

# NEGOTIATING MUSICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL AGENCY IN A LEARNING COMMUNITY

- A CASE OF REDESIGNING A GROUP PIANO  
**VAPAA SÄESTYS** COURSE IN MUSIC TEACHER EDUCATION

**INGA RIKANDI**





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EDUCATION**

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## Abstract

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The purpose of this study was to design a learning environment in group *vapaa säestys* (VS) within the context of music teacher education that supports the development of students' musical and pedagogical agency, which is seen as the main goal of music teacher education. VS is a student-centered subject that concentrates on piano improvisation and accompaniment and playing by ear and from chord symbols, with emphasis on the process of music making and learning. It is most often studied with the piano, and the majority of tuition is offered in the form of one-on-one lessons. All music education students of the Sibelius Academy study VS for at least three years, of which only the first year studies (VS1) takes the form of group tuition. As a teacher of VS in higher music education, my motivation for embarking on this study was underpinned by my own experiences of teaching VS in a piano laboratory setting, which triggered a need to evoke change in this specific environment.

The rationale for this study arose from the acknowledgment that, despite its student-centered goals, the student and his or her experiences is often neglected in VS1, which fails to take account the special characteristics of group tuition. In addition, VS1 usually focuses solely on musical issues and is not seen to have any pedagogical value. As a result, the VS1 course in the piano laboratory can be viewed as a badly designed learning environment; the curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment are mis-aligned with both the goals of VS and the goals of music teacher education. Through this investigation, I address this issue by aiming to design a learning environment that helps to align VS1 practices.

Working in a pragmatist framework, and adopting a sociocultural view on learning, this study is situated in the field of practitioner inquiry as a form of *generating knowledge for practice from practice*. At the core of this inquiry is a project where I held a dual role as the teacher-researcher. The inquiry took place in two cycles of academic years, and it was carried out in collaboration with the participants with the aim of improving shared educational practices. Although the context of the study was local, wherein the general aim was to develop this particular context in terms of better teaching and more effective learning, the study also aims to broaden the understanding of the ways in which instrumental courses in higher music education might contribute to the growth of music teachers and pedagogues.

I collected data by using various sources and methods during the two cycles of the inquiry, including: a teacher's research diary, videotaped lessons, videotaped exams, audio recorded group discussions, audio recorded feedback from colleague teachers, student essays, and individual follow-up interviews with students. The analysis in turn combines two approaches: narrative analysis and data driven qualitative content analysis. Using the narrative approach and triangulating various data sources, I construct three Vignettes as points of reference when discussing how the negotiated process of redesigning the VS group course as carried out by the members of the learning community – the students and the teacher-researcher – changed the course in terms of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. I use data driven qualitative content analysis to analyze how the students articulated their experiences of musical and pedagogical agency in this learning environment, which was designed to facilitate collaboration in and as a learning community. Based on these accounts, I then proceed to discuss the kind of structure that would support the development of students' reflexive musical and pedagogical agency in group VS, within the context of music teacher education.

The findings of this study suggest that a learning community can be an important asset in music teacher education and in VS, because a learning community, once formed, starts to contribute to the process of teaching and learning by engaging in creative knowledge creation. Importantly, I found that being able to alternate between and explore different positions in the community (e.g. student, teacher, policy maker, researcher) was an important tool in building agency for both the students and the teacher-researcher. A significant outcome of the study was an increased level of reflection demonstrated by the students with regards to their musical and pedagogical agency. This reinforces the need for music teacher education students to acquire various diverse teaching and learning experiences as part of their education. The findings of this study also reinforce the need for music teacher education to align its curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment with the overall goals of the program, not only at the general level of the program but also at the level of individual courses situated in that program, as in the case of the VS1 course.

**Keywords:** Music teacher education; piano pedagogy; practitioner inquiry; vapaa säestys; group piano; narrative inquiry; musical agency; collaborative learning; learning community.

## Tiivistelmä

Rikandi, Inga. 2012. Neuvottelu musiikillis-pedagogisesta toimijuudesta oppimisyhteisössä – Tapaustutkimus vapaan säestyksen ryhmäopetuksesta musiikkikasvattajien koulutuksessa. Sibelius-Akatemia. *Studia Musica* 49. Väitöskirja. 178 sivua.

Tässä tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan vapaan säestyksen (VS) ryhmäopetusta musiikinopettajakoulutuksessa. VS on oppilaslähtöinen ja oppilaan tarpeisiin mukautuva, musiikin prosessiluonnetta painottava oppiaine, joka pitää sisällään mm. improvisaatiota, säestämistä sekä korvakuulolta tai sointumerkeistä soittamista. Valtaosa vapaan säestyksen opetuksesta on yksityisopetusta. Sibelius-Akatemian musiikkikasvatuksen koulutusohjelmassa vapaata säestystä opiskellaan vähintään kolme vuotta, joista ainoastaan ensimmäisen vuoden opinnot (VS1) ovat ryhmäopetusta pianolaboratoriossa.

Työn tutkimusintressi nousi tutkijan omista vapaan säestyksen ryhmäopetuksen opetuskokemuksista musiikinopettajakoulutuksessa. Lähtökohtana oli tilanne, jossa pianolaboratoriossa tapahtuvassa opetuksessa ei huomioitu opettajakoulutuksen eikä ryhmäopetuksen erityispiirteitä. Opetus perustui yksityisopetuksesta nousevaan pianopedagogiseen perinteeseen ja pedagogiset kysymykset oli rajattu opetuksen sisältöjen ulkopuolelle. Kurssin opetussuunnitelma, pedagogiikka ja arviointi eivät tukeneet toisiaan eivätkä vastanneet musiikinopettajakoulutuksen tai vapaan säestyksen laajempia tavoitteita. Koska musiikillisen ja pedagogisen toimijuuden tukeminen nähdään tässä tutkimuksessa musiikinopettajakoulutuksen tärkeimpänä tehtävänä, tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli kehittää sellaista oppimisympäristöä vapaan säestyksen ryhmäopetuksessa, joka tukisi sekä osallistujien musiikillisen että pedagogisen toimijuuden kasvua.

Tutkimus sijoittuu pragmatistiseen viitekehykseen ja pohjautuu sosiokulttuuriseen oppimiskäsitykseen. Lähestymistapa on toimintatutkimukseen läheisesti sidoksissa oleva *practitioner inquiry*, joka pyrkii tuottamaan tietoa käytännölle käytännöstä ja jossa tutkija toimii sekä opettajana että tutkijana. Aineistonkeruu tapahtui kahdessa lukuvuoden mittaisessa syklissä, jossa opiskelijat ja tutkija-opettaja pyrkivät yhteistoiminnallisesti kehittämään jaettuja opetuksellisia käytäntöjä. Vaikka tutkimuksen konteksti on paikallinen ja sen ensisijaisena tavoitteena on kehittää paikallisesti jaettuja opetuksellisia käytäntöjä, se pyrkii myös laajentamaan ymmärrystä siitä, mitä annettavaa yksittäisillä instrumenttiopetuksen opintojaksoilla voi olla musiikinopettajakoulutukselle.



Tutkimuksen aineisto muodostuu tutkija-opettajan päiväkirjasta, videoidusta opetuksesta ja tenttitilanteista, äänitetyistä ryhmähaastatteluista, kollegapalautteista ja henkilökohtaisista haastatteluista sekä opiskelijajesseistä. Analyysissä hyödynnettiin narratiivista analyysiä ja aineistolähtöistä laadullista sisällönanalyysiä. Narratiivisessa analyysissä trianguloitiin eri aineistoja, joiden avulla luotiin kolme kehystarinaa (*vignette*) kuvaamaan oppimisyhteisön neuvotteluprosessia kurssin kehittämisen aikana. Kehystarinoista analyysi laajenee kirjassa tarkastelemaan, miten opiskelijoiden ja tutkija-opettajan neuvotteluprosessi muutti VS1-kurssin opetussuunnitelmaa, pedagogiikkaa ja arviointia. Aineistolähtöisen laadullisen sisällönanalyysin avulla puolestaan tarkastellaan miten opiskelijat artikuloivat kokemuksiaan musiikillisesta ja pedagogisesta toimijuudesta oppimisympäristössä, jonka tavoitteena oli tukea toimintaa oppimisyhteisössä ja -yhteisönä. Näihin tuloksiin perustuen työ hahmottelee rakenteita, jotka tukevat musiikillisen ja pedagogisen toimijuuden kehittymistä vapaan säestyksen ryhmäopetuksessa musiikkiopettajakoulutuksen kontekstissa.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että oppimisyhteisö voi olla tärkeä voimavara musiikinopettajakoulutuksessa ja vapaan säestyksen ryhmäopetuksessa, koska oppimisyhteisön on mahdollista luoda uutta tietoa yhteistoiminnallisesti ja siten edistää oppimisprosesseja. Tässä tutkimuksessa yhteisön tiedon luomisen prosessin mahdollistamisen ja toimijuuden kasvun kannalta oli tärkeää, että oppimisyhteisön jäsenet pystyivät joustavasti vaihtelemaan positioita yhteisönsä sisällä (opettaja, oppilas, kehittäjä). Positioiden vaihtelevuus edesauttoi sekä yhteisten käytäntöjen ja tiedon luomista että musiikillis-pedagogisen toimijuuden rakentamista. Tutkimuksen yhtenä tuloksena oli opiskelijoiden lisääntynyt reflektiivisyys suhteessa musiikilliseen ja pedagogiseen toimijuuteen. Tulokset viittaavat näin ollen siihen, että opettajakoulutuksessa opiskelijoiden on tärkeä saada mahdollisimman monipuolisia omakohtaisia kokemuksia sekä oppimisesta että opettamisesta opintojensa aikana. Tulokset osoittavat myös, että musiikinopettajakoulutuksessa on syytä tarkastella yleisiä tavoitteita, opetussuunnitelmia, pedagogiikkaa ja arviointia sekä koulutusohjelman että yksittäisten kurssien tasolla.

**Avainsanat:** musiikinopettajakoulutus; pianopedagogiikka; practitioner inquiry; toimintatutkimus; vapaa säestys; pianon ryhmäopetus; narratiivinen tutkimus; musiikillinen toimijuus; kollaboratiivinen oppiminen; oppimisyhteisö.

## Acknowledgements

Staring at the endless list of names I wanted to include in this section, my mind kept returning to Richard Sennett's (2012, xi) remark about lists of acknowledgments becoming like telephone directories. He was clearly right. However, I feel that my extensive list is well founded, since it rises from the acknowledgement that my ideas and work are the result of an ongoing, endless web of collaborations. The format of acknowledgements that stems from an individualized, centered view of the production and ownership of ideas does not really fit the nature of this work. I therefore want to start by stating that it is impossible to acknowledge each moment, occasion, community or individual who contributed to this dissertation, knowingly or unknowingly, yet I am grateful to you all.

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Inga Rikandi

June 2012



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# Intro



I am not sure exactly what I was expecting when I started teaching the group *Vapaa Säestys I*<sup>1</sup> course for first year music education students in the piano laboratory of the Sibelius Academy. Whatever it was, it was not what I eventually encountered. With years of experience in piano and *vapaa säestys* teaching in various settings, ranging from music schools to in-service teacher training, I had a general sense of confidence in my teaching abilities when I began the class. In addition to having mastered the content of the course, I also felt I knew how to share it in a well-structured, student friendly, and musically versatile manner. And yet, after teaching the same course with the same overall content for several years, the more time I spent teaching in the piano laboratory, the more something seemed to be off. To be blunt, I did not enjoy teaching that particular course, and the students did not seem to appreciate or enjoy it as much as I would have wished. The inspiration for my study comes from this realization. I enjoyed teaching *vapaa säestys*, and I felt that I was a competent teacher; however, I was faced with the reality of this course, one that neither fitted with my conception of *vapaa säestys* as a subject that inspires students to learn, nor related to my self-image as a versatile, exuberant teacher. Having arrived in this situation, I felt a need to reflect on the reasons why the course did not function particularly well, and what I could do to make it work better.

As I looked back, the first thing that I realized was that even though I was teaching a group of students in the piano laboratory I was basically relying on a one-on-one teaching approach. During the course the students would spend the better part of the lessons rehearsing privately by using headphones, and the course ended with an individual examination of each student in front of an examination board. Also, as the teacher I provided most of the musical material used in class, and ended up spending a lot of time instructing students individually. As a result of these factors - although they were technically studying as a group within the same space - the students had virtually no communication with each other during the lessons. In addition to the fact that the course description seemed to envision this sort of relationship, the physical setting and layout of the piano laboratory itself promoted and facilitated this type of practice: each student had her own keyboard situated facing the teacher, a set of headphones, and a microphone for talking only to

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<sup>1</sup> *Vapaa säestys* is a primarily Finnish (and Scandinavian) form of studying piano that does not have a well-established translation into English, although the terms “free piano”, “keyboard accompaniment”, “practical accompaniment”, “practical piano skills”, “secondary piano”, and the direct translation “free accompaniment” are sometimes used. *Vapaa säestys* is a discipline that concentrates on piano improvisation and accompaniment, playing by ear and from chord symbols. The emphasis is on the process of music making and learning. In principle it is not bound to any particular musical style, although it often draws on various pop and rock styles. *Vapaa säestys* is most often studied with the piano. However, it can also be studied with the guitar, the accordion, or the kantele - in other words, instruments that can produce melody and harmony simultaneously. In this study, the discussion is limited to *vapaa säestys* as a subject for the piano. The majority of *vapaa säestys* tuition is offered in the form of one-on-one lessons. For a more detailed account, see Section 1.2.

the teacher, while I was positioned in front of the class behind a huge desk that held a keyboard, a computer, several players for different formats, and a mixing console that controlled all the student keyboards. All in all, my approach to group teaching was a rather conservative adaptation of the traditional master-apprentice model, which did not function particularly well and furthermore did not even suit the concept of *vapaa säestys*.

I thus realized that I needed to question my preconceptions of this setting in order to recognize better the potential knowledge, know-how, and interests brought to the piano laboratory by the students. This in turn led me on a two-year journey of redesigning *vapaa säestys* group studies in Sibelius Academy's music teacher education program *in collaboration* with my students. The inquiry, which then became my doctoral study, began by examining the social aspects of learning taking place in a group setting, in this case in the context of the piano laboratory. However, the process of collaboration with the students transformed an investigation of the social aspects of learning into an exploration of learning as a social phenomenon more generally, thus bringing about the need to examine the practices of the piano laboratory as a pervasively social endeavour.

Working from this starting point, one of the main goals of the study was to promote a transition from one-on-one methods to more collaborative working methods. In trying to transform the participants of the *Vapaa Säestys 1* course – 6 to 8 students and the teacher – from a group of individual people into what I would come to call a learning community, I found support in Etienne Wenger's (1998/2003) social theory of learning, which stems from the pragmatist tradition of John Dewey and has been further developed in terms of group creativity by thinkers like Keith Sawyer (2007, 2011). In the light of the ideas of these and other thinkers, I started viewing learning as a type of participatory work within a community. From this perspective, the goal of my inquiry was not merely to encourage the music education students to take a more active stance in their learning as individuals, or simply to facilitate communication between the students in group lessons, but rather to engage the students in the actual process of creating their own learning environment. Two learning communities were formed during the course of the study, over the academic years 2008-2009 and 2009-2010.

Subjecting my own pedagogical actions to collaborative reflection also unavoidably broadened the investigation of the *Vapaa Säestys 1* course to include pedagogical reflection as a part of the curriculum. Before the study, the course had focused solely on developing musical skills and no attention was paid to supporting the students' growth into reflexive music teachers - despite the fact that the course was a part of the music teacher education

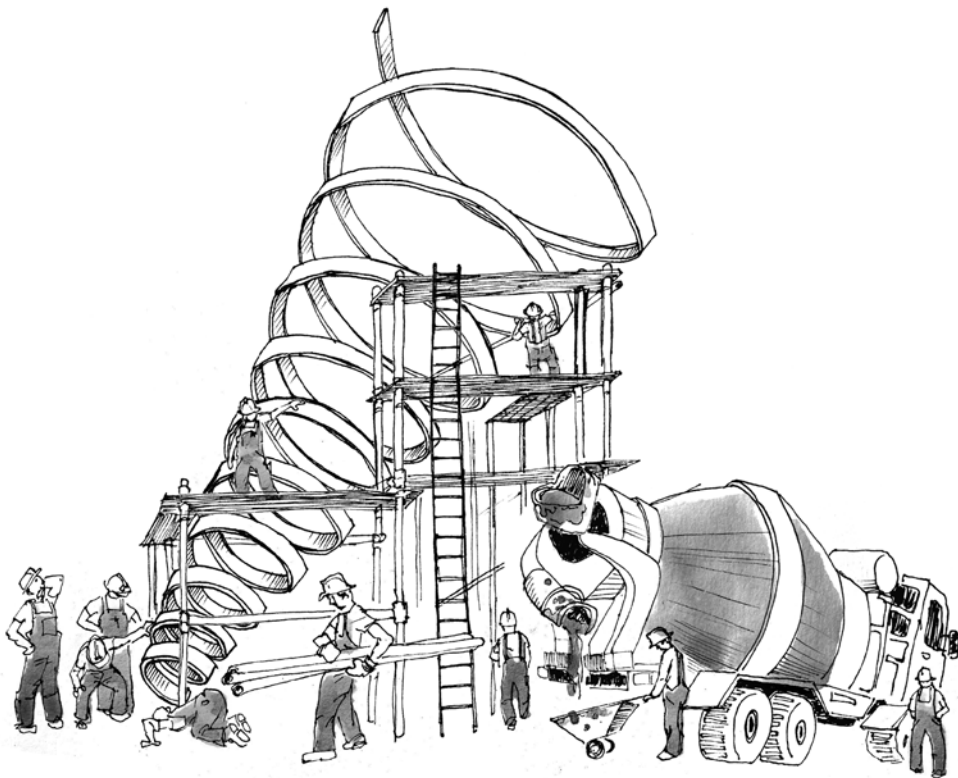
program. Raising these issues of individual and community learning within the course, and promoting shared reflection supporting both the students' musical and pedagogical development, thus became the main objective of the study.

In this book I share with you the ups and downs of the process of the inquiry, and the consequences it had on all of us participants as well as on the practices of *vapaa säestys* group teaching in the Sibelius Academy. Throughout this study I will use an image of the inquiry as a spiral to illustrate how its different aspects – methodological, temporal, contextual, and conceptual – relate to the whole. Also, a visual storyline, *the story of the spiral*, frames each chapter. The visual storyline was developed in close collaboration with and drawn by visual artist Lissu Lehtimaja, and it is an essential part of the design of this study.





# 1 Theoretical lenses and the context of the inquiry



As explained in the Intro, my interest in research arose from personal teaching experiences that triggered both a need to evoke change in a specific pedagogical environment and a need to change my own behaviour as a teacher. By initiating change, I hoped to alter the dynamics of teaching and learning so as to enable the students to attain spaces and positions that would subsequently allow us to develop the learning environment collaboratively. As Westerlund and Karlsen (*forthcoming*) have argued, the transformation of teaching practice from a private activity - with many of its aspects invisible and implicit - into a locally public activity - with many of its aspects visible and explicit - opens teaching practices to discussion and critique by others. By opening my teaching practices to a dialogical process with the students, this inquiry began with a dream of empowering both the students and the teacher, myself, in the process.

Starting from this point, my study builds on a combination of theoretical contributions from pragmatist educational thinking (e.g. Dewey 1916/2007, 1938/1997; Westerlund 2002), recent sociocultural learning theories (e.g. Wenger 1998/2003; Paavola & Hakkarainen 2005; Hakkarainen *forthcoming*) and their application in music education (e.g. Barrett 2005, 2009; Karlsen 2011), as well as critical educational thinkers (e.g. Freire 1970/2006, Giroux 1988; Shor 1992; hooks 1994, 2003). In spite of several differences, most of these theories and approaches are engaged in attempts to redefine and reassess the relationships between knowledge, practice, theory and experience – a goal that is at the very core of this inquiry.

## **1.1 Inquiry as stance**

The general approach of this study is best described as belonging to the realm of practitioner inquiry. My decision to adopt this general approach was guided by my beliefs regarding the nature of knowledge (epistemology) and the nature of reality (ontology) (Stanley & Wise 1993; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Cochran-Smith 2003; Cochran-Smith & Lytle 2009). Although these beliefs may be made explicit independent of one's approach, this seems even more important in teacher research, where the researcher plays the dual roles of practitioner and researcher, and where the lines between those who know and those who are studied are blurred (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 2009, p. 338). In other words, the epistemological and ontological starting points of this study are intimately connected with the methodological choices. This chapter articulates these choices from a theoretical point of view, while Chapter 2 describes the methodological approaches used to generate, analyse, and present the data.



The concept of practitioner inquiry as stance, as applied by Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle (2009), emerges out of the dialectic and synergy of inquiry, knowledge, and practice. It intentionally blurs theory and practice, knowing and doing, conceptualizing and studying, analysing and acting, researchers and practitioners, and public and local knowledge. As a common label encompassing a variety of methodological choices in educational research, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (ibid.) conceptualize practitioner inquiry as including action research, teacher research, self-study, the scholarship of teaching and learning, and the use of teaching as a context for research. My study is built on the idea of engaging in sustained inquiry into my own teaching practices and the students' learning processes, and it started from an assumption that it is impossible to divorce the self either from the research process (e.g. Stanley & Wise 1993) or from educational practice. Therefore, my journey of overcoming routines and set habits as a practitioner by working as a member of a learning community represents an integral part of the inquiry, one that includes aspects of self-study as well as the scholarship of teaching and learning. (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 2009, pp. 39-40.)

Liz Stanley and Sue Wise (1993) already argued twenty years ago that personal is political within the research experience as much as with any other experience, meaning that systems and social structures can best be examined and understood through an exploration of relationships and experiences within everyday life (p. 63). They called for recognizing the importance of the presence of the researcher and her personal experiences in all research (p. 157), claiming that the researcher's experiences and consciousness should be involved in the research process as much as in life (p. 58). Following their ideas, and those of many qualitative researchers since then (e.g. Barone 2001; Kemmis 2006; Riessman 2008; Cochran-Smith & Lytle 2009) I see inquiry as being possible only through the medium of one's experiences.

Acknowledging one's partiality and subjectivity is especially important in the field of music education inquiry. The vast majority of music education researchers possess embodied experiences of music going back decades, as well as a background in studying and teaching music in various settings. Most music educators start their research already ingrained with conceptions of what constitutes good and bad teaching and assumptions about learning based on our personal experiences, thus projecting our own past into the future of our prospective students. Conducting research with this level of admitted personal involvement makes claims of absolute objectivity pointless. Faced with this dilemma, I chose to take the pragmatist stance (Biesta & Burbules 2003) that the alternative to objectivity is not relativism, but intersubjectivity; we live and act together

in an intersubjective world for which we share a responsibility (p. 108). In line with this train of thought, I aim to make my own experiences of the research process explicitly present in this study in as transparent a way as possible for the reader, by reporting who I am, how I experienced the inquiry, and how this impacted what I saw, did, interpreted, and constructed (Stanley & Wise 1993, p. 60).<sup>2</sup> Through this study, I aim to provide the reader with an organic fusion of the temporal occurrence of events and the logical development of an argument (ibid. 152). However, it is worth keeping in mind that what you are now holding in your hands has been written in the fourth year of the inquiry, while the research questions, theoretical views, and methodological approach developed and came into focus over a process of those four years.

In addition to letting go of the traditional perspective on objectivity, I also abandoned the modernist quest for absolute knowledge. This connects my study to the broad spectrum of postmodern and feminist epistemologies that seek out and celebrate meanings that are partial, tentative, incomplete, even contradictory, and originating from multiple vantage points (Lyotard 1979/1984; Greene 1988; Stanley & Wise 1993; Barone 2001; Minnich 2005). I especially concur with Biesta and Burbules (2003), who argue that in discussing the problems of contemporary educational research we can draw on Deweyan understanding of knowledge and action, since Dewey's philosophical account is ultimately motivated by an attempt "to restore rationality, agency, and responsibility to the sphere of human action". (p. 22.) Dewey (1910/1997) claimed that information cannot be accumulated apart from use and then later on be freely employed at will in thought. (pp. 52-53.)

In the same spirit, educational theorist Etienne Wenger (1988/2003, p. 220) sees information that does not contribute to an identity of participation as remaining alien, literal, fragmented and unnegotiable. To Wenger, what makes information knowledge and what makes knowledge empowering is the way in which it can be integrated with participation. Importantly, Dewey also argued that although action is a necessary condition for knowledge, it is not a sufficient one; in addition, we need thinking or reflection. It is this combination of reflection and action that leads to knowledge. (Dewey 1910/1997; Biesta & Burbules 2003.) Dewey's understanding of knowledge in general thus supports the view that education is a thoroughly human practice in which questions about how are inseparable from the whys and what fors. It is in this pragmatist manner that action and reflection are used in this study as tools for striving towards better educational practices.

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<sup>2</sup> Following the ideas of Stanley and Wise (1993, p. 150), in this inquiry the personal idiosyncrasies, 'confusions', and 'mistakes' of research are not considered as confusions and mistakes, but as an inevitable aspect of research.

As an educational inquiry, the goal of this study is to enhance meaning rather than reduce uncertainty<sup>3</sup> (Barone 2001; Dressman 2008). My pedagogical practices have emerged from a mutually illuminating interplay of critical, feminist, holistic, and dialogical pedagogies. These educational theories all emphasize the political aspect of teaching and learning as knowledge creation, as well as the implications for the distribution of power and resources in society that are inherent in all knowledge creation processes and products (e.g. Freire 1970/2006; Giroux 1988; hooks 1994, 2003; Brydon-Miller & Maguire 2009). At the same time, these educational theories also resonate with sociocultural approaches by treating the participants in the process of learning (students and teachers), with their range of experiences, as the starting point for teaching and learning. In this study, I make use of these educational ideas to examine how redistributing power-relations changes the context of group vapaa säestys teaching, both from the point of view of the teacher and that of the students.

While working within an overall pragmatist framework, this study draws on several related theories that all view theory, experience, practice, and research as inextricably interwoven. In what follows, I will use these ideas as tools for approaching and addressing specific issues that arise from the inquiry. This study should thus be understood as a fusion of experiences, theory, research, and practice, with each element being involved in the development of the rest and *vice versa*.

## 1.2 Conceptualizing vapaa säestys (VS)

Vapaa säestys, hereby referred to as VS, is a well-established subject in Finnish music education, and VS in its different forms can be studied throughout all levels of music education. VS can be studied as the main subject or as a secondary instrument. The primary responsibility for developing the subject on a nation-wide level lies with The Society of Vapaa Säestys Teachers (Vapaan säestyksen opettajat ry), formed in 2004 (Vapaa Säestys 2012). Taken literally, vapaa säestys translates into English as ‘free accompaniment’. The concept is somewhat unfortunate and misleading, since playing VS is rarely completely free (*vapaa*) of limitations in style or musical form, and it does not necessarily include any accompanying (*säestys*). Indeed, VS can also be practiced as a form of solo piano, in which case playing with elements from different musical styles, improvisation, and making one’s own arrangements is an essential part of it. Subsequently, the concept of what exactly comprises VS is rarely agreed upon, even among people who practice and teach it.

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3 Barone (2001, p. 152) calls this the epistemology of ambiguity.

During the last twenty years, VS has expanded its turf from being a form of developing practical piano skills in music teacher education to being a widely popular subject in extra-curricular music schools<sup>4</sup> across Finland, where VS teaching is guided by the National Core Curriculum for Basic Arts Education in Music<sup>5</sup> (Opetushallitus 2002). The phenomenon has changed considerably over this time, causing a great deal of debate and confusion about what VS is or is not. The subject has especially interested music education students, who have produced well over 30 master's and bachelor's theses about the subject<sup>6</sup>. Although this discussion is ongoing, VS is nevertheless still a primarily oral tradition, and there is no research on it past that of the master's level. In the following, I will examine VS from two pedagogical angles, based on discussions with experienced VS teachers such as Esa Helasvuo and Carita Holmström<sup>7</sup> as well as my own experiences: firstly, VS as an emancipatory subject; and secondly VS as a counterhegemonic force. These pedagogical angles are constructed in order to help to understand the context and the challenge of this particular study.

