

Comparing Approaches to Music Education in Malaysia and Bulgaria: Progress Towards a Qualitative Study

Nikolay Tomov Demerdzhiev
Johann Sebastian Bach Music Academy, Hong Kong

Abstract

This article is a working paper that previews the next stage in an ongoing comparative study. It explores nodal situations (Bode, 2013) within music education in Bulgaria (Demerdzhiev, 2024b) and compares them to the findings of a grounded theory-based study of the education of gifted music students, conducted in Malaysia from 2017 to 2019 (Demerdzhiev 2021a, 2024a). While Western-style music education tends to prioritize curriculum, evaluation, and technical equipment (López-Íñiguez & Westerlund, 2023), traditional music education in Southeast Asia and Southeast Europe places more emphasis on the teacher-student relationship and the development of students' artistic personalities, alongside instrumental technique (Brand, 2006; Demerdzhiev 2021a). Recent studies indicate that this holistic approach is crucial for nurturing young people's musical talents (Bork, 2016; McPherson, 2016; Gagné, 2023, López-Íñiguez, & McPherson, 2023). The project seeks to facilitate mutual learning and capacity improvement while encouraging a critical review of music education programs in both regions and beyond.

Keywords: Change, Comparative research, Gifted music education, Narratives, Qualitative studies

Theoretical Framework

Culture and arts schools in Bulgaria offer professional education in the arts, including music, for gifted students. Their framework has been discussed in comparative research (Demerdzhiev, 2024b) with a research sample from Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI), in Perak, Malaysia (Demerdzhiev, 2021a). The first paper in this study investigated the challenges associated with the transformation process of Bulgaria's music schools into a culture and art education system within the country's education framework from 1989 to the present day. The second part of the study developed the theoretical sampling process (central case sampling) of the preliminary comparative study. Acknowledging the influence of unfolding stories and narratives in driving change in music education (Westerlund 2020), new interview data were gathered in the summer of 2023. The two previous studies and the additional data are here analysed in the context of the transformation process to gain a deeper understanding of what might be considered 'successful' and sustainable change, given the new aims of Bulgaria's culture and art schools. The findings confirm that music education in Bulgaria is indeed shifting towards new transdisciplinary opportunities, but the process is not without its problems,

and new legislation is probably needed. One particular music school project in Sliwen stood out as a potential model for transforming the Bulgarian music education system. The project has been characterised by collaboration among stakeholders that include music schools, performing arts institutions, and tertiary education providers, nurturing students' passion and motivation to overcome challenges, and ensuring that students sustain their interest in music training in the long term.

In addition, the research has been conducted in the hope of exploring those 'nodes' or 'nodal situations' that are game changers that occur within uncertain contexts (according to Bode, 2013). It aims to capitalize on these findings and provide a concrete framework for how they can be integrated by policymakers. I believe this can happen through the power of the stories, since the power of stories, within institutions, lies in their ability to act as mediators between social structures and individual agencies (cf. Faber 2002 and Westerlund 2020). Stories provide a space for new narratives, granting us new forms of agency and offering fresh choices and options (Faber 2002, p. 25; Westerlund 2020, p. 16).

Finally, the current working paper fits into the broader theoretical framework of cooperative professionalism and trans-

formation in music education (Hahn et al. 2024; Westerlund 2002; Westerlund et al. 2018). For instance, the ‘Music Schools in Changing Societies’ initiative focuses on understanding music pedagogy beyond tutor-student interactions and psychological phenomena, analysing as an alternative the broader sociocultural, three-dimensional, institutional contexts of music education (Hahn et al. 2024, p. i). On the other hand, ‘The Teaching of Music in Nine Asian Nations’ addresses the opposite, as it states: ‘The narratives are not dry research, but stories and accounts that truly inspire us to believe more deeply and passionately in this wonderful profession which we proudly call music education’ (Brand 2006, p. i). The approach now proposed stands in the middle of both earlier studies mentioned here: while it aims to study institutional resilience and approaches to transformation towards new goals, my goal is also to portray vivid narratives from the teachers and students who have participated in the research. So, in summary, this paper presents work in progress towards a research study that will be characterised by engaging narratives that make reading enjoyable and useful not only for the academic community but also for a broader audience such as teachers, students and music enthusiasts.

