Towards relational music teacher professionalism: Exploring intercultural competence through the experiences of two music teacher educators in Finland and Israel

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Abstract
This study explores the complexities that are involved in the development of intercultural competence in music teacher education by examining the accounts of two music teacher educators from Finland and Israel who work extensively in culturally diverse contexts. A semi-structured interview method was used in conducting the interviews. Deardorff’s categorisation of the process model for intercultural competence was used as a starting point for the data analysis. The findings suggest that considering intercultural competence within a broader framework of relational professionalism would deepen the understanding of the essential aspects of intercultural music teaching and learning. Seen from this perspective, it is important to acknowledge and identify both the capabilities of music education professionals and the relational and contextual aspects of culturally diverse educational settings. Both hold lessons when striving for a meaningful intercultural educational relationship. The study suggests that in order to enhance the conceptual and experiential understanding of the development of intercultural competence within relational professionalism in music teacher education, music teacher educators could share and discuss their own experiences of teaching in intercultural contexts with their colleagues and students. This can in turn lead to enhanced intercultural competence. The increased self-reflection through sharing and discussion can also make the development of reflexivity possible.

Keywords
diversity, intercultural, intercultural competence, music education, music teacher education, reflexivity, relational, self-reflection, professional development, teacher education

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**Introduction**

A culturally diverse classroom has become increasingly common in schools, due to societal phenomena such as global mobility and worldwide migration. In situations where the different cultural backgrounds of students might create challenges for interaction and collaboration in class, teachers need to rely on their intercultural competence (e.g., Byram et al., 2001; Deardorff, 2006, 2008; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009), that is, the “ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes” (Deardorff, 2008, p. 33). Developing this ability should help teachers in their work as intercultural educators. However, the development of intercultural competence first requires strengthening self-reflection, which, according to Feucht et al. (2017), may in turn pave the way for developing the capacity for reflexivity. Developing a reflexive perspective on one’s own work in intercultural contexts requires that teachers are first granted opportunities to enhance their critical self-reflection on issues of cultural diversity. Only by becoming aware of one’s feelings, reactions and motives, and how they influence one’s thoughts, behaviour and actions in intercultural situations, can a teacher consciously start to build up her or his intercultural competence.

Previous research on general teacher education has shown the potential that enhancing teachers’ self-knowledge and self-reflection holds for fostering intercultural interaction and learning in classrooms (e.g., Edwards, 2011; Garmon, 2005; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Mills & Ballantyne, 2010; Pennington et al., 2012). As Pennington and colleagues (2012) state, learning to be self-reflective towards one’s work as a teacher educator with culturally diverse students enhances the teacher educator’s capacity for empathy, self-knowledge and intercultural communication, which are integral parts of professional growth and satisfaction. Moreover, when these individual capacities are practised in class, they can also foster and facilitate intercultural awareness, critical thinking and empathy in the students, thus making progress towards a more socially just and emotionally sound classroom (Jokikokko, 2016). In the field of music education, more research is needed on music teacher candidates’ and music teacher educators’ self-reflection on intercultural work (see, for example, Broeske, 2019; Kallio & Westerlund, 2019; Westerlund et al., 2015; Westerlund & Karlsen, 2017). Some literature can be found on music teacher candidates’ personal conceptualisations of teaching in culturally diverse settings, and their understandings of cultural diversity (Emmanuel, 2005; Joseph & Southcott, 2009; Southcott & Joseph, 2010), understandings and perceptions of social justice in music education (Ballantyne & Mills, 2008), and the critical role of individual music educators in promoting culturally diverse music education (Cain, 2015; Cain et al., 2013). Self-reflection is also seen as a key skill in the field of culturally responsive pedagogy in music education (Lind & McKoy, 2016).

