

Belonging is Sharing is Belonging is Including. An Interview with Nikos Ziaziaris.

CHRYSI KYRATSOU

Mary Immaculate College | University of Limerick | Ireland

ABSTRACT

This conversation with Nikos Ziaziaris and Chrysi Kyratsou discusses the contributions comprising this Thematic Issue on 'Music Education among Refugee and Migrant Youths: Sharing, Belonging, Including'. Availing of the unique perspectives that experience in performance, music teaching to migrant youths, and research in music education among migrant youths offer, this interview concludes the discussion developed throughout the contributions of this TI. It foregrounds the conditions under which music education can have a transformative role for the lives of refugee and migrant youths (as well as the teachers and co-facilitators involved in this process). Furthermore, it argues for the integral interconnection between belonging, sharing and including, explaining how each concept serves as pre-requirement for facilitating an inclusive music lesson. The interview further reflects on the conditions in which in-group music learning -and making- can amplify processes of including, senses of belonging, and practices of sharing. At the core of this process is the music educator, as a meticulous and respectful listener; committed to tackling learning barriers and navigating any challenges as a facilitator of the learning experience.

KEYWORDS

refugee camps; inclusion; inclusivity; learning barriers; performance;
co-facilitation

Chrysi.Kyratsou@mic.ul.ie

INTRODUCTION

This interview concludes the discussion developed across the contributions in this Thematic Issue, aspiring to emphasise the entanglements between the key concepts of ‘belonging’, ‘sharing’, and ‘including’, as perceived by a music educator. As stated in the Introduction, ‘...the order, intensity and forces between concepts are influenced by those who experience, think, and express them (for example, migrant students, music teachers, programme directors, and policymakers)’ (Sarrouy and Kyratsou 2025, p. 16). As such, the choice to conclude this TI with an interview reinforces the relevance and value of understanding the processes pertaining to music teaching-learning among migrant youth, through the lenses of ‘belonging’, ‘sharing’, ‘including’, not as separate processes, but rather as integral to the life-worlds coming into being through musicking in educational contexts.

Nikos Ziazaris is a Greek performer, musician, singer, actor, and PhD candidate in Music Studies at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. He has been working as a community music facilitator since 2016 in partnership with several organisations. Nikos is particularly interested in the promotion of inclusion and the development of personal and social skills through music education.

Both editors of this Thematic Issue (TI) had the chance to see him ‘in action’, teaching music lessons to young learners in Reception Centres of Asylum-Seekers¹ in Athens, Greece. Chrysi Kyratsou first met Nikos Ziazaris when she was doing fieldwork research for her MA dissertation, back in 2017 (Kyratsou 2018). Alix Didier Sarrouy met Nikos Ziazaris during his own fieldwork research in 2022 (Sarrouy 2023). When designing this TI, both Guest Editors agreed on the need to foreground the dialogue between academic research and music teaching practice, further wishing to reinforce practitioners’ perspectives, as those who actually facilitate the possibility of sharing, belonging, and including. To this end, it seemed appropriate to have a music educator discussing the key points made in the contributions comparatively to their own relevant experience ‘on the ground’. Nikos Ziazaris was selected based on his diverse background and rich experience that interweaves performance, education, and academic pursuits. He reviewed the articles post-peer-review as they were being finalised. The interview took place online in mid-October 2024.

Note: any references to certain organisations draw on Nikos Ziazaris’ personal experience of collaborating with them, and when and as appropriate to his research work (2020).

INTERVIEW

CK: How do you balance the different aspects of your identity as a performer, music educator, actor and a PhD student? What is your motivation for engaging with music in different capacities?

NZ: I was initially interested in performance. Ever since I was still a child, my efforts have been concentrated on becoming an artist, a performer. I continued working as an artist during my BA studies in Law, and it was during that time that I decided to focus on music and performance. 2016 marked a pivotal moment for

¹ Reception Centres of Asylum Seekers is the official name for this form of designated facilities that accommodate people seeking asylum. Throughout the interview the terms ‘reception centres’ and ‘refugee camps’ are used interchangeably.

the European refugee crisis in the aftermath of the war in Syria.² I felt the need to put my art at the service of people of migrant backgrounds³ and support their inclusion. Then I heard about El Sistema Greece (ESG), which had just been formed, and I joined the team of the first ten teachers. Teaching young learners in the refugee camp was a very tough yet thrilling experience. Making music and performing for an audience involves mutual benefits for the artists themselves and for the audience. Both parties need to feel fulfilled by the performing experience, and in this sense, the act of ‘offering’ nests within the performance. As an educator, I realised the increased effect and therefore value that this ‘offering’ has. As foregrounded by the articles in this TI, art entails a distinct power to change lives, and music education can become a powerful tool to this end.

