Empowering girls as instrumentalists in popular music. Studying change through Engeström's cultural-historical activity theory

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ABSTRACT

*This article contributes new knowledge about the music educators' role in informal learning settings, and potentials for empowering girls to transcend gender norms characteristic of popular music. Specifically, the article discusses change in the fields of music education and gender in light of Engeström's cultural-historical activity theory and the concept of expansive learning. The discussion is based upon a study of girls ages 11 to 19 offered training to play in Norwegian popular music bands in an informal learning setting. The study identified conditions and elements that allowed change to take place by providing a potential for expansive learning and development. The authors seek to highlight and illustrate how Engeström's theory can be used to analyze different actors in the field, the elements that shape their activity in the work of creating independent and competent female musicians and instrumentalists, and the actors' motivation and learning processes that can be recognized through their mastering of tools. How the context, rules, and division of labor regulate and shape the activity and its goals and objects are important details.
Keywords: Informal learning; girls in popular music; music and gender; Engeström's cultural-historical activity theory.*

"It seems quite unnatural for girls to perform on a stage with a bass and electric guitar in their hands. It seems much more natural for boys to do this. Through this Music Workshop, we get help to learn and to understand that we too can stand there with instruments, because we are at least as awesome doing it, and it looks just as good, if not even better, because we are prettier." (Excerpt from the study "Sure you can!" – Band practice in a Music Workshop for girls (Nysæther, 2017). From the interview with Beate, a 16-year-old guitarist and vocalist.)

Introduction

In this article, the authors reflect upon how music educators can facilitate a learning environment that enables girls to act independently as instrumentalists within popular music, and furthermore, how cultural-historical activity theory and socio-cultural theory can serve as tools for understanding gender issues in student-directed learning in an informal learning context. As a backdrop, we refer to, and further reflect upon findings from the study: "Sure you can" – Band practice in a Music Workshop for girls" (Nysæther, 2017), that explored girls' needs in an educational context when playing together in pop bands, using cultural-historical activity theory as an alternative to post-structural feminism, the latter commonly applied in research on females in music education. The study identified needs linked to both methods of informal learning and to the breaking down of barriers related to gender norms within popular music.

Girls in popular music in Norway

Norway is known as one of the leading nations concerning gender equality in labor and society. However, previous research (Björck, 2011a, 2011b; Kamsvåg, 2011; Lorentzen & Stavrum, 2007; Onsrud, 2011, 2013; Stavrum, 2004, 2008) on women's participation as instrumentalists (performing typical band instruments such as electric bass, electric guitar, drums and keyboard) indicate that women in these contexts remain a minority. Research from education, leisure and professional practice demonstrate that in certain areas of popular music, women only represent 10 or 20 percent of participants (Lorentzen & Kvalbein, 2008; Lorentzen & Stavrum, 2007). The overall

pattern indicates that female popular musicians are predominantly vocalists whereas males typically play band instruments.

The question of female representation in popular music has been a core concern of researchers. Stavrum (2008) writes that women experience resistance as instrumentalists, are expected to show that they are good enough, and have difficulties obtaining positions as studio and freelance musicians as well as getting acceptance or entering bands consisting of men. Stavrum discusses the lack of female role models playing band instruments and the perception of these instruments as being male (Stavrum, 2008). Similarly, in her study of pupils in two Norwegian secondary schools, Onsrud (2013) observes that girls sing, and boys play instruments, even in popular music lessons. Onsrud argues that this pattern is partially due to teachers' lack of insight into gender challenges combined with limited time resources for training the pupils on band instruments, and lack of equipment. She further explains this through conformity embedded in the culture of popular music itself.

Kamsvåg (2011) finds similar patterns in her study of music lessons in a Norwegian secondary school; in pupil-directed activities, boys want to perform as instrumentalist in rock bands, while girls want to sing and dance in groups. Kamsvåg concludes that the adolescents use the musical activity for gender acceptance and status through the exploration of acceptable or non-acceptable ways to behave as girls and boys. In Sweden, Björck (2011a) studied four projects that aimed to empower and recruit women into the popular music field. She points out that male codes, such as being confident, having a loud appearance, and a strong focus on technology, as well as the objectification of the female body, are obstacles for women performing in popular music. She focuses on the discourse that women need to claim space in a masculine domain. At the same time, she concludes that women need a private space of their own, away from the male gaze, in order to gain the strength and confidence needed for developing skills and genuine expressions.