## **VS as an emancipatory subject**

While not unequivocal, the word 'free' is essential in discussing VS. Although 'free' in this context neither means freedom from musical style or form, nor does it refer to idioms such as free jazz or free improvisation, it does entail an aspiration towards a freedom of musical expression as experienced by the person involved in practicing VS. What is generally agreed upon is that VS always stems from the person who is involved in the act of making it, in this sense mirroring the musical agency of the individual, whether through

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4 Formal music education in Finland takes place mainly in two separate arenas. Firstly, education takes place in schools through general music education that is compulsory for every child. Secondly, it takes place through extra-curricular music studies in music schools that are made easily accessible for everyone. This latter arena includes individual one-on-one instrumental studies and the more traditional conservatory approach in music education. Both institutional forms of music education are based on the idea that every child has the right to receive high quality music education regardless of whether living in a large city or in a remote rural area, and irrespective of the family's socio-economical status.

5 The first nation-wide curriculum for the use of VS in music schools was developed during 2000-2005 by a team of teachers assembled by The Association of Finnish Music Schools (Suomen musiikkioppilaitosten liitto). I worked as a member of this team from 2001 to 2005. The student-centred and experiential curricular emphasis of VS coincided with the larger trend at the time to move towards a constructivist approach to learning in music schools.

6 In Finland, music teacher education is offered in three universities: the Sibelius Academy, the University of Jyväskylä, and the University of Oulu. Although a few master's theses about VS have also been written in the field of ethnomusicology and primary school teacher education, the vast majority of work resides in the field of music education. As a whole, this body of work consists of studies on the pedagogy, teaching materials, learning and teaching experiences, and on the conceptions of VS, in which each writer offers their own definitions and perspectives on the matter.

7 Based on personal accounts through telephone discussions and personal meetings during the years 2008-2012.

teaching, performing, rehearsing, or any other form of music making. This commonly shared view represents another starting point for this study.

Consequently, the goal of empowering agents to experience themselves through musical actions frames and guides most VS practices, regardless of whether the tuition takes the form of one-on-one or group teaching. This emancipatory, experiential goal is well articulated, for instance, by the Finnish Society of VS teachers (Vapaa säestys 2012). The society defines the aims of VS as placing emphasis on the experiences and musical worlds of the students, and enhancing musical communication by offering naturally emerging opportunities for social interaction. Importantly, VS aims to be student-centred. (Rikandi 2007; Vapaa säestys 2012.) These general goals of VS are pursued through developing diverse, plural, and flexible musical skills, which cover knowing and mastering the basic elements and general phenomena of music, and manifest as an ability to create or reproduce music without written texture (Vapaa säestys 2012). The ability to apply knowledge of music theory and a variety of musical traditions fluently through VS is equated with freedom of musical expression. Hence, developing skills of accompaniment, playing by ear as well as from chord symbols, and improvisation all play an important part in VS teaching. In principle, VS is not bound to any particular musical style, despite the current tendency of teachers to draw heavily on various pop and rock styles. This emphasis has developed in parallel with the rise of teaching popular music in Finnish music teacher education programs and in public school music classes since the 1970's (see, e.g., Väkevä 2006; Westerlund 2006; Muukkonen 2010).

In recent years, coinciding with the rising numbers of VS textbooks being published (e.g. Tenni & Varpama 2004; Pesola 2008; Hakkarainen 2010), a strong emphasis has been placed on playing piano based on rhythmical patterns and chord symbols.<sup>8</sup> These textbooks have been essential in helping VS establish itself in music schools and conservatoires, giving piano teachers, students, and enthusiasts across Finland access to the main principles of VS practices. Although using patterns to accompany different styles can be seen as a legitimate part of VS, this trend also raises questions about how well the individual emancipatory goals of VS, mentioned above, are represented in teaching when textbook directed pattern playing is over-emphasized. For instance, Carita Holmström has taken a wider stance in her work, emphasizing that VS should not be reduced to simply

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8 The first of the VS textbooks rising from the publishing boom at the beginning of this millennium was *Vapaa säestys ja improvisointi* (Tenni & Varpama 2004), functioning mainly as a textbook for higher music education and in-service piano teachers. Shortly after, *Syke* (Pesola 2008) and *Piano soikoon* (Hakkarainen 2010) were published, targeting students in music schools. Although aimed at different audiences, all the books have a strong emphasis on VS playing based on rhythmical patterns derived from different musical styles, much like the 1990's Swedish book series *Bruksklaver* (see e.g. Palmqvist & Nilsson 1996).

playing pop music from chords. According to her, VS is a much richer phenomenon that transcends and bridges the understanding of music from different histories, traditions, and contexts.

The tendency to reduce VS to mimicking rhythmical patterns that are canonized as the correct or authentic representation of a given musical style may result in quick learning results. However, it also runs the risk of losing sight of some of VS's potential to empower and liberate (Rikandi 2010a; 2010b). As Dewey (1910/1997) wrote: "sheer imitation, dictation of steps to be taken, mechanical drill, may give results most quickly and yet strengthen traits likely to be fatal to reflective power." (p. 51.) The practices of VS – playing music by ear or from chord symbols in different styles – may prove to be an empowering experience or it may not. There is nothing inherently empowering in replacing one type of notation with another. As I will discuss in the next section, VS has challenged many of the practices of the conservatoire-based tradition. However, this does not necessarily mean that VS has succeeded in creating space for the student and her experiences in its practices. The challenge of this study is to integrate questions about *how* and *what* with questions of *what for*, and to examine both VS teaching and learning based on these questions in order to truly explore the empowering and liberating potential (Bowman 2002) of VS practices.

## **VS as a counterhegemonic force to traditional piano pedagogy**

It is possible to conceptualize VS through its relationship with traditional piano pedagogy. Traditional piano pedagogy here refers mainly to the master-apprentice tradition of teaching instruments in western art music. As with instrumental pedagogy in general, this process primarily relies on the master-apprentice tradition, with strong emphasis on notated music, technique, and upholding the musical tradition (see, e.g. Jorgensen 2008). Although the master-apprentice tradition has had many manifestations over the course of its existence (Broman-Kananen 2005), it can be considered as a relatively static, well-established, and unquestioned mode of instrumental teaching in most western countries, including the piano pedagogy tradition in Finland (e.g. Hirvonen 2003; Hyry 2007). Apart from the master class setting (e.g. Hanken 2008), attempts to update and develop the master-apprentice –model have had only modest success in creating practices that depart from the individualistic view of learning. While Jorgensen (2008), for example, has articulated the tradition of teaching musical performance as what she metaphorically describes as steward-conservation or a pilgrim-quest, both of these models still focus on knowing and understanding taking place as a process between an individual teacher and a student. (Westerlund & Väkevä 2008.)

As a whole, VS can be seen as a counterhegemonic force (Giroux 1988; Shor 1992) that throughout its existence has been in constant tension with the existing conservatoire-based tradition of piano pedagogy. Born out of the needs of Finnish music teacher education in the 1960's,<sup>9</sup> through its very existence, albeit guided by the new practical needs of music teacher education, VS brought to light what was missing from piano pedagogy in general at the time. It challenged traditional piano pedagogy by taking working methods that were marginalized, such as improvising and playing by ear, as its central focus. Instead of relying on learning canonized masterpieces of western art music, it emphasized the ability to create musical structure without a detailed score in order to use one's knowledge to create music in daily situations. Working without notation or departing from the score challenged the idea of music consisting solely of existing masterpieces that are to be reconstructed time and again as authentically as possible based on the original score. Above all, however, it challenged the idea of musicianship, particularly in music teacher education.

The very same idea of VS being a counterhegemonic practice to traditional piano pedagogy can also be seen at the beginning of this millennium, when VS was established and gained popularity as a subject in extra-curricular music schools. This time, again guided by what was seen to be missing in traditional piano pedagogy, the aims and content of VS were shaped according to the presumed needs and interests of students who studied piano as their extra-curricular hobby. Subsequently, in addition to the working methods discussed above, musical styles outside the European classical tradition were introduced to most music schools via VS.

VS, then, can be viewed as a nomadic practice “involved in acts of resistance to oppressive and hegemonic structures within the profession.” (Gould 2004, p. 68.) VS challenges the musical and pedagogical tradition of western art music by focusing on aspects and elements that do not fall into the categories of existing hierarchies, hierarchies that rely on the idea of the superiority of a fixed reality and the inferiority of changing things and events – something that feminist philosophers systematically challenge and question. It should be possible to use this stance to attempt to de-center the dominant system, problematizing what is established and revealing its instability. However, if not utilized in its proper spirit and to the fullest extent of its capability, VS's differences with traditional piano pedagogy

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9 The historical roots of VS can be traced back to the year 1957, when Einar Englund started to teach a subject called improvisation in the newly founded koulumusiikkiosasto [department of school music] (Dahlström 1982, p. 190; Sibelius-Akatemian vuosikertomus 1957-1958). The name of the subject in this context was changed to vapaa säestys in the beginning of the 1960's, while improvisation as a subject continued to be taught in parallel.

could lead to it being considered as an inferior approach, and VS could succumb to the pressure to mimic the conservatoire-based tradition in trying to become its equal.

To illustrate the relationship between the two traditions, I will use what Schippers (2010, p. 124) has conceptualized as the *twelve continuum transmission framework*, (TCTF) (Figure 1). Schippers' framework of continuums can be viewed from four perspectives that may be, and often are, at odds with one another: the tradition, the institution, the teacher, and the learner. He writes,

[t]he aim of the framework is not to establish the “correct” way of teaching for any music but to increase awareness of conscious and subconscious choices, assuming that teaching is more likely to be successful when the institutions/teachers/learners are fully aware of the choices they have and make, and are able to adapt to the requirements of different learning situations by choosing a particular position or moving fluidly along the continua. (p. 125.)

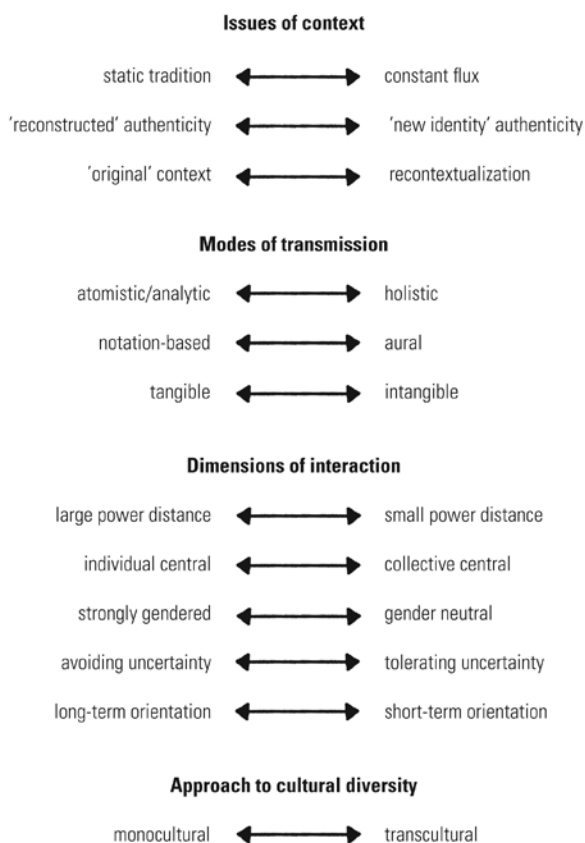


FIGURE 1. Twelve Continuum Transmission Framework (TCTF). (Schippers 2010.)



When this framework is applied in the context of piano pedagogy in western art music, it is clear that the pedagogical tradition leans towards the left side of the continuum. Although complemented by an accumulating body of contemporary musical pieces, the transmission of knowledge amongst pianists is based more on a static tradition that aims at ‘reconstructed’ authenticity and maintaining the ‘original’ context than the opposite. Teaching can be seen more as notation-based, analytic, and atomistic than aural and holistic. Large power distances are common in student-teacher relationships, and especially between those creating music (the composers) and those reproducing music (musicians). The historical tradition of western classical music is strongly gendered, and pedagogy is mostly based on one-on-one tuition, aiming at avoiding uncertainty, and has a long-term orientation. It is not the aim of this study to misrepresent traditional piano pedagogy from an overly stereotypical viewpoint, or to suggest that VS represents the only effort being made towards renewing the established piano pedagogical tradition (see e.g. Cathcart 2012; Dube 2012). Nevertheless, Schippers’ framework does provide tools for situating VS in relation to piano pedagogy in the Finnish context: VS was designed from the beginning to tilt more to the right side of the continuum, and equally so in issues of context, modes of transmission, and dimensions of interaction.

In reality, both traditions are much more complex, and the relationship between traditional piano and VS pedagogy is a great deal more nuanced. Teachers in Finland have a large amount of freedom in designing their individual teaching. Also, as I have already indicated, VS is not immune to sliding to the left side of the continuum by over-emphasizing ‘original’ context and ‘authenticity’ and ceasing to tolerate uncertainty in its practices by establishing a canon of repertoire that defines teaching and learning. Thus, in this study, the two pedagogical traditions of piano playing are seen as being in dialogue - rather than in opposition - with regards to this outlined framework.<sup>10</sup> Working in the context of western art music as well as in VS, in other words having one foot in both worlds, I see the relationship between VS and traditional piano pedagogy as offering the possibility to raise questions and bring to light some of the taken-for-granted aspects of piano pedagogy, helping it to re-evaluate its set practices in the midst of the challenges of today’s society (Rikandi 2010a). The tendency to use VS’s potential to act as a bridge between, rather than to deconstruct, different musical and pedagogical traditions and

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10 This study limits the discussion of Finnish piano pedagogy to the subjects of western art music and VS. Although jazz, pop rock, and folk piano are also taught in various settings in Finland, the position of these subjects is marginal when compared to western art music. Also, some research suggests that as new musical styles become accepted into the curriculum of instrumental teaching, they tend to adopt the pedagogical practices of western art music rather than develop practices from their own starting points (e.g. Green 2001, 2008; Rostvall & West 2003; Lebler 2008).

practices is key, for example, in the *Vivo Piano* book series (Jääskeläinen & Kantala 2003/2011; Jääskeläinen, Kantala & Rikandi 2007, 2009, *forthcoming*). This series is built on bridging and integrating traditional piano pedagogy with VS, starting from the elementary level of piano teaching.

## **VS and group tuition**

The general goals of VS as defined in Finnish music teacher education, in the society of VS teachers, and in the National Framework Curriculum for Basic Art Education, lend themselves well to group teaching. In fact, until the year 1983, VS in the music teacher education program of the Sibelius Academy was taught mainly in groups of three, and from 1989 to 1997 as pair tuition (Sibelius-Akatemia 1977-78, 1981-82, 1982-83, 1989-91, 1991-93, 1997-98, 1998-99, 2000-01). The teaching of the VS1 course for first year students in the piano laboratory started in 1998. The emphasis on individual tuition gained ground slowly at the same time and, apart from the VS1 course that is the focus of this study, became the main form of teaching in the 1990s. While small group tuition has been a part of VS from its beginning, the conservatory-based tradition, which has a tendency to value one-on-one tuition over any other teaching form (e.g. Rostvall & West 2003; Daniel 2008; Gaunt 2008, 2010; Westerlund 2009; Rikandi 2010a), has had a firm hold on teaching practices. Even when teaching is provided in the form of group teaching, one-on-one teaching methods often prevail, meaning that teachers use one-on-one teaching methods even when in a group setting (Rikandi, 2010b).

The need for alternative approaches is apparent, as reflected in the rapidly growing literature on group piano teaching (e.g. Goliger 1995; Cremaschi 2000; Daniel 2008; Fisher 2010). While extending the role of the teacher from the traditional stance of a master to that of an activity planner and a facilitator or moderator of peer interaction, group piano tuition as cooperative learning<sup>11</sup> (as articulated by Cremaschi and Fisher for example) sees students as being in need of constant monitoring and controlling. For instance, according to Cremaschi, individual accountability is seen as essential for group work to avoid “free-riders” and “social loafers.” Individual accountability can be achieved by means of the teacher frequently assessing the students individually and giving the results to both the group and the individual, or by asking the group to file periodic reports,

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11 Following Roschelle & Teasley (1995), Frederick Seddon (2006) has articulated the confusion between the concepts of collaborative learning and cooperative learning. According to these writers, collaboration is more a philosophy of interaction, with participants making a coordinated effort to solve the problem together, whereas cooperation is specific interaction designed to accomplish an end product through the division of labor. The outcome of collaborative learning is characterized as deep level learning, critical thinking, shared understanding, and long-term retention of the learned material.

with the contributions of the members outlined. Moreover, holding tournaments and awarding group points is encouraged. (Cremaschi 2000; Fisher 2010.) In other words, I suggest that this recent literature on group piano studies does not see the group as a community in the process of creating its own practices and creating knowledge. Rather, it sees group teaching as a way of making the teacher's job of disseminating knowledge more efficient, and it is suggested that this one-sided flow of information from the teacher to the students needs to be carefully controlled and regularly monitored by the teacher. Most of the literature on group piano teaching tends to take the form of manuals, as they offer, for instance, detailed instructions for lesson plans and curriculum implementation (see. e.g. Cremaschi 2000; Daniel 2008; Fisher 2010). While not trying to diminish the value of such books, the pedagogical approach in this study does not aim to offer detailed micro-models for teachers of VS to follow.

To conclude, group VS tuition in music education at the Sibelius Academy takes place within an intersection of mutually diverse musical and pedagogical traditions and practices. While aiming to convey the general goals and practices of VS, group VS tuition in the context of music education at the Sibelius Academy is simultaneously influenced by the traditions and practices of traditional piano pedagogy, group piano pedagogy, and music teacher education. This study mediates between the tensions of these traditions and practices, aiming to make them more apparent and a focus of reflection.

### **1.3 Musical and pedagogical agency**

In this study, I understand agency as an actor's or group's ability to make purposeful choices (Samman & Santos 2009, p. 3); the space and capacity to act in a given setting, context, and community. Understood this way, agency can be conceptualized as a kind of process freedom (Ibrahim & Alkire 2007, p. 9) – what a person or a group is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values they regard as important (Sen 1985, p. 203). Agency includes an ethical dimension, meaning that to act means to act responsibly in relation to these settings and communities, in and outside the classroom (hooks 1994, p. 152). An individual, as I understand it, does not have a singular agency, because agency is inherently multidimensional: it can be exercised in different spheres, domains, and levels (Samman & Santos 2009, p. 6). We all have various experiences of agency in relation to different aspects and contexts in our lives. In other words, agency is domain-specific (Ibrahim & Alkire 2007, p. 5). Increasing agency in one domain may have positive 'spillover' effects on agency in other domains, but it also may not (Alkire 2005, p. 226). I, for example, have a strong agency as a VS teacher, while having no agency in cooking.

However, agency is not a fixed goal that, once reached, is automatically sustained, nor is it a quality that you simply either possess or not. Agency is contextual, relational, and it can be nourished and developed. My agency as a VS teacher may be shaken in a new pedagogical setting like the piano laboratory, but this does not mean that I have to accept this loss as anything more than a temporary setback. It does however mean that I have to start finding tools to rebuild and reconstruct my agency in this new situation. In the same way, I can most likely develop my agency in cooking by engaging in the practice of cooking, in other words, by starting to cook on a more regular basis (this is surely a theory that my spouse would appreciate).

The goal of this study is to explore the ways in which future music teachers, studying in the Finnish teacher education programmes, can develop their agency in the domains of music and pedagogy in a manner that would be mutually supportive. The study is based on the idea that this mutual development does not happen automatically, and it is therefore the challenge and task of music teacher education programs and educators to ensure that the development of both musical and pedagogical agency in music education students is fostered and supported. In the context of this study, developing agency takes place in a group VS course. Because of the group setting, the learning community is seen as an important aspect of and an asset in the process of developing agency. In the following section, I will discuss how the concepts of agency, identity, and reflexivity, as well as the closely related concepts of experience and empowerment, are used to support the pedagogical solutions and rationale of this inquiry.

## **Musical agency**

While the notion of agency is widely used in music education, it carries with it many different meanings and connotations in the separate fields of music education philosophy, psychology, and sociology. Yet according to Karlsen (2011), despite their distinct points of views, all of these fields share the idea that “musical agency, one way or the other, has to do with individuals’ capacity for action in relation to music or in a music-related setting.” (p. 4.) Or, as Westerlund (2002) argues, music has the potential to give rise to transformational agency, and students can be viewed as active musical agents insofar as they have the ability to change their own experience and the social environment (p. 25). Also, Regelski (2008) emphasizes the teachers’ responsibility to enhance students’ empowerment, and to make students authors of their own musical lives and histories, by developing the musical skills and understandings to enable them to be active practitioners of musical practices throughout life (p. 10).

In this study I utilize the idea of musical agency as a lens, as suggested by Karlsen (2011) (see Figure 2). To Karlsen, research-based investigations into musical agency are key elements in designing educational environments that put the positive experiential and learning outcome of each student in focus. Based on the works of Small (1998), DeNora (2000), and Batt-Rawden and DeNora (2005), Karlsen (2011) outlines a conception of musical agency as a lens, with an individual as well as a collective dimension. In the individual dimension of agency, music can be used for self-regulation; the shaping of self-identity; self-protection; thinking; matters of ‘being’; and developing music-related skills. With regard to the individual dimension, my study takes the category of developing music-related skills as its special focus. Developing musical skills is an act through which individuals “negotiate and enhance their opportunities for participating in the world as well as in further musical interaction.” (Karlsen 2011, p. 8.) Most writings in music education are concerned with this category of musical agency, since it concerns the most common areas of musical action: developing and executing music-related skills, for instance, through playing an instrument, singing, rehearsing, performing, improvising, composing etc. This does not mean, however, that the discussion of the individual dimension of musical agency is restricted in this study to the category of developing music-related skills, because, as Karlsen (2011, p. 8) points out, all other aspects of the individual dimension of musical agency are accessible through this one category.

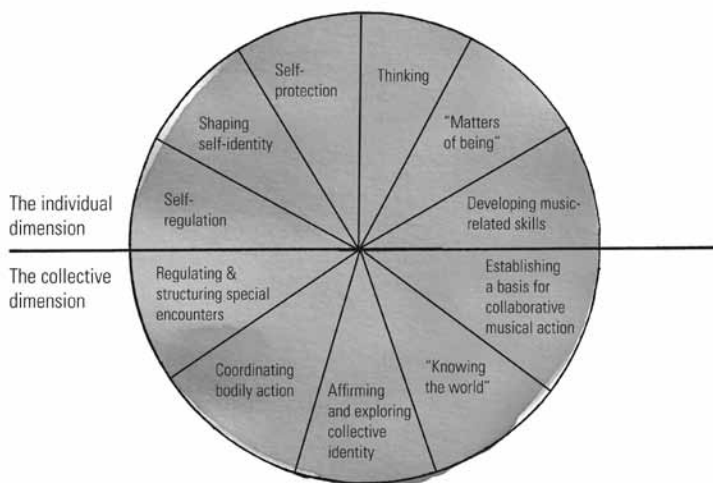


FIGURE 2. Musical agency as a lens (Karlsen 2011).

The collective dimension of musical agency is divided into using music for regulating and structuring social encounters; coordinating bodily action; affirming and exploring collective identity; ‘knowing the world’; and establishing a basis for collaborative musical

action. Viewing musical agency through its collective dimension offers valuable insight into collaborative learning. As with the individual dimension, the last category in the collective dimension – establishing a basis for collaborative musical action – sums up all other aspects on the collective level, and is the focus of this inquiry.

### **Musical agency and pedagogical agency in music teacher education**

If agency is viewed as domain-specific, then it follows that future music teachers have to be able to develop their agency in at least two domains: music and teaching (Figure 3). There is a considerable amount of literature that discusses the challenges in the relationship between music and pedagogy in music teacher education, especially from the point of view of identity and socialization (e.g. Roberts 1991, 2007; Dolloff 1999, 2007; Bouij 2004, 2007; Bernard 2005, 2007; Froehlich 2007; Regelski 2007; Muukkonen 2010). A fair amount of this work discusses the nature of the musician “who eventually ends up as a teacher in front of our children in schools” (Roberts 1991, p. 30), claiming that music education majors appear to be socialized in school as performers or general musicians rather than as future music teachers (Froehlich 2007).

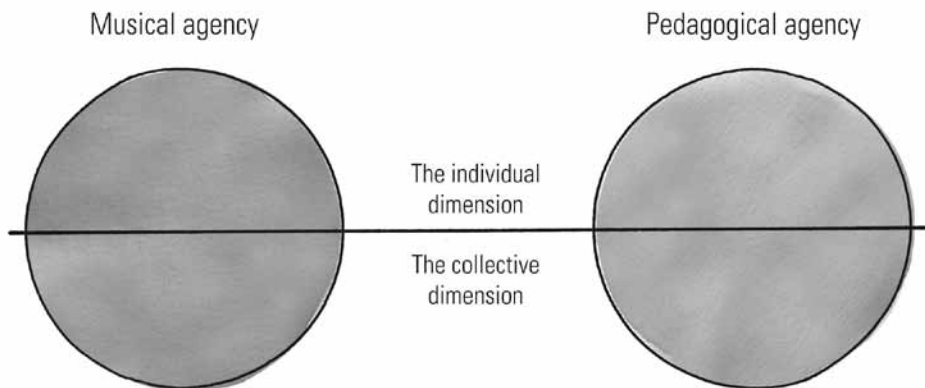


FIGURE 3. Musical agency and pedagogical agency.

However, when compared to many other countries, the Finnish perspective on discussing music teacher education is somewhat unique (Väkevä 2006; Westerlund 2006; Väkevä & Westerlund 2007), since in Finland, music teachers are highly skilled and trained primarily as music teachers.<sup>12</sup> Students wishing to study music education apply directly to the five-and-a-half year teacher preparation program in music education through

extensive and highly competitive entrance exams. For instance, the Sibelius Academy auditions prospective music education students to discern their capacity for flexibility and adaptation (Väkevä, 2006): students must perform with multiple instruments in multiple styles; they must be able to sing and play the piano; and they must demonstrate through interviews and a demonstration lesson the appropriate disposition to teach. Should an enrolled music performance major (an instrumentalist) wish to switch from a performance degree to a degree in music education inside Sibelius Academy, she must pass the broad criteria laid out in the music education entrance exams and start her degree all over from the beginning. In his overview of Finnish music teacher education, Allsup (2011) characterizes the structure of music teacher preparation in Finland as follows:

To put it roughly, music education [in Finland] is not a “safety” or fall-back for a performer’s cold feet, rather it is a rigorous degree whose preparation begins in secondary school. Nor is it a winner-take-all setting in which narrow expertise trumps broad experience or a desire to teach. An applicant who exhibits a high degree of expertise on one instrument and little else will be recommended to audition as a performance major, not as a music education major. (p. 51.)

Several scholars have argued that there is a tension between teacher identity and performer identity in music teachers, continuing to suggest that engagement with music is central to a teacher’s identity, and music making should be used as an approach for professional development for the musician-teacher. According to Ball (2003), Pellegrino (2009), and Schmidt and Robbins (2011), for example, the kind of engagement where “the artist self informs the teacher self” can blend personal and professional growth and lead to renewal and well-being, resulting in the emergence of a more integrated teacher who is present, connected to students, and engaged in teaching and learning (Schmidt & Robbins 2011, p. 98). A recent Finnish study about classroom music teachers (Muukkonen 2010) supports this view. According to Muukkonen (ibid.), Finnish music teachers narrate their musicianship and teaching work as being intertwined - shaping, complementing, and supporting rather than distinguishing from each other. The findings of Muukkonen suggest that in many ways Finnish music teacher education has succeeded in supporting students in growing into flexible and versatile music teachers, since in-service music educators are comfortable with their identity as musician-teachers.