Developing a Programme for Musically Talented Students in Malaysia

In the previous Sultan Idris Education University-based study (Demerdzhiev, 2021a), the present author created a Talent Identification System (TIS) partly based on Renzulli’s (1977) ‘Three Ring Conception of Giftedness’, which includes above-average ability, creativity, and task commitment and additionally incorporated into the university observation model checklists for screening students with high potential in dance and musical talents. The checklists could also be adapted for this project. The TIS was used to identify potentially talented students accepted into the university’s acceleration programme. Another achievement of this study was the development of a theoretical narrative that describes the environment, the circumstances and the challenges that musically gifted students experience on their path to professionalism.

A consequent study, framed as a similar case study based on the Grounded Theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1996), was conducted in late 2019, just before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study aimed to compare the Malaysian Gifted Programmes Permata (‘Jewel’) and Sekolah Seni (Arts School) and their

impact on tertiary music education in the country. The study delivered important insights regarding specific nodal situations that potentially could carry transformative processes (after Bode, 2013 and Westerland et al., 2018). Firstly, access to education emerged as a critical theme for all interview participants. They emphasized the significance of providing access to quality music education, highlighting the importance of reaching out to students from various socio-economic backgrounds and ensuring equal opportunities. This theme represents a node that can shape the future of music education in Malaysia by promoting inclusivity and widening participation. Secondly, the interviewees emphasized the need for a comprehensive curriculum. They stressed the importance of a well-rounded education encompassing various aspects of music education, including theory, performance, composition, and appreciation. This theme signifies a node that can guide the development of a curriculum that nurtures students' artistic abilities, fosters creativity, and equips them with a broad range of skills. Another important theme that emerged is the critical role of teacher training. The participants highlighted the necessity of providing comprehensive training programmes for music educators, equipping them with the skills and knowledge to deliver effective

music education. This theme acts as a node that emphasizes the importance of investing in professional development opportunities for teachers, ultimately enhancing the quality of music education in Malaysia. Finally, collaboration and networking were highlighted as crucial for the growth and development of music education in Malaysia. The interviewees emphasized the need for platforms, such as networking events, conferences, and workshops, that facilitate knowledge sharing, exchange of best practices, and collaboration among music educators, institutions, and organizations. This theme represents a node that encourages collaboration as a means to strengthen the music education ecosystem in Malaysia.

In summary, the research highlights a shared vision among interview participants for advancing music education in Malaysia. The common themes identified, acting as nodes, provide a framework for future initiatives aimed at enhancing music education, including comprehensive arts education, increased support for programmes like Permata and Sekolah Seni Malaysia, and the active involvement of universities in shaping the music education landscape.

Gifted Model Examples

Several authors used Renzulli's 'Three Ring Conception' in their studies. For in-

stance, Baum, Owen, and Oreck (1996) studied urban students who are economically disadvantaged or do not do well on written tests. Consequently, they are not often identified as having outstanding dance and music talents (Zimmerman, 2004). On the contrary, other works applied a combination of Gardner's (1983) 'Theory of Multiple Intelligences' and Renzulli's (1977) 'Three Ring Conception of Giftedness' for their studies. Such research was conducted by Kay and Subotnik (1994), Zimmerman (1995) and Clark and Zimmerman (1988). In these articles, Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences (musical, spatial, and kinaesthetic) and Renzulli's (1977, 1986) 'Three Ring Conceptions' were modified to include physical and cognitive skills in music and dance; motivation and creativity were defined as individual expression and cooperative problem-solving. That modification aligns with Zimmerman's (2004) suggestion that the ability to use multiple methods is crucial to ensure the quality of inquiry in gifted arts education. (Zimmerman, 2004, p. xxix).

