

CHAPTER TWO

Inclusion and involvement: Special needs in music education from a life-world phenomenological perspective

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Introduction

At the same time as I started my postgraduate studies in Music Education in Piteå in 1998 I finished my Special Education degree. Since then my research interests in music education and special education have become closely intertwined with a life-world phenomenological way of thinking about being and learning. Sometimes one of the perspectives has been foregrounded, at other times the other perspective has been my main focus. When the field of special education overlaps with the field of music education, the combination is most often interpreted as music therapy and treatment. In this text, I want to illuminate the concepts of special needs, inclusion and adapted teaching, which are educational concepts, relevant for music education and music educators. The concepts will further be related to music education in the spirit of life-world phenomenology, which demands an exploration of being and learning in this holistic tradition. The philosophical reasoning will build up to an idea of musical engagement, which can be seen as a goal for inclusive music education. Thereafter, I will relate to the revision of the national syllabuses in music, which implies that music teachers will need insights in a holistic inclusive way of thinking about special education. Finally I will re-connect to inclusive music education in general.

Special education dilemmas

All pupils have the right to experience, and express themselves in music. All children and adolescents have the right to take part in social settings and to develop towards

becoming members of a democratic society. They have the right to be met from where they are, regarding needs, abilities, interests and preconditions. To offer both the individual and the social experience at the same time can be very demanding in heterogeneous educational settings. In other words there exists a dilemma between the social and the individual perspective in special education, which also calls for a discussion regarding other contradictions within the field. The question is how to get beyond the contradictions.

Tensions within the field of special education of music can be presented as existing between the following conflicting views:

- Human beings seen as *whats* or *whoms*,
- Special needs seen as *individual* or *contextual*,
- Integration seen as connected to *buildings*, *age* or *individual* needs,
- Inclusion seen as *taking part* or *being involved*,
- Adapted teaching seen as directed towards pupils' *motivation* or *ability*
- Musical inclusion seen as *social* or *engaging*.

In the following I will offer a brief elaboration regarding the fields of tension. To see an individual as a 'what' means that you know how to meet and treat other human beings by getting information about their social and educational background together with abilities and specific characteristics and existent diagnoses (von Wright, 2000). On the other hand to view an individual as a 'who' implicates that you cannot know anything about meeting and treating other human beings before you encounter them in specific social and situational contexts.

Special needs can be seen as individual, as preconditions directly connected to and included in the constitution of an individual – individuals *with* special needs. Another viewpoint is to see needs as something that appears in different social and situational contexts. The contexts can offer hindrances as well as possibilities – individuals *in need of* special education.

In the field of special education, integration can be approached in several ways, of which three are taken up here. Firstly integration can be about having activities directed towards different groups of individuals in the need of special education under the same roof as ordinary school activities. Secondly it can be about having all pupils of the same age in the same classroom, and thirdly it can be to organise teaching in a way that makes individuals feel they are being part of common learning activities.

Inclusion can be defined in different ways as well, closely connected to the views of special needs, where contextual factors can be seen as taken into account or not. One definition of inclusion builds on a view that pupils' barriers and possibilities become visible in each situation. This kind of special educational approach focuses each situation as holistic, and offers understanding for those specific situations as giving meaning to pupils' abilities, potentials and interests (Barton, 1997; Germeten, 2002). The motive for learning becomes more important than specific skills or abilities in this view. Accepting that different people experience the world in different ways, depending on earlier experiences and sensational functions, is central in this line of reasoning. The world becomes meaningful in different ways depending on how it is experienced by the human being (Ferm, 2005). Inclusion is about making the pupils feel unique and as parts of a larger context at the same time (Wennergren, 2007).

Adapted teaching can be about having the special needs, the problems of the individual as a starting point – a narrow definition (Kristiansen, 2007), or a wish of taking care of individual motivation and offering the individual to be engaged in his or her own learning processes towards a feeling of involvement, ownership and 'I-can' – a broad definition (ibid., 2007). The latter demands a curious and open-minded teacher, who is interested in who the pupil might become; a teacher who thinks and believes that all people are capable beings.

