are no longer visible (e.g. East and West Germany) (see *ibid.*). Thus, because the latter are less permeable and still have a decisive impact on our thinking, attitudes, and perspectives, they are particularly persistent, in contrast to territorial borders. This stability of mental boundaries is particularly evident today in the context of migration movements and questions of social belonging. When boundaries simultaneously include and exclude and thus forcibly establish social orders of belonging, they can become instruments of power.

Given the globally increasing polarizations of society, the focus has shifted from originally territorial to **social boundaries**, and accordingly to questions of identity, social belonging and power relations (see Charim 2018: 18). In the context of migration movements, such social and mentally manifested boundaries show up in two processes: the border crossing itself and the symbolic demarcations between ‘them’ and ‘us’ that take place there:

⁶ Translation by AB: “not really belonging’ and are subjected to (sometimes also positive) racist, ethnicizing, exclusionary attributions”.

Wer Grenzen überschreitet, gilt als MigrantIn, während gleichzeitig Grenzen die Unterscheidung zwischen denen, die dazugehören und denen, die nicht dazugehören hervorbringen und beständig stabilisieren (Castro Varela 2016: 43).⁷

At the same time, such processes of inclusion and exclusion establish classificatory orders of belonging. They simultaneously form an inside and an outside, a belonging and not belonging, an 'us' and 'the others' (see Castro Varela 2018: 28). Since in this way those not seen as belonging to the nation-state are forcibly pushed behind the border, they simultaneously stabilize social hierarchies and existing power relations (ibid.: 31). The ambivalence of boundaries and orders is shown by the fact they create nations and national identities in the first place, which in turn are linked to certain rights, duties, and securities. However, to stabilize and further secure such existing orders requires boundaries between an 'us' and a 'not-us', which are usually formed in a process dominated by power and dominance relations (see Geier and Mecheril 2021: 173). In this context, migration movements represent phenomena that challenge and threaten existing social orders. Such boundaries, which create classificatory orders of belonging, are particularly powerful when they also create hegemonic relations of dominance (see ibid.: 176).

Representatives of postcolonial theory view the emergence of such boundaries as closely linked to the history of colonial domination, which reached its peak in the 19th century. The effectiveness of colonial patterns is sometimes attributed to the construction of the Other and its exclusion in Orientalism (see ibid.: 182). Such historically generated boundaries are problematic in different ways: first, they still have mental repercussions today that lead to undesirable social processes of distinction; second, the community then decides on the recognition and denial of social belonging; finally, people with a migration history are further stabilized in the position of the Other. To achieve epistemic change and resolve this problem, postcolonial theorists argue that thinking must be decolonized ('Dekolonialisierung des Geistes')⁸ (see Castro Varela & Mecheril 2010: 97). However, a fundamental contradiction has not yet been resolved: it is difficult for the dominant population to imagine a world without nation states and border regulations because they always benefit from a world with borders (see Castro Varela 2018: 24).

Boundaries in the empirical data material – an exemplary insight

In my interview material, mental boundaries have been analyzed in the teachers' reflections on interculturality in music lessons in relation to various aspects, e.g. music-cultural or socio-cultural aspects. The latter includes those boundaries that are constructed by the teachers in relation to the students regarding aspects of their 'kulturelle Herkunft' (cultural origin) or their 'soziales Milieu' (social milieu). The category of the 'kulturelles Päckchen' (cultural package), originally marked as 'in-vivo', represents the interaction of different categories of social difference in my data material. The following statement shows the extent to which 'kulturelle Herkunft' (cultural origin) and 'Bildungschancen' (educational opportunities) are related from the perspective of the interviewed teachers. In response to the question of

⁷ Translation by AB: "Whoever crosses borders is considered a migrant, while at the same time borders create and constantly stabilize the distinction between those who belong and those who do not".

⁸ Translation by AB: "Decolonization of the mind".

what Ms. Grenzmer understands by interculturality in music lessons, she describes two levels, namely, on the one hand, the music cultures that are the subject of the lessons and, on the other hand, the cultural background of the students. Regarding the latter, she states:

Ja das sind eigentlich zwei Ebenen. Das eine ist, dass man im Moment immer mehr eine ganz multikulturelle Zusammensetzung im Unterricht hat, an den Schülern. Aus ganz verschiedenen Herkünften. Das dünnt sich dann leider immer ein bisschen aus nach oben hin. Also je älter sie werden. Weil es immer noch so ist, dass kultureller Hintergrund auch die Bildung beeinflusst. Aber generell in der Fünften oder in der Unterstufe hat man ganz viele also mit, wenn man da fragt, woher sie kommen, dann hat man ganz ganz verschiedene Einflüsse. Oft noch europäisch, aber auch natürlich schon auf teilweise jetzt afrikanischen Hintergrund. Oder natürlich sehr sehr viele auch im asiatischen Bereich. Indisch ist bei uns sehr viel. Ist auch sehr interessant. Das ist die eine Ebene. Also, dass ich, dass man dieser Mischung gegenübersteht. Jeder bringt natürlich ein anderes kulturelles Päckchen mit und das ist natürlich für den Musikunterricht sehr interessant (Frau Grenzmer, Pos. 5).⁹

