

# Centering Student Voice and Agency in Cross-Cultural Music Classrooms: The Expression–Negotiation–Co-creation Model

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**Abstract:** Global student mobility makes music classrooms culturally mixed, but teaching remains teacher-centred, while student voice is ignored. Drawing on critical pedagogy and Self-Determination Theory, this paper phases the Expression–Negotiation–Co-creation model for centring student agency. Expression enables students to clarify diverse musical identities; Negotiation shares power via rotating facilitation and anonymous feedback; Co-creation develops competence through role rotation, quick peer loops, and interdisciplinary Project Weeks. The three phases map to SDT needs: autonomy, relatedness, competence to sustain motivation. We discuss curriculum design, teacher learning cycles, policy supports, and research steps for testing this models.

**Keywords:** Student Voice, Expression-Negotiation-Co-creation Model, Cross-cultural Music Education, Self-Determination Theory, Critical Pedagogy.

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## 1. Introduction

In today's world, cross-border mobility among students and teachers is increasingly common. International schools and culturally diverse mainstream schools have become micro examples of global multiculturalism. In music classrooms, the teacher-centred model still holds strong. Students take only a minimal part in curricular discussion and setting assessment rules. This imbalance of classroom authority directly undermines the inclusiveness and equity. Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) tries to reach these.

Looking at studies from 1995–2020. They show “student voice” has drawn a lot of notice in educational research. It is still missing in music-education writing. The existing writings mostly stay with views that teachers control. Research across countries adds proof that students get seen as ones who can change schools. They can help build an inclusive school culture better.

In this situation, the current article brings together critical pedagogy, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and recent work on student agency in music education. It then puts forward a three-part Expression–Negotiation–Co-creation model. Using a mix of literature review and model building, the study accomplishes three objectives. 1) it carefully maps main talks about student voice, agency and inclusive teaching in research from 2021 to 2025. 2) It makes clear the inside logic of the three-part model. It also shows how it matches SDT's three main needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. 3) It looks into what the model means for curriculum design, teacher professional growth, and educational policy. At the same time, it outlines specific ways for future real-world testing.

This model gives a tool. It looks at theory critically, also works in practice. It wants to help music classrooms in global settings. These classrooms can become public spaces. They value students' cultural identities and helps move educational fairness forward. It helps cultures live together in music education.

## 2. Theoretical Foundations

### 2.1. Critical Pedagogy and the Culturally Sustaining Lens

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* argues that students absorb knowledge from teachers, they are unable to develop critical consciousness. The true essence of education, he contends, lies in dialogue and co-construction that helps learners “reposition themselves within their own humanity.” This basic idea set up the theory for Critical Pedagogy, a field that keeps dealing with big issues. These issues are about power setups. They are about forming identities and freeing how people see themselves<sup>[1]</sup>.

In music education, Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) and Culturally Sustaining Teaching (CST) have carried this vision forward. They stress classrooms must do more than just show multicultural content in a surface way. Students should take an active part in building culture, and helps fight the hidden impacts of epistemic colonisation. It helps them work toward social justice<sup>[2]</sup>. This matters a lot in transnational or international school settings, where have clear cultural and language differences. They need a teaching approach, it must be aware in a critical way and be based on real practice and must share out classroom authority.

### 2.2. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Student Motivation

Self-Determination Theory points to three basic psychological needs. They are autonomy, competence and relatedness. Studies show teachers make classroom environments. Students' intrinsic motivation and sustained engagement increase markedly.

In music-education writing, SDT serves as a “unified analytic framework,” it brings together motivation theories and weaves together previously fragmented motivation theories. The theory let students share their own takes on music. Let them actively try and get good at music skills,

engage in deep exchanges with peers and teachers effectively. This lights up their intrinsic motivation. They are part of this article's "Expression–Negotiation–Co-creation" three-part model.

### 2.3. Student Agency in Music Education

In a music-education setting, agency is usually defined this way. "Students' capacity to make choices on their own, speak up about who they are and affect how others experience things in musical practice." Vecchio did a qualitative study that looked at composition in secondary instrumental groups. It shows agency happens in a changing "create → reflect → re-create" cycle. When classroom structures and teacher–student power relations are reset, Students feel more ownership and creative output rise significantly[3].

