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Musicing, cultural diversity, and intercultural humility in Finnish liberal adult education

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Abstract

This qualitative case study examines the interplay between music and cultural diversity in an ensemble course involving learners from varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds at a Finnish liberal adult education institute in the Helsinki metropolitan area. The study draws on a teacher-researcher reflective field journal and two semi-structured focus-group interviews with ten participants from weekly 90-minute ensemble sessions across two semesters in 2023-2024. Musicing with culturally diverse musical materials combined teacher-guided reflection. Through thematic analysis, three interrelated processes were identified: challenging assumptions, building inclusive micro-spaces, and developing transculturally oriented outcomes. Across these processes, intercultural humility emerged as an ongoing disposition of self-reflection, dialogic listening, and ethical co-creation. Findings indicate that multicultural learning environments, when supported by teacher-guided intercultural engagement, may not immediately produce transcultural artistic results but can create conditions for transculturally oriented outcomes over time. This approach appears promising for rethinking the public role of music pedagogy in increasingly pluralistic societies.

Keywords: intercultural humility, cultural diversity, musicing, artistic citizenship, Finnish liberal adult education

Introduction

Public adult education in the Nordic countries has long been grounded in welfare state commitments to equality, inclusion, and lifelong learning (Hebert & Hauge, 2019; Heimonen & Westvall, 2015; Kuusipalo et al., 2021). In Finland, liberal adult education (*vapaa sivistystyö*) aims to guarantee access to education and culture for all through publicly oriented, non-formal provision that promotes 'social cohesion, equality, active

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citizenship, and the well-being and versatile development of citizens' (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017, pp. 8-9). These goals explicitly include democracy, pluralism, sustainable development, and multiculturalism (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017). As Finland's population grows more culturally and linguistically diverse, especially in the Helsinki metropolitan area (Väisänen et al., 2024), the adult education sector faces the task of aligning its foundational aims with the realities of a plural society. In response, this article approaches music ensembles as democratic spaces for inclusive learning through ethically informed public pedagogies that engage cultural diversity in Finnish liberal adult education institutes.

Nordic intercultural music education research cautions against treating cultural diversity as a fixed list of styles or genres. Rinde and Christophersen (2021), for instance, argue for dynamic, relational understandings of cultural difference that embrace collaboration, reflexivity, and shifting boundaries in everyday practice. Building on this relational framing, the study centres the teacher's role in guiding ethical and creative processes of intercultural engagement in ensemble teaching (Westerlund & Karlsen, 2017). Kallio and Westerlund (2020) clarify the conditions such an approach requires, highlighting that stepping beyond personal comfort zones is not an obstacle to avoid but an ethical precondition for intercultural teaching and learning. Decolonial analyses likewise foreground stepping outside epistemic comfort zones and treating responsibility as relational ethics-in-practice (Kallio, 2020). This orientation shaped the course design: culturally diverse repertoire was not approached through superficial genre labels, such as 'World', 'Global', 'Ethno', or 'Fusion', but through ethical engagement with difference and the pedagogical use of discomfort.

In Finnish liberal adult education, music is widely offered through ensemble-based tuition, including bands, choirs, and orchestras. Musicing offers a useful way of understanding learning in such settings because it shifts attention from music as object to music as situated practice (Elliott & Silverman, 2015). Artistic citizenship extends this praxial understanding by bringing its social, ethical, and civic dimensions into view (Elliott et al., 2016). From this perspective, music ensembles can be understood not only as spaces for individual skill development but also as practices in which participants learn to act with and for others through working with sonic materials. In the Finnish music education context, these ideas resonate with Väkevä and Westerlund's (2007) account of classroom music as a 'method of democracy' (p. 103), where value is ideally generated through shared activity and context-sensitive ethical deliberation rather than fixed hierarchies.

Adult education scholarship on the arts further reinforces this democratic component by treating art as public pedagogy. Wildemeersch (2019) argues that aesthetic experience in adult learning is not merely decorative; it expands what communities can perceive, imagine, and debate in public life. Similarly, community-based adult education in the arts emphasises that transformation requires more than participation alone. Butterwick and Roy (2016) argue that transformation in adult education requires more than enabling students to express their perspectives; voices, especially at the margins, must also be received in ways that change how we live together. These concerns resonate with decolonial and ethical debates in Nordic music education. Kallio (2020) shifts the emphasis from 'speaking' to 'establishing conditions for listening' (p. 184), while Väkevä (2025) develops 'voicing' as a pedagogical lens for questioning whose voices are amplified in society and on what terms. Connecting these ideas to Finnish liberal adult music education, ensembles can be seen as more than leisure activities; they can offer democratic, public, and educational spaces in which plural voices are negotiated through attentiveness, recognition, and response.

