

# The musical risk of education

## A qualitative study of music teaching in a Waldorf School

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**ABSTRACT:** Music is a subject that plays an important role in Waldorf education. The music curriculum emphasises musical practice and the pupils' active participation in and interaction with music as crucial elements of the teaching and of the school's efforts to make the school day meaningful. At the same time, music pedagogy research problematizes schools as an arena for musical experience. Relevant questions that arise in this context include: How does a music teacher work to facilitate musical interplay in music teaching? What are music teachers' experience of and reflections on this issue? What can we learn from this? The article is based, among other things, on educational theory that highlights and elucidates the importance of working with the unforeseen in teaching. This is put into a music pedagogy context with the focus on facilitation of musical interplay, and it raises questions relating to music's place as a school subject in general and in Waldorf education in particular.

*Keywords:* Music teaching, interplay, musical interaction, openness and awareness, unforeseen pupil initiatives.

**ZUSAMMENFASSUNG:** Der Musikunterricht spielt eine maßgebliche und wichtige Rolle in der Waldorfschule. Der Lehrplan des Faches Musik betont das Ausüben von Musik, die aktive Teilnahme des Schülers an und durch Musik als wesentliche Elemente in dem Bestreben, einen sinnvollen Schulalltag zu gestalten. Gleichzeitig ist die Schule auch als Arena für musikalische Erfahrungen in der musikpädagogischen Forschung problematisiert worden. Relevante Fragen in diesem Zusammenhang sind: Wie arbeitet der Musiklehrer mit dem Gestalten von musikalischen Aktivitäten im Musikunterricht? Welche Erfahrungen und Reflexionen hat der Musiklehrer in dieser Hinsicht? Was können wir daraus lernen? Der Artikel nimmt unter anderem Ausgangspunkt in ausgewählten pädagogischen Theorien mit Schwerpunkt auf der Bedeutung des Arbeitens mit dem Unvorhersehbaren im Unterricht. Dies wird in einen musikpädagogischen Kontext gestellt mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Gestaltung musikalischen Zusammenspiels/gemeinsamen Musizierens. Dadurch werden Fragen in Bezug auf die Rolle und Bedeutung der Musik in der Schule generell und der Waldorfschule speziell aktualisiert.

*Schlüsselworte:* Musikunterricht, Zusammenspiel, gemeinsamen Musizieren, Aufmerksamkeit und Gegenwart, unvorhersehbaren Schülerinitiativen

## Introduction

Music is something that does not have a place in the exam room,  
it has a limited place in the recording studio  
but it most definitely has a place as a living, breathing art form  
whereby we all must open ourselves up to share and learn from each other.

Evelyn Glennie

Music as a subject appears to be under increasing pressure in schools today: 'It seems that it is increasingly designated as an expendable luxury. Music is gradually being pushed into the role of unnecessary cream on the top of the educational cake' (Pio & Varkøy, 2015, p. 4). According to these authors, music is regarded as a superficial phenomenon compared with what is known as the school's 'core subjects'. Instead, they highlight the need for thinking around the legitimisation of music as a school subject to take into consideration *the intrinsic value of musical experience* when addressing this question. By *the intrinsic value of musical experience* is meant first and foremost the subjective encounter with music as an object and the intrinsic value of this encounter. Attention is thus focused on the actual encounter between the human subject and music, which can include many different musical genres and forms of expression. (Varkøy, 2015a).

Rewording the question from why we have music as a school subject and focusing instead on opportunities for musical experience can help to counterbalance the instrumental approach to issues related to school and education, where the most fundamental question – what is the *purpose* of education? – has been replaced by the question of what constitutes *efficient* education (Biesta, 2010). An instrumental approach to subjects primarily sees school subjects as a useful means to a desired end, and it is often associated with a way of thinking that comes from economics and emphasises production and quantifiable results (Biesta, 2006; Pio, 2017; Varkøy, 2007; 2012; 2015b).

To approach the question of what music as a school subject can mean is therefore about directing one's attention to which *musical experiences* music teaching facilitates (Varkøy, 2009; 2017a; Pio & Varkøy, 2012). As Biesta (2018) also emphasises: 'Rather than asking what education *produces*, we should be asking what education *means*. And rather than asking what education *makes*, we should be asking what education *makes possible*' (p. 13).

In this article, I want to examine in depth musical interplay as an aspect of the intrinsic value of musical experience and to do so from a music teacher's perspective. The school as an arena for musical experience and music teaching's possibility of embracing the pupils' experience are not unproblematic and unambiguous (Bergman, 2009; Ericsson, Lindgren & Nilsson 2010; Kamsvåg, 2011; Ray 2004; 2010). Nonetheless, a music lesson and the musical interplay it includes may be a social arena that facilitates musical experience and interaction (Ferm, 2004; 2009; Linge, 2013).

