

Multicultural music education from the perspective of Swedish-speaking teachers and state authorities in Finland

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses minority rights and educational aims in relation to the Nordic welfare state model, discussed through the lens of musical diversity in the increasingly multicultural society of Finland. The topic derives from a research project named “The Minorities in the Minority,” which was carried out in the Swedish-speaking parts of Finland in 2012/2013. The principal question of this investigation was whether, and if so how, teachers in the Swedish-speaking schools in Finland perceive that music in the school environment can provide a basis for the development of multicultural skills. This study is based on qualitative research and content analysis. Empirical data was gathered through focus group interviews with teachers in Swedish-speaking schools, policy documents, and individual interviews of state authorities at the Finnish National Board of Education.

Keywords: Multicultural music education, Swedish-speaking schools in Finland, minority perspectives

Introduction: The research context

In this study, we will address two angles that have received little international attention in the academic debate about Finnish education. The first is the perspective of the *Swedish-speaking minority* with its long historical roots in Finland (Brink, Nissinen & Vettenranta, 2013). The second is the *role of music education* in the national context of Finland, which has become more pluralistic due to increasing immigration. According to Statistics Finland (Tilastokeskus), approx. 32,000 persons immigrated to Finland in 2013. The number is highest since Finland gained independence, which was in 1917, and it is 660 higher than in year 2012. These aspects provide a multidimensional perspective on minority issues in relation to music education, and we are interested in investigating what role music education has in the Swedish-speaking schools in relation to an increasingly culturally diverse Finland.

At present, both Finnish and Swedish are official national languages, as confirmed in the Constitution. The country has two parallel school systems, taught in Finnish and Swedish, although only approximately 5,5 % of the population (of a total of approx. 5 million) are Swedish-speaking. Legal rights for the Swedish-speaking population include not only basic education, but also university-level studies and the right to use one's own mother tongue with the state authorities (Constitution of Finland, § 17). In principle, only minor differences can be noticed between these two school systems, although the Swedish-speaking population has university-level teacher education and school materials of its own (Holm & Mansikka, 2013; Tallroth, 2012).

Although the number of immigrants arriving from diverse regions of the globe has recently increased in Finland, which has also had an impact on education (Hebert & Heimonen, 2013: 139), the Swedish-speaking schools are still in general culturally and ethnically homogeneous. Only a few studies have been done on cultural diversity and multiculturalism in Swedish-speaking schools, and these studies have found that the Swedish-speaking teachers feel that they are a little separated from the questions of multiculturalism and immigration, perhaps due to the homogeneous groups of students they teach (Mansikka & Holm, 2011). Their attitude is said to be something such as: *immigrant children are in those Finnish schools, not with us* (Mäkelä, 2013: 20). However, in political debates, the Swedish-speaking minority has been interested in broader immigrant questions. One reason for this is that the integration of immigrants into the Swedish-speaking community would reverse the current trend of a decreasing number of Swedish-speakers in the country, and thus strengthen their position (Mansikka & Holm, 2011: 134).

Research carried out on multiculturalism in music education in Finland (e.g. Karlsen & Westerlund, 2010; Karlsen, 2012; 2014) has not discussed the perspective of the

Swedish-speaking minority. Moreover, previous studies on multicultural education in Swedish-speaking schools mentioned above (e.g., Mansikka & Holm, 2011) have not discussed the role of music education, which is the focus of this study.

Research question and method

This article discusses teachers' perceptions of music education in Swedish-speaking schools in Finland, in relation to a state intervention in the Finnish National Board's project on the development of multicultural skills in schools (2007–2011). This state-directed project is here represented by relevant documents as well as two interviewed state authorities from the National Board of Education, which is then discussed in the light of the reflections of teachers, collected from Swedish-speaking schools. The main research question is as follows: *How is music perceived to be a means for developing "multicultural skills" in the Swedish-speaking school environment in Finland, by both teachers and state authorities?*

In this qualitative case study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006), data was collected through focus group interviews with teachers from two Swedish-speaking schools in Finland, and through individual interviews of two state authorities at the Finnish National Board of Education held in Fall 2012 and Spring 2013. The interviews were semi-structured and built on themes related to the research question. Swedish was used as the interview language in both the focus group interviews with teachers and in the interviews with the state authorities, except one occasion when both English and Swedish were used. Consequently, data was developed from the following sources:

1. one state authority represents the state authorities for Swedish-speaking education,
2. one state authority represents the project in question (Developing multicultural skills),
3. the National core curriculum for basic education (2004) and the new draft of the forthcoming new core curriculum represent ideals of music education from the viewpoint of the National Board of Education (2016). Additional documents include relevant legislation (such as the Constitution of Finland, the Basic Education Act and the Integration Act) and other relevant policy documents published by the National Board of Education (e.g. Immonen-Oikkonen & Leino, 2010; National Board of Education, 2009).

