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Jyrki Honkonen

Improvisation Workshops and Development of Musicianship. A Study in a Finnish Waldorf Teacher Training College

Introduction

Observing Waldorf School Music Curriculum

This study focuses on the musical activity and learning processes of adult students in a Waldorf teacher training college in Helsinki. The college in question provides the only training opportunity in Finland to qualify as a Waldorf School[1] class teacher. In addition to the class teacher qualification, the studies include a possibility to deepen the skills in the craft and artistic subjects. The students are free to choose secondary subjects depending on their interest without preceding tests.

Waldorf School[2] represents a 12-year comprehensive school. Comprehensive school in Waldorf context denotes a coherent curriculum without specific division into primary, secondary and upper secondary schools. Even though this format changed in 1999, when the specific legislation governing Waldorf schools was replaced with the Basic Education Act that unified the Finnish education system's levels, the pedagogical foundation of the curriculum is still identical globally in all Waldorf schools.

The main feature of music education in Waldorf School is the presence of music and musical activity throughout the entire school time. It offers music teachers an opportunity to develop their work in cross-curricular sense and reflect on the impact of music on education's more general goals (Stockmeyer 2001, 166–167). According to the founder of Waldorf pedagogy, Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), the essence of music education is founded on every child's right to participate in music education during the entire time of school education. According to Steiner, the development of children's musical ability does not follow a uniform pathway; therefore, the teacher has an important task to help every child awaken their musicality (Stockmeyer 1976, 162–170; see also Wünsch 1995, 14–20). Steiner's approach is echoed in the words of Juvonen, Lehtonen, and Ruismäki (2016, 31), who state that 'the sleeping musicality can be awakened by offering substitutive learning experiences to the pupils'.

Partti (2016, 21) presents the idea of variable musicianship, arguing that teacher training needs to develop those tools that would help students develop diverse and creative musicianship. A certain idea of variable musicianship lies at the core of what it means to be a Waldorf School music teacher. At the core of Waldorf teacher training lies a substantial and versatile use of artistic practice, emphasising the development of sensitivity of perception (Snellman-korkeakoulu 2008, 8). In addition, the role of a teacher in Waldorf School is an image of the teacher as an artist whose personal creativity and artistic capacity is the springboard for the development of a creative approach to teaching. The learning process in adult education contains phases, which the teaching has to support: perceiving, inner orientation to resolve, the analytical processing and finally, an individual and creative settling of the issue (Snellman-korkeakoulu 2008, 7).

Remarks on Music Improvisation in Finnish National Core Curriculum

According to Johansen, Holdhus, Larsson and MacGlone (2019) improvisation, in its various forms, has been an integral element of western music throughout its history, and, in recent years, it has been increasingly incorporated in music education (see also Chauhan 2012). Learning to improvise deepens the understanding of musical elements and musicality among learners (Campbell 2009). In the context of Finnish music education, a reference to music improvisation occurred, possibly for the first time, in the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (FNCCBE) in 1970, aiming 'to offer students possibilities for creative expression with the means of music' (Suomi 2009, 75). However, both the proficiency of music teachers and teachers' education were not yet ready to address this challenge (Erkkilä 1998). Until 1970, when the first FNCCBE came into effect, music teaching in Finnish schools focused mainly on singing. Notably, playing instruments was virtually non-existent (Kosonen 2012; see also Suomi 2009, 74–78). FNCCBE, for the first time, introduced music as a distinct subject in education.

The Finnish National Board of Education subsumed improvisation as part of music's educational content into the curriculum in 2004 (FNCCBE 2004, 233–234). Finally, in FNCCBE 2014, creating music with the help of improvisation and composing became an essential working method. However, the curriculum is merely a normative instrument that guides teaching; it is essential that its spirit and orientation are translated into practical classroom work (Vitikka, Krokfors & Hurmerinta 2012). Galey (2015, 3) argues that improvisation contains a structure as a composition does and indeed, improvisation and composing form a conceptual pair in FNCCBE 2014, as, often, compositions emerge from improvisations. However, the concept of improvisation in connection with music making remains undefined in the FNCCBE 2014 and is not, either, subsumed into any specific genre, structure, or form in music. Therefore, we must distinguish between the different qualities of improvisation, the elements and contents of structured and unstructured improvisation. Structured improvisation works are based on a variety of pre-set elements, a predesigned form and connection to a specific style or genre. However, in free improvisation, intuitive musical intentions form the content of the common musical space (Kanellopoulos & Wright 2012, 141–143).