Teachers have ideas about agency. Technological platforms get used in specific settings, curriculum planning, improvisation workshops, modern-band rehearsals. Both expand the possibilities for students' agency to develop.

## 3. Selective Literature Review

### 3.1. Research Trajectories of "Student Voice"

Viewed through the twin lenses of critical pedagogy and culturally sustaining teaching, *student voice* is considered a key. It breaking one-sided power structures of the classroom. Yet a systematic survey of literature from 1995 to 2020 shows that studies put student voice first in music education are scarce. The small number that exist focus mostly on settings outside regular classes. Such as after-school groups and choirs. Students lead the research design themselves, and carry out long-term practice in classrooms are clearly missing.

Accordingly, future work must dig into daily music-class settings. It must do this through curriculum changes and through assessment reforms. It must give real importance to student voice and it will shrink the ongoing gap between research and practice<sup>[4]</sup>.

### 3.2. Expression and Creation

Expression is the starting point. It gets the cycle of student agency moving. These allow students express themselves in many ways. Let students express themselves differently. Teachers give different choices in how hard the music is. These are in how to present things, the way about use tools for checking progress. Rap, movement, visual symbols are examples, students' learning motivation and sustained classroom engagement goes up a lot[5].

Taking this further, there is a three-step sequence for original songs. It includes writing lyrics, making up music and recording. This forms a full chain of practice, helps students get better creative capacity. It helps them get better at music skills, enhances emotional regulation skills and strengthens their sense of who they are stronger[6].

Modern Band courses let learners pick popular music and instruments freely. They expand the students' musical experience and study. This way makes students feel more like they belong in class and cultural presence stronger[7]. These practices support the growth of agency and set a strong base for future questions and research.

### 3.3. The Significance of Individual Student Agency

Agency is about more than just making sure students' ideas get heard. It requires students take part in class in a

meaningful way. They participate meaningfully in the classroom, and use real influence over the direction of instruction.

One effective route is link students' music experiences outside school with learning in class. A long-term study in Finland shows that the teenagers do music practices after school. They make content for social media and start their own bands. These things affect how they see themselves in class and make them talk more deeply with teachers<sup>[8]</sup>. More proof indicates that when teachers deny the value of individual creativity, Students' willingness to take action goes down a lot. Classrooms welcome people talk freely, and improvisation significantly heighten student agency<sup>[9]</sup>.

Educators can set up strong ways for students to take part in class. This lets educators meet SDT's core needs. These are autonomy, competence and relatedness. It also helps build agency step by step. This creates a good cycle goes "practice-participation-impact."

## 4. The "Expression–Negotiation–Co-creation" Triadic Model

### 4.1. Expression

The expression phase matches SDT's need for autonomy. It gives students a safe space. This is an accessible space that can show who they are here. thereby granting them the sense of being *heard* and seen as subjects.

A large-scale review of music-and-movement pedagogy shows that combine rhythm, gesture, tempo and moving in space, students can use their bodies to show pitch, dynamics and emotion, even if they don't have words or theory terms. It is like adding live subtitles and emojis to music<sup>[10]</sup>.

Teaching practice can be set up in three steps : 1) Foundational imitation phase. The teacher leads the whole class. They do standard basic movements, sets a shared way to reference expression. 2) Variational substitution phase. Students put their own gestures in place of the ones shown. For example, they change the curve of an arm to show dynamic swells, this adds creativity while staying within the frame. 3) Original generation phase. Small groups design a complete movement for a short chosen melody. They have one person teach it to the class, so the "create to teach" back-and-forth strengthens deep memory of how movement works.

This step-by-step way turns musical knowledge into a real, hands-on activity. Musical knowledge is usually learned by listening or reading, it helps certain students a lot. These are learners who are hard of hearing, and for students with weak pulse, it lets their connect their body and rhythm, help them fit into lessons more easily.

Because the practice is both diverse and personalised, it directly meets students' need for autonomy. In the process, it accumulates cultural symbols and emotional experiences. They are for the deep talks in the next negotiation phase.

