

Researching ensemble teachers' assessment criteria and values from a dialogical theoretical perspective

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ABSTRACT

Since the beginning of the 1980s, playing in pop ensembles and rock ensembles has been an integrated part of both Swedish music teacher education and the Swedish national curricula for music. However, there is little research on ensemble playing and teaching in Swedish schools, and even less so on the assessment and the criteria for assessment of this practice. The aim of my PhD project is to investigate what values music teachers in focus groups express and what criteria they base their judgements on when they comment on and discuss video excerpts from ensemble classes. This paper, however, focuses on the method of analysis: a discourse analytical method that is informed by a dialogical theory of meaning. In order to create 'thinking societies in miniature', focus groups consisting of music teachers were asked to comment on video excerpts from ensemble classes playing music in four different Afro-American genres. The discourses from these focus groups were analysed in a three-step procedure, which comprised: (1) reconstructing the participants' perspective through a dialogical discourse analysis, (2) eliciting hierarchies from the discourses and (3) presenting a final analysis of implicit and explicit values and criteria expressed in the focus groups. In this paper, an outline of the dialogical theory of meaning is given, the method is illustrated in some detail and its potentials for music education and music education research are discussed.

I. INTRODUCTION

Playing popular music in small groups has, since the early 1980s, been a substantial part of Swedish music education from the seventh or eighth grades upwards. Since 1994, there is an option in Swedish upper secondary education called the Aesthetic programme - with a speciality in Music (*gymnasiet estetprogram, musikgrenen*), where the pupils can gain deeper knowledge and skills in music. Among other music-related subjects, the pupils play ensemble (mostly Afro-American genres) for one or two hours each week. There is little research on this activity; however, a National Evaluation (2005) drew the conclusion that in the Swedish compulsory school, curricula have a negligible effect on education and marking in music: the teachers are said to be their own curricula. Given that Swedish music teachers in compulsory school often have the same music education as their colleagues in upper secondary school, a vast field of enquiry opens up. What activities are taking place in music education? What is taught and assessed? Swanwick (1994) contends that "if there is to be any meaningful interaction between teacher and student in schools and colleges, hidden assumptions underlying assessment have to be brought out into the light" (p. 102). What more or less hidden assumptions are held by ensemble teachers in upper secondary schools? What musical and didactical values exist among these teachers? In an ongoing PhD project, these questions are addressed, and the aim of the research is to get a first glimpse of

what criteria and values some ensemble teachers express with regard to pupils' ensemble playing. The purpose of this article, however, is to present how dialogical meaning theory is used as a foundation for the analytical process. Hence, the analysis presented in this paper is only concerned with two groups' discussions of one of the four ensembles.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Dialogical theory of meaning

The analysis is founded in a dialogical theory (Linell, 2001, 2009). This dialogical theory of communication, cognition and meaning distinguishes itself from the Cartesian monological stance by seeking the roots of meaning-making in situated interaction. In the word interaction, *inter* and *action* are equally important; talk is considered as action, and the cooperative construction of meaning resulting from this talk is taking place in the *interstice* between the communicating subjects.

In this perspective, human verbal meaning-making stems primarily from spoken discourse, which of necessity is situated in time and space. Such a concrete discourse, defined by Linell (2009) as "a stretch of concrete, situated and connected verbal, esp. spoken actions", has some general characteristics. Following Morson and Emerson, Linell (2009) claims that all communicative and cognitive acts inhere the following three dialogical properties: responsiveness, addressivity and genre-belongingness. Being an act, a single utterance is always *addressed* to somebody, and it is at the same time characterised by being *responsive*. This responsiveness is multidimensional; for example, it can relate to the physical environment, to the preceding utterance, to the socio-cultural context, the emotional climate, the expected answer and to the speech genre. Linell refers to this as the "double dialogicality" of spoken discourse. In claiming the centrality of *genre belongingness*, Linell leans both on Bakhtin's "speech genres" and on Wittgenstein's "language games". According to them, an apprehension of genre is a prerequisite to verbal understanding.

Functionally, a discourse can be seen as composed of *communicative projects*. These are "other-oriented and jointly accomplished communicative actions" (Linell, 2009) that can be of different magnitudes, from a ritualised greeting procedure to an institutionalised social activity, for example, a music lesson. Communicative projects aim at establishing mutual understanding through dialogue, and can be seen as collaborate problem-solving. A communicative project is an intersubjectively accomplished action, is always dialogical and thereby dynamic. It is never totally predetermined by one party or by social constraints but has a varying degree of asymmetry when it comes to distribution of power and communicative labour.

To summarise, a situated discourse is created through predominantly spoken interaction consisting of communicative

projects in which meaning is created through a continuing process of responses and initiatives within speech genres. As the discourse evolves, its inner frame of reference widens and more and more topics are “constituted and transformed” (Linell, 2001, s. 181) through the intersubjective meaning-making. As mentioned earlier, a discourse is situated within a network of contexts, which we can call its *outer framing*. This provides meaning potentials for the inner framing; if an aspect of the outer framing is dialogically addressed, then it gets incorporated into the discourse and becomes part of its inner framing.

