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Society for Education, Music and Psychology Research

Research Article

Reflective writing in a community music project with students in higher music education

Research Studies in Music Education
2023, Vol. 45(3) 634–652

DOI: 10.1177/1321103X221107513
journals.sagepub.com/home/rsm
SAGE

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Abstract

Meet4Music (M4M) is a low-threshold community music program based at the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz, Austria, offering free participatory sessions to people from all social and cultural backgrounds, including students. The program allows attendees to experience an emerging field of music pedagogy and approach current challenges of migration and cultural diversity from an artistic perspective. The purpose of this study was to explore how students considered and reflected on their M4M experiences. Research questions included the following: (1) How did students consider the experience of making music in a heterogeneous ensemble, and what meanings might they have made from it? And, (2) What aspects of M4M may have contributed to artistic and interpersonal enrichment, and in what ways? We examined meanings developed across the various practices involved in this artistic initiative, with a specific focus on the students' experiences. To do so, qualitative data based on their written reflections are presented, analyzed, and discussed. Findings include attributions for M4M and personal impact. Themes center on a holistic understanding of the musical community of the program and students' reflexive and responsive attitudes. Implications include refining notions of artistic citizenship and recommendations for higher music education.

Keywords

Community music, reflective writing, higher music education, improvisation, cultural diversity

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In recent years, the themes of bonding and bridging, cultural participation, social justice, and multiculturalism have gained increasing attention in the field of music education (Bucura, 2022; Benedict et al., 2015; Elliott, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2015; Silverman, 2009). This reflects significant global sociodemographic changes. For example, as the recent migration crisis has increased the number of asylum seekers in European Union (EU) countries, a number of schools, educational institutions, and music conservatories have demonstrated a growing interest in community services, inclusion, and activities specifically intended for marginalized communities. These topics connect the lives of diverse people in both social and artistic terms, and therefore impact music in society as well as music education in a variety of ways.

With this in mind, the community music project M4M—which we describe in the present contribution—serves a double function as an artistic and social initiative. Grounded by the intention of "bonding and bridging" for the wave of asylum seekers since the end of 2015 (Bucura, 2022), we established a low-threshold community music program based at the university of M4M, offering free participatory sessions to people from all social and cultural backgrounds.

In December 2015, the Department of Music Education at the university of Music and Performing Arts Graz organized a charity concert called "Music4Refugees." With more than 500 attendees from the general public and 69 performing musicians from the University, this concert contributed to create a community of practice that welcomed individuals of all cultures and musical backgrounds. Stakeholders collaborated with colleagues from the University and were motivated to continue holding collaborative events of joint music-making. This facilitated the establishment of M4M in March 2016. Since then, M4M has provided weekly alternating workshops in activities such as choir, theater, and drum circle. The project involves three different dimensions:

1. Meet4Music constitutes an *artistic, open-access community platform*. It offers a meeting point for individuals of all ages and dispositions from different sociocultural backgrounds, whether musically trained or not. The workshops are free of charge. This results in an ever-changing ensemble, as participant numbers and group composition vary each week. Attendees' ages are heterogeneous. Female visitors, mainly from the home community, are in the majority. Asylum seekers come mostly from Syria, Iraq, or Afghanistan. They are young men aged 16 to 40 years; the number differs between 2 and 10 migrants each workshop. Around five asylum seekers visit M4M quite regularly. In total, the workshops vary from 20 to 50 or sometimes even 60 participants.
2. The project is also carried out as an *elective course* across all Universities in the city of Graz, to allow attendees experience an emerging field of music education and new approaches of music-making in a context of migration and cultural diversity. Students are encouraged to acquire or extend their musical, artistic, and teaching skills in shaping and transforming their community and themselves. Collaborative feedback based on the critical response process (Lerman & Borstel, 2003) and written reflections help students consider their musical, pedagogical, and social approaches and values, and their ways of taking part in M4M. In doing so, most students gain firsthand experiences in leading a multifarious ensemble, supervised by workshop facilitators. Because of varying participant numbers (between 9 and 85), students must adapt to the situation, drawing from competencies such as openness, spontaneity, and flexibility.
3. Meet4Music is an ongoing research project in which, inter alia, the needs, challenges, and potential benefits for both participants and facilitators are examined and developed in detail. In her PhD project, Andrea Gande is exploring how the program's facilitators

deal with pedagogical, social, and musical challenges, through a qualitative analysis of interviews with facilitators and participants in M4M. Other studies looking at M4M have focused on what reflecting and practical challenges this program may pose to a diversified society (Kruse-Weber & Gorzela, 2019) and on the personal experiences of the facilitators involved in the project (Gande & Kruse-Weber, 2017; Schiavio et al., 2019).

