

## Music outreach in Lebanon

What do the concerts on the Lebanon project mean to the local participants, and what are their views on the pupils' involvement?

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One key element of the *Lebanon project* at the Norwegian Academy of Music (NMH) is music education and concert performances for and with children and young people living in the Palestinian refugee camp Rashidieh near Tyre in Southern Lebanon. The project also involves school concert collaborations with several Lebanese schools<sup>1</sup>. The project is part of a wider collaboration between a number of organizations<sup>2</sup> working to protect the interests of refugees in Lebanon. The project has its roots in NORWAC's<sup>3</sup> mental health programme. Every year since 2005, a group of third-year students<sup>4</sup> from our music education bachelor programme has travelled to Lebanon to teach and perform concerts as part of the professional placement module of their course. Outreach work and concerts are becoming an increasingly important part of the *Lebanon project* at the NMH, and in recent years the students have given school concerts in several Lebanese schools in addition to the concerts performed with children and young people in the Rashidieh refugee camp. The school concerts have evolved into collaborations between the students and the schools they visit – primarily by increasing pupil participation and having the children prepare their own material, which they then perform together with the students.

In this article, I will be looking more closely at the music outreach element of the project and how this aspect has evolved. Approaching the subject from a music education perspective, the following questions will be discussed:

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1 See Chapter 1 for a more detailed presentation of the *Lebanon project*.

2 See Chapter 2 for more information about the project partners.

3 NORWAC: Funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Norwegian Aid Committee is a humanitarian organisation involved in providing healthcare. <http://norwac.no/>

4 An average of 10–12 students travel to Lebanon every year, but the cohorts have ranged from 5 to 16 participants from year to year.

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By local participants we mean our partners in Lebanon – both in the Rashidieh camp and in the participating Lebanese schools – especially the children and young people.

First, I will describe the concert activities on the *Lebanon project* with particular focus on certain challenges that arise when engaging in music outreach with children and adolescents in a foreign culture and on how pupil participation in the concerts has changed over the years. Next, I will present the results of seven interviews conducted in the summer of 2013 with teachers and leaders at the schools and organisations with which the NMH collaborates in Lebanon. The findings from the interviews will then be discussed in view of the questions that this article seeks to answer.

## The Lebanon concerts

The concert activities in Lebanon have evolved in several ways over the years, both in scope and in terms of venues/audiences and the degree of pupil participation. The changes have been driven by the contributions made by the *Lebanon project* towards boosting the teaching skills of Palestinian and Lebanese music teachers and by a growing interest in introducing music as a school subject in our partner schools. Schools in Lebanon are partly state-run, partly operated by various organisations. Music and arts are not normally part of the curriculum, nor are school concerts or other arts projects. Lebanon does not have a tradition for training music teachers, and the music conservatoire in Beirut does not offer a teacher training programme. Most of our partner schools are run by religious and/or political organisations and have been able to include music as a school subject, while the UN-run (UNRWA<sup>5</sup>) schools attended by the Palestinian pupils do not offer music education. For many of the pupils, the Norwegian students' school concerts would have been their first concert experience.

The collaboration with our partner schools (a school in Tyre run by the Imam Sadr Foundation, two primary schools in the town of Saida run by the Maarouf Saad Social

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<sup>5</sup> UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) is a UN agency working to improve living conditions for Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

& Cultural Foundation<sup>6</sup>, and Shohour Official High School) has evolved over the years and now includes regular school concerts for the pupils and an increasing degree of pupil participation whereby the pupils give their own performances at these concerts. The concerts in the Rashidieh refugee camp are slightly different in that they mark the end of the students' placement project and see the children and youngsters work with the Norwegian students to rehearse musical numbers which they then perform together at the final concert. The Palestinians have also put on their own musical and dance numbers, while the Norwegian students have performed their prepared repertoire. These concerts thus involve a greater degree of musical collaboration than do the school concerts at the partner schools.

Preparing and performing school concerts in a foreign culture poses linguistic, cultural and religious challenges. Many of the pupils – especially the youngest – speak little English. The two schools in Saida teach French and English respectively as second languages, and the Norwegian student teachers have from time to time tried to use both languages when communicating with the audience. When the language barrier has become too great, we have used an interpreter to translate from English to Arabic. The cultural and religious challenges are partly down to how music generally or certain instruments and/or forms of music specifically are considered by some to be *haram* (forbidden) and partly due to the way in which certain constraints are imposed on the concert programme when it comes to the meaning or lyrical content of some pieces. Another major challenge is that the Palestinian and Lebanese pupils have quite different musical experiences and preferences to the Norwegian students, and most of the music performed by the students will be entirely new and unfamiliar to the children. Only a minority of the pupils have attended concerts before.