Obviously, this dialogical perspective is socio-cultural; it locates the genesis of language and cognition in social interaction (thus harmonising with Vygotsky’s (1986) theory of language and thinking) and emphasises the cultural-historical situatedness of discourse. When it comes to the specific, situated interaction, this perspective also draws from Mead’s (1967/1934) notion of “taking the role of the other”. There are, in particular, two aspects of Mead’s thinking that are of fundamental importance for dialogical meaning theory. Firstly, his description of how interaction includes anticipation of the other’s reaction to one’s own planned action, and secondly his emphasis on the tripartite process of mutual meaning-making: (1) I make a gesture (while anticipating your interpretation of it), (2) you answer (also anticipating my next move), thereby giving me a clue about how you really understood me, and (3) I affirm or disapprove of your interpretation of what I meant.

In the course of a unique dialogue, a “temporarily shared world” (Rommetveit, 1979, p. 25) or using Linell’s words, an “island of shared understanding” (2001, p. 142), is gradually established as the dialogue incorporates and defines affordances from its outer framing. This implicates that discourse and contexts are interdependent and mutually constitutive.

According to this dialogical perspective on communication and discourse, construction of meaning is always local, situated, multivoiced, cooperative and hence dynamic, that is, in constant change. However, the emphasis on cooperation and dialogicality does not presuppose consensus. On the contrary, without tensions due to, for example, misunderstandings, different aims or a ‘will to power’, there would be no need to communicate. Communication is a means to execute agency by way of establishing intersubjective meaning. The ‘inter’ in intersubjectivity, however, is not seen as a means for an autonomous individual to execute power but as a dialogical accomplishment that presupposes participation and agency from more than one party, even when the distribution of power seems extremely uneven.

Apart from the concept *communicative project*, two other concepts are central to Linell’s dialogical perspective; these are *communicative activity type* and *topic*. A topic is constituted when two or more participants have been mutually aware of what they are talking about. Most economically, this can be accomplished in a “minimal communicative interaction” (MCI) where (1) A takes a verbal initiative, (2) B responds by showing his/her understanding of A’s turn and (3) A responds to B’s turn as relevant to her first utterance (Linell, 2009). As a consequence of the dynamism of discourse, topics are not clearly defined once and for all; they change when new topical aspects are added. A communicative activity type (CAT) is a

“comprehensive communicative project tied to a social situation type” (Linell, 2009). Participants in a CAT are often aware of both the purpose of the overall activity and of its physical and social framing. A music lesson or a rehearsal are typical such CATs. They create an outer framing that is indispensable for the interpretation of the communicative activities and the dialogical meaning making that takes place within the activity.

The building of a particular discourse is a sequential activity; its meaning-making draws not only from its surrounding contexts, for example the ongoing CAT, but also from what has already been dialogised in the discourse (from the evolving inner framing). Attempts at understanding what is meant (as opposed to explicating what is said) in a discourse must attend to this sequentiality and cannot draw conclusions from decontextualised utterances.

This research is conducted within a school context, which constitutes part of its external framing; its inner framing is the discourses of the four focus groups, two of which will be presented in the ensuing analysis.

B. Assessment of qualities in complex learning settings

In an influential article, Sadler (1989) outlines a theory of formative assessment and defines “a qualitative judgment” as “one made directly by a person, the person’s brain being both the source and the instrument for the appraisal” (p. 124). According to Sadler, expert judgements are based on a wide range of criteria that are often of a fuzzy nature, and the choice of which particular criteria that are applicable in a specific situation is guided by metacriteria that are often implicit. Apart from the fact that his definition is cast in a monological mould, Sadler’s reasoning highlights the situatedness of qualitative judgement, understanding and meaning-making and he stresses that knowledge of qualitative criteria are “‘caught’ through experience, not defined” (p. 135) and that expert knowledge is often tacit. Sadler presupposes that a teacher “must possess a concept of quality appropriate to the task, and be able to judge the student’s work in relation to that concept” (p. 121). It is precisely these concepts and judgements that are the focus of the study underlying this paper.

III. METHODOLOGY, METHOD AND DESIGN

The data were collected through focus group encounters, this being the method with the greatest potential for displaying dialogical meaning-making (Kitzinger, 2004; Marková, Linell, Grossen, & Salazar Orvig, 2007). According to Morgan (1997) and Krueger and Casey (2000), focus groups ought to be composed of people that do not know each other but that are supposed to have similar experiences and similar social status. In this study, however, each focus group consists of colleagues from the same school. Even if the participants know each other, the situation is in many respects new to them. Firstly, there are very few, if any, institutionalised opportunities for teachers to discuss pupils’ music-making, since teachers practically always work alone with ensembles and there is no system of assessment boards in Sweden. Secondly, from my experience, teachers draw heavily from their pre-history with the pupils when they discuss their work; however, in this setting they see and listen to

unknown pupils, which supposedly creates a novel situation. Finally, hidden assumptions, if they exist, are probably not easily captured and verbalised. A focus group affords a context where such assumptions can be realised through a joint effort, provided that its participants feel sufficiently at ease with each other. This seemed to be the case in at least three of the four groups.