Students' perspectives[1] were particularly interesting to us because they served multiple roles: student-participant, teacher-leader, host who welcomed community members from outside the university, and, in some cases, organizer who set up or took down the room. We were curious about how they considered their experiences in M4M and how it may have impacted them. The purpose of this study is therefore to explore in detail such dimensions. Our research questions were the following:

1. How did students consider the experience of making music in a heterogeneous ensemble, and what meanings might they have made from it?
2. What aspects of M4M may have contributed to artistic and interpersonal enrichment, and in what ways?

Theoretical background

Inspired by the 5 *Music Rights* of the International Music Council (n.d.)—especially "the right for all children and adults . . . [to] express themselves musically in all freedom"—M4M integrates significant aspects inherent to *community music*, *performativity*, the *philosophy of praxial music education*, and *reflective practice*. In what follows, we offer an introductory look at these dimensions, exploring their connections with M4M.

Community music

Community music is a domain notoriously difficult to define with precision (Higgins, 2006). It has been described as both too broad and too narrow (Schippers & Bartleet, 2013), with scholars emphasizing activities, the many ways of music-making (Veblen, 2008), and the socialization of music (Higgins, 2007). Defining difficulties aside, M4M might be easily understood as a community music project, aiming to provide cultural and artistic access to a broad community. Regardless of the sociocultural background, origin, language, or age, it is meant to encourage collaborative and nonhierarchical approaches to musical learning by fostering empowerment, inclusion, self-determination, and cooperation among participants. This aligns with a series of recent findings emphasizing the value of collaborative and nonhierarchical approaches to musical learning (e.g., Schiavio et al., 2020a, 2020b, 2020c; Veblen et al., 2013).

As an *artistic laboratory*, M4M promotes openness and an innovative pedagogical spirit among attendees. It supports gaining practical experiences in what Smilde (2006, 2009a) referred to as an atmosphere of trust. Meet4Music encourages all stakeholders "to come out with their own idea [while] searching and exploring new meeting points, new languages and possibilities" (Smilde, 2009b, p. 279). Participants in M4M benefit from a vast range of musical, social, and cultural possibilities, which can impact their emotional and physical well-being while increasing their sense of self-worth. This resonates with the notion of musicking provided by Small (1998), who stated that music is best understood as a verb "to music"—which can be characterized by a variety of actions: "by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or

practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing" (p. 9). According to Small, musicking is a collaborative activity that provides people the chance to discover, scrutinize, modify, and celebrate their identities.

Along these lines, Higgins (2007) described the important features of community music through the notion of *hospitality*. This "provides touchstones through which openness, diversity, freedom and tolerance flows. These sentiments reflect community music's commitment to access and equality of opportunity" (p. 284). Novices or new people can achieve hospitality by joining the ensemble and being welcomed; similarly, openness and tolerance can help develop a wider social network and fulfill the life of participants and facilitators (see Hallam, 2015). The different levels of activity and interaction of all participants can also change and shift across time (see Smilde, 2009b; Wenger et al., 2002).

Performativity

The paradigm of performative music education (Elliott, 2007) has been debated in music education for some time, including in the German-speaking context (Hirsch & Steiner, 2014; Krause, 2010; Krause-Benz, 2013, 2016a, 2016b, 2017, 2018). Krause-Benz (2016a) points out the inconclusiveness of the older terms "action" and "practice," specifically when they are reduced superficially to externally visible actions of learners (p. 83). Fundamental in the debate about performativity is the assumption that social and cultural practices are understood as "performances," which are "staged" by the "actors" (i.e., the people involved in and at the practices) (Krause-Benz, 2013, p. 56). Following Max Herrmann, we define a *performance* as "any event in which all participants find themselves in the same place at the same time, partaking in a set of activities—either as actors or as spectators" (Fischer-Lichte, 2010, p. 24). Roles can change and, in particular, a "performance arises out of people's meetings, their interactions and interplay" (p. 24). Wulf and Zirfas (2007) adopted the term *performativity* for pedagogical contexts, explaining that social realities appear different from how they appear before a performative action takes place (pp. 13–15).

These new realities emerge from the acting bodies in repeatable performances and occur between actors, who produce gestural, linguistic, physical, and mimetic realities. They have a binding character for all participants, even if they can be negotiated (Wulf & Zirfas, 2007). Indeed, any performance moment is always unique, irreversible, and unpredictable: "something happened once: it's over" (Mersch, 1997, p. 20). A performance does not create a product in the common sense but creates itself in the single moment. It can occur abruptly but be open-ended: it is transitory and ephemeral, even if it involves spaces, bodies, and objects that outlast the performance (Krause-Benz, 2016b).