The music curriculum for Norwegian Waldorf schools emphasises that enabling pupils to participate in musical interplay is one of the cornerstones of the efforts to create a school that stimulates *joie de vivre* in its pupils, and it is an important principle of Waldorf pedagogy that pupils practise and perform music together and for each other (Læreplan for Steinerskolene, 2007). An interesting issue related to this is what form the efforts to achieve this take and can take in music teaching in Waldorf schools. This article therefore focuses on the interacting field in musical interplay seen from the music teacher's point of view: *How do Waldorf school music teachers facilitate and perceive musical interplay together with their pupils?*

This is not the only perspective that can elucidate and elaborate on musical interplay in a music lesson. It will therefore only be used as one possible approach to the topic, and it will also have to interact with other perspectives and approaches. However, I also see a need to bring local and contextual factors into the discourse about the overarching questions of why we teach music in schools and what the subject of music makes possible. The music teacher's own role in developing knowledge about his or her own musical practice is significant in this context (Bowman & Frega, 2012; Westerlund, 2012).

The article builds on empirical data collected at a Waldorf school in Norway in connection with my master's project at the Rudolf Steiner University College in Oslo, and is based on interviews and observation of two primary/lower secondary school music teachers (Stene, 2014). As I see it, Waldorf education is not alone in emphasising the importance of pupils participating in musical practice and interplay. However, I do see a need to bring the voices of Waldorf school music teachers into the broader music education discourse of which the general subject of music is part. Such a dialogue could be important to research as well as to the further development of musical interplay and music teaching in Waldorf education.

## Part 1: Musical interplay in the theoretical landscape

### *Perspectives and clarification of concepts*

Musical interplay in music education is a broad concept that can encompass many activities and work methods. I choose to define musical interplay as a phenomenon that comprises song, instruments or a combination of these elements in a group of pupils or a whole class together with a music teacher. I include musical arrangements, composed music and freer activities of an improvisational nature in this definition. This does not mean that other activities associated with a music lesson are less interesting in a relational and interplay perspective or in relation to the pupils' active musical experience (see e.g. Eftestøl, 2018). The delimitation is influenced by my interest in music performance activity in a school context and the type of interplay and pedagogical relationships that this opens up for.

Interplay is a word that can apply to music as well as to human relations and communication in general. It can mean both to 'play together' and to 'have an effect on each other', and can be applied to all forms of human interaction (Samspill, n.d.). This also makes the concept interesting and relevant in an educational context to the extent that it is assumed that '[...] the relationship between adults and children forms the basis for and fulcrum of educational activity' (Sævi, 2013, p. 241).

Interplay is both an activity and a relationship. In a music lesson, the pupils and the music teachers create music together. This interaction is both interpersonal and musical. The relational and musical aspects of interplay can thus be called 'sounding relationships', where this form of interaction can be expressed as sound and understood as a 'dynamic and vibrant adaptation process' linked to the act of participating in musical activity (Trondalen, 2004, p. 107).

In line with this, I limit myself to looking at interplay as a musical activity that takes place within the framework of educational activity. It is facilitated by the music teacher, but can only reach its full potential in the concrete (musical) encounter with the pupils. I also choose to emphasise the process that this form of interaction involves rather than the (musical) product that such an activity gives rise to.

In the following, I will start by placing the topic in a Waldorf pedagogy context. I will then review relevant literature and theory related to this perspective that could help to shed light on the research question addressed in this article.

### *A Waldorf pedagogy perspective on musical interplay*

Steiner is particularly interested in the profound effect that music has on people from early childhood and in our perception of the phenomenon of music. This is universal and concerns everyone, and Steiner links this to the spiritual aspect of human existence (Steiner, 1989). When Steiner deals with music in his lectures on education, the aspect he highlights is its social function. While the plastically formative artistic schoolwork supports the child's individuation, the musically poetical supports social life (Steiner, 1974).

Steiner (1975) also provides a definition of music that falls outside the educational context, but that is nonetheless relevant to it. In this definition, Steiner emphasises that the audible, the systematisation of music's notes, is regarded as its physical expression, while its true core is what lies between the notes and creates a connection – the inaudible. What is heard is a real expression in the form of sound, but what is experienced is the real musical element:

So wie der menschliche Körper nicht die Seele ist, so sind die Töne nicht die Musik. Und das ist sehr interessant, denn die Musik liegt zwischen den Tönen! [...] Was ist das Musikalische? Dasjenige, was man nicht hört! Dasjenige, was man hört, ist niemals musikalisch. Also wenn Sie das Erlebnis im Zeitverlaufe nehmen zwischen zwei Tönen, die im Melos erklingen, dann hören Sie nichts, denn Sie hören dann die Töne erklingen; aber das, was Sie nicht hörend erleben zwischen den Tönen, das ist die Musik in Wirklichkeit, denn das ist das Geistige in der Sache; während das andere der sinnliche Ausdruck davon ist. (Steiner 1975, pp. 48-49)

This definition of music, which links true music to the space between, opens up for an important perspective in the music pedagogy context. The space can be understood as a connecting element that, based on the different notes in the music, becomes a musical experience. In this way, music also becomes symbolic of a relationship. An encounter between two people arises in the space between – in the relationship. In a music pedagogy context, this perspective gains a dual meaning, both through the music and through the encounter between teacher and pupil in the musical interplay.

