

Musicship: didactic considerations of music activity in preschool

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ABSTRACT

This article, which is based on my thesis research, aims to describe and analyse the didactics of music activity in early childhood education and, through empirical research, to test concepts that can capture and denote the figuration of music activity. The overall research question was “What characterizes music activity and its possible figuration in preschool practices?” “Possible figuration” refers to an interwoven presentation, a didactics-based concept (‘musicship’) that describes the transformation of the significance of music activity within interwoven empirical and theoretical threads of references.

The empirical material comprises of video observations and reflections with teachers conducted one day a week for eight months at three preschools. As a theoretical resource, various concepts were tested within the framework of didactic theory, music didactics, and the theory of musicking.

The concept of musicship arose when conducting the research. It is being introduced and developed as a resource for both critical and creative reflection on music activity. It is constantly recreated via music-related processes, moving between the actual and the possible, and facilitating the analysis and understanding of music activity.

Keywords: music, didactics, preschool, musicship, music activity

Background

Never before have so many children, i.e. 95% of children aged three to five years, attended preschool in Sweden (Skolverket, 2013). This means that early childhood in Sweden is largely spent at preschool, which now increasingly emphasizes children's learning. Research into *didactics* in early childhood education (ECE) is rare (Pramling & Pramling Samuelsson, 2011). Music didactics (defined in the next paragraph) in ECE is even less studied, especially in the context of 'regular' preschools with no special educational programmes dedicated to music.

The word 'pedagogy' could probably be used instead of didactics, but from a Nordic perspective, I hope to connect to current debate on the use of the term "didactics" in ECE (Brostrøm & Veijleskov, 2009). While the English term tends to stress method, *didaktik* (with a "k", here written *didactics*), represents a critical continental European (Gundem & Hopmann, 1998, Selander & Kress, 2010) approach that emphasizes the reflective process of *Bildung* which aims to prepare individuals for an open future (Uljens, 1997). The word "didactic" is from Greek and refers to teaching, to "the art of pointing out something for someone" (Doverborg et al., 2013: 7). As the basis for teachers' reflective process (cf. Comenius, 1657/1989), teachers can address the questions what, how, where, when, who, and which.

This article uses these didactic questions, with a focus on the questions what, how, who, and which, as a starting point for describing and analysing the didactics of music activity. In the world of music, people as actors interact with, co-create, and are affected by music. For children who are producers, users, and interpreters of music, its significance, even within the domain of preschool, is complex. This article treats music activity in preschool as comprising of music-related processes in which children and teachers alike are surrounded by and co-create music, ranging from spontaneous improvised to arranged and recorded music. The aim of this article is to test an alternative language for musical-didactic relations in music activity in preschool.

The present article describes and analyses the didactics of music activity in ECE, testing concepts that can denote and capture the possible figuration of music activity. The overall research question is "What characterizes music activities and their possible figuration in preschool practices?" 'Possible figuration' refers to an interwoven presentation, a didactics-based concept ('musicship') that describes the transformation of the significance of music activity within interwoven empirical and theoretical threads of references. Answering this overriding research question entails addressing the following three sub-questions:

- What appears to be the focused content of music activity?
- How is music activity staged?
- How do children, teachers, and music (in itself) act in music activity?

The three sub-questions are based on the didactics-based questions addressing what (i.e. content), how (i.e. staging), and who (i.e. the perspectives of children, teachers, and music as actors). These *didactic* questions can be seen as three threads that sometimes cross each other and sometimes merge, but are all involved in answering the overall research question.

What appears to be the central content of music activity can be seen in terms of the four dimensions of reality, i.e. the intended, the perceived, the observed, and the possible reality (Nielsen, 1997: 163). The present article mainly concerns the observers', i.e. the researchers', reality. However, the conversations with teachers touch on the intended and the perceived.

Theoretical resources

In music activity, the music phenomenon is understood as object (Reimer, 2003), action (Elliott, 2005; Small, 1998), and something that occurs between the subject and the object (Nielsen, 2006). These three aspects of music stand in relation to the abductive method of analysis and are relevant in generating an informative analysis (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008) that reveals the full complexity of music activity.