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12 Instead of being governed and monitored, teachers in Finland, including music teachers and instrumental pedagogues, enjoy a great amount of independence in their work. All teachers, working even in the lowest level of education, are required to have a masters level university degree and specific teacher’s pedagogical studies independent of the subject matter. Subsequently, there is a continuous trust in teachers who are free to expand their repertoires of teaching methods and to individualize teaching in order to meet the needs of all students. (Sahlberg 2011, 2012.) Teacher preparation programs, like all education in Finland, are free of charge, and music teaching, as teaching in general, is a high-status job that enjoys wide school and community support.

In the context of Finnish music teachers, it is clear that Karlsen’s (2011) model of musical agency, although extensive, does not suffice for the purposes of this study, because in this context musical agency cannot be separate from pedagogical agency; musicianship and educatorship are interdependent (Elliott 1995, p. 262). Despite some promising evidence of balance between these two domains of agency in music teachers, however, Finnish music teacher education still needs to be conscious and aware of questions of agency in order to articulate and carry out practices that bridge the gap between and support the development of both musical and pedagogical agency. In this study, viewing the question from a pragmatist viewpoint, I take the stance that bridging these two domains calls for acknowledging and supporting the development of reflective practices in music teacher education.

The concept of reflective practice was first introduced by Donald Schön (1983; 1987), although the underlying ideas are much older and can be found in the writings of thinkers like John Dewey. From a pragmatist view, reflexivity is not something about education – it is for education.<sup>13</sup> Reflective practice involves paying critical attention to the practical values and theories which inform everyday actions, by examining practice reflectively and reflexively. In my study, I take the stance that through developing reflective practices in music teacher education it is possible to address issues of bridging musical and pedagogical agency in this context (Figure 4).

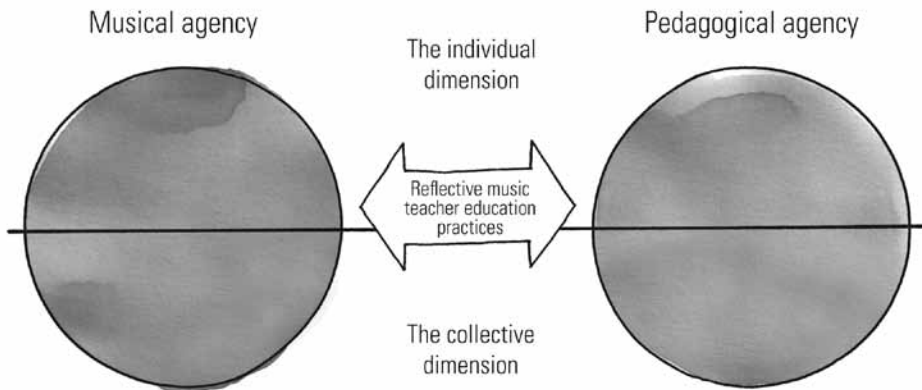


FIGURE 4. Musical agency and pedagogical agency in music teacher education.

13 According to Dewey (1910/1997), it is the business of education “to ingrain into the individual’s working habits methods of inquiry and reasoning appropriate to the various problems that present themselves.” (p. 28.)



Furthermore, I will argue that these reflective practices should put experience into their focus. The understanding of the concept of experience in my work comes largely from pragmatist thinking, especially the ideas of Dewey, who saw experience arising from the interaction of two principles – continuity and interaction (1938/1997, p. 51). With continuity, Dewey argued that each experience a person has will influence her future, for better or for worse. By interaction Dewey referred to situational influence on one's experience. In other words, one's present experience is a function of the interaction between one's past experiences and the present situation. The value of the experience is to be judged by the effect that experience has on the individual's present and future, and the extent to which the individual is able to contribute to society. Dewey saw that educators are responsible for providing students with experiences that are immediately valuable and which better enable the students to contribute to society (Dewey 1938/1997, see also Westerlund 2002). As hooks (1994) argues, different, more radical subject matter does not necessarily create a liberatory pedagogy; a simple practice like including personal experience may be more constructively challenging than simply changing the curriculum (p. 148).

## **Empowerment as expansion of agency**

In my study I view empowerment as an increase in certain kinds of agency that are deemed particularly instrumental to the situation at hand (Alkire 2005, p. 4). I draw on the definitions of empowerment that focus not only upon the person's freedom to act, but also on the social and institutional preconditions required to exert agency. For instance, Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) have described empowerment as having two components:

The first component might be thought of as expansion of agency – the ability to act on behalf of what you value and have reason to value. The second component of empowerment focuses on the institutional environment, which offers people the opportunity to exert agency fruitfully. (...) Clearly a process of empowerment is incomplete unless it attends to people's abilities to act, the institutional structure, and the various non-institutional changes that are instrumental to increased agency. (pp. 8-9.)

Several authors (see. e.g. Alkire 2005; Alsop, Bertelsen & Holland 2006; Ibrahim & Alkire 2007) frame empowerment as an increase in power, understood as control or a real ability to effect change. In my study, I am interested in empowerment as a group's or individual's capacity to make choices and then to transform these choices into desired actions and outcomes (Alsop, Bertelsen & Holland 2006, p. 10). Utilizing the framework set forth by

Ibrahim and Alkire (2007), I look for four indicators of possible exercises of agency that can lead to empowerment: choice (power to), control (power over), change (power from within), and communal belonging (power with). (p. 19.)

## **1.4 A sociocultural perspective on learning**

This study adopts a sociocultural perspective that sees all human thought and activity as social and cultural in nature, advanced by and through communicative processes (see e.g. Wenger 1998/2003; Barrett 2005; Wenger 2006). This makes learning a process of appropriating tools for thinking that are made available by social agents who initially act as interpreters and guides in the individual's cultural apprenticeship (Rogoff 1990). It is not just that we learn from others in social contexts and during social exchange, but rather that we internalise and transform the actual means of social interaction – like language and gesture – to form the instrumental tools for thinking, problem-solving, remembering, and so on (Wertsch 1985a, 1985b). Therefore, learning can be viewed as social participation that belongs to the realm of experience and practice. Learning changes who we are by changing our ability to participate, to belong, and to negotiate meaning. (Wenger 1998/2003, pp. 225-226.)

When learning is viewed as social participation, it becomes necessary to articulate and integrate the components that characterize social participation as a process of learning and knowing. According to Wenger (1998/2003), these components are Meaning (learning as experience); Practice (learning as doing); Community: (learning as belonging); and Identity (learning as becoming). (p. 5.) Rethinking learning from this broader perspective has consequences for individuals, communities, and organizations. For individuals, it means that learning becomes not only an issue of engaging in, but also contributing to the practices of their communities. For communities, it means that learning is an issue of refining their practice and ensuring new generations of members. For organizations it is an issue of sustaining the interconnected communities of practice through which an organization knows what it knows, thus becoming effective and valuable. (pp. 7-8.)

### **Communities of practice**

In articulating and conceptualizing the practices of the VS1 course in the piano laboratory, I make use of the concept *community of practice* as first coined by Wenger and Lave in 1987 (Lave & Wenger 1991/2009; Wenger 2006), and further developed by Wenger (Wenger 1998/2003; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder 2002; Wenger 2006; Wenger, Trayner & de Laat 2011). Community of practice is not a synonym for group, team, or network, since it

has its own characteristics (Wenger 1998/2003, p. 74). According to Wenger, a community of practice is best understood by viewing it through the dimensions of practice as the property of a community, because practice is the source of the coherence of a community. In essence, communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an on-going basis. (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder 2002, p. 4.)

A community of practice includes three dimensions that function as resources for the negotiation of meaning in the community: 1) mutual engagement of its members “organized around what they are there to do” (Wenger 1998/2003 p. 74); 2) “the negotiation of a joint enterprise” (p. 77) defined by the participants in the very process of pursuing it; and 3) a shared repertoire in terms of “routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, and concepts” (p. 83). Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning within a shared domain of human endeavor. The key characteristic of learning in a community is the blending of individual and collective learning in the development of a shared practice (Wenger, Trayner & de Laat 2011, p. 10). Wenger (1998/2003) makes a distinction between a community of practice and a learning community. It is crucial for the creation and sustenance of any community of practice that engagement in pursuing an enterprise together enables the members to “share some significant learning” (p. 86). However, a learning community makes learning its very core, the focus of its enterprise (p. 214).

It is worth pointing out that a community of practice is not an ethical endeavor by default; it is not privileged in terms of positive or negative effects. For example, those involved in organized crime can be considered to be members of a community of practice. As Wenger (1998/2003) himself states, in some cases conflict and misery can constitute the core characteristic of a shared practice (p. 77.) Yet, as a locus of engagement in action, interpersonal relationships, shared knowledge, and negotiation of enterprises, communities of practice also have the potential for real transformation (ibid). My study uses the concept of communities of practice in the context of my own educational practices and, therefore, also scrutinizes the ethical dimensions and values of the formed communities.

### **Agency as the operational dimension of identity**

It is possible to interpret the work on communities of practice as an attempt to bring together social theory and learning theory. One of the central questions in social theory is the relationship between social structure and agency (Giddens 1984; Wenger 1998/2003; Wenger 2006; Karlsen 2011). As Wenger (2006) states,

communities of practice are a context in which structure and agency meet through learning. The community and its practice represent a social structure; membership and engagement in practice represent agency. (p. 14.)

In sociocultural theories of learning, the concept of agency is closely related to the concept of identity. Wenger (1998/2003) argues that identity is ‘learning as becoming’; a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities (p. 5). The experience of identity in practice is not necessarily discursive or reflective; it is not equivalent to a self-image. It is a way of being in the world. (p. 151.) According to Karlsen (2011), agency can be used to explore and shape identity, both on a collective and individual level (p. 11). Along the same lines, Wenger (2006) describes the relationship between identity and agency by defining identity as “a learned experience of agency in the context of social structures.” (p. 19.) He continues to argue that

[d]efined as a learned experience of agency, the concept of identity requires a theory of power to talk about the ability to act as an agent. Learning changes our ability to be an agent in the world and therefore involves relations of power – including competence and incompetence, participation and non-participation, centrality and marginalization. These struggles for legitimacy depend on identification, which makes us accountable to the competence of certain communities. (p. 21.)

In the context of this inquiry I am interested in the concept of agency as the operational dimension of identity. In other words, rather than concentrating on students’ experiences of *who they are*, I am more interested in how students participating in the VS1 course experience their *capacity to act*, and how I, as a teacher, can support the growth of that experience. As Wenger (2006) argues, we have to include within a social theory of learning the full range of resources available to learners for negotiating meaning and producing an experience of agency (p. 22). I address the issues of power involved in the ability to be an agent through a discussion of empowerment, as articulated in section 1.3.

## **1.5 Situating the VS1 course in a sociocultural framework**

According to Wenger (1998/2003), one cannot design learning, but one can design learning environments. Further to that point, I believe that the piano laboratory as I experienced and approached it at the start of this inquiry was poorly designed — in fact, I would call it an ignored learning environment. The tension between the stated emancipatory goals and existing practices of VS, as discussed earlier, was in many ways heightened in VS1,

with the course concentrating on a relatively limited set of purely musical skills to be acquired during one academic year. The official description of the VS1 course in the music education department of Sibelius Academy (see Appendices 2 & 3) failed to recognize in any way the fact that learning was taking place through group instruction. Based on the course description, it seemed that VS1 was intended to consist of purely musical subject matter presented systematically and independently of the dynamics of group instruction. Lacking almost all the characteristics of a community of practice in the form of mutual engagement, accountability of a shared enterprise and negotiability of repertoire, the practices of the piano laboratory thus served as a reminder that learning to play the piano is not usually viewed as a process of becoming a member of a community.

### **Special characteristics of VS1 viewed as learning communities**

In this inquiry, I define the practice of group VS1 teaching as a community of practice, while the students that are taking part in VS1 as a group, along with me as their teacher, are conceptualized as a learning community. Subsequently, and as will be explained in more detail in Chapter 2, the inquiry consisted of two learning communities formed inside one community of practice. As a member of both learning communities, I introduced elements of the first community to the second, thus functioning as what Wenger calls a broker between the two learning communities (Wenger 1998/2003, p. 105). Coming from this perspective, I look at VS1 as a practice developed and owned by the learning communities engaged in the process of developing and living it.

The two VS1 learning communities in this inquiry had many significant characteristics. The communities were temporal, living within strict time limits defined by the academic year, and with all members joining and leaving the community at the same time. This is considerably different from the broader operative concept of communities in Wenger's work, where a community of practice by definition consists of both old-timers and newcomers, and individual members of the community have different trajectories that can lead in to (inbound trajectory) or out from (outbound trajectory) the community (Wenger 1998/2003, pp. 154-155). Also, in this inquiry, all members were full participants in the community, and it was not possible to participate in the community through a peripheral trajectory (*ibid.* p. 154). In other words, the learning communities of the inquiry had a distinct life span and a limited set of trajectories available for its members, thus making them different from communities of practice where members are able to join and leave as individuals without the community disbanding.

As a teacher and a researcher, I consider myself to have been a part of the learning communities of both cycles. However, being both the teacher and the researcher, it is self-evident that my position in the learning community was considerably different from that of all other members. My negotiation with other members of the community did not take place on equal terms, because I was in a position of considerable power in both communities. Instead of trying to deny or diffuse this issue, I take a Wengerian view of power being primarily the ability to act in line with the enterprise being pursued (Wenger 1998, p. 189). The kind of coherence that transforms mutual engagement into a learning community requires work, and the responsibility of that work fell on me as a teacher and a researcher. In the following chapters, when talking about the experiences or practices of the learning communities, I include myself and my experiences as part of those communities. Due to my position in the communities, my experiences are often in tension with those of the students. In such cases I make these tensions visible, not seeing them as a problem so much as a potentially rich source of different perspectives.

VS1 was not the only learning community that the students were members of during the time of the inquiry, and some of these communities were inter-related with ours. Students participating in the inquiry can be seen to belong to the communities of first year music education students, music educators, and students of the Sibelius Academy, just to name a few. The fact that students were taking part in a VS inquiry that was affecting institutional policies added an additional form of participation, and a new dimension to the practices of the learning community. In addition to being part of the VS1 learning community, I myself was teaching other courses in and outside the music education department, and was also actively involved in the communities of VS teachers and of the doctoral students of the music university. For the purpose of this inquiry, it is reasonable to limit the focus of the examination to the two learning communities formed in VS1 course. However, I return to the theme of numerous communities living alongside one another briefly in the discussion, because it is

incumbent on a learning community to deal with its position in various communities and economies and with respect to various enterprises, styles, and discourses. It must seek the reconfigurations necessary to make its learning empowering – locally and in other relevant contexts. (Wenger 1998/2003, p. 220.)

## **Learning in VS1 as a process of negotiating meaning and creating knowledge**

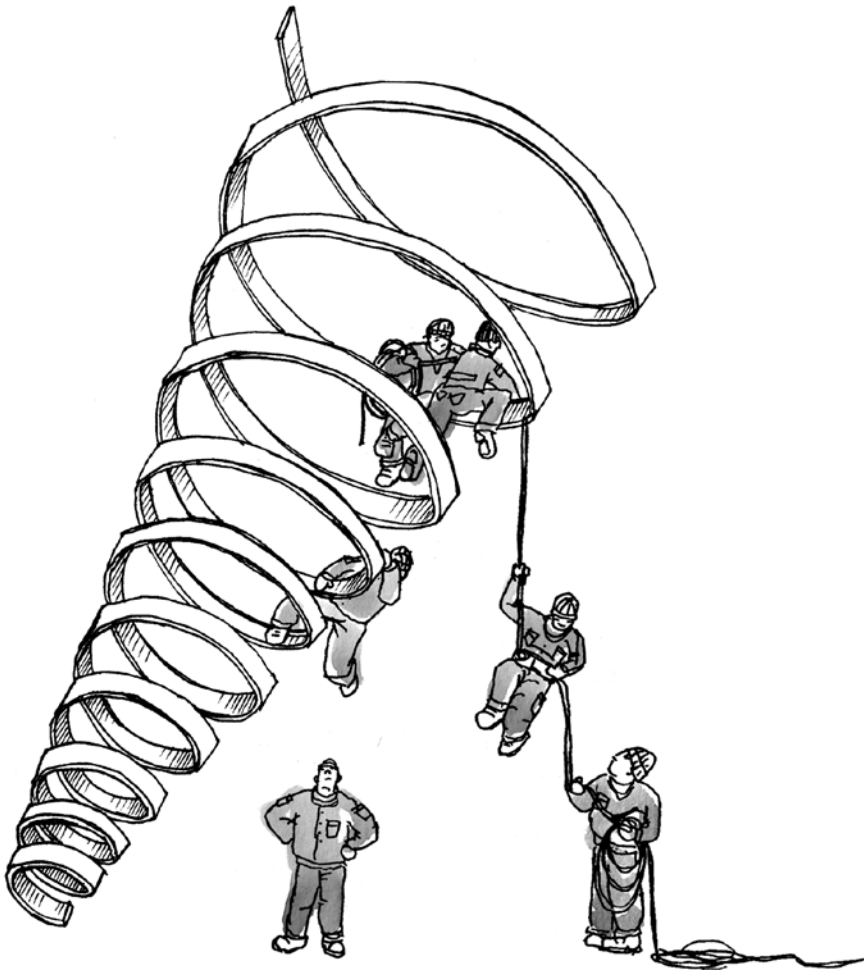
So far I have established that the perspective of this inquiry is that learning is the engine of practice, and practice is the history of that learning. As a consequence, communities of practice have life cycles that reflect such a process. Furthermore, practice is ultimately produced by its members through the negotiation of meaning (Wenger 1998/2003, p. 96). Before exploring the life cycles of the two VS1 learning communities as a process of negotiating shared histories of learning in Chapter 3, I will now discuss how it is possible to articulate the learning that takes place in these communities.

Wenger, Trayner and de Laat (2011, p. 15) suggest that since communities are human experiences that evolve over time, they possess stories about how they started, what has happened since that time, and what their participants are trying to achieve. Communities of practice are a privileged locus for both the acquisition and creation of knowledge. A community of practice is a living context that can give newcomers access to competence, and that enable a personal experience of engagement by which to incorporate that competence into an identity of participation. (Wenger 1998/2003, p. 214.) At the same time, if a strong bond of communal competence exists alongside a deep respect for the particularity of experience, a history of mutual engagement around a shared enterprise is an ideal context to explore radically new insights (*ibid.*), as I will discuss in Chapter 5. Paavola and Hakkarainen (2005) have described this process of knowledge creation as the dialogical approach to learning, while Keith Sawyer (2007) calls it the creative power of collaboration. What is common to all these writers is that they see collaboration as means of creating knowledge that no one individual could construct without the respective community. Throughout this study, my inquiry supports this view by showing how the learning communities in question time and again created knowledge that cannot be attributed to any one individual; in other words, knowledge that would not have been created without the contribution of the learning community. In this sense, the outcomes of this study belong to the learning communities from which they originated.





## 2 Research questions and methodological approach



The rationale for this inquiry arose from an acknowledgement that the group VS1 course had failed to take into account, or take advantage of, the specific setting of the piano laboratory, in which a number of students work simultaneously as a group. When eight violinists are put together in the same room, sooner or later it is likely that they will start playing together in some form or another. In the piano laboratory, however, there was surprisingly little, if any, collaborative music making taking place, despite the fact that it had been a part of the Sibelius Academy curriculum for over a decade. The Sibelius Academy's curriculum for the VS1 course guided *what was* taught in the course, but not how the course was taught. As a result, the individually oriented piano pedagogy tradition prevailed, and as teachers like myself were socialized into the one-on-one tradition we found ourselves lacking the tools to move beyond the accustomed ways of doing things, even though the piano laboratory setting differs considerably from the traditional piano studio environment. Hence, the rationale for this inquiry was not guided by the requirements of the curriculum (*what is* taught), since the requirements in the form of the learning outcomes of the course were and continue to be fully met. Instead, the rationale arose from experiencing the disjointed nature of the day-to-day teaching and learning practices (*how* the course is taught) that resulted from enforcing established piano pedagogy practices on the piano laboratory environment. Furthermore, the course focused solely on musical issues and was not seen to have any pedagogical value. As a result of these factors, the VS1 course in the piano laboratory produced what I would call a badly designed learning environment. My own unease with this situation led to this inquiry as a form of *generating knowledge for practice from practice* (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 2009, p. 21).

## 2.1 Research questions

In order to start generating knowledge from practice for practice, the aim of the inquiry was to create 'professional learning communities' (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 2009, pp. 52–53; Wenger 1998/2003, p. 234). The goal was to design a learning environment that would support the development of students' musical and pedagogical agency in VS group studies, within the context of music teacher education. With the inquiry adopting the sociocultural view of learning, the concept of a learning community has been an important theoretical tool in this developmental work. In this study, the development of the VS1 course is viewed firstly as a process of negotiation between participants as members of a learning community. Secondly, the study is interested in the students' experiences of agency in this process. Finally, the process of negotiation and the experiences of agency, as described by the members of the community, are used to synthesize what I call an improvisational structure for VS group teaching in Finnish music teacher education. The study therefore

concentrates on three research questions developed heuristically (Moustakas 1990) during the process of the inquiry:

1. How did the negotiated process of redesigning the VS group course by the members of the learning community – the students and the teacher-researcher – change the course in terms of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment?
2. How did the students articulate their experiences of musical and pedagogical agency in a learning environment designed to facilitate collaboration in and as a learning community?
3. What kind of structure supports the development of students' reflexive musical and pedagogical agency in group VS, in the context of music teacher education?

## **2.2 Positioning the inquiry and myself as a practitioner-researcher**

At the core of this inquiry is a project that has many characteristics of an educational action research project: the inquiry took place in two cycles of academic years, and it was carried out in collaboration with the participants (the first year music education students) with the aim of improving shared educational practices in the VS1 course (e.g. Carr & Kemmis 1986; Kemmis & McTaggart 2002; Kemmis 2006; Brydon-Miller & Maguire 2009; Nygreen 2009). However, the aims of the inquiry go beyond the usual goals of action research to alter a curriculum, challenge common school practices, or to work for social change. In addition to these goals, this inquiry also engages with the more general themes of practitioner research as articulated by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009): confronting issues of equity, engagement, and agency; developing conceptual frameworks; inventing and reinventing communities of inquiry; shaping school reform and educational policy; and reforming research and practice in universities. While the ultimate goal of action research is often restricted to local action (Noffke 1997), the aims of this inquiry coincide with the wider framework of practitioner research that includes generating “local knowledge of practice.” (Cochran-Smith 2003; Cochran-Smith & Fries 2005; Cochran-Smith & Lytle 2009.) In other words, although the context of my study is local, wherein the general aim is to develop this particular context in terms of better teaching and more effective learning, at the same time the study aims to broaden the understanding of the ways in which instrumental courses in universities and conservatories might contribute to the growth of music teachers and pedagogues. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) write,

[p]ractitioner research is grounded in the identification and empirical documentation of the daily dilemmas and contradictions of practice, which then become grists for the development of new conceptual frameworks and theories. In turn, these new distinctions and concepts guide new understandings and improvements in practice in the local site, as well as more broadly. (Ibid. p. 95.)

Throughout this inquiry, the boundary between the researcher and the participants is blurred. Following the ideas of participatory action research (PAR), the aim of the inquiry has been to do research with people, not on people (Nygreen 2009). However, it is no straightforward matter to achieve this, and it is a widely acknowledged dilemma in literature concerning PAR that doing research with versus on people is inherently laden with tension (Kemmis & McTaggart 2002; Kemmis 2006; Brydon-Miller & Maguire 2009; Nygreen 2009; Niemi, Heikkinen & Kannas 2010). In cases like my inquiry, where the research report is written by the researcher, the researcher always holds a considerable position of power compared to other participants. Controlling the question is the ultimate manifestation of power in research (Brydon-Miller & Maguire 2009), and in this inquiry I held all the power, starting with asking the questions and eventually ending with articulating the answers.

The problematic issues of power in this study go beyond the usual tensions between the researcher and the researched, as there is an obvious power structure present in the form of the researcher leading the course as the teacher, versus the first year university students participating the course as newcomers to music teacher education. It is therefore self-evident that, although this inquiry was realized as a collaborative project, there was an unusually unequal distribution of power inherent in the design. However, there is little sense in becoming paralyzed by this paradox and simply continuing with the status quo, abandoning any attempts to include students in the framework of power governing their learning. Instead, I would rather adopt the pragmatist perspective that we must live and act responsibly together in an intersubjective world (Biesta & Burbules 2003, p. 108). I based my inquiry on recent work done in the field of practitioner inquiry, which has revealed how inquiry conducted with and by students allows learners to empower themselves to take different stances on their education, and furthermore to act as agents for change in their schools and communities (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 2009, p. 14).

In this inquiry, I positioned myself to confront the responsibility that comes with this power by embarking on a collaborative project with the students that defied the conventional power structures inherent to the teacher/learner relationship. As already discussed, as a teacher I also enjoyed a considerable amount of freedom in the process of this inquiry to

develop and change VS1 practices as I saw fit. I thus had the power to influence a broad spectrum of the learning process, and to act as a broker between the students and existing institutional practices through my efforts, including designing lessons and units of study, researching students' responses to new strategies, establishing more efficient and inviting procedures and routines, rethinking ensemble structure and assessment, collaborating on curricular redesign, and guiding the incorporation of self-evaluation into student grading. (Schmidt & Robbins 2011, p. 99.)

Finally, having been deeply engaged with music education, piano pedagogy, and VS for most of my adult life, my own experiences add a heuristic quality to the inquiry (Moustakas 1990). Teacher research is always personal (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 2009, p. 337), but in this particular case I was additionally studying the primarily oral and tacit tradition of VS, which I had been involved in developing for several years. I therefore drew inspiration from heuristic research, where being deeply involved in and with the research is considered the general starting point of the process rather than a negative aspect affecting issues of reliability.

## **2.3 Research Design**

This study, situated within the wider framework of practitioner inquiry, utilizes the cyclical concept of action research - the spiral model - in its design. The spiral model of research, perhaps most often associated with action research as first described by Kurt Lewin (1946), typically involves the self-reflective spiral of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (e.g. Carr & Kemmis 1986; Kemmis & McTaggart 2002; Kemmis 2006; Brydon-Miller & Maguire 2009), and has since come to symbolize almost all action research. At the same time, it is commonly acknowledged that the stages of action research can and often will overlap, merge, and intertwine rather than follow each other in a strictly temporal and dynamic manner. The most obvious embodiment of the cyclical concept of action research in this study is the empirical part of the inquiry, which was realized in two research cycles following the general idea of the action research spiral. However, the study does not limit itself to the idea of the spiral as defined in action research, but instead uses it more flexibly to illustrate various methodological, temporal, contextual, and conceptual aspects of the study.

## Data collection

The inquiry consisted of two research cycles that both lasted for one academic year (2008-2009 and 2009-2010). The duration of the VS1 course is one academic year, with the course consisting of weekly 45-minute lessons (30 lessons/course) and an exam. In both cycles the participants were first year music education students, which means that apart from myself as the practitioner-researcher the two cycles had different participants.

In the first cycle the course was attended by six students, four female and two male, between the ages of 20 and 25. The students' main instruments ranged from piano (N=3), to pop jazz vocals (N=1), violin (N=1), and clarinet (N=1). All students who did not have vocals as a main instrument studied either pop jazz or classical singing as a supporting instrument, while the student majoring in pop jazz vocals studied pop jazz piano as a supporting instrument. In the second cycle the course had 8 participants between the ages of 19-29; all the students in the second cycle were female.<sup>14</sup> One student played classical piano as her main instrument with pop jazz singing as a supporting instrument; three students studied classical singing as a main instrument with either classical or pop jazz piano as a supporting instrument; and four students had pop jazz singing as their main instrument with either pop jazz or classical piano as a supporting instrument. In addition, one student had already started to study pop jazz drums as a second supporting instrument.

