



CHALLENGING THE BINARIES:
A QUEER PERSPECTIVE ON NORWEGIAN
MUSIC EDUCATION

Eirik Skjelstad

PhD in Teaching and Teacher Education 2025

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**Challenging the Binaries: a Queer
Perspective on Norwegian Music
Education**

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Abstract

This article-based dissertation explores the significance, potential, and challenges of integrating gender and sexuality perspectives into music education within the framework of the 2020 Norwegian national curriculum for primary and lower-secondary public schools (Ministry of Education, 2020). With the implementation of the 2020 curriculum, several new learning objectives, known as “competence aims,” have been introduced, some explicitly addressing gender and sexuality. Within the music subject, pupils are expected to “investigate how gender, gender roles, and sexuality are presented in music and dance in the public sphere, and create expressions that challenge stereotypes” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020b). This dissertation examines how teachers work with gender and sexuality topics in music education, including the opportunities and challenges they encounter in this context. Additionally, it investigates the formative role that music can play in the identity construction of gender-expansive¹ youth, thereby highlighting the importance of music education from an informal perspective. The overarching research questions guiding this dissertation are: *What can a queer perspective offer music education?* and *How can gender and sexuality perspectives be integrated into Norwegian music education within the framework of the 2020 national curriculum, and what challenges and possibilities arise from this integration?*

The dissertation addresses these questions through three articles. Article 1 examines music teachers’ interpretations of the competence aim and their experiences with integrating gender and sexuality in music education. This is investigated through an analysis of the teachers’ so-called interpretative repertoires (Wetherell & Potter, 1987; Edley, 2001), which reflect larger ideological dilemmas. Article 2 focuses on the experiences of a non-binary thirteen-year-old with having a non-normative gender expression and illustrates how music serves as a medium for exploring and negotiating their (non-)gendered identity. Article 3 offers a philosophical discussion on the concept of educational “risk” (Biesta, 2016), in music education. I discuss this specifically in relation to the uncertainty and potential discomfort inherent in addressing gender and sexuality in music education. To support this inquiry, the dissertation employs a theoretical framework based on queer/gender theory (Butler, 1990/2007; Foucault, 1981)

¹ I use the term “gender-expansive” throughout the dissertation to encompass the breadth of (non-)gendered identities. The term is borrowed from Garrett and Palkki (2021).

pedagogy of discomfort (Boler, 1999; Røthing, 2020), and *Bildung*-oriented pedagogical approaches within music education (Dyndahl & Ellefsen, 2009; Nielsen, 1998). It also conceptualizes “a queer perspective” as a critical-analytical lens for examining how music education can either reinforce or challenge normative frameworks through processes of subjectification. Methodologically, the dissertation utilizes qualitative research methods, including semi-structured interviews with music teachers and a narrative single-case study of a non-binary youth. Discourse analysis and narrative storytelling serve as key analytical tools, enabling an in-depth exploration of how gender and sexuality perspectives manifest in pedagogical practices, both in formal and informal music practices.

The dissertation’s findings indicate that music education often operates within heteronormative frameworks, with teachers frequently interpreting the curriculum aims through traditional gender norms. However, the experiences of the non-binary participant in Article 2 emphasize the transformative potential that music education holds as an arena for exploring and negotiating (gender) identity. The dissertation argues that integrating gender and sexuality perspectives is not just about adding new knowledge, but also about viewing pedagogical practice through a “queer perspective” – by embracing identity as a non-essential quality, by embracing risk and uncertainty as strengths, and by acknowledging subjectification as a continuous process. It emphasizes that this rethinking involves taking a risk (cf. Biesta, 2016) of allowing educational spaces to remain open and unpredictable. In this way, this work contributes to the field of music education by advocating for an approach that actively navigates the complexities and possibilities of queer pedagogy within the context of the Norwegian curriculum.

Sammendrag

Denne artikkelbaserte avhandlingen utforsker betydningen, potensialet og utfordringene ved å integrere kjønn- og seksualitetsperspektiver i musikkundervisningen innenfor rammen av læreplanen fra 2020 (LK20) for grunnskolen (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2020). Med innføringen av læreplanen har flere nye kompetansemål blitt introdusert, hvorav noen eksplisitt omhandler kjønn og seksualitet. I musikkfaget forventes det at elevene skal “undersøke hvordan kjønn, kjønnsroller og seksualitet fremstilles i musikk og dans i det offentlige rom, og skape uttrykk som utfordrer stereotyper” (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020). Denne avhandlingen undersøker hvordan lærere arbeider med temaer knyttet til kjønn og seksualitet i musikkundervisningen, inkludert de mulighetene og utfordringene de møter i denne sammenhengen. I tillegg utforsker avhandlingen den formative/dannende rollen musikk og populærkultur kan spille i identitetskonstruksjonen til kjønnskreativ (gender-expansive) ungdom, og fremhever dermed betydningen av musikkundervisning fra et uformelt perspektiv. De overordnede forskningsspørsmålene som styrer denne avhandlingen er: *What can a queer perspective offer music education?* og *How can gender and sexuality perspectives be integrated into Norwegian music education within the framework of the 2020 national curriculum, and what challenges and possibilities arise from this integration?*

Avhandlingen adresserer disse spørsmålene gjennom tre artikler. Artikkel 1 undersøker et utvalg musikk læreres tolkninger og forståelser av læreplanens mål knyttet til kjønn og seksualitet, og hvordan disse tolkningene påvirker deres undervisningspraksis i klasserommet. Dette undersøkes via en diskursanalyse av lærernes såkalte fortolkningsrepertoarer (Edley, 2001; Wetherell & Potter, 1987;) som gjenspeiler større ideologiske dilemmaer. Artikkel 2 fokuserer på en ikke-binær trettenårings erfaringer med å ha et ikke-normativt kjønnsuttrykk, og illustrerer hvordan musikk fungerer som et medium for utforskning og forhandling av hens (ikke-)kjønnede identitet. Artikkel 3 gir en filosofisk diskusjon om begrepet “utdanningens risiko” (Biesta, 2016) i kontekst av musikkundervisning, spesielt med tanke på usikkerheten og det potensielle ubehaget som ligger i å inkludere kjønns- og seksualitetsperspektiver i klasserommet. For å støtte denne undersøkelsen benytter avhandlingen et teoretisk rammeverk basert på skeiv teori og kjønnsteori (Foucault, 1981, Butler 1990/2007), ubehagets pedagogikk (Boler, 1999; Røthing, 2020) og dannelsesorienterte pedagogiske tilnærminger innen musikkundervisning (Dyndahl & Ellefsen, 2009; Nielsen, 1998). Den konseptualiserer også et “queer perspective” som en kritisk-analytisk linse for å undersøke hvordan

musikkundervisning enten kan forsterke eller utfordre normative rammeverk gjennom subjektiveringsprosesser. Metodologisk benytter avhandlingen kvalitative forskningsmetoder, inkludert semi-strukturerte intervjuer med musikk lærere og en narrativ kasusstudie av en ikke-binær trettenåring. Diskursanalyse og narrativ historiefortelling fungerer som sentrale analytiske verktøy, og muliggjør en dyptgående utforskning av hvordan kjønns- og seksualitetsperspektiver manifesterer seg i pedagogiske praksiser, både i formelle og ikke-formelle musikkpraksiser.

Avhandlingens funn indikerer at musikkundervisningen ofte opererer innenfor heteronormative rammeverk, der lærere ofte tolker kompetansemålene gjennom tradisjonelle kjønnsnormer. Imidlertid understreker erfaringene til den ikke-binære deltakeren i Artikkel 2 det transformative potensialet musikkundervisning har som en arena for utforskning og forhandling av identitet. Avhandlingen argumenterer for at integrering av kjønns- og seksualitetsperspektiver ikke bare handler om å tilføye ny kunnskap, men også innebærer å beskuе den pedagogiske praksisen gjennom et “queer perspective” – ved å omfavne identitet som en ikke-essensiell kvalitet, ved å omfavne risiko og usikkerhet som styrker, og ved å anerkjenne subjektivering som en kontinuerlig prosess. Den understreker at denne nytenkningen innebærer å ta en risiko (jf. Biesta, 2016) ved å la utdanningsrommene forbli åpne og uforutsigbare. Slik bidrar denne avhandlingen til musikkpedagogikk som fagfelt ved å fremme en tilnærming som aktivt navigerer i kompleksitetene og mulighetene for skeiv pedagogikk i kontekst av den norske læreplanen.

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Hamar, September 2024

Eirik Skjelstad

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Part 1: Extended Introduction

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Prelude

I was born in 1987. Growing up, questions about my gender and sexual identity consumed much of my time. As a young boy, I enjoyed borrowing my mother's dresses and putting elastics in my hair. I was obsessed with Disney's *The Little Mermaid*; every day, I would play the videotape (this was in 1991 and we had a VHS player at home) and dance and sing along to every song. I loved the voice of Sidsel Kyrkjebø, who provided the Norwegian voice for Ariel, and I tried to sound like her by imitating her Bergen accent while prancing around in my mother's high heels. My mother responded with a big smile and warmth, helping me find outfits to wear. In 1993, the year I turned six, I started first grade. Very early on, I realized I wasn't a "boy" in the right way. While the other boys and some girls in the class played rambunctiously and often fought, I preferred quiet games in the corner of the sandbox with some of the girls. As



a child, I was often asked by both children and adults, "Are you a boy or a girl?" "Boy," I would reply indignantly, while instinctively understanding that they weren't asking to be mean but because they genuinely wondered. What initially started as teasing soon turned into bullying, and school was a nightmare for many years. I remember lying in bed praying to God to either let me become a girl or an ordinary boy. The never-ending series of bullying was always related to the fact that I was acting "girly" and only played with the girls. PE classes were a nightmare as we in the early 90s in Norway often were divided by boys-girls. I didn't dare to ask the teacher if I could do gymnastics or play volleyball with the girls (two sports that I in hindsight can only interpret to be conceived as girl-friendly by the teacher) and suffered through football, ice hockey and basketball with my bullies. I have no doubt in my mind that many of the boys took great pleasure in giving me an extra hard time during those classes.

I have oftentimes asked myself if I would have been considered trans had I been a child today. I even brought this question up to my informant Neptune from Article 2, a non-binary 13-year-old:

Neptune: I think that ... well, let's start at the beginning. Being questioning one's gender identity is not a bad thing. People will go through major life-changing events that will change who they are and act as a person. Even – heavy air quotes for the recording – [Eirik laughs] “normal” people go through that.

Eirik: Yes.

Neptune: And ... those people are not considered weird, and neither should – air quotes again – “gender-confused” people. Because it's just as valid. So, if a young person is trying to figure out whether they are more masculine or feminine ... that shouldn't be an issue. The questioning itself is *not* a bad thing.

I clearly remember the time I admitted to myself that I was gay. I was 14, having spent hours watching the rehearsals of the Norwegian National Youth Orchestra, who were to perform a series of concerts in relation to a music festival in my hometown. Every year during the Summer Holidays, the Norwegian National Youth Orchestra would tour Norway, performing a set program of orchestral pieces, often together with various solo performers. I happened to discover that the orchestra rehearsals took place in an indoor sport arena. The orchestra was playing the opening movement of Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4 and I was immediately mesmerized. I sat on the first row on the far side and studied the young musicians until I laid my eyes on a young viola player. His hair dyed dark purple, with matching beard. I had never seen a more beautiful man in my life, and I could not take my eyes off him. It was as if I managed to tune out every other person and sound in the room. Later that day, I admitted to myself that I had fallen in love, albeit with someone I didn't know or had talked to.

Carrying the newfound realization about myself and my sexuality I went systematically to work. I didn't know anyone who was gay, and the only gay individuals I had ever seen were on TV at home, where I heard them being referred to as “sissies.” I felt an immense urge to learn more about myself and “my people.” My hometown's library was relatively small, and I knew the librarians well, as I was already spending a lot of time there, usually reading in a corner. On the counter laid a thick register, in which books were sorted by genre. Terrified of the prospect of being discovered by anyone I found the letter “H” and found a short section

listed as *Homofili*. I quickly noted down a few books before anyone could see me. I found the first book on the list, *Querelle de Brest* by Jean Genet (first published in 1947) and read it with a feeling of uneasiness as it depicted the life and crimes of Georges Querelle, a bisexual thief and prostitute who also turned out to be a serial killer. It was my first encounter with gay sex being explicitly described, and I couldn't help feeling a bit uneasy as many of the books I read at that time depicted homosexuality through the lens of struggles, illness, violence, abuse, and promiscuity.

In the early 2000s openly gay and lesbian characters in mainstream media and popular culture were sparse, but in the beginning of a momentum. Already a decade earlier, Gross noted that “[h]ardly ever shown in the media are just plain gay folks, used in roles which do not center on their deviance as a threat to the moral order which must be countered through ridicule or physical violence” (1991, p. 30). As I was in secondary school and later in upper secondary school, I started to notice a certain increased visibility of gay characters and openly gay people in media and popular culture. However, the gay character very often seemed to be there as a “token,” not really contributing to the main story or being cast as the main character. Raymond (2003) identified three distinct tropes or patterns that would reoccur in American sitcoms at that time and argued:

...how these shows resolve tensions often results in a ‘reinscription’ of heterosexuality and a ‘containment’ of queer sexuality, that is, that the resolution these programs offer enables viewers to distance themselves from the queer and thereby to return to their comfortable positions as part of the dominant culture. (p. 100)

Things are radically changed now at the time of writing this in 2024. As I will point out (see chapter 1.1.1) there has been an ever-increasing body of different media either aimed directly at a LGBTQ+ audience or even more prevalent, aimed at a general audience but with a strong presence of LGBTQ+ characters (GLAAD, 2022).

I have had a long career as a flight attendant, traveling the world for a major airline. During this time, I had the privilege of meeting two remarkable colleagues, both employed as “Air Hostesses (our nametags displayed our roles; purser, steward, host, or hostess based on individual job titles). These two colleagues are trans women, and I witnessed firsthand the challenges they faced related to social stigma. I remember how they were spoken about among colleagues. While some were supportive and admiring, many expressed shock, questioning

how our employer could hire “men in dresses.” I distinctly recall feeling deeply frustrated on one occasion and responding, “Do what? Serve coffee? Administer life-saving first aid? Extinguish fires? Evacuate the aircraft in an emergency?” This experience mirrors larger societal attitudes. In reflecting on this, I must address the critical question: Is it still possible to engage honestly with the debates surrounding queer and trans identities in today’s socio-political landscape? Can one hold a skeptical view without being dismissed or labeled? Who is truly harmed by these debates? Some worry about a new generation of children who might undergo medical interventions unnecessarily. However, I believe the opposite is true. The increased visibility we see today is not a symptom of confusion but rather a result of better social conditions and increased openness. Without claiming medical expertise, I suggest that human expressions are fluid and have always been so. For instance, if we take a deconstructive approach to terms like “masculine” and “feminine,” what do they really signify? Are they related to clothes, behaviors, occupations, or cognitive and emotional traits? These terms have had different meanings across time, whether in 1924, 1824, or 1424, and across cultures. While my dissertation does not focus on a historical analysis of these terms, it is grounded in post-structuralist theory, which posits that these concepts are not fixed but are fluid and change across different discursive fields. This fluidity is also a central premise of the three research articles that follow in this dissertation and helps substantiate the queer perspective I aim at music education as a field and practice.

This dissertation is primarily aimed at teachers, teacher educators, and other professionals who work with children and young people who fall outside the norms of gender and sexuality. At the same time, as a doctoral dissertation, it is written to contribute to the academic field, ensuring its relevance to the scientific community as well. My hope is that it offers insights that are valuable both for researchers and for those in practical educational roles. While I am deeply engaged with the issues explored in this dissertation, my intention is not to take an overtly activist stance. Rather, I hope it will be read as a friendly greeting (inspired by Bjelkerud, 2022) to the field, recognizing both the challenges and the importance of navigating the evolving landscape of identity categories. I understand how afraid one can be of making a mistake or saying something wrong. I have been there myself, and I always feel a sense of nervousness when I, as a white, privileged middle-class man working in academia, publicly express opinions on gender and sexuality. After all, what we refer to as the letters in “LGBTQIA+” are people of all ages. Some are activists and speak with a loud and clear voice,

while others remain in the background. Some are proud of who they are, while others feel shame. Some have supportive families and networks, while others live in hiding.

As teachers in a country where we have laws to protect the rights of all groups, it is highly likely that we will encounter children and young people who fall outside the norms of gender and sexuality either in our classrooms or in our day-to-day lives. As a teacher educator and educational researcher, it has been a significant driving force for me to explore ways to seamlessly integrate queer perspectives into various topics, not just when the school theme week is “Pride.” This aligns with a branch of critical pedagogy that we now refer to as queer pedagogy. This will be a recurring theme throughout the dissertation. The goal will be to contribute empirical and theoretical perspectives that can benefit the school field and, more concretely, how schools can better support children and young people who fall outside the norms of gender and sexuality.

Words, Terms, and Abbreviations

The landscape of gender and sexual identity is rich and diverse, marked by a vocabulary that evolves as general understanding and acceptance grow. As I intend to clarify (see chapter 2.1.1), our linguistic repertoires are dynamic and shaped in and through discourse, which is why the terminology identity categories are nuanced and sometimes might even seem contradictory or identical to other words. For readability and clarity, I offer a simplified overview (Table 1) which aims to elucidate terms that are foundational within queer/LGBTQ+-oriented contexts and to give the reader some context for the terms they will encounter in this dissertation. An extended glossary can be found in Garrett and Palkki (2021, Appendix A) and Litschi (2022, pp. 11-17). I offer a theorization of the term “queer” in chapters 2.1.1, 2.1.2, and 2.1.3.

LGBTQIA+	A broad spectrum of sexual and gender identities, including Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and many other terms that encompass the diversity of human sexuality and gender identity. For brevity and common usage, I will employ the shorter acronym LGBTQ+ in this thesis.
Queer	Term that has been reclaimed from its pejorative roots to denote a spectrum of sexual and gender identities that are not exclusively heterosexual or cis-gender. It serves as an umbrella term for individuals who do not identify with traditional categories of gender and sexual orientation.
Queering/to queer	Queer employed as a verb. The process or approach of challenging and deconstructing traditional norms around gender and sexuality. It is a critical tool used to examine societal norms and propose alternative ways of thinking about identity and relationships.
Gender-expansive	Term that encompasses a wide range of gender identities and expressions that transcend the traditional binary understanding of gender as merely male or female.
Gender non-conforming	Individuals whose gender expression does not adhere to societal expectations associated with the gender they were assigned at birth.
Cis-gender	A person whose gender identity corresponds with the sex they were assigned at birth, contrasting with transgender experiences.
Heteronormativity	Belief system that posits heterosexuality as the default or normal sexual orientation, often marginalizing or invalidating queer identities
They/Them pronouns	Gender-neutral pronouns used by individuals who do not identify strictly as male or female, often used by those with non-binary identities.
Non-binary	Gender identity that is not exclusively masculine or feminine. Non-binary individuals may identify as a blend of both, neither, or as a different gender entirely.
Transperson or transgender person	Describes someone whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. Trans can also be used as an adjective and should be used with respect to acknowledge the person's gender identity.

Table 1: Words and abbreviations related to LGBTQ+/Queer terminology

1. Introduction

1.1 Gender and Sexuality in Music Education

This dissertation examines the significance, possibilities, and challenges of incorporating gender and sexuality perspectives into music education within the framework of the 2020 Norwegian national curriculum for primary and lower-secondary public schools (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020). With the introduction of the new curriculum, several new learning objectives, called “competence aims” (Eurydice, 2023; Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020b) have been included, some of which explicitly address gender and sexuality. For example, one of the competence aims for CREE² in 10th grade states that the students should be “able to account for and reflect on different views on gender and sexuality in Christianity and other religions and beliefs” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020d, my translation). Another competence aim for social studies 7th grade requires that the students “reflect on variations in identity, sexual orientation, and gender expression, and one’s own and others’ boundaries in connection with emotions, the body, gender, and sexuality and discuss what one can do if those boundaries are violated” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020c). For the music subject in 7th grade, the curriculum expects the students to “investigate how gender, gender roles, and sexuality are presented in music and dance in the public sphere, and create expressions that challenge stereotypes” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020b). Ever since the implementation of the new curriculum in 2020 there has been a need to explore how music teachers specifically approach these topics, whether they feel prepared to do this or not, and what this approach (or lack of it) potentially could signify for gender-expansive³ children and adolescents. This case from the Norwegian context may also provide valuable insights into understanding and addressing similar challenges in international educational settings.

Moreover, the heightened visibility of queer identities as a prominent cultural and societal entity in the twenty-first century offers new opportunities for reflection within the field of

² Christian and other religious and ethical education

³ I am using the term “Gender-expansive” to encompass the breadth of (non-)gendered identities. I have borrowed the term from Garrett and Palkki (2021), who define “... *gender-expansive* as an umbrella term to describe a broader range of gender expressions and identities” (p. 20, original emphasis).

education. Hawkins (2016, p. 3) has highlighted the prevalence of queerness in pop music, showing how expressions of gender and sexuality are deeply embedded in popular music. This increased visibility is further reflected in the growing representation of LGBTQ+ individuals in media and popular culture (GLAAD, 2022).⁴ These societal shifts have significant bearings on the contemporary schooling environment, as the boundaries between students' academic and leisure time are increasingly blurred rather than distinct (Abramo, 2011; Abramo, 2020; Folkestad, 2006; Green, 2008; Partti & Karlsen, 2010). Students' interactions with music and popular culture are always present, and it is through such interactions that they are exposed to an array of cultural expressions through their screens. As such, music education is inevitably entwined with broader cultural circumstances. This prompts questions about the impact that music, popular culture, and queer representation in media can have on the lives of young individuals who identify as LGBTQ+,⁵ or queer,⁶ within both the realm of formal music education and their daily lived experiences. Thus, the heightened visibility of queer identities as a prominent cultural and societal entity in the twenty-first century, or the *queer turn* as Onsrud (2021) puts it, informs this dissertation as a whole. As music teachers in Norway, we are tasked to maneuver these societal expressions and contextualize them in a way in the classroom that promotes critical thinking and democracy (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020a).

The selection of the topic (to examine the possibilities and challenges with the incorporation of gender and sexuality perspectives in Norwegian music education) was motivated by three key considerations. Firstly, young individuals' lives today are profoundly shaped by popular culture and (social) media, which subsequently permeate the school context as well as music classes (Abramo, 2011; Abramo, 2020; Hebert & Williams, 2020; Partti & Karlsen, 2010; Quan-Haase, 2020). Secondly, music teachers in Norway are tasked with examining the

⁴ GLAAD is a non-profit organization founded in 1985, focused on LGBTQ advocacy and cultural change, working to map and ensure fair, accurate, and inclusive representation of LGBTQ+ individuals in media and entertainment. In its *Where We Are on TV* report for 2022, GLAAD noted a record high of 11.9% of series regular characters identifying as LGBTQ+, along with increased racial diversity and representation of lesbian and transgender characters, while also highlighting the need for more portrayals of characters living with HIV (GLAAD, 2022).

⁵ LGBTQ+ in this dissertation encompasses a broader spectrum than the previously mentioned gender-expansive categories, serving as a collective term for all identities regardless of sexuality or gender.

⁶ The concept of "queer" is elaborated in chapter 2.1.2. Briefly, in this context, queerness refers to any behaviors or identities that challenge conventional gender norms. Importantly, this suggests that individuals who are cisgender and heterosexual can also engage in actions or embody attitudes that are considered queer. See "Prelude" for a glossary and chapter 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 for a detailed overview of the queer term and its connotations.

depiction of gender roles and sexualities in music and dance in the public sphere alongside their students through the above-mentioned curricular competence aim, as well as facilitate for them to “create expressions that challenge stereotypes” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020b). Thirdly, I became increasingly interested in exploring how young, queer individuals utilize music as a tool to explore, negotiate, and construct their (non-)gendered identities and sexual/attractional orientations (Garrett & Palkki, 2021; Nichols, 2013; Taylor, 2012).

The dissertation hypothesizes that young people who identify as queer in Norway and other countries in the global North today are more likely to encounter increased representation (media portrayals) of LGBTQ+ persons through music and other cultural mediums than in the past. I believe this has several implications for music education in Norwegian public schools. Music education as we know it from a Norwegian context does not occur in isolation but significantly interacts with, and contributes to the surrounding society and culture (Dyndahl & Ellefsen, 2009; Hansen & Askerøi, in print; Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020e). This becomes apparent in the overall part of the music curriculum, depicting the subject’s relevance and central values:

Music is an important subject for fostering creativity, cultural understanding, and identity development. It equips students to engage with music throughout their lives. In music classes, students develop skills in playing, singing, and dancing, creating music, and understanding a variety of expressions. The subject helps students appreciate how music originates from and contributes to cultural and social change, and it offers experiences that enhance the quality of life. Music education prepares students for participation in a social and working life that values practical and aesthetic skills, creativity, and social interaction. (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020e)

Music is always present in schools, inside and outside classroom settings, and as part of students’ and staff’s everyday life. In music classes, different musical expressions introduced by participants (students and teachers) become topics for discussions, negotiations, and even discomfort. The continual negotiation and reflection of the surrounding culture contribute to giving music education its shifting and decentered “didactic identity” (Dyndahl & Ellefsen, 2009, p. 22) and supports the argument that music education occurs both on formal and informal arenas (Folkestad, 2006). Put simply, my approach is grounded in the belief that music, popular culture, and media play a significant educational/formative role in the lives of young people and become important technologies (DeNora, 1999) for identity development

and formation. In the context of music education, I believe it is necessary to examine the significance that music and popular culture, especially LGBTQ+/queer representation, can have for children and youth today.

This dissertation holds relevance for music teachers, who navigate both the conduct and content of their music classes, albeit within the framework of national curriculum guidelines. The increased mainstream visibility of queer personae, queer identities, trans individuals, gender-expansive persons, and LGBTQ+ narratives offers an opportunity to rethink how these identities intersect with music education. These shifting dynamics call for a deeper exploration of how music education can evolve to engage more meaningfully with the diversity of student identities and experiences.

1.1.1 Intersecting Mainstream Media, Popular Culture, and Music Education

In the era of digitalization, the advent of digital music sharing and streaming has revolutionized users' listening habits. Platforms such as Spotify, Tidal, YouTube Music, and Apple Music have become repositories of diverse genres, songs, and artists. These services utilize sophisticated algorithms and user-centric taxonomies to cater to individual preferences (Ferwerda et al., 2019). With Spotify's 226 million subscribers as of 2023 (Götting, 2024), and Netflix's dominance in the television sphere with over 213 million subscribers as of 2021 (Persaud, 2021), it seems evident that mainstream media algorithms play a pivotal role in shaping cultural consumption. These algorithms not only recommend content based on general popularity but also tailor suggestions according to individual users' past interactions (Netflix Research, n.d.).⁷

The influence of these platforms extends beyond mere consumption; they seem to shape societal narratives and contribute to the visibility of marginalized communities. For example, the success of shows like "Orange Is The New Black" (2013–2019) on Netflix introduced a broader audience to the diverse lives of female prison inmates, notably increasing the visibility

⁷ This is exemplified by Netflix's assertion of the centrality of personalized suggestions to their service:

Recommendation algorithms are at the core of the Netflix product. They provide our members with personalized suggestions to reduce the amount of time and frustration to find something great content to watch. Because of the importance of our recommendations, we continually seek to improve them by advancing the state-of-the-art in the field. We do this by using the data about what content our members watch and enjoy along with how they interact with our service to get better at figuring out what the next great movie or TV show for them will be. (Netflix Research, n.d.)

of trans women of color through Laverne Cox's portrayal of the character Sophia Bursett. Cox has later been covered on the *Time* magazine, featured in numerous films and television roles, participated in public debates regarding trans people's rights and have been portrayed in a Netflix documentary, depicting the history and suffering of trans people in the U.S (Glover, 2016, p. 339). Such representations in media have profound implications, as evidenced by the variety of TV shows that now address queerness and LGBTQ+ topics, ranging from "Pose" (2018–2021), "Sex Education" (2019–), "RuPaul's Drag Race" (2009–), "Sense8" (2015–2018), "The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina" (2018–2020), "American Horror Story" (2011–), "Heartstopper" (2022–) to many more that prominently address queerness and/or LGBTQ+ agendas. In the realm of music, algorithms promote songs rapidly, as seen with Taylor Swift's 2019 hit "You Need to Calm Down," which not only spread quickly after its release but also carried a strong political message celebrating the LGBTQ+ community. The music video, featuring cameos from notable LGBTQ+ celebrities and allies, became a cultural talking point, prompting public discussions on the political engagement of pop artists (Caramanica et al., 2019; Heil, 2019; Power, 2019). As of September 2024, the music video has over 353 million views on YouTube.

My aim in highlighting algorithms in streaming services is to emphasize the significance they hold for the content received by children and young adults across various platforms. This is something I've personally experienced as an active user of streaming services, but also have observed in schools. For instance, the informants in my master's thesis were six 14-year-olds who all actively used streaming services, and each one emphasized how the platform's recommendations influenced their music choices (Skjelstad, 2019). For these teenagers, music was a crucial part of their identity; it served as both an external marker important for their position in the classroom environment and as a technology for relaxation and emotional expression when alone (cf. DeNora, 2000). On the social significance of popular music and culture, Hansen (2017) emphasized the profound impact of pop artists and music on both the intellectual and emotional aspects of individuals: "Pop artists have an extraordinary ability to affect us in complex and fascinating ways. Popular music engages both our intellectual and emotional faculties, which holds true not just for fans, but also for scholars" (p. 1). As both a fan and a scholar, I too have engaged with popular music in meaningful ways, which have influenced me both professionally and on a personal, intimate level. This intersection of media representation, popular culture, and the audience's emotional engagement presents a unique

opportunity for pedagogical exploration, particularly within the context of Norwegian music education.

In summary, I have highlighted how music and popular culture are always present in both formal and informal music practices, as supported by research (Abramo, 2020; Folkestad, 2006; Onsrud, 2021; Partti & Karlsen, 2010; Quan-Haase, 2020). The music and the cultural references brought into the classroom will undoubtedly leave their mark and thus have a significant didactic impact. This is one of the aspects that makes music, as a school subject, interesting to study, as it necessarily deals as much with culture and societal trends as with music itself. Here, I lean on Dyndahl and Ellefsen's (2009) reflections of music didactics as a field of cultural didactics studies when I frame the music subject as a cultural subject.

The merging of mainstream media, popular culture, and music education creates a potential for what I see as a pedagogical synergy (inspired by Biesta, 2016, p. 129). This synergy not only broadens the scope of what can be taught within the confines of a music classroom but also enhances the relevance of music education to students' lived experiences. Therefore, the overall objectives of this dissertation are multi-fold: to highlight the significance of popular culture and its representations within the music education framework; to investigate the intersections of (gender) identity, queer theory, and music education; and to propose actionable insights for the incorporation of these elements into the Norwegian music educational landscape. To achieve these overarching objectives, the research focuses on two specific aims that together address both the educational practices of teachers and the personal experiences of students. By doing so, I aim to affirm the educational imperative to engage with and reflect the dynamic and evolving tapestry of society – a tapestry in which every thread, no matter how unconventional, contributes to the richness of the whole.

1.1.2 Music Education in/and the Queer Perspective

In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, Alice reflects on the strange and constant changes she experiences in Wonderland, remarking, "It's no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then." This observation comes after she has undergone various transformations, both in size and in her perception of the world around her. The statement captures her realization that, having gone through these changes, she can no longer relate to her past self in the same way. This sentiment reflects the essence of a queer

perspective: to recognize that identities, norms, and experiences are in constant flux. A queer perspective, much like viewing the world through a colored lens, reshapes how reality is perceived. Just as a colored lens may bring certain hues into focus while obscuring others, a queer lens draws attention to the fluidity and complexity of (gender) identity, while destabilizing fixed categories and assumptions (see chapters 2.1.1, 2.1.2). But what happens when this queer lens is applied to music education? In this dissertation, I explore these issues through the notion of a “queer perspective.” I seek to illuminate an approach that challenges (hetero)normative assumptions, deconstructs and challenges binaries, and embraces fluidity in understanding gender and sexuality in the context of music education. This perspective moves beyond fixed gender and sexuality categories, instead viewing identity and experience as dynamic, always in flux, and deeply contextual. By applying a queer perspective, I aim to question the foundational (heteronormative) structures that often underpin educational practices, specifically within the context of Norwegian music education. As such, the queer perspective encourages a rethinking of what is traditionally considered stable or coherent. It asks us to reconsider the ways in which gender and sexuality are constructed and performed, not as natural or given, but as cultural artifacts shaped by discourse and power relations (Butler, 1988, 1990/2007; Foucault, 1981a). In the context of education, the queer perspective disrupts standard pedagogical approaches that often reinforce binary understandings of gender and sexuality. Music education, as a cultural and social practice, offers a particularly rich site for such exploration, as it is inherently tied to broader sociocultural circumstances and expressions of identity, emotion, and belonging (Blix et al., 2021; Hansen & Askerøi, in print; Källén, 2021; Onsrud, 2021; Warwick, 2023). Through a queer lens, the boundaries between formal and informal music education, between the personal and the public, are blurred. This perspective allows for an engagement with the complexities of identity formation, especially for students whose experiences and expressions may fall outside the dominant norms.

By employing a queer perspective in this dissertation, I aim to highlight the potentialities and possibilities that arise when embracing the fluidity of identity and the multiplicity of experience when teaching about gender and sexuality in the context of music education. This approach is not about providing definitive answers or solutions but rather about fostering critical reflection on the ways in which education, particularly music education, can become more inclusive, expansive, and responsive to the diversity of students’ lives and identities. However, a queer perspective, when applied to music education, reaches beyond student

experiences; it disrupts the very frameworks that govern educational practices, including the roles of teachers, the curriculum, and the pedagogical approaches themselves. What might make the queer perspective particularly thought-provoking is its insistence that identity is always in motion. Queer, in this sense, is not a static state of being, but an ongoing performance, a verb rather than a noun (Hawkins, 2016, p. 15). It pushes us to ask: How might we engage with music education if we accept that identities are not something students have but something they do? This shift in perspective encourages us to view identity as an ongoing process, always in the act of becoming (Hall, 2011), always being performed and re-performed in response to the social and cultural contexts that surround it. And how can music education respond to this ongoing *doing* of identity? In this sense, music education becomes more than a space for knowledge transmission; it becomes a site of constant identity formation, where the fluid and performative nature of gender and sexuality can be expressed, negotiated, and even contested. This ongoing *doing* of identity means that students are not reduced to passive recipients of knowledge but active participants in their own identity-knowledge construction. Queer, understood as a verb, invites both teachers and students to see identity as something that is not fixed, but always in the process of being redefined, reinterpreted, and resisted.

Ultimately, by applying a queer perspective on Norwegian music education I seek to challenge the binaries that often define identity, opening a space where teaching and learning become a dynamic process of questioning and reimagining what it means to be and become.

1.2 Research Design and Research Questions

1.2.1 Overview of Research Design

This dissertation consists of three research articles, framed by an extended introduction. The research embodied in these articles was gathered across distinct phases over a period of three years, aiming to ensure a comprehensive and robust analysis. Each article is driven by a set of own research questions, which, when combined, contribute to a nuanced understanding of the overarching theme of this dissertation.

The initial phase of the doctoral project investigated the repertoires of Norwegian music teachers, scrutinizing their approaches to gender roles and gender-expansiveness within the

framework of the 2020 national curriculum. This phase was particularly concentrated on how teachers interpret and enact the competence aim for the music subject, stating that pupils should be able to “investigate how gender, gender roles and sexuality are portrayed in music and dance in the public sphere, and create expressions that challenge stereotypes” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020b). The objective was to understand and interpret how Norwegian music teachers navigate and integrate the notions of gender and identity into their pedagogical practices. In the second phase of the study I conducted an intimate narrative study (Chase, 2005; Nichols, 2013) of Neptune, a 13-year-old gender-expansive individual. The focus was on their engagement with music and literature as mediums for constructing and negotiating their identity, specifically as it pertains to being gender non-conforming. This in-depth exploration provided valuable insights into the personal impact of cultural texts on identity formation in the formative years. In the final phase of the project, I have carried insights and knowledge from the first two sub-studies to discuss how approaching gender and sexuality perspectives in schools entails an educational risk (Biesta, 2016) and a potential discomfort (Boler, 1999; Røthing, 2020).

Each phase of research not only stands on its own merit but also aims to contribute to a cohesive narrative that addresses the complex interplay between gender identity, popular culture, and educational practices. I hope that the cumulative knowledge gained from these distinct yet interconnected studies can represent a solid foundation for offering tangible strategies for (music) teachers to adopt and adapt within their classrooms, enriching the discourse on diversity and inclusive education.

1.2.2 Research Objectives and Questions

An overall aim of this dissertation is to explore what a queer perspective can offer music education. This is primarily a philosophical exploration, which I address in the extended introduction. To ground this exploration in practice, I provide empirical material that serves two main purposes. First, this dissertation analyzes how gender and sexuality perspectives can be integrated into Norwegian music education within the framework of the 2020 national curriculum, thereby exploring the challenges and possibilities associated with such integration. Second, I examine how students and teachers perceive and experience gender and sexuality perspectives in music education, focusing on how young people who identify as queer engage

with LGBTQ+-friendly music and popular culture to construct and negotiate their identities, especially within informal music learning contexts. Collectively, these two aims contribute to fulfilling the broader objectives by providing insights into both the systemic and individual dimensions of integrating gender and sexuality perspectives in music education. This exploration is particularly relevant for both music teacher educators and in-service music teachers, as it aligns with the curriculum's competence aims for students in the 7th grade to "investigate how gender, gender roles, and sexuality are presented in music and dance in the public sphere, and create expressions that challenge stereotypes" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020b). In light of this, the following two guiding questions steer the dissertation:

What can a queer perspective offer music education?

How can gender and sexuality perspectives be integrated into Norwegian music education within the framework of the 2020 national curriculum and what challenges/possibilities arise from this integration?

To address these overarching questions, the following articles each focus on a related but distinct aspect, with their specific research questions:

Article 1: (Skjelstad & Ellefsen, 2024) *Challenging Stereotypes? Norwegian Music Teachers' Repertoires on Gender Roles and Gender-Expansiveness*

- (1) Which interpretive repertoires are drawn upon by a sample of music teachers when discussing gender, gender expressions, and sexuality?
- (2) Which ideological dilemmas emerge from these repertoires?

Article 2: (Skjelstad, forthcoming) *Exploring the Lived Experiences of a Gender-expansive Youth: Music, Gender Identity, and Epistemic Injustice*

- (1) How do gender-expansive individuals, like Neptune, navigate and negotiate their identities in societal contexts that predominantly favor gender binary norms, and how do they utilize cultural resources, specifically music and literature, as technologies for understanding and expressing their non-binary identities?

Article 3: (Skjelstad, under review) *The Beautiful Risk of Music Education*

- (1) How can we assess risk in addressing gender and sexuality in Norwegian public school music education

- (2) Which challenges and/or possibilities does such a risk entail?

These guiding questions aim to invoke an investigative approach, acknowledging the potential for discovery and development of new pedagogical insights within the field of music education.

1.3 Literature Review and Previous Research

I conducted several literature searches in the last three years to gather comprehensive and relevant studies on the intersection of gender, LGBTQ+, and music education. The aim was to ensure a broad yet detailed understanding of the existing research landscape, focusing on how LGBTQ+ issues are represented and addressed within music education. The searches were carried out across several academic databases, including ERIC,⁸ SCOPUS,⁹ RILM,¹⁰ and IDUNN¹¹ (see appendix 1). I selected these databases for their extensive coverage of educational and music-related literature. The primary search strings included combinations such as “Music Education AND gender OR LGBTQ+,” “Queer AND music education,” “Epistemic injustice AND music education,” and “Gender-expansive AND music.” To ensure the relevance and quality of the literature, I applied specific inclusion criteria. Only peer-reviewed academic journals, dissertations, and relevant book chapters were included to ensure the credibility of the sources. The search focused on primarily literature published from 2001 to 2022 to capture recent and relevant developments in the field. Only studies published in English and the Scandinavian languages were included. Furthermore, I included studies if they specifically addressed issues of gender, sexuality, and music education, with a particular focus on LGBTQ+ perspectives. As such, there are studies on gender perspectives in music education that I chose to not include as I deemed them to be less relevant in the context of this dissertation. Furthermore, I conducted a search using the exact phrase “queer perspective” in

⁸ ERIC (EBSCOhost) is an online digital library of education research and information, sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences of the U.S. Department of Education. It includes a wide range of materials related to education, including journal articles, research reports, conference papers, and dissertations.