The present study does not regard theory as a fixed point of departure, framework, or background. It is instead seen as a resource that provides various concepts to be tested within the framework of music didactics (Nielsen 2006), didactics theory (Klafki, 2005), and musicking theory (Small, 1998). As theoretical resources, theories are not tested in their entirety; instead, various concepts are used to provide explanations and been contextualized. These concepts are used as analytical tools (see Reflexive analysis).

Used concepts

Didactics theory was foregrounded in this study and used for critical reflection. The concepts that informed my thoughts were material, formal, and categorical theories (Klafki, 2005). In material theory, the learning object is the basis of teaching, the content is at the centre, and music can be seen as both goal and means, with the

learning object being, for example, mathematics or language. Unlike material theory, formal theory focuses less on *what* is to be learned than on what contributes most to the child's development in general. From this perspective, music becomes a means rather than an end (which perhaps is not music didactics, but is often observed in the empirical material and is interesting in relation to the teachers' *didactic* considerations regarding music activity). Categorical theory adopts a hermeneutic dialectical process between the child and the content. The content is expected to be both accessible and challenging for the child. In 1985, Klafki proposed a 'critical-constructive didactics' (Klafki, 2005) in which the critical aspect takes account of the goal-orientation of everyone's possibility of self-determination and co-determination. The present article is interested both in categorical and critical-constructive didactics in relation to how actors emerge from music activity. 'Constructive' points towards internship, a kind of model draft for a possible internship with thoughtful ideas for a changed and changing internship. This concept also reflects the "possible or potential reality" posited by Nielsen (1997: 163; author's translation).

Music didactics (Nielsen, 2006) has, in present article, been tried as a foreground theory. Nielsen (2006) has described certain didactic positions and concepts in music as a subject, i.e. music as a singing subject, music as a "musick" subject, music as a societal subject, music as part of a poly-aesthetic task, and music as a sound subject. These positions all seem relevant to early childhood music education, but the present article treats only three of them, i.e. the didactic conceptions of singing, instrument-playing, and movement. Nielsen (2006) also uses the categories of activity and function. The form of a music activity says nothing about the kind of music involved; instead, it is meant to be understood as a way of 'being with music'. Nielsen distinguishes between the forms of activity (e.g. singing, instrument-playing, and moving with music) and their underlying functions (i.e. reproduction, production, perception, interpretation, and reflection). All five functions may be relevant to this study to various degrees, but this study considers only reproduction and production in relation to various forms of activity. *Reproduction* is defined as "performing and recreating existing music" (Nielsen 2006: 295; author's translation), which in an early childhood setting could be singing existing songs. *Production* includes creating, composing, arranging, and improvising music. In an early childhood setting, this could occur when the children explore and create sounds or improvise on drums. Interpretation and reflection cannot be materially demonstrated from the observations, but they do form a theoretical thread that is used in the work with the interwoven presentation of music activities' possible figuration, i.e. musicship.

Before continuing to present the underlying rationale of learning during music activity, I want to distinguish, on the operational level, between the complementary

learning perspectives used as analytical tools for learning *in*, *about*, *with*, and *through* music (Lindström, 2002). In learning *in* and *about* music, music is the goal of the activity, which can be related to material theory in which the content is the focus. Learning *in* music is about what the teacher singles out for the child to attend to. Opportunities to learn *about* music are what the teacher and children talk about during the music activity. In learning *with* music, the music illustrates or animates something other than the main object of learning, which can be related to formal theory in which the child rather than the music is at the centre. For example, if the children are curious about a particular country, perhaps its music could bring its culture to life. In this way of using music in teaching, music becomes a means rather than an end. Learning *through* concerns music as a medium for explorative work, music being the carrier. The difference between learning *with* and *through* music concerns the prominence of the role of music. “The goal of working with music is to activate, bring to life, or illustrate rather than, as in learning through music, to explore, problematize, or formulate an opinion” (Lindström 2002: 124; author’s translation). Music activity characterized as a means rather than an end (as in learning *with* and *through* music) perhaps does not belong within music didactics, but is still interesting in relation to music practice in preschool education.