My teaching approach during my first steps as a music educator at ESG involved largely improvisation, which was a mind-changing experience focused on managing the flow⁴ of the lesson regarding the teaching material and the interactions with the learners. Then, I studied at the Department of Music Studies in Athens, where I completed my MA dissertation on the Methodology of ESG. My PhD is an attempt to explore the ways in which music education could be a tool for social inclusion, social justice, and democratisation of society, in response to the exacerbating societal issues, i.e. criminality. My academic journey is further informed by my continuous engagement as a music-learning facilitator and performer. Practicing both not only utilises my creativity but also further improves my practice as a performer, a musician, and a facilitator. As a performer, I work on contemporary repertoire and techniques, such as extended vocal techniques. Consequently, I must constantly learn and develop new performing skills as I work through the repertoire. My learning practice and experience inadvertently inform my practice as a facilitator, and it shapes my approach to what and how to teach my students.

CK: Considering your limited teaching experience at the time, how did you manage the challenges pertaining to a radically diverse learning context embedded in the harsh living conditions of the refugee camps and the uncertainty and precarity that legal limbo involves?

NZ: Completing a two-year course in Teaching Praxis was a requirement to obtain my Degrees in Piano and Operatic Singing. This gave me experience in teaching music in a one-to-one context. At that stage, being myself a 17-year-old student, I tended to ‘stick to the plan’ that I had pre-set. My learners were 15-year-old friends and classmates at the Music Conservatoire, which made building teacher-student relationships challenging in a very particular way.

² In March 2016 EU and Turkey agreed on the notorious Plan for Joint Action Between EU and Turkey, hailed in official discourses as ‘the end of the European Refugee Crisis’ that had started in 2015 in the aftermath of the Syrian civil war. This Agreement has been heavily criticised by human rights organisations, scholarship, and advocates for affecting disproportionately refugees themselves, exacerbating the predicaments they faced. For details on the EU-Turkey Plan for Joint Action see EU (2016, online). For an indicative discussion of the effects of this Agreement on refugees, see Gabrielsen-Jumbern and Tank (2019).

³ Throughout the interview we try to assume the phrasing ‘people of migrant/refugee/asylum-seeking background(s)’, to avoid reducing humans into a singular aspect of their socio-cultural experiences that the terms ‘migrants’/ ‘refugees’/ ‘asylum-seekers’ tend to suggest (see also Forkert et al. 2020).

⁴ Csikszentmihalyi coined the concept of ‘flow’ (1990) to describe the optimal experience of an activity for those participating in it. This can only be facilitated when there is a fine balance between ease and challenge, reflective of the individual and collective competencies and expectations.

Furthermore, around 2009 -long before the recent refugee crisis, and during my BA studies in Law - I volunteered as a Greek language teacher to students of migrant backgrounds. These group lessons were hosted by the theatrical school 'Theatre of Changes' [Θέατρο τῶν Ἀλλαγῶν]. Learners were mostly economic migrants, and they could barely speak Greek. This experience sparked my interest in using the arts as a means of inclusion. After all, teaching Greek to someone who is not Greek is a way of fostering inclusion. As highlighted throughout this TI, and across relevant scholarly work, language is one of the major learning barriers among learners of refugee/asylum-seeking backgrounds. Once this barrier is superseded, senses of belonging can be fostered more effectively. Given that these lessons were facilitated by a theatrical school, we often used theatrical plays as learning materials, which revealed to me the effectiveness of using the arts as a teaching tool. I previously talked about the notion of 'offer' and how it pertains to performance and teaching settings. This experience was particularly fulfilling in this sense. A music educator may start on a, say, altruistic basis; however, this is in a way 'selfish', because by 'offering' someone simultaneously 'receives'.⁵ The extent of genuine gratitude that I received from my learners was beyond imagination. The love and intimacy that we felt, and the relationships that we built with these people -who were mostly older than me (I was a 22-year-old student of Law, and I was teaching people in their 60s, who might have migrated from Pakistan, and whose life experiences and socio-cultural backgrounds were radically different from mine) made for a magical, transformative experience. Compared to the formal setting of the one-to-one lessons at the 'Teaching Praxis', this education setting was informal, in the sense that there was no structured curriculum, but we rather structured it ourselves bottom-up.

In the context of the ESG lessons, I worked for the first time with young children (3-12 years old) in the extremely harsh conditions of the refugee camps, which involved working with people who had been experiencing trauma and were sheltering in containers in marginalised areas outside the city of Athens. We had to carry the piano that we used for the music lessons ourselves, once we got one donated, and we had to bring chairs and any other equipment we needed. We worked with a cultural mediator who spoke some but not all the languages and dialects that all people sheltering in the camp might have spoken. Learning how to navigate the challenges underpinning this context so that we could facilitate our students' music learning was a very dynamic learning process for ourselves.

CK: What instigated your sensitivity to matters of migration and exclusion?