Improvisation, playing, and social activities are essential working methods in Waldorf School music education and therefore in Waldorf School teacher education as well. However, the concept of improvisation in Waldorf education is much broader and comprehensive than that which underpins much music education. Improvisation in Waldorf education lies closer to free improvisation and is an intuitive way of combining and experiencing consciousness, knowledge, social behaviour and emotional development (see Wünsch 1995, 84–97, 141–142; Honkonen 1995, 18–19; Honkonen 2018, 31–44; Rawson & Richter 2004, 217–223). Waldorf education approaches conceptual thinking and definition of a subject via games, playing and exercising where improvisation forms an essential part (Stene 2018). The practice of improvisation at various activity levels provides tools for social working in the school community (Ahlbom 2012). The endeavour towards holistic education has created new directions inside Waldorf pedagogical communities, which exploit improvisation and workshops as a primary system for music education and social working (Ahlbom 2012).

Workshop as a Creative Project

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, a workshop is 'a usually brief intensive educational program for a relatively small group of people that focuses mainly on techniques and skills in a particular field' (Workshop, 2018). The workshop varies between and with different contents, working spaces, combinations, aims, and tools. It can be goal-oriented,

differently shaped, or based on some other systematic approach. However, a workshop as a working method in Finnish music education has not been actively encouraged until the FNCCBE 2004 and further 2014. In the FNCCBE 2014, improvisation and composing as a means for creative music making play a substantial role. Improvisation and creative music making often rely on workshop-based working methods, in which pupils are divided into sub-groups. This requires new types of skills and practices to be implemented into teacher education (Honkonen 2018). Fortunately, the current music teacher's education practice takes social and people skills into consideration; after the FNCCBE 2014, the variability of music teaching means seems to be widening (FNCCBE 2014, 142–143, 263–267, 422–425).

A workshop provides a variety of tools for teacher education. Collective learning and social interaction form the framework of individual musical action and development. This is closely related to music therapy working methods grounded on improvisational musical dialogue (see, for example, Erkkilä 1998 and Punkanen 2011; Dove 2016), although, of course, without the clinical orientation that music therapy naturally has. However, it can help participants to find their musical self.

Furthermore, it is necessary to distinguish between ordinary co-exercising and workshop acts. Practising with existing compositions is comparable to a usual rehearsal process or preparation for performance while creating new musical material belongs to the workshop category of improvisation and composition (e.g., Partti 2016). Karlsen (2011) believes that musical activity in a group can lead to collective identity experience. According to Karlsen, the cultivation of artistic agency in a group can be one of the best ways to create a basis for collaborative action. This applies well to the workshop. Awareness of the starting level of participants is of the utmost importance when positioning a workshop's objective. The participating group can be coherent or vary according to musical ability. Creating a socially balanced and equal working team demands discernment and proficient knowledge of social behaviour (Hargreaves & North 1999). According to Kairavuori, Karppinen, Poutiainen and Rusanen (2016), processual working strengthens learners' experience and grows the readiness to collaborate and learn from others. Therefore, in the study of artistic and practical subjects, there is a reason to emphasise the importance of the overall process instead of outcome (Kairavuori, Karppinen, Poutiainen & Rusanen 2016, 18).

Aim of the Study

Waldorf pedagogy emphasises each teacher's creative potential as an artist as the foundation of being an educator. Improvisation and workshop-type working methods encourage creative, dialogical action, requiring deep involvement and personal input from each participant. It may be argued that this kind of work is useful for fostering learner's musicianship. However, there is little research that has been done in this direction.

The current study investigates the perceived effects and consequences of improvisation on a learner's personal musical development that result from her/his involvement in a series of workshops. The study approaches the topic from a learner-oriented perspective, understanding musical improvisation as a tool to improve and deepen one's musicianship. A workshop frames a particular communal and social learning environment, in which the collaborative music-making and interaction are possible to execute. This study focuses on observing the participants' reactions and further, on understanding the potential consequences of the emerging emotions. The research aims to illustrate how collective music creating transforms participants' experiences of their musicality. This broader aim is further sub-divided into the following research questions:

1. How do the students perceive and experience music making and learning in the workshops?
2. How does collective music-making influence individual learners' musical activities as a representation of their musicianship?
3. What is the relevance of the workshop as a working method for developing musicianship?