The training to become an instrumentalist in popular music has traditionally taken place outside of formal education. In Scandinavian countries, several studies have shown that rock bands are a natural learning context where instrumental skills are acquired through both collaboration and individual practice (Berkaak & Ruud, 1994; Eikeland, 2009; Karlsen & Väkevä, 2012; Westerlund, 2006). In Scandinavian compulsory schools, the use of band practice as a method for learning popular music has a long tradition (Kallio & Väkevä, 2017; Karlsen & Väkevä, 2012; Ruud, 1996). However, it was when Green (2002, 2008) first introduced her research-based methods of informal learning

that learning popular music in an authentic frame gained terrain in the international field of music pedagogy. A central aspect in Green's method for informal learning is that the learners should have ownership of their practice. In order to do so, the learners should contribute in the selection of musical material, they should copy and play by ear with a holistic approach to music through integration of listening, performing, improvisation and composing in all parts of the learning process, this should preferably take place in friend-groups where students learn collaboratively, and the music educator takes on a facilitator rather than a teaching role (Green, 2008, 2014).

About the study

In the study: ""Sure you can" – Band practice in a Music Workshop for Girls" (Nysæther, 2017), the research followed 22 girls aged 11–19 and their instructors for one semester in a municipality-based Music Workshop in a Norwegian city. The workshop involved 2.5 hours of classes per week, held at a Cultural Center where the girls were placed into four bands playing popular music. At the end of the semester, there was a concert where the different bands performed the pieces that they had been working on. In addition, a music video with a self-composed song was produced. The Music Workshop was established in 2011 as an initiative to get more girls to use the music facilities at the Cultural Center. By 2016 the distribution was equal between girls and boys, and the initiative was deemed successful (Nysæther, 2017). The research question for the study was:

> What needs for skills and facilitation do girls in the Music Workshop have when they are performing in popular music band activities?

The study employed an ethnographic approach with participant observation in own culture (Fangen, 2004; Fuglestad, Aase & Fossåskaret, 1997; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1996; Wadel, 1991). The study gathered a large amount of empirical data. Nysæther was present in the field for 58 hours. In addition; a large number of observational notes and 16 independent field interviews were recorded. The fieldwork was supported by three independent qualitative data acquisition methods: 1) Rotating idea development (RID)[1], 2) a written 50-question mapping survey for the group, includ-

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1   Rotating idea development (RID) is an idea development method incorporated by the project. The method focuses on student participation in the process of planning goals and content of the semester.

ing both open-ended and closed questions, and 3) a group interview with one of the bands resulting in 33 pages of interview analyses following the model of Kvale, Brinkmann, Anderssen, and Rygge (2009: 226). The data were triangulated and analyzed through Engeström's cultural-historical activity theory (Engeström, 2000, 2001, 2015; Engeström & Glaveanu, 2012; Sannino, Engeström & Lemos, 2016).

Socio-cultural foundation and the concept of expansive learning

We will give our readers an account of the socio-cultural and cultural-historical theoretical framework through five principles, as a point of departure for this article:

1) Knowledge is distributed and exists in a culture before the individual appropriates it into her own practice and mindset. In this way, knowledge is not seen only as an individually owned concept, but shared between individuals in collaboration, and collectively developed through time and history (Dysthe, 2001; Säljö, 2001, 2006).

2) Learning is situated in a context and individuals act through practice in collaboration with the context; they both affect and get affected by it. A context is an interactive system or community where individuals join forces to act together in different roles, expertise, tasks and identities to accomplish something, and their activity is maintained and adjusted by rules and cultural norms given by the specific context (Dysthe, 2001; Säljö, 2001, 2006). Context can be viewed as a community of practice and learning as legitimate peripheral participation as presented in the theories of Lave and Wenger (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). However; in this article, context will mainly be presented and analyzed through the framework of an activity system (Engeström, 2000, 2001, 2015).

3) A central relational aspect of learning in a socio-cultural understanding is the idea of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), first presented by Vygotsky and further developed by others (Dysthe, 2001; Illeris, 2006; Säljö, 2001, 2006). The movement through ZPD can be hard and painful for the learner. Without sufficient support from a more competent "other", the learner can experience defeat, resign,

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Every participator gets to input their own suggestions into categories concerning the planned activities in the Music Workshop.

or even experience apprehension when dealing with similar situations in the future (Illeris, 2006). This risk for resignation, if the resistance in the learning process becomes too overwhelming for the learner, is also a central aspect in Flow theory by Csikszentmihalyi (2014), who argues that Flow is located in a zone somewhere between two outlines: anxiety and boredom. Lack of Flow in a given practice can lead to poor motivation and participants quitting the activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1975).

4) Human knowledge is throughout history transformed into and "saved" inside cultural tools or artifacts and gets activated when individuals or cultures grasp the artifact and use its resources or functions to accomplish something they set their minds to (Säljö, 2001, 2006). This is illustrated by the term double stimulation (Engeström, 2015; Säljö, 2006; Vygotskij, Cole, John-Steiner, Scribner & Souberman, 1978), coined mediation, by which the tools and artifacts become mediating artifacts. When an individual is learning to use a certain tool, whether it is physical or mental, she goes through a process of slowly appropriating the tool into her own practice (Säljö, 2001, 2006).