NZ: This entangles tightly with my musical and personal growth. Attending music lessons at my home, a small rural community, was not a common activity, and this sometimes made me feel slightly different or out of place; engaging in music-learning seemed to challenge the norm. This experience made me aware of how it feels to stand apart, encouraged a strong sense of support for diversity and instilled the importance of standing by one's values. That's why I'm particularly empathetic towards people who seem isolated, and I was particularly motivated to work with students of migrant backgrounds. Furthermore, music education per se can cultivate an empathetic attitude. As a music learner myself, I developed certain personal and

⁵ The delicate balance between the motivations and objectives of offering support to or helping someone is discussed extensively in Rozakou's work (indicatively: 2018; 2017; 2016), that focuses particularly on expressions of 'solidarity' and 'hospitality' among citizens and migrants in Greece.

social skills.⁶ Even if my teachers were not conscious of these processes, the ‘seed of empathy’ was planted and grew in me. Providing (music) education to students of migrant backgrounds has been an expression of this ‘seed’ growing.

CK: Navigating the usually rigid structures of music lesson plans and curricula can be hard. Moreover, shaping a lesson and/or a curriculum bottom-up, sounds -still- quite radical. How did this happen in your teaching practice?

NZ: When I started teaching at ESG, they were developing their practice. Although ESG is an El Sistema-inspired organisation, at that stage, it differentiated itself from other programmes around the world because it targeted the lessons offered primarily to people seeking asylum. Therefore, the curriculum was developed to match the particularities of this learning group. Although ESG and other ES-inspired projects regularly exchanged their practices and experiences shaping a solid framework (after all, the facilitators that provided training workshops to us were teaching at other ES-projects), there was room for individual contribution that informed the teaching practice.

Furthermore, at that stage of its activity, ESG prioritised hiring performers to deliver the music lessons rather than music educators and trained them so that they teach effectively. Reflecting on my own journey as a music educator, I consider this choice very smart. Immense educational knowledge does not necessarily involve equally successful teaching practice, especially when the objective is to develop performers. The music teacher must be able to meet competently the performative expectations they have from their learners as part of their learning course. Additionally, the teaching practice itself is performance, in that you need to maintain students’ attention and interest not only through your knowledge, but also through your character, your whole self. Unless you are fully present, you cannot facilitate the magical, transformative process of education. What I posit here intertwines largely with the argument made throughout the articles in this TI, that the teacher needs to be genuinely flexible so that they can co-facilitate.

‘Co-facilitation’ contrasts the objectives of ‘sticking to the plan’. Although having a plan remains necessary as a guiding compass, an educator needs to observe the flow of their lesson and honestly assess what works well and what does not and why, adjusting their teaching practice and plan accordingly. Enhancing their capacity to ‘co-facilitate’ is part of the educator’s professional learning journey, so that they can eventually switch between alternative activities as appropriate to the given team within which they happen to be the music-learning facilitator. Reflecting on my experience as an educator in the first years of ESG, co-facilitation has been pivotal, in that we were learning from each other’s experiences. Pendenza’s, Cortesi’s, and Haddon’s article in this TI resonates with my experience, and I would like to complement it by foregrounding that the criteria through which a pair of co-facilitators is selected are crucial in ensuring that co-facilitation will be successful. This regards the interrelationship between the co-facilitators, which is pivotal in ‘listening to’ their learners, making room for their input, and adjusting their lesson to their needs, interests, and backgrounds.

CK: What do you mean by ‘performative’ in a music education setting?

NZ: I’ll give an example from my teaching experience with younger children, with whom I’ve worked extensively, especially at ESG. When performing, someone

⁶ Simones (2022, ch3) offers a succinct and detailed overview of the diverse benefits of music education on personal and social development.

needs to be themselves and simultaneously an exaggerated version of themselves. To teach early childhood students effectively, someone needs to deliver a performance; they need to get out of their comfort zone and act a little bit like a 'clown'. Someone cannot say 'Be quiet!', expecting that students will remain quiet. Someone needs to perform 'Be quiet!' to achieve a quiet class. It is not enough to say, 'Let's walk like an elephant, to learn what we mean by "slow" in music!', but the teacher needs to act as an elephant, to perform how an elephant walks to achieve their teaching objective.

CK: In a way, music educators need to embody what they teach. Teaching is not just words, but rather embodied action.

NZ: Exactly. Teaching and performing teaching are entangled with embodied action. Being a performer-educator means participating in the teaching process by being fully present and using any means that are available to you. The educator needs to employ their imagination, they need to be engaged, they need to be present and commit themselves completely to the process, so that students engage with their learning. In this sense, recruiting performers and training them to serve as educators, especially in the settings where ESG started their activity, was very smart. Seeing teaching as a performative, embodied action is equally effective among older students, i.e. teenagers, who, at this developmental stage, may be seeking role models outside their family contexts.

CK: You mentioned earlier the marginality of refugee camps. How did the place of students' residence pertain to the music lesson?

NZ: In 2016-2017, people seeking asylum may have been allocated to different camps depending on their nationality. Unaccompanied minors resided in designated facilities of collective living within the city. People who would relocate to other European countries soon stayed in a camp on the margins of Athens. People from Afghanistan seeking asylum, who were unlikely to be successful in their applications, resided in a separate camp outside Athens. People seeking asylum from African or Asian countries used to shelter at another camp close to the city centre of Athens.⁷ In a way, human geography pertained to the geographies of asylum-seekers' residence, and by extension to the students' demographics across the different facilities.