### 4.2. Negotiation

The negotiation phase matches the autonomy need in Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Its core to weave individual voices into group choices and do this through equal talks. These are between teachers and students among classmates, reach a changing balance of power in the classroom.

In real classroom talks, there are two ways: First is Rotating facilitation. In each micro-unit of teaching, pick a student leader who takes turns, manage time and sum up content. They encourage this leader to initiate questions, so it makes a

multi-voiced discussion space.

Second is Anonymous feedback channel. Gather suggestions through anonymous submissions. These are about choosing music, changing difficulty, making rehearsal steps better. The teacher sets a daily time to answer and put workable ideas into use. This makes sure students' ideas get quick replies and turn into real actions.

Practical strategies: 1) Rotating facilitation. In each micro-unit, a student takes charge of timekeeping. They sum up what's covered, start questions. Thereby activating discussion going with many voices. 2) Anonymous feedback. Collect suggestions on repertoire, how hard things are, rehearsal flow. The teacher responds at set times and put workable ideas into practice. This connects each student's worries with the group's goals. 3) Four negotiation rules. Do not interrupt; encourage questioning; give concrete examples instead of unclear views; provide quick responses. The teacher writes down changes and track of how often students speak. They also rating classroom equity<sup>[11]</sup>. 4) There is a clear way to plan the curriculum together with students. First, create a structured table with three columns: "What I Want to Learn" (content I hope to get good at), "What I Can Teach" (experience I can share) and "What I Am Curious About" (topics I want to explore). Students fill it out on their own. The teacher then finds common needs in the answers and find unique interests in the responses, and use these as the main base for planning the course.

This negotiation process makes students truly feel they own the course design. It makes their emotional connection to the classroom and their sense of duty stronger. It also builds up the thinking and feeling needed for later parts of teaching.

### 4.3. Co-creation

The co-creation phase connects directly to the competence part of Self-Determination Theory (SDT). It matches the theory of Culturally Sustaining Teaching's goal to reproduce cultural capital.

1) Unique value of the physical band / ensemble rehearsal room

A school may offer a special rehearsal studio and performance stage, the quick on-site interaction and direct feedback are hard to copy in a digital environment. So the moving tension and energy flow from body collaboration.

Actionable pathways:

Role rotation. Across the rehearsal cycle, students take turns being conductor, arranger, recording engineer or stage manager. Trying different roles makes their understanding of the co-creative process deeper.

Instant feedback loop. Use a "5-minute play+2-minute feedback" cycle. Peers provide targeted feedback on performance details and teamwork. Portable recorders catch each take. Clips go up to a class cloud drive. for self- and peer review.

Showcase platform. Plan community flash-mob performances or on-campus concerts. Live shows allow students to feel the social impact of their work. This strengthens artistic success and identity formation.

2) Interdisciplinary Project Week: Music × Arts × Community (1–2 weeks)

A one- to two-week Project Week links music with drama, dance or local-history courses. It creates results that mix different subjects and stay connected to culture.

Ideate. A team of teachers from different subjects designs the course framework together, guides students do

community surveys and fieldwork. They pick out creative ideas rooted in the local area.

Iterate. Workshop sessions drive deeper creation across set design, blocking, lighting and music production. Each day ends with a meeting that teachers and students give feedback together, they make improvements right away.

Impact. Breaking the classroom boundary. They are held in theatres, community-cultural centres or outdoor spaces. Parents, residents, staffs from different subjects and non-arts teachers form a varied review group, create an open, interactive space.

For wider sharing, the whole production is edited into a short documentary that promoted online. This sets up a feedback loop across different areas to expands public impact. Assessment uses a four-part mixed model: students evaluate themselves and each other and starts reflection. Teachers give professional opinions and the community offers helpful feedback. Putting these data together leads to quick reflection, it helps improvement of teaching practice.

## 5. Discussion and Implications

### 5.1. Curriculum Design

The triadic model gives a clear step-by-step logic for teaching design. Its use needs considerations. It must fully get students to take charge and closely linking learning to socio-cultural contexts.

