Keeping it real: addressing authenticity in classroom popular music pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

This article provides theoretical understanding for a development project that is reported in a separately published item. We discuss the implications of authenticity in music pedagogy, especially as regards popular music in general music education. First we problematize authenticity in music classrooms through three themes: (1) how music sounds, (2) "glocal" music cultures, and (3) the role of mediation in framing the student's freedom of choice. After that we argue that the authenticity gap between the classroom and the "real-world" can be narrowed if the classroom is understood as specific place for cultural production, in which the students can experiment on the use of technical tools guided by a variety of culturally specific psychological tools to construct their identity. Finally we vision what this could mean from the teacher's perspective. Our article suggests that authenticity can be seen as a function of musical productivity that is meaningful both from the standpoint of the culture and from the standpoint of the individual learner.
Keywords: authenticity, informal learning, popular music pedagogy, general music education

Introduction

A growing body of research indicates that music educators are increasingly integrating their students' "own" music into the curriculum (Georgii-Hemming & Westvall, 2010; Green, 2008; Muukkonen, 2010; Väkevä, 2006; Westerlund, 2006). It has also been suggested that informal learning contributes to music education by helping teachers focus on how their students learn music outside school (Folkestad, 2005, 2006; Green, 2001, 2008; Karlsen & Väkevä, 2012). The rationale unifying these two premises appears to be that formal music instruction should focus on subject matter derived from a cultural domain that most of the students are familiar with, and on teaching such subject matter in ways that are intrinsically motivating (Crawford, 2014).

Lucy Green (2008) has argued that by focusing on musical learning as it takes place in the "real-world" outside of school, educators can bring a sense of authenticity to the music classroom. In the philosophy of music, the term "authenticity" has been used to signify qualities that make a performance true to the work, or to the conventions of a given stylistic-historical period (see e.g., Davies, 1991; Levinson, 1990; Young, 1988). In music education, authenticity has also been linked to membership, values, and identity (Kallio, Westerlund & Partti, 2013). On one hand, authenticity has been discussed as a function of culture that frames the meaning and value of musical experience in situations of musical learning (Dyndahl, 2014; Martin, 2012; Small, 1998). For instance, Martin (2012: 1) argues that because culture provides meaning through "negotiations among [its] present and past members .... learning activities should be contextualized by the authentic situations from which they are derived." This necessitates that the students are given "real-world models, resulting in a meaningful, engaging and potentially life-long learning experience" (ibid.). On the other hand, authenticity has also been discussed as a function of individual agency and ownership of learning. For instance, Karlsen (2010) suggests that music educators should create learning environments that fulfil their students' personal needs for authenticity. In other words, authenticity can be taken as a function of learning that is meaningful both from the standpoint of the culture as a whole and from the standpoint of the individual.

In the following, we will first problematize authenticity in relation to three themes: musical sound, the "brokering" pedagogies of "glocal" music cultures, and the influence of mediation in students' freedom of choice. We then argue that the "authenticity gap" between the classroom and the "real-world" can be narrowed if the classroom is understood as a specific place for glocal cultural production. In such a classroom, the students would be able to experiment with the use of technical tools, guided by a

variety of psychological tools, in order to construct their identities. Finally, we envision what this could mean from the teacher's perspective.

Obviously, we do not profess to exhaust the potential for discussion of these themes. However, we hope that we can shed light on the tangled theoretical issue of authenticity by addressing problems specific to classroom music pedagogy. While these themes are not genre-specific, we will discuss them in relation to popular music. The reason for this is simple: because popular music appears to represent real-world music to most (if not all) students, it seems to provide the most accessible platform for authentic learning within the classroom. As Lucy Green's work has been in the spotlight of the discussion of popular music pedagogy in recent years, we will use her texts as a point of departure and a reflecting surface.

Sonic authenticity

According to Green (2006, 2008), it is in authentic (or natural, or real-world) situations that people become motivated to learn music. As far as most young people are concerned, such situations often relate to popular genres, which in turn means that such genres can provide authenticity to the music classroom by connecting the students to the real-world music outside school (Green, 2008). Thus, Green advises teachers to look at how popular musicians learn, as an indication of how to develop their pedagogies in ways that are inviting and intrinsically motivating. Furthermore, Green (2008: 83–84) argues that by building on the informal learning practices of popular music, a resourceful music teacher can raise her students' interests in other kinds of music and, in this way, help them to develop the critical musicality needed to judge authentic musical meanings in connection with a variety of cultural fields.