The music education students who participate in the *Lebanon project* specialise in classical music, folk music or improvised music (jazz, pop, rock), and they all play a principal instrument as well as multiple secondary instruments. The students are musically versatile, something which has resulted in concert programmes that are varied in both repertoire and instrumentation. When preparing for the Lebanon placement project, the students put together a school concert programme lasting around 45 minutes and comprising relatively short pieces in different genres and involving different instruments. The programme has historically consisted of one or two a

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6 <http://imamsadrfoundation.org/> and <https://www.facebook.com/MaaroufSaadFoundation>  
A presentation of the partners and NORWAC is also available in *Forum for Culture and International Cooperation, 2012* and at [http://www.norwac.no/index.php?option=com\\_weblinks&view=category&id=39%3Ali-ban&Itemid=48](http://www.norwac.no/index.php?option=com_weblinks&view=category&id=39%3Ali-ban&Itemid=48)

cappella pieces (often involving the entire student group), a few jazz/pop/rock songs, a couple of Norwegian folk tunes, some classical pieces for various instruments, and a couple of humorous and playful musical items, often with audience participation. The aim has been to make the concert programme so flexible that elements of it can be presented at the different school concerts with timings and content adapted to the performances that the schools themselves have prepared. Since music outreach is becoming increasingly important to the *Lebanon project*, the work going into preparing the repertoire and concerts has become more structured over the years. Before departure, the students have worked to create coherent projects taking into consideration musical variation, pupil involvement, scene changes and verbal communication.

I will now look in more detail at the different concerts that the students have performed in Lebanon. I will also provide a very brief account of the schools and their music provision as a backdrop to the (school) concerts.

### Concerts in the Rashidieh refugee camp

The musical activities and most of the concerts in the Rashidieh camp take place at the Beit Atfal Assumoud centre in the camp<sup>7</sup>. The centre has a large instrument collection containing band instruments (keyboard, electric guitars, bass guitars and drum kits), saxophones, accordions, violins, guitars, *darbukas* (Arabic hand drums), xylophones, glockenspiel and a range of smaller instruments. A number of permanent teachers teach on the music project weekly, and the centre has developed a fairly extensive musical repertoire in the form of multi-function scores and CD recordings for use as teaching materials and therefore also as a substantial part of the concert repertoire in Rashidieh. The repertoire contains folk music from all over the world, ballads, pop and rock songs and songs written for educational purposes<sup>8</sup>. The students also prepare their own multi-function scores of pieces of their choice and rehearse these together before the concert according to the instruments available and the musical abilities of the pupils. The centre houses a large room with a stage as well as several smaller rooms used for practice. The concerts, which take place in the room with the stage, are the direct result of the students' teaching activities with the children and young people in the camp. To mark the end of three days of intensive learning, the songs they have been practising (usually two or three) are performed for family and friends at the centre along with the students' own concert programme and performances of

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7 Beit Atfal Assumoud / National Institution of Social Care and Vocational Training (NISCVT) <http://www.socialcare.org/>. See also Rodin and Gjestrud, 2008, and Rodin, 2006.

8 See chapter 3

Arabic music and dance. Many of the children and adolescents also receive instruction in Palestinian folk dancing (*dabke*) at the centre, and several of the dance groups keep a very high standard with participation in festivals both in Lebanon and abroad – including the MelaFestivalen in Norway. The dances and music represent important aspects of Palestinian culture and, as part of the cultural exchange element of the project, the Norwegian students learn parts of the *dabke* and Arabic music and songs. One permanent feature at these concerts is a performance by the students of these dances and songs dressed in Palestinian national costume – to much applause from both the audience and the Palestinian pupils.

In addition to these final concerts, the students put on short performances – both of the joint repertoire and their own material – in between lessons and rehearsals. Hearing the music several times allows the pupils to recognise and familiarise themselves with it, and it can also be an inspiration to hear the Norwegian musicians perform. This way, these brief and intimate performances enable the pupils to discover and engage with the music.

The concerts with the Palestinian pupils have often also been moved out of the camp to larger venues in Tyre or Beirut. On those occasions they have often taken place in conjunction with a bigger event – e.g. the marking of an important Palestinian occasion – and audiences have come from other parts of Lebanon, primarily from other refugee camps. These concerts are extended to include speeches and music and dance performances with Palestinians from other camps in addition to the material presented by the Norwegian students and the children and young people from Rashidieh.