Method

Data were collected from November 2014 to June 2015 during seven workshops at Waldorf School teacher training college in Helsinki. The workshops were part of the student's secondary subject in music, aiming to develop musical activity and skills through improvisation and composition. The participants, two men and eight women, were 25–49 years old. The workshop was offered to the participants as part of their music studies; participation was voluntary, and the process could be interrupted at any moment. The priority of the anonymity of the participants was highly protected; also, the specified comments of the participants later in this paper were revised unidentifiable. The participation was not preceded by testing or demanded foreknowledge. Participants had varied prior experience with music making: two participants had not had any musical activity after upper secondary school, six participants were partly engaged with music making in everyday life, and two participants were studying music more systematically. The research coordinator, however, only knew these remarks. Furthermore, only the relevant assessed information of the data was used for the research.

The working groups formed freely without pre-estimating the students' musical capabilities. Participants were instructed to take notes about their experience, emotions, feelings, and other music-making thoughts before, during, and after the workshops. In every session, a specific issue, with instructions to prepare the performance, was introduced. The participants were asked to associate different places and stories for the foundation of the improvisation. The working groups planned the soundscape, and the presentations varied from structured pieces, similar to composition, to relatively free expression.

Data were collected via the Google Docs platform in the form of an unstructured design, a private memo, aiming to achieve more personal and narrative writings (see, for example, Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006) and not to cause extra stress or harm. The students were able to process the output and comment on their personal notes during the whole process. The data processing was strictly confidential; only research coordinator did have access to the information. In the text, abbreviations [I1-10] were applied to indicate the participants' sequence; not, however, in any specific order. English translation of the Finnish quotations and transcription are by the author.

Data processing and interpretation of the results followed the principles of phenomenographic analysis (e.g., Marton 1988, 140, 143–151, 153–154; Järvinen & Järvinen 2004, 83–88). After collecting the data, these were studied carefully in order to achieve an overall picture of it. After that, data were reviewed in more detail, to create the sections of different words, phrases and sentences according to participants' expression and researchers' interpretation of the transcription. The sections were summarised into fifteen categories and further, to nine categories in order to analyse the qualitative variation of the ideas in data. These nine categories formed the basis for the emergence of three upper-level description categories, in this study called the main categories. According to Marton (1988, 146–147) in phenomenographic analysis, the main categories, which derive from the earlier defined subcategories, form the outcome of the study. Furthermore, Marton (1986, 35) suggests that 'the different forms of thought are usually described in terms of categories, categories

and organised systems of categories are the most important component of phenomenographic research'. A phenomenographic research strategy focuses on people's experiences, thoughts, and ideas of the surrounding world; certain phenomena are conceptualised by assigning them exact significance or meaning (Järvinen & Järvinen 2004, 83).

Findings

Being Thrown in: Negotiating Insecurity

The first main category, A Workshop and Developing Musicianship, is comprised of three subcategories containing descriptions of experiencing the workshop, readiness for teamwork and concentration on group work (Fig. 1). In general, the stance towards the workshop was mainly positive and curiously expectant:

> *My learning experience is related to this teacher training issue, anyway. It has been a bit of a different study than what I have ever gone through. From time to time, one feels uncomfortable and begins to ask oneself about the sense of things. Still, something seems to be working. Something that one might not otherwise be able to achieve* [I5].

Some comments even contained glowing feedback:

> *The improvisation on Saturday was absolutely brilliant. We had enough time to use* [I2]. *The days in February introduced me to the wonderful world of improvisation* [I1].

At the beginning of the course, the atmosphere was expectant, with a degree of doubt in one's abilities, as one of the participants later described:

> *Teamwork on Saturday was challenging, aggravating, but still an educational experience for me. Creating new [music] by taking a group into account and making things together is a challenge for an ordinary person* [I1].

After becoming acquainted with improvisation, the mood would likely change to encouraging and partly inspiring:

> *I realised that my relation to music, listening in the first place, has woken up from a long hibernation. I was missing it: I was playing more, singing more. I was more gracious to myself. Somebody mentioned that this way to learn is somehow so different, sometimes overwhelming. I cannot find any words, only feelings* [I6].