Twenty one teachers from four Swedish upper secondary schools that had aesthetic programmes with a speciality in Music agreed to participate, and the teachers at each school formed a focus group, moderated by me. The groups consisted of 3, 4, 6 and 8 teachers and gathered for a ninety-minute meeting in a classroom in their own school, thereby stressing the didactical framing. The focus material was produced in a fifth town and consisted of video recordings of four different upper secondary school ensembles, one of which was playing black metal hard rock. All ensembles were videotaped in classrooms. From these recordings, the stimulus material was created by choosing excerpts of between 1.5 and 2.5 minutes that showed music-making, not teaching or instruction. The video picture had two synchronised frames: one strip showing the whole ensemble and the other presenting closer views of the musicians. The focus groups were presented with the video recordings and were asked to comment on what they noticed, saw and heard. At the end of the session, they were also asked to discuss what they should have worked with had they been the teachers in these ensembles.

The focus group discussions were transcribed with overlapping talk, timed silences and stressed words, and these transcripts were then analysed in a three-step procedure:

1) *Reconstructing the participants' perspective.* In order to identify dialogically constituted meanings, the discourses are scrutinised for communicative projects and topics. If a statement does not meet any response in the group, it is not considered dialogically established and is hence excluded from further analysis. Topics that appear on different occasions in the same or in different focus groups are called themes.

2) *Eliciting relations between topics from the discourse.* Explicitly or implicitly expressed relations between topics give hints to the relevance and status of different topics.

3) *Formulation of assessment criteria and values.* From the results in stage one and two, conclusions of assessment criteria and values concerning ensemble playing can be drawn.

IV. RESULTS

The first step of the analysis, the reconstruction of the dialogical meaning-making in the focus group, is a meticulous task that is fundamental to the credibility of the results. In order to show the technique used, rather long stretches of discourse from two focus groups are analysed in this paper. Following this fairly descriptive analysis, the relations expressed in the discussions about the black metal ensemble are presented (step 2) and finally (step 3) the dialogically expressed criteria and values are hinted at.

In the transcriptions, the following symbols are used: underlined words are those words that have been stressed by the

speaker, figures within parenthesis (2) indicate the number of seconds there is silence, a left bracket [indicates the starting point for simultaneous speech and asterisks * are used on each side of instances when talking at the same time as laughing takes place.

A. Step one: topics

FOCUS GROUP B consists of one female and three male music teachers and the moderator (OZ). They listen to the heavy metal excerpt after having discussed two other ensembles. Among topics already established in the discourse are *the impact of the video camera on the pupils' expressivity and the pupils' positioning*, the importance of *listening, bodily expressivity, communication, a differentiated voicing and free music-making*. The teachers have also topicalised *problems of using sheet music and copies of texts*. Knowledge of already established topics is essential for the interpretation of the discourse, as single utterances that associate to already established topics can be considered as relevant to the dialogical production of meaning. Birgit starts off immediately after the excerpt has been played:

117 Birgit: this is the first time this feels that this is theirs

118 Bo: (1) their thing

119 Birgit: their thing, like (Bo: umm) they connect with the music either they've chosen it or they like it somehow=

120 Bill: =but they've got it in them (Birgit: yeh, right) in a completely different [way ((putting her head to one side and shaking it ≈ "really!"))

121 Birgit: [yeh it's a completely different commitment

122 Bengt: but they're listening to [each other and there's something in their bodies and there's well, there's like a

123 Birgit: [yeh, really, but that

(2) it's not an exercise that we have to do

(1) right or wrong

124 Bo: (2) a will ((Birgit laughs a bit))

125 OZ: how do you notice this

126 Bill: (1,5) well but purely musically like (Birgit: yeh) especially this

'I'm the' ((shows the drum playing and sings)) everything fits together like (moves his hands towards his stomach and the lower part of his body) well alright- it g- it sometimes gets carried away purely musically but you fee...you c...- you see it ((shows with his hand towards his face)) on their body language, eh (4)

In turns 117, 120 and 121, the teachers compare the hard rock ensemble with the previous ensembles, which have been criticised in the preceding dialogue. In turns 117-119, Birgit and Bo create the topic *music is their thing (ownership)* in an MCI (minimal communicative interaction). Each turn has both a responsive and an initiatory function; Birgit (119) adds to this turn by giving possible reasons for this perceived ownership, Bill (120) responds to Birgit's (117) comparative stance by his "in a completely different way", Bengt (122) initiates listening and affirms Bill's (120) "they have it in them" by rewording it to "there's something in their bodies". The topic *bodily grounded commitment* is thereby established for the second time in the group. Bengt doesn't get any explicit response to his initiative about the listening within the ensemble (122). However, the importance of listening is already a part of the discourse's dialogically established internal framing, so it is justified to consider Birgit's responsive "yeh really" (123) also encompass the topic *listening*. In turn 124, Bill supposedly

opposes Birgit's (123) statement about "not an exercise" with his "a will", and she gives him an emotional response by laughing. This is less than an MCI, and we need more evidence before we can say that a dualism between "exercise" and "will" is topicalised. Prompted by the moderator's (OZ) slightly diffuse question "how do you notice this?" (125), Bill again emphasises the already topicalised bodily aspect and suggests an expansion of it by introducing the word "body language". He also initiates a "purely musical" dimension.