For the analytical framing of cultural diversity, the article draws on Huib Schippers' cultural diversity continuum from monocultural through multicultural and intercultural to transcultural approaches (Schippers, 2010). Within Nordic studies on intercultural music education, this continuum supports pedagogies that move beyond superficial exposure to unfamiliar musical content toward dialogic co-creation, where participants negotiate and re-articulate materials and practices through translation, adaptation, and reflexive attention to power dynamics and ethics-in-practice (Westerlund & Karlsen, 2017; Westerlund et al., 2022). One longer-horizon possibility for observing transformation along this continuum is a transcultural orientation, understood as a continual negotiation and ethical reimagination of musical difference through dialogic collaboration (Thomson, 2024). Within this orientation, intercultural humility offers a way to examine how such negotiation may develop through listening, dialogue, and ongoing reflection.

While these bodies of literature offer important resources for rethinking the role of music, cultural diversity, and democratic adult learning, less is known about how intercultural humility emerges in ensemble learning within Finnish liberal adult education. Guided by this gap, I ask: *How does intercultural humility emerge among adult learners from culturally diverse backgrounds when teacher-guided musicing is intentionally oriented toward intercultural engagement in ensemble classes at a Finnish liberal adult education institute?* To answer this question, I first situate my teacher-researcher positionality, then present the theoretical framework, the study context and pedagogical setting, the methodological and ethical approach, the findings, and the conclusion.

Teacher-researcher positionality

My position was not that of an external observer but of a teacher-researcher embedded in the ensemble practice from which the research material was generated. I am a musician, pedagogue, and doctoral researcher whose work focuses on intercultural music-making. This background shaped the pedagogical design examined in this study, including the selection of culturally diverse musical materials, the facilitation of group discussions, and the creation of classroom conditions in which moments of discomfort could lead to shared reflection and, potentially, individual transformation.

At the same time, my role required reflexive caution. I was responsible for teaching and leading the ensemble, while also documenting classroom dynamics, participants' reflections, and my own pedagogical interventions in a field journal. My interpretations are therefore grounded not only in participant focus-group interviews but also in field-journal notes, through which I re-examined my pedagogical decisions and assumptions. In practice, I moved between ensemble leader, facilitator, coach, and experienced participant: offering musical guidance, suggesting alternatives for interpreting the musical material, supporting intercultural negotiation, and responding when stereotypes or cultural biases arose in discussion.

Theoretical framework

Musicing

In this study, musicing functions as an analytical concept for examining what adult learners do together in and around sound in the ensemble: playing, listening in action, arranging, improvising, cueing, evaluating, and responding to others as part of situated

musical practice (Elliott & Silverman, 2015). In this praxial frame, musical understanding develops through the interplay of performance, improvisation, arranging, listening, and situated judgment. Musicianship can therefore be understood as context-sensitive judgment developed through musical praxis, including decisions about music-making, listening, and interpersonal relationships before, during, and after musical involvement (Elliott & Silverman, 2015). As a teacher-researcher, this perspective allows me to approach the ensemble not only as a site of musical skill development but also as a civic space where participants negotiate roles, responsibilities, and relationships in sound, cultivating judgment about when to lead, when to support, how to shape musical content, and why to adjust to others' musical interpretations.

Artistic citizenship

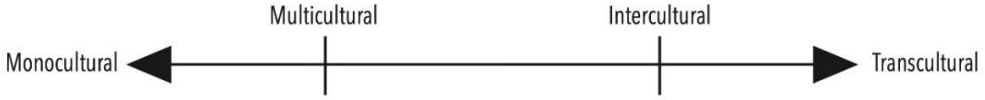
As a theoretical extension of musicing, artistic citizenship provides a bridge between praxial music education and adult education because it frames art-making as a form of ethical and civic action. Elliott et al. (2016) argue that artistic practices can be understood as ways of acting with and for others rather than merely as aesthetic or individual achievements. In this study, artistic citizenship helps conceptualise ensemble learning as a civic micro-practice: participants listen, take turns, negotiate responsibility, support vulnerability, and make musical decisions whose value is both relational and technical.

This framing is particularly relevant to Finnish liberal adult education, where learning is connected to social cohesion, active citizenship, cultural participation, and democratic life. Artistic citizenship therefore supports my central claim in this article: ensemble musicing can cultivate dispositions such as attentiveness, reciprocity, humility, and responsibility. Operationally, this lens directs the analysis toward situated moments in which assumptions are unsettled, risk-taking is enabled, learners move beyond comfort zones, and listening, identity, and belonging are reshaped.