Klafki (2005), Nielsen (2006), and Lindström (2002) provide theoretical resources for analysing music activity in terms of content and staging. Both Klafki and Nielsen consider the question of *whom* to be central to the subject, while Nielsen discusses the tensions between *ars* and *scientia*, between the spirit of art and its linguistic articulations. In analysis from the perspective of the different actors (i.e. the children, teachers, and music) that can alternate in the foreground of the activity, there is a need for alternative tools, which leads us to musicking theory.

In Small’s theory of musicking (1998), the meaning of music is not in the object, but in the act. This makes the analysis focus on music activity as a network, as a direction of motion, and as co-constituted between the children, teachers, and music (as an actor). The meaning of musicking is in the relations constituting the network of music activity. The spirit of musicking requires that the analysis concentrate on the actors in a music-related process, emphasizing how music activity is performed and by whom. Small’s musicking theory opens up our understanding of music activity, seeing it as a network in which music is an intertwining link. In that way, music activity can be described as jointly constituted direction of motion.

In this article, the “*who*” question does not concern why an actor acts, but rather how the actor acts. The building of the music network can be related to postmodern theory in which music can be seen as an actor, not with intentions (like humans), but still as a substantive co-creator. This alternative (see also Brostrøm, 2012) way

of assembling theory can help us understand the relations and engagements in a socio-material relationship.

In the *music activity* concept, music is central to the activity whose content is an outgrowth of the teachers' awareness. The teachers studied here invited me to observe their planning of music activities. The activity in itself was not always planned beforehand, but was sometimes spontaneous.

Concepts in relation to a possible figuration: musicship

In the emergence of a possible figuration, critical-constructive didactics seems to support both the critical and the constructive parts of musicship. This figuration is critical partly of earlier school-based theories and partly of the staging of music activity. It is constructive because it provides thoughts upon which to “act, shape, and change” (Klafki, 2005: 108) music activity to support a future that is open and indefinite. This perspective can also accommodate categorical education theory within its critical-constructive orientation. As pedagogical practice in preschool increasingly focuses on school preparation, Brostrøm (2012) writes that there is a need to apply critical didactics to ECE. Brostrøm combines a Bildung-oriented critical-constructive didactics (Klafki, 2005) with childhood studies and postmodern ideals (Barad, 2003, Deleuze & Guattari 1988, Lenz Taguchi, 2010). I will return to this matter in the section on musicship.

The design of the study

The empirical material was generated by video observation one day a week for eight months at three anonymized preschools in southern Sweden, here called Havsvågen, Solstrålen, and Trädet. Teachers and children are also anonymized. The preschools were chosen because they all considered themselves as working a lot with music, i.e. at least once a week, though none of them offered special education programmes in music or had a particular music profile. The preschools each had four to six departments with 16–20 children in each department. At one preschool, no child had Swedish as a first language, while at the other two, nearly all children had Swedish as their first language. The group size was 4–40 children aged three to five years old. The children's ages are partly obscured, as the study does not focus on the children's individual development, but on the content dimensions in relation to the learning perspective.

The observations generated 46 video excerpts (16 hours) depicting music activity. With the camera, I followed the music and music-related processes rather than specific children. I started out as a participating observer and ended up as a partially participating observer (Fangen, 2005). After each music activity, all participating teachers watched the video observation and reflected on, commented on, and had a conversation about it. The conversations can be seen as a mixture of reflective conversations and analytical interviews (Alvesson, 2011) in which the teachers' dialogue partners describe the music activity. Initially, the teachers were free to comment, but later I asked what, how, and who questions. The descriptions in the result part are mainly based on the observations and the conversations can be seen as complements.

Reflexive analysis

Music activity was analysed using an abductive approach incorporating the perspectives of both generation and articulation. The analysis moved iteratively between the study's aims and questions, theoretical resources, and empirical material. It is the interaction between theory-loaded data and data-loaded theory that characterizes abductive analysis (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008). The abductive approach has led to theory being seen as a source of inspiration for pattern discovery that fosters understanding (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008: 56).

