

## The majorest third ever played—music education as an adventure of knowledge

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### ABSTRACT

*The point of departure for this article is a research study (Nyberg 2011), with the purpose to investigate how students in Swedish Upper secondary school's music programme conceptualize and communicate musical knowledge and learning. Based on pragmatist philosophy and narrative inquiry, a qualitative study was undertaken. The empirical data was analysed using narrative analysis (Kohler Riessman 2005; Bowman 2006; Clandinin et al. 2007, 2009), and categorised in relation to pragmatist key concepts. The results showed that regardless of school, form and type of programme, none of the informants stated that they had been asked to reflect upon these matters before. Musical knowledge is conceptualized by the participating students as a three-part combination of theory, practice and expression/emotion that cannot be fully separable; knowledge that is manifested through action and valued differently depending on surroundings—hence contextualized. In turn, musical learning in school is seen as dependent upon action, and is made possible through the will to practice and thereby develop innate abilities. In this, curricula and teacher experience are seen as key factors. In accordance with what Deweyan pragmatism asserts, for music students' voices to be heard in music education it is crucial that the teacher is the one who takes responsibility for making a dialogue with the students possible. Through their professionalism, teachers will be able to learn, teach, guide and form the education in accordance and balance with students' experiences, interests and the demands of musicianship as well as curricula. This way, education may become an adventure of knowledge for students as well as teachers.*

*Keywords: pragmatism, narrative, narrative analysis, music education in Upper secondary school, students' perspective.*

## Introduction

The student was adamant, and kept playing a minor third on the bass as he sort of huffed: “Well this is the ‘majorest’ third I can play anyway...” The teacher, somewhat bewildered, scratched his head and then started to speak: “I think I understand your way of thinking, but I want to be sure. Can you describe in *what way* that third you just played is major?” During their following discussion, the teacher and his student not only realized that they had come to a point where their respective trains of thought deviated from what was previously a common track, but through that exchange of experiences they also unveiled the source of that deviation. In their struggle with teaching and learning how to create bass lines in accordance with harmony and chord progressions, it became clear that the student’s knowledge of chord structures and intervals on the instrument related to the physical playing technique—where a minor third sometimes spans a wider (hence “majorer”) fingering than a major third. The teacher’s knowledge, on the other hand, included a framework of music theory and was primarily focused on the sounding distance between pitches. The teacher’s *lack* of knowledge in this case was in regard of his student’s positionality<sup>1</sup>, including preconceptions of theory connected to the physical practice of playing the bass. The solution in this case lay in a communication that exposed the teacher’s and student’s respective positionalities, preconceptions and experiences of music in practice and theory.

This situation is an example that illuminates education as a *mutual activity* as well as a *communicative practice* (Dewey 1916, 1958; Biesta 2007a, 2007b; Larsson 2007). But what lies behind the mutual and the communicative? What experiences are being expressed and how? These are the questions posed and problematized in this article by presenting and discussing a research project conducted within the frames of the Swedish Upper secondary school’s music programme (Nyberg 2011)—a project that hopefully can become one of the building blocks in making music education an adventure of knowledge.

## Purpose and research question

The overall purpose of the research project (Nyberg 2011) was to find and highlight pathways to students’ learning in Swedish Upper secondary schools’ music programme. In this article the aim is to present and expand upon the specific purpose: to develop an understanding of and knowledge about students’ conceptualizations of musical knowledge and learning from a pragmatic perspective. Conceptualization

is in this article addressed as a way to reflect upon and describe, explain and present experience as well as understanding and opinions.

The specific research question being examined and discussed in this article is: how do music students attending Swedish Upper secondary schools' music programme conceptualize and communicate musical knowledge and learning?

## Philosophical and pedagogical background

John Dewey (1934/2005) describes tension as a prerequisite for equilibrium and balance, as well as growth in life. Reconnecting to the narrative in the beginning, the teacher and student experienced tension until it became clear that they did not agree upon the subject matter of what the constituents were of playing a major third. I want to stress that the resistance it caused concerned them both—teacher as well as student—and this because one crucial aspect of teaching and learning according to Dewey (1916/1997; 1934/2005) is his view of the *holistic* and the *relational*. This means that there is no use in making separations between for example theory and practice or body and mind. These are terms that can be used as models of explanation, but they cannot be separated in a dualistic, Cartesian sense since they are to be regarded as prerequisites rather than opposites. The world is seen as existing outside the human being but can only be examined, explained and understood through the frames of history and social conventions, wherefore what is seen as real and true develops and changes over time. The core of Deweyan pragmatic philosophy can therefore, although simply, be summarized as composed of two categories: the single organism and the social context (Hartman, Lundgren and Hartman 2004, my translation)—this in conjunction with the notion of action as the way for the organism to grow. Since action, according to Dewey, is not solely to be seen in terms of physical movements but also in terms of thinking, he sees the goal of his philosophy as regarding *intelligent action* (Biesta 2007a; Dewey 1916; Hartman, Lundgren and Hartman 2004; Pihlgren 2008; Väkevä 2007). Moira von Wright (2007) elaborates on the thoughts of George Herbert Mead and Dewey regarding action and learning, and points to the possibility and necessity to regard action as not solely an observable act of perceivable movements, but as something also to an act of being and related to meaning. What is perceived as passive by an observer may for the observed be an intense period of activity, something that can occur for instance within a teaching situation (cf. Heikinheimo 2010). This signifies a dialectic relationship of mind and body, and the fact that they cannot be separated but are permanently linked to one