⁹ SCOPUS is a multidisciplinary abstract and citation database that covers science, technology, medicine, social sciences, and arts and humanities.

¹⁰ RILM (EBSCOhost) is a comprehensive music bibliography featuring citations, abstracts, and indexes for scholarly and popular periodicals, books, conference proceedings, and dissertations in the field of musicology.

¹¹ IDUNN is a digital publishing platform for Nordic scholarly literature, maintained by Universitetsforlaget. It includes academic journals, books, and conference proceedings across a range of disciplines, with a particular focus on humanities, social sciences, and education in the Nordic countries.

article titles, which resulted in 15 hits. Out of these, 9 were peer-reviewed articles that specifically included the coined phrase “queer perspective” in their titles. Many of these articles seemed to use “queer perspective” as a general application of queer theory, rather than offering a specific conceptualization of the term and are not included in this review.

1.3.1 The Norwegian Context: Conditions for LGBTQ+ People

Norway is often celebrated as a progressive and LGBTQ+ friendly country, with significant milestones in LGBTQ+ rights over the past 50 years (NIM, 2024). From legal protection against hate speech and hate crimes to the legalization of same-sex marriage and the right to change one’s legal gender, the journey has been, in my own words, remarkable. For instance, since 1981, “homosexual orientation” has been protected under Norway’s hate speech laws, offering legal recourse against hate speech and hate crimes directed at the LGBTQ+ community. This legal protection has since expanded to include “gender identity” and “gender expression,” particularly benefiting transgender individuals (Ministry of Culture and Equality, 2022). The introduction of the Partnership Act in 1993 and the amendment to the Marriage Act in 2009, which allowed same-sex couples to marry, marked significant milestones in the fight for equality. These legislative changes positioned Norway as a global leader in LGBTQ+ rights, being the second country in the world to introduce such laws (NIM, 2024). Furthermore, the 2016 law allowing individuals to change their legal gender without the need for medical diagnosis or treatment represented another leap forward in ensuring the rights and dignity of transgender people.

Despite these advancements, however, the reality of life for LGBTQ+ individuals in Norway is more complex. Beneath the surface of these progressive laws, significant challenges persist. Reports and studies reveal that many LGBTQ+ individuals continue to face mental health challenges, discrimination, and exclusion, particularly in healthcare settings (Eggebo et al., 2020; Klatran, 2019; Stokke et al., 2018). For instance, a 2018 report on LGBTQ+ people’s living conditions in Southern Norway highlighted that a significant portion of the homosexual and bisexual community faces heightened mental health struggles, a trend that is even more pronounced among transgender individuals (Stokke et al., 2018, pp. 67-68). These findings suggest that identifying as LGBTQ+ in Norway is still associated with an increased risk of mental health issues, despite the legal protections in place. While there has been a rise in

societal openness and awareness about the LGBTQ+ community, which may reduce these risks for younger generations (Klatran, 2019, pp. 2-3), there remains a persistent lack of competent information throughout childhood and adolescence. This lack of information exacerbates the mental health disparities seen in the LGBTQ+ population (Støren et al., 2020, p. 43).

Moreover, LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly those who are elderly or have immigrant backgrounds, often feel compelled to conceal their identities within healthcare and caregiving contexts to avoid discrimination (Eggebo et al., 2020; Siverskog, 2016). This is further complicated within ethnic minority communities, where exclusion based on gender expressions or sexuality is prevalent, and compounded by exclusion from LGBTQ+ communities because of one's immigrant background (Eggebo et al., 2020). National surveys further support the existence of negative societal attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community, revealing that men, in particular, hold greater prejudice towards homosexual, bisexual, and transgender individuals (Andersen & Slåtten, 2008; Bufdir, 2020). This aligns with Klatran's (2019) observations of homosexual men concealing their sexuality in certain contexts as a defense against potential hate crimes.

A 2021 survey on life quality in Norway revealed that 7% of all recipients (aged 18 to 79) identified as LGBTQ+ (Gram, 2021), with a higher incidence in younger age groups (10,8% in age group 18-24), indicating a shift in generational self-identification (Støren et al., 2020). However, this data points to a gap in understanding the experiences of younger children, where similar trends might also be emerging but remain unstudied. These challenges in the Norwegian context echo broader international findings, such as those from The National Center for Transgender Equality in the U.S. (Garrett & Palkki, 2021, p. 62), which provide insights into the educational experiences of transgender students. These international perspectives enrich the understanding of the complexities faced by gender-expansive youths, as represented by Neptune in my second article, whose experiences underscore the critical role of education, and music education in particular, in fostering a comprehensive understanding of gender diversity.

1.3.2 Inclusive Music Educational Practices

Previous research on gender and sexuality perspectives within the context of music education has often focused on fostering inclusive practices in the music classroom. Scholars have discussed how heteronormativity permeates the field (see chapter 3.1.1). Both Bergonzi (2009) and Goodrich (2020) have highlighted how heterosexual students and teachers often experience privileges not afforded to their LGBTQ+ counterparts, with Bergonzi noting that, “[h]eterosexual students and teachers enjoy advantages over their LGBT counterparts regarding their professional environment, classroom experiences, and visibility in instructional materials. These privileges may not be evident to their straight counterparts” (Bergonzi, 2009, p. 22). Goodrich expanded on this by emphasizing the importance of creating resilient environments that support LGBTQIA+ students through peer mentoring and community-based practices (Goodrich, 2020, p. 583).

A central concept in music education that I engage with in this dissertation is the interplay between formal and informal music education practices (see chapter 3.2.1). Abramo (2011) offered valuable insights into this overlap, particularly in how informal pedagogies could either challenge or reinforce traditional gender norms, depending on the approaches employed by teachers. Abramo suggested that while informal learning environments, often associated with popular music, offer opportunities for students to negotiate their gender identities, these spaces are not immune to the reinforcement of traditional norms (2011, pp. 473-474). In exploring how music education can become more inclusive, Taylor (2018) emphasized the role of empathic teaching. Taylor argued that by adopting empathic models, teachers can help students understand diverse perspectives, reducing identity threats and fostering a classroom environment where all students feel valued (2018, p. 57). This approach is particularly relevant in addressing the barriers to inclusion, which Cayari’s (2019) study identified regarding transgender students in music education. Cayari found that transgender students often face significant challenges in music classrooms, from the lack of inclusive curricula to the absence of understanding from peers and teachers (p. 119).

Interestingly, there appears to be fewer studies that address inclusivity and safety from teachers’ point of view. As I argue in Article 3, addressing topics such as gender, sexuality, and LGBTQ+ perspectives carries inherent risk and may lead to discomfort, as argued by

Røthing (2020). An illustrating example of this in action is provided by Allen (2023), who underlined the inherent paradox of education, particularly in the context of teaching sexualities with the aim of promoting social justice. The central paradox she identified was the tension between the transformative aspirations of education, seeking to shape students into non-queerphobic individuals, and the ethical concerns that arose from this desire to mold students according to predefined outcomes. Allen challenged the notion that education should be about dictating what students should become, arguing instead for a reconceptualization of education as an “uncertain event” (p. 1014). Simultaneously, she warned that even the best intentions could backfire. Specifically, she referred to an instance where she received negative feedback from a student after using the word “fag” in a lecture. Allen had discussed the significance of the word “fag” in the context of masculinity studies, referencing C.J. Pascoe’s book *Dude, You’re a Fag*. For the student, this was perceived as triggering in that scenario (p. 1011). Teachers in general must navigate these complex and sensitive topics carefully to avoid alienating or harming students, even unintentionally.

Across the three articles I argue that music teachers need more tools and increased knowledge on LGBTQ+ related topics to feel more secure when addressing gender and sexuality perspectives in the classroom. Garrett (2012, p. 55) pointed out that incorporating LGBTQ+ content into music teacher training programs is critical for the development of inclusive teaching practices. This incorporation involves not just an understanding of LGBTQ+ issues but also the integration of strategies that support inclusion and diversity. Palkki and Sauerland (2018) went further to suggest that music teacher education must consider gender complexity, advocating for a curriculum that goes beyond binary notions of gender to embrace a spectrum of identities:

The importance of discussing gender in music education is rooted in the inherent and pervasive conundrum that gender is not necessarily seen with the plain eye, and in a cisgender-centric society students may assume that music teacher educators are not supportive of gender diversity. Furthermore, it is not only issues around gender diversity and trans musicians that deserve attention; there are many important gender-related issues being discussed in music education scholarship. (Palkki & Sauerland, 2018, p. 78)

Analyzing the impact of inclusive pedagogies in music education reveals their varying impact across different cultural contexts. Burnard et al. (2008) offered a global perspective, highlighting how music teachers from four countries perceived and implemented inclusive

pedagogies. This international lens acknowledges the diverse cultural considerations that influence how gender and sexuality are addressed in educational practices. For instance, what may be considered inclusive in one cultural setting may not translate directly to another, necessitating adaptations that respect cultural norms while still striving for inclusivity. Moreover, Panetta's (2021) literature review on the experiences of LGBTQ+ persons in music education underscores the importance of understanding these experiences to inform pedagogical practices. According to Panetta, by recognizing the unique challenges and needs of LGBTQ+ students and teachers, music teacher education can be tailored to prepare future music teachers to create environments that are truly inclusive and affirming of all students, regardless of gender identity and/or sexual orientation (pp. 23-24). For example, music classrooms can become sanctuaries for sexual-minority young people, where they feel seen and respected (Southerland, 2018). This sense of safety is not just physical but also emotional and intellectual, where students' identities are affirmed, and their voices are heard. The creation of such spaces is contingent upon the teachers' ability to engage with students empathetically and supportively, which is directly influenced by the quality and depth of their training in LGBTQ+ inclusive pedagogies.

1.3.3 Implications Outside of the Music Classroom

The broader implications of LGBTQ+ inclusive music education extend beyond the classroom, influencing societal attitudes towards gender and sexuality. Music teachers who implement LGBTQ+ inclusive pedagogies not only provide a supportive environment for LGBTQ+ students specifically, but also educate all students on diversity, acceptance, and empathy. Garrett (2012) did a study on the LGBTQ+ component in 21st-century music teacher training and underlined the importance of equipping teachers with the tools to navigate discussions on gender and sexuality effectively (Garrett, 2012). This training can have far-reaching effects, as music teachers who are confident in addressing LGBTQ+ issues can influence future generations of students to be more accepting and less prejudiced. As noted by Peters (2016), when students see themselves reflected in the curriculum, it encourages a sense of belonging and validation. For LGBTQ+ students, this visibility might be crucial as it can reduce feelings of isolation and marginalization.

The relationship between music and identity questions emphasizes how music provides various spaces for individuals to make sense of themselves (see e.g. DeNora, 1999, 2000; Dibben, 2002; Ruud, 2013). For instance, Abramo (2011) emphasized the transformative potential of queering informal pedagogy, particularly within the intersection of sexuality and popular music in school settings. He argued that these spaces provide unique opportunities for identity negotiation, where the fluidity of gender and sexuality can be both explored and affirmed. This queering of pedagogy, as Abramo suggested, holds subversive potential for reimagining music education, pushing it beyond the constraints of traditional, binary frameworks (Abramo, 2011, p. 475). A recurring theme throughout this dissertation is precisely how music offers these spaces for creation, exploration, and negotiation of one's (gendered) identity through engagement with music and popular culture. This theme is also central to the analyses I conducted in Article 2. Scholars have emphasized the transformative potential for music and popular culture to offer a space where identities can be explored and expressed (DeNora, 1999; Hawkins, 2016, 2017; Onsrud, 2021; Ruud, 2013; Välimäki, 2020). Marshall (2013) provided historical depth to this discussion by examining the role of popular culture in informal sex education for young LGBTQ+ individuals. He demonstrated how media has long served as an informal educator, offering narratives that both challenge and validate the experiences of queer individuals. As such, media's portrayal of gender and sexuality often subverts traditional views, providing alternative narratives that are essential for the self-affirmation of gender-expansive youth. Ey's (2016) four-phase study on sexualized music media underscored how deeply popular culture impacts children's gender roles and self-identity. These media portrayals might offer templates from which young individuals can draw to shape their own identities. By recognizing and incorporating these narratives into the classroom, music teachers can develop pedagogical strategies that not only challenge traditional gender stereotypes but also affirm the diverse identities of all students (Garrett & Palkki, 2021; Garrett & Spano, 2017).

In terms of societal impact, the normalization and inclusion of LGBTQ+ perspectives in music education can lead to a greater acceptance and understanding of gender and sexual diversity in society at large. As Silveira and Goff (2016) suggested, supportive school practices and teacher attitudes toward transgender students can have significant implications for the school culture and the broader community's view on gender diversity (p. 153). In essence, LGBTQ+ inclusive music education contributes to the creation of a more LGBTQ+-friendly and

understanding society (Garrett, 2012; Garrett & Palkki, 2021; Peters, 2016; Silveira & Goff, 2016).

1.4 Outline of the Dissertation

Following this introduction in chapter 1, the dissertation is organized as follows:

Chapter 2 discusses the linguistic and cultural contexts surrounding the concept of “queer” and its implications for music education. It examines how language shapes our understanding of gender and sexuality, tracing the theoretical foundations of queer theory, particularly through the works of Foucault and Butler. The chapter also explores the concepts of *epistemic injustice* (Fricker, 2007) and *ontological disappearance/erasure* (Gould, 2012; Wittig, 1992), setting the stage for a deeper understanding of how a queer perspective can inform and reshape music education by challenging normative educational practices.

Chapter 3 examines the Norwegian core curriculum (LK20) for music education, focusing on how gender roles and sexuality are represented in both formal and informal music education contexts. The chapter also addresses the concept of *Bildung*, considering how this philosophy influences the development of identity and values in music education, and how queer theory intersects with and challenges these pedagogical aims. The term *queer pedagogy* is thoroughly unpacked in this chapter.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodological foundation of the dissertation. It details the process of project planning, obtaining ethical approval, conducting interviews, and the analytic afterwork. The chapter also discusses the ethical considerations and quality assurance measures taken throughout the research process, reflecting on the complexities of engaging with participants whose identities challenge normative frameworks.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the three articles included in this dissertation, each of which addresses different aspects of integrating gender and sexuality perspectives in Norwegian music education. This chapter highlights the main findings and thematic focus of each article, showing how they collectively contribute to the overall research questions. The three articles explore: (1) how Norwegian music teachers perceive and discuss gender roles and gender-

expansiveness in the classroom, (2) how a gender-expansive youth navigates identity through music and literature, and (3) the risk of addressing gender and sexuality in music education.

Chapter 6 synthesizes the findings from the previous chapters and articles to discuss the broader implications of integrating queer perspectives into Norwegian music education. It reflects on the challenges and opportunities identified throughout the research, offering philosophical reflections on how queer pedagogy can disrupt traditional educational norms. This chapter also addresses the transformative potential of queer-inclusive music education and explores future directions for critical inquiry and educational transformation within the field.

Articles 1, 2, and 3 are presented at the end of the dissertation in the section titled “Dissertation Articles.”

Finally, **Appendices 1-7** include literature search overviews, interview guides, NSD (SIKT) approval documents, and consent forms, offering detailed insights into the research process.

2. The Language and Knowledge of “Queer”

A central focus of this dissertation is to examine the linguistic repertoires we use when we talk about gender and sexuality, as language plays a crucial role in how we understand ourselves and the world around us. From a queer perspective, this examination is not limited to only understanding how language shapes identity but also how it reinforces or challenges normative structures. This perspective is rooted in the critical theories developed in the aftermath of the Frankfurt School and other 20th-century intellectual movements, particularly the *linguistic turn*¹² in the humanities, which emphasized that reality is constructed and mediated through language and shaped by the social world (Glock & Kalhat, 2018). Queer movements, in particular, have long recognized the centrality of language in shaping both personal identities and political struggles (Kumashiro, 2002; Marinucci, 2016). The act of queering; a key theme in this chapter, challenges fixed definitions and categories, engaging with the fluidity of gender, sexuality, and identity. This process resonates profoundly within educational settings, where language and knowledge frameworks can either reinforce or dismantle normative binaries (Kumashiro, 2002). This chapter provides an overview of the theoretical frameworks and contextual background that inform this dissertation. While much of the theoretical foundation is rooted in the established research on gender and sexuality, the focus here is on exploring these through a queer lens; one that resists fixed categories and embraces multiplicity. Understanding the language of queer is especially relevant because much of the struggle within queer movements has revolved around terms, repertoires, symbols, and signs (Butler, 1993/2011, p. 169). The theorization of the concept of queer is well-established, building on a rich foundation of research on gender and sexuality, which has significantly shaped the field of queer theory (Marinucci, 2016). Therefore, with deep appreciation for the thinkers who have contributed to this field, I will attempt to guide the reader through a landscape I have spent the past four years exploring in the context of this dissertation.

¹² According to the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, the term refers to “a radical reconception of the nature of philosophy and its methods, according to which philosophy is neither an empirical science nor a supraempirical enquiry into the essential features of reality; instead, it is an a priori conceptual discipline which aims to elucidate the complex interrelationships among philosophically relevant concepts, as embodied in established linguistic usage, and by doing so dispel conceptual confusions and solve philosophical problems.” (Glock & Kalhat, 2018)

2.1 Linguistic and Cultural Context: The Language of Queer

In this dissertation, the concept of queer becomes the focal point for understanding various forms of human expression, whether they are gendered, non-gendered, sexualized, performative, aesthetic, or all of the above. Through this lens, a queer perspective is applied to explore the fluidity and complexity of identity and expression in contemporary society, while also engaging with the broader conceptualization of *queer* itself within the framework of a queer perspective. Understanding the role of gendered language is crucial for my dissertation as it shapes the way teachers and students engage with music, popular culture and their associated gender norms. The focus on language informs my analysis in both Article 1, where I examine how music teachers discuss gender in the context of music classes and their students, and Article 2 where I portray 13-year-old Neptune as a single-case narrative study to demonstrate how gender-expansive youth may navigate their identities through music and popular culture.

2.1.1 Understanding Queer as a Term and Concept

Many people have become comfortable using words like “homosexual” or “gay” or “trans” when discussing their own identity, while other terms like “queer” may not personally appeal to them, which could be explained by “queer” meaning different things to different people. This lack of a clear denotation was pointed out by Butler already in 1993:

As expansive as the term “queer” is meant to be, it is used in ways to enforce a set of overlapping divisions: in some contexts, the term appeals to a younger generation who want to resist the more institutionalized and reformist politics sometimes signified by “lesbian” and “gay”; [...] in others the term represent a false unity of women and men. Indeed, it may be that the critique of the term will initiate a resurgence of both feminist and anti-racist mobilization within lesbian and gay politics or open up new possibilities for coalitional alliances that do not presume that these constituencies are radically distinct from one another. (Butler, 1993/2011, p. 174)

While the abbreviation LGBTQ+ is used throughout the thesis to refer to individuals who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning, and other sexual and gender identities, the term “queer” or “queerness” is employed with a slightly different nuance. Historically, queerness often describes the act of deviating from heteronormative expectations. However, the act of “queering” is not limited to individuals who identify as LGBTQ+, but

rather refers to a broader process of challenging and disrupting normative boundaries around gender and sexuality (Eilertsen, 2017; Hawkins, 2016). In this sense, queerness is not an identity fixed to a particular group but an ongoing practice, a way of being that is constantly in flux. Jarman-Ivens (2011) elaborated on this, reminding the reader that queerness operates outside of dominant narratives of subjectivity, meaning that anyone, regardless of identity, can access and engage in queer acts or expressions. Queer is something one does, not something one inherently is, and it becomes queer precisely because it resists normativity. As Jarman-Ivens stated, “because queer finds its formation outside of the dominant narratives of subjectivity, the conditions for its possibility must be built into those narratives, and access to queer is not denied any subject” (2011, p. 17). As such, a straight or heterosexual person could still engage with queer expressions or act “queerly” by challenging traditional gender roles or norms of behavior (Eilertsen, 2017, pp. 13-14). The term “queer” thus encompasses a broader spectrum of behaviors and identities that destabilize conventional understandings of gender and sexuality. In this framework, queerness is an active engagement with alterity, a refusal to conform to the rigid binaries of identity.

The word “queer” has taken on many meanings and roles in discourses surrounding gender and sexuality throughout modern history. Although the word itself can be traced back to the 14th century (Merriam-Webster, 2024), there are various perceptions of the word’s etymology. The use of queer as a noun can be traced back to 1894 and can be used to describe a “non-heterosexual person” (Merriam-Webster, 2024). Additionally, queer has a multifaceted range of use and can be combined with a number of other words to create new compound terms such as queer pedagogy, queer activism, queer art, queer politics, queer cinema, queer studies, and so on. According to Halperin (2003), the composition of the words queer and theory can be attributed to gender researcher Teresa de Lauretis:

Queer theory originally came into being as a joke Teresa de Lauretis coined the phrase “queer theory” to serve as the title of a conference that she held [...]. She had heard the word “queer” being tossed about in a gay-affirmative sense by activists, street kids, and members of the art world in New York during the late 1980s. She had the courage, and the conviction, to pair that scurrilous term with the academic holy word, “theory.” Her usage was scandalously offensive. Sympathetic faculty at UCSC asked, in wounded tones, “Why do they have to call it that?” But the conjunction was more than merely mischievous: it was deliberately disruptive. (Halperin, 2003, pp. 339-340)

de Lauretis's combination of the words "queer" and "theory" came in the wake of significant publications on gender and sexuality. To understand the complexity of what the term queer connotes today, I consider it relevant to view it in the context of historical understandings of humans and sexuality. Already by the late 1940s, Alfred Kinsey and the Kinsey Institute had conducted thousands of in-depth interviews that would be presented as findings in two publications: *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* in 1948 and then the sequel, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, five years later (Marinucci, 2016, p. 3). These two publications (commonly referred to as the Kinsey Reports) claimed that as many as 37% of the men and 13% of the women who participated in the study reported that they had had homosexual experiences (2016, p. 3). Two decades later, Foucault published the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* with the subtitle *The Will to Knowledge*, where he laid the significant groundwork for what we today refer to as queer theory.

Foucault's examination of the relationship between power and knowledge offers a radical way of understanding how sexual categories and norms are constructed and maintained. Historically, medical, religious, and political narratives have played significant roles in defining what it means to be a sexual being. Behaviors deviating from societal norms were often targeted for correction or punishment (Foucault, 1981a, p. 38). Foucault argued that this shaping of sexuality is deeply entwined with language. He suggested that the authority over sexuality is upheld not just by actions, but by words and discourse, which, simply by being spoken, create a set of unwritten rules (pp. 30-31). This perspective on the power of language over our conceptions of sex becomes particularly relevant today, where we recognize gender identity and sexuality as distinct, yet interconnected, concepts. Language, with its embedded power dynamics, plays a crucial role in discussing queer identities. The terms and phrases we use; our discursive, or *interpretative* repertoires (Edley, 2001; Wetherell & Potter, 1987), shape every discussion about gender, gender identity, sexuality, and sexual identity. In fact, these repertoires became a pivotal starting point for the analysis conducted in Article 1. The current conversation around the use of pronouns as markers of personal identity is a prime example of this. Pronouns are more than mere grammar; they are a recognition of individual identity and a reflection of the evolving understanding of gender and sexuality (Garrett & Palkki, 2021, p. 100).

Foucault's work on how individuals historically became subjects through discourses of sexuality provides a foundational lens for queer theory's analysis of identity formation. He noted:

The transformation of sex into discourse [...], the dissemination and reinforcement of heterogeneous sexualities, are perhaps two elements of the same deployment: they are linked together with the help of the central element of confession that compels individuals to articulate their sexual peculiarity – no matter how extreme. In Greece, truth and sex were linked, in the form of pedagogy, by the transmission of a precious knowledge from one body to another; sex served as a medium for initiations into learning. (1981, p. 61)

Foucault's argument suggests that sexuality has become understood as a central axis around which the self is organized, arguing that individuals are made into subjects through various social, cultural, and political discourses that define and regulate sexual desire and behavior. Elsewhere, he highlighted the practice of confession (Foucault, 1997, p. 223), where individuals are encouraged or compelled to disclose their sexual thoughts and actions, thereby reinforcing societal norms and power structures. Lastly, the reference to (ancient) Greece underscores the historical connection between sexuality and knowledge, where sexual relationships between men facilitated educational mentorship and the transmission of wisdom (p. 229).

In today's digital age, the transformation of sex into discourse can be seen in the way sexual content is pervasive across various media platforms, impacting societal norms and individual identity. The practice of confession (Foucault, 1997) seems evident on social media, where individuals share intimate details of their lives, including sexuality, which then becomes subject to public scrutiny and discourse. Consequently, it seems evident that this proliferation of sexual discourse influences our understanding of normalcy, deviance, and personal identity. Furthermore, the historical pedagogical role of sex, as mentioned in Foucault's depiction of mentor roles between men in ancient Greece, can be paralleled today in how discourses surrounding gender and sexuality shape individuals' learning and understanding of sexuality, often serving as an initiation into societal norms and values. In this sense, one could argue that popular culture and (social) media become important spaces for meaning making, through which individuals explore gender identity and/or sexuality, as argued by several musicologists (Dibben, 2002; Hansen, 2017, 2022; Hawkins, 2016; Jarman-Ivens, 2011; Negus, 1996, pp. 125-126; Onsrud, 2021). Understanding media and popular culture as key sites of discourse

is central to the queer perspective in this dissertation as these spaces not only reflect but actively challenge normative identities, thereby contributing to questioning and destabilizing entrenched norms. By doing so, the fluid and constructed nature of identity formation is brought to the forefront, encouraging a deeper exploration of how individuals negotiate and express gender and sexuality. In the context of music education, this perspective opens up possibilities for rethinking how gender and sexuality are addressed, offering new ways of engaging with these topics within pedagogical practice.

Queer theory views sexual identities as fluid, multiple, and contingent, shaped by historical contexts and cultural discourses rather than being purely biologically determined or fixed. Building upon Foucault's deconstruction of sexuality, Butler's (1990/2007) theory of performativity extends the examination of identity construction into the realm of gender. Butler's work further dismantles the presumed naturalness of gender identity, echoing Foucault's challenges to the stability of sexual identity. While Foucault's analysis paves the way for understanding the discursive formation of sexuality, Butler takes a step further by unraveling the performative nature of gender itself.

2.1.2 Performing Queerness

Just as Foucault laid bare the mechanisms through which sexuality is discursively constructed and governed, Butler (1990/2007) famously problematized the conventional dichotomy of gender. Butler posited that what is commonly understood as gender does not precede societal interaction but is rather an identity repeatedly forged through performative acts (1990/2007, p. 33). Butler suggested that these acts are learned, socially conditioned gestures that manifest and reify gender:

In this sense, *gender* is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed. (Butler, 1990/2007, p. 34, original emphasis)

Put simply, any act that could be coded either feminine or masculine is not a universal truth, but rather an act that aligns with what is considered feminine or masculine at a given space or context at a given time in history. Continuing from Butler's assertion that gender is always a

doing, it becomes evident that the modern understanding of queerness aligns with the notion of performativity. Queerness, in contemporary discourse, transcends a fixed identity marker or a static noun; it is rather understood as an active process of becoming and behaving in the world. It reflects an ongoing negotiation of identity that defies the conventional categorizations of sexuality and gender, as in the intersection between queer and feminist theory: “Although the word “queer” is commonly associated with sex and sexuality, queer theory is a way of understanding, not just sex and sexuality, but also gender. Specifically, queer theory avoids the binary and hierarchical reasoning usually associated with these concepts” (Marinucci, 2016, p. 139).

The notion of “queer” as a verb embodies this dynamic. Inspired by Butler, I suggest that the act of *queering* is a continuous engagement with non-normative performances of oneself. Or as Hawkins put it on the topic of queerness in pop music: “Any divergence from norms can lead to unlimited possibilities for queering” (Hawkins 2016, 192). Queerness, therefore, is not limited to an identity or a label that one wears; it is a series of actions and expressions that challenge the traditional binaries and expectations of gender and sexuality. This performative aspect of queerness means that queer identity is not something one is, but something one does. The concept of performativity has significantly influenced music research focused on gender and sexuality. In addition to Hawkins (2016), musicologists such as Burns and LaFrance (2002), Jarman-Ivens (2011), Railton and Watson (2011), and Hansen (2022) have all explored how performativity shapes our understanding of music and gender. Gendered performativity has also been addressed in the context of music education in Norway, as seen in the doctoral dissertations of Kamsvåg (2011), Onsrud (2013) and Ellefsen (2014). In essence, queerness lies in the subversion and questioning of established norms and in the fluidity of identity that resists the rigidity of prescribed roles. By viewing queerness through this performative lens, we begin to understand it as a form of resistance and a method of critiquing and destabilizing the concepts that have historically sought to define and contain it (De Villiers, 2012; Gopinath, 2018; Muñoz, 2009; Taylor, 2012), thus adding to the foundation for understanding queer pedagogy (see chapters 3.1 and 3.1.1).

Just as Butler posited that the acts constituting gender are compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence, so too are the acts of queerness driven by a resistance to these same norms. Queerness disrupts the very discourse that tries to stabilize the identity of

individuals, making it a powerful force in the deconstruction of fixed identity categories and in the promotion of a more fluid and inclusive understanding of human experiences. This perspective is critical in discussions of identity politics and social justice, as it emphasizes the role of individual agency within the structures of power and discourse. It underscores the importance of recognizing the diversity of experiences that constitute queer lives, and it insists on the importance of an ever-evolving dialogue about what it means to live as a queer individual in a society. By asserting that gender is discursively produced by social knowledge institutions, Butler (1990/2007) underscored how our understanding of gender as a biological marker is, in fact, a cultural creation. This conception of gender as an ongoing performance involves a series of acts that are both intentional and complicit in the perpetuation of gender norms. These acts constitute gender discourses, that is, systems of interpretation that ascribe femininity and masculinity to bodily expressions. Butler's insight that gender is an expression, a learned pattern of behavior (p. 173), dovetails with Foucault's notion that our identities are not pre-given but rather the result of discursive practices, or more precisely, that subjects are shaped through mechanisms of power (1982/2000, p. 332). These notions make up a significant foundation for the field of queer theory and constitute a backdrop on which I base myself when I address gender and queerness as dynamic, always-in-flux terms.

2.1.3 The Queer Perspective

Perspective¹³ is not simply about seeing but about engaging in the act of seeing. It involves an interaction between the observer and the observed, a process through which meaning is created (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Perspective is never neutral, as it is always shaped by the positionality of the observer (see chapter 4.1) and the interpretive frameworks brought to the act of seeing. The lens through which the world is viewed is inherently active, reshaping what is seen and how it is understood. As discussed earlier (see chapter 1.1.2), I examined what a queer perspective could offer music education as a whole. Here, I aim to invite the reader into reflections on the queering of perspective and what that might mean for a broader understanding of identity and social constructs. Fundamental to this understanding of “queer” in “queer perspective” is that queering involves the multiple possibilities one performs in the

¹³ “Perspective” refers to a mental view or prospect, the interrelation in which a subject or its parts are mentally viewed, or the capacity to view things in their true relations. It also refers to the appearance of objects in respect to their relative distance and positions, and in art, to the process of representing this spatial relationship to create the illusion of depth (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

world, or as I argued in chapter 2.1.2: “The act of queering is a continuous engagement with non-normative performances of oneself.” A queer perspective as employed in this dissertation is an interpretive stance that resists normative frameworks, unsettles fixed categories, and embraces fluidity and multiplicity in identity through various performances or acts (Butler, 1993/2011, p. 172). Thus, what is seen and how it is understood is always framed by the conventions of language, culture, and power (see chapters 2.1.1 and 2.1.2). As such, a queer perspective not only exposes these instabilities but also challenges the notion that (gender) identity can be confined within fixed categories.

Identity, in a normative sense, is often treated as stable, something that can be known, categorized, and fixed. This premise was also built upon by Dyndahl and Ellefsen, when they reflected on the didactic identity of the music subject and argued:

The concept of identity emerges as if it were an apparently self-contradictory relation: ‘Identity’ denotes the subjectivizing, discursively constructed ‘truth about ourselves’, at the same time relating to multiple and mobile connections which we do not necessarily interpret as either causally determined by power relations in the field or as motivated by the subject’s struggle for holistic synthesis and coherence. This means that we might imagine the notion of identity as both in singular and plural: in the singular as a temporary situated stabilization of meaning, in the plural as a potential repertory of connection and self-comprehension. (2009, p. 12)

Dyndahl and Ellefsen emphasized here the fluid and multifaceted nature of identity in the context of music education, providing a framework for understanding how a queer perspective further challenges these notions. For instance, Waitt (2012) argued that queer perspectives challenge the spatial imaginaries embedded in traditional frameworks by disrupting categorical norms of sexuality, gender, and identity. “Queer geographies,” he suggested, question the stability of these categories and emphasize their fluidity, thus exposing how they are socially constructed and maintained through spatial practices. Waitt noted that a queer perspective aims to “disrupt the categorical stability of heterosexuality as ‘normal’ in everyday spaces” and instead reveals the flexibility and performative nature of sexuality and identity (2012, p. 82). Hall (2011, p. 4) argued that identity is not a stable essence, but rather a “production” that is always in process, always constituted within representation. A queer perspective, then, does not seek to define identity but to explore its potential, its resistance to categorization, and its capacity to disrupt the norms that seek to solidify it. It means questioning what is presented as given and remaining open to the ambiguities, contradictions,

and complexities that lie beneath the surface of normative assumptions, which brings me to the question of normativity itself.

Norms function by defining the boundaries of what is acceptable and what is excluded. They create divisions between what is legitimate and what is illegitimate, between what is considered real and what is dismissed as deviant (Björkman et al., 2021, p. 180) A queer perspective resists this binary logic. It embraces multiplicity, rejects the simplistic division between normal and deviant, and insists on the legitimacy of all forms of expression and identity. Normative frameworks seek to contain, to fix, and to exclude, but a queer perspective celebrates what exceeds these boundaries. It affirms the possibilities of self-expression and self-understanding that exist outside the constraints of normative categories. Gender, for example, is not a given but a social construct, produced through repeated performances and normative expectations (Butler, 1988, 1990/2007). A queer perspective asks us to interrogate these constructs, revealing their artificiality, and imagine new ways of being that transcend their limits. Such a queer futurity offers a radical rethinking of (utopian) possibilities, as outlined by Muñoz (2009), who introduced his acclaimed work *Cruising Utopia* by claiming that queerness is yet to be realized:

Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. (Muñoz, 2009, p. 1).

Queerness then becomes a refusal of the normative structures that constrain identity and expression, suggesting a utopian horizon of future possibilities. The refusal to settle for stable meanings allows for a continuous reimagining of what identity can be, of what reality can become.

Finally, I wish to touch upon the notion of knowledge, which I will critically discuss in the subsequent chapters. The queer perspective is not satisfied with easy answers or stable truths. It demands an engagement with uncertainty, an exploration of the multiple possibilities that exist beyond the boundaries of normative thought. This refusal to settle for established answers has deep epistemological implications. A queer perspective does not simply critique the knowledge that has been inherited from normative frameworks; it fundamentally reshapes how knowledge itself is conceived. Categories of knowledge, often presented as natural or self-

evident, are revealed to be contingent, constructed through social, political, and historical processes. A queer perspective exposes these contingencies, showing that the coherence produced by normative frameworks is a fragile illusion. The world, when seen queerly, is more complex than any rigid categories can contain. Knowledge, therefore, is always incomplete, always partial. This is not a limitation but an invitation to continue exploring. This recognition extends beyond questions of gender and sexuality. A queer perspective challenges how all forms of knowledge are structured. It insists that the categories used to define and organize the world are not reflections of reality but part of the processes that shape reality itself.

2.2 Othering, Epistemic Injustice, and Ontological Disappearance

One of the focuses of this dissertation lies in how music teachers can mediate knowledge about gender and sexuality in light of the competence aim, which states that students should “investigate how gender, gender roles, and sexuality are presented in music and dance in the public sphere, and create expressions that challenge stereotypes” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020b). As I will return to in chapter 3, this involves both challenges and opportunities for the music teacher. A central argument of this dissertation is that teachers require more resources and deeper knowledge concerning gender and sexuality perspectives. This is not only to increase their confidence in approaching these topics in the classroom but also to ensure they provide nuanced representations that reduce the risk of stereotyping non-normative identities through the process of othering (Kumashiro, 2002; Spivak, 1988). Through the lens of a queer perspective, I critically engage with the established epistemological assumptions surrounding gender and sexuality and explore how certain forms of knowledge can be both oppressive and emancipatory, depending on how they are framed and understood. To deepen this inquiry, the concepts of “epistemic injustice” (Fricker, 2007) and “ontological disappearance” (Gould, 2012; Wittig, 1992) become particularly relevant. These frameworks help to explain how certain identities and forms of knowledge are marginalized, disregarded, or even erased within educational contexts, among others. By applying these concepts, I seek to understand the ways in which traditional knowledge structures can contribute to the exclusion or invisibility of LGBTQ+ identities, and how this may impact the educational environment for both students and teachers.

2.2.1 Knowledge and Othering

Kumashiro (2002) pointed out that knowledge about what society defines as normal and normative often leads to the marginalization of Otherness:

Researchers have pointed to two kinds of oppressive knowledges. The first kind of knowledge is the knowledge about (only) what society defines as ‘normal’ (the way that things generally are) as well as what is normative (the way that things ought to be). In this case, Otherness is known only by interference often in contrast to the norm. [...] The second kind of knowledge encourages a distorted and misleading understanding of the Other that is based on stereotypes and myths. (pp. 39-40)

Kumashiro’s insight is pivotal in examining how societal norms dictate the validity of knowledge, marginalizing those who deviate from these norms. This marginalization is not merely overt but manifests through subtle yet pervasive mechanisms within knowledge production and dissemination. Othering, as argued by Spivak (1988), in extreme cases can deprive a group of people of their ability to speak and be listened to. In her famous text “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988), she criticized Deleuze and Foucault for failing to clarify their own European subject positions and for ignoring the connection between subject formation and global political economy (pp. 68-69). Spivak used the term “the subaltern” to encompass a breadth of different subject positions without pre-defining them based on an already dominant political discourse (p. 78). She questioned the claim that the subaltern have a voice and examined the preconditions behind the perception of what way people outside the hegemony have the opportunity to speak and be heard (p. 80). According to her, the deconstructive approach to concept categories and identity politics is essential for recognizing difference and singularity in political discourse. In essence, Spivak (1988) called for increased self-reflexivity among researchers related to the question of who can speak for whom (see chapter 4.1).

Building on Spivak’s critique of who gets to speak and under what conditions, it becomes essential to explore how individuals perceive themselves within the structures of power that define them. Social identity theory, in this context, offers a useful framework to examine how individuals categorize themselves and others within social groups (Stets & Burke, 2000). This theory posits that social identity is not only about one’s knowledge of belonging to a particular social category but also about how these categories are shaped by broader social and political discourses, including those that marginalize certain identities. Through a social comparison

process, individuals who are similar to the self are categorized with the self and labeled the in-group, while those who differ from the self are categorized as the out-group. The consequence of self-categorization is an accentuation of the perceived *similarities* between the self and other in-group members, and an accentuation of the perceived *differences* between the self and out-group members (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 225, my emphasis). This process of categorization and comparison is fundamental to understanding how so-called “implicit biases” are formed and perpetuated, thereby contributing to othering. Brownstein and Saul (2016) described implicit bias as “evaluations of social groups that are largely outside of conscious awareness or control. These evaluations are typically thought to involve associations between social groups and concepts or roles such as ‘violent,’ ‘lazy,’ ‘nurturing,’ ‘assertive,’ ‘scientist,’ and so on” (p. 2). This idea underscores how prejudicial stereotypes can result in marginalized groups being unfairly judged or discredited, further entrenching their marginalization. Implicit biases can lead to the systematic devaluation of certain groups, reinforcing the mechanisms of othering.