Cultural diversity

To conceptualise cultural diversity and intercultural engagement without treating musical cultures as fixed categories, I draw on Huib Schippers' cultural diversity continuum. This framework is useful because it attends to movement and exchange across tradition, institution, teacher, and learner, rather than treating musical cultures as stable or self-contained units (Schippers, 2010). Schippers describes a continuum ranging from monocultural to transcultural approaches in music transmission, showing how musical traditions can move beyond coexistence or exchange toward new hybrid forms of musical expression. Schippers suggests that transculturalism emerges when musical traditions cross their original cultural boundaries and generate new musical forms that embody characteristics of more than one cultural context. Figure 1 illustrates this continuum.

Figure 1. Cultural diversity continuum. Source: Schippers (2010, p. 31; reprinted with permission)



In this model, monocultural transmission focuses on a single dominant music culture or practice, while multicultural transmission acknowledges the coexistence of multiple musical practices without necessarily requiring explicit interaction among them. Intercultural transmission involves comparison and interaction between musical cultures, potentially leading to musical fusions. Transculturalism refers to a more intensive form of synthesis, where new musical forms may develop beyond the sum of their influences, establishing distinctive artistic approaches and identities. Table 1 illustrates the defining characteristics of music transmission for each approach.

Table 1. Music transmission in culturally diverse environments. Source: Schippers (2010, p. 31; reprinted with permission)

Monocultural	Multicultural	Intercultural	Transcultural
• Music is transmitted in the context of a single, dominant music culture • Often a sense of superiority or belief in evolutional model • Single cultural reference for quality	• Music is transmitted without explicit reference to other musics but within an awareness of several other music cultures existing in a single cultural space • Multiple cultural references for quality	• Music is seen in relation to other musics, compared cross-culturally • May lead to mixing or fusion • Quality is addressed from multiple cultural perspectives	• Music has taken on in-depth characteristics of more than one culture • Likely to have become a genre of its own right • New, fused quality criteria are developed and applied

Within Nordic studies on intercultural music education, this continuum sustains a pedagogical stance toward dialogic co-creation: the negotiated re-articulation of materials and practices through translation, adaptation, reflexive attention to power dynamics, and ethics-in-practice (Kallio, 2020; Westerlund & Karlsen, 2017; Westerlund et al., 2022). European intercultural music education similarly stresses evolving relations and synthesis across groups rather than simple coexistence (Rinde & Christophersen, 2021). When analysing the ensemble processes examined in this study, I use the term transculturally oriented outcomes to describe shifts toward a transcultural orientation.

Intercultural humility

I use intercultural humility to understand the processual stance through which dialogic and co-creative intercultural musical collaboration can make such transculturally oriented outcomes pedagogically possible (Thomson, 2024). Intercultural humility originates from the concept of cultural humility, which has been developed in medicine and social work as a lifelong, power-aware practice oriented to self-critique and partnership rather than as a claim to competence. Tervalon and Murray-García (1998) characterise this as 'a commitment and active engagement in a lifelong process' (p. 118) involving self-evaluation and self-critique, re-addressing power imbalances, and developing mutually beneficial, non-paternalistic partnerships with communities. Understood this way, cultural humility resists endpoint thinking and can emerge in a collaborative musical setting where knowledge and authority are negotiated through shared experience and dialogue. Intercultural humility is not treated here as a measurable competence or final

learning outcome, but as an emergent, practice-based disposition of listening, self-reflection, and ethical responsiveness. Extending cultural humility into intercultural collaboration and community engagement, Thomson (2024) conceptualises intercultural humility as a valuable lens for music education:

> Although this discussion emerges from within medicine and social work, intercultural humility is a very relevant and important concept within the context of intercultural musical dialogue and collaboration. It becomes particularly salient in terms of approaching intercultural musical collaborations from the perspective of life-long learning processes that are in constant need of self-reflection, breaking down preconceived assumptions, and shifting perspectives. In this way, intercultural musical collaboration can be seen as a dynamic, fluid act of listening and dialogue that requires ongoing reflection and development, rather than a narrowly defined skill with an end point. (p. 137)

This perspective emphasises how intercultural dialogue and collaborative projects can enhance students' learning experiences while supporting the embedding of interculturalism and community engagement. Thomson (2024) also highlights the formation of intercultural humility in students' minds when engaging in musical dialogue and collaboration:

> The qualities of intercultural humility can be seen to emerge in the findings as a byproduct of studying in an intercultural environment, which gives rise to an understanding that we are all in a constant state of coming to know ourselves, others, and our ever-changing intercultural communities. (p. 153)

Such a reflective posture entails discomfort as an ethical condition for learning with difference (Kallio & Westerlund, 2020) and requires leaving epistemic comfort zones and treating responsibility as relational ethics-in-practice (Kallio, 2020). In relation to public pedagogy, music ensembles in Finnish liberal adult education can provide civic spaces where intercultural humility is practised in and through shared meaning-making. In such contexts, aesthetic experience can broaden 'what we are able to see and hear' (Kompridis, 2014, as cited in Wildemeersch, 2019, p. 117), enabling reciprocal listening and debate in shared public life. This requires not only opportunities for voicing identities but also the establishment of conditions for listening, so that voices, especially at the margins, can be heard in ways that matter for how we live together (Butterwick & Roy, 2016; Väkevä, 2025).