5) New knowledge, practice, tools and technology are continuously developed. These expansions, and further potentials for change, can be understood and analyzed through the complex frame of an activity system or in the meetings and networks between two or more activity systems (Engeström, 2001). The idea of ZPD is further developed in this understanding to not only applying to the acquiring of existing knowledge, but also to the creation of new knowledge through an innovative boundary crossing coined expansive learning (Engeström, 2000, 2015; Illeris, 2006).

In the field of music education, these five principles underpin an understanding where learning to practice popular music is an appropriation of tools and context in an exist- ing, interactive culture that holds its own practice, methods, norms and musical and visual expressions. In the field of popular music, new genres, expressions, practices and technology are continuously modified and invented. The understanding of learning as expansive gives an interesting approach to both the practice and research on music education in popular music. Furthermore, when we add the issue of gender and girls as a minority in the field, the theory can help clarify why initiatives like the all-girls' Music Workshop may help empower girls as instrumentalists in popular music, and some of the gender-related issues one must pay attention to in this field (Nysæther, 2017). Expansive learning provides insight into learning as the development and creation of something entirely new: "Expansive learning is a creative type of learn- ing in which learners join their forces to literally create something novel, essentially

learning something that does not yet exist." (Sannino et al., 2016). Thereby we can understand how changes occur and what effects the changes might have. We can even intervene into an existing practice to promote changes. Cultural-historical activity theory can also contribute to explain why an activity becomes static, and why change is so hard to accomplish. But expansive learning cannot fully be understood without the analytic framework that Engeström developed in his exploration of the theory.

In the next paragraph, we will show how Nysæther (2017) used Engeström's cultural-historical activity theory (2000, 2001, 2015) as a methodical frame of analysis in his study on the Music Workshop with girls. Thereafter we will expand upon this and further analyze the Music Workshop as a ZPD for expansive learning.

Cultural-historical activity theory as a methodological frame of analysis

Engeström's cultural-historical activity theory has been developed through three generations. The first was Vygotsky's idea of mediation through double stimulation, that Leontjev put into a model of a triangle that shows how individuals act to stimulate or manipulate an object using a tool (Engeström, 2000, 2001, 2015; Vygotskij et al., 1978). But Leontjev was also concerned with the overall activity and described how complex chains of individual actions lead to a common accomplishment for the activity (Leontyev, 1981). Engeström expanded Leontjevs triangle of subject, tools and object – to include the whole activity, adding three components of context: rules, community and division of labor, making the 2nd generation as presented in the figure below.
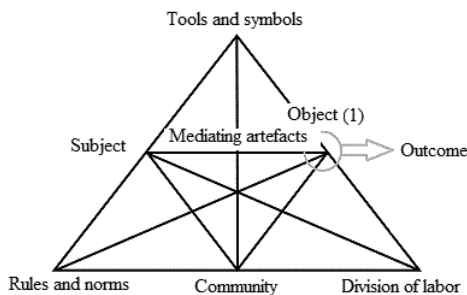

Figure 1: 2nd generation Activity Theory (Engeström, 2015)

The top of the activity system shows the subject's relation to the object through the mediating artifacts, tools and symbols, what is defined as the components of the 1st generation. This is in the 2nd generation supported by three new components: The rules are explicit and implicit stated norms, rules, and conventions, which control and adjust the participants in their actions; the community shows the group of participants sharing a goal and perceiving themselves as members of the same group. The division of labor is the expertise and specialization of tasks and roles, clarifying the distinction between individual actions with their own goals, and the common motive and object for the activity (Engeström, 2000, 2015). An object can be concrete, like the semester concert, or abstract, like a vision or a concept like "what does it mean to be a woman in popular music". The object is the leading component of the activity system, but it will first become a real object when it responds to a need, and when the participants at the same time add meaning and motivation into it (Engeström, 2015). An object is always under construction and change, is often multi-faceted and fragmented, and can hardly be grasped solely by the individual, but must be understood in relation to the community (Sannino et al., 2016). Later, when the theory got international, issues concerning conflict, interaction and dialogue between different traditions or perspectives became prominent. This is addressed through the 3rd generation, where two or more activity systems interacting through the negotiation or construction of a potentially shared object, is the smallest unit of analysis (Engeström, 2000, 2001).
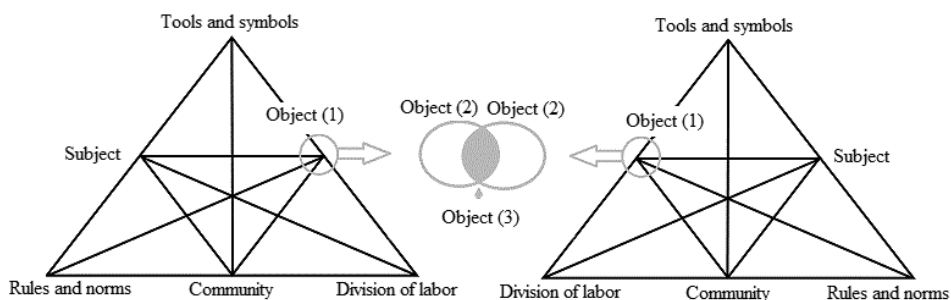