4. Interviews with teachers in two schools in Swedish-speaking regions of Finland. The schools were situated in bilingual areas: one in the rural area of the west coast and the other in the more urban area of the south coast. The both groups consisted of three to four teachers.

The interviews of teachers were carried out in focus groups during the Winter and Spring of 2013, which consisted of two sessions per group of about one hour each, with the interviews being based on topics introduced by the researcher(s). Focus group interviews were chosen as a method in order to stimulate discussions between teachers, and to get different perspectives on the topics in question (Puchta & Potter, 2004; Wibeck, 2010). The aim was also to give time for the teachers to reflect on the issues; thus, the groups were interviewed twice. The teachers addressed the topic of multicultural skills from a twofold minority perspective: 1) the history of Swedish-speaking people and the role of the Swedish language, without having the experience of being regarded as an immigrant in Finland, and 2) the recent increase of minority groups in Finland, from the perspective of belonging to an “established” minority group.

The state authorities were interviewed at the offices of the National Board of Education in Helsinki. The first interview was made in Fall 2012, with the interviewee that was responsible for the Development project on multicultural skills; she was interviewed again in Spring 2013. The state authority responsible for Swedish-speaking education was interviewed in Spring 2013. Each interview lasted for approximately one hour. Individual interviews were chosen because the researchers aimed at giving the state authorities an opportunity to reflect and speak without influence from each other.

The analysis of the collected data was based on qualitative contents analysis and thematization, i.e. reading the transcribed interviews and documents several times, categorizing issues that were similar or different, the focus being on rather what was said than how something was said (Denzin & Lincoln 2000). The categories were created according to the main themes interpreted from the interviews, in dialogue with the research question, theoretical literature, and other written documents. The analysis was carried out collaboratively by the two researchers. In addition to this article, two other articles connected to this project are in process. These forthcoming articles address multicultural music education from a critical perspective, as well as multicultural music education in relation to popular music in the curriculum.

All of the interviewed teachers and state authorities participated in the research voluntarily. Since the amount of Swedish-speaking schools and teachers in Finland is quite small, the researchers decided not to mention an individual teacher’s name or school, and not even invent new names for them, since the teachers are seen as representing a group. The two interviewed state authorities are also quite difficult

to anonymize, even if their names are not mentioned. In the analysis, the researchers decided not to make straight citations from the state authorities as much as from the teachers' interviews. Rather than expressing individual views, the state authorities give information on the topics they are responsible for (Tutkimuseettinen neuvottelukunta).

Theoretical framework

Inter- / multicultural approaches and the challenging of norms

In this study, the concepts of *multiculturalism* and *multicultural education* are used, since these are the terms used in Finland both in research (Mansikka & Holm, 2011: 134) and by the state authorities at the National Board of Education (Immonen-Oikkonen & Leino, 2010). The terms related to multicultural education are presently in flux, and other terms such as “intercultural education” and “intercultural approaches” are favoured by several researchers (see e.g. Räsänen, 2010: 12). Multicultural education has historically been connected to rights as well as representation (ibid.: 12), and as mentioned it is used by the state authorities in this particular case study.

The idea of multiculturalism as an educational policy is based on a worldview that critiques assimilation and strives for equal status for different ethnic groups and cultures. Multicultural education also highlights structures and experiences of discrimination and injustice (Dervin, 2013; Räsänen, 2010). However, there is a risk that immigrant students' cultural backgrounds tend to be viewed by the majority population more as an “import” from other countries, rather than in the context of the relationship of previous and current cultural experiences in interaction with the “new” cultural context (Spowe, 2007). In Finland, state authorities argue that multiculturalism is the second stage in a process towards an intracultural environment. According to Nissilä (2010: 21), Head of Unit at the Finnish National Board of Education, the “journey” from monoculturalism to intraculturalism includes four stages, as follows:

1. Monoculturalism refers to the first stage, in which the ethnic minorities are not visible. Nissilä (2010: 21) states that there are still some schools or educational institutions in Finland that are at this stage.
2. Multiculturalism refers to the second stage, in which different nationalities live and act as separate groups of their own. In this stage, education in tolerance is needed (ibid., 2010).

