


Developing Intercultural Communication and Cultural Intelligence through Intercultural Musical Contacts

Montassir Hmala^{1*}

CRMEF of Meknès, Morocco

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Abstract

This article presents a scientific recording of a two-term intercultural musical experience that took place in October 2018 and March 2019 in a high school in Beaune la Rolande, France. It explores the crucial role that music can play in developing and strengthening intercultural communication (IC) and cultural intelligence (CI), specifically in intercultural educational contexts. To achieve this and drawing on Allport's (1956) Contact Hypothesis Theory (CHT) and Bennett's (1953) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), a qualitative research design was chosen, with focus group discussions; involving participating students, and semi-structured interviews with three teachers and the high school principal as the main techniques for data collection. The thematic content analysis of the data resulted in the emergence of six main themes: Anxiety/Scepticism, Resistance, Discovery, Appreciation, Openness, and Transformation. The findings of the study concretely demonstrated that exposure to foreign music could have a tangible impact on students' development of intercultural communication and cultural intelligence skills.

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¹  <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-1369-5087> | ✉ montassirpianiste@hotmail.fr

* Trainer at the CRMEF of Meknès, Department of English Language, Meknès, Morocco

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1. Introduction

Among the challenges and the new demands of the globalized contemporary world, intercultural communication (IC) and cultural intelligence (CI) are vital concerns that continue to attract scholars and specialists' interest. This has been justified by the growing prominence given to “the exchange of cultural information between two groups of people with significantly different cultures” (Barnett, 1997, as cited in Cudykunst, 2003, p. 260) (IC), and the necessity “to interact effectively with others from different cultural backgrounds, or the outcomes of these interactions” (Shaffer & Miller, 2008, p.109) (CI). Correspondingly, there is an urgent need to initiate and create contexts, cultural initiatives and intercultural encounters that would help individuals and groups behave appropriately and effectively in culturally varied settings. The ultimate objective would be to facilitate an exit from one's cultural comfort zone and, hence, favor attitudes and values of openness, acceptance, and cultural appreciation. Rowe (2010, p. 218) explains, in this sense, that intercultural contexts help in “moving (in and) out of safe spaces, those which feel like home”. Miettinen (2020, p. 27) argues, in the same vein, that the initial contribution of such encounters is to “encourage one to cross those boundaries and become more interculturally courageous”. On her part, Sæther (2013, p. 37) adds that “the most fundamental learning takes place when comfort zones have to be abandoned as a consequence of intercultural collaboration”. Following this perspective, intercultural encounters are seen to help achieve a fearless leap into the unfamiliar (Sæther, 2013). Individuals and groups are given the opportunity to transcend their pre-existing feelings of anxiety and skepticism towards ‘other’ cultures. They become culturally courageous, capable of transitioning from an initial cultural dissonance to a later intercultural consonance.

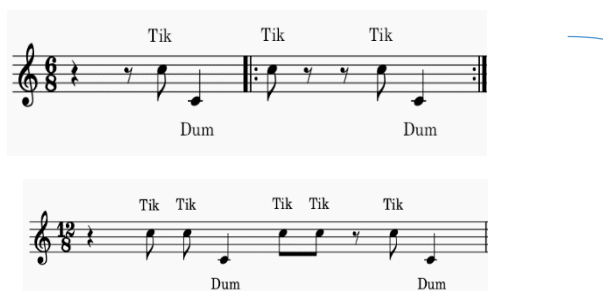
That said, the case of intercultural / educational musical contacts has been presented as an effective context for IC and CI development (Oehrle, 1996; Campbell, 2002; Ilari et al., 2013; Schippers, 2016; Dolloff, 2020). Students in these contacts are offered the possibility to question their views and pre-existing judgments about the ‘others’ music and culture and change their understanding of cultural difference. Oehrle (1996, p. 95) explains that “intercultural education through music is one way of raising people's level of tolerance for that which is different”. She adds that it “could be the means of correcting those ‘errant perceptions’: a way of breaking down the barriers and prejudices which isolate one from the other” (Oehrle, 1996, p. 96). Similarly, Campbell (2002, p. 6) ponders that “music affords powerful (and beautiful) encounters” that concretely help in “steering students from bias and bigotry to tolerance, acceptance, and genuine respect” (p. 12). Ilari et al. (2013) argue that intercultural musical programs offer a tangible advantage by encouraging students to question and transcend cultural and ethnic stereotypes that they may have previously internalized, ultimately leading to personal transformation. Furthermore, Schippers (2016, p. 2) affirms that such initiatives “can be a highly effective way of eliminating musical prejudice before it even starts by demonstrating and experiencing different musical sounds and concepts without focusing on a single tradition”. Dolloff (2020) asserts, within the same vision, that musical encounters help students in developing cultural humility.

