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Children's subject positions in discourses of music in everyday life: Rethinking conceptions of the child in and for music education

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Children's subject positions in discourses of music in everyday life: Rethinking conceptions of the child in and for music education

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Abstract

In this article I discuss children's everyday uses of recorded music (such as CDs, Mp3-files) in the light of sociological notions of "children" and "childhood". The discussion provides perspectives on musical engagement and musicality that supplement perspectives within developmental psychology. The study is based on observations and interviews with 3- to 6-year-old children, kindergarten staff and parents, situated in two kindergartens and nine family homes. The results show that two contradictory narratives of children's musicality are available simultaneously; the everybody-can narrative and the only-the-talented-can narrative. The subject positions made available by these narratives are challenging because they create a split between enjoying music (a pleasurable natural capacity) and learning to play an instrument (burdensome work). I argue that the subject position "musicker" would work as a better alternative, because this position encompasses both playing an instrument and enjoying it. Keyword: sociology of childhood, everyday life, subject position, musical engagement, musicality

In this article I present findings from a project examining how and why children between three and six years of age use recorded music, such as CDs and Mp3-files, in their everyday lives (Vestad 2013). I will focus on the subject positions—understood popularly as social “roles”—that are discursively available from which children experience music, and the consequences of these subject positions for children's engagement with music. As a theoretical backdrop for the exploration of children's subject positions, I turn to current developments in the sociology of childhood, particularly James and Prout's ([1997] 2007) affirmation that children are

worthy of study “in their own right” (11). That is, researchers should focus on what children already are as opposed to focusing strictly on what they can become later in life.¹ However, to focus on what children already are does not mean that children’s subject positions can be explained and defined in an indisputable manner. A range of oftentimes contradictory subject positions are made available by discourses of the child, childhood and music respectively. In this article I will concentrate on the following understandings of the child’s subject positions: children as subjects, children as co-producers of culture, children as beings and becomings, and children as competent and vulnerable. On this background I will discuss two general narratives regarding children’s engagement with music—the *everybody can* narrative and the *only the talented can* narrative. In the final paragraphs I argue for a third, alternative narrative based on Christopher Small’s (1998) concept of “musicking”. A discussion of these narratives is important in order to gain a better understanding of the consequences of living in a particular historical time, culture and social setting—focusing in particular on the consequences regarding children’s engagement in music.

Background—a quest for musical meaning

As I grew up, a new kind of music entered the stage, namely recorded music for children. I purchased my first radio/cassette deck as a 9-year-old and, as many others, discovered the pleasures of being able to find and listen to music that I liked and that I came to think of as “my own”. Placed close to my bedroom window and tilted a little bit sideways, my radio was able to pick up music from my favourite station. I lived a couple of hours’ drive away from the city, and the radio signals were not the best. If the weather was right, on Thursday nights I was able to listen to a show featuring pop-music, international as well as Norwegian. The rest of the week I enjoyed a whole range of musical genres. I can still remember the contentment and satisfaction I felt by listening to music on my own, but still connected to the world “out there”. I can also recall the feeling of joyfully singing along with George Michael’s songs, and later Whitney Houston’s. Of course, looking back, this takes on a comic touch, but at the time, it was dead serious.

However, in the 1970s and 1980s commercial music was met with scepticism by responsible adults, whether my parents, music educators or music researchers.

Regarding technology in general, David Buckingham (2009) wrote: “Like the idea of childhood itself, technology is often invested with our most intense fears and fantasies. It holds out the promise of a better future, while simultaneously provoking anxieties about a fundamental break with the past” (124). Discourses that bring into play anxieties about a fundamental break with the past can be understood in terms of the Swedish music educator and researcher Bertil Sundin’s (2003) descriptions of music as a commodity. The same might be said about the Norwegian music educator and researcher Even Ruud’s (1983) reflections on what happens when music from a cassette deck or radio station becomes prevalent in childhood. These two writers’ ideas bring into play images of the solitary child—that is, one who is without the company of his or her parents, listening to recorded music produced by a music industry that appears to be cold and exploitative. This image contrasts with those of, for instance, happy children playing singing games together, parents and children celebrating their family relationship by singing together, or children playing instruments or singing under the caring wings of a professional music teacher.

From an international perspective, concerns over “consumer passivity and alienation” have also been noted by Amanda Minks (1999, 77). Minks, however, takes a more positive stance, and argues that media consumption “may be a realm of *active sociality* for some children as they engage with pop music and share music-talk with their peers” (1999, 77). In her concluding remarks to her study of fifth-grader’s social lives with pop music she argues, with reference to Richard Middleton (1990), that listening must be seen as a productive force and proposes, now with reference to Paul Willis (1990), a “creative continuum” that links consumption and production:

It is precisely this productive capacity of cultural consumption that keeps *reproductive* processes open. The potential for social transformation in play or in consumption may not always be realized, but we must take into account its latent *possibility* (Minks 1999, 96).

From a music education perspective, Susan Young (2009) encourages readers to see music technology as an ally, and “not as something that threatens the ‘naturalness’ of children’s musical activity” (40).

In retrospect, as a child and teenager, technology was to me an ally insofar as it offered a sense of selfhood (Ruud 1997). I found something of “me” in the music

that supported and contributed to the constitution, sustenance and development of myself (DeNora 2000, Ruud 1997). Along the lines of Minks' discussion, my individuality, in terms of the kind of music I listened to, was kept "in place" in such a way as to conform to and maintain my peer group's social norms. Minks (1999) draws attention to a paradox between cultivating individuality and adjusting to social norms. "The trick, then, for the fifth-graders", she writes, "was apparently to seem unique and independent in their musical tastes without seeming strange, maintaining a sense of social belonging in an image-oriented, purportedly individualistic society" (87). For me, music served to constitute both my individual and social identity at both a personal/intimate, and official level (Ruud 1997).

