

Barriers and energizers for change: A study of tensions and agency in a music education partnership project between Norway and India

Brit Ågot Brøske, The Norwegian Academy of Music

This paper reports from a case study on an intercultural music education partnership project between India and Norway. The project aims to develop music education for children in schools and music teacher education in India, create mobility possibilities for students and teachers between India and Norway, and enhance intercultural competence among students and teachers in both countries.

The aim of the research study is to answer the following research questions:

- What can be identified as tensions experienced by participants in the project?
- What can be possible causes to the tensions?
- How do the tensions affect agency in the project?

The theoretical and analytical framework for the study is cultural-historical activity theory (AT) (Engeström & Sannino, 2021). AT is especially useful when studying two or more interacting activity systems working together to develop shared objects and activities. Within AT, contradictions and tensions is seen as energizers for change. Engeström and Sannino (2011) developed a framework for identifying discursive manifestations of contradictions, and this framework is especially useful when trying to identify and analyse systemic causes to tensions occurring in cross-cultural and inter-institutional development projects, such as this research study.

The empirical material in the research study consist of audio-recordings of six project group meetings, with different participants from both India and Norway in the period from January 2021 to November 2021. The meetings were a regular part of the collaborative work between India and Norway. Preliminary results show that there are tensions experienced by participants that relate to issues such as learner/teacher-centred music education, hierarchical/democratic relationships, detailed instrumentalism/teacher creativity, and issues around handling the pandemic. I will discuss how the participants in the collaboration handle possible underlying conflicts and dilemmas, and relate the findings to perspectives on institutionalized structures and transformative agency (Haapasaari et al., 2014).

Engeström, Y., & Sannino, A. (2011). Discursive manifestations of contradictions in organizational change efforts: A methodological framework. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 24(3), 368–387. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09534811111132758>

Engeström, Y., & Sannino, A. (2021). From mediated actions to heterogenous coalitions: Four generations of activity-theoretical studies of work and learning. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 28(1), 4–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10749039.2020.1806328>

Haapasaari, A., Engeström, Y., & Kerosuo, H. (2014). The emergence of learners' transformative agency in a Change Laboratory intervention. *Journal of Education and Work*, 29, 1–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2014.900168>