Initial phase. Teachers should focus on how deeply students take part, they need to build different platforms for expression that will spark creativity. From there, they can slowly guide learners toward helping each other. while need to set up ways for teachers to think about their work and to change courses quickly.

Creation and assessment. The importance of cultural interpretation must be clear. This makes sure that in group projects students not only display musical skills but also explain the cultural background of their work. Its deeper meaning for personal growth and community connection.

Project-to-project continuity. After each big project, teachers help students look back at their experiences. These cover the "Expression → Negotiation → Co-creation" phases, work together to plan the next theme's advanced pathway. This lets learning go deep over time, builds ability through repeated improvement.

For students with special educational needs, whether sensory, learning or motor, curriculum design must include specific help. Examples include visual or tactile beat tools (e.g., visual metronomes, vibration cues), simplified or bigger notation, multitrack slow-tempo accompaniments or broken-down rhythm materials, peer tutoring and grouped by different levels. There are also flexible changes to assessment rules and deadlines.

Putting in a friendly needs support system, the design phase ensures that every step of the "Expression → Negotiation → Co-creation" model is fair and open to all learners, not just work for most students<sup>[12]</sup>.

### 5.2. From Theoretical Insight to Practice

Surveys indicate that most music teachers agree with culturally responsive teaching, keeping it going in practice often runs into many real problems. To narrow the gap between theoretical understanding and classroom reality, here is a suggested way:

1) Record practice on video. Using simple tools such as a

smartphone and tripod. record about ten-minute parts of teaching that focus on the teacher's questions, ways of interacting and whole-class dialogue.

2) Facilitated peer analysis. Divide the teaching staff into small groups, each has three to five members. In organized discussions, each group looks at the recorded clips systematically. They study teaching behaviours, interaction patterns and contextual expression.

3) Iterative cycles. Conduct this record-and-analyse process every three to four weeks.

As time passes, culturally responsive principles will become part of daily practice. Teachers' teaching skills and learned knowledge will improve. So will students' interaction abilities and grasp of content. These gains should be easy to see.

### 5.3. Assessment Systems and Resource Allocation

The UK's critical report *The Music Literacy Gap* says that assessment systems stuck on Western classical score-reading, and performance skills will keep making cultural and class inequalities worse[13]. The triadic model gives three big policy ideas in reply:

1) Curricula and standards. National and regional music syllabuses should name cultural interpretation and collaborative co-creation as key skills. They should let students have more control. This gives them more room to take part and be creative.

2) Funding and projects. Establish a Co-creation Fund to pay for student–community projects, inter-school bands and interdisciplinary productions. When moving around school ensemble budgets, limit how much large traditional orchestras get, and give more support for modern bands and ethnic-instrument groups. This covers equipment maintenance, materials and performance costs.

3) Teacher qualification and evaluation. Future follow-ups can move forward in three ways. Track students' learning motivation, cultural identity and creative output over time across regions; compare learning results from in-person rehearsals and Project Week–style co-creation across different cases; develop and check teacher and student level scales that aligned with the triadic model by using strong data-privacy protections.

## 6. Conclusion

Based on critical pedagogy and Self-Determination Theory, this study creates a triadic “Expression→Negotiation→Co-creation” model. It uses this way of looking at and to explain two phenomena orderly. First is how power relations change in cross-cultural music classrooms. Second is the dynamic ways cultural reproduction works. On the practical level, a combined review of recent empirical and review studies finds strategies, including student-led learning, redesigned rehearsal environments and an interdisciplinary Project Week. It offers specific advice on three main issues. (1) adapting instruction for special-education needs, (2) Improving teachers' professional skills, (3) Making policy-level resource allocation better.

On the research side, the paper points out three empirical pathways. These are longitudinal tracking, iterative curriculum design and assessment-scale development. It supports design-based research that also supports having

students act as co-researchers, and makes sure future model checks and improvement the demands. These are academic strictness and cultural care.

Overall, the proposed triadic model provides a clear plan that based on theory but can be used in practice. It works for music classrooms in a global setting and builds a sustainable foundation. This model helps make culturally responsive teaching stronger across different subjects.

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