At the time I understood that the kind of music I liked meant something different to me than to my parents. Their objection to the introduction of the song "Mickey", performed by the famous Scandinavian artist Carola Häggkvist, was unconvincing, and completely missed the point of my understanding of its meaning (Chapman, Chinn, and Forsman 1983, track 7). Later, I became a music educator myself and I also became a mother. From these two subject positions, musical meaning from children's perspectives became important once again. Moreover, from each of the three subject positions of *having been a child*, *being a music educator*, and *being a mother*—each of which took form within particular historical, cultural and social contexts—the meaning of music, musical engagement, and music listening all looked different from the other positions. Different things were at stake.

Methods and processes

For this study, I explored children's everyday uses of recorded music by observing and interviewing children, kindergarten teachers, and parents in two kindergartens and nine family homes. This approach offered insights into how musical meaning is constituted as a joint effort between adults and children (James and Prout [1997] 2007). Norwegian kindergartens are regulated by the Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (Ministry of Education and Research 2011). "Participation" is a buzzword, and signals that concepts of children's citizenship are prevailing in the pedagogical foundation. Although the kindergartens' content to a large extent consists of activities led by the kindergarten teachers, children's "free

play” holds a strong position in the Norwegian kindergartens’ pedagogical thinking, as well as in the Scandinavian discourse of childhood. Within this context, my intention was to generate data that could help to gain insights into how children use recorded music on their own. Therefore, observations were mostly conducted during the parts of the day reserved for children’s free play. I applied a method adapted from studies in children’s literature (Simonsson 2004): I sat with a camcorder in my lap, and whenever someone (adult or child/children) put on a CD or recorded music of some other kind, I recorded what happened (i.e. how the children engaged in the music). In addition to the observations, interviews were conducted with the kindergarten staff in each of the kindergartens and with the children. Immediately after each visit in the kindergartens I wrote field notes, which allowed me to reflect upon what I had observed. These proved to be very helpful for the analyses (Fangen 2004).

Nine of the children who engaged the most with recorded music in the two kindergartens were selected to participate in the part of the study conducted in the family setting. Each of the nine families was lent a camcorder and was asked to record everything that happened with music in their family over one week. I picked up each of the recordings and studied them before I returned them to each of the families and conducted a stimulated recall interview, based on the family’s recordings. After each visit with the families I also wrote reflective field notes. The interviews as well as the recorded observations from each of the kindergartens and the family homes were transcribed and analysed. The field notes were also analysed, and the recordings and field notes proved to be mutually enriching.

The participating kindergartens were publicly funded and had no special programme of music instruction; none of the nine children who participated in the family observations and interviews had parents with musical occupations. Consequently, although one of the arenas for generation of data was a public childcare institution, lay perspectives on music in a childhood setting are heavily represented, at least considered from the perspective of music education.

To sum up, the question of “how” children use music in their everyday lives was answered by an ethnographic method, that is by observing “real” children in “real” everyday life settings (Fangen 2004, James and Prout [1997] 2007). One of the

aims was to arrive at a compilation of practices in a children's perspective, inspired by DeNora's (2000) exploration of how adults use music in their everyday lives. The "why" question was explored by applying discourse analysis to the observations and interviews. By looking for metaphors and figures of speech, a second aim was to arrive at a compilation of available ways of thinking about why children engage in music (Potter and Wetherell 1987, Wetherell and Potter 1992). This combination of ethnographic and discourse analyses was inspired by Dorothy E. Smith (1987, 2004, 2005). Smith argues that discourses on a structural level have consequences for individuals, and sets out to explore the embodied experience of these consequences. Simultaneously, each individual's experiences serve to constitute the discourses. A premise for my exploration of children's embodied experience of music is that discourses of music regulate the ways in which children's musical experiences are made sense of, and that the children's uses of music simultaneously constitute and re-constitute discourses.

In addition to arriving at compilations of practices and discourses, I have arrived at a compilation of available subject positions. In this article I will concentrate on the subject positions available for children, based on a sociological perspective.

Music in everyday life from a theoretical perspective

In order to explore musical meaning in everyday life as a joint effort between children, parents, and kindergarten care-givers, two theoretical perspectives seem fruitful. First, I turn to research on music in everyday life, particularly the concept of "affordance". This approach was inspired by Campbell's ([1998] 2010) exploration of the meaning of music in children's everyday lives. "For children, musical meaning is deeply related to function" (226). An affordance relates to how music "resonates" with the listener (Clarke 2003, 2005) or, in other words, what music provides, offers, or "does for" him or her (DeNora 2000). An affordance is, according to Gibson (1986), something that is "neither an objective property nor a subjective property... It is equally a fact of the environment and a fact of behaviour.... An affordance points both ways, to the environment and to the observer" (129). DeNora (2000) applies the term to an exploration of music's everyday uses. She uses a ball as an example:

“Objects ‘afford’ actors certain things”, such as “rolling, bouncing and kicking in a way that a cube of the same size, texture and weight would not” (39). Furthermore, affordances are “constituted and reconstituted in and through projected courses of action within settings” (40). This, according to DeNora, makes it virtually impossible to explore music’s affordances without taking into account the particular music, the particular individual, and the particular situation.

Second, discourse theory provides a means to explore how musical meaning is contingent and can be constructed in different ways from one person to another. This fits well with the notion of affordance. Discourse analysis takes into account contingencies that effect musical affordances across time and culture, and enables the researcher to take into account the ascriptions given to music from different subject positions (child, music educator, parent, kindergarten teacher), as well as contingencies—even contradictions—within an individual discussion (Potter and Wetherell 1987, Smith 2005, Wetherell and Potter 1992).

