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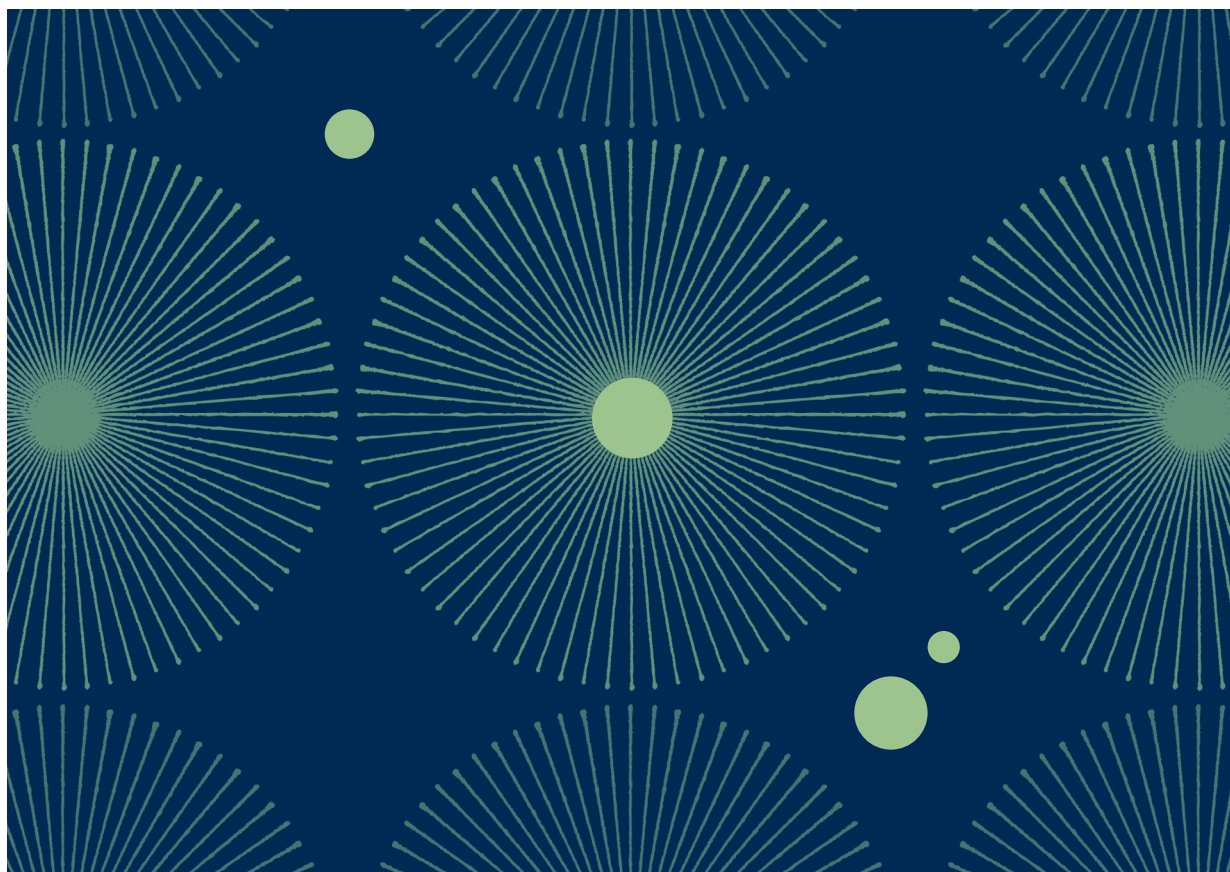
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# Music and visual research – inclusive learning environments and the shaping of time and space

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## Abstract

The paper explores the potential of video ethnography concerning educational research *on music as contributing to an inclusive learning environment in elementary school* (research objective). In music education research, the use of visual data provided by video seems to be a relevant choice of method, because music as a school subject encompasses multiple ways for the pupils to participate and interact in the learning environment, and music itself provides a whole set of complex linguistic rules that will escape traditional observation and interview methods in ethnographic research. Therefore, ethnographic video observation was chosen as a way of handling complex data and analysing complex interaction. Preliminary analyses of the findings indicates the ability of music to both contain and express experiential, sensory, emotional and cognitive complexity in ways that allow for differences in participation. In the video material from our study, the pupils do participate in a wide range of ways, from sitting with closed eyes over listening to their class-mates singing to engaging in the activity as a rock star on stage. The analysis of video data indicates that, paradoxically enough, the complex nature of music may create exactly the space for containing pupils' differences in participation-and-learning styles, and maybe even expressing other complexities of the children's experiences in school.