The bodily topic seems to be exhausted after Bill's utterance, to judge from the four-second silence following it. Bill breaks the silence himself by relating to the topic *visual communication*, which has been established in an earlier episode of the meeting:

- 126 Bill /.../ (4) they are also sitting looking down at their instruments, they're not looking into a music stand
127 Bengt: they're looking at each other a bit, too (Bill: yeh) well it sounds good doesn't it (Bill: yeh) ((Bill nods))
128 Birgit: you don't think that it's a teacher who's said that you do 'bill' like this in the solo and= ((Bengt laughs quietly)) =you do like this on the bass but they have probably listened to this (Bengt: 'mm?', Bill: mmm) and got their own ideas ab out what they're going to do ((Bengt, Bo and Bill nod))

In turns 126-127, *the visual focus of the musicians* is topicalised. Bill introduces sounding music by using the expression "purely musically" twice in turn 126, and when Bengt praises the sounding qualities (127), Bill agrees both by back channelling and by nodding. However, these signs of acceptance are not unambiguous, so it takes Birgit's assumptions on inspiration through listening (128) to establish *it sounds good* as an intersubjectively established topic. Birgit elaborates her idea (128) from turn 123 about "an exercise" and explicitly renounces the possibility that a teacher has been involved in the rehearsing. What they have seen and heard must have been an example of autonomous learning by listening! There are only two "nots" in turns 117-128, that is when Birgit marks a distance from a pedagogical setting, thus creating a dichotomy between school and the pupils' music-making. However, this dichotomy has, as yet, not been explicitly accepted by anyone else in the group. The dialogue continues by Bengt and Birgit summarising the previous dialogue, thus establishing the topic *identification*. Turns 129-131 make up a very condensed MCI: Birgit's laughter and "exactly" qualify her "yeh" as utterances and not as back channelling, and Bengt's two "ands" show that he has accepted and affirmed her turn as relevant:

- 129 Bengt: they have identification with their ((Birgit laughs)) yeh but then [it's what
130 Birgit:]yeh exactly yeh
131 Bengt: and and then it's always like this (.) there's never a hard rock solo that you can hear in a teaching context, (Birgit: *no that's right*) 'cos' they don't dare play as loud as they should (OZ: mm) so you could think that they're not playing enough or what? ((Bo nods))
(2) they seem to believe that they're playing too loud they are not they often play too quietly *those guitarists*
132 Birgit: yeh why do they do it?
133 Bengt: 'cos it would be so blood... 'cos distortion
(1) they often have a bit too much distortion and distortion takes away the transient /.../ if you must have so much distortion, you have to play disgustingly loud (Birgit: yeh) *well no* it's hard to play as loud as you have to
or

- (1) get the others to go back (Birgit: yeh) or what becomes of it
134 Birgit: yeh exactly
135 Bengt: but they're doing all the gestures ((shows a guitar in the air)) (Birgit: mm mm)
(3) you could see they're playing solo (Bo: mm; Birgit: yeh; Bill: mm)
/.../
138 Bo: but it's not at all the same feeling of it being a (.) lesson (Birgit: well)

Turns 131-134 constitute a brief communicative project where the problem of unheard solos is addressed and, at least theoretically, solved. Bengt expresses the norm that the guitarists "should" (131) and "must" (133) play "disgustingly loud" and Birgit affirms this both by her laughing "no, that's right" (131) and in turn 132. Here, we can identify some related topics: *hard rock solos are seldom heard* and *hard rock solos must be played at a higher volume than the pupils believe*. However, Bengt's explanation of the causes is not dialogically established – neither can we tell from Birgit's responses how his explanation is interpreted by her. At the end of the sequence, Bo (138) gives Birgit his first articulate response on her "negative" statements in turns 123 and 128, and she back channels a "we...ll". However, in the next turn, Bengt doesn't connect to that which is not but to the perceived qualities of the music-making:

- 139 Bengt: but they're sitting in a ring, too [and they've like (3) and they care about the communication
140 Bo: [right, quite right, they're sitting in another way and
/.../

Bo (140) establishes the topic *communication* with his response. The following omitted turns contain a short communicative project about *the ensemble's positioning* in the room and about why they are sitting down when they play. Then the moderator (OZ) resumes the idea unit about "the feeling of it being a lesson" and deliberately misinterprets Bo in order to make him more explicit about his values:

- 144 OZ: /.../ you got a bit upset about the fact that it was a lesson and yet it didn't have the feeling of being a lesson
145 Bo: no, the opposite
146 OZ: you don't like that?
147 Bo: yees, I do like it ((Birgit laughs))
148 OZ: that it's not a lesson about a lesson
(2) (Bo: mm) can you motivate that?
149 Bo: yeh, 'cos then it's about finding I think a balance between having a lesson about but get them to still feel that what they're playing is what they like /.../ like you yeh find some way
(1) balance it (OZ: mm) to get them to play instead of of me saying that you should play it
150 Bengt: we've even got a colleague who's free this year and who Birgit is substitute for who's coined the expression vacuum didactics ((all round laughter))

Bo contrasts preferences to education and Bengt (150) affirms Bo's utterances and supports the scepticism against interfering with teaching by using the word "vacuum didactics". The topic created is overtly evaluative and can be labelled *it's good that you don't get the feeling that it's a lesson*.