### School concerts at the Imam Sadr Foundation School in Tyre

Imam Sadr is a private Lebanese primary and vocational school educating mainly girls from troubled homes. NORWAC has helped establish a special education department for disabled pupils and pupils with learning difficulties. It was in these special classes that the school first chose to introduce music activities 10 years ago. The teachers noticed how many of the pupils began to make good progress, and the school management therefore decided to offer music education to the ordinary classes as well – first for Years 1–3 in 2007 and then for Years 4–6 in 2011. The school actively provides in-service training for its teachers through the *Lebanon project* (singing, dance and guitar), and its music teachers have been trained in subject didactics and developed

both teaching and musical skills by participating in the training programme *X-art* (Forum for Culture and International Cooperation 2012)<sup>9</sup>.

The Norwegian students have given concerts every year since 2005, and their concerts at this particular school have changed significantly over the years. From a fledgling start with the students performing a few songs in the school's foyer, the concerts have evolved into well planned events at which the Lebanese pupils from both the special and ordinary classes participate with their own material. Concert programmes are printed, sound and lighting rigged, the concert hall decorated, and school management and other key people join pupils and teachers in the audience. Many of the classes and a large number of the pupils have contributed with music and dance numbers that they have prepared, and the standard has risen noticeably from year to year. The improvements resulted in a choir from the school winning a national school choir competition in Beirut in 2013. The pupils' performances at the school concerts have comprised dances, songs and performances on rhythmic instruments, metallophones and xylophones. The concerts have become important milestones in the academic year, and here, too, the cultural exchange element of the project has seen the Norwegian students learn Arabic songs which they then perform at the concerts alongside the Lebanese pupils. Pupil participation in the school concerts has increased as the music education provision and the school's music activities have evolved. In recent years this has resulted in the pupils and students performing for 20 minutes each in a show lasting 40 minutes in which the Lebanese pupils have given the first part of the concert.

### School concerts at the Maarouf Saad Foundation Schools in Saida

Since 2008 the students have also performed school concerts in two primary schools in the town of Saida. The schools started to provide music tuition in 2001 as a result of their involvement in the NORWAC mental health programme. These schools take creative subjects seriously, and drama and art are also on the timetable. The pupils receive music tuition for six years starting in Year 1, and music is considered an important tool in delivering the schools' curriculum. For the first few years, the school concerts were held in a recital hall seating around 100 people in the town's arts centre. This is where the Palestinian and Lebanese pupils would have had their first concert experience. The pupils also prepared their own material that included singing, dancing, rhythmic instruments, glockenspiel and metallophones. In the first couple

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<sup>9</sup> X-art: <http://www.interculture.no/x-art.html>

of years, pupil participation was somewhat experimental and informal. After the Norwegian students had finished their concert programme, the pupils would leap to the stage and start their performance under the direction of their music teacher. Since 2010 the school concerts have taken place in a larger concert hall in the Maarouf Saad Foundation arts centre in Saida, and the pupils have opened the concerts with a series of well prepared music and dance performances. Next, the Norwegian student teachers have performed the bulk of their programme before concluding the concert with a joint number in which everyone sings a traditional Arabic song that the student teachers have learnt during their stay in Lebanon.

### School concerts at Shohour Official High School

The school is located in upcountry Southern Lebanon and is run by the Lebanese education authorities. The school concerts were launched in 2007 and have since been a regular annual event despite some resistance on cultural and religious grounds. Some families consider music and dance to be *haram* (forbidden) and do not want their children to attend the concerts. The school does not have music on the timetable, but in the last couple of years it has offered voluntary music tuition to pupils who express an interest in it. In the beginning, the school had no premises suitable for musical events, and the first concert with the Norwegian students took place in a large shared space with no stage and difficult acoustics. Investments and improvements have been made every year since then, and more recently the school concerts have taken place on an outdoor covered stage in the school grounds. Here the students have performed their concert programme for the pupils and teachers. Prominent guests such as the local mayor, representatives of the school administration and municipal council, religious and political leaders and the Norwegian ambassador have also attended. It has been important for the school to gain acceptance for the music and concert activities both from the education authorities and from the pupils and their parents. The presence of public figures and religious and political leaders has therefore been significant. Since 2009 the Lebanese pupils have also presented their own material – initially dance and drama performances and later also musical items. In 2012 we began to see the results of the voluntary music education programme. That year many of the pupils participated in the school concert with their own performances in which they sang and played saxophones, keyboards, *darbukas*, accordions and guitars.

## **What do the concerts on the Lebanon project mean to the local participants, and what are their views on the pupils' involvement in the school concerts?**

### Method

This article investigates aspects of a broader study into music outreach in Lebanon. The study as a whole is based on repeated field visits, participant observation, interviews and student diaries about the teaching and outreach practice in Lebanon. My own field notes and extensive video documentation of the teaching and concert activities on the project are central to the study.