**Keywords:** Music Education, Inclusive Learning Environments, Elementary School

## Introduction and Background for the Study

Over recent years, the concept of inclusive teaching and learning has gained interest within educational pedagogies (Petersen, 2015; European Agency, 2015). The intense political interest in education as an important means of economic growth and competitiveness between nation states is correlated to an interest in societal coherence and stability, and in a world with increasing mobility and migration, education seems to become a means of securing this coherence and stability:

“Education and training have a crucial role to play in meeting the many socio-economic, demographic, environmental and technological challenges facing Europe and its citizens today and in the years ahead” (European Council, 2009).

Since the educational systems are regarded as contributing to individual nations’ competitiveness, *inclusive education* seems to be one way of conceptualising the goal of social coherence, economic growth and societal stability. However, the focus on inclusion in education does not only relate to economic arguments, but also bases itself in a humanistic human rights perspective, e.g. with reference to the Salamanca Declaration. The right to participate in education is emphasised, regardless of social, economic, ethnical, cultural, and religious backgrounds, and regardless of physical or mental disabilities (Prince & Hadwin, 2013).

In this briefly sketched educational climate, pedagogies, approaches and methods that may support inclusion become of great importance. It is, however, often unclear what is implied in the term inclusion and inclusive education. The concept of inclusion has strong roots in cognitive educational research, where the focus is on how to contain and handle pupils with special education needs in a school setting ( ). This research is directed on developing knowledge on how to strengthen the individual pupils’ weaknesses in e.g. concentration, and on compensating for learning problems and ‘insufficient’ preconditions in the individual child – in other words what could be termed a deprivation approach to inclusion (Prehn & Fredens, 2011). In opposition to this, more recent psychological research has pupils’ perceived ‘sense of school belonging’ (SOSB) as its focal point (Prince & Hadwin, 2013). SOSB is correlated with inclusion as one of the signs of social integration of pupils in a learning environment. The sense of belonging develops from an emotional experience of being accepted, respected and supported by the social environment (Prince & Hadwin, 2013). One area, which has been gaining interest in the latter respect, is music.

## Music in school

Traditionally, the subject of music has played a central role as a unifying and educating activity, contributing to the formation of the child’s character within societal norms (Nielsen, 2010). Later, in the 1970ies, music was seen as a liberating force, contributing to societal change. Recent research sees music as contributing with a much broader potential for creating learning environments

with multiple possibilities for the students to participate, express themselves and lay foundations for learning in general. In a socio-cultural learning perspective, music can be understood as cultural production, where aspects like identity building within a community, building of social belonging etc. also can be found (Lines, 2009). When looked upon in an inclusive learning perspective, music may therefore contribute to emphasise an intersubjective aspect of learning processes and learning environments

Over the last two decades however, music seems to be struggling with a reputation of being, at best, an ornamental, recreational or even relaxing activity for students during a hard school day, or, at worst, superfluous and therefore not of value in a school system that needs to compete on 'hard measures' such as math or science (Bamford, 2006).

Never the less, other cognitive paradigms of research have studied learning effects of music on children's brains, investigating pupils with learning disorders and disabilities and their benefits from music (Prehn & Fredens, 2011). This research borrows insights from music therapy, and focuses on the so-called work memory, stating that insufficient work memory is one factor that impedes learning for children with psychological disorders or other inhibitory conditions for learning. Occupying themselves with music seems to help pupils and students with learning disabilities or disorders increasing their work memory. From this point of departure, the conclusion is that music can help these pupils to improve learning content matter in school (Prehn & Fredens, 2011). Other research fields attempt to measure music's effect on the brain and learning abilities, using natural science methods, with great success in establishing scientific evidence of music's positive effects on the brain (Vuust et al. 2012), but with limited effect on the actual status and role of music in education (Bonde, 2010).

This indicates that there is a basic need to investigate and discuss, if music, as a phenomenon and as a school subject, has been studied in a way that corresponds with the complexity of its interactive, social and emotional aspects, and its dynamics in a social environment. The need of a complexity-containing data collection and analysis method is even stronger when we want to study the complex correlation between music and pupils' sense of belonging and inclusion, in this case a learning environment in elementary school. The development of methods that are able to capture, examine and document the effects of music education in a broader, pedagogical perspective seems to be highly relevant. Therefore, this paper will explore the potentials of video observation in an ethnographical framework as one suggestion for a way to study music as contributing to inclusive learning environments.

