

Christopher Wallbaum

About Different Cultures in Music Classrooms of Europe. An Exploratory Study

If we talk to people of other countries, it seems to be common course of action, that our countries have comparable grounds and many similarities, but also differences – all in all different cultures. In the year 2010 I showed cuttings of three different music-lessons from different German countries (Wallbaum, 2010)¹. A colleague from the British music-teacher-training centre noticed, that she had never seen something like the “Saxony-Lesson”, but the “Hamburg-Lesson” looked familiar to her. It looks like that similarities and differences are evident everywhere, also in the music classroom. The available study brings up hypothesis about (a) categories to describe music in the classroom, (b) about cultures as different contents of music education of five European countries and (c) hypothesis about interferences between musical and pedagogical cultures in music classrooms generally.

Watching a music lesson on DVD and experiencing hundreds of music lessons generates another kind of knowledge than reading a curriculum on paper. Since the 1960s we have known the term “hidden curriculum” for values, attitudes and knowledge frames, which are embodied in the organization and processes of music lessons in general schools (Jackson, 1968)². But this term sometimes seems to be fixed to the implicit content only (and beyond that talking about its phenomena has a connotation of revelation). So I prefer to talk about “culture” in the meaning of a “set of shared attitudes, values, goals and activities, that characterizes an institution, organization, or group”³. In the field of the Intensive Program “School music in the EU – Learning from Diversity” I had the opportunity to ask the participants for both, watching music lessons on DVD and relating it to their experience during their schooldays. The participants were five groups of music-teacher-students with their lecturers from five European countries, from Sweden, the Netherlands, from Estonia,

¹ Wallbaum 2010 includes three Multi-Angle-DVDs with English subtitles. A repeated investigation in Leipzig 2011 with other students from the same countries confirmed the results, even the results from the german group were more detailed. The results are published in German language only in Wallbaum 2013.

² Zinnecker (1975) called it in German „Der heimliche Lehrplan“.

³ This is an usual meaning of culture. Compare <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture> [Accessed: 28.11.2011]. About different meanings of culture in music education compare Barth, 2008.

Portugal and Germany, altogether about 35 people⁴. We showed all participants short cuts (15 minutes each) of three different music lessons and asked the national groups to choose those lessons, which they regarded as the most similar ones to those they knew from school. Afterwards, the national groups watched the entire selected lesson, discussed it and took notes on the characteristics, on the similarity or difference, compared to the culture of the music lessons, they had experienced at home. Final presentations and discussions with all groups were recorded and transcribed.

Research about Music Education in Europe is in its infancy

Most articles describing and comparing studies about music education in Europe relate only to the guidance for schools and teacher-education⁵. At last the homepage of the “Music Education Network” (meNet) shows a lot of quantitative results. “What we have not explored in detail“, writes the meNet-conclusion (p.13), „is how such guidance translates into the day to day experience of teachers and their students in music lessons“⁶. Speaking about „translating“ can in this case be called a little bit optimistically, because practicing music education includes many cultural elements beyond the written curriculum, which have strong influence to the processes and contents of music education.

It becomes difficult if we try to understand what students and teachers are doing during their lessons in different countries. Watching the examples of practice on the MeNet-homepage, the following points attracted my attention:

- The presentations of the examples are not comparable, because some of them are written about “principles” of teaching and others about examples of “classroom-reality”.

⁴ The Intensive Programme (IP) is funded by Brussel and lasts three years. Each year the participants come together for 12 days. The student-participants change every year. Compare Wallbaum, 2009. The participating teachers of this study in Aveiro were Ene Kangron, Floor Pots, Helena Caspurro, Steffen Reinhold, Christopher Wallbaum and Tommy Lindskog.

⁵ These guidance is often changing, what makes them difficult to interpret (Gall et al. 2010, Malmberg, Sammer, 2010). Lindskog et al. (2007) point out the difficulties to interpret guidance on the internet, which are translated from foreign languages into English: The English versions are often so much shorter than the original one, that there must be an information gap.