In the part of the study discussed in this article I have chosen to conduct qualitative research interviews to try to ascertain how the local participants evaluate the importance of the concerts and how they see pupil participation in the (school) concerts. All the interviews except one (which took place partly with an Arabic interpreter) were conducted in English and took on the form of a semi-structured interview in line with what Kvale (1997, p.73) describes as a conversation between two people about a topic of shared interest.

The informants were selected on the basis of their key roles as leaders or teachers at the schools and organisations participating in the *Lebanon project*. One of the interviews was with two young Palestinians who have been involved in the music project in the refugee camp since the very beginning and now serve as teaching assistants on the project alongside the Palestinian teachers. The informants were told that the interviews would be included in this study/article, and all of them consented to their names being published and to the content and direct quotes from the interviews being reproduced.

The questions posed in the interviews focus on how the local participants view the concerts and on their thoughts on the pupils' involvement in them. The questions can be divided into the following categories:

- questions concerning pupil participation in the concerts and what this has meant to the children and young people

- questions about the significance of the concerts to the children and young people's learning and development – in music and generally
- questions about the significance of the concerts in developing music tuition in the participating schools / the music project in the refugee camp
- questions surrounding the concerts' impact on the school environment / local community
- questions (to the schools) about how the school concert collaborations can be developed further

The analysis of the interview material was conducted with these categories as a starting point.

### The role of researcher and participant in the *Lebanon project*

I have been travelling with colleagues and students to Lebanon for eight years, and I have served as a supervisor to the students for their teaching and outreach practice on the *Lebanon project*. More recently I have also been responsible for teaching and supervision relating to the students' concert preparations and execution. I have also been responsible for producing video documentation of the teaching and concert activities on the project. As a researcher, my involvement in the *Lebanon project* poses a challenge in terms of keeping the research project and the interpretation of results at arm's length. This involves disassociating myself from any good, bad, positive or negative experiences with the project. At the same time, my knowledge of our local partners, the Palestinian and Lebanese cultures as well as my close involvement in the project and the questions the project raises are the very factors that have allowed me to devise a survey that can provide relevant information about both the significance of the school concerts and the pupils' participation in them. The cultural differences between our respective project participants and countries are great – something which also affects the way in which we express ourselves and communicate. Without having been this closely involved in the *Lebanon project*, analysing and understanding the local partners' opinions and experiences would have been more difficult.

## The interviews

I will now present the results of the interviews carried out in Lebanon in the summer of 2013.

### **The Beit Atfal Assumoud centre, Rashidieh**

- Interview with Chadi Ibrahim – music and dance teacher on the project since 2003.
- Interview with Ali and Ahmed, both aged 21 – have participated in the music project since 2003 and are now teaching assistants on the project.

One of the first things that Chadi Ibrahim brings up when asked about the significance of the concerts is the music itself and the value of being able to discover music. He puts it like this: “When you feel the music, it’s life for you, you feel free... Music helps for everything.” He goes on to say that the concerts encourage the local community to acknowledge the importance of music and music tuition and allow parents to see and hear what their children are learning – something which is important in terms of supporting the children’s activities. The parents are proud of their children’s involvement in the music project, and that has an impact on their support for the project. He points out that not many Palestinian children and teenagers can play a musical instrument and that participation in the project and concerts in Rashidieh has afforded them a high status in the local community and amongst friends and family.

To Chadi it is important that the concerts with the Norwegian student teachers allow the children and young people to discover new and unfamiliar music – “we always see something new in the concerts” – and he stresses the value of being able to appreciate musical diversity. He adds that there is a great deal of inspiration and learning to be gained from participating in the concerts and hearing the students perform: “My kids learn from the performance and from the Norwegian students.” One particularly important aspect for him is that student teachers, teachers and Palestinian children and adolescents can play and perform together and share each other’s music. He puts it like this: “It’s very important to play with the kids – we are playing with our colleagues – the students. The kids feel proud, and their goal is to play together.” Chadi also highlights the impact of the concerts on the cultural exchanges that take place on the project, saying that the concerts are important because they bring people together across cultures: “We also feel proud when the Norwegian students dance Palestinian

dances and sing Palestinian music – that really means a lot to us, it’s our identity. We feel that we – the Palestinians – are not alone, you are our friends.”

Some of the young people who have been involved in the project since the beginning now work as teaching assistants. When asked about the significance of the concerts, two of them – Ali and Ahmed – say that the concerts have allowed them to listen to different types of music. “Perfect music,” says Ali about the concerts. Both of them agree that they have been “very happy with the concerts”. They also say that participating in the concerts has gained them recognition in the local community: “All the people came to the concerts and saying very good – I was very proud,” says Ali. Ahmed continues: “All the people hope and dream to play music, and we are the lucky ones.” Asked how long they will continue to be involved in the music project, Ahmed nods in agreement when Ali says: “For a very long time. I want to learn more and more and more – I hope to become a perfect teacher.”