In all cases, people could move in and out of the accommodating facility by showing their ID card to the security officers at the gates. However, the location of residence involved a certain, more or less dynamic social life within the camp, rooted in the sheltering populations, and the relationships they developed with each other and the place within which they happened to co-exist. The location of residence involved accessibility to the city centre, for instance, by commuting, as well as encountering certain aspects of its social life. However, I should note here that this frequently comprised drugs, trafficking, and so on. In all cases, students' location of residence shaped their social experiences in and outside the camps. For residents of the camps, 'inclusion' was never 'theirs'; they could not lead it, as they were not in control of their whereabouts. The whole process was very fragmented. Consequently, the teaching experience differed regarding its performativity and the diverse identities that were enacted in its contexts. Identity concerns not only the particular features that instil a sense of self to someone, but also the place(s)

⁷ For a more detailed and accurate overview of the housing situation of people seeking asylum in Greece, you may see GCR (2017, online).

wherein identity will be enacted accordingly.⁸ Place refers to origin ('where am I from?'), current location ('where am I now?') and future location ('where will I go?'). Unless someone can affirmatively answer these questions, they feel unsettled. Irurzun's article in this TI discusses the interplay between music, education, identity and inclusion in-depth. Music can foster inclusion, but can equally foster marginalisation and separation, depending on where someone will eventually feel included. That's the reason why the ways in which music is used in educational contexts really matter.

CK: An educator needs to tackle diverse learning barriers in their practice, i.e. linguistic, interpersonal, physical/geographic, and so on.⁹ Could you give some examples illustrating the major barriers that you managed as a music lesson facilitator?

NZ: Regardless of the particular setting, the major challenges that I faced comprised interpersonal relationships (particularly their gendered aspects) and how they were shaped in these intercultural contexts, considering linguistic differences, as well as experiences of trauma. Of course, trauma is not typical of residents of camps; each person may carry their own traumatic experiences. However, in the contexts of a camp, trauma is induced largely by the experiences of refugeehood and asylum-seeking.

I will never forget my students' responses when I attempted to shake hands with a girl from Afghanistan, wearing a hijab. As long as she wore hijab, it meant that she had menstruated; therefore, she was considered by her community as a woman, not a child anymore. As such, physical contact with the opposite gender was deemed inappropriate. At my attempt to shake hands, I saw the girl withdrawing immediately - embarrassed before her classmates, also from Afghanistan, who also viewed me immediately in a somewhat hostile manner. I had to make clear to everyone that this is how I would greet all children of the class, and that the human body is an important part of the teaching process. This incident exemplifies how gender played out in the interpersonal relationships between me and the students, as well as my increased responsibility to be aware of any cultural particularities and navigate any challenges. At the same time, this example shows the need to maintain a careful balance, establishing boundaries regarding what constitutes (in)appropriate touch. Eventually, this is also a matter relevant to 'sharing': shaking hands involves touching each other's bodies, sharing momentarily something very personal. It is the educator's responsibility to navigate these boundaries, and it becomes even more urgent in contexts that involve working with vulnerable populations and young ages. Somatic expressions and interactions are very common when working with such populations and ages; it's very common, for instance, that children tend to hug you spontaneously.

CK: Of course, and hence, the 'no touch' policies that pertain largely to safeguarding and child protection policies in educational settings.

NZ: This is a very tricky matter, which is also relevant to 'sharing'. Touching involves sharing something very personal: shaking hands with someone is very personal. You need to be cautious, considerate and respectful of each other's boundaries. Sharing is built through trust, through belonging.

⁸ For extensive discussions regarding the entanglements between music, identity, and space or place, you may look indicatively Stokes (1998), Whiteley, Bennett and Hawkins (2004), as well as Green (2011).

⁹ You may see Simones (2021, pp. 90-92) for a succinct yet detailed overview.

The positionality of different genders as embedded in diverse cultural backgrounds was also significant. The examples that I will discuss further on concern mostly teenagers.

Among my students, I had two siblings, a 17-year-old girl and a 16-year-old boy. They were from Syria, and they were sheltering in the camp with their mom. Their dad was not with them. Once a relationship of trust had been established with the residents of the camp, I started collecting the children from their containers to bring them to the classroom.¹⁰ When my students missed some lessons, I went to their place to check on them. The girl explained to me that although she really wanted to join, her brother did not allow her, because he himself got bored and no longer wanted to attend the classes. I had a chat with her brother; however, he was adamant. It turned out that they faced linguistic difficulties, as the lessons provided by the British Council were in English. While linguistic challenges may have contributed to the boy's disengagement, the girl was not allowed to attend them because her brother decided so. This example shows how gender (interpersonal/intercultural) and linguistic barriers intertwine, and in conjunction with the policies assumed by the education provider, may pose certain particularly challenging barriers for an educator to navigate. The gendered power dynamics within the family can exacerbate a situation.