another. Acting in the world, or rather interacting (as illustrated in the introduction of this article) brings forth the above-mentioned tensions and causes the individual to react, and thereby grow through the gaining and development of experience. Learning may then be seen as based on interaction with others through the communication of experience (Dewey 1916/1997).

In an educational system, students' experiences need to be taken into account in relation to demands framing the education, for instance curricula. It was Dewey's belief that teachers need to know their students as well as the educational framework (Dewey 2004). In relation to music education, previous research show that the outcome for students partaking actively in their own education is one of consummation, appearing for instance as heightened awareness of learning strategies (Green 2006; Rusinek 2007) or music in school being regarded more in aspects of expression rather than technical prowess (Strandberg 2007). The way students apprehend music when they feel included in the education can also change, from school-music to music (in school) (cf. Green 2006; Sandberg 2006; Strandberg 2007). Börje Stålhammar (2004a; 2004b) stresses that in music education the socio-cultural aspects of student experience have been in focus as opposed to the emotional aspects. In relation to Deweyan pragmatism, the focus in these cases has been on experiences *done* and not *undergone* (Dewey 1934/2005). Dewey sees these aspects as crucial parts of an experience, and as a unification of knowledge as well as feelings. Without both these aspects, he points out that the experience made often is inchoate and thereby risk lack of meaning for the perceiver. For to make an experience complete, and thus meaningful, one can and often need to reflect upon the experience made. Experience is therefore something both immediate and reflective. Regarding experience in relation to music, Dewey (1934/2005) sees *esthetic* experience as so powerful that it is both *direct* and *complete* even without reflection. Or as Heidi Westerlund (2002: 43) puts it: "Music' makes sense". This may be one reason why students, when asked to reflect on music as being both a school subject and a free-time phenomenon, start making contextualisations regarding their musical preferences in connection to learning music in their school environment. Instead of being passive participants, they become active advocates for a more elaborative music education with suggestions regarding for example peer-to-peer teaching, thus redefining the teacher role in some parts to more of a supervising one (Stålhammar 2004a; 2004b).

The balance between personal interest and the demands within an educational framework is one where tension can appear, and when that happens teachers as well as students need to reflect upon their own, personal experiences and interests in relation to said demands. This is a balance where educators need to involve students in the pedagogical process, although the responsibility for content, shaping or execution

of the educational practice never can be left solely to the students. Teachers have an ethic and democratic responsibility for providing students with a social and cultural capital, vital for their understanding of and cooperation with other people and, in the widest sense, a variety of cultures (cf. Dewey 2004; Georgii-Hemming 2005; Larsson 2007; Skolverket 2011). The practical aspects of teacher responsibility lies in making sure that the learning activities indeed have a musical focus. Students need to be guided and supervised in their learning so not solely to become administrators of their own time, but practicing and reflective participants and performers (Ericsson and Lindgren 2010; Georgii-Hemming and Westvall 2010). In this article, these aspects are elaborated upon in relation to the stated purpose and research question—hence focusing on music education within Swedish Upper secondary school and the student.

## Methodology and design

This article concerns students' views of musical knowledge and learning, students who attend Swedish Upper secondary schools' national music programme (a non-compulsory education). To gain access to these views in relation to the purpose and research question, a set of mixed methods was used: a questionnaire with follow-up focus group interviews. A possibility of constructing a narrative was thereby created, in regarding and analysing the qualitative data as conceptualized experiences. In the following part of this text, the methodology and mixed methods will be presented as well as the design of the study.

### Narrative inquiry

The research project engages narrative as a way of coping with existence, and narrative inquiry as the study of experience as story (Bowman 2006; Clandinin et al. 2007; 2009). This comprises a field of research with frameworks for designing, living out and representing narratives—in short, to make inquiries into stories in a narrative way. Narrative inquiry shares features not only with other qualitative research forms, but also with ontological standpoints such as experience, temporality, situatedness and sociality. These features make Deweyan pragmatist philosophy “well suited for framing narrative research” (Clandinin and Murphy 2009: 599), while Dewey himself regarded narrative as a both powerful and important tool for learning (1910).