### **The Maarouf Saad Foundation Schools, Saida**

- Interview with Mona Saad, general manager of the Maarouf Saad Social & Cultural Foundation

Mona Saad explains that introducing music tuition was a challenge and that the schools were met with resistance and scepticism from the local community: “The community was not ready for music.” The schools welcome both Palestinian and Lebanese pupils, and many of them come from poor families and communities. Mona stresses that the most important thing about music is that it is considered to be something positive for the students and that it helps improve their lives: “to look at life in a nice perspective”. It is not an aim for the schools to train musicians, but if some pupils show a special interest in or talent for music, the music provision allows them to take it further. She goes on to say that music tuition is an “alternative to academic subjects”, that it helps prevent pupils from dropping out of school – “music opens doors to stay in school” – and that it is particularly beneficial to pupils with learning difficulties.

When asked about the impact of the concerts and pupil participation on the schools and their pupils, she says that in the first couple of years the schools were somewhat reluctant and the pupils quite reserved about taking part. This is because many of the pupils come from backgrounds where concerts are not commonplace and often considered to be highly formal events. The pupils’ involvement has evolved greatly

since the first couple of years, however, and the material they perform in the concerts is now the result of serious work over the entire year, Mona explains. She adds that the pupils are keen and look forward to the annual collaboration with the Norwegian student teachers. She emphasises that the pupils work hard to perfect their concert performances and that being able to actively participate with singing, dancing and instrumental performances has boosted their self-confidence: “This is very important because it also gives them self-confidence ... towards music, towards interacting with people from outside their community, outside their environment ... there are people who appreciate their playing, so they always do their very best to perform in these concerts.”

She also says that music performance has become increasingly common amongst the pupils, and the annual school concerts have inspired them to incorporate music in other contexts, too. For instance, the schools organise special concerts for “Child Day”, when many locals come to listen. Up until now it has unfortunately not been possible to invite parents to the school concerts with the Norwegian students, but the school is working to make this happen because parent involvement is important, according to Mona.

She also points to the importance of music as a means of communication between cultures, and she would like to see the Norwegian students spend more time with her pupils, get to know them better, observe the music teachers’ lessons and perhaps visit some of the families. In terms of developing the concert collaboration further, she says it would be a priority for the school that the pupils and Norwegian students should rehearse some material together which they then perform at the school concert. “It’s so nice the ending of the concert when your students and our children are singing together a traditional Arabic song ... that’s really a good point” ... “it’s very important to have more interaction with the Norwegians ... and the students”.

### **Imam Sadr Foundation School – primary school for girls and disabled children**

- Interview with Fatimah Hobballah, head teacher
- Interview with Leila Basma, co-ordinator of the school’s music project
- Interview with Diana Adel Mostafa, music teacher

Fatimah Hobballah – the school’s head teacher – starts by emphasising how important music is to the children’s development in a number of areas: physically, intellectually and mentally. Music helps the children to learn – “learning in general” – and gives every pupil plenty of opportunities to excel at something. When asked whether music is important in itself, she says that not all music is important – not music that encourages undesirable behaviours – but the music used in school which both relaxes and prepares the pupils for learning is important. She also points to the social aspects of music and says that music provision has helped the pupils get to know each other better. The music provision is not designed to educate musicians. Fatimah puts it like this: “You know we are a girls’ school, and girls can do music at home, but not in public. I don’t want the students to become musicians,” before quickly adding that it is OK for women to work as music teachers. She also stresses the significance of music as a kind of shared language and says it is important to learn about the music and instruments of other cultures: “Music helps people come together.” She is proud that her pupils are participating with their own programme at the school concerts with the Norwegian students and says they also prepare musical items for other school events, including at “graduations” or end-of-term celebrations.

Leila Basma explains how 10 years ago the music project encountered both cultural and religious barriers and how both management and colleagues raised questions about the music activities. Over time the project has garnered increasing support and interest within the school, however. The pupils greatly appreciate the school concerts, and every year they ask what they will be performing and when they can start rehearsing, she explains. She says preparing for the school concerts is good training for the children. They put on mini-concerts in the classroom to decide what to perform and who should play what. Leila says that some of the children receive private tuition from Diana (the music teacher) outside school but adds that many of them do not have the opportunity to receive additional music tuition – or education.