⁶ <http://menet.mdw.ac.at/menetsite/english/topics.html?m=1&c=0&lang=en> [Accessed: 28.11.2011]

- Watching the videos about practice you will find almost exclusively “products” of lessons: closing performances of pieces of music, but not of the way to it: of the “process” of the lesson.

What is lacking is: Information about national cultures in music classrooms.

Does it make sense to ask for national cultures in this methodological setting?

We asked ourselves, if this methodological setting would make sense. On the one hand, we speculated, if it was possible, that we perhaps “produced” cultural differences just by asking for national⁷ cultures, even if there was none. But how should four (Portuguese group) to ten (Swedish group) persons have come to common ideas about different national cultures in music classrooms, if these differences did not exist? On the other hand, we discussed two doubts about the validity and reliability of our method: (1) Could showing videos from German lessons divert the attention from central aspects of the own (= validity) – and (2) could six students (on average) plus one lecturer be representative for a national culture in music classrooms (= reliability)? (About 1:) One reason for using the DVDs with German lessons was that they already existed with English subtitles, but, in addition, they allowed to show the same music lessons to all national groups: Relating to the same DVDs makes the results of the national groups more comparable. In fact, every national group focuses on different aspects from their national curriculum, what means that watching the German lesson didn’t draw the attention to the same aspects. (About 2:) Every pupil in the participants’ countries has experienced about 500-1000 music lessons in his/her schooldays. Thinking about this number of experienced music lessons can offer a quantitative accent to this qualitative study, but at least we have to admit, that the study leads to temporary, explorative results⁸.

Apart from their explorative character, the results in fact provide relevant input regarding both: European and general aspects of teaching music in the classroom.

⁷ The word ‚national’ is used in the meaning of ‚from the same country or state’

⁸ Basic assumptions, features and characteristics of qualitative research compare Flick et al. 2010, p. 6-8. Methods about qualitative research with videos specially, as presented by Knoblauch et. al., 2009 or Heath, 2010 seemed to be dispensable, because the videos in this study were less the subject of interpretation, but a stimulus to jog the participants memory of their own lessons.

Resulting and hypotheses about national cultures in music classrooms of Estonia, Germany, Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden

During the 12-days-meeting we had a time frame of approximately four hours to gather the data. In the beginning of the investigation we secured some explicit common things about music education in every European country to prevent the participants from telling about these things:

- **Common Content** (more or less): Singing folk songs in the native and the English language; being accompanied by the teacher on piano or guitar⁹; moving with singing; body percussion (not absolutely common); listening to classical music; elementary theory like names of the tones and basic principles of building minor and major chords.
- **Common methods:** 1. „Frontal teaching“ (= the teacher acts in front of the pupils, who are sitting or standing); 2. Pupils working in groups without teacher (not absolutely common!).

The results about the five investigated national cultures in music classrooms include the following things:

- the posters with theses of each national group,
- the explicit given reasons for choosing one of the videos, which they think to be closest to their own national school music-lessons,
- a table of aspects of culture in the classroom. The five aspects on the right are created from the remarks of the national groups on the left, which they made during their presentation and the following group discussion¹⁰. The creation of the aspects can also be called categories of my hermeneutic interpretation of the poster, of minutes, recording, and transcription of the group discussion and my own knowledge of participation in the Intensive program. The categories (including the hierarchy) are a result, which was built “after” knowing the aspects of “every” national group.

⁹ The results of Gall et al. (2010, p. 14-17) confirm these two common points about Slovenia and England, even if in England in 2009 a government report based on inspections of schools stated that “singing was an area of relative weakness” in secondary schools (p. 15).

¹⁰ For example some remarks about learning by ear, the use of written notes and chord symbols can be seen in relation to the musical style/culture (aspect 2), the use of many 1-3-5-chords can be related to the authenticity of the sound in the classroom (aspect 2). This fuzziness of the border between these aspects seems to be no problem in this phase of investigation.



Still 1.



Still 2.

