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Dialogue possibilities in guided autonomous music studies in class-teacher education in Finland

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Abstract

This study investigates the kinds of issues dialogical perspective can reveal among teacher students in different learning environments and how different learning environments talk to each other. This qualitative study is based on Burbules' (1993) theory of dialogue. The research sample consists of teacher educators' (authors) discussions with one student and with groups of students during and after music lessons as well as teacher students' responses to a semi-structured questionnaire. This paper considers the recognized needs in the guiding process and addresses some critical incidents in that process as a model that teacher educators can apply to other subjects.

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1. Introduction

This paper presents a study of class-teacher education in Finland focusing on music as one of the subjects that incoming class-teachers are supposed to be able to teach (Government Decree, 2004). In class-teacher education, students have to pass an aptitude test. Nonetheless, the test does not include any sections about different school subjects. Music is one of the subjects that require training in various skills. For example, the new national curriculum for basic education in Finland, "National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014" (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014), specifies the following skills for music education: singing, listening, playing instruments, composing or interpreting music using a means of expression (for example of voice, sports, pictures or technology). In written and spoken feedback, teacher students, even qualified class-teachers, have often expressed uncertainty, and even fear, about teaching music (Hietanen and Koiranen, 2014; Ruismäki and Tereska, 2008). Thus, how to motivate students who are afraid of learning and teaching music is a critical issue. There seems to be a need for intrinsic motivation (Corno, 2008). In order to enhance the intrinsic motivation of teacher students, it is essential to consider how teacher educators encourage their students to consider what they like about and deem significant in their own experiences with music (Reeve et al., 2008; Ryan and Deci, 2000). This leads teacher educators to address the principles of dialogue in reflective situations (Burbules, 1993; Valli, 1997).

This study is based on the observations and experiences of music teacher educators (the authors) who have taught class-teacher students for several years. Additionally, the authors have collected feedback through semi-structured questionnaires that were distributed after most of the music courses they taught. In this study, the main data was obtained from an interview conducted in June 2015 in which one fifth year teacher student revealed how he found meaningful material that he could use in order to learn how to play the piano. This case is described as an impulse and a reason to focus on the teacher educators' guiding process from a dialogue approach. The way in which a teacher student becomes motivated to learn by finding meaningful material is seen as one of the basic needs and requirements in a class-teacher student's music education path; for example, Ruismäki, Juvonen and Lehtonen (2012) wrote about a student who learned how to play the guitar through the Internet. In this current paper, some critical incidents in teacher educator guiding will be addressed based on the interview with one student as well as some previous feedback and the findings from prior research studies.

2. Hermeneutics, dialogue and reflection forming the theoretical framework

Contextual hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1997) is the methodological approach used in this research study because its starting point is the social space and the group's account of studying music. While this approach is both practical and based in real-life experiences, it seeks to promote openness, which, according to Gadamer (1997), essentially belongs to people's reciprocal relationships. Gadamer (1997, p. 361) refers to this open approach as the "highest type of hermeneutical experience". The theoretical frame of reference for this research is based on Bruner's (1996) cultural psychological approach. Bruner (1996) emphasizes the importance of speech in collaborative learning, and notes that the mind is not only naturally active, but tends to seek dialogue and discourse with other active minds. Barrett (2011) also suggests that, in music education, the mind and cognition cannot be separated from the culture, context, values, beliefs and culturally-mediated identity. She points out that, from a cultural psychological perspective, any event can be interpreted in many different ways, depending on the different cultural contexts in which it occurs. According to Barrett (2011), the cultural psychological approach to music education provides opportunities to more deeply examine music education practices in order to understand the role that culture plays in' musical learning and thinking. Barrett (2011) describes the cultural psychological agenda as a means by which to illustrate the variety of ways in which cultural practices, meanings and human activities are interconnected and how they are strengthened and sustained by each other.

St. John (2006) suggests that, if the teaching agenda begins with the child's perspective, that is, if the child's interpretation of the teacher-defined task is honored, scaffolding will lead both the teacher and the student to a new place not yet known to either partner. We believe that the teaching agenda position taken by St. John (2006) is relevant when applied to music education in the class-teacher education with adult students. In other words, this unknown place would be a place somewhere *between* (Buber, 1970) the participants. Buber (1970) also notes that, in dialogue, equality between the participants is essential (see also Valli, 1997). Kent and Taylor (2002) state that

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