Narrative may be seen as a construction aimed at communication. As a construction it is more of a prism than a mirror, constructing an image of the past where fantasy

and strategy influence how the narrator chooses to connect the parts of the narrative and make it meaningful to others. Narratives may be constructed on different scales and levels, with the common features of *sequence* and *consequence*: situations are selected, organized and linked regarding what is seen as meaningful to a specific group of people (Kohler Riessman 2005). The differences in types of narrative may be described through scope and size, differences that Wayne D Bowman (2006: 7) relate to as follows:

At one end of a continuum lies “mere” narrative; toward the other end lies story. As we progress toward the storied end of this narrative continuum, we add, successively, considerations like explanation, teleology, unity of purpose or intentionality, plot, and so forth. Story is narrative that is designed, among other things, to invoke emotional response: to be persuasive.

Accordingly, with reference to Dewey’s notion of experience, Bowman sees narrative as descriptive of experience, while story describes *an* experience.

Perspective, scope and size may differ but—regarding narrative research—common for all types of narrative are their connection to time, sociality and situation, something Jean Clandinin (2006: 47) refers to as “three-dimensional space”. Studies have temporal dimensions and address temporal matters. They focus on the social and personal appropriately balanced to the inquiry, as well as the fact that the performed studies occur in specific places or in sequences of places. Although focus on these parameters may differ according to approach, the researcher must never disregard any one of them (Bowman 2006; Clandinin, Murray Orr and Pushor 2007). In the research project presented here, *music* was included as an additional parameter in the narrative analysis connected to the participants’ experiences inside and outside the school environment. The key aspect for any narrative research approach, regardless of focus and type of narrative, is the possibility to enable the construction of a narrative based on informants’ conceptualized experiences.

Besides focus and type of narrative, a difference also lies in what way the researcher relates to text: is it what is being examined, or is it the form in which the research is being concluded and presented? The latter is of importance for this study regarding the methods for the attaining of data (questionnaire and focus group interviews). The data consists of text and speech transcribed into text, finally presented as text, for which reason it is necessary to focus on “the meaning and linguistic forms of text” (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009: 240, my translation). The intentions of doubling/

combining information in the forms of text and speech are multiple, and concern both the participants and the researcher. The former have had the opportunity to supplement/adjust and discuss their written answers, and the latter has had the possibility to cross-reference sources and access additional parameters such as tone of voice and interaction, among others.

## Questionnaire and focus group interviews

To enable access to the students' conceptualizations, the empirical part of the study was conducted in two stages. The choice of methods was made with the analysis process in mind: to enable access to the students' personal narratives.

The first stage consisted of a questionnaire with open questions regarding the participants' personal views on musical knowledge and learning, within as well as outside the school context (Bjørndal 2005; Scrimshaw and Gleason 1992; Trost 2001). In the second stage, the students participated in focus group interviews, where data from the questionnaire had been analysed and was used in the form of an interview template (Kitzinger 1994; Morgan 1996; Kidd and Parshall 2000; Kirsch 2001; Krueger and Casey 2001; Kosny 2003; Hollander 2004).

Of a planned total of thirty-two informants, a total of thirty students' responses from four different schools were finally included in the research project. The number of interviews amounted to seven, with group sizes ranging from three to seven participants. Aiming for diversity in the qualitative data, the participating schools—all offering the national music programme and using the same curriculum—were chosen from a set of parameters. Taken into account were geographical location, entry qualification levels, school size, musical profile and type of school organization.<sup>2</sup> The chosen schools represent different geographical locations (city centre, city district, suburb and commuter district of a major Swedish city) with high, middle and low entry qualification levels and municipal as well as independent school forms. The sizes range from app. 350 to 1000 students with musical profiles covering classical, pop/rock and jazz as well as stage performance. The pedagogical systems and school forms range from the outspoken progressive to what can be regarded as traditional, with the common denominator being the national curriculum for the Upper secondary school's Arts programme. At the time of the project, all participating students were taught and assessed within the now former curriculum (Lpf94), although the transition phase to the one in use today (Gy2011) was underway (Skolverket 2000, 2006, 2011).

All headmasters were contacted to give their approval for the investigation to begin, as well as setting up a liaison teacher for each school. The selection of participating students was assigned to each school respectively, with the instructions that

the amount of participants should not be less than or exceed the limits of the study (eight students per school). To assure a spread of informants according to the set parameters, a check-up was made with each liaison teacher regarding the students' musical profile, main instrument, school year and gender before the first part of the study was performed.

For the first part of the study, the questionnaire together with an introduction letter was sent via e-mail to the liaison teachers for distribution to the students. In two cases, I made the distribution personally—in one case because the school management wanted a personal meeting, and in the other because the students misunderstood the time and place for the distribution the first time. The students were free to choose where and when to answer the questionnaire. Some answered it outside their school environment, others within it. In the latter case, some of the liaison teachers arranged for the students to use their scheduled time. The answered questionnaires were then collected either via e-mail or by picking them up at respective school. A first analysis was then made, creating the interview template for the following focus group interviews (Kirsch 2001).