1.1. Context of the study

It is within this perception that Morocco has engaged in various intercultural projects, primarily musical/ educational partnership programs, to assist Moroccan and partner countries' students in

exchanging and sharing cultural content. These projects aim to create IC and CI learning contexts through which values of acceptance, openness and cultural appreciation are encouraged and developed. The present study reflects on the particular case of the intercultural partnership between the Fez Meknes Region in Morocco and the Centre Val de Loire Region in France. This educational partnership, through its pilot event called *Arts aux Lyceens*, invites French and Moroccan high school students to discover and learn about the culture and arts of the two countries, specifically music and theatre. The two regions, Fez Meknes and Centre Val de Loire, regularly invite French and Moroccan interveners to convene workshops in both disciplines. Correspondingly, I was invited, as a professional musician, to pedagogically direct a two- term intercultural musical program. This initiative relates to the will of the Centre Val de Loire region to offer students the opportunity to open up new cultural vistas. This was justified, in fact, by an alarming diagnosis that pointed to the existence of real intercultural deficits. Students of Centre Val de Loire region were found to manifest tangible signs of cultural insensitivity and ignorance about “other” cultures, which obviously impact their intercultural knowledge, skills, competencies, and hence, their whole personalities.

At the heart of the intercultural/ musical exchange were rhythmic patterns, namely the Moroccan 6/8 and 12/8, in addition to the oriental typical 4/4 pattern, with two of its main variations: *The Baladi and the Ouahda*. The focus was also on songs, Moroccan (Andalusian music and contemporary songs) and Arabic, with selective texts that celebrate values of beauty, tolerance, openness and acceptance. The exchange program comprised theoretical lessons, listening sequences, and specifically open workshops that put into practice the notions being learned. Choral singing was the main technique opted for to ensure effective group work. In this regard, students were invited to sing in Moroccan *Darija* and classical Arabic, and more importantly, to rhythmically accompany their singing by playing on some of the Moroccan and Arabic percussion instruments such as *derbouka*, *tar* and *taarija*. The choices of 6/8, 12/8 and 4/4 rhythms were justified by the fact that French music, be it classical or modern, comprises similar patterns, though with a different distribution of weak and strong beats. The latter similarity was seen by the researcher to be a facilitating factor for the successful learning of Moroccan and Arabic rhythms. Moreover, reliance on singing was because “songs consist of music, language, and cultural knowledge” (Ilari et al., p. 203). More importantly, “singing might be an optimal activity to foster cultural understanding because songs offer a means to talk about different peoples” (Ilari et al., p. 203).



*The 6/8 and Its Extension
Rhythmic Structure 12/8
with Distribution of Weak
and Strong Beats:*

Figure 1. Examples of Moroccan typical rhythms

The present study is, then, inscribed within this intercultural reciprocity that relates Morocco to France. It stands as a scientific recording of the intercultural inputs and outputs regarding the musical encounter that took place at *Le Lycee Agricole* of Beaune la Rolande in October 2018 and March 2019.

1.2. Statement of the problem

This musical/intercultural experience revealed certain tensions and dynamics. Students who participated in this two-term event showed two opposite reactions to the Moroccan/Arabic music: initial resistance and rejection that were transformed, by the end of the program, into amazing appreciation and acceptance. This attitudinal change was so interesting to the point that it provoked many questions that required reflection, exploration, and therefore, an empirical procedure to reach answers. This fueled the intervener's/researcher's curiosity and interest in scientifically approaching the students' remarkable shift. Following this perspective, the purpose of this narrative/phenomenological study was to describe, explore, and understand the "what", the "how", and the "why" of students' attitudinal change, with a specific regard for the role of music in stimulating and activating that change.

1.3. The rationale

The present study aimed to provide multi-layered contributions. The first one was to illustrate and prove the powerful role of music in developing IC and CI specifically in intercultural/musical encounters. Put differently, how musical interculturality in educational settings can effectively help students open "a window of learning opportunities" (Ilari et al., 2013, p. 205) that would, in turn, encourage them to "review multiple views of important aspects of daily life, such as religion, nature, and interpersonal relationships, but also ...many ways in which humans are alike". Accordingly, the second contribution was to demonstrate that music has the power to stimulate the "individual's ability to grasp and reason correctly in situations characterized by cultural diversity" (Ang & Van Dyne, 2015, p. 4). The third contribution of this study was to demonstrate that music, particularly through the intercultural perspective, can stand as an effective medium capable of bridging the cultural gaps between the 'I' and the 'Other', which in turn would instigate the maximization of mutual cultural understanding and proximity between the north and the south. At a different level, the fourth contribution of the study was to assess the eventual outputs of Morocco's intercultural partnerships. It is worth mentioning, in this sense, that though Morocco has been engaged in antecedent musical intercultural programs, little has been done to evaluate their outcomes, specifically their impact on participants' views, understanding, attitudes, and thus behavior towards the "other's" culture. As a matter of fact, very few local studies, if any, have been conducted to shed light on the role of music in building and solidifying participating students' IC and CI. Moreover, the fifth contribution of the present study was to enrich the existing literature on musical / intercultural encounters, specifically about Morocco and the Middle East/ North Africa (MENA) region. It is worth indicating, in this respect, that contrary to the abundant European and American literature on the "interculturalization of music" (Miettinen, 2020, p. 6), MENA studies on the topic, particularly in educational contexts tend to be hardly visible. Finally, the most important added value of this study was to demonstrate that music, particularly through the intercultural perspective, can stand for an effective tool in bridging cultural differences between the north and the south.