I interview the music teacher Diana Adel Mostafa with a bit of help from her brother Raji acting as an interpreter (English-Arabic). Raji is also a music teacher at the school and at both of our partner schools in Saida. In response to my question about justifying the case for music and whether the children ought to learn music for music’s sake or in order to do well at school, Diana says (with Raji nodding in agreement) that the answer is somewhere “in the middle of the two”, stressing that music tuition “is good for [the children’s] personal development”. All pupils therefore receive weekly music lessons, and the best of them are invited to join the school choir.

Diana affirms what Leila said: that the pupils look forward to the school concert for a whole year and put in a great deal of practice ahead of it: “The pupils are very happy, they are waiting for this party”. Diana also says she lets her pupils listen to a variety of music as preparation for the school concerts to allow them to expand their musical frames of reference. The children want their performance to be as good as that of the student teachers, and they gain a great deal of inspiration from both the instruments and the music that the Norwegian students play, she says. She adds that the school looks forward not only to the students’ presentation but also to its own pupils’ performance. The joint finale – in which the students and pupils sing an Arabic song – is also very well received, and Diana, Leila and the head teacher all want to see closer collaboration to allow the pupils and students to perform more such items together.

### **Shohour Official High School**

- Interview with Abdelmagid Rashid (Abbed), head teacher

Abbed Rashid says the school was founded in 2003 and that in 2007 – the year he was appointed head teacher and despite some resistance in certain sections of the community – he invited the Norwegians to visit the school and give a concert. As head teacher he takes the view that music should be taught in the same way as other school subjects and that concerts can play an important role in cultural exchange and multicultural understanding. Abbed has on several occasions said that he sees the music project as a peace project that helps foster peace, hope and co-operation between people in the north and south.

“In addition to the concerts, I also want to offer the pupils regular music lessons, but this is difficult to organise because of a lack of music teachers,” Abbed says, adding that the school currently only offers tuition outside ordinary school hours (afternoons, weekends, holidays) to pupils who show a particular interest. This music provision has eventually come to include tuition in a number of different instruments. Abbed says the school concerts are the first concert experience for many of the pupils, and he is clearly proud to have seen an increasing number of pupil performances in recent years. We wish to show off the country’s own musical heritage while also introducing our pupils to other musical cultures, Abbed says. He continues: “The school does not yet put on dedicated concerts other than those with the Norwegian students, but we do incorporate music into various school events. We should like to see even

closer collaboration with the Norwegian Academy of Music and for our pupils and the Norwegian students to work even more closely together and rehearse a joint repertoire that can be performed in the concerts.”

## Discussion

A closer examination of our partners’ views on the concerts as expressed in these interviews reveals some interesting perspectives. One such perspective is the impact that the collaboration between the Norwegian student teachers and the Palestinian and Lebanese children and teenagers appears to have on the children’s/teenagers’ *self-esteem* and *self-confidence* and on the *recognition* they receive as a result of participating in the concerts. The teachers, school leaders and young people we interviewed all mentioned that being allowed to participate alongside the student teachers engenders a sense of pride and that the children and young people work hard to ensure that they put on a good performance. This sense of pride also relates to the way in which learning and communication work both ways: the children are introduced to Norwegian and Western music, but the Norwegian students also have things to learn – they learn Arabic songs and dances which they perform alongside the Palestinian children and teenagers. The interest shown by the Norwegian students in learning about Arabic culture and music makes both the children and the teachers feel proud of their music, according to the teachers on the music project in Rashidieh (Norwegian Academy of Music 2011, p. 28). This way, pride in one’s own culture can have a positive impact on self-esteem.

These experiences could be seen in a context in which *participation* has become associated with theories on learning, health and quality of life in recent years. The music therapist Brynjulf Stige (2005) emphasises how learning in this context should be understood as a social practice and the learning process as gradual qualification for competent participation within a given community. With regard to participation, Stige refers to music as a condition of possibility for growth and development in which participation denotes a relationship between a musical situation and a relevant person or group. In our context, that would be the relationship between the concert, the children/teenagers as active participants, and the student teachers. Stige’s assertion is that when we use music as a means of participation, the musical perspective cannot be the sole perspective; it must be balanced against taking an interest in both the individual and the situation. For instance, it could mean that the criteria we apply

when evaluating the significance of the concerts cannot merely relate to musical or artistic qualities and outcomes; they must also incorporate quality in terms of interpersonal relationships and quality of relevance as regards the participating children and young people as well as the audience. Our case, in which the situation is a cultural encounter between Palestinian children and adolescents and Norwegian students, also involves important perspectives on respect for each other's cultural expressions. Many of the interview statements made by the informants illustrate the importance of balancing these different perspectives:

It's very important to play with the kids – we are playing with our colleges – the student teachers. The kids feel proud, and their goal is to play together. “We also feel proud when Norwegian students dance Palestinian dances and sing Palestinian music – that really means a lot to us, it's our identity. (Chadi Ibrahim)