Cultural diversity in music education has often been approached from a multicultural perspective which emphasises the enhancement of musical diversity by, for instance, adding musically diverse repertoire to the curricula or by developing music teachers’ skills in how to teach music from diverse cultures (e.g., Howard et al., 2014). However, as Westerlund and Karlsen (2017) point out, “multicultural music education has not been dynamic enough to highlight the contextual – social, political, and ethical etc. – situatedness of musical encounters” (p. 80). In other words, while multicultural music education has primarily concentrated on diversifying the musical contents and practices, the approach has not sufficiently considered the wider social and cultural conditions that are involved in music teaching and learning.

It has been argued that becoming interculturally competent requires more from a music teacher than including different musics in the curriculum and the pedagogical skills to transmit
Data and method of the study

The impetus for the study reported here arose from previous research involving focus group interviews that my colleagues and I conducted with music teacher educators in two music teacher education programmes in Finland and Israel (Miettinen et al., 2018). Whereas Finland has only fairly recently had to acknowledge issues of cultural diversity due to migration and a growing number of asylum seekers, Israel has been a multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious society since the state was founded. The different socio-political and cultural conditions of these two countries created a fruitful setting for this exploration. The study follows what can be called purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). The selection criteria for interview participants included (1) a high level of self-reflection and (2) longer experience of working with diverse student populations – both of which the two selected music teacher educators fulfilled. In addition, one of the reasons for selecting them as interviewees was to gain deeper insight into some of the topics that were discussed in the group interviews in the previous phase of the study (reported in Miettinen et al., 2018). The data consists of four in-depth interviews, two interviews with each of the participants. The interviews with the Israeli music teacher educator were conducted in 2014 and 2015, and the interviews with the Finnish music teacher educator were conducted in 2015 and 2016. A semi-structured interview method was used in conducting the interviews. The Israeli music teacher educator was interviewed in English, and the interviews with the Finnish music teacher educator were conducted in Finnish.\(^1\) The length of each of the four interview sessions was 90–120 min. Although limited in length, the data provided a rich source for exploration. The study reported in this article adheres to the ethical requirements of the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (2012) and the code of ethics of the University of the Arts Helsinki valid at the time of data collection and analysis. Accordingly, the interviewees have given their informed consent regarding participation, including consent for publishing the findings of the data in academic articles. In order to guarantee the interviewees’ anonymity, pseudonyms are used. However, both of the interviewees are aware that, despite every effort to protect their anonymity, there is a possibility of someone identifying them in the text.

Theoretical starting points and data analysis

Deardorff’s (2006) categorisation of the process model for intercultural competence (p. 256) was used as a starting point for the data analysis. Deardorff developed the categories of this model from interviews with 23 intercultural experts who answered the question “What is intercultural competence?” The categories are attitudes (e.g., respect, openness, curiosity and discovery), knowledge and comprehension (e.g., cultural self-awareness, deep cultural knowledge, sociolinguistic knowledge), and skills related to gaining that knowledge (e.g., listening, observing and evaluating, analysing, interpreting and relating). Deardorff also created two additional categories as the outcomes of the process of developing one’s intercultural competence, namely, the internal outcome of informed frame of reference shift (e.g., adaptability, flexibility, ethnorealistic view, empathy) and the external outcome of effective and appropriate communication and behaviour in an intercultural situation (Deardorff, 2006). These five categories, presented in the process model of intercultural competence, informed my analysis by setting the guidelines for the categorisation of this study’s data. Thus, the research question posed to the data is:
What aspects of intercultural competence can be detected in the accounts of the two music teacher educators?

The content analysis of the data followed an abductive approach (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017). The analysis included phases of inductively identifying emerging themes and deductively organising the data according to Deardorff’s categorisation. The findings of the analysis are presented below, grouped according to the categories by Deardorff with the identified themes as subheadings.