Hence, in its ubiquity, popular music appears to offer a fruitful point of departure for authentic musical learning. However, one may argue that, when taken into the classroom, it might lose part of its appeal, because it might not sound right. Indeed, several writers have pointed out that music education has a tendency to build its own musical practices, which may be sonically irrelevant to the students' lives outside school (Paynter, 1982; Regelski, 2004; Stålhammar, 1995; Swanwick, 1999; Tagg, 1982). An unwanted outcome of such practices may be the creation of a specific genre of "school music"—music that is alienated from its cultural origins to a certain degree, and which may not appear to the student as relevant at all (Georgii-Hemming & Westvall, 2010; Lindgren & Ericsson, 2010; Väkevä, 2010).

One way to rationalize the authenticity gap between classroom and real-world popular music might be that the students' "aural awareness" (Hugill, 2008; Partti, 2012) is pre-tuned to musical sounds in such a way that they do not accept what they hear in the classroom as authentic. Furthermore, the students might not be able to produce authentic sounds in the classroom because the classroom might not offer suitable conditions for authentic sound-making, due to availability of resources, time, or space. Also, the teacher's abilities to guide the student may be limited as a result of previous musical training and experience.

As an answer to such concerns, Green (2006: 114) maintains that it might be an error to expect that students are "that concerned about the authenticity of their musical products as adults expected them to be". Perhaps "the problem of authenticity in the classroom is an adult construction, caused by too much focus on the product" instead of the "process of music-making"? (ibid.) Green even posits that "no ordinary class of mixed-ability children is likely to be able to play any kind of music in a way that is musically authentic" (ibid.).

However, we believe that there may be possibilities to cater to both the authenticity of learning and sonic authenticity in classroom. This necessitates paying attention to at least four factors: the pedagogical implications of "glocal" music cultures, the role of mediation in determining what sounds authentic, the authentic use of tools in the classroom, and the role of the teacher in guiding such use.

The "brokering pedagogies" of the "glocal" music cultures

It has been said that we live in an increasingly "glocal" culture that exist at the crossroads of global and local interests (Dyndahl, 2009; Folkestad, 2006; Söderman & Folkestad 2004). It might also be argued that each glocal music style introduces its own way of learning and, in this respect, its own pedagogy. Thus, today's popular music pedagogy might have an increasing need of "brokering" – transformative learning that helps the learners to travel fluently "between communities, transferring ideas, styles, and interests from one practice to another" (Partti, 2012: 154). Hence, while it is probable that many young people today identify with some kind of popular music, this does not suffice as reason to assume that all popular music should be taught in the same way (Allsup, 2008; Clements, 2012; Väkevä 2009, 2010). Instead of constituting a unitary musical field, in its glocal variety popular music present itself as a dynamic "mix" of creative influences that flow freely between musical styles (ibid.). This might

mean that perhaps there is no one authentic way of learning popular music, but rather different place-based varieties that imply a multiplicity of pedagogical possibilities.

Attempting to define a means to guide students in all glocal idioms would certainly be too overwhelming a task, even for teachers specialized in popular genres. Still, the teachers should have an understanding of the students musical lives. However, recent research (Georgii-Hemming & Westvall 2010) claims that music educators who teach popular music in schools may make repertoire choices on the basis of their own preferences, rather than those of the students. In Nordic countries, this often means utilizing popular songs accompanied with guitars, basses, drums, percussion instruments, and keyboards, in order to obtain goals that are taken to be relevant to the aesthetics of mainstream pop and rock styles (Georgii-Hemming & Westvall 2010; Lindgren & Ericsson 2010; Muukkonen, 2010; Väkevä, 2006; Westerlund, 2006). This practice might lead to a new ethnocentrism, wherein some students might actually have their learning hindered (Dyndahl, 2014).