Figure 2: 3rd generation Activity Theory (Engeström, 2001:136)

In Nysæther's (2017) study, the concept of 3rd generation was applied to the girls (pupils) and the instructors (educators) practice and collaboration in the Music Workshop. Using the 3rd generation model, he viewed the multi-faceted and fragmented object "what we focus on in our practice" (1–3) as seen and described in the empirical data from the two groups of subjects – the girls and the instructors. The research question for Nysæther's study was placed as the shared object, but the needs were displayed by the five components in each of the two activity systems, as shown in the figure below:

The interaction between the pupils- and educators perspective analyzed through Cultural-Historical Activity Theory
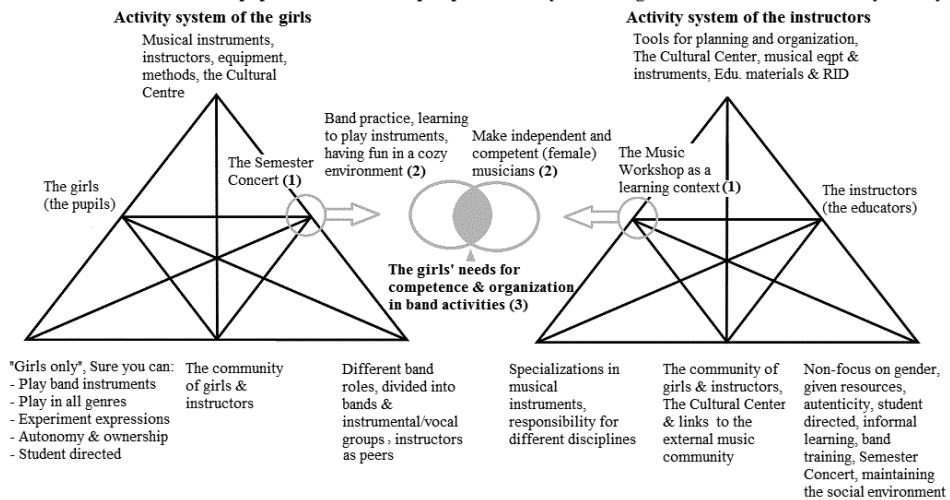
Figure 3: The girls' and instructors' activity (Nysæther, 2017: 79)

The girls were focusing on their vision for the semester concert (1). This was made into a more concrete object by (2) the practice of rehearsing individually and collectively to make a great show for the audience, or what the girls described as: "Practicing in our own band, learning to play musical instruments and have fun in a cozy environment". From the girls' perspective, they expressed their needs (3) for facilities, guidance and tutoring as immediate needs in relation to the present challenges that they faced, given the context of their activity. The instructors (educators) focused on the vision of the Music Workshop as a learning context and community of practice (1), and their practice was directed to the long-time work of creating competent and independent (female)

musicians by facilitating and educating them in the practice of playing in pop bands (2). However, the fact that the pupils were female, was not a subject of great attention in their practice as educators and facilitators, although it was an implicit aim for the project to empower girls as musicians. By providing equipment, by setting clear rules to fill all band roles, to aim their practice at the semester concert, and by challenging the girls in their creative work, the instructors also created needs for the girls (3) to master new tools and become sufficiently competent to achieve their goals for the concert. Nysæther found that the girls' needs acted as a potentially shared object (3), that was shaped and negotiated by both subjects, and that expressing, creating and responding to needs, were indeed at the core of the interaction of learning and tutoring in the Music Workshop.

Engeström's five principles (Engeström, 2001: 136,137) were deployed in the further analyses of the data. The five principles are: 1) The activity system is the prime unit of analysis. 2) The activity systems are multi-voiced, meaning that activity systems exhibit different opinions, intentions and views. 3) Historicity implicates that the activity system should be viewed in light of its own history. 4) Contradictions, understood as latent tensions embedded within or between activity systems, are sources of change and development, and finally 5) The potential for expansive transformation is seen as a collective journey through the ZPD (Ibid.).