Findings

The teaching contexts and social realities of the two interviewed teachers are vastly different. Anne is teaching in a music teacher education programme in a higher education institution in Finland, where most of her students are White, middle-class and Finnish, with the exception of when she teaches music education subjects to exchange students enrolled at her institution. In addition to her job in the programme, she also has extensive work experience teaching culturally and ethnically diverse populations all over the world by giving shorter courses for music teachers, music teacher educators or people with a special interest in music education. The other music teacher educator, Michal, is teaching in music teacher education programmes in a college in Israel, where she teaches students from different cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds. The work contexts for these two music teacher educators are different and in the interviews, Anne is mainly reflecting upon her experiences outside of music teacher education, whereas Michal is talking about the cultural diversity that she is experiencing daily in her teaching within the music teacher education programmes. Therefore, their goals for interaction and teaching differ slightly: in her work, Michal is continuously reflecting on her everyday teaching practices and interaction with any given group of students from different cultural backgrounds, and has a longer period of time to establish relationships and re-evaluate her pedagogical choices; whereas Anne, when working as a visiting music education expert, has a different position in trying to connect and communicate with a new group of people in a foreign context within a short time frame, and not having the opportunity to see the relationships grow or witness the students’ development over time.

Attitudes

*Commitment, passion and curiosity as the fuel of intercultural teaching.* Both music teacher educators approached new situations dealing with people from different cultural backgrounds, and the challenges created by cultural diversity, through their own personalities, using their life experiences and personal strengths, values and beliefs as guideposts in their encounters with students. Both Anne and Michal seem committed to and passionate about their work: they are both advocating for music education in their own ways and making efforts to further educate themselves. Anne more so in practical skills, Michal academically. They both feel that it is important for a teacher to constantly develop herself in the profession. Anne also says that she is passionate about different music cultures, their instruments and songs, and she works extensively with people from different cultural backgrounds.

This is what Anne describes as her “credo” in music teaching:

* I believe in encounters between people with and through music. I believe in curiosity and the positive comprehension of the richness of diversity. (Anne)
As teachers, both participants felt that they were most of all facilitators and inspirers for their students: mentors who create the favourable circumstances for their students to express themselves safely; to explore, learn and display their talent; and to grow as music teachers in their care.

I feel that as a teacher I am an inspirer. I am showing the students their strengths and encouraging them to be themselves. (Anne)

I believe that my job in any of the courses [is that] I’m a facilitator. What I want to facilitate when I’m in music teacher education, is the relationship between the music teacher or musician and their own identity and their own practice. And their culture. (Michal)

Authenticity as a central principle of being a teacher. “Being who you are” is an important principle for both of them, professionally as well as personally. Both Anne and Michal see their personal traits as central to their work as educators: they use their personalities as strengths in teaching and connecting with their students.

The most important thing is to be yourself as a teacher. [. . .] As a teacher educator my message to my students is: Dare to be yourself, be curious and interested in different phenomena and that will carry you through life. (Anne)

Michal identifies herself as liberal, open and sensitive. She describes herself as a “colourful persona”, and although in some (religious) contexts she has to tone herself down, she feels that she has to be able to be herself and bring that persona into her teaching. It is a continuous negotiation between herself as a person and how she is supposed to present herself as a teacher in different teaching contexts, with culturally diverse student populations.

I bring a colourful persona . . . to them and that’s on purpose. It’s part of what I do. If I want to tell them it’s OK to be yourself, I have to be myself. (Michal)

By “being themselves” in class, both Anne and Michal want to encourage the students to do the same:

I want to create this atmosphere in class that everyone can be comfortable in their own skin and find their own motivation and understanding of why we are doing the things we do in class, and why it is important for oneself. And then finding one’s own way of doing and being. (Anne)

I want them [the students] to find peace with what they are and who they are and where they are. And what they’re doing. (Michal)

Colliding values as part of intercultural teaching. Both Anne and Michal have experienced situations where accepting some specific cultural values, attitudes or positionings have made them feel uncomfortable. Anne has, for instance, taken part in religious rituals as a spectator in which she has not felt herself entirely comfortable. Also, the inferior status of women in some cultures that she has taught within has made her think about these value clashes. Although these occasions have been rare, reflecting upon them makes her think of her own values and what they mean to her in terms of her work. When teaching in religiously strict settings, Michal feels that she has to downplay or even change her identity in various ways, including the way
she expresses herself or what clothes she wears. This makes her very uncomfortable and she is reluctant to do it. However, despite the discomfort that the restrictions bring, she does not want to give up teaching in these settings because of the special atmosphere and relationship she has with the students. In these situations, the interviewed music teacher educators have tried to alleviate the discomfort by concentrating on the connection and interaction that making music creates, by approaching people as individuals, or by trying to find the general humanness underneath the cultural differences.