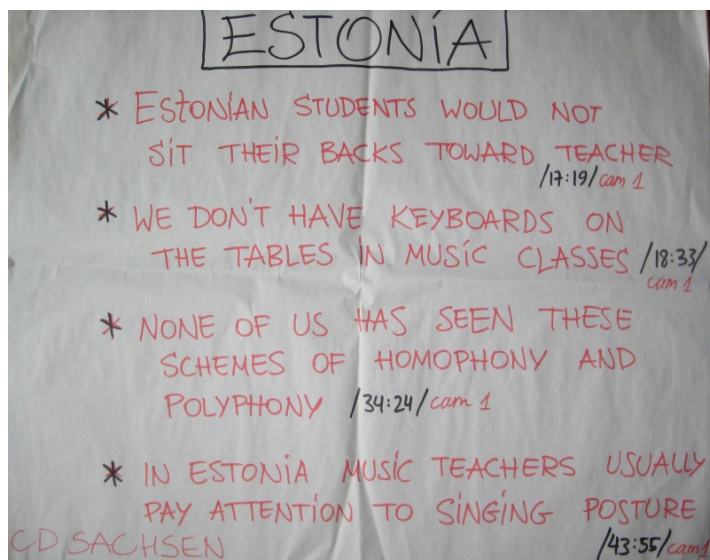


Still 3.



Still 4.

Estonia



Still 1

Still 2

Still 3

Still 4

Reasons for choosing the video of the Saxony-lesson:

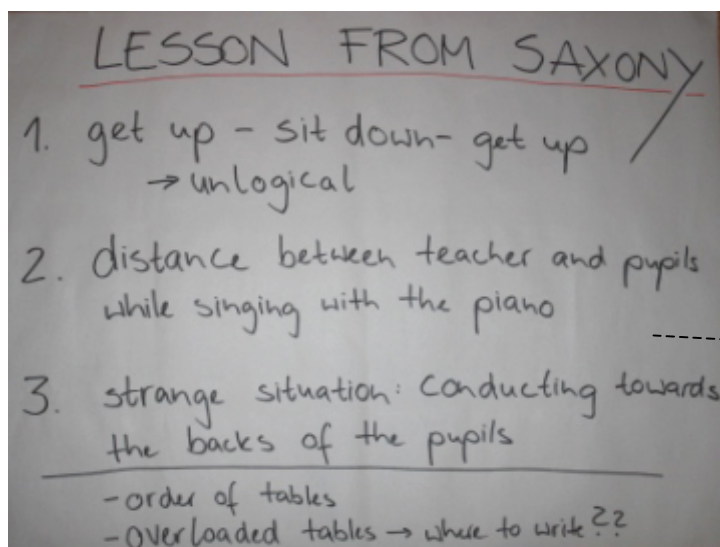
- “We have the same structure of lesson. We start with this warm-up body percussion stuff, we have this theory part, we have the singing part and we have the playing part on instruments. And that’s all in this lesson also”. There are only some differences.

Aspects of the classroom practice in Estonia	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In Estonia, they are always singing and they learn a lot about singing Estonia doesn't have keyboards, sometimes they have a cittern (6-string), a guitar and flutes for the whole class 	1. Instruments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comment¹¹ 	2. Sound/ Style
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The singing posture is very important in Estonia. "Stand straight, and than it's good to sing" ; "And it's not only the singing position, but also playing the piano [...], how to play the flute. You have to have the right posture". "You have to hold the Orff instruments sticks always right, in right positions" Sitting with your elbows on the table would not be acceptable (Compare two girls at their keyboards) 	3. Attitude/ posture/ [Style]
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compare the preceding comment 	4. Interaction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warm-up with singing and body-percussion Never saw the homophony-polyphony-schema 	5. Other aspects of classroom-practice

- The hypothesis about **Estonian** culture in a music classroom (close to the Saxony-lesson): The characteristic lesson is very close to the Saxonian one, but there are some differences: The body posture when it comes to singing or playing an instrument is far more stressed. The approach seems to be closer to old as well as to new „classical“ music (including improvisation) than to popular music.