In this short episode, the following topics have been created or reestablished:

- music is their thing (ownership)
- bodily grounded commitment

- listening
- sounds good
- visual communication
- identification
- the visual focus of the musicians
- hard rock solos are seldom heard
- hard rock solos must be played at a higher volume than the pupils believe
- communication
- the ensemble's positioning in the room
- it's good that you don't get the feeling that it's a lesson

FOCUS GROUP D consists of three female and five male music teachers. They have listened to and commented on the same two ensembles as group B before they encounter the heavy metal ensemble. In the preceding dialogue, they have created, among others, the following topics: *the impact of the video camera on the pupils' expressivity, stiff and disciplined music-making, genre as the norm, the importance of knowing the music and text by heart, the importance of expressivity, joy, and the importance of the musicians' own choices*. They have also topicalised that *active pedagogy constrains pupils' freedom of autonomous action*. After having heard and seen the heavy metal ensemble, Darin opens the dialogue by introducing a new idea:

178 Darin: lovely seeing that music unites cos' these are, like, five long-haired lads dressed in black and then there's a short-haired lad with a training suit but he's

179 Dan: he's part of it anyway

180 Darin (1) but he's allowed to be part of it ((laughs)) it's lovely to see

Darin and Dan collaborate in explicating an aspect of what they have seen. They create meaning together, and their topic *inclusion in spite of differing clothing* has been created in an MCI. By using "anyway" and "but /.../ allowed", Dan and Dag also create the implicit topical aspects that they *expect dress codes to reflect (musical) group identities* and that *young people from different subgroups may have problems cooperating*. In their explicit meaning-making, however, they talk about what they have seen in the video. Now Dan widens the scope to a more generalising description by the use of "they've" and "like that":

181 Dan: they've got such a special mike technique when they sing like that

(1) I don't really get how it works

(1) you hold like this-

Dan gets no response to his initiative, and hence, prototypical ways of holding the instruments are not included in the discourse. Dag adheres to the more generalising way of expression that Dan has introduced but initiates another subject without responding to Dan:

182 Dag: what strikes me is that when they play this music style, they're most often quite drilled in it (Doris: yeh) and it sounds quite right (Doris: yeh)

(.) it sounds good it sounds much better than when they try to play funk or because they're like not really into the genre [here it's like

183 Doris: [yeh they've listened their way into what it should sound like

184 Dag: right, exactly, they've listened their way into this

185 Diana: yeh, exactly

186 Darin: and practised their way into it

187 Dag: yeh, exactly

188 Darin: it's often the case that hard rock musicians and jazz musicians are often (Dag: yeh) the ones with the most drive (Dag: yeh) on their instruments (Doris+Dan: yeh) even when they are big so to speak

Now (182-188), the focus group engages in intense meaning-making; back channelling and simultaneous talk give evidence of at least five of the participants considering *it sounds good, quality of sound depends on the familiarity with the genre, learning by listening and driven instrumentalists* as relevant topics. It's only Dag (182) that explicitly mentions "music style" and "genre". However, *genre as a norm* is already topicalised in the group's discourse and is thus a part of its inner framing. In turns 182-183, Dag and Doris are using the expressions "sounds right" and "what it should sound like", thereby implying that there are norms for right and wrong within musical genres. *Genre as stylistic normative framing and genre as identification* are implicit topics in the whole episode cited above, from the introductory remarks on "dress code" to Darin's (188) statement on "hard rock musician".

When Dan responds to turn 188, he makes an altogether hypothetical assumption: "what's interesting about this" (187) is not something he has seen or heard on the video but a pre-history that seems to be a given for him:

189 Dag: but what is interesting about this is that

(.) there probably hasn't been any teacher (Dan: no...) present (Dan: exactly) when they've rehearsed this, but they've done it themselves (Dennis: yeh) and then

(1) [it sounds better ((Dan starts laughing)) in some way

190 Doris: [it sounds better

(3) it sounds it sounds more-

191 Darin: so we can get rid of ourselves you mean

192 (Dag: [yeh exactly])

193 Doris: [yeh, but it sounds more genuine because it's theirs like

194 Dag: yeh it's theirs exactly it's their home

(1) their street like

Dan's laughter provides an emotional response, which makes it more plausible that his affirmative "exactly" can be understood as a real response, but it is when Doris (190) and Dag say "it sounds better" in unison that we get more solid evidence that they are working as a "talking and thinking community" in the pursuit of establishing interpersonal meaning. This meaning is an extension of the earlier established topic about the constraining effects of didactics on the pupils' autonomy. The topic is *it sounds better because no teacher has been involved*. Darin's question (191) provides an affordance to a new communicative project discussing the didactical consequences of the stance taken in turns 189-190. Dag's "yeh exactly" (192) might be a response to Darin's question but is overtaken by Doris who continues the "old" project of describing the virtues of the music-making. Interestingly, Dag (194) reuses his responsive "yeh exactly", but now it affirms Doris' (193) utterance. Dag's affirmation has such similarity to Doris' preceding utterance that we can conclude that they have reached a consensual opinion; the topic *genuine music-making stems from ownership of the music*. This is one of many examples from the data indicating that utterances that, taken on their own, seem to be personal opinions, function as affordances for the cooperative communicative work that creates the discourse and its meanings.