Context of the study

I conducted this qualitative case study at a Finnish liberal adult education institute in the Helsinki metropolitan area. The research was situated in a music ensemble class within the institute's arts programme, organised as weekly 90-minute sessions across two semesters (autumn 2023 and spring 2024).

The institutional setting is significant because Finnish liberal adult education includes folk institutes (*kansalaisopistot*) and workers' institutes (*työväenopistot*), which are historically rooted in broadening access to education and culture, supporting social cohesion and equality, and fostering active citizenship through non-formal provision (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017). In the Helsinki metropolitan area, these aims intersect with increasingly multilingual and culturally diverse everyday realities (Väisänen et al., 2024). In relation to these developments, and as part of expanding

learning opportunities for adults with transnational backgrounds, the institute had recently begun offering English-language provision, including the ensemble class examined here. Within the class, most participants, including myself, came from varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds, with roots outside Finland, and for many of us, English was not our first language. Cross-cultural communication therefore became a central part of the ensemble dynamics, and the class functioned not only as a music-learning setting but also as a small adult-education space in which questions of participation, listening, and cultural negotiation became pedagogically relevant.

Given the focus on ensemble playing, there were fewer singers than in other music classes taught at the same institute, such as choirs or vocal groups. Most students played Western ensemble instruments, including piano, guitar, drums, bass, saxophone, trombone, violin, and trumpet. Their musical backgrounds ranged from hobbyists to semi-professional musicians. New students joined each semester, although some continued from previous semesters.

Pedagogical and methodological design

The lessons included instrumental and vocal improvisation, call-and-response exercises, group listening, and short reflective discussions. I taught the musical content through a combination of learning by ear, imitation, short model demonstrations, and simple one-page scores outlining structure, chords, lyrics, and basic rhythmic ideas. I presented short musical excerpts and song-based materials connected to diverse oral music traditions. Examples included Afro-Caribbean and call-and-response rhythmic phrases that students transferred to their own instruments; melodic motifs and performative elements explored through interaction with flamenco dance; and improvisational tasks inspired by Arabic maqam-related melodic practices, introduced through imitation. I emphasised the social context of the music: who uses it, where and when it is performed, and for what purpose.

When the musical materials were adapted to the instruments and skills available in the group, students negotiated tempo, form, instrumentation, improvisation, endings, repetitions, and interpretive emphasis. In practical terms, this meant that guitarists, pianists, and other instrumentalists often had to invent their own parts for materials not originally arranged for the Western ensemble instruments available in the class. These adaptations became part of the intercultural learning process because they required students to consider what could change, what needed to remain recognisable, and how the ensemble could work with unfamiliar material respectfully in relation to its origins.

Data collection and analysis

The data consisted of two semi-structured focus-group interviews and a reflective field journal kept throughout the weekly ensemble process. I used the focus-group format to examine collective reflection and interaction among participants, a key feature of focus-group methodology (Morgan, 2019). Each interview lasted 60-75 minutes and was conducted in English in a private room at the end of each semester. The interviews involved two different groups, comprising ten adult learners aged 25-66 who volunteered and gave informed consent. The analytic dataset included five participants in autumn 2023 and five in spring 2024. I also used a separate preparatory group interview with seven different participants from a prior semester to evaluate the clarity of the interview questions and to estimate the length of the interviews.

During the interviews, participants responded to open-ended questions about their ensemble experiences, musical decision-making, moments of discomfort, and perceptions of cultural diversity. Alongside the interviews, I kept a reflective field journal after each ensemble lesson. In the analysis, the journal helped me compare participant reflections with my own observations of classroom interactions, pedagogical decisions, and ensemble dynamics. I analysed the interview transcripts and field notes through thematic coding, iterative theme development, and theoretical interpretation (Burnard et al., 2016). I used the field journal to examine both alignment and dissonance between participant perspectives and my own teacher-researcher observations.