3. Interculturalism refers to the third stage, in which members of different cultures communicate with each other, and the ethnic relationships between individuals and groups are good (ibid., 2010).
4. Intraculturalism is the fourth stage, in which several languages and cultures are part of the everyday-life of a school or an educational institution. In this stage, communication between individuals and groups is natural and obvious (ibid., 2010: 21).

This type of description of a 'journey of stages' is fairly common in literature on this topic. Spowe's (2007) illustration of four perspectives on culture in education describes the following developmental path:

Monocultural: What represents the majority population is the norm, the ideal and the goal. Assimilation and adjustment to these norms are expected.

Multicultural: The aim is to increase the understanding of immigrants and minorities. Food, music, dance, and celebrations are highlighted as diversity. This can be a shallow approach, and risks developing into a kind of 'tourism' for the majority population.

Antiracist: A consciousness and vision of an equal society where power relations are not based on gender, class, colour, or migration status.

Intercultural: Processes of interaction between people (students, teachers, parents etc.). However, the power aspect is still present: On whose condition is this interaction taking place?

The role of music in Spowe's (2007) analysis is interesting. Music is described as an area where specific cultural features are highlighted, however sometimes on a shallow level. Yet, the relationship between, and the co-existence of, the culturally specific and the culturally "blended" within the area of music is well worth considering.

Within the area of music education, Huib Schippers (2010a; 2010b) discusses different approaches to cultural diversity and highlights his approach with a framework of arrows, indicating a continuum from a static tradition to a tradition in constant flux. In his approach to cultural diversity, 1) monocultural is seen as part of a static tradition, 2) multicultural and 3) intercultural are positions in the middle of the arrow, whereas 4) transcultural is part of a tradition in an ever present flux. The positions are not stable, nor are they permanent; every teacher has her or his own position that varies between cultures, time, and personal development. Schipper's framework aims to increase awareness of choices, not to judge or establish one "right" way of teaching (Schippers, 2010a: 42; 2010b: 30–31). However, Schipper's idea of music education can be seen as emphasising the individual teacher's right to choose her or his actions, not the student's right to musical diversity.

The term cultural diversity is also discussed by the Finnish state authorities responsible for education. Helena Oikarinen-Jabai (2010: 11) writes how school as a social environment has always been multicultural, and that our experiences of the world are related to our genders, social backgrounds, and values. She describes how learning one's own mother tongue has been emphasised in schools, and respects immigrant children's own culture and language as a basis for a balanced identity, which is also connected to the rights of "our own" minorities in Finland. However, she argues that the discussion on multicultural education usually refers to immigrants as special learners, and states that the knowledge of "our own minorities" could be used much more in teaching, since their historical experiences connect the Finnish culture with the post-colonial discussion on multiculturalism (ibid.: 11–12). She also describes how Finland's history and basis for multicultural education differs from many other European countries or the United States, in which a great amount of the populations are born outside their home country. In Finland, the discussion on multicultural education became active as late as in the 1990s, and arts education was seen as a potential means to build bridges between cultures. Oikarinen-Jabai discusses the difficulty in encountering differences in Finnish society and schools, and argues that questions related to gender, class, sexual orientation, and colour are hidden, which makes difference alienating (ibid.: 17–18). This phenomenon, a colour-blind approach to multicultural education considering teaching to be independent of children's cultural background, was also remarked upon in the study of teachers in Swedish-speaking schools in Finland (Mansikka & Holm, 2011: 133).

Today, a multicultural context which entails an intercultural approach (Spowe, 2007) often involves broad aspects of diversity, including for instance ethnicity, gender, class, and sexual orientation. In Sweden this approach is defined as *norm-critical*, and highlights the idea of what could be defined as a 'diversified normality' (Goldstein-Kyaga, Borgström & Hübinette, 2012; Leön, 2001). The concept of diversified normality could be transferred to the area of music education when it comes to diversified (musical) normality in the development of curricula, content, and teaching methods.