The topics that focus group D has created or reestablished in this episode are

- inclusion in spite of differing clothing
- people from different subgroups may have problems cooperating
- expect dress codes to reflect (musical) group identities
- it sounds better because no teacher has been involved
- it sounds good
- quality of sound depends on familiarity with the genre
- learning by listening
- driven instrumentalists
- genre as stylistic normative framing
- genuine music-making stems from ownership of the music

The teachers were asked to comment on what they noticed in the video excerpts. Within the overarching communicative project of the focus group, different smaller projects have been constituted and sometimes nested into each other. In the two short episodes analysed, the purpose of the groups' communication seems to be to verbalise the qualities of the hard rock ensemble's playing. This takes some dialogical labour in that it includes the performance of different communicative projects *and* the creation and reestablishment of a number of topics. Not only do the teachers respond to each other but they also reuse each other's words and expressions, for example "completely different" (B120, 121) and "their thing" (B118-119) and "exactly" (D 183-184). Often the responses refer to the preceding turn, but there are examples in the data of participants referring to statements made nearly one hour earlier.

This has been a rather detailed dissection of two short pieces of discourse. The rationale for making such fine-grained analyses is that in order to get access to the participants' perspective, it is important to observe how they interpret each other and on what topics they create intersubjective meaning. Without a thorough analysis of the complete discourses, it is impossible to tell whether a single utterance is part of the dialogical meaning-making or not.

Through this analytical method, it is possible to establish what dimensions of music-making are considered relevant to at least two persons in each group. In this specific context, these dimensions have functioned as assessment criteria. In the second analytical stage, we will look for relations and hierarchies between these dimensions.

B. Step two: relations and hierarchies

Now and then, utterances or topics are formulated as relations, either as causal relations or as ends and means. Sometimes, these relations are formulated as generalisations, for example, "There is never a hard rock solo that is heard /.../ 'cos they never dare play as loud as they should" (B131). Sometimes they are interpretations of concrete situations, as when Birgit says "like they connect with the music, either they've chosen it or they like it somehow" (119). This implies that she presupposes two causal relations, namely that personal choice as well as liking of the music furthers connecting with music. Since not all of these relations are topicalised qua relations, the interpretation of them as generalisations of cause

and result or ends and means implies a significantly increased degree of researcher impact compared to step one.

Given this, the relations expressed in the above quotations can be generalised as follows (for the sake of brevity, the statements are without qualifications):

1. If you like the music you play or if you have chosen it yourself, then you "connect with" the music (B119).
2. If you are committed, it shows in the body language (B121-126)
3. If you listen to music instead of to a teacher you get your own musical ideas (B128)
4. If you have listened a lot to a genre, your playing will sound good (D182-185).
5. If no teacher is involved in the practice, the sounding result will be better (D188-191)
6. If no teacher is involved in the practice, the sounding result will be more genuine (D192-193)
7. If a pupil guitarist plays a hard rock solo, it will not be audible because the player doesn't dare to play loud enough (B131-132)
8. If you play with much distortion, you have to play very loud to be heard (B133)
9. If the ensemble is sitting in a circle, this indicates that they care about the communication within the ensemble (B139)
10. If you sing hard rock, you have a particular microphone technique (D181)
11. If you play hard rock, you are a dexterous instrumentalist (D180)
12. If you practise a lot, you will become skilled (D182, 186-188).

Most of these relations are expressed by one single group member but all relate to topics created in the group (although not always topicalised in the above analysis). Some of the relations are quite trivial, but the interesting and important thing is not their originality (or possible offensiveness) but what is described as cause and what is described as effect. If one scrutinises the relations, it becomes obvious that the more desirable quality often is formulated as an effect. Communication is most probably more essential than how the players are located in the classroom (9), the sounding result is in all likelihood considered more important than teacher involvement (5) and being a good instrumentalist is presumably more important for the music teachers than playing heavy metal (11). For the sake of argument, let us include some more relations that are formulated in the two focus groups' dialogues on the hard rock ensemble:

13. If the teacher is present without intervening, the pupils will become more focused on their work (B166, 182)
14. If the teacher intervenes, the pupils feel unhappy or feel watched (B168-171)
15. If a task has been assigned to a pupil, it diminishes the pupil's joy of playing (B123, 146)
16. If you identify yourself as a hard rock musician, you will not accept people with other musical preferences (D217-223)
17. If you are a hard rock musician, you don't want to play other genres (D217-223)

If we focus on the 'effect' side of these relations, we find that some aspects are more prevalent than others. The sounding music is described as a result of listening, practice or courage (4-8), the way the pupils connect with the music and take joy in playing is made a consequence of liking, freedom of choice and teacher involvement (1, 2, 14, 15) and technical skills are described as an outcome of practice and adherence to hard rock (10-12). Teacher involvement is the most prevalent factor in the above seventeen relations. It is mentioned as a cause six times, and every time, the effect is described as harmful. Teacher activity is said to hamper the joy of music making, the creation of musical ideas and the quality of the sounding music (3, 5, 6, 13-15). Genre is talked about both as an identity and as a musical idiom. When taken as identification, it is described as a cause for both instrumental dexterity and intolerance (10-11, 16-17), and when talked about as an idiom it is mentioned as a prerequisite for a good sound (4). In all cases, except the last, genre is described as a cause and not as an effect.