¹¹ Comment: Perhaps it is possible to derive cultural aspects about the vocal sound (aspect 2) and/or about the typical interaction (aspect 4) in the Estonian classrooms, even if nobody talked about it explicitly? If we imagine the sound of voices in the described posture "stand straight" we can ask: Is it possible to derive the musical style from it? In opposition to the Swedish "laid back" "stand straight" looks like a classical singing posture, but I heard Estonian students sing at the IP and they sang in different, not only classical styles. But perhaps it's possible to derive something about aspect 4 (Interaction): Imagine, how you can teach "stand straight"; I imagine a teacher in front of the class in the manner of a conductor: He/She shows the posture, looking astonished with the larynx down, the student tries to imitate and the teacher-conductor controls. There seem to be an interference. Perhaps a further investigation can proof these aspects.

Germany



The participants from Germany decided to give notimecodes for stills with two reasons: Thesis 1 cannot be shown on a still, 2 and 3 can be shown on lots of stills. *Stills 2 and 4 could give starting points to thesis 2 and 3, CW.*

Reasons for choosing the video of the Saxony-lesson:

The German students come from different German countries and therefore have different experiences with practice of music in the classroom¹². But the Saxony-lesson comes closest to their experience in general.

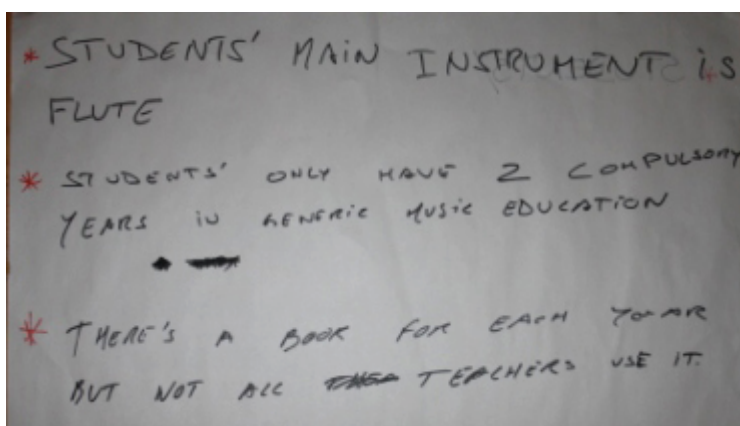
Other than the Saxony-lesson, the group of Germans didn't find common aspects of music lessons in the different countries (Remember, that the Hamburg- and Thuringia-Lesson are German too). But they discussed some critical points of the Saxony-lesson concerning interaction and the lack of communication in the classroom.

¹² From Saxony (3), Berlin (2) Saxony-Anhalt (1), Baden-Württemberg (1), Lower Saxony (1)

Aspects of the classroom practice in Germany	
	1. Instruments
	2. Sound / Style
	3. Attitude / posture / [Style]
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical view of the forms of interaction in the classroom from different aspects. In general they see a great distance between teacher and pupils. • It's not always clear, why pupils have to stand up and sit down. • The furnishing of the classroom brings the teacher into the back of the pupils (tables, keyboards, instruments). • Too many instruments, which are not used, fill the space and obstruct interaction in the classroom. 	4. Interaction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do we need desks in the music room? Is it necessary for pupils to write a lot in a music lesson? 	5. Other aspects of classroom-practice

- The hypothesis about **German** culture in a music classroom (close to the Saxony-lesson): The majority of lessons is close to the Saxon one. So the central content is classical music along with written notes. The concept of music seems to be less problematic than the way of interaction in the classroom.

Portugal:



The participants from Portugal decided to give notimecodes for stills. Perhaps still 3 could give a relation to the reasons, that they gave for choosing the Saxony-lesson, CW.