The curriculum for Waldorf schools in Norway and the music curriculum for primary and lower secondary levels (Læreplan for Steinerskolene, 2007) emphasise music's individual and social importance to people. Music is highlighted as a subject that has intrinsic value, but also one that forms part of a greater whole in the social life of the class and the school. Musical interaction is emphasised as an important principle of Waldorf pedagogy. This interaction is understood as an activity that takes place in and for the group. The subject is given an important position in school life, and comprises a multitude of musical activities adapted to suit different age groups. Varied and diverse musical practice and performance form the basis for a more analytical and reflective approach.

Adapting music teaching to the children's age and development is also a key element in the definition of a music teacher practice in Waldorf education (Beilharz, 2004; Friedenreich, 1977; Kalwa, 2004; Kern, 2013; Ronner, 2004; 2005; Wünsch, 1995). These works shed light on this practice from a normative perspective that is largely based on the authors' own experience and Steiner's directions. There is thus quite a lot of practice-oriented literature that sheds light on music teacher practice in Waldorf pedagogy, one important aspect of which is the emphasis given to an inquiring attitude and access to musical elements seen in relation to the pupils' development.

The thesis written by Kern (2007) also elucidates music teaching in Waldorf schools as a whole seen from an epistemological point of view. It highlights that, ultimately, it is about the music teacher's ability to embody the music education principles that this point of view encourages.

Empirical studies of music teaching in Waldorf education in particular are relatively scarce. Heinritz (2012) contributed a valuable longitudinal study of a music teacher practice in a German Waldorf school. The point of departure for the study is a music project that aims to provide instrument teaching for the youngest school pupils. This study is both interesting and relevant, as it examines how the plans for the project are manifested in practice and what experience the participants gained. It highlights both the strengths and weaknesses of such a school project, and provides a research-based foundation for further development of similar projects and practices in Waldorf education.

### *The opportunities and problems of the music lesson and the challenges facing music teachers*

Music is closely related to the personal experiences of both pupils and teacher, and these two worlds meet in school music lessons. It is a professional challenge for music teachers to reach all their pupils through musical activities, particularly because musical experiences in a school context will always involve an encounter between the personal and the collective, between the known and the unknown. At the same time, these challenges represent the possibilities inherent in music teaching (Georgii-Hemming, 2005; Georgii-Hemming & Westvall, 2010) and point to the need for professional knowledge about music pedagogy and further development of this knowledge in interplay with teaching practice (Georgii-Hemming, Burnard & Holgersen, 2013).

So what, specifically, are the problematic aspects of music teaching or of the music lesson in a school setting? I will not discuss this question in depth here, but I would like to point out two aspects it is natural to view in light of Nordic research on music teaching in general. One concerns the challenges associated with involving and reaching pupils through, for example, musical interplay activities and the role of the music teacher in this context. The importance of involving pupils in musical interplay and making use of their own musical culture is highlighted in a study by Ericsson, Lindgren & Nilsson (2010). This study also shows that it is a problem that the musical culture that is communicated is not the pupils', but usually the teacher's own. Other findings from this study also indicate that institutionalised music teaching can be a systematised and controlled activity that appears to reduce the pupils' musical involvement and learning.

Kamsvåg (2011) made an important contribution to this issue, since her study uses sociological theory to investigate pupil interaction during music lessons. It also problematizes the role of the music teacher and how allowing pupils too much freedom during lessons can facilitate actions and social relationships that are not necessarily positive and constructive.

The other problem relates to music and musical experience and the school as a potential arena for such experience. Music pedagogy research has emphasised that the school both can and cannot be a distinct arena for musical experience, and it has also pointed out how contemporary society comprises many other arenas where such experience is more often gained (Ray, 2004; 2010). This gives rise to questions about what characterises school as an arena for musical experience and how it is developed on school's and school life's terms.

In the Nordic context, and taking thinkers outside the field of music pedagogy as our point of departure, the focus is on the intrinsic value of musical experience and music as an existential experience (Varkøy 2009; 2017a; Varkøy & Pio, 2015). Based on Bollnow (1969) and his concept of 'encounter', Varkøy (2017b) emphasises the importance of exercising 'existential composure' in relation to music and its place in education as relevant input to the present discussion. According to Varkøy (2017b), this way of thinking's focus on a form of self-expression that is always related to a 'you' – and that is thereby always in relation to something or someone – makes an important comment on our time's '[...] somewhat naive and not entirely unproblematic individualism' (p. 73).

This is a relevant point of departure for exploring the challenges and opportunities of music teaching in schools. However, I would also like to point out that this perspective expands three-dimensionally in a music lesson. A music lesson involves the music teacher, the pupil *and* the music. It entails interplay and the possibility of encounters. A (music) pedagogical relationship is thereby not just about being together, but also about the way in which we are together – specifically *what* we do together. In Sævi's (2013) opinion, the pedagogical relationship exists both in the encounter between the adult and the child, but also in what we together direct our focus and attention on. In this way, the pedagogical relationship is: '[...] a form of *togetherness* between adults and children that is about something other than the persons themselves' (Sævi, 2013, p. 244).