The second example concerns a 17-year-old girl, a brilliant student from Syria. Along with the support of UNICEF and the British Council, we were organising the first World Voice Concert. For this project, I proposed and managed to bring together students residing in camps and Greek students attending two schools in Korydallos, Athens. We would perform at the Athens Conservatoire. We were finalising our rehearsals, when the girl stopped joining. I went to her place to check on her. Her dad explained that he would not let her join, because he did not want her to be in contact with Greeks 'who do not respect our girls'. I remember the girl being upset, saying that she didn't love her dad. I tried to console her, although I was fully conscious myself that this is unquestionably unjust. The girl didn't manage to attend the concert that she wanted so much to be part of. This example shows the intercultural biases and assumptions that may prevent someone from joining music lessons.

I observed gender-based differences in treatment concerning my colleagues, too. During the first stages of our work with ESG, we faced a massive issue with students disregarding female colleagues. I remember that most of the time, boys would only listen to a male teacher. It became commonly accepted that we needed to have a male teacher attending the lesson so that he could reinforce a request or a reprimand. After some time, and once children got familiar with the (male) cultural mediator, they'd listen to him, too. That was an expression of gendered biases. We tried to break such stereotypes by building relationships of trust. We managed to achieve equal treatment of the Greek colleagues regardless of their gender, but it was harder to achieve the same for women coming from other communities.

¹⁰ Outreach to remind participants that the activity they have registered to attend is due, or to recruit new participants, is a significant part of organising and facilitating activities successfully in refugee camps (see also Kyratsou 2023, p. 149). This is primarily due to the effects of living in protracted legal limbo, which results in leading an everyday life lacking in structured routine and paced by indefinite waiting. As Khosravi characteristically says to describe the disorganising effects of waiting and the erasure of meaningfulness of time: 'Mondays represent "moving forward", the first day of a meaningful week of work. In contrast, for undocumented migrants, Mondays mean "remaining at the same point". Their time is not that of "ordinary" people' (2014, p.74).

Interacting and building relationships with the opposite gender in the class context was an integral aspect of the music lessons, and while embedded in the students' diverse backgrounds, the music class fostered an intercultural space of re-negotiation. There were students attending music lessons outside the camps, joined by people from Greece, of migrant and/or asylum-seeking backgrounds, whose gender identity development revolved around their attraction to people of the same gender. During the course of the music lessons, these students were accepted by their classmates and by this small community brought together through music lessons. Acceptance of different gender identities has been particularly important and pertains to inclusivity within the music-lessons community, entailing the potential to extend hopefully outside the context of these lessons.¹¹

Intercultural contact pertained to the repertoire that we taught as well. The gravity of the taught repertoire is discussed in other contributions in this TI, too.

At ESG we had included pieces from our students' places of origin in the repertoire. There were times when our students from Syria did not sing songs that our students from Kurdistan did, because Kurds in Syria had a minoritarian, marginal positionality. We really struggled at the beginning to convince them that we should equally sing songs in other students' own languages from different communities. We faced similar challenges with students from other backgrounds, for instance, from different parts of Afghanistan marked by inter-community conflict. We worked on this, and especially among younger ages, it was relatively easy to achieve. Such matters, of course, pertain to family backgrounds and are reproduced at school. In any case, having built relationships of trust among us and our students' families worked particularly to our advantage, something that highlights the importance for an educator and an educational organisation to work with their students' community/ies.

Facilitating intercultural contacts pertained to our -- as music educators -- broader care over the repertoire that we would teach. While teaching repertoire from our students' 'home(s)' could often be accompanied by the frictions I described previously, teaching European Art music, or more broadly speaking, repertoire representative of the society they were trying to become part of, entangled with the asymmetries of 'integration'. We did not aim for 'integration', as we were conscious of its exclusionary nature. Choosing pieces from repertoires other than our students' 'homes', was seen as a tool to help them understand and navigate the new settings they found themselves in, or the ones they would soon find themselves in, once relocated to other European countries.

CK: Inclusion or inclusivity?

NZ: Both inclusion and inclusivity. I see inclusivity as a means for inclusion. As long as we understand inclusion as living together, co-existing in a society can happen through inclusivity. Inclusivity suggests the processes that will structure an activity in ways that encourage the participants to perceive each other as equals and accommodate their differences. At times, the concept of 'inclusion' might be entangled with exclusion. This is my understanding when the focus of delivering lessons and workshops 'for inclusion' is restricted to a certain group of people deemed vulnerable. Such an approach contrasts with the practice of facilitating lessons and workshops to people who are considered vulnerable alongside others

¹¹ For the transformative potential of music-making that supersedes the contexts of actual musicking you may see Turino (2016), among others.

not considered vulnerable. In the latter case, the lessons and workshops are genuinely inclusive as they welcome anybody interested to join; the objective is to ‘work with’ the participants regardless of their characteristics. In doing so, they serve as interfaces between the diverse participants, facilitating encounters that can hopefully foster inclusion.

CK: How can the approach to inclusion and inclusivity that you foreground, be actualised within the given institutional, political, economic, and so on, frameworks?