Ethical considerations

I followed the ethical guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (2023). Before the study began, I provided participants with written and verbal information about the research purpose, methods, voluntary participation, and confidentiality procedures. I obtained informed consent from each participant. Because I was also the teacher, I repeatedly emphasised that participation in the research was voluntary and separate from participation in the ensemble class. This was important for mitigating teacher-researcher power dynamics and for maintaining procedural fairness. A peer researcher not involved in teaching also observed the interview process and provided feedback after each interview. This supported reflexivity, helped me evaluate the clarity and fairness of the interview situation, and offered an additional perspective on my dual role as teacher and researcher. The research activity was integrated into ongoing teaching without altering the pedagogical intent of the class (Burnard et al., 2016).

I ensured anonymity through pseudonyms in transcripts and quotations, minimised potentially identifying details, and retained no identifying demographic data beyond age range and general musical or cultural background. Because the class was not designed as a public recording or concert project, the empirical material consists of focus-group interviews and teacher-researcher field notes rather than a publicly accessible performance archive. Audio files and transcripts were stored in encrypted, access-restricted drives and will be deleted after five years.

Results

Drawing on focus-group interviews and my reflective field journal, the results are organised in relation to the research question: how intercultural humility emerged among adult learners when teacher-guided musicing was intentionally oriented toward intercultural engagement. I present the findings through three interrelated themes: challenging assumptions, building inclusive micro-spaces, and developing transculturally oriented outcomes. These themes are interpreted in dialogue with the theoretical framework developed above.

Challenging assumptions

In relation to a praxial view of musicing as knowing-in-action (Elliott & Silverman, 2015), I analysed participants' reflections as moments in which musical learning involved the re-evaluation of assumptions, including cultural biases (Thomson, 2024). This process was not only individual but also collective: assumptions became visible through ensemble interaction, group discussion, and the practical negotiation of unfamiliar musical

materials (Kallio & Westerlund, 2020; Westerlund & Karlsen, 2017). To examine how intercultural humility emerged through these processes, I asked questions such as:

- Before the course, what were your expectations about music and cultural diversity?
- During the lessons, when did you reconsider earlier ideas? What triggered that?
- Did the ensemble experience change how you think about music? If so, how?

When reflecting on students' motivation to participate in the ensemble, I noticed that several participants initially expected an enjoyable and somewhat exotic encounter with unfamiliar music. In the first lessons, they were curious to try something different from other ensembles offered in adult education settings. While such curiosity supported engagement, it also created moments in which culturally diverse materials risked being approached through simplified or stereotypical associations.

A concrete moment emerged in the second lesson of the spring semester. When I presented musical material rooted in Afro-Caribbean traditions, some students laughed and described the sound as too happy, or naive, framing the music as entertainment. I then opened a group discussion about the implications of slavery, colonialism, and postcolonialism in shaping Afro-Caribbean cultural expression. As the conversation unfolded, students engaged in self-reflection and began to re-evaluate cultural biases. One student also reflected on their own cultural origins and explained how their own community had experienced comparable forms of oppression in the past. From this experience, I observed what appeared to be a shift toward a more ethically informed stance, accompanied by increased motivation for music learning. When we played the song again, the energy in the room changed; students seemed to feel a responsibility to respect the cultural tradition and contribute to the music as well as they could. In interviews, students reflected on similar moments in which musical context shaped their perceptions:

> At first, it felt kind of funny to play these 'Latin' songs cause it's January and it's Helsinki and is cold and dark outside, and the music sounded so colourful and happy that I just laughed. It just brought me joy. (FG2 P2)

> It makes the songs more alive when you know some background about it, the image in your head like, okay, it should be like fun, so you don't need to worry too much. (FG1 P4)

> I love the music history and the context, that brings creativity because I get this image that I can relate to. I'm sure it adds something to my playing too. (FG1 P5)

As the course continued, students began to reconsider their preconceived ideas and ask more questions about the background and stories of the musical material. As captured in the interviews, this reorientation also involved feelings of discomfort, insecurity about one's own ideas, and a tendency to return to familiar stylistic or cultural categories:

> The other jazz songs were totally unfamiliar for me but then the bossa novas were a little bit more familiar. I noticed one lesson when someone said to me, 'I'm completely lost.' I should have said 'so am I,' but I didn't. (FG2 P3)

This insight suggests that students sometimes attempted to categorise the music by style or subgenre to stay within a comfort zone, while gradually accepting vulnerability and learning through discomfort. In the interviews, students also expressed frustration about

learning the musical content by ear in situ during the lessons, rather than using more traditional approaches, such as learning through written scores. They felt more confident practising beforehand and arriving ready to play what they knew and staying in their comfort zone:

> I tried to find a bass line for the song you suggested, and I found a different version. I practiced with that one at home and in the lesson was different. But it was kind of a great way to learn a new way to play the bass, I knew something about the structure, but it was a bit of a tricky situation because I practiced it wrongly. (FG1 P2)

