

Challenging Music Teacher Education in Norway: Popular Music and Music Teacher Education

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Introduction

While there are ongoing debates about popular music education's legitimacy in some parts of the world (Ho, 2014; Mantie, 2013; Feichas, 2010), popular music repertoire has been a part of Nordic music education curricula over the last four or five decades (Dyndahl & Nielsen, 2014; Karlsen & Väkevä, 2012; Lembcke, 2010). Nevertheless, it seems that the full potential of popular music in Norwegian education has not been realized, among other things because of dominant traditions and discourses within music teacher education (Sætre, 2014).

In this paper, I examine a common rationale for popular music in education, that of popular music being the students' own music. Further, I argue that even if popular music has been well integrated into Nordic music education, it is still not an integral part of music teacher education in Norway. Looking for ways ahead I contend that popular music could challenge existing music teacher education in several ways: It could challenge dominant notions of repertoire and musicianship, structures of music teacher education, the role of the teacher/educator, as well as inherent perceptions of musical values and hierarchies in our institutions. Finally, I examine how popular music can contribute to a music teacher education for the future.

A common rationale for popular music in education

A common rationale for wanting to include popular music in education is making students "own" music part of education (Green, 2006), this is also the case for teacher education (Väkevä, 2006). This rationale signals a seemingly broad cultural under-

standing of popular music that relates to musical experiences and practices in everyday life as well as to questions of identity, informal learning, and youth culture (Frith, 2007). I write “seemingly”, because it seems as the practices of music teacher education conflate popular music with repertoire, thus ignoring popular music’s cultural and educational potential. I will return to this, but let me first point out that the claim that popular music generally could be considered students’ “own” music, is imprecise. “Popular music” denotes a variety of groove-based, mass-produced and mass-distributed musics aimed at broad audiences (Davis & Blair, 2011; Frith, 2007). For example, the garage band music most commonly taught and played in Nordic schools is older male-dominated guitar-based subgenres such as classic rock (Snell & Söderman, 2014: 166), which is probably closer to the teachers’ or educators’ (or their parents’) musical preferences and everyday culture than those of schoolchildren (Kallio, 2015; Lindgren & Ericsson, 2010), and even those of student music teachers. Whatever students’ “own” music is, it is most likely not classical rock.

On occasion, the idea of popular music as students’ “own” music is connected to the argument that popular music could be appropriated as a starting point for familiarizing students with other forms of music (Green, 2006). Extrapolating from the familiar to the unfamiliar is generally considered a sound educational principle. However, the argument for starting “from” popular music could easily be interpreted as an argument for the need to expand students’ musical tastes, which would imply educating students away from their current preferences and toward “better” and more “worthy” music. Green rightly claims that the idea of starting *from* popular music does not automatically devalue popular music and that popular music can “be educationally valued, both for itself *and* in relation to its potential for leading pupils out into a wider sphere of musical appreciation” (Green, 2006: 102). The tension between what *is* and what can *become* is at the heart of all educational practices, but it could still be difficult to address without inducing moral or aesthetic judgement (Georgii-Hemming & Westvall, 2012: 103) and incurring the risk of taking neither popular music nor students seriously.

Integrated, but not integral?

I will now return to the alleged conflation of popular music and repertoire within music education. According to Väkevä, popular music “crept in by the back door” (2006: 127) of Finnish education, following the practices of music educators several

decades ago, but not with much reflection in its pedagogical implications included. This un-reflected integration of popular music repertoires into education is, by extension, probably correct for the whole Nordic region. Analyzing international research on popular music education, Mantie (2013) finds a utility discourse concerning “student experiences and how teachers can better bring about ‘quality learning’ on the part of the students” (2013: 342) within UK and the Nordic region. However, as implied in a recent study of music programs within Norwegian general teacher education, even if popular music has indeed been added to the programs and the discussions of educational quality, teacher education programs are very much influenced by conservatory structures and discourses (Sætre, 2014). This influence manifests through fragmentary course structures with performance-oriented and musicological disciplines as well as a “pedagogic discourse representing tradition more than innovation” (p. 195).