Furthermore, contemporary gifted education has identified the potential of François Gagné's differentiated model of instructions, which studies the evolving nature of talent and distinguishes between giftedness and talent. As Gagné (2021)

argues, something that helped his model to gain international recognition was its employment 'not only in education but also in arts (especially music) and sports' (p. 9). López-Íñiguez & McPherson GE (2023) revealed that several studies have applied Gagne's model for research in music giftedness. By employing 'Preferred Reporting Systems for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses' they conducted a scoping review of the literature on caring approaches in the upbringing and education of musically gifted children. The relevant literature from the 1930s until nowadays was gathered manually and sourced from digital databases and relevant journals. From 652 publications, 506 records fell within the inclusion criteria. The detailed analysis process enabled the authors to categorize the studies by sampling location, methodology, quality assessment, and related topic criteria. Key themes in the selected research included addressing inequalities in access to gifted programs; recognizing the socio-emotional needs of gifted and 'twice-exceptional' students; providing a nurturing environment; emphasizing intrinsic motivation; developing coping strategies for overall well-being; and fostering healthy attitudes toward competition through collaboration and humility among peers. These themes were organized according to François Gagné's 'Differentiated

Model of Giftedness and Talent’, but of all these studies, only 14 included the aspect of care in their findings. Therefore, as the authors, López-Íñiguez & McPherson (2023), argue, ‘the most important finding of this review [...] is a serious lack of systematic approaches to the education of young, gifted musicians’ (p. 12).

Another concern that the authors identified was the lack of a strong theoretical framework in all but one of the studies. The research on the talent development of musically gifted adolescents in Singapore, led by Ho and Chong (2010), was identified as a key paper in applying Gagné’s talent model in nurturing musically gifted students. This paper identified macro themes that emerged from the findings of the study (Ho & Chong, 2010): ‘(1) natural abilities; (2) early musical experiences, (3) empowerment and motivation for success; (4) support from significant others; and the (5) cultural knowledge and values’ (p. 56). Given the cultural and geographical nearness between Singapore and Malaysia, it is not surprising that these five macro themes fit neatly into Demerdzhiev’s (2021a) three theoretical constructs that were developed from the UPSI-based research sample, namely ‘Environment Influences in the Multi-educational Role Strain’, ‘Exceptional Proficiency, Above Average Ability, Creativity and Application to a Task’ as

well as ‘Emotional Intelligence and the Positive Reinforcement of Self-identity as Factors Contributing to the Development of Young Talent’. These three theoretical constructs were featured as a part of gifted behaviour in a multiple intelligence model extracted from an organized theoretical narrative that describes the environment in which gifted music students in Malaysia grow, the circumstances which further and hinder their talent development, as well as the pluses and the minuses of the education at UPSI.

Objectives and Innovation Level

Apart from the theoretical sampling process, the primary goal of the present study is to enrich the existing knowledge about traditional methods of music education in Bulgaria and their impact on empowering gifted music students. Specifically, it explores how transdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and interdisciplinary approaches can shape the field in new and innovative ways. In personal communication with present author, Harkov (June 30, 2023), claimed that interdisciplinary education is the foundation of music education in Bulgaria. Examples of interdisciplinary education in the national-wide curriculum include elementary music theory and solfeggio, a traditional musical scale relat-

ed to Gregorian chants. Moreover, as Harkov argues, the transdisciplinary approach is the basis of the study of *Chamber Music*. In it, each student participates with the specific knowledge and skills relating either to a musical instrument or singing. Along with this, the student applies knowledge and skills in music history and music theory, without which quality musicianship in a chamber ensemble is impossible.