Furthermore, if we accept the Wengerian perspective that "building an identity consists of negotiating the meanings of our experience of membership in social communities" (Wenger, 1998: 145) it is essential that music educators offer their students possibilities for creative conjoint brokering. Instead of accepting that there is a natural way to learn popular music, we should embrace a variety of learning strategies as a point of departure for designing local curricula. If we further accept that music educators should be interested as much in the authenticity of musical sound as in the authenticity of musical learning, we might conclude that they should be able to cater to a variety of learning needs that derive from different musical-cultural contexts.

Freedom of choice and the role of mediation

In the late modern culture, in which we allegedly live today (see e.g., Giddens, 1990; Beck, 1992; Fornäs, 1995; Bauman, 2000), popular music is globally mediated (Born, 2005). Indeed, one may ask whether it is possible to talk about authenticity in contemporary popular culture at all, given that the latter is largely dependent on mediation to get its message through, and that mediation influences the mediated content (Väkevä, 2009). Concerning the authenticity of learning, the question emerges whether our students are free to make informed choices, given that the production, distribution, and consumption of media content are to a large degree regulated by the marketing tactics of the entertainment conglomerates. Because of the dependence on the distribution of popular music in the global commercial market, some music education

scholars have insisted that popular genres should not be accepted as a part of music education (Bayles, 2004; Bloom, 1987; Handford & Watson 2003; Scruton, 1999; Walker, 2007). One way to justify such assertions is to claim that because authentic musical experience is not possible in conditions regulated by the cultural industry, music education should look elsewhere for lasting cultural (and thus educational) value.

While this is not the place to examine such arguments in detail, they are relevant here, as they suggest that one of the concerns of contemporary music educators dealing with glocal popular culture may be that "children are insufficiently equipped to defend against [the] market exploitation" that the music industry allegedly represents (Allsup, 2008: 6). Such concerns imply that music educators should be at least aware of the major influence that global marketing tactics have on the local cultural consumption and experiencing of music, and how this is reflected in the students' choices.

If we accept that authenticity is at least partly linked to freedom of choice, as Taylor (1991: 67) suggests, we may ask how music education can provide room for manoeuvre between the students' freedom to choose their "own" music and the conditioning factors of the media-dependent global cultural economy. Green (2008: 46) also acknowledges this: she argues that it is important to recognize that, even when we give the pupils free choice in terms of what music to study, there are in fact many restrictions on their choices. For instance, some students might feel pressure to conform to the mainstream definitions of popular music, which in turn might prevent the teachers from suggesting approaches that deviate from the norm. In such conditions, authenticity of learning may become restricted both by the commercial mediation of the signifiers of common taste and by the teacher's personal aesthetic and didactic preferences. It is between these two coercive factors that the student must find her niche for an authentic learning experience.

Green (2008) argues that increasing the musical understanding of different music genres can lead to an awareness of how musical mediation and the music industry work, and encourage alternative ways of viewing music in society, thus teaching the student to examine musical cultures critically. Following this rationale, contemporary market-oriented popular music can be brought into the formal educational environment, but it should be accompanied by a critical attitude that helps students evaluate its cultural meanings. However, a critical consciousness of music's cultural meanings best grows out of a productive hand-on music experience, shared in social space. Hands-on musical involvement provides a material basis for authentic learning, regardless of where this learning takes place. We will argue next that this necessitates the understanding of, and ability to use, the proper tools in relevant contexts.

The use of authentic tools

Vygotsky (1978) famously argued that our living conditions affect the way we learn, and that learning can be improved through using different aspects of our environment as tools. There are two kinds of tools we use to expand our learning environment:

- *Technical tools* are used to control the environment. For instance, in the context of music education, technical tools can include any devices used to manipulate sound, such as acoustic, hardware, and software instruments.
- *Psychological tools* control thinking and help us to solve problems regarding the use of technical tools. In music education, psychological tools can include for instance, instrument playing skills, theoretical concepts, or the critical under-standing of musical culture.

If "learning activities should be contextualized by the authentic situations from which they are derived" (Martin, 2012: 1), it logically follows that students should use tools derived from real-world musical situations. However, even more critical than their origin is how these tools are used in problem solving activities in the classroom reality. In other words, authentic learning requires more than emulating the use of the real-world tools: it also requires an understanding of the relevant use of these tools in the actual situations of problem solving. The relevant use of technical and psychological tools is determined partly by broader culture, and partly by the specific community of learners that negotiates the use and meaning of these tools in their individual learning situations. Wenger (1998: 46) also emphasizes the importance of tool selection, by pointing out that "having a tool to perform an activity changes the nature of that activity". For instance, experimentation with contemporary digital tools can gradually transform teachers' pedagogical approaches from teacher-direc-ted towards student-centered, and in this way embrace new possibilities of learning (Wise, Greenwood & Davis, 2001).