1.4. The researcher position

The researcher's role/position in the present study is related to three main levels. The first level regarded his status as a professional musician, the second one concerned his preoccupation with the enquiry process, and the third one touched upon his status as a cultural "outsider". The three levels divergently impacted the course of the study. The rich musical background covering Moroccan and international musical orientations, permitted a smooth communication with students, specifically when navigating through Moroccan and French musical repertoires. The investigative concern fueled the researcher's willingness to opt for effective methodological tools and strategies to reach valuable and credible findings. The "outsider" position, the most challenging level, imposed the consideration of both cultural and ethical aspects. In this respect, the researcher, having cross-cultural competence, tried to handle communication with both students and the administrative staff that was considerate and respectful of the norms of the host institution (culture). He also tried to maintain a maximum degree of awareness in relation to his pre-existing ideas and preconceptions regarding the "other", the French students in the present case. This was of great importance in keeping power relations at a balanced level. It is worth indicating, here, that intercultural exchange is basically "a site enmeshed in power relations" (Rowe, 2010, p. 216); therefore, a careful consideration of this dimension is a necessary component of these exchange arrangements: "Close attention to the webs of power we weave and into which we are woven renders visible the affective labor we invest into lives of others, and how that labor is constitutive of the selves we are becoming" (Rowe, 2010, p. 223).

Within this perspective, the nature of the questions (cultural dialogue) asked in the focus group and the way they were handled by the convenor followed a balanced line of power relations and thus an "egalitarian reciprocity" (Xu, 2013, p. 390) coupled with "an egalitarian universalism" (Benhabib, 2002, p. 5). On one hand, questions were linguistically simple and respected the general local cultural norms. They basically targeted the understanding of students' attitudinal shift. On the other hand, the debate in the focus group was open, and students were free to react and convey their viewpoints and remarks. The same was true for interviews with the administrative staff. The researcher's role was mainly that of a moderator.

This study was guided by three research questions:

1. What stage (s) of intercultural sensitivity did students' manifest at their first contact with the Moroccan /Arabic music?
2. How did the musical encounter encourage students to step out of their cultural comfort zone?
3. What promising signs of IC and CI did students manifest at the end of the musical experience?

2. Theoretical and conceptual framework

This study was framed by four fundamental constructs and theories: intercultural communication, cultural intelligence, the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS), and the Contact hypothesis theory (CHT). These theories share the common principle of moving from ignorance and a state of denial and rejection to an attitude of appreciation and acceptance.

2.1. Intercultural communication

Intercultural Communication is a construct generally defined as communication across cultures. However, IC has been associated with various conceptualizations that insist on its complexity as a process of negotiating meanings through cultural variance. Within this assumption, Eisenchlas and Trevaskes (2007, p. 416) consider it as “a process of negotiation across individuals and groups”. Besides, Stewart (1974, as cited in Saral, 1977, p. 289) presents the concept as “communication which occurs under conditions of cultural difference-language, values, customs, and habit”. On his part, Novinger (2001, p. 13) conceives IC as “cultural variance in the perception of social objects and events”. This definition tends to be more relevant, specifically regarding the experience reported in this study, in the sense that it basically describes a cultural (musical) information exchange.

2.2. Cultural intelligence

Most scholars' definitions of CI rely on the core idea of behaving effectively in a culturally different context (Peterson, 2004; Livermore, 2011; Ang & Van Dyne, 2015). Cultural intelligence allows one to adopt an appropriate attitude and, thus, exhibit congruous behavior within a different cultural setting. According to Ang and Van Dyne (2015), CI refers to an individual's ability to function and successfully navigate diverse cultural environments. Livermore (2011) expands on this definition, stating that CI involves efficiently operating in various cultural contexts, including ethnic, generational, and organizational cultures. Besides, Peterson (2011) defines CI as the capacity to shift from a thought pattern of believing one's own perspective is the only valid one to recognizing the existence of other valid ways of seeing and engaging with life.

Cultural intelligence is presented by many scholars to be a multidimensional, multifactor construct founded on four basic levels: the cognitive, the meta cognitive, the motivational, and the behavioral (Livermore, 2011; Ott & Michailova, 2018; Earley & Ang, 2003). The first level focuses on “knowledge about how cultures are similar and different” (Livermore, 2011, p. 7). The second one relates to “how an individual processes and uses” this knowledge (Ott & Michailova, 2018, p. 4). It occurs when “you make judgments about your own thought processes and those of others” (Livermore, 2011, p. 7). The third level reflects one's ability to acknowledge and comprehend a culture while also feeling compelled to interact with others in unfamiliar environments (Earley & Ang, 2003). And the fourth level, the behavioral, concerns the “capability to adapt your behavior appropriately for different cultures. It involves having a flexible repertoire of responses to suit various situations while remaining true to yourself” (Livermore, 2011, p. 7).