NZ: Unfortunately, the feasibility of such endeavours is embedded in politics. Education itself is a political matter, in that it is shaped and delivered within pre-set contexts determined by state policies, and so on. On the other hand, how educators practice their teaching is also embedded in their own ‘political’ choices, enacted within these frameworks, either aligning with or questioning them. Educators are accountable for their choices. Classrooms are sites where inclusivity could potentially materialise genuinely without limitations. Teaching could be designed and delivered in ways that could include all participants, by accommodating their unique abilities, interests, motivations, particular (cultural, religious, class, and so on) backgrounds, (gender, national, and so on) identities, and so on, and by extension making room for the possibility of inclusion.

Education is a lengthy process that unfolds across time. Decisions that result in its discontinuation, for example, through limited funding for certain (music educational) programmes, and so on, are deeply political, in that they enable or set the limitations for its facilitation.¹² Any possibility of something good flourishing is coincidental when educational programmes discontinue once the funding is over. The educators recruited for, say, one year, may plant a seed and then hope for rain once the programme they were working on is over; if it rains the seed will grow, if it doesn’t rain, they can only hope reassured that they did what they could. Education cannot be a one-off. Maximum results can only be achieved when the tools available to the educators can be used to the maximum degree feasible, through a continuous educational process. That’s why it’s extremely important that the innovative approaches and activities implemented by institutions and organisations focusing on social inclusion should be in dialogue with and appropriately incorporated in the formal settings of state education, which structures all levels of [formal] education. Privately-led initiatives display inherent limitations embedded in the funding limitations.

I will focus now on the approach that I see in music educational programmes advocating for social inclusion. There is a very dynamic group between 18-30 years old that is not accommodated by any of these programmes, and they are ignored by and essentially excluded by initiatives fostering inclusion, as they are not given the choice to participate in and benefit from them. Considering the effective role that Music (and Arts) can have individually and collectively, Music (and Arts) Education entails a tremendous potential to shape the future society. Therefore, the trend in Greece and elsewhere to reduce the available time and space for Music (and Arts) Education is deeply concerning, while integrally entangled with politics, as noted in international literature (i.e. Prof. José Luis Aróstegui’s work). Not only should the available space be maintained, but we should further explore how, by

¹² The limitations that inconsistent funding sets to educational projects aspiring to promote inclusion and inclusivity are foregrounded elsewhere, too. Indicatively, Kyratsou (2022, online).

incorporating Music (and Arts) as tools of teaching, we could enhance the learning experience of other subjects, too, i.e. History, Geography, Literature, Maths, and so on.

CK: Which elements of music, and of music-learning, offer an advantage for inclusivity, and by extension for inclusion?

NZ: Music education within a collective context, i.e. a class, community-music projects, and so on, fosters enhanced possibilities to develop personal and social skills. However, as case-studies in this TI have shown, being part of a music activity does not guarantee that someone will feel belonging. Having the option to participate in such an activity gives someone the opportunity to use it to their own advantage, so that they can pave their way for their inclusion. The collectiveness underpinning a music activity should be a means to achieve this goal. This further entangles with the pleasurable character of music lessons, with the fact that they are, or that they can be ‘fun’.¹³ Sharing moments of ‘fun’ creates a possibility to foster an ‘open space’, a ‘safe space’ so that the participant can ‘open’ themselves to the other(s) and get engaged in this process, developing their personal and social skills. As such, inclusion and senses of belonging intertwine with the development of personal skills that can later translate into social skills. Examples to that comprise the ways someone learns to communicate within the group, the ways someone expresses and practices their creativity, building their confidence to undertake risks, make and own mistakes, proposing their own suggestions respectfully to the others, and more, all pertaining to the individual initiative and the collective interactions.

CK: All these are integrally connected to the design of the music lesson, and consequently, the facilitator.

NZ: While having access to music education entails the potential for a student to benefit in the ways I mentioned previously, actually materialising this potential and building the skills is embedded in individual agency and responsibility. The music educator, as the person who designs and delivers the lesson and facilitates the learning experience, undoubtedly bears an increased responsibility. In that lies the necessity to be always prepared having an appropriate plan as a compass and simultaneously be ready and willing to change it and adjust it as appropriate. Among the most insightful tips that I have received is that I should never sing along with the children; instead, I should stop and listen to them. Only this way can the teacher/ facilitator understand what their students have not understood, and thus support them appropriately, encouraging their independence. By doing this, the teaching practice models behaviours that are transferable across different spheres of life, i.e. to step back, hear what other people have to say, and respond appropriately.