The role of the state in the development of multicultural skills

"State intervention" refers to a Nordic view of the state's role in securing conditions and circumstances for activities such as education and social security for its citizens (e.g., Heimonen, 2010). Basic education is offered free-of-charge for every child, and this right is stipulated in the Constitution. The state subsidies, and free health-care and education are secured by heavy taxes; so, education is not "free-of-charge" even if children do not have to pay for it. The state controls the immigration politics and

decides the amount and the criteria of those who will be able to stay in the country. The state also has an active role in promoting the *kotouttaminen*; which aims to make immigrants “feel at home” and become active members of the society. This duty of the state is based on law (Integration Act 1386/2010). In short, one important instrument of state intervention is legal regulation.

Another important instrument of state intervention is financial. One example of financial means used by the state is the use of government grants. This kind of regulation is not as mandatory as legal regulation, which usually has to be obeyed and followed. However, even if financial means are “voluntary” and offered in a way that leaves freedom for the municipalities to choose to participate or not, this can be seen as a strong means of state intervention, since the financial support is almost always needed for economic reasons. The National Board of Education, for instance, uses government grants as a “carrot” to get local authorities in municipalities to create development plans for education and to promote its own state-driven projects directed at developing multicultural skills in schools, for instance (Gustafsson, Herzen-Oosi & Lamminmäki, 2010: 5; Finnish National Board of Education, 2009).

The state intervention of the Finnish National Board of Education into schools (Immonen-Oikkonen & Leino, 2010) is a typical example of Finnish education policy. The idea to improve “multicultural skills”, and the competence to meet “others” from different cultures in schools, was developed in the Ministry of Education, and the task was then given to the National Board of Education, which promoted financial support as a means for municipalities to take part in the project. The idea was probably influenced by the rebellious actions in various multicultural cities in Europe. Moreover, the development project on multicultural skills is in line with the aims prescribed in the National Core Curriculum for basic education (2004), according to which equality, democracy, and acceptance of multiculturalism are basic values in education (Immonen-Oikkonen, 2010: 6). As a result, 28 municipalities took part in the project and received financial support in 2007 (altogether 600 000 euros). In addition, 1,1 million euros was granted in 2008 for the above mentioned 28 municipalities and to 14 new municipalities. In 2009, 1,2 million euros was granted to 45 municipalities, of which 10 were new participants in the development of the multicultural skills project. In sum, 52 municipalities took part in the project and 3,3 million euros was granted as state support (Immonen-Oikkonen, 2010: 9). Of these municipalities, only two (Närpes and Vöro-Maxmo) were Swedish-speaking municipalities. In addition, some municipalities were bilingual (Immonen-Oikkonen, 2010: 10).

The municipalities are the “clients” of the National Board of Education, not the schools or individual teachers. Moreover, the “carrot” (the proffered state support) has to be chosen and “eaten” by the client voluntarily. The authorities in the National

Board do not know all the actual schools that participated, only the administrative co-ordinators in the municipalities. Usually, the link between individual teachers and national state authorities needs a local, enthusiastic co-ordinator at the municipality level, since freedom of choice requires information on the available choices. Despite several investigations, the researchers of this study did not find any Swedish-speaking school that would have taken part in the state's development project on multicultural skills. Thus, the teachers were chosen on criteria described in Chapter 2, and the project is represented by documents and two interviewed state authorities at the National Board of Education.

The concept of *immigrant* is left quite open in the state's documents, and is not problematized in any way (Immonen-Oikkonen, 2010: 7). Moreover, bilingual pupils speaking both Swedish and Finnish – an increasing percentage of pupils in Swedish-speaking schools have one Swedish-speaking and one Finnish-speaking parent – are not included in those parts that discuss multiculturalism or multilingualism in the National Core Curriculum (2004). According to Holm and Mansikka (2013), this situation may create borders between the already existing minority groups and the new-comers with an immigrant background.

The term “multicultural skills” [*monikulttuuriset taidot*] is also left rather open in the state documents (Immonen-Oikkonen & Leino, 2010). Immonen-Oikkonen (2010: 7) describes the term as follows: “In this development project, multicultural skills (that include features of several cultures) refer to skills of both immigrants and the majority people to interact with persons that belong to different language and culture groups.” In this study, multicultural skills refer to skills pertaining to how to meet different people, others.

Otherness refers to strangeness, alien to another than oneself, and the concept “other” (or “Other”) has been derived from otherness. Written with a capital O, it usually refers to the theoretical use of the term. Some philosophers such as Lacan use this term both with a lower-case o (“other”) and a capital O (“Other”) since he needs more nuanced meanings for its theoretical use (Johnston, 2013). These terms are also used in political debates (e.g. Said, 2003); otherness referring usually to the East such as the Orient (Islam), in contrast to “we” living in the West. Said (2003:xii-xiii) states that terms such as Orient or West do not have ontological stability; “each is made up of human effort, partly affirmation, partly identification of the Other” (ibid.: xii).