Opening up another vista in this context, we briefly focus on the term *aura*, introduced by philosopher Benjamin (1939/2007), who defined it as a "unique appearance of a distance, as close as it seems to be" (p. 16).[2] Besides singularity, Benjamin characterizes the aura of an artwork by a connection to a location and its history. He noticed the loss of auras in modern society, blaming the simplicity of today's easy technical reproduction of any artwork. Live re- creation in concerts or theaters is often replaced by technical reproduction, which Benjamin argued can lead to a loss of its uniqueness, singularity, and instantaneousness. Conversely, performances and their exclusive presence in each single moment might provide the exceptional opportunity for the revival of an aura (Mersch, 1997). A rising aura opens up the opportunity for participants to experience each single moment—a "now-moment"—in connection to the identity, experience, and culture each other participant brings forth.

It should be noted that music-making in the context of community music may not naturally imply performativity, promoting auras, or even now-moments. Instead, it requires deliberately facilitated performative actions as well as didactic decisions, which leave space to be negotiated between the participants to initiate processes of education, or *Bildung* (Krause- Benz, 2016a, 2017). We refer here to the active process- and subject-related forming of the inner person through music (Vogt, 2012).

Praxial music education, artistic citizenship

In 1995, Elliott's work on a *praxial philosophy of music education* opened up extensive discussion over how goals of music teaching and learning relate to general goals of human flourishing. He suggested that

> self-growth, self-knowledge and optimal experience . . . . The aims of music education, and the primary goals of every music teaching-learning situation, are to enable students to achieve self-growth, self-knowledge, and musical enjoyment by educating their musicianship in balanced relation to musical challenges within selected musical practices. (Elliott, 1995, p. 129)

In light of this idea, the boundaries between music, learning, and society become increasingly fluid and blurred. Such domains are inherently participatory and active, reflecting their non-decontextualizable nature; in other words, musical activities can only be understood by looking at the concrete, situated dynamics in which they take place. This recognition emphasizes the radical entanglement of musicking in daily life and society. This pragmatic know-how embraces forms of knowledge that cannot be reduced to individual activity, but rather celebrates the complex, transient, and flexible ways in which subject and world coalesce through bodily action—as in music, so in life (see Borgo, 2007; Bowman, 2004; Elliott & Silverman, 2015 van der Schyff et al., 2016, 2022).

As such, the nature and significance of the moment-to-moment experiences that permeate the learning process, as well as their social and real-life relevance, could be examined from the perspective of *praxis*. The latter term is used here according to the following description provided by Elliott and colleagues (2019):

> to Aristotle, praxis meant active reflection and reflective action for the positive transformation of people's everyday lives and situations. But praxial music education [. . .] also includes (1) the why-what-where-when of effective, democratic, and civic education in, about, and through music performing, improvising, composing, arranging and conducting/leading music musically, regardless of the media and technologies utilized; and (2) empowering people to make and listen to music for their own and others' experiences of meaningfulness, happiness, self-worth, and musical satisfaction. (p. 8)

This occurs, for example, when learning responsibilities are shared between students and teachers (Schiavio et al., 2020a), and when musicking is conceived of as an opportunity for joy, growth, and the flourishing of oneself and/through the other. This ethical dimension is an important part of M4M, given its transformative and trans-individual purposes in which everybody contributes to shaping the community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Thus, community music endeavors may resonate closely with the concept of artistic citizenship and its "belief that artistry involves civic-social-humanistic-emancipatory responsibilities, obligations to engage in art making that advances social 'goods'" (Elliott et al., 2016, p. 7).

Reflective practice

Reflective practice is viewed as a key competence to respond to changing developments of the music profession and a navigation of the social and personal complexities this entails (Kruse-Weber & Hadji, 2020). Since Schön's (1983) conceptualization of reflective practice, scholars have generally agreed that reflection can be seen as constitutive for professional action and personal growth (Brandenburg et al., 2017; Ghaye, 2011; Kolb & Fry, 1975; Korthagen & Vasalos, 2009). To be effective, however, reflection has to be given space, prepared for, and learned. Accordingly, reflective practice and the concept of the reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983, 1987) have become a crucial aspect in professional discourse since Dewey's (1910) work marked the beginning of reflective teacher education at the beginning of the 20th century. Music education researchers often employ reflective practice, for instance, to construct collaborative meanings through stories (Kallio, 2015) and to describe experiences of second-stage teaching careers (Conway & Eros, 2016). Some music education researchers have used reflective journaling to document students' perceptions of computer-assisted composition approaches (Chen, 2012) and reflections of teaching aging adults (Ballantyne & Baker, 2013).

The complexity of today's music professions changes rapidly (Gaunt et al., 2021); expertise and actions require continuous adjustments. Consequently, different frameworks of feedback have been suggested (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Lerman & Borstel, 2003) and have contributed to the concept of lifelong learning (Alheit & Dausien, 2018; Arbeitskreis Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen, 2011). Many community music activities are based on the idea of lifelong learning:

> to cope with rapid change and the challenge of the information and communication age, we must ensure that people can return to learning throughout their lives. We cannot rely on a small elite, no matter how highly educated or highly paid. Instead, we need the creativity, enterprise and scholarship of all our people. (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p. 7)

From this perspective, M4M can be seen as one example of the University becoming a "learning organization," facing new possibilities and challenges for music education (Higgins, 2012b; Kenny, 2016).