Analyzing the findings through the concept of expansive learning

Nysæther identified several interrelated aspects of the activity that took place in the learning context, which were decisive to produce independent and competent female musicians (Nysæther, 2017: 69 FF). We have further analyzed some of these findings, and outlined how we see the essential elements of the learning process of the girls, as showed in the model below:
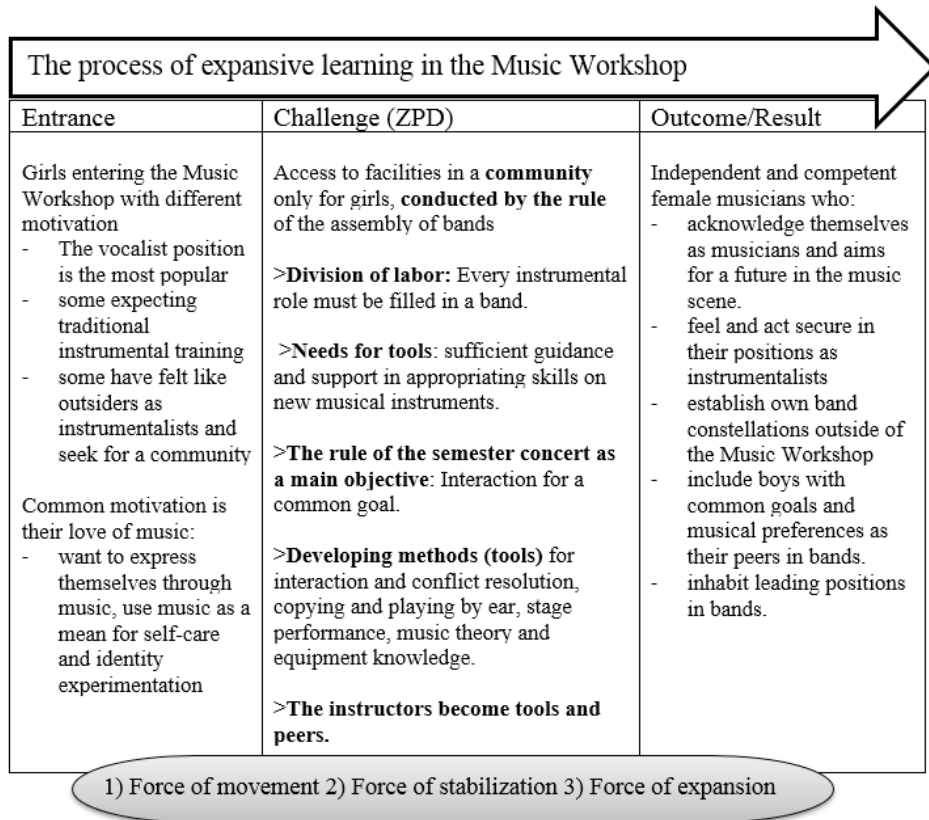
The process of expansive learning in the Music Workshop		
Entrance	Challenge (ZPD)	Outcome/Result
Girls entering the Music Workshop with different motivation - The vocalist position is the most popular - some expecting traditional instrumental training - some have felt like outsiders as instrumentalists and seek for a community Common motivation is their love of music: - want to express themselves through music, use music as a mean for self-care and identity experimentation	Access to facilities in a **community** only for girls, **conducted by the rule** of the assembly of bands >**Division of labor:** Every instrumental role must be filled in a band. >**Needs for tools**: sufficient guidance and support in appropriating skills on new musical instruments. >**The rule of the semester concert as a main objective**: Interaction for a common goal. >**Developing methods (tools)** for interaction and conflict resolution, copying and playing by ear, stage performance, music theory and equipment knowledge. >**The instructors become tools and peers.**	Independent and competent female musicians who: - acknowledge themselves as musicians and aims for a future in the music scene. - feel and act secure in their positions as instrumentalists - establish own band constellations outside of the Music Workshop - include boys with common goals and musical preferences as their peers in bands. - inhabit leading positions in bands.

1) Force of movement 2) Force of stabilization 3) Force of expansion

Figure 4: The process of expansive learning in the Music Workshop.

The figure shows that the girls enter the Music Workshop with different expectations and intentions that meet the principle of multi-voicedness. Still, they share the same love of music and a motivation for self-expression, seeing music as a means of self-care and self-technology (DeNora, 2000; Ruud, 2013a, 2013b; Stålhammar, 2006). As members of the Music Workshop they are challenged to establish bands and fill all the instrumental roles. As there are no boys to play the instruments, the girls must learn to take the instrumentalist roles, even if they lack experience and need to start from scratch. They also need to learn to collaborate and interact as a band unit, which demands skills for practicing together and resolving conflicts. They need to learn the methods of rehearsing in popular music styles, including the reading of chord progression forms, copying and playing by ear, in addition to other skills like stage performance, music theory and equipment knowledge. The girls seek guidance when

needed, and the instructors (educators) become background facilitators and tools, rather than tutors, in the girls' music activities. After being members for a while, more girls want to start their own band projects outside the Music Workshop. Some girls then feel ready as members and move on, while others remain in the Music Workshop and continue to use its community and competence, as an incubator to gain skills, which they use in their practice outside.

