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Doing Gender While Doing Interculturality?

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Doing Gender While Doing Interculturality?

Gender-Specific Argumentation Strategies in Interviews and Group Discussions on Interculturality with Music Teachers

1. Introduction and Theoretical Background

As part of our ongoing research project *KoMuF* (cooperative music teacher education Freiburg), we are in the process of conducting two studies analyzing music teachers' perspectives on intercultural learning and how they deal with this thematic field in their everyday practice. Our aim is to reconstruct the orientations and logics that underpin this practice. Our data basis comprises biographical-narrative interviews with music teachers and group discussions with colleagues who work together at the same school, and who therefore share common experiences in their professional life. It is our goal to reconstruct the shared norms and habitus of school music educators as well as the common-sense theories and the implicit knowledge that guides the practice of music teachers in contexts of intercultural learning.

Comparing the results of both studies, we discovered that music teachers share norms that are also present in the discourse on diversity in education and to a large extent in the public debate on processes of social change by migration, i.e., the appreciation of diversity, the demand for social integration, and the principle of equal opportunity. Music teachers transfer these norms to school music education (Buchborn, 2020; Buchborn & Bons, 2021; Tralle, 2020). They note that their teaching should deal with the diverse music cultures of learners; they aim to take the heterogeneous migration backgrounds of their learners into account in planning their lessons; and they argue that respecting “foreign” musical styles from “extra-European music” [außereuropäische Musik] or “world music” is important. At the same time our reconstructions show that music teachers have only limited experiences of their own in dealing with these aspects in their practice. Music lessons are mainly focused on understanding music from the repertoire of Western art music. Teachers are implicitly guided by a static, ethnic-holistic concept of culture, and they position intercultural learning and migration outside their classroom, professional practice, and expertise. Even though we can only give a basic account of our results in this paper, it will become clear that our studies point to a discrepancy between the explicitly formulated norms and the orientations that implicitly guide music teachers in their everyday practice in school (see fig. 1)¹.

¹ By the concept of habitus we understand here, following Bourdieu (1995, p. 17), one's own position in the social space as a kind of practical sense based on the incorporated knowledge.

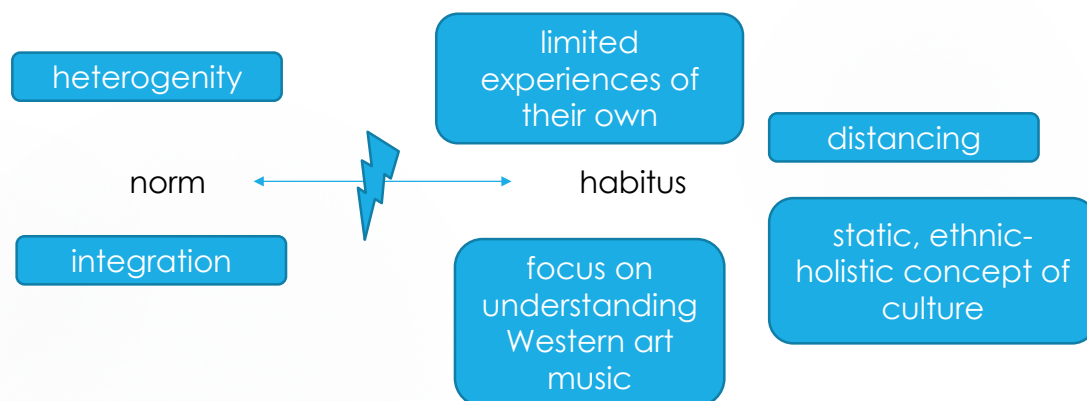


Fig. 1: Reconstructed discrepancy between habitus and norm

However, our interview partners deal with this discrepancy in very different ways. By referring their coping structures to the social background data we collected from the participants, we revealed that male and female participants deal differently with the discrepancy between habitus and norm. Drawing from the perspective of the praxeological sociology of knowledge (Bohnsack, 2017), we understand the modes of dealing with this tension as a practice whose logics guide the actions of the actors, both in the surveyed conversational situations and in situations that go beyond this setting. In this paper we would like to connect two groups of ideas: our observations of these reconstructed routines of action produced in interaction, and the approach of understanding gender as a product of social interaction systematized by West and Zimmermann (1987). Our thesis is that gender-typical strategies of dealing with the tension between social norm and practice while “doing interculturality” entail “doing gender”. Our intention is thus to study “gender as a routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment” (West & Zimmermann, 1987, p. 126) within the sample described above by inquiring from a perspective of music education.