As I now shift focus within the epistemological exploration, we arrive at the nexus of knowledge and (in)justice, which serves as a central theoretical viewpoint for understanding the experiences of Neptune in Article 2. The concept of “epistemic injustice” (Fricker, 2007), a term fortified within feminist epistemology, spotlights a distinctive wrong that afflicts individuals by undermining their status as knowers.

2.2.2 Epistemic Injustice: Testimonial and Hermeneutical Injustice

Epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007) is a concept that highlights the ways in which individuals are discredited as knowers or deprived of the interpretative frameworks necessary for articulating their experiences. This can occur in two distinct forms: *Testimonial injustice*, where individuals’ testimonies are discredited or dismissed (Fricker, 2007, pp. 22-23), and *hermeneutical injustice*, which arises when individuals lack the necessary conceptual resources or terminologies to interpret and express their experiences (p. 151).

Testimonial injustice is a distinct form of epistemic injustice which acknowledges the wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower. As articulated by Fricker, it refers to the discrediting of a speaker’s word based on prejudicial biases, resulting in an unjustified deflation of their credibility (Fricker, 2007, 2017; Fricker & Jenkins, 2017). This phenomenon

emerges in everyday interactions, where an individual's opinion or assertion is undermined or dismissed due to prejudicial perceptions of their gender, accent, clothing, skin color, or other social markers. The empirical backbone of testimonial injustice lies in its connection to pervasive forms of prejudice and stereotyping, illustrated by Steele and Aronson's (1995) work on "stereotype threat." Through a study of African American students' performance in mathematics the study revealed the profound impact of negative stereotypes on academic achievement, demonstrating that expectations can shape reality. Steele later posited that recognizing a negative stereotype about one's group can trigger a fear of being judged or treated based on that stereotype, which in turn can impair performance by increasing psychological pressure (Steele, 1997). This concept underscores the intricate relationship between identity, perception, and systemic biases in educational and other evaluative contexts. The subtleties of testimonial injustice become particularly salient when examining gender stereotypes. In a discussion on the *Philosophy Bites* podcast (Edmonds & Warburton, 2020), Fricker illustrated the concept of testimonial injustice through the lens of gender and sports expertise. She presented a scenario where a woman's comprehensive knowledge of football, including her familiarity with the leagues, players, and matches, was overlooked. This specific example underscores how biases against women's sports expertise can lead to their contributions being undervalued or ignored and serves as an example of testimonial injustice. Fricker pointed out that the problem arises when such a stereotype turns into outright prejudice, despite clear evidence provided by the woman to the contrary. This form of injustice not only impacts the individual's epistemic agency but also resonates with broader theories of power and oppression (Butler, 1997; Foucault, 1981a, 1982/2000; Hall, 2001; Spivak, 1988), as it reflects and perpetuates discriminatory power structures.

Hermeneutical injustice refers to an inequity in the distribution of hermeneutic resources; collective interpretative tools necessary for self-understanding and interpersonal interactions (Fricker, 2007, 2017). This form of injustice arises when individuals or groups lack the conceptual framework to comprehend and articulate aspects of their experiences, creating a gap in collective interpretive resources. In exploring this concept, I am drawn to Foucault's examination of the evolution of self-understanding against the backdrop of societal norms (Foucault, 1997). Foucault's inquiry into the regulation of sexuality and its attendant emotions underscores the historical development of hermeneutic resources, revealing how individuals' understanding of self is influenced by the prevailing norms of what is forbidden or permitted.

The resulting dialectic between personal understanding and societal interpretation frames the crux of hermeneutical injustice. Foucault notably illustrated this through the diminishing value assigned to the discourse of the marginalized, such as the madman in medieval society, whose voice lacks the “currency” or legitimacy accorded to dominant discourses (Foucault, 1981b, p. 10). Foucault’s (1997) exploration of the “technologies of the self” and how they have been shaped by societal structures, brings to light the various methods through which individuals attempt to comprehend and articulate their selfhood. In Article 2, music and books become such technologies of the self, as Neptune finds resonance and empowerment in narratives that align with their experiences, offering frameworks for understanding and articulating their non-binary identity. These technologies of the self consequently act as hermeneutic resources and when individuals lack these resources, they face a unique kind of marginalization, as in the case of patients unable to communicate their experiences effectively within the medical system, leading to a form of hermeneutic injustice in healthcare settings (Carel & Kidd, 2017).

Fricker (2007) posited that hermeneutical injustice occurs when there is awareness of an experience, yet an absence of a framework within the communal resources to make sense of it. The injustice is compounded when the inability to articulate one’s experiences results in a societal deafness, leading to a so-called “hermeneutical inequality.” She explained it as follows:

Hermeneutical inequality is inevitably hard to detect. Our interpretive efforts are naturally geared to interests, as we try hardest to understand those things it serves us to understand. Consequently, a group’s unequal hermeneutical participation will tend to show up in a localized manner in hermeneutical hotspots – locations in social life where the powerful have no interest in achieving a proper interpretation, perhaps indeed where they have a positive interest in sustaining the extant misinterpretation (such as that repeated sexual propositions in the workplace are never anything more than a form of ‘flirting’, and their uneasy rejection by the recipient only ever matter of her ‘lacking a sense of humour’). But then in such a hotspot as this, the unequal hermeneutical participation remains positively disguised by the existing meaning attributed to the behaviour (‘flirting’), and so it is all the more difficult to detect. (2007, p. 153)

As of writing this dissertation in 2024, there has been an increased focus on sexual harassment in the public sphere in the wake of the #MeToo movement (Hansen, 2022, p. 19). Yet, Fricker’s example is relatable and raises some central questions about how we can define hermeneutical injustice. As I interpret Fricker, it is not necessarily the sexual harassment itself that defines the injustice but rather how the person who is subject to these experiences feels

believed in their testimony (here we can see clear parallels to testimonial injustice), and even more importantly, how the existing conceptual framework can capture these experiences in words. This is where I attempt to make a rhetorical point that knowledge can have an oppressive function. Based on these observations, I argue in the context of this dissertation that epistemic injustice (specifically hermeneutical injustice) can ultimately lead to what I refer to as ontological disappearance/erasure.

2.2.3 Ontological Disappearance/Erasure

To understand what it means to be ontologically disappeared or erased, one should reflect on what it means to exist ontologically in the first place. The word “ontology” itself derives from the Greek “ontos” (being) and “logos” (study), meaning the study of being (Flick, 2018, p. 68). It involves studying and understanding the reality around us, an exploration of the fundamental categories of beings and their relations. Thus, to be ontologically existing could mean both to be assigned a subject position in the social world, which entails both an integral sense of agency, and being recognized as a subject by the surrounding society. This recognition involves not just physical existence, but also the acceptance and integration of one’s identity, experiences, and essence into the collective understanding of what it means to exist. In philosophical terms, to be an ontological being is to have a state of being that is understood, acknowledged, and situated within the context of reality as defined by a particular epistemological framework or cultural context.

When I build on the notion that one can be ontologically disappeared or erased, I draw on Gould’s (2012) adaptation of Wittig’s feminist philosophy. In her work, Wittig (1992) explored the idea of the woman as an ontologically existent being, building on Simone de Beauvoir’s famous assertion that one is not born a woman but becomes one. Viewing her reflections in a contemporary context, we can suggest that the subject position “woman” becomes a metaphor for any marginalized identity:

[...] the concept of difference between the sexes ontologically constitutes women into different/others. Men are not different, whites are not different, nor are the masters. But the blacks, as well as the slaves, are. This ontological characteristic of the difference between the sexes affects all the concepts which are part of the same conglomerate. But for us, there is no such thing as being-woman or being-man. ‘man’ and ‘woman’ are political concepts of opposition, and the copula which dialectically unites them is, at the same time, the one which abolishes them. (Wittig, 1992, p. 29)

Gould (2012) used this difference between men/women as a basis to argue that homosexuality itself is non-existent and instead just a “failed” form of heterosexuality (p. 49). She explored the complex and often fraught relationship between music, homosexuality, and music education. She argued that music had long been associated with femininity in Western society, particularly in North America. This association had led to the perception that participation in music emasculates men and boys, contributing to the conflation of misogyny and homophobia within both music and music education (p. 46). Music education was seen as particularly susceptible to homophobia and homosexual panic, phenomena driven by societal norms emphasizing rationality, competitiveness, rigor, and masterfulness, which are traits traditionally aligned with hegemonic masculine and heterosexual values. These values often marginalized those who do not conform, such as homosexuals, thereby leading to their disappearance within the profession. Gould used Derrida’s concept of “under erasure” to describe how homosexuals are ontologically disappeared/erased (p. 52). In this framework, homosexual subject positions do not exist because they are viewed through the lens of failed heterosexuality. Consequently, within music education, this ontological disappearance manifested in curricular and pedagogical practices that did not account for homosexual subjectivities. Music was often taught as a totalizing discourse that failed to recognize or include the “Other,” thereby perpetuating the invisibility of non-heteronormative identities (p. 57).

The concept of “difference,” as articulated by Wittig (1992) and Gould (2012), serves as a linguistic tool to distinguish between the stable and naturalized (the man, the masculine) and the Otherness (the woman, the feminine, the queer). It is precisely in this linguistic difference that I wish to conclude this theoretical chapter. The notion of objective, neutral knowledge is called into question when we examine the lived experiences of individuals who identify as gender fluid or non-binary. Public discourse often gravitates toward biologically deterministic views on gender and gender expression, and this determinism imposes limitations on how we understand and accommodate non-binary and gender-expansive identities. A significant debate in contemporary discussions of gender revolves around whether more than two genders exist and whether categories beyond the binary should be acknowledged. Should gender be understood as strictly biological, or should we view it through a Butlerian lens, understanding gender as performative gestures tied to socially constructed ideas of what is considered masculine and feminine at any given time?

As a music teacher educator and educational researcher, my role is not to provide a definitive answer to this question. However, I believe it is essential to ask whether we are adequately acknowledging and supporting individuals like Neptune if we insist on reducing gender to biological determinism. By rejecting any recognition of gender outside the binary, we risk erasing the lived experiences of gender-expansive individuals, thereby excluding their identities from the knowledge frameworks we rely on to understand gender. When considered in the context of music education, these reflections open up important questions about how gender and identity are negotiated within the classroom. Music teachers may find themselves navigating complex intersections between gender identity and self-expression. If gender is understood as fluid rather than fixed, it prompts further reflection on how educational spaces might better accommodate a broader range of experiences. Such considerations could influence how music teachers approach the challenge of stereotypes, ensuring that students from all gender backgrounds are not inadvertently marginalized or made invisible. As Kumashiro (2002) highlighted, the knowledge students acquire both inside and outside school is often partial and biased, relying on stereotypes and myths about marginalized groups. He noted that “students learn about queers from sensationalist and stereotypical accounts in the media and popular culture [...]. But even inside school, students learn little that challenges these stereotypes and misrepresentations” (p. 40). This insight underscores the importance of queering the knowledge we rely on in education, challenging dominant narratives to ensure that students are not only informed but also equipped to question and dismantle stereotypes.

At its core, queering the knowledge we rely on in education is not just an intellectual exercise but a necessary process for ensuring that all students are ontologically present in the classroom. This critical engagement with knowledge (supported by the directives of the national curriculum) offers a pathway to challenge the processes of othering. By queering educational practices, music education can become a space where difference is not erased but embraced, providing a foundation for a more inclusive pedagogical approach. This opens up possibilities for understanding how a queer perspective on pedagogy can work against the forces that marginalize and other non-normative identities.

3. Queer Perspectives as Educational Practice

In this dissertation, the queer perspective introduced earlier finds its application within the realm of critical pedagogy, presented under the term queer pedagogy. While critical pedagogy challenges the systems of power and oppression within education, queer pedagogy specifically interrogates the normative structures surrounding gender, sexuality, and identity. By building upon and extending critical pedagogical frameworks, queer pedagogy addresses the complexities of identity, knowledge, and power through a lens that actively resists the binary and normative constructions that shape much of educational discourse. This queering of pedagogical approaches encourages teachers and students to continuously question the categories that define identity and knowledge, particularly the ways in which these categories are socially constructed and often restrictive. The instability of these categories becomes central to the exploration of queer pedagogy in the context of Norwegian music education in this chapter.

At this juncture, it becomes relevant to extend this perspective into the educational domain by engaging with Biesta's (2016) concept of the "risk of education." Education, as Biesta argues, involves an inherent risk because it invites both teachers and students to step into the unknown, challenging pre-existing frameworks and assumptions (pp. 1-2). In the context of queer pedagogy, this risk is embraced by pushing against the safety of normative structures, opening up spaces for identities and expressions that defy categorization. Rather than operating within the confines of fixed, binary understandings, queer pedagogy invites teachers and students to engage in an ongoing exploration of identity, challenging the assumption that gender, sexuality, and knowledge can be easily categorized or known in advance. Rather than offering certainty, queer pedagogy acknowledges the unpredictable and transformative nature of education, where students and teachers alike must navigate the discomfort of uncertainty and change. This process does not aim to provide concrete answers or prescriptive practices but instead creates space for questioning how normative assumptions about gender and sexuality are reproduced and challenged within educational contexts.

By situating queer pedagogy within the broader discourse of critical pedagogy, this chapter aims to explore the potentialities of a pedagogical approach that recognizes the fluidity of identity and the complexities of engaging with non-normative perspectives in educational

settings. This reflective approach underscores the ways in which both teachers and students are implicated in the ongoing negotiation of knowledge, creating a space where questioning and critical engagement become central to the learning process.

3.1 Theoretical Foundations of Queer Pedagogy

Queer pedagogy serves as a central theoretical framework in this dissertation and is contextualized within a broader landscape of pedagogical developments, including pedagogy of emancipation (Freire, 1970/1999), anti-oppressive pedagogy (Kumashiro, 2002), pedagogy of discomfort (Boler, 1999; Røthing, 2020), and norm-critical pedagogy (Björkman & Bromseth, 2019; Björkman et al., 2021). Each of these approaches, while sharing overlapping dimensions, offers distinct focal areas that enrich my understanding of educational practices related to gender and sexuality. While I will not dwell too much on already well-established pedagogical theories that substantiate queer pedagogy, I find it necessary to introduce a trajectory that outlines how I situate myself within a broader intellectual tradition. In particular, queer pedagogy emerges at the intersection of Critical Theory and the linguistic turn in the humanities; movements that have significantly shaped contemporary understandings of identity, power, and language. Critical Theory, which builds on the legacy of Marxist thought and the Frankfurt School, has been crucial in developing frameworks that critique systemic inequalities and oppressive structures in society (Celikates & Flynn, 2023).¹⁴

One of the foundational works in this tradition, Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*,¹⁵ was published in English in 1970 and has been immensely influential in shaping what we now know as emancipatory pedagogy. Freire's transformative approach emphasized empowering students to critically engage with and reshape their world, highlighting the importance of

¹⁴ "Critical theory" refers to a family of theories that aim at a critique and transformation of society by integrating normative perspectives with empirically informed analysis of society's conflicts, contradictions, and tendencies. In a narrow sense, "Critical Theory" (often denoted with capital letters) refers to the work of several generations of philosophers and social theorists in the Western European Marxist tradition known as the Frankfurt School. Beginning in the 1930s at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, it is best known for interdisciplinary research that combines philosophy and social science with the practical aim of furthering emancipation. (Celikates & Flynn, 2023, first paragraph)

¹⁵ Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* emerged from the repressive political climate of mid-20th century Brazil under military dictatorship, where it resonated with global liberation and social justice movements. Influenced by Marxism and liberation theology, Freire critiqued the traditional "banking model" of education that reinforced existing power dynamics, advocating instead for a dialogical and participatory approach. His work was shaped by widespread educational inequalities, post-colonial thought, and a broader push for systemic change, positioning education as a tool for empowerment and social transformation.

reflection and action to challenge systemic oppression. While Freire's pedagogy and queer pedagogy share the goal of empowering students, Freire's work focused more on social justice and political activism, often concentrating on class and economic disparities, whereas queer pedagogy extends this focus to encompass the fluidity and multiplicity of gender and sexual identity. Moving forward, the term "feminist pedagogy" emerged as early as the 1980s (Pinar & Miller, 1982), but the term "queer pedagogy" was first established by Bryson and de Castell in 1993 (I will return to this in more detail in chapter 3.1.1). In other words, queer pedagogy as a scholarly field has been developed and adapted for over more than three decades. Queer pedagogy shares many commonalities with "antioppressive pedagogy" (Kumashiro, 2002), which emphasizes the importance of recognizing and addressing inequalities and biases within educational practices. Central to this recognition is what the nature of oppression is, and how it takes place in educational practices. Kumashiro noted:

[...] some researchers have attempted to work against oppression by focusing on what all students – privileged and marginalized – know and should know about the Other. Given that knowledge can lead to oppressive as well as antioppressive actions [...], and given that a primary goal of schooling is to teach and learn more knowledge, these researchers suggest that antioppressive knowledge is central to challenging oppressions in school. (2002, p. 39)

Both approaches are committed to inclusivity and the deconstruction of normative structures. However, antioppressive pedagogy tends to be broader in scope, addressing various forms of oppression beyond gender and sexuality, including race, class, and ability. Put simply, antioppressive pedagogy encompasses a range of identity categories, including queer, with the overarching aim of highlighting the experiences of marginalized groups to challenge normativity. In contrast, queer pedagogy focuses on challenging normativity specifically through the lens of queerness, thus substantiating my referral to the queer perspective.

Røthing (2020) built upon several notions and terms from antioppressive pedagogy when she adapted Boler's (1999) "pedagogy of discomfort," which encourages students and teachers to engage with uncomfortable topics and emotions to foster critical awareness and personal growth:

A pedagogy of discomfort begins by inviting educators and students to engage in critical inquiry regarding values and cherished beliefs, and to examine constructed self-images in relation to how one has learned to perceive others. Within this culture of inquiry and flexibility, a central focus is to recognize how emotions define how and what one chooses to see, and conversely, not to see. (Boler, 1999, p. 176)

The aim of this pedagogy is to challenge and scrutinize preconceived notions and self-perceptions, particularly in understanding “the Other” (Kumashiro, 2002). Over time, this approach has evolved into a framework for navigating discussions on social justice, diversity, and racism, pushing the boundaries of emotional comfort zones (Røthing, 2020, p. 60). The fundamental belief underlying this approach is that discomfort is essential for challenging the status quo. Embracing uncomfortable emotions is crucial for questioning and transforming established norms, behaviors, and practices that reinforce stereotypes and sustain social injustices (p. 60). Røthing also pointed out that Norwegian studies on addressing controversial topics in the classroom suggest that teachers often avoid these discussions for fear of them becoming uncontrollable (p. 59). Topics such as racism, anti-Semitism, immigration, right-wing extremism, transgender issues, and LGBTQ-related questions are particularly challenging. In such instances, teachers may feel helpless and lack the necessary competence, leading them to avoid these topics altogether. This approach aligns in my view well with queer pedagogy’s aim to challenge comfort zones and provoke critical thinking about normative assumptions (Bryson & De Castell, 1993, p. 299). Yet, pedagogy of discomfort is distinct in its methodological emphasis on emotional and psychological engagement as pedagogical tools (Boler, 1999, p. 4).

As I have systematically delved into the theoretical foundation for what is referred to as a queer perspective in this dissertation, I have also become acquainted with the somewhat newer concept of “norm-critical pedagogy,” which has gained significant traction in Scandinavian educational discourse over the past decade. Similar to queer pedagogy, this approach challenges normative assumptions and practices, particularly those related to gender and sexuality. Norm-critical pedagogy closely aligns with queer pedagogy in its critique of heteronormativity and emphasis on inclusivity. It also focuses on identifying and deconstructing societal norms that perpetuate inequality and exclusion. Björkmann et al. (2021) outlined norm-critical pedagogy as an educational approach that seeks to question and dismantle the normative structures that maintain social hierarchies and exclusions, extending the scope of queer pedagogy:

The concept of norm-critical pedagogy was developed in Sweden with strong inspiration from and based on queer pedagogy. The emphasis during its early establishment was largely focused on the heteronorm, mainly due to the concept’s roots in the sexual political movement of the early 2000s and the queer turn (see Alm & Laskar, 2017). The ambition when norm-critical

pedagogy was established was to discuss and act from a more intersectional perspective than what queer pedagogy had previously done (Björkmann et al., 2021, pp. 181-182, my translation)

While these above-mentioned pedagogical approaches share a commitment to challenging normative assumptions and promoting inclusivity, they also offer unique insights and distinctions. In this dissertation, I primarily engage with queer pedagogy as a theoretical framework. However, in its practical application, I also draw on norm-critical pedagogy, as it provides a valuable context for implementing potential risky topics within the Norwegian school system, as discussed in Article 3. This integrative approach allows for a nuanced exploration of how gender and sexuality perspectives can be incorporated into music education, addressing both theoretical and practical dimensions. By situating queer pedagogy within this broader pedagogical landscape, this dissertation aims to offer actionable insights for developing inclusive and critically engaged music education practices by providing queer perspective. This choice is driven by the recognition that queer pedagogy not only encompasses a range of critical educational theories but also provides a versatile and dynamic framework for addressing the complexities of gender and sexuality in the classroom.

3.1.1 Queer Pedagogy

In many ways, queer pedagogy emerges as a transformative nexus between queer theory and critical pedagogy. Its foundations lie within Marxist critical theory, which scrutinizes the intersections of identity, power, and learning within the educational sphere (Bryson & de Castell, 1993, pp. 285-286). Kumashiro's (2002) aforementioned perspectives on knowledge and antioppressive pedagogy (see chapter 2.2.1) further illuminate how queer pedagogy seeks to deconstruct normative structures and promote inclusivity and social justice in education and becomes a foundational text for a contemporary notion of a queer pedagogy. Queer pedagogy must be seen in the context of feminist pedagogy, which has long emphasized the need to address power imbalances in the classroom and validate the experiences and voices of marginalized groups (Bryson & de Castell, 1993; Pinar & Miller, 1982; Kumashiro, 2002). Queer pedagogy extends this by focusing specifically on the marginalization of non-heteronormative identities.

Modern notions of queer theory and education largely originate from an understanding of curriculum as gendered texts, critiquing the ways in which misogyny and masculinity play out

in various educational frameworks. As Pinar and Miller noted, feminist studies within the curriculum field focus on transformative possibilities and the representation of women's lives in educational contexts (1982, p. 219). Feminists create a radical critique of cultural and epistemological underpinnings in school curricula, exposing parts of the world that have remained hidden within the dominant (male) educational paradigm (Pinar & Miller, 1982, p. 220). This critique has been instrumental in revealing the need for a more inclusive approach that integrates feminist perspectives into education. Building on this foundation, queer pedagogy, coined by Bryson and de Castell in 1993, expanded on feminist and poststructuralist theories by challenging not only heteronormativity but other entrenched forms of social dominance. Heteronormativity¹⁶ refers to the pervasive cultural presumption that heterosexuality is the default or "natural" state, shaping both social life and institutions ("heteronormativity", 2024). This presumption underpins much of traditional pedagogy, making it an essential target for queer pedagogy's disruptive approach, which seeks to dismantle these assumptions and create emancipatory spaces for learning (Bryson & de Castell, 1993).

Bryson and de Castell's work is anchored in poststructuralist and feminist theories, aiming to deconstruct traditional power dynamics and create more inclusive and emancipatory educational environments (Bryson & de Castell, 1993, p. 288). For example, the authors emphasized that queer pedagogy involves actively disrupting norms related to gender, gender roles, and sexuality. This disruption is achieved through deconstructing normativity and fostering reflexivity, or, as the authors put it, through the act of *queering*:

[...] we attempted to reflect on what it might mean to take Rubin's challenge seriously in re-thinking, or *queer*<y>*ing*, normatively sanctioned pedagogies – to insist on the 'right to speak as one,' to make pedagogical spaces where the hitherto unsayable could be uttered, where so-called deviant images could be represented, and where conscious efforts could be made to re-

¹⁶ Heteronormativity is a deeply-embedded cultural presumption that humanity and heterosexuality are synonymous. The term was coined in 1993 by the American literary critic Michael Warner (b.1958), who quoted the French feminist Monique Wittig (1935–2003): 'To live in society is to live in heterosexuality...Heterosexuality is always already given within all mental categories.' Gayle Rubin (b.1949), an American anthropologist, had already coined the phrase compulsory heterosexuality in 1975 to refer to the taboo on homosexuality as being more basic than that on incest, while the American poet Adrienne Rich (1929–2012) used the same term in 1986 to argue that heterosexuality is a social construct sustained by social sanctions. Heteronormativity permeates social life and social institutions, from the reactions of all-male groups when an attractive woman passes to the checkbox for 'married or single'. However, the presumption of universal heterosexual desire is an inherently unstable myth. (Heteronormativity, n.d.)

think forms of subjectivity and relations within the oppressive confines of the always-already heterosexualized classroom. (p. 296, original emphasis)

Queer pedagogy also interrogates the conventional categories of identity that are often taken for granted in mainstream education. It challenges binary oppositions (such as male/female, heterosexual/homosexual) that underpin much of traditional educational practice. This deconstruction aims to reveal the fluid and constructed nature of these identities, thereby opening up more inclusive and diverse expressions of identity (Bryson & de Castell, 1993, p. 288). Additionally, queer pedagogy emphasizes the importance of reflexivity among both teachers and students. This involves a continuous examination of one's assumptions, biases, and privileges within the educational process. Building on this, queer pedagogy also emphasizes the role of reflexivity, urging both teachers and students to continuously examine their assumptions, biases, and privileges. This reflexive process is central to queer pedagogy's critical stance, encouraging a deeper engagement with the complexities of identity and the ways these complexities manifest within educational contexts.

Queer pedagogy questions the limits of conventional knowledge and encourages a deeper reflection on how (hetero)normative assumptions shape educational practices. It also opens a space for ambiguity and uncertainty, asking what remains unseen when knowledge is framed solely within normative parameters. This dynamic invites ongoing inquiry rather than conclusive answers, positioning the classroom as a site of continuous exploration. In this context, it becomes necessary to consider how queer perspectives might inform music education in particular.

3.2 Norwegian Music Education and Queer Perspectives

The Norwegian curriculum's approach to competence integrates knowledge, skills, reflection, and critical thinking, creating a comprehensive framework for education. It is with this backdrop I conduct an inquiry across the three articles to explore what it entails for students and teachers to "investigate how gender, gender roles, and sexuality are portrayed in music and dance in the public sphere, and create expressions that challenge stereotypes"(Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020b). To thoroughly understand this, it is essential to consider both formal and informal perspectives in music education, particularly as a thoroughly gendered field. These perspectives provide a comprehensive view of how students

interact with and interpret music both inside and outside the classroom, highlighting the recurring themes of gender and sexuality. As Ellefsen and I explored in Article 1, teachers often approach these topics through a heteronormative framework, limiting the potential for broader discussions on gender and sexuality. This suggests that while the competence aims may appear progressive, the scope for addressing these topics is often constrained by the normative frameworks within which teachers operate.

While the existing curriculum does provide space for critical reflection on gender and sexuality, queer pedagogy offers an approach that can help fully realize this potential by questioning the underlying assumptions about what is considered “normal” in music education. In other words, for the curriculum’s scope to be fully utilized, queer pedagogy provides the necessary framework for challenging normative assumptions and expanding teachers’ interpretive practices. The queer perspective encourages teachers to reflect critically on how their own biases and societal norms shape their teaching practices. For example, when discussing popular music, most of the teachers in Article 1 focused on stereotypical representations of gender and sexuality, such as the hypermasculinity and sexualization of women in hip-hop music. Queer pedagogy, however, asks what might happen if these discussions were framed differently, emphasizing non-normative expressions of gender and exploring queer identities within musical cultures. Additionally, queer pedagogy can be viewed as complementing the broader aims of the Norwegian school system, particularly its focus on democratic participation and critical thinking. Through engaging with the representation of gender and sexuality in music, students may have the opportunity to reflect on these topics in ways that challenge normative assumptions. This reflective process could contribute to fostering a classroom environment that invites inclusivity and dialogue. In this way, queer pedagogy opens up avenues for exploring how students’ critical engagement with societal norms might be integrated into educational practices, resonating with the Norwegian education system’s overarching goals. This alignment becomes even clearer when considering the three main interdisciplinary topics in the curriculum: “Health and Life Skills,” “Democracy and Citizenship,” and “Sustainable Development” (Sundby & Karseth, 2022, p. 433). These topics aim to develop students’ abilities to see connections between different areas of knowledge and apply their learning to real-world situations, thus promoting comprehensive education that goes beyond traditional subject boundaries:

These three interdisciplinary topics in the curriculum are based on prevailing societal challenges which demand engagement and effort from individuals and local communities, nationally and globally. The pupils develop competence in connection with the interdisciplinary topics by working with issues from various subjects. They shall gain insight into challenges and dilemmas in these topics. Pupils must understand where we can find solutions through knowledge and collaboration, and they must learn about the relationship between actions and consequences. The knowledge base for finding solutions to problems can be found in many subjects, and the topics must help the pupils to achieve understanding and to see connections across subjects. The goals for what the pupils should learn in the topics are stated in the competence goals for the individual subjects where this is relevant. (Ministry of Education and Research, 2020b, section 2.5)

The Norwegian curriculum's emphasis on competence reflects a multifaceted approach to education, integrating values and principles that permeate the entire educational journey. According to the curriculum, "Competence is the ability to acquire and apply knowledge and skills to master challenges and solve tasks in familiar and unfamiliar contexts and situations. Competence includes understanding and the ability to reflect and think critically" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2020a, section 2.2). This definition includes not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the development of skills, understanding, reflection, and critical thinking. *Knowledge* encompasses familiarity with and understanding of facts, concepts, theories, ideas, and relationships in various subject fields. *Skills* involve mastering actions or procedures to carry out tasks or solve problems, including motor, practical, cognitive, social, creative, and linguistic skills. *Reflection* and *Critical thinking* are integral to understanding theoretical reasoning and performing practical tasks, contributing to the development of attitudes and ethical judgment.

Given this comprehensive definition of competence, one might consider how the integration of a queer perspective in music education can deepen the ways students engage with the curriculum's broader aims. While the curriculum already encourages critical engagement with gender, sexuality, and identity, queer pedagogy offers specific tools for unpacking the assumptions and norms that underlie these representations. By utilizing a queer perspective, teachers can guide students in questioning not only how these identities are portrayed in music but also how normative frameworks shape their own understandings and experiences. This more nuanced, reflective approach encourages students to actively deconstruct stereotypes and dominant narratives, thereby enhancing the critical thinking and self-reflection that the curriculum seeks to foster. In this way, queer pedagogy supports students in navigating

complex social issues, offering deeper insights into diversity and inclusion within educational contexts.

3.2.1 Music Education in Formal/Informal Contexts

As music education opens up spaces for students to reflect on gender, sexuality, and identity, it invites deeper inquiry into the very nature of learning itself. How do students' experiences of music, whether in the classroom or in their everyday lives, shape their understanding of these complex social dimensions? And how does the interplay between formal and informal contexts influence the ways in which students navigate and perform gendered identities through music? These questions invite us to reflect on the fluidity of music education as a space where structured pedagogy meets spontaneous, everyday engagement with music. It is within this dynamic intersection that possibilities for transformative learning emerge (Paul & Quiggin, 2020), revealing how the boundaries between formal and informal education are often more blurred than fixed (Abramo, 2011; Abramo, 2020; Green, 2008; Partti & Karlsen, 2010). In the context of this dissertation, I draw on Folkestad's (2006) reflections on music education, where he presented the concepts of formal/informal as follows:

Formal and informal ways of learning are aspects in most educational situations, in and out of school, and one interesting way of analysing musical activities is to observe and describe the switch between the formal and informal ways of approaching learning. (p. 142)

Additionally, Folkestad highlighted that

[...] the distinction between formal and informal learning should not be seen as primarily physical; formal learning as equivalent to learning in school versus informal learning as a description of learning outside school. It is rather a question of whether the intentionality of the individuals is directed towards music making, or towards learning about music, and of whether the learning situation is formalised in the sense that someone has taken on the role of being 'the teacher', thereby defining the others as 'students'. (p. 143)

As both a teacher educator and a teacher, it appears evident to me that in the current music education landscape in Norway, it is impossible to draw sharp distinctions between what can be classified as formal and informal education. Inspired by Partti and Karlsen's (2010) depiction of a typical teenager in 2010 (p. 369), I offer the following example as of 2024:

Jagoda (13) wakes up to the sound of music from her smartphone. She gets ready for school, has breakfast, and takes the bus to school. The trip takes 20 minutes, and Jagoda checks TikTok, Instagram, and texts with friends. At the moment, she is in a group chat on Snapchat with her best friends Kristian (14), Nora (13), and Filipe (14). The friends have been allowed to work together on a music performance project at school. The assignment spans the entire fall term, is in three phases, and sounds as follows:

1. *As a group, use GarageBand to create a jingle for a commercial. You decide what the commercial will be about and who the target audience is, but you must find a slogan and create a suitable jingle. The jingle can be between 25-45 seconds, and you can choose whether to add vocals.*
2. *The group will select a band, group, artist, or performer(s) to learn about and present to the class. Additionally, the group will choose a song from the selected band/artist/performer(s) to lip-sync in front of the class.*
3. *Same as phase 2, but now you will sing yourselves. You choose whether to sing to a playback or perform acoustically/a cappella. Remember: you will not be graded on your singing voice, but on the overall performance. Be creative! Perform in front of the class.*

The group eagerly shares suggestions with each other, but no one agrees. Filipe gets frustrated and suggests they can ask the music teacher for help later in the day when they have class. Later in the day during lunch break, the group watches various music videos on YouTube for inspiration. Each has their own smartphone and switches between watching their own video or something one of the others wants to show. After lunch, they have a double music lesson and finally get to talk to the teacher about the problem. They find a solution and sit in one of the small group rooms to plan their performance.

The above example is entirely fictional¹⁷ but attempts to illustrate how popular music and (social) media constantly infiltrate students' daily lives, whether in formal education or outside school hours. My purpose with this overview is to rationalize the significance of popular music and media for students' (in)formal music education, as discussed in chapter 1.1.2. As I now present the educational-theoretical perspectives that have inspired my thinking about the challenges and opportunities of the Norwegian music subject, I do so under certain assumptions. Firstly, I implicitly base my work on the notion that students' formal and informal music education is not distinctly separated. Secondly, I base my inquiry on pedagogical perspectives following the *Bildung* tradition when I build on the idea that culture in all forms has a formative effect on humans. Specifically in the context of this dissertation,

¹⁷ The example itself is fictional, but it is based on the same assignment given to the students in my master's thesis. In other words, this is a completely legitimate example of how project work in Norwegian music education can be conducted. See Skjelstad (2019).

the significance of music, popular culture, and other media for individuals in a phase where they are trying to figure themselves out. Thirdly, I draw upon Dyndahl and Ellefsen's (2009) notion of music didactic as a field of cultural didactic studies when I assume that music education will always be a discursive field in which a variety of discourses and agents thrive in continuous negotiations, shaping the subject and influencing its didactic development. Rather than establishing a fixed or unique identity, the subject emerges from these ongoing discourses, which are characterized by complexity and fluidity. Dyndahl and Ellefsen argue that the identity within didactics is not static but is instead constituted through various cultural, pedagogical, and social practices that continuously evolve (Dyndahl & Ellefsen, 2009, p. 22).

3.3 *Bildung* and its Influence on Norwegian Music Education

A central argument throughout this dissertation is that the Norwegian music subject transcends mere musical learning and engages with a more expansive view of education, as reflected in the national curriculum's competence aims, core elements, and interdisciplinary themes. These aspects highlight a more comprehensive and multifaceted approach to learning that cannot be reduced to musical education alone (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020a). To gain a deeper understanding of the structure of the Norwegian music curriculum, it is important to consider its philosophical foundations, particularly its connection to the German *Bildung* tradition. *Bildung*, which is difficult to translate directly into English, refers to the cultivation of individuals in a way that integrates personal development with societal and cultural understanding. As Biesta (2002) emphasized:

It is important to acknowledge that there is no such "thing" as *Bildung*, that is not as a "thing" on its own. We first of all need to be aware of language and context. Is, so we could ask, the German word "*Bildung*" the same as the Swedish word "Bildning"? Is that similar to the Dutch word "Vorming"? And what would this be in English? Liberal education,? Edification (Rorty)? Cultivation? The key to addressing this issue is to see that *Bildung* has a history – or perhaps we should say: that it has several (possible) histories. (p. 344, original emphasis)

In the context of Norwegian education, the curriculum reflects the principles of *Bildung* by emphasizing not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the formation of individuals capable of critical engagement with cultural content. This idea is aligned with Klafki's theory of *categorical Bildung*, which seeks to combine material and formal educational aspects,

emphasizing that education should not only impart knowledge but also foster the capacity for critical thought and reflection:

In Klafki's theory of categorical *Bildung*, both the formal and material aspects are united. According to Klafki, the essence of education can be described as a dialectical process between the subject (the student) and the object (the culture), where the individual opens up to the world and the world opens up to the individual ("the double opening"). The content that can create such a "double opening," according to Klafki, is the exemplary. (Straum, 2018, pp. 49-50, my translation)

Klafki's approach resonates deeply with the objectives of the Norwegian music curriculum, which stresses not only making, performing, and experiencing music (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020e) but also reflecting on its cultural significance. This reflection aligns with the notion that education should be both materially enriching and formally empowering. As Straum (2018) pointed out:

Despite Klafki's development in response to both empirical-scientific and critical pedagogy, this categorical thinking forms the backbone of his didactics. New elements and issues are incorporated, but they do not replace the foundational ideas. When he began using the term critical-constructive didactics more frequently from the 1980s onwards, it was because Klafki's focus increasingly shifted away from *Bildung* as a process towards its main goals (self-determination, co-determination, solidarity, and democracy). Nevertheless, the categorical thinking with its 'double-sided opening' through the exemplary principle remains a basis for his reorientations. (Straum, 2018, p. 50, my translation)

A central premise for understanding Norwegian music education is that it is strongly oriented toward the tradition of *Bildung*. This orientation can be traced back to the work of Nielsen (1998), who has been instrumental in framing music education in a multifaceted *Bildung*-oriented perspective. Nielsen, building on Klafki's framework of categorical *Bildung*, emphasized the idea that music education extends beyond the music itself, encompassing broader aspects of human formation. His general music didactics are grounded in Klafki's ideas, but Nielsen took it a step further, moving towards a more critical form of *Bildung* by incorporating political and social perspectives on music and the arts. As Fuglseth (2018, p. 82) observed, Nielsen has been instrumental in clarifying Klafki's categorial approach within the field of music education. He noted that while it may be challenging to identify exemplary content for categorical *Bildung* in music, this does not undermine the overall usefulness of the approach. Furthermore, Nielsen emphasized the importance of differentiating between

Klafki's original categorical thinking and later developments, particularly in relation to addressing new social issues. Fuglseth (2018) elaborated:

Nielsen pointed out that the term 'elementary' can be misleading when applied to the study of school subjects. He identifies four meanings of the elementary: simple parts, straightforward and easily understood, original, and essential. What constitutes the elementary in different subjects and fields remains a topic of debate. (2018, p. 82, my translation)

Nielsen's multifaceted approach to music as a subject matter reflects a three-dimensional foundation that includes artistic, technical, and scientific aspects. This foundation, which Nielsen (1998, p. 110) referred to as the "three-dimensional basis," expresses the complexity and richness of the subject matter within music education. Further building on this, Nielsen introduced the dual concepts of *ars* and *scientia* as essential dimensions of music education. In his framework, *ars* represents the artistic and aesthetic components, while *scientia* encompasses the theoretical and scientific aspects of music education (Nielsen, 1998, pp. 106-107). He emphasized that these dimensions interact fluidly, noting that the practice of teaching music involves a dynamic interplay between the two, thus encompassing both craftsmanship (*håndværk*) and everyday culture (*hverdagskultur*). Additionally, Nielsen categorized music education into various functions or work forms, which he categorized as: *Reproduction* (performing and recreating existing music), *Production* (creating, composing, arranging, improvising), *Perception* (receiving auditory impressions and deriving musical "meaning"), *Interpretation* (analyzing and expressing understanding of music through non-musical means), and *Reflection* (considering, investigating, and contextualizing music within historical, sociological, psychological, and other frameworks) (Nielsen, 1998, p. 295, table 6.1, my translation).