When the audio productions of the video-recordings of music activity had been transcribed verbatim, the data was interpreted using an expanded, four-part hermeneutic approach (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008). The expanded approach included: 1) a closed empirical interpretation in which all activities were interpreted from the perspectives of all questions; 2) a hermeneutic interpretation conducted as a dialogue between my preconceptions and new understandings, which led to; 3) critical-constructive challenges concerning substantive dimensions that could create alternative ways of acting, thinking, and talking and to; 4) a postmodern interpretation situated in relation to Brostrøm (2012) and his critical preschool pedagogy and in relation to postmodern theory.

During the abductive analysis, parts of texts were marked and became theory-driven themes within the question area. For example, *learning in, about, with, and through* music (Lindström 2002) and *material, formal, and categorical* theories (Klafki, 2005) were all tested. With an openness to language as well as action, aspects of music activity were grouped into *singing, playing, and moving with* music; the activities were then related to, for example, the *reproductive* and *exploratory/productive* functions (inspired by Nielsen, 2006).

The above examples were theory driven, but during the abductive analysis, interwoven empirical–theoretical themes were also developed, as exemplified by the various players (see Actors in music activity). As well as interpreting the children’s and teacher’s actions (and the power of music), it was also interesting, in parallel, to record impressions from the perspective of Small’s theory of musicking (1998). The empirical research provided groundwork for, and sometimes even challenged, the theory. For example, through the abductive analysis, the content initially seen as *productive* was extended and combined with an *exploratory* way of working. Only improvisation could be linked to previous knowledge of the structure of music, for example, so improvisation had to be understood in relation to that. But with increasing attention paid to exploration, previous knowledge was less emphasized.

However, theory also challenged the empirical results when traces of and content relative to possible figuration emerged during the analysis. In this way, data and theory challenged and informed each other, and can be seen as intertwined threads. The theory-loaded empiricism can also be seen inspiring the development of didactic-based music content. Working with an abductive analysis answers the first question of the study through testing alternatives and developing possible figuration, which can be referred to as musicship.

Result: Description and analysis of music activity

Musicship emerges from the interplay between theory and practice. Therefore I will start by describing and analysing didactics in music activity from the perspectives of content, staging, and actors.

Focused content of music activity

Traces of focused content that appear in the empirical material have been categorized according to Lindström (2002). Learning is regarded as partly *in* and *about* music, which in Klafki’s terminology can be compared to material theory, in which the content (i.e. music as an object) is the focus, and as partly *with* and *through* music, which, again following Klafki, can be compared to formal theory, in which the child rather than the music is at the centre.

Learning *in* music, which concerns music as both end and means, was common at all three preschools. In music, learning about dynamics, pulse, rhythm, tempo, and pitch are recognized. The featured aspects of music that were not pointed out to the

children include the time signature (mostly 2/4 or 4/4) and harmony (e.g. major and minor, mostly major).

Sometimes the music activities were verbalized when the teacher directed the children's attention towards something special and learning *about* music occurred. Traces of learning about music were rare and varied between the preschools. For example, at Trädet preschool, one activity entailed learning the names of various instruments. The children played a game in which lots of instruments were put in a circle and the teacher took one away; the children were then supposed to work out what instrument was missing.

Other traces of learning *about* music touched on dynamics, genre, hard and soft sounds, and pitch. At Trädet preschool, tempo, the fact that music changes, and sheet music were also discussed. With lots of sheet music on the piano, the teacher said the name of the note and showed it on the piano keyboard.

Teacher: What do you see? [She points at the sheet music.] Here is sheet music, with dots like that.

Child: Sheet music?

Teacher: Look there, it is a C. [She points at a C on the piano and on the sheet music.]

Teacher: And here is an A.

Child: Is it that one?

Teacher: Yes. [The teacher goes on showing the child which key is which note and the child plays. Together they play "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star".]

In formal education theory, the child is said to be the focus rather than the music itself. The music is used as a method for learning something other than music. Learning *with* music can be understood as touching on language, mathematics, and socialization.

Music used for *language* learning was exemplified when the children danced to music. The teacher at Trädet, imitated one of the children's soft movements and commented: "It almost looks as though you are dancing over the sea." The comment can be interpreted as the teacher offering the children language with which to describe their movements.