Rather than being descriptions of cause and effect, these examples can be interpreted as expressions of means and ends, and, taken as such, they give us clues to hierarchies between the qualitative dimensions that have been dialogically established. Teacher activity and hard rock identity appear to be central as means rather than ends. While hard rock identity is described as having both positive and negative consequences, teacher activity seems to occupy quite a lowly position in this hierarchy. When it comes to ends, we find good sounding music, technical skills and joyous connecting with the music as the most related to dimensions, but the above relations also suggest that communication, broad knowledge and experience of the genre, acceptance of differences and focused playing can be interpreted as goals.

While the first analytical step gave an insight into the music teachers' perspectives on the video recorded music making, it gave little information about how they related different aspects of music making in terms of importance or value. This second step analysis does only include expressions of such relational aspects in the discourse and disregards all other meaning making in the group. By sacrificing some of the dialogical rigour and thus giving a limited view of the discourse, it provides us with some suggestions as to the hierarchical relations between certain topics.

C. Step three: criteria and values

In this last step, the topics from step one and the relations from step two are combined in order to give a picture of what criteria and values are expressed by the focus groups after having watched and listened to the hard rock ensemble. In step one, the ambition was to stay as close as possible to the dialogically established perspective of the focus group participants and postpone interpretations. This resulted in a number of dialogically created topics which show what dimensions of music making the teachers pay attention to. Or, in other words, what criteria they assess. Step two was considerably less close to the data; it constructed generalisations of expressed relations and interpreted these relations as ends and means in order to examine their relative importance in the discourse. This gave some hints as to how the teachers perceive the relative importance of different criteria. In this last analytical step, the findings in the first two steps are

interpreted as criteria and values. Values are more seldom dialogised than criteria. If the values are expressed in utterances that are not responded to, we must therefore search the discourse for meaning-making that expresses these values. Taking the sequentiality of dialogical meaning-making seriously is to see each utterance as primarily a response to the preceding one but also, simultaneously, as a response to all the preceding meaning-making in the discourse, that is, to its inner framing. By tracking the 'itinerary' of an expressed value in a discourse, the meaning-making can be explicated and credibly interpreted. The aim of this paper is not to present the results of this research but rather to illustrate a method grounded in dialogical meaning theory. Therefore, this last step will only be hinted on.

In stage two the most sought after dimensions seemed to be commitment and joy, good sound and technical skills. While instrumental dexterity seldom is dialogically addressed, the quality of the sounding music is often dialogised, as is ownership, joy of playing and commitment. The latter is one of the most frequently recurring themes in the discourses; it is highly valued and is often contrasted against teacher interference. Identification as a hard rock musician is described as conducive to committed and skilful playing but does not seem to be a value in itself, as it is also described as countering the valued qualities of openness and breadth of genre. Visual communication within the ensemble seems to be an important criterion, as does listening. Musical genre is talked about as an arbiter of sounding quality, and the adherence to stylistic norms seems to be highly valued.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper has been to illustrate an analytical method that is based on a dialogical conception of thinking, communication and meaning-making. This perspective stresses that talk is an activity that is inevitably intersubjective; it also emphasises that this communicative activity is always locally situated within a texture of context. The immediate didactical relevance of this research is dependent on to what extent expressed criteria and values are applied in or applicable to ensemble teaching and learning. The research area of interest is ensemble teaching and the qualitative foundations for music teachers' assessments and pedagogical actions. Given that all situated discourses are in constant interaction with their contexts, and that a focus group context is distinctly different from a classroom setting, it is appropriate to ask to what extent results from these discussions on anonymous pupils' ensemble playing can have relevance to everyday music education.

This is of course an empirical question. However, a few comments on the matter are timely. Säljö (2005) emphasises that learning within an activity is a matter of identifying differences that make a difference, "seeing what differences are worth paying attention to" (p. 147, my translation). The focus group is a new context for all the teachers, that is, it has not yet evolved into an institutionalised communicative activity type, so the teachers have to draw from other activities when creating the discourses. These activities are most probably school-related. The framing is very school-like; the teachers are sitting in classrooms, listening and looking at video recordings that clearly display music-making in a school environment. The

teachers are experienced ensemble teachers and know that they are watching ensembles taking the same courses that they themselves teach. The act of observing music-making without participating is a constituent part of their praxis, so the only new, unknown aspects of the context are the presence of the researcher, the unknown pupils that have been displayed on video and of course the possibility to discuss with colleagues. It seems as though the impact of the researcher was inversely related to the size of the focus group; however, in all except the smallest group, the conversation flowed freely, and very seldom needed input from the researcher. Reflection on unknown pupils' music making is not an entirely new activity for the teachers, as they meet new ensembles every year. Interestingly, they very often explained observed pupil conduct by bestowing personal histories on them. The pattern of letting a critical remark be ameliorated by a constructed biographical explanation is so prevalent that it seems unlikely that it is an artefact of the focus group context. Rather it suggests that this is a common way of reasoning among the participants.

