

ABSTRACT to NNMPF 2014

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“The double dialogicality” reflected in children’s music teaching

The following elaborates on the present study of mine, i.e. the PhD-project in progress, called “Signing and Singing – Children in Teaching Dialogues”. However, I found it appropriate to pragmatically select only some parts of it here, in order to open up for particular discussions within our field. Hence, I will leave out some facts and results in my study referred to, instead ending up with addressing an issue of interest for the ongoing philosophical debate in music education; the contentious issue of the current neo-liberalist discourse (and some sub-discourses implied).

By way of introduction, some words about my study and the relation to the aim in this abstract are needed. The primary research interest is to explore social premises for learning and teaching. That includes probing into the communicative premises for creativity in general. More specifically, my concern is how cultural and social dimensions constitute aesthetic learning, particular young people’s musical learning. In focus is children’s co-constructed teaching. What makes sense for them when coming together for a particular musical task? And what role does culture play in their collaborative work? With these research questions in mind I try to conceive of how some children, aged 9-10, organize their joint music-pedagogical work together in terms of communication.

Theoretically I base my findings on a sociocultural perspective, discussing the ideas of classical theorists as Bakhtin, Vygotsky and Bruner. In the music-educational context Hultberg (2000, 2007, 2009), Barrett (2006, 2012), Johansson (2012), Lagergren (2012), Mars (2012) and Wallerstedt et al. (2013) with others represent this overall epistemological framework. The ambition is to contribute with an alternative epistemology in contrast to the traditional experimental one in research of children’s musicality. Experimental designs with a cognitivist (somewhat positivist) approach are argued to embrace a reductionist approach in its epistemological ambition. I also point at the ethical problem in the methodology of putting young individual’s musical action into decontextualized and rigid procedures. For example, it is really ethical unproblematic to tell, or not tell, children that the research aims at mapping out the children’s musical mistakes in terms of errors and inaccuracies? And, further, is it that kind of facts that takes us to subtle understandings of social learning in arts? This discussion has to do with underlying statements and is resonant with the music-educationalists who argue that the philosophical view on music and human beings

resides behind the conducted research (cf. Alerby & Ferm, 2005; Olsson, 1993; Pio & Varköy, 2012; Varköy, 2009, 2012; Wallerstedt, 2010). It is thus possible to look at musical experiences in a more existential way, beyond a mentalist (cognitivist) framing.

In my analysis as well as in my conclusive reasoning, however, I draw on Linell's (2009, 2010, 2011) dialogue-theoretical (and sociocultural) writings. They outline principles for how to analyze dialogical sense-making within communicative activities. Linell (ibid.) introduces two concepts pertinent to my study, and this abstract as well: the notion of "the double dialogicality" and the notion of CATs. In short, *the double dialogicality* implies the actors' orientation to both the interactional level in situ – the situated social interaction as it unfolds on the interpersonal level, and the actors' simultaneous orientation to the culturally constituted level. The latter embeds cultural values, conventions and established knowledge forms throughout history. In a CAT – "a communicative activity type" – people engage in a situation type in which a central task for the participants is to interpret the *situation definition* in order to make joint sense and to establish intersubjectivity as a basis for their actions.

In my present study, one of the main results is the particular way the participants chose to organize their singing and signing activities. They employed different kinds of cultural resources in its multiplicity, and one type of resource in their teaching was an organizing resource, leaning on an established social convention; the institutional knowledge development. The children framed their conversations in a formal style, clearly orienting to a particular CAT: to do a music lesson in a schooling way. That implies how they indulged in the reproduction of a traditional school-discourse, consistently acting out the social roles of acting a teacher vs. a pupil (the instructor and the apprentice respectively). For example, they were focused and very structured in their work, not talking about other things than the task. Written texts and notations were crucial aids for their pedagogic ideal of memorizing and reproducing the songs. Moreover, according to earlier research conversations in school are permeated by *evaluations*. My participants showed a distinctive preference for a highly evaluative discourse, realized in a routinized, recurrent fashion.

In sum, the children in my study displayed skills in "the task culture" of school (Ericsson & Lindgren, 2010) and in social skills as well. They focused on reproductive elements of music, pedagogy and social attitudes, constructing tasks, making sense of the structure of a school-lesson (here called a CAT). So they displayed *a double dialogicality*. They also embodied a neo-liberalist discourse, I would say, emphasizing efficacy, instrumentality and meta-awareness. The same discourse has produced the idea of the autonomous, self-dependent and productive individual, in need of knowledge that allows for assessment and measurement (cf. Aspelin, 1999, 2012; Aspelin & Persson, 2011; Bergqvist, 2010, Bergqvist & Säljö, 2004; Biesta, 2009a, 2009b, 2011; Pio, 2009; Pio & Varköy, 2012; Varköy, 2003, 2009, 2012). Lindgren (2013) points at the neo-liberalist school-discourse in music as one of the two current influences in music-educational practice in elementary school. Folkestad (2006) urges us to consider both informal and formal ways of learning, and the relations between those knowledge forms.

What does my empirical main result imply in terms of a creative, experience-based pedagogy and a creative production of musical knowledge? It is possible to problematize further on precisely the links accounted for above between communication, school-

discourses, framing activities, culture and musical knowledge development. I will come back to this issue in the following paper to NNMPF.

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