Data was collected using various sources and methods during the two cycles. The collected data consists of a teacher's research diary, videotaped lessons (N= 45), videotaped exams (N=2), audio recorded group discussions (N=8), audio recorded feedback from colleague teachers (N=2), student essays (N=12), and individual follow-up interviews with students (N=14) (for a more detailed account of the temporal occurrence of data collection, see Figure 5). The individual follow-up interviews lasted for approximately one hour each, while the format and length of the group discussions varied. Both cycles encompassed four group discussions (GD) with the following themes: GD1: sharing personal backgrounds and interests; GD2: setting shared goals and developing collaborative working methods; GD3: designing the exam; GD4: assessing the course. The first three discussions in both cycles focused on group processes during the course. The focus of the fourth group discussion and the individual interviews was reflecting upon the process in retrospect, with the fourth group discussion focusing on the collaborative processes and the individual interviews on personal experiences. Using the 65-page research diary as a guide, two

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<sup>14</sup> It was only by chance that all participants in the second cycle were female, and this situation does not reflect the gender ratio of music teacher education at the Sibelius Academy. However, this learning community subsequently developed a distinct identity as an all-female group.

lessons from both cycles were chosen to be transcribed and subjected to closer analysis. All group discussions and individual interviews were transcribed, resulting in over 250 pages of material.

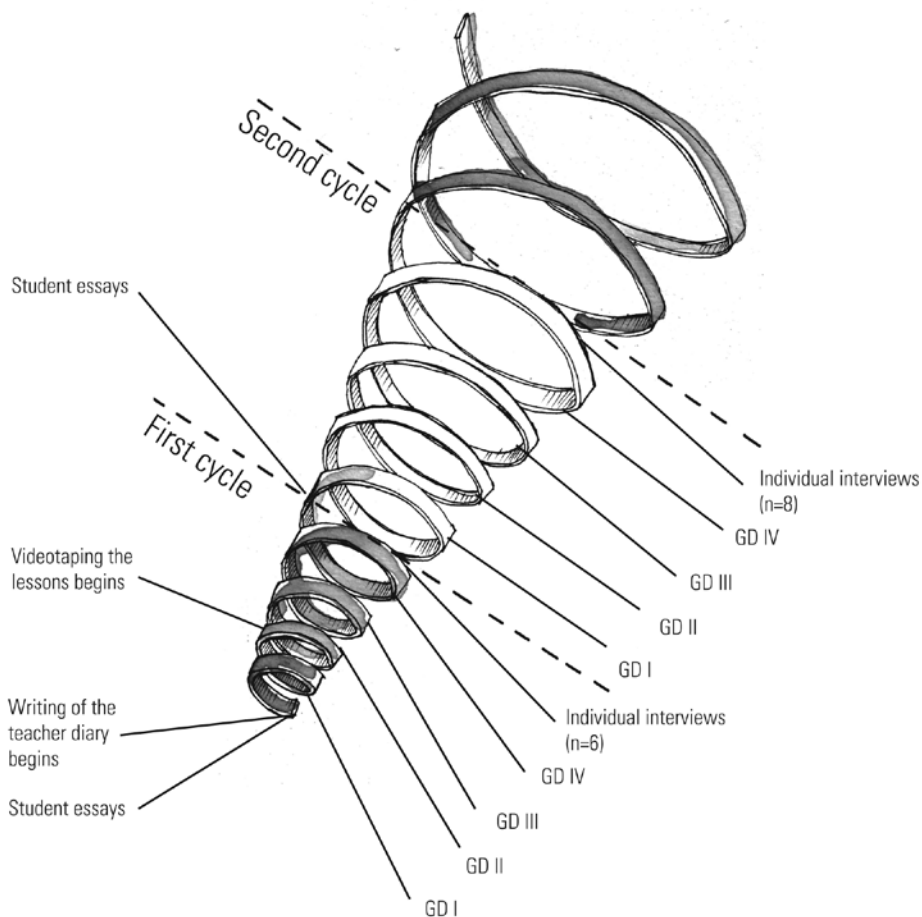


FIGURE 5. Data collection in the inquiry.

## Methods of analysis

The data analysis combines two approaches: **narrative analysis** and **data driven qualitative content analysis**. The negotiation process of redesigning the VS1 course is analysed in Chapter 3 by using narrative analysis, with the main sources of data being the teacher diary, lessons, and group discussions. Following the idea of positioning the practitioner-researcher as part of the field, simultaneously mediating and interpreting the “other” in dialogue with the “self” (Riessman, 2008, p. 17), the starting point for the analysis was to identify meaningful events that facilitated the process of negotiation in the learning community based on the experiences of the teacher-researcher, as described in the

research diary. These events, conceptualized as kairotic points (Czarniawska 2007), were taken as the basic unit of analysis in building the key narratives. Therefore, upon starting the analysis, the accounts in the teacher diary played the central role. As the analysis progressed, student interviews and essays were included in the process.

This inquiry follows the idea that it is in the context of narratives that one can appreciate what learning is taking place and what value is being created. Narratives that frame the contributions of communities to learning are always complex, with multiple voices and perspectives, and including both personal and collective narratives (Wenger, Trayner & de Laat 2011). Viewed from this perspective of personal and collective narratives, Chapter 3 focuses on discovering and articulating the collective narratives that relate to the learning communities in this inquiry, whereas the personal narratives that refer to the experience of the individual participants are discussed in Chapter 4.

The interview data and essays are not treated as concrete facts, but as selected representations of experience. As experience is here conceptually understood as temporal in nature – a continuous stream in which events following each other create distinctive qualities of interaction (Dewey LW14, p. 28; see also Westerlund 2002, pp. 54-56) – it is within this stream of experience that certain events become more significant as told, remembered and evaluated. Therefore, every event or representation, as Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) put it, “involves selective emphasis of our experience” (p. 39). Told and evaluated experiences are not isolated, but seen as continuous and having meaning in relation to each other, referring not just to the past but also to the present and future; and yet, some experienced qualities are given special meaning depending on their status in the experiential continuum. From a pragmatist perspective, however, all modes of experience and everyone’s experiences are equally real (Biesta & Burbules 2003, p. 43). Based on this understanding, when analysing the redesign process of the course I asked the following questions from the data: *What events in the project stand out from the teacher diary, student essays, and student interviews? How can these events be used as a basis for conceptualizing and evaluating the redesign process of the VS course?*

Accordingly, I perceive both the students’ interviews and the analysis of the teacher diary as stories representing narrative temporality (Baars 1997). In other words, when students reflected on the project some time after its completion, the chronological time originally encompassing the project was replaced by a sense of time punctuated by meaningful events. Also, when reflecting upon my own experiences based on the teacher diary, both after the first cycle and again when the project had come to its conclusion, I had gained



some perspective and distance from my role as a teacher-researcher, allowing for some events to fade to the back, and for others to sustain their meaning or become even more meaningful. According to Czarniawska (2007, p. 387), this perception of time can be understood as *kairotic time*. Kairotic time is the time that is represented in the participants' stories by events of special significance to the process. Or, as Riessman (2008) articulates, "in a dynamic way then, narrative constitutes past experiences at the same time as it provides ways for individuals to make sense of the past." (p. 8.)

In order to identify the kairotic events of the project, I condensed and reconstructed the many smaller narratives that the students and I had contributed into one richer, denser, and more coherent history that will be presented in Chapter 3. During the analytical process I was continuously changing roles, alternating between being a *narrative finder* – looking for narratives in the interviews – and a *narrative creator* – moulding many different happenings into one coherent history (Kvale, 1997, pp. 131-133; Kvale & Brinkman 2009). In this way, by creating a multi-voiced narrative, I enabled a new history to be told. This history was the shared history of learning<sup>15</sup> (Wenger 1998/2003) among the VS1 learning community members, a history that in many ways can be seen to further develop the themes from the original data.

There were several reasons for starting the analysis with the experiences of the teacher-researcher. Firstly, as the teacher-researcher I was engaged with the project from start to finish, while the individual students' active participation was confined to a single cycle. Therefore, by analysing the two years of teacher diary entries it was possible to create a general overview of the entire process, and to get a sense of my overall experience of the project. Secondly, although all lessons between November 2008 and May 2010 were video recorded, consisting altogether of over 70 hours of video data, it would not have been possible to transcribe and analyse all of the video material. The teacher diary thus also functioned as a guide or an index to help identify lessons and key events that had been especially significant during the process, and that were then taken as subjects for closer analysis.

The construction of the vignettes during the process of analysis is an example of how the methodology developed during the course of the inquiry. Initially, I had not planned

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15 According to Wenger, communities of practice can be thought of as shared histories of learning in the sense that "what defines a community of practice in its temporal dimension is not just a matter of a specific minimum amount of time. Rather, it is a matter of sustaining enough mutual engagement in pursuing an enterprise together to share some significant learning." (p. 86.)

on constructing any vignettes for the dissertation. My plan was to rely on quotes taken from interviews, lessons, and my teacher diary, and to proceed to represent the events in a chronological manner. However, while writing the dissertation, I noticed that each time I talked to somebody about the project I tended to start by telling a story taken from the project, and that these stories tended to remain more or less the same. Clearly, the stories were important tools that I used to make sense of what I had experienced. This realization led me to construct the three vignettes included in the dissertation. I constructed the vignettes by combining data from lessons and group discussions with the teacher diary and my personal recollection of events. In the process of constructing the vignettes, my initial stories were extensively rewritten, cross-checked against data and through member checking, tested in conferences, and revised again before they reached their present form.

In addition to exploring the essential aspects of the negotiation of this collaborative project, this study also brings to light “different histories than might have existed if participants had not intervened to transform their practices, understandings, and situations” (Kemmis & McTaggart 2002, p. 597). Following Kemmis and McTaggart (*ibid.*), I want to incorporate both collective action and the making and remaking of collective histories in my research. In Chapter 4, which focuses on the students’ articulations of their musical and pedagogical agency, I conducted qualitative content analysis of the individual student interviews. Following Zhang and Wildemuth (2009), I examined “meanings, themes and patterns that may be manifest or latent in a particular text, thus allowing the researcher to understand social reality in a subjective but scientific manner.” (p. 19.) Therefore, all individual interviews were first coded<sup>16</sup>, in an ongoing process of allowing the initial codes and themes to emerge from the interviews. This first stage of coding the data (as well as formulating the initial codes) was carried out in Finnish. Using the research questions as a guide, I then revised the codes by grouping them according to themes<sup>17</sup> and finally translated them into English. These thematized codes helped to focus the analysis and provided structure to the writing of Chapter 4.

As a form of triangulation and strengthening the analysis (see e.g. Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000, pp. 112-116), the structuring of the narratives and conducting the thematic analysis were in part carried out at the same time. In many parts of this book, various

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16 To help in the process of coding and analyzing the coded data, I used HyperResearch software.

17 At this stage of the analysis, the following themes emerged: learning experiences related to musical agency and VS; pedagogical learning experiences; learning viewed as personal growth or empowerment; mutual engagement and ownership; from preconceptions to a shared process; peer learning in a diverse community; the importance of trust, and; relationship between Me, We, and Them.

sources of data compliment each other. Data from individual interviews are used to support the analysis of the process of negotiating the redesign of the VS1 course, and group interviews are used as supporting data for the analysis of the students' articulations of agency. As is typical of practice-based research, both research cycles also encompassed countless smaller cycles of collecting and informally reviewing the data, identifying initial themes, making tentative hypotheses based on those themes, and making adjustments to teaching based on those hypotheses. At the end of the first cycle, I also analysed the data from the teacher diary and the group interviews in order to make a revised plan for the second cycle. (Figure 6.)

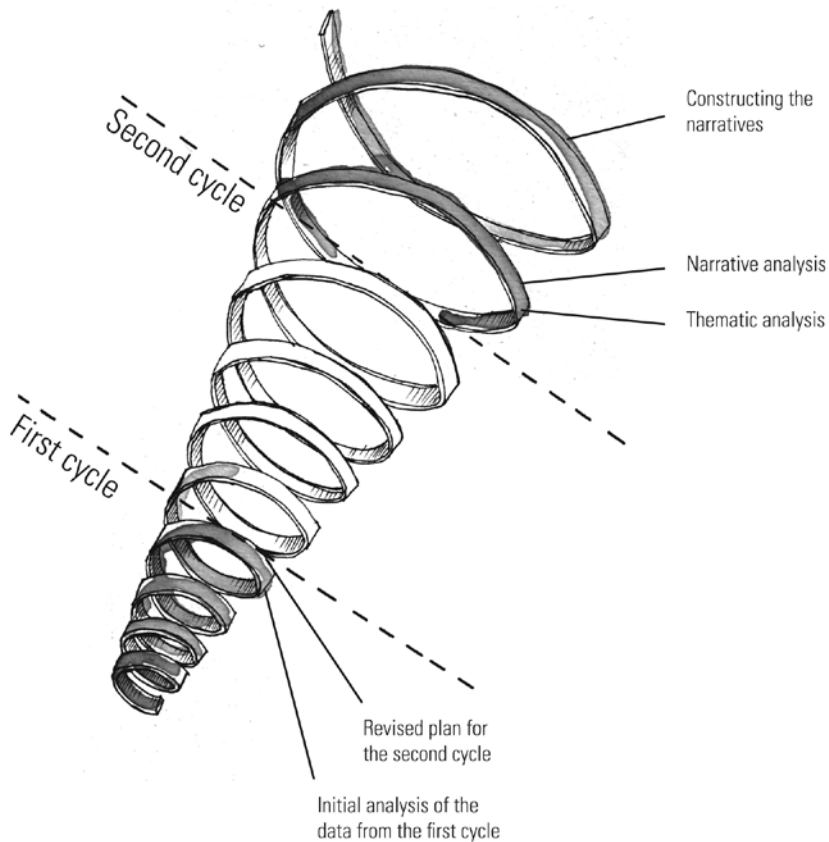


FIGURE 6. Main points of analysis.

As a whole, the process of analysis in this study is best described as being heuristic (Moustakas 1990), or as a process of prolonged engagement (Bresler 1995, 2006). As a teacher-researcher, I continued to be a member of the music education community of the Sibelius Academy after the targeted cycles had been completed, during the time when the process of detailed analysis was carried out. Therefore, throughout the life of the inquiry, I had the opportunity to continue conversing with the students and discuss aspects of the study: initially regarding the developmental process, and subsequently the process of analysis. For instance, when in the process of constructing the first narrative I requested help from one of the students who had a central role in that narrative. I then carried out major revisions to the story based on her recollection of events. Likewise, on several occasions when I needed additional information or clarification of a specific issue, I e-mailed students with questions and typically received their responses within a week. While I was working in my office in the library of the Sibelius Academy, up until the completion of the study, students would also regularly pop in to see how I was doing, and I would thus have the opportunity to show them the progress of the work. Finally, the first complete draft of the manuscript was made available for students for observations and comments as a form of member checking (Lincoln & Guba 1985). In other words, although only taking part in the inquiry as a full member for the span of one research cycle, students were involved with this study until its completion.

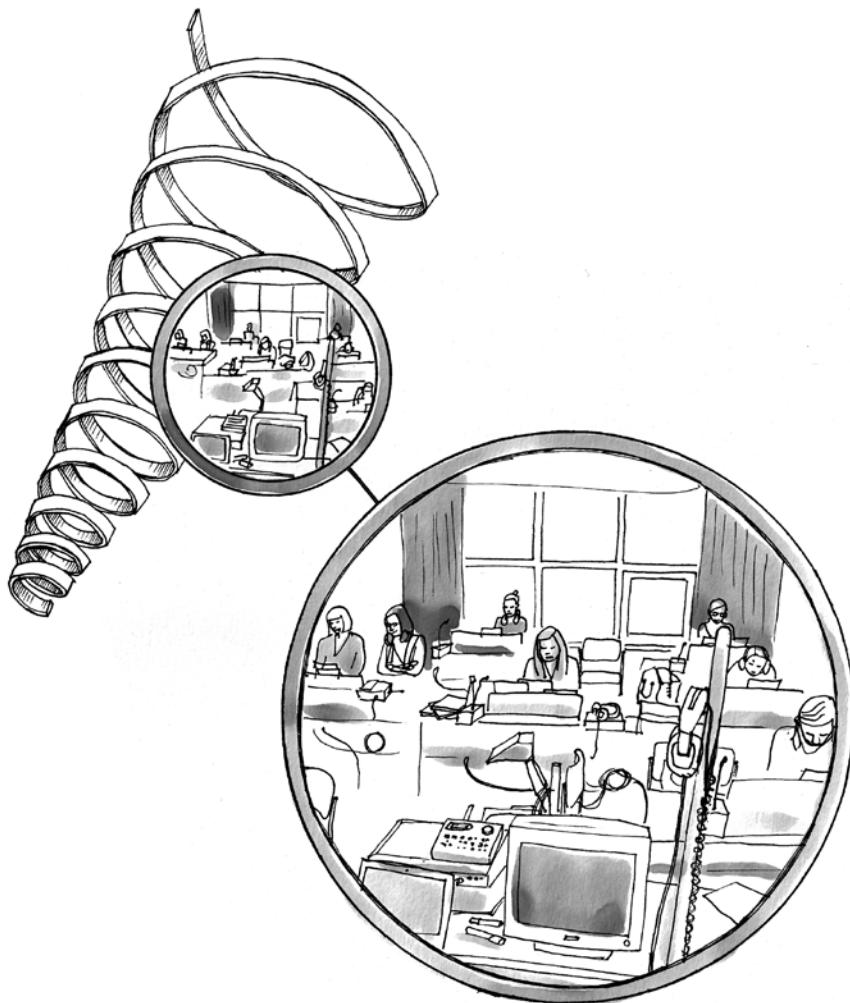
## **Ethical considerations**

The Sibelius Academy does not require official ethical approval for its research projects. However, in this inquiry all national guidelines provided by The National Advisory Board on Research Ethics in Finland (2002, 2009) as well as the general ethical guidelines for qualitative research (Zeichner 2001; Creswell 2009) were followed. All participants were first approached by a letter asking about their willingness to participate, and providing them with information regarding their possible participation in the study (Appendix 4). Indication of an initial willingness to participate was followed up by an informal discussion with the whole group prior to the start of the course, in both cycles. In this discussion, the progression of the inquiry and the level of involvement required of each participant were discussed, ensuring that the participants were fully informed as to the nature of their role in the study and what was expected of them (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, pp. 170-174). Finally, a consent form (Appendix 5) was given to and signed by all participants. All participants had the opportunity to withdraw from the inquiry at any stage by changing to another group in the VS1 course.

Ensuring the anonymity of participants was an ethical challenge in this inquiry. The music teacher education community of the Sibelius Academy is small and tightly knit, and everybody knows everybody. Also, the level of anonymity desired by the students was substantially less than what I had considered to be adequate. For example, on more than one occasion, when being asked in a social situation what I was researching, a participant would beat me to the answer by replying along the lines of: “she is studying me.” Regardless of all precautionary measures, it became clear that it was impossible for me to guarantee the participants complete anonymity. Instead, I endeavoured to ensure to the best of my ability that participants cannot be identified in their comments and stories; in other words, aiming to ensure confidentiality (Crow & Wiles 2008). I myself have refrained from making personal introductions of individual participants and instead chose to provide an overview of their age-range and the instruments they played. When choosing aliases, I sent a letter of inquiry to all participants in which they were invited to come up with their own alias if they so wished. However, the gender of the participants was maintained in the choice of alias.



### 3 Negotiating shared practices in VS1 learning communities



This chapter examines the two-year project in the piano laboratory, by articulating the process of negotiation that took place in both learning communities. The chapter explores how the process of negotiation shaped the VS1 course in terms of its curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. Based on my analysis of the meaningful events, or kairotic points, of the project, I have built three vignettes to function as anchors and starting points for the articulation of the negotiation process. In building these vignettes or key narratives, presented in sections 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4, the teacher diary and selected material from the lessons and group discussions were used as data. Individual interviews were in some cases used as means of strengthening the analysis.

### 3.1 Setting the stage

*Teacher diary (beginning of the first cycle): Tomorrow I start teaching the project group. At the moment I feel like I don't have much to go on, and I'm having trouble planning tomorrow's lesson. I've been reading Freire again, and I'm trying to put the concept of generative themes in the context of vapaa säestys. I know it's not just about the music. It's also about experiences and feelings you attach to the music you have played or listened to and the role it has in your learning. I feel naive, stupid, and stuck, because I just started to think about it. Tomorrow, I'll probably just start with improvisation, and then try to take it from there.*

bell hooks (1994) has said that when first entering the classroom at the beginning of the semester the burden is on the teacher to establish that the purpose of the course is, for however brief a time, to bring a community of learners together (p. 153). Walking into the VS1 classroom with the project group for the first time, I surely felt the weight of that responsibility. I wanted to do things differently, to give students more space and a voice, to make my teaching participatory; however, at the same time I was struggling with my own pedagogical agency after ripping out the scaffolds and abandoning my routines and familiar ways of doing things. I had already met with the students before the first lesson, and explained to them that the idea behind this inquiry was to start developing the course together. In other words, I could not predict exactly what was going to happen. Coming together in the piano laboratory for the first time, I had an idea that improvising together in small groups would be a fun way both to get to know each other and to introduce the main themes of the course at the same time. In VS, it is common to emphasize musical communication over the verbal, with the view that playing together is the best way to establish and strengthen an overall sense of connection and dialogue in teaching. And indeed, this approach started the students playing, talking, and asking questions, leaving me a relieved and happy teacher after the lesson.



*I think it [the lesson] went well, although I was nervous and talked too much. The students were interested and involved, seeming happy, and raising questions about the differences in playing basic styles like humppa, jenkka, polska, polka and so on with root five (vaihtobasso). I will make this a theme for the next lesson.*

As can be seen, right from the beginning of the course we could already see the seeds of some of the working methods we would develop together in the project. Rather than having a fixed route as a course curriculum, I intended to pick up on student questions and allow the curriculum to be steered in the direction suggested by those questions. As a result, the further we progressed in the project the more student involvement influenced the *why*, *what*, and *how* of our work, making the course a process of negotiation between the members of a learning community within a set framework.

In the first lesson, I assigned the students the task of writing a personal essay about their previous experiences with VS, and to also include what they expected from this particular course, what they especially wanted to learn, and what, if anything, they were afraid of or felt anxious about. I stressed that the essays were meant for themselves, not for me, and that I would never read them without their permission. We agreed that the essays would be kept in sealed envelopes until being returned to each student in the follow-up interview, in order to help them reflect upon the course. After reading their essay during this final interview, each student would also have the opportunity to turn in their essay to be used as data in the inquiry, but only if they so wished. Out of the 14 students in the two cycles, 12 turned in their essays to me in the follow-up interviews. The students who chose not to hand in their essays did not do so because of a lack of willingness to share their thoughts with me; rather, these students shared what they had written in the essay during their individual interviews as a form of reflection on the course, and their subsequent decision to not hand in the essay was motivated by wanting to keep the essays as a token, a concrete memory from the course.

As both these initial essays and the ongoing discussions with students during the course show, trusting others enough to play with and in front of them from the very beginning of the course – in other words sharing one's musicianship with the group – was not at all a simple matter.

*Silja (essay, first cycle): School has just started, and we have had two VS lessons. I've really liked the lessons, although I feel nervous playing in front of others. It seems like everyone is so much better than me. It really makes you concentrate, and you have to be okay with your own level of playing. Relaxed, joyful and supportive atmosphere in the lessons helps to ease the nervousness and the pressure of comparing yourself to others.*

To play in front of others, especially your peers, colleagues, or teachers, means exposing your strengths and weaknesses as a musician, which requires a fair amount of trust and musical agency. Rather than assuming that students come into their studies possessing this agency, building it should be seen as the main goal of teaching. Ira Shor begins his book *Empowering Education* (1992) by talking about his efforts to introduce a dialogical approach in the first day of a writing class with college students, and the difficulties he encounters in getting students to trust him enough to open up and be willing to share their thoughts. Teaching music introduces an additional angle to establishing a dialogical approach, because in addition to verbal communication there is the possibility, not to say necessity, for establishing musical communication. To trust a person enough to have the courage to open up musically is at least as difficult as talking to someone, and trusting someone with your thoughts does not necessarily mean you feel comfortable exposing your musicianship to them.

Much of the tone, mood, and direction of the first cycle of the inquiry were established in the first couple of lessons. Both the students and I experienced the overall atmosphere of the first lessons, as created by a combination of verbal and musical dialogue, as what Silja described as “*relaxed, joyful and supportive*”. At the same time, our experiences were complex, ambiguous, and multi-dimensional, with everyone having to face feelings of uncertainty and inadequacy in a new learning and teaching environment. We had not yet formed a learning community, which led to a sense of insecurity. Rather than trying to eliminate this feeling by resorting to old habits and set practices, I was determined to stick it out and explore the possibilities of finding a new approach. My decision was somewhat strengthened by the fact that I had also just received funding for the inquiry for three years.

## 3.2 Changing the music and the way we make music

### *Vignette 1*

*It is the beginning of semester in the first cycle and the class has been working together for less than a month. Last week we ended the lesson by playing and singing easy pop/rock tunes by ear. The assignment for the lesson this week has been to find a song you can play using the so called 'beat' accompaniment, study how to play it, and bring it to class. Walking into the piano laboratory, I feel uneasy. Reflecting on the previous lesson, I have come to realize that my instructions about the assignment were cursory and hasty, given at the last minute of the lesson. One student asked me to clarify what I meant by 'beat', and I replied casually along the lines of "Oh, you know, all kinds of pop/rock music," failing to acknowledge the need for more detailed instructions. I am not exactly feeling like the pedagogue of the day, but I have decided to face my mistakes, learn from them and move on.*

*I start the lesson apologizing for giving inadequate instructions, discussing the assignment in more detail and going over what we played last time before moving on to the material students have brought to class. The repertoire proves interesting and songs like Let it Be, It's Too Late, Scientist, as well as Finnish songs Aamu and Hiuksissa hiekkaa are played.<sup>18</sup> Each student accompanies one verse of their chosen song, while others join in to sing in the parts they are familiar with. There is only one song in the mix that no one apart from Elina, the student who has brought it to class, has heard of. I fear that Elina is put in a tough spot, and she is clearly anxious and hesitant, having to face the situation of performing the song to the group without others being able to join in. For a moment the lesson comes to a halt while we try to figure out how to proceed, and I feel inclined to skip ahead in the lesson. However, the group encourages Elina to go ahead, and she plays us a verse from the song Eye to Eye.<sup>19</sup>*

*After hearing all the songs, we discuss which songs we wish to start working on together. The students collaboratively decide on Hiuksissa hiekkaa, a contemporary Finnish pop-tune, and Eye to Eye. The latter is chosen mainly because it is not a familiar tune so the students articulate it as a "chance to learn something completely new." I am happy to continue working on Eye to Eye, because it brought up several challenges that I want to address in my newly introduced approach of co-constructing the subject matter.*

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18 Let it Be by The Beatles; It's Too Late by Carole King; Scientist by Coldplay; Aamu by Pepe Willberg; and Hiuksissa Hiekkaa by Maija Vilkkumaa. For more information on Finnish music and concepts discussed in this study, look at Appendix 1: Glossary of Finnish terms.

19 Eye to eye by Amy Grant.

As previously discussed, my research was born out of the experience of conflict between my pedagogical ideals and practices (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 2009). The issues I could identify as not being in line with my pedagogical thinking were my habit of dictating the subject matter, and the fact that the students were being left in social isolation while working in a group setting. Therefore, my first two initiatives in the piano laboratory were to 1) change the musical repertoire by starting the practice of co-constructing the subject matter; and to 2) change the way we make music by transitioning from an emphasis on private practice via headphones to making music together and for each other. In the later analysis, these initiatives stood out as the first kairotic points of the project, and opened the way to developing collaborative practices between participants.

### **The beginnings of collaboration and co-construction**

Vignette 1 describes how the subject matter was co-constructed with the students for the first time, while learning a pop/rock genre I assumed the students would be familiar with. This approach worked well overall, and students contributed interesting repertoire choices. The vignette, however, also shows that my initial approach was too careless in assuming what vocabulary and styles the students would already be familiar with, and what the students would be comfortable playing in front of others without further instructions or guidance. In addition, in VS you are often playing the piano and singing at the same time, a situation that may be challenging in more than one way. In a later interview, Elina revealed to me that for her it was not only the playing but especially the singing that she found challenging to do in front of others.