Finally musical inclusion should be taken up as another field of special educational tension. On the one hand musical inclusion can be about being a part of collective musical activities (Karikou & Glasman, 2004), and on the other hand of

being involved in personal musical learning processes (Allan & Cope, 2004). A question is if musical inclusion means to experience community, or musical development. As regarding almost all of the mentioned contradictions, the answer is: Both please! In the following I will offer a deeper insight into the concept of inclusion from a holistic perspective and furthermore discuss how a life-world phenomenological approach can offer tools for that kind of special educational views.

Inclusion from a holistic perspective

First I want to show that inclusion is not only a question for the individual teacher in the individual classroom. Zollers et al. (1999) have enlightened three factors that might encourage inclusive school cultures. They argue that an inclusive school leader, a broad vision of school community and a shared language are crucial factors towards an inclusive school culture. Without going into what a school culture is or can be, I want to describe some dimensions of these three factors. To be able to encourage adapted teaching and participation, the researchers have found that a democratic approach is important. The school leader has to practice collaborative decision-making, let all voices be heard, see conflicts as quality communication, and involve parents in school related discussions. Just as inclusive education aims to let pupils feel that they own their learning, teachers in an inclusive school culture must feel that they own and can handle their work. “Within a democratic and empowering culture, teachers have the opportunity to contribute to the implementation of inclusion and, thus, will be invested in the complex process of making inclusion successful” (Zollers et al., 1999, p. 164). In other words, inclusion requires democracy and openness to be successful. When it comes to a shared language and vision, the research stresses that an open and continually discussed school vision is important.

To be able to run adapted teaching based on a holistic view of inclusion, the teacher has to acquire knowledge about pupils’ abilities, potentials and interests through being open for and curious about them. There is always a risk that the

school offers some pupils 'non-adapted' teaching, in the form of forced learning, absence of teaching, exclusion or different kinds of social invisibility. Such teaching always includes dimensions of indignity, as the pupils feel that their abilities, interests and knowledge levels are not paid attention to, or cared for (Kristiansen, 2007). Adapted teaching is context dependent; it cannot be done in any other space but in the meeting between teacher and student (Kristiansen, 2007). During the education, adapted teaching is characterised by offering the students opportunities to show, challenge and develop their musical knowledge, in dialogue with the teacher and the group. Another challenge is for the teacher to be open towards these pupils' abilities; their potentials and interests can concern all dimensions of music. Adapted teaching even implies that pupils' learning processes should be directed towards specific goals. A holistic special educational approach acknowledges that there are many ways to reach the same goals. Instruction, guiding, content and environment are important factors when adapted teaching aims to get pupils involved in the group process as well in their own learning towards common goals (Allan & Cope, 2004).

Involvement is also an important concept connected to inclusion and adapted teaching. The pupils have the right to be involved in the social and individual learning processes as presented above. If we take an individual-social perspective on teaching and learning, even the teacher has to be involved in the same processes as the pupils, to be able to offer them involvement. He or she has to ask her and himself: Who are we, the ones that are going to learn music together, and how do my pupils want to develop together with me? How can I make them reach a feeling of 'I-can-make-music'? This presupposes that all pupils are seen as active human beings who want and are able to take part in learning situations as well as in life in large. Through involvement in social-individual learning processes, pupils are trained for life-long learning.

Musical engagement

Musical engagement can be seen as engaged participation in musical settings, or involvement in musical individual-social learning processes. One precondition for

musical involvement can be connections to the already known, to music that already has meaning for pupils in one way or another. It can be about connecting to music from the pupils' everyday life, such as local traditional music, or music from their own play-lists. Another aspect can be the relation to the music and music as expression, for example to reach a level where you can express yourself, or about strong experiences of music as a listener (Alan & Cope, 2004). In her study of young musicians and their engagement in musical activities, Custodero (2002) identified three fundamental tenets for an approach to music education that provides students with the opportunity to achieve optimal experience or flow: (1) providing appropriate challenges to young students; (2) supporting students as autonomous learners who transform musical materials in personally relevant ways; and (3) designing musical experiences that are culturally and developmentally authentic (pp. 6-8). She found that increased mindfulness can be possible throughout the school curriculum when young people are challenged appropriately and are able to learn autonomously in personally relevant ways. Teachers who create culturally and developmentally authentic contexts and who are sensitive towards and encouraging of transcendent experiences can help to facilitate such experiences among their students.