This [i.e. actively participating with singing, dancing and playing] is very important because it also gives them self-confidence ... towards music, towards interacting with people from outside their community, outside their environment ... there are people who appreciate their playing, so they always do their very best to perform in these concerts. (Mona Saad)

Even Ruud (2010) is also concerned with the participation perspective, and in many of his interviews with the young people involved in the music project in Rashidieh he would ask the question: “How do the participants feel about performing together?” He was looking for possible correlations between cultural participation and “perceived health” – that is to say, the subjective perception of increased well-being and improved quality of life. Based on his interviews with the teenagers, he links “perceived health” to vitality and self-experience, belonging, achievement and recognition, and meaning – the last of which containing both hope and affiliation with traditions. Just like the findings in my study, Ruud discovered that being able to play an instrument and participate in the musical collective gave them a sense of pride as well as status and recognition amongst friends and family. There are also several similarities between these two studies. In the same way as the young people in Ruud's study, the teachers and school leaders I interviewed reported noticing a heightened sense of achievement, improved self-esteem and self-confidence. Ruud draws the following conclusion:

If we assume, then, that there is a link between health and a subjectivity mode in which we are able to open up to the world, to live the music, to conceptualise and express our emotions or to have an aesthetic experience, we can see a correlation between music and health, and we can assert that participating in the orchestra has an effect on health. (Ruud, 2010, p. 73)

*Recognition* is not just about the status that the children and teenagers achieve by mastering an instrument and taking part in the concerts; it can also be linked to issues surrounding *cultural exchange* and *interaction*. When the children and young people learn to listen to and sing Norwegian folk songs, and when the Norwegian students listen to and sing Arabic songs and dance the *dabke*, it is also a manifestation of mutual recognition of each other's cultural expressions. Chadi Ibrahim acknowledges this by saying how proud the Palestinians feel when the Norwegian students perform local music and dances at the concerts, while Mona Saad describes how important the musical interaction is when the pupils and students sing together during the concert finale. All the informants highlight different aspects of being able to relate to the music of different cultures. It is sometimes linked to social relationships, such as when Fatimah Hobballah claims that music brings people together and when Abbed Rashid views the school concerts as an important platform for developing multicultural understanding. These perspectives are present in established Norwegian education policy, too. In light of the globalised world in which we live, it demands that Norwegian pupils and students be citizens of the world and that this can be achieved by ensuring that education embraces multicultural dialogue, interpersonal understanding and solidarity with people in countries with much poorer living conditions and future prospects than ours (White Paper no. 14 (2008–2009), Section 1.1). If we approach the concerts in light of the informants' observations and this particular education policy context, we could say that working with the music and collaborating over the concerts constitute a small contribution towards interpersonal understanding and solidarity and towards developing the participants' (the children, teenagers and student teachers) readiness for multicultural dialogue, interaction and respect for each other's cultural expressions. Music education in Norwegian schools also emphasises the significance of the multicultural perspective:

In order to meet the objectives of the subject, it is therefore essential that schools work to ensure a breadth of genres and musical diversity at all levels and in all subject areas. This way, it becomes possible to develop pupils' attitudes to approaching different forms of musical expression with curiosity and an open mind. In a multicultural society the subject can help ensure

positive identity formation by encouraging children to identify with their own culture and cultural heritage, show tolerance and respect for other cultures and gain an understanding of the importance of music as a culture-bearer and a means of building values locally, nationally and internationally. (LK06, from the music curriculum – objectives)

The curriculum claims that music can serve as an identity former – an assertion that is particularly interesting in this context. Monika Nerland (2004) discusses how different cultures “offer” identities or positions from which individuals can act and give meaning to their existence. In such a perspective it is possible to see Palestinian music and dance as a particularly strong and identity-forming expression of Palestinian culture in a context in which the Palestinians live as refugees without the same opportunities and rights as people who live in freedom. On the *Lebanon project* the music and dance can therefore serve as a leveller that engenders kinship and mutual recognition and respect – despite the participants’ highly different living conditions. The concerts are the shared platform on which this takes place and manifests itself, not just to the participants themselves – the Palestinian and Lebanese children and teenagers and the Norwegian students – but to the audience and thus the local community, too.

Another interesting finding worth noting is that the school concerts appear to give some direction to the music provision in the schools that have music permanently on the timetable. Many of the statements made by the informants suggest this is the case: The material the pupils perform in the concerts is the result of serious work over the entire year; according to Mona Saad, while Leila Basma says the children put on mini-concerts in the classroom in preparation for the concert with the Norwegian students. All the schools say their pupils look forward not only to the Norwegian students’ performance but just as much to what they themselves will be contributing to the concert.