*Elina (follow-up interview, first cycle): My insecurities have a lot to do with my singing voice. I am insecure with it and so it takes up too much of my attention. I have had a couple of experiences in the past with singing in public, and somehow in my mind they are all related to being really nervous and embarrassing myself. And that always comes through.*

Learning new musical skills and new instruments, especially at the university level, means that all music education students have to face a fair amount of uncertainty, and situations where they are making music far outside of their comfort zones. Helping students to cope with and overcome challenges that are thrown at them by helping them build their musical agency is one of the most important tasks of a music educator, as well as one of main themes of this book. However, there is a fine line between designing a learning environment where students can safely face their fears in order to overcome them, and creating a situation that hinders the development of musical agency by making students feel they are embarrassing

themselves. Needless to say, the latter was not on my agenda. Therefore, as we moved forward with the course, we started to negotiate practices within the learning community that supported rather than disrupted the development of musical agency. In discussions that took place both during lessons and as group discussions (especially GD2, see Section 2.3), we continuously developed the practices of co-constructing our musical material so that it would take place in a supportive and meaningful manner.

Although playing together during the lessons from the very beginning was not without its problems, it resulted in one very important development in the learning environment. The routes of communication in the class, which previously moved from the teacher to the student(s), were opened up so that students started to have a dialogical relationship with their teacher as well as each other. To put it in layman's terms: when we started to play together, we started to trust each other more and talk more. In hindsight, this was a key factor in enabling the birth of the first learning community, which in turn was a basis for us being able to work together in a meaningful way and negotiate the course together. Subsequently, in the second cycle, beginning the course with bonding in order to facilitate a learning community became an explicit starting point.

### **Designing lessons based on co-construction and collaborative music making**

Making music together in class was a starting point for the goal of designing a learning environment that supports collaborative learning.<sup>20</sup> In making sense of this process I found support in the ideas of Wenger (1998/2003), namely that you cannot design learning, but you can design learning environments. At the same time, as a teacher I found myself exposed, uncertain, and having to let go of my need as a teacher to control all teaching and learning situations. In music, there is a strong tradition of trying to control learning, and I found myself struggling with moving the focus from control to designing learning environments. The new approach brought with it questions of time-management and lesson planning. These are issues that every teacher faces, but when starting to co-construct the course I was approaching them from a new direction. The curriculum and lesson plans became a base for the community's collaborative negotiation, a map rather than a fixed route. As a teacher, I made suggestions as to what route to take, but these

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20 When conceptualizing collaborative learning in the context of learning a musical instrument, it is worthwhile noticing that collaborative music making does not necessarily equate with collaborative learning. It is possible for two or more people to play together – playing the same piece of music at the same time with each player having her own part in the musical whole – with very minimal, if any, collaborative learning taking place.

suggestions were subjected to a process of negotiation. My way of approaching the *teacher paradox* - the constant negotiation between structure and improvisation (Sawyer 2011, p. 16) - was to include the students in this process of negotiation. Subsequently, my method of planning lessons started to change, and planning future lessons was balanced with an equal amount of reflection taking place after lessons were held. By making time after each lesson to reflect on the structure that I had planned and the improvisational process that had actually taken place as a collaborative event, I was able to make sense of the on-going learning process of the community and balance my actions as a teacher accordingly. Our approach to co-constructing the subject matter was constantly changing and developing. For example, I was learning how to carefully introduce new styles before having students find their own repertoire; we enhanced time-management by starting the practice of students sending me e-mails of their chosen songs prior to the lesson; I was collecting audio samples of the student-based repertoire, and listening to these recordings became an essential part of the course.

After experiencing two cycles of research and working in two different learning communities, it was clear that the creation of each new community always entails a certain amount of uncertainty and confusion, and with each group the work takes on different forms and dimensions. Allowing space for negotiation is an essential part of becoming a learning community and developing that particular community's goals and practices (Wenger 1998/2003; Sawyer 2007), and it is something I came to both accept and embrace as a teacher. However, when working in a learning community within a certain time-frame and with specific aims and content, it is unnecessary to add to this confusion by attempting to impose foggy and poorly designed structure. Therefore, after working together with the students for two years we developed general guidelines for co-constructing the subject matter (see Appendix 6). Developing general guidelines for the practices of the learning community helped me in the process of rebuilding my pedagogical agency as a VS teacher in the piano laboratory. At the same time, clear guidelines worked as tools for the students, making them more comfortable in the learning process.

*Ronja (follow-up interview, second cycle): I always found it helpful to know about what we are going to do a little in advance, so that I can think about it and be prepared. Not like studying the thing from a VS textbook, but getting into the general mood and feeling of, say, a particular style. For example, listening to some bossa tunes to remind myself of what the style is like.*

Aiming to diversify the established practice of VS lessons in the piano laboratory, in which the teacher typically gave an introductory presentation of the subject followed by students

mimicking the given model by rehearsing individually using their headphones, I shifted the emphasis to making music together. The established method of isolated individual practice seemed at odds with our goals, as VS in the context of music teacher education aims mainly at developing collaborative music making skills. With this in mind, during the first cycle I initiated new collaborative music making practices: starting and ending all lessons by collaborative singing and playing together via speakers, with everyone singing along even if only one student is playing, and changing players frequently without interrupting the song; playing the blues or the diatonic circle of fifths with one student playing the chord progression in a chosen style, and another improvising the solo; listening and commenting to each other's version of the given song. While many of these changes in approach were developed together with and welcomed by the students, they initially also caused me some uncertainty and concern.

***Teacher diary** (Month 2, first cycle): I'm worried about whether we play enough in the lessons. What if, come spring, I wake to realize that half of the group has not yet learned to play the things they are supposed to? For me, this has always been an issue with this course, but now I think about it even more, because due to the "one student plays and everyone sings along" practice I don't think students play as much as before in the lessons. I know that most rehearsing takes place outside the lessons, but I still find this problematic, I have been taught that it is important to teach and learn piano by playing. On the other hand, I wonder, which is more important: the amount of piano keys you push in the lesson, or the experience and feeling you get when you play? And which is more important: to learn to copy what the teacher does, or to reflect and make your own decisions when playing? And what is my role in this as a teacher?*

I expressed my concerns to the students during a group discussion (GD2, first cycle). The students were quite consistent in their views that making music together was "*what VS is all about*", and by accompanying others in class it was possible to "*learn skills that you actually need*", also stating that "*rehearsing is something you need to do in between lessons anyway.*" Playing together was also seen as an important part of creating a learning community that in turn helps to empower oneself as a VS musician, as the following excerpt illustrates.

***Inga:** One option would be, if we want more playing time per person, that everyone would play more privately, using headphones. Because if we continue with these jam sessions, it always means that some people are playing while others are listening, digging and just singing along.*

***Terhi:** I think it's good that we play together a lot, because, well, for one it is*

*collaboratory. It helps to create the spirit of togetherness. Also, I find it more fun if we all get our turn to play, and everyone is cheering each other on.*

*Ulla: It is both frightening and liberating at the same time.*

To sum it up, establishing collaborative and co-constructive practices in VS1 did not happen overnight. Nor did it happen as a result of me as a teacher-researcher dictating newly found practices in a one-way manner. Instead, the changes were negotiated between all members of the learning community. Also, the changes were not painless. Especially at the start, when introducing new, untested practices, they were a cause of concern and uncertainty for all members of the learning community.

## **Making inquiries into musical phenomena**

With time, the practice of students contributing to the subject matter expanded to cover almost all themes in the VS1 course. This meant that when encountering a new style or phenomenon students had to do independent background work to find music for class, and they were expected to contribute to the contents of the course on a weekly basis. Students had different strategies for choosing music for class. Some turned to school music textbooks where songs are clearly labelled with different styles, while others went through their own archives, trying “*to figure out what is what.*”

*Kaisa (follow-up interview, second cycle): I think it was good that we had to find songs in different styles for class, because we had to think about what that style is really all about. Compared to you coming to class, saying that “this is shuffle”, and then giving us the song. Probably the only thing I would remember that way would be the song that you gave us. But the way we did it, we had to chew it for ourselves, dig around our piles of music, think about what is what, and that is a good thing.*

Having students do research into different styles and chord progressions proved to be an interesting practice for several reasons. Firstly, as Kaisa said, through this approach students had to connect issues covered in class to a wider musical framework, and they also had the opportunity to connect these issues to the music they already knew, thus moving the approach closer to problem posing or experiential concept of education (Dewey 1938/1997; Freire 1970/2006). Secondly, having students’ personal repertoire legitimized as part of the curriculum functioned as a way of enabling dialogue in class and creating space for musical agency, much in a manner that Freire (1970/2006) talks about generative themes as a way of inaugurating “the dialogue of education as the practice of freedom.” (p. 93.) Through building practices of co-construction and collaboration in the



piano laboratory, we were starting to address the idea common to all radical pedagogies that everyone's presence in the classroom needs to be acknowledged, recognizing that everyone influences classroom dynamic, and that everyone contributes. (hooks 1994, p. 8.)

Thirdly, with students bringing their own choices of music to class, the overall depiction of each phenomenon became much deeper than it would have been when presented only from the point of view of the teacher. Before starting the project, my experience was that as a teacher I got 'stuck' using the same well-trying repertoire time and again. The use of the repertoire was pedagogically justified, but when used for prolonged periods of time it started to function as a canonized repertoire of VS, obscuring the conception of the subject as a way to approach piano in a creative, student-centred manner. Students bringing new songs to class was a wake-up call, and an opportunity for me to move beyond my set habits and critically reflect on the tensions between my pedagogical ideals and everyday practices.

I have often found myself in debates over student-based music teaching where it is suspected of narrowing the musical repertoire in teaching, because students are taught music that they are already familiar with. However, in this inquiry, including students' repertoire in the curriculum made the musical repertoire considerably broader for all members of the learning community. For example, without Elina I would have never gotten to know Eye to Eye, and most likely neither would anyone else in our group. However, as a result of making the song a part of our curriculum, another student got so excited about the song that the following year she made an arrangement of Eye to Eye for their rock band course and performed it in the university 'examination gig' at a rock club. Student-introduced repertoire choices thus have the potential to become anthems for the community.

*Krista (individual interview, second cycle): Some songs that we played in the course eventually became "our songs." For example, when Milla first brought Now At Last<sup>21</sup> to class, I don't think anyone knew the song. But then we all fell in love with it.*

In the context of this inquiry, developing shared repertoire (Wenger 1998/2003) in the learning community took place on many levels. As a community, we developed shared repertoire in terms of everyday teaching and learning practices. However, in some cases, developing shared repertoire actually took the concrete form of shared musical repertoire.

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21 Now at Last as performed by Feist.

### 3.3 Redesigning assessment practices as a collaborative effort

#### *Vignette 2*

*Half-term of the first cycle is approaching. During the last month, I have been talking with the students about the examination that concludes the course, and a recurring theme has started to come up: several students want to know why they are going to have an individual exam while studying as a group, especially in vapaa säestys that has an explicit aim of learning how to make music together. I have not really questioned this paradox until now. I have been so focused on rethinking my teaching and the interaction in the lessons that the examination itself has not been a part of my study until now. However, now I have given it some thought, talked it over with the head of the department, and am ready to tackle this issue.*

*I go to class filled with enthusiasm and ask the students if the examination is something that really bothers them. Moreover, if so, would they be interested in working on it with me to make it better. Students get excited. Terhi says it “would be nice to get this exam figured out and working in a group, because that way everyone could get support and good vibes (fiiistä) from each other.” Silja also points out that “it would be fun to do it in a way that it doesn’t emphasise the feeling of strict, rigid studying. If you do it together it can also be fun.” The overall consensus is that a group exam would serve the purpose of this course much better, and the group immediately starts envisioning a spectacle in the style of the musical Fame.*

*During the following weeks, we start to develop an exam that we feel would be more in line with the course as a whole, while I am making sure it still meets all the requirements of the course. Starting from the idea that instead of an individual exam, the students would take the exam together as a group, we re-design the exam to take place in a setting suitable for collaborative music making with several pianos — the piano laboratory. As a learning community, we go step-by-step through every part of the exam, discussing the aims of each task, the best practices for striving towards those aims, and the most meaningful ways of performing them in the actual exam. We then re-design most of the exam tasks to include collaborative music making. For example, playing the 12-bar blues is to include another student improvising the solo, and when a student is accompanying one’s own singing, others can join in the chorus. In the case of tasks that we find necessary to perform solo, the students still prefer for their peers to be present for support.*

*A couple of months later I am standing in the food line at the cafeteria next to Terhi. Unexpectedly, she turns to me and says that she feels the group exam is the best thing we could do in vapaa säestys. With the exam approaching in just a couple of weeks time, I feel my confidence rising. I think this will work.*

In the previous chapter related to Vignette 1, as a teacher-researcher I had a leading role in introducing new, albeit collaborative practices, and creating favourable conditions for a learning community to be born. In this second vignette, the communication and the dynamics of negotiating shared practices in the learning community are considerably different. Students participate in the learning community as full members, and are active in pointing out practices that they do not experience as justified or meaningful. My position as a teacher-researcher has also changed. I now function in a double-role – on the one hand, I am a member of the learning community in the process of creating its own practices. On the other hand, I am a broker (Wenger 1998/2003, p. 105) that mediates between institutional restrictions and the knowledge emerging from the learning community. According to Wenger, brokers are able to make new connections across communities of practice, enable coordination, and hopefully open up new possibilities for meaning. The job of brokering

requires enough legitimacy to influence the development of practice, mobilize attention, and address conflicting interests. Brokering often entails ambivalent relations of multimembership. (p. 109.)

## **A Learning community designing its own learning**

The most visible result of the learning community creating its own tools of collaborative learning in the first cycle was the development of the group exam. The learning community reconstructed the examination and the assessment practices, while the process of reconstructing the exam in turn strengthened and shaped our group as a learning community. Following Wenger (1998/2003), one could say that reconstructing the exam functioned as a way of negotiating the values and goals of the community and its pursuit of a joint enterprise. In the process of reconstruction we developed a shared repertoire of routines, tools, and ways of doing things, which led to an increased sense of mutual engagement.

The group exam was developed during the period of five months preceding the exam date. For the most part, the exam was developed as part of regular lesson work. However, we also held a group discussion that focused on redesigning the exam (GD3, first cycle), and organized one extra lesson in the piano laboratory in which the details of the exam were finalized. The group exam retained the overall structure of the individual exam, with harmonization and prima vista tasks being followed by chord progressions and the individual repertoire (Appendix 7). However, most of these tasks were redesigned to include collaborative music making. Also, instead of students performing all the tasks

successively, they decided to take turns so that all participants concluded each section of the exam before moving on to the next task as a group. When redesigning the exam, students focused mainly on two themes: how the exam could best integrate our daily practices in class, and how well the exam conveyed the community's general consensus about the goals and values of VS. In a sense then, the students were intuitively striving towards a better alignment of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices as conceptualized by McWilliam and Lebler (2008); this theme will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

When the first cycle exam was actually held, one extra element was added to the beginning of the exam at the spur of the moment. A colleague from the examination board pointed out to me that a group exam could start with people making music together instead of the usual individual harmonizing and prima vista tasks. On that note, when all the students had arrived in the piano laboratory, I asked them how they wanted to begin:

*Inga: Would you like to have a sing-along before starting with the exam?*

*Terhi: What song would we do?*

*Inga: You could sing something like 'Leijonaa mä metsästän', before we begin with the actual tasks.*

*Several students: Yes, let's do that.*

*Inga: Is that okay with you, Mikko? Could you play it?*

*Mikko: Sure, why not.*

*Leijonaa mä metsästän*, translated roughly into English as "I Hunt The Lion", is a simple children's tune that follows the call-and-response principle. During the course, Mikko had arranged the song as a samba, where he had the role of the accompanist and the lead singer, while all the other students followed him by giving appropriate responses to each verse. We had played the song on several occasions earlier in the course, so it was well known by all. The song is up-beat and quite humorous, and in the exam the students started to jam and relax while performing it, which seemed to take the edge off of their nervousness. After this improvised beginning, the exam continued according to the planned structure, and students started to perform the required tasks, both individually and in pairs. However, the overall atmosphere created in the beginning remained in the piano laboratory throughout the exam. For example, in addition to playing and singing together, students conversed with each other rather freely during the exam, cheering each other on and joking in much the same fashion as in our weekly lessons.

## The assessment of the first exam

Redesigning the exam also affected the nature of the assessment. Instead of the students receiving individual feedback from the VS teachers on the examination board<sup>22</sup> about their performance, the group exam was followed by an open discussion (GD4) between the four teachers who were present at the exam, myself, and all the students. During the discussion the main voice was given to the students, who reflected on the exam, on the course as a whole, and on their learning process during the year. The teachers' comments, in turn, focused on reflecting on the goals of the course and VS, as well as general comments and advice to the students about continuing on to the second and third year of VS studies.<sup>23</sup>

The assessment discussion after the group exam of the first cycle offered valuable feedback, from both students and colleagues, for me as the teacher-researcher. I had updated my colleagues on my project a few times in staff meetings during the semester, but the exam was the first time my colleagues witnessed our learning community in action. The assessment discussion functioned as a forum for my colleagues to converse with the learning community, asking the students and myself questions that occupied their minds as well as offering their perspectives on the project, especially the exam they had just witnessed. Students in turn reflected on what they had learned in the project, their learning processes in and as a member of a learning community, and the role of the course in their process of starting to develop agency as a music teacher. The assessment discussion thus served many functions: 1) feedback to students; 2) feedback from students; 3) introducing the learning community to the VS teachers of the Sibelius Academy; 4) including VS teachers in the process of the inquiry; 5) experience for the students of both student and colleague collaboration in their future work as teachers.

In hindsight, the assessment discussion for the first cycle was not planned as well as it could have been. Going into the discussion without any structure made everyone involved feel a bit unsteady. We were not really sure what was going to happen. How would the discussion proceed? Who would be responsible for leading the discussion? What would the guiding themes be? Would the students get individual feedback from their performance, or would the discussion revolve around more general themes? Although the first assessment

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22 In both the individual and the group exam for VS1, the examination board consists of two VS teachers, including the responsible teacher of the course. However, the group exam of the first cycle awoke much interest in the VS teachers of the Sibelius Academy, so in addition to myself, there were four VS teachers present. All the teachers participated in the assessment discussion, although we decided collaboratively that only two teachers would be marked as members of the examination board.

23 In the second and third year of VS studies, the tuition is offered in the form of one-on-one lessons.

discussion could be considered successful in general, upon reflection there was much to improve. After the first cycle, I discussed both the exam and the assessment with all the students in the follow-up interviews, asking them for their insight and ideas on how they would improve the practices in the future. Their experiences, and the initial analysis of the data of the first cycle, functioned as a basis for the developmental work in the second cycle.

## **Reflecting on the exam and assessment of the first cycle**

In both the assessment discussion and in the follow-up interviews, students of the first learning community were asked to reflect upon the exam and make suggestions as to how to develop it further in the future. One theme that had stood out during the process of redesigning the exam was that students saw playing and singing together as an asset and an integral part of the course and the subject VS, and they wanted this to be a visible part of the exam. Discussing the exam after it had taken place, students reflected on how well it had succeeded in capturing the overall atmosphere of the learning community. The students experienced the exam as capturing the essence and mood of the lessons, and this was seen as important.

*Ulla: It was a safe situation. From the beginning of the exam, we started to build a relaxed atmosphere and that is really important. I also liked that we took turns in playing and we didn't know what songs we were going to play in advance. It was different from a recital, where you concentrate on perfecting your select repertoire. Overall, it was a good, whole package. And the fact that the exam was in the same style and mood as the lessons was a good way to end things. I'm happy to have been a part of it.*

*Terhi: I thought the exam was fun. It was kinda like while we had an exam we were pretending it was not one. We were just hanging out and playing with our gang. Of course it added to the excitement that we had the "members of the board" there, but in the end, they didn't really matter anymore.*

For most students, the group exam was a positive experience, something that they "got a good kick out of". The group exam was particularly valued because, according to the students, during their studies in Sibelius Academy they have numerous opportunities to stand alone in front of an examination board, but taking an instrumental exam in a group is a rare occasion. Therefore, the group exam was seen as a valuable experience, although not necessarily an easy one.

**Matti** (individual interview): Somehow, combined with the fact that the lessons are not in a one-to-one format and that we do the whole course as a group, it would feel weird to have an individual exam. Besides, individual exams are awful, and you encounter them more than enough here anyway. I think that it is good to experience at least one group exam, even if it turns out to be something that you do not really like.

For Elina, the group exam proved to be a stressful experience. In the exam, each student had prepared a repertoire of ten pieces. Elina was in the unfortunate position of being the last student playing. While waiting for her turn to play, she heard her peers play several songs that were also in her repertoire and guessed, quite correctly, that she would not be asked to play the same tunes again, which added pressure to the wait. We discussed her experience in the assessment discussion right after the exam.

**Elina:** I had a different experience from what others have described. I was the last one to play, and I heard people playing songs that I had in my repertoire and I knew they would not be played again.

**Terhi:** It happened to me too, when Matti got to play *Akselin ja Elinan häävalssi* before me. It was my absolute favourite, I would have liked to play it.

**Ulla:** And to me it was, when Mikko played *Ranskalaiset korot*. That would have been my bravura.

**Elina:** I just witnessed all my strong pieces being played before my turn.

**Ulla:** Same thing happened to me. You always have a couple of songs that you are least comfortable with. And they were the ones I got to play.

**Teacher1:** But you can never know which songs you are going to be asked to play in the individual exam either.

**Elina:** I just found it logical that the same songs would not be chosen to play twice, let alone three times.

**Teacher1:** Did you start drawing conclusions on what songs you would be asked to play?

**Elina:** Yep. And I was right. And I think I got depressed even before my turn. But I can say that most people do not react like me.

**Teacher2:** I think this is important, because this is different from an individual exam where you do not know what you are asked to play.

**Elina:** And everyone's singing was so strong, it was gorgeous.

**Terhi:** Honey, I have the flu and no voice what so ever. And I thought you played and sang really well. Really well.

**Elina:** The combination of my favourite songs being played, and being anxious about singing was what triggered it, I think.

**Teacher1:** Was it that you would have liked to show us your best too?

**Teacher2:** You could think of having an element of choice involved in the exam.

*Getting to choose and prepare one song that you are sure you will get to play. Something that you would know in advance.*

**Ulla:** *I would like that. Having two songs picked at random, and one you can choose yourself.*

**Mikko:** *That would be good.*

**Inga:** *A song to start with, perhaps?*

**Ulla and Mikko:** *Yeah. Could be.*

The students continued to reflect on Elina's experience in the individual follow-up interviews. When discussing the future of the exam, developing it so that it would be equally fair for everyone participating became the main focus.

**Terhi** (individual interview): *I remember Elina stating strongly that she felt bad when some of her repertoire was "crossed off" her list. I can imagine that it is not fun: hearing pieces that you know and like being played by someone else, and feeling that only the pieces you don't like or find difficult are likely to be played by you. I don't know how the examination board feels about this. Do they want to hear only one tango, one bossa and one shuffle in during the exam? Could we have the "Bonus round" like we talked about in the assessment discussion? A round where you could play one extra song, any song you like, even if it has been played already. It doesn't mean that you are competing with anyone; whether and how someone else has played the piece is irrelevant. To me it is a statement: "I have done a lot of work on this, and I want you all to hear it. I want to acknowledge its worth." Personally I would have liked to play more pieces, and I would so have liked to play Akselin ja Elinan häävalssi. I knew it so well and I had done so much work on it.*

The idea of getting to choose at least one of the performed songs resonated with everyone, and this practice was subsequently realized in the second cycle's exam. In fact, in the assessment discussion after the first cycle, the students responded to the idea so strongly that the practice of offering the student the chance to choose one of the pieces to be performed in the exam was also adopted in the individual exams for VS1 and VS2, starting right from the day after the assessment of the first cycle. In this particular instance, VS teachers who had attended the group exam functioned as brokers, introducing the idea to the rest of the VS community of Sibelius Academy, and working in an extremely short time frame.

Several students proposed extending the performance practices outside the venues of the lessons and the exam, in the form of matinees, for example "a spring matinee where everyone could play a piece or two of their own choice." Students saw that in the matinees every student would have the chance to play their favourite pieces, while at the same time



getting to share the music with people outside the learning community as well as much needed experience in performing. We even discussed whether we needed an examination board listening to the exam, or whether the course should be developed more in keeping with peer assessment practices, even to the point of not having an examination panel at all (see. e.g. Lebler 2008a). However, having outsiders listening to the exam was something that the students saw as meaningful in a positive way in relation to their growth as musicians.

*Ulla (individual interview): It is good rehearse to play in front of people you don't know. It is experience that we all need as musicians, and the more we get opportunities to do it, the better.*

Having people from outside the learning community come and listen was also something that was experienced as adding to the level of concentration required, and subsequently to the level of performance.

*Terhi: I felt that some people played much better in the exam than when rehearsing the day before. We rehearsed together with Silja the day before, and I want to say for the record: in the exam she really outdid herself. I think the feeling of "The Exam" can be a good thing, it makes you concentrate, it adds something to the situation.*

## **Negotiating the exam in the second cycle**

After analysing the experiences and reflections of the first cycle, the goal of the second cycle was to explore and expand upon the themes and practices that the first learning community had found meaningful and relevant, including the exam. In the process of introducing the existing themes and practices to what would become the second learning community, I was positioned as the only 'old-timer,' moving from the first learning community to the second. When starting to work with the new group of students, goals had to be renegotiated collaboratively. Concerning the exam, the students of the second cycle decided to wait until we had had the chance to work together before deciding whether to continue experimenting with the group exam or to go for a more traditional, individual approach. The decision to work towards a group exam was eventually negotiated by the second learning community in a group discussion (GD2, second cycle) after working together for two months.

**Inga:** *I think we should talk about the exam, and about what we are aiming at in this course. This could clarify what we are doing and why. Last year the exam changed considerably after we had developed a similar way of working to that we have now. The individual exam before an examination board started to feel off because it was so different from what we did in the class. I can talk you through what happened in the exam last year as well as what happens in the traditional, individual exam. Afterwards, if you feel that you are more comfortable with the individual approach then you have the right to decide so.*

**Kaisa:** *I am thinking about what our goals are for learning in this course. About what we have been talking about a lot, about learning together. To me it sounds that the group exam would respond and answer to how we have succeeded together. When you think about taking what we have done out of context and going into a classroom by yourself, then is it really what we have learned and rehearsed? On the other hand, I guess you would get more individual feedback that way which is always interesting.*

**Krista:** *Yeah, but we are used to playing in front of and with each other. I think it would be more fun together, not having to fear anything. Of course you have to know and master the pieces exactly the same way you would in the individual exam, that has to be the starting point.*

**Kaisa:** *That's what I was thinking. And if we have something that we plan on playing together we have to make time to rehearse together. I don't know how busy our spring will be otherwise, can we find the time?*

**Krista:** *Oh, that. But do you think that we would need a lot of rehearsals? I thought that we could put it together quite easily.*

**Inga:** *I thought you could start the exam in the same manner that you start each lesson. Having a song where you change players without interrupting the piece. Nothing more complicated than that. Just having something to kick-start the exam, before moving on to the required elements.*

**Pia:** *To me, it could feel more relaxed and make it less tense. Exams always have that certain "now you have to do everything right" feel to them.*

**Kaisa:** *Don't we have an individual exam in VS2?*

**Inga:** *Yes, you will.*

**Ronja:** *We will get plenty of experience from individual exams.*

Eventually, the group exam of the second cycle was designed based on the experiences from the first cycle. Rather than starting from scratch, some of the best practices developed in the first cycle were adopted through negotiation, and new collaborative practices were developed based on the foundations laid the year before. Through the process of negotiation, the learning community of the second cycle included an element of their own in the exam structure of the previous year. While keeping the main elements intact, the second exam emphasized collaborative music making even more, by adding pieces played together to the beginning and end of the exam (see Appendix 8).