2.3. The developmental model of intercultural sensitivity

Created by Bennett (1953) and founded on ethnocentric and ethnorelative stages, the DMIS model aims to explain the stages through which intercultural sensitivity is built (Bennett & Bennett, 1993). In the ethnocentric stages, namely Denial, Defense, and Minimization, “one’s own culture is experienced as central to reality in some way” (Bennett & Bennett, 2004, p. 152), implying a personal incapability to recognize the existence of “other”, “equal” different cultures. In these stages, individuals and organizations tend to draw an “imaginary” line of cultural similarities to “minimize” cultural differences (Bennett & Hammer, 2017). Yet, this only aggravates the “us” / “them” divide. In the ethnorelative stages, namely Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration, one experiences “all cultures as alternative ways of organizing reality” (Bennett & Hammer, 2017, p. 3). Hernandez and Kose (2012, p. 516) explain, within this vision, that cultural differences are approached with curiosity and respect, and behavioral change is strongly encouraged “to effectively interact with people from another culture”. The two scholars add that the ultimate level of ethnorelative stages is the development of an inclusive identity “that is not based in any one culture”. It is worth pointing out that reliance on this theory was justified by the need for a consistent theoretical framework that can elucidate the evolution from one phase to another (Bennett & Hammer, 2017).

2.4. Contact hypothesis theory

Initiated in 1956 by Allport, Contact Hypothesis Theory (CHT) has been “a high- profile and much-researched theory” in the field of IC and attitude change (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2005, p. 328). Also known as Intergroup Contact Theory, its main argument is founded on the idea that direct contact “changes the attitudes and behavior of groups and individuals toward one another and, in turn, those changes will influence any further contact (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2005, p. 328). However, this expected attitude change is related to four main conditions: equal status, intergroup cooperation, common goals, and support by social and institutional authorities.

3. Method

3.1. Design

The present study was founded on a qualitative method that aimed to describe, explore and understand students’ attitudinal change, with special focus on the role of music in facilitating that change. The choice of this method was due to the socio- phenomenological aspect of the studied musical intercultural experience and the attitudinal implications it brought about. In this sense, Mahajan (2018, p. 2) explains that the qualitative approach “is exploratory and seeks to explain ‘how’ and ‘why’ a particular social phenomenon, or program, operates as it does in a particular context”. Correspondingly, “it aims to provide a detailed understanding into human behavior, emotion, attitudes, and experiences (Tong et al., 2012, as cited in Mahajan, 2018, p. 2).

Following this reasoning, the objective of the present study was essentially to conduct an “empirical inquiry into the meaning” students derived from their experience (Shank, 2002, as cited in Ospina, 2004, p. 2). In this context, the word “empirical” refers to an inquiry that is “grounded in the world of

experience” (Ospina, 2004, p. 2). As stated by Mahajan (2018, p. 2), “qualitative researchers are interested in people’s belief, experience, and meaning systems from the perspective of the people”. Therefore, their main work is done through “the observations and interpretations of people’s perception of different events in a natural setting” (Gentles et al., 2015, as cited in Mahajan, 2018, p. 2).

3.2. Participants and sampling

Twenty second-year baccalaureate male students attended the musical intercultural program, primarily chosen by the high school administration. Out of these students, ten, ranging in age from 15 to 17 years old, took part in the focus group discussions. Their selection was based on convenient sampling and influenced by three main reasons. First, they exemplified the behavioral change observed at the end of the musical program. Second, they showed willingness to participate in the study. And third, they were easily accessible as they were present in the high school at all times, unlike the other students.

These subjects had a unique aspect as they had never studied music nor been exposed to a “foreign” musical repertoire. It was their first introduction to such a course, particularly within an intercultural context. Furthermore, their musical background was primarily “western”.

The other participants were three of the students’ teachers and the high school principal. They participated in the study through interviews in which they expressed their visions, beliefs, expectations and attitudes regarding the importance of such musical intercultural encounters, specifically the contribution of musical “interculturality” in developing morals and values of openness, appreciation and acceptance of cultural differences. The selection of these four interviewees was justified by two main reasons: their consistent presence during rehearsals and the valuable feedback and insights they received from students about their impressions, emotions, and perceptions regarding the different stages of the experience.

3.3. Procedures

The process of data collection encompassed every moment and all the sessions of the two-term intercultural program. Ranging from observation and note-taking to focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, and students’ mental maps, data collection strategies followed a deliberately balanced procedure. In this regard, at the first level, the researcher’s continuous observation of students’ actions and reactions formed the basis of many important ideas, remarks and impressions. These observations, along with systematic and careful note taking of their behavior, arguments, and counterarguments, served as primary sources of information. These two techniques were implemented using a pre-planned guide. The latter consisted of prompts, questions and specific instructions that were designed to spot and describe the important moments and sequences of the musical experience.

Throughout the exchange program, students exhibited inconsistent behaviors and feelings of indifference, appreciation, rejection, and acceptance that required close attention. The pre-planned guide was of great help, in this sense, in documenting their verbal and non-verbal reactions (Mulhall, 2003) and “the physical setting as well as accounts of particular descriptions of the observer’s behavior” (Muswazi & Nhamo, 2013, p. 13).