In order to explore ways of thinking about musical affordances, I choose to apply a framework from discourse psychology. The notion of interpretative repertoires is important in this respect, and is oftentimes used as synonymous with discourse. An interpretative repertoire is understood as “a lexicon or register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterize and evaluate actions and events” (Potter and Wetherell 1987, 138). Edley (2001) describes interpretative repertoires as “relatively coherent ways of talking about objects and events in the world” (198). According to Potter and Wetherell (Potter and Wetherell 1987, Wetherell and Potter 1992), people use terms and metaphors that are given them by history. Thus, conversations appear as “a patchwork of ‘quotations’” (Edley 2001). The manner in which such a patchwork is constituted is regulated by a discursively available choreography: “[T]here is an available choreography of interpretative moves—like the moves of an ice dancer, say from which particular ones can be selected in a way that fits most effectively the context” (Wetherell and Potter 1992, 92). Even if interpretative moves and repertoires are regulated by what is historically given, it is impossible to predict exactly how a conversation will proceed and how it will end (Edley 2001, 198).

In this study, interpretative repertoires were explored as repertoires of musical affordances. The most important interpretive repertoires constituted in the data material are: *music as boring and dull*, *music as [children's] play*, *music as something that can be learned*, *music as something for children*, *music as a tool to create and sustain good things in life*, *music as healthy*, and *music as joyful and pleasurable*.

Another key term within discourse psychology is subject position. Subject positions are explained by Edley (2001) as “locations’ within a conversation” and as “identities made relevant by specific ways of talking” (210). The specific ways of talking addressed in this article are, for one, sociological ways of talking about the child and childhood, and next, the specific ways of talking about musical affordances from the perspective of children’s everyday lives. In the following paragraphs I will first address children and childhood at a theoretical level, and then discuss sociological perspectives on subject positions available for children, in combination with children’s uses of recorded music, based on the empirical data.

Children and childhood at a theoretical level

In her closing remarks on pop music in fifth-graders’ social lives, Minks (1999, paraphrasing Stephens 1995) suggests “that the current adult discourse of ‘loss’ and ‘crisis’ in the experience of children signifies a rupture in the meaning of childhood and in the organization of larger social structures” (97). She continues:

Amid concerned accounts of loss of childhood innocence—alternatively portrayed as ‘children at risk’ or ‘children as the risk’—we need to ask how children’s experiences in a variety of social contexts at the turn of the millennium are diverging from past conceptions of normativity. (97)

Conceptions of normativity might be challenged continually as each generation grows up. All adults carry memories of childhood, and notions of what it is to be a child are important constituents of musical meaning in children’s everyday lives. Minks (1999) implies that children’s conceptions of themselves serve to regulate their interpretative repertoires of musical affordances. Ideas about what “childhood” and “children” are and should be, regulate normative unconscious processes. In such processes, ideas provided by history, culture, discourse, and emotion are woven

together in ways that regulate personal behaviour on an individual level, as well as the evaluation of these behaviours (Layton 2006a, 2006b)—becoming a virtually undetectable inner “compass” by which children and adults unconsciously navigate. In addition, in contemporary Western culture, children hold a subject position as *emotionally priceless* (Zelizer 1994). This notion regulates adults’ everyday behaviours, as well as the development of legislation. For instance, a general thought in the Western world is that children should not work, and there are laws against child labour. Although this position may seem “natural”, other positions may be possible.

In her preface to *Children in Culture Revisited*, Lesnik-Oberstein (2011) writes: “[C]hildhood (but also any identity) is a historically and culturally contingent construction, not an essential, transhistorical or transcultural continuity, predetermined by inherent biological or physiological factors” (1). Chris Jenks (2000) addresses the child on an ontological level when he asks: “What is a child?” and Lesnik-Oberstein (2011) goes further when she raises the question: “How is a child possible as such?” (10). In this article I will not go so far as to contest conceptions of “children” and “childhood” altogether, but I *will* explore how particular conceptions of “the child” contribute to musical affordances and the conceptions’ consequences.

As mentioned earlier, the new sociology of childhood will serve as a theoretical backdrop for this exploration. A central aim of this article is to augment the understandings of children that seem to be the most prevalent in the music education literature, particularly those connected to developmental psychology. However, the aim is not to disregard developmental psychology, and thereby “throw the baby out with the bathwater”, as Erica Burman (2001) puts it, for there are strong connections between children’s development and the culture in which they live. As Burman argues, “practices of labour and interpretation are always implicated within particular gender, class, historical, geographical and cultural relations, and (therefore) are never innocent” (7). It is in this regard that Burman describes culture as a resource to understand “what the baby is all about” (20).

A sociological approach to children and music in everyday life

Children as (cultural) subjects and co-producers of culture

The idea of the “child-as-subject” is a leading theme within the new sociology of childhood. For instance, Allison James and Alan Prout ([1997] 2007) proposed that a new sociology is needed in order to study children “in their own right”, because within the model of development that has come to dominate Western thought, “[l]ittle account is given of their [activities’] significance to children’s social life or to the variation which they reveal in the social context of childhood” (11). Per Olav Tiller (1991), in a Scandinavian approach to this same issue, stresses that it is the five-year-old him- or her-self who knows the most about how he or she experiences the world, for which reason it is vital to be aware of or to listen to children’s voices. Two decades later, adults’ ability to take in the insights offered by children is still debated as an epistemic challenge to education (Murriss 2013).