An example of music as a method for learning *mathematics* and, more specifically, numbers was when the children sang the song "Dance One and One" ("Havsvågen"). At the beginning of the verse one child was in the middle, with everyone dancing in a circle around him/her during the chorus. Before the next verse, the child who was last invited to the middle could invite another child to join the small circle in the middle. Before every new verse, all the children counted how many children were in the inner circle. The teacher commented on the choice of the song: "Oh, the song 'Dancing One and One', well, it has maths in it. So that was my reason for choosing it."

Music used for *socialization* was exemplified when the children sang a song (Havsvågen) during which one child was supposed to stand in the centre of the circle and pretend to be a butterfly. The child in the middle was supposed to invite another child to dance with. The focus of the teacher can be understood to be on socialization, having the children invite, bow to, and thank each other, rather than on the music itself.

Learning *through* music is mostly about explorative work. In one example (Havsvågen), the children explored the soundscape on a walk. They were on their way to a playground when the teacher started telling a story about an angry and ugly witch. They did not want to wake up the sleeping witch, so they had to sneak. They came to a bridge and the teacher asked the children to listen to the sound and compare it with the sound of walking on grass. Through making sound, the children explored the difference between walking on a bridge and walking on grass. Learning through music in the three preschools was not about problematizing or formulating opinions. The children did not seem to ask any new questions, which was surprising considering the children's questions about other things.

To summarize, the focused content of music activities usually concerns learning *in* and *with* music rather than *about* and *through* music.

The content of music activities appears to be both linear and nonlinear, with movement between the two. 'Linear' implies tradition, such as in traditional songs, which form much of the repertoire, and is the main selection criterion in contrast to challenging, deepening, or imaginative exploration. 'Nonlinear' content, arising from spontaneous, exploratory, and improvised interaction in the moment, can make the music activity appear both sporadic and fragmentary. Such music activity in the moment is not planned with any idea of progression. This is where there may be latitude for the child to add something new to the music activity and not just take part in a preconceived music activity. In this way, content can be seen both as an object (i.e. music as a linear, goal-oriented activity) and as a direction of nonlinear movement with novel content and shifting goals.

Some basic elements of music are processed and music activity can apparently move between material and formal education theory. The teachers sometimes focus

on music as an object, for example, by emphasizing playing the guitar correctly, so much so that it draws their attention from the children. On the other hand, the teachers sometime focus on the children so much that they play in a different key from the one they are singing in. Only one teacher, a specialized music teacher, was able to concentrate on the interaction between music and children, in line with categorical theory.

Staging music activity

The intention in this section is to describe and analyse how music activities are conducted. Staging music activity partly concerns spatial staging, and partly concerns the activities themselves (analysed in terms of singing, instrument playing, and movement/dancing) and their underlying functions (i.e. as exploratory/productive or reproductive).

In the context of preschool and music activity, spatial staging refers to how the room is used. For example, an activity entails sitting in a circle. The ritual of forming a circle can be interpreted as bodily disciplining in the room setting. The circle formation seems to be a necessary ritual of preschool music activity that offers clarity and security as well as latitude for variation; it can also constitute a 'straightjacket' that can be difficult to escape. In music activity in which movement is emphasized (which is rare), sitting and the circle formation are both dispensed with.

Staging a music activity refers to how the activity starts and ends, as well as to how each constituent action of the activity starts. In initiating the music activity, spoken instructions dominated. Instructions as to where the children should sit, what they were going to sing, or what instruments were available were given more or less playfully. There are cases, however, in which music itself is used to open and close the activity. For example, at Havsvågen preschool, when the music activity was ending the teacher said:

Now, my friends it is over for today, because today there are other children who also want to come in and have a try. Now, let's see if you can clap your hands and sing ...

The constituent actions of the music activity can be categorized as *singing*, *moving*, and *playing instruments*, which can be related to their *reproductive* or *exploratory/productive* functions. *Singing* was mostly reproductive in character. The children sang songs that they already knew, and no new songs were taught during the months of observation. The children played with their voices in an exploratory/productive way only once.