An Inner Other can be distinguished from an Oriental Other. In musicology, the term “Inner Other” refers to ethnic minorities within a nation, to Romas and Jews for example, to which the term linguistic otherness is also applied (Hautsalo, 2013: 53; 77). The Swedish-speaking Finns could be described as Inner Others, characterized as “our own minorities” by Oikarinen-Jabai (2010: 11), of which otherness is mainly

based on their language, not religion, gender, race, or ethnicity. They live within the nation and have the same rights as the majority. Outer Others refer in this study to minorities of which their otherness is not only based on language but also on ethnicity, perhaps also race and religion. However, clear categories are impossible to make; even the concept of having one stable identity is not recognized anymore. As Sen (2009) says, no one is only a Muslim, but is also someone's daughter, mother, etc. He also reminds us how dangerous it is to categorize people, and how it may lead to violence between groups or individuals.

In this study, the Inner Others – Swedish-speaking teachers – talk about the skills of their pupils in interacting with Others. Who these Others are is not specified. Moreover, the term Otherness is problematic, since the intent of this study is not to promote the use of it. Thus, in this study interacting with others means *interacting with each other*.

Findings: Developing multicultural skills via music in Swedish-speaking schools

The analysis and findings are based on focus group interviews with teachers in Swedish-speaking schools, and individual interviews with two state authorities at the Finnish National Board of Education. The research question *How is music perceived to be a means for developing "multicultural skills" in the Swedish-speaking school environment in Finland* is firstly discussed from the perspective of historical roots. Then, a new un-stable situation in the society for the Swedish-speakers is addressed. The third part discusses the concept of multiculturalism, and the fourth part highlights multicultural skills in relation to music.

Historical roots: Security as a basis for openness

The interviewed teachers and state authorities stressed the importance of the long history and the special status of the Swedish language in Finland, which is secured in the Constitution. The state authority responsible for Swedish-speaking schools mentioned that the "roots" of Swedish are based on the common history Finland has with Sweden (Karonen, 1999; Klinge, 2003: 17). She stated that Swedish-speaking people have a special status due to historical reasons.

The state authority pointed out that, when compared with other minorities, the Swedish-speaking minority has a good position in Finland. They have the right to study in their own language, they have their own schools, even universities, and their

own political party (Svenska Folkpartiet) that represents them in the Parliament. Moreover, the teachers also strongly pointed out that the position of Swedish-speakers is different from those minorities now moving into Finland. The teachers feel that the Swedish-speaking population has been in Finland for a long time, and that they thus know how to act in the country; as a result, their position is much stronger when compared to the newcomers.

One teacher says: *You start in the familiar and then you go from there.* He/she talks about how to always begin the music class with something that is already known and familiar to the pupils. The teacher means that something that is unfamiliar should not be the first kind of music to be studied in the class.

The teachers think that something that is familiar to pupils and that is already known is a good starting point to learn something new. A stable feeling, security that is based on legislation, good self-esteem, and a secure feeling of one's own position would make it easier to meet new music, cultures, and people. Openness to others is not connected to one's own minority position if it is not a secure one. The feeling that you know the rules of life, how to act in a society, seems to be of crucial importance. The Swedish-speaking people have lived in Finland for such a long time that they know the way of life and how to act and live in the society. The "others", the new-comers, do not know these rules. When music is used as a tool to develop skills to meet each other, the teachers indicate that they would use familiar music as a basis.

The teachers in Southern Finland remember how Swedish had been the majority's language in their home town some years ago. Especially old people tend to remember that time, the "golden years". It seems that one's own stable position as a local majority is experienced positively, although the present minority position in a bilingual town is not seen as a catastrophe either.

A new un-stable situation for the Swedish-speakers

The political climate and atmosphere is changing in Finland, and it is known that the situation for the Swedish-speaking population is not stable anymore (e.g. Helsingin Sanomat 2013a, 2013b; Terho, 2013). A teacher describes the new political climate as follows:

The whole country is in this position now where Swedish has been pushed into a corner politically.