In further personal communication, Nenova (July 30, 2023) notes that multidisciplinary education is also part of the curriculum of the culture and arts schools in Bulgaria. A multidisciplinary approach is often proposed in the form of project-based education, whereby students with different majors participate in a project (for example stage performance) and every student contributes to this performance from the standpoint of their major, so the students learn to think in a multidisciplinary way. However, a recent study (Demerdzhiev, 2024b) has shown that since it has to align with the graduation requirements of the Education Ministry, the current curriculum is often perceived by students and teachers as inflexible and overburdened. Therefore, the objectives of the current project are to strengthen the trans, multi and interdisciplinary approaches to learning to improve students' learning experience within the music school system. The plan is to create

and promote a framework inspired by the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum network to provide students with the desired learning experience, which will be based on the traditions of music education in Bulgaria.

Moving forward, two special schools are central my research interest: the National Schools of Traditional Music and Folklore in Kotel and Shiroka Luka. By employing François Gagné's 'Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent' (2023) for an unusual case sampling, I hope to identify the scope and sequences in the traditional methods of music teaching that transform giftedness into talent; these factors have been highlighted as a core difference in the Western gifted music education approaches, in earlier research on music giftedness and talent development in Southeast Asia (Brand, 2006; López-Iñiguez & Westerlund, 2023; Demerdzhiev 2024a).

Also, I will address other unconventional settings such as the music school of the Roma community in Sliwen, led by the violinist Georgi Kalaidzhiev (sensitive case sampling), which will offer other valuable insights into how a music educational project can help to transform the whole community. This project is characterized by collaboration among stakeholders, including music schools, performing arts institutions, and tertiary education providers.

Thus it offers new and innovative ways of music school management that have the potential to become a model for the transformation of the music schools that will help them to newly define themselves amid changes in society and expectations among the stakeholders (Westerlund et al., 2019).

In summary, the current project is innovative because it meets the underserved students' needs (for instance, the needs of the Roma community) using the existing capabilities of the music schools but providing new learning experiences to all students through offering trans, inter, and multi-disciplinary approaches to learning.

Research Questions

The leading research question for this study is how the theoretical constructs from previous research samples apply to the culture and art schools in Bulgaria today, considering François Gagné's 'Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent', particularly the aspect of care. Furthermore, the study aims to explore how newly emerged knowledge shapes the understanding of success in music education, and how music teachers identify the teaching approaches that they believe contribute to the success of their work. As part of the transformative process, these teachers are agents of change, and their work is

the focus of the research.

As the study progresses, additional questions may arise. One such question would be the extent to which François Gagné's 'Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent' (2023) can be implemented in the field of music education in Bulgaria to enhance its effectiveness. Furthermore, theories from influential educators such as Piaget, Bruner, Ausubel, Vygotsky, Raymond and Gagné, who have translated abstract learning theories into concrete guidance for instructional designers (Willis, J., 2011), can provide further insights and potential strategies for enhancing gifted music education. The integration of these theories and their practical implementation in the field of gifted music education has the potential to become a crucial aspect of this research (Shuter-Dyson, R., 2002). It is important to acknowledge the significance of understanding the institutional context before applying external knowledge (Elliott, 1994). Therefore, I will conduct a thorough examination of the Culture & Arts School system in Bulgaria, including its policies, structure, and cultural influences. This deep inquiry will enable the integration of external knowledge with the existing system, leading to informed recommendations and potential advancements in music education within the Bulgarian context.

Goals

The goals of this comparative study are two-fold. Firstly, the study aims to expand the previous theoretical constructs beyond the initial sample of music schools and gather additional evidence to support them. This involves examining whether the findings from the recent research in Malaysia (Demerdzhiev 2021a, 2024a) apply to a wider range of music school educational settings (unusual and sensitive case samplings). Secondly, this study seeks to explore the teaching and learning practices within the culture and arts schools in Bulgaria and beyond, with a specific focus on traditional music education. I am especially interested in studying the non-conventional music teaching practices that have been transferred from generation to generation within traditional music education. I believe that this practice can bring fresh inspiration and motivation to teachers and students. Therefore, I aim to approach first the schools for traditional music and folklore in Kotel and Shiroka Luka (unusual case sampling), before approaching other unconventional settings like the music school of the Roma community in Sliwen that is led by the violinist Georgi Kalaidzhiev (sensitive case sampling).