Playing instruments was mostly exploratory/productive in character. One example (Havsvågen) was when the children were playing with boxes that they turned upside down and then used as drums. They were exploring how the sound changed when the space inside the drums changed:

Teacher: Can you go and get something to put in your box? A pillow? A doll? Blocks? [The children get different things to put in their boxes. The teacher helps Sixten put his box on top of a pillow.]

Teacher: What does it sound like? [Sixten plays for a while.]

Teacher: Now, put the box on the floor again. What does it sound like now? Do you think there is a difference with and without the pillow?

The children were encouraged to explore the changing soundscape with and without pillows in the box. Only at the preschool with a specialized music teacher (Trädet) did this instrument-playing activity shift from sound exploration to become something else, when they tried to play different songs that they already knew.

Moving was equally reproductive and exploratory/productive. Movement in combination with a song usually illustrated the song, and this happened when the teacher was in the room with the children; however, more exploratory/productive movements were made to recorded music when the teachers left the room.

To summarize, it seems that the relationships between the specific activities (i.e. singing, moving, and instrument-playing) and their functions were invariant.

Actors in music activity

The third and last question addressed in the article concerns the actors in the music activity. To make their actions more obvious, I traced and categorized the actors (i.e. the children, teachers, and music) as four types of *players* according to their types of action: *front players* are soloists who take the initiative and influence the music activity through their actions; *co-players*, while not soloists, shape the music activity by transforming it into an interaction; *fellow players* take part in the music activity, but follow the lead of the front and co-players rather than shape the content; and *opposing players* create dissonance between the other actors.

As *front players*, the children's actions concern participating, choosing the content of the music activity, and staging. The children at both Havsvågen and Solstrålen preschools are asked before the music activity whether they want to participate. They are

not required to participate, but if they start to engage in the activity they are supposed to stay until it finishes. This sometimes causes teachers to act as co-players focusing all their energy on capturing the attention of children who do not want to stay in the activity. At Trädet preschool, though, all children are required to join in, though they are free to interrupt and do something else during the activity. This sometimes causes the teachers, as co-players, to spend energy keeping the activity interesting even with fewer and fewer children in the room.

The teachers' actions as *front players* concern content choices, which are often based on tradition and recognition. When teachers initiate a music activity, they often use strategies or didactic tools to capture the children's attention. Such strategies vary and include such aspects as style of accompaniment as well as the use and choice of pitch, instrument, dynamics, movement, pictures, and lyrics. Teachers as front players are also concerned with group formation and rotation.

Music as front player can both *capture* the children's attention and *shape* the music activity. One example (Havsvågen) of music capturing the children was when they were practicing the tradition of Lucia. One of the boys was bored and showed his resistance by lying down on the floor, being an opposing player. Suddenly the teacher changed the guitar accompaniment and started playing a rock song. The boy immediately sat up and started to sing and play air guitar. This example can be interpreted two ways. The teacher can be seen as a front player, as she intentionally alters her style of playing. On the other hand, the boy reacts to the music in itself, although it was produced by the teacher and her guitar. In this way, the music can be said to have captured the children's attention and, depending on what music the teachers provide, to have shaped the music activity.

Co-players shape the music activity by transforming it into an interaction. They seem to work for music activity that emerges in interaction, in a process involving children, teachers, and the music. One example of this is a music activity in which the teacher and children for the first time play the didgeridoo. Because neither the teacher nor the children know how to play the instrument, they together, in a nonlinear spirit, find a way by simply making it up. The children, teachers, and instruments can all be interpreted as co-players. Creating a music activity in interaction seems to have a few key features: a small group of children, equipment that invites exploration, and teachers with a combination of topic qualifications and curiosity.

Fellow players take part in the music activity, but follow the lead of the front and co-players rather than shape the content—a more trivial participation.

Opposing players create dissonance between the other actors, between the children and their teacher, between the teacher and the music, and between the children and the music. Dissonance arising between children and their teacher often concerns

children who do not want to do what the teacher planned. Children can manifest this opposition through passive resistance (e.g. by not singing or not playing an instrument when they are supposed to). Dissonance between the teacher and the music occurs relatively rarely, as it is usually the teacher who chooses the music for the music activity. However, such dissonance can appear when children as front players, for example, play instruments that were not supposed to be used in the music activity, or when a child playing around on YouTube, finding 'wrong' music (which from the perspective of the teacher happened to be Lady Gaga). Finally, dissonance can appear between the children and the music when the music does not capture the children's interest.