## Method for data collection: video-ethnographic approach

According to Raudaskosi, it is important to embrace the ethnographic nature of studying social relations, and when it comes to studying music as contributing to inclusion in the learning environment, it is furthermore necessary to consider the multimodality of this question (Raudaskosi, 2010). The multimodal perspective is a consequence of asking whether music can contribute to inclusive learning environments. This research question implies music as an agency in the social relations in the classroom, and this agency as having an interactive, social function. This in itself makes video ethnography relevant, but there are more agencies implied in the research question, that underscores the relevance. The musical agency is initiated by the teacher by means of her actions, and by the environment, the music room with its instruments and space for movement. The musical agency is also played out by the pupils, with their bodies and their voices as contributing to the social interaction. This complex interaction between the room, the teacher, the pupils and the music is attempted captured by means of a course of lessons, where the teacher had planned that a 4<sup>th</sup> grade class should write their own song.

The video-observations were recorded by my colleague Christopher Harter in a successive number of music lessons devoted to writing this class-song. The teacher was a song-writer herself. Based on this, she had worked out a thoroughly scaffolded and structured lesson plan with well-defined tasks for the pupils:

1. Lesson one: Creating a text for the chorus, based on a process generating ideas and keywords on a theme for the song
2. Lesson two: Creating a melody for the verse, based on recorded harmonies that were distributed on the school's internal web-server
3. Lesson three: Creating a text for the verse, based on the key-words from lesson one
4. Lesson four: Putting all the parts for the song together

The teacher prepared the pupils for the course of lessons by recording herself singing the chorus melody while playing the harmonies, and recording the harmonies of the verse.

The first, rough round of video analysis of the many hours of material was executed by my colleague Christopher Harter with the aim of selecting situations in which the pupils' interplay with each other and the teacher was framed by the music agency in the music classroom. These video selections were analysed by me by means of a field work-inspired meaning condensation



form (please see below), building on the basic ethnographic approach that the individual situation is a particular case of the general phenomenon that is being studied (Raudaskosi, 2010). Therefore, the video analytical tool is to explain the particular case or situation in light of the general understanding of the phenomenon (ibid). In this case, the video material was watched and analysed by me, using a structured video-observation form that was based on the following themes and research questions:

Pupils' learning and participation (theme 1):

- Are they contributing with ideas to the song writing? Are they singing/playing?
  - Do they seem to be able to feel free in the activities?
  - Signs: body language, relaxed or tense tone of body, voice, facial expression
- Pupils' interactions (theme 2):

- Do the individual pupils' contributions seem valued by the class-mates? The teacher?
- Do the pupils build on each others' ideas for the song (immediate recognition and appreciation of each other by means of music)?
- Signs: body language, relaxed or tense tone of body, voice, facial expression

Apart from the video material, the study also brings group interviews with selected pupils (executed by my colleague Christopher Harter) as well as an explorative research interview with the music teacher into use (Brinkmann, 2012). Based on this, I will outline a preliminary finding from the study on music's potentials for building inclusive learning environments in a 4th grade-class in a Danish elementary school. The example is one out of many, but it is chosen to show the potentials of using video-recording and video observation as a method for analysing correlations between music activity and inclusive learning environments.

## Music, Complexity and Participation

The finding relates to music as containing complexity and inviting to participation as an including potential, which stands out from the multimodal nexus analysis of the video material. While the music structures time and space (Green, 2009), the pupils seem to participate in a wide range of ways, from sitting with closed eyes, listening to their classmates singing to engaging in the activity as a rock star on stage. In this interplay between the music structure and the pupils' participation, the video material furthermore captures the correlation between the pupils' varied expressions of participation and the music

teacher's way to frame the song-write-activity in a way that invites the pupils to engage in many different roles. She provides and acknowledges the roles of composer, arranger, listener/audience, player/singer (enacting), analyst, and interpreter (see also Burnard, Dillon, Rusinek & Sæther, 2008). All of these pupil roles in relation to music seems to provide with a wide range of opportunities for engagement, learning, participation and subsequently be a potential for development of inclusive pedagogy. Furthermore, the video material indicates the ability of music to both contain and express experiential, sensory, emotional and cognitive complexity in ways that allow for differences in participation. As one of the pupils states in the focus group interview:

"I think that we respect each other more in music, because you have to – or else you cannot play or sing together. It feels better, because music makes everybody happy, and everybody can participate" (Pupil, 4th grade)

This statement together with the video analyses points to the preliminary conclusion that, paradoxically enough, the complex nature of music may create the space for containing and maybe even expressing other complexities of the children's experiences in school (Green, 2008). The video analysis shows the complexity of music as inviting to different roles and different kinds of engagement for the pupils, allowing for multiple ways of participation and learning.