**Knowledge and comprehension**

*Learning together and from each other in intercultural situations.* These two teachers are not afraid to show their vulnerability in their accounts. Vulnerability implies honesty. This honesty and openness is likely to create trust between the teacher and the students, an essential precondition for successful teaching and learning. Both Michal and Anne emphasise this joint exploration as one of their central pedagogical principles.

Here Michal describes her first experiences of teaching a group of Arab students:

So what I was trying to tell them [the students] in that the first lesson is, look guys I don’t know anything. And kind of opening myself up and telling them it’s much more complicated than you being able to translate your experience into Hebrew. And what I hope . . . is to get them to bring something from their own practice, and their own life as music educators . . . so that I can learn from them and hopefully they can learn from me some kind of dialogue, that’s what I’m looking for right now in that class. (Michal)

This quote expresses how Michal is being self-reflective about the necessity of opening up both herself and her teaching practices to knowledge that does not belong to her area of expertise, and accepting that as a teacher, she can never know everything.

When Anne is teaching abroad and in a different cultural context, she tells her students that she might not always know how to act or behave accordingly, and that she apologises in advance for the cultural mistakes she might make. She also asks students to tell her if she unknowingly does or says something inappropriate. The insights presented above show that both Michal and Anne understand that making cultural mistakes is an inevitable part of becoming interculturally competent, and that one should not be afraid of failure. In addition, they approach the situations with their students dialogically, opening up a space for mutual learning through interaction and inviting them to share thoughts and new knowledge together.

**Skills**

*Communication and negotiation skills as the basis of intercultural awareness.* Michal and Anne use their communication and negotiation skills in class: in their accounts, they identify openness, respect, interest and dialogue as the most important of such skills. In addition, both of them use humour as a coping skill in culturally complex situations, or when they feel uncertain or have to negotiate their teaching methods. All of these skills are valuable when developing one’s capacity of intercultural awareness. Anne tries to communicate her good will and interest in the students and cultures they represent through facial expressions and body language. When she and her students lack a common language, she uses other modalities of communication to her advantage in teaching. This is a valuable asset when working in intercultural contexts. Here, she describes her visit to Iran:
I worked with groups of school children. I started to approach the situations very carefully, observing what they were allowed to do with me. Because nobody can tell me in advance that “you can’t clap or stomp”, if that is something that people are not supposed to do anyway. So I just had to watch and see how they reacted, and observe the looks on the children’s and teachers’ faces – did someone look horrified when I made a certain gesture? [laughs] (Anne)

Stepping in and out of comfort zones: Coping with uncertainty. The ability to enjoy feelings of uncertainty can be something that a teacher develops over time and through experience. In their day-to-day work and life, Anne and Michal have learned to balance between stepping in and out of their own personal and professional comfort zones. It could be argued that this balancing helps them actively reflect upon their teaching methods and teacher identities, and to develop, both consciously and unconsciously, their intercultural competence. In this way, they may learn something new about themselves in culturally diverse situations, through experiencing uncomfortable feelings of uncertainty and insecurity. Both Anne and Michal like to challenge themselves. They both enjoy the feeling of uncertainty and the excitement that jumping into the unknown brings.

M: I don’t feel competent, in that [the Arab] programme, as I do elsewhere.
Me: So how does that make you feel?
M: I’m excited about it. I like it, I like the unknown.