In summary, the goals of this study are to expand theoretical constructs, gather

evidence, explore traditional teaching and learning practices, and understand the institutional context within culture and arts schools in Bulgaria. By pursuing these goals, my aim is to contribute to the field of music education and promote improvements, particularly in the area of transdisciplinary and inclusive education.

Methods

In a previous study at Sultan Idris Education University (Demerdzhiev, 2021a), Renzulli's 'Three Ring Conception of Giftedness', which encompasses above-average ability, creativity, and task commitment, was used to develop a framework for musically talented students. Building on this knowledge, I propose François Gagné's 'Differentiating Model of Giftedness and Talent' (2023) to reveal how music giftedness evolves into music talent within the Bulgarian music educational traditions. Following the recommendations of Auerbach & Silverstein (2003), I suggest five steps that will guide me in the next stages of my study: (i) stating the research concerns and theoretical framework; (ii) conducting critical case sampling; (iii) reviewing relevant literature; (iv) constructing a narrative interview; and (v) continuing the research process until theoretical saturation is reached.

First Step

According to Auerbach & Silverstein (2003), the first step for designing the next phase of this study would be to state the research concerns and theoretical framework that emerged from the first study. There are altogether six themes which emerged from the first Europe-based study, namely music pedagogy, identity, cooperation/competition, experience, comparison and five theoretical constructs (Demerdzhiev, 2016). The study also highlighted five propositions:

- The first proposition highlights the importance for their future survival of music schools addressing social phenomena and fulfilling their social responsibilities.
- The second emphasizes the need for modern music schools to integrate into the general educational system while preserving their unique expertise in teaching professional music.
- The third discusses the unique nature of each music school, based on its location and the reflection of the concerns of the current era in its profile.
- The fourth underscores the significance of considering music schools in state cultural and educational policies, as they have the potential for individual empowerment and social transformation.
- The fifth and final proposition highlights the importance of music schools being open-minded institutions that promote arts education without discrimination or intolerance.

These propositions have been explored also in the Malaysian context. The related study (Demerdzhiev 2024a) has highlighted the importance of the connection of tertiary education with all the different stakeholders in the country, such as the programmes for the musically gifted, *Permata* and *Sekolah Seni*. It has also identified nodal situations within the Malaysian music educational context. The analysis and evaluation of the interview data reveals that the following themes are equally important to all interview participants, despite their diverse backgrounds:

- **Access to Education:** All interviewees expressed the significance of providing access to quality education in music and the arts. They emphasized the importance of reaching out to students from various socio-economic backgrounds and ensuring equal opportunities for all.
- **Comprehensive Curriculum:** The interviewees highlighted the need for a comprehensive curriculum that encompasses various aspects of music education, including theory, perfor-

mance, composition, and appreciation. They stressed the importance of a well-rounded education that nurtures students' artistic abilities and fosters their creativity.

- **Teacher Training:** The participants emphasized the critical role of well-trained teachers in delivering effective music education. They highlighted the necessity of providing comprehensive training programs for music educators, equipping them with the skills and knowledge to facilitate engaging and impactful learning experiences for their students.
- **Collaboration and Networking:** Collaboration among music educators, institutions, and organizations was seen as crucial for the growth and development of music education in Malaysia. Interviewees emphasized the need for networking platforms, conferences, and workshops that facilitate knowledge sharing, exchange of best practices, and collaboration among stakeholders in the field.

These themes emerged as common priorities among the interview participants, demonstrating a shared vision for advancing music education in Malaysia, regardless of their diverse backgrounds.