3.3.1 Reimagining Subjectification through Queer Pedagogy

What is the purpose of schooling? Who is education for, and what role should it play in shaping individuals and society? Such foundational questions have long guided educational philosophy, and Biesta's (2010) work adds depth to this inquiry by identifying three key functions of education: *qualification*, *socialization*, and *subjectification*. Qualification involves the transmission of knowledge and skills necessary for participation in society (p. 19), while socialization addresses how individuals are integrated into the social, cultural, and political frameworks of their community (p. 21). However, it is subjectification that presents

the most profound philosophical challenge, becoming the dimension on which Biesta's focus lies. Subjectification speaks to the emergence of individuals as autonomous, thinking subjects, capable of questioning and reshaping the world around them (p. 23). Yet, the radical potential of subjectification to frame education as a process of self-formation, it still tends to operate at a level of abstraction where individual identity – whether gendered, racialized, or otherwise – remains largely unexamined. In seeking to theorize the complexity of subjectification, educational philosophers like Biesta, Nielsen, and Klafki often lift the subject out of its specific context. The subject they posit is often a universal figure, devoid of class, gender, or religious markings – a neutral subject that can be shaped through the *Bildung* process or musical education. This abstraction, while useful for certain theoretical purposes, risks flattening the subject into something detached from the lived experiences of individuals, particularly those navigating specific social, cultural, and political contexts.

This is where queer pedagogy offers a crucial intervention. By challenging the presumption of a universal subject, queer pedagogy foregrounds the complexity and fluidity of identity. As discussed in chapter 2.1.2, the process of becoming a subject is not an abstract or neutral endeavor but one deeply intertwined with embodied, non-normative experiences of gender and sexuality. From this perspective, subjectification cannot be disentangled from the cultural and social forces shaping individual identity. Thus, music, as both a pedagogical tool and cultural expression, is never neutral, nor is the subject it forms devoid of gender or context (Hansen, 2022; Hawkins, 2016; Jarman-Ivens, 2011; Onsrud, 2015). Queer pedagogy invites an exploration of the multiple, situated forms that subjectivity can take, revealing how identity is continually shaped by intersections of social norms, cultural values, and lived experiences. In questioning the universalized subject, queer pedagogy does more than broaden the scope of subjectification; it transforms the foundation of educational processes by refusing to impose fixed identities. This tension between the abstract universality of subjectification and the particularities of individual identity calls for a re-examination of Biesta's framework. Through a queer perspective, subjectification in music education can be reimagined as a process that resists closure, remaining open to the multiplicity of identities students bring to the classroom. Rather than assuming a stable or universal subject, this perspective highlights the ongoing negotiation of identity.

Biesta's (2016) concept of risk in education complements this approach by framing education as inherently uncertain. Risk emerges from the possibility that neither the teacher nor the student can fully control the outcomes of the educational process (p. 60). Queer pedagogy embraces this uncertainty, not as something to be feared but as an opportunity for the unknown to unfold – where traditional boundaries of gender, sexuality, and identity can be questioned and reimagined. This philosophical inquiry invites the question: Can education ever fully escape the imposition of normative frameworks, or is it always entangled in the process of defining what it means to become a “subject”? In music education, this question becomes particularly pressing, as music itself is both a product, reflection of, and creator of cultural values, identity, and power. Dyndahl and Ellefsen (2009) highlighted this becoming as a self-contradictory relation:

‘Identity’ denotes the subjectivizing discursively constructed ‘truth about ourselves’, at the same time relating to multiple and mobile connections which we do not necessarily interpret as either causally determined by power relations in the field or as motivated by the subject’s struggle for holistic synthesis and coherence (p. 12).

As argued across this dissertation’s articles, queer pedagogy invites us to consider how music education might become a space where students engage not just with musical forms but with the deeper, often contested, dimensions of their own identities. In doing so, music education becomes a site not only of learning but of transformation, where the process of subjectification is constantly in flux, shaped by and shaping the diverse and often non-normative experiences of students. In this sense, subjectification cannot be reduced to an abstract process of becoming; rather, it must be recognized as one deeply embedded in the social, cultural, and political contexts that define students’ lives. Queer pedagogy, by foregrounding the complexities of identity, challenges us to rethink the very foundations of what it means to become a subject in education. It opens a space for reimagining the possibilities of education, not as a fixed pathway toward a universal subject but as an ongoing, reflective engagement with the self and the world. This aligns with Biesta’s call for a more reflective and open-ended educational process (Biesta, 2010, p. 76), yet it extends this reflection into the realm of gender, sexuality, and the intricacies of identity formation in contemporary society.

So far I have argued that the structure of the Norwegian music subject draws significantly from Nielsen’s (1998) educational philosophy, which itself is rooted in the broader principles of *Bildung* and formational didactics. Additionally, the incorporation of informal learning into

music education highlights the importance of aligning pedagogical practices with students' cultural contexts and personal experiences. As Bjørnsen and Woddis (2020) noted, “the informal learning associated with a ‘progressive’ music education tradition encourages children’s and young people’s own cultural valuation. [...] This kind of music also aligns more closely with all the other signifying practices that young people use as part of their identity formation, making use of their ‘implicit musical understanding’” (2020, p. 201). This form of engagement resonates with the broader aims of *Bildung* by acknowledging students’ implicit musical understanding and the role of music in their identity formation. Recognizing the value of these informal approaches emphasizes the need for a dynamic, culturally responsive music education that reflects the lived experiences and evolving identities of students.

The principles of *Bildung* extend naturally into the structure of the Norwegian national curriculum, which shapes the educational experience across all subjects, including music. Through its emphasis on core elements, basic skills, and interdisciplinary topics, the curriculum mirrors the broader objectives of *Bildung* by encouraging not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the formation of critically engaged, culturally aware individuals. In the music subject, the four core elements (performing music, making music, experiencing music, and cultural understanding) align closely with the *Bildung* philosophy, emphasizing both personal and social development through musical engagement. Each of these core elements reflects a dimension of cultural and personal growth (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019). “Performing music,” with its focus on participation and expression, allows students to engage actively with music as a means of forming and negotiating identity, a concept central to *Bildung* (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019). Similarly, “making music” encourages creative expression and innovation, enabling students to shape and transform cultural materials, reflecting *Bildung*’s emphasis on self-determination and creativity. “Experiencing music” fosters emotional and existential reflection, connecting students’ inner lives with broader cultural narratives, while “cultural understanding” underscores the importance of music as a reflection of societal contexts, furthering students’ engagement with historical and social structures (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019).

Moreover, the interdisciplinary topics woven throughout the curriculum such as *health and life skills, democracy and citizenship, and sustainable development* (Norwegian Directorate

for Education and Training, 2020a) reinforce the multifaceted educational aims of *Bildung*. These topics challenge students to connect their learning in music with broader societal issues, encouraging them to think critically about their role in society. This mirrors the overall educational goal of forming individuals who are not only knowledgeable but also capable of reflective and ethical engagement with the world around them, as stated in the Education Act (Ministry of Education and Research, 1998). By integrating these elements into music education, the Norwegian curriculum ensures that students' musical experiences are not confined to technical skills alone. Instead, they are invited to explore music's deeper cultural and personal significance, aligning with the broader educational philosophy that views learning as a continuous process of personal and social formation. This connection between the core curriculum and the principles of *Bildung* reaffirms the idea that music education in Norway is more than a subject; it is a means of fostering critical, creative, and culturally engaged individuals who are equipped to navigate the complexities of modern life.

4. Methodology

In this chapter, I will account for the methodological phases of the research project with a specific focus on the selection of the chosen methods. I will also discuss how I sampled music teachers and made contact with Neptune, the data collection process, and the analytical post-work. Initially, I will account for my positionality and self-reflections that have been prominent in connection with the dissertation's theme, my role in the field when meeting with informants, and in the post-work with the data material, followed by a section on considerations to ensure quality in the research. The goal is both to show how the different methodological approaches were used to answer the different articles' research questions, but also how the articles are interconnected and how they collectively contribute to answering the main research questions for the dissertation. An underlying premise of this chapter is the influence of a queer perspective on the research design, data collection, and analysis. This perspective is not only central to the thematic exploration of the dissertation but also informs how I approached the interviews, the narrative study, and the analysis of data. For instance, in Phase 1, the queer perspective guided the way I interpreted teacher responses, particularly their reliance on heteronormative frameworks. In Phase 2, it shaped my understanding of Neptune's narratives as part of a subjectification process deeply embedded in gender and identity. By incorporating this lens, I aimed to foreground the complexities of identity formation in both research contexts. While I outline three phases of research in this dissertation, only Phases 1 and 2 will be detailed in this chapter. The third phase, which pertains to Article 3, did not involve any new empirical fieldwork or analysis. Instead, it represents the period in which I synthesized insights from Articles 1 and 2 to engage in a broader theoretical discussion about risk in music education. Therefore, the empirical methodologies and data collection processes described here will focus solely on Phases 1 and 2.

4.1 Qualitative Research, Self-Reflexivity and Positionality

In qualitative research, the relationship between the researcher and participant is crucial in shaping knowledge production (Berger, 2015, p. 220). The researcher's language, nationality, profession, gender, age, level of education, and personal background can all influence this

relationship, positioning the researcher as either an insider or outsider relative to the participant, which can also affect an interview situation (p. 220). By exploring the “unfamiliar,” as Berger termed it (p. 227), researchers may never fully grasp the experiences of being a member of a marginalized group. As such, the researcher’s self-reflexivity should be integral to the discourse on research ethics. Self-reflexivity is defined as a process of ongoing internal dialogue and critical assessment of one’s position, and the active, explicit acknowledgment of the potential impact of this position on both the research process and the outcomes (Berger, 2015, p. 220). Thus, self-reflexivity is not a one-time activity but an ongoing process throughout a project’s lifecycle - from planning and formulating research questions to data collection, processing, and the articulation and presentation of findings.

The goal of explicit self-reflexivity is to enhance the validity and credibility of a research project’s results (Cho & Trent, 2006; Tracy, 2010). One objective should thus be to amplify the voices of marginalized groups by presenting their experiences and views on their own identity and their place in society. Cho and Trent (2006) noted the emergence of two different approaches to the question of validity within qualitative research, which they labeled as “transactional” and “transformational” validity. Transactional validity is grounded in active interaction between the inquirer and the research participants. Techniques such as member checking (sharing notes and transcriptions with participants for approval), bracketing (disregarding the researcher’s own perspective), and triangulation (combining different methods to cross-verify findings and ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research context) are employed to ensure this interaction. Cho and Trent described this as “an interactive process between the researcher, the researched, and the collected data” (p. 321). Transformational validity, on the other hand, is viewed as a progressive, emancipatory process leading toward social change, achieved by the research endeavor itself (pp. 324-325).

Spivak (1988) prompted reflection on how we can capture the voice of those we write about and cautioned against an essentialist understanding of people, warning against speaking of a “cultural group” as though it were a homogeneous entity, thereby ignoring the various forms it may take. Central to this notion is how we can ensure, or at least minimize the risk, that we do not further contribute to this othering (Spivak, 1988, p. 75). According to Berger (2015) questions arise about whether an outsider can truly understand and convey participants’ experiences, even with self-reflexivity as a central part of the research process (Pillow in

Berger, 2015, p. 228). An important part of self-reflexivity lies in making our backgrounds explicit, also known as positionality. Using myself as an example: I am a white, cis-gendered Norwegian-born man who is in the process of attaining the highest possible academic level. These aspects make me a clear outsider and thus may place me in a superior power position relative to others. This self-reflexivity must be communicated both to participants and in what is published. At the same time, I have also personally experienced exclusion and negativity in relation to my belonging to the LGBTQ+ community, which has given me a certain basis for understanding the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth from an insider's perspective. Nevertheless, we as researchers must engage in a deep reflection on representation: Who can truly speak for whom? This ongoing introspection helps ensure that our interpretations and representations do not perpetuate biases.

Hacking (1999) noted that our understanding of identities and other people's experiences is shaped by the dominant societal narratives and power dynamics. For example, Hacking discussed how a refugee woman had to submit to the social construction "refugee woman" to stay in Canada (1999, p. 11). To maneuver in the social field, we must submit to social discourses. This could ultimately lead us to accept (victim) roles that we actually try to free ourselves from, as per Marshall's (2010) concept of the victim trope about queer youth: "Because naturalized understandings of the queer youth as victim in discourses and practices undermine queer youth agency, greater critical pressure need to be applied to these understandings" (Marshall, 2010, p. 67). By attributing a victim role to a group of people, one simultaneously risks maintaining and perpetuating power relations, as Foucault argued: "Power is everywhere; not because it encompasses everything but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault, 1980, p. 93). Thus, the power dynamics that marginalize a group are the same that are reproduced through the accepted victim role among the agents themselves. As researchers, we would then logically be part of the production of power relations by writing out these stories. As such, explicit and transparent self-reflexivity can contribute to an increased power balance between the researcher and participant(s).

4.1.1 Self-Reflexivity Through the Research Process

Maintaining a high degree of self-reflexivity at all stages of a project is crucial. Agee (2009) argued that the researcher should be careful from the development of qualitative research

questions with regard to how they position themselves relative to the participants and the extent to which the research will impact their lives (p. 441). Agee emphasized that even as an insider, it is not guaranteed that one will be accepted by the participants as “one of them” (Agee, 2009, p. 441). Therefore, as noted by Angrosino and Rosenberg, the researcher does not become “a spokesperson for issues already defined by the community” (2011, p. 474). In the context of my second article in which I present Neptune’s story I made similar reflections. Even if I state that I, as a homosexual man, identify within the LGBTQ+ umbrella, it does not automatically grant me insight to life-experiences of others who belong in that group as well, especially as LGBTQ+-identities and queerness not necessarily encapsulate the same experiences (see chapter 2.1.2). Furthermore, it prompted me to reflect on words and terms to use when writing about these topics.

Within LGBTQ+ communities, a plethora of terms with varying discursive meanings exists depending on usage context. Words like “queer” and “trans” can be potentially charged, and it is not appropriate for researchers to use these terms without first ensuring participants are comfortable with them. As outsiders, we must also be aware of our incomplete understanding in the analytical aftermath and text production. Researchers may have to contend with questions tinted by social discourse, which, if not approached critically, could close many doors and cause us to miss important perspectives – those that are genuinely the participants’. Furthermore, involving participants in discussions about findings and potential interpretations and analyses, known as member checking or member reflections (Tracy, 2010, p. 844), can reduce biases and allow participants to shape the research outcomes. This was a consideration I deemed to be very important for this project, especially when collecting and re-telling Neptune’s narrative (see chapter 4.3.3). During my interactions with Neptune, I ensured they were fully informed of their right to skip any questions that made them uncomfortable or to withdraw from the study at any point. Our conversations were recorded and securely stored on an encrypted server with password protection. Following the transcription of these interviews, I provided the transcripts to Neptune for review and feedback. Additionally, I made it a point to share draft versions of the manuscript with Neptune before submitting them to any journal.

By choosing qualitative method as the methodological cornerstone for this dissertation, I aimed to zoom deeply into the rich, nuanced experiences of individuals rather than mapping

broad trends. This approach aligns with my intent to understand and interpret the subjective realities of those whose lives and experiences do not neatly align with quantitative measures. Qualitative methods offered the appropriate tools to capture the depth and complexity of the lived experiences of queer youth, as well as the perspectives and repertoires of the teachers interviewed in relation to Article 1. This facilitated a more empathetic and detailed understanding that quantitative methods might not provide. In framing this discussion, qualitative methodology emerged as the most fitting approach, giving precedence to the depth and subtlety of personal narratives over the breadth of data. This decision further reflects my commitment to honoring the intricacies of individual lives and my belief that such complexities are best explored through a methodology that prioritizes human experiences at its core. However, it is important to recognize the value of quantitative studies in complementing qualitative research. Quantitative methods can provide broader insights and statistical data that highlight trends and patterns across larger populations. Future research should also focus on quantifying the experiences of LGBTQ+ children and youth to provide a more comprehensive understanding. Combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches can offer a more nuanced view, capturing both the depth of individual experiences and the generalizability of broader trends.

4.2 Phase 1: Project Planning and Teacher Interviews

4.2.1 Project Planning and Ethical Approval

The first methodological phase of the dissertation involved getting the study approved by the NSD (Norwegian Centre for Research Data), now known as SIKT (Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research). I chose a combined qualitative design consisting of semi-structured group interviews with music teachers (see Appendix 2) and narrative in-depth interviews with the teenager Neptune (see Appendix 3). The project was registered on January 29, 2021, and approved by the NSD on March 10, 2021 (see Appendix 4). After receiving approval, I recruited four music teachers for a pilot study through my own personal network. These teachers worked at the same school and all had general teacher education with additional ECTs in music. After conducting the pilot study, I modified some of the questions in the interview guide that in various ways were unclear/confusing for the pilot participants. After the pilot study, I started recruiting teachers from all over Norway for the project.

4.2.2 Teacher Interviews

Interviews are a fundamental tool in qualitative research, offering deep insights into participants' perspectives and experiences. Among the various types of interviews, semi-structured interviews are particularly prominent in the human and social sciences. Brinkmann (2018) provided a comprehensive overview of interviews, focusing on the semi-structured format. He suggested that interviews exist on a continuum, with fully structured interviews at one extreme and fully unstructured interviews at the other. However, in practice, interviews typically involve some degree of structure, depending on the field and topic of study. Semi-structured interviews balance structure with the flexibility to explore topics in depth.

My aim was to conduct five semi-structured group interviews with four music teachers in each group. During the spring of 2021, I had recruited 19 music teachers: twelve men and seven women. Five of the participants withdrew for various reasons, and a total of 14 teachers (11 men and 3 women) participated in the study. In retrospect, I have made two reflections on this: firstly, it is possible that the study's results would have looked different if the gender distribution had been more equally balanced, and secondly, I could have made a deeper reflection on the teachers' gender identity rather than assuming that all identified as cisgendered men and women. Recruitment took place by first calling a number of randomly selected schools across the country and obtaining the principal's approval to send an invitation to the music teachers. Then I sent a request for participation directly to the teachers by email with the principal Cc'ed (see Appendix 4). Before all the interviews, I spent ten minutes on an informal conversation in the groups where the teachers who did not know each other had the opportunity to tell a little about themselves. I noted down names, (assumed) gender, grade level of teaching, and music-related/pedagogical educational background. In two of the focus groups, the teachers knew each other beforehand. This made the dynamics different from the focus groups where the teachers were strangers to each other. Due to restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic, I conducted three of the interviews digitally via the Zoom platform. Only one of the interviews was conducted physically (with all restrictions observed). This was also one of the groups where the teachers worked at the same school and knew each other. Table 2 shows an overview of the teachers in the four focus groups (all names are pseudonyms):

Focus group	Grades 1–7	Grades 8–10	Grades 1–10/other
FG 1	Anne Stian	Kristian Erik	n/a
FG 2	Peter Sindre	n/a	Håkon
FG 3	Bente Knut	Kurt	Glenn
FG 4	Vilde Martin	Amund	n/a
N = 14	8	4	2

Table 2: Distribution of teachers in the various FGs according to teaching level/grades

The interviews were divided into three different parts according to the interview guide. In the first part, I asked open questions to the teachers about the students they met in their practices: “How would you describe the dynamics in the classroom,” “If you were to group the students in some way, how would you do it,” “Who takes space at the expense of others,” and so on. In the next part of the interview, I based the questions on the competence aim from the national music curriculum, “investigate how gender, gender roles and sexuality are presented in music and dance in the public sphere, and create expressions that challenge stereotypes,” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020b) and asked the teachers to reflect on this specific aim. Here, I was interested in the teachers’ understanding of the wording, and I was also interested in hearing what reflections they made with the idea of designing teaching plans based on the competence aim. In the third part of the interview, I asked the teachers to reflect on gender and sexual identities based on the conversations triggered by the aforementioned competence aim. In all the groups, the teachers had brought up topics such as homosexuality and transgender individuals without me consciously asking them to reflect on these specifically.

4.2.3 Translating and Analyzing the Teacher Interviews

Analyzing interview data involves a systematic examination of the conversations to uncover patterns, themes, and meanings. This process is crucial for understanding the depth of the data collected through interviews, allowing the researcher to interpret and make sense of the participants’ experiences and perspectives. According to Silverman (2017), there has been a tendency in qualitative research to prioritize interviews, which raises questions about their reliability and validity. He emphasized the need for robust analysis methods to improve the quality of interview research (2017, p. 149). He suggested focusing on the interactional nature

of interviews and considering them as exhibits of behavior rather than mere reflections of experiences (150). Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori (2018) also highlighted the importance of understanding the organization of conversation in interviews. They argued that talk is a form of action, structurally organized, and it creates and maintains intersubjective reality (2018, p. 678). This perspective is crucial for analyzing interviews as it shifts the focus from what is said to how it is said and the underlying structures that shape the conversation.

In my study, I applied these principles to analyze the teacher interviews. The initial phase involved translating all interviews from Norwegian to English. Certain idiomatic expressions posed a challenge in translation, but I aimed to stay as close as possible to the original quotes from the teachers. A stereotype that emerged in most interviews was the term “fotballgutter,” which is closely tied to the Norwegian context where most schools have affiliated football clubs with various teams for different age groups. Therefore, I am aware that the translation to “football guys” might come across as somewhat unclear to an international audience. Another challenging translation was the word “berter,” commonly used to describe girls with certain stereotyped feminine traits, often carrying negative connotations. I translated this as “babes.” Another concept that is difficult to translate is the Norwegian tradition of “russetid,” a weeks-long celebration in April/May marking the conclusion of high school. This period is characterized by various customs, such as decorated minibuses, specific clothing, organized challenges known as “russeknuter,” and associated party music. Music plays a central role during “russetiden,” and many DJs and songwriters specialize in creating music specifically for this time and for the “russ,” often as commissioned works (for further reading, see Hanssen, 2021).

After translating the interviews, I uploaded them into the analysis software NVivo. In my analysis, I began by highlighting words that appeared repeatedly. It was particularly interesting to see how certain terms emerged across all interviews in the context of specific questions. For instance, the topic of students who had changed their gender expression was addressed by all groups, where the word “natural” frequently appeared. Another common theme included teachers talking about structural factors as a potential barrier to planning and conducting music lessons in accordance with the curriculum’s content and goals. These are intriguing findings that I believe should be explored further in future research. It was only after conducting the initial analyses that I decided on a methodological-analytical framework to understand and

analyze the interview responses. I returned to the NVivo analyses and conducted a new analysis, this time aiming to identify so-called “ideological dilemmas” and “interpretative repertoires” (cf. Edley, 2001; Wetherell & Potter, 1987). These became the chapter headings in the completed article.

4.2.4 Using Discourse Analysis to Analyze Teacher Interviews

The teacher interviews provided a rich material for understanding how music teachers may navigate the topics of gender and sexuality in their practices. By applying discourse analysis to these interviews, I aimed to uncover the underlying interpretative repertoires and ideological dilemmas that shaped the teachers’ perceptions and practices at the time of the interviews. This approach aligns with the broader theoretical framework of this dissertation, which emphasizes the significance of language and discourse in constructing social realities (see also chapter 2.1). It is important to note that a queer perspective influenced the analysis of these interviews. One key point in Article 1 is that teachers predominantly interpret the curriculum’s emphasis on how students should “investigate how gender, gender roles, and sexuality are portrayed in music and dance in the public sphere, and create expressions that challenge stereotypes”(Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020b) through a heteronormative lens. The teachers in this study largely view this competence aim as a way to examine how men and women either uphold or challenge stereotypical gender roles within specific genres, such as hip-hop and Norwegian “russemusikk.” This analysis reveals a limited engagement with queer or non-heteronormative expressions. Thus, applying a discursive psychological framework to this analysis was inherently colored by a queer perspective, aiming to highlight the absence and potential marginalization of queer expressions within these pedagogical practices.

Discourse analysis in this dissertation involves examining ways in which language is used to construct meanings around gender and sexuality within music educational contexts. Specifically, discourse analysis allowed me to focus on identifying patterns in the teachers’ speech, understanding how these patterns reflected broader societal discourses, and analyzing the implications for educational practices. The central tenet of this approach is that language is not merely a tool for communication but a medium through which social identities and power relations are constructed and negotiated. Put simply, a discourse can be understood as

“a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)” (Jørgensen & Phillips 1999, p. 9, my translation). One key aspect in my employment of discourse analysis was the concept of “interpretative repertoires” (Edley, 2001; Wetherell & Potter, 1987), which are essentially the building blocks of talk - recurrent ways of describing and explaining events and phenomena. These repertoires reflect culturally available narratives that people draw upon to make sense of their experiences. In the context of the teacher interviews, the interpretative repertoires revealed how the teachers talked about gender and sexuality, and how these discussions were shaped by existing cultural and institutional norms.

Discourse analysis also involves examining the historical and cultural contexts that shape the way language is used and understood. Jørgensen and Phillips (1999) highlighted that discourse must be seen in light of its historical context and understood in relation to other discourses (p. 74). This historical perspective is crucial for understanding how certain ways of talking about gender and sexuality have become normalized and how they serve to reinforce existing power structures. In this dissertation, I draw on Foucault’s concepts of power and knowledge to understand how teachers’ discourses about gender and sexuality are both productive and limiting (see chapter 2.1.3). Jørgensen and Phillips (1999) explained that “power is both what creates our social environment and what makes the environment appear and be articulated in certain ways, while other possibilities are excluded” (p. 23, my translation). This perspective helps to illuminate how teachers’ talk about gender and sexuality can both reflect and perpetuate dominant norms and values, thus aligning with Foucault’s idea of “power-relations” as discursive negotiations at a micro-level (Foucault, 1981a). These power-relations are enacted through everyday interactions and language use, contributing to the maintenance, challenging, or undermining of established discourses (1981a, p. 97). In the context of this study, this means examining how teachers’ talk about gender non-conforming students can both challenge and reinforce normative understandings of gender and sexuality. The concept of interpretative repertoires (Edley, 2001; Vestad, 2014; Wetherell & Potter, 1987) were helpful for understanding how teachers navigate these power-relations in their everyday practices. For example, in discussing students who did not conform to traditional gender norms, the teachers often drew on repertoires of “naturalness” and “unnaturalness.” These repertoires reflect broader cultural narratives about what is considered normal or acceptable behavior and appearance for boys and girls. By categorizing certain behaviors as “natural” and

others as “unnatural,” teachers contribute to the reinforcement of binary gender norms and the marginalization of those who do not fit within these norms (Butler, 1988).

Another important concept in my application of discourse analysis was the notion of subject positions, which refer to the roles and identities that individuals are assigned within a particular discourse. Butler (1997) explained that “[s]ubjection’ signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject” (p. 2). This means that individuals are both shaped by and active participants in the discourses that define their identities. In the teacher interviews, subject positions were evident in the ways that teachers talked about different groups of students, such as “football guys,” “babes,” and “outsiders.” In general, such categories often reflect the teachers’ perceptions of normative gender behavior and the ways in which students are expected to conform to these norms. By assigning students to these categories, I argue that teachers participate in the discursive construction of gender identities and the regulation of behavior within the school setting.

4.3 Phase 2: Neptune’s Story

As discussed in Chapter 3.3.1, the queer pedagogical lens addresses subjectification as a process that is not gender-neutral. In bringing forth narratives from gender-expansive youth like Neptune, I aimed to exemplify how gendered and non-gendered processes of subjectification can unfold through hermeneutic resources, such as books and music. In this way, the queer perspective informed my understanding of Neptune’s experiences as part of this subjectification process. The narrative approach was thus guided by a commitment to foreground voices that represent non-normative gender experiences, aligning with the overarching queer pedagogical framework of this dissertation. By highlighting Neptune’s story, the study sought to illuminate the lived realities of gender-expansive individuals in the context of music education, advocating for a more inclusive understanding of identity formation.

4.3.1 A Single-Case Study

My original plan for Phase 2 was to conduct interviews with a small sample of gender-expansive teenagers. Through my personal network, I received tips about potential

participants. I contacted a teacher I knew and had her convey my request to participate in the project to a group of students she knew (see Appendix 6). These students had in common that they all identified as either trans and/or non-binary. Four students agreed to participate, but due to a lack of responses in my follow-up, I ended up with one participant, Neptune, aged 13. I therefore chose to change the research design to a single-case narrative study, which is now presented in this dissertation as Article 2. Our meetings took place both in person and on zoom during the spring of 2022. We also had regular email contact after our meetings, as I sent them my interview transcripts after our meetings for them to read through and approve. The pseudonym “Neptune” was chosen by themselves, inspired by a God-like character in one of the books we discussed.

There are divided opinions on whether data from single-case studies have the same credibility as studies with multiple participants. An obvious challenge is whether one can generalize data from a single informant and whether validity can be ensured in such types of studies. Flyvbjerg (2006) addressed several misconceptions about single-case studies, emphasizing their capacity to generate nuanced understandings and robust theories. One common misunderstanding is that single-case studies lack generalizability and scientific rigor. However, Flyvbjerg argued that the depth and detail provided by single-case studies can lead to more profound theoretical insights than large-scale studies. He underlined that the force of example is underestimated and that single-case studies are essential for the development of a nuanced understanding of complex issues (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 228). In the context of Neptune’s experiences, the single-case study approach allowed for a detailed examination of their unique challenges and the systemic barriers they faced. This approach aligns with Flyvbjerg’s assertion that single-case studies are particularly valuable when they offer a critical test of a significant theory, present a unique case, or provide revelatory insights (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 229).

The case of Neptune exemplifies the concept of ontological disappearance, where individuals’ identities and experiences are rendered invisible within dominant narratives and institutional practices (see chapter 2.2.3). As I highlight in the theoretical framework chapter, knowledge production often marginalizes non-normative identities, thereby contributing to their ontological erasure. This phenomenon is evident in Neptune’s interactions with the gender incongruence clinic, where the institutional framework failed to recognize and validate their non-binary identity. Therefore, it became an important driving force for me to place Neptune’s

experiences and life stories at the center, supported by a complementary knowledge base. Drawing on Florio-Ruane's (2002) argument for complexity in research, single-case studies illuminate the intricate and often contradictory experiences of individuals. Florio-Ruane emphasized the importance of embracing complexity and avoiding the oversimplification of social phenomena (2002, p. 206). By zooming in on the specificities of Neptune's case, Article 2 aims to highlight the systemic biases and epistemic injustices that contribute to the erasure of non-binary identities. Neptune's experiences underscore the limitations of a binary understanding of gender, as discussed previously. Their case challenges the notion of oppressive knowledge (see chapter 2.2.1), which often excludes or invalidates non-binary and gender-fluid identities. In examining Neptune's experiences, the single-case study approach allowed for a detailed exploration of their journey, capturing the intricacies of their interactions with educational and medical institutions. Schreier (2018) noted that qualitative research, particularly case studies, aims to provide a rich, detailed understanding of the phenomenon being studied rather than broad generalizations (p. 84). This is especially pertinent in studying marginalized populations, where individual experiences can reveal systemic issues and inform more inclusive practices. Flyvbjerg (2006, p. 237) argued that single-case studies can provide powerful insights by exploring the "how" and "why" questions, revealing the mechanisms underlying complex social phenomena.

As an educational researcher and music teacher educator, it is not within my expertise to assess whether the decision made at the clinic was right or wrong. What I have attempted to do in the article, however, is to highlight how different forms of epistemic injustice can occur, specifically in the context of a young person's gender journey. This insight is relevant for teachers, particularly music teachers, who often work with material central to identity formation. Neptune's experiences highlight the oppressive nature of epistemic structures that fail to accommodate non-binary identities. As Flyvbjerg noted, "context-dependent knowledge and experience are at the very heart of expert activity" (2006, p. 222), emphasizing the need for more flexible and inclusive epistemic frameworks. Schreier (2018, p. 85) also discussed the importance of careful sampling and generalization in qualitative research. She argued that while qualitative research often deals with smaller samples, the depth and richness of the data allow for meaningful insights that can inform broader understandings. In the context of Neptune, this means that while their experiences are unique, they also reflect broader issues faced by many gender-expansive and non-binary individuals. Schreier's

perspective reinforces the value of single-case studies in highlighting these individual yet universally significant narratives.

4.3.2 Choosing Narrative Inquiry

Even before I had met Neptune, I had decided that narrative inquiry stood as the right choice for my study as it would offer an intimate lens through which to explore and tell the life stories of individuals, a process fundamental to understanding how adolescents harness popular culture in the complex journey of identity formation. Chase (2005) defined narrative as “a distinct form of discourse” and described it as

... retrospective meaning making – the shaping or ordering of past experience [...] a way of understanding one’s own and other’s actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, of connecting a seeing the consequences of actions and events over time. (2005, p. 656)

This I considered to be the right method to approach my second research question, in which I aimed to explore how students (and teachers) perceive and experience the integration of gender and sexuality perspectives in (in)formal music education. Overall, I am arguing that Neptune’s relationship with music and popular culture can be framed within the context of informal music education, which in turn highlights the significant role these informal experiences may play in the formation of gendered identities and the broader educational journey. Through the co-construction of narratives between researcher and participant, these accounts transform into performances that communicate deeper insights into personal experiences (Riessman, in Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 68). This methodological choice was underpinned by the understanding that narrative research is not a mere recounting of events but an analytical process where the stories of lived experiences are collected and interpreted.

In conducting narrative research, it is crucial to remain cognizant of the delicate interplay between representation and reality. The researcher must navigate the potential power dynamics, considering whether one’s role as an insider or outsider may affect the interpretation and presentation of narratives (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 73). Within this inquiry, my initial position as an outsider to Neptune’s experiences shifted towards a collaborative insider perspective as their story unfolded. This evolution was made possible through a narrative-inspired inquiry that allowed for thematic representation of Neptune’s experiences, inviting a depth of understanding into the lifeworld of a non-binary individual (see also Nichols, 2013,

2016). The purpose of such inquiry, as discussed by Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 68), is to shed light on how individuals perceive their identities, revealing how they see themselves and how they navigate their own narratives within the broader social fabric. The process involves various strategies of analysis that can transform a participant's story into a structured chronology, emphasizing turning points or significant transitions that highlight the contours of their lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 69).

4.3.3 Fieldwork and Analytic Afterwork - Ensuring Quality

Qualitative research demands a meticulous approach to ensure that the data collected and the interpretations made are both accurate and trustworthy. One of the methods for achieving this is through “rich rigor.” Tracy (2010) suggested that rigor in qualitative research can be demonstrated through the careful and systematic collection of data, thorough analysis, and detailed reporting. This involves not just the quantity of data but its quality and the researcher's deep engagement with the data (p. 841). “Thick descriptions” are another crucial aspect of ensuring quality. Geertz (in Cho & Trent, 2006, p. 328) introduced this concept, which involves providing detailed accounts of social actions, contexts, and meanings. This method allows readers to grasp the complexity and richness of the studied phenomena, facilitating a deeper understanding. Thick descriptions help to contextualize findings within the specific social and cultural settings of the participants, making the research more relatable and credible (p. 328). Another approach to enhance credibility is the aforementioned “member checking”. By involving participants in the review of findings, researchers can validate their interpretations and ensure that they accurately represent the participants' perspectives. As Cho and Trent (2006, p. 322) note, member checking involves “playing back” the data to the informants to check for perceived accuracy and reactions. This iterative process helps to correct any misunderstandings and refine the data based on participants' feedback, thus bolstering the study's credibility.

Before conducting the interviews with Neptune, I prepared an interview guide that was approved by SIKT (see Appendix 3). However, during the actual interviews, I adopted a relatively unstructured approach, as described by Brinkmann:

Relatively unstructured interviews are [...] seeking to highlight ‘the most important influences, experiences, circumstances, issues, themes, and lessons of a lifetime’ (Atkinson, 2002, p. 125).

What these influences are for an individual can only be known in the course of spending time with the interviewee, which means that the interviewer cannot prepare for a life story interview by devising a lot of questions but must instead think about how to facilitate the telling of the story. After the opening request for a narrative, the main role of the interviewer is to remain a listener, withholding desires to interrupt, and occasionally asking questions that may clarify the story. (Brinkmann, 2018, p. 579)

This allowed the interview settings to flow more naturally and highlighted the most important influences and experiences that Neptune wished to share with me in that moment. This approach was conducted as ethically and respectfully as possible, as it required continual consent and input from Neptune and their family, especially considering Neptune's age and the responsibility I held to protect their privacy and integrity. To further enrich my understanding and maintain self-reflexivity, I kept a diary after each meeting with Neptune, allowing me to reflect on my own thoughts and biases. Here is an excerpt from one of those entries:

Diary entry: Fourth meeting

For our fourth meeting, Neptune's mother suggested I came to their house to have dinner and meet with the entire family. I took the bus out of the city and was met at the stop by Neptune. They seemed less cheerful than I had seen them before. We hugged and I asked them about their week.

- Not too good, Neptune sighed.
- What happened, I asked wearily.
- Swim class today, they answered, looking down on the ground.
- It was just a hard reminder of all the body dysphoria I struggle with.

I decided not to ask more about it in that moment, as we entered the house and were met by Neptune's siblings, the family dog and five cats. In the kitchen were Neptune's parents, greeting me with big smiles and some light chaos as dinner was being prepared while children were running back and forth and the dog craving attention. I couldn't help smiling, as it reminded me of the dynamics of the family of my Portuguese partner. I felt right at home. Neptune's older sister was eager to tell me about how proud she was of Neptune and how much she wanted to support them through all the hardships.

- You seem to be very close to each other, I noted, smiling at both.
- Neptune is my best friend, the sister replied immediately, followed by:
 - Can I give you a hug right now?

- Sure, but you'll have to come here because I am too lazy to move right now, Neptune replied.

The interaction made me giggle, but I couldn't help feeling very touched when the two siblings hugged each other, right next to me. It was in that precise moment that I knew that I was far more involved than I had intended when starting this project. I expressed my thoughts to the entire family during dinner.

- In my dissertation, I will have to be very transparent regarding how my presence will influence Neptune as my informant, I explained.

- I do have an ethical responsibility, firstly because of the sensitive topic, and secondly, because Neptune is so young. Many researchers will challenge me to reflect upon how I undoubtedly will have a strong influence on someone this young. Some people might even find it problematic that I am now here in your house on a Friday night, having dinner with you. What are your thoughts on this?

The table went quiet for a few seconds before the mother spoke:

- Because it is so important that stories about kids like Neptune are being told.

- Can I please say something? Neptune's sister spoke.

- Please, I smiled at her.

- Yes, we are young. And yes, you might have an influence. But also, this is our everyday life. I firmly believe that we who are kids today know about complex stuff since we are exposed to it every day. My best friend is non-binary. My sibling is non-binary. For me, this is the most natural thing in the world. Even if Neptune was born as my little sister they have always been themselves. They are not a 'she' or a 'he.' They are *they*; you know. And I can't understand why adults are so resilient to use the correct pronouns. Maybe your study can bring this awareness that adults need to really see kids.

She reached over the table and took Neptune's hands in her own, squeezing them as she was talking. I felt very moved.

- Regarding you being here now, Neptune's mother spoke, - I also reflected on it after having invited you. But also, Neptune's story is part of our story. By being here you also get to see a glimpse of their life that you wouldn't necessarily have gotten from an interview alone.