In this passage, boundaries are constructed on different levels. On the one hand, the teacher delimits the students within the class regarding different cultural origins. However, because Ms. Grenzmer speaks here of “verschiedene Einflüsse” (different influences) and “dieser Mischung” (this mixture), these do not seem to be static and closed, but rather permeable boundaries. Despite this permeability, which seems to characterize her idea of the cultural composition within her class, she simultaneously names geographic boundaries. Here, she opens associated (boundary) spaces using the example of continents (European, Asian, African) and nation states (Indian). In this way, she not only locates the students in a supposed culture of origin, but also metaphorically assigns them a cultural affiliation, albeit implicitly, with the ‘kulturelles Päckchen’. The fact that she herself confronts this mixture spatially and speaks of “oft noch europäisch” (often still European) allows conclusions to be drawn about her own cultural location. During the interview, it becomes evident that in the reflection situation, Ms. Grenzmer tries to distance herself from her own, socialization-related localization within a European culture, which sometimes shapes her ideas of boundaries. That these mental boundaries, especially because they are implicit, are sustainably anchored and correspondingly effective becomes clear in the further course of the interview:

[...] die meisten sind schon so lange da, dass sie das eigentlich adaptiert haben. Man hat natürlich, wir haben viele mit türkischem Hintergrund, aber dann muss man ja sagen, dass die Türkei ja eigentlich schon europäisch ist und deswegen da eigentlich ganz wenig Unterschiede sind manchmal. (Frau Grenzmer, Pos. 9).¹⁰

⁹ Translation by AB: “Yes, there are actually two levels. One is that now you have more and more a very multicultural composition in the classroom, with the students. From very different backgrounds. Unfortunately, this thins out a bit towards the top. So, the older they get. Because it’s still the case that cultural background also influences education. But in general, in the fifth or lower grades, you have a lot of students who, when you ask where they come from, have very different influences. Often still European, but also of course already on partly now African background. Or, of course, very many also in the Asian area. There is a lot of Indian in our country. It’s also very interesting. That is one level. So that I, that one faces this mixture. Of course, everyone brings a different cultural package with them, and that’s very interesting for music lessons.” (Ms. Grenzmer, pos. 5).

¹⁰ Translation by AB: “[...] most of them have been here for so long that they have actually adapted. Of course, we have many with a Turkish background, but then you have to say that Turkey is actually already European and therefore there are actually very few differences sometimes.” (Ms. Grenzmer, pos. 9).

In the reflective situation, the teacher explicates an awareness of the boundaries manifested in her imagination, which she sees in relation to students with a Turkish background. And even if the geographical border allows for indications of permeability (“aber dann muss man ja sagen, dass die Türkei ja eigentlich schon europäisch ist”)¹¹, the double use of “eigentlich” (actually) resonates with a simultaneous relativization that refers to a simultaneous otherness. And although “da eigentlich ganz wenig Unterschiede sind” (there are actually very few differences), the effectiveness of these mental boundaries is ultimately reflected in the fact that, based on a geographical border, the students with a Turkish background are also marked as others. As if, to reference Castro Varela, the migration experiences remain inscribed in the bodies forever, no matter in which generation the people already live here (see Castro Varela, 2016: 43).

However, the category of the ‘kulturelles Päckchen’ (cultural package) combines not only the aspects of ‘kulturelle Herkunft’ in the teachers’ imagination, but also those of the ‘soziales Milieu’. Ms. Kult-Geoff also uses the package metaphor to outline the connection between culture of origin and social milieu (in this case, the influence of the parental home):

[...] und manchmal kommen die schon in die Schule, und haben halt so eine Last und soviel Pakete hier zu tragen (Frau Kult-Geoff, Pos. 34).¹²

The fact that here, too, cultural aspects of origin and educational opportunities are connected is reflected in the fact that ‘das Paket’ (the package) is not seen as an added value, but rather as a burden. If a supposed ‘kulturelles Päckchen’ is then also assigned in the teaching situation without being asked, in the belief that the students are to be picked up in their cultural location and positively acknowledged, this can be momentous. As Barth & Honnens postulate, the students could „dieses Bild als zentrales Moment der Selbstbeschreibung annehmen und in ethnische Selbstinszenierungen überführen“¹³ (see Barth & Honnens in prep.). Such a situation is expressed in the interview with Mr. Grund-Willge:

Ist halt geil, wenn man die Schüler aus ihrer Kultur abholt. Wenn man dann zum Beispiel jemanden hat aus Afghanistan oder aus Indien oder irgendwo da: in dem Bereich. Und dann fragt man die, sag mal kannst du eigentlich was spielen? Und oft kommen die gar nicht darauf, dass die irgendwie, dass sie ein Instrument spielen. Dabei haben sie das irgendwie von der Pike auf irgendwann mal mitgekriegt in ihrem Kulturraum. Bei der Darbuka zum Beispiel ist das so. Dann gibst du denen was und dann können die auf einmal irgendwas spielen. Und meistens sind das diese typischen ((uftata ufta ufta ufta)) so ein typischer orientalischer Rhythmus. Und das gehört für die so richtig normal dazu. Und damit kann man super arbeiten. (Herr Grund-Willge, Pos. 6).¹⁴

¹¹ Translation by AB: “then you have to say that Turkey is actually already European”.