Sociologist Jens Qvortrup (2001) opposes the romantic view of children, found in some of the literature on children’s own cultures, and argues that research into children’s culture should look at children as co-producers of culture. Researchers, he argues, should not think of children as “sacred culture producers”, as if what children produce, qualitatively speaking, is somehow better than other parts of culture. The notion of the child as a “sacred” producer of culture finds a strong parallel in the concept of the child as a “noble savage”—an outsider who has not been corrupted by culture and society. The conception of the child as a “noble savage” has also been criticized by Barbro Johansson (2010) among others.

In this article, “culture” encompasses both the repertoire of songs and music, and, in an anthropological sense, all social action. The collection of music, the selection processes of the music that is used, and how it is used are all components of children’s musical culture. The following example is an illustration of the co-production of everyday musical culture that occurs between children and adults. The excerpt from the data shows Emil on his way to kindergarten, safely strapped in his car seat while listening to music by Terje Fomoe, in the role of *Captain Sabertooth* (Kaptein Sabeltann og Grusomme Gabriels skatt 2010). As Emil’s father explains in the interview, he usually asks Emil what he wants to listen to. Emil usually has

specific wishes in this regard and his father often skips through several tracks on the car CD player, because in just a couple of seconds of listening to a song, Emil knows whether it is the track he wants to listen to or not. “He has totally fallen in love with the *Sabertooth*-music”, his father remarks.

Whereas the example above shows children and adults’ joint culture production and constitution, the following example shows how children constitute their culture by learning from each other:

Mari, Johanne and Jennifer are playing (children’s play) together in one of the smaller rooms of the kindergarten. Mari has brought with her a CD player which she places on the floor. Mari explains to the other two girls that it is very important to hold one’s fingers at the edges of the CD, otherwise it gets smudged, and the music does not come out right. She demonstrates the desired grip thoroughly, placing her thumb against the inside of the hole in the middle of the CD and her other fingers at the outer edges of it. Then she pulls three chairs across the floor and places them in a semi-circle around the CD player. The two other girls look surprised at Mari when she insists that they should sit down quietly on the chairs and listen. Johanne and Jennifer argue that they want to play a game of “assault course” while listening to the music. This game was partly invented by the girls themselves, as the kindergarten teachers later explained. It consisted of chairs, tables and other pieces of furniture and larger toys (like doll’s beds) being placed on the floor to form a circle. Gaps were left between some of the items, so that it was sometimes rather difficult to get from one piece of furniture to the next. The purpose was to move around by stepping on the items whilst avoiding stepping on the floor. As the music played the tempo and intensity of the girls’ movements varied accordingly, and this made the difficulty of their task vary. As Johanne and Jennifer suggested playing this game, Mari looked confused. Her way of listening to music was quite different, and she probably had not participated in Johanne and Jennifer’s way of listening before. However, she joined the other girls, and I did not observe the calmly-sitting-down-version of listening in this group of children again, either on the same day or later.

The data are full of examples like these, regarding co-constitutions between children as ways of using music and the selection of repertoires. The data also contain examples of children, on their own initiative, teaching themselves songs and lyrics by listening to the same song over and over again with a concentrated look on their faces, while singing a little more of the lyrics each time. This occurred in group-play settings in kindergarten, as well as in children’s family homes. In this way they contributed to a shared musical repertoire, and shared ways of engaging with music.

Children also acted as subjects with musical agency when they used music to get into a certain mood or atmosphere. The kindergarten teachers understood such practices as an invention of a repertoire of musical affordances for themselves. For instance, the children's uses of music that had been produced as a spin-off of a television series for children was understood by the kindergarten teachers as being appropriate for the children's desire to put themselves in the right mood for engaging in role-play based on the series. In other words, this particular music was thought to be "playable" in the sense that, together with the television series, it provided interesting, engaging and enjoyable characters and story themes. Thus "playability" was used as a criterion for assessing the quality of music (Vestad 2010). In another example, a piece of music was believed by one of the kindergarten teachers to put the two participating girls in the right mood for their play, insofar as the music belonged to and constituted their friendship. If they did not have the music, the girls' play was not the same. The kindergarten teacher explained that the music served as an "engine" for their preferred play, namely building a hut using tables, chairs and blankets.

Children as "beings" and as "becomings"

Powerful notions of the child are *children as human beings* and *children as human becomings*, respectively. Closely related to the notion of the children as *human beings*, James and Prout suggest that "[c]hildren's social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right, independent of the perspective and concerns of adults" (2007, 8). The examples that I have discussed above illustrate how the notion of the child-as-subject, which is implicit in this citation, fulfils the ethical obligation to see children as "real people"—as what they already are—opposed to seeing childhood as a kind of "deficiency disease" in urgent need of a cure (Selmer-Olsen 2005; see also Juncker 2003, Kampmann 2003, and Mouritsen 1996). Moving too far in the child-as-subject/being direction, another ethical dilemma is encountered in the form of the question of how much responsibility a child is capable of handling. And what happens if the adult world relinquishes its inclination to lead the way for the next generation? In other words, the assumption that children are the (only) ones who know best can confront educators and parents with an ethical

conflict. Moreover, the ideas of child-as-subject and child-as-being can even threaten to undermine the teaching profession altogether. It is not very likely that James and Prout's aim was to bring about such an extreme change!

Uprichard (2008) argues that neither a perspective on the child-as-being nor that of the child-as-becoming is satisfactory. They must both be taken into account simultaneously in order to arrive at a more balanced view. The question still remains of how a music educator can make use of the information gained from a child-as-subject/child-as-being perspective. Kathryn Marsh's approach to children's musical play in school playgrounds is encouraging in this respect.