Everyone in the group was not familiar with collaborative music creating practices; some of the participants made the acquaintance of their instruments for the first time. Still, after some basic instructions, the groups went bravely on and conducted their assignment successfully. Teamwork was found to be useful, even fun and deemed creative, too:

> *The result was an achievement. All groups were so proficient in their way* [I3]. *The team worked well and had much fun creating something new together and even fooling around. Thank you!* [I4)].

Despite the team's support and a warm and friendly atmosphere, the unfamiliar situation also brought to light critical points of view. Some of the participants found the work challenging:

In the beginning, it was frustrating; it was difficult [I8]. *If teamwork is not easy most of the time anyway, composing is even more challenging. Through the difficulties we came, if not as winners, then at least to the finishing line* [I5].

The response to the next assignments with more complex improvisation was slightly dubious:

More difficulties were faced when we moved towards composition. How could I express this constructively? It was difficult. [I2)]

The notes in the first main category demonstrate that the readiness for teamwork varies widely. Insecurity and trust in one's musical abilities were found in every note, even if the participant had earlier music experience. As for future class teachers, while teamwork might have been familiar for them, the working environment with instruments might not. It required intense concentration both in their work and in dealing with others.

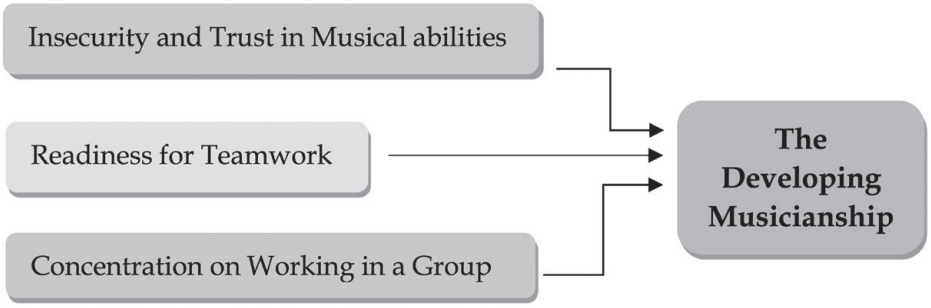

Figure 1. Negotiating Insecurity.

Delving into an Enlightened Musical Experience

The second main category, The Metamorphosis in a Workshop Process, collates the enlightened musical experience to music making and further, the modification of musical activity (see figure 2). Its three subcategories are the following: ambition for ongoing work with music, confidence in the working methods and essential inner experience. These subcategories form further two sequential subcategories: 1) change of attitude towards music and 2) impact on personal action. The participants' perception indicates that musical action was evolving during the workshop, and excitement was diminishing. Increased belief in one's artistic capability, in general, created a positive mood and inspired an individual to go forward or even to resume musical activity. As one of the participants stated:

My attitude to music has changed—wider, more permissive, more curious, more experimental—more active [I8].

Another participant had the following to say about the reducing of fear and excitement:

The fear to grab something [an instrument] has decreased although I do not find myself handy at all [I7].

The increased interest in studying an instrument or even taking up new ones is apparent:

In the improvisation on Saturday, I tried the flute after a long time, and it felt lovely and inspiring [I6].

Another participant relates further:

For the first time in my life, it seems possible that I could learn to play several instruments. Not virtuoso, of course, hardly even that well, but it is possible that I could work such sounds out and could create music [I1].

The workshop can offer the participants growing interest and wish to develop further:

Even if I have not been very active playing the instrument, I went for lessons in my free time. I have started to look also for other instruments. For the first time in my life, it feels possible that I could learn to play several instruments [I9].

It is noteworthy that none of the participants added any adverse or negative notes.

Furthermore, participants report that their interest in music in general (i.e., listening to music and attending concerts) seems to have increased:

This study has raised my interest in music, and I pay more attention to the music I hear. I have taken special notice of not only music for violoncello but also older music. I even attended a concert with Renaissance music; it was quite magnificent [I9].

The second category demonstrates growing confidence and trust in work based on personal abilities. Still, the second category's primary outcome seems to be the positive and activating impact on participants' music making with the help of teamwork. It appears reasonable to argue that the experience of creating music within a non-selected group in a workshop can lead to a further desire to work actively with music because the musical background is not the determining factor (see Johansen, Holdhus, Larsson & MacGlone 2019, 3). It allows for the sensing of an affinity for creating music and hence an essential inner experience.

