Meaning making in Swedish compulsory schools – What do we know and what do we need to investigate further?

Symposium 1h + 1,5h

Introduction
Cecilia Ferm Thorgersen, Professor
15 minutes

This symposium aims to offer a picture of how and from what perspectives musical meaning making in Swedish compulsory schools, has been and currently is being investigated. The last years two educational reforms with strong influence on the subject music in compulsory school have been launched: A new curriculum with syllabuses and a new grading system, as well as a new teacher education program are currently being implemented. The expectations of what pupils in schools should be able to handle in the subject music, have been more clarified, specified, and subject specific, while at the same time few student are recruited for music teacher training programmes for the years 1-9. Hence, music education research that focus how musical meaning making in this new setting is taking place, what the steering documents could imply, and what the conditions for musical meaning making look like is important to pay attention to. By mapping what we already know, and what is currently investigated, we can also get information about what should and could be investigated in the future.

Musical learners experience music as listeners, performers and composers in different styles and contexts. Through meaning making in the musical world pupils should reach a feeling of I can express myself through music, I can compose, I can make music, and I can listen to and experience music. In such processes pupils are expected to experience and learn to handle, for example, form, texture, timbre, pitch, linearity, harmonies, rhythms, and movement, in different styles and contexts. The combination of musical parameters, how they sound as one, constitutes music, or a phenomenon possible to experience as music. Hence, music is not constituted solely by the sum of the musical parameters, but also by the gaps between them; gaps which make meaning-making possible. Through interaction within musical styles and social contexts music show itself as a whole, where acoustic, structural, bodily, tensional, emotional, and existential dimensions of meaning-making are offered.

In earlier studies I have investigated how musical meaning making is made possible in Swedish schools from a teachers perspective, and currently I am, together with Olle Zandén, investigating how the implementation of the new grading system influence
possibilities for musical learning, as well as to what extent the new syllabuses offers holistic musical experience, partly together with Susanna Leijonhufvud. In the introduction I will briefly mention and attempt to map earlier published research connected to the theme of the symposium by Börje Ståhlhammar, Ralf Sandberg, Claes Ericsson, and Monica Lindgren, together with more recent studies by Anniqa Lagercrantz, Mikael Persson, Katharina Dahlbäck, Manfred Scheid and Tommy Strandberg. However, Joakim Hellgren, the symposium will primarily present recent studies by the researchers themselves that approach musical meaning making in the compulsory schools from different angels and theoretical perspectives. The short presentations will be summarized and discussed by Catharina Christophersen. In the following the focus of the participating researchers’ work is presented.

Democracy, equality and participation - Issues for the context of Music Education
Annika Danielsson & Maria Westvall, Senior Lecturers
School of Music, Theatre and Art, Örebro University Sweden
25 min

Is it the everyday and familiar music that makes music education accessible and meaningful to students? This is an issue that in recent years has become increasingly significant within Swedish research that relates to the role of music in the schools and the society (Danielsson 2012; Georgii-Hemming & Westvall 2010; Sernhede 2006; Bergman 2010; Eriksson and Lindgren 2011). In this symposium, we intend to discuss this topic by applying the following conceptual dichotomies:

Ability and Inability
Familiarity and Unfamiliarity
Usefulness and Uselessness
Today and Tomorrow

Our theoretical framework builds on the dialectic relationship between the individual and the collective in the social context (of music education) (Giddens 1991; Small 1998; Wright 2010) and addresses the role of music education and how it relates to questions concerning democracy, equality and participation in particular.
Musical meaning making through verbal communication in children's collaborative music-making

Cecilia Wallerstedt, Senior Lecturer
Gothenburg University
15 min

The aim of the presentation is to highlight an understanding of what skills in collaborative improvisation and music-making consist of, and what the teacher's role in these kinds of activities might be in order to support their development in children. The data that will serve as illustration consist of a video-observation of the activities that unfold when three 7-year-old girls try to manage a composition task using a keyboard and a novel digital technology. The questions posed by the children and their verbal dialogue are analysed. The results show that they pose few questions and that they do not use musical terms in their conversations. Instead, they come to invent a concept, which is shown to fill several mediating functions for the children in the activities, such as facilitating discernment, playing/composing music and sharing their musical experience. A teacher's task is pointed out as introducing the children to functional concepts in order to being able to coordinate their perspectives on the music and in finding ‘musical problems’. The need for further analyses of young children’s verbal communication in music activities is pointed out, in order to get hold of children’s perspective on music and musical activities and for developing a music education informed by socio-cultural theory.