At the second level, focus group discussions with students and semi-structured interviews with their teachers constituted the core data collection tools of the study. The former technique, conducted twice in the rehearsal room immediately after the second term, lasted for one hour each session, providing an opportunity to approach students from a close and intimate perspective. The choice of focus group discussions was based on the fact that it “is an effective technique for gathering rich, in-depth accounts of people’s thinking, experiences, and attitudes” (Plummer, 2017, p. 350). It also helps “to produce concentrated amounts of data on precisely the topic of interest” (Morgan, 1997, p. 13). Following a predetermined question protocol consisting of pre-established questions designed to outline students’ attitudinal change, the focus group discussions elicited important ideas and themes that described and explained students’ attitudinal shift. Additionally, the second technique, interviews, was similarly conducted after the second term, and were of great importance as they allowed for a diverse recording of students’ dynamics. The responses from teachers and the high school principal to the different questions were particularly helpful in understanding students’ behavioral and emotional attitudinal changes. They provided highly credible feedback on students’ real sensations towards the “outsiders”, the musician, and the musical content of the intercultural program.

At the third level, students’ mental maps served as an additional data collection tool. They provided reliable written reflections and recordings of the different meanings students attributed to the musical experience at each stage. More importantly, they served as a platform for open interaction and expression, relatively free from power dynamics.

3.4. Data analysis

Thematic content analysis was the inductive method used in this study. It involved “readings of raw data to derive concepts” (Thomas, 2006, p. 238), and “analyzing transcripts, identifying themes within those data and gathering together examples of those themes from the text” (Brunard et al., 2008, p. 429). Importantly, within this approach, the researcher began by transcribing focus group discussions and interviews. The different answers and reactions were then coded using an initial “open coding” (Brunard et al., 2008, p. 430). This involved writing initial notes in the margins of the transcribed texts. Following this, after several meticulous readings, the researcher initiated a structuration process to identify significant words, expressions, and statements that directly related to the research’s initial problem and questions. This process aims to understand the interplay between individuals and the social context in which they operate. In other words, structuration is employed to uncover the complex relationship between individuals and the social structures that influence their thoughts and behavior. Following this procedure, key words were first identified based on their frequency of use. Then, general important ideas and trends were identified and reduced to a specific number of labelled categories. The final step involved converting the emerging categories into thematic units, which were used to write the final descriptive report.

Similarly, the same procedure was applied to the mental maps. The objective was to identify the key words and phrases that students systematically used to describe the meanings they attributed to the intercultural encounter. This facilitated the transition from “the particular or the detailed data... to the general codes and themes” (Creswell, 2011, p. 238). Important ideas and categories were identified in this process, which confirmed the themes reached during the analysis of interviews.

4. Results and discussion

The thematic content analysis of focus group discussions, interviews and students' mental maps resulted in the emergence of six major themes: Anxiety/Skepticism, Resistance, Discovery, Appreciation, Openness and Transformation. This sequence describes the process of attitudinal change that students participating in the musical intercultural event went through. It also explains how students progressively developed principles of IC and CI.

4.1. The theme of anxiety/skepticism

During the focus group discussions, particularly regarding the initial stages of the experience, students described various feelings of anxiety and skepticism towards the "other" Moroccan/ Arabic music. Their discussions about their expectations from this musical encounter revealed clear indications of "fear" and suspicion. Their responses included highly negative terms and expressions such as skeptical, horrible, anxious, and bad emotions:

Participant 1: we thought that things will be boring.

Participant 4: hum, yes, there were those who were skeptical at the beginning, they were asking: "we do not know the teacher! what is this music?". They asked questions about the "accent": "how can we master it? it is horrible!"

Students' answers also included other key terms such as "prejudgments", and a consistent use of the word "unknown":

Participant 3: hum...yes because before we had prejudgments on Arabic songs and all that.... but when we discovered it...things changed.

Participant 1: no, we have developed it, before we had prejudgments....and we were discovering it.....we all did not have the same idea.

Participant 4: yes, that's it. There are some students who say it jokingly, but there are others who were serious, and it was clear, they did not joke, hum ... they do not appreciate the "unknown".

These feelings of anxiety and skepticism were simultaneously raised through the semi-structured interviews conducted with the students' teachers and the high school principal. When asked about the idea of fearing "the other", teachers 1 and 2, for example, explained that it is a principal trait of their students when they are confronted with any aspect of a different culture, be it language, music, or dance. Teacher 1 further added that she had worked on intercultural exchange programs for many years, inviting participants from different countries with diverse backgrounds, and the diagnosis was almost always the same. These intercultural "encounters" were always preceded by agenuine skepticism. The high school principal confirmed these observations, arguing that the word "contact" itself may pose a challenge, particularly when it is associated with culture:

Teacher 1: yes, that is it. There are two aspects the cultural musical aspect, and the aspect of encountering someone who comes from a different country....to say the things as they are, we are in a rural environment, with no experiences of encountering people coming from the Maghreb...that is why they feel fear.

Teacher 1: yes, definitely.... and when we tell them that this music comes from another country, which is again far from their profile.... Here is the problem...more than that, they need to cross the Mediterranean. Here fear is at its peak.

Teacher 2: in fact, students we have here are students who come from relatively low social milieu, less opened at the cultural level ...this is a fact, they are actually students who rarely have the chance to approach other cultures, to go abroad and, thus, for them, there is a kind of novelty, a feeling of insecurity because of this encounter with foreign cultures, with foreign persons, but it is good since it would jostle them a little bit.