A music lesson has a potential for both opportunities and problems that could, from one perspective, be said to constitute the challenges facing music teachers when endeavouring to facilitate musical interplay. This can be elucidated from many different angles. My focus in this context is on the musical interplay itself as defined above and as an opportunity to embrace both the individual and the social aspect. In the following, I will therefore highlight some relevant concepts that could help to shed light on this.

Classroom work involving creativity and creative activities gives rise to a potential tension between order and chaos (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2010). Furthermore, teaching is about the present and presence, which makes it unpredictable and improvised (Willbergh 2010). Willbergh sheds light on this based on the German didactic tradition and a hermeneutical perspective. She coins the concept of *followability* of teaching in the sense of getting the pupils to follow teaching in a *here and now* and where the trick is to create fruitful moments (p. 59). 'The importance of teaching arises in a "now" in which the challenge facing the teacher is to continuously interpret what is expressed based on what the pupils already know and what can be meaningful to their future' (Willbergh 2010, p. 60).

Sawyer (2011) further develops the improvisational aspects of teaching. Here, the concept of ‘disciplined improvisation’, understood as both knowledge and the ability to make use of experience when encountering new impulses, is coined. This concept emphasises both structure and freedom as important aspects of classroom teaching. Similarities and differences between musical improvisation and what we can call educational improvisation are also pointed out in this context. The metaphor nevertheless highlights an important element of teaching. Improvisation resides at the tension between structure and freedom, and the metaphor endeavours to emphasise the interplay between teacher and pupil in a classroom situation: «The improvisation metaphor emphasizes that teachers and students together are collectively generating the classroom performance» (Sawyer, 2011, p. 5). In a music lesson, this also applies to musical interplay as a form of interaction. The improvisation metaphor also points to an aspect of the challenge facing music teachers that is related to presence.

Pedagogical research based on psychological theory highlights the importance of presence in the teaching context (Meijer, Korthagen & Vasalos 2009). Barker & Borko (2011) emphasise interaction in improvisational teaching as ‘shared control’, where the participants are aware of their own participation and what the others have to offer in the situation. As Barker & Borko (2011) conclude, the improvisational aspect of teaching creates a need to look at the different aspects of the teacher’s presence. They are a simultaneous attunement to oneself and the pupil, openness to shared control in the teaching situation, and attention to individual pupils as well as to the class as a whole. In this way, teaching is created ‘through a blend of careful planning, artful listening, and nimble responsiveness’ (Barker & Borko, 2011, p. 288).

But, as Day (2012) also points out, the quality of the teaching process is not just related to the teacher. It also depends to a large extent on the pupils’ presence. At the same time, this entails a willingness and openness to seeing the other, but also to allow oneself to be seen (Rogers & Raider-Roth 2006). Here, teaching is understood as participation in a relationship-forming activity. In this context, ‘presence’ becomes a crucial concept that attempts to capture an aspect of the teacher’s actions. Presence is understood as awareness, receptivity and a connection that helps teaching to progress.

We define this engagement as ‘presence’ – a state of alert awareness, receptivity and connectedness to the mental, emotional and physical workings of both the individual and the group in the context of their learning environments and the ability to respond with a considered and compassionate best next step. (Rogers & Raider-Roth 2006, p. 266)

This view of presence is also relevant to music teachers, and it has been highlighted in music pedagogy research in the Nordic context by Ferm (2004; 2006). Ferm (2006) believes that a music teacher’s openness and awareness are crucial parts of the ‘holistic competence’ that a music teacher needs in his/her interaction with pupils (p. 248). Openness and awareness are also, in my opinion, important characteristics of presence.

### *Interplay in relationships – openness to the unknown*

Music pedagogy links music and education. When the purpose of a teaching session includes facilitating musical experience through musical interplay, this is also a question of relationships in an educational context and the interplay these relationships involve. So far, this has proven to be strongly influenced by the (music) teacher’s presence and openness, a shared responsibility in teaching, and something that cannot be fully controlled.

As Sævi (2013) emphasises, the pedagogical relationship must involve an element of something that cannot be planned by the adult in order to prevent the relationship from primarily becoming a tool the adult uses to achieve a desirable outcome. According to Sævi, this is also what gives the pedagogical relationship its existential content: ‘The child’s possibility to transcend the established and conventional thus becomes a reality, and the relationship is not simply a channel for imposing habits, rules or practices for others’ benefit [...] even the simplest situation between an adult and a child has existential qualities despite its triviality» (p. 238). Pedagogical relationships thus involve a significant element of risk in that we can never fully predict what will happen.