It is time for adults to peer out through the windows of the classroom and *notice* children's musical play. By incorporating observed manifestations of this play into the classroom, it is possible to develop a 'playful' rather than 'playlike' pedagogy, one that takes account of the cultural nuances and realities of children's musical capabilities and preferences, providing cognitive, performative, creative, and kinesthetic challenge. In doing so, music educators may lessen the dichotomy between the playground and the classroom. (Marsh 2008, 318)

A blurring of the dichotomy between playground and classroom might be related to another between the child-as-subject/being and the child-as-object/becoming. In the playground, children know what they know and do what they do without a teacher leading the activities, at least not in the traditional sense of formal music education (Folkestad 2006). Marsh (2008) encourages us to "*notice* children's musical play"—so as to recognize that children know something already that they feel an ownership towards, and thereby have a sense of musical citizenship because they "belong" to the music and the music "belongs" to them. Music in the classroom should support such relations.

Furthermore, Marsh points out that much "playlike" pedagogy does not reveal the complexity children show in their musical play in the playground, insofar as this approach is too "pedagogical", too easy and too inclined to objectivize children. Moreover, this approach presumes what children should be like and be able to do at a certain stage or age, forgetting—or at least not taking into account of in a satisfactory way—that musical development is also dependent on culture; and that the best way of knowing where to start as a teacher is to notice individual children's skills as they

occur and are “lived” in, for instance, hand clapping-games and other kinds of children’s musical play. By way of such observations the teacher can lead the way into the curriculum. Moving further in this direction, one should also consider adapting or even building the curriculum on what is going on in children’s musical cultures. Lucy Green’s research into informal music learning is an excellent example of such an approach with older children (2008). Combining children’s musical repertoire with the professional skills of a music educator in this way can lead to the co-production of the music curriculum.

To experience “being there” from the perspective of “becoming”

When considering music education, it is not only observations of children’s technical capabilities and skills in informal everyday life that may prove fruitful. There are other ways in which one can take up James and Prouts’ invitation to study children’s cultures “in their own right, independent of the perspective and concerns of adults” ([1997] 2007, 8). The adults who participated in this study often talked about the present with an eye to the future. For instance, in one interview with a kindergarten teacher, the teacher described the purpose of children’s musical play, as well as play in general in the following way:

Play [children’s play] contributes to maturation and to prepare you for things that occur later in life. This makes it important when considering the future, socialization and interaction with others. But it is also important for just what happens there and then [in the present moment]—because it is fun to play. Joy emerges from it. Play does not need to have a function other than being an experience in the moment.

The latter part of this description resembles Böhme’s (2010) conception of beauty. “Beauty” he says, “*is that which mediates to us the joy of being here*” (31, italics in original). Similarly, in this excerpt from an interview, the teacher suggests that play can constitute a kind of “being here” that is valuable in itself. When the participants describe musical play in the here-and-now, it suggests that experiencing joy and pleasure with and through music is connected to being able to return to the music of one’s childhood in order to experience similar emotions of love, comfort, and safety later in life (Vist 2008, Ruud 1997). In this kind of use of music, nostalgia can be considered as a productive force (see Vestad, forthcoming).

One of the mothers interviewed said quite explicitly that this was one of the reasons why she believed that music was an important part of childhood. She used her own experience as an example when explaining how music—throughout life—can help one find a secure base by returning to something familiar, something that is “you”:

I have been travelling in Asia and have experienced other cultures with a lot of music, but not *my* music. I had to listen to my music at home. ... Because it was *me*, it is my sense of belonging, my base. That is where I am. It is very interesting and thrilling to hear Indian or Asian music you know, but—really—those sounds are a little unfamiliar to me. That is exploration. The other thing is more of an affirmation: A “here-I-am”, “this-is-me”-thing. ... It is as if one returns to where one is. ... No matter how noisy the music might be, it is reassuring and soothing.

In this way, music from one’s childhood constitutes a resource in the here-and-now *and* in the future (see also Vestad 2012).

Children as competent and in need of protection

A powerful notion regarding children is their vulnerability, especially when it is combined with the notion of children as innocent. Barbro Johansson writes (2010) that “around the turn of the millennium, researchers started to problematize the notion of ‘human beings’, claiming that all people, regardless of age, are ‘becomings’, constantly transforming, developing and changing directions in their lives” (81). This idea counters the view that children develop from vulnerability to sophistication and that all human beings can be either vulnerable or sophisticated depending on the particular situation they are faced with (Uprichard 2008). As mentioned earlier in this article, Buckingham (2009) pointed towards anxieties brought about by new technologies. Similarly, Anna Sparrman (2006) discussed the moral panics that occurred when the girl pop band, Spice Girls, was launched in Sweden in the 1990s. All over the world parents and teachers complained about them, claiming that their songs were inappropriate for children. In retrospect, the Spice Girl listener, Ashley Perez (2013) reflects on the band’s lyrics along similar lines of argumentation: “Um, remember when you used to belt these lyrics out in front of your parents? That’s right, you sang, ‘Are you as good as I remember, baby?’ IN FRONT OF YOUR

MOM!!!” On the other hand, in the 1990s it was claimed that children could handle the impact of the media, and could understand that the Spice Girls were not expressing themselves, but just acting or putting on a show. Sparrman (2006) argues that treating children as competent in every situation and in every domain leaves them just as marginalized as its opposite, that is, as being always vulnerable and always in need of protection.

The parents and kindergarten teachers who participated in this study were cautious about playing CDs that contained bad language, or making them available for children. However, as children in Norwegian kindergartens do not always understand the English lyrics of pop songs, it was debated whether this really was a good reason for not playing the songs in particular situations, such as during a carnival.

Listening to music produced for older children was described as an experience of “coolness” by one of the mothers interviewed. Her 5-year-old daughter listened to a CD by the Norwegian artist Celine (Bæstevænna 2007), who had won the Norwegian version of the Junior Eurovision Song Contest with the title track of her CD, *Celine*. The photo on its cover, as well as the lyrics, revealed that the singer was a teenage schoolgirl, whereas the 5-year-old still attended kindergarten/preschool. A sense of precaution was evident in the mother’s talk, alongside reminiscences of her daughter’s pride.