The principal: contact always poses problems.... when it is applied to culture, another challenge arises. For students, and considering their age and limited background, it is again more complicated, which justifies their reactions.

4.2. The theme of resistance

Resistance was a fundamental idea that both students and their teachers evoked, either implicitly or explicitly, through their respective answers. The first indication of this resistance was the lack of motivation. The initial stages of the musical experience were characterized by an apparent indifference, which was mostly expressed through passive verbal and non-verbal reactions. As a result, it was particularly challenging to get the students actively involved in the various activities. Creating a comfortable intercultural learning environment required significant time and intense efforts. The students' responses during the focus group discussion provided tangible evidence of this:

Participant 4: there were some students who did not want to sing in another language ...

Participant 4: hum, ... I think they were not interested in another language, which is Arabic ...

Participant 2: we had no motivation to learn ... to tell you the truth.

The second indication of resistance was an explicit aspect of close-mindedness. When attempting to initiate a discussion about Moroccan and Arabic music, its history, and its specific characteristics, students clearly showed signs of disinterest and a lack of willingness to try to learn about it. This close-minded attitude reached its peak when, during rehearsals, students would stop singing once there was a switch from French language to Arabic:

Participant 3: Ah! no, there were those who, when singing in French they are engaged, but once we started singing in Arabic they stop. The same thing for anthems. There are those who sang the French anthem but not the Moroccan one.

Teachers clearly raised this sense of conservatism and reject during the interviews:

Teacher 1: exactly, I would say that we have students, unfortunately, quite close-minded, quite less open-minded.

Teacher 3: yes, the beginnings were complicated, I mean the first sessions, hours, they said “oh, what is that?”

4.3. The theme of discovery

Feelings of anxiety and fear were gradually replaced by sensations of familiarity and ease with the advancement of work. It was truly amazing to notice how students started to show more attention and motivation, thus creating an atmosphere of comfort and positivity that characterized the end of the first term. Students’ reactions at that stage reflected a turning point in the experience. Importantly, within this new energy, the sense of discovery emerged as a key theme during the focus group discussion:

Participant 5: we were anxious in the beginning, but later, singing meant discovering, singing a new language, hum...It permitted ...new things: new melodies, new rhythms.

Participant 3: hum, yes because before we had prejudgments on Arabic songs, and all that but when we discovered it ...things got better.

This energy generated through “the discovery effect” was confirmed by teachers 1 and 2, who pointed out a positive sense of discovery that led to a clear evolution at the end of the first term. This signaled the first step in the deconstruction of pre-existing judgements that considered Moroccan and Arabic music as “foreign”, “strange”, and even “unsophisticated”:

Teacher 2: ... I noticed it at the end of the final session of the first term, they were all really happy.... they changed their minds.... when you were leaving, they did not want that, they were asking for selfies....

Teacher 2: yes, I have discussed with them, after the first term, and frankly, what they have said about that first term they have spent with you ... “how good it was, we have learnt a lot of things, have you noticed that Madame? We are capable to sing in Arabic, to practice Moroccan rhythms”

4.4. The theme of appreciation

The focus group discussion revealed signs of advancement from discovery to appreciation. Aspects of this positive shift could be traced through the way students started to talk about specific components of Moroccan and Arabic music, such as melody, lyrics, and rhythm. For example, in response to a question about the elements they liked more in the songs they were introduced to, their answers were very pertinent:

Participant 4: I would say the melody.... hum.... the lyrics if I can understand them...yes, we had actually the translation of the texts, hum, but more importantly, the melody.

Participant 9: for me the melody, the rhythm is good, and the lyrics, later... the mixture of the three elements is good, I liked it.

This attitude of appreciation was empowered by an additional feeling of pride that students started to manifest once they realized that they were part of a project that aimed to bridge two different cultures and two musical genres:

Participant 9: yes! it was a question of showing to others the things we were able to realize... we feel really proud, so proud of what we accomplished.

Participant 6: yeh! the work on language, all the pronunciations, learning sentence by sentence, with the appropriate rhythm, and to show by the end that it had a good result.

4.5. The theme of openness

Openness was the most important theme that emerged from the data content analysis. It reflected the cognitive, motivational, and most importantly, the behavioral changes that students started to show at the end of the first term, throughout the second term, and particularly during preparations for the final two concerts. When asked about their “new” attitudes towards what they previously considered “different” and “unknown”, students responded in a way that portrayed the “new” behavior they were developing:

Participant 9: I liked it; I would like to go to Morocco to discover this new culture.

Participant 4: The same thing for me, I would like to go to Morocco to look for the origins of this music, its rhythms and melodies. It is always good to approach things, to listen to this music, in their original context.

The students’ amazing willingness to make the final concerts a real success was another important indicator of their attitudinal change. Their insistence on going through “very serious” rehearsals to avoid possible mistakes, in addition to their awareness that the concert should be a true reflection of the exchange program’s main theme- the bridging of the Moroccan and French cultures- epitomized the extraordinary transformation they were undergoing:

Participant 4: we need to pay attention to the lyrics, not to make mistakes.