Second Step

The second step, as described by Au-

erbach & Silverstein (2003, p.92), would be to do theoretical sampling, which can be understood as 'the process of choosing a research sample to extend and refine a theory.' The first and second parts of the theoretical sampling process have been completed and published (Demerdzhiev 2021a, 2024a). This research reports the findings of similar case sampling conducted in Malaysia featuring two case studies (Permata & Sekolah Seni) with a similar environment to the one in the Sultan Idris Education University. As part of this research, codes were created that highlighted the most important themes, similarities, and differences between the views of the interviewees. The research method used for this was thematic analysis (Braun/Clarke 2006). Fine-structure analysis (Froschauer/ Lueger 2003) identified hitherto unnoticed themes that are nevertheless important to us, and consequently six codes have been created: educational strategy & challenges, chance equality, success, talent, open-mindedness, and well-being. The codes created fit together into the theoretical narrative that emerged from the theoretical constructs from the previous UP-SI-based Malaysian project; hence the two case studies of Permata and Sekolah Seni are similar instances of case sampling that provide textual evidence for an extension of the theses previously developed. They

thus have further enriched our knowledge about the music school education environment in Malaysia.

The second part of the theoretical sampling process was central case sampling. For that research project, I chose the arts and culture schools in Bulgaria, because they represent a framework that has been said to define gifted music education (Landry, 1997) in an innovative way and thus it represents a central case sample for my study. At the same time, the case sample is convenient, as I have first-hand experience with the art and culture school's framework. It is convenient also because a relevant study was carried out a few years ago (Demerdzhiev, 2017).

The current research project is the third part of a theoretical sampling process that will address unusual and sensitive case settings. The schools in Kotel and Shiroka Luka offer unusual (for music schools) experiences of folkloric and traditional methods of music teaching, and Kalaidzhiev's project in Sliven offers valuable insights as a sensitive case setting, as he works with children from the Roma community, who are often marginalized within Bulgarian society.

Third Step

Auerbach & Silverstein (2013, p.100) recommend as a third step a review of the

available research literature: 'Review the research literature relevant to the new research sample to discover relevant background information and also to elaborate the research concerns and theoretical framework.'

In the current study, the literature (both academic & popular) related to music school education in Europe (especially Bulgaria and Austria) as well as in Southeast Asia (Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong) have been reviewed. Three books have to be mentioned in particular, as they have a special impact on the proposed study: *The Teaching of Music in Nine Asian Nations: Comparing Approaches to Music Education* by Manny Brand (2006); *Wende und Übergang: Die Kulturpolitik Bulgariens, 1989-2012* by Alexander Alexandrov (2017); and the book chapter by Anders Ronningen (2024), 'No kulturskole is an island,' included in *Music Schools in Changing Societies*, edited by Michaela Hahn, Cecilia Björk, and Heide Wetslerlund.

Manny Brand's book on music education in Southeast Asia is a particular inspiration for the present study of both traditional and non-traditional music education in Bulgaria. My aim is to make this research broadly engaging while still being academically rigorous. By exploring the educational practices, challenges,

and successes in the region, I hope to add to our understanding and offer some fresh perspectives. I want to share meaningful stories and personal experiences that not only inform but also inspire. This project will take a close look at the diverse music education practices in Bulgaria, highlighting its rich cultural and educational landscape. Just like Manny Brand, I hope to capture readers' interest and make a real contribution to the field of music education.

Furthermore, my research project on music education in Bulgaria takes inspiration from Alexandrov's (2017) work, which explores Bulgarian cultural policy. This book provides important background information for the current study. As Bulgarian music schools fall under the management of the Ministry of Culture, their future is closely tied to the country's cultural policies. Therefore, Alexandrov's research is an integral part of my project, offering valuable insights into the cultural and policy landscape that influences music education in Bulgaria. By incorporating Alexandrov's findings, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the broader cultural and political factors that shape the state of music education in the country.