Reasons for choosing the video of the Saxony-lesson:

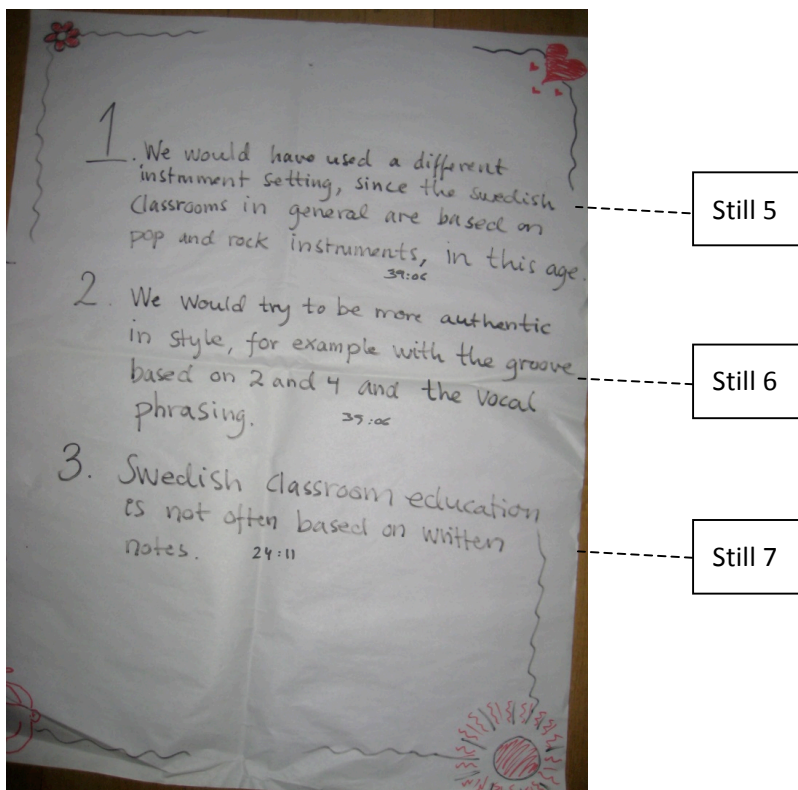
- Pupils at the age of 10/11 and older don't get compulsory music education at school in Portugal. So the Portuguese participants cannot compare the lessons with any lesson they experienced directly. But two elements of the Saxony-lesson gave them starting-points: Orff-instruments (typical for generic music education) and talking about music without listening or making music.
- This is currently changing towards an increased playing of music together.

Aspects of the classroom practice in Portugal	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No concrete aspects, because there is no music in the classroom corresponding to the age of the pupils in the examples 	

The hypothesis about **Portuguese** culture in a music classroom (close to the Saxony-lesson): The practice of music education is not really comparable with any of the three examples, because the compulsory music education ends at the age of 10 or 11. The national group remembered later lessons with only talking about music, without playing any music, but – allow me to say this in a little bit poetic way – the times of this old fashion style of music education, they are changing.



Sweden:



Reasons for choosing the video of the Thuringia-lesson:

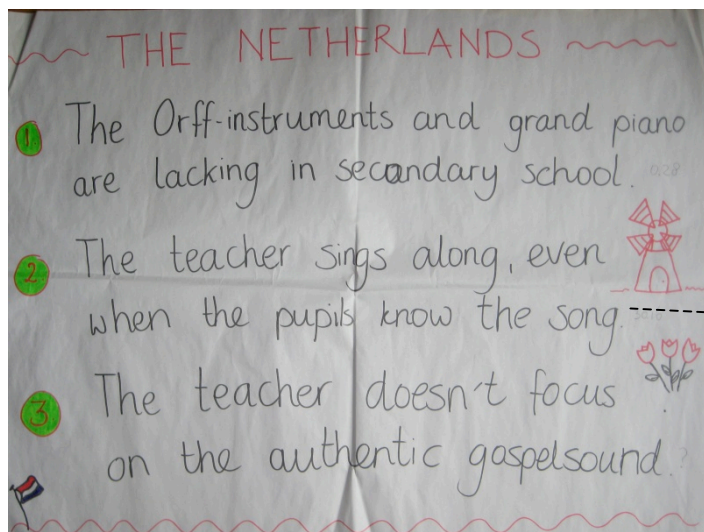
- The lesson in whole.
- The seating plan.
- The laid-back attitude of the teacher.