The fact that the concerts and the children’s participation appear to be such a central part of the music provision in the schools helps create a performance subject in which developing the pupils’ singing, playing and dancing skills is key. Aural skills are also given an important role as the pupils prepare for – and are expected to deal with – the different musical expressions and instruments they encounter in the school concerts. The fact that music in these schools is performance-driven is not a given, considering that there is no long-standing music tradition in Lebanese primary schools and that there is a shortage of qualified music teachers. Nor should it be taken for granted that the subject should focus on performance and embrace musical diversity, bearing

in mind the religious and cultural barriers I discussed earlier. At the same time, the interviews with the school representatives revealed that the schools justify music in an instrumental perspective in which music is first and foremost seen as an important tool for learning and development. This is also evident in the evaluation of the Lebanon project (Norwegian Academy of Music 2011, pp. 26–27), in which all four partners stress the impact of the concerts on the children and young people: “The concerts that the NMH students held together with children from Rashidieh have boosted the children’s self-confidence, and they created good social relations through making music together” (Beit Atfal Assumoud – Rashidieh centre). “The concerts with the Norwegian students have given the pupils self-confidence and training in presenting something before an audience” (Imam Sadr Foundation School). “The school concerts with the students from the NMH have been a great success. The students and the Lebanese children have learnt from each other’s cultures. Being on stage alongside the Norwegian students has given the pupils self-confidence, and the concerts are seen by the pupils as one of the most important events of the year” (Maarouf Saad Foundation Schools in Saida). “The NMH has helped heighten interest in music amongst teachers and pupils. This has allowed new talent to be discovered, and many of them are now making money from their band activities” (Shohour Official High School). The evaluation report concludes:

To the children and teachers in Rashidieh, the visit by the NMH students is the highlight of the year ... Our other partner organisations in Lebanon see the school concerts given by the NMH students together with their pupils as something that gives direction to the tuition during the year. Many of the organisations, including the leaders in Rashidieh, believe that the concerts have encouraged the children to take pride in their own music and culture by having students from Norway coming to learn from them, and that standing on stage boosts their self-confidence. (Norwegian Academy of Music, 2011, p. 29)

## Concluding comments

In this article I have focused on the significance of the concerts on the *Lebanon project* and on the pupils’ active participation seen from the perspective of the local participants. The *Lebanon project* is part of a collaboration with NORWAC’s aid programme. Looking at the results from this study from an aid perspective, it would be natural to

emphasise the health benefits that the concerts have produced. The interviews have shown how the children and young people have developed self-confidence and pride in their own culture through music and participation in the concerts and that this has had a positive impact on their identity formation. In a musical perspective, the concerts appear to have encouraged legitimisation of the music project in Rashidieh and music provision in the schools in that the local community – pupils, parents, teachers and leaders – have come to acknowledge the importance of music tuition and musical activity. As far as the partner schools are concerned, the concerts have given a sense of direction to their music performance programmes in which singing, dancing and instrumental performance have been given a key role and where musical diversity is seen as valuable when developing the pupils' knowledge of the music of other cultures. This diversity is also seen as an important factor in the music project in Rashidieh. The concerts and the active participation by the pupils therefore appear to have generated a string of positive consequences and important experiences – both to the local participants, in particular the children and young people, and to the further development of the *Lebanon project*. Yet it is no secret that there are challenges involved in such music making in a culture noted for its cultural and religious barriers where it is held that musical performances by girls in particular are acceptable and positive only when they stay within the school and the private sphere.

There is also potential for further development of the school concerts on the *Lebanon project*. In the Rashidieh refugee camp the concerts are the result of several days of co-operation in which the Norwegian students teach and rehearse together with the children and teenagers. This leads to a joint performance, with much of the concert involving the students and children performing together. The significance of this is clearly communicated in the interviews. One thing the school concerts at the Lebanese schools have in common is that they are not based on a similar collaboration. The students' and the pupils' programmes are two separate elements with a joint performance (Arabic song) as the final number. All the leaders and teachers at the partner schools say they want to see closer collaboration over the concerts – ideally by having the student teachers rehearse with the pupils, alternatively by agreeing on a joint concert repertoire in advance that the students and pupils can rehearse separately. Additional resources from the NMH are required if the students are to spend time preparing the concerts together with the pupils. One solution may be to involve additional groups of students in the project. It would also be possible to strengthen co-operation over the concerts within the existing set-up and resources by planning a few musical items that the students and pupils can perform together. This way the

concerts on the *Lebanon project* can further enhance discovery, learning, multicultural relations and interaction.

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