An educator needs to be a performer and supersede their personal boundaries so that they can request the same from their learners. In this sense, the educator models a behaviour and enacts, performs, a certain role. An educator needs to use all their expressive means; pursue perfection, without being consumed by pursuing it. This principle becomes particularly pertinent in community music contexts, where the process may usually be prioritised over the result. In my experience, this aligns with relevant research, and is further reinforced in this TI, music lessons with no further objective are not as effective as music lessons aiming towards achieving a particular

¹³ The transformative potential embedded in engaging with musical activities due to their pleasurable nature and their voluntary character has been foregrounded in scholarship, too, i.e. Turino (2016).

outcome, for example, a performance before an audience. Accordingly, it emerges as important that the educator invests in achieving optimal results, so that motivation is fuelled along with challenge, interest is maintained, and learning is enhanced. Learners' demands and expectations entangle interchangeably with the educator's demands and expectations. Yet, achieving optimal results should not compromise the value of the process itself to reach the goal. The educator inspires this vision. That's why I have foregrounded time and again the necessary 'performative' aspects of an educator's personality.

CK: Considering the harsh living conditions in the refugee camps, in conjunction with the precarity at present and uncertainty for the future, are such demands and expectations relevant?

NZ: Life is an empty box; someone fills this box up with the content that is meaningful to them. Someone fills it up with their long-term and short-term goals, and by trying to achieve them, they infuse their life with meaning. The balance, and consequently the 'flow' of interest, does entangle with the level of difficulty in conjunction with the level of skill and capacity. This pertains to any context, including music education. Thus, music educators should set up goals that maintain their students' flow of interest, always considering their particular circumstances, abilities, motivations, interests, and so on. If music educators choose something very simple, children will lose their interest. If music educators choose something very difficult, again, children will lose their interest. As long as expectations are complemented by an understanding of what is feasible, this balance is facilitated.

Among people seeking asylum, the process and the envisaged outcomes of music lessons contrast the predicaments of living in limbo, of waiting indefinitely for when they will leave the camp and/or Greece.¹⁴ The music educator adds a layer of meaning to their everyday lives, which is distinct from their circumstances and may shape those students' dreams for their future. No one should stop making dreams and striving to make them true because of the circumstances they happen to live in.

When I was working with ESG, the first concert took place at Herodium, one of the most prominent venues in Greece, and possibly in South Europe. Children were particularly proud that they performed there once they realised the symbolic significance of this place. Performing there was thanks to their musicianship, regardless of their particular backgrounds and experiences. Performing there materialised the goal of their music lessons at that time.

Here, I should further highlight a potential 'danger' lurking in setting immensely high goals. The following gig was hosted at the National Library, which is located at the Stavros Niarchos Cultural Centre (SNFCC). The enthusiasm for performing at Herodium dissipated when they realised that this venue meant that a considerably smaller audience would attend. Someone can read this disappointment as non-alignment with high expectations regarding the venue. It was the music educator's responsibility to reinforce the value of the specific performance and probably reset the goals to be more relevant.

CK: You previously said that as a music educator 'you need to step back and hear what is going on within your class'. That moment further posits 'sharing' between

¹⁴ This argument is further supported by research into the role of music in the everyday life among people seeking asylum in Greece (Kyratsou 2023).

a music educator and their student. How does this 'sharing' shape the experience of teaching/learning music? Can it foster inclusion and inclusivity?

NZ: I'd like to highlight again that an educator should have achieved first what they request from their learners to achieve. A genuinely inclusive music lesson can be facilitated by a teacher who feels comfortable with this principle. Only then can a music educator implement and inspire inclusivity. As an educator, someone needs to be already competent in communication, if their teaching objective is to build their students' communication skills. Communication comprises 'Listen and Speak', 'Ask and Answer'. As an educator, someone needs to show their learners first what it means to listen, and lead by example.

This principle is also relevant to previous questions regarding how maximum results can be achieved through music education. An educator should share what they expect and listen to their learners' sharing of what *they expect*, or what *they can*, or *could do*, and figure out how the two can come together. An educator needs to assess honestly what *they themselves actually know* and *what they can do*. 'Sharing' concerns personality features, experiences, knowledge, expectations, and desires; 'sharing' involves a complex constellation of things that will further lead to 'belonging' by doing 'what I am', 'what I want', 'what I can', and 'what I know'.

Quite often, my students asked me to teach them a specific pop tune that they liked, and I replied to them 'Folks, I don't know this song, let's figure it out together'. They really appreciated that their teacher '*did not know*',¹⁵ and that we would work it out together, and that they may also teach me something. On other occasions, we were learning an Arabic piece. And my accent in Arabic was really bad! And my students would say, 'Wait, we'll teach you how to say it properly!' It's very important that the educator holds their ego back -this is also a form of performance, in that someone shows their imperfections.

An educator is not *above* their learners; they happen to be present amidst this particular group of learners, and they happen to have this role. This approach further suggests boundaries -which should not be confused with 'hierarchies'- delineating each participant's role in the 'sharing' within the teaching/learning process and establishing mutual expectations and equal responsibilities. This is also relevant to what Higgins calls 'the welcome' (2008). An educator 'welcomes' in this sense by entering the classroom 'open' to their learners, trusting them and inspiring trust among them. In this sense, 'sharing' and 'belonging' intertwine. Someone can only 'share' with the ones that they feel that they 'belong', and we 'belong' with whom we feel that we can 'share'. This is something that is built simultaneously. This idea resonates with Kenny's and Lukianchenko's argument in their contribution to this TI that, first the educator needs to accomplish a sense of belonging, and then creativity, risk-taking, learning, and play can unfold. Unless someone feels comfortable that they belong, they cannot express their creativity.