However, as the discussion in the interview progressed, several students noted that practising alone at home can improve execution of a musical excerpt, but it does not necessarily foster innovation or learning new approaches. The discussion developed around the idea that remaining in one's comfort zone and learning only through familiar routines can lead students back toward familiar musical styles, making it harder to engage with unfamiliar forms of musical expression. Some students described this discomfort as a crucial element in learning new musical ideas:

> We realised that what we practiced at home didn't quite fit because there were many guitars and I could not play my part. So, we had to kind of relearn the song and piece it all together, you're learning not that 80% of the riff; you're learning that 20% to make it sound better. (FG1 P3)

> I didn't even know any of these songs beforehand. I thought we could not play them, but I was so surprised that in the end we can play each of the songs as a band, even if we don't understand the song beforehand. (FG2 P4)

These insights highlight that meaningful learning did not happen in isolation; the ensemble made it possible to learn through discomfort. As one student put it, 'I thought we could not play the songs, but I was so surprised that in the end we could play each of the songs as a band' (FG2 P4). That surprise was less about individual technique and more about what the group made possible. This collective dimension leads to the second theme: the building of inclusive micro-spaces in which risk-taking, support, and responsibility could be shared.

Building inclusive micro-spaces

Framed by artistic citizenship's emphasis on acting with and for others, I treated the band as a civic micro-public where roles, norms, and opportunities are made explicit and shared (Elliott et al., 2016). This approach aligns with Finnish music education debates on classrooms as democratic spaces where value emerges through doing together (Väkevä & Westerlund, 2007) and with teacher-guided co-creation in intercultural settings (Westerlund & Karlsen, 2017). Discomfort was treated as a pedagogical resource when working across difference (Kallio & Westerlund, 2020). Given the focus on intercultural humility, I invited learners to discuss how these inclusive micro-practices were experienced in the ensemble:

- Can you recall a moment you stepped outside your comfort zone?
- What made it possible to try something uncertain (e.g., a new role or a way of improvising)?
- How did you contribute to ensemble dynamics and discussions?

Participants consistently emphasised that a safe, supportive atmosphere and a manageable pace made risk-taking possible when learning together. In my field notes, I recorded moments of tense silence after unexpected situations and misunderstandings while playing, especially in the first lessons, when students met for the first time and brought different musical backgrounds into the room. In response, I slowed down the tempo of the class, provided clear instructions, avoided using complicated musical jargon, and offered short model examples of the musical excerpts before playing together. During the interviews, students described the atmosphere as supportive and safe, identifying it as an important condition for trial and error in ensemble practice. One participant explained, 'I really appreciate how the atmosphere is supportive and safe. Even though we have different skill levels, it's not about who plays best, everyone gets to try' (FG1 P4). Another participant emphasised the courage and patience involved: 'I'd say courage, being willing to jump in the deep end and patience. It takes lots of repetitions, lots of listening again, and trying a little differently' (FG1 P5).

These early tensions were connected to differences in language, musical background, and instrumental skill. At the beginning, students did not know each other, and the musical material placed different demands on different participants. For some, the repertoire was difficult, while others expected more challenge, as one student noted: 'I was personally hoping to jam more and learning to improvise with other people, and we didn't communicate so much while playing, that would have been interesting for me' (FG2 P5).

I observed that these moments required teacher guidance and group discussion to move the ensemble toward safer forms of risk-taking. Students took turns improvising, shared musical tasks, and gradually treated leadership as a role rather than a status. These practices helped distribute responsibility and lowered the threshold for others to step forward. Over time, such practices became micro-norms: small, repeated interactional routines that made risk-taking feel safe rather than punitive. Learners described how they began to co-create and rely on small interaction rules that helped them support one another. One participant summarised this as a practical rule: 'Never stop playing, if you keep the rhythm going, it still sounds okay' (FG2 P3). Another emphasised non-verbal communication: 'To let the others know you're finishing your solo, give a nod. That was the most important thing for me: communication' (FG2 P2).

I noted how these micro-norms emerged as simple, repeatable and structured micro-routines, such as rotating who counts in before the music starts; agreeing on one clear cue for endings; and a brief call-and-response warm-up exercise at the start of each lesson. I observed how these routines lowered the pressure in the group and created visible entry points for more active participation. Leadership was treated as a role rather than a status, distributed across the group by taking turns and reducing hesitation. Teacher guidance was also crucial for aligning individual learning needs with the group's progress. At times I intervened to help differentiate parts in the songs, rebalance the musical performance, or slow down the tempo so that everyone could hear how their lines fit into the music. Learners described how teacher guidance and individual feedback became crucial for building confidence in the group:

> When you suggested things like 'you take the higher notes,' I learned about the different layers, how the song is put together. The more you play, the more confident you get, and then you can concentrate on enjoying playing together. (FG1 P5)