The right-wing party, the True Finns, known for its critical, even racist, comments towards immigration has become more popular in Finland. It has representatives in

the Parliament of Finland, and in the European Union as well. This party was active in making an official initiative in the Parliament against obligatory Swedish studies in schools, which was made possible when a new form of law-making was introduced in Finland, according to which citizens are allowed to make initiatives to the Parliament and propose a new law (Hongisto, 2013; Kansalaisaloite, 2013a, 2013b). The Swedish-speaking teachers stressed the importance of their rights, although they are at the same time uncertain if and how they could make a claim for those rights:

... the limit for justice? What rights do we have, what can we claim? [Swedish] is [one of] the official language[s] so you have the right to it.

Moreover, the teachers remarked that Finnish-speakers do not always know the common history of Sweden and Finland anymore. In school, they start studying history only from 1809. So, teachers in Swedish-speaking schools seem to think that Finnish-speaking pupils learn more about the time when Finland was part of Russia, and the time of independence. Power aspects have been part of Finland's history, and Finland's position between Sweden and Russia has been a reason for several wars (Lindqvist, 2003; Meinander, 2010). Moreover, during the Second World War, Finland lost its eastern part to Russia, and it is said that the first huge group of refugee-immigrants entered in 1947 from these eastern parts to the part that remained independent. During the time of the Soviet Union, the border between Finland and Russia was closed, but currently it is much easier to move to Finland than it used to be. In fact, the Swedish-speaking minority – that is used to having a strong and powerful position – is now interacting with a growing number of Russian immigrants (see Statistics Finland). So, new kinds of power relationships with connections to historical aspects are part of the discussion concerning how to meet others.

The special and secure position of Swedish as a national language, and especially as a compulsory school subject, is questioned especially in the Eastern parts of Finland, in which Russian is nowadays a much more common language than Swedish. One of the interviewed state authorities promotes pluralism in language studies, and said that “not Russian instead of Swedish but Swedish *and* Russian”. She thinks that many languages could be studied in school. However, she also realizes the financial limitations of the municipalities and that they therefore will not to be able to offer all languages needed. In practice, the schools can offer only a limited number of choices due to group sizes (ie. requirements of how many pupils have to choose a language so that a group can be established and a teacher hired) and teachers available.

The view of music as an international language that is understood by everyone can be interpreted from the interviews of the teachers in this study. Music is seen as

something that unites people from different cultures, even if they do not know each other's languages. However, according to the state authorities responsible for music in schools, music has different meanings in various places and for different people; music is context-bound (Kauppinen, 2009). This view of pluralism based on individuals is seen in pupil-centred music teaching such as song writing and singing. Moreover, music as a tool in learning languages and ways of life in others cultures is common in education. All this is connected to the question of who is able to take part in music: is it everyone in his or her own way according to his or her capabilities, or only those who are considered talented? Presently, the curricula and the ethos is that music belongs to everyone, and every child has the right to participate. However, public performances, musicals, and talent shows influence the choices of music teachers. Pluralism in music education touches on values and aims in teaching in various ways. If everyone is needed and valued, it demands skills to meet others in democratic settings.

Who dares to talk about multiculturalism?

Multiculturalism is not seen as a neutral concept. It is related to political issues and power, and it may arouse critical and conflicting viewpoints. In some instances the interviewed teachers wondered how the interviewer “dared to approach” the concept of multiculturalism. However, they also thought it was interesting that someone “dared” to discuss the concept:

I think it is interesting that you dare to approach the concept of multiculturalism.

Talking about what this concept means is at the same time discussing politics. A state authority tried to give a definition for multicultural and was unsure about it, even though this term is used in the national project, in which it is said to refer to how to meet others. However, could “interacting with others” rather be called interculturalism? Sometimes concepts are closely connected to political issues, and multiculturalism is said to be rooted in the human rights movement, whereas intercultural is more related to interacting (Räsänen, 2010). The teachers stressed that you cannot claim the same rights if there is only one minority or if there are 50 minority groups in the society.

When the interviewed teachers were uncertain about the meaning of concepts, they tried to explain them from the viewpoint of something that was known to them, for instance from a family perspective. A family is seen as a starting point for learning how to be with others. Moreover, in the present society, “multicultural families” are not rare at all, and many pupils in Swedish-speaking schools have one parent that is Finnish-speaking, while the other one is Swedish-speaking. This kind of environment

might promote understanding and empathy for difference, since multicultural issues are closely connected to emotions for instance:

The worst thing that could happen when you travel abroad is if someone asks you to sing a Finnish-Swedish song and you would not know one. Then you would feel ashamed.