In the second part of the study the interviews were conducted at each school respectively and during school hours. The interviews were all recorded in audio and then transcribed on a micro-level using Gail Jefferson's (2004) system for coding. Since the research question regards students' conceptualizations and communication, and thereby verbal interaction with others, a slight modification was made to be able to code the speed of speech. This was done because of the considerable difference between students' speed of speech. By making it possible to get a comprehension of the relative speed of speech between informants, as well as within their answers respectively, eventual possibilities of change in speed related to excitement and engagement could also be seen within the written transcripts. To get access to and a view of the flow and interplay during the interviews, the transcriptions were done with columns for each participant. This in a similar fashion to what Kate Millett (1975) set out to achieve by placing her informants' responses from one-to-one interviews in parallel to each other, and thereby creating a sort of polyphonic, narrative score.

The data gathered, being non-numeric, was subsequently of a qualitative nature as well as the research approach as a whole—this since it concerns the subjective perspectives of the participants (Åsberg 2001; Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2008). The aspect of validity concerning the results is thereby not to be regarded as general, but the findings are in turn linked to the chosen pragmatic ontology in three concepts of validity, namely the concepts of *representation*, *application* and *carrying of meaning* (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2008, my translation). Pragmatism as a philosophy acknowledges the holistic and relational, as well as the variable and evolving. The empirical data



(written and spoken conceptualizations) can therefore be seen as representative for the informants (the conceptualizations are theirs at that time), it is applicable to the method of analysis (narrative analysis) and carries meaning in relation to the group to which the informants can be categorised (students attending Swedish, Upper secondary school's national music programme). Within this group, the informants are representative of themselves and the situations within which the research was performed. Therefore it was seen as relevant to study their conceptualizations since they are students in an (allegedly) equal education, and the results can be compared in relation to ones own practice (Göransson and Nilholm 2006).

### Narrative analysis

To be able to interpret as well as present the data, narrative analysis was applied to the transcriptions. Narrative analysis can forge connections between personal biography and experiences and social structures. It is used to describe and highlight experience from a subjective perspective in a form open for others (cf. Kohler Riessman 2002; 2005). It is a method where stories are told (by informants) and retold (by researchers), not necessarily in the same form, but always with focus on the above-mentioned three-dimensional space of the original narrative(s). In this case, focus was also put on a music parameter. The results were presented in two parts. The first was a narrative dialogue between a student and a researcher voice, while the second was sorted into categories connected to the key concepts experience, action and meaning of pragmatist philosophy as well as the notion of resistance as a prerequisite for learning.

## Results

Both parts of the research project's result section as described above are represented in the following paragraphs, with a focus both on the students' experience of conceptualization as well as their conceptualizations of musical knowledge and learning. Under these headings, the result-categories: action, meaning and resistance will be intertwined. As described in the beginning, conceptualization is in this article addressed as a way to reflect upon and describe, explain and present experience as well as understanding and opinions. Therefore, students' experience of conceptualization is included—not as a main result, but as an introduction to the results directly connected to the research question of this article.

## Students' experience of conceptualizations regarding musical knowledge and learning

During their participation in the research project, the students were asked to reflect upon and describe musical knowledge and learning in relation to different environments and personal experience. Overall, the results show that regardless of school, form and type of programme none of the informants state that they, during their years as students in the Swedish school system or other types of music education, have been asked to reflect upon these matters before: what they regard as musical knowledge and how to learn musical material. Their experience of conceptualization of musical knowledge and learning seems at first to be one of novelty. During the interviews, when the informants were asked to reflect upon their reactions answering the questionnaire, they all shared the experience of initial difficulties in conceptualizing musical knowledge and learning. Only one of the students claimed to have been "thinking" in the line of these questions before. As one of the participants explained during the course of an interview:

*You do know. Like, in some way you know what you think. But it is still difficult, sort of, to express it, what you are thinking.*

Another student came to the realization that in order to be able to find answers to the questions, you had to reflect on the matter of "what music really is."

The students in this study express a developed and multifaceted understanding when conceptualizing both musical knowledge and learning. If they have conceived this prior to, or during the course of the investigation (or both) is not clear. Regardless of their ability of conceptualizations, and the nature of these, none of the students expressed any great concern about the experience of not being asked to reflect upon these matters prior to this research project. This is interesting in comparison to what prior research on student participation has shown, as well as Dewey's view of esthetic experience. With one of the student answers in mind, maybe this will be a different story further down the road:

*It was pretty nice to get the opportunity to reflect, and to be able to express one's personal meaning for once. About music.*

What demands and possibilities this finding, along with the students' conceptualizations of musical knowledge and learning, can purport for music education will be included and elaborated upon in the discussion.