Musical engagement can also be connected to transcendent music making experiences (Bernard, 2009). According to Bernard, transcendent music making experiences are distinguished by two main qualities: (a) that the performer is functioning at the height of his or her abilities; and (b) that the performer has a sense of being a part of something larger than him or herself in some way, perhaps by being a part of a long-standing musical or cultural tradition; a particular social group; the larger forces of nature; or of the universe.

In the following I will describe the life-world phenomenological approach more thoroughly in order to give the reader possibilities to assess whether this way of thinking might offer tools for holistic inclusiveness, which in turn should contribute to pupils' musical engagement.

Life-world phenomenology as a point of departure for being and learning

A life-world phenomenological way of thinking offers a holistic view of human beings and the world – of body, mind and soul. The theory was developed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962/1945) in his work *Phénoménologie de la perception*. In this theory soul and mind are not only mental, but also embodied. The body is not only a body, but also a subject. Material and thinking, subject and object, body and soul, are closely intertwined and dependent on one another. The living body is a subject – human beings live through their bodies and cannot separate themselves from them (Bengtsson, 2009). My lived body constitutes the subject for all my experiences and actions, and is in consequence necessary for an object to exist. In other words, life and soul always demand a living body. Experience and thinking, emotions and dreams, will and action are all embodied and their contents are dependent on bodily changes (Bengtsson, 2009).

In a life-world phenomenological way of thinking, the world is also inter-subjectively constituted. Human beings are indissolubly intertwined with each other and the things in the world. They are directed towards phenomena in the world, at the same time as the things show themselves for them, a condition called intentionality. In the inter-subjective world, learning takes place through interaction in the world. By being in the musical world as living subjects, human beings embody insights, music and instruments, tools for expression and communication in, about and through music, which make the world possible to handle. This can be compared to what Pio (2009) calls “capability of life”. The learning becomes meaningful in different ways for different individuals, depending on earlier experiences, and how individuals function as whole bodies. In other words musical learning consists of theoretical, practical and existential dimensions. Music is learnt through active holistic¹ “sensuous contemplation” (Dufrenne, 1953), musical dwelling (Benson, 2003; Ferm Thorgersen, 2010a; Ferm Thorgersen & Schwieler, 2010; Heidegger,

¹ Human beings are in this tradition seen as living, bodily, whole subjects who are indissolubly intertwined with the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

1987) or musical presence (Ford, 2010). Musical learners experience music as listeners, performers and composers. That kind of experience, or being-in-the-world, demands presence, representation and imagination and finally reflection² as well as emotions (Dufrenne, 1953), and might end up with the subject experiencing an ‘I-can-feeling’, or in a set of ‘I cans’³.

In interacting in the musical world, which can be said to be conceptual-nonconceptual⁴ (Ford, 2010), human beings experience and learn to handle form, depth, timbre, pitch, linearity, harmonies, rhythm, and movement, in specific genres and contexts (Merleau-Ponty, 2000). The aspects of music, are not exclusively musical, or artistic, but connected to living in the world in general (Merleau-Ponty, 2004). The combination of the musical parameters – how they sound together – constitutes music, or a phenomenon possible to experience as such. Hence, music is not constituted solely by the parameters, but also by the gaps in between them, which makes meaning creation possible (Merleau-Ponty, 2004). It can be stated that music is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, which includes acoustic, bodily, structural, tensional, existential and emotional dimensions (Ferm Thorgersen, 2010b; Nielsen, 1997; Varkøy, 2009). Consequently musical knowledge is multidimensional as well, and includes and requires experience of all dimensions. The expressions (of combinations) and experiences can be seen as taking place in (or at least in relation to) contexts or worlds that can be defined as musical ‘styles’ (Heidegger, 1987; Ford, 2010). The style can be equal with tradition or genre, but can be a wider regionalised part of the musical world as well. The style lets the music show itself as a whole, or constitute a space for dwelling where music can be expressed and experienced,

² The function of reflection, or authentic thinking, as a part of aesthetic experience and learning of art will be further examined in a paper based on Heidegger’s later works (see Ferm Thorgersen & Schwieler, 2010).