## **The body and multiple possibilities of participation and learning in music**

An interesting aspect of the video ethnographical approach is its ability to capture the bodily roots of music, and the interplay between sound, time structure and the pupils' and the teacher's bodies. The video material underscores how the pupils' outset to understand or to respond to music is bodily, when we see the pupils *listening* carefully to the teacher playing and singing the chorus of the song. When the fundamental bodily activity in respect of music is listening, it means that the pupils use their ears as primary sensory receiver of impressions of the sounds of the music (Green, 2008), and this is seen in the video material, when the pupils are sitting calmly on their chairs with their heads and eyes turned towards the teacher. Afterwards, carrying out musical activity, imitating the teacher, adds to the bodily involvement, as the pupils' voices and kinaesthetic interaction with instruments become parts of participation in singing or playing (Lines, 2009), and in the video, we see and hear the pupils

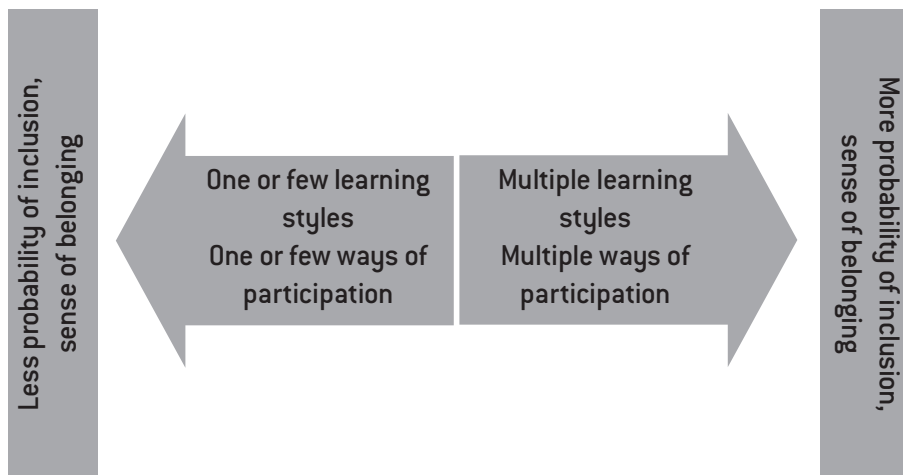
repeat what the teacher just sang and played. In respect of inclusion, this bodily outset for participation seems to be of value, as it creates ways of participating and learning in the classroom that are different than the cognitive, verbal and academic. This corresponds *with the video observations, where both teacher and pupils interact* by means of musical tools – they use the pulse, harmonies, melody and rhythms as a social interplay, imitating and responding to each other within the musical agency (Burnard, Dillon, Rusinek & Sæther, 2008), which creates space for the pupils that may not be verbally strong.

## **Discussion and conclusion: Music, Meaning Making and Inclusion**

These findings, based on the video observation and analysis within an ethnographic approach to knowledge creation, provides with insights that will be discussed in light of a socio-cultural understanding of music as creation of meaning. In this perspective, music can be understood as a cultural means of understanding and engaging with the world within schools and local communities (Bruner, 1997). Music thus provides multimodal opportunities of communicating by means of musical expressions, conveyed and understood by means of tones, harmonies, rhythms and melodies (Bruner, 1997) – music is seen as a tool for creating meaning in the situation. The inherent creation of meaning refers to the personal, experiential dimension of music observed in the video material, in which the pupils' responses to specific music are socially and culturally coded. Pedagogies that not only focuses on the analytical and performative aspects of music, but also on creation of meaning as a way to participate and learn within music, enhances the chances of engaging pupils in personal, experiential exploration within musical *expression* (Green, 2008). This experiential approach invites to tolerance for individual, emotion-based meaning making within music (as well when sensing music as when practicing and performing music), which may allow the pupils to participate and learn individually, and to develop a sense of belonging within the school culture as outlined by Prince and Hadwin. In this discussion, the inclusive potentials of music are beginning to contour.

What we can learn from the video analysis of the agency of music as creating multiple roles and opportunities for learning is consequently, that if learning environments are created with variation in opportunities for participating and learning, the potential diversity and variety of the pupils' learning predispositions, conditions for learning and learning styles can be embraced and valued. This means that learning cultures that invites to, allow and reward

more than just one or few ways to learn, and more than just one or few ways to participate, creates the potential to encompass diversity and increase the sense of school belonging. It follows the other way round that a school culture that invites to, facilitates, and rewards only one or a few ways to learn and participate may be of risk of creating exclusive learning environments, where only the pupils meeting the specific ways of participation and learning may develop a sense of school belonging and identity within the school culture (Bruner, 1997; Prince & Hadwin, 2013). This is simplified in the following figure:



**Figure 1:** *Inclusive pedagogy continuum (Jensen, 2017)*

This suggests that music may contribute to creating socially inclusive learning environments, if multiple ways of participation and learning are recognised and emphasised. In this sense, music may contribute to the development of a sense of belonging in class and school culture.

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