Studying “gender at work”, Wetterer pointed out how gender is constructed in professional contexts, noting:

Not until women and men really do different things or at least do comparable things in different ways do they become different, do they become women and men (and the work they are doing starts to be women’s work or men’s work). (Wetterer, 2002, p. 130, translated by the authors)

Whether or not and how music teachers are enacting gender-related differences in their professional practice is rarely researched, although gender-specific aspects are observed, for example, in Niessen’s study on individual self-concepts of music teachers [Individualkonzepte von Musiklehrer:innen]:

Stronger than the women, the five male participants give me the impression that they get along with their professional situation well. However, I had the impression that this was less based on the feeling of being in an easier situation than on a stronger effort to express themselves in more positive ways in comparison to the women. (Niessen, 2006, pp. 325-326, translated by the authors)

Niessen states that “the question of whether gender plays a role in self-evaluation [...] would be an interesting and worthwhile question for further studies” (ibid., translated by the authors). Ten years later, Siedenburg (2016) emphasized the desideratum of gender-specific studies in music education in a more general way. She notes “that there is also a need for research into the participation of teachers in constructing gender in music education. This concerns their function as a role model as well as their subjective gender theories and their actions as educators” (ibid., p. 3, translated by the authors).

With a focus on the category “gender” as a means of denoting difference, we are aware that this is only a “selection from a set of competing categorizations” (Hirschauer, 2014, p. 183, translated by the authors). From our point of view, the fact that we create, with such an indifference towards further categories of difference, for example age or professional experience, “a difference that makes a difference” (ibid., translated by the authors) has to be relativized to the extent that we observe this difference in the context of a discourse (interculturality and migration in music education), in which the category of gender has so far itself represented an indifference. Without claiming an intersectional perspective, however, we understand our contribution as an attempt to give our “material a chance [to] show factors other than migration as relevant or more relevant” (Goel, 2020, p. 11, translated by the authors). This is even more important taking our understanding of interculturality into account. We approach interculturality from an action-theoretical perspective, not as something “‘ready-made’, ‘given’”, but as something that is “constituted in communication as an interactive process of negotiation” (Földes, 2009, p. 512, translated by the authors). Within this doing interculturality, we observe gender being done.

2. Sample and Method

The sample examined in this paper contains three group discussions and eight biographical-narrative interviews, all conducted in 2017 and 2018 with music teachers working at different high schools [*Gymnasien*] in various regions of Germany. Using the documentary method (Bohnsack, 2014), we reconstruct the participants’ common-sense theories as well as the “implicit knowledge that underlies everyday practice and gives an orientation to habitualised actions” (Bohnsack, Pfaff & Weller, 2010, p. 20). We selected excerpts of this data that show how music teachers deal with the tension described above between a norm claiming diversity and integration and a practice that is experienced as insufficient in regard to this norm. Bohnsack has described this phenomenon in the methodological framework of the documentary method as the “tension and the notorious discrepancy between conjunctive and communicative, that is to say, between performative and propositional, logic” (2017, p. 54, translated by the authors). In order to gain deeper insight into processes of doing gender while talking about intercultural music education and therefore doing interculturality, we reconstructed differences and similarities between male and female teachers within our set of data. In this we aim to examine our findings in relation to the sociogenetic dimension of gender, even though our set of data is not broad enough to work out a full sociogenetic typology as it is described in the context of the documentary method (e.g., Nohl, 2010, pp. 211-212).