Anne wants to feel the energy and adrenaline rush that is triggered by entering into unfamiliar situations. Uncertainty even fortifies that feeling of “being alive”. The fear of failing is transformed into a positive energy that keeps her going and exploring.

The energy that I get from it is the thing. When I travel to far-away places and meet the 30–40 people that I am supposed to work with, and then start my thing, I feel this tingling sensation, a positive anticipation, and the uncertainty even fortifies the feeling. (Anne)

One important factor in the ability to tolerate uncertainty is experience. Both of the music teacher educators have extensive teaching experience in culturally diverse contexts. That experience, together with their personal characteristics (e.g., being curious, adopting a positive outlook on life) make them more prone to turn feelings of uncertainty into a driving force in their work.

The internal outcome of the process of developing one’s intercultural competence

Sensitivity and flexibility as the core qualities of an informed frame of reference shift. The way in which Anne and Michal present themselves as teachers in culturally diverse teaching contexts is situational: in their accounts, an informed frame of reference shift manifests itself through sensitivity and flexibility, with both abilities shifting and changing according to what information they receive in the particular situation they are in. This information can be gathered by sensing, observing, asking or adjusting the situation according to their previous experience:

[When teaching in a different cultural context] I enter the situations with this idea in my head, that I am interested in your culture, your school, and your teaching practices, and I can even bring in a drop of how we [in Finland] are doing things . . . so how do I apply this? I usually have a non-verbal exercise at the beginning of a session, a movement exercise that everyone can take part in and which does not
require language in order to participate. . . . In that moment I try to be myself, to show my interest, to say it but most importantly to show it. And showing that I am enthusiastic about what we are doing, having an emotional connection to the repertoire that I have chosen. And then, when we start doing things together, I will observe them and try to sense what is needed in this particular group of people to get the energy flowing. (Anne)

Anne is reflecting upon a requirement of empathy in teaching: how a teacher has to be able to show interest and strive for an emotional connection with the students. She has to use her senses to notice what is needed by a certain group of people in a certain situation, and use that information in order to create favourable circumstances for music learning and teaching.

The situatedness of these two music teacher educators’ representations of themselves can be seen to contradict the notion of “being yourself”, which both of them discussed previously. The quotation from Anne above implies that she is aware of different aspects of her personality and different ways of approaching a new teaching situation. When teaching in different cultural contexts, she always has to make a judgement call on which side of herself to bring forward, according to what she senses are the needs and atmosphere of the situation. The same principle applies to Michal, who operates in-between culturally diverse student populations in her work.

The external outcome of the process of developing one’s intercultural competence

Creating a safe space for exploring and experiencing in an intercultural situation. Both Anne and Michal express the need for and importance of creating a safe space for their students. When Anne teaches, she wants to create a safe atmosphere in class so that her students can feel comfortable and are free to explore who they really are as music teachers. In a culturally diverse situation, creating a safe space is especially important to her, and she uses her sensitivity in perceiving that everyone feels comfortable. Here, Anne describes how she tries to ensure that students feel safe in her class:

I make sure that everyone feels safe, and that we do not jump into doing unfamiliar things right from the start. I try to find the appropriate tempo and way of being in every situation where I teach, so that everyone would feel comfortable, and motivated, and so that everyone would maintain the meaningfulness in what we are doing. (Anne)

As part of her teaching, Michal likes to challenge her students – and also herself – but at the same time, she tries to ensure that the students feel safe to open up. She uses concepts of “responsible daring” and “respectful challenging” when she describes her views on what this mixing of risk-taking and feeling safe means in her work. Here, she describes this process with the ultra-orthodox Jewish female students:

Being responsible in terms of respect, respecting the walls of the community, the closeness as a value. And daring to open that window to push the limits a little bit without offending. And like I say this quality is very fragile, and it can break any second. . . . I may be doing wrong in some of these stretching the limits, and I would try to maintain my inner sense of ethics and keep an open-minded communication with my ultra-orthodox colleagues, to let them in on things that I’m doing. (Michal)