Biesta (2006) argues that the important thing is not what the teacher knows, but what the teacher can learn through interaction with the pupils. Response is no guarantee, but a *possibility* that defines the pedagogical relationship. It can be both the unexpected and something that interrupts what has already been established. Such a pedagogy of interruption is thus also an educational challenge. For Biesta (2008), this is largely about meeting the pupils with empty hands in order to be able to receive whatever may come. This is a challenge for education in general, and for music teaching in particular, namely the challenge of letting go of what is expected and opening up for the unexpected when it comes to examining in depth the aspects of interaction or musical interplay that concern processes and relationships.

Biesta (2014) also argues, taking into account a number of pedagogical topics, that a teaching situation entails a degree of risk insofar as it involves encounters with other people. This also forms a basis for seeing education as an event, and, potentially, as a thing of beauty: ‘We rather need a pedagogy of the event, a pedagogy that is orientated positively toward the weakness of education. This is a pedagogy, in short, that is indeed willing to take the beautiful risk of education’ (p. 140).

The unpredictable can also be said to be present in a music teaching situation where the music teacher interacts with his or her pupils in musical interplay. Interplay is, as I have explained above, both an activity and a process of adaptation, a pedagogical relationship between music teacher and pupil in their encounter with music. From a music teacher’s perspective, this demonstrates the importance of understanding and accommodating pupils’ responses and of being open to the pupils’ musical experience if the purpose of the activity is to facilitate such experience.

## Part 2: Empirical research

### *Method and methodology*

In qualitative research with the focus on professional development, a pragmatic approach is emphasised as a suitable point of departure for research that primarily aims to further develop, e.g., educational practices (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). In these authors’ view, it is a flexible and eclectic way of working on research questions, depending of what suits each study best. The strong point of this approach is precisely its flexibility and the possibility of designing a unique study to understand a phenomenon. However, it is not exempt from the fundamental challenges that face any qualitative research approach, and the strengths of this approach are also its weaknesses.

My primary intention in my master’s project was to carry out an in-depth study of a music teacher practice in a Waldorf school. When designing my study, I drew inspiration from the definition of *case study* as an ‘in-depth exploration’ of the ‘complexity and uniqueness’ of a phenomenon within its real-life context (Simons, 2009, p. 21), and *self-study*, which is a research genre that has become widespread in the educational research field in recent years (Loughran et al., 2007; Tidwell, Heston & Fitzgerald, 2009; Ritter et al., 2018).

I chose to examine two practices in a single school, one of which was my own – two teachers in separate teaching situations, but at the same school. One possible objection is that the two may be linked and thus represent one practice to the extent that they relate to each other. I would nevertheless like to emphasise, in line with Higgs & Cherry (2009), that a teacher’s practice is a complex and individual interpersonal phenomenon.

Instead of setting myself aside and excluding my own experience of the field, I chose to include this perspective in the study design. In this sense, the project is also inspired by autoethnography in that the researcher becomes part of the subject of study (Chang, 2007; Ellis, 2008; Jones, 2005). Autoethnography also allows for more traditional qualitative research methods, such as interviews and observation and, in this case, self-interview and self-observation. In addition to interviewing and observing my colleague, I chose to let my fellow music teacher, who has experience of qualitative research, interview and observe me. This was done to maintain a more balanced approach to the problematic aspects of autoethnography. The emphasis

on the personal is both the strength and weakness of this approach. As pointed out by Jones, Adams & Ellis (2013), this gives the researcher immediate access to the subject of study, and thereby also the possibility of expressing something that other forms of research might leave out. The problem associated with this is that there is a limitation inherent in placing too much emphasis on the personal, and thereby losing contact with the experience and practice of others. To focus exclusively on oneself can also limit what one wants to investigate.

Coia & Taylor (2009) recognise the everyday conversation in a professional context and its importance to the development of a professional identity and personal practice. This is reflected in their coining of the concept of 'co/autoethnography'. This collaborative form of autoethnography is based on a research approach that highlights the dialogical aspect.

I chose to exploit the possibilities inherent in taking a dialogical approach to the research question. A dialogue contains a fruitful learning aspect for both the researcher and the interviewee. Simons (2009) emphasises how an open research interview can create active engagement in participants and contribute to the identification and analysis of themes. This was also confirmed in one of our conversations – after the end of the interview, but fortunately after the tape recorder had been switched back on:

These conversations really teach me to shift instantly in my own observation of everything: moments, situations with pupils... [...] That you achieve a very vibrant presence that helps you to understand what it is possible to achieve with a class this Monday in the music lesson, the last lesson of the day. I feel that these conversations really help to wake me up. And then you can achieve more, I think. I love the pedagogical conversations!

The empirical data on which this study is based consist of qualitative research interviews, participant observations and two research conversations between two Waldorf school music teachers. The text material was analysed on the basis of interpretative phenomenological analysis – IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009; Smith, 2010; Smith & Eatough, 2012).<sup>1</sup>

### *Presentation of findings and analysis*

Considering the research question, and on the basis of the literature presented, I will continue by introducing an excerpt from the fieldwork I conducted in connection with my master's degree project. It is based on an observation of a music lesson. This will form the basis for the concluding discussion in the final part of the article.