3. Results

In the following passage we present our results by analyzing excerpt examples from our data. In a first step we examine a biographical-narrative interview with a female music teacher (*1990) and supplement the observations we made in this interview with further examples from the study that work with biographical-narrative interviews (see 3.1). The second example (3.2) is from a group discussion at a school with an emphasis on teaching music. Two male and two female teachers participated in this discussion.

3.1. “I would say that is more of a blind spot for me”

The following transcript excerpts are from the interview with Lf²(*1990), who was a music teacher trainee at a secondary school in Berlin at the time of the interview. In response to the interview prompt³, Lf began her biographical-narration as follows⁴:

Lf: mhm okay. um (.) yes: so I'll start at the beginning, I was born in Berlin, in the NAME OF DISTRICT and uh (.) yes my mother is also a teacher my sister is I have an older sister, um: my family comes from so is from the former east of the city, mh I'm a child of the reunification["Wendekind"] myself, so to speak um it doesn't affect me so (.) much, exactly. and then, um, I would say in general, so I think that runs through my whole life until now I haven't really had much contact with foreign cultures; so beyond holiday trips, but otherwise (.) everything was so very focused on (.) Berlin and then also not so foreign influences, I don't know how one might have it in the NAME OF DISTRICT or in other districts, but it was all quite (.) homogeneous.

Fig. 2: Interview excerpt Lf

Lf begins the narrative in a rather conventional way by naming the place of birth and her family background. She then marks a biographical fundamental: the lack of “contact with foreign cultures”. In naming this negative horizon in the beginning of her narrative, she refers to a norm that requires the full experience of cultural foreignness. By distancing herself from this norm not just once but twice, she shows a strong distancing from the interview situation and its topic as being biographical relevant for her. In the further course of the interview, she implicitly contrasts the opened negative horizon (i.e., the perceived inadequate fulfilment of the norm that requires the full experience of cultural foreignness):

² In the following analysis, the second letter after the reference to the speaker indicates the gender with which each speaker identifies (f = female, m = male).

³ “Please tell me your life story with all of the experiences, incidents and occasions you personally connect with interculturality. You may start by telling about your childhood, then continue with your youth and through your college years and professional career to this day.”

⁴ All interview passages are translated by the authors. The transcription follows the format TIQ (talk in qualitative social research): <https://transkriptwunder.com/formate/talk-in-qualitative-social-research-tiq/> [29.10.2021]

Lf: in a biographical view my time was also always very full somehow and very focused on completing my studies and learning these instruments and so on, so that I had the feeling that getting to know European music culture in general, across epochs, is already simply a (2) broad field, and finding my way around in it, uhm, was more my focus, I think, and uhm, yes, that's where interculturality actually kind of (2) fell behind. @.@ //mhm// I would say that is more of a blind spot for me mhm

Fig. 3: Interview excerpt Lf

Here, it is explicitly “European music culture” that forms the positive horizon on which Lf has always focused as she describes it in her retrospective telling. Furthermore, she seems to be oriented towards fulfilling institutional requirements (“completing my studies”). Using the metaphor of a “blind spot”, she reveals her perceived biographical indifference towards the topic of interculturality and marks it as a personal deficit. When Lf is asked in what way she is currently confronted with the topic in her everyday professional life, she answers:

Lf: however (2) only when tal- well only in the teacher training seminars so in contrast to other students in inservice training [Referendare] that just have much more contact with it; so if then so; uhm and in my everyday working life (3) somehow not so much so (.) I think if I had to teach this more now, well then even more I would have the feeling wow I woah I am really have no clue yet; kinda