Who's meaning is represented?
Annika Falthin, PhD student
Royal College of Music, Stockholm, Institute of Music, Education and Society
15 min

Quite old music within the field of popular music seems to be prevalent repertoire in general music education in Swedish schools. Who does the music appeal to, the teacher, pupils or both? How do pupils and teacher experience the repertoire and what relations do they have to the music? In a time when ‘recycling’ and transforming music is more frequent than ever, a multitude of references can be represented in a piece of music. The references known to the teacher are not necessarily the same as the references known to the pupils. Hence, the purpose with this paper is to discuss how references to- and interpretation of repertoire in
music education in school can differ. The issues draw from an on-going study with the purpose to scrutinize pupils’ musical meaning-making. Two classes in lower secondary school, 8th form, have been followed and video recorded in the course of one semester during ordinary music lessons and performances. A couple of pupils, strategically chosen, from each class were observed more frequently than the rest and the same pupils have also participated in interviews. A track in the research is to inquire how the pupils and the teacher react to and express themselves about the chosen repertoire and how the pupils express themselves about personal musical preferences.

Musical learning in cultural encounter
A case study of Gambian and Swedish adolescents in interaction
Annette mars, Licentiate
15 min

In my licentiate thesis, I studied how young people from two different countries, Sweden and the Gambia, learn music in interaction with each other within the context of a concert project carried out in the Gambia. This study in music education is inspired by ethnomusicology and anthropology. The main aim of the study was to explore in what ways adolescents acquire music and to analyse it in a context of cultural identity. The primary research question is: What characterizes musical learning in a situation where the intention is that young people from different cultures are expected to learn in interaction with each other?

The theoretical points of departure are to be found in (i) socio-cultural theories of learning, with a focus on how cultural tools are used in the learning and teaching processes, and in (ii) theories on orality and literacy. The analysed data consist of observations and video recordings of the musical learning activities, individual and focus group interviews and field notes from the years 2008-2010. The participants are nine students, age 15-16, from one Swedish high school and nine students from different schools in the Gambia. The results demonstrate how the students’ musical and cultural background strongly influences the ways in which they learn themselves and how they teach others. The cultural background also affects their choice of tools for learning and teaching. In my licentiate thesis, it becomes clear that when I go out of the role of the researcher and into the role of the teacher, the musical quality get higher in the music pieces youngsters play together.

In conclusion, the results point at the importance of teachers not always using the same methods in teaching their students as they have experience of having learnt themselves, and that teachers need to have the ability to identify the learning styles of their students and to
create a learning environment in which all these various ways of learning are given space. The skilled music teacher can lead music students forward in a more qualitative way than young people themselves can do in a peer teaching situation.

THE SCHOOL MUSICAL
On cross border learning and gendering in school musical projects
Lorentz Edberg, PhD-student
Umeå University, Department of creative studies
15 min

My study focuses on how one can understand the school musical in a social and educational context. The empirical data was based on four school musical projects, carried out during the last year of the Swedish compulsory lower secondary school. My research was inspired by i.a. Basil Bernstein’s theoretical framework. The study, with a hermeneutic and constructivist approach, was based on 17 qualitative interviews with teachers and pupils, focused group discussions and participant observations. The participant’s social and artistic interactions, common artefacts, joint commitment, together with influences from popular culture had a major impact on the creation of a cross border learning environment. Status and hierarchies among the pupils could be renegotiated due to the impact of that new environment. In the presentation I will connect to the curriculum as well as the challenges and possibilities regarding teaching music in a setting very loosely connected to the music classroom. Concepts that will be touched upon is assessment, gender issues, and socialisation.

Reflections and ideas for further research – Catharina Christophersen
10-15 minutes

Open discussion
15- 20 minutes