The multicultural setting of the ensemble and the focus on intercultural engagement through culturally diverse repertoire made students' individual learning needs especially

varied. This made differentiated guidance important for supporting risk-taking and for working constructively with the diversity of the group. To support this, I used short group discussion moments to reflect on collective decision-making, such as deciding who leads, who supports, and when to start playing. As these routines settled, ensemble sound became more cohesive, and learners reported paying closer attention to one another rather than to notation alone. I guided this approach by emphasising listening to one another while playing. A recurring challenge was widening the attention from one's own line to the entire band. Several participants described this shift as demanding but necessary:

> Every time I came to the lesson, I had the target to really listen to what the rest are playing. And every time I was like, damn it, I still didn't hear properly because I was so focused on trying to keep my place in the score. (FG2 P2)

Overall, the observations and interview accounts show the ensemble functioning as a set of inclusive micro-spaces: small, repeatable practices that made risk-taking feel safe rather than punitive and spread responsibility across the group. These micro-spaces did not remove discomfort, but they made discomfort pedagogically workable. In the next section, I consider how such practices opened possibilities for re-articulating musical materials and imagining outcomes beyond superficial stylistic labelling.

Transculturally oriented outcomes

Framed by Schippers' (2010) cultural diversity continuum, I analysed participants' reflections and my field-journal notes as indicators of longer-horizon possibilities rather than immediate transcultural products. In this sense, transculturally oriented outcomes appeared first as curiosity, shifts in listening, and tentative changes in musical identity and belonging. To examine these longer-horizon changes, I asked questions such as:

- How did the ensemble experience affect the way you perceive music now?
- Did the focus on cultural diversity change the way you play? In what ways?
- How did dialogue and collaboration in the ensemble influence you outside the class?

Several learners described how unfamiliar grooves and musical expressions were incorporated into their musical interests. These experiences extended beyond the lessons into aspects of everyday life. For instance, students expressed incorporating the musical expressions acquired as embodied habits or routines. This cultural curiosity opened new ways to engage with music and transformed their listening habits. Some interview excerpts reflect on this experience:

> The cumbia basic beat, it's the offbeat. I find myself tapping it, it makes you even more interested in rhythm and exploring things, is a very simple thing, yet it can be complicated because it's not part of my rhythmic history. (FG1 P4)

> This song opened a new path for me, I found some playlists and collections of the same music, it was very interesting to investigate it and now I listen it all the time. (FG2 P1)

In the interviews, students discussed how the exposure to diverse musical traditions affected their perceptions of music, prompting creative ideas and expanding their musical language. They also discussed how they found themselves transferring those ideas to their own instrumental playing or creative processes, as one student said: 'I have some

inspiring thoughts about combining something traditional with Finnish lyrics and some psychedelic stuff. Could this happen here?' (FG1 P3). This insight indicates that the participants began to imagine cross-pollinations without pressure to produce an ultimate result framed into a specific musical category. Although such ideas may begin superficially and without deep intercultural understanding, they can provide directions for potential transculturally oriented outcomes in the future. Another field-journal moment concerned how a guitarist had little motivation to play a musical expression that did not traditionally include guitar. At first, the student appeared frustrated but tried to play the song. A few lessons later, the guitarist asked to play the song one more time, as they wanted to show their ideas about how the guitar could fit into the music. Students responded with supportive ideas on how to adapt the song based on the new guitar part, the group encouraged them to continue playing, and by the end, they appeared pleased with the outcome they produced. I read these not as a transcultural artistic result but as a negotiated re-articulation in progress.

When I asked learners to describe what had changed for them through the ensemble experience, they emphasised courage, mutual support, and permission to be vulnerable, which I interpreted as an indication that the ensemble functioned as a micro-public where risk is normalised and contributions matter. One participant explained, 'I gain a lot more confidence learning to play with other people. Previously I have been panicked fearful. I've lost a bit of the fear now' (FG1 P3). Another participant stated, 'What I got was communication and being allowed to be vulnerable sometimes' (FG2 P1).

During the interviews, students discussed how the ensemble experience influenced the way they communicated in musical contexts. They named confidence, patience, cooperation, and the ability to be vulnerable while playing together. Several linked these qualities to concrete ensemble norms, such as listening beyond one's own part, giving cues, and adjusting to others. As the discussion developed, participants connected these values to wider social relations, including respect for pluralism and communication across linguistic barriers. I interpret this as a modest democratic dimension of ensemble musicing: value shifted from individual display toward collective sound, and moments of disorientation became opportunities for learning together.

Taken together, these interviews and field notes suggest that transculturally oriented outcomes might begin in modest, embodied shifts, such as tapping unfamiliar offbeats on the bus, or in tentative cross-stylistic ideas tried out in a band rehearsal.