Fig. 4: Interview excerpt Lf

Here, too, Lf repeatedly distances herself from the thematic focus of the interview prompt and assigns the topic a peripheral relevance with regard to her own everyday professional life by opening a counterhorizon (her colleagues as a contrast to herself). In the following reflexive action plan, an orientation towards her own incompetence in relation to the topic shows up. In this context, Lf's status as young professional must of course also be taken into account, which inevitably limits her horizon of practical professional experience. At the same time, it could be argued that Lf can be expected to be familiar with current concepts and discussions on social participation and diversity precisely because she has recently completed her studies. Regardless of her actual professional experience, one could think that in a theoretical action plan, she would formulate clear ideas and conceptions about what would be important to her in practice. However, she assigns to herself a lack of knowledge available to her, describing it as a feeling and thus pointing to a deficient self-image. It is striking that in our interviews with male music teachers this form of explicit self-doubt does not occur. For example, Cm (*1983), who has three years more professional experience than Lf, describes himself as a “multiplier” within his staff when it comes to questions of interculturality and diversity in school. According to his observations, “older colleagues” in particular have difficulties in “dealing sensitively with other cultures” (l. 1184). He also sketches the colleagues as a counterhorizon, which, in contrast to Lf's remarks about her colleagues, has a negative connotation. In this way he implicitly attributes a positive self-image to himself while talking about his experiences with interculturality.

Opening theoretical alternative action plans and alternative biographical decisions as a counterhorizon to one's own actions is a mode of narration that we observed especially in the biographical-narrative interviews with female teachers. The opened counterhorizons tend to be connoted positively, while the respondees tend to characterize their own decisions and actions in a deficient light. This negative self-attribution is expressed particularly clearly in the interview with Uf (*1984). In an evaluative statement at the beginning of the interview, she correlates the focus she had put on her instrument (during her studies and "all her life") to a perceived deficit regarding musical openness:

Uf: I'm sure I've always gone through life with blinders on, I'd say, just in relation to my hobby, always this instrument in my head, um, there's also the fact that you could have tried out other things musically, and then in my studies I immediately went back to what I could do, somehow I tried to intensify and open my eyes a bit for the other things that was (.)difficult for me because somehow there was no reason for, //mhm// um I regret that in retrospect I regret that

Fig. 5: Interview excerpt Uf

She contrasts her formulation of "blinders" in regard to her own biography with an alternative theoretical action plan that expresses curiosity and openness in relation to music as a norm. This image of "blinders" expresses that Uf ignored these alternative options for action in favor of an intensification and continuation of her instrumental main subject, which Uf connotes negatively in a retrospective view. In her explicit articulation of remorse, a discrepancy between practice and norm becomes clear, which she deals with by retrospectively doubting her practice.

By pointing explicitly to "blind spots" (Lf) and describing oneself as having "gone through life with blinders" (Uf), both female teachers express deficient self-images when confronting themselves with norms that intercultural learning evokes.

In the following, we would like to follow these observed traces on doing gender while doing interculturality by analyzing group discussions with music teachers.

3.2. "This can be a task, however, this is by far not our only task"

The following excerpt of a group discussion shows how two male teachers are coping with the difference between norm and habitus regarding intercultural learning. Just before the transcript shown in figure 6 starts, Dm also talks about dealing with world music at school and cooperating with experts from the world music scene from his town. The following transcript shows his conclusions about this work with world music. He also notes a deficit in his practice.

Af: so first of all I was quite astonished, about this task, because I thought that we (.) yes of cause we have pupils from= of other countries? an=then I was asking myself to what extend this plays any role in my teaching.

Bm: mhm

Af: or (.) if I expect from the students, to @adapt themselves to my lesson@? or at what po= at which uh (2) point the students have the possibility to (.) mmh to bring in their own culture. (2) and; uhm (2) that's why first of all I did not feel qualified to show up here?

Fig. 7: Group discussion excerpt Af (and Bm)

Shortly after, Cf continues with a statement directly connected to Afs proposition:

Cf: spontaneously I thought; what does he [the interviewer] want here? uhm (.) that doesn't take place at all here. that was my spontaneous thought? migration, we

Af: └ mhm ┘

Cf: don't have that here. (.) yes, we don't have welcome classes (.) we don't have all of that; that takes place far outside of our elitist institution. and intercultural music yea=ah, we try that a little but finally when I look at the artistic side that is even not welcome. right? here should (.)should be taught according to the classical goals; but then I thought no, it still takes place. (.) but in a very special way; and the children that come from foreign countries, they are situated in some kind of (.) migration they are out of their culture and they have to get into a new culture here; and then I also thought about what (.) are we doing something about this? (.) beside smushing some German in them? uhm, nope. we don't do this. there we are expecting we expect? from them? that they assimilate. that is ()

Af: └ () ┘

Cf: what you said.