The basic idea of holding an assessment discussion after the exam remained the same with the second group exam as it had been in the first cycle. However, the students of the first cycle had expressed the thought that, in addition to a collaborative discussion and feedback, they would have liked to receive more individual feedback on their performances than was possible in the group discussion. Therefore, in the second cycle, teachers that were listening to the exam also wrote individual comments for each student that I then relayed to the students in individual follow-up interviews, thus ensuring both collaborative and personal feedback.

### **3.4 From boundary objects and brokering to celebrating the learning community**

#### *Vignette 3*

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*The final moments of cycle two are at hand: the group exam for the students of the second cycle is coming to a close. Air in the piano laboratory is thick from hosting 8 students and three teachers for the last 90 minutes. During this time all students have played several songs in different styles, including the melody on the piano or accompanying themselves while singing, playing tunes they have prepared for the occasion as well as tunes they have to master on the spot. Students have played collaboratively as one group, in pairs, and individually; they have played chord progressions in different keys and styles, improvised solos, and harmonized a children's tune. However, there is still one piece the students have chosen to perform as an extra. They start a traditional hymn, Suvivirsi – a song that is widely played at the end of the school year in schools and kindergartens across Finland. Starting out as a traditional choral, the arrangement progresses gradually to a groovier version, and students take turns in playing while everyone sings along. When the song ends, so ends the exam. Everyone claps.*

*As the teacher of the course, my focus turns immediately to hosting the group discussion for all participants in the teachers lounge with my two colleagues who have been listening to the exam. The discussion is meant to start right after the exam, and it is the main forum for evaluation and feedback for both the students and me. While I am busy moving cameras to the teachers lounge, the students run downstairs shouting out at me as they go: "It will only take a minute, we just want to play the last one to the people in the cafeteria!" Sure enough, five minutes later they return and by that time we are ready to start our evaluation of the exam and the course as a whole.*

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The first cycle had begun with the learning community starting to develop collaborative practices somewhat from a clean slate. The chance to create new practices increased the student's sense of ownership of the project, making it "*our thing*" as repeatedly articulated in the discussions and interviews. However, it is not possible or reasonable to build a pedagogical approach on the idea that each group of students starts from scratch, re-inventing the course in its totality all over again. The position of the learning community of the first cycle was unique, because like the students I was in the process of redesigning practices for the first time.

In addition to the already mentioned position of brokering between the learning community and institutional practices, my position in the second cycle was that of a broker in relating the practices of the first learning community to the second. A teacher's position is naturally central in course development, and the teacher can easily lead the process through top-down leadership. In this inquiry, however, my aim was to position myself as a broker facilitating the process of negotiation in a community. Hence, I was balancing my eagerness to expand and further explore the themes that had become essential in the first cycle, with taking a step back and allowing space for the second community to start creating their own themes. When starting the second cycle, I was also still emotionally processing the loss of the first learning community that I had been deeply involved with, while the students that formed the second learning community were experiencing the process for the first time. The second learning community's journey was different from the first learning community's in many ways. However, through the process of negotiation it became every bit as strong a community, with mutually engaged members creating its own set of practices for its joint enterprise. Also, despite the initial burden of my memory of the first learning community, I became every bit as invested intellectually and emotionally in the second community.

Although the two learning communities were unique in the sense that they were comprised of different students, developed their own set of practices and tools, and also developed their own sense of group agency, the two communities also shared many of the same themes. In some cases, due to the temporal progression, the second learning community built upon the foundation laid by the first community, clarifying themes and practices set in motion during the first cycle. For example, in this inquiry collaborative music making practices are seen as one of the many building blocks that enable and facilitate collaborative learning. Vignette 3 describes an instance where these building blocks came together, resulting in the learning community experiencing meaningful collaborative learning. Prior to the events in the vignette, the second learning community had developed practices of

peer teaching and learning already set in motion by the first learning community. Hence, in the following section, I will explore themes that permeate the work of both learning communities.

## **The emergence of peer learning**

Peer learning has recently been examined within music education as an authentic way to learn popular music (Green 2001), involving no or minimal teacher involvement. In this inquiry, peer learning emerged as an organic part of the practices of both learning communities, without the need to draw clear borders between peer learning and other kinds of learning in the course. Peer learning developed gradually in both learning communities. Discussing ideas and questions openly in class, in addition to making music together, resulted in students starting to reflect their ideas not only to me, but also to each other, giving their input as well as asking advice from others. For example, in the first learning community, after working together for a month I assigned the students the homework of harmonizing a tune called *Syysunelmia* (see Appendix 1). The following week, students listened to each other's versions in class and started to 'exchange chords' in a quite informal manner.

*Terhi: I liked your ending. Can you show me how to play it?*

*Mikko: Yeah, of course! But you did something interesting in the beginning of the chorus, what was it?*

Students shared their choice of chords, and the reasons for choosing different harmonies, thus sharing their learning process with the community. The learning community's harmonized version of *Syysunelmia* was eventually built up from varied verses, combining the ideas of all the members of the learning community.

In both learning communities, the act of working together expanded its scope from collaborating in lessons to rehearsing together outside class. Interestingly, in my previous years of teaching I had always encouraged students to rehearse together, but - to the best of my knowledge - before we started to work together in class during the first cycle it had not actually taken place. Wanting to know whether this interest in rehearsing together emanated from our classroom practices and the students themselves, or was due to my verbal suggestions, in the second cycle I mentioned the possibility of getting together outside lessons to rehearse in passing, but did not stress it any further. My verbal suggestions, or the lack thereof, seemed to have had little bearing on the outcome, with students in the second cycle also getting together to rehearse in a similar way to the first. Interestingly,

in the follow-up interviews for the second cycle, some students even reprimanded me for not stating more clearly from the beginning how beneficial rehearsing together would be. Having found peer-learning practices on their own, the students expressed the importance of rehearsing together and wanted to make sure that future students would be aware of this opportunity from the beginning.

***Ronja:** I rehearsed with Kaisa, especially before the exam, and it was really beneficial. That is a tip I would like to give to future students: Rehearse together. There are a lot of classrooms with two pianos here. And you can support each other even if you are not the best at everything. You can listen with a fresh ear. I played my exam program to Kaisa, and she had really good and clear advice about simple things that I had not noticed myself while playing, like “you could play that bass line a little more clearly”, or something. It was really good practice. I think it was possible because our group dynamics was so good overall.*

## **The impulsion leading to peer teaching**

In the follow-up interviews for the first cycle, one of the themes was how the students would develop the VS1 course in the future, if given a chance. In the discussion that followed, Terhi suggested having peer teaching sessions as part of the curriculum.

***Terhi:** I had an idea that it would be fun to get to try teaching VS in one of the lessons. I've been trying to teach my own piano students VS, because they expressed interest in it. But anyway, it would be nice to get to teach a song of your choice to the rest of the group in the latter part of the course when you know and trust everyone. You, as the guiding teacher, could supervise and make sure the piece is doable, but everyone could have a go at teaching. I think it could have been a lot of fun.*

In the first learning community, students took an active role in expanding their roles from that of learners to active developers of their learning environment, constantly reflecting on their own actions and our common practices. Terhi's suggestion of peer teaching, which resonated with many of her peers, can be viewed as an impulsion<sup>24</sup> to include the experience of the position of the teacher in her learning. Impulsion, as Muhonen and Väkevä (*forthcoming*) have discussed, can be viewed from a Deweyan perspective: as the initial indeterminate phase of a process, the dynamic moment when someone in the middle of doing something becomes aware of an acute need to inquire into the situation, in order

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<sup>24</sup> Dewey chooses to use the term “impulsion” instead of “impulse” in his inquiry concerning expression. According to him, impulsion is the movement of the organism in its entirety, the initial stage of any complete experience. (Zeltner 1975, p. 32; see also Dewey “The early works V.” pp. 96-109.)

to find new meaning in what is going on. In addition, from the pedagogical standpoint, “impulsion marks the need of the learner to get an active response from the educator and other learners.” (Muhonen & Väkevä *forthcoming*.) An active response resulted from Terhi’s suggestion, and peer teaching was subsequently realized in the second learning community. From an action research point of view, experimenting with peer teaching was one way of further developing the themes of the first cycle.

Upon beginning the second cycle, many collaborative practices, such as co-constructing the subject matter and collaborative music making, had already been introduced and developed by the first learning community. Being a part of both cycles, it was not possible for me to assume the same position of a ‘first-timer’ a second time and, as already discussed, neither was it necessary. I negotiated this dilemma with the students early on in the second cycle, and we agreed that it was worthwhile to continue working on developing the existing practices. The sense of becoming a learning community cannot be made dependent on a complete renewing of practices on a yearly basis. However, it is vital for each group 1) to have space for negotiation and re-evaluation of already existing practices, and 2) to have their own project as part of negotiating their shared enterprise (see e.g. Barrett 2005; Rikandi, Karlsen & Westerlund 2010). Subsequently, peer teaching became one of the projects of the second learning community. Although the idea of peer teaching originated from a student in the first cycle, it had not been realized in practice. The second learning community negotiated the structure and the purpose of the peer teaching sessions, using it as a tool in articulating what was meaningful and important in their learning.

When eventually realized, peer teaching took the form of individual 15 minute sessions held during spring term. The sessions served as one forum for reviewing the main themes of the course and building one’s repertoire for the exam. Students were able to choose the topic for their peer teaching session freely; however, I offered to assist in finding a theme if necessary. I offered students several possible points of departure when designing their teaching session: basing the session around what they experienced as the strongest aspect in VS; concentrating on a topic they found particularly challenging or troubling; or choosing a topic that they felt had not been covered in sufficient detail and that they would like to get to know more deeply. Based on these guidelines, the topics of the sessions varied from studying a groovy bass-line<sup>25</sup> to tips on how to improvise a blues solo, and from playing a pop-tune with the melody to learning how to use extended chords in harmonization.

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25 Surf Rider as performed by The Lively Ones.

Kaisa introduced Suvivirsi - the hymn in Vignette 3 (see also Appendix 1) - to the class in a peer teaching session, with me participating as one of the students. After her 15 minutes of teaching, however, Kaisa continued to cover the song in the following lesson, because the group was interested in playing it together in the exam. The second lesson was an independent peer teaching session held without me.<sup>26</sup> In the process of learning the piece, Kaisa guided students to work in pairs and as one group, leading the discussion on different aspects that need to be considered when playing the song.

***Kaisa:** I don't feel that I was teaching as much as I was asking about how people thought hymns could be played, what was their take on it. And many different ideas came up in the session, which I think was probably a good thing. Somehow the topic fit me quite well, I had fun when planning it, and overall, it was great fun.*

It is important to take into account that in the second learning community all members were able to experience the roles of peer teacher as well as peer learner equally. Also, in peer teaching sessions I assumed the position of a student, equal with everyone else.

## **Negotiating one's place and voice in the community**

After two peer teaching sessions, the learning process continued collaboratively. Students co-arranged Suvivirsi, working as a group in trying to achieve a musically coherent whole. In the following excerpt from a lesson, students are in the process of negotiating the overall structure of the arrangement.

***Pia:** What chords did we alter or change? I missed that.*

***Kaisa:** Oh yeah. We had several options that we analysed, but we still have to choose. It depends on whether we want to base it on the old version or the new version. It depends.*

***Hanna:** I think the question is: if we all play a part of it, does it really matter. I mean everyone can use the chords they prefer; we don't all have to sound alike, do we?  
Students mumble acceptingly.*

***Kaisa:** But if we begin with the 'organ' verse, that could be a more traditional choral, couldn't it?*

***Inga:** There are eight of you. With my math, four verses equals half a verse per person. You just have to decide who plays what part.*

***Suvi:** Yeah. Do we sing or play the melody?*

***Inga:** With hymns, can't you also do both?*

***Suvi:** Oh yeah, good point!*

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26 Both sessions were videotaped, like all our lessons.



**Kaisa:** *How about if I write out the lyrics and then we listen to the groovy version and take the chords from there? Everyone takes a section and gives a suggestion on how it could be played?*

**Several students:** *Yes.*

**Ronja:** *Or, we could start the traditional way, and slowly mould it towards a more modern take?*

**Kaisa:** *That would be so cool!*

**Inga:** *Sounds like an interesting plan, especially if you play all four choruses.*

From this process of negotiation, an overall consensus about the progress of the arrangement emerged, in which each student had both the responsibility and the freedom to execute her part of the piece as she preferred. The goal of the arrangement was to achieve a coherent whole while still offering each player the opportunity to express her individual voice.

It is evident that, when present, I also participated in the negotiation. In fact, caught up in the excitement of what we were doing, many times I participated as an equal member of the learning community, realizing only in hindsight that my position as a teacher had influenced the decision-making process more than I had intended. However, students also turned to me to get the point of view of an outside listener, stating that while *“playing and singing all the time, it is hard to realize how it sounds if you are listening to it for the first time”*, asking if I could hear the *“nuances and colours”* and whether the arrangement was *“clear and understandable”*.

## **Celebrating the learning community**

Overall, the experience of group agency seems to be heightened in the third vignette. Both during the lessons and in the follow-up interviews, students participating in the second cycle articulated several reasons for making Suvivirsi part of the exam. These reasons can all be placed in the overarching category of cherishing the work of the learning community and wanting to celebrate and share it with others, which in turn can be interpreted as having a strong sense of agency as a community.

Wenger (1998/2003) has stated that the histories of communities of practice “are not just internal; they are histories of articulation with the rest of the world.” (p. 103.) In that spirit, the spontaneous performance of Suvivirsi in the cafeteria after the exam could be seen as the students wanting to make public the outcome of their collaborative learning process and the importance of the community in their learning. The students were genuinely excited about the music they were making, and wished to share it with others outside

the course. Moreover, students wanted to end the exam on a high note – with everyone playing together. There was a general consensus that making music together had been an essential part of the course, and therefore it should be an essential and visible part of the exam. Also, for many students this was the last exam of the academic year. Ending the exam with Suvivirsi thus functioned as a reference to the ritual (Small 1988) of ending the school year, as previously experienced in general education, while at the same time exemplifying and celebrating the shared practices of this particular community.

Finally, before moving on to the next chapter, which concentrates on how students experienced agency in the project, I conclude this chapter with a visual representation of the analysis of the two-year project as a process of negotiation, situated in a kairotic time line (Figure 7).

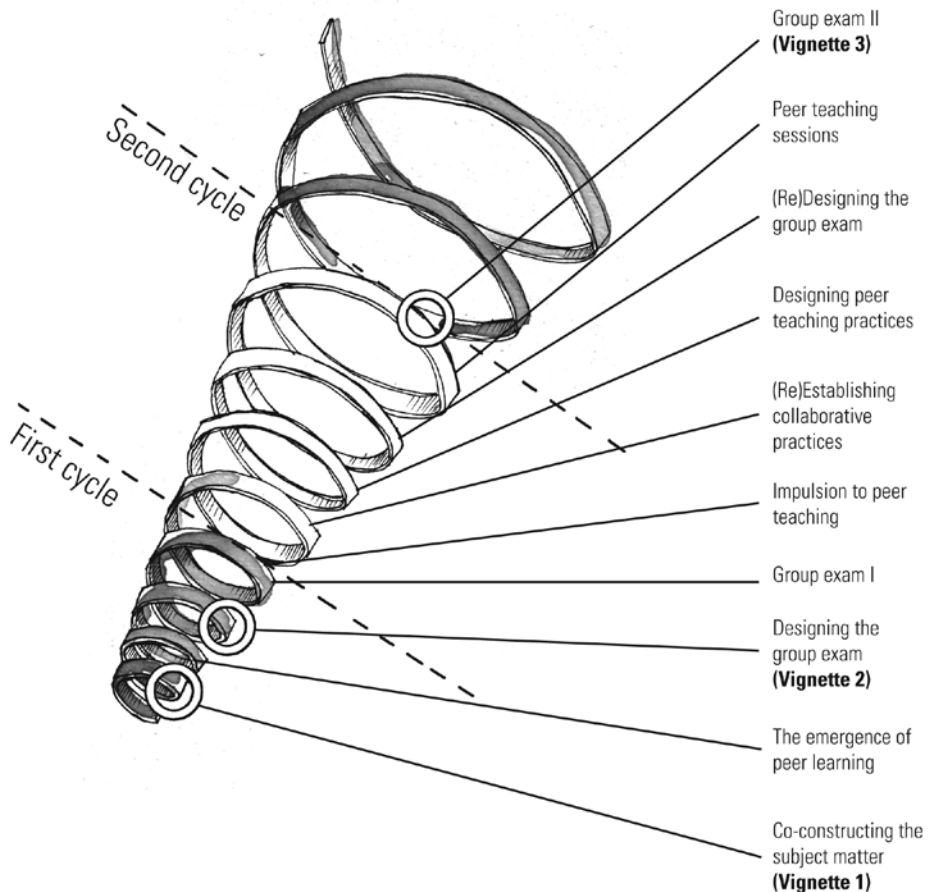
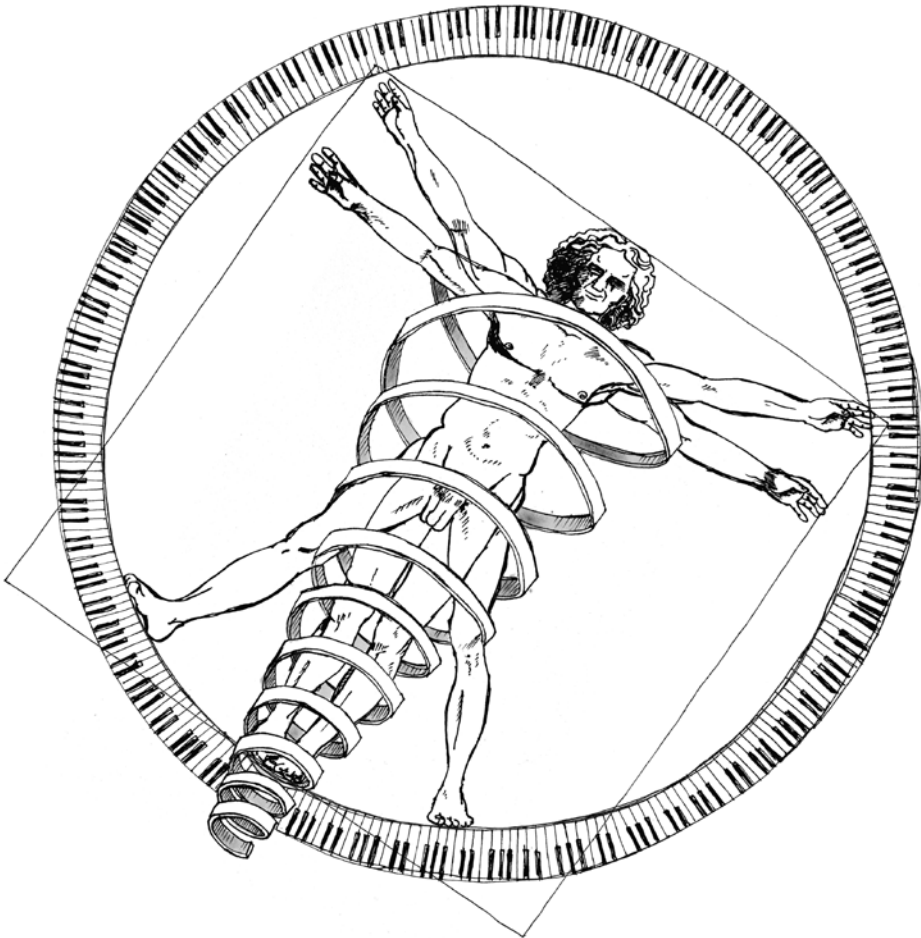


FIGURE 7. Kairotic points of negotiation in the project.





## 4 Student reflections conceptualized as building agency



As recent writings within music education have suggested, our field's traditional concentration on musical outcomes may lead to the neglect of students' experiential conditions, and there is a need in music education to adopt the perspective of the learner's experience (Westerlund 2004; Westerlund 2008; Karlsen 2011). For instance, Karlsen (2011) argues that it is by emphasizing students' processes of learning over the products of their education that teachers and researchers may help to create environments in which "the positive experiential and learning outcome for each student is in focus." (Ibid. pp. 1-2.) As Henry Giroux, among others, has stressed (1988), we cannot deny that students have experiences, and we cannot deny that these experiences are relevant to the learning process. What we can do is critically engage that experience. Following this train of thought, in this inquiry the students' experiences are at the forefront throughout the process. The aim of this chapter is to analyse the students' articulations of their experiences as building agency.

The chapter is mainly based on the analysis of the individual follow-up interviews, which were thematized by searching for accounts dealing with agency in relation to the learning processes in the VS1 course. Unless otherwise indicated, the quotes from the data in this chapter come from individual interviews. The final group discussions of both cycles were used as additional data to illustrate how students discussed issues of agency with their peers. The process of building agency is conceptualized by viewing it through the following themes: constructing musical agency, developing pedagogical agency, and agency and empowerment in a learning community. These aspects of agency form an intertwined dynamic relationship throughout the inquiry.

## **4.1 Constructing musical agency**

When examined from a broad cultural perspective, the music education students of the Sibelius Academy tend to come from fairly similar backgrounds: they are mostly Finnish or Swedish speaking, white, and educated through the Finnish music school system. However, Finnish music education students possess a larger degree of variance in their musical backgrounds. Students come equally from classical, pop jazz, or folk music backgrounds, and bring with them different traditions, expectations, and practices. Therefore, students also start building their musical skills and agency in VS from different perspectives, concentrating on different aspects. Irrespective of their backgrounds, when starting VS studies students generally have a clear focus on wanting to become better musicians, concentrating on attaining and developing musical skills.

*Suvi: My goals in the beginning of the course were individually oriented. In the beginning I listed things I wanted to learn how to play with the piano. Those were the types of things I expected to get from the course.*

As discussed in Section 1.3, the development of musical skills can be viewed through the lens of agency, because it is an act through which individuals negotiate and enhance their opportunities of participating in music related communities (Karlsen 2011, p. 8). However, developing musical skills is not the same as developing musical agency as such. One can also develop one's musical skills without the experience of agency, if gaining musical skills does not lead to an increase in opportunities to participate. In this inquiry, the introduction of co-constructing and collaborative music making practices, as exemplified in Vignette 1 (Section 3.2) functioned as a tool to expand the scope of the class from musical skills to musical agency.

### **Constructing agency in relation to the concept of VS**

During the course of the inquiry, the learning process often started with reflecting on and revising attitudes and preconceptions towards the subject. Some students had studied VS as a formal subject before coming to Sibelius Academy, while many had a long-standing informal relationship with VS, and some were just starting to explore the world of piano. Before starting to develop agency in VS, students reflected upon what they thought VS actually is, thus beginning to negotiate the nature of our joint enterprise. In many cases, especially with students who were piano majors, this meant having to overcome a preconceived notion that VS is easy, a musical free flow without structure, or that it requires no rehearsing or effort.

*Krista: I confess having a bit of an attitude in the beginning. I thought the course would be just going through the basic comping styles, and I felt I had done that before. I thought I would just get it over and done with. But then, the course was completely different from what I expected with the group spirit emerging, doing things together and everything.*

To others who had a strong sense of agency in VS from the start, VS functioned as a safe haven and a source of support in their studies, which in the first year comprise a vast range of courses.

*Terhi: VSI was probably the only class I attended first year to where I always went feeling calm and relaxed. Piano is so familiar to me, and I felt like I knew something already. Other instruments, like the guitar or even voice were, well, not so familiar. But VS was fun.*

For many students, the concept of VS was sketchy at the beginning of their studies. While students may have had experience of competence in VS, it was hard to articulate what that competence actually entailed. One student even described VS as a “jungle”. Getting an overall view of the phenomenon and finding structure and clarity in their VS studies was a clear goal for many students. This goal can be viewed as a tool to help in locating and developing the students’ agency in VS, articulating existing tacit knowledge and making it something the students owned.

*Terhi: I feel I now have clearer frames for what I’m doing. Compared to before, when I had a large random pile of styles, rhythmical patterns, and advice from different teachers somewhere at the back of my head. It was all a bit scattered, and I feel that this course brought structure to it all. And that was my main wish in the beginning essay: To get clarity.*

Many students had broad informal experience in VS when starting the course, and they came to their VS studies with a sense of mastery over the phenomenon. Beginning to study VS in a formal environment meant the students had to balance their previous experience and know-how with what was actually taught in class. In some cases this led to having to re-evaluate one’s initial position towards VS.

*Ronja: Starting our VS course I had a feeling that this is fun, I know this. And then, after a few lessons, I felt like I don’t know this after all. Having learned stuff on my own, I had done some things in a funny or difficult way. And now I notice that during the year I have learned clear stuff that works, sounds good, and supports me when I sing. So in hindsight – I have learned things that I wanted to learn although I did not know exactly beforehand what that meant.*

As the teacher, it was not easy to hear that as a result of starting the course a feeling of knowing changed into a feeling of not knowing. However, Ronja’s account can be viewed as a process of opening oneself to a process of negotiation through which learning is made possible (Wenger 1998/2003). In this process, one’s individual experiences are the foundation upon which learning takes place, but learning requires that these personal experiences are subjected to re-evaluation in the process of negotiation.



Unlike students who had previous experience in VS – regardless of whether this experience stemmed from formal or informal studies – students who had just started to familiarize themselves with piano and VS put a slightly different emphasis on their learning. To fledgeling pianists, establishing a positive relationship with the instrument was the primary goal.

*Ulla: You know, I'm going to answer a question that you did not even ask now, but do you know what was the best thing? I had only briefly tried piano before in my previous school when I was offered a couple of VS lessons. And that helped a bit in overcoming the notion that piano is so difficult that it's better to leave it altogether and not even try. But now, during this year I have really gained confidence with the piano. I can try out new things by myself, even if I suspect it may not be the 'correct' way. I have come to know the piano, and I am no longer afraid to play it. I don't even feel embarrassed if there are others listening, which would have been a definite no-no before. Now I feel that whatever helps me learn more is fun.*

Rather than having to change one's understanding of a VS musician, students who were novices at the piano were just starting the process of building their understanding. While faced with largely the same issues as other students when it came to mastering musical styles, these students were faced with additional issues such as familiarizing themselves with the piano as an instrument, and developing the highly specialized technical skills required to play it.

*Pia: I think my biggest challenges are technical at this point. After all, I started to play piano only a couple of years ago, as an adult, so the technical challenges take their time. But the technical things affect everything. This means that it is not possible for me to proceed as fast as I would like to at all times because there is so much I have to rehearse. And I sometimes feel like I don't really see my own progress, because there is so much to do and the process is so slow.*

Acknowledging and differentiating individual aspects of learning was important in the process of accepting one's own progress. Once articulated, students could position their learning within the larger continuum of VS studies.

*Suvi: My playing feels lighter now. Sometimes it may still sound awful, but I can do something about it now. I know what is going on. I still have to think a lot all the time; nothing really comes automatically yet. But, everything will come with time.*

## Re-evaluating rehearsing methods

Rehearsing VS caused much discussion, and was a cause for concern for many students. For example, some students who had a long history with classical music found it difficult to adapt the rehearsing methods they had acquired in their previous studies to VS in a meaningful way.

*Elina: I was used to VS as just playing and messing around. All of a sudden we were supposed to rehearse, and do work on the rhythms and styles and such. It's really different from rehearsing classical piano. In classical, the rehearsing methods have been hammered into you since you were little, and the musical pieces are broader, at least compared to the ones we played in VS. You have to perceive the VS pieces from a different angle.*

It is not surprising that the established rehearsing methods of the classical tradition are not all best suited for VS. After all, as stated earlier in this work (see Section 1.2), VS in many ways functions as a counterhegemonic force to the classical piano pedagogy tradition, introducing new musical idioms as well as varied working methods. Faced with this new context, several students found it “hard to focus attention on what you are trying to rehearse” and “hard to evaluate your own progress.” When beginning their VS studies, some students were taken by surprise by the fact that they were actually expected to rehearse.

