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This is the submitted version of a paper presented at *Nordisk Nettverk for Musikkpedagogisk Forskning conference, Örebro, Sweden, 21th-23rd of January, 2009.*

Citation for the original published paper:

Lagergren, A. (2009)
What and how do children negotiate in a creative music-making task?.
In: *NNMPF conference in Örebro 21th-23rd of January, 2009*

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:hh:diva-23928

Paper presented at NNMFPF Örebro 2009
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What and how do children negotiate in a creative music-making task?

Introduction

This paper is an attempt to present my PhD project in progress, or at least a very limited piece of the theoretical, methodological ambitions and some preliminary results. The aim of my PhD project is to investigate children's creative music making activity and the conditions that such an activity is surrounded by, focusing on collaborative learning and gender. Previous research of creative music making in Sweden of for example Sundin (1963), Folkestad (1996) and Nilsson (2002) have been focusing the creative learning process from an individual perspective and none of the studies has had a collaborative learning or a gender perspective.

In this presentation I have focused on especially what kind of musical aspects is negotiated between the participating children and which are not? Also what tools they use in their musical communication? The main reason for this approach is an attempt to in my analysis try to find out what it means to be able to create music, what kind of knowledge does such an activity imply? It is obvious that there are a whole lot of studies made concerning collaborative creation of music from a socio-cultural perspective. Young (2005) is one of these researchers that have been studying musical communication in early childhood. Also Green 2008 study children's music-making by focusing on popular music and informal learning. Some studies I have found about this issue deals mostly with creativity and what kind of knowledge is embedded in a creative process see for example Dillon (2004, Ed. Miell & Littleton) who investigated young people's collaborative creative music activities. In this study creative music making was to create music with the software eJay, musical software that allows you to mix samples or pieces of music together into new combinations. The study was carried out in one formal and one non-formal setting, participants were young people age 11-17 years old containing in sum 21 males and 11 females. Data was collected through video and field notes and the dialogues between the children were analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Focus in the study was formal and non-formal contexts, computer-based technologies settings and participant's interaction in the creative work. Knowing or knowledge is in this study treated as shared creative thinking even though musical knowledge

is focused to some extent in the analysis as a category of talk about musical suggestions and musical extensions. The result of Dillon's study that's of importance to my own study is the qualitative illustrations of the kind of talk and creative processes participants engaged in. For this presentation one result of importance in this study is that one of the most common categories of talk was musical suggestions and extensions (Dillon, 2004).

Method

Data was collected through video observations at one occasion with children age 9-12 years old. The design of the study might be described as quasi-experimental; data consists of questionnaires, video recordings and the music that was created by the children. This was during one whole day that was arranged together with a music teacher in a Swedish school of culture (kulturskola). This setting can be described as both formal since the study took place in a school like context, and informal since participation was voluntary and in the participants free time. The task of making music together lasted in sum for 3 hours, Participants were children age 9 to 12, and they were divided into 3 groups. Mixed group consisted of 4 girls and 2 boys. Girl group, 4 girls and boy group, 3 boys. They all have been taking lessons in playing different instruments such as trombone, trumpet and violin, mixed group and boy group had played their instruments about one year and the girl group had played for about five years of time. Almost all of the participants had some time or at least one time created a piece of music themselves.

A room was provided for each group containing instruments and a computer workstation and compositional software (Band in a box). The teacher also offered the participants a musical arrangement or background music that he had made in the software on forehand, to use as a tool for their compositions. The instruction was; use the instruments and facilities in this room and make music together as you want. The activity lasted for one whole day that was arranged with the working teacher. A video camera was placed in every room capturing the ongoing process.

The creation of music lasted for 4 hours with pauses for lunch and play. Then all the pieces of music that was created were recorded in a studio and two hours later there was a concert where the children performed the music they created for their families and friends. The concert was also video-recorded and all participants was given a DVD each containing the studio recorded music and the concert.

Collaborative learning in a creative music-making task

The theoretical perspective that's being used in my thesis is a combination of socio-cultural perspective for example Vygotskij (1978) and an ecological theory Gibson (1986). However, in this presentation the theoretical analysis is limited to only a part of socio-cultural theories.

Knowledge is from a socio-cultural perspective seen as something that appears between human beings that later becomes a part of the individuals thinking and acting. Through the individual the knowledge then appears again in other communicative practice, built in artefacts. Learning is from this perspective something that is always going on in all practises so the question is not if people learn in these practises, instead the question is what they learn according to Säljö (2000). Wertsch (1985) on the other hand writes that Vygotskijs view is that the most important thing to study is the process of learning, or in other words how learning appears. These two points of views can be seen as oppositional where the learning process is in focus but on the other hand the learning outcome is. It's obvious that both of these standpoints is important and interact with each other and where it can be difficult to separate them. So, therefore it seems better to treat them as intertwined.

Learning in a creative music making activity can from this point of view be understood as the resources that each and every participating child possess but also in the social interaction between the children and between the teacher and children. And also the resources that exists in the materiel surrounding, in other words the culture. Culture can in this context be seen as the resources that the participating children and the teacher has acquired through interaction with the surrounding world. These resources can in this context be for example musical ideas, musical values, musical knowledge and other resources such as the instruments and technical equipment in use.

One of the socio cultural terms in learning is appropriation which means that the individual acquire intellectual and manual tools (Vygotskij, 1978). Intellectual tools can in musical learning be seen as the knowledge that in a creative music-making task can for example be the acquiring of musical varieties of tones, rhythm or other qualities of sound. Manual tools can be seen as the acquisition of how to handle the musical artefacts such as the keys on a keyboard or how to use an instrument or computer with musical software.