What were the crucial elements that had to be present for the girls to pass the challenge of the Music Workshop, and reach the point of independence and empowerment? We believe that the three constituting forces illustrated in our figure are essential for shaping of the Music Workshop activity as a ZPD for expansive learning: The first is the force of motivation through "having fun, being in the zone" interpreted in a balance between mastery and resistance, safety and unsafety, that drives the activity forward through the ZPD, the need for, and anticipation of experiencing Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1975), giving the girls the spirit to overcome challenges and reach the other side as competent and independent musicians (Nysæther, 2017: 80, 81, 93). The second is the force of stabilization that makes the girls stay in the activity over time. The contradiction between the volunteerism of the workshop as a leisure activity on the one hand, and the strong commitment to the band and its dependence on each participant's expertise on the other, made both the girls and the instructors engage in maintaining a safe and cozy social environment where the girls were free to express themselves as musicians. This second force was therefore found in the activity system's division of labor ("I am needed in my expertise and role in the band"), the community ("we take care of each other"), and in the rules ("we are free to express and experiment with our identity") (Nysæther, 2017: 82). Finally, the third is the force of expansion, driven by the agency of the participants leading to change, beyond the activity of the Music Workshop. By the autumn of 2016, when Nysæther did his fieldwork, the Music Workshop had resulted in creating a growing environment for girls in and around the Cultural Center, which then again contributed to the local music community. But what was the vital element that had led to this development? Applying the principle of historicity, Nysæther found that a key success factor was that the activity of the Music Workshop was maintained over time, allowing the formation of repercussions where experienced members became role models for novices, and experienced instrumentalists gained status within the community of girls. Former members established bands and networks that recruited new members to the Music Workshop. This effect of girls acting as change agents through actions of transformative agency (Engeström, 2015; Nysæther, 2017: 87, 88), proving time after time that girls with instruments were possible, natural and

cool, had over time driven the activity into expanding circles (Engeström, 2015: xx, xxi, xxii), that challenged the existing cultural perceptions of girls as musicians, and had caused a transformation of the object "girls as musicians".

The music educator's role in empowering girls as instrumentalists

There are ongoing discussions concerning the educator's role in popular music. Green (2002, 2008) has, in her informal learning method, divided the learning process into different steps, where the teacher sometimes just observes the students, and sometimes intervenes in the process. Green advocates that the activities ought to take place on the student's terms, that students should choose both the song material and the instrument (Ibid). Green's strong focus on the student's freedom of choice and management has been problematized in the research community (Karlsen & Väkevä, 2012).

The sense of ownership to both their music material, band management, and the overall community in the Music Workshop, was also of great importance for the girls to engage in the activity and do the hard work of learning to use new instruments (Nysæther, 2017). In this matter, the instructors were part of the girls' tool-kit, and in the girls' method of rehearsal and creating musical products, they used the instructors to get feedback on their own actions and products. Another significant task for the instructors was to provide other kinds of tools, such as elements of music theory, methods of musical interaction, and new techniques on their musical instruments.

The balance between intervention and withdrawal

The instructors expressed that the balance between intervention and withdrawal in the girls' band practice, was the most challenging task in their role as educators in an informal context. The instructors had learned through experience that the degree of intervention had to be rapidly assessed in the actual situational context and in response to the immediate needs of the bands. The instructors had to be constantly present as observers and collaborators in the practice room with the band. In other words, there were no sneak-offs to the coffee-machine when the bands were practicing. The girls got accustomed to the instructors hanging around and did not seem bothered

by their presence. The girls expressed that they did not want to be left alone while practicing, because they needed the instructors' presence as a safety line, with the possibility to quickly seek guidance when needed. The data gathered from the Music Workshop point to a shared intention between learners and educators, to find the most efficient learning method and to avoid periods of stagnation and conflicts, because time moved fast towards the semester concert. We will argue that in an informal learning context, the presence of the teacher is important, and the ownership and control of the process is pending, negotiated between the students and the educator as a near-peer collaborator. The educators' task has shifted from "convincing" dissemination of expertise and knowledge, where the educator would traditionally have to explain why the given subject is important to learn, to providing instruction driven by demand, where the primary objective is to improvise the support asked for by the students. The educators must also foresee needs for new tools that the students might lack the ability to identify themselves.