Last but not least, 'No kulturskole is an island' by Anders Ronningen provides

a fresh illustration of how collaborative professionalism can help music schools transform by embracing new goals shaped by changing environments and community expectations. The chapter examines how to identify and overcome challenges to achieve better representation of minority groups and how institutions can make our communities more inclusive and open-minded. This aligns the learning outcomes from the *kulturskole* development project with the objectives of my proposal. In short, I aim to contribute to the common goal of making culture and arts schools in Bulgaria more accessible, inclusive, and welcoming to all members of the community.

Fourth Step

The fourth step involves constructing a set of narrative interviews, incorporating questions retained from the previous studies and new issues emerging from the literature review, following the guidelines of Auerbach and Silverstein (2003, p.101). In a similar case study (Demerdzhiev, 2024a), experts from the Permata Music Programme and Sekolah Seni were approached, while for the central sampling case study (Demerdzhiev, 2024b), professionals and experts from music school education in Bulgaria were interviewed. The question covered themes such as edu-

cational strategy, chance equality, success, talent, open-mindedness, and well-being. For the current unusual or sensitive case sampling, the interview questions will address similar themes to those addressed in earlier research, while also including new inquiries; for example regarding the opportunities for inter- and transdisciplinary education, the question of care within the Bulgarian talent development practices, prevalent challenges in education such as dealing with prejudice and social stigma, the future of professional music education in Bulgaria, and the definition of a ‘successful’ music school.

Fifth step

The last step, according to Auerbach & Silverstein (2003) is to ‘Continue this process until theoretical saturation is reached’ (p.102).

The theoretical saturation (the process when the knowledge obtained from the interview subjects begins to repeat what already had been said) will occur as the proposed new study progresses. The focus of the current study will be therefore on a comparison between the previous theoretical narrative, associated with the typical

mdw-based music school², and the associated central case sampling (Demerdzhiev, 2016 & 2017; Demerdzhiev 2024b), the theoretical constructs of the UPSI-based initial study and the associated similar case sampling (Demerdzhiev, 2021; Demerdzhiev 2024a), and the newly created theoretical narrative from Bulgaria based on the local traditional music school experts and samples from other non-traditional music educators’ settings.

Conclusions

The present working paper has outlined the background and methodology of an innovative, ongoing pedagogical project to improve the education of gifted students by comparing interventions in two markedly different contexts, particularly Bulgaria and Malaysia. The findings of this project will have implications for music education in more general contexts and add to our understanding of how best to provide gifted students with the opportunities and challenges they require, and how to integrate music into education more generally, to benefit society as a whole.

² The renowned University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna is commonly known by the abbreviation ‘mdw’.

References

- Alexandrov, A. (2017). *Wende und Übergang: Die Kulturpolitik Bulgariens, 1989-2012* (p. 272). LIT Verlag GmbH & Co. KG.
- Auerbach, C. & Silverstein, L. B. 2003. *Qualitative data: An introduction to coding and analysis* (Vol. 21). New York and London: NYU Press.
- Brand, M. (2006). *The Teaching of Music in Nine Asian Nations: Comparing Approaches to Music Education*. Edwin Mellen Press
- Bode, C. (2013). The theory and poetics of future narratives: A narrative. Future narratives: *Theory, poetics, and media-historical moment, 1*, 1-105. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110272376.1>
- Braun, Virginia & Clarke, Victoria (2006), Using thematic analyses in psychology. In *Qualitative Research in Psychology 3* (2), pp. 77-101.
- Demerdzhiev, Nikolay (2016), Music schools in international comparison. *Bulgarian Musicology*, 2-3, 176-195.
- Demerdzhiev, Nikolay (2017). *Kunst- und Kulturschulen in Bulgarien*, Südwestdeutscher Verlag für Hochschulschriften
- Demerdzhiev, N. (2021a). Developing a Program for Gifted Music Students in Malaysia. *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia*, 37. <https://kyotoreview.org/trendsetters/developing-a-program-for-gifted-music-students-in-malaysia/>
- Demerdzhiev, N. (2024a). *A Comparative Study of Gifted Music Programs in Malaysia: The Impact on Tertiary Music Education and Talent Development*. ASR: CMU Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, 11(2), e2024017. <https://doi.org/10.12982/CMUJASR.2024.017>
- Demerdzhiev, N (2024b). 'Culture and arts schools in transformation: Narratives from Bulgaria'. The Finnish Journal of Music Education - FJME, special issue, 01 2024 vol. 27.
- Elliott, D. J. (1994), *Music, education and schooling*. In M.McCarthy (Ed.), *Winds of change: A colloquium in music education with Charles Fowler and David J. Elliott: Uni-versity of Maryland at College Park, April 3, 1993* (pp. 24-45). New York:

