

Nordic Research in Music Education

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Editorial

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In 1974, Elliott Eisner wrote that no one should underestimate the power of myths, beliefs, or convictions in shaping one's view of the world and one's treatment of new evidence in art education (Eisner, 1974). Few domains are as deeply steeped in myths as music and music education. For example, a quick search on Google scholar using the search words “myths+music+education”, gave more than 400,000 hits, covering topics such as *talent, creativity, perfect pitch, and gender*, to mention just a few. Currently, the most famous, debated and resilient music myth is probably the so-called “Mozart effect”, first presented in a paper almost 30 years ago (Rauscher et al., 1993). Despite a number of failed attempts to replicate the result that listening to Mozart makes you smarter, including a large-scale meta-analytic study with the title *Mozart effect—Schmozart effect* (Pietschnig et al., 2010) that concludes that it is indeed a myth (reinforced by confirmation bias), the narrative about the *Mozart effect* vigorously persists on the internet.

Hard reality may be one driving force establishing such myths. A constant battle for resources has created a perceived need to justify music education, resulting in advocacy that relies on tropes such as those claiming that music practices are inherently inclusive and embrace diversity. Moreover, with the purpose of influencing policy, legitimization narratives sometimes occur alongside descriptions of the insufficiencies of music education practices, such as a lack of priority in the curricula or of qualifications in teachers (see for example Knigge et al., and Nielsen & Karlsen, this issue). Paradoxically, there may be a danger that this narrative of woe in music education becomes yet another trope, repeated as a “truth” to justify the efforts put into improving music education.

Concerning arts education, Eisner (1974) did not believe “that this field can grow either theoretically or practically if we do not examine our beliefs with all the clarity we can

muster” (p. 100). As editors of NRME, we concur with Eisner’s claim. Thus, in the current issue, we present six research articles that contribute to “myth-busting” in different ways by “examining beliefs” (to paraphrase Eisner) and interrogating established tropes about the current state of music education.

The first research study in this issue challenges and clarifies in fundamental ways how notions of the intercultural are enacted in music education contexts. The article entitled *Developing an understanding of intercultural music education in a Nordic setting*, written by Felicity Burbridge Rinde and Catharina Christophersen, asks what the notions of *diversity* and *intercultural music education* actually mean, and what is at stake and impacted when such concepts are poorly defined or understood. Based on a systematic literature review, the authors problematize how the answers to these questions have consequences for how *music* is understood in the nexus between cultures, and whether music in education is used to mark difference, or enable diversity.

How music content and activities are selected and performed seems to be deeply connected to teachers and their backgrounds. *Who* gains admission to higher music education, and *how* this admission is decided, are therefore very important questions. The second article, *Care as technology for exclusion*, leans on Foucault’s theoretical concept of *governmentality* to investigate how admission tests can be seen as an instrument for exerting power. The authors, Monica Lindgren, Ragnhild Sandberg-Jurström, and Olle Zandén, suggest that the exclusion of some applicants from entrance into higher specialist music education is paradoxically legitimized by a rationale of *care*.

The third article, *Who are the music student teachers in Norwegian generalist teacher education?*, continues to consider the question of who future music teachers are. The authors, Eyolf Thovsen Nysæther, Catharina Christophersen and Jon Helge Sætre, bring to light the conformity of this group, as they tend to be middle class and ethnically Norwegian, with experiences of music making throughout their upbringing. The researchers find that traditional gender differences in terms of stereotypical instrument choices and genre experiences are reproduced in this group. They conclude, among other things, that Norwegian teacher education seems to be reproducing uniformity in terms of social class, ethnicity, and gender normativity.

Another finding of Nysæther et al.—that having performance skills is highly valued by student music teachers and seen as important for the confidence needed to teach music in the classroom—connects to the focus on teachers’ skills and confidence in *singing* highlighted in the fourth article. In *The current status of singing in kindergartens in Norway*, Jens Knigge, Ingrid Danbolt, Liv Anna Hagen and Siri Haukenes take as their point of departure the often stated claim that there is too little singing in Norwegian kindergartens due to a lack in teacher qualifications. Although perhaps not representative due to the number and characteristics of respondents, their findings show that singing is considered important among kindergarten teachers and is reported to be done frequently. Among other

factors, teachers' self-reported musical expertise as well as the collegial environment—the degree to which colleagues appreciate singing—are significantly correlated to a high frequency of singing activity.

Siw Graabræk Nielsen and Sidsel Karlsen take another «truth» as their point of departure: that music teachers in primary school lack qualifications. Their article *Grunnskolelærere i musikk og deres kompetanse: Hvordan er situasjonen i norsk kontekst? [The competence of compulsory school music teachers: What is the situation in the Norwegian context?]*, is based on data from a national survey, and finds that this assumed lack of qualifications is not necessarily the case. Previous research shows that a high degree of professional specialization in teachers is connected to possibilities for creating rich music lessons for pupils, across social and cultural borders. Drawing on Bourdieu, Nielsen and Karlsen highlight the complexities of understanding teachers' qualifications for teaching music and the consequences of these qualifications for the enactment of music as a school subject.

From the same study of Norwegian primary school music teachers, Live Weider Ellefsen discusses the notion of *genre* and how it is operationalized or performed in the primary school music classroom. In the article *Sjangring som musikkdidaktisk praksis [Genre-ing as music didactical practice]*, she argues that genres as categories should not be seen as static entities, since teachers' didactic processes of organizing content and music learning activities involves *producing genres* in a performative sense. As with the first article in the issue (Rinde & Christophersen), this article touches upon how musical categories are constituted, and what happens when these categories travel between music cultures and their reconstruction as musical content in the classroom.

The final contribution to this issue touches upon the question of how the larger society is reflected or engaged with in higher music education practices. This question is addressed in a recent anthology edited by Sidsel Karlsen and Siw Graabræk Nielsen, titled *Verden inn i musikkutdanningene. Utfordringer, ansvar og muligheter [Higher music education and the surrounding world. Challenges, responsibility and possibilities]*, with chapters in English and Norwegian. In her review of this book for NRME, Silje Valde Onsrud acknowledges its balance between theoretical and philosophical contributions and concrete empirical studies related to some of the current challenges of higher music education in an ever changing world. She also highlights topics that seem to be excluded from the volume, such as music and digitalization, and asks whether this is because digitalization is also being excluded from conservatoires. If so, Onsrud suggests that these institutions may be less relevant in shaping future music workers than commercial, profit driven arenas despite the attempts of conservatoires to initiate important debates on democracy and inclusion.

To summarize, this issue of *Nordic Research in Music Education* indicates that teacher qualifications in music are better than what has often been believed to be the case, at least in Norwegian education contexts for preschool and primary school children. The issue also raises the concern that, in the pursuit of promoting greater diversity in music education,

attention needs to be paid to who society educates to become music teachers. This both connects to the requirements of students selected for higher education, and who music teacher education attracts. Fundamentally, notions of diversity, intercultural music education and genre categorizations should not be taken for granted as self-evident tropes, but looked into as playing important parts in the construction of content in music education. Although the power of myths may be strong, as Elliott Eisner (1974) claimed, his encouragement to “examine our beliefs with all the clarity we can muster” in order to achieve theoretical and practical growth, seems to be aspired to in current music education research. As editors, we wish to thank all the authors who have contributed to the issue, as well as the peer reviewers. Your efforts are highly valued.

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