A social good

Together, concepts of community music, performativity, praxial education, and reflective practice converge toward connections that may result in furthering a greater social good. This forms the basis for our theoretical framework. Beyond the commonality suggested in Herrmann's discussion of performance, we look to types of interactions and interplay (Fischer-Lichte, 2010) that can affect the ways groups connect or fail to connect. Interactions and interplay involve not only being in the same place and participating in music-making together, but ideally fostering fellowship and responsibility—what Higgins (2006, 2007) might refer to as hospitality that builds commonality, togetherness, and mutuality. Such mutuality can result in the aura of a now-moment, integrating space, time, culture, norms, history, and relationships that allow for deep and meaningful connections as well as personal growth (Turino, 2008).

However, different types of connections exist, as Bucura (2022) noted in a discussion of Putnam's (1993) bonding and bridging forms of social capital (stemming from Bourdieu's 1986 theory). Bucura (2022) described Putnam's bonding capital as a shared experience that is formed among those who seem similar, while bridging capital results in connections between seemingly different social groups. Bridging capital therefore implies a connection that may result in collective action for the mutual benefit of diverse groups. Such action facilitates and engages a

community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) that may benefit from purposeful reflection in a dedicated space. Such activities can enhance the bonding that may arise from mutual experiences and bridge seemingly disparate social groups. Bridging in this way may contribute to advancing a greater social good through the concepts of praxial education and artistic citizenship.

Method

In what follows, we report on a qualitative study examining the reflections of a cohort of students who participated in M4M between 2015 and 2018. We contextualize their experiences through the lens of the theoretical approaches discussed in the previous section.

We first sought informed consent among participating students in M4M, and 29 students agreed to take part in this study. At the semester conclusion, they were invited to describe how their participation in M4M impacted them. We aimed to consider the importance of making music in a heterogeneous ensemble and also to reflect on what aspects of M4M might impact students artistically and interpersonally. Because key questions can progressively upsurge abilities and agency (Brown, 2009; Coulson & Harvey, 2013), a study protocol involving a series of items was developed to invite critical reflection. Examples of such items include the following:

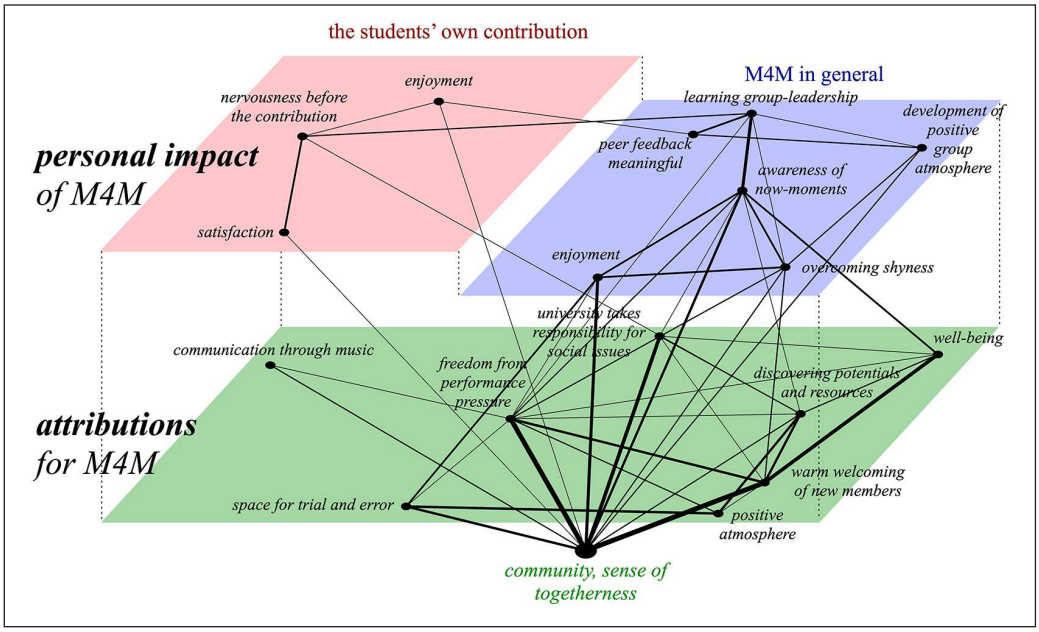
- What does M4M mean for me (personally, interpersonally, as an artist / musician / educator / etc.)?
- What did I learn from M4M? How might I have benefited from it?
- What might M4M contribute socially and musically?