Conclusion

This case study examined how intercultural humility emerged in a Finnish liberal adult education ensemble when teacher-guided musicing with culturally diverse repertoire was deliberately oriented toward ethical intercultural engagement. In line with the sector's public mission of social cohesion, equality, and active citizenship (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017), the findings suggest a plausible pathway from initially superficial engagement with cultural diversity toward more reflective, ethically informed participation. Such movement was not linear, but it was observable in situated descriptions of classroom moments: students reconsidered assumptions after brief context-setting discussions; they accepted guided discomfort as part of learning; and they began to listen with and for others while sharing responsibility for the ensemble sound. Three pedagogical processes were especially consequential. First, introducing concise social and historical context reframed the musical content as community-situated practice, which prompted self-questioning and re-evaluation of cultural biases. Second, establishing inclusive micro-spaces made risk-taking more natural rather than

intimidating, distributed leadership, and lowered the threshold for participation. Third, attention shifted from individuality to the group, with learners naming confidence, patience, and willingness to be vulnerable as outcomes of playing together rather than of individual practice. Read from a praxial lens on musicing and artistic citizenship, these were not merely indirect outcomes; they were ethical and civic capacities cultivated in and through shared musical action (Elliott & Silverman, 2015; Elliott et al., 2016; Väkevä & Westerlund, 2007).

Considering Schippers' cultural diversity continuum, the course was not designed to produce a polished transcultural hybrid form of expression. Instead, the findings offered indicators of processes that may lead toward transculturally oriented outcomes: altered listening habits that travelled beyond class, exploratory cross-pollinating ideas, and shifts in identity and belonging (Schippers, 2010). These small, repeated practices are consistent with current Nordic debates that advocate for transformative processes beyond superficial exposure toward dialogic re-articulation in music pedagogy (Rinde & Christophersen, 2021; Westerlund & Karlsen, 2017). In this context, intercultural humility appeared less as a competence to be mastered than as an ongoing, power-aware stance of listening, dialogue, and reflexivity in action, coupled with responsibility as ethics-in-practice (Kallio, 2020; Thomson, 2024).

The findings also pointed to public-pedagogy implications for liberal adult education. When ensembles are treated as civic micro-publics, brief contextual prompts and negotiated routines can broaden what participants are able to perceive together (Wildemeersch, 2019), creating conditions in which plural voices are not only expressed but received in ways that influence living together (Butterwick & Roy, 2016). In that sense, the ensemble's democratic method, understood modestly as value generated through shared musicing, aligns with wider societal mandates of Finnish liberal adult education and its capacity to facilitate transformation at modest scales (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017; Kuusipalo et al., 2021; Väkevä & Westerlund, 2007).

Pedagogically, the study emphasised teacher guidance not as a means of prescribing artistic outcomes, but as a way of enabling ethical engagement, noticing emerging biases, and steering moments of disorientation toward collective learning rather than derailment. Institutionally, music programmes in adult education can integrate this approach by considering ensemble courses as civic spaces, supporting teacher autonomy for intercultural designs, and valuing process outcomes alongside technical performance (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017; Väkevä, 2025; Westerlund & Karlsen, 2017).

This study offers a limited view because of its single-site design, small volunteer sample, short time frame, and the teacher-researcher's dual role. Focus-group interviews were conducted in English, which may have constrained some participants. Results should therefore be read as context-bound and illustrative rather than generalisable. Nonetheless, the convergences between interview data and field notes lend credibility to the patterns described, and the mechanisms identified, such as context-setting, micro-norms, and distributed roles, may be adaptable across adult education music ensembles with comparable aims.

Future work could follow groups of adult learners longitudinally to examine whether early attentional shifts and exploratory cross-pollinations consolidate into sustained transcultural collaboration; compare different ensemble designs, including repertoire selection, skill levels, and students' backgrounds; and investigate how language support and translation practices affect participation in multilingual adult education settings. Mixed-methods studies could also triangulate participant reports with audio analysis of interaction to link perceived learning with observable ensemble behaviour.

Within adult education ensemble practice, this study observed how intercultural humility can begin to take shape. While the study does not claim rapid transformation or polished transcultural artefacts as outcomes, the findings suggest that teacher-guided musicing, grounded in ethical context and micro-democratic routines, can cultivate dispositions such as curiosity, reciprocity, reflexivity, and shared responsibility. These dispositions may support adults in engaging pluralistic futures within culturally diverse societies through musicing (Butterwick & Roy, 2016; Kallio, 2020; Schippers, 2010; Thomson, 2024; Wildemeersch, 2019).

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The author declares no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship or publication of this article.

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