As for the 'unnaturalness' of discussing pupils' music making with colleagues, its advantages outweigh its disadvantages. Not only did the discussions give access to a multitude of criteria and values, but the analysis also revealed hierarchies, tensions and contradictions between these values and criteria which probably affect teaching and ought to be addressed both by research and in the praxis field.

Focus group research can be conducted both from a monological perspective and from a dialogical one. A monological way would be to analyse each utterance as an expression of an autonomous self. However, the focus on dialogically established topics strengthens both the validity and the relevance of the findings, since a dialogically established topic has been paid attention to, and found contextually relevant by at least two persons in the group. In fact, even if there were many differences in the four focus group discussions, there were many similarities as to values and criteria.

Finally, I would like to present some considerations on the possible values of a dialogical approach to music education and music education research.

- In school instruction as well as in interpretation of research data, misunderstanding must be seen as normality. It takes dialogical work both to realise the extent of such misunderstandings and to establish more mutual meaning. In fact, misunderstandings can be seen as one of the fundamental propellants for both communication and for creative change. An active awareness of the fundamentals of communication and meaning-making is imperative for teachers when they interact with their students. When it comes to interpretation of research data, the method illustrated in step one can act as an aid for the researcher to avoid some misunderstandings in the interpretation process.

- According to dialogical meaning theory, people are actors; there is place for human agency even if it is always constrained by multiple contexts such as cultural traditions, communicative activity types and power relations. However, we are not seen as acting towards other people but rather as acting with other people, regardless of our intents or how we perceive the situation - even the most manipulative person is dependent on cooperation from those she tries to manipulate - and this of course has implications both for the researcher and for the

teacher. In didactical politics, a dichotomy between seeing the pupil as an autonomous, active learner or a more or less passive receiver of instruction is often constructed; this polarization has also become evident in this analysis. If sense-making is an outcome of collaborative work, activity on the parts of both the teacher and the students should be equally important, as implicated by Vygotsky (1986) in his explication of the zone of proximal development. The didactical challenge must be to find ways of enhancing the interaction rather than limiting it.

- The emphasis on the situatedness and sequentiality of discursive meaning-making puts constraints on how discursive data can be interpreted, but it also opens up for research that includes dimensions that are often neglected, such as emotional aspects, for example. The point that discourse and context is mutually constitutive also implies that the context is not a constant but, due in part to the sequentiality of discursive meaning-making, the context of all collaborative meaning-making is constantly evolving. This can be less than ideal in ongoing institutionalised interaction, for example between students or between teacher and students, but it is fundamental to the dynamics of learning.

- Kitzinger (2004) discusses the fact that focus groups are often accused of creating a bias on participants' utterances in that pressure of group dynamics is imposed on them, which, in turn, prevents them from expressing their true opinions. From a dialogical standpoint, this is not a valid accusation. In principle, since cognition is seen as dialogically grounded, every subject can use many voices and is also changing over time. A statement, ever so confidently expressed, is seen as an action situated in time and space, and as discourse unfolds, the "island of shared understanding" grows and changes, and verbal actions that were appropriate some minutes ago are no longer applicable. Social actions are inevitably *interactions*, and thus dependent on (by means of responsivity and anticipation) other people, that is, they are dialogical. Indeed, people change their statements during the course of discourse, but more often than not, this seems to be the result of the collaborative process of thinking and interpreting the stimulus material. Rather than being evidence of lost authenticity, these changes are the results of intensive collaborative cognitive activity. From a monological standpoint, knowledge as well as opinions reside within the subject and teaching strives at facilitating the subject's creation of meaning and acquisition of knowledge. This knowledge is tapped by testing, and any collaborative thinking in a test situation is labelled cheating. A dialogically conceived didactical practice could have transformative implications for education in general and music education in particular. In music education, the quest for authenticity can make the student musician a chained captive to his or her supposed or expected authentic voice or personal aesthetic opinions. A determinate musical identity can provide a person with a sense of self and belonging, but it can at the same time be a hamstring to new experiences, learning and change. A dialogical stance to ensemble playing would stress music-making as a situated joint activity where music, players and listeners are the interactants who draw from historical, cultural and physical contexts in their cooperative meaning-making. From this point of view, authenticity can be seen as linked to the situated musical activity rather than as coupled to a true artistic self. Thus a dialogical view of music

making can open up for liberating, transcending and transformative musical experiences that implicate learning and change.

- If assessment is to be taken seriously, it ought to be considered one of the core competencies of music teaching and learning. Every time teachers and students are communicating on, with or through music, there is assessment going on. We bring emotionally and culturally informed values and criteria into each situated interaction, and whether we are aware of them or not, they are part of the communication. Sadler (1989) stressed the situatedness of qualitative judgements and the importance of judging student's work in relation to the teacher's concepts of quality. From a dialogical standpoint, it is not so much a matter of judging but of the teacher as well as the student bringing their criteria and values into a didactical collaborative process that is situated within a network of intersecting contexts: musical, emotional, cultural, biographical, institutional and so forth.

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