Fig. 8: Group discussion excerpt Cf and Af

Cf also states that interculturality is not very present in school life. She positions migration outside of her school. As she understands migration (“Welcome classes” and “all of that”), it is not part of her everyday experiences. And referring to “intercultural music”, the other topic she seems to associate with interculturality, she admits that the music teachers of the school only “try that a little” and in her point of view for the instrumental teachers (“artistic side”) “it is not even welcome”. After expressing these ideas, she then differentiates her point of view. Interculturality is a topic at her school as well, she notes, but in a very special way as students from all over the world visit the school to be trained as musicians. With regard to the international students, she concludes that the staff (“we”) is not doing enough, leaving the students with the task to assimilate. Again, we can reconstruct a static, ethnic-holistic conception of culture in her contribution and also a demarcation of a deficit in the teaching practice in her school. In comparison to Dm, Cf has another way of dealing with the discrepancy between the norm (what should be) and the practice. Instead of justifying her practice, she takes the norm as a guide by pointing to the lack of activities in school life and by emphasizing the need of support for their students.

Parallel to the topic of Dm’s contribution, later in the discussion Cf asks how the students’ attention could be drawn to other music practices in the cultural life of their city.

Cf: uhm (.) how can we get our students to (.) uhm also have open ears f-f-f-
for for such things. and to be in- interested. (.)
uhm an- I think with regard to that we still have a long way to go last week
there was a concert in the uhm in the University of Music, an orchestra from
Syria was playing a joint concert there together with (.) uh=m young musicians
from Berlin; and they have Syrian well S-Syrian refugees.

Dm: uhm
Bm: L uhm J

Cf: and they played (.) Syrian music. hve we been there? (.) have our students
been there? (.) did we even know about that? right?

Dm: L no, I did not know about that.
I would have been going.

Bm: L uhm J

Cf: yes(3) well, and there were were (.) flyers
Dm: L uhmm J

Cf: that were lying around; there also were it was in the papers it was present
in the media. However (.) uhm this doesn't draw our attention at our school.
Dm: L mmm J

Dm: ()

Cf: because uhm (.)
Bm: mhm

Cf: we, now I really say we are not really interested in that. (3)
I already said that before uhm (.) especially the artistic department is really
focused on teaching Western art music.
Dm: L yes J

Af: uhm
Bm: uhm

Cf: this is not supported.
Af: L (well) J and at an- another school I already did dances
from different countries kind of or what they suggested, but here (.) I (.)
Bm: L mhm mhm J

Cf: L () J

Af: never did that.
Cf: why not.
Af: yes why not.
Cf: yes, why why don't I sing this Turkish song now.
Bm: L mmm J

Bm: uhm (.) well but now this is of cause (.) now one really has to differentiate
Af: L mmm

Fig. 9: Group discussion excerpt Cf, Dm, Bm and Af

As the central speaker in this passage, Cf gives the example that the students as well as the staff from her school missed a concert where Syrian musicians were involved. She thereby illustrates that music practices, especially from Syria, where many immigrants came from over the last years, have been ignored in the school setting. She emphasizes this point by using rhetorical questions (“have we been there?”) and repetitions. The way she states this along with how her colleagues react also shows that this is a shared everyday impression of the teachers of that school and there is no doubt about this everyday practice. She argues that the instrumental teachers from the artistic department are primarily focusing on Western art music. However, she also includes herself and the colleagues from general school music education (the participants of the discussion) by emphasizing the “we”. Both female speakers openly criticize their own practice and looking for reasons (“why”) for their—in their view—insufficient teaching practice. They ascribe the mistake

to their own action. Even though both male participants do not actively take part in this passage, their attempts to contribute show that they do not share the orientations of the female speakers. Dm argues that he would have gone to the concert if only he had known about it, and Bm starts to argue against Cf's conclusion in the end of the excerpt. His argument (not in the transcript) relativizes Cf's statement by pointing to the goals of instrumental training to educate future musicians playing in classical orchestras. He states that dealing with a world music repertoire or even with jazz is not "opportune" for these careers. Bm argues that the norm of diversity and inclusivity is not appropriate to be applied to the particular practice of the given school setting due to the goal of training professional classical musicians. Again, the argumentation pattern we reconstructed in earlier examples becomes obvious: the male participants justify their practice and argue against the norm.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