This iterative process of member checking and collaborative manuscript development ensured that the research remained grounded in Neptune's own words, aligning with Tracy's guidelines for maintaining the integrity and quality of qualitative research through member reflections, which "allow for sharing and dialoguing with participants about the study's findings, and providing opportunities for questions, critique, feedback, affirmation and even collaboration" (Tracy, 2010, p. 844). One important aspect of this research was my position as an intimate insider, particularly in relation to Neptune. While I initially described myself as an outsider, this shifted over time as our relationship evolved, allowing me to move closer to Neptune's perspective and experiences Taylor (2011) detailed the benefits of ethnographic research within the LGBTQ+ community to which she belongs: "Benefits include enhanced understanding from prior knowledge, familiarity with community-specific language, frequent field contact, nuanced perceptions of social actors, and seamless communication due to the researcher's ongoing field engagement" (p. 6). Yet, Taylor also highlighted the potential drawbacks: the risk of damaging personal relationships and compromising the researcher's objectivity, thereby creating ethical dilemmas (p. 15). In my research, being an "intimate insider" allowed me to gain deeper insights and build trust with Neptune and their family, but it also required careful navigation of ethical considerations to maintain objectivity and protect their privacy.

5. Summary of Dissertation Articles

In this chapter, I provide a comprehensive summary of the three articles included in this dissertation, highlighting their main findings and thematic focus. These articles collectively explore the integration of gender and sexuality perspectives in Norwegian music education, each from distinct angles and through different methodological approaches. The articles share a common thematic emphasis on examining the challenges and opportunities that arise when addressing gender and sexuality in educational contexts. This dissertation's overarching aim is to contribute to the understanding of how music education can be a site for inclusive and transformative pedagogical practices. The theoretical framework underpinning all three articles is grounded in educational philosophy, particularly queer pedagogical underpinnings. This framework provides a lens through which the complexities of teaching gender and sexuality in music education are examined, emphasizing the need for teachers to navigate these topics thoughtfully and critically. Each article is either published or under review in peer-reviewed journals. Together, these studies offer a multifaceted view of how Norwegian music education can serve as a platform for fostering inclusive and reflective pedagogical practices.

5.1 Article 1: Challenging Stereotypes: Norwegian Music Teachers' Repertoires on Gender Roles and Gender Equality (Skjelstad & Ellefsen, 2024)

Article 1, co-written with my main supervisor Live W. Ellefsen,¹⁸ explores the integration of gender and sexuality discussions in the Norwegian music education curriculum, specifically focusing on the aforementioned competence aim introduced in 2020. The study is situated within the broader debate on gender identities and sexual diversity in Norway, which has been intensified by discussions around the introduction of a third legal gender (Bakke, 2021). I conducted four focus group interviews with a total of 14 Norwegian music teachers to understand their perceptions and experiences regarding the new competence aim. The analysis utilized discourse psychology to identify and trace the interpretative repertoires; patterns of narration, explanation, and reflection used by the teachers when discussing gender roles,

¹⁸ The interviews were conducted and transcribed by me, while the analytical work and writing of the article were a shared effort between the two of us.

gender identities, and sexuality. The study aimed to uncover the broader ideological dilemmas inherent in these repertoires and how they might simultaneously support and limit gender diversity and freedom of expression.

The findings revealed four main interpretative repertoires: *binaries*, *sexualized femininity*, *divergent masculinity*, and *natural transitions*. Each repertoire reflected the teachers' attempts to navigate and address gender issues within the educational context, often oscillating between progressive views and traditional binary gender norms. For instance, while teachers acknowledged the importance of challenging gender stereotypes, their discussions often reinforced binary thinking, particularly when describing students' gender expressions and transitions. The study highlighted the ideological dilemmas faced by teachers, such as balancing the need to challenge stereotypes with the risk of reinforcing normative gender roles. We proposed queer pedagogy as a potential tool to help music teachers address these challenges more effectively by promoting a broader, more inclusive understanding of gender and sexuality. The article emphasizes the complexity of integrating gender and sexuality discussions into music education. We suggested that while teachers are in a unique position to influence students' understanding of gender through music, they must critically examine their own practices and the repertoires they employ to ensure they are not inadvertently perpetuating the very stereotypes they aim to challenge.

The article was accepted on February 8, 2023, and was published in *Journal of Research in Music Education* (JRME) in 2024.

5.2 Article 2: Exploring the Lived Experiences of a Gender-expansive Youth: Music, Gender Identity, and Epistemic Injustice (Skjelstad, forthcoming)

Article 2 examines the life of “Neptune,” a 13-year-old non-binary individual. This narrative single-case study presents Neptune's personal journey, exploring how they navigate and articulate their gender identity in a world dominated by binary gender norms. The narrative is structured around four key themes: Neptune's use of language to define their gender-expansive identity, the role of music and literature in their identity development, their interactions with the Norwegian health system in seeking gender-affirming care, and their reflections on how

schools can create safer spaces for gender-expansive students. By examining Neptune's experiences, the study highlights the challenges and systemic barriers faced by young gender-expansive individuals, particularly in educational and medical contexts.

Central to the article is the concept of epistemic injustice, as proposed by Fricker (2007), which addresses how social systems can undermine the credibility and understanding of certain groups. This is linked to the notion of ontological non-existence (Gould, 2012; Wittig, 1992), where non-binary identities are marginalized or erased by societal structures that favor binary gender norms. Neptune's narrative reveals the importance of representation and supportive cultural resources, such as music and literature, in providing validation and a means of self-expression for gender-expansive individuals. The study emphasizes the transformative potential of music and literature in supporting the identity formation of non-binary youth. It calls for teachers, particularly music teachers, to adopt inclusive practices that acknowledge and affirm diverse gender identities. By fostering an environment that respects and celebrates gender diversity, teachers can help mitigate the effects of epistemic injustice and promote a more inclusive and equitable educational experience for all students.

The article was accepted by *Lambda Nordica* on June 10, 2024, and will be published in 2025.

5.3 Article 3: The Beautiful Risk of Music Education (Skjelstad, under review)

The article investigates the challenges and opportunities associated with incorporating gender and sexuality topics within the Norwegian music education framework for primary and lower-secondary public schools. Rooted in Biesta's (2016) notion of "risk in education" and the concept of the pedagogy of discomfort (Boler, 1999), this article explores how these topics can challenge traditional norms and encourage critical engagement among students. It emphasizes the unique role that music education plays in fostering discussions on gender roles and sexuality, and it highlights the potential discomfort and transformative power involved in addressing these issues.

I build on Biesta's views on the risk of education by discussing the role of Norwegian music education in addressing contemporary gender and sexuality discourses. This discussion

involves examining the compatibility of modern gender expressions with music education and identifying the associated challenges and opportunities. Questions such as “What does risk in music education entail?”, “Is risk always negative?”, and “For whom is something at risk?” guide this exploration. As a music teacher and educator, I see the necessity of providing teachers with better tools and support to meet the curriculum’s competence aims related to gender and sexuality. Previous research has shown that music actively contributes to constructing social and gendered identities (DeNora, 2000; McClary, 1991/2002; Onsrud, 2015, 2021), highlighting its potential role in gender and sexuality education. However, integrating these perspectives into music education can present risks and discomfort for teachers and students alike. Engaging students in discussions about gender and sexuality involves navigating complex challenges, including potential resistance and the risk of reinforcing stereotypes. Norwegian music education serves as an interesting case for exploring these issues due to its unique characteristics, including a high enrollment rate in public schools, a singular national curriculum, and the mandatory inclusion of music education throughout primary and lower-secondary school. The national curriculum’s core elements, interdisciplinary topics, and competence aims provide a framework for addressing gender and sexuality in the classroom, which consequently highlights the need for comprehensive teacher training and support systems.

The main argument is that the beautiful risk of music education lies in its transformative power. By addressing topics like gender and sexuality, teachers can create safe spaces for students to explore their identities, challenge societal norms, and develop a deeper understanding of themselves and others. This approach positions music education as a vehicle for broader social and cultural conversations, encouraging students to engage critically with the world around them. I also stress the need for future research to focus on providing empirical evidence of the implementation of gender and sexuality-related topics in music education and exploring their long-term impacts on students’ attitudes and behaviors. Such research will be crucial for the continuous development of teacher education and the creation of inclusive and empathetic learning environments.

The article was submitted for first peer review to *Nordic Research in Music Education* (NRME) on September 8, 2024.

6. Discussion and Concluding Remarks

In this final chapter I embark on a reflective inquiry into the intersections of music education, queer pedagogy, and the fluid complexities of identity. The preceding chapters have laid out a theoretical and empirical landscape, but what does it mean to consider music education as a site of disruption, as a space where the boundaries of gender, sexuality, and culture are continually reimagined? How might queer perspectives invite us to reconsider the very foundations of what it means to teach and learn music in contemporary Norway? Rather than simply summarizing conclusions, I seek to explore not only what has been uncovered but also what remains open, unresolved, and full of potential for further exploration. In this light, the research questions are not endpoints but points of departure for a deeper philosophical engagement with the role of music education in shaping identity and social norms.

Chapter 6.1 will turn to the first research question, discussing how a queer perspective offers new ways of thinking about the purposes and practices of music education. What might it mean for music classrooms to become spaces of questioning, where normative assumptions are not only challenged but transformed? In chapter 6.2, I approach the second research question, addressing the practical realities and tensions that arise when gender and sexuality are addressed in music education. Finally, in chapter 6.3, I look toward the future. What questions remain unanswered? What new avenues of research does this work open? By contemplating the way forward, this chapter invites us to think not just about what queer pedagogy can offer to music education today but how it might continue to evolve, inspiring new forms of critical inquiry and educational transformation in the years to come.

6.1 A Queer Perspective on Music Education

What happens when we approach music education not as a neutral terrain, but as a space rife with cultural assumptions, (hetero)normative structures, and possibilities for disruption? How does music education change when viewed through the lens of queer pedagogy – an approach that challenges not only what we teach but the very frameworks within which teaching and learning take place? These questions lie at the heart of this inquiry: “What can a queer perspective offer music education?” A queer perspective challenges the notion of a universal subject, foregrounding the complexity and fluidity of identity. When applied to music

education, a queer perspective turns our attention toward the ways in which musical engagement is inseparable from the social and cultural contexts in which students exist, thereby questioning the traditional notions of knowledge, identity, and pedagogy.

Gould (2013) explored these complexities through her concept of a “queer pedagogy of companion-able species”. She argued that queer pedagogy should not be about mere “inclusion” within an existing framework. Instead, it should involve “holding each other in regard, meeting face to face, as significant others” (2013, p. 64). This is not a straightforward task, for it involves creating spaces that do not just acknowledge differences but rather engage with them in a way that co-creates an ever-shifting understanding of identity and knowledge. For Gould, queerness disrupts the traditional forms of subjectification, suggesting that music education should be a space of potentiality rather than certainty. A queer perspective in music education therefore invites us to consider pedagogy as something that is not fixed but is in a state of constant flux. Gould (2013) critiqued the conventional “inclusion” approach, suggesting that it often results in a superficial integration that leaves heteronormative structures largely intact. Inclusion, as she noted, can become a “discourse of pity and pathology” where queer perspectives are absorbed into a heteronormative framework without questioning its underlying assumptions (2013, p. 69). Rather than just bringing “Others” into the fold, Gould encouraged teachers to co-create an environment where identities are fluid and constantly negotiated, emphasizing that “no one gets to set the rules by which everyone else must play – and live – in the world as well as in the profession of music education” (2013, p. 68).

In light of Gould’s ideas, a queer perspective shifts the focus of music education from the transmission of knowledge to an exploration of subjectification as an embodied and culturally embedded process (cf. Biesta, 2010). It challenges us to see music education as a space where the traditional boundaries of gender, sexuality, and identity are not only questioned but also reshaped. This resonates with the idea that subjectification is not about reaching a stable endpoint but about engaging with the continual negotiation of personal and cultural meanings (see chapter 3.3.1). By queering music education, teachers resist the closure that comes with fixed categories and instead highlight the fluid, often contested dimensions of subjectivity. Gould (2013) warned against simply integrating queer perspectives into music education without addressing the risk of reinforcing existing power structures. Instead, she proposed an

educational process that embraces uncertainty, asking teachers to “learn from and about each other in the context of humility and doubt” (2013, p. 69). In this way, pedagogy becomes a site where traditional binaries are disrupted, and the familiar is rendered unfamiliar, creating space for new forms of subjectivity to emerge. As explored in Article 2, Neptune's narrative offers a concrete example such subjectification. Through their engagement with music, they challenge normative gender constructs and create new spaces for self-expression within the educational context. Their narrative underscores how music education, in formal and informal contexts, can become a site for reimagining subjectivity, allowing for a multiplicity of identities to emerge and be affirmed. This challenges music education to become a space that recognizes the multiplicity of student experiences and the dynamic interplay between personal and cultural identities. In doing so, a queer perspective offers new ways to envision how music education can move beyond the confines of normative frameworks and embrace the complex realities of students’ lives. To critically engage with this, there is a need to acknowledge the tension between an educational system that often seeks stability, structure, and order, and the disruptive, transformative aims of queer pedagogy. Music classrooms, as with other educational spaces, are embedded within a larger framework of societal norms and expectations (Dyndahl & Ellefsen, 2009). These norms shape not only the curriculum but also the hidden expectations of how students should engage, behave, and express themselves. The idea of education as a “safe” space must be reconsidered; instead, it may be more fruitful to think of the classroom as a space of productive risk, where discomfort becomes a catalyst for growth and transformation.

A queer perspective also provides educational research with a means to critically interrogate normative assumptions, particularly around identity, subjectivity, and knowledge production (Bryson & De Castell, 1993; Kumashiro, 2002; Røthing, 2020). It resists closure and stability, advocating instead for a continuous exploration of complexities, contradictions, and the ways in which established norms shape, constrain, and sometimes obscure new possibilities. In essence, it challenges research to uncover the unseen and the unspoken within educational contexts. Within the field of music education, this perspective invites researchers to look beyond surface-level practices and examine how structures of power and normativity manifest within pedagogy. This inquiry involves a deeper reconfiguration of the questions we ask, the methods we employ, and the meanings we ascribe to educational experiences. In this light, applying a queer perspective on research itself becomes a process of exploring the uncertain,

revealing new potentials for understanding music education. As Bryson and de Castell (1993) suggested, a queer pedagogical framework encourages researchers and teachers to critically engage with the power dynamics inherent in knowledge production, raising questions about who is speaking, what is being said, and for what purposes. By examining these processes through a queer lens, music education researchers are invited to consider how music education might serve as a space where identities are not fixed but are constantly negotiated and remade.

A queer perspective thus embodies a commitment to unsettling what appears self-evident. It operates as a form of philosophical inquiry that refuses to take the seemingly stable and given aspects of identity, knowledge, norms, and pedagogy at face value (Björkman & Bromseth, 2019). Queerness, in this sense, resists the allure of certainty and the comfort of fixed meanings; it is a way of perceiving the world as constantly unfolding, forever in flux. Central to this perspective is the recognition of complexity as an inherent condition of existence. As I have explored earlier in this dissertation, to queer something is not simply to categorize it as “Other” or outside the norm (Kumashiro, 2002); it is to engage with it in a manner that reveals its multiplicity, its contradictions, and its capacity to disrupt. In music education, this means challenging the naturalized forms of knowledge and practice that assume stable categories of identity and expression. It means asking how the practices we regard as normal might, in fact, conceal the vast array of possibilities for becoming that lie beneath their surface. A queer perspective calls upon us to perceive the familiar as strange, to approach what is known as though it were radically unknown (Gould, 2012). This philosophical stance does not seek to establish a new order or a different set of norms. Instead, it lingers in the realm of uncertainty, where meanings remain ambiguous and open to interpretation. In this space, what is taken for granted – be it gender, sexuality, or even the very notion of what constitutes education – is laid bare as something constructed and contingent, not as an inevitable truth. It compels us to ask: What happens when we view the world as a series of possibilities rather than as a set of predetermined realities? How does this shift in perspective alter our understanding of what music education can be?

In this philosophical light, the queer perspective does not offer a clear path forward. Rather, it urges us to dwell in the complexities and contradictions of our practices, to view the educational process not as a journey toward clarity and closure but as an invitation to remain in dialogue with the unknown. It is through this relentless questioning, this refusal to accept

the given as the final word, that queer thought opens up new potentials for research. It transforms our view of education from a structured process of knowledge acquisition into a dynamic, ongoing encounter with the world in all its ambiguity and multiplicity. Thus, to philosophize with a queer perspective is to embrace the very act of disruption as a form of insight. It asks us to see the world not as it appears but as it might become, constantly in a state of emergence. This, in itself, is the essence of the queer: to render the familiar strange, to live within the folds of complexity, and to seek the new horizons that lie beyond the limits of the normative (Muñoz, 2009).

What can a queer perspective offer music education? It can offer a way of seeing that challenges the very foundations of normative structures. By refusing to accept simplicity where complexity thrives, a queer perspective transforms music education into an ongoing process of exploration, where knowledge, identity, and pedagogy itself are fluid and ever-changing. It disrupts the binary thinking that often defines educational spaces, urging teachers and students to embrace uncertainty, risk, and the unfamiliar. In this act of queering, music education becomes more than the transmission of knowledge; it becomes a space of negotiation and transformation. It asks teachers to listen differently, to question whose voices are present and whose are absent, and to create an environment where identities are not just acknowledged but reshaped through musical encounters. A queer perspective, then, does not provide a final answer. Instead, it offers an invitation: to disrupt, to question, and to explore what music education can become when it fully embraces the fluidity of human experience.

6.2 Addressing Gender and Sexuality in Music Education

In Article 3, I borrowed Biesta's (2016) well-known title, "The Beautiful Risk of Education," and added the word "music" to it. As I approach the question of "How can gender and sexuality perspectives be integrated into Norwegian music education within the framework of the 2020 national curriculum, and what challenges or possibilities arise from this integration?" Biesta's concept of risk becomes a central focal point for rethinking the notion of risk within the educational context. In everyday language, "risk" is often understood as the possibility of something negative happening. It involves exposure to danger, loss, or undesirable outcomes. However, if we replace the word "negative" with "change-inducing" or "transformative," the concept of risk takes on a new dimension. According to Biesta (2016, p. 23), it is through such

a risk that “the event of subjectivity has a chance to occur.” Paul and Quiggin (2020, p. 562) suggested that transformative experiences often involve a radical shift in how individuals see and understand the world around them, fundamentally altering their preferences, beliefs, and values. In these contexts, risk can be seen as a catalyst for growth and development rather than something to be minimized or avoided. It carries a connotation of uncertainty and potential transformative consequences that can lead to new and enriching experiences. When something is transformative, it means that it has the power to cause significant change or alteration in form, appearance, or character. Transformative experiences or processes can lead to profound shifts in understanding, behavior, or perspective: “Causing or able to cause an important and lasting change in someone or something” (Merriam-Webster, n.n.) In the context of education, transformative implies that the learning experience changes the learner, often leading to personal growth, new ways of thinking, and a deeper understanding of oneself and the world (Biesta, 2016, p. 135; Paul & Quiggin, 2020, p. 579). It is about moving beyond the status quo and engaging in a process that can result in meaningful and lasting change.

However, transformative experiences are not always positive, nor do they always result in outcomes that are beneficial or comfortable for those involved. Transformation can be challenging, disruptive, and even painful, as it often involves questioning deeply held beliefs, confronting uncomfortable truths, and navigating periods of uncertainty and instability (Boler, 1999; Røthing, 2020). Engaging with topics of gender and sexuality might evoke strong emotions, resistance, or conflict among students and teachers. While the ultimate goal is personal growth and a nuanced understanding of gender and sexuality categories, the process itself can be fraught with difficulties and discomfort. Thus, the transformative nature of such experiences does not guarantee positive outcomes; rather, it opens up possibilities for change that can be both constructive and challenging.

I believe this experience underscores the dual nature of risk in education: it can be both a source of discomfort and a catalyst for deep learning. In considering how risk plays out in the teaching of gender and sexuality within the Norwegian music education system, it is crucial to recognize that risk operates on multiple levels. At the most immediate level, there is the risk of discomfort and uncertainty for both teachers and students (Allen, 2023; Boler, 1999; Røthing, 2020). This discomfort can arise from confronting challenging topics, from the fear of saying the wrong thing, or from the potential backlash from parents or the community. Yet,

at a more profound level, there is the risk inherent in the very act of teaching – risk that goes beyond the immediate classroom dynamics and touches on the broader implications of what it means to educate (Biesta, 2010, 2016). In this way, addressing gender and sexuality in music education is not just about including marginalized perspectives; it is about rethinking the very foundations of what education can be. It is about creating spaces where students can explore who they are and who they might become, not in isolation but in relation to the music, the culture, and the identities that shape their lives (Dyndahl & Ellefsen, 2009). This approach to education is not without its risks, but it is through these uncertainties that the true potential for growth and transformation is realized.

Yet, as revealed in Article 1, many teachers struggle to integrate gender and LGBTQ+ perspectives into their teaching. This hesitancy stems from a lack of resources, time, and familiarity with the material, but it also reflects a broader tension in education: the balance between engaging with non-normative identities and the pressure to conform to established curricular norms. The empirical findings from Article 1 reveals a spectrum of responses from music teachers when asked how they interpret and approach the curriculum's competence aims regarding gender and sexuality:

I used to introduce ballet to students without telling them it was ballet. Everyone participated, thinking it was about building strength and core muscles. When I revealed later that they had actually been doing ballet, they thought it was fun. This approach helped break the stereotype that ballet is only for girls. (Bente, FG 3)

We've mostly addressed stereotypes through discussions about genre and the different roles in music. For instance, when talking about rock bands, we look at how certain instruments are typically associated with men, like the electric guitar, and how women are often seen as vocalists or backup singers. I try to challenge this by showing examples where these roles are flipped, but it's not always easy to get the students to see beyond their ingrained ideas. (Stian, FG 1)

I feel uncertain about this competence aim. I don't know. That's the best answer I can give, that it [the text in the curriculum] is quite unclear and confusing. I would think that different music teachers have different perceptions of what it actually involves. (Amund, FG 4)

As these quotes illustrate, some teachers demonstrate a willingness to engage with risk in a way that is both inclusive and transformative. Others, however, expressed uncertainty or even

hesitation, largely due to the ambiguous nature of the curriculum and the potential for conflict in the classroom. This diversity of interpretation points to what I recognize as a broader challenge within the public-school music education: the inconsistency in how the curriculum is implemented. This inconsistency is not merely a matter of differing pedagogical approaches but is also reflective of the broader cultural and societal discourses that shape how teachers understand and engage with these topics. The findings from this dissertation suggest that while the Norwegian curriculum offers opportunities for addressing gender and sexuality, these opportunities are not always realized in practice. The reasons for this are varied, ranging from teachers' personal beliefs and comfort levels to the broader societal discourses that shape how these topics are understood. In some cases, the risk is that of perpetuating stereotypes rather than challenging them. For instance, when music teacher Sindre highlighted the Norwegian artist Sigrid as a role model for challenging stereotypes (Skjelstad & Ellefsen, 2024, p. 406) his approach, though well-intentioned, could also be seen as reinforcing certain ideals of respectability that may not fully address the complexity of gender and sexuality in contemporary society. This example illustrates the challenge of navigating the fine line between challenging stereotypes and inadvertently reinforcing them, a challenge that is compounded by the lack of concrete guidelines in the curriculum. Moreover, the findings highlight the risk of omission – where teachers, feeling uncertain or uncomfortable, choose to avoid these topics altogether. This risk of omission is perhaps one of the most significant challenges facing music education today. By avoiding difficult conversations about gender and sexuality, teachers may inadvertently contribute to the marginalization of certain identities and experiences, perpetuating a status quo that fails to reflect the diversity of the student body.

The potential for transformative education lies in embracing these risks, not avoiding them. As Biesta (2016) argues, risk is a necessary component of true education, as it opens up the possibility for growth, change, and transformation. However, for teachers to effectively navigate these risks, they need more than just a willingness to engage; they need support, resources, and clear guidance. This is where the current curriculum falls short. While it opens the door for discussions around gender and sexuality, it leaves much of the interpretation and implementation up to individual teachers, leading to a wide range of approaches and, in some cases, a reluctance to engage with these issues at all. One of the key recommendations that emerge from this dissertation is the need for more consistent and targeted support for teachers. This includes both pre-service training for new teachers and ongoing professional

development for those already in the field. As the findings suggest, teachers' interpretations of the curriculum are heavily influenced by their own experiences and backgrounds, which means that any efforts to improve the teaching of gender and sexuality in music education must take these factors into account. Furthermore, there is a need for clearer guidelines and more concrete examples of how to integrate these topics into the classroom in a way that is both meaningful and respectful. The ambiguity of the current curriculum allows for a wide range of interpretations, which can lead to inconsistency and, in some cases, the omission of important discussions. By providing teachers with more concrete tools and resources, it is possible to reduce some of the uncertainty and risk associated with addressing these topics while still allowing for the flexibility needed to adapt to different classroom contexts.

6.3 Looking Forward

Is it possible to arrive at a final understanding of the role that gender and sexuality play in the context of education, and specifically music education? Or is this inquiry, by its very nature, one that must remain open, continually unfolding as the world changes and new voices emerge? In contemplating the way forward, we must acknowledge that the very questions we are asking about identity, pedagogy, and transformation are without definitive answers. These are questions that call us to continually re-examine our assumptions and to remain attuned to the complexities and contradictions of lived experience. At the heart of this dissertation lies the challenge to the binaries that have long structured our thinking about gender, sexuality, and education. This dissertation is not simply a critique of the current system but an invitation to reimagine it. It is an invitation to think beyond the fixed categories of "male" and "female," "straight" and "gay," and to explore the fluidity of identity in ways that resist easy classification. In doing so, we can acknowledge that education itself must resist binaries; between teacher and student, between knowledge and ignorance, between tradition and innovation.

When speaking of transformation, we must resist the temptation to think of it as a final state, an endpoint where we arrive and rest. Transformation in education is not something that we simply "set into motion"; it is an ongoing process that is always already happening. It constantly reconfigures itself in response to the shifting landscapes of identities, cultures, and knowledge. In this context, queer pedagogy does not initiate transformation but instead offers

a way to navigate, shape, and influence the direction of this continuous movement. It is through this lens that we explore the possibilities of music education, not as a fixed journey toward a particular outcome, but as an evolving space where change is embraced and actively engaged with. This reflects Biesta's (2016) notion of education as an engagement with the unknown – a journey into spaces of uncertainty, where both teachers and students are transformed through their encounter with one another and with the material they are exploring. In looking to the future, the concept of risk takes on new meaning. Risk, in this sense, is not something to be avoided but something to be embraced. It is the risk of not knowing where the journey will lead, of not being able to predict the outcomes of our pedagogical choices. Yet, it is precisely this uncertainty that holds the potential for the most profound transformations. In embracing risk, we allow for the possibility that education might not only teach us about the world but change how we engage with it. Music education, when infused with queer pedagogy, opens up spaces where students and teachers alike can engage in these transformative processes. As we have seen, music does more than reflect culture; it actively shapes it. It provides a site where identities can be explored, contested, and reimagined. This is where queer pedagogy offers its most profound contribution: in encouraging students to question not only the categories of “male” and “female,” “straight” and “gay,” but also the very foundations of what it means to be human. The challenge of this dissertation; “Challenging the Binaries,” is to continue this work of questioning: What would education look like if it truly embraced the fluidity of identity? If it welcomed the complexity of human experience rather than trying to simplify it? These questions are not easily answered, nor should they be. The purpose of a queer perspective, after all, is not to provide answers but to create spaces where questions can be asked, where identities can be expressed, and where new ways of being can be imagined.

What, then, remains unanswered? Perhaps it is not a matter of unanswered questions but rather of the recognition that new questions will always emerge. As society continues to evolve, so too must our pedagogical approaches. The future of music education, inspired by queer perspectives, will undoubtedly involve new forms of critical inquiry, new ways of thinking about identity, and new possibilities for what it means to teach and learn in current times. This dissertation has laid a foundation, but it is only the beginning. The future of music education, particularly in the Norwegian context, will depend on our ability to remain open to change – to embrace the uncertainties and possibilities that come with integrating gender and sexuality

into the curriculum. It will require ongoing support for teachers, who must navigate the complexities of addressing these topics in the classroom, often without clear guidance or adequate resources. Yet, there is also much to be hopeful for. The integration of a queer perspective into music education offers the possibility for profound transformation; not only of individual students but of the educational system itself. By creating spaces where non-normative identities can flourish, we move beyond the status quo, opening up new possibilities for what education can be. These spaces, where risk and uncertainty are embraced, where identities are fluid and open to interpretation, hold the potential to inspire new forms of social change.

So, as we look toward the future, we must ask ourselves: What kind of education do we want to create? What kind of world do we want to prepare our students for? The answers to these questions will never be fixed, but they will continue to evolve as we engage in the ongoing work of transformation. Ultimately, the future of queer pedagogy in music education will be shaped by the questions we ask and the risks we are willing to take. It will be shaped by our willingness to engage in conversations that challenge normative assumptions, by our openness to new ways of thinking, and by our commitment to creating learning environments that are inclusive, dynamic, and transformative. As teachers, we must be prepared to step into the unknown, to embrace the transformative potential of the educational encounter, and to allow ourselves to be changed in the process too. The journey of transformation is never complete. It is always ongoing, always evolving. And that, perhaps, is the greatest promise of a queer perspective on music education: Not that it will provide us with answers, but that it will continue to inspire new questions, new possibilities, and new ways of being in the world.

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Part 2: Dissertation articles

Dissertation articles

Article 1:

Skjelstad, E., & Ellefsen, L. W. (2024). Challenging stereotypes? Norwegian music teachers' repertoires on gender roles and gender-expansiveness. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 71(4), 398-417. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00224294231175859>

Article 2:

Skjelstad, E. (forthcoming). Exploring the lived experiences of a gender-expansive youth: Music, gender identity and epistemic injustice.. *Conditionally accepted for Lambda Nordica*.

Article 3:

Skjelstad, E. (under review). The beautiful risk of music education. *Submitted for peer-review for Nordic Research in Music Education*.

1

Challenging Stereotypes? Norwegian Music Teachers' Repertoires on Gender Roles and Gender-Expansiveness

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Abstract

The 2020 Norwegian national curriculum for primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary education includes a “competence aim” after Year 7 that expects pupils to be able to “investigate how gender, gender roles, and sexuality are presented in music and dance in the public sphere and create expressions that challenge stereotypes.” This article reviews four focus group interviews in which music teachers discussed the relevance and application of the new competence aim and their own experiences with gender roles and gender-expansive expressions among their pupils in their music practices. Using analytical tools from the field of discourse psychology, we trace and identify the discursive resources or “repertoires” that music teachers draw on when approaching questions of gender roles, gender identities, and sexuality. While the repertoires in question imply that the teachers hold progressive views about gender identities and expressions, the notion of “ideological dilemmas” enables us to ask whether the progressive attitudes may in fact also work to confirm perceptions of normative, binary gender conformity, hence also delimiting the diversity and freedom of gender expression that the repertoires seem to celebrate. We suggest that a queer pedagogical thinking can offer music teachers tools to address topics related to gender roles, sexuality, and queerness in their music educational practices.

Keywords

interpretative repertoires, ideological dilemmas, music education, queer pedagogy, gender-expansive

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Similar to countries across the world, Norway currently finds itself in the middle of a charged and growing debate concerning questions of gender identities and sexual diversity. Spurred on by the Minister of Culture and Equality's pledge to commission a report on the possibility of introducing a third legal gender option in Norway (Bakke, 2021; Ministry of Culture and Equality, 2022), the debate spans social media platforms, national newspapers, academic journals, and broadcast media and draws voices from a variety of academic fields, political interest groups, and religious communities.¹ The discursive urgency with which gender issues are treated also extends to the Norwegian national curriculum for Years 1 through 10, which, in its 2020 revision, introduced new "competence aims" in music, religion, and social science to increase pupils' understanding of and deepen their reflection on gender expressions and identities. Hence, in the music subject, pupils in Year 7 are expected to be able to "investigate how gender, gender roles, and sexuality are presented in music and dance in the public sphere and create expressions that challenge stereotypes" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020).

In this article we analyzed four focus group (FG) interviews in which music teachers discussed the relevance and application of the new competence aim and their own experiences with gender-expansive² expressions among pupils in their music practices. Our overall purpose was to inquire into the discursive repertoires (Edley, 2001) available to and operationalized by teachers in experiencing, reflecting on, and debating gender identities and expressions. This, we maintain, is important for at least two reasons. First, music teachers work with and through materials and activities that hold considerable significance in young people's lives. The discursive repertoires enacted to articulate music in the context of gender may, by association, acquire similar significance for pupils' understanding of themselves and others as (non)gendered subjects. Second, researchers have shown that music education is a thoroughly gendered field of practice (Green, 2002; Onsrud, 2015; Roulston & Misawa, 2011). However, as has been argued by popular music researchers, in music as a field of practice, gender relations and hierarchies are under significant scrutiny, deconstruction, and renegotiation (Green, 2002; Hansen, 2022a; McClary, 2002). Hence, music teachers are in a privileged position to understand and even contribute to the debate with their pupils, colleagues, stakeholders, and the public in general (Garrett & Palkki, 2021; Onsrud, 2021). The potential of music education to investigate and challenge such issues is supported by research across the globe. Previous researchers have demonstrated that music education plays an important role in students' social and cultural (gender) development process (Abramo, 2011; Edley, 2001; Eerola & Eerola, 2014; Iverson, 2011; Lam, 2018; Onsrud, 2015; Roulston & Misawa, 2011) and in the collective effort to challenge (or maintain) gendered social hierarchies (Karvelis, 2018; McBride & Palkki, 2020; Onsrud, 2012; Silveira & Goff, 2016).

However, little is known about the language in use when teachers approach topics on gender-expansiveness and sexuality in their classrooms with their pupils. In exploring Norwegian music teachers' thoughts and statements about the new Norwegian curricular aims to address gender roles and challenge stereotypes in the music subject, the present study serves as a case in this regard. By using analytical tools from the field

of discourse psychology, we trace and identify the discursive resources or “repertoires” (Edley, 2001) that music teachers draw on when approaching questions of gender, gender identities, and sexuality. Equally, we are interested in what the repertoires imply about the broader ideological situation and dilemmas they emerge from and contribute to uphold or challenge. Thus, our objective is to identify how the teachers’ repertoires on gender roles, gender-expansiveness, and sexuality are enacted and made possible through discourse. We ask the following questions: (1) Which interpretative repertoires are drawn on by a sample of music teachers when discussing gender, gender expressions, and sexuality in light of the Norwegian music subject curriculum? and (2) Which ideological dilemmas emerge from these repertoires?

The repertoires will be presented as separate headlines under the findings and discussion section, immediately followed by a discussion of the broader “ideological dilemmas” (Edley, 2001) emergent within and across the repertoires that constitute important sites of meaning making over which different repertoires struggle to achieve dominance.

Interpretative Repertoires

An “interpretative repertoire” can be understood as “basically a lexicon or register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterize and evaluate actions and events” (Wetherell & Potter, 1987, p. 138). Different interpretative repertoires provide different (even contrary) registers of terms, narratives, and rationales for objects and events. Together, they are “part and parcel of every community’s common sense” (Edley, 2001, p. 198). In our application, interpretative repertoires denote the distinguishable patterns of narration, explanation, and reflection regarding gender non/normativity³ that we found in four FG interviews with Norwegian music teachers.

Discourse analytical studies often focus on the patterning of the positions taken up by users (Davies & Harré, 1990; Edley, 2001). In our study, the users were the teachers. However, rather than tracing individual positionings, we analyzed the interpretative repertoires of gender non/normativity themselves, the assumptions on which they seem to be based, and on the narratives and possibilities of identification they seem to offer. We recognize that the FG interview setting represents a discursive practice. Nevertheless, we take the strength and consistency of the discursive repertoires identified to indicate that these repertoires are also available to the teachers when teaching. Put otherwise, we speculate that they are enacted in music educational practice. Hence, they will come to constitute actual discursive possibilities of participation for pupils by ascribing to them places and positions in discourse from where the repertoires make sense.

Our analytical approach also includes the concept of “ideological dilemmas” (Edley, 2001). In the field of discourse psychology, ideology has come to acquire a meaning more similar to lived culture than to compelling belief, as in sociological traditions (Edley, 2001, p. 202). Furthermore, and following the logic of competing interpretative repertoires, the ideology of a society will not only be characterized by inconsistency and contradiction but will be driven by these (Edley, 2001, p. 203). In

being sensitive to the dilemmas that animate conversations (i.e., the places of indeterminacy and tension), we examine the active dynamics of contemporary ideology and hence how discursive relations of meaning are continually being negotiated.

Queer Repertoires and Pedagogies

Judging from the current Norwegian and international debates on gender, gender identities, and sexuality, the interpretative repertoires enacted to understand and talk about with and to each other as non/gendered sexual beings are excessively concerned with repertoires: words, abbreviations, linguistic distinctions, and divisions. Gender pronouns and sexuality labels are of significant strategic importance in political struggles for recognition, and the repertoires they constitute are thus continuously subjected to social strife and resignification (Cayari et al. 2021; Garrett & Palkki, 2021).

Queerness has, however, come to take on meaning that goes beyond simple signification of attractional orientation and/or gender identity and could offer a theoretical lens to approaching the aforementioned competence aim, understood as a way of thinking beyond binaries. This discursive impact of queerness as an expanded concept is evident in Henderson's (2019) entry-level introduction to queer/LGBTQ+ studies, where he writes that the term "queer" "predicates on the concept of nonnormativity as a natural and legitimate variation in human existence and relates to how one views, understands and acts in the world" (Henderson, 2019, p. 5). In the field of education, the queer pedagogy⁴ similarly commits to a broader, critical perspective on normativity. Neto (2018) suggests a queer pedagogical approach in which one resists the hegemonic heteronormativity of a society by exploring the role of identities in the classroom, the nature of disciplines and the curriculum, and finally, the connection between the classroom and the broader community (Neto, 2018, p. 591). He further advocates that focusing on language use among the participants in the pedagogical context is crucial for a queer pedagogy that aims to recognize and include a variety of gender expressions (p. 601). Sympathizing with this stance, we investigate in this article the language-in-use when Norwegian teachers reflect on gender expressions and classroom practices, display the repertoires they draw on in doing so, and explore the dilemmas that produce and are produced by these repertoires. We have no ambition of identifying and deciding on the most proper, productive, or pedagogically sound repertoires. Rather, our overall purpose is to support further queer-pedagogical efforts by mapping out the gender repertoires that teachers and researchers in the field of music education are habitually and undoubtedly subconsciously putting into play and thus also confronting them regarding such repertoires.

Onsrud (2021) recently offered perspectives on queer pedagogy as a tool for music teachers. She argued that "popular culture could be a relevant entrance into such [queer] issues, due to the queer turn in popular music as well as other areas, such as [the] film and television industry" (p. 135). Through an audiovisual analysis of the song "Girls" by the Norwegian singer-songwriter Girl in Red, Onsrud shows how the lyrics, music, and music video all promote a specter of (sometimes contradictory)

layers of meaning. Still, Onsrud reminded the reader of the ambiguity of queerness in popular culture as something dynamic, as opposed to something fixed:

Young people in Scandinavia today are surrounded by friends who are in transition. Some may call themselves pansexual, [while] others actively emphasize that they are still in a process when it comes to sexual orientation identity. "Girls": does not cover the multiple possibilities of queerness at all. (p. 152)

Exploring queer music, music videos, queer personae, and other queer expressions from popular culture and social media platforms can be a useful tool for thinking queer pedagogy in the context of music education. There are always pitfalls to consider, such as avoiding othering of pupils, misrepresentation of queer expressions, and contributing to the reinforcement and maintenance of certain stereotypes. Moreover, no matter the carefulness with which one treads, even a queer music pedagogy can fail to be exclusively inclusive. Yet using cultural texts such as music videos is an available resource for teachers who are approaching the aforementioned competence aim. Following Edley's (2001) arguments, as a discursive practice, music education thrives and develops through interpretative disagreements and dilemmas, social-border drawing and exclusion, and collective and individual distinctions. Dyndahl and Ellefsen (2009) argued for an approach to music education and music education research that takes as its starting point the *discursiveness* of music education, its complete cultural immersion, and the ever-on-going negotiations of power and knowledge:

No matter what didactic identity it claims for itself or is interpreted as conveying, the educational subject music is unavoidably obliged to constitute an aesthetic-functional field of constructing, performing and negotiating meaning and power, most notably relating to certain nodal points of subjectivity and identity. However, different didactic identities are significant with respect to *which* meanings and *whose* power are becoming dominant or marginal respectively. Thus, as part of its didactic - and didactologic - reflexivity, music education should be aware of what kind of cultural meaning and power it is dealing with in different situations and contexts. (p. 24, italic in Original)

While refraining from closing in on gender and sexuality, Dyndahl and Ellefsen's (2009) approach is in line with queer pedagogical criticism and investigation of discursively constructed normativity. From their "culture-oriented didactic (research) approach," we take that while music educational practices are always already happening within discourse, participants' active identification with and subjectivation through the repertoires they use will necessarily also change discourse (including music educational practice).