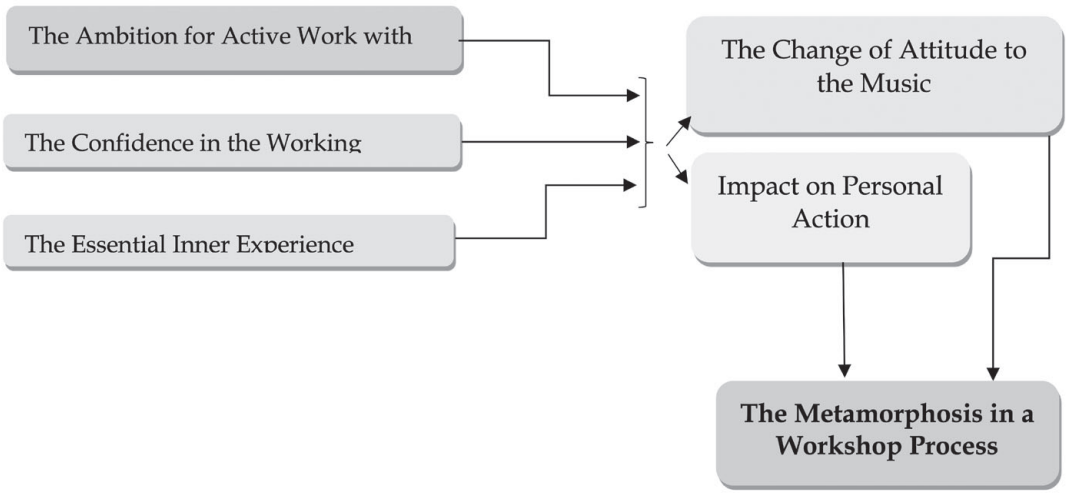

Figure 2. Musical Experience and Workshop Process.

Dealing with Creative Ambiguities

The third main category, The Multiformity of the Teamwork, presents the participants' experiences and aspects in the workshop as a process (Fig. 3). The arguments, as well as the descriptions of the workshop, form three subcategories in this category. If the first main category in this study is labelled as 'being thrown in: negotiating insecurity' and the second as 'an enlightened musical experience', the third main category 'dealing with creative ambiguities' contains a partly contradictory summary of the workshop itself. Experiencing creative musical processes does not correlate with means and structure, together with social collaboration or teamwork. The musical starting point can likely cause uncertainty or insecurity. However, the data of this enquiry does not support that idea. The participants expressed this openly:

> *The power is in the music; we all have the music and rhythm in our body, doing things together and meeting all you people! What else can I say? I can hardly wait for the next time* [I9].

> *I remember the group improvisation in the first place: In the beginning, it seemed to lead nowhere, but luckily one of the team members said that it usually takes about half an hour before the group will find the mutual tune* [I3].

> *Moreover, it happened that after about half an hour, something sprang up* [I2].

Altogether, the participants did not take a stand on to the musical abilities of the individual participants. The dynamic and ambience of the teamwork seem to be determined instead. One of the participants described the team process as follows:

> *Everyone had their ideas about how the word* [tone?] *should sound, and the listening was missing for a long time in our team. However, then the time came to present our exercise, and we did work up something quite different, still functional. Wonderful* [I8].

She continued:

> *I did learn a lot about myself and my relationship to social situations* [I8].

Besides, the team members noticed the dynamics in social behaviour and motivation. One of the participants commented on the motivation as follows:

> *It is a pity if part of the team has the feeling that there is not enough commitment to the study. One needs, of course, humour after a long working or studying week, but one must also have the right attitude for the teamwork* [I4].

Another participant commented:

> *'feel extremely frustrated if the team does not have a collective commitment to the study* [I7].

The motivation was noticed quite strongly and seemed to be a significant observation of the critical views. The teamwork dynamics seem to tolerate the different starting level and musical abilities when the team member has a virile attitude to the work. From accomplished to a novice, the inner sentiment seems to carry out the work if the team's balance is correct and accepted.