### Students' conceptualizations of musical knowledge

The participating students in this investigation were asked to make conceptualizations both in writing and in dialogue. The students' conceptualizations of musical knowledge can be seen as centred around two aspects: (1) "to know" music and (2) "expression" and/or "feeling", i.e. *knowing* and *feeling* music (in Swedish *känna till* and *känna*). As two students put it in their questionnaire answers:

*In my opinion there are two different types of knowledge: One where you know a lot about terms and concepts and such concrete knowledge regarding music. The second type of knowledge is connected to how much one can contribute to different, musical contexts and situations solely through one's own musical picture, and accordingly how enjoyable the result is. If a person knows these two [types of knowledge], the person in question knows music.*

*But to me, knowing music is not to know musical terms and theory—although this makes you more knowledgeable—but to know is when you can be touched by music.*

In 'knowing' music, students described knowledge in terms of "practical" and "theoretical", something that in pragmatic philosophy falls under the notion of *action*. The 'expression' or 'feeling' of music, in turn, can be related to what Dewey (1934/2005) describes as *esthetic experience* or *pure experience*, and thereby also to (direct) *meaning*. According to the students, both aspects of musical knowledge can be understood and manifested in practice as well as in personal experience, but there always has to be some kind of action for a manifestation to take place—publicly or internally. The emotional connection to *knowing* music, and therefore the practical and theoretical, lies within the aspect of prerequisites: the students describe different aspects, or parts, of musical knowledge that are interconnected to and dependent upon each other.

In their answers and in the dialogues, the participating students conceptualize musical knowledge as a three-part combination of *theory*, *practice* and *expression/emotion*, a combination where, which they underline, the parts cannot be fully separable.

You can have different focus or emphasis, but to totally disconnect one from the other and still be able to create music is seen as impossible to some students. Others regard it more as being improbable, in the sense that the outcome hardly would be experienced fully as music(al). This since musical knowledge, as mentioned earlier, is seen as manifested through action but also valued differently depending on surroundings—hence it is regarded as contextualized as well as situated. An example of this is the students who compare experiences of singing:

*Student 11: But, I wonder: don't you have a musical ability from the start? I mean, it's like... it feels as if you're good at it in different ways, because a four-year old has a musical ability as well as fifty-year old. You can't claim that a singing four-year old doesn't know music in some ways, sort of.*

*Student 13: Or, actually there are different levels of knowledge.*

*Student 11: Exactly, it's like that that person knows less about music than one who's a professional musician, or...?*

Another of the participants, when answering the questionnaire puts the importance of the environment forward in another way: "It's not the knowledge that differs—it is the environment!" This is something evident also in relation to individual knowledge, genre and type of group, as the following interview excerpt highlights:

*Student 4: You have to play according to a score with feeling, making your own interpretation. Otherwise it's just, like ... Well, at least that's what I think.*

*Student 6: But sitting in a big orchestra, you can't make your own interpretation.*

*Student 4: No no, but ... I don't mean like that, it's more of a contribution of sorts, contributing with your...*

*Student 6: But you always do that. Everyone has his or her own interpretation, because if two persons playing the same instrument see the same score, they won't play exactly the same.*

These excerpts may seem as contradictory at first, but when analysing the empirical data, the students' conceptualizations include an understanding of knowledge as connected to (level and depth of) skill in relation to the surrounding environment's

experiences, expectations and demands. For example, one group of students expanded upon the terms within the three-part combination of musical knowledge, and thereby made them applicable to different aspects of musical action. *Theory* and *practice* were seen as “tools” and compared with brushes, paints and canvases enabling you to paint a picture for yourself and others to see. When discussing these metaphors, the students admitted that “it becomes a bit fuzzy” because you have people who can make music without having any deeper knowledge about the different “tools”. As an alternative and a complement to the “tools”-concept, this group suggested the metaphor “main groups” of music. For instance, composers can create music and thereby display a deep musical knowledge without the “know-how” of actually performing it them selves—others can do that for you. The theoretical aspect of musical knowledge then works as the facilitator for communicating with the performer(s), which is something that all participating students touch upon and agree to. It can aid you in “translating” that which you hear to what you can, want and is supposed to do. This way, you can be more “correct” in a specific situation, even though—and this is something the students stress—you never really can be “wrong” when it comes to musical knowledge.

Other aspects of the *theory* category are pronounced in relation to learning and teaching, but also when it comes to “mastering” and “being in command” of music through musical knowledge. Theoretical knowledge of music is thereby something that enhances and supports the other knowledge aspects, the practical and the emotional/expressive. One student even pinpoints theory as the starting point for the will to learn how to play: “That’s where it starts”. This makes also the theoretical aspects of music a possible key to students’ curiosity, or other forms of “drive” when it comes to musical learning.

Musical knowledge is by the participating students described as something holistic and dialectical, where the different set of skills regarding theory, practice, expression/emotion as well as the individual and her surroundings matter since they influence and challenge one another. Also in that aspect, they see musical knowledge as something that in it self cannot be regarded as “wrong” since it has to be seen in relation to the level of skill and development of every single person. What they do emphasize is that a development of knowledge (i.e. learning) may be necessary to be able to participate and communicate in an environment, for example in getting one’s own musical ideas realized or to pass the demands of an education. Within an education, they agree upon certain musical knowledge as necessities but without getting into detail beyond the three aspects of musical knowledge. They see a risk though, when it comes to these aspects. Focusing too much on either aspect (the practical, theoretical or expressive/emotional) can lead to an “overabundance of knowledge”, resulting in a discord in

perception of musical qualities: it can cause difficulties in reaching an audience or the understanding of others' performances. Depending on who the perceiver is, the sounding result can be something that risks no longer to be regarded as music. The key as they see it lies in the balance between and development of these aspects, subjectively and in relation to the surroundings, i.e. in what, when, why and how to learn.