In order to study collaborative learning in a creative music-making context you have to analyze the ongoing interaction between the children, that is, what they is negotiating and how they negotiate. Then it's possible to identify in this study the musical knowledge that is being learnt and also what tools that's being used in the process.

Analytical tools

In this specific analysis I have chosen to use the following musical aspects as an expression of musical knowledge:

Timbre, the quality of the sound itself

Duration; short or long tone, the length of the sound both in regard to the natural length but also regarding the pattern from a rhythmical aspect in shape of sound and silence.

Dynamics; the character of the sound as strong or weak and how the music develops.

Pitch; the character of a melody in sense of brightness and darkness.

Tempo; how fast or slow the music is.

Texture; the musical content as layers and how close of far from each other the layers are.

Structure, overall the shape of the music as a whole.
(Young & Glover, 1998, sid 27)

In order to describe how the children communicate musical aspects with each other I have chosen to use the terms: Intellectual and manual tools (Vygotskij, 1978).

Intellectual tools are the children's shared experiences of for example pieces of music. Manual tools are the artefacts or physical objects that's available in the context such as instruments or a computer (Ibid).

Result

So what could be observed when analysing the video recordings?

The mixed group and the boy group chose to use the computer with the background music, the girl group chose not to. The difference observed between the groups concerning this choice was that, the mixed group and the boy group never really had any negotiations about this they just used the computer. The girl group on the other hand made an active decision together not to use the computer. One of the girls in the group said "are we going to use the computer?" the other participating girls looked at each other and said, No, we are not.

One of the most common negotiations among the participants was about the music they were creating which in this study is presented as musical aspects. In this presentation it is only possible to scratch the surface and give you a few examples of the negotiations made concerning these musical aspects. The examples have been chosen out of relevance for this presentation and there is a lot more examples that will be presented in my future dissertation.

Pitch, was the main aspect that were negotiated in all three groups of children. Mainly which notes they were going to use in the piece of music they were making. I observed one difference between the groups though. In the mixed and boy group the children communicated the notes not only by their names but also through songs they have in common. In this case the song "Spain" a common piece of music that is learnt by beginners of an instrument was used.

Example 1:
Boy group.
The trumpet boy: "You know "Spain"
Trombone boy 2: Yeah
The trumpet boy: we can start with the same note that "Spain" begins with and then we can go to the note below"

Example 2, negotiating notes by their name:
Mixed group:
Clarinet girl 2: "What should we begin with?"
Clarinet girl 4: "Well, I don´t know, what should we begin with then?"
Clarinet girl 2: Can't we start with Bess, C, D, Bess?"
Trombone boy: "ceff, e, bess e Ptroot"
The girls giggle
All of the clarinet girls: "Can't we start with Bess?"

Tempo, is also being negotiated in some sense in all three groups.
Example 3:
The tools being used in the communication of tempo in the boy group was the computer. When they were listening to the background music negotiating if they were going to play their piece of music two or three times the trumpet boy says, " we do it a little faster" and then he

increases the tempo on the computer. They all start to sing, do, dodo, do and trombone boy 1 start to move, trombone boy 2 says “now it’s even more fun”, trombone boy 1 lifts the trombone to his mouth and start to play while moving at the same time.

Duration; Duration is also negotiated in some sense.
Example 4:
Violin girl 2, “if you first play the melody and then you play….then you play like this, eh some long notes, then you play the melody again” the girls is playing their instruments…violin girl 2 “well we have to decide”, the girls continue to play and violin girl says “we can do it like this” and then she plays, violin girl 1 says “or like this” and plays.

Structure; Structure was also negotiated but only in some sense. Very limited in the mixed and boy group, but in the girl group there was a tendency to this kind of negotiation.

Timbre, dynamics and texture; was not negotiated in the mixed and boy group to any large extent. In the girl group though dynamics and texture were negotiated in some sense.
Example 5:
Dynamics was for example negotiated when the participants in the girl group were writing down their song on a piece of paper and one of the participants says, “are we going to write a bow between these two notes?”
Example 6:
They also tried to play the melody they created with two of the violins starting at D and the other two starting at G. However they did not like how that sounded so they abandoned this idea.

Discussion
In this presentation the musical aspects negotiated between children in a creative music-making task have been focused. The reason for this choice of analysis was to try to find out what it means to be able to create music collaboratively. I also would like to have a discussion whether this is a reasonable analysis to make, if the analytical tools in use are of relevance and useable for that purpose. This very small part of the results presented does show that all the participants possess musical knowledge to some extent with some differences between the groups. The girl group for instance seem to have some more or deeper knowledge about these musical aspects than the other two groups. That may be because the girl group all have been

playing an instrument for a longer period of time than the participants in the two other groups. How they negotiate is also in line with the theoretical suggestions made, such as what tools is used in the negotiations. Intellectual tools in use were for example the song Spain, the name of the notes they know like Bess. Manual tools in use were for example the computer but mainly their own instruments. As in the girl group when they were negotiating the musical aspect duration by playing their instruments.

The results presented was from the first study, next I will also make one more study with children in fourth grade in a formal learning situation. 21 children will participate with their class teacher and their music teacher. The setting and task will be the same as in the first study and it's going to be exciting to se if the results will differ between these two studies.

In my further analysis I'm also going to focus on the gender perspective, it's obvious that there are some gender issues to discuss in this study. This is clear when looking at the kind of negotiations that is being made; the mixed group is different from the boy and girl group as you can see in example 2. Another interesting aspect to have a closer look at is the contextual possibilities and limitations. One thing that was observed was that the created songs were very much like the kind of songs that they play in their instrumental training. This was surprising since I had expected the participants to create maybe popular music, use the computer more in the process and not be limited to their own instruments as much as they were. I wonder if the results will show the same thing in my next study? Some of the participants in this next study may take lessons playing an instrument and some may not, a fact that may implement the results.

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