Consequently, Norwegian GTE music programs seem to resemble miniaturized music conservatories to which educational and research perspectives are added (p. 213). While popular music is aural, learned by imitation and playing together and integrating the playing, listening, and creative processes (Green, 2014; Green, 2006; Green, 2002), music reading and main instrument skills are, not surprisingly regarding its conservatory influence, frequent concerns within GTE music. The primary objectives of conservatories are not to promote diversity and innovation, rather, they are “intended to support, even conserve (as implied by the word ‘conservatory’, particular genres, instruments or methods (...)).” (Christophersen & Gullberg, 2017: 433). From a popular music education perspective, then, music teacher education programs could be considered reminiscent of educational thinking and practices developed for other kinds of musicianship, other kinds of musical styles and technologies. The interpretive, curative traditions of art music that usually pervades higher music education, could be considered “excellent at canonizing knowledge, filtering it, and passing on” (Smith, 2014: 37), and thus complicating educational change. This, again, could contribute to explain why popular music has been integrated to some extent within teacher education, but is still not an integral part of such education.

Challenging music teacher education

As implicated above, popular music practices represent certain challenges for music teacher education. I will present four such challenges in the following:

1. Challenging notions of repertoire and musicianship

Popular music is always plural (Peterson, 1997), “not an ‘it’ but a ‘them’ — a vast, multifarious, and fluid range of musical practices with remarkably different and divergent intentions, values, potentials, and affordances” (Bowman, 2004: 34). Keeping up with the popular music field’s fluid, hybrid character is obviously difficult for educational institutions, who are notoriously slow, and will therefore inevitably lag (Christophersen & Gullberg, 2017). From a teacher education perspective, it seems as if there has been an unreflected introduction of (once) new repertoires to traditional structures without any real consequences for teaching practices or the education itself. The Norwegian study of GTE music (Sætre, 2014) shows that, while teacher educators are positive to more versatile repertoires, the institutions are not equipped with the competence or structures to incorporate those repertoires.

To add to this challenge of repertoire, digital musicians have started to enter music teacher training. Contemporary popular music is often digitally mediated, and the digital musician “has embraced the possibilities opened up by new technologies, in particular the potential of the computer for exploring, storing, manipulating and processing sound” (Hugill, 2008: 4). Digital musicianship differs from other kinds of musicianship, for instance, digital musicians may not be able to handle cellos or guitars, but they may be virtuoso laptop musicians. While formal musical training obviously could be helpful for developing musical skills, one may very well become a very successful digital musician without such training. In other words, student teachers’ musical background and competence are changing, and so are their future pupils. The pedagogic practices of Nordic music teacher education may not be equipped to handle this change.

2. Challenging the structures of music teacher education

Popular music, if taken seriously, must necessarily challenge the structures of music teacher education. Popular musicians generally integrate playing, listening, and creating, which is, of course, also very much the case for digital popular musicians who effortlessly integrate versatile activities such as sound design, composing, production, and hardware and software modifications as well as performance into their musicianship (Väkevä, 2013; Partti, 2012; Hugill, 2008). The current fragmented structures of music teacher education, where, for example, the main instru-

ment, composing, music history, and aural training are treated and taught separately, do not benefit popular musicianship. An obvious, though radical measure would be to dissolve old disciplinary structures and build new structures that afford versatility instead of specialty and integration instead of separation. Music teacher education needs structures that are better suited than the current conservatory style of education to cater to versatile musicianships and learning styles.

3. Challenging the role of the teacher and/or educator

Popular music is commonly linked to informal learning styles; that is, learning that takes place outside of schools, possibly in the public sphere, and that is free from teachers and educational intentions (Folkestad, 2006). Such learning processes are also aural, collaborative, and self-directed within peer groups, implying that participants decide what to play and how to work (Green, 2006; Green, 2002). Informal learning processes are obviously problematic for education. The teacher, his/her competence, and his/her mandate to educate students on behalf of society are cornerstones in formal education. However, when it comes to learning popular music, students could learn just as well, or perhaps even better, outside of school, and they may even be more competent than the teacher.

Popular music, then, inevitably challenges teachers' and educators' positions as masters or experts, thus leaving teachers' and educators the role of critical guides and facilitators (Allsup & Olson, 2012; Rodriguez, 2012), helping students to make things happen for themselves. However, as some researchers have pointed out, the emphasis on informal learning strategies could result in *laissez-faire* strategies, in effect leaving students to themselves to do as they wish (Georgii-Hemming & Westvall, 2012). Music teacher education is a meta-education, where student teachers in addition to learning musical skills, must also develop educational strategies, actions, and reflections. Leaving student teachers alone to figure out their own learning is not a viable strategy. Intervention is a necessity characteristic of teacher education. However, what kinds of intervention, by whom, and how much are all questions that need to be further explored in music teacher education to find a constructive balance between providing space for students' musical life-worlds and competence while still contributing to their educational development.