Our analysis of strategies and actions female and male music teachers apply to deal with the discrepancies between shared norms and habitus that underpin everyday practices of doing interculturality show gender-specific differences. As a homogeneous pattern, we could reconstruct that male and female music teachers both note deficits in their everyday teaching practice with regard to interculturality, and both tend to distance themselves from the discussed issue and its relevance to their lives and teaching practice. However, our data shows that the female music teachers in our sample take distance by questioning themselves and their professional practice while taking the norm for granted. They link a deficient practice to a personal lack of competence and articulate a guilty conscience in regard to the everyday practice at school. By contrast, male music teachers tend to justify their practice and distance themselves by questioning the relevance of the norm. Meeting the requirements of the norm is described as (nearly) impossible and the relevance of the topics related to interculturality for the participants is relativized. Thus, male music teachers in our sample implicitly put themselves in a good light and accentuate their expert roles. In a nutshell our results show that female teachers are guided by the norm whereas male teachers are rather guided by their practice by dealing with discrepancies between those different types of knowledge (habitus and norm) that guide everyday practice.

Our results provide deeper insight into the gender-specific discrepancies already described by Niessen (2006). In addition to the findings of Bastian (1981, p. 163) that young professionals suffer more under the disparate expectations in their profession than more experienced colleagues would—also confirmed by Niessen (2006, p. 323)—our results indicate that gender may play a relevant role here as well. We also see our observations in line with results from social psychology, according to which women tend to develop a negative self-image when they are asked to evaluate their own competences in general (Stäudel, 1992), whereas men tend to attribute mistakes or deficiencies in a way that won't compromise their self-image (Dweck, 1975; Wiegers & Frieze, 1977). Our findings are also congruent with other empirical findings, according to which women's self-assessment in job application situations is much more modest than that of men (Sieverding, 2003, p. 158). In this context we would like to point to our understanding of gender as a product of social interaction again (see above). According to the methodological foundation of our research

in the praxeological sociology of knowledge, the reconstructed differences in the orientations that guide everyday practice as male or female are learned by acting in social contexts. Therefore, our research does not aim to claim or (re)produce gender-specific stereotypes but rather reconstructs hegemonial structures of society related to the constructs of gender internalized by acting in everyday practice. In short: we do not understand the reconstructed differences between acting female or male participants as given.

Considering the differences in the data collection of our two studies (group discussions with colleagues and individual biographical-narrative interviews), we can state that a comparison of the two sets of data proved to be fruitful, especially for the reconstruction of orientation patterns related to social data of the participants. Apart from the discrepancy noted elsewhere between the explicitly formulated norms and the everyday practice of music teachers in school (Buchborn, 2020; Buchborn & Bons, 2021; Tralle, 2020), the general view on how music teachers talk about interculturality offers the possibility to observe specifics and differences in the way music teachers deal with this discrepancy that might have been less visible within the individual studies.

The observed gender-specific differences could be relevant in music teacher training, e.g., when future music teachers are invited to reflect on their own routines of self-evaluation. Further we have to keep in mind that due to their position, teachers are role models and teach gender on a daily basis:

School is a stage for daily productions with students in the classroom who train themselves in their gender roles and are at the same time pushed into them, as well as teachers, who likewise represent gender and sometimes serve as role models. (Wedl & Bartsch, 2015, p. 15, translated by the authors)

In the context of these general thoughts on gender in education and school, we would like to close by repeating Siedenburg's (2016) plea (quoted above) for more and detailed research in music education to reveal how gender is constructed by teachers and learners in their everyday practice in school and other music education settings.

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