For the analysis, we generated a priori codes and categories from the underlying key questions (using a deductive approach) before data were reviewed line-by-line (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Using the analysis software MAXQDA, manifold codes were generated and organized (using an inductive approach; Rädiker & Kuckartz, 2019; VERBI GmbH, 2018). We first focused on in vivo coding; we then simplified and abstracted the codes. As we further refined, described, and developed the code system, both differentiation and meaningful codes were determined. Afterward, we contrasted the interim list with the previously gathered a priori codes to intertwine inductive and deductive approaches. This helped us keep data linked with their context, ensuring validity and coherence of the findings (Miles et al., 2019). Furthermore, we maintained openness for unexpected occurrences within the data (Schmidt, 2013). We then transformed our emerging system of codes into an accessible, compact form (see Figure 1; Miles et al., 2019). By means of the visualization tool "MAXMaps" within MAXQDA, interrelations between different codes were charted (Rädiker & Kuckartz, 2019; VERBI GmbH, 2018). It should be noted that in this article we do not discuss all code interrelations, but only essential interrelations between codes. With the emerging two-dimensional displays, we analyzed different code compilations regarding their interrelations. On the basis of these two-dimensional visualizations, we then generated a three-dimensional code system by, inter alia, compressing, stretching, rotating, and mirroring. The resulting representation allowed us to visualize the whole system of codes without losing code interrelations.

Findings

The emergent system of codes (see Figure 1) shows two main, overarching perspectives of the students: *attributions of values for* M4M and the *personal impact* of M4M, the latter involving both M4M *in general* (right) and the *students' own contribution* (left).

Figure 1. Visual Coding System with Interrelation Lines.



Three colors (green, rose, and violet) represent the three themes, which emerged through the analyses. Larger distances between codes represent larger distances between the related written passages and mirror the relevance of key questions; therefore, Figure 1 does not represent a hierarchy between the codes.[3]

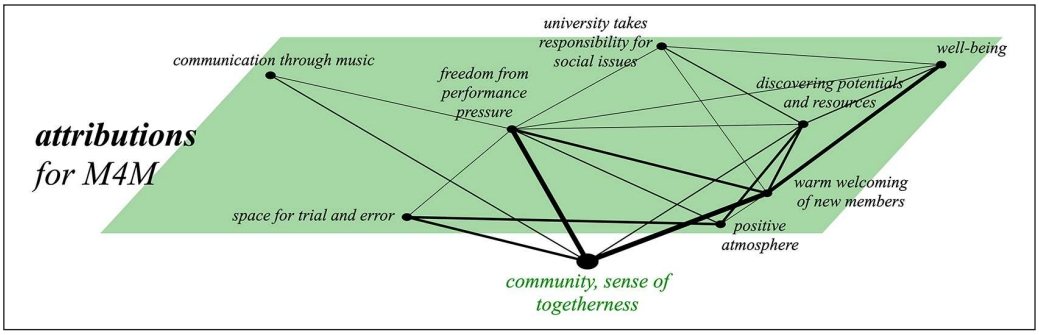
To provide insights into the analysis and the illustrated coding scheme, we present short, selected excerpts associated with these main perspectives. We identify significant codes for each perspective and demonstrate their construction. By deduction of the full code system presented in Figure 1, we explain the interrelations within the field of *attributions for M4M*.

Attributions for M4M

We begin with the code labeled *community, sense of togetherness*, which is located in the field *attributions for M4M* (see Figure 2). Without exception, all students emphasized this as a crucial characteristic of M4M: "being together with like-minded people, the encounter, musical activity, creative self- expression, the feeling of being integrated, and joy of multiculturalism give room for all sorts of feelings, thoughts and inspiration" (17SS_K; see Footnote 1).

Students valued the opportunity to shape a community with a variety of personalities—regardless of their distinctive cultural or social origins—and to make music together, which they said often had negative connotations within society and daily university life. They recognized an incomparable "transcendental sense of togetherness" (16/17WS_K), which contributed to bonding and feelings of inclusion in the community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991): "to experience a feeling of common joy and solidarity together in a group. . . . Only together we can originate something and everyone is important in this" (16/17WS_D). Furthermore, the existing *sense of togetherness* within M4M led to the development of "more and more skills, which would not be developed naturally" (17/18WS_K); besides social skills in encountering other cultures, nationalities, religions, or ethnicities, students developed pedagogical and reflective skills.

Figure 2. Field of Attribution for M4M (Extraction from Figure 1).



It is noteworthy that all further codes (except the code *nervousness before the contribution*) are closely intertwined with the code *community, sense of togetherness*. Figure 1 highlights *community, sense of togetherness* as a source. It is located beneath the two main levels between the interrelations of further codes, whether within the level of *personal impact* or *attributions for M4M*.