¹² Translation by AB: “[...] and sometimes they already come to school, and just have such a load and so many packages to carry here” (Mrs. Kult-Geoff, pos. 34).

¹³ Translation by AB: “accept this image as a central moment of self-description and transfer it into ethnic self-presentations.”

¹⁴ Translation by AB: “It’s cool when you pick up the students from their culture. For example, if you have someone from Afghanistan or India or somewhere in that area. And then you ask them, tell me, can you play something? and often they don’t even realize that they somehow play an instrument. But they have somehow learned to play from scratch in their cultural area. With the darbuka, for example, it’s like that. Then you give them something and then suddenly, they can play something. And mostly these are these typical ((uftata ufta ufta ufta)) such a typical oriental rhythm. And that’s part of it for them as normal. And you can work super with it.” (Mr. Grund-Willge, pos. 6).

Even if Mr. Grund-Willge pursues well-meant intentions in this passage, namely by wanting to encourage and recognize the students in their musical abilities, the ambivalence of constructing boundaries becomes apparent in this passage: because musical abilities are attributed to supposed cultural contexts of origin and stereotyping, the student is also simultaneously assigned a supposed cultural affiliation, namely by the assumption that "einen typisch orientalischen Rhythmus musizieren zu können, weil dieser von der Pike auf mitgekriegt wurde in ihrem Kulturraum und für die so richtig normal dazugehört".¹⁵ The power-creating function becomes apparent in the fact that the 'kulturelles Päckchen' is filled and addressed in this way without being asked. Cancellation may be difficult.

Discussion

As much as boundaries (e.g., between ethnicities) appear to be necessary to strengthen identity components or become aware of them, they can also have a powerful effect on the other side. Here, the postcolonial perspective on boundaries has shown that social distinctions imply at the same time powerful boundaries, which consequently may promote undesirable processes of inclusion and exclusion. Mental boundaries could be unmasked here as particularly powerful and extremely persistent; in contrast to territorial borders, they linger far longer than is desirable today. The effects of the resulting processes of inclusion and exclusion are particularly evident in relation to migration phenomena. For as long as communities are created by boundaries through the recognition and denial of belonging, people with migratory histories can never truly belong. To use Castro Varela's metaphor, ancestral migratory experiences remain forever inscribed in their bodies (Castro Varela 2016: 43). A dissolution of these historically generated and mentally anchored boundaries seems more necessary today than ever before because, on the one hand, they have a lasting effect on attitudes and perspectives, while, on the other hand, they are able to enable belonging and real educational justice. The necessity of a power- and representation-critical perspective is also emphasized in music pedagogical considerations. But at the same time the relevance of boundaries for identity formation is also emphasized. In contrast to the primarily deconstructivistly oriented postcolonial pedagogy, in music education both ways of dealing with cultural identities of origin should be considered: recognizing and deconstructing.

From the interview excerpts it becomes evident that these mental boundaries are also reflected in the thinking about interculturality in music lessons of the interviewed teachers. The examples also show that teachers try to recognize students in their cultural identity of origin in the teaching situation, but at the same time run the risk of unconsciously making ethnic attributions and in this way reinforcing social boundaries. When a 'kulturelles Päckchen' is filled and addressed without being asked, unwanted but powerful boundaries can be constructed that mark students with a migration history as 'others'. Such ways of dealing are particularly problematic in two ways: they quickly promote social exclusion processes and can also reinforce hegemonic structures. On the other hand, the boundaries seemed relevant to the teachers because they offer them protection and orientation at the same time. In the analysis of my data material, different influencing factors could be identified. Therefore, I worked out the category 'Grenzen der Möglichkeiten' (limits of possibilities),

¹⁵ Translation by AB: "they can make music to a typical oriental rhythm because they learned it from scratch in their cultural area and it really belongs to them as a matter of course".

which can be traced back to the boundaries constructed by the interviewed teachers. This category includes systemic-institutional (e.g. curricula or teaching materials), personal-biographical (e.g. socialization, musical experiences, or travel experiences) or emotional aspects (e.g. fears, insecurities, reactions of the students). Thus, the ambivalence cannot be resolved at once. After all, just like the dominant population, teachers also find it difficult to imagine a world without boundaries because they too ultimately benefit from them.

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