Aspects of the classroom practice in Sweden	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music in Swedish classrooms is based on Pop- and Rock-Instruments in this age of the pupils. (Thesis 1) • Very rarely Orff-Instruments, if they have any, they are broken . • Many guitar and/or keyboard classes (25 instruments); it depends on the teacher's instrument. 	1. Instruments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to be more authentic. (Thesis 2) Video: No gospel-vocals; the beat doesn't sound right; Gospel with Orff-Instruments sounds wrong. • Better to check first, which style of music is to be played, and only then select the instruments. 	2. Sound / Style
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laid-back attitude of the teacher. 	3. Attitude / posture / [Style]
	4. Interaction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swedish classroom education is often not based on written notes. (Thesis 3) • Many songs are taught and learned by ear. • More chord symbols instead of written notes. Many 1-3-5 chords. • "Often when we teach songs, [...] we teach the whole class", everyone learns everything and than you choose. 	5. Other aspects of classroom-practice

- The hypothesis about **Swedish** culture in a music classroom (close to the Thuringia-lesson): The style of popular music sets the tone for the music educational practice. Pupils learn by ear, use less written notes and more chord-symbols, they play band instruments and the attitude of the teacher is laid-back, close to the attitude of pop-musicians¹³.
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¹³ Compare the meNet-conclusion p. 13: „With a few exceptions jazz and popular music is included but not given the same emphasis as art music. Sweden is the only country, where the curriculum makes no reference to any particular styles or musical traditions“.

Netherlands:



The participants from Netherland didn't give timecodes for stills different from the Swedish. *Thesis 1-3 could be related to Stills 5, 8 and 6, CW.*

Reasons for choosing the video of the Thuringia-lesson:

It is closer to the known Dutch practice than the other two examples (Hamburg and Saxony).

Aspects of the classroom practice in the Netherlands	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orff-instruments and grand piano are lacking in secondary schools. (Thesis 1) Orff instruments only in primary schools • Never had such nice grand piano, only pianos with a sound "like an off-tune pillow" • Keyboards + guitars + bass + drums (combo-instruments, 	1. Instruments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holland: more concentration on the sound of the genre. Teacher on Video doesn't focus on the authentic gospel-sound (Thesis 3). • i. e. Rock-vocal more deep and rough, classically more high and lighten 	2. Sound/ Style
	3. Attitude/ posture/ [Style]
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher should not put himself in the center. • Dutch students learn: don't sing along with the pupils, listen instead! German teacher in the video is always singing. (Thesis 2) 	4. Interaction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holland has not a strict curriculum. There's not "the one" 	5. Other aspects of

<p>Dutch style.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone learns every instrument for a short time, afterwards they play with different instruments 	classroom-practice
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- The hypothesis about the **Netherlands** culture in a music classroom (close to the Thuringia-lesson): The style of practice in the classroom seems to be similar to the Swedish, but its content is less orientated on popular music. The focus of interaction between teacher and pupils seems to be close to the German concept.

Interferences between musical and educational cultures in the classroom

The outcome of this investigation can be reflected in different respects. On one hand the investigation shows some common and different aspects of culture(s) in a music classroom more in depth. The result cannot be generalized as a quantitative result but rather as a reasonable hypothesis. On the other hand – and that’s what I want to reflect upon in this part - we got four relevant aspects of music education in the classroom on which music educators concentrate. These aspects are:

1. Instruments,
2. Sound and musical style,
3. Attitude and posture,
4. Interaction.

At first sight this diagnosis only seemed to be interesting, because i.e. from 12 German music education scientists, who watched the same videos through the “glasses” of their theory of music education, only three referred to the instruments, the sound and music style in the classroom (Wallbaum, 2010). On closer inspection, these four aspects, which are the result of simply gathering, show music-lessons in the tense atmosphere between different ways of life. Both, musical and educational “cultures” refer to ways of life (which include philosophies of life, in other words ideologies)¹⁴. In this study the tense atmosphere can be