Participant 5: the important thing is how to associate the concert’s theme with the songs we will be performing. We will sing two different cultures ...that is amazing!

Along the same lines, teachers’ feedback in the interviews also evoked the open-minded thinking that their students were remarkably developing. Teacher 1 considered “openness” to be the supreme objective of intercultural experiences, a noticeable trait that was progressively acquired and manifested by participants specifically at the psychological and behavioral levels:

Teacher 1: I have found that fantastic, I was really touched, and that was clearly reflected on their faces.... that openness is also deciphered through their behavior; hum... we could notice it through their smiling, and their posture...

At a different level, students’ mental maps, such as the one in figure 2, a brainstorming post-work technique that was used to explore participants’ personal perception of the added value attained

through the musical experience, also included key words and expressions that meaningfully denote the value of openness: new language, new way of singing, discovery of music, new friends, new culture, etc. All these terms implied the “new” mindset students were developing.

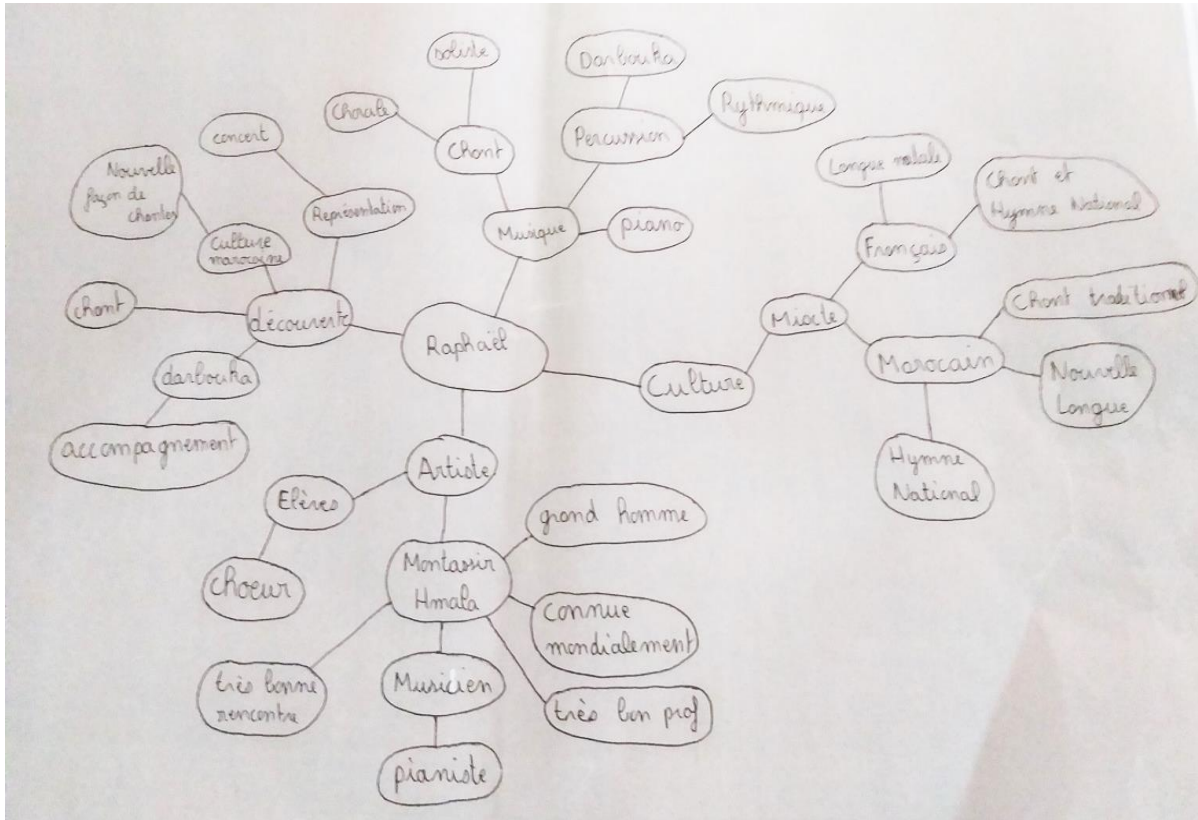


Figure 2. An example of students’ mental maps

4.6. The theme of transformation

Transformation was the key title that best described and personalized the outcomes of the intercultural musical experience. Students, both at the psychological and behavioral levels, manifested a clear change. They were, in fact, developing real senses of IC and CI. Teachers’ reactions concretely captured this evolution:

Teacher 1: and then, they confront their stereotypes and prejudgments with reality, and this is very important. And here clearly, I have noticed a transformation in students.

Teacher 2: yes, I have noticed so many things. I was totally amazed. Students’ transformation at various levels: the first one is that you succeeded in making them sing, and that was a real challenge, I think that they themselves were surprised regarding their own capacity to sing, to practice a different music.

Teacher 3: yes, there is also this aspect regarding their initial attitude, they were transformed in their way of considering “the other”, abroad, the foreign culture, and it was reflected through their behavior ...I noticed it at the end of the final session of the first term, they were all really happy...when you were leaving, they did not want that.