### *The music teacher's attention and presence*

One important theme in the conversations and interviews conducted during this project was linked to experience of the importance of attention, presence and observation in the teaching situation and as an important basis for facilitating musical interplay as part of the teaching. Attention and presence were linked to the challenge of the music teacher often playing an active part in the interplay situation in an attempt to support the musical cooperation. The conversations highlighted these aspects as a complex form of presence in a teaching situation that the music teachers often found demanding. They could also be about the difficulties of, for example, involving a whole class in interplay, while at the same time having a keen eye for the needs of individual pupils. In short, attention and presence were regarded as an important part not only of facilitating musical interplay in a music lesson, but also in relation to the quality of the interplay that was facilitated.

These two concepts are not unambiguous, but they are too nuanced to be described in sufficient detail here. I will therefore highlight one aspect of them that was prominent in the work on the data material.

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1. I chose IPA as an analytical tool as it combines empathic and critical questioning with a phenomenological commitment to explore personal experience (Smith & Osborn, 2008) in order to support the balancing of my role as both researcher and participant in this project.



### *Openness to pupils' initiative*

Musical interplay in a school setting is not without risks or unforeseen events. At the same time, there is a potential in the unplanned and what happens based on pupils' initiative and input to the teaching as it unfolds. These can be small or big events related to the teaching itself and to transitions between activities or before and after a music lesson.

The first minutes of my observation proved to be significant. The school bell had rung, and the music lesson was about to start. The classroom slowly filled up as pupils returned from their break. The music teacher was already there, and the class teacher who followed the teaching arrived a little later. In this music lesson, the music teacher was in charge of the class and was assisted by the class teacher. The class had recently been working on a song arrangement consisting of group song, recorder music, a rhythm section and a xylophone. They had been rehearsing this arrangement for some time and planned to perform it in front of the whole school at a monthly festival.<sup>2</sup> The classroom was abuzz with expectation of the lesson, as illustrated by the observation notes:

There is a lot of expectation and excitement in the air. Before the lesson: The door is open, the pupils arrive in groups, alone. The music teacher greets them. Some go straight to their seats, fetch a recorder. Others go straight to the instruments that are placed in the classroom: three djembe drums with sticks, a triangle, a xylophone. One pupil heads straight for the xylophone and starts to play it. The music teacher notices and approaches the pupil. He listens to what the pupil is playing and demonstrates something. An interplay arises between the two in a classroom teeming with pupils before the lesson starts. There is a lot of enthusiasm and some chaos.

It is interesting to note from the field notes quoted above that an interplay situation arises already before the music lesson has started. The pupil's initiative required the music teacher to be attentive, open, present and willing to respond. Instead of disregarding the pupil and starting the lesson, the music teacher chose to respond to this pupil's initiative. The interplay consisted of the pupil playing for the music teacher and the music teacher both listening to what was played and playing himself. There was an element of interaction in which the pupil was active by playing and the music teacher actively listened and responded musically to what the pupil was doing. The interaction was brief, but significant. The encounter that arose between these two at the beginning of the lesson would re-emerge towards the end of the lesson as a new possibility with even greater scope.

Following a long session of different run-throughs of the song that the class was working on, I observed that the same pupil contacted the music teacher again. This was in connection with one of the transitions in the lesson. The lesson was more open to input, but the music teacher was busy instructing a group of pupils. The pupil nonetheless made contact with the music teacher:

The music teacher exclaims: 'It can't be right every time!' The class has spread out a bit. There is a moment of slight dissolution in the lesson. The music teacher is now focusing intensely on the one pupil. Interplay again arises between the two. The rest of the class remains standing in groups, each busy with their own thing. There is a mix of music and conversation. The music teacher is completely focused on the pupil playing her part amidst all the noise. The music teacher listens. Then he plays himself.

Another encounter arose between the two in the form of musical interplay. This time, the encounter was longer and more focused. The music teacher listened to the pupils playing, and vice versa. This excerpt highlights the alternating interplay between music teacher and pupil in one concentrated moment. In the meantime, the class has dissolved. The situation was described in more detail in one of the follow-up conversations afterwards. It turned out that the music teacher had taught the pupil something that went against the rhythm of the piece and created problems for the pupil in the interplay with the ensemble. Something was not right. The pupil noticed this and caught the music teacher's attention. This led to the above-mentioned interplay and allowed them to rectify the mistake together. It turned into an encounter involving interplay between pupil and music teacher.

2. In Waldorf education, a 'monthly festival' is an event where pupils and teachers get together to share each other's artistic work in different subjects. The contributions can be musical elements or performances that show how artistic work is integrated into other subjects. (Cf. Kalwa, 2004)

It is interesting to note the double element of risk in this event. The lesson had arrived at a point of dissolution where things could disintegrate into chaos. The pupil's initiative was unexpected and unplanned. In addition, the notes emphasise that the music teacher's immediate reaction did not correspond to the pupil's perception. The pupil felt that something was wrong with the part she was to play, to which the music teacher responded that we cannot get it right every time we perform a piece of music.