*Hanna: I think I have been thinking about the whole VS business the wrong way. It took me by surprise that we actually rehearsed pieces in the course, and you could perfect them like you would in classical music. I thought that in VS, you do not really rehearse. You just play, somehow. And the music just comes, somehow. It was a paradox to me, the idea of playing freely [vapaa], but rehearsing the same piece several times. Vapaa säestys sounds to me like you should be able to play anything without preparation. Of course I know that we cannot be there quite yet, and of course it helps you along if you have a base of rehearsing some pieces really well, but still, it was confusing at first.*

This idea of learning without rehearsing could be linked to the ‘mystification’ of creative skills that are emphasized in VS. In our culture, skills like improvising and composing are sometimes viewed as innate talents that you cannot learn, but either possess or not (Sawyer 2007; Westerlund 2009). However, to quote Aristotle: “For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them.” (Aristotle 1984, p. 1743.) To some students, rehearsing VS afforded a sense of control over their first year of instrumental studies, a liberating sense of learning by doing.

***Kaisa:** I remember Hanna talking in a group discussion about thinking you don't have to rehearse in VS, and then noticing that you actually do need to. To me, throughout the year, VS has been a subject where you actually can rehearse and it makes a difference if you do. I could see myself learning if I rehearsed. In instrumental studies like piano and voice I was struggling with huge and challenging issues, and sometimes it could all get a bit overwhelming. In VS we were dealing with smaller issues, and playing interesting repertoire. It was challenging but doable and I could get a grip on what I was doing. I liked that feeling; it was a nice change.*

The fact that students struggled with rehearsing means that when teaching VS it is important to articulate alternative means for rehearsing the subject in ways that support its goals, thereby opening up new possibilities for students to approach the subject. Through rehearsing, we form a relationship with the phenomenon, and rehearsing thus functions as an important tool for building agency in the related subject. Although rehearsing usually takes place largely independently, outside lessons, we cannot place the responsibility for developing rehearsing methods best suited for VS on the students alone.

## **Locating and expanding agency in VS**

VS is a subject where everyone has their own strengths, weaknesses, and personal profile as a VS musician (see Section 1.2). There is always something to learn, but at the same time you can always draw from your experiences and strengths as a musician, regardless of your musical tradition and background. For the students, this made learning VS in a learning community where members are equipped with different skills easier to come to terms with.

***Mikko:** I don't feel there was much difference between the piano majors and minors in the end. I don't know if I can explain it, but I don't feel like the technical level you had in piano was that relevant. Everyone had some things they had to learn, even the pianists.*

In fact, realizing that they in fact possessed musicianship to draw upon and rely on was an important experience for many, and this experience was facilitated by the learning community. Students started to perceive their own musicianship more clearly through working together with their peers, and were able to use this experience to build their musical agency.

*Pia: I realized that I do in fact have some strengths through our group discussions. There, Katri said something about finding some things difficult because of her background as a classical pianist. Her comment made me realize that coming from pop music, some things - like phrasing - come easier to me, although it's a lot of work executing it with the piano. But I know in my head how I want it to sound, even if I can't quite do it yet. In areas like VS that are not my strongest, I need help to put things into perspective, and listening to others talk about their experiences gave me that.*

In discussing experiences of musical agency gained through developing musical skills in VS, four themes stand out from the students' interviews. Students articulated mastering new styles, developing the ability to sing and play at the same time, increasing the quality of playing the piano in general, and overcoming barriers to improvise or play by ear as significant experiences. The first two themes can be considered as building musical agency through developing one's musical-technical expertise. For example, bossa nova was clearly experienced as the most challenging style included in the curriculum by the vast majority of students. Succeeding in playing bossa nova, not to mention playing bossa nova while singing at the same time, was a major accomplishment for students regardless of their background, and this was mentioned repeatedly in interviews when talking about positive learning experiences. The latter two themes relate more to learning to identify existing qualities in your playing and finding the courage to move beyond your comfort zones as a musician. As such, their nature is more reflective: whilst students described what they learned in the course (“*I learned to play the bossa nova*”), they also reflected on how things they learned contributed to their musical agency.

*Kaisa: The idea of merging new styles into one's playing was a new experience for me. Through learning new rhythmic patterns and studying the stylistic features I know now that I can do it. Also, as a result, I have started to listen to my playing in a different way.*

*Ulla: I feel that I have learned a lot in just one year. I have an experience of learning, although I cannot necessarily transfer it all to my hands while playing. But it is there, inside me, and it's coming to life, little by little. I understand a lot, but it takes a while for it to find its way to my fingers.*

In addition to learning new styles, building technical tools, and becoming more aware of one's playing, the course also functioned as a platform to find the courage to explore working methods like improvisation or playing by ear. Especially for students coming from the classical tradition, “*improvising and just letting go and doing whatever can be difficult.*”

*Matti: At first it was difficult to me. But when we started playing the blues for example, it wasn't that hard to find the 'anything goes' attitude, after all; to realize that you don't have to stress yourself out about every single note. Before, I had been really self-conscious about what I played, and I had the feeling you have to know all the jazz scales before you can improvise anything.*

To recapitulate, students learned new musical skills in the VS1 course that functioned as tools in the construction of their musical agency. In this process, existing skills were reflected upon with the help of these new tools. In some instances this led to the realization that what had been known previously had to be re-evaluated, in others it gave new insight and depth to what was known, and in some cases it helped in recognizing that something was already known.

## **4.2 Developing pedagogical agency**

In both the group discussions and individual interviews, students reflected upon their learning in a manner that I here conceptualize as pedagogical reflexivity or pedagogical agency. Students reflected on their pedagogical experiences around three themes: as learners in the course, as leading or participating in peer teaching sessions, and when engaging in informal peer learning.

### **Reflecting on pedagogy from the perspective of a student**

In many of the student accounts, the examination of the learning process from a pedagogical angle started with analysing and giving feedback to me as a teacher. I welcomed the students' reflections on my teaching. To me the fact that students were willing to sit down with me in a face-to-face conversation and give feedback on my teaching was a huge display of trust, as well as an expression of commitment to the process we had shared. The idea that when teaching in teacher education you do not only teach the subject, but also always give an example of what you think good teaching is, was one of the guiding tenets of this inquiry. Through reflecting on their ideas about pedagogy as experienced in the course, students made my teaching a tool for building their pedagogical agency, rather than an implicit 'take it or leave it' model to copy as future teachers. Being invited to reflect on my teaching, as well as being included in the learning processes of their peers in the learning communities, helped students in finding tools for their own teaching. This does not however mean that after the first year students felt they were ready to teach.

**Ronja:** *In the beginning I had the thought that in addition to playing, it would be nice to learn how to teach VS in this course, perhaps learn something by seeing how you teach us. I don't know how much I could actually teach now, because one thing that I learned this first year is that I am just at the beginning in both playing and teaching VS. There is much more to this than I thought.*

Instead of finishing their first year of studies feeling like teachers ready to go out into the field, students started asking questions along the lines of: How would I teach this? Would I like to teach this? What would it require for me to teach? While the students had focused on describing their musical/technical goals for VS1 in their beginning essays, in the follow-up interviews students concentrated more on reflecting upon the processual nature of becoming a musician and a music teacher. A focus on detailed, sometimes atomistic musical goals had shifted towards perceiving larger issues and reflecting on themes that were at times hard to identify or articulate.

**Milla:** *What has been great in this course is that it always started from us. And you as a teacher really had to be present and live in the moment, go with the flow. Sometimes it worked out and at other times perhaps not, and somehow you had to be able to accept that. I don't know. It started me thinking that perhaps I don't need to be so overwhelmingly perfect at all times. That also as a teacher, I could meet students halfway.*

Students showed much appreciation for being able to participate in constructing the VS1 course, and there was a general consensus on what Milla describes here as the course "starting from us". While experiencing this as a positive thing from the perspective of a learner, students also imagined themselves in the position of a teacher in this type of a collaborative learning environment. This led to many interesting conversations, particularly concerning the position of a teacher as a source of knowledge.

**Matti:** *It is important for a teacher to not quite know at all times. A good teacher definitely needs to know and to know how, but also be wise enough to know when not to know if the situation calls for it.*

For a teacher, being able to work with a state of insecurity and "not quite knowing" was seen as a positive quality. Students wondered whether they themselves could possess this type of quality.

**Kaisa:** *As a teacher, you possess a kind of courage to throw yourself into situations. I have started to think about my personality or base as a teacher a lot; and of how minuscule it has been up until now. And I don't think I have that kind of guts to*

*just jump in head first without knowing exactly what is going to happen, and then just swim along as you go, without stressing yourself out over it. I don't know why, but I have the tendency to take things in, personally. Like if someone has in that moment trouble learning, or a teaching situation moves into a direction that I have not planned. It activates a certain defence mechanism in me and I try to force the situation back on track. But in our course, while there was a sense of moving ahead, it flowed more freely and we created the situations together. I thought it was a really good thing. And you had the courage to do it.*

The comments of Milla and Kaisa, and similar remarks from other students, led me to share experiences from my years as a teacher. I thought it was important to make it known that my path as a teacher has been and still is constantly in motion, and that in this path I have had to encounter my share of challenges when letting go of the need for certainty, learning how to prepare myself for deviating from lesson plans when the situation calls for it, or encountering new types of learning environments. I shared with the students that this whole inquiry started from me finding a certain type of teaching environment particularly challenging.

## **Learning pedagogical reflection from and with peers**

Peer teaching sessions were introduced as part of the curriculum in the second cycle of the inquiry. This does not however mean that learning with and from peers and expanding one's pedagogical perspective through this type of learning did not take place during the first cycle. Quite the contrary: students from the first cycle reported stories of gaining pedagogical insight by rehearsing together with their peers and engaging in informal peer teaching activities. Collaborating with students from different musical backgrounds and skill sets was seen as particularly valuable. The majority of students saw a heterogeneous community as a strength and an asset in their learning, with students making references to how much they had learned while learning together with people with varied backgrounds and skills.

*Mikko (GD4, first cycle): In the group, everyone had their strengths and weaknesses. Because of that, there was no need to feel embarrassed about your own weak points. You could always ask for help from those who know better.*

*Suvi (GD4, second cycle): When playing the same song with everyone playing one verse, you heard different versions of the same piece. For example, if I found that Katri's version sounded particularly good, I could reflect on why that was. And if I came to a conclusion that it is because she articulated the bass-line differently, I could try to do it myself. It was really educational.*

From a Wengerian (1998/2003) perspective, this can be conceptualized by viewing mutual engagement as involving not only our competence, but also the competence of others, and hence being inherently partial. However, this partiality is as much a resource as it is a limitation. Belonging to a community of practice where people help each other thus makes it more important to know how to give and receive help than to try to know everything yourself (p. 76). Terhi, who majored in piano, experienced the group as “*an eye-opener, a chance to learn with people who were just starting out with the piano.*”

*Terhi: Having been playing piano for such a long time, it is hard to remember how it feels when you're just learning it. While rehearsing with Silja outside lessons, she said to me once that piano is a new experience for her. To me it was a moment of epiphany. In our group I learned a lot by having the chance to see how other people learn, and seeing you work through the basic stuff from a pedagogical point of view.*

In the follow-up interview, Terhi clearly emphasised the pedagogical perspective in her learning. When asked how she would develop the VS1 course in the future, she suggested adding peer teaching sessions to the curriculum. In her first year of studies, Terhi had a positive experience with peer teaching in guitar lessons, and she would have liked to “*get a sense of what it feels like to teach VS*” with our group. The peer teaching sessions, subsequently realized in the second cycle, proved to be a rich source of meaningful learning experiences. Students articulated the experiences gained from the sessions not only from the perspective of leading the sessions as a teacher, but equally as learners participating in sessions held by their peers. In our final group discussion (GD4), students reflected on their teaching experiences from the peer teaching sessions, as illustrated by the following excerpt.

*Kaisa: In my opinion, the more we have those types of experiences the better. It doesn't really matter what subject you teach either. But we need experiences of being given a subject and then being thrown into a teaching situation. That is how we learn to cope and get to know oneself as teachers, start finding our own ways of approaching things, and find out what works and what does not. It is only our first year and we cannot expect to be excellent in teaching groups if we have never done it. We need to be able to rehearse.*

*Ronja: And it was self-serving too, in a good way, because when you have to teach something to others, you have to go through it really thoroughly yourself first. Teach the task to yourself, and find out what is essential in what you are doing.*

*Hanna: Yeah. Because usually, if I play something and someone asks me what I just did or how I did it my answer would be: 'Erm ... I don't know.' But before teaching others I really made sure I knew every aspect of what I was doing. And after that I knew it better myself.*



**Kaisa:** *You learn it more in-depth.*

**Suvi:** *Personally, I had difficulties in preparing for my peer teaching session. I tried to find a subject, and I caught myself having a really negative attitude about it. Thinking that ‘this is really irritating, and what am I supposed to know how to teach here.’ I think I was nervous. Then the session went well, and that awoke a process of thought in me about why I initially felt the way I did. Because it has a lot to do with playing the piano. And I feel that through this process I got past my initial feelings by discovering that I can manage, I can do this, there is no point in stressing myself out over it. To me, this has been the absolute best thing in this first year: finding out that it is okay to play the piano and it is fun. And if you rehearse, it gets even better.*

Even in this short clip, it is possible to see many themes, rising from experiences in peer teaching, that the students later developed further in the course of the discussion: the need to get as much experience as possible in teaching in different environments and subjects; deepening one’s own experience of learning through teaching others; and experiencing a sense of empowerment through accepting one’s unavoidable incompleteness.

The individual interviews later added an extra layer to these reflections. Due to the fact that the focus of the group discussion had largely been on the peer teaching sessions from the point of view of a teacher, in the individual interviews I asked students to reflect also upon the experience of participating in peer teaching sessions as learners. As a result, the following themes emerged: peer teaching sessions provided varied, rich musical points of view; different pedagogical approaches used in peer teaching sessions provided a foundation for one’s own pedagogical reflections, and they were a good source of pedagogical and musical dialogue; it was easy to identify with peers as teachers, which gave rise to a need to support them in their efforts.

All peer teaching sessions were described by students as “*having a personal character according to who was teaching.*” This brought welcomed variation to the class, with new musical and pedagogical points of view being introduced. Many students chose a topic for the teaching session that reflected their strengths as musicians. From the point of view of their peers, this offered an insight into the tools they possessed as musicians.

**Kaisa:** *When Milla held her session about different ways of extending and colouring chords, I got to know how she does what I had heard her do so many times in lessons. It was a nice experience: I had wondered about it, and then I got tools to do it myself.*

At the same time, different pedagogical approaches used in the peer teaching sessions provided a foundation for one's own pedagogical reflections, and functioned as a good source of pedagogical and musical dialogue. As Kaisa said: *"We had the chance to experience different styles of teaching, which was good. You could see in which direction each of us was starting to develop as a teacher, beginning to find our individual styles."* Students thought that experiencing the process of mirroring one's thoughts and actions as a musician and a teacher to the actions of your peers, in the context of peer teaching and learning, was a valuable opportunity.

*Suvi: When you teach us, we take your position as a teacher more as self-evident. You are a professional, so okay, we mostly believe what you say. But when we were teaching each other, I feel like we were more reflective and questioning, and I think it can be a source of good dialogue. The attitude is more towards: 'This is interesting, I have thought about this differently. I wonder how you have arrived at your way of doing things?' (...) I think every one of us was probably a little nervous about teaching others, and everybody knew that we have all put a lot of effort into the session. You also know that once you're up there you want everyone to be engaged and involved, with a positive attitude. So of course people wanted to return the favour when others were teaching.*

For students, it was easy to identify with their peers as teachers because they *"knew they were going to be up there too"*, and this generated a need to show support and make the experience as easy as possible for the peer teacher. As a result, students seemed to be engaged in the peer teaching sessions with their senses heightened and aware. For example, after grasping something with ease during a peer teaching session, students tended to articulate the experience as meaningful both pedagogically and musically.

*Hanna: Upon seeing others teaching, people who are more or less at the same point as you, it was possible to see specifically what you could learn from this particular person at this particular moment. To have an 'Aha' moment and realize when something was exceptionally well presented – in a manner that was understandable and did not leave me feeling stupid as a learner.*

Students experienced peer teaching as empowering all learners when their peers had managed to master teaching a topic. The progress of their peers was not seen as a threat or something to compete with, but as a sign of encouragement and hope.

*Ronja: Don't be offended or anything, but although many of the peer teaching sessions were recaps of what we had already done before, it is different when coming from another student compared to coming from you. When you teach, I sometimes*

*doubt whether I could learn everything because I don't have your expertise and experience, you being a professional and all. But someone from my own class mastering that same thing and teaching it to us gave me hope that I can grasp this too. We were operating more from an equal level and with the same tools, so it was something like 'simple solutions for simple people.'*

To sum it up, including peer teaching in the curriculum strengthened the link between musical and pedagogical agency. Having the chance to assume various positions in the course - student, teacher, and peer learner - made students more aware of their pedagogical ideas. Developing pedagogical agency in this manner would not have been possible in individual tuition, where the only pedagogical model and source of pedagogical ideas is the teacher. Moreover, through peer teaching, students drew inspiration from each other, and felt empowered by it. Kaisa, who chose Suvivirsi (see Section 3.4) as the topic of her peer teaching session, articulates the session as a space for sharing experiences.

***Kaisa:** I was thinking about what is the closest music to me, about what I have played, as well as what is most challenging for me, and I started to think about hymns. I kind of had a hidden agenda, because generally people tend to have strong feelings related to spiritual music. But for me it has come to mean nice things, something that can be fun to play and arrange, and I wanted to give a piece of that feeling to others.*

### **4.3 Agency and empowerment in a learning community**

Up to this point I have concentrated on discussing how students articulated the individual dimension of their musical agency, and how they expressed the development of their pedagogical reflexivity as individual learners. However, based on the data from both group discussions and individual interviews, it is clear that the learning that took place in the VS1 course can not be separated from the work of the learning community. Therefore, I will now turn the focus to the collective dimension of musical and pedagogical agency (Karlsen 2011), by looking at the students' experiences of empowerment in the learning community. I will identify and conceptualize some of the key elements of the process of making the learning community a tool for empowerment that supports both the individual and the collective dimension of agency – a process that the students described as “*starting out as something, and ending up as something else.*”

## From preconceptions on group learning to a shared process

**Ronja:** *Piano laboratory is a bit surreal with all those pianos. It's like a Salvador Dali painting where there are many things where there should be only one. Like too many eyes or something.*

Learning piano in a group setting was as alien a concept to the students as it was to me when starting to work in the piano laboratory. Therefore, initially many students did not think the group would play any role in their learning. However, the group gained significance throughout the process of inquiry, and eventually became an asset and an essential part of the learning process. In the assessment discussion (GD4, second cycle), students were asked about the expectations they had about group tuition when starting the course.

**Hanna:** *I think the difficulty of this course lies in the preconceptions. After all, it is VS and it is in a group, so it is easy to think it has to be easy and there is no need to put any effort into it. It is important to realize that this really is learning in a group, doing things as a group, versus studying individually in a group setting. You get my point. Because after I realized this, everything got a lot easier. And you need to rehearse and work as much as in any other thing.*

**Ronja:** *The group tuition thing felt funny to me with everyone having their own piano and then being together, somehow.*

*Several students: Exactly. We are used to ...*

**Krista:** *Used to having the piano just for me!*

**Ronja:** *That's right.*

*Students laughing.*

**Krista:** *I am clearly revealing my classical background here, ha ha. However, I adjusted to learning in the group, and eventually I drew a lot of energy and support from all you guys. I think it made me a better musician.*

**Milla:** *In individual piano lessons, you concentrate a lot on perfecting the details, and in the beginning this course I wondered if I could learn all the fancy stuff the same way in a group context. I did not expect to learn a new attitude towards my playing, a feeling of joy that was fostered by the positive atmosphere.*

**Hanna:** *In the end, learning in a group is also what VS is all about. Just letting go and playing no matter what, the song always goes on.*

In other words, most students started the course with an individualistic view on learning, focusing their energy on the musical skills they wanted to achieve. Although they knew the course would take place in a group setting, they did not see this as relevant. During the course, students gradually started to recognize their peers as more and more significant in their learning process, and by the end of the course the boundaries between individual

and collaborative processes in the VS1 course had become blurred. The most important theme that arose when discussing the role of the learning community in the inquiry was that the community had developed the potential to liberate and empower, and this was not something the students had expected or anticipated.

## **Developing ownership through social trust and mutual engagement**

The emergence of a learning community came as a surprise to the students, but the community, once formed, became an integral part of their learning experience and processes of meaning making. However, in order for the students to be empowered in and by the learning community it was essential to be able to work in an atmosphere of trust. The students did not see trust as a pre-existing condition in the community - trust had to be built and nurtured. The experience of trust was vital in the learning community, because once established it functioned as a source of inspiration and security. Students described the experience of trust in many different ways: the group being a safe place, the group giving courage, having a good group spirit, and even a group sense of humour.

***Terhi:** In the beginning, I think people were quite careful about what they revealed about themselves as musicians, because we didn't know or trust each other yet. But towards the end, it started to resemble a crazy VS party. If you feel nervous playing in front of other people then this course is an excellent opportunity to get rid of stage fright and learn to have fun with playing. Because it really can be that, FUN! Just doing things together. In the individual lessons, it gets lonely sometimes. I loved the social aspect of bringing 7 pianos together and then playing together.*

*Group discussion (GD2), second cycle*

***Krista:** I just had an individual piano lesson today, and a student sat in to observe.<sup>27</sup> I mean, it was just one student, but right away, I froze completely. I didn't hit the right keys, and I blushed and my hands started to shake. Our VS1 group has been like a form of group therapy.*

***Ronja:** Especially because we work so well as a group. It is like a soft landing.*

***Milla:** We have managed to generate a daring attitude. We are not afraid to go ahead and play without having to stop to check and ensure at all times.*

***Krista:** We have had a lot of group comedy moments too, and I see it as a good thing.*

***Kaisa:** Definitely! And we have attended the lessons. That speaks volumes.*

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<sup>27</sup> Lessons in the Sibelius Academy, including individual lessons, can in principal, with the permission of the student and the respective teacher, be observed by anyone who so wishes. Often, students coming to 'listen in' are either studying with the same teacher themselves, or carrying out their observation quota as part of a pedagogical course.

When working in a trusting atmosphere, the learning community increased its members' motivation to learn by awakening feelings described as positive pressure and responsibility. Being a member of the learning community meant acting responsibly with regard to the members of that community, in other words “*pulling your weight*”. Students experienced a strong sense of mutual engagement in our joint enterprise (Wenger 1998/2003), which they differentiated from their studies as individual students. The responsibility towards the learning community was rewarding and potentially empowering because of the shared goal of being able to achieve something unique together.

*Group discussion (GD4), second cycle*

**Katri:** *I always end up having to do the final crazy sprint at the end of the school year with each subject. With some of the individual exams this year, I decided to accept that I don't have time or energy for this, and I will have to make do with what I know. But, in our group, I felt a sense of responsibility for the group, one that each member has to carry.*

**Krista:** *Yeah, I know what you mean.*

**Katri:** *Like when we played Don't Stop Me Now<sup>28</sup> together. I felt I needed to practice my part, because I cannot let the group down, the way I can sometimes let myself down in an individual exam.*

**Suvi:** *It is the positive compulsion. The need to do the work in order for the result to sound good. To get the experience that we are doing this, achieving this together, and it is cool. I had that same feeling last week.*

## **The learning community as a platform for reflexivity**

According to Roberts (1991), at the beginning of their studies music education students often have an idealized view of themselves as musicians and performers. After being accepted into a music school this view has to be re-examined, as students discover many others whom they acknowledge as playing equally well or even better. This process, especially when combined with learning new, highly specialized skills as discussed in Section 4.1, is often difficult. In this inquiry, students experienced learning to recognize one's strengths and individual ways of learning as both empowering and overwhelming. Sharing their struggles and successes with the learning community helped the students' find their perspective, which in turn helped in empowering themselves as learners. For example, learning in a learning community with students from different backgrounds facilitated the process of empowerment, by providing challenges that everyone faced in

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28 Don't Stop Me Now by Queen.

front of each other. In other words, the learning community helped “to put things into perspective” and this was an empowering experience.

***Matti:** Seeing people overcome different problems raised my confidence in my own ability to learn the same things. Nobody was alone with his or her problems.*

Students saw the process of coming to terms with not being the best at everything as an important goal of teacher education, and in the assessment discussion (GD4) of the first cycle this theme was discussed in-depth. The students saw that because there will always be “people who are better than you”, accepting this and transforming it into a resource instead of a threat was important in empowering them as teachers.

***Ulla:** Sooner or later you will encounter a situation as a teacher, where a student is better than you at something. You cannot avoid it. I was recently teaching a rock band course where there was a little boy who played the drums, jazz drums. I was uncertain whether I had anything to give to him as a teacher because I'm not really a jazz drummer at all. But I did have something to give, and I had something to give to that band as a group. There will always be people who are better than you in our field.*

***Terhi:** We are not all talented in the same ways. And that is great; it is not something that diminishes me. On the contrary, you can draw a lot of inspiration from others and get a positive urge to develop your own skills. At least this is the way I look at it at the moment. But I have had to work at my attitude a lot to be able to not compare myself to others all the time. Here, during the first year of music teacher education studies, I have encountered surprisingly little jealousy. At least in our class, the class of 2008, everyone is really encouraging, and happy for others if they do well, say, in a piano recital. There is no ‘rehearse until you taste the blood, as long as you are the best’ attitude going on. At least that’s how I see it.*

Working in a learning community was a chance to make the prospect of facing multiple perspectives an asset. Instead of competing with their peers, competition was transformed into a spirit of supportive collaboration and learning from each other. Working in a learning community, the success of one did not take place at the expense of others, but was instead a positive addition to the learning community’s shared field of experience. However, learning in a community is not necessarily an easy experience for all.

***Elina:** If given a choice, I would have probably chosen individual lessons. But I'm not sure it would have been a good thing. Maybe I just have to face group situations, and I probably learn more from it. Working in a group is really good for me, even though it is extremely tough.*

Elina struggled with the group setting, and admitted that she would have been more comfortable with individual tuition. At the same time, she acknowledged the need to widen her experience of group learning situations. She made meaning out of her experience in the inquiry by making it into a story of growth, with the potential to lead her towards more gratifying and empowering experiences in the future: *“Hopefully, now that the rock band course is beginning, after all the crying and fumbling around of the first year, I have learned to relax in a group and could actually enjoy playing in one.”*

## **Empowerment and performance**

Performance is an essential part of being a musician. For example, Elliott (1995) sees performance as “an embodiment of a student’s musical understanding of a given work and its related practices.” (p. 76). Especially in our western culture, performing is also a source of conflicting emotions, stage fright, and performance anxiety (see, e.g. Taborsky 2007). We love and hate performing; we fear and are driven by it. Enjoying performing in one area does not mean that we like it in others. A performance, just like teaching, can give us a sense of empowerment or leave us feeling insecure and discouraged, even paralysed.

The practice we developed of playing together in class meant that students had to face playing in front of each other on a weekly basis. This was described as difficult and challenging, but also as an essential or even the best part of the course. Increasing one’s confidence in public performance was seen as a vital aspect of becoming a musician, and getting as much experience as possible in performing was seen as key in achieving this. Playing together on a weekly basis in VS1 was a tool in this process, a “soft landing”. Once again, trusting the learning community was a key element in becoming empowered by performing in the community. Vignette 1 in Section 3.2 describes a situation where the first learning community has not yet established a sense of trust. Subsequently, playing a piece of music in the lesson caused a sense of discomfort in students. The students in the second learning community also described the experience of playing together in the beginning of the course as nerve-racking. However, in both communities, once trust was established, playing in front of your peers, playing together, and hearing your peers play became a source of empowerment. A good illustration of this process is the way the attitude towards performance transformed from Vignette 1 to Vignette 3, which describes the final moments of the second learning community, working together in the context of the VS1 course. In Vignette 3, students are not only comfortable playing in front of others, but they also end up having a spontaneous public performance with no hesitation or hint of performance anxiety. Another example of how the learning community functioned as a



tool in empowering individual students to perform was highlighted during the reflection upon the first cycle's exam (GD4, first cycle). At its best, the presence of the group in a performance situation such as the exam was felt to have an effect described as positive pressure.