However, belonging to a minority does not necessary mean that someone is tolerant and open to other minorities. A feeling and need to strengthen one's own cultural identity and rights can be important. To strengthen one's own culture via pluralism is seen almost as a rule:

[it is like] a rule, that you re-inforce your own culture through cultural diversity.

The Swedish-speaking minority has a long history with special rights of their own, when compared with other minority groups, which a new kind of pluralism with several new ethnic and cultural groups moving into the country may threaten.

Multicultural skills and the role of music

Many of the interviewed teachers connected the term multicultural or intercultural with immigrants, although Mansikka and Holm (2011) state that multicultural education is not only for immigrants and ethnic minorities. At the first meeting with teacher groups, the first issue that came up while introducing the discussion topic of "multicultural skills" was the fact that the teachers stressed that most immigrant children are in the Finnish-speaking schools, not in Swedish-speaking. As a teacher puts it:

Most immigrants are channelled into the Finnish school system, not into the Finnish-Swedish.

It seems that the first connection that the teachers make with the concept of multicultural music education is that the presence of immigrants in a class is a main pre-condition for multicultural or intercultural education. However, some Swedish-speaking teachers have immigrant children in their classes. These pupils may be so-called new-Finns (usually referring to people moving to Finland from countries close to it) or others moving into the country for different reasons. Music education's connection with multiculturalism is explained by the interviewed teachers as self-evident and natural, without any problems such as those defined by the stage of "intraculture" as

presented by Nissilä (2010). Music education creates so many possibilities, naturally, that you do not have to point them out, as a teacher expresses:

Music is a multicultural subject by its nature. I mean, you have different perspectives [...]. I absolutely do not see any problems, on the contrary, there are possibilities. It might just come naturally, so you do not make it a big thing eventually.

When music is characterized as a “natural” subject related to multiculturalism, the teachers stress the importance of respecting each other, not pointing out differences. A teacher describes how sensitivity is needed in the classroom:

You do not point at somebody and say “Now I would like to hear how your music sounds.”

Young pupils from grades 7 to 9 are usually especially sensitive, and would prefer to be just like other young people, regarding everything, not only cultural background. In these cases, it would be most harmful to point out someone’s special features in a group situation. However, teachers stress that an educational aim is to create an atmosphere in the group in which pupils with different cultural-backgrounds are respected:

But I think it is connected to create an atmosphere in the group so it is considered a richness.

This requires practical wisdom and ethical sensitivity; teachers have to understand when it is the right time and which is the right place to include cultural issues related to pupils’ backgrounds, as a teacher declares:

You have to try to fit it into a suitable context and there it will also interact. It must not be isolated, it has to be connected to a context.

In addition, and related to the atmosphere in a group, personalities of individuals matter, since it also depends on courage and self-esteem. Who will be willing and who will dare to talk about their own cultural background for others in the classroom? Sometimes this happens naturally; one teacher remembers how an Asian boy who had been growing up in Finland was eager to talk about his cultural background with the others in the school, a little bit like an ambassador:

I am thinking of a boy at our unit that actually had been brought up in Finland but had a Chinese [background]. I think he even went to the high school and talked about Chinese culture [there]. And he [also] went to the secondary school and spoke to secondary school kids, so he was a real ambassador.

According to the interviewed teachers, multicultural skills mean the same as *multicultural acceptance*. Music is related to multicultural acceptance, since music does not comprise conflicts related to race or nationality, not at least as clearly as they appear in other issues, says a teacher:

That we learn to understand that today music represents a diversity in many ways.[...] In music conflicts are not as obvious as they can be in other areas.

As already mentioned, the teachers regarded music as a “natural” subject to promote multicultural skills, i.e. multicultural acceptance, because they connect music with cultural plurality. Nowadays, different musical styles and genres having their roots in different cultures are commonly mixed with each other. This means that Western art music does not have a central role in music education anymore, or at least not a sole role. Teachers talked about musical pluralism and the unconscious nature of multicultural activities in music as follows:

And today it is common that you blend different music styles that themselves come from totally different cultures. [...] I think this happens indirectly, that they might not even be aware that this would be a multicultural action, because it is so integrated that it happens unintentionally in a way.