- American Council for the Arts in cooperation with the University of Maryland at College Park.
- Faber, B. D. 2002. *Community action and organizational change: Image, narrative, identity*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Froschauer, Ulrike & Lueger, Manfred (2003), *Das qualitative Interview: Zur Praxis interpretativer Analyse sozialer Systeme*. Wien: WUV/UTB
- Gardner, H (1983), *Frame of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*, New York: Basic Books.
- Goleman, D. (1996). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Gagné, F. (2023). The integrative model of talent development (IMTD). In *From giftedness to gifted education: reflecting theory in practice*. (pp. 149-183). Routledge.
- Gagné, F. (2020). *Differentiating giftedness from talent: The DMGT perspective on talent development*. Routledge.
- Hahn, M., Björk, C., & Westerlund, H. (Eds.). (2024). *Music Schools in Changing Societies: How Collaborative Professionalism Can Transform Music Education*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003365808>
- Kay, S. L., & Subotnik, R. F. (1994). *Talent beyond words: Unveiling spatial, expressive, kinaesthetic, and musical talent young children*. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 38(2), 70-74.
- Landry, C. (1997). *From the art of the state to the state of the art: Bulgaria's cultural policy in transition*. The Council of Europe. Strasbourg.
- López-Íñiguez, G. & Westerlund, H., 'The Politics of Care in the Education of Children Gifted for Music: A Systems View', in Karin S. Hendricks (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Care in Music Education*, Oxford Handbooks (2023; online edn, Oxford Academic, 16 Aug. 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197611654.013.13>.
- López-Íñiguez, G. & McPherson, G.E. (2023) Caring approaches to young, gifted music learners' education: a PRISMA scoping review. *Front. Psychol.* 14:1167292. <https://doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1167292>

- Renzulli, Jo. (1977), *The enrichment triad mode: A guide for developing defensible programs for the gifted and talented*. Mansfield Center, Conn.: Creative Learning Press.
- Renzulli, J. (1978). *What makes giftedness? Re-examining a definition*. Phi Delta Kappan 60, 180-184, 261.
- Renzulli, J.S. (1986). The three-ring conception of giftedness: A developmental model for creative productivity. In: R. J. Sternberg & J. E. Davidson (Eds.), *Conception of giftedness* (pp.53-92). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Senge, P. M., (2006). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. London: Random House.
- Shuter-Dyson, R. (2002). Introduction: Looking multiples ways in research. In *The new handbook of research on music teaching and learning: A project of the Music Educators National Conference* (pp. 277-278). Oxford University Press.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. M. (1997). *Grounded theory in practice*. Sage.
- Westerlund, H., Väkevä, L., & Ilmola-Sheppard, L. (2019). How music schools justify themselves. *The future of music schools—European perspectives*, 15-33.
- Westerlund, H. M. (2020). Stories and narratives as agencies of change in music education: narrative mania or a resource for developing transformative music education professionalism? *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, (223), 7-25.
- Zimmerman, E. (1995). *Factors influencing the art education of artistically talented girls*. The Journal of Secondary Gifted Education, 6(2), 103-112.
- Zimmerman, E. (2004), *Artistically and Musically Talented Student*, California: Corwin Press.