### Students' conceptualizations of learning music

Describing learning music, overall it is regarded by the students as dependent upon action and made possible through the will to practice and thereby develop innate abilities. Here you do not need to go to Dewey for an analysis framework—the students already *are* Deweyan in their conceptualizations of action as something related to both thought and bodily movement. Learning through action is discussed and defined in terms of singing and playing as well as reflection and dialogue, but also in terms of dwelling. To exist in an environment where music is present (and thereby experienced) is seen by the students as leading to a development of musical skills within all three categories of musical knowledge—this as long as the experiences are reflected upon through action.

Other aspects that affect musical learning are the relation to the environment (e.g. orchestra vs. band settings) and type of musical genre. According to the students, different genres and ensemble settings come with certain prerequisites, for instance as described above when it comes to musical expression and leeway for personal interpretation. In a school context, curricula and teacher experience are seen as key factors for learning while musical learning outside school is regarded as less regulated. Since this article is aimed at music education within Upper secondary school, the school context will be presented more in detail although all these aspects regarding learning of music (as well as the ones presented further) are of interest when it comes to the notion of resistance.

According to the students, the common denominator for the personal and the external factors influencing musical learning is the will to learn. Of concern for a learning situation are therefore what the student herself feels capable of but also what is perceived as meaningful personally and according to others. This is something the students' feel teachers need to be aware of as well as make connections in relation to the purposes of learning controlled by curricula. This because the will to learn is seen as aided by clearly articulated and common goals and purposes by all those interacting in the learning environment, thereby creating a sense of meaning. Being able to combine the three knowledge-aspects of practice, theory and expression/emotion is regarded as important from several perspectives—since all aspects are

expressed as “helpful to each other”. An example of this is the one described earlier, where “theory” was seen as a key to curiosity and thereby a will to learn. Another is given regarding learning within the course Music theory: Those students who feel that their prior knowledge of theory is on a lower level than that of their performance skills experience a more problematic learning process. According to the students, this kind of resistance is something that could have been avoided if learning both aspects in parallel “from the beginning”, or if similar goals from different music courses are connected.

To use your practical and theoretical musical knowledge simultaneously or alternately and on matching levels is seen as something that enables and fortifies learning. The combination and development of these parts simultaneously are by some students even seen as necessary for actual musical learning to take place. Others see it as possible to learn, being on different levels of skills as long as the set goals and expectations are communicated and reflected upon. This is similar to Dewey’s (1916/1997) thoughts regarding the necessity of symbols as tools, where he stresses the importance of presenting these within a context and in relation to experience. If not, there is a risk that the symbols will be seen as representative of something forced upon the learner by external powers, and thereby being apprehended as meaningless and arbitrary. The following narrative dialogue is an example of how such a context can be created according to the students according to the students:

*Researcher: We have talked about musical knowledge within the different music courses that you attend within the Arts programme, and how they are connected. Do you see any connections between these in relation to learning? And if so, how could these connections be of aid when learning?*

*Student: One way could be that they contain the same elements, what the courses are built upon and if they contain the same stuff—rhythm for instance. Then it depends on what you like, and what possibilities you have to connect these. If you suddenly find something in one course that is cool, a groove or a rhythm for example, then you can bring it to another course. Working in projects that are being staged makes things very clear regarding what knowledge to use, and how to use it.*

*Researcher: Could you give an example?*

*Student: Different concert projects or performances, big or small. You can also use this when playing live outside school, knowing more about stage presence.*

*We have also written our own songs to be taught to others. It becomes sort of a leadership where you “share learning” similar to that of practicing one’s instrument together with others.*

In connection to learning music, the participating students describe the balance between theory and practice as although you know the theory behind something “you still have to practice your hands and your brain”. Focusing too much on either aspect of musical knowledge can lead to the before mentioned “overabundance of knowledge”, and therefore a possible result of discord in the perception of musical qualities. According to the students you have to be aware of the difference between practicing *technique* and practicing *music*. As an example, a comparison is made between knowing scales and multiplication tables, where the former is seen as part of the technical and theoretical aspects of musical knowledge. An audience will for instance experience a void of emotion/expression if you mistake playing scales for performance of music. You have to practice what one group refers to as your “inner” as well as your “outer” instrument.

A common feature among the participants’ conceptualizations of musical learning is the risk within the school context of focusing too much on the theoretical aspects of musical knowledge. According to the students this can be avoided in different ways, one being a balance between courses/classes that focus music theory and performance respectively. Another is to combine different aspects of, and goals for learning. To enable a sense of meaning in music education, the students see a possibility in teachers using goals that are common for, or emanating from, different courses and address these either during respective class or in the form of a project. Yet another way of action seen by the informants is allowing students to take responsibility through peer-to-peer actions during class or practice.