And I'm wondering: 'Is it music-making that fosters belonging, or that belonging facilitates music-making?' As far as I'm concerned, belonging facilitates music-making. Unless learners feel connected with their music facilitator, they will not sing a single note. No creative activity can happen unless participants feel that they belong with the rest of the participants. And this is inspired by the music facilitator, who enters the classroom presenting themselves as this 'welcoming' person,

¹⁵ This example elaborately exemplifies Rancière's principle of the 'Ignorant Schoolmaster' (1991), previously discussed in the Introduction of this TI.

sharing honestly their strengths and their weaknesses. That's the reason why 'sharing' and 'belonging' are integrally interconnected, and I further argue that 'belonging' comes before 'sharing'. 'Belonging' entails 'trust'. Someone can feel 'belonging' when and where we can trust to be ourselves; when and where we are also asked to commit our total capacity, and at the same time we trust that we will still be accepted if we do not meet the expectations. And it is through the processes and practices of including each other that sharing can happen, and belonging can be experienced.

CONCLUSION

The concluding phrases of the interview with Nikos Ziazaris encapsulate, in a nutshell, the responses to the key questions explored in this TI. Not only music education among refugee and migrant youth plays a pivotal role in their everyday lives, but it can also be a transformative force, reconfiguring existing relationships, suggesting alternative perspectives on the present, and encouraging hopeful visions of the future. The interview with Nikos Ziazaris maintains a dialogic connection between his insights, gained through his experiences across the different positions and settings within which he has been active, with the insights shared through the contributions to this TI that discuss case studies across the world. As such, this response, articulated by a performer, music educator, and young researcher, foregrounds the relevance of the insights offered through the contributions to this TI, to (music) educators, practitioners, and academic researchers, active across various settings in multiple locations.

In this work, belonging, sharing, and including emerge as being integrally interconnected, serving as a prerequisite for successful in-group music-learning and music-making, and at the same time being fostered and amplified through the musical and social interactions and relations unfolded during the music lesson. The music educator, as the facilitator of the learning experience, plays a pivotal role in coordinating the learners' and all involved stakeholders' competencies and expectations. The music educator's responsibilities revolve around listening to the dynamics among their learners, addressing any barriers, and navigating the challenges embedded in radically diverse learning settings. It's upon the 'welcoming' approach and the humble mentality of the music educator that a sense of 'belonging' may be sensed among all stakeholders. In turn, a genuine 'sharing' may happen. Unless the educator listens to their class, any learning barriers cannot be effectively tackled, and the challenges they pose may undermine or even halt the learning experience. It is through careful listening that a music educator can provide a learning experience that resonates with their particular backgrounds, identities, interests, expectations and competencies. The very sense of belonging intertwines with the music educator's capacity to listen to their learners' needs and aspirations, and tailor their teaching to accommodate them. Only then can a sense of 'trust' be felt; trust among learners that they are heard and considered and therefore allowed equally to shape the teaching practice. Only then, 'sharing' feels safe to happen; a sharing of self, interests, aspirations, expectations. This sharing pertains to all stakeholders involved, reinforcing a communion between the teacher(s), the (co-)facilitator(s), and the learners, as well as among the learners.

It is through belonging and sharing that including may take place. Including is understood as a process that facilitates a communal learning experience among diverse learners. Their characteristics are considered to inform the particularities of the teaching approach aiming at reinforcing shared learning environments. It is

through inclusivity, by considering and accommodating diversity, that inclusion may occur, not as an endgame destination, but as a stop to an ongoing journey across ever-shifting landscapes. This work is co-led by the music educators and learners on board, who, trusting each other and by confidently and safely sharing, they belong together. Belonging is sharing, is belonging, is including.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chrysi Kyratsou is currently a Postdoctoral Researcher Fellow at the Research Ireland-funded project [MUSPACE](#), Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick. She previously held an Irish Research Council Postdoctoral Researcher Fellowship at UCD School of Music. She holds a PhD in Anthropology from Queen's University Belfast (research project funded by a Northern Bridge DTP-AHRC Studentship and a British Forum for Ethnomusicology Fieldwork Grant 2019), and degrees in Musicology and Music Education, and Ethnomusicology. Her research interests comprise musicking, encounters, (im)mobilities, (non)belonging. Chrysi's fieldwork research into refugees' sheltering in reception centres explores how refugees' aesthetic agencies are informed by the shifting backgrounds in which they live, and how they shape their socialities. She is the Editor of the Special Issue: Navigating hurdles and reconfiguring (im)mobilities in times of corona (*Critique of Anthropology* 44:4), Editor of the Round Table Voice and Agency (*Royal Musical Associational Research Chronicle* 56), and author of several articles available OA.

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