Besides *community, sense of togetherness*, students valued a *warm welcoming of new members* and the *freedom from performance pressure*. The former included the openness and honesty of the community. With M4M, we strove to include all participants as fully integrated members as quickly as possible. As a result, all participants interacted creatively and artistically. Meet4Music became a social, cultural, and intergenerational meeting point, where all were equal and important. Consider the following quote:

> M4M wants to welcome everyone, no matter at which point this person stands in his or her life. It is not important if this person has money, many academic titles or if he or she is a native or a foreigner. . . . That way, people become human, because in M4M, everyone is a fully-fledged member of this community. (17/18WS_K)

This view was also supported by another participant, who wrote, "from my point of view, the marvelousness of M4M is that every participant, expert or facilitator has to go through unknown territory, engage with other people and be open for new experiences" (16/17WS_S).

We also identified the code *freedom from performance pressure* as significant, revealing the unconventional nature of the M4M workshops, where students changed roles and became facilitators. They expressed that they felt free in both creative planning and implementation. We viewed M4M as an artistic laboratory, carrying out no assessment and allowing students to reveal their personality and emotions. The following two quotes illustrate this:

> M4M gives people the opportunity to have fun while learning something new and creative or eventually further develop already present skills, without any commitment or obligation. (17SS_S)

> Already in the first session, I understood that M4M is a place where it is not the point to analyze and evaluate. The focus lies on the strengths of people. It is always possible to do something "better," but does it support people to let them know what they could have done better? That often results in pressure and upset. (17/18WS_K)

Meet4Music also presented *space for trial and error*. The connection between these two codes shows the possibility for students to attempt innovative ideas. Supervising facilitators

empowered students to take risks. Moreover, by means of the *freedom from performance pressure* and a strong *sense of togetherness*, students overcame inhibitions and potential shame. Above all, the results demonstrated students' awareness and appreciation regarding their teaching and learning. As one student mentioned, "through M4M, people flourish more than they would without this event, because you meet like-minded people who do not feel ashamed to try out something new or to make mistakes" (17SS_L).

The students emphasized the relevance that a *university takes responsibility for social issues*. In M4M, music served as a medium for communication (*communication through music*), thereby deemphasizing language barriers. As an "altruistic project" (17SS_S) without hierarchical structure, M4M provided an "open space of artistic [and musical] exchange" (16/17W_M), in which all participants could connect:

> M4M is an extremely interesting and important project, which is essential for today's society. Especially in our times, (social divide, entry of refugees, . . .) we need initiatives that bring people together and connect them! Especially teenagers should participate more in and collaborate with such projects, to aim for a better social cohesion of humanity in future. (16/17WS_B)

Another participant wrote;

> It is impressive for me that a University . . . offers such a project. Meet4Music can thus also contribute something to our society through opening doors and send signals as: That's how human cooperation should work—people who need support get it from those who could give it at the moment. (17/18WS_K)

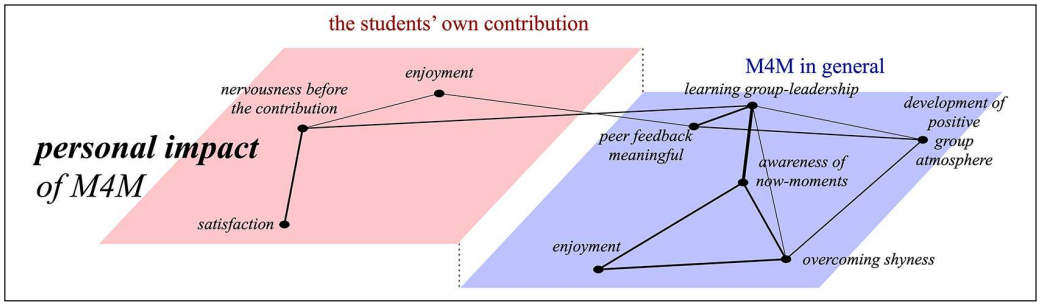
These codes, most strongly interrelated with *community, sense of togetherness*, appear to shape a holistic conception of *community*. We view these codes and excerpts as an indication of a *sense of togetherness* during each semester or during the period since M4M was established.

Personal impact

We now focus on the personal impact regarding M4M in general (see Figure 3).

The *awareness of now-moments* is located in the center of the field, *personal impact regarding M4M in general.* The coded passages reveal unique experiences. For two participants, M4M allowed them to "forget everyday worries" (16/17WS_S) or "recover their [lost] passion" (17SS_B). Furthermore, the code demonstrates students' open-mindedness to seek subjective, expressive moments, an awareness of such moments, as well as the ability to recapitulate and reflect upon them orally and written. Connections with the codes *freedom from performance pressure, well-being*, and *discovering potentials and resources* (see Figure 1) show the capability of M4M to promote students' *awareness of now-moments*. Moreover, the students expressed gratitude for the opportunity of participate in M4M: "there are some people I like for a variety of reasons, and even some who are an inspiration to me because of their attitude and sometimes I even thought of them when I had a bad day" (17SS_L). This example is in line with two further dimensions. First, M4M can influence and enrich participants' lives. Second, it can affect the perception and reflection of people's traits and attitudes, as well as their abilities to relate them to themselves. Moreover, the interrelation between *community, sense of togetherness* and the *awareness of most personal meanings* (see Figure 1) could be interpreted as the emerging openness for proximity and trust, which allows now-moments. Taking into account the interrelation with the code *University takes responsibility for social issues* (see Figure 1), students described being particularly proud to face social inequality with like-minded others.