The discursive performance of gender will never be a straightforward affair. We see this as an underlying premise for the analyses in this article. Nevertheless, the empirical materials on which the analyses are based do not provide grounds for analyzing pupils' gendered subjectivation. What they do offer is insight into the conditions of *possibility* for pupils' gendered subjectivation that the teachers' interpretative repertoires constitute.

Methods, Research Participants, and Data Analysis

The data collection took place in 2021 through four FG interviews with 14 music teachers.⁵ We utilized semistructured interviews so that we could extract and make use of “the knowledge-producing potentials of [the] dialogues” (Brinkmann, 2018, p. 579) in addition to promoting a freer conversation between the interviewer and the teachers and among the teachers themselves. We used purposive sampling (Schreier, 2018, p. 88) to collect rich information that could help answer the research questions. The teachers were sampled from all over Norway, from both rural and urban areas, to promote geographical diversity. We picked random schools from different locations. After receiving ethics approval for our study from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data, we contacted teachers directly by phone, after which we sent each of them an email with a registration form attachment. Twelve male and seven female teachers initially agreed to participate in the study, but five teachers withdrew from the study at a later date. Thus, a total of 14 teachers (11 male, 3 female) participated in the interviews. The interviews took place digitally, via Zoom (except for FG 1⁶), and lasted for 60 to 90 minutes. Each focus group interview was conducted using a three-part interview guide. The first part (the initial stage of each interview) consisted of general questions (e.g., “What can you tell us about the pupils in your classes?” and “How are the class dynamics?”) to create an atmosphere in which the teachers could talk freely about their everyday practices. The second part evolved around the specific competence aim for Year 7. In FG 2 and FG 3 (in which the teacher participants knew each other), the conversation flowed freely without much prompting by the interviewer. In the third part (the final stage of each interview), the interviewer encouraged the teachers to share anecdotes and stories regarding their pupils, their experiences in relation to the competence aim, and stories about pupils who “stood out from the crowd.”⁷

After transcribing and analyzing the four FG interviews, we decided that the data would provide sufficient findings for this study as we started to discover emerging patterns and a few similar experiences among the participants. We took this into consideration when we decided not to recruit more participants (cf. Schwandt, 2001, p. 111). However, we acknowledge that the skewed distribution of the participants in relation to gender may have influenced the data. Music subject didactics were integrated into all the teachers’ degrees because this was one of the criteria for participation in the study. Table 1 shows the distribution of the teachers in the FGs by level taught at their respective institutions (all the names are pseudonyms).

The data were analyzed using the analysis program NVivo. In the initial analysis, utterances were placed under categories such as “masculine,” “feminine,” “boy behavior,” “girly,” “hip-hop,” “clothes and hair,” and “social media.” We then reread the data and replaced the utterances and stories in different *cases* (a sorting function in NVivo), which ultimately informed our recognized interpretative repertoires, as presented in the following section.

Table 1. Teacher Distribution in Focus Groups According to Grade Level ($N = 14$).

Focus Group	Grades 1–7	Grades 8–10	Grades 1–10/other
1	Anne Stian	Kristian Erik	n/a
2	Peter Sindre	n/a	Håkon
3	Bente Knut	Kurt	Glenn
4	Vilde Martin	Amund	n/a
Total	8	4	2

Findings and Discussion

In this section, we present and discuss the four interpretative repertoires and two main ideological dilemmas (cf. Edley, 2001) emerging from the analyses as described in the methods section. The repertoires “binaries” and “sexualized femininity” connect to and are followed by the dilemma “im/maturity and in/capacity,” while the repertoires “divergent masculinity” and “natural transitions” are followed by the dilemma “de/stabilizing gender norms.”

Repertoire: Binaries

Naturalized to the point of being invisible as an interpretative repertoire, the male/female gender binary permeated the teachers’ talk regardless of the topic in question. Indeed, when the teachers described the pupils they had met in their respective music classes, the binary served to evoke cultural archetypes, such as “football guys,” “babes,” “rowdy boys,” and “quiet girls,” as in the following interview excerpts:

FG 1, Anne: I apologize for categorizing them like this (.), but, for example, the football guys, they are loud and boastful. They set the tone in class and have the (.) ‘babes’ (.) come along.

FG 3, Glenn: Where I used to work, a group of rowdy boys who were seen as troublemakers showed a very different attitude and enthusiasm when I arranged for them to learn the guitar. They even performed for their parents, who practically hadn’t seen them achieve anything before.

Notwithstanding the teachers’ aversion to stereotyping, gendered archetypes were cast across the interview data, featuring the cool or tough boys, the choir girls, the outsiders, mature girls who exhibit alternative tastes in music, and the girls already absorbed in planning their *russetid*, a several-week-long party that accompanies upper secondary graduation in Norway. These constructs also assist in reiterating

well-known narratives about boys' lack of motivation and empowerment through practical learning, about girls' preoccupation with boys and partying, about the puberty-related tension between the noisy boys and the grown-up girls, and about the classed superiority of the popular kids, as exemplified through Vilde's statement:

FG 4, Vilde: The boys (.) and girls (.) at the top [of the social hierarchy] have Gant sweaters (.). . . And in the same groups, you have the quiet, conscientious girls who don't have Gant sweaters and who thank me at the end of class. . . I have a few dance girls sitting in between these quiet and conscientious girls, and (.), well, a lot of stereotypes from me here (.).

It comes as no surprise that the binary repertoire regulated the formation of other repertoires in the four FG interviews. Hence, pupils' musicianship and musical interests, their leisure activities, their development toward puberty, and their sexuality are always already binary gendered. It is thus predictable that teachers challenge stereotypical gender roles and expressions for educational purposes, but their educational efforts at subverting and/or broadening stereotypical gender behaviors and preferences tend to enforce binary thinking.

Repertoire: Sexualized Femininity

All the four FG conversations in our study quickly turned to a repertoire concerned with sexualization and degrading representation of women when the teachers discussed how to deal with the new competence aim of investigating "how gender, gender roles, and sexuality are presented in music and dance in the public sphere and create expressions that challenge stereotypes" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020):

FG 1, Kristian: Taking hip-hop culture as an example, [there are] often very explicit lyrics with gangsters, hoes, and bitches (.), generally a degrading view of women, especially in music videos. There's a great deal of twerking and sexualization. It's important to talk about it and reflect on how these women are being portrayed.

Hip-hop culture constituted a self-evident case of demeaning sexualization of the female body in the conversations. The sexualization of *male* bodies (demeaning or not) was not included in the teachers' repertoire, nor was the *gender-subversive* potential of hip-hop, as discussed in contemporary literature (Djupvik, 2014, 2017; Karvelis, 2018; Kruse, 2016). In comparison, the sexualization of women constituted the *main* repertoire for considering female gender roles. The teachers' discussions of the Norwegian phenomenon of "russ" music similarly showed the sexualization repertoire in use:

FG 2

Håkon: The lyrics are not at all suitable for 8-year-olds, for example.

Sindre: They're not suitable for anyone, I think, in the public sphere, because much of it is really sex discrimination.

Interviewer: In what way?

Sindre: Well, it paints a picture of how russ girls are supposed to be, like, for example, "Tonight it is allowed to be a whore" and the explicit lyrics we've heard in media.⁸

Russ music (*russelåter*) is a type of house/techno-inspired Norwegian party music produced on request by groups of upper secondary graduate students (*russ*) to go with their graduation party concepts; it also includes group logos, clothes, and party buses, with speakers playing russ music at full volume (Hanssen, 2023). Russ music has also become popular with younger children, a fact that the teachers find problematic because the lyrics involve partying, drugs, sex, and drinking. Kurt (FG 3) even warned that russ music lyrics might mirror the rape culture (see Johnson & Johnson, 2021) Norwegian media has claimed to find on the party buses (Berglund, 2014). Peter (FG 2) referred to a situation he had read about where school pupils were selling sex and drew a parallel to the sexualized lyrics of pupils' music, the normalization of sexualized language, and the accessibility of pornography in society. He said, "That's why kids need to be educated, in school, and (.) yes, in science class and other school subjects (.), but [especially] in music, because of the sexualization there and the gender roles we see in certain musical genres." In line with Peter's advice, all the teachers in our study held that raising pupils' awareness about sexualization and misogyny in music is a main educational task:

FG 3, Bente: When their idols say that "tonight it is allowed to be a whore" and call all women to become whores, it's easier (.) I know there's been a recent media debate about this (.) More and more children call each other whores, use similar insults... The competence aim demands that we teach them that "this is not the case" [laughs], that "you are not a whore."

Kurt and Sindre offered educational suggestions, including the following:

FG 3, Kurt: For example, if something is very demeaning to women, you can try to turn the lyrics around (.) write a song lyric like these coarse gangster rap lyrics, but do it the other way around. Girl lyrics, but with a boy.

FG 2, Sindre: [Norwegian pop artist] Sigrid is a good example to use... She is wholly dedicated to giving a good performance, to singing well (.), ehh (.), rather than showing off her body. She chose a white T-shirt and a pair of jeans to turn the focus away from [her body] and over to herself and her music. I think that's a good way of doing it. Perhaps you don't have to use your body to (.)... well... achieve something.

Similar deconstructive strategies to the one suggested by Kurt are often advised by feminists to get at naturalized gender repertoires (Björck, 2011; Gould, 2004, 2009;

Lam, 2018). The conversation in FG 2, however, led Sindre to evoke an argument that feminists have been fighting to put down: that because women, contrary to men, use their bodies to attain success, they are, by inference, responsible for the demeaning sexualization of their gender. Although hardly dominant in the FG interviews, the “achieving success by sex” narrative nonetheless serves the sexualization repertoire Sindre drew on when putting forth Sigrid as an alternative role model as opposed to music with inappropriate lyrics.

Ideological Dilemma: Im/Maturity and In/Capacity

When drawing on the “binary” and “sexualized femininity” repertoires, the teachers in our study alternated between seeing their pupils as mature and capable and problematizing their pupils’ lack of the same alleged virtues. In all four FGs, the conversations turned to young people’s (particularly boys’) use of profanities, such as “fag,” “homo,” “bitch,” and “whore” (for further reading on this subject, see e.g., Pascoe, 2011). Anne (FG 1) stated that pupils were spreading these slurs around without fully realizing what they entail. Stian (FG 1) observed that “fag” is primarily used by boys about other boys, whereas the girl “equivalent” is “bitch.” Amund (FG 4) pointed out that: “[The pupils] call everything and everyone a ‘homo’ without really understanding what ‘homo’ means. They hardly know the differences between homo, lesbian, trans, and other terms. They don’t know the concepts (.). They don’t know anything about the matter.” In approaching questions of challenging (gendered) stereotypes for educational purposes, the teachers considered the receptiveness of the pupils themselves:

FG 1, Anne: My first thought [about the competence aim] was “Oh, God, but they’re so young, and this is so huge and difficult.” I panicked a little... It’s an aim that’s really demanding for seventh graders. Also, to be investigating gender and gender roles and sexuality in music when you’re 12–13 years old (.)... well, it does make sense because you’re in a situation where you really have to figure yourself out.

FG 4, Vilde: [The pupils] are moving into a grown-up world they’re unfamiliar with, which we can actually discuss in music and in Norwegian class. It’s important that they familiarize themselves with this [world], but they need a maturity level that my eighth graders still lack... to have a serious discussion [about sexuality in music]. Now, they’re just testing us teachers regarding the vocabularies we know and what they can get away with.

The repertoire governing the FG conversations in the aforementioned considerations tends to position the pupils as ignorant of the (supposedly) adult issues behind the competence aim formulations: They are too young and too immature. The assumption that pupils’ capacity to critically reflect on gender issues and sexualized language increases as they go through puberty is implicitly expressed and fits well with the preceding repertoires (see also Karvelis, 2018; Kruse, 2016).

A running theme supporting the positioning of pupils as innocent and immature is the influence of popular music, television, and social media. As Amund (FG 4) reasoned elsewhere, considering what pupils hear and see on the internet and in reality

television, it is hardly their fault. The innocence repertoire thus demands that teachers straighten out the misunderstandings conveyed by their idols (“You are not a whore”). The teachers in FG 1, FG 2, and FG 4 all stated that social media and reality TV are significant influencers of young people. This could be a starting point for exploring gender roles and sexuality, as referred to in the competence aim, but as Anne noted:

FG 1, Anne: Now, we [the teachers] can hardly show music videos without getting reactions from the parents (.), especially if we show the pupils things that are not age appropriate. For instance, I was asked by a concerned parent who had watched a film together with the sixth-grade pupils if I was allowed to show the pupils that film, especially as a naked butt was shown in it [laughs]. For reasons like that, I’ve decided to be careful with this competence aim until I’ve figured out how to address it in the classroom.

In FG 2, a short dialogue on children’s and youth’s gender activism emerged. According to Håkon, his pupils are concerned with being “politically correct,” such as in their use of personal pronouns. On the other hand, he said that they had gone beyond defining sexualities with prefixes like “homo,” “bi,” “pan,” and “hetero.” It is a more “open room,” he mused. Responding to Håkon, Sindre agreed that “children today are more accepting, in a way, of who you are. . . . Not that they are activists, but they do participate in our conversations and have. . . . real acceptance.”

One could certainly argue that an alternative repertoire to the innocence narrative was in play in FG 2, which credited the pupils with an active, informed voice. Looking back to Vilde’s (FG 4) statement in which she said that the pupils are just testing the teachers regarding words and vocabularies to see what they can get away with, we also sense a recognition of the pupils as mature teenagers (who are testing their teacher’s limits by using profanities and fowl words) as opposed to the innocent child who knows nothing of the adult (sexual) world. The dilemma becomes evident in this dichotomous representation of an eighth grader and could very well represent the complexity of defining maturity itself; mature compared to the innocent child or immature compared to the adult subject position? The pupils’ capacity for participation as im/mature agents thus seems in many cases to be regulated by their discursive positioning enacted by the teachers themselves (cf. Davies & Harré, 1990).

Repertoire: Divergent Masculinity

Rather than dwelling on the topic of sexualization, as with the repertoire for female stereotypes, the teachers discussed masculinity by sharing examples that they believed would expand the scope of masculine gender expressions. By doing so, we suggest, the teachers implied that there is a normative masculinity behavior to expand or diverge from:

FG 2

Håkon: [School kids today] listening to acting-tough music learn how boys are supposed to behave: They must be tough and strong but cool.

Interviewer: What do you mean by acting-tough music?

Håkon: Well, rap and hip-hop. Russ music also belongs to that category.

Judging from the general discussion of rap/hip-hop and russ music in the FG interviews, the main male stereotype to be put under educational scrutiny is the tough man, the gangster (see e.g., Djupvik, 2017). Ordinary, everyday maleness, however, such as the average “dad,” constitutes an even more important archetype for the masculinity repertoire in use, as exemplified by the following quote. Anne, remembering finding David Bowie “disgusting” as a child, has introduced his music to her 12-year-old pupils:

FG 1, Anne: It’s about him being all painted up and that he . . . well . . . he isn’t a man, in a way [laughs]. It challenges the “man” stereotype, I think. Showing that boys can wear make-up, you can do so and so, [artists like] Freddy Mercury, Prince (.). So, that’s what I did, with Year 7. Seeing him [Bowie] and taking in the fact that he’s different from all the dads they see around [the city], that was weird for them at first, like, “Oh, gross,” “What? That’s weird!,” and such. But then we talked about it: that there are people who have something inside themselves that’s unusual compared to most people. [It’s about] being different.

While presenting the case of Bowie not being a man, the way he looked, Anne tacitly conveyed that, of course, Bowie was a man, but a different man with something unusual inside him. Narrating how she problematized her pupils’ initial disgust, Anne simultaneously seemed to lend their disgust a legitimate place in the masculinity repertoire as something to be overcome. Kristian followed up on Anne’s story:

FG 1, Kristian: Harry Styles is another good example. He’s witty and entertaining, really cool. He can dress in absolutely anything and get away with it. That’s pretty brave, I think, going with such an alternative, modern style.

What Kristian’s statement can be said to add to the repertoire is an enhanced emphasis on success and authority as features of masculinity that spin all potential threats to manliness into evidence of the same: Styles does whatever he wants and gets away with it, including dressing flamboyantly. This repertoire is in line with representations of a so-called new masculinity, a topic currently under scrutiny within musicology (Hansen, 2022a). Witty carelessness and cool arrogance are macho characteristics that are as good as any.

Turning now to a longer story told by Vilde about a pupil in her school, we can see that the same repertoire played out somewhat differently¹⁰:

FG 4, Vilde: There’s a pupil in the 10th grade (.). . . Yes, it’s a boy (.). Well, on the first day of school, he shows up with a purse, nail polish, an orange belly top, and a skateboard. I’m thinking, “Wow, you’re so cool!” There has been talk in the staffroom that this pupil is struggling a lot mentally, but to have the courage (.), I think that’s awesome. But being

away from school for a longer period last year made this pupil miss out on a lot of things that the class did. I suppose this explains his “Now I’m back, look at me!” attitude. I see him as a role model for the rest of the school, especially because “homo” is used as an insult among eighth graders like mine. He copes with these issues every day, although one day he was wearing ordinary jeans and a gray hoodie that covered his head. He seemed to have taken a break from showing off.

Similar to Kristian, the repertoire that Vilde used to recount her experience with the boy who diverged from the male-gendered clothing codex at school constructed his coolness and courage. Indeed, in Vilde’s interpretation, the pupil’s coolness and courage were all the more awesome due to his mental and social struggles. She implicitly added health/sickness to the divergent masculinity repertoire, an ambivalent dichotomy that has a history of application to nonnormative expressions of gender for reasons of modification, medication, control, and even empowerment and that continues to constitute a principle nodal point of meaning making in contemporary gender discourse (see Garrett & Palkki, 2021; McBride & Palkki, 2020). Furthermore, the repertoire of divergence again serves to confirm binary gender repertoires: The act of “taking a break” also suggests that the pupil’s more flamboyant expression is understood as a performance; to take a break from expressing gender in a certain way indicates that there exists a natural state to fall back on, perhaps a state that this pupil was socialized into while growing up. Following up on Vilde’s story, Amund (FG4) reflected: “There are pupils who (.) well, when we [the teachers] talk among ourselves we might say that [laughs] ‘Well this one *has* to be gay’ without making any fuss about it. We might be wrong, but oftentimes [it’s] accurate.” When the interviewer asked a follow-up question on how the teachers assume pupils’ attractional orientation, Amund mentioned “feminine behavior” as a signifier but emphasized that he and his colleagues rarely dwelled further on it.

Repertoire: Natural Transitions

When asked about their experiences with gender-expansive pupils, the teachers told stories of pupils “changing gender.”¹¹ The casualness with which the stories were told was striking, particularly considering how contemporary discourse, political and academic alike, seems to find transgender issues thoroughly complex and problematic (Cayari et al., 2021; Garrett & Palkki, 2021; Silveira & Goff, 2016). Consider the following three interview excerpts:

FG 1, Anne: One of my pupils (.), a girl (.), had long, beautiful hair for years. One day, she came to school with short hair (.). She always befriended boys. She wanted to play with the boys (.), and she had changed her name. In lower secondary school, she started as a boy. I think she was so brave to have made that choice at such a young age. It happened smoothly, gradually. Towards the spring of seventh grade, it started to feel like “Yes, this is the way it should be.” (.) and there was really no one who commented on or reacted to it. . . . It’s been so natural. She was like a boy; that’s how it was.

FG 2, Håkon: At my school, we had a pupil who changed her gender from girl to boy, and of course, she also changed her name. It did not take long for this to be accepted by both the teachers and the pupils. My impression is that the process was painless for the boy.

FG 4, Amund: I actually used to have a student who decided to change her gender (.) between ninth and tenth grades. She quit our school for other reasons, but she changed her gender all by herself, and it was unproblematic (.), without trouble. It's like it happened overnight, and everyone was okay with it maybe because everyone had understood it already.

In recounting pupils' gender transitions, Anne, Håkon, and Amund acknowledged that, to use Anne's words, "This is the way it should be" (i.e., "she was like a boy," "everyone had understood it already," and "it settled so naturally"). The natural transition repertoire in use did not challenge the boy/girl gender binary. Quite the contrary, by emphasizing naturalness, the repertoire seemed to encourage binary thinking. Facts were conveyed as empirical evidence for a trans personality: If a girl dresses in boys' clothes and behaves like a boy (e.g., playing with boys, wearing her hair short), referring to herself as a boy and using a boy name is the "natural" gendered behavior. The pupil's gender expression is in accordance with what is considered gender normative. The natural transition repertoire, then, might be less challenging for stereotypical gender interpretation than what might first seem to be the case.

Another feature of the natural transition repertoire was the *smooth* change. Happening gradually or overnight, the transition provoked no reaction; it was acceptable to everyone. Juxtaposed to the concept of health/sickness from when discussing divergent masculinity, it was surprising that the teachers rehearsed a narrative of painless, smooth gender transition. Considering that the same teachers reported widespread use of sexualized insults among their pupils (see the dilemma on im/maturity and in/capacity), we are even more curious about the social and cultural function of this narrative. In an educational context, an answer might be that the teachers consciously and/or unconsciously aimed to empower their students. Moreover, paired with the concept of naturalness, the narrative of smooth transition works to reconstitute potentially incomprehensible gender subjects within that which can be comprehended (and hence also dealt with painlessly) within the already existing educational discourse.

Ideological Dilemma: De/Stabilizing Gender Norms

The interpretative repertoires of "divergent masculinity" and "natural transitions" allowed the teachers to eagerly express their support and relaxed attitude toward gender-expansive expressions in general and pupils in transition in particular. Transitions were described as "natural," suggesting that the pupils in question transferred to a fixed position with ease. The "naturalness" of it was informed by descriptions of the pupils' hair, clothes, and (expected) gendered behaviors. However, these are all signifiers that potentially also maintain the teachers' (implicit) rehearsal of stereotyped gender characteristics. We can see this ideological dilemma working in the following

excerpt, where the teachers in FG 3 talked about a pupil who has transitioned. The natural transition repertoire is also effective here, but the dialogue took a different turn than in the other groups, as introduced by Glenn's statement that "he plays the guitar":

FG 3:

Glenn: Well, there's a student in eighth grade who used to be a girl. He plays the guitar.

Bente: Really talented!

Glenn: Yes, he's really good at playing the guitar. He's really into music (.), and he also has a high "standing" socially among the pupils.

Interviewer: Why do you think he does have a high "standing" among the pupils?

Glenn: Well, he has a great personality and is generally a nice person. I don't think it has anything to do with his gender transition. He's smart and kind, and he's not afraid to speak his mind, but without being stupid about it. He balances it just fine.

Kurt: Twinkle in his eyes!

Glenn: Yes, twinkle in his eyes, for sure! A lot of people look up to him. He engages a lot in musical activities. He's very focused on his guitar.

The dialogue between the teachers in FG3 is not primarily a story of transition. Indeed, Glenn rejects the idea that the gender transition bears any prominence on the pupils' current social situation. What the excerpt illustrates, however, is how repertoires of musicianship and gender strengthen each other to position a transgendered boy favorably in society. The dialogue is specked with statements that testify to the boy's masculine musicianship, starting with his prowess at the guitar, "in many ways the musical signifier *sine qua non* of swaggering, heterosexual masculinity," as Warwick (2015, p. 334) put it. The emphasis on the pupil's focused dedication to music implicitly activates the idea of single-minded male absorption (or nerdiness). Similar to the descriptions of Harry Styles given by Kristian in the previous quote on divergent masculinity, the "twinkle in his eyes" serves to seal a charming boyishness to his musical and social performances. Framing his kindness within statements of intelligence and integrity ("speaking his mind") assigns even this potential feminine trait a masculine value, which is in line with the dilemma on gender norms. In this case, our analysis indicates how the gender binary effects of the natural transition repertoire are supported by the mutual constitution of maleness and male musicianship: The boy's masculinity is constituted by his musicianship, and his musicianship is constituted by his masculinity (see also Hansen, 2022b).

Interestingly, the various transition stories all depicted the stories of "boyish" or short-haired girls transitioning to boys. The ideological dilemma emerged when the

teachers told stories of boys who did not fit into the stereotypical “boy” category, as seen in the statements from Amund and Vilde (FG 4). The teachers’ discursive rehearsal of gender nonconformity contributes to the stability of ideas of conformity. In resorting to stereotyped characteristics to reinterpret a person’s gender, we suggest, the teachers maintain rigid and mutually excluding notions of what signals the being of a “boy” and what signals the being of a “girl.” There was nothing nonconforming about it; it was just a reinterpretation. Hence, the teachers’ challenging of stereotypical gender roles and expressions for educational purposes and their educational efforts at subverting and/or broadening stereotypical gender behaviors and preferences tended to enforce, rather than to challenge, binary thinking.

Concluding Remarks: Challenging Stereotypes?

Through this analysis, we have aimed to describe the interpretative repertoires available to the teachers in our study when discussing questions regarding gender expressions and sexuality in relation to their pupils and popular culture in general, prompted by the core curriculum and the aforementioned competence aim. Some of the expressions in question were well-established notions of a sexualized, sometimes even misogynist, portrayal of women in certain musical genres, while others specifically represented our time and age, in which many people refuse to adhere to a traditional gender binarity. Through our analyses of the teachers’ conversations, we recognize a dichotomous representation of a Year 7 pupil: On one hand, the child was seen as mature, sexualized (ready to perform gender transition), and ready to partake in a discussion about gender roles and representation, while on the other hand, the child was seen as immature, naïve, and not ready to fully understand what this discussion entails. Simultaneously, we glimpsed from the repertoires and the ideological dilemmas the teachers’ wish to do what is right while simultaneously expressing an underlying feeling of impotence. Put simply, challenging stereotypes can be quite challenging.

Music and popular culture can offer expressions that defy notions of normativity while also limiting young people’s freedom in expressing their gender by reinforcing stereotypical notions of gender roles. Onsrud (2021) recognized this as a challenge for music teachers, specifically in how they can “support pupils in how to deal with controversial issues and contradictory values in popular culture and popular music, which they meet every day and everywhere through social media” (p. 150). The inclusion of diverse cultural texts within music education can provide a more nuanced picture of gender expressions in media and thus make music classes safe spaces for all the participants, pupils, and teachers alike. The objective of our study was certainly not to reprimand teachers for their views on gender-expansiveness and (stereotypical) gender expressions. Rather, we hoped to underline the importance of creating an increased focus on gender diversity and gender-expansive identities in teacher education, much in line with a queer-pedagogical thinking. We believe that (music) teachers should be provided with tools and resources to prepare them to deal with an increasingly complex landscape of gender-expansive pupils and (queer) identities, who are very much present in a postmodern classroom. We see queer pedagogy as a possible starting point for challenging

stereotypes and thinking beyond binaries, but we also acknowledge that the complexity of the matter (as shown through the ideological dilemmas) might discourage teachers in addressing certain topics in the classroom. One approach could be to rethink the term “diversity” in the Norwegian context (which is often connected to cultural background and ethnicity) to be expanded to include gender-expansiveness and queer identities. Furthermore, an increased focus on interdisciplinary topics within teacher practices can encourage teachers to explore questions of gender, gender roles, and sexuality across all school subjects and thus challenge not only the stereotypes in popular culture but also the way teachers relate to gender-expansiveness among their pupils in general.

We acknowledge that the findings from a study of 14 teachers cannot be generalized, and more studies are needed to understand the long-term implications of the new Norwegian curriculum from the perspectives of both the teachers and the pupils. Future studies could also address the wording in the curriculum to further investigate what is meant by terms as “sexuality” and “gender” to promote a language that is more in line with contemporary feminist and queer discourse. While we do understand that many teachers may find the aforementioned topics challenging, we also recognize that music teachers are in a privileged position to approach them in the classroom. Having pupils use music to reflect on societal issues such as racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and sexism is a good starting point for challenging stereotypes and making music classes safe spaces for reflection and discussion.

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Notes

1. See Ministry of Culture and Equality (2022) for an extended report on LGBTQ rights in Norway.
2. We utilize this term to encompass the breadth of gendered expressions.
3. We utilize this term when referring to the teachers’ own repertoires on gender-expansiveness.
4. The term “queer pedagogy” was coined and first used by Bryson and de Castell in 1993. It was then used by bell hooks’s significant work on transgressive pedagogy in 1994 (referred in Kumashiro, 2002), which is also considered (among other theories of anti-oppressive education) to have informed later notions of queer pedagogy (see Kumashiro, 2002).
5. The interviews and initial coding were conducted by the first author of this article, while the analysis was a collaborative task between the two authors.
6. The FG 1 interview happened prior to the second COVID-19 lockdown in Norway.

7. We acknowledge that this question itself can constitute a loaded discursive repertoire.
8. In 2015, the Norwegian producer/singer TIX caused a controversy with his song “Sjeiken 2015,” written for a group of 28 graduate boys and infamous for its lyrics “Tonight it is allowed to be a whore.”
9. “Homo” in Norwegian corresponds to how “fag” is used among English-speakers (see also Pascoe, 2011)
10. Vilde’s story, as presented here, was condensed to fit the scope of this article.
11. “Changing gender” is a direct translation of the Norwegian “bytte kjønn,” a colloquial way to describe gender transition, used by the teachers in our study. We acknowledge that this wording may come across as offensive.

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2

Exploring the Lived Experiences of a Gender-expansive Youth: Music, Gender Identity and Epistemic Injustice

ABSTRACT

This article delves into the lived experiences of “Neptune,” a 13-year-old non-binary person, within the broader contexts of gender identity, music/culture, and education. Grounded in music education and queer studies, I provide a nuanced and empathetic exploration of Neptune’s narrative. This portrayal serves not only to illuminate their journey but also to connect their lived experiences with a comprehensive theoretical framework. The aim of this study is to explore how young gender-expansive individuals navigate and negotiate their identities in societal contexts that predominantly favor binary gender norms. The research question guiding this study is: How do gender-expansive individuals like Neptune utilize cultural resources, specifically music and literature, as tools for understanding and expressing their non-binary identities? By examining Neptune’s narrative through the lenses of epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007) and the concept of ontological non-being/disappeared (Wittig 1992; Gould 2012), the study aims to uncover the systemic challenges faced by young, gender-expansive individuals. Additionally, this study investigates the potential of music and literature as transformative tools for gender-expansive individuals, offering means of identification for those who find themselves alienated from the prevailing gender discourse. This interdisciplinary examination contributes to a multifaceted understanding of the experiences of individuals who identify outside of the normative gender binary and seeks to enrich broader dialogues on gender identity, social justice, and cultural expressions, offering valuable insights for educators and professionals engaging with gender diversity in various contexts.

Keywords: gender-expansive, non-binary, epistemic injustice, ontological non-being, music and identity

The school environment is just so binary. It’s like you have to choose between being with the girls or having to deal with the boy group and their toxic masculinity. The bullying would just never end and at some point, it does something to you. You just get to the stage where you don’t fight it anymore (...). I have been called crazy, trans, lesbo, and the f-slur on numerous occasions. Luckily, we are a few queer kids at school now and we stick together.

The above excerpt provides a condensed version of a more extensive conversation about feeling safe in school environments, which occurred during one of my “walk-and-talks” with “Neptune” – a 13-year-old student who identifies as non-binary or gender fluid.¹ In this article, I delve into Neptune’s lived experiences as a gender-expansive individual based in Norway. The narrative unfolds across four key themes: Neptune’s use of language to encapsulate their gender-expansive identity; Neptune’s journey in developing and negotiating their gender-expansive identity through the lens of music and literature; Neptune’s encounters with the Norwegian health system while seeking gender-affirming care; and Neptune’s reflections on the role of schools in creating safer spaces for gender-expansive students. These themes both arose from my conversations with Neptune and reflect my scholarly interests in gender, music/culture, and education. Throughout, I aim to provide a rich exploration of Neptune’s experiences within these contexts, emphasizing the transformative power of cultural resources like music and books in shaping and expressing their non-binary identity in a world largely oriented towards gender binary norms.

While this article primarily explores the sociocultural dimensions of gender and identity, it is important to acknowledge the ongoing debates within the field of medical ethics surrounding gender-affirming care. For instance, while it seems reasonable to suggest the visibility and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community have significantly increased in Norway and other European countries, controversies surrounding transgender and non-binary issues, medical procedures, and related topics persist. Notably, the issue of medical and psychological treatment of gender dysphoria in children and youth has led to heated discussions (Chait 2022). In Norway, a similar debate has arisen with the leftist movement’s push for a third legal gender option (Bakke 2021), which has raised concerns about the impact of gender identities and gender expressions on the Norwegian society as a whole (Klinge 2022; Ottosen 2022). In contrast, some Norwegian medical professionals have warned that limiting gender to a binary model ignores the reality of diverse gender identities (Slagstad 2018; Slagstad et al. 2023).

These debates also extend into the context of education, as the 2020 Norwegian national curriculum for primary and lower secondary school years 1-10 includes learning objectives, or competence aims, explicitly related to gender and sexuality. These objectives aim to promote equality, respect, and understanding for diversity, including sexual orientation and gender identity. The curriculum includes topics such as attractional orientation and consent in

social studies (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2020b), as well as gender stereotypes and gender roles in the music subject (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2020a). The inclusion of gender and sexuality in the Norwegian national curriculum can be seen as part of a broader effort to promote social equality and human rights through education. The curriculum aims to equip students with the knowledge and skills they need to navigate complex social issues related to gender and sexuality and to become responsible and informed citizens (see Ministry of Culture and Equality 2022).

In this article, I aim to provide a much-needed voice for the gender-expansive student community and offer perspectives for teachers working with materials central to identity formation for gender-expansive students. The aim of this study is to explore how young gender-expansive individuals navigate and negotiate their identities in societal contexts that predominantly favor binary gender norms. The research question guiding this study is: How do gender-expansive individuals like Neptune utilize cultural resources, specifically music and literature, as tools for understanding and expressing their non-binary identities? By presenting Neptune's story as narrated to me, I aim to provide insight into the challenges that gender-expansive students face in navigating school and health environments.

Gender-expansive Identities and Society

To explore the intricate terrain of non-binary and gender fluid identities, a foundational perspective emerges from Wittig's (1992) linguistic approach to gender.² Building on Wittig's ideas, Gould (2012) accentuated the limitations inherent in the non-heterosexual subject position, particularly in comprehending the nuanced landscape of gender identity. Gould contended that the homosexual subject position fails to encapsulate the fluid and dynamic nature of gender identity (2012, 50). Even when acknowledging the existence of fluid gender identity, it is always seen in relation to a fixed binary view on gender, as the subject position of being non-binary or gender fluid would not exist ontologically.³ Additionally, Gould (2012, 51) extended Wittig's concepts to propose that a "straight mind" may struggle to conceive social configurations outside of heterosexuality, possibly perceiving homosexuals as deviant or failed heterosexuals.

While there has been progress in understanding diverse sexual orientations in contemporary society, the exploration of non-gendered subjectivities still poses social challenges.

Mainstream media has traditionally cast gender-expansive individuals as deviations from the binary norm (see e.g. Marshall 2010), possibly rooted in a deficiency of language and concepts capable of expressing their unique experiences. Could it be that the absence of adequate linguistic and conceptual resources contributes to the alienation of gender-expansive individuals from the prevailing binary discourse? Pearce, Gupta and Moon problematize this notion:

Trans people are asked to account for feelings that simply cannot be described through the language of cis emotionality. Phrases such as ‘wrong body’, ‘gender identity’ and ‘brain gender’ have perhaps represented a step forward, but remain woefully inadequate (Lester, 2017). Terms such as ‘cis’ and even ‘non-binary’ help us to account for relations of relative power and (in)equality between those who have a particular range of ‘trans’ experiences and those who do not, but also retain an investment in binary thinking and absolute categories. (2020, 3)

The concept of ontological non-existence may be connected to epistemic injustice, as coined by Fricker (2007), which sheds light on how social systems can undermine certain groups’ recognition as knowers and the serious consideration of their experiences and perspectives. Broadly speaking, epistemic injustice can be categorized into two main types: *testimonial* injustice and *hermeneutical* injustice. Testimonial injustice occurs when individuals are deemed unreliable or not credible sources of information based on prejudice against perceived identity markers such as gender, race, class, or sexuality (Fricker 2007, 22-23). Conversely, hermeneutical injustice involves the exclusion of certain groups from cultural narratives, leaving them without adequate tools to articulate their experiences (2007, 151). It refers to situations where individuals are unable to make sense of or articulate their experiences due to a lack of shared linguistic and cultural resources, for example in healthcare settings (Carel and Kidd 2017), leaving them without adequate tools or frameworks for understanding their own experiences or communicating them to others (Fricker 2007, 151). Hermeneutical injustice is particularly pertinent to understanding the experiences of gender-expansive children and youth in heteronormative school settings, where limited linguistic and cultural resources may impede self-expression and understanding. For example, if a non-binary student is constantly referred to by the wrong pronouns or forced to use a gendered bathroom that doesn’t align with their identity, they may struggle to articulate why this is problematic and how it affects them (Garrett and Palkki 2021, 146-147). These experiences underscore the interconnected social and epistemological barriers faced by gender-expansive individuals such as Neptune.

Music, Literature, and Self-understanding

Given music's close and complex relationship with gender (Björck 2021; Hansen 2022a, 2022b; Hawkins 2016; McClary 2002; Välimäki 2020; Warwick 2015), music teachers can play a central role in informing the debate surrounding gender-(non)conformity (Abramo 2011; Askerøi and Vestad 2021; Bergonzi 2014; Garrett and Palkki 2021; Nichols 2013; Onsrud 2021). As they work with musical materials that can be both gender-normative and gender-challenging, they are uniquely positioned to affect their students' understandings of gender and sexuality. In music classrooms and ensembles, structured around binary gender divisions, gender-expansive youth may feel excluded or overlooked, with specific instruments or genres often associated with either masculine or feminine qualities (Green 2002; Hansen 2022a; McClary 2002; Warwick 2015). The lack of representation of non-binary and/or gender-expansive identities in music curricula and educational materials further contributes to the erasure of their experiences and perspectives within the (music) world (Garrett and Palkki 2021, 54-55). This absence of representation not only hinders youth from seeing themselves reflected in the music they learn and perform but also restricts their opportunities to explore music that resonates with their identity and experience (Garrett and Palkki 2021; Peters 2016). Critical musicology⁴ have shed light on music's ability for transformation, emancipation and narration (McClary 2020; Tobias 2014; Välimäki 2019; Jarman-Ivens 2011), offering perspectives that can be valuable for music education and music teachers. Importantly, music and popular culture can also uphold gendered and racial prejudice and do not always act as positive forces (Cheng 2020; Dhaenens 2016; Hansen 2022b, 2022a). It is, therefore, necessary to engage in critical reflection on music education and the ways in which it can both reinforce and challenge gender norms (Green 2002; Onsrud 2015, 2021).

In addition to music, literature also serves as a powerful cultural resource that influences identity formation. According to Breen (1998, 233), queer pedagogy involves finding transformative possibilities⁴ within texts. This approach can be applied to both music and literature, as they provide narratives that validate queer identities and challenge oppressive norms. For example, Neptune's connection with Rick Riordan's series and the book "Symptoms of Being Human" illustrates how literature can resonate with personal experiences and offer validation and language for expressing one's gender identity. Furthermore, Nylund (2007) emphasized that media texts provide materials out of which people create their identities, and engaging with these texts can be a powerful tool for self-

empowerment. Nylund described how young people, like the case of “Steven,” a gay youth, used popular culture texts such as the Harry Potter series to find support for their identities. Steven inserted himself into the text of Harry Potter, uncovering hidden “queer” readings and messages that resonated with his experiences. This process of engaging with and interpreting popular media texts helped Steven to navigate and affirm his sexual identity in the face of societal heteronormativity.