The findings of this study confirmed the positive correlation between music interculturality, and the development of IC and CI. As described in the findings section, students, through their exposure to the Moroccan / Arabic “foreign” musical repertoire, actively re-evaluated their previous perspectives on other cultures and music. This process was a crucial step in developing a heightened awareness and appreciation for a completely different style of music. Students demonstrated an ability to step outside their cultural comfort zones, indicating a willingness to transition from musical ethnocentrism and cultural exclusivity (Reimer, 2009) to cultural relativism.

The unique melodic, rhythmic (as shown in Figure 1), and textual aspects of Moroccan / Arabic music were proven to be powerful tools in stimulating their interest in exploring and learning “valuable” alternative musical expressions. The course of events showcased that music serves as “a vehicle for knowing culture, a way to understand the self, the other, and the relationships between them” (Campbell, 2017, p. 10). At a deeper level, this study yielded intriguing conclusions.

The reactions, tensions and emotions witnessed throughout the exchange program showed that, despite living in a globalized world where physical and cultural boundaries are believed to be transcended, there is still an essential need for intercultural exchanges. Indeed, the association between “me” and the “other”, with its superior/ inferior complex, remains an inevitable characteristic of our cotemporary world. The current musical context demonstrated that the musical and cultural specificities cannot be disregarded. Undeniably, “people within cultures and between cultures often speak of ‘our music’ and ‘their music’” (Elliott, 1989, p. 1). This is precisely what the students conveyed in the first term of the intercultural program. They did not “immediately understand, appreciate, or enjoy the music of other cultures” (Elliott, 1989, p. 11). Their initial resistance revealed that “ours and theirs...is pervasive in our lives and identities, and in our music as well” (Elliott, 1989, p. 107). Given this reality, achieving the globalization of culture, unlike the economy, seems to be an unpractical objective or “dream”. What can be envisioned, therefore, is the development of sustainable intercultural mechanisms and plans that would help individuals and groups engage in processes of discovery of and dialogue with the “other”. This would significantly contribute to maximizing cultural understanding and appreciation, ultimately narrowing the gap between the “me” and the “other”.

Intercultural musical contact would be very useful in this sense. The present study revealed that musical encounters, specifically in educational settings, offer students potential opportunities to learn new ways of approaching cultural differences. More importantly, interaction with different music proved to be effective in transforming those differences into a source of cultural richness, similarity, and complementarity. It is worth pointing out that the transition outside of the comfort zone significantly helped students abandon their narrowed worldview. Their encounter with “a cultural outsider” (Miettinen, 2020, p. 14), who invited them to learn about an outsider music /culture, created an unpleasant feeling of unfamiliarity and cultural discomfort. However, this contact was highly productive (Kallio & Westerlund, 2020). Students progressively relinquished their “narcissistic belief” (Alfred et al., p. 226), and their initial hesitation and anxiety, instead embracing a sense of “reflection

and reflexivity” (Miettinen, 2020, p. 27) on the outsider music as well as their own music. This, in turn, facilitated the transition from ethnocentric stages of denial and defense to ethnorelative stages of acceptance and integration.

From a different perspective, students’ attitude change at the end of the intercultural experience tangibly validates the principals of Allport’s (1956) CHT theory on the effects of intercultural contact on participants and how it “changes the attitude and behavior of groups towards one another” and, in turn, how “those changes will influence any further contact” (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2005, p. 328). Musical contact was proven to help reduce epistemological distances and reach the “epistemic unfreezing” (Tadmor et al., 2012). The initial sense of confrontation that students exhibited due to their belief that they were encountering an “unknown” music gradually transformed into a positive attitude, which later developed into an appreciation of the content and motivation to participate in the second term. This motivation took a further step toward increased engagement and participation in all the sessions of the second term. All activities were characterized by regular attendance, concrete enthusiasm, and a determination to make the final two concerts a true celebration of cultural relativism, a festivity of cultural difference, and a specific invitation to discover Moroccan Arabic music.

These attitude changes indicated clear signs of willingness and motivation to participate in any other musical experiences. Students’ abandonment of their prior prejudices and stereotypes reflects their newly developing mindset and, therefore, their flexible and open thinking. The present intercultural experience was an extraordinary context that led to “reconstructing others’ frames of reference” (Alfred et al., 2003, p. 228).

Additionally, the course and the findings of the present study interestingly demonstrated the existence of unbalanced cultural power relations that link the west to the global south. The reasons behind the reception of the researcher (musician) in a French high school can be attributed to the intercultural deficits that French students face. The unbalance lies in the fact that while the cultural outsider possesses the necessary musical knowledge about French music to establish smooth communication with students, the latter have no knowledge of Moroccan and Arabic music. This suggests that more efforts should be invested to address this situation, particularly on the part of the west, and the “Arts aux Lyceens” project can serve as an example to be replicated and enhanced.

Disclosure statement

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About the Author

Dr. Montassir Hmala is a teacher trainer at Regional Centre for Education and Training Professions (CRMEF) of Meknès, Morocco since 2010. He is also a researcher in the fields of Communication, Education, Language teaching, Musicology, and Sociology. Email: montassirpianiste@hotmail.fr