The most prevalent worry in the interviews concerned noise. Several of the kindergarten teachers, parents and children were tired of being constantly subjected to the multitude of sounds in a kindergarten environment with many children. Because listening to music was challenging in such an environment these teachers expressed a need for a separate room reserved for music listening. Along similar lines, the parents who participated in this study reported that children asked their parents to turn the music on the car stereo off when driving home from kindergarten because they were tired. One 4-year-old boy whose favourite music and artist is *Captain Sabertooth*, stated that, although he liked to listen to his songs (something that the video recording from his home confirmed), he did not want to listen to it while going to sleep because, as he said, it was too noisy. In the video recording he

lies in his bed, with his pyjamas on, and listens to a recording of calmer, slower, and—musically speaking—more monotonous children’s songs at bedtime.

Both of the kindergarten teachers and children invented ways to avoid—or protect themselves from—boredom. The former said that (Western) classical music was a genre that they did not play to children because they expected them to be bored by it. However, one of them was surprised that some children related to and showed interest in it in ways that she had not imagined. The children, it seemed, did not categorize the music as “classical” and “boring”, but just as “music”. Protection against boredom proved unnecessary when classical music was talked about in terms of the stories and emotions it carried just as with any other music.

Elsewhere in the data the children said that they looked for ways to protect themselves against boredom when listening to music. So it was that when the children argued with each other about which CDs to listen to, “boring” was a word they often used. On one occasion I asked one of the older girls in the kindergarten why she, in a specific situation wherein a small group of children played CDs, did not want to listen to one in particular. She picked it up from the table where the CDs were lying side by side and looked at the picture on the front cover. It was of a young adult male fiddler, holding his fiddle in one hand, standing and looking down at the green meadow that surrounded him. She put the CD down and picked up another. When I asked her why she did not want to listen to the CD with the fiddler on it, she explained that he looked sad and that the CD was too “adultish”. This term presented a counterbalance to that of “childish”, which was used by other children in connection with some recordings of traditional children’s songs.

Two general narratives and a third possibility?

“Social scientists are too likely to essentialize children, and literary critics are too likely to completely dissociate their studies from real children,” writes Lesnik-Oberstein (2011, 4). Conversely, this article is based on observations and interviews with real children, their parents, and kindergarten teachers. I have applied sociological notions of the child in order to rethink the cultural “nature” of musical children. The new sociology of childhood as a backdrop for analysing children’s subject positions in their experiences of music in everyday life provides alternative

ways of thinking about the well-known and more traditionally used metaphors in education studies, such as the *teacher as gardener*, *the child as plant*, and the *child as an empty vessel*. Each of these three metaphors leaves the child passive, and yet with an obligation to grow/change.² In the last paragraphs of this article I will look into two general narratives that regulate music in the everyday life of children's culture, and propose a third alternative. The two general narratives of children's musicality emerge from the empirical data as a whole. These can be summed up as *only the talented can* and *everybody can*. Each of them intersects with sociological notions of children and childhood, and together they give rise to various dilemmas (Edley 2001). Intersections and dilemmas will be addressed after explaining each of the narratives of children's musicality.

An illustration of how musicality is constituted as a scarce resource (only the talented can) is how one of the families, with more than one child, felt that only one of their children was very "musical." As the others were always compared to "the musical one" they were said to be "not so musical". One of these "not so musical" children of their family was recruited for the study because she was one of those who spent by far the most time with the CD player in her kindergarten. Therefore, I was surprised when, in the family interview, the parents talked significantly more about her older sibling than about the kindergartener. From their talk it was evident that this child had a far more modest musical role in her family than in kindergarten where she was together with her friends. It is difficult to say anything decisive about the consequences of this positioning of siblings from the evidence of the data. However, from the perspective of music education it seems important to note that parents' attitudes about their children's musicality is influenced by the musicality of their siblings. A question that should be raised is whether the child, who biologically speaking is just as musical at home as in kindergarten, constitutes him- or herself as less musical if another sibling is constituted by the family as "the musical one". An alternative narrative could be to constitute children as "very musical" (as opposed to the "musical one"), and to recognize that more than one child in any family could occupy the subject position of being "very musical".

Another way of constituting musicality as a scarce resource reserved for very few children emerged from a different interview. The mother and father of a boy

talked about his siblings who played in a marching/concert band, the mother who sang loudly together with her CD player while doing housework when she was alone at home, the father who enjoyed listening to music, and the boy himself who listened to music almost every day and who, according to his parents, had his own specific tastes in music and went to sleep with music on the CD player every night, often after the parents had sung him a lullaby. The mother said that she did not like to sing when someone was hearing her. The father followed up by stating that he and his wife knew music, but were not musical. This raises the question once again of what it means to be musical.

It is interesting to note what modes of musical action and participation the parents felt constituted musicality. In the former example, the “musical” sibling had an outgoing personality, which was made evident from the video recordings and from the interview I conducted with the family. The kindergartener was more modest and shy. The sibling had a firm singing voice and had taken dancing classes for a few years. She was older than the kindergartener and had the advantage of being more experienced and advanced, although she was still in primary school. The kindergartener had a softer, less distinct singing voice, still enjoyed playing with little toys such My Little Pony while listening to children’s music, and her dancing could be characterized as “jumping” and “spinning”. In the latter example mentioned above, important elements of musicality were the ability to sing in tune and to play an instrument in a wind band. Thus, musicality was heavily invested with the ability to perform music easily and skilfully, preferably within a formal setting (Folkestad 2006).