[. . .] It’s something that I believe in ideologically: challenging with respect. It’s something that I believe that these women, as musicians in their community, need to help them to negotiate internal dissonances. So I believe that I’m helping them. I hope I’m not wrong. By sharpening that skill of internal negotiation. (Michal)
Here, she talks about responsible daring in the Arab context:

I think that responsible daring in the Arab context is less about challenging their cultural norms. It’s more about recognising their cultural norms and trying to bring them into their college experience. What I’m daring or challenging in the Arab programme are the norms of music teacher education in [the] college. So, what I’m challenging in their case are the institutional norms. That’s where I’m daring. I always have to be daring. I guess it’s a self-image thing. I need to be on the edge. (Michal)

Both of the music teacher educators emphasise how they are very aware of creating a safe space for the students (and themselves) when they teach. Michal seems to also acknowledge that a teacher’s role is twofold when it comes to safety: she is simultaneously the safety-keeper and the challenger. It can be argued that both of these roles are necessary for the learning and development of the students. Feelings of safety can increase feelings of trust between the teacher and the students, an essential factor in successful teaching and learning. In sum, actively striving to create a safe space and challenging the students to think differently can be identified as examples of the change that happens externally in the music teacher educators’ behaviour, actions and teaching practices within the developmental process of intercultural competence.

**Discussion**

Using Deardorff’s model as the basis of the analysis has shown how different aspects of intercultural competence can be detected in the ways the two music teacher educators understand their educatorship in culturally diverse teaching contexts. Perhaps more importantly, the analysis also illustrates how the identified issues are fundamentally relational in nature. Indeed, as Gert Biesta (2004, p. 21) argues, “education doesn’t exist in any other sense that as a relation and “in relation””. Moreover, in her study on relational teaching practices in schools, Anneli Frelin (2013) argues that teachers’ relational professionalism is not a “pre-package ability that can be called forth and applied in each and every instance”, but rather “it is viewed as action in pursuit of relational ends that are beneficial for educational purposes” (p. 2). Adopting an educational relationship, that is, “a negotiated and dynamic relationship that is conceived as a precondition for the fulfillment of the task of teaching” (p. 57) includes, according to Frelin, that the teacher is willing to learn from the students, an attitude that the two music teacher educators in this study describe. According to Frelin, “Openness to the student, the willingness to step out of the safety of knowledge in the moment of encounter, can in this regard be connected to negotiating an educational relationship” (p. 60).

Deardorff’s conceptualisation of intercultural competence characterises it more as a set of skills that educators have in their “mind storage” that can be “turned on” when needed. However, the concept of teachers’ relational professionalism emphasises instead the contextual and relational aspects of the competence. In other words, the actualisation of certain aspects of the teacher’s intercultural competence depends heavily on the contextual and relational conditions of the given situation. Seen from this perspective, the teacher can never fully master or “have” intercultural competence. Instead, the competence is created time and again in situ and in relation to the students. Moreover, as Frelin (2013) argues, “a teacher’s ability to create and sustain good relationships with and among students is not merely an inherent quality, or something that concerns the particulars of her or his personality, but is a dimension of teacher professionality” (p. 2). Following this line of thought, it is the combination of personality traits, attitudes, intentions and actions in context that form the relational professionalism of the two
music teacher educators in this study. This combination of different aspects of their professionalism can also be seen as the core of their intercultural competence; the source that they can turn to and draw from in a culturally complex situation. In addition, a teacher’s past experiences may indeed fortify the competence, or, on the contrary, possibly prevent her from responding appropriately if the past experiences have been negative in nature. Becoming aware of these experiences and learning to examine them critically helps the teacher in the further development of her intercultural competence.