Figure 3. Field of Personal Impact (Extraction from Figure 1).



Besides the code *enjoyment*, the students also expressed themselves *overcoming shyness*. For a number of students, it seemed to surprise and delight themselves to overcome their shyness in the workshops:

> Because I am a rather shy person, I had some reservations at the very beginning. However, I found myself utterly surprised in noticing how quickly and well I have integrated myself not only within the colleagues and experts, but most importantly among the participants. (17SS_S)

This example shows that there are deep interrelations between the codes *enjoyment, warm welcome of new members*, and *community, sense of togetherness*, which allow participants to overcome shyness. Moreover, the existing interrelation with the code *awareness of now-moments* (see Figure 1) supports our finding that M4M promotes an atmosphere in which now-moments can arise and students can overcome their own shyness. As a result, the M4M community developed a foundation of giving and taking.

Furthermore, the students pointed out their learning outcomes concerning *group leadership* and continuous improvement. Next to skills like spontaneity and humor, basic knowledge in ensemble conducting, or the development of sensitivity for the needs of a heterogeneous group, the students seemed delighted to see that group leading was possible without verbal communication. This was captured by the following two quotes: "This is fascinating. It's hard to imagine a group making music together without words" (17SS_K) and "There is also much non-verbal communication, for instance in the drum circle" (16/17WS_D).

Interestingly, the students experienced *peer feedback* as *meaningful*. Feedback upon the students' group and the open exchange in the breaks of the workshops were constructive. These two codes, *learning group leadership* and *peer feedback meaningful*, offer a bridge from M4M in general to their own contribution (see Figure 1). The former code is highly connected with *nervousness before*. The latter stands in relation to individual *enjoyment* within the *students' own contribution*. Our findings demonstrate students' good feelings after their own participation, and expression of satisfaction and thankfulness. Although they experienced *nervousness before the contribution*, they were proud of themselves for overcoming nervousness. Although leading the group was largely unfamiliar territory, the strong connection of their *nervousness before the contribution* with both *satisfaction* and *enjoyment* of the own contribution (see Figure 1) revealed they were able to cope with nervousness.

Even though the codes within *personal impact regarding the own contribution* are located far away from the code *community* within written reflections, there emerged an important interrelation. The openness and support rooted in the spirit of the M4M community established an

environment that allowed students to make unconventional contributions. They were liberated from rating or grading while planning and leading their contribution. "It was a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere in this session, because on the one hand people already know each other and on the other hand I succeeded in facilitating the participants to overcome their shyness" (17SS_S).

By means of the interrelation between the code *community, sense of togetherness* and other codes, we argue that there is a reciprocal effect between our holistic understanding of the community within M4M and the impact it had upon students. Generated from the germ-cell, community power grows within M4M and leads to an atmosphere in which the participants were able to discover now-moments and regard themselves in different ways.

Discussion

Our study serves as a window to understanding processes of M4M and extends previous contributions (Gande & Kruse-Weber 2017; Schiavio et al., 2019). Our findings point to a holistic understanding of the musical community. Participants took part in M4M regardless of the differences and identified themselves as musical, social, and cultural agents. They flourished as they strengthened solidarity, experienced a strong sense of togetherness, and moved toward bonding with a potential for bridging. Our findings are consistent with Elliott's (2005) characterization of music-making, "namely musical enjoyment (or 'flow'), self-growth, self-knowledge (or constructive knowledge), and (throughout continuous involvements with music over time) self-esteem" (p. 9). In this view, students experienced themselves as transformative forces that engaged with wholes and parts, individualities and collectivities. They could be considered to have navigated the processes of musical meaning-making through the constant development of shared "now-moments" that played out at multiple intra- and inter-individual scales.