Instead of ignoring this or leaving it until after the lesson, the music teacher chose to respond to the pupil's initiative there and then. This contributed to a state of chaos for the rest of the class at that moment, but proved to be important in relation to what was at stake in this encounter, namely the musical interplay as perceived by this pupil.

### Part 3: Discussion

#### *Openness to pupils' initiative – 'the musical risk of education'*

The above example shows that the facilitation of musical interplay in music teaching can in itself be regarded as an interplay or a pedagogical relationship in the encounter with music. The music teacher's intention must be met by willingness on the pupil's part to respond and enter into the interplay with the music teacher and her fellow pupils. The music teacher's facilitation is to no avail if the pupils themselves do not enter into the interplay (Day, 2012).

At the same time, this points to an interesting freedom of action in a teaching setting where something unforeseen and non-facilitated can arise in the form of a pupil's initiative. The teacher's openness and willingness to accept this – which is, ultimately, something unknown and new – is significant here. It concerns the dialogical nature of teaching. As Biesta (2008) emphasises, the act of teaching is a potential dialogical space in which the teaching can constitute an event to the extent that it is open to the possibility of something new entering the dialogue, and thus also the world. This makes learning and, I would like to add, musical experience in interplay, not primarily a matter of acquiring knowledge, but an encounter in the form of response. 'Learning in this view is not about the acquisition of knowledge and truth. It is rather about responding, about formulating a response' (p. 206).

These ideas shed light on the content and the above-mentioned example. Because, in many ways, everything is at stake in an interplay based on precisely this response or lack thereof. In this case, the music teacher had every reason to choose not to respond to the pupil's initiative out of consideration for the whole and the progress of the music lesson. Nonetheless, the initiative was an expression of the pupil's perception that something was not right and of the frustration that this created.

This makes musical interplay in a music lesson more than an event that can or should be facilitated. The question is also what this event presents. What chooses to enter the space that has been opened up? The freedom of action in musical interplay is a space where questions and answers are formulated in an encounter with music. This gives the music teacher an opportunity to enter into this interplay, or dialogue, with *empty hands* (Biesta, 2008) and both see and hear what emerges. And music can thereby be created.

This image is significant in itself. However, a completely open attitude also has a potential disadvantage in that it may lead to a passive and inactive attitude towards the pupils. For what happens if the pupils do not respond or take the initiative? This is perhaps pushing it to extremes, but it does point to an important element when it comes to facilitating musical interplay and openness to pupils' initiative. In any case, facilitating is about an intention and an active, action-oriented approach to pupils and the musical interplay that is facilitated. In the above-mentioned example, the music teacher had a clear, planned structure for the lesson. The song arrangement was the decisive element around which the lesson was structured. And, in this case, it was an intended and planned task given to the pupils that formed the basis for the interplay that arose between the teacher and the pupil.

As Ferm (2004) emphasises in her study, which nuances and elaborates on Biesta's (2008; 2010; 2014) overarching thinking in relation to this, the challenge is twofold. It is about providing opportunities and

encouragement, while remaining open to viewing pupils' initiative as a natural part of the teaching situation (Ferm, 2004).

Beghetto & Kaufman (2011) argue that there will always be a gap between the (music) *curriculum-as-planned* and the *curriculum-as-lived*. The point here is that the gap cannot be closed, so one should try to work inside the gap instead: '[...] rather than trying to forcefully close or attempt to bridge this gap, it is much more fruitful to find ways to work in the "in-between" space of the gap' (p. 95). In my opinion, the empirical example referred to in this article shows how such a gap can unfold in a teaching situation and how one can work with it to facilitate a musical interplay that is also open to the pupils' initiative.

I would also like to emphasise the importance of providing a framework for the interplay that is open enough to accommodate pupils' initiative and to permit them to influence the teaching, but also defined enough for the interplay to unfold in a meaningful way. The music teacher's openness to the pupil who represents something new should be seen in the context of the music teacher's responsibility for facilitating this. This is about mutual respect, although it is the music teacher who has chief responsibility (Ferm, 2004).

Biesta (2010) emphasises that the teacher's experience in an encounter with a pupil is not everything in a pedagogical encounter. The pupil also represents something new that goes beyond existing experience. Therefore, the music teacher's ignorance, understood as an openness to encountering something new and unknown, is an important part of the facilitation of musical interplay. To express this in musical terms, the pupil represents an unheard or as yet unplayed melody that the music teacher can discover and play along to, thereby further developing his or her music pedagogy experience when encountering it.

A critical objection to this argument is the question of whether musical interplay is an exclusively positive thing – as I have so far described and discussed it. The music teacher's role in music teaching is crucial here. It can vary between the extremes of being almost absent (Kamsvåg, 2011) and controlling (Ericsson, Lindgren & Nilsson, 2010). Both these extremes have consequences for musical interplay.

A classroom situation can also be a problematic point of departure for musical experience. The classroom is also a social arena for the pupils, which has a bearing on their willingness to express and share personal experiences relating to music. This also problematizes school as a potential arena for musical experience (Ray, 2010). It is not automatic. This problematisation therefore contributes important input to the discussion of music teaching and interplay in the classroom.