The *everybody is musical* discourse was verbally constituted by kindergarten teachers and parents who thought that everybody is musical in that they have a (natural) musical capacity to enjoy music—*everybody can*. This kind of musicality was noticed throughout the interviews and observations when the children engaged in music in several ways including to accompany their everyday activities. One of the interviewed kindergarten teachers expressed the belief that all human beings have a natural capacity for music. Another teacher added to her statement: “It is beyond doubt that music ... well, music is something that is never difficult to get going. It is never difficult to get all the children to join in on the singing, or ... Music is something

they are very keen on.” The observations reveal that children participated in music in a multitude of ways. These ways (modes) can be described as listening, singing, dancing, jumping, talking about music and discussing it, relaxing to it, playing children’s games with music in the background, and engaging in role-play related to the music.

An illustrative example is the way in which “The Chocolate Song” [“Sjokoladesangen”] (Lyriaka—og hunden fra Horrgatark 2006) was first presented to the children when the band “Lyriaka” visited the kindergarten with a concert. “It was like a miniature musical hit-story” one of the staff members commented. At the end of the concert the band played “The chocolate song”. They asked all the children to get up and jump and the audience exploded. The staff member continued:

And the children just wanted more and more, and after that we have played “The chocolate song” [from the CD player] like twenty times every day. ... What “The chocolate song” is, is that everyone gathers in the sofa and jumps up and down, following the songs tempo and intensity, falling over, laughing and singing.

Looking back at “musicality” in this context of the *everybody can* narrative includes a number of modalities for expressing musicality. Interestingly, “joy” and “pleasure” were words very often used by the interviewed kindergarten staff and parents when they described children’s engagement in music.

Ideological dilemmas

The two narratives, *only the talented can* and *everybody is musical* exist side by side in the everyday discourses of music, and give rise to ideological dilemmas. An ideological dilemma occurs when available discourses or narratives “collide”; they are both available, but both of them cannot be true simultaneously (Edley 2001). The availability of both these narratives and negotiations between them was identified in some of the interviews, for instance when a sense of inferiority came to the surface regarding the *everybody can* narrative. It could sound like: “I only enjoy music (but I am not musical/have no musical talent)”. On some occasions these statements suggested a kind of sorrow. The inferiority narrative could then be described as follows: “I am sorry that I’m not musical/have musical talent, it makes me inferior to

the people who do *real* music.” “Real music” here did not primarily concern genre, but pointed towards the talented individuals, who had the skills to perform music in more formal settings, such as concerts of any kind. This suggests that there are two possible subject positions: to be talented or to be musical in the sense that every human being is born with a capacity for music. While this latter kind of musicality was talked about with warmth and enthusiasm by some of the kindergarten teachers who described children’s engagement in music, it was related to feelings of inferiority when kindergarten teachers and parents described themselves. Looking back at the beginning of this article, the 70’s and 80’s concerns regarding the music industry is echoed in some of these statements. Although theories of active audiences are well known from a research perspective, the empirical data suggest that to consume music is considered less valuable than to produce music. This narrative is lurking in the background and regulates how people feel about and constitute their own and other’s musicality.

On the other hand, the experience of not having musical talent could also—and sometimes simultaneously—encompass a sort of relief: “I am happy that I have no musical talent. I enjoy music and can do so freely and without serious obligation.” A related perspective on the musically gifted child was provided by one of the mothers I interviewed. She stated spontaneously that in Norway people feel sorry for the musically talented and respond negatively to children who play an instrument seriously because they have to practice every day instead of playing outside and engaging with children’s games. She continued: “We don’t want those kind of [talented] children. ... I would never force my child to practice every day.” Her daughter went to ballet classes once every week, which her mother thought was sufficiently demanding for a child of her age.

Here, musical talent is constituted as a kind of burden. An obligation to develop one’s talent (which the mother mentions in relation to a contemporary professional musician who she grew up with) collides with a discourse of the free, happy child playing children’s games, preferably outside. Perhaps this is a Nordic construction related to the description of the Nordic countries as “child friendly” nations (Johanson 2010). In the Scandinavian countries the playing child seems to be a powerful notion (Mouritsen 1996), perhaps stronger and more positively viewed

than in other Western cultures (see for instance Wyness 2006). The result of the interviews and the discussion above suggest a dichotomy between either you “(only) enjoy music” or you have “talent with a (burdensome) obligation”. Both sides of the dichotomy relate to notions of the natural child. The ability to enjoy music is related to a notion of the natural child, because to enjoy music is constituted as an innate capacity. Having a talent is constituted as a burden, because a cultural-sociological notion of the natural child encompasses here the belief that children should play outside on their own, engage with nature, and get their hands and clothes dirty. Thus, in both cases notions of the “naturalness” of children and of childhood come forth as a regulating force.

Following up on these discussions, two main challenges are encountered when considering the discursively available subject positions for musical engagement for children. First, the children’s natural capacity for music is regarded as satisfactory only in the first years of their lives, and even then this subject position is oftentimes simultaneously regarded as less valuable than being talented. Talent is understood here as a child who possesses the skills to perform music on a musical instrument. Second, the children who are talented cannot make use of their talent without breaking some normative ideas about childhood. This comes forth as an important ideological dilemma concerning music.

The mother who brought up the issue of talent as a burden discussed sports activities in comparison to musical ones. She seemed to differentiate between how talent in sports is allowed a higher social status than musical talent. The mother also talked about health, stating that doing sports in one’s leisure time is healthy, and associated with images of tanned, active and eager children with dirty clothes, hands and faces who enjoy life and childhood. The child practicing a musical instrument, on the other hand, was associated with pale and physically unfit children, who were deprived of their “real” childhood. Whether such children really exist is beside the point because these differences are discursive rather than real, and that is what they are navigated by.