The students acknowledge that for to perceive meaning in any school subject, the knowledge must be felt to have an actual value of use in everyday life. They realise the possibilities and benefits of depth and width of an education in relation to aspects of “knowing” and “feeling”, but in some school subjects “you are already done” with what you feel you need to know—sometimes even years ahead, and with several courses left before graduation. The key according to them, is the possibility to understand why and for what you are supposed to learn certain things and hence enabling the making of meaning—for instance by the examples given earlier where different goals relating to the aspects of musical knowledge are integrated.

For musical learning to be perceived as meaningful, there must also according to the students exist a balance between personal interest and curiosity and external demands. The latter can for instance concern “what you *should* know” in a school



environment or in other specific situations. Here, teachers are seen as important both in their curiosity regarding their students and the subject matter, and in the way they give feedback. “Praise is good”, as some students put it, but if the feedback in general is lacking constructive criticism or commentary it will not suffice. As a student, “you need to know what level you are on” and this is also something teachers need to be able both to assess and communicate. To make this possible, all students agree that goals and demands must be known to and open for everyone involved in the learning process.

To enable learning of music as conceptualized by the students, context and situation are seen as paramount. According to the students, you need others as well as something other to “mirror” yourself regarding your musical knowledge and learning. Within in the school environment the teacher is seen as utterly important when it comes to this, but with that importance comes quite a heavy barrage of affordances for a teacher to live up to. The students express that teachers need not only to have a deep and professional understanding of and interest for the subject(s) taught and how to teach. These skills must also be rooted in all aspects of musical knowledge (practical, theoretical and expressive/emotional), and teacher professionalism must be matched by an interest and understanding when it comes to the student as well. As one informant put it, teachers need to know and show an interest for what “the situation is like for young people today”. A common thought among the participating students is the teacher’s ability to communicate constructively with their students. The teacher is seen as the one who can make actual learning possible, but there is also the risk of lessons focusing too much on teachers’ personal experiences. Therefore a balance is seen as necessary between teacher and student experience. According to the students, this can be achieved through feedback on study performance and, as with meaning making, making sure that “everyone involved” is familiar with the expected goals and outcomes: What are students expected to learn and achieve, and what responsibilities lies on teacher and student respectively? One way according to one group of informants is to let students “find their own ways to what one likes”. In this, they see a need for teacher guidance as well as expressing the insight that learning is something you *do*, not something you *receive*.

## Discussion

If learning of music on a deep level is made possible through inclusion of those who are seen as learners, those who are seen as teachers—as well as those who have the

power to shape educational prerequisites—need to address this issue, and start to make it possible for music students' voices to be heard in music education. This is not to be read as an appeal for teachers to take a place in "the back seat". On the contrary, in accordance with what Deweyan pragmatism asserts, it is crucial that the teacher is the one who—through his or her professionalism—takes responsibility for establishing a dialogue with the students. Thereby the teacher can teach, guide and form the education in accordance and balance with students' interests and the demands of musicianship as well as curricula. Through this, there is the possibility of nursing as well as evoking students' curiosity and will to tackle resistance.

Through their conceptualizations, the participating students in this research project show that they have a multifaceted understanding of musical knowledge and learning. These conceptualizations, in my opinion, open up several pathways of interest for music educators to investigate. They range from the particular regarding musical knowledge to overall methodological aspects concerning education, as well as possible interpretations of the curriculum. Along with the students expressing a novelty towards conceptualizations, the two main themes of *knowing* and *feeling* music together with the three-part knowledge combination of *theory*, *practice* and *expression/emotion* all pose interesting questions regarding what and how to teach.

One example of the particular is the students view on certain aspects of knowledge as essential and at the same time having a holistic and dialogical view of musical knowledge and learning. Especially since they do not articulate these aspects in particular. This, along with their understanding of *Bildung*, opens up for a discussion within their music education of what essential aspects of knowledge can as well as should be. This should be seen in relation to teachers' and students' experience, personal interest as well as demands posed by the curriculum. Are these critical aspects in turn something that belongs to the domain of school and education, or are they related to and valid in other domains? What potential of meaning making lies within these essentials of musical knowledge?

The students' conceptualizations of musical knowledge and learning may be seen as similar to what Dewey (1934/2005) describes as undergoing and doing an experience and then expressing this—to re-enact experience through action. They also describe learning in school as dependent on communication and dialogue, a way for "mirroring" to use their vocabulary. In this, the teacher plays an important part as a facilitator for learning music, but although seen as utterly important not the sole facilitator. There is a shared experience within this group of students that learning is something that you yourself are responsible for, but what and how you learn is influenced by others. Questions that arise in relation to these results are why the students seem inexperienced at conceptualizing, why they are of the opinion of

not being asked to share or make these during their years in music education and why they do not seem troubled by that fact? This should pose some difficulties in accomplishing learning regarding the different aspects of and level of skills within musical knowledge that they describe. How important a role does these students' music education then really have for learning music? Is school attendance in this case just being in a space, creating an opportunity for exchange and collection of information? If the experience of novelty in conceptualization is only an apprehension by the participating students—i.e. there have been opportunities for conceptualizations and reflection—must there be a revelation of the implicit and self-evident to achieve and maintain a balance between interest and demand within the music education?