³ In an intended learning situation the feeling of ‘I can’ should be directed towards, or concern, agreed-upon dimensions of music.

⁴ The conceptual and nonconceptual influence each other and are closely intertwined. We experience phenomena in the world as nonconceptual, before we know their names, and before they are incorporated in the structures of the inter-subjectively constituted world (Ford, 2010).

created and discovered at the same time (Benson, 2003; Heidegger, 1987). The more experience of a specific style, its structures, symbols and expressions, the better possibilities for nuanced partaking, understanding and learning (Benson, 2003; Ford, 2010; Merleau-Ponty, 2004). The style can also offer barriers for discovery and creation, uncovering and devotion. There has to be room for nonconceptual experience and opportunities for new combinations of musical parameters, and thereby new gaps and possibilities for meaning making, which includes emotions and reflection.

Consequently all individuals have to be offered the opportunity to make different musical experiences in the world, to be able to embody music as a multidimensional phenomenon. In an interpretation of Langeveld (1984) musical experience can be seen as every-day, non-obligatory, artistic and personal ways of being in the world (Ferm, 2009). The every-day experience is about learning common agreements about musical structures and concepts through interacting in everyday musical settings, formal as well as informal. Non-obligatory musical experience might on the other hand offer individuals to climb out of these agreed-on concepts and ways of using musical tools and 'play around' to use a tennis racket as a guitar, or imagine that they are opera singers, for example. The third kind of experience is about having the possibility to express own musical thoughts through combining existing parameters in new ways. The final personal way of experiencing concerns ways of interacting in musical settings with the aim to find oneself as a musical being. To run adapted musical teaching is hence to offer each and every pupil all four kinds of musical experience.

Summing up: Inclusive music education from a life-world phenomenological perspective

Inclusive music education relates to the individuals' as well as to the groups' earlier musical experiences. With that as a point of departure all pupils are offered musical development in an engaged way. The content of teaching connects to the everyday life, and the musical (local) engagement of the pupils. Such education offers several ways towards common goals, which in turn are formulated in a way that includes music as a multidimensional phenomenon that can show itself in different 'styles',

contexts and genres. The incorporated musical knowledge can also be ‘performed’ in many different ways; different forms of expressions can be used. Within the frames of inclusive music education, every pupil has the right to experience the feeling of ‘I-can music’, which implies that the pupil feels that (s)he can handle music in relation to agreed-on goals and can be defined as a musical being, based on emotional, existential and aesthetical experiences. Finally the pupils’ dreams and expectations are taken care of, and their engagement and motivation constitute the impetus for all activities – being with others in the musical world. This demands adapted teaching, engagement, curiosity, respect, and encouragement – through communication.

To offer insights in the importance and function of inclusive music education from a life-world phenomenological perspective, two studies could be shared. *To learn an aesthetic language: A study of how hard-of-hearing children internalise dance* (Ferm, 2007) aimed to describe how hard-of-hearing children’s learning of dance could be shaped. More specifically the aim of the study was to examine and develop the process in which a dance teacher, together with some general class teachers and a number of hard-of-hearing children, worked with ‘dance in school’. *To be offered musical development – experiences of compulsory music education among talented adolescents* (Ferm, 2005) aimed to describe and offer an understanding of the experience of music education in compulsory schools among adolescents with a special talent in music. The results of the studies underline the need for a holistic inclusive way of thinking among music teachers in special educational settings. So do the terms of reference that guided the writing of new syllabuses in all subjects and school forms in Sweden during the fall of 2009. The guidelines should guarantee all pupils to reach the goals for musical learning at any level in Swedish compulsory schools.