It seems that researchers should help providing a verbal repertoire that can bridge the gap between the two poles of the dichotomy. If the theorist, as is done in discussions of music education by Dyndahl and Ellefsen (2009), keeps both sides of

the dichotomy in play simultaneously, a third possible position may emerge, which could be described as the “happy, talented, committed musical child”. This is a position encompassing both the possibility of enjoying music and working to develop a talent. The blending of the poles in this dichotomy—a kind of middle ground—was found in my research observations. For instance, children organized situations by themselves that can be described as “practicing”. One of the video recordings from kindergarten shows a 5-year-old girl, joyful and energetic looking, listening to one particular song 17 times in a row. She engaged in dancing as her main mode of participation. Each time she focused on particular moves in the dance, and her facial expression that shifted from concentration to the joyful feeling of mastery.

Christopher Small’s (1998) description of “musicking” as a way of celebrating life and relations comes close to what I observed. The subject position of the “musicer” could supplement the explanatory discourse of children’s everyday musical lives, insofar as it designates that making music is a celebration of life and relations, including all kinds of ways of participating in music from selling tickets at the door, to playing an instrument. In this way, skills in music could be understood in a discursive context that is better suited to notions of the child and childhood (at least from a Scandinavian perspective).

That this interpretative repertoire was available to my research observations, and not so much in the verbal statements of the participants of the study, is interesting. After all, the concept of “musicking”, especially when it is understood in connection with research on music in everyday life, can be derived from observing and interviewing “real” people about their engagement with music. However, people do not necessarily have such a rich verbal repertoire with which to describe their everyday music-making and their relations to music as researchers do. This also goes for professional kindergarten teachers. Music education, then, could be understood as the continuous work of raising the consciousness of how musicality, musical engagement and “musicking” can create alternative narratives of children playing instruments, and those who do not. So it is that the analysis of the subject positions that are constituted and made available by means of those narratives that inevitably become part of people’s emotional evaluations, and then (simultaneously) are re-

constituted as “truth”, may have positive consequences for understanding children’s musical lives.

Conclusion

In this article I have argued that by looking at sociological notions of childhood and children in combination with discourse analysis we can reach a better understanding of how children’s engagement with music is regulated by what are taken-for-granted and normative unconscious processes. In an everyday life perspective, Norwegian adults (in this study, at least) do not seem very concerned with protecting their (innocent) children from imagery and idols of popular music, but children are protected from too much music (noise) and from music the adults think will be too boring from them (for instance classical music). Children protect themselves from music that feels too noisy in the specific listening situation (for example when going to sleep) and when they expect the music to be too “adultish” (for instance judged by the sincere and sad-looking fiddler on the CD cover). Children are active co-producers of their musical cultures, and contemporary children’s culture is a co-production between children and adults. By the children’s active engagement with music, they can be described as competent subjects and musical agents in and for their own lives. However, the notion of children as human beings is not sufficient in order to understand children’s positions in contemporary Western culture. It is argued that the notion of children as human beings should be applied simultaneously as a lens, and that the music teacher should take into account both what the child already is *and* prospects for the future.

Finally, in this article I have argued that music educators and researchers in music education should engage with sociological understandings of childhood and children, in order to augment the insights into the cultural and discursive notions of the musical and “musicking” child. Understanding a culture’s ideas of children and childhood, as well as understanding how such ideas conflict with and/or support children’s various ways of engaging with music, can be helpful on the path towards successful music education for all children. However, this article is merely scratching the surface of some of the themes that emerge when research in music education is combined with the new sociology of childhood.

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Notes

¹ The new sociology of childhood builds on the sociological work from the 1970s, but aimed in its beginning to move research on children centre stage, away from a marginalized position within sociology. James and Prout ([1997] 2007) abstract some of the new sociology of childhood's predominant and characteristic features. The most important theme is that childhood, within this paradigm, is to be understood as a social construction. The institution of childhood can be thought of as an interpretative frame for understanding the early years of human life, and this institution varies cross-culturally. A second theme is that childhood never can be separated from other variables such as class, gender, and ethnicity. In this text on children and music a parallel approach is applied to children's everyday uses of music; these can never be separated from other variables, such as the notions of children and childhood. The third theme is already mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, that is, that children's social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right. However, as James and Prout addresses in the second edition of the mentioned book, this position entails that children's worlds are not constructed as "worlds apart". Rather, children are seen in their relationships with adults. In this text on children and music, children's musical cultures are constructed as co-productions between children and adults. Thus, children are not regarded merely as the outcome of social processes, but as actors within them, as is central within the new sociology of childhood.

² This article can be criticized for omitting extremely relevant sociological perspectives such as race, ethnicity, gender, and class. There is no doubt that perspectives such as these are important, as well as the ways that children take up their place in an intersection between race, ethnicity, gender, and class, as well as the way that they are presented in this article (cf. Crenshaw 1989, Knudsen 2006). For instance, Boocock and Scott (2005) point out that black boys' bad behaviour towards school personnel "is made to take on a sinister, intentional, fully conscious tone that is stripped of any element of childish naïveté" (154). Further research is needed into the ways in which childhood intersects with social categories.

About the Author

Ingeborg Lunde Vestad is an associate professor (PhD) at the Department of Music at Hedmark University College, Hamar, Norway. She lectures at the Music Teacher Education Programme, the Kindergarten Teacher Education Programme and the Master's Education Programme. As a researcher Vestad is particularly interested in how people ascribe meaning to music in an everyday life perspective, how musical meaning is constituted as part of a broader culture and social settings (people's way of life, discursive regulations and available artefacts), as well as music's role as a resource in childhood and in parenting.