Findings also suggest how M4M revives Benjamin's (1939/2007) lost aura: the students' awareness of singularities relating to their subjective now-moments and their changes of consciousness verify a "unique appearance of a distance" (p. 8). Besides the experience of aloofness, genuineness, and singularity (Benjamin, 1939/2007), the students located these personal impressions in their university, fulfilling the aura's necessary association with a location. Furthermore, there was a twofold sense in which the emergent aura was historical. The first pertained to the period in which M4M was situated, involving issues and different characteristics of migration (Phelan, 2012), social inclusion, and multiculturalism. The second was reflected in the students' personal biographies. With this in mind, we endeavored to keep track of lost auras (Mersch, 1997). In line with findings from the project "teaching as improvisational experience" (Westerlund et al., 2015, p. 65), the most difficult challenges for the students were the rapidly changing requirements of the heterogeneous group and the need to adapt to each situation. Acting as facilitators, the students of M4M developed a reflective and responsive attitude to change (Smilde, 2012) and "[learned] to face the unknown" (Westerlund et al., 2015, p. 63). Students of M4M appeared somewhat afraid of the open-endedness in their own contributions, but began trusting themselves as improvising teachers as they handled dynamic complexity (Hammerness et al., 2005; Westerlund et al., 2015). We therefore assume that curricula offering student teachers the possibility to facilitate projects like M4M could help them to grow professionally, personally, and socially by considering teaching from an improvisational perspective (Sawyer, 2011).

As musicians are challenged to relate their cultural identities to others, they gain a deeper understanding of themselves and come to value shared experience (Elliott, 2005; Vogt, 1999). As mentioned, the significance of M4M was that we implemented the concept in the context of

higher music education while embedding an informal learning approach into a formal context. The findings suggest that the students benefited from such an artistic laboratory (Smilde, 2006, 2009a), including through instances of what Putnam (1993) referred to as bonding with others and the potential for bridging with those who seem different from oneself. Experiences of unfamiliarity were important, stimulating challenges for all involved: agents with different cultural identities and previous music-related experiences negotiated the goals of the community of practice. This included the confrontation of demands and expectations with others in the community, and also the use of their abilities to bridge apparent differences in musical and social acts of mutuality. Creative music-making could lead to a common experience of musical enjoyment and "instances of encounters with the unexpected and the unpredictable" (Higgins, 2007, p. 86–87). Such experiences could necessitate deepening collaboration and understanding, highlighting strengths of different members, and making their contributions known and valued within the community. In line with recent community music research (Elliott & Silverman, 2015; Higgins, 2012a; Higgins & Willingham, 2017; Veblen et al., 2013), our findings support that a nonhierarchical and collaborative approach to musical and personal development can indeed lead to valuable musical and nonmusical outcomes.

Our study has necessary limitations and challenges. Students of M4M were asked to reflect on their subjective experiences. Self-reflection tasks, however, are not easy to accomplish: scholars note that students need support to learn how to reflect effectively (see Carey et al., 2018; Coulson & Harvey, 2013; Kruse-Weber & Sari, 2019). Coulson and Harvey (2013), for example, point out that "effective reflection for learning through experience requires a high level of introspection and open-minded self-analysis, a capacity for abstract learning, and self-regulation and agency that few students in higher education innately possess" (p. 1).

Furthermore, Kruse-Weber and Sari (2019) showed that there is potential to deepen written reflections through structured activity, in alignment with Bräuer's (2016) "reflection model." The latter shows how different levels of reflection based on self-analysis can help students critically examine, discuss, and revise their writings while also challenging assumptions. Similar activities might help students better evaluate the effectiveness of their actions, identify strengths and weaknesses, and make concrete plans.

Conclusion

Programs like M4M can offer stakeholders multiple benefits. Among others, our analysis emphasized enjoyment and playfulness through active participation, as well as a sense of togetherness when liberated from conventional performance pressure. As such, we feel similar projects could promote valuable outcomes in other places, particularly when bridging the gap between higher education and community music.

As our work suggests, one way forward might involve students taking more responsibility for initiating and developing creative musical collaborations through spontaneity and self-development. This may involve being confronted with different cultures to those they might have experienced in their studies. As such, M4M promotes perspective-taking and positive transformation, negotiating between cultures to promote mutual enrichment. As Elliott (1990) notes, culture is "not something that people *have*, it is something that people *do*" (p. 149, original emphasis). In this sense, M4M might also be regarded as a reaction against the focus on instrumental and vocal excellence and professionalization—too often celebrated as the defining feature of musical development in Western musical contexts. While the traditional notion of excellence still heavily leans on quantity of practice, outstanding instrumental skills, or future career options, M4M may help reframe this notion in novel ways: "excellence," in less grandiose

terms, may refer to the development of key competencies that span broad artistic and social skills, thereby providing a holistic view that traces a continuum between musicianship and social presence. This is counter to traditional notions of excellence that may suggest competition, as discussed by Bucura (2020). In M4M, music and cross-art work were able to connect individuals from a range of backgrounds and empower them to enjoy musical experiences, including in higher music education. We hope this work will inspire research initiatives that further develop similar ideas and practices, leading to curricula that more decisively account for holistic experiences and social actions.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Notes

1. As detailed later on, all student data, including names and other identifiable information, have been anonymized.
2. Translations for German quotations are the authors'.
3. Because there are many interrelations within the code system that were not anticipated in the key questions, the resulting visualization in Figure 1 reveals code relationships. However, the thickness of the lines between codes also reveals insights into the frequency of occurrence.

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