Inclusion and involvement – musical learning in compulsory schools in Sweden in relation to new learning outcomes and marks

During the fall of 2009 I was involved in rewriting the national syllabuses for music education in Swedish compulsory schools, which was part of a large governmental project called *Skola 2011* (School 2011). All syllabuses in all subjects and school-

forms were to be rewritten in relation to the government's instructions. Also, the overarching curricula were reorganised aiming to include all general learning outcomes and topics. Hence, the syllabuses should only focus on subject-specific knowledge and skills. The government's instructions signalled a will to make education equal and transparent, which in turn demanded that knowledge and content in the different subjects were made explicit, and possible to define, communicate and not least to assess. At the same time an impetus in the project was to offer the teacher pedagogical freedom.

The Institute of Special Education was included in the project to guarantee the rights of pupils in the need of special support and challenge. To be able to discuss consequences for inclusive music education, I will in the following present the terms of reference they provided, and further on relate these terms to the learning outcomes and the marks in music, as formulated in the syllabus version that was presented to the government on the 1st of April 2010.

Special needs and inclusion terms of reference

The terms of reference primarily concern the concepts of *equality*, *accessibility*, *involvement*, and *community*. *Equality* means that all pupils shall be given the same possibilities to develop knowledge and skills that are written down in the syllabuses regardless which school or school-form they are situated in. The concept also entails that all pupils shall have the possibility to develop knowledge and skills towards levels that are presented in the definitions of achievement criteria. Therefore concepts such as accessibility, involvement and community are central as referential points (Rådbrink, 2009). The instruction also illuminates the importance of critically reviewing the formulations aiming to see if they are opening or closing learning of music among pupils in need of special education. Rådbrink poses the question: How could it be possible to maintain the educational quality in different subjects, while simultaneously offer as many pupils as possible the opportunity to reach the subject specific goals?

Accessibility is a crucial educational and pedagogical concept. It constitutes a central concept within handicap politics and puts attention to the importance of what different dimensions of a learning environment have in the meeting with pupils in need of special support and challenge. The concept of accessibility includes different aspects of adaptations, thinking, teachers' approaches and knowledge that are needed among teachers to make activities, information, teaching material, teaching and facilities accessible to all pupils.

Involvement as defined by *The Institute for Special Education*, contains social, physical, educational, didactic and psychological aspects and is connected to integration, segregation, inclusion and exclusion. One important thought is that all pupils shall have the possibility to reach all formulated learning outcomes to high degrees, not just 'the most important'. This can demand that the content shall be possible to reach from different angles and starting points, and that different tools and scaffolding for learning can be relevant to use. Another consequence is that views upon how embodied internalised knowledge can be performed have to be widened (Rådbrink, 2009). There is a tendency in the syllabus formulations that verbal and written languages get a more important role in all subjects. How does that influence pupils in need of special education, and possibilities for running inclusive music education? The concept of *community* is mentioned to stress that it is not only crucially important to be included in one's own learning process, but also in a community, a social setting where learning of different kinds takes place. Through this the fields of tension mentioned in the beginning of the article become visible, not least for educators to reflect upon.

Another problem when it comes to how achievement criteria in the syllabuses are formulated is the relation between higher mark degrees, and the level of independence. If independence means lack of supervision, we have a special educational problem. If independence is shown through reflection and creativity it is possible to show regardless of tools and scaffolding, but that has then to be clearly formulated in the syllabuses. Rådbrink (2009) stresses that supervision is needed for all kinds of learning and development at all levels. Pure memory knowledge is also

valued in some achievement criteria formulations, which is also problematic from a special educational view. For some individuals in need of special education it can be a huge problem to retain such information without support from pictures for example. On some occasions the verb *handle* should function in a better way in relation to subject content. On the other hand handling of practical knowledge forms, common in aesthetic subjects, can be problematic, and this makes the concept of accessibility crucial. For example, which pupils will be excluded when it comes to performance of incorporated musical knowledge? Is it possible to formulate achievement level criteria in a way that opens for differences without reducing the qualitative abilities that are to be assessed? (Rådbrink, 2009). The terms of reference should be taken into account in the formulations of the syllabuses. In the following I will try to make such an analysis of the public formulations, aiming to make some special educational challenges clear.

Learning outcomes – public version

By taking part in music education the pupil shall develop:

- The ability to play and sing in different musical forms and genres;
- The ability to create music and shape and communicate own musical thoughts and ideas;
- The ability to analyse and discuss musical expressions in different social, cultural and historical context (Skolverket, 2010, my translation).