As presented earlier, the students emphasize that learning is something you *do*. For instance when it comes to dwelling, you have to reflect or otherwise put into action the experiences gained by this to learn. Within the school environment they emphasize the need to “practice”. In relation to the experience of novelty in conceptualizing, the question of what the constituents are of “practice” arises. When, where, how and why do you practice? What kind of action(s) could be included in this term and thereby within their education, and what demands are then put on teachers and students?

In relation to the results of this study, communication within the students' education has to be based upon a mutual exchange, curiosity and will to allow both dissent and disagreement, as well as conceptualizations. This must also be done without any initial demands regarding what could be described as verbal and musical correctness. According to Dewey (1916/1997; 1958; 2004), the primary goal of communication must be to find ways for and to accomplish mutual understanding. When analysing their conceptualizations, this is a view shared by the participating students.

There can be several reasons for students within an education having the experience of not being included in a communication: a familiarity between the partakers (teachers and students), a perceived tradition within an educational system (teachers speak and students listen), a lack of insight that you actually are invited to and make conceptualizations, and the possibility that music “makes sense” in itself (cf. Dewey 1934/2005; Westerlund 2002). It could also be a sign of neglect regarding the subjective understanding of musical learning.

The students participating in this study stress the importance of the teacher regarding the learning process, not at least when it comes to curiosity and understanding of both music and the students as persons. In my interpretation, this can be seen as diminution from the students regarding the importance of their own responsibility for learning as well as their privileges. At the same time they stress that learning is achieved through action, why one conclusion could be that they do not see dialogue regarding their own conceptualizations as important.

Possible lines of action, as well as of meaning-making and curiosity, can be found within the students' reasoning regarding goal integration. Examples are given in the form of projects and by allowing students to take responsibility through peer-to-peer actions during class or practice. A possible route for strengthening the inclusion and experience of dialogue may be to tap into these methodological aspects, but also through collaborative planning within the educational frame (cf. Stålhammar 2004a; 2004b).

In what ways can an educational system learn from, and meet these conceptualizations of musical knowledge and learning? Some aspects are highlighted in this article, but what possible demands can these results put on those responsible for the music education in Upper secondary schools' music programmes? *Not* meeting or learning from them seems not only to oppose the idea of public education as a basis for a democratic society (which in Sweden is statutory), but also as counterproductive in relation to the field of practice. This not only according to what the students express in this study or in relation to the research in music education presented in this article. Dewey's pragmatic philosophy as well as construction of narratives may be seen as ways to influence the making of a democratic society, or parts of a society, e.g. school systems. (cf. Bladh and Heimonen 2007; Dewey 2004; Georgii-Hemming 2005; Georgii-Hemming and Westvall 2010; Larsson 2007; Schmidt 2008; Väkevä and Westerlund 2007). Within such a system, education starts and ends with the meeting between student and teacher, wherefore all aspects regarding this meeting should be of utmost importance. Within music education in Upper secondary school these can for instance be teacher professionalism (cf. Solbrekke and Englund 2011; Zandén 2010, 2011), teacher identity (cf. Asp 2011; Georgii-Hemming 2005; Zimmerman Nilsson 2009), gender issues (cf. Borgström Källén 2011) or student conceptualizations (cf. Scheid 2009; Nyberg 2011).

When reflecting upon the results of this research project and Dewey's philosophy as well as the power of narrative, the balance between students' and teachers' responsibilities as well as rights outline a focus on mutual curiosity, understanding and learning. Since Upper secondary school is a non-compulsory form of education you could be tempted to talk about student professionalism, but that is not comparable to the prerequisites of today's educational system (or at least not yet). What I would suggest instead is a further focus on reflexive dialogue that includes student and teacher experience of music as well as responsibility, thus enabling what Eva Georgii-Hemming (2005) calls an arena for discoveries, Patrick Schmidt (2008) sees as an opportunity for invitational conflict and Americole Biasini and Lenore Pogonowski (1979) refer to as including actions of discovery. Including all these aspects along with the results presented in this article, this seems to me an interesting starting point for the making of music education as an adventure of knowledge.

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## Notes

- 1 Positionality in this text relates to "the multiple, unique experiences that situate each of us" (Takacs 2003: 33) as markers of relational positions, and can include gender, age, conception of hierarchy, (prior) knowledge, preconceptions, attitude, taste, etcetera (Beverly 2011; Takacs 2003). This should be seen in relation to the context of praxis in music education.

- 2 Since 1992 the Swedish school system is based upon freedom of choice where students can choose between schools, mainly within their home borough. The same year, a national, free market for anyone willing to establish independent schools was opened. To gain access to the National music programme in Upper secondary school, the entry qualification level is based on the students' grading from comprehensive school weighed together with that of local entrance tests at a 50/50 rate.

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