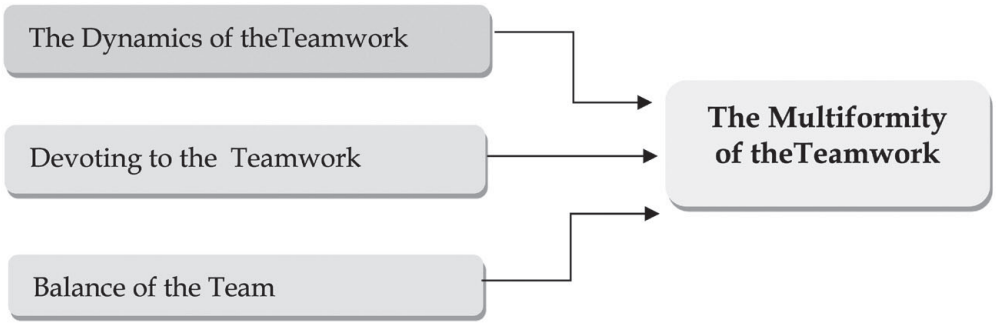

Fig. 3 The Multiformity of the Teamwork

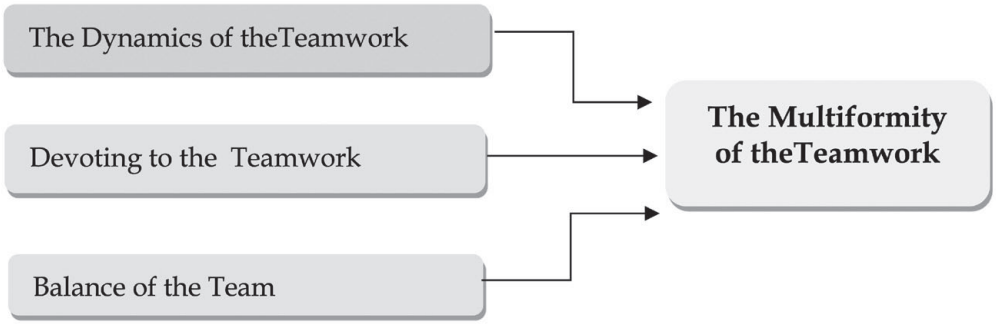

Figure 3. The Multiformity of the Teamwork.

The participants' notes indicate that during the workshop, musical activity was evolving and excitement diminishing. According to the participants' notes, at the beginning of the workshop, the excitement was influenced by music making, partly even in a preventive mode. After the circumstance became familiar, the participants were encouraged to work more open and actively. Therefore, it seems that an increased belief in one's artistic capability creates a positive mood and inspires one to move forward or even to resume musical activity. The increased interest in studying an instrument or even starting a new one is noticeable.

Furthermore, the interest in music in general (i.e., listening to music and attending concerts) seems to have increased. The data indicate that regardless of one's starting level, a learner-oriented individual can benefit from teamwork in a heterogeneous group. Still, the primary outcome from all categories seems to be a positive and activating impact on participants' relation to music making with the help of teamwork. It appears reasonable to argue that the experience of creating music within an indiscriminate team can lead to a further desire to work actively with music.

Discussion

A changing world induces changes in the musical agency; therefore, music education requires variability and wide-ranging flexibility, the ability to move between different musical worlds and thoughts (Johansen, Holdhus, Larsson & MacGlone 2019, 5–7). Karlsen views the one-sided concentration on musical outcomes as problematic and suggests revising the old music education paradigm (Karlsen 2011). The relation to music and music creating is

changing, not least because of intensive digitalisation, which enables various means for this activity (Kosonen 2009). Endowment or aptitude is now involved in music production only as a component in a myriad of different skills. It means changes both in music making and creating in general and a reassessment of the sentiment regarding the approach to music (see, for example, Green 2017, 61–66, Dove 2016; Kanellopoulos & Wright 2012, 146–147).

The results of this study provide insight into how an improvisation workshop can function as a process of developing one's musicality, particularly in a group of participants that do not necessarily enter the activity as holding an identity of a musician. The findings bring out the potential of this working method in fostering sensitive negotiation of one's insecurity, the supporting role of being motivated to work together, and the shared experiences' capacity to renew individual perceptions on one's musicality and creative potential.