Consequences for musical inclusion, involvement and learning

According to my analysis the goals are formulated in a way that makes different inclusive ways of learning possible. In relation to the terms of reference that have been challenging the syllabus writing, there are no clear hindrances in the formulation of the goals. On the contrary the formulations can be seen as encouraging teaching that offers equality, involvement, accessibility and community. What makes this possible or not, is the formulation, and in a longer perspective

possible interpretations, of content and marks or achievement criteria, the completing parts of the syllabuses. What dimensions of music the pupils will be offered and demanded to go into, and how they will be expected to perform their embodied musical abilities at different achievement levels, will be crucial.

Marks – expected learning outcomes at the end of year six

The pupil takes part in unison singing and plays different instruments. In music making the pupil is able to manage simple common melody and bass parts together with given rhythms and chords with the support of others. The pupil creates music by using some given musical patterns and forms, combines these and with the help of voice, instrument, movement or digital tools mediates his/her own musical idea. Based on given criteria the pupil makes simple judgements regarding own music making and composing. Based on given questions and with the help of basic musical concepts the pupil talks about his/her own and others' music making and composing. The pupil describes and exemplifies melody, rhythm, and chord instruments and recognises musical characteristics in a couple of genres (Skolverket, 2010, my translation).

Comments

Through an analysis based on *possibilities for multidimensional expressions, dependence, physical handling* and *memory knowledge* the following came up in connection to the formulated 'pass' mark level in year six. When it comes to the possibilities of multidimensional expressions, the formulation 'musical concepts' provides something to think about. Why should it be obligatory to communicate musical experience using the 'right' concepts? Could that exclude pupils? Who are involved in such activities, and what learning is excluded? As Rådbrink stresses above, verbal and written languages are highly valued in school, as well as in general instructions for the formulation of the national syllabuses. What do we gain, and what do we lose by that? Maybe some pupils would communicate their judgements and reflections upon musical experiences and expressions in a better way for example through pictures or dance? Regarding dependence, the formulation of achievement level criteria at the

end of year six encourages cooperation and supportive ways of making music. The question is what happens at higher levels. Physical handling of for example instruments can be a problem in relation to accessibility. One aspect is that it is essential what instruments that are mentioned in the content part of the syllabus; another aspect is the teachers' expectations when it comes to what instruments that are acceptable to use in order to show to which extent the goals are reached, and a third aspect is what kind of instruments that are available in the classroom based upon what each school's resources permit. There are instruments that almost all pupils can use, the question is if they are allowed to learn and use them. Finally pure memory knowledge should be discussed. The formulation of "describes and exemplifies" can become excluding. What do we mean when we say exemplifies – is it 'enough' to bring a video with the instrument in question; are pupils expected to name instruments that the teacher brings; or should it show in a written test? We have to reflect on and discuss, over and over again, what learning outcome is desirable in the school subject music, and how it can be made accessible for the pupils through teacher-led communication and presentation.

Final words

To conclude this text I want to go back to inclusive music education in general. Some questions are relevant to offer the reader about the topic: What are the goals for musical (teaching and) learning activities? Who are to learn what, and in what ways? What possibilities and hindrances for learning show themselves in the teaching and learning situation? How is it possible to offer a learner ways towards musical engagement and a feeling of 'I can'? Of course the answers will be different depending on in what setting the activities will take place and in what position the learner is situated. To avoid a static, un-dynamic approach to inclusion and involvement in relation to music, these questions have to be asked over and over again in various settings and at different levels to different persons.

Possibilities and challenges for inclusive music education are dependent on decisions and standpoints taken and developed at several societal levels: at school organisational level, teacher education level, governmental level and societal level.

During my time as a lecturer, PhD-student and associate professor of music education at the Department of Music and Media at LTU, situated in Piteå, I have been encouraged, and have also had the possibility, to work with and influence such questions at different levels and in different contexts. One of the persons that have made this possible, mainly through his way of being an academic – with an open and discovering mind – is Sture Brändström. Thank you, Sture. I will try to continue the work towards equality, mutual curiosity and respect throughout my future career within the Academia...

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