Music in school and the life project.
Music in upper secondary schools
as part of young people's identity construction

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Introduction

In Sweden there has been a shift in the view of music as a school subject, from an "aesthetic perspective" towards an "anthropological view", that is, from a strict perspective on musicality as something for the chosen ones to elaborate, towards a relativistic view where musicality is for everyone to acquire, based on experience and grounded in the understanding of music in different contexts. It is important for music as a school subject in Sweden to emphasise creativity, to successively develop a more personal and aesthetic awareness, and to incorporate personal modes of expression. This is done to a great extend by letting the pupils play music, using electro-and acoustic ensemble instruments and repertoire from popular music.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how pupils apply and perceive music in school environments as a part of their identity. Part of the study highlights the relationship between music activities at school and in leisure time. My research questions are:
   • How do pupils relate to music in school versus in leisure time?
   • What function does musical education at school have in the pupils' lives?
   • What importance do music and musical education have in the pupils' construction of identity?

Theoretical framework

This study needs a theoretical framework that consists of theories about young people's situations in contemporary society. I decided to draw partly on late- and post-modern theories, and partly on the idea that we construct our knowledge and identity in interaction with other individuals in a social context. This study also includes aspects of media, music and identity, which are used in youth culture and in (Swedish) music education research.

Some characteristic features of late and post-modernity are *reflexivity* (Beck, 2000; Giddens, 2002; Habermas, 2003; Ziehe, 2003), *individualization* and *dissolution of traditional social forms of living* (Beck, 2000; Giddens, 2002; Ziehe, 2003), and a *condensation of time and space* (Giddens, 2002; Hargreaves, 1994). This requires individuals to appear as *genuine, unique* and *authentic,* and to respond to *choices and opportunities.*

Individuals construct knowledge and identity in a social context, in the interaction of people and surroundings and their use and development of mediating tools (Dysthe, 2003; Säljö, 2000). Identity and knowledge are thus not situated inside a person or in the external world but exist in the interface of these. Lev Vygotskij argues that social interaction is the foundation for learning and personal development and not merely surroundings for individual processes (Dysthe & Igeland, 2003b). Creativity, according to Vygotskij, progresses by

acquiring skills, knowledge and experience, and consequently creativity increases over time (Vygotskij, 1998).

> Media make it possible for the audience to understand themselves in a social, historical and maybe an existential perspective. Pulp literature and TV-series, theatrical performances and art exhibitions are all forms of communication that transform into culture in the rendezvous with the audience and the surrounding community (Drotner, 1996, my translation).

Drotner (1996) argues that we now live in a "multimedia culture" where several forms of media combine and strengthen sensory impressions. A characteristic feature is that the process of communication and interpretation exists not only in the head of the producer or the recipient, but in the content and forms of the media itself (Drotner, 1996). Music plays an important role in the media evolution, and in young people's lives. Music relates to the ability to shape emotions which it is not possible to express otherwise (Bjørkvold, 2005; Ruud, 2002; Saar, 1999). Small (1998) argues that music is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do. He calls this activity "musicking", doing music, to take part in any kind of musical performance, playing, listening, dancing etc. Musicking is to simultaneously articulate different forms of relations and multiple layers that matter.

Among many theories of identity I see the conceptions of Goffman (1972, 2004), symbolic interaction in the form of a dramaturgical perspective, and Gergen (2005), identity presented as narratives, according to Wittgenstein's language games, particularly useful in this study.

Research with relevance to the thesis/study

This study relates to youth culture and music education research. In media, popular culture mediates style and music, and offers lifestyle alternatives as raw material for constructing identities. Along general lines, youth culture studies deal with young people in their leisure time and music education studies focus on music activities in schools. But music is trans-boundary, as young persons bring their leisure time music to school. This trans-boundariness is an aspect of this study, namely to study music as a marker of style and identity, both in school and in leisure time. Style as a concept involves appearance (clothing, hairstyle and visual attributes), behaviour (ways of moving and talking) and music. Widdicombe and Woffitt (1995) reason that the complexity of different styles could be analysed as a language game, an ongoing process of constructing identities. Their result shows that it is neither a social nor a group identity that seems to be at stake, but rather *individuality, autonomy* and *authenticity.* In this cultural production, music has also been seen as a language, a rendezvous where young people can meet and express feelings, ideas and thoughts about life (Berkaak & Ruud, 1992, 1994).

Method

This study consists of both quantitative and qualitative methods, including interviews, observations and a survey. The informants were selected amongst third-year upper secondary students. Three groups of students were studied: one group from an aesthetic program with a focus on music; another group from a social studies program with a culture and media profile; the third group of informers came from an upper secondary school with an optional course, "Music and Theatre", open to any student at that school to choose. All in all this study includes eighty tree answered questionnaires, out of which I interviewed twenty-nine pupils, individually and in focus groups.