However, the fact that it is problematic does not mean that we have to rule out the *possibility* of musical experience in connection with interplay in music teaching. Asking questions about how and in which way we work and can work on it can open for perspectives and nuances in how this issue is viewed that could be of significance to teaching practice. The event taken from my empirical research illustrates precisely the possibilities that lie in the pedagogical relationship that arises at the moment when a music teacher and pupil share an experience – in this case, music. It also shows how the teacher-centred and pupil-centred approaches to teaching are intertwined and influence each other. In practice, it is about an interplay between the two approaches rather than a clearly defined distinction between them.

The pedagogical relationship is thus not only open, empty and completely without an adult's intention or concrete purpose for it (cf. Sævi, 2013). In teaching practice, it is also found to be linked to a plan laid in advance, a defined framework for the teaching and the music teacher's intention of facilitating musical interplay. The interesting question in this context is more how the planned and foreseeable is shaped and influenced by the uncontrollable and unforeseen – and vice versa. It can just as well be a question of interplay and be reciprocal in nature. As Sævi put it, the pedagogical relationship can therefore '[...] have the potential to be filled with something that neither party owns, but that they both find meaningful, attractive and appealing' (Sævi, 2013, p. 244).

I will therefore say that the challenges relating to the school as an arena for musical experience and for involving pupils in musical interplay are linked to the importance of doing so. And, as I have tried to highlight in the discussion above, this is linked to the role of music teachers and their presence and

awareness in encounters with the pupils' initiative and response. A presence characterised by awareness of what can have a disruptive effect on teaching, but that at the same time has an inherent potential to create encounters in and through music.

The pupil's initiative turned out to represent something new and unknown to the music teacher. As Biesta (2010) sees it, this is a weakness of teaching that is also its strength. This means that an educational approach that accommodates the unpredictable and unknown is not just an unforeseen event, but also a risky one, and one that can nevertheless be beautiful (Biesta, 2014).

The music teacher took a risk by following up the pupil's input and initiative because it was uncertain what the outcome would be for the lesson as a whole and the interplay in the class. It was also the pupil who made the music teacher aware of the situation. In this perspective, it is problematic to assume that everything that happens during a music lesson can be consciously understood and interpreted by the music teacher at all times. However, there is a potential in the encounters that take place and are allowed to occur. The pupil's initiative emphasised an alertness to the here and now of teaching, and the music teacher's response opened up new possibilities and took the pupil's musical experience seriously. Most aspects of the situation were open and uncertain, but the outcome was music. To paraphrase Biesta (2014), this could be an educational approach that is willing to take 'the musical risk of education'.

## Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, I would like to ask the following question: What is at stake in musical interplay? This is not intended as a rhetorical question, but is meant to be taken literally. What possibilities does musical interplay offer in a music teaching setting, and what are the stakes?

Music encourages encounters between people, between music teacher and pupil. Each encounter is unique and each interplay is unrepeatable. Because, in the meantime, life has given us new impressions, new insights, new experiences to play on. The interplay that takes place in music teaching can never be repeated, but it develops. As long as musical encounters take place in musical interplay, development will take the form of a continuous process rather than distinct steps. In the above, I have emphasised how these musical detours map new terrain and make it possible to discover new musical landscapes.

To go where interaction or interplay takes you is to dare to tread new paths that could lead to something surprising. As Ferm (2004) also emphasises, this involves a division of responsibility that means relinquishing control, which makes the topic even more complex. The dichotomy between teacher-centred and pupil-centred music education is thereby dissolved. I will also claim that the dichotomy between teacher-centred and pupil-centred musical interplay is dissolved. But, as the findings and analysis in the study on which this article is based show, the facilitation of musical interplay hinges just as much on the music teacher being active, enterprising, inquisitive and musically engaged. A music teacher who is open and willing to listen, but who also takes responsibility for facilitating interplay by taking vulnerability as a strength seriously.

Everything is at stake in interplay, because it involves an encounter that cannot just be facilitated, but also has to be opened up for. This entails more than just setting up instruments or devoting a lesson to group song. Musical interplay, as I have explored it within the framework of Waldorf education, has instead made it possible to see new openings in this interaction, thereby emphasising the importance of responsibility and willingness on the part of both music teachers and pupils. Musical as well as educational improvisation involves shared control, freedom and structure (Sawyer, 2011; Barker & Borko, 2011). From a music teacher's perspective on interplay, I would like to add that shared control also entails shared non-control. However, the imperative of being present and aware of whatever the other has to offer, and giving the other space to offer something, is nevertheless a meaningful challenge for both the school and a music lesson. Musical interplay allows music teachers and pupils to learn from each other and enhance each other's musical experience, both separately and together.

Relinquishing control can feel frightening, both from an educational and a musical perspective. Everything could collapse. There is a possibility that nothing will arise. And still: everything could acquire meaning. A moment filled with risk could open up a wealth of new opportunities. Music could take shape. If I am willing to take the risk.

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