The competence-based approach to intercultural teaching is heavily focused around the teacher and, as mentioned above, in music education, the focus has been on teachers’ specific and practical skills in transmitting a variety of musics. The argument made in the beginning of this article was that becoming interculturally competent requires the music teacher to consider both musical diversity of the repertoire and the curriculum and the wider social and cultural conditions that are involved in music teaching and learning. This, as is suggested by this study, could be achieved by considering intercultural competence within a broader framework of relational professionalism. In this view, both the capabilities of the music education professionals and the relational and contextual aspects in culturally diverse educational settings are important to acknowledge, identify and learn from, when striving for a meaningful intercultural educational relationship. First, however, it is important that the music teacher educators become aware of their beliefs, attitudes, practices and actions through self-reflection, as the two interviewed music teacher educators in this study illustrate, in order to be able to make sense of their experiences in critical and culturally sensitive ways. Geert Kelchtermans (2009) argues for the application of a “broad” type of reflection in teacher education programmes and in-service training in order to enhance teachers’ and teacher educators’ self-reflection. As he notes, “Teaching as enacted scholarship implies not only a technical agenda of effectiveness (achieving the curriculum goals), but also a complex relationship with others, characterised by moral responsibilities, political interests and emotional experiences” (p. 269). Learning to be self-reflective in this kind of deep way makes the teacher able to think and act critically and thus “move beyond the level of action to the level of underlying beliefs, ideas, knowledge and goals – in other words to the personal interpretative framework” (Kelchtermans, 2009, p. 269). Applying Kelchtermans’s notion to include the issues of cultural diversity, it is through this kind of deep engagement with developing one’s self-reflection that the teacher is able to critically examine her or his own attitudes, preconceptions and values regarding teaching in culturally diverse contexts.

Conclusion

This study has explored the complexities that are involved in the development of intercultural competence in music teacher education through examining the accounts and reflections of two music teacher educators from Finland and Israel who have experience of working extensively in culturally diverse contexts. The purpose of this study is not to make generalisations but instead, through the analysis of the data, advance the theoretical argument made on the more complex nature of intercultural competence in music teaching. Through this exploration, the study reconsiders how intercultural change could be possible within music teacher education programmes in general.

The limited number of interviewees and the relatively small data sample constitute perhaps the most obvious limitations of this study. Including more interviewees from within the first sample of focus group participants could have contributed to a wider spectrum of perspectives gained in the study. Some other focus group participants might also have met the selection criteria but could have been prevented from participating fully by the group interview situation or
the use of English as the interview language despite the availability of a translator. Moreover, this study is limited to two teacher educators in two institutions and countries, Finland and Israel, and including more interviewees from different institutional settings, populations and geographical locations would have allowed for a richer and more varied exploration of the phenomenon in question.

This study’s examination of different aspects of intercultural competence through the accounts of two music teacher educators from Finland and Israel suggests that providing the opportunities for critical self-reflection and reflexivity is vital for the development of intercultural competence. The findings also suggest that considering intercultural competence within a broader framework of relational professionalism would include both the capabilities of the teacher and relational and contextual aspects of intercultural music teaching. Both are important to acknowledge when striving for a meaningful intercultural educational relationship. The study further suggests that for enhancing conceptual and experiential understandings of the development of intercultural competence within relational professionalism in music teacher education, music teacher educators could share their own experiences of teaching in intercultural contexts with their colleagues and students. Through that process it becomes possible to discuss the contextual resources, relational insights and emotional strategies in regards to how to deal with uncomfortable feelings. This can in turn lead to enhanced intercultural competence. By sharing and discussing experiential knowledge together, music teacher educators and students could collaboratively learn about the multifaceted aspects of intercultural music teaching. In this way, the enhanced self-reflection through sharing and discussion can also make the development of reflexivity possible. Through the opportunities of developing their self-reflection and reflexivity, and framing the developmental process as relational instead of solely competence-based, music teacher educators and teacher students might be able to step beyond the issues of mere musical diversity towards a more holistic understanding and experience of what it means to be an intercultural music education professional in culturally diverse settings.

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Note

1. I have translated the participant’s quotations in English for the purpose of this article. Consent for translating has been asked for and received.

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