Concluding discussion

Music = Feelings = I seems to be a conclusion in this study. It clearly stands out that the pupils relate music to feelings. Music has the capacity to create and mediate feelings and the most desirable feeling is the feeling of being authentic. Authenticity cannot be bought but must be earned. In the study, many pupils process and express personal experiences and emotional memories. Some pupils perform on stages others compose music for personal usage, a therapeutic or reflexive use of music. The pupils emphasize that music is up to everyone to interpret and evaluate. Pupils talk about "open-mindedness" as something desirable, to be open to others' music. I interpret this "open-mindedness" as an expression of freedom in late modernity. The Internet provides young people with an almost endless access to music, with a potential for everyone to search and find attributes for a personal identity. Perhaps in late modernity with an awareness of the relative nature of truth and permanent changes, "Cogito, ergo sum" (Descartes) ('I think, therefore I exist') can be tentatively replaced by "Sentio, ergo sum" (I am feeling, therefore I exist), that is to say, what is relevant is what I feel.

Egologo is a visible and audible identity, designed, mediated and distributed. Young people are aware of stereotypes and how these relate to groups, norms and attitudes, which they use on the basis of personal objectives and circumstances. The pupils combine, use and transform music and attributes from popular and high culture into a personal style. Within youth culture theories, styles include conceptual appearance and behaviour, and are often described in terms of identity constructions in late modernity (Bjurström, 1997, 2005; Persson, 2000). Widdicombe and Woffitt (1995) argue that style is not only representations of single images, but also an active process by which young people shape their identity, by comparing themselves with others, both within the group and with other groups. Changes that society is undergoing have a cultural impact on young people's opportunities to shape their identities. Part of this change is the expansion of market aesthetics. Market aesthetics designs brands and fills them with dreams and desire, which becomes more important than the function and quality, i.e. the use of the product (Person, 2003). In this way, I believe, market aesthetics represents what Hargreaves (1994) called "hyper-reality", Hassan (2003) "derealisation" and Baudrillard (2003) "simulations", a blending of fact and fiction. Lundberg, Malm and Ronström (2000) argue that in a multicultural society, the capacity for aestheticism is a qualification for becoming visible. Being visible is a necessity to get attention, which may lead to what is anticipated – recognition. The concept of 'Egologo' will include a combination of psychological, technological and aesthetic considerations, a visible and audible identity by which young people promote their identities.

Music in school differs from other school subjects, in both form and content. Pupils bring music from their leisure time, popular music and popular culture, to school, to be played and learned from. They can also use the school's musical resources without teachers' direct supervision, they take joint responsibility; it is fun and gives a kick to play music at school. A school is in many ways an arena where pupils meet other pupils and where they can play together, compose, record and edit music and music videos. In this perspective music in school could be seen as an arena where young people get a possibility to form cultural identities, that is, identities not only based on nationality, ethnicity, religion or gender, but on the values, ethics and lifestyles that music represents (Brömssen, 2006; Folkestad, 2002; Sæther, 2006).

To bring popular music and youth culture into school and let the pupils use and develop those aesthetic skills in music gives them a scene for contemplation and meditation. This can be described as situations for *thoughtfulness,* opportunities to reflect, *social perspective take-over,* where young people can articulate their own needs and at the same time consider alternative perspectives and *situations for body experience,* that is, by concentration, motions and expressions with the body experience aspect of serenity and confidence.

Musical symbols in the media landscape of late modernity refer to how the expansion of media is affecting young people's production, consumption and distribution of music. It is

evident in this study that the pupils spend much time listening and playing music. They download music from the Internet and share it with their peers. You Tube, My Space, Facebook and other communities are sites where young people meet, talk and share music. Here, young people have the opportunity to present themselves and to distribute their own musical compositions. Ziehe (1994) stresses the link between social change, technological impact and cultural production. This study shows that values correlated to symbols in music tend to alter over time. High culture that once was the norm against which different cultures were measured, today seems to be one equivalent to others and to be used freely.

Being creative is essential to the pupils. To have the capability to create something in a personal way is evaluated as important. The ability to improvise in jazz, to compose and make personal interpretations of covers indicates creativity. The bottom line seems to be the pupils' desire to define themselves as creative individuals. This implies that young people want to picture themselves as creative individuals who exploit changes in a society characterized by individualization, the dissolution of traditional norms and values and an awareness of the relative nature of truth. To be creative and have the ability to produce and create new ideas and artefacts, and not simply replicate previous models, is a theme in all interviews. Based on the notion that young people's behaviours are seismic readings of tendencies in society, this study implies that upper secondary school music activities are cultural investments in identity and in the students' life projects.

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