Periods of dissonance tend to shift, partly because of the children's actions. At the preschools where the children's actions as front players are given free rein, dissonance seems to arise between the children and their teacher, whereas at preschools where the children are not treated as front players, the dissonance seems to shift, arising between the children and the music.

Musicship

A didactic study can address the intended content to be learned, for example, through examining teachers' plans and the curriculum. Nielsen (1997) emphasizes the actualized perspective, addressing what appears to be the central content during the process of learning. Through studies in settings very similar to practice situations, the intended perspective can be established on a realistic basis. It is also possible that things could happen in practice situations for which we do not yet have language from the intended perspective. This opens up the possibility of developing an alternative way of using language, grounded in practice situations, that expresses the possible figuration of music activity. The overall research question, "What characterizes music activities and their possible figuration in preschool practices?", seeks to describe the phenomenon of music activity: what happens, how it happens, and what actions the actors take. These three aspects of music activity meet in the concept of musicship in which alternative descriptions join together their various theoretical and empirical threads.

The concept of musicship arose during my thesis research and is being developed and introduced as a resource for reflecting on music activity. It is based on and intended to transform the meaning of music activity through the interweaving of empirical and theoretical threads.

The concept of musicship gradually came to play a more noticeable and nuanced role during my research. Musicship, in which music is a link in an interwoven process, can in this context say something about what is happening in music activity as figuration. Whereas music didactics can be seen as a tool based on central questions, musicship is based on critical and creative reflections.

Grounded (but not foregrounded) in education theory and music didactics theory, a postmodern view of music can be seen as a complement, providing support to critical reflections on a future that is open and indefinite and fostering alternative ways of thinking. The empirical material illustrates how a music activity with specific content is linear and based on tradition, while a nonlinear music activity works without content-focused goals or notions of progress. This invites alternative ways of linking theoretical and empirical threads. Brostrøm (2012) suggests a continental Bildung theory (Klafki, 2005) influenced by postmodernism when he problematizes how adult-initiated activity dominates preschool, resulting in a preschool with less and less space for activities initiated by the children themselves. He notes that the use of Bildung theory leads to overemphasis on the teaching subject rather than the process, and seems to suggest a need for more radical change in our understanding of children as individuals, and for activities not always driven by goals and focusing on objects. Without specific goals, the teacher needs to follow the child's lead when constructing an understanding, which means that the teacher can work spontaneously rather than following a set agenda.

In musicship, music is the interlacing link (cf. attachment point, Holgersen, 2012) between three threads (i.e. content, staging, and actors) that sometimes cross each other and sometimes merge. The concept is also affected by a more general view of what music is intended to be and what teachers emphasize, such as the music itself, the child/process, and the child/music interaction. These three threads focus on the content, staging, and actors of the music activity. They invite critical and creative reflection on music activity in preschool settings and in music-related processes. The content thread concerns learning in, about, with, and through music. The staging thread concerns procedure: the process of the activity with its functions and constituent actions. The action thread describes not only how children and teachers are actors, but how the music is an actor too. The concept of musicship concentrates on:

- *content* as movement between the linear and nonlinear, content as object, content as direction of movement, unestablished content, and shifting goals;

- *staging* in which the actions constituting the activity (e.g. singing, moving, and playing) vary and interact with their underlying reproductive or exploratory/productive functions; and
- *action in movement*, in which children, teachers, and the music act as different types of players, i.e. front players, fellow players, co-players, and opposing players.

Musicship stands in relation to the teacher's idea of what music is. Music in preschool practice emphasizes music as an object (Reimer, 2003) to learn in and/or about. Music in preschool education can also be seen as musicking (Small, 1998). However, the musicking way of thinking about music and its usefulness in preschool could deflect too much attention from music as an object. This could by extension lead to difficulties focusing on music as an object in an educational context. In musicship, music is about the meeting between the subject and the object (Nielsen, 2006). This way of looking at music can foster movement between content as object and content as direction of movement.

