

Implementation of a final examination in music

On the 3rd of February 2009 the Ministry of Education in Denmark propounded a plan of action to strengthen the arts education¹ in the Danish primary and lower secondary schools (Link 1). To music teachers one of the most important suggestions in the report is the implementation of a final examination in music as an elective subject². This is explained by the argument that implementation of final examinations in music as a school subject will enhance the attention of the subject from both teachers and students. The latter idea is supported with reference to a report from 2002 which investigates the value of final examinations in the Danish primary and lower secondary schools and their relation to the teachers' instruction (Link 2). In this report the teachers suggest that a final examination in a school subject is important to the status of the subject, and that the implementation of this kind of evaluation will affect the students and the teachers in a disciplined and motivational manner (Ibid.). Thus the teachers involved in the survey stated that "(...) it is motivating that a school subject ends with a final examination, most students work more engaged and responsible when they have to account for the subject in the end" (Ibid., p. 18, own translation). The majority of the student respondents in the study also stated, that they work harder in school subjects, where they get a final grade or which end with a final examination (Link 3, p.16).

With the plan of action as a point of departure, Danish schools have been invited to implement trials with final examinations in music as an elective. Thus the chosen schools have the opportunity to create a model for a final examination and try this out in practice. Finally this might end up as a final model for all schools in Denmark. The situation mentioned above, leads us to the questions of how such an examination can be designed, on which basis, and how it can be implemented in the educational practice.

During a study visit in New York, we worked with "Assessment in Music Education". In relation to that, we gained insight in how assessment in music classes takes place at three schools in New York. In the state of New York there is a requirement to grade the students in music as a school subject. Through interviews with students and teachers on different schools in New York, we experienced a tendency among the teachers to base the grade on measurable musical disciplines such as sight

¹ Arts education in the Danish primary and lower secondary schools includes the subjects music, visual arts, craft, woodcraft, cooking and physical education

² It is possible to choose music as an elective from 8th to 10th grade, yet it is only provided by few schools.

singing, notation reading etc. The teachers explained this practice by the fact that this requirement is not meaningful for them, because the demand of grading the students is not implemented to improve the student's learning, but to account for what is going on in the schools (Mandrup & Vinter 2009, unpublished paper). Thus, the grades were only based on the assessment of a few of the musical practices, which took place in the music classes. This knowledge has made it evident for us, that the Danish music teachers must be involved in the development of such a final examination in music. By doing so, a final examination might be more meaningful to the teachers, since their ideas of important musical practices in the school can be taken into account.

On the basis of what we have stated above, the aim with our thesis is to suggest some tendencies from the music teachers' statements, which can be taken into account, when the authorities have to create a model for a final examination in music.

Temporary thesis statement:

On the basis of the government's proposal of implementing a final examination in music, we wish, on the basis of qualitative interviews with eight music teachers and a large survey, to critically discuss the basis of the examination and its content and design.

Content:

Based on existing literature in the field, we wish to investigate what the concepts *evaluating*, *assessment* and *final examination* mean, how they relate to each other and how the concepts are used in Danish schools. Thus we will begin with a clarification of the relevant concepts.

Subsequently we will take a closer look at international research on assessment in music education and how this might affect the situation in Denmark. Furthermore, we wish to investigate the development within music as a school subject in Denmark and examine the development within assessment in Denmark during the last twenty years. All this, to propose the tendencies which might have led to the present situation.

We also wish to investigate the philosophical and pedagogical dilemmas which might arise when implementing a final examination in music. Finally we will compare the findings above to Fælles Mål³ to propose which precautions we need to take in order to develop a final examination in music.

As suggested in the beginning of this abstract we emphasize the importance of investigating the teachers' ideas about the final examination. Thus this thesis will consist of a lot of empirical data. First we wish to contact the schools participating in the trials with a final examination in music, to get further information about how they intend to form a final examination. Second we are planning to conduct some interviews with eight Danish music teachers from different parts of the country. Finally we wish to make a survey with a larger number of respondents. This is done to get a realistic picture of the music teachers' ideas and positions towards the new initiative. Thus there is going to be both a quantitative and a qualitative part of the empirical data.

Finally on the basis of the theoretical and empirical contributions we wish to propound some tendencies and ideas towards a final examination in music.

References:

Link 1:

http://www.uvm.dk/~media/Files/Udd/Folke/PDF09/090417_handlingsplan_for_styrkelse_praktiske_musiske_fag.ashx

Link 2:

http://eva.dk/projekter/2001/evaluering-af-folkeskolens-afgangsproever/projektprodukter/folkeskolens-afgangsproever-proevernes-betydning-og-sammenhaeng-med-undervisningen/view?searchterm=folkeskolens_afgangsprøver

Link 3:

http://eva.dk/projekter/2001/evaluering-af-folkeskolens-afgangsproever/projektprodukter/Bilag-1-Evaluering-af-folkeskolen-afgangsprøver-blandt-eleverne.pdf/view?searchterm=folkeskolens_afgangsprøver

³ This is a publication which entails descriptions of aims and content of the Danish primary and lower secondary schools.