The music educators as empowerment agents

Nysæther (2017) found certain aspects of the student-directed learning to be particularly important for girls. Establishing rules for the division of labor was crucial to enable the girls to make the leap to become instrumentalists and band musicians. When the girls had to play all roles in a band, not everybody could be singers, although the vocalist role was the most coveted. "Girls play all instruments" came in direct conflict with the norm: "girls sing, boys play" that existed in the community outside the Music Workshop. Over time, the activity of the all-girls Music Workshop community, with the new division of labor, had created a culture expressing that playing instruments is natural for girls. When new girls entered this established community of practice, they met experienced role models who were good at playing band instruments. It was crucial that the instructors expressed a "Sure You Can" attitude, where the values were translated into words that provided the power to open new practices for the girls. This is illustrated by the following quote a group interview with the rock-band:

"...then you got the question: "Do you want to play rock music?", and I was like:" Yep, keep it coming". (…) and I was told that I could do it! And that was what gave me the guts to do it, the guts to play rock music. That I was told that sure I could do it, that I could learn it, to hit as hard on the guitar as I pleased, yeah, just keep it coming! The Music Workshop helped me a lot in this matter". (Nysæther, 2017: 57)

One might imagine that girls easily identify and grasp all the possibilities that are available to musicians, but this is not necessarily the case. It is important for girls that the educator recognizes and projects opportunities that mobilize their actions and prospects in the role of a musician. As educators, we must assume that our own attitude, and what we express, may have a greater impact than we might think. Girls need to hear that they can, they need to be challenged to explore new practices – and when supported through this practice, they experience that it is indeed true that girls can play "boys' instruments" and express themselves musically and personally in a variety of different ways, as impressively and naturally as any boy.

The challenge of gender norms when seeking authenticity

The girls in the Music Workshop were familiar with the gender norms that limited their practice, although this was a topic that was not much talked about. Several places in the empirical material, we found examples of the girls attributing to the instructors the power to open boundaries. It seemed that the girls felt a need for validation of their ability to cross over and gain access to new domains.

Nysæther (2017) also discovered the necessity to establish rules for deciding on the goal of the music activity. Here is an example from the study: The whole group of girls was to make a music video of a self-composed song by one of the bands. In this process, the girls laid the premises for the content, genre and the musical and visual expression. Although the instructors arranged studio sessions and instrumentalists recorded a piece of music in a funk-rock arrangement, this was at the end rejected by the group of girls, because they did not want to identify themselves with this type of music in a music video. The process ended with a soft-pop song with electronic beats produced solely on the computer by an instructor, with no room left for the instrumentalists. The girls provided the vocals, wrote the manuscript, did each other's hair and makeup, and posed as actors in the visuals of the video. There was no visual representation of girls playing or self-staging with instruments in the video either, just a group of girls singing. The girls expressed that they were satisfied and proud of the result, which became an authentic professionally produced music video, similar to the kind of videos their idols in the popular music industry are presenting.

First of all, this example illustrates that the girls had a strong focus on the product. It was less important how the process had taken place and who had done the work. Even

though one of the instructors made the music and mixed the song, and an external director had done the filming and editing, the girls had a clear view that this was their music video. This corresponds with what Lave and Wenger write about as legitimate peripheral participation in a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991, 2000; Wenger, 1998, 2000). Even though the students had only participated in peripheral roles in the production of the music video, they experienced great ownership of the product. More important is the second issue, that the girls, wanting to make something authentic, nice and appropriate, were drawn to the expected normalcy for female representation in the music industry. In other words, when the activity was free of rules, the girls picked rules from a familiar activity system and implemented these rules in their own activity. This can also be understood through the concept of reification (Wenger, 1998). The girls had a strong opinion on what they valued as a "real" music video that they would benefit from. For the girls to engage in the process, they needed to see the music video as meaningful, and they found meaning by aligning the representation of themselves on the video with the norms of the popular culture. This shows "real-ness" and normality as powerful mechanisms (Schei, 2007). Nysæther concluded that the making of the music video conflicted with the intention of the Music Workshop, which was to empower the girls as instrumentalists and to be bold stage performers. Instead the instrumentalists and bands were rationalized away, and only the vocalists remained. Like Hargreaves, Marshall, and North (2003), Nysæther concludes that powerful technology challenges existing practice and enforces the development of new methods in the field of music education. Furthermore, the example of the music video also shows the girls' clear move towards fulfilling conformity in the choice of music expressions and genres. This illustrates that gendered conventions are embed-ded in popular music (Björck, 2011a, 2011b; Green, 1997; Hawkins, 2017; Onsrud, 2011, 2013; Ruud, 2013b; Stavrum, 2008; Vinge, 1999), affecting the activity through constraints encapsulated in the cultural history of the activity. The question arises as to how we as music educators can facilitate such activities in an authentic, student-oriented and informal context without amplifying these norms. It seems important that the authenticity must be found in the tools of the activity system, and in the train-ing to master the tools. With tools, we are referring to the instruments, methods of rehearsal and informal learning and collaboration, methods of performance, industry knowledge, equipment and technology that is authentic to the popular music scene. Nevertheless, the rules for instrumental roles and gender configurations cannot be directed solely by the students. If the students are left to choose their own rules, this would potentially result in the attraction to gender conformities and a stereotypical division of labor, where "girls sing, and boys play instruments" (Björck, 2011a, 2011b; Kamsvåg, 2011; Lorentzen & Kvalbein, 2008; Lorentzen & Stavrum, 2007; Onsrud,