The teacher’s stress that an educational value of music could be to make these unseen and unconscious aspects in music more visible via choices of repertoire, instruments, and artists. Acceptance and understanding of different kinds of music and their pre-conditions is an educational aim that teachers pointed out, which could also be used in a more general sense.

Summary and conclusions

Our point of departure was to investigate how music is perceived as a means of developing multicultural skills in the school environment, from the perspective of teachers in

the Swedish-speaking schools and state authorities in Finland. The findings indicated that a feeling of security was considered to be the basis for openness to diversity, both among teachers and state authorities.

Regarding a multicultural approach to music education, the teachers stressed that by beginning with something that was known to the pupils, this would enable the pupils to develop an interest for something that was new and/or not so familiar to them. Music was also described as a universal language that is understood everywhere, with the potential to connect different people. More specifically, teachers in this study mentioned how they prefer to begin with music that is familiar and known to the young students, and how this builds a basis to understand new music, something that is different.

Music was perceived to be a means for learning languages and thus promoting understanding for differences. Sensitivity and respect were emphasised as vital aspects of music education and music was also connected with cultural plurality, since various genres and music styles were described to be blended in music education. In conclusion, music was associated with acceptance of, and an interest in diversity, aspects that could be interpreted as a definition of multicultural skills.

Discussion and implications

Using music which pupils already know might be a useful starting point and a pedagogically valuable standpoint, in a music education setting. However, one could also argue: “why not occasionally begin with ‘new’ or unfamiliar music”? Music that is radically new to the pupils might open their ears to the unexpected, and at the same time challenge them to act in situations which are unfamiliar to them. Such experience may prepare them to understand and become interested in diversity and difference within a larger context, not only in the classroom. Music has this unique quality of both representing something musically and culturally specific, which Spowe (2007) highlights as a multicultural feature, whilst at the same time having the potential to meet, blend, and transform into something new; something which highlights its inter- and transcultural qualities (ibid.; Schippers 2010a, 2010b).

Regarding the rights of minorities in Finland, the accepted fact that there is a long history of Swedish-speakers in Finland can still provide the basis of a claim to rights but it can also help to raise questions. The Saami people also have a long history in Finland, but do not have as strong rights as the Swedish-speaking population (Korkeakivi, 2013). In a way, a long history connected to a stable status as a minority group in a

society may be helpful with regards to becoming open to differences. The Swedish-speaking people's experiences might be valuable for the state authorities when aiming at developing skills in how to interact with "newcomers". In fact, Finnish society has had minorities for a long time, and much could be learned from their experiences. Thus, pupils with immigrant backgrounds should also be placed in Swedish-speaking schools so that the Swedish-speakers will not be left out of sharing the experiences of educating for an increasingly diverse society.

State authorities are experiencing the influence of the European Union within educational systems. The aims and values in the curricula, even the development project on multicultural skills, came from the outside and had its origins in Central Europe, in events that had happened in the suburbs of Paris. The teachers also mentioned the European Union's educational ideas which have been implemented in Finland. The experience of being part of something bigger – not only being a nation state – can be interpreted as a new phenomenon: pupils and parents are moving within the European Union and the rules and regulations, curricula, and state projects are part of the politics of the EU; not only Finland but across Europe and Scandinavia. The Finnish educational state might almost be seen as an immigrant in the EU, with its own minority position. Does this not complicate the incorporation of actual immigrants, as they are being incorporated into another system which itself is being threatened by its own minority status? Although the law, especially the Constitution of Finland, was felt to be the basis for minority rights, there are financial limitations in the municipalities which might limit the securing of those rights.

Based on this study, many kinds of "multicultural skills" are needed in order to be able to live in a pluralistic society. Power relations are in flux, and tensions between different groups, and individuals as well, may also become part of life in Finland. A school can be seen as a society in a small-scale, in which children learn how to act democratically, and can be educated into the life outside the classroom, the greater society.

In this study we have touched upon the encounter between minority and majority experiences. The Swedish-speaking teachers expressed that they can to some extent relate to the new minority groups in Finland. They are used to being regarded as different from the majority, but at the same time they can negotiate between their roles as Swedish-speakers and their roles as Finnish citizens in the sense that they have a stable and historical background in Finland and they are well acquainted with the language and the way of life. Until now, immigration to the Swedish-speaking areas in Finland has been comparably small. However, the openness and visions of a more pluralistic society among the teachers in the Swedish-speaking schools,

together with their minority experiences, can be seen as a potential that has not yet been fully explored.

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