4. Challenging inherent perceptions of musical values and hierarchies

Popular music could challenge inherent perceptions of musical values and high/low culture, which inevitably mirror distinctions in musical taste and social class. Some consider popular music commercial and simple. However, judging popular music from art music's criteria of autonomy and complexity is unjust, which illustrates that value is always "value for" someone or something. Quoting Bowman (2004: 44): "Inherent and autonomous values are inspiring, but ideologically loaded, constructs that are designed to privilege music whose 'value for' is institutionally hidden". There is no reason to assume that popular music experiences are of less value or that such experiences do not produce profound insights or inspire fundamental questions. Popular music could provide experiences "of the body, time, and sociability, experiences which enable us to place ourselves in imaginative cultural narratives" (Frith, 1998: 275), which may equally evoke critical potential by propelling questions and reflections of dominant discourses and practices in educational, cultural and societal settings.

Even so, the question of methodology remains: "One could allow pupils to bring in their own music; however, what should we do with it then?", Green (2006: 105) asks.

Popular music indirectly challenges the dominant performance-oriented discourses by (a) introducing new digital instruments and new notions of musicianship, as well as (b) suggesting other approaches to music. In other words, music teacher education may need to take up other instruments and instrumental practices, and devote itself to other ways of musicking than instrumental performance. Lewis (2016), thus indirectly answering Green's question, suggests that music teachers and educators shift their attention from performance to listening, since listening is the main way that children and adolescents interact with music. Further, one should consider neither children and adolescents, nor student music teachers as passive recipients of popular culture but rather as "engaged participants in the creation of cultural meanings, alternative readings, and counter-narratives" (Lewis, 2016: 17). Popular music listening could then become a starting point for addressing vital issues of reflexivity, criticality, agency, and power within music teacher education.

Popular culture and its potential contribution to education

While some consider popular culture to be problematic in connection to education, others recognize popular culture as an important site for discussion and negotiation of meaning. According to Dolby (2003), popular culture practices are especially significant because of their potential contribution to social change and democratization: "...we cannot afford to ignore the popular as a site where youth are invested, where things happen, where identities and democratic possibilities are worked out, performed, and negotiated, and where new futures are written" (2003: 276).

Popular music is a pervasive cultural expression that children, adolescents and young adults have intimate knowledge of long before entering compulsory schools or institutions of higher education. Consequently, student teachers as well as students in schools are experiencing parts of their education in the public cultural sphere. However, the cultural and musical resources students bring to educational institutions may not be recognized as such by educators. According to Bowman, applying the lenses of the generic "aesthetic" of the conservatory tradition serves to exclude certain people from musicianship and music education, and the "people we presume to educate become incidental to the professional practice of music education (Bowman, 2007: 117). Or with Allsup's words: "Do we (...) teach a tradition, or do we teach a child?" (2016: 65), or in this case, a preservice teacher?

A broad understanding of popular music education must exceed training in specific instruments, genres and repertoires. If popular music practices are indeed human, social, and cultural, they give rise to questions about education, learning and cultural participation in a broad sense. Recognizing the popular as educationally potent, as well as making popular culture an integral part of the educational practices of music teacher education would represent an opportunity to engage student teachers actively, not only in their own education but also in the shaping of their future engagement in schools as music teachers (Christophersen & Gullberg, 2017).

Educational philosopher Biesta (2007) stresses the need to direct education towards the question of "what (or better: who) is coming towards us from the future" (p. 31) in order to avoid the mere maintenance and reproduction of traditions and status quo. He contends:

I am only arguing that we should not try to judge before the event – we should not try to specify what students and children and newcomers should be *before* they arrive. We should let them arrive first, and only then engage in judgement (Biesta, 2007: 34).

By extension, then, acknowledging students and preservice teachers' cultural and musical competence as well as popular culture's critical potential and significance for education would be one way of directing music teacher education towards the future.

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