By integrating perspectives from both music and literature, we can see that these cultural resources, whether musical or literary, provide critical tools for self-reflection and identity negotiation. Both mediums offer narratives that can either reinforce societal norms or provide alternative frameworks for understanding oneself, thus supporting the identity formation process for young gender-expansive individuals. This interdisciplinary approach highlights the importance of a holistic view of cultural resources in educational practices aimed at supporting diverse identities. As such, perspectives from critical musicology and literary studies can offer useful insights into how music and literature education can support young gender-expansive individuals in their ongoing processes of identity formation.

Music and other cultural resources serve as vital tools or technologies of the self for gender-expansive individuals, aiding them in making sense of their experiences and asserting their subjectivity amidst epistemic injustice. The concept of *technologies of the self*, encompassing various techniques individuals employ to shape and transform themselves (DeNora 1999; Foucault 1994), applies to cultural resources like music and books. As I aim to demonstrate, these resources can be instrumental in empowering gender-expansive individuals to explore and express their identities, providing unique avenues for self-reflection, interpretation, and transformation.

Methodology and ethics

As the researcher crafting Neptune’s narrative, I acknowledge my positionality as a white, cisgendered, homosexual man residing in Norway, a wealthy Nordic country. My background as a music teacher educator motivates my desire to comprehend the spectrum of gendered and non-gendered expressions among contemporary young people, the full breadth of which is becoming increasingly visible in popular culture and music (Hansen 2022a; Hawkins 2016; Välimäki 2020), thus in our contemporary society. I am of the firm conviction that teachers bear the responsibility of creating safer spaces within their educational practices, particularly

for individuals who do not conform to normative gender and sexuality categories, a topic addressed by educators both in Norway and internationally (Garrett and Palkki 2021; Onsrud 2021; Røthing 2020). I approached these issues through a narrative-inspired inquiry single-case study (Elbaz-Luwisch 2007; Flyvbjerg 2006; Nichols 2016, 2013), which provides the means for exploring an individual's personal experiences and present them thematically and critically, allowing for a deeper understanding of their lived realities.

This study was conducted over a period of three months during the spring of 2022 in a densely populated area of Norway. To recruit participants, I sent an open invitation to several schools in major cities and also promoted the study through my personal network, which ultimately led me to Neptune, a 13-year-old non-binary student. Since Neptune was a minor, it was crucial to protect their privacy and ensure research ethics were upheld⁵. Neptune's mother was instrumental in facilitating their participation, as she signed the electronic participation form and accompanied Neptune to our initial meetings. The pseudonym "Neptune" was chosen by Neptune themselves, referring to the God character from American writer Rick Riordan's youth novels.

When conducting qualitative research with marginalized groups, it is crucial for researchers to be self-reflective and make active decisions about which life stories to include. Loutzenheiser (2007) suggested that researchers should avoid including stories that could be used to reinforce stereotypes or dominant representations; so-called "bad data" (2007, 116). Marshall (2010) have cautioned against the use of the "victim trope" as it may inadvertently reinforce existing power dynamics. Characterizing queer youth solely as victims can undermine their sense of agency, thereby perpetuating an unproductive cycle. Therefore, it is imperative to challenge such simplistic understandings and apply a more critical lens to how we view and address the experiences of marginalized groups (2010, 67).

During my meetings with Neptune, I emphasized their right to decline answering any questions that made them uncomfortable or to withdraw from the study at any time. I recorded our conversations and stored the files on an encrypted server with password protection. After transcribing the interviews, I submitted the transcripts to Neptune for member checking and approval, following Tracy's (2010) guidelines for ensuring quality in qualitative research. Additionally, I shared the manuscript drafts with Neptune prior to journal submission. To maintain fidelity to Neptune's own words, I conducted the interviews in

English⁶ and made efforts to accurately capture their language. Meetings took place in cafés, via Zoom, and as walk-and-talks. However, when Neptune's mother invited me to their home for dinner, I raised ethical concerns about my presence potentially disrupting their everyday life. Neptune's older sister hoped that the study could bring awareness to the correct use of pronouns for non-binary individuals, while their mother acknowledged the value of the study in offering a glimpse into their lives beyond a formal interview setting. This may serve to highlight the importance of researchers conducting themselves ethically in the field and respecting the welfare of research participants and their institutions (Strike 2006).

Simultaneously, it is crucial to actively focus on the experiences of marginalized individuals and challenge the historical invisibility imposed upon those who exist outside societal norms.

Neptune's story

Through Neptune's story I aim to weave together their lived experiences and the study's theoretical underpinnings. I intentionally opted not to utilize an interview guide in our walk-and-talk conversations, providing Neptune the freedom to guide the conversation and raise topics and experiences they wished to share with me. The themes that emerged from our in-depth conversations and reflections have been organized to frame Neptune's lived experiences. In the analytic afterwork I identified four overarching themes. First, I discuss how language and terms serve to encapsulate Neptune's (non-)gendered identity. Second, I discuss the formative role of books and music in shaping Neptune's gender identity, drawing inspiration from Wittig's linguistic perspective and Gould's critique of non-heteronormative subject positions. The third theme unfolds as I explore the challenges Neptune encountered at a medical clinic while seeking gender-affirming care, aligning with Fricker's ideas of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice. The fourth theme shifts the focus to school settings, with a particular emphasis on music education. Here, I use music education as a lens to unravel the complexities of negotiating gender identity, contributing to our broader exploration of how music and popular culture may reflect possibilities for self-exploration within (or beyond) the conventional gender binary.

Encapsulating gender identity through language, terms and abbreviations

In one of our first conversations, as Neptune and I delved into the intricate language of gender-expansiveness, I posed a question to Neptune about the words and abbreviations they use to express their identity. With a moment of contemplation, Neptune explained:

I use trans [about myself] when I talk to people I don't really know. And the further people get into understanding, the more accurate I will be in my self-descriptions. I am not just trans; I am non-binary. I am gender fluid. All three of those are my umbrella terms. You could be queer, bisexual, and pansexual at the same time, you know. Different words mean different things to each individual but are also adjusted to the situation as well as who you are speaking with. Sometimes people will use terms that are more familiar to outsiders because it's just too hard to explain. But sometimes they will be forced to choose a label because people will be like "but, what are you?" which is sort of against the point. Because it's just who you are ... if you don't want to have a label then just ... tell them.

The nuances and intricacies of gender identity and sexuality are complex and multifaceted, rendering limited utility to labels in fully capturing the diversity and fluidity of human experience. Neptune's narrative underscores this point, as they spent considerable time searching for terms that resonated with their sense of self. Indeed, Lohman and Pearce asserted that "[t]rans' does not [...] have a single, fixed meaning; it instead incorporates a multiplicity of meanings that vary according to both individual and social context, and might shift over time" (2020, 73). Garrett and Palkki (2021, 37) argued that language holds significant power in addressing and acknowledging gender-expansive individuals, using their preferred pronouns. Being mis-gendered through wrong pronouns, or having to explain themselves to teachers, peers, other adults, and even other members of the LGBTQ+ community has strongly contributed to Neptune's sense of not being validated as a person. After us having a longer conversation about this they firmly stated that:

I like who I like. I guess that I need to have a label, because otherwise people will not understand me and just think that I'm weird. But there are also people in the queer community who don't go by any labels, you know.

This statement is important for several reasons. Neptune's experience of needing a label to be understood by others highlights the issue of hermeneutical injustice (cf. Fricker 2007, 159). Moreover, the pressure to have a label and explain oneself in a society that lacks understanding of diverse gender identities and expressions perpetuates ontological erasure, denying or erasing the existence and validity of certain subject positions, like the non-binary (Gould 2012; Wittig 1992). It is worth noting that the absence of cultural resources for

cisgender individuals and those who lack understanding of non-binary identities contributes to ontological erasure. This limitation hinders their ability to comprehend and recognize the existence of such identities, unintentionally perpetuating their erasure. Thus, education and advocacy are crucial in providing the necessary resources for comprehending and validating diverse gender identities (Garrett and Palkki 2021), as are various cultural resources that can provide a richer basis for grappling with one's experiences.

Developing and negotiating gender identity through literature and music

Ever since Neptune was very young, they had a strong sense of something being “not right” in terms of their gender. Having been born in the late 2000s, gender-expansive people had already gained a fair visibility and recognition in media, but Neptune still didn't have a linguistic repertoire to describe their sense of being gender fluid. In one of our meetings Neptune recollected one of their first distinct memories related to the discovery of their gender identity:

I was at the park with my big sister and her friend (...) and she was explaining [what was] testosterone shots to another friend. And I went, “Oh, that would be so cool! I would really like to be a boy. I really feel that I would be a good boy, and I feel like I would've loved to be a boy.” But then I was like, “but I would have liked get to go back as well,” you know? Because some days I feel more masculine, some days I feel more feminine, and some days I'm on the middle of the spectrum.

After the episode in the park, Neptune did research on the internet and social media to find other people who felt like them. Additionally, they found resonance from fantasy books written by Rick Riordan:

His [Riordan's] series is about Greek mythology, with the protagonist Magnus Chase.⁷ Magnus, who is pansexual, falls in love with Alex, who is gender fluid (...) which is what I am. Spoiler alert! [both of us laugh].

Books have remained an important source for resonance and entertainment in Neptune's life. In one of our meetings Neptune took me to one of their favorite places, a shop that sells anything related to fantasy genres and anime, and Neptune was eager to recommend several books to me. Later, as we were walking together Neptune spoke of a specific book, *Symptoms of being Human*,⁸ that helped them talk to their parents about their gender identity:

The book describes gender fluidity very well. It's [written] from the perspective of Riley, who is also a gender fluid person, which was something I was struggling with quite a lot before I came out, and (...) when I read those words, I was like "this makes a lot of sense, that is how I feel." I had mentioned to my dad before this that I thought that I might be trans. He has always been really open; they both [parents] have. They have always said that I could tell them anything (...). One day I went downstairs [from my room] and [I said] "mom and dad? Read this section in this book, because it makes a lot of sense to how I feel."

This excerpt highlights the important role that representation can play in helping individuals understand and accept their gender identities (Garrett and Palkki 2021, 20-21) and effectively communicate this understanding to others. Neptune's connection with literature, such as Rick Riordan's series and the book *Symptoms of Being Human*, illustrates how these texts resonate with their personal experiences and offer validation and language for expressing their gender identity. According to Breen (1998) literary texts also offer pedagogical strategies for addressing LGBTQ+-related topics:

In the literature classroom, we can disrupt 'cultural determinism' by teaching students and ourselves how to pull stories—beautiful, celebratory stories—out of the bits and pieces of stories of self-hatred, and of suffering [...], reading for renewal proves a necessary pedagogical strategy for the teaching of lesbian and gay literature." (1998, 235)

Through representation, individuals can strive to be understood not only by themselves but also by others, fostering a sense of recognition and acceptance. Neptune also emphasized the challenges and fears that can come with coming out to loved ones, even when one knows they will be accepting. This is a common experience among gender-expansive individuals (Goldberg and Kivalanka 2018; Khayatt and Iskander 2020), as the social stigma and lack of understanding surrounding gender identity can create a sense of isolation and fear of rejection.

During hard times when Neptune was struggling with poor mental health caused by gender dysphoria and others' lack of understanding and validation, they found solace and comfort through music. During our meetings, Neptune would often refer to songs they loved, many of which were from musicals and depicted fighting back from oppression and finding one's voice. One song, in particular, stood out to me – a simple tune with ukulele fingerplay and a medium-pitched voice, titled "I Wish I Were a Boy" (MJ 2020, September 10). Neptune knew the lyrics by heart and cited them while we listened to the song:

*I wish I were a boy.
Not all the time, just sometimes.
I wish I could put on eyeliner and glitter and actually look good,
And have girls whisper about me in bookshops because I look like a character from
their favorite book.
I wish I were a boy.
With dark fluffy hair that I love to mess up, and shake, and makes everyone stop and
stare.
And I wish I were a boy,
so I finally look cute in dresses and skirts and pants and suits.
And I wish I were a boy.
With a deep rock and roll voice
That makes people stop in their tracks. But I don't have that choice.
And I wish that I did because every song that I write for myself
never sounds right because it was meant to be sung by somebody else.
I'm happy being me, but sometimes I wonder:
What I would be like as the opposite gender?
Would I finally be happy being me?
Because I like being a girl
But ...*

The lyrics made me reflect upon the complex interplay between the social and cultural expectations of gender roles, the desire for self-expression and the yearning for a sense of belonging. The lyrical wish for a male persona is not a categorical longing for a fixed identity, but rather a desire for the fluidity of gender expression. I asked Neptune to reflect on why this song in particular resonated with them:

It just describes it so perfectly. Because you do want to appear different, and your voice does cause dysphoria. You will listen to recordings of yourself, and you'll be like "everyone must think that I'm feminine, because of my voice" and it's just so ... hard.

The concept of the gendered voice can be explored through two interconnected facets. Firstly, the voice holds queer potential as it operates in a "third space" between bodies and language, transcending gender and allowing for performative expressions (Jarman-Ivens 2011, 17-18). Secondly, listeners play a crucial role in reinforcing (and opposing) gendered stereotypes by

interpreting a speaker's gender based on their voice's characteristics (Garrett and Palkki 2021, 159). This highlights the subjective nature of gender perception, indicating that gender exists in the ear of the beholder. Consequently, these insights challenge the notion of an inherently gendered voice and call for a critical examination of societal norms surrounding gender and the voice as discussed by musicologists (Hansen 2022a, 36-37).

The relations between societal norms and gender stereotypes reinforced by the human voice connects with Neptune's personal experience of the challenges faced by gender-expansive individuals and the emotional turmoil caused by dysphoria. The dynamicity of gender can be observed in the song protagonist's desire to wear eyeliner and glitter, look good and be whispered about by girls in bookshops, and have the freedom to wear dresses, skirts, pants, and suits without any social constraints. These desires are not limited to any one gender but rather are indicative of a deeper human yearning for self-expression, freedom, and acceptance. Furthermore, the song speaks to the problem of essentialism in identity formation, where the self is assumed to be an immutable entity with a fixed essence. The lyrics highlight the limitations of such essentialist thinking and instead suggest that identity is a dynamic and ever-evolving process, constantly in flux. The desire to be the opposite gender is not a rejection of the self but rather an exploration of the limitless possibilities of the self. As Hawkins put it when exploring queerness in pop music: "Any divergence from norms can lead to unlimited possibilities for queering" (Hawkins 2016, 192). In this sense, the lyrics also highlight the importance of self-discovery and self-exploration in the formation of a queer identity.

Neptune found representation in music and literature that reflected their gender identity and helped them build a sense of self. Nylund (2007) emphasized that media texts provide materials out of which people create their identities, and engaging with these texts can be a powerful tool for self-empowerment. For example, Neptune's engagement with aforementioned books helps them to uncover 'queer' readings and messages that resonate with their experiences and support their identity formation. Addressing a similar issue, Nichols (2013) highlighted the pivotal role that music can play in the lives of gender-expansive students seeking community and self-expression. Music and literature can provide individuals with the tools to explore and express their gender identity, allowing for a more fluid and nuanced understanding of their identity. Neptune's relationship with "I Wish I Were a Boy" exemplifies this. The song reflects a dynamic interplay between social expectations,

personal desires, and the existential journey towards self-understanding. It is a poignant reminder of the importance of fluidity, self-expression, and the constant exploration of the limitless possibilities of the self.

Encounters with the Norwegian health system

As Neptune contemplated their gender identity, they also grappled with the physical changes that puberty would bring and the accompanying gender dysphoria. With the support of their parents, Neptune sought hormone blockers at a medical institution that provides gender-affirming care for trans individuals and is also a starting point for many teenagers with gender dysphoria seeking hormone treatment. Unfortunately, Neptune's experience at the medical institution was distressing, culminating in a traumatic encounter during which they were confronted with a form that forced them to choose between two binary gender options:

I refused to fill that out.

Having completed the rest of the form, Neptune was called in to meet the medical professionals without being able to bring their mother with them into the room:

They told me that I couldn't get the blockers because it would affect my growing and do irreversible damage on my body. I tried to argue my case, but they didn't show any interest. It was like they had decided already. I exited the room, feeling completely suicidal and in desperate need for a hug. I felt empty, finished.

Neptune's mother was then called into the same room and was told that there was no reason to give Neptune, a healthy young person, hormones that could cause irreversible damage. As their mother explained to me, "It was no use to argue. They had already made up their minds." Neptune then looked at me and stated:

I have a friend who has been through the same process. They advised me to present myself as trans to get the right treatment. I decided not to do that as I believed that they [the medical staff] would understand, which I was completely wrong about. The fact is that I can't tell right now which gender I feel at most home in. The blockers could have offered me a chance of having more time to think about it, which I find less intervening than having to undergo gender corrective surgery at a later stage. Right now, it feels as I'm running out of time.

Neptune's experience with the medical institution highlights the challenges and barriers that gender-nonconforming individuals might face when seeking medical treatment for gender dysphoria in Norway. In particular, their account prompts consideration of whether medical professionals exhibit the necessary understanding and sensitivity towards queer identities:

I think one of the major problems is that most of the people that worked there are not queer and don't know how it feels to go through every day feeling uncomfortable, feeling judged.

As I understand Neptune, the utilization of familiar labels when describing one's identity is often due to the difficulty in expressing the nuances of identity to those who may not possess a similar understanding. Furthermore, this alludes to the structural obstacles facing gender non-conforming individuals within medical systems that operate through a binary gender paradigm (Slagstad 2018; Slagstad et al. 2023). Neptune laments the lack of queer representation within healthcare spaces, and the resulting alienation of non-binary individuals within these systems. This alienation, in turn, forces individuals to confront the dichotomous choice of enduring psychological and physical distress by adhering to binary gender norms or risking social ostracization and potential violence by rejecting these norms.

Neptune's experience seeking medical advice for hormone blockers highlights the potential for epistemic injustice in the medical system. In Neptune's case, their gender-expansive identity may have been a factor in medical professionals dismissing their request for hormone blockers, thus a case of testimonial injustice. Neptune's situation highlights the complexity of medical treatment for gender dysphoria. While hormone blockers are often used to slow down abnormal growth in children and young teenagers in addition to treatment for transgender youth (see Rew et al. 2021 for an extensive literature review on the topic), their use may pose additional challenges. One concern is the potential for irreversible damage, which can result in long-term health consequences (Giovanardi 2017). This raises ethical questions about the appropriate age at which someone should be able to make decisions about their own body, especially in cases where the decision may have irreversible consequences. However, I wish to explicitly acknowledge that the aforementioned medical and ethical debate is multifaceted, and I am not attempting to prescribe what is right or wrong. Rather, I aim to illuminate both the sociocultural and medical dimensions of the debate. Additionally, it's important to note that Neptune's experiences at the clinic play a significant role in their narrative. Discussed in

nearly every one of our meetings, these experiences offer a poignant lens through which we can gain a deeper understanding of the intricacies of seeking gender-affirming care and navigating societal norms around gender identity in Norway.

Reflections on the role of schools in creating safer spaces

This theme covers Neptune's reflections on how schools can create safer spaces for gender-expansive students, emphasizing the importance of supportive educational environments. Neptune told me several stories of bad experiences in school with bullying, being pressured to undress in front of their peers in swimming class, and repeatedly having to correct teachers using wrong pronouns. Despite the multitude of bad experiences, Neptune believes that schools have the potential to play a critical role in normalizing queer identities. They emphasize that teachers, in particular, have a significant responsibility in this regard.

Schools and teachers in general can normalize using people's preferred pronouns and names. If people do that, then everyone else will follow suit. They can also include small things, like gay sex in sex education or even pamphlets outlining different resources and terminologies.

Indeed, the impact of normalizing queer identities in educational spaces goes beyond just the classroom. As Neptune mentions, it can have a profound and lasting effect on the attitudes and beliefs of future generations:

I think a common misconception is if people begin to normalize queer things in public or educational places, everything will be centered around queer people, which is not the case. Normalizing queer things in educational spaces specifically would be a great step into normalizing queer people in public. When you think about it, if you normalize queer people to an entire school, they will pass that knowledge on to their children and future generations. Suddenly, an entire group of people is supportive or at least has a mild understanding of queer people and see them as people deserving of respect and love.

This "paying it forward"-effect can help combat the lack of shared cultural resources by introducing language, concepts, and resources to young people that they can carry with them into adulthood, much in line with queer pedagogical thinking (Breen 1998; Garrett and Palkki 2021; Onsrud 2021; Røthing 2020).

I told Neptune that the new Norwegian national curriculum for the music subject contains a competence aim for 7th grade that expects the students to be able to “investigate how gender, gender roles, and sexuality are presented in music and dance in the public sphere and create expressions that challenge stereotypes” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2020a), and asked them what they thought about it. Neptune immediately asserted that:

Music teachers have a special place in this because they teach a very open form of art, which is very much able to be modeled to the student's meanings and diversities. Music is used as a tool to spread messages and can definitely be utilized in a way that is fun and inclusive.

According to Neptune, music educators have an important role to play in creating a safer and more inclusive environments for gender-expansive youth in music education. However, this requires a nuanced approach that may benefit from drawing on critical musicology to address the epistemic injustices that marginalize non-binary identities in the music world. Epistemic injustice in the context of music and popular culture arises when dominant narratives and perspectives in music exclude the experiences and contributions of marginalized groups. For gender-expansive teenagers in school settings, this can manifest as a lack of recognition for their gender identity and exclusion from musical networks and curricula, hence their ontological erasure (cf. Gould 2012). Furthermore, gender-binary structures in music classrooms and ensembles can limit the opportunities for non-binary youth to explore and express themselves through music. I find this necessary to point out, as music and arts tend to be presented as predominantly positive forces in people's lives (e.g. DeNora 1999).

To address these issues, music teachers could engage in a collaborative exploration with their students to critically examine how dominant narratives and perspectives shape music and contribute to the perpetuation of epistemic injustice, much in line with queer pedagogical thinking. In doing so, music educators can advocate for greater representation of gender-expansive and non-binary musicians and traditions within the musical repertoire used in classes. This can be achieved for example by incorporating a curated selection of music that represents or addresses gender-expansive and queer issues, as well as works created by queer/trans artists (Onsrud 2021).

The aforementioned competence aim in the 2020 Norwegian music curriculum for 7th grade could thus be interpreted as a starting point for promoting safer spaces in music classes.

However, the inclusion of gender and sexuality in music education curricula must be approached thoughtfully and critically. Music has the potential to challenge stereotypes and promote inclusivity, but it can also reinforce power dynamics that limit non-conforming identities (see e.g. Dhaenens 2016). As Neptune suggests, music educators can implement policies and practices that recognize and affirm non-binary identities, such as using gender-neutral language and pronouns and allowing students to perform music that reflects their identity and experience (Garrett and Palkki 2021, 37). It can also involve incorporating diverse perspectives and experiences into music curricula and educational materials (Peters 2016, 28), and creating opportunities for non-binary teenagers to participate in musical networks and communities. As Neptune notes:

Music can challenge boundaries and is often something a variety of people can understand. In dance, female and male roles are often blurred and can be very easily made to represent very many different things.

Concluding remarks

This study aimed to uncover how gender-expansive individuals like Neptune utilize cultural resources, specifically music and literature, as tools for understanding and expressing their non-binary identities. By examining Neptune's narrative through the lenses of epistemic injustice and the concept of ontological non-being, I have highlighted the systemic challenges faced by young gender-expansive individuals. Cultural resources such as music and books can serve as transformative tools, providing spaces for self-exploration and self-expression, allowing for the emergence of new subjectivities. In Neptune's case they have found solace in songs such as "I Wish I Were a Boy," which provides a space for them to explore their subjectivity as a non-binary person and find representation. Through listening to music, individuals like Neptune can create a space for self-exploration and self-expression, allowing for the emergence of new subjectivities. Similarly, books like *Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard* and *Symptoms of Being Human*, offer alternative ways for thinking about gender and allow for the possibility of non-binary and gender-expansive individuals to be ontologically recognized.

My goal with this interdisciplinary examination was to contribute to a multifaceted understanding of the experiences of individuals who identify outside of the normative gender binary and to seek to enrich broader dialogues on gender identity, social justice, and cultural

expressions. Additionally, community and peer support play pivotal roles in the well-being of non-binary youth. The experiences of non-binary youth are intricately shaped by ontological, epistemological, and social factors, which this study has aimed to illuminate. Further research is needed to center the experiences and perspectives of gender-expansive individuals in knowledge production. This involves creating empowering spaces for the development of their own hermeneutic practices. As researchers and practitioners, our responsibility lies in critically examining and dismantling binary norms and assumptions. Through this engagement with Neptune's narrative, this article seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the nuanced nature of gender identity and advocate for more inclusive and supportive social institutions for gender-expansive individuals.

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SAMMENDRAG

Denne artikkelen presenterer en narrativ studie av opplevelsene til "Neptune", en 13 år gammel skoleelev som identifiserer seg som ikke-binær. Som forsker innen musikkpedagogikk og queer-studier ønsker jeg å gi en nyansert og empatisk fremstilling av Neptunes historie, samtidig som jeg plasserer hens opplevelser innenfor en større teoretisk ramme som kan bidra til at (musikk)lærere og andre fagpersoner som møter barn og ungdom kan få en utvidet forståelse av kjønn i praksisene sine. Spesifikt fokuserer jeg på to dimensjoner i Neptunes historie: hens opplevelse av å leve mellom kjønnsbinariteten og hens

bruk av musikk og bøker som verktøy for selvforståelse. Jeg argumenterer for at Neptunes opplevelser kan forstås gjennom to sammenkoblede teoretiske linser: epistemisk urettferdighet (Fricker, 2007) og konseptet ontologisk ikke-eksistens (Wittig, 1992; Gould, 2012). Ved å undersøke Neptunes opplevelser gjennom disse konseptene ønsker jeg å belyse hvordan unge kjønnskreative individer ofte blir utsatt for diskriminering i en verden som favoriserer binære kjønnsidentiteter. Jeg ønsker å utforske potensialet til musikk og litteratur for å tilby identifiseringsmuligheter for kjønnskreative individer som føler seg fremmedgjort av den rådende kjønnsdiskursen. Jeg argumenterer for at musikk lærere, musikkpedagogisk forskning og musikkutdanning generelt kan bruke denne kunnskapen for å utvikle [trans- og] ikke-binært-orienterte inkluderende praksiser i musikk timer (og i skolen generelt). Det overordnede målet er å tilby en tverrfaglig forståelse av opplevelsene til ikke-binære individer og bidra til utvidede samtaler om kjønnsidentitet, sosial rettferdighet og kulturelle uttrykk.

NOTES

¹ To refer to the range of diverse gender expressions, I have opted to use the term “gender-expansive.” I have borrowed the term from Garrett and Palkki (2021), who define “... *gender-expansive* as an umbrella term to describe a broader range of gender expressions and identities” (p. 20, italics in original). However, in quoting Neptune, I will use the terminology that they personally identify with.

² Feminist philosophers such as Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray had already made significant contributions on this topic prior to Wittig. For the purpose of this article, I have opted to build on Wittig’s concept of the ontologically non-existent/disappeared. Wittig argues that gender serves as a linguistic marker of political division between the sexes, where only the feminine gender is specific, while the masculine gender represents the general rather than a distinct gender (Wittig 1992, 62).

³ Ontological non-existence is, if drawing on Wittig’s (1992) concepts, the state of being denied a subject position to engage with the world.

⁴ I am using the term “critical musicology” in this article to refer to the study of the complex interplay between music and gender, as well as to highlight the critical examination of societal power structures and the desire for transformation. While terms like feminist musicology or queer musicology also exist, I believe “critical musicology” more aptly captures the multifaceted nature of the intersection between music and social critique.

⁵ The study was approved in 2020 by SIKT, The Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research

⁶ English was Neptune’s preferred spoken language.

⁷ Magnus Chase’s relationship with Alex Fierro, a gender-fluid demigod, is a significant part of the *Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard* series by Rick Riordan. Their relationship highlights the challenges faced by individuals with fluid gender identities and the importance of acceptance and understanding in relationships.

⁸ *Symptoms of Being Human* is a young adult novel written by Jeff Garvin, which tells the story of Riley, a gender fluid teenager who creates a blog to document their experiences of being a teenager with an anonymous identity. The novel explores Riley’s struggles with gender identity, mental health, and bullying, while also highlighting the importance of self-expression and acceptance.

3

Abstract

This article investigates the potential risk of addressing topics related to gender and sexuality within Norwegian music education for primary and lower-secondary public school. I root this investigation in the theoretical framework of pedagogy of discomfort and the (2016) notion of risk in education. The article examines the unique position of music education in fostering discussions on gender roles and sexuality in Norway, emphasizing how these topics challenge traditional teaching norms and encourage critical engagement among students. Drawing on previous research and educational philosophy, the article highlights the potential risk and discomfort involved in such educational settings, proposing that navigating these challenges is crucial for developing inclusive educational practices that acknowledge and include diverse identities and perspectives. The article calls for more research to deepen understanding and improve the implementation of these critical pedagogical approaches across various cultural contexts, suggesting that music education can serve as a dynamic platform for broader social and cultural engagement.

Keywords: *Pedagogy of Discomfort, Gender and Sexuality, Music Education, Norwegian Curriculum, Risk in education*

Introduction

Since 2020, Norwegian music teachers are expected to teach about gender roles, gender expressions, and sexuality as part of the national curriculum for 7th grade. The curriculum explicitly states that the pupils should “explore how gender, gender roles, and sexuality are portrayed in music and dance in the public sphere, and create expressions that challenge stereotypes” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020b). This mandate challenges teachers to incorporate these complex and often sensitive topics into their teaching practices. This can lead to discussion, discomfort and even challenge students’ (and teachers’) cultural norms. Consider the following scenario: In a 7th-grade music classroom, the teacher introduces a music video by a contemporary artist known for their gender-fluid identity. The students’ reactions are varied—some are intrigued and curious, while others show visible discomfort. The teacher, fully aware of the emotional complexity the video might provoke, carefully guides the discussion by asking students to reflect not only on the

music but also on how it intersects with broader societal messages about identity, gender roles, and (gendered) expressions. One student raises a question about why certain representations challenge traditional gender norms, while another shows negative attitude towards the example and makes jokes. The teacher has deliberately designed the lesson to align with the curriculum's competence aims related to gender, gender roles, and sexuality in music and dance in the public sphere (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020b). However, the teacher is acutely aware of the uncertainties that accompany such discussions. There is the potential for discomfort—both for students wrestling with these themes and for the teacher who is tasked with navigating sensitive social dynamics. The situation is further complicated by the presence of a gender-expansive¹ student in the class. The teacher wonders how this student might feel during these lessons—will they feel affirmed and included, or might the conversation unintentionally spotlight them in ways that feel alienating?

These concerns illustrate the inherent risk described by Biesta (2016) when he argues that true education involves encountering the unknown and engaging with the transformative potential of learning. Both teachers and students engage in a process that is unpredictable and filled with potential for growth and conflict—hence the *beautiful risk of education* (p. 59). Biesta's notion of the risk of education is rooted in the idea of resistance, interruption, and transgression: “in order to highlight the need for resisting the idea of the learner identity as a natural and inevitable identity and for interrupting the ‘common sense’ about learning” (2016, p. 7). This allows individuals to become aware of themselves as autonomous subjects within a social context. Biesta encompasses this process within the dimension of *subjectification*, one of three dimensions, or *functions* of education in which learning takes place. According to Biesta, education should be about creating opportunities for students to encounter the unknown and to experience personal transformation (2016, p. 18). This is particularly relevant in the context of Norwegian public school music education, where the content and conduct can often challenge students' preconceived notions and cultural norms. Here, the risk lies in the unpredictability of the dialogue, the possibility of resistance, and the chance that long-held norms may be disrupted. Yet, as Biesta suggested, such risks are central to education's role in the three dimensions of qualification, socialization, and subjectification

¹ I am using the term “gender-expansive” to encompass the breadth of (non-)gendered identities. I have borrowed the term from Garrett and Palkki (2021), who define “... *gender-expansive* as an umbrella term to describe a broader range of gender expressions and identities” (p. 20, italics in original).

(2010, p. 19)—facilitating opportunities for students to engage critically with themselves, their peers, and the world around them. For the teacher, this scenario is not just about conveying curricular content but about creating a space where students can encounter difference, experience discomfort, and potentially undergo personal transformation.

In this article, I address and further Biesta's views on risk in education as I discuss the role of Norwegian music education in light of contemporary discourses related to gender and sexuality. I aim to dissect thoroughly the compatibility of addressing topics related to gender expressions and sexuality within music education to identify challenges and opportunities that may benefit music education as a field. This involves considering what risk in music education entails, whether risk is always negative, and for whom something is a risk. Additionally, I raise a range of issues concerning where the boundaries of the music education framework lie, what the Norwegian music curriculum requires of music teachers' competence, and whether music teachers themselves feel they possess this competence. As a music teacher and music teacher educator at an institution where future music teachers are trained and prepared for future work life, I see the necessity of providing teachers with better tools and support in meeting the curriculum's competence aims related to gender and sexuality. As such, I pose the following questions as the premise for this article: 1) How can we assess risk in addressing gender and sexuality in Norwegian public school music education, and 2) Which challenges and/or possibilities does such a risk entail?

Previous Research: Music Education, Gender, and LGBTQ+ Perspectives

In the last two decades, educational researchers have increasingly turned their attention to the more visible gender-expansive identities among young people and the implications for schools and education (Allen et al., 2020; Allen, 2023; Garrett, 2012; Garrett & Palkki, 2021; Onsrud, 2021; Ralston et al., 2017; Skjelstad & Ellefsen, 2024). The backdrop for these studies can be seen in relation to the growing proportion of young people in Norway and the rest of the world who identify with gender and sexuality categories beyond the binary, heteronormative framework. A 2021 survey on life quality in Norway revealed that 7% of all recipients (aged 18 to 79) identified as LGBTQ+ (Gram, 2021), with a higher incidence in younger age groups (10,8% in age group 18-24), indicating a shift in generational self-identification (Støren et al., 2020). This shift points to a broader recognition and acceptance of non-heterosexual identities

among young people. While we can study this shift among adults there is a lack of data concerning younger children, where one might speculate a similar trend.

Research has shown that music actively contributes to constructing social and gendered identities, highlighting the potential of music education to play a role in gender and sexuality education (DeNora, 2000; Garrett & Palkki, 2021; McClary, 1991/2002; Onsrud, 2015, 2021; Roulston & Misawa, 2011). Considering these gendered dimensions inherent in this field, it seems evident that music education serves as an area through which gender norms can be both reinforced and challenged. For instance, Onsrud (2015) demonstrated how music class activities provide gendered subject positions, offering students the opportunity to perform, embody, explore, and challenge specific gender norms and stereotypes (p. 71). Simultaneously, music does not only offer a space for individuals to explore and express their gender identity but can also maintain traditional gender norms and stereotypes, as supported by empirical examples from her research (p. 78). Furthering this discourse in later work, Onsrud (2021) noted an increasing influence of what she framed as the “queer turn” in popular music and advocated for leveraging popular music as a tool to develop queer pedagogy in the classroom (p. 135). This approach proposes a dynamic integration of popular music into teaching strategies, facilitating a broader exploration of gender and sexuality issues, thereby enriching students’ understanding and acceptance of diverse identities (p. 152). My interpretation is that the teacher does not create separate alternative teaching plans, but instead integrates diverse perspectives into the standard curriculum. Gould (2013) viewed this approach as a way to seamlessly incorporate queer pedagogy into everyday teaching practices; not as an alternative approach but rather as what she termed “mess mate”, integral of “standard” pedagogy (2013, p. 69).

Recent studies on incorporating sexuality and LGBTQ+ perspectives into music education often focus on how teachers can facilitate an inclusive and safe classroom environment, particularly for LGBTQ+ students (see e.g. Garrett & Palkki, 2021; Garrett & Spano, 2017; Southerland, 2018). However, there appears to be fewer studies addressing the potential discomfort and risks involved in incorporating these perspectives from the teachers’ point of view. Engaging students in discussions about gender and sexuality within the (music) classroom involves complex challenges and can often lead to discomfort. This issue was exemplified by Allen (2023) in her discussion of teaching the course “Learning Sexualities.” Allen referenced C.J. Pascoe’s book, *Dude, You’re a Fag*, and shared an incident where a

student objected to the use of the word “fag” during class discussions. Reflecting on this, Allen observed that her role as an educator aiming to challenge heteronormativity was perceived differently by the student; she was seen as someone who might be reinforcing heteronormativity by using homophobic slurs, albeit in an educational context (p. 1011).

“Why did the student get offended?”, one might wonder. As Kumashiro (2002) aptly noted, “Those who are traditionally marginalized remain outsiders, called upon as ‘experts’ to speak with their own voices and educate the norm, only to be deemed not rational because they speak from a visible (or nondominant) stand” (p. 49). Furthermore, Kumashiro pointed out, “[s]uch lessons serve to ‘Otherize’ students who cannot be engaged by a pedagogy that presumes to address the mythical norm. What this means is that critical pedagogy is helpful for challenging oppression but itself needs to be treated critically” (p. 50). Without careful attention, attempts to integrate gender and sexuality perspectives might inadvertently Otherize students, making them feel invisible. These insights underscore the complexities, risks and potential discomforts inherent in navigating pedagogical practices and the imperative to critically examine even well-intentioned inclusive approaches. Feelings of discomfort, while potentially unsettling, are not devoid of value. As teachers traverse these challenging conversations, they may have to confront their own insecurities and uncertainties about the best pedagogical approaches (as demonstrated by Skjelstad & Ellefsen, 2024). Despite teachers’ best intentions, they might express a need for more robust frameworks to guide their practice in these sensitive areas (pp. 413 - 414).

The Context of Norwegian Music Education

There are several reasons that Norwegian music education for primary and lower-secondary school serves as an interesting case for exploring the topic of gender and sexuality in the context of an educational setting. Firstly, most pupils (95.14%) are enrolled in the Norwegian public school system (Statistics Norway, 2023). Secondly, the teaching is governed by one singular national curriculum, a legislative framework that outlines educational objectives and expectations across the country (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020a; Sundby & Karseth, 2022). In practice, this means every teacher in the public school system teaches subject-related content according to the same national curriculum. Thirdly, music education in Norwegian public schools is unique internationally because it is taught as a mandatory core subject throughout primary and lower-secondary school. Fourthly, the music

subject in Norway covers a broad range of content and topics that expand beyond traditional boundaries associated with music learning, as exemplified through the subject's relevance and central values stated in the curriculum:

Music is an important subject for fostering creativity, cultural understanding, and identity development. It equips students to engage with music throughout their lives. In music classes, students develop skills in playing, singing, and dancing, creating music, and understanding a variety of expressions. The subject helps students appreciate how music originates from and contributes to cultural and social change, and it offers experiences that enhance the quality of life. Music education prepares students for participation in a social and working life that values practical and aesthetic skills, creativity, and social interaction. (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020e)

Each subject in the national curriculum consist of so-called *core elements*, *interdisciplinary topics*, and *basic skills*. Each subject also consist of various curricular *competence aims*, which are defined as learning objectives that specify what students should be able to accomplish by the end of the school year (Eurydice, 2023; Sundby & Karseth, 2022): “[C]ompetence aims are described by grade level and are formulated as learning outcomes that can potentially be measured over time. However, it appears that aspects such as ‘methods,’ ‘ways of thinking,’ and ‘forms of expression,’ along with *basic skills*, are more explicitly integrated into the *competence aims* than specialized subject knowledge should be acquired” (Sundby & Karseth, 2022, p. 10, italics in original)

For several of the school subjects, the Norwegian national curriculum's explicit competence aims direct teachers to address issues of gender and sexuality within their pedagogical practices. This emphasis is implicitly included in the clause of the Education Act (Eurydice, 2023) as well as the curriculum's core values, and explicitly stated in the defined competence aims for the various subjects. In addition to the aforementioned competence aims for the music subject, one of the competence aims for CREE (Christian and other religious and ethical education) for grade 10 states that the pupils should be “able to account for and reflect on different views on gender and sexuality in Christianity and other religions and beliefs” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020d, my translation). Another competence aim for social studies (7th grade) requires that the pupils “reflect on variations in identity, sexual orientation, and gender expression, and one's own and others' boundaries in connection with emotions, the body, gender, and sexuality and discuss what one can do if those boundaries are violated” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020c). In the context of the aforementioned competence aim for the music subject, it becomes crucial to

explore how Norwegian music teachers understand, interpret, and work with these issues in their music classes (Skjelstad & Ellefsen, 2024).