The teacher as a producer of authentic learning

As Green's (2001, 2008) research suggests, outside the classroom much of musical learning takes place in voluntary conjoint activity, at least as it pertains to popular genres. However, this does not have to make the teacher obsolete in the classroom (Sexton, 2012). Rather, it shifts her role from being a provider of information to a faci-litator, manager, or *producer* of learning. The teacher-as-producer analogue could be

remarkably useful, if a "producer of learning" would be understood as someone who works between the musical and pedagogical domains in a creative manner, recognizing her responsibility for the outcomes of the learning. In the same way that a music producer is expected to bring forth the capacities that potentially exist in unfinished musical ideas, and in the persons involved in the production process (Hepworth-Sawyer & Golding 2011), the music educator can produce learning by bringing forth the capacities that already potentially exist in her students, and in their constructive interactions (see also Jorgensen, 1997).

If we think of music education in terms of producing, we may argue that teachers are especially needed in the beginning of the learning process, as learners have to be supported and scaffolded (Elliott, 1995) sufficiently to find relevant goals and working methods – a procedure akin to that of a professional music producer, whose role is to encourage the musicians to partake in the creative process and to see that everything takes place fluently (Hepworth-Sawyer & Golding, 2011). If we accept that the music classroom is a complex learning environment that affords multiple trajectories of learning, it might be feasible to expect that the teacher has a say in how the students work towards an authentic goal without unequivocally dictating the procedures and outcomes. Thinking of herself as a producer of learning, the teacher may find a mediating role that contributes to the artistic outcomes of the students in ways that support authentic learning experiences. However, this necessitates that the teacher creates a stimulating learning environment for her students as well as builds technical, creative and social competencies that engender trust in the students – things that are also required for successful music producers (Hepworth-Sawyer & Golding, 2011; Ramone, 2007).

Conclusion: education as an extension of the realm of authenticity

We have argued in this article that it may be possible to cater to both the authenticity of learning and the authenticity of musical sound in the music classroom. However, this necessitates paying attention to at least four factors: the pedagogical implications of glocal music cultures, the role of mediation in what sounds authentic, the authentic use of tools in the classroom, and the role of the teacher in the classroom.

We suggested that the music classroom could be seen as a complex learning environment that affords multiple trajectories for authentic learning. In such conditions, the teacher can be seen as a producer of learning who helps her students to negotiate

their musical identities within the communities of practice that glocal music-related interactions make possible. This would fit with the notion that there may be no natural way of learning popular music. Instead, popular music pedagogy could adopt an open-ended and brokering approach, through which the teacher could address a variety of issues related to glocal and mediated music cultures without losing her focus on hands-on music making.

Through creative hands-on involvement, students can expand their musical understanding and incorporate new realms of cultural meanings (Green, 2008: 4). However, the students' room for authentic learning experiences may be narrowed by two coercing factors: the commercial mediation of the signifiers of common taste, and the teachers' personal preferences. Nevertheless, formal music education can reach out towards a more expansive understanding of how music is globally mediated: this, however, necessitates that music teachers are themselves aware of the complex dynamics of glocal music cultures, and have competencies to help their students to experiment with the use of different technical tools guided by a variety of psychological tools.

In light of what has been discussed above, taking Green's work into account, it seems that music classrooms can offer places for negotiating musical identities in ways that support authentic learning. The reality of the classroom does not have to hinder authentic learning: it can offer possibilities to extend the realm of authenticity from immediate contact with musical subject matter of the student's own choice to culturally relevant uses of a variety of musics. The individual situations of music classrooms should not be understood as distinct from real-world musical and music-related activities, but neither should music classrooms be understood as merely derivatives of natural learning environments. Music classrooms, in this sense, can be taken as specific places for glocal cultural production, where a teacher equipped with pedagogical tact can channel uses of the tools in ways conducive to both cultural and individual authenticity.

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