Musicship can be seen as something that permits a critical and possibly also a creative relation with a music activity, based on process and constantly recreated as a form of music-related figuration, as the merging of freeing and directing relations within a network, and as a concept moving between the actual and the possible, facilitating the analysis and understanding of music activity.

Why musicship?

The aim of this article has not been to illustrate what music activity should be; instead, it has been to describe and analyse the didactics of music activity in ECE to test concepts that can denote and capture the figuration of music activity. By extension, this might well foster the conditions for the further development of didactics in music activity in ECE.

It is an open question whether and to what extent the concepts categorized here (e.g. learning in, about, with, and through music; formal, material, and categorical theory; singing, playing, and moving; and production, reproduction, and actors) enable or limit discussion. I believe that they provide an enabling foundation, a model, a springboard for inspiration and innovation in efforts to test alternative concepts as contributions to didactics in ECE. In relation to the aim of the article, i.e. to test

alternative concepts, the question is whose concepts? Where do they come from and who are they for? I used the everyday concept of music activity as an empirically demarcated object of study to which music is central. With its figuration, my hope with musicship is to offer a concept that invites both critical and creative reflection about music activity. As a concept that also stems from situations that are close to practice, I hope it can be useful to both practitioners and to researchers.

This article has focused on describing and analysing music activity, but now it is time to touch on the central question, "What is music activity for?" Although such "why" questions are unanswerable (Biesta, 2011: 24), it can still be productive to reflect on them.

Biesta (2011: 15) writes that all pedagogical work exerts influence on three areas: *qualification*, *socialization*, and *subjectification*. In the context of musicship, qualification (i.e. knowledge and understanding of citizenship) can be influenced through learning in, about, with, and through music; socialization (i.e. becoming members of personal, cultural, and political-social groups and learning how to behave within them) occurs through exploring and learning music in groups; and subjectification (i.e. cultivating self-identity and individuality) is expressed through the unique capacity of music activity to allow children to explore various player roles. Historically, Swedish preschools have legitimized music education as a method of upbringing, as a means of communication, and as a type of learning (Holmberg, 2014); now it is increasingly seen as the child's right. When upbringing was the emphasis, the focus was on socialization. However, with an increasing emphasis of music as means for developing language or mathematics, the qualification aspect has been reinforced. Perhaps with growing emphasis on children's right to music, the area of subjectification/individuation will also expand.

According to Biesta (2011: 54), it is desirable that researchers not only study the most effective ways to achieve certain goals, but also consider the desirability of the goals in themselves. The curriculum for preschool (Utbildningsdepartementet, 1998) says that creating and communicating using different forms of expression, such as song, music, dance, and movement, are supposed to be both the means and content. Music is thereby presented as a means of communication. Music, seen only as the subject of communication (cf. Åsén & Vallberg Roth, 2013) is drained of meaning. For something to qualify as education, all three functions (i.e. qualification, socialization, and subjectification) need to be engaged. To support preschool teachers in their work with music, musicship also allows for subjectification via creation and communication, but the empirical material from the preschools instead emphasized socialization (joining in the established order) and qualification (i.e. knowledge and understanding). Subjectification is about how we in unique ways distinguish

ourselves from the established order, which in turn depends on how others receive our beginnings (Biesta 2011: 88).

To return to the notion of players within musicship, opposing players can sometimes be singled out by their subjectification function, as they distinguish themselves from the established order and their actions are treated in different ways. With an emphasis on children's opportunities to become different sorts of players, where fellow players' and co-players' actions are mostly about socialization (actors in a linear way), while front players' and opposing players' actions are about subjectification (actors in a nonlinear way), musicship also provides a community-oriented dimension in which children as citizens with 'voting rights' can be related to democracy.

The concept of musicship can include all three: qualification, socialization, and subjectification. In supporting all three functions, music activities can approach the historical ideal of *Bildung*, in which children are given both the inspiration and the tools to create and be enriched by music during and after the music activity, in preschool and throughout their lives.

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