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Okt -09

Paper for the Nordplus seminar, Hamar, Nov. 9-13, 2009

Ideations and expectations among children in connection to a symphony-orchestra event – a study of school concert-activity with a historical perspective. About mediated and mediating artefacts.

In this presentation I shortly introduce my coming dissertation-project in progress. In the continuous working-process, asking questions, re-evaluating old "answers" and perpetually discovering new aspects that has to be taken into consideration, alterations are frequently made, and so even in relation to the abstract recently sent to Nordplus this text is modified.

Aim and personal background

The aim of the dissertation, from an Activity Theoretical point of view, is an attempt to shed light on the function and the meaning of the symphony-orchestra school concert event for children.

One main question is which ideations can be found, what are characterizing children's and young people's expectations, and how do ideations and expectations interact and develop in and with the experience of a school concert.

The personal background to the subject for this thesis is to be found in a general interest for communication-and mediating-processes and the psychological meaning of artefacts in these processes. From a sociocultural and historical perspective I am interested in the meaning-making function of tools and instruments, how these influence and interact in and with mediation and learning, in specific actions and activities. I engage in children's and young people's formal and informal learning, both in institutionalized contexts and in play and free time (which also involves different kinds of musical activity). The search for an understanding of various interplaying levels, with a theoretical as well an empirical approach, is in my point of view a meaningful perspective. A central question is how possibilities for participation and creating meaning for every child can be promoted in multitudinous contexts where learning and new knowledge take place and develop.

Theoretical and methodological frame

The theoretical frame of the study is Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). With CHAT the mental connection and relation of the individual with the collective activity she or

he is a part of, becomes a central point of departure. In focus land mediating artefacts (signs and cultural tools) and their psychological importance, as well as their influence in mediation and learning, in specific actions and activities (Vygotskij 1999, Leontyev 2009, Engeström 1987, Cole 1998). Methodologically communication becomes a central aspect in all subject-object-related activity. Tools and artefacts and the communicative aspect of activity form an original unity: In that sense the social practice – human action – becomes a fundamental empirical unit of analysis.

Music educational aspects

The starting point of the study from a music educational perspective becomes the understanding of music as communication; *musicking* is something people do together (Small 1998). Music is not a thing, rather it is something people do together – it is an activity. Seen that way music implicates a wide social aspect and can thus be said to also mean/carry a deliberative potential (this relates for example to Englund 2000).

Small (1998) questions the idealistic view in which work of music is seen upon as an autonomous "thingness", and traces some corollaries as a consequence of such a point of view. For example musical performance is not considered as a part of a creative process, rather it is barely a mediating link, through which the final, self sufficient – and disconnected from the situation – work of music is supposed to reach its final purpose: The listener. Another corollary that Small points out is that in regarding music as an autonomous object lays also the assumption that no work of music can become, or be done, better than it "is"; the performance, the contribution of the artist, can not develop a composition, renew, or change, its detached nature.

The idea about "the pure music", about the work of art being an autonomous universal Greatness, made redundant from its sociocultural and historical connections, with Small is not a new issue – on the contrary it is well represented in a musicological and music educational discussion (Ling 1989, Olsson 1993, Reimers 1989). However, with the delimitation that here is made, I call upon Small to speak. Not at least has the concept "musicking" been adjuvant and illustrative, and I found that the essential thesis, music being a social activity, in a interesting and adequate way relates to Vygotsky (1978), Engeström (1987), Cole (1998) and others, and general with CHAT.

The relation to new technique – a historical perspective

In connection to the "information-society" the newer information-and communication (IT) technique – here understood also as a sociohistorical artefact and as such a part of a wider technological development (Berner 1999) – is itself a overriding field for examination, with multifaceted pedagogical implications (Riis 2000, Säljö 2002). Turning more specific towards the music-education-field, the IT, among other things, implies new forms and ways in which music is distributed and accessible – for as well creating as listening to music. In connection to that I found it urgent questioning whether the function and role of music is in a state of change, possibly in a more profound way than in earlier historical periods. Consequently it could be of interest to, with a historical perspective, seek an increased understanding for what meaning or importance the school-concerts of today – which, for a change to the virtual experiences of music-events (for example Youtube), often represent contact "live" with music in also a material and physical way – might have for children in their musical or/and cultural developmental process.

Method

By means of partly to shed some light on a possible frame of understanding in a wider historical and societal context (with its changing activities by which children's different ideations mediate and reshape) and partly through examining the policy concerning the school concert projects at some varying orchestras, the issue how the children's ideations and expectations about the symphony-orchestra event can be understood is reflected. The study will be carried through by 1) following some children by participating observation and interviews, in connection to their attendance in a school-concert project, and 2) examining the purpose with the school concerts at some orchestras; studying their policy documents, interviewing those concerned (administration, as well as some of the musicians). The two empirical parts of the study will be connected in and through a third part; a theoretical analyses and discussion.

Aspects of participation and democracy

A main question, as mentioned initially, is which ideations can be found and what are characterizing children's and young people's expectations, and how do ideations and expectations interact and develop in and with the experience of a school concert: In which way/how is the school concert meeting up with the children's needs, and in what degree does it hold the possibility of participation, in the sense of for example giving every child an equal chance receiving a new and positive experience. Such a viewpoint can be seen as being of importance from an educational policy-aspect in the broader sense, as well as from a music educational standpoint, and not at least it can be considered as an issue of fundamental democratic matter.

The result of the study will hopefully offer a wider understanding for how we might enable every child being in contact with a multifaceted and expansive music-cultural line of development.

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