¹⁴ The connection between musical culture and ideas of life has been investigated not only in “cultural studies” about youth culture, experimental and classical music (Frank Hentschel 2006). For a concept of “cultural

exemplary substantiated in the “posture” of teachers and students. The Swedish group marked the “laid-back” style of the teacher as significant for similarity between the Thuringia-lesson and Swedish lessons, the Estonian group marked differences to the Saxony-lesson with some advice to the posture: “Stand straight”, “You have to have the right posture”. Beyond this some remarks about “learning by ear” (Sweden) can be taken as another example of cultural interference. They can be related to popular music as well as to theories about learning music in general¹⁵.

Which of the notes is referred to the musical, which to the educational culture? The German group of students only reflected furnishing and interaction in the classroom. “Do we need desks in the music room?”, “Is it necessary for pupils to write a lot in a music lesson?”, “It’s not always clear, why the pupils have to stand up and sit down.” Of course it’s not difficult to find correspondences between styles of interaction in both musical and educational cultures. For example, interaction between an orchestra and the conductor isn’t essential symmetrical or democratic. So how can we teach this musical culture simultaneously with teaching responsibility or democracy? It will be possible, but we should be aware of traps.

Music’s cultural aspect	Field of cultural interference in the classroom	Education’s cultural aspect
i.e. learning by ear i.e. stand straight i.e. laid-back	} The meaning of practice }	} i.e. learning by ear i.e. stand straight i.e. laid-back

Thinking about cultures in a music classroom doesn’t only bring up interferences between musical and educational cultures, but also between different musical cultures. In the

psychology” an alignment with the Vygotskian tradition tends to be a common component: “In short, we cannot separate mind and cognition from culture and context, values and beliefs, and a culturally mediated identity.” (Barrett 2011, p. 3). The *philosopher* Martin Seel (2005) brings out a “korrespondive” or atmospheric mode of *aesthetic* perception (beside two other modes). He establishes, that when we perceive something, a sound, a posture, a fashion, a room, a work of art, a landscape, an atmosphere, etc. with the attention focused on its “korrespondive” meanings, we envision and open up ways of living.

¹⁵ Compare also the Swedish remarks about using chord symbols instead of written notes, just as the use of many 1-3-5-chords. They all can be related to musical as well as to educational cultures (Think about the Middle Ages for example, when music was a science.).

Thuringia-lesson you can see correspondences to three musical cultures: classic, pop and gospel (Wallbaum, 2010, p. 107-112)¹⁶. Perhaps music teachers can do that on purpose. It depends on the concept of music in our concept of music education: Does it implicitly follow one musical culture (as a hidden curriculum of music education) or is it (implicit or explicit) monocultural, hybrid, or intercultural?

Cultural interference between different musical and/or musical and educational cultures seems to be a field, which should get more attention in reflecting and teaching music and music education.

Outlook

The investigation shows, that referring to music lessons on DVD in combination with group discussions brings up other important results about music education than other methods of research. From this study I can see two ways going forward to further research. One leads to the concrete structure and content of national cultures in music classrooms in Europe. The theses of this investigation about national cultures in music classrooms should become verified, completed and/or corrected and our corresponding knowledge should find its way into national and European curricula and concepts of music pedagogy competence. The other way leads into models and theories about music education in general. They would have to depict the way, how both educational and musical cultures produce interferences, which complicate the tasks of music education and can be discerned and shown in the classroom.

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¹⁶ About (spaceous) educational culture in mathematics classroom compare Angier, Povey, 1999. The German musicologist and music educator Wolfgang Martin Stroh (2010) – in alignment with the Vygotskian tradition - makes a difference between 4 realities (“Wirklichkeiten”) in the meaning of cultures of music in the classroom: (1) the initial reality of a piece of music, (2) the history of its reception, (3) its reality in allday life of the pupils and (4) its reality in the classroom.

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