2013; Stavrum, 2004, 2008). This pattern could, in a typical classroom context, be perceived as if the girls are overrun by boys, and therefore excluded from the roles of instrumentalists. However, even though boys are absent, girls still choose to fulfill the expected norms of what is suitable for a girl to do in popular music. The educator must therefore play a significant role in facilitating a division of labor in the community and be aware of the latent gender biases associated with popular music culture.

The need for a private space?

Björck (2011a) has discussed female musicians' need for space as both agency and privacy. She found that women were expected to claim their space in the male domain of popular music. At the same time, women needed a private space of their own to gain strength and seek community. Nysæther (2017) found that a community consisting only of girls made it necessary, and hence easier, to enter the role of instrumentalists. However, is it necessary to exclude boys in order for girls to become instrumentalists? In the educational system in Norway, gender segregation as a measure is strongly regulated by law (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017). Nevertheless, in leisure activities, there is widespread practice of separating girls and boys (Fasting, 2008). Regarding the stereotypical behavior and participation in school music lessons (Kamsvåg, 2011; Onsrud, 2013), what can be done in the school context to ensure the same possibilities for girls and boys acting as instrumentalists, or vice versa, as singers? Nysæther's research suggests that establishing rules is a key element, and that the exclusion of boys is just a very efficient way to change the rules concerning division of labor. We believe that rules also can be changed by highlighting and paying attention to gender issues in the rule-setting and framing of an informal learning context. This subject warrants further research. Cultural-historical activity theory can be a useful tool in developmental research (Engeström, 2001, 2015; Engeström & Glaveanu, 2012; Sannino et al., 2016), and we will encourage researchers to approach action-oriented methods in music education that safeguards the gender perspective in informal learning contexts inside and outside the classroom.

Conclusion

In this article, we have reflected upon issues concerning girls as instrumentalists in an informal learning context in popular music, with the study of an all-girl Music Workshop in Norway as a backdrop (Nysæther, 2017). We have outlined several elements to be considered when facilitating learning environments that respond to girls' needs when they are learning to become musicians. By using cultural-historical activity theory as a tool for analyzing the impacts made by the Music Workshop, we have argued that this theory can bring new insights to the issue of empowering girls as instrumentalists.

We have discussed the role of the educator in an informal setting, where we argue for pursuing negotiation and collaboration between the students and the educators in the learning activity. It is also vital for the educator to be aware of the importance of recognizing opportunities that mobilize girls in their role as musicians. Establishing bands and creating common goals of performing in a concert seem to be strong motivators for girls to learn instrumentalist skills. It is also important to establish a safe community, which over time allows girls to be role models for each other, and to engage in band practice, with both girls and boys, outside of the educational context.

When the goal was shifted to producing a music video, the girls adopted norms and expressions from the popular music culture, and the instrumentalist roles were abandoned in favor of the attractive, stereotypical pop vocalist role. From this, we can see that the establishment of rules may be essential when working with aims of authenticity. The authentic elements should be carried out by the access to and mastering of tools, and not by the rules and the division of labor. These two components should not be uncritically adopted in an educational context or left open to be managed by the students. This brings forth the need of developing educational methods in informal learning where the educator also can be a clear director who sets the rules for the activity in order to facilitate a context that addresses the gender issues related to popular music.

We have reflected upon the effects of a single gender context, and we believe that the absence of boys is just an effective means to change the rules and the division of labor, so that "girls sing, boys play" gets replaced by "girls play all instruments".

This article has shown that it is possible to study girls in popular music without utilizing a post-structural feminist perspective. Cultural-historical activity theory poses

the potential for change as more important than the fact that the target group is girls. This theory, as an analytical method, focuses on potentials for constructive change and development, rather than consolidating a perspective that highlights patriarchy, male hegemony, and gender-based discrimination. Studying gender in a relational and practice-oriented perspective can give new contributions to the research on gender in music education, providing new insights to how the gender norms can both be challenged and changed through practice.

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