The broader context of this discussion is rooted in how music education in Norway navigates these multifaceted demands. Nielsen (1998) demonstrated how the music subject in the Scandinavian tradition operates along a continuum, with the artistic and aesthetic dimensions (*ars*) on one end and scientific and theoretical considerations (*scientia*) on the other. This framework captures the inherent dynamism in music education, where teachers draw from both ends of this continuum depending on the educational goals at hand (p. 111). Nielsen's further categorization of music education into various work forms or functions—*Reproduction* (performing, recreating existing music); *Production* (creating, composing, arranging, improvising); *Perception* (receiving auditory impressions and finding musical “meaning”); *Interpretation* (analyzing and interpreting music and expressing understanding in non-musical forms); and *Reflection* (contextualizing music historically, sociologically, and psychologically)—provides a comprehensive lens through which to understand how music is taught in Norwegian schools (1998, p. 295, table 6.1, my translation). These functions of music education align well with the broader values and principles outlined in the national curriculum (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020a), which emphasize creativity, cultural understanding, and identity development. The functions also offer varied entry points for addressing gender and sexuality within music education, whether through the critical reflection on gendered representations in popular music or the interpretation of musical works that challenge traditional norms. Therefore, understanding how these pedagogical functions intersect with the curriculum's competence aims is essential to contextualizing the risks, challenges, and opportunities Norwegian music teachers face in navigating these sensitive topics.

Dyndahl and Ellefsen (2009) furthered Nielsen's ideas about a multifaceted music subject by rethinking music didactics as “cultural didactic studies.” According to the authors, music education cannot be seen in isolation from the surrounding culture; instead, it is constituted through cultural influences (p. 15). These cultural influences are brought into the classroom by the participants (students and teacher) and through the surrounding society. This makes music education dynamic and contributes to the constitution of its identity (p. 16). Thus, Nielsen's portrayal of music education, which recognized the subject as a dynamic field characterized by the interplay of its artistic (*ars*) and scientific (*scientia*) dimensions, aligns well with Biesta's

multidifunctional view of education through the lenses of qualification, socialization, and subjectification. To understand what Biesta means by these lenses, or “domains” as he calls them elsewhere (2016, p. ix), it is necessary to understand how Biesta himself defines concepts such as “education” and “learning” when contextualizing the risk of education.

What is the risk of education?

For over a decade Biesta has challenged neoliberal trends in the modern Western school where learning is increasingly capitalized. In his publication *Good Education in an Age of Measurement* (2010) he offered an exploration of contemporary societal trends, notably the prevalence of consumerism and the logic of shopping as defining paradigms of the modern age. He unpacked how desires shape our interactions with the world, from economic transactions to political promises, and even the realm of education itself. In this context, education is increasingly treated as a commodity, with students positioned as consumers whose satisfaction is paramount (2010, p. 56). This consumer-centric approach risks reducing education to a transactional process devoid of meaningful encounters with the real world. Biesta challenged this paradigm by advocating for an education that transcends ego-logical desires and instead fosters encounters with the world, with others, and with the self. Thus, education can be understood through three functions as Biesta (2010, p. 19) put it; the qualification, socialization, and subjectification of education. Biesta suggested that:

... when we engage in discussions about what constitutes good education we should acknowledge that this is a *composite question*, i.e., that in order to answer this question we need to acknowledge the different functions of education and the different potential purposes of education. An answer to the question of what constitutes good education should therefore always specify its views about qualification, socialization *and* subjectification —even in the unlikely case that one would wish to argue that only one of them matters. [...] The three functions of education can therefore best be represented in the form of a Venn diagram, i.e., as three partly overlapping areas, and the more interesting and important questions are actually about the intersections between areas rather than the individual areas per se. (Biesta, 2010, pp. 21-22)

When Biesta (2016) introduced the concept of “the risk of education,” emphasizing that true education involves an inherent uncertainty and unpredictability, he argued that learning is not reduced to the transmission of knowledge from teacher to student but encompasses the transcending potential that lies in all educational encounters. This transformation is risky because it involves stepping into the unknown and embracing the possibility of change, both from a teacher and student perspective. In the context of Norwegian public school music

education, this risk becomes particularly pronounced. When teachers bring topics like gender and sexuality into the music classroom, they are not just teaching musical skills but also engaging students in discussions about identity, society, and self-expression. According to Biesta, since education is fundamentally social and relational, there is always a risk present in all these social encounters, just as any social interaction can go in various directions, based on what the subjects bring into the situation (p. 1). Biesta also emphasized that the teacher should be seen as more than just a co-participant or facilitator of learning, but rather that the learning process requires the teacher to bring something into the teaching situation that was not there before (p. 44). Biesta had earlier posited that education should accommodate spaces for interruption, suspension, and sustenance. In the context of interruption he specifically focused on the subjectification function of education (2010, p. 75) and posited the idea of liberating the learning and independent subject through interruption. Only then does it seem that the subject can “come into the world” with an (as I understand him) ethos of agency (p. 85). What role does the teacher play in this context, and does a pedagogy of interruption have a similarly liberating function for the teacher as an acting subject? Questions like these become relevant when addressing gender and sexuality in the classroom as these topics are deeply personal and often fraught with social and cultural tensions. By incorporating them into the curriculum, teachers take on the risk of confronting these tensions head-on, potentially facing resistance from students, parents, administrators, and even colleagues (Allen, 2023; Røthing, 2020; Skjelstad & Ellefsen, 2024).

Røthing (2020) built on Biesta’s understanding of risk when she argued for a pedagogy of discomfort as an entry to norm-critical perspectives in teaching (p. 59). The concept of a “pedagogy of discomfort,” introduced by Boler (1999), advocates for educational practices that provoke students and teachers to critically examine their values and entrenched beliefs:

A pedagogy of discomfort begins by inviting educators and students to engage in critical inquiry regarding values and cherished beliefs, and to examine constructed self-images in relation to how one has learned to perceive others. Within this culture of inquiry and flexibility, a central focus is to recognize how emotions define how and what one chooses to see, and conversely, not to see. (Boler, 1999, p. 176)

Pedagogy of discomfort thus aims to scrutinize and challenge preconceived notions and self-perceptions, especially in relation to understanding ‘the Other.’ Over the years, this approach has evolved into a framework designed to navigate discussions on social justice, diversity, and

racism—essentially pushing the boundaries of emotional comfort zones (Røthing, 2020, p. 60). The foundational premise behind a pedagogy of discomfort is the belief that discomfort is essential for challenging the status quo. Embracing uncomfortable emotions is seen as key to questioning and ultimately transforming established norms, habitual behaviors, and practices that reinforce stereotypes and maintain social injustices (p. 60). Furthermore, Røthing pointed to Norwegian studies on approaching controversial topics in the classroom that suggested teachers avoid opening up certain discussions for fear that these might take uncontrollable turns (2020, p. 59). Specifically, she referred to teaching approaches to topics such as racism, anti-Semitism, immigration, right-wing extremism, as well as transgender issues and LGBTQ-related questions (p. 59). In such cases, teachers may experience helplessness and a feeling of lacking competence, preferring instead to avoid these topics. However, equally significant is the risk of contributing to Otherize (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 33) or make a student ontologically disappeared (Gould, 2012). The risk of otherizing or making someone ontologically invisible in education could involve reducing their identity to a stereotype or marginalizing their experiences within the educational discourse. This can lead to a sense of isolation and exclusion, where the student feels unseen and misunderstood by their peers and educators. Biesta (2016) has stressed the influence education has on an individual, thus one can assume that such invisibility can undermine the student's self-worth and hinder their personal and academic development. Moreover, it perpetuates systemic inequalities by failing to challenge the dominant narratives that marginalize certain identities.

To sum up, several underlying understandings have been highlighted in the preceding sections. Firstly, previous research reveals that we have limited knowledge about the risks associated with teaching about gender and sexuality in music education specifically, and we have limited knowledge about how the teacher as a professional practitioner experiences doing this in practice. Secondly, building on Biesta's understanding of education as a multifaceted process that is entirely dependent on social encounters opens new opportunities for bringing attention to the risks inherent in engaging with questions of gender and sexuality in music education. This perspective will guide the exploration of how these encounters manifest in the music classroom, revealing the complexities and potential conflicts involved. Thirdly, by proposing that music education in the Scandinavian model should be understood and imparted as a cultural studies subject, as posited by Dyndahl and Ellefsen (2009), this article underscores the importance of viewing music education through a broader cultural lens. This approach will inform the subsequent discussion on how integrating gender and

sexuality into music education challenges traditional norms and provides opportunities for deeper cultural engagement among students.

The beautiful risk of music education

The presence of gender and sexuality perspectives in schools and society as a whole is undeniable. For the music subject specifically, they manifest in the selection of activities, instruments, genres and subject-related content (Askerøi & Vestad, 2021; Green, 2008; Hansen & Askerøi, in print; Källén, 2021; Lam, 2018; Onsrud, 2015). Furthermore, media and social media also play significant roles, exposing children and youth to various gendered impulses and expressions that consequently are brought into music classes (Ey, 2016; Onsrud, 2021; Tobias, 2014). Critical engagement with cultural expressions is essential not only for developing students' nuanced understanding of the social world but also for challenging and deconstructing stereotypes they encounter. Music education, particularly in the Norwegian context, provides an ideal platform for this exploration. Unlike some music educational traditions where the focus might strictly be on acquiring specific skills like playing an instrument or performing, Norwegian public school music education often embraces a broader, multifaceted approach to music, much in line with Nielsen's (1998) aforementioned *functions* of music education. This approach encourages students to engage with music not just as an art form but as a medium through which to discuss and reflect on societal issues, cultural heritage, and current affairs. We can see this in the context of the aforementioned ars-scientia model (Nielsen, 1998), where music education spans from aesthetic and artistic dimensions to scientific and analytical inquiries. For instance, through the function of *Reflection*, teachers may encourage students to engage in discussions and reflections related to gender roles and sexuality, completely in line with the aforementioned competence aim for 7th grade. This approach to music education helps expand our view on music education as more than just a music subject but rather as a cultural subject, effectively enhancing its didactic identity (Dyndahl & Ellefsen, 2009). The music subject is constituted by what the participants (students and teachers) bring into the educational context, and therefore carries risks inherent to interpersonal relations. In a music subject that is increasingly influenced by informal learning environments (Abramo, 2011; Abramo, 2020; Folkestad, 2006), various expressions from popular culture of different (including explicit) characters can therefore be brought into the teaching context.

Discussing sensitive topics like gender and sexuality in the classroom carries inherent risks. In the aforementioned study by Skjelstad and Ellefsen (2024), these risks included classroom challenges such as parental complaints over content deemed inappropriate, like a video showing a naked buttock, which led to an upset parent (p. 408). Additionally, managing sensitive discussions proved difficult, particularly when explicit expressions in hip-hop music elicited immature responses from students (p. 407). These examples demonstrate why integrating gender and sexuality perspectives in educational contexts can present risks and discomfort, such as in the aforementioned scenario regarding the word “fag,” presented by Allen (2023). The challenge lies not only in the subject matter itself but also in the potential reactions from students and the public, which highlights the need for careful navigation and sensitivity from teachers. Moreover, it prompts an important discussion about the relative risks associated with addressing these topics across different academic disciplines as the school’s overarching mandate is to create good citizens. Here is an excerpt from *Section 1-1* of the Education Act, “The objectives of education and training:”

Education and training must help increase the knowledge and understanding of the national cultural heritage and our common international cultural traditions.

Education and training must provide insight into cultural diversity and show respect for the individual’s convictions. They are to promote democracy, equality and scientific thinking.

The pupils and apprentices must develop knowledge, skills and attitudes so that they can master their lives and can take part in working life and society. They must have the opportunity to be creative, committed and inquisitive. (Ministry of Education and Research, 1998)

As such, schools and training establishments must meet the pupils and apprentices with trust, respect and demands, and give them challenges that promote formation and the desire to learn. All forms of discrimination must be combated. Furthermore, schools aim to qualify students to succeed in the existing society, but also to think innovatively, sustainably, and justly. Drawing on Biesta (2010), *Qualification* in this context is as much about preparing students for the unknown future as it is about training them to participate in the present. For this to be possible, students must learn to interact with others, both professionally and privately. They must learn to participate in a society where diversity includes different religious and cultural affiliations, varying degrees of physical and cognitive abilities, and a range of gender and sexuality expressions, many of which can directly contrast with certain cultural values and religious beliefs. Education should help students navigate the social field, which happens through a *socialization* process over many years. Simultaneously, the curriculum focuses on the

individual. To create good and participatory citizens, teachers must also facilitate students' growth into strong and independent individuals, arguably something teachers do daily through all interactions with students. Not least, for students to learn to interact with the social field requires them to reflect on who they are on a personal level. It is here that education gains a *subjectification* dimension.

Integrating gender and sexuality perspectives into music education provides significant opportunities for transformative educational experiences. Engaging students in discussions about these topics, where the potential for disruption and challenge is high, invites a dynamic interplay between discomfort and growth. One of the key opportunities presented by incorporating these perspectives is the ability to foster a more inclusive and empathetic classroom environment. When students engage with music that challenges traditional gender norms or explores diverse expressions of sexuality, they are not just learning about music; they are participating in a broader, critical reflection on identity and society. This reflection can lead to a more profound acceptance and understanding of diversity, both within the classroom and beyond. Nielsen's (1998) aforementioned functions of music education provide a structured framework through which these discussions can be meaningfully integrated into the curriculum. By aligning these pedagogical functions with the aims of exploring gender and sexuality, teachers can ensure that music education serves not only as a site of artistic and aesthetic development but also as a powerful tool for social and personal transformation. The transformative potential of this approach is evident when considering how discomfort, though challenging, can serve as a powerful catalyst for personal growth and social awareness.

Research has shown that students exposed to challenging content within a supportive framework often experience significant shifts in self-awareness and empathy (McIver & Murphy, 2022). This aligns with the idea that discomfort, when navigated carefully, can foster critical thinking and reflection, which are essential for developing a deeper understanding of both oneself and others. In this context, music education offers a unique opportunity to engage students in these transformative processes, particularly through creative and expressive activities that challenge normative assumptions and encourage critical reflection. As Zembylas noted, "discomforting feelings are important in challenging dominant beliefs, social habits, and normative practices that sustain social inequities and they create openings for individual and social transformation" (2015, p. 163). Quilty (2017) further emphasized that such discomfort, particularly when employed through "queerly disruptive pedagogies," can deepen students'

reflexivity and help them understand the shifting and contingent nature of their subjectivities (p. 118). The discomfort associated with confronting deeply ingrained biases and stereotypes is not merely an obstacle but a necessary part of the learning process. When students are pushed out of their emotional comfort zones, they are compelled to re-evaluate their assumptions and beliefs, leading to more nuanced and empathetic perspectives. This becomes particularly important in the context of music education, where the subject matter often intersects with issues of identity, culture, and society (Dyndahl & Ellefsen, 2009). By addressing these intersections through the lens of gender and sexuality, teachers can create a learning environment that not only acknowledges but actively engages with the complexities and challenges of these topics. Activities that encourage students to create their own musical expressions, reflecting their understanding of gender and sexuality, can empower them to use music as a tool for personal and social commentary.

The risks of avoiding such discussions are significant. Neglecting to address gender and sexuality in music education could inadvertently reinforce existing stereotypes and contribute to the marginalization of students who do not conform to traditional norms. Thus, teachers must recognize the dual nature of this “beautiful risk”: while it invites discomfort and potential resistance, it also opens the door to a more inclusive and reflective educational environment. This duality is not a limitation but a powerful aspect of education’s transformative potential, offering both challenges and profound opportunities for growth (Boler, 1999; Røthing, 2020; Zembylas, 2015).

Concluding remarks

In this article, I have explored the potential risk of integrating gender and sexuality perspectives into Norwegian music education. The notion of risk, as highlighted by Biesta (2016), underscores the unpredictable and transformative potential of educational encounters. This exploration has revealed that addressing these complex and often sensitive topics in music education involves navigating significant challenges but also holds the potential for transformative educational outcomes. The integration of gender and sexuality topics in music education inherently involves a degree of risk, as “risk” in education according to Biesta (2016) exists in the social encounters. This risk manifests in various ways, including the possibility of discomfort, resistance from students, and the potential for reinforcing stereotypes if not handled with care. However, it is essential to recognize that this discomfort is not inherently negative.

On the contrary, it can be a catalyst for critical engagement and personal growth, supporting the main aims of education of producing independent, critical and socialized individuals (Ministry of Education and Research, 1998). Music education, particularly within the Scandinavian model, offers a unique platform for discussing gender and sexuality. The subject's broad scope, encompassing performance, creation, and cultural understanding, aligns well with the goals of fostering inclusive and empathetic learning environments. Previous research has pointed out music education's connection to cultural expressions, which makes it an ideal medium for exploring diverse (gender) identities and challenging traditional norms (Garrett & Palkki, 2021; Garrett & Spano, 2017; Onsrud, 2015, 2021; Skjelstad & Ellefsen, 2024; Southerland, 2018). By linking musical content with discussions on identity and society, teachers can create learning experiences that are both relevant and transformative. This approach positions music education as a vehicle for broader social and cultural conversations, encouraging students to critically engage with the world around them. The curriculum's explicit directive for students to "explore how gender, gender roles, and sexuality are portrayed in music and dance in the public sphere, and create expressions that challenge stereotypes" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020b) underscores the potential for music education to widen cultural and identity perspectives among students, and thereby positively impact societal cohesion and tolerance of diversity in future generations.

The beautiful risk of music education lies in its transformative power. By daring to address topics like gender and sexuality, teachers do more than just educate—they can provoke and inspire. They can create safe spaces where students can explore their identities, challenge societal norms, and develop a deeper understanding of themselves and others in the context of music. While music teachers see the importance of addressing these topics, they often feel ill-equipped to do so effectively (Skjelstad & Ellefsen, 2024). This points to a critical need for comprehensive teacher training and support systems. To fully realize the transformative potential of integrating gender and sexuality perspectives into music education, concerted efforts are needed to support teachers through targeted professional development programs. Additionally, future research should focus on providing empirical evidence of implementations of gender and sexuality related topics and exploring the long-term impacts on students' attitudes and behaviors. Such research will be crucial for the continuous development of teacher education, and thus will benefit both future teachers and students.

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Appendix 1: Literature search overview

Database	Search string	Limit to	Year span	Results	Search date
ERIC (EBSCOhost)	Music Education* AND gender* OR lgbtq*	Academic journals, dissertations, peer reviewed	2001-2022	756	01-Sep-21
ERIC	“Music Education” AND “gender” OR “lgbtq”	*	1991-2022	249	*
SCOPUS	*	*	*	834	*
RILM (EBSCOhost)	LGBTQ* AND representation in media OR film OR television	*	*	9	*
IDUNN	Musikk AND kjønn*	*	2000-2022	643	10-Feb-22
IDUNN	LHBT*	*	*	67	*
ERIC	Epistemic injustice	*	2008-2022	52	*
ERIC	Queer* AND music education	*	2004-2022	18	28-Oct-22
ERIC	nonbinary* OR genderqueer* OR gender non-conforming*	*	*	40	*
ERIC/RILM	Nonbinary OR non-binary OR non binary	*	*	108	*
ERIC/RILM	Queer AND education OR pedagogy	*	2022-2024	13193	30-Jan-24
ERIC/RILM	Queer AND music education	*	*	9	*
ERIC/RILM	Norm critical pedagogy* AND music education*	*	2010-2024	3	*
ERIC/RILM/SCOPUS	music teacher education AND queer*	*	1995-2024	13	*
ERIC/RILM/SCOPUS/ACADEMIC SEARCH COMPLETE	“Queer Perspective”	*	2001-2024	15	09-Sep-24

Appendix 2: Teacher interviews guide

Musikklæreres refleksjoner rundt ny læreplan i musikk, MUS01-02 (Fagfornyelsen LK20)

Utviklet/forberedt av:
Eirik Skjelstad

Deltakerinformasjon	
Antall deltakere:	
Deltaker 1	
Navn:	
Deltaker 2	
Navn:	
Deltaker 3	
Navn:	
Deltaker 4	
Navn:	

Samtykkeinformasjon – generell informasjon	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Deltakerne er blitt informert om sine rettigheter og om hvordan dataen/personopplysninger behandles
<input type="checkbox"/>	Deltakerne har fått samtykkeerklæring og returnert denne med signatur
<input type="checkbox"/>	Forsker har presentert seg og prosjektet. Deltakerne er gjort kjent med betydningen av sin deltakelse. Praktiske spørsmål vedrørende intervjusituasjonen er avklart.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Deltakerne er påmint om viktigheten av å overholde taushetsplikt og bes unngå å referere til hendelser som kan identifisere elever

Intervjuguide	
Spørsmål	Detaljer/tilbakemeldinger/refleksjoner
Tema: Innledende spørsmål/oppvarming. Viktigheten av at lærerne tør å komme med historier og erfaringer de har gjort seg.	
Hva kan dere si om elevene dere har i musikkgruppene?	NB: Unngå opplysninger som kan identifisere enkeltelever

<p>(Hva slags elever møter dere i klasserommet?)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Er det god stemning blant dem? - Er det en gruppe med ganske like elever? - Har dere god kontakt med elevene deres? - Når er det at det blir uro? - Hvem får plass på bekostning av andre? 	<p>Diversitet - mangfold</p> <p>Kan du komme med eksempler? anekdoter?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nytt tema: utdrag fra kompetansemål 7.trinn i LK20 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hvordan kan man forstå dette? - Hva slags undervisningsopplegg kan dere lage som imøtekommer denne ordlyden? (mål 1) - Hvordan tenker dere at man kan jobbe med «å skape uttrykk som utfordrer stereotypier»? - Hvordan vil dere integrere mål 2 inn i undervisningen? 	<p>Med bakgrunn i hva de svarer, har du eksempler? noe du har sett? tanker?</p>
<p>Nytt (siste) tema: være seg selv/annerledeshet, (queerness)</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ta utgangspunkt i svar fra innledningsspørsmål om elevene. - Hva legger dere i «å være seg selv»? - På hvilke måter kan man være seg selv i musikktime deres? - Hvilke former for «å være seg selv» er greit, og hvilke er ikke greit? - Historier om elever som ved å skille seg ut har gjort et inntrykk på lærerne? 	
<p>Avslutning, tilbakemeldinger</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Andre opplysninger som kan være av interesse for prosjektet - Plukke opp temaer som kan diskuteres nærmere 	

Appendix 3: Narrative interview guide

Narrative dybdeintervju

Tema: Skeivhet og musikk, skeivhet og populærkultur

Temaet for intervjuet vil kunne variere fra gang til gang avhengig av deltakerens ønske om å snakke om visse hendelser framfor andre. Denne formen for intervju er dermed å betrakte som i lav grad strukturert, med fokus på store, åpne spørsmål og samtaler rundt enkeltopplevelser og isolerte hendelser i deltakerens liv.

Denne intervjumalen er dermed å betrakte som en hjelp i startfasen hvor jeg ennå ikke kjenner deltakeren godt. Etter hvert som vi blir kjent vil det bli lettere å snakke mer inngående om temaer som deltakeren nevner.

Dette innebærer også at jeg må ta til etterretning at veldig personlige spørsmål om deltakerens kjønnsidentitet og kjønnsuttrykk ikke vil falle seg naturlig før vi har møttes noen ganger og hen føler seg tryggere på meg.

Utviklet/forberedt av

Eirik Skjelstad

Samtykkeinformasjon – generell informasjon

- Deltaker og foresatt(e) er blitt informert om sine rettigheter og om hvordan dataen/personopplysninger behandles
- Deltaker og foresatt(e) har fått samtykkeerklæring og returnert denne med signatur
- Forsker har presentert seg og prosjektet. Deltakerne er gjort kjent med betydningen av sin deltakelse. Praktiske spørsmål vedrørende intervjusituasjonen er avklart.

Intervjuguide

Spørsmål	Oppfølgingsspørsmål/annet
Tema: Innledende spørsmål/oppvarming.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Hvilken musikk liker du å høre på?- Hvilken spilleliste på Spotify går det mest i om dagen?- Når hører du på musikk?- Hva liker du å se på TV?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Høre på musikken sammen. Få informanten til å vise fram ulike musikk via strømmetjenester.

Tema: Hverdagsliv/skole/musikkundervisning	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hva liker du å gjøre på fritiden? - Hvordan trives du på skolen? - Hva kan du fortelle meg om lærerne/vennene dine? - Hvilke fag liker du? - Hvordan trives du i musikkundervisningen? 	
Tema: Skeivhet (queerness) i musikk og populærkultur	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hvilke skeive (offentlige) personer liker du/har du et forhold til? - Hva er skeiv musikk for deg? - Hvilke skeive skuespillere kjenner du til/liket du? - Hvilke skeive TV-program liker du/kjenner du til? 	
Tema: være seg selv/annerledeshet, (queerness)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hva betyr det for deg å være skeiv? - Hvordan var det å komme ut som skeiv? - Hvordan opplever du det er å leve som skeiv i ditt lokalmiljø? - Hva tenker du om å uttrykke seg gjennom hår/klær/sminke? - På hvilke måter kan man uttrykke seg som skeiv gjennom musikk? 	<p>Det vil sannsynligvis ta tid å bygge opp tillitt med deltakeren før vi kan nærme oss disse spørsmålene, som naturlig nok har en meget personlig karakter.</p>
Tema: oppfølging	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Plukke opp temaer som kan diskuteres nærmere 	

Appendix 4: NSD approval

10/05/2021

Meldeskjema for behandling av personopplysninger

NSD NORSK SENTER FOR FORSKNINGSDATA

NSD sin vurdering

Prosjekttittel

"Inn i musikken - ut av skapet". En musikkdidaktisk-kultursosiologisk studie av skeiv ungdoms forhold til skeiv mainstream-kultur og det å finne sin identitet derunder.

Referansenummer

236191

Registrert

29.01.2021 av Eirik Skjelstad - eirik.skjelstad@inn.no

Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon

Høgskolen i Innlandet / Fakultet for lærerutdanning og pedagogikk / Institutt for kunstfag og kulturstudier

Prosjektansvarlig (vitenskapelig ansatt/veileder eller stipendiat)

Eirik Skjelstad, eirik.skjelstad@inn.no, tlf: 95224940

Type prosjekt

Forskerprosjekt

Prosjektperiode

03.05.2021 - 28.06.2024

Status

10.03.2021 - Vurdert

Vurdering (1)

10.03.2021 - Vurdert

Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen av personopplysninger i prosjektet vil være i samsvar med personvernlovgivningen så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet den 10.03.2021 med vedlegg, samt i meldingsdialogen mellom innmelder og NSD. Behandlingen kan starte.

MELD VESENTLIGE ENDRINGER

Dersom det skjer vesentlige endringer i behandlingen av personopplysninger, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til NSD ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. Før du melder inn en endring, oppfordrer vi deg til å lese om hvilke type endringer det er nødvendig å melde: <https://www.nsd.no/personverntjenester/fylle-ut-meldeskjema-for-personopplysninger/melde-endringer-i-meldeskjema>

Du må vente på svar fra NSD før endringen gjennomføres.

TYPE OPPLYSNINGER OG VARIGHET

Prosjektet vil behandle særlige kategorier av personopplysninger om seksuelle forhold og orientering, samt alminnelige kategorier av personopplysninger frem til 28.06.2024.

LOVLIG GRUNNLAG

Prosjektet vil innhente samtykke fra de registrerte til behandlingen av personopplysninger. Vår vurdering er at prosjektet legger opp til et samtykke i samsvar med kravene i art. 4 nr. 11 og art. 7, ved at det er en frivillig, spesifikk, informert og utvetydig bekreftelse, som kan dokumenteres, og som den registrerte kan trekke tilbake.

Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen vil dermed være den registrertes uttrykkelige samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a, jf. art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav a, jf. personopplysningsloven § 10, jf. § 9 (2).

PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER

NSD vurderer at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningen om:

- lovlighet, rettferdighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a), ved at de registrerte får tilfredsstillende informasjon om og samtykker til behandlingen
- formålsbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelig angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke viderebehandles til nye uforenlige formål
- dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet
- lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lengre enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet

DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER

NSD vurderer at informasjonen om behandlingen som de registrerte vil motta oppfyller lovens krav til form og innhold, jf. art. 12.1 og art. 13.

Så lenge de registrerte kan identifiseres i datamaterialet vil de ha følgende rettigheter: innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18) og dataportabilitet (art. 20).

Vi minner om at hvis en registrert tar kontakt om sine rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned.

FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER

NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1 f) og sikkerhet (art. 32).

Tjenester for Sensitive Data (TSD) er databehandler i prosjektet. NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene til bruk av databehandler, jf. art 28 og 29.

For å forsikre dere om at kravene oppfylles, må dere følge interne retningslinjer og eventuelt rådføre dere med behandlingsansvarlig institusjon.

OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET

NSD vil følge opp underveis (hvert annet år) og ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet/pågår i tråd med den behandlingen som er dokumentert.

Lykke til med prosjektet!

Kontaktperson hos NSD: Jørgen Wincentsen
Tlf. Personverntjenester: 55 58 21 17 (tast 1)

Appendix 5: Participation information for music teachers

Undersøkelse om læreres arbeid med ny læreplan i musikk (LK20)

Undertegnede er Ph.d-student ved Høgskolen i Innlandet der jeg skal forske på musikk, kjønn og identitet. Målet med undersøkelsen vil være å diskutere den nye læreplanen (LK20), mer spesifikt læreplanen i musikk (MUS01-02), der jeg ønsker læreres perspektiver på innholdet og ordlyden i denne.

For å danne meg et så autentisk bilde som mulig av dere læreres refleksjoner av temaet ønsker jeg å gjennomføre intervjuer. Disse er primært tenkt å gjennomføres i grupper på 2-4 personer (med alle Covid-19-restriksjoner ivare tatt), men det vil også være ønskelig å ha muligheten til å kunne gjennomføre oppfølgingsintervjuer som da vil være en-til-en. Du kan selvfølgelig senere takke nei til å delta i en-til-en-intervjuer selv om du har samtykket til å delta i gruppeintervju tidligere.

For å forenkle datainnsamlingen vil jeg gjøre opptak av intervjuene. Lydopptakene vil lagres som krypterte, passordbeskyttede filer i TSD (tjenester for sensitive data). Disse vil slettes når doktoravhandlingen er ferdigstilt, senest i 2024. Dersom du ønsker å delta i undersøkelsen og har lyst til å la deg intervjuet innebærer det at jeg vil bruke ca. 1 – 1 1/2 time(r) i avsatt tid til å snakke med deg/dere om læreplanen og musikkundervisning.

All data vil behandles konfidensielt. I håndskrevne feltnotater og lydopptak kan det forekomme personidentifiserende opplysninger, og slike opplysninger vil anonymiseres i den digitale skriftlige etterbehandlingen. I den ferdige avhandlingen får elever, lærere og skole fiktive navn, og alle utsagn som identifiserer enkeltpersoner og institusjon anonymiseres. Alle håndskrevne notater blir makulert innen 2 måneder etter at den praktiske undersøkelsen er gjennomført.

Intervjuene vil gjennomføres i tidspunkt som passer deg/dere i avtalt tidsrom i løpet av våren 2021. Du kan når som helst i prosessen trekke deg fra undersøkelsen. Dette gjøres i så fall direkte til meg, enten muntlig eller skriftlig. Alle opplysninger om deg slettes da umiddelbart.

Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra *Høgskolen i Innlandet, fakultet for Lærerutdanning og Pedagogikk, Institutt for Kunstfag og Kulturstudier* har NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

Dine rettigheter

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke personopplysninger som er registrert om deg,
- å få rettet personopplysninger om deg,
- få slettet personopplysninger om deg,

- få utlevert en kopi av dine personopplysninger (dataportabilitet), og
- å sende klage til personvernombudet eller Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger.

Hvor kan du finne ut mer?

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

- Min veileder Live W. Ellefsen, førsteamanuensis ved Høgskolen i Innlandet på epost live.ellefsen@inn.no
- Personvernombud hos Høgskolen i Innlandet, Anne S. Lofthus, forskningsrådgiver, anne.lofthus@inn.no, telefon 61288277
- NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS, på epost (personverntjenester@nsd.no) eller telefon: 55 58 21 17

Håper på positivt svar.

Vennlig hilsen Eirik Skjelstad,
Ph.d.-stipendiat ved Høgskolen i Innlandet

Svarslipp:

Jeg har mottatt informasjon om undersøkelsen av læreplanen i musikk, kjønn og identitet og takker ja til å delta i gruppeintervjuer og/eller personlig (en-til-en) intervju.

Jeg takker ja til å delta i personlig intervju

Jeg takker ja til å delta i gruppeintervju

Underskrift:.....

Svarslippen leveres til Eirik Skjelstad i forkant av intervjuet.

Appendix 6: information for participating queer youth and their parents/guardians

Har DU lyst til å delta i mitt forskningsprosjekt?

Hei!

Jeg heter Eirik Skjelstad. Jeg er 33 år og bor på Hamar sammen med kjæresten min Ricardo og våre to katter. Jeg stod fram som homofil da jeg var 15 år og syntes verden var ganske vanskelig da jeg var yngre. I den lille byen jeg kommer fra var det ikke mange åpne homofile (transpersoner visste man ikke engang hva var) og vi som var åpne ble mobbet mye på skolen. Det fantes heller ikke mange forbilder i media som jeg følte at jeg kunne sammenlikne meg med.



I dag jobber jeg hos Høgskolen i Innlandet der jeg tar en doktorgrad. I doktorgradsprosjektet mitt er jeg interessert i å studere hvordan unge skeive mennesker i dag tør å uttrykke sin identitet på ulike måter. Jeg er spesielt interessert i å se på hvordan økt representasjon av LHBTSIA+-personer i populærkulturen kan tilby en plattform for å kunne være seg selv og leve stolt i sitt eget uttrykk. Som musikk lærer har jeg selv tenkt mye på hvordan lærere på skolen også kan bidra til å gjøre skolehverdagen enklere for unge, skeive mennesker. Det å vite at man passer inn, at det er greit å ikke se ut som og gjøre det samme som alle andre skal være greit i skolen, synes jeg. Så langt i prosjektet mitt har jeg intervjuet musikk lærere i hele Norge om hva de tenker om kjønnsroller og seksualitet i musikk og musikkvideoer, og hvordan de jobber med dette i musikkundervisningen. Nå er jeg interessert i å snakke med deg/dere som er unge i dag!

Mitt ønske er å bli kjent med noen unge, skeive mennesker som har lyst til å snakke med meg om hvordan de fant ut hvem de var, hvordan prosessen har vært (om de har fått støtte) og ikke minst om de har hatt forbilder i populærkulturen. Jeg vil også gjerne høre om hvilke musikkvaner du har, hva du liker å lytte til, osv. Om du er homofil/lesbisk, cis-kjønnet, trans eller ikke-binær spiller ikke så stor rolle.

Hva vil det innebære å delta?

Dersom du sier ja til å delta innebærer det at vi møtes på en uformell måte og blir kjent med hverandre. Når du føler deg trygg på meg så har jeg veldig lyst til å snakke med deg om tanker, opplevelser og erfaringer du/dere har gjort deg rundt det å være den du er og ha det uttrykket du har. Jeg vil gjerne høre om artister/musikk/musikkvideoer som har vært viktige for deg. Jeg bor på Hamar, men vil komme på besøk til stedet der du bor i løpet av våren på tidspunkt vi avtaler på forhånd. Vi kan da møtes på café, gå en tur eller gjøre andre aktiviteter som du har lyst til å gjøre.

Jeg vil gjerne, dersom mulig, få lov til å ta lydopptak av samtalene våre. Det vil gjøre det lettere for meg å transkribere (skrive ned det vi snakket om) i etterkant. Lydopptakene

kommer jeg til å slette når jeg har transkribert ferdig. Jeg kommer også til å la deg få lese gjennom ting dere har sagt slik at du kan få mulighet til å be meg ta bort noe/endre på noe dersom du føler at jeg ikke har skrevet det ned på riktig måte. Dersom du synes at det er enklere å møte meg sammen med en venn/en foresatt så er det også en mulighet. Det viktigste for meg er at du føler deg trygg og vet at alt vi snakker om blir mellom oss, og at ingenting av det du forteller meg vil bli brukt dersom du ikke ønsker det.

Dersom du sier ja til å delta vil følgende skje:

- Jeg sender et mer formelt informasjonsskjema til deg og evt. foresatte dersom du er under 18 år
- Jeg sender deg lenke til et elektronisk samtykkeskjema. Dersom du er under 18 år, må foreldre godkjenne med Bank-ID. Alternativt kan jeg sende et papirskjema som kan skrives under på. Du kan NÅR SOM HELST trekke deg fra studien uten å måtte forklare noe eller oppgi grunn. Dersom du helst ikke vil si ifra selv kan du be noen gjøre det for deg og jeg kommer ikke til å stille noen spørsmål. Dersom vi er i gang med intervjuene kommer jeg i så fall til å slette alle opplysningene jeg har samlet.
- Vi avtaler når det passer å møtes, om du ønsker å møtes med en venn eller foresatt og hva du har lyst til å gjøre.
- Jeg ser for meg at vi møtes 3-4 ganger i løpet av våren/forsommeren på sted/tidspunkt som passer for deg, og at møtene våre varer i et par timer (men igjen - jeg er fleksibel)

Dersom dette høres interessant ut så håper jeg å høre fra nettopp deg! Kanskje dere er to venner som har lyst til å delta? Dersom norsk ikke er morsmålet ditt så kan vi også snakke engelsk.

Dersom du og/eller dine foresatte er interessert i å vite mer så håper jeg dere ikke nøler med å ta kontakt med meg. Jeg kan nås på følgende plattformer:

Tlf/SMS: 95 22 49 40

e-post: eirik.skjelstad@inn.no


Facebook: Eirik Skjelstad

Vennlig hilsen

Eirik Skjelstad



Eirik Skjelstad



This dissertation explores the significance, potential, and challenges of integrating gender and sexuality perspectives into music education within the 2020 Norwegian national curriculum for primary and lower-secondary schools (LK20). The curriculum introduced new competence aims, including one in music requiring pupils to “investigate how gender, gender roles, and sexuality are presented in music and dance in the public sphere, and create expressions that challenge stereotypes.” This thesis examines how teachers approach these topics, the challenges they face, and the role music plays in the identity construction of gender-expansive youth, highlighting the importance of informal music education. The research questions are: What can a queer perspective offer music education? How can gender and sexuality perspectives be integrated into Norwegian music education, and what challenges and possibilities arise?

Through three articles, the dissertation addresses these questions. Article 1 analyzes teachers’ interpretations of the competence aim and their experiences, using interpretative repertoires to explore ideological dilemmas. Article 2 focuses on a non-binary thirteen-year-old’s experiences, showing how music facilitates identity negotiation. Article 3 offers a philosophical discussion on educational “risk” (Biesta, 2016) and the uncertainties of addressing gender and sexuality in music education.

The theoretical framework combines queer/gender theory and Bildung-oriented approaches, using qualitative methods like interviews and a narrative case study. Findings indicate that music education often reinforces heteronormative frameworks but also holds transformative potential. The dissertation advocates a queer perspective that embraces risk, uncertainty, and subjectification, contributing to a reimagining of music education within the Norwegian curriculum.