The results of this study also highlight the complexity of workshops. Thus, developing and improving the workshop's substance as a working method seems necessary so that it could be a more substantial part of music teacher training and further, could benefit music education in schools. If we observe the guidelines of the FNCCBE 2014, which instruct teachers to take a personal and individual music experience into account and guide the students towards creativity in music, we must understand how improvisation and composing, act in vital roles in this evolution (see Johansen, Holdhus, Larsson & MacGlone 2019, 2–4). According to MacDonald and Wilson (2014), improvisation plays an increasingly essential role in the development of musical agency; therefore, more in-depth reference to work on improvisation in music education is needed (see also Johansen, Holdhus, Larsson & MacGlone, 2019, 3–4; Kanellopoulos & Wright 2012, 146–147). Furthermore, working within a guided team can draw to the surface one's hidden or even repressed musicality, as the results in this paper indicate.

An important observation made during the study was the increased interest in instrument handling among the participants and a readiness to start from the beginning or renew the relationship with music. The capacity of a short workshop to be transformative in terms of one's fundamental attitude towards music suggests that strong, effective and personal experiences during an improvisation workshop may lead to longer-lasting, even to lifelong interests to music, music making and music creating. Improvisation and workshop do naturally not form the only element of FNCCBE 2014, and essential elements include aspects such as music listening, moving with the music and cross-cultural work. However, both improvisation and workshop have, as a method, a long tradition and knowledge in Waldorf education, particularly emphasising the potential of this type of action in supporting the students' discovery of their creative potential. Elements of improvisation in Waldorf education (experiencing consciousness, knowledge, social behaviour and emotional development), as mentioned earlier, may represent working contents, which in the context of free improvisation, could benefit the aims of creative music producing stated in FNCCBE 2014.

According to the Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra (2019), 'Finland needs a lifelong learning policy where the development of skills and competencies is a long-term investment and a source of wellbeing'. Although this statement refers primarily to developing resources in working life, it also emphasises lifelong learning as a source of wellbeing. Recent research has demonstrated that music can act as a vital resource for mood regulation, health and wellbeing, and self-identity management (see, for example, Hargreaves & North 1999; Macdonald, Kreutz & Mitchell 2012; Saarikallio & Erkkilä 2007). This study suggests that free improvisation as a workshop content can lead to an intense experience of making music and further, to the development of a new or reassessed relation to music. Therefore, it is necessary to create educational environments and prospects in which these properties can develop further. ■

Notes

[1] In this study, the designation of Waldorf School is used as a general term of Waldorf Schools worldwide. The term is not pointing to any specific school.

[2] There are 24 Waldorf Schools in Finland and total 1092 schools in 64 countries (Freunde der Erziehungskunst Rudolf Steiner, 2019).

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Abstrakti

Improvisation Workshops and Development of Musicianship. A Study in a Finnish Waldorf Teacher Training College

Artikkelissa tutkitaan steinerkoulun luokanopettajiksi valmistuvien opiskelijoiden näkemyksiä ja kokemuksia improvisaatio- ja sävellystyöpajatoiminnasta musiikin opetuksessa. Aineiston hankinta suoritettiin opiskelijoiden workshop-tyyppisellä kurssilla, jonka avulla saatiin materiaalia työpajatyöskentelyn vaikutuksista ja sosiaalisesta merkityksestä. Tutkimuksen keskiössä oli opiskelijoiden kokemus yhteisöllisen musiikin luomisprosessin vaikutuksesta omaan musiikilliseen kehitykseen. Artikkelissa tarkastellaan vapaan improvisaation ja musiikin omakohtaisen tuottamisen merkitystä musiikin kokemisen ja uuden musiikkisuhteen kontekstissa. Tulosten perusteella voidaan todeta, että musiikin parissa toimiminen tuottaa positiivista latausta mielialan sääntelyyn ja sosiaaliseen kanssakäymiseen. Kokemus mahdollisuudesta tuottaa musiikkia omaehtoisesti saattaa johtaa edelleen musiikin kehittymiseen elinikäisen oppimisen työvälineeksi. Tutkimuksen tulosten perusteella on perusteltua ehdottaa, että improvisaation, säveltämisen ja työpajatyöskentelyn tulisi sisältyä keskeisinä työskentelymuotoina yhä vahvemmin sekä opetussuunnitelman perusteisiin että paikallisten musiikin opetussuunnitelmien sisältöön. ■

Avaintermit: Steinerpedagogiikka, opetussuunnitelman perusteet, workshop, improvisaatio, elinikäinen oppiminen