***Matti:** I didn't realize I could make a fancy intro to the prima vista before someone played one in theirs. I was like: Oh yeah, I shall do it too!*

***Terhi:** I had planned to only play two bars for intro in the prima vista, but Mikko had such a fancy prelude that I decided to play the whole of the last line.*

***Silja:** And the thing that helped me for sure is that I thought everyone else played their harmonisation pieces really well. I was the last one to play, and I thought to myself: "Gosh, everybody has played their piece from start to finish without stopping. They have plodded through so I shall do the same. If everyone else can do it, then so can I."*

The feeling of support from your peers in the exam, as well as in class, was described as liberating and confidence building. This positive characteristic was linked both to the working methods developed in the learning community and VS as a subject in general. Being able to embrace the flow of the music in VS, rather than paying extreme attention to perfecting every detail and avoiding mistakes at any cost, was a way to experience empowerment as an expansion of agency.

Group discussion (GD4), second cycle

***Hanna:** One of the points of VS is that no matter what happens, the song continues, life continues, and the show goes on, and playing in a group forces everyone to face that. If I rehearse on my own somewhere I can always discontinue the song, say Oops, think about it for a while and start all over again. In the group, with everyone singing along, you just had to move forward.*

***Milla:** And playing together you realize that everyone has their share of slip ups, and it's really not that serious. That makes it easier to not take your own little mistakes too seriously.*

***Katri:** Yeah. You don't need to wallow in self-pity for missing that G in the second verse.*

## Participation in the inquiry as empowerment

Finally, I turn to the second component of empowerment as discussed in Section 1.3, by discussing the students' articulations of their interaction with the institutional environment (Ibrahim & Alkire 2007), and the role it played in their learning process. Being part of an inquiry was an explicit part of the learning experience for the students; one that is impossible to separate from the process. For the students, it was an empowering experience that helped them feel they were legitimate members of the music education community of Sibelius Academy. While both the students and I quickly became accustomed to having the camera in the classroom, it served as a constant reminder of the fact that we were engaging in more than a regular lesson.

*Terhi: I liked that I felt useful, being a part of our group. I was part of the group that you were filming, and I knew you would be watching the footage in a couple of years. It meant that me being in this particular lesson made a difference to someone. It was really nice.*

The process of redesigning the assessment strategies in the first learning community, as described in Vignette 2, was an excellent example of how students in the inquiry empowered themselves to take different stances on their education, and to act as agents for change in their school and community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 2009, p. 14). Being able to discuss this process with the VS teachers who observed the exam made the experience even more articulated and explicit, giving it a more profound meaning.

*Silja: I liked that we had outside members listening in to our exam, because I thought it was important for them to see what we had been doing. After all, they were VS teachers too, and I thought they may want to be influenced by what we had done. And after the exam they did ask a lot of questions about the process and how we had experienced it. It made me feel really nice. I felt that our project had been important and the other teachers were there to sense the atmosphere.*

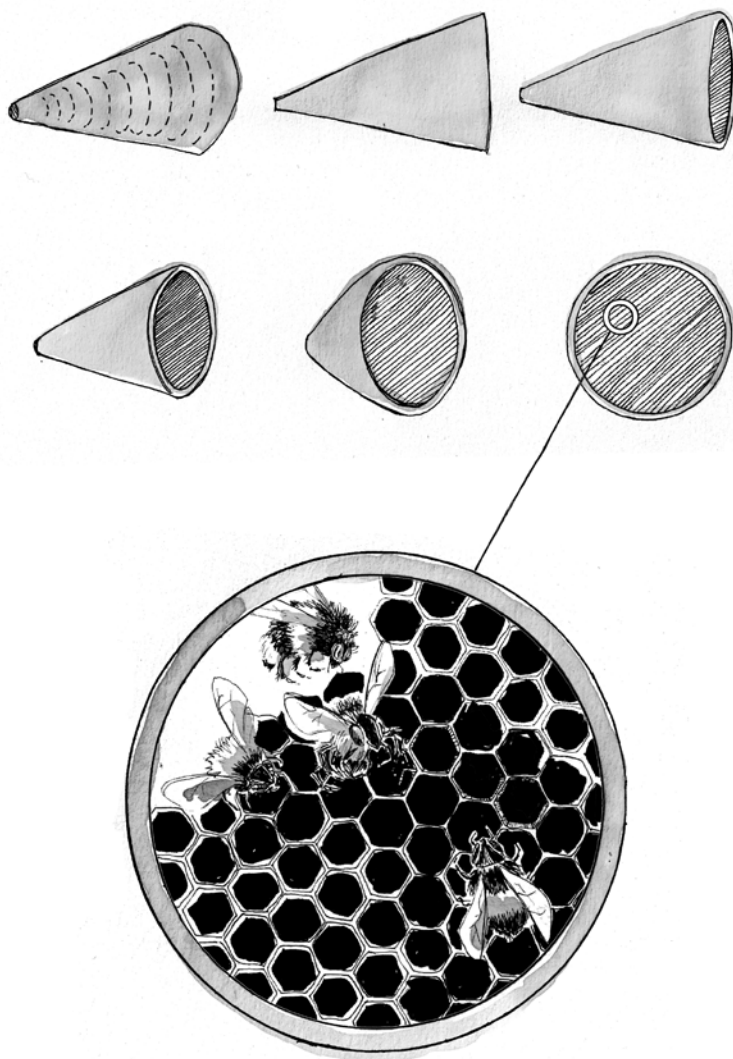
Although the students were just at the beginning of their studies, participating in the inquiry offered them the unique experience of insight into a study. The interest that the VS teachers showed in the students' perspectives made the students feel that their experience had value for the broader music education community. For the students, then, it was important that what we had experienced in the inquiry was also shared with people who were not involved in the process.

***Kaisa:** It is good that you as a teacher have the interest to communicate to the outside world what we have been doing. You acknowledge the need for communication and write articles and everything. You could just keep your insight to yourself and enjoy the fruit of your work privately. I don't know how many people have the energy to make what they do public.*

Brydon-Miller and Maguire (2009) claim that educational practitioner inquiry with a critical stance can build the capacity for critical reflection, as well as help teachers and students recognize and contend with the implications of their identities and positionality, however 'narrow' their starting question may seem. In this inquiry, this became explicit in the way that students started to relate their experiences in the VS course to the much larger issues of teaching and working as a teacher and a musician. Throughout the process of the inquiry, the scope of the VS1 course expanded from focusing on musical issues alone to reflecting on how learning and teaching were becoming an integral part of the students' learning experience. The task of the next chapter is to explore what opportunities this process could create for the VS1 course in the future. For example, how can the practice of critical reflection, which formed an essential part of the students' experiences of agency, be supported in a VS1 course outside of the framework of an inquiry?



## 5 Creating an improvisational structure for group VS teaching and learning



This study is based on the assumption that because learning is a unique process that takes place between people who are participating in this process in varied contexts, it is not possible to define a single model or method for good teaching that applies to all situations. Each classroom is different, and strategies must constantly be changed, invented, and reconceptualized to address each new teaching experience (hooks 1994, p. 11). Therefore - and I cannot stress this enough - I am not creating a Method. Instead, I take the position that it is possible to develop an educational design for teaching and learning VS in a group. I see the purpose of this educational design as supporting the formation of learning communities (Wenger 1998/2003). Following Wenger (ibid.), I believe that students need places of engagement, materials, and experiences with which to build an image of the world and themselves, and ways of having an effect on the world and making their actions matter (p. 271). An educational design can provide some points of reference and some guiding themes when trying to provide students with meaningful and empowering experiences - or, in other words, trying to help students in building their agency in the domains where learning is taking place.

As articulated earlier, the aim of practitioner research is to create knowledge from practice for practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 2009). In this chapter I discuss the findings of the previous two chapters in relation to three current views for building meaningful educational practices. In so doing, I aim to create knowledge from practice for practice as applied to group VS teaching, while also linking this study to current discussions of education theory. The three theories I use are Wenger's (1998/2003) idea of a design for learning, Sawyer's ideas of group creativity (Sawyer 2007) and creative teaching as an interplay between structure and improvisation (Sawyer 2011), and the idea of the alignment of curriculum, pedagogy, assessment presented by McWilliam and Lebler (2008). The chapter is divided into three sub-chapters: 1) VS1 as a collaborative creative process, 2) aligning curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in VS1, and 3) the role of a teacher in these processes.

## **5.1. Designing VS1 as a collaborative creative process**

Before learning as a collaborative creative process can take place, a learning community needs to be formed. Hence, the first task of the educator is to design a learning environment that facilitates learning communities. As is the case with most learning communities in higher education, a VS1 learning community always has temporal limits of existence and a limited set of available trajectories for its members (see Section 1.5; also Wenger 1998/2003). As the only old-timer (Wenger 1998/2003, p. 154) in the community, the teacher is responsible for introducing all other members to the community of practice, and

facilitating the creation of a learning environment where a learning community can be born (see Chapter 3). As hooks (1994) states,

I enter the classroom with the assumption that we must build “community” in order to create a climate of openness and intellectual rigor. (...) I think that a feeling of community creates a sense that there is shared commitment and a common good that binds us. (p. 40.)

Wenger (1998/2003) claims that “learning communities will become places of identity to the extent they make trajectories possible” (p. 215). According to him, a community can strengthen the identity of participation of its members in two related ways:

- 1) by incorporating its members’ pasts into its history – that is, by letting what they have been, what they have done, and what they know contribute to the constitution of its practice
- 2) by opening trajectories of participation that place engagement in its practice in the context of a valued future. (p. 215.)

Since the trajectories of participation in a VS1 learning community are in many ways predefined, it is especially important for VS1 teachers wishing to facilitate learning based on learning communities to consider how to best address both of these aspects. Firstly, in designing a learning environment based on learning communities in VS1, its practices have to be able to draw upon the pre-existing musical experiences and know-how of all its members. This inquiry attempted to create such an environment through co-constructing the musical material, establishing collaborative music making practices, and facilitating both peer learning and peer teaching practices. Secondly, VS1 learning communities need to define the context of a valued future that can guide the trajectories of participation in its practice. As the result of a collaborative process of negotiation, the learning communities in this inquiry came to a shared understanding that a valued future in the context of VS1 is more than being acculturated into VS practices and developing piano playing skills. Instead, the learning communities came to see the valued future in this context as also entailing pedagogical issues relevant in the larger context of music teacher education. In other words, the learning communities came to view VS1 as part of the community of practice of music teacher education. From this perspective, then, gaining agency in VS functions as a tool in becoming a full member of the community of practice of music teachers, which in turn shapes VS1 practices.

*Ronja (individual interview): At the end of the first year, I noticed how many irons I actually had had in the fire. I struggled with wanting to give 100% to everything that I was doing, which simply was not possible. But looking at the bigger picture, VS is a really important part of the work in our field, so it is worth investing in. Luckily VS1 is not our final course in this subject.*

## **Using individual and collective narratives as tools for learning in a VS learning community**

The learning communities in this inquiry included both personal and collective narratives. The learning communities developed a collective identity that became part of the identities of their members, and likewise stories of individual participation become part of the stories of communities. As Wenger, Trayner and de Laat (2011) suggest,

[i]n a community participants are more likely to know (or claim to know) the collective narrative because creating a collective narrative around a practice is part of the formation of the community. This narrative may still be contested. In fact, because of a joint commitment and expectation that the collective narrative is endorsed by participants, this narrative is likely to be more contentious. That is why sessions in which community members negotiate what their community is about and where it should be going can be so useful. (p. 16.)

In this inquiry, both learning communities developed a strong sense of a collective narrative. Riessman (2008) suggests that groups use stories to mobilize others, and to foster a sense of belonging (p. 8). The learning communities demonstrated strong cohesion in their collective narratives, fostering a sense of belonging that functioned as a source for empowerment (see Section 4.3). The collective narrative was articulated most clearly and strongly in the final group discussions (GD4), where the learning communities articulated their practices to outsiders. In the final discussion, the collective narrative momentarily reached the point of what Sawyer (2007) would call groupthink, described by the students in retrospect as collective group hype.

*Hanna (individual interview): I think it was funny, the way we all went into a collective hype in the discussion after the exam. I mean, it was an excellent course, and our group functioned well, but both evaluating teachers tried so hard to ask, whether there was something that did not function that well in a group and we were going on and on about how nice it all was.*



At the same time, as suggested by Wenger, Trayner, and de Laat (2011), the collective narrative was contested and challenged by the individual learning experiences of its members. The robust experience of a collective narrative did not exclude the members of the learning community from having individual, highly diverse personal narratives of their own learning. For instance, while engaging with the highly positive collective narrative of learning as having fun in a community, Suvi described her individual experience of planning the peer teaching session in the following manner:

*Suvi (GD4): I had difficulties in preparing for my peer teaching session. I tried to find a subject, and I caught myself having a really negative attitude about it. Thinking that 'this is really irritating, and what am I supposed to know how to teach here.' I think I was nervous. Then the session went well, and that awoke a process of thought in me about why I initially felt the way I did.*

Suvi's individual experience of having difficulty in preparing the peer teaching session functioned as a basis for further reflection. She was becoming aware of and in control of her learning through actively participating in reflective thinking (see e.g. Dewey 1910/1997). Dewey stressed that

[r]eflective thinking is always more or less troublesome because it involves willingness to endure a condition of mental unrest and disturbance. Reflective thinking, in short, means judgment suspended during further inquiry: and suspense is likely to be somewhat painful. (Dewey 1910/1997, p. 13.)

For example, Elina's stressful experience during the exam in the first learning community became a part of both that learning community's collective and personal narratives. Elina made meaning out of her experience as a process of growth and her struggle to engage in the shared, collective narrative. At the same time, Elina's peers included her experience in the collective narrative of the learning community as a tool for reflection on engaging with different, sometimes conflicting perspectives and experiences. In short, the value of learning experiences is not determined by their initial power to awaken positive feelings. Instead, their value is determined by their potential to become a part of the individual and/or collective narratives of learning. Subsequently, the most difficult experiences can sometimes prove to be the most valuable. Instead of depending on whether the learning experiences in the community were easy or difficult, the value an individual learner was able to derive from these learning experiences depended on the extent to which that learner was engaged with the learning community. The students expressed this as a situation of "you get what you give".

*Inga: Did the fact that you were absent more than most students in the group affect your interaction with the rest of the group?*

*Matti: A little bit, yes. I think others had a closer relationship with the whole process than me. I had hoped to have played together with others outside the lessons, in my free time. And I think I did not get involved in doing that because I was away a lot. Others seemed to play together quite a bit. So, it affected the way I interacted and felt in the group. But then again, we had such a strong sense of a community as a group that it evened it out. To the students of the second cycle, I would say: Be actively engaged with the group as much as you can.*

The four group discussions held in both learning communities helped to develop a shared narrative in the respective communities, which then functioned as a basis for reflecting on the individual narratives of learning experiences. This study therefore supports Wenger, Trayner, and de Laat (2011), who argue that sessions in which community members negotiate what their community is about and where it should be going are useful tools for learning. The fact that both learning communities in the inquiry had their own narrative, shared by the members of that community, made it possible for the members of that community to negotiate their own experiences alongside those of the community.

*Krista: The group was our Wednesday family. We always went to lunch together, we even started to copy each other's habits. It was interesting how we all acquired Katri's habit of commenting our own playing with high-pitched sound effects. I don't think any one of us would do that anywhere else, but in this group, it was "our thing."*

## **Knowledge creation in a VS learning community**

Collaborative creative processes start from a paradoxical state of enthusiasm and uncertainty (Rikandi, Karlsen & Westerlund 2010, p. 175), a sense of empty space that comes from having to endure not being in total control as a consequence of exposing oneself to genuine dialogue with others. Sections 3.1 and 3.2 aimed to illustrate how both the students and I struggled with these tensions at the start of both cycles, because the moment when we began collaborating was the moment when we were no longer in control. However, to endure this state of uncertainty, to somehow be comfortable in the uncomfortable, is the prerequisite for a community to engage in a process of creative learning (Sawyer 2011) - to engage in learning as knowledge creation (Paavola & Hakkarainen 2005).

Sawyer (2007) claims that "there's no creativity without failure, and there's no group flow without the risk of failure." (p. 55.) Along the same lines, Keith Johnstone (1979), a

drama instructor whose work has had a major influence on the art of theatre improvisation, emphasizes the creative power of mistakes. Throughout this study, my own mistakes have been part of the inquiry. Indeed, on many occasions mistakes or moments of confusion have helped the group as a learning community to create knowledge instead of merely acquiring it (Wenger 1998, p. 214). For example, forgetting to include the exam as part of the research project when starting the inquiry was one of my blind spots or mistakes. Terhi and Silja pointing out that a group exam would be a more natural conclusion to a collaborative project subsequently started a process of redesigning the exam as a collaborative effort in the first learning community.

I see the collaborative reconstruction of the examination strategies as one example of enhancing the sharing of significant learning by the members of the community of practice. At the same time, the reconstruction of the examination can be seen as knowledge-creation, “a kind of individual and collective learning that goes beyond information given and advances knowledge and understanding: there is collaborative, systematic development of common objects of activity” (Paavola & Hakkarainen 2005, p. 536). This process of collaborative knowledge creation or group creativity (Sawyer 2007) initially started from a few observations by individual members of the learning community. However, it ended up being a process in which the entire learning community was highly involved, and developing the group exam in the first cycle is the defining achievement of the first learning community. Here is where the power of collaboration lies: a small idea generated by any individual member of a learning community can start a snowball effect with unforeseen results, and the end result of group creativity can exceed the imagination of any one of its individual members. “The creativity in improvised innovation isn’t additive; it’s exponential.” (Sawyer 2007, p. 68.) Sawyer therefore claims that

[t]he key to improvised innovation is managing a paradox: establishing a goal that provides a focus for the team – just enough of one so that team members can tell when they move closer to a solution – but one that’s open-ended enough for problem-finding creativity to emerge. (Sawyer 2007, p. 45.)

In the balance between structure and improvisation in one’s teaching, I see collaborative learning and collaborative knowledge creation as both the aim and the tool. For instance, both learning communities in the inquiry built a unique musical repertoire, with each member of the community contributing to that repertoire. This repertoire was then used as the basis for innovating improvisation; for example, in the process where students negotiated the arrangement of *Suivirsi* (see Section 3.4; also Appendix 1). It was important that these negotiation processes took place through accepting and adding to

the existing pool of ideas, not by dismissing and devaluing the ideas of others (Sawyer 2007, p. 138). In Vignette 3, the process of negotiation resulted in a unique arrangement of Suvivirsi that was a reification (Wenger 1998/2003) of the community's shared learning.

A small detail from the inquiry, however, serves as an example of the cyclical process of collaborative knowledge creation in creative teaching as the interplay between structure and improvisation (Sawyer 2011). Specifically, this is the importance of the small details and routines that the students contributed to my practices as teacher. In the first cycle, Terhi articulated the routines we established during the year as an important part of the course, with the lessons starting when I arrived at the piano laboratory with the camera equipment, and each student activated their keyboards and sound modules. In the second cycle, Kaisa highlighted these same issues, but expanded upon them to include the importance of the routines in ending our lessons:

***Kaisa:** The routines we developed were an important part of the course: having your own piano, starting the lesson with turning it on and checking the settings in your sound module. By these routines everyone had the chance to build their own space and window from where to enter into the mood of the lesson. Small things like that may many times be left unnoticed, but they go a long way in making a lesson into a good lesson. For example, we usually left the piano laboratory with you putting some music on from the speakers at the very end. The thing we were left with after the lesson was feeling the music, not hearing your voice telling us what to rehearse. I liked that.*

Kaisa is right in saying that routines may go unnoticed. Indeed, until our discussion I was not conscious of my habit of ending lessons by playing recordings related to the topic. But I checked the video-data and Kaisa was right - more often than not the lesson ended with a record playing while the students were leaving the piano laboratory. My discussion with Kaisa made me aware of this habit, and I was surprised to learn that Kaisa had conceptualized it as a pedagogically meaningful tool. I am not claiming that all students experienced the endings of our lessons in the same manner, or that it was a significant experience to them in any way. However, without Kaisa's reflection, I would have perhaps never recognized my routine as having any significance in how the students experienced learning in the piano laboratory. As a result of this discussion, the meaning of the lesson endings evolved through a combination of my initial, intuitive habit, Kaisa's articulated reflection of how she experienced this habit as meaningful (this reflection made my habit explicit and gave it meaning it did not previously possess), and my interpretation of how this new meaning relates to my actions as a teacher in the future.

## Facilitating multiple positions to support pedagogical reflexivity

A central issue in building a framework for group VS learning in music teacher education is that all participants in the inquiry had an equal opportunity to assume multiple positions as members of their learning community: student, peer-learner, peer-teacher, and policy maker. Students were equally involved in reflecting on and developing shared practices, holding peer teaching sessions, and influencing teaching and assessment practices. The possibility to assume these various positions was not dependent on the student's initial skill level or experience in piano or VS; it was available equally to all. In this study, student reflections show that assuming these multiple positions afforded students different types of learning experiences that enriched and diversified their learning. Also, it gave the students much-needed tools for reflecting on their learning as musicians and pedagogues.

*Mikko: It would be good to emphasize the pedagogical dimensions of all courses right from the start. During the first year we have courses like Introduction to Guitar. Also students who major in guitar should go there to explore the pedagogical aspects. To pay attention to it from the start. Otherwise, after a few years you are a really good musician but you'll feel irritated because you missed a lot of good opportunities to attend courses would have been helpful pedagogically.*

Being able to assume various positions within the community served several functions. Firstly, it inspired pedagogical imagination. Assuming multiple positions in the learning community prompted the students to start imagining themselves in unforeseen future situations. For instance, in the group discussions we had many conversations about facilitating and managing collaborative learning environments as prospective teachers. To make use of the stonecutter<sup>29</sup> analogy, we can cut stones, and we can take pride in cutting stones, or we can build a cathedral. Through the use of imagination we can learn very different things from the same activity (Wenger 1998/2003 p. 176), and in addition to learning musical skills VS1 proved to be an excellent venue for exercising pedagogical imagination.

*Kaisa (individual interview): In a way, VS1 is situated in the core issues of music pedagogy. What I mean is, that in the curriculum, everyone can find an area, which is difficult, and which you have to overcome. And that is something that I am pondering about teaching music in general. About how to work and function in these*

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29 "Building a Cathedral" is a story about a traveler in the Middle Ages, who visited a city where many stone cutters were working. Approaching several, he asked the same question: "What are you doing?" The first stonecutter he met replied, "I'm cutting stone. It's dull work, but it pays the bills." A second stonecutter responded, "I'm the best stone cutter in the land. Look at the smoothness of this stone, how perfect the edges are." A third pointed to a foundation several yards away, and said, "I'm building a cathedral."

*situations, and how to overcome the fear of the shame of the possibility of messing up. I think that to overcome this fear is even more difficult in a group than in an individual lesson, because it is harder to establish trust among many people than it is between two individuals. And what I have realized is that as a teacher I need to be able to create this sense of trust with each new group.*

Secondly, being able to negotiate and alternate one's position fluently as a full member of a learning community supported the growth of both musical and pedagogical agency by empowering the members of the community to genuinely influence its practices. Because critical reflection extended to all aspects of the course, including the general goals, curriculum, and assessment, students had the opportunity to reflect on the VS1 course from a broad pedagogical perspective, not only from the obvious point of view of what happens in the classroom. As previously stated, teachers in Finland are seen as active agents in creating and changing educational policies, by policy makers ranging from The Finnish National Board of Education to principals of educational institutions; teachers are expected to design and carry out their own curricula in different learning environments. It is crucial, therefore, that future teachers have experiences in their university education that challenge their ability to affect collaborative change. The extent to which the inquiry empowered all stakeholders to make policies from the bottom up is an important theme in contemporary education research, and one that is especially important in Finnish music teacher education.

## **5.2 Aligning curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment for agency and empowerment**

One perspective on this inquiry is to view it as a process of the alignment of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment as conceptualized by McWilliam and Lebler (2008). In their study, McWilliam and Lebler examined the practices of an Australian Conservatorium as an example of an aligned program that unifies its curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment around students' ownership of learning. They argue that many music education settings are currently facing issues of mis-alignment, and there is a "need for models of teaching and learning that demonstrate quite precisely how it is possible to align curriculum, pedagogy and assessment." (p. 1.) McWilliam and Lebler's (ibid.) study deals with alignment in the context of an entire music program. In the following, I will narrow that scope by situating the idea of alignment to the context of this inquiry, in other words, my own teaching of the VS1 course in the Sibelius Academy. While McWilliam and Lebler based their analysis of

the process of alignment on the concept of students' ownership of learning, the point of reference around which alignment is discussed in this inquiry is supporting the growth of agency and empowerment.

When considering this inquiry as an effort to align curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in VS1, the following themes stand out from the process: a need to move beyond existing pedagogical practices, blurring research and pedagogical strategies in the process of alignment, developing assessment strategies collaboratively, and the tensions of aligning practices from the bottom-up while working inside an institution.

### **Pedagogical tools for aligning VS1 practices**

The collaborative practices developed in the inquiry, as discussed previously in Chapters 3 and 4, were essential in aligning the curriculum, pedagogy, and practices of VS1. Although it was one of the subjects that claimed to be student-centered and experiential, the VS1 course had been taught in a teacher-centered and top-down manner, which represented a gross mis-alignment between its goals and practices. In the following section, to add an additional pedagogical dimension to this discussion, I will use the concept of alignment to shed light on three interconnected pedagogical aspects of VS that have not yet been discussed in this study: the role of listening as a pedagogical tool, using new technology and media in aligning VS practices, and the role of printed textbooks in VS pedagogy.

I remember recording radio programs on a cassette tape when I was growing up, hoping to catch some of my favourite songs, and then listening to them over and over again until the cassette would eventually wear out and the tape would break. In my classical piano repertoire, the only way to hear someone other than me or my teacher play any of the same pieces was to stumble across a student matinee where a fellow student was playing a similar repertoire. This seemingly unrelated story leads me to the much-discussed issue that in today's world music is everywhere. Technology has drastically increased our possibilities for music-related learning, information sharing, and other activities outside schools and other institutional settings of music education. (See e.g. Partti 2009; Partti & Karlsen 2010). The reason I am touching upon this issue is that while students of today are what Partti (*forthcoming*) calls digital natives, growing up adopting these new possibilities and technologies as natural ways of music-related learning, the majority of the teachers still come from the analog era. This gap between generations becomes obvious when examining how slowly the use of new technology and media is becoming part of the discourse on VS pedagogy and practices. While students are making video tutorials and

uploading them to online communities, and engaging in various informal technology-enabled peer-learning practices, teachers are still focusing on publishing printed textbooks, with a CD disc taped to the back cover marking the extent of technological innovation. My intention is not to trivialize the significance of textbooks, since I have produced many myself. However, I agree with Partti (*forthcoming*), who argues that while informal music practices do not necessarily represent ideal models for the music classroom,

[i]t is essential for music educators to pay heed to music making inside and outside school, as well as in the whole continuum between the formal and informal poles, and to promote learning that facilitates the construction of identity and ownership of meaning by placing matters of democracy at the centre of attention.

The Sibelius Academy's piano laboratory is technologically better equipped than most piano studios and classrooms, which in this sense makes it an ideal stage for making use of new technologies. For instance, the piano laboratory provides nearly unlimited opportunities for listening to authentic recordings of music. It is possible to access various audio or video files of almost any given musical piece via Spotify or YouTube within seconds. During the inquiry, listening to various examples of different musical styles, and listening to a recorded version of practically every musical piece that we learned to play, became standard practice. In addition, the VS1 course moved away from relying solely on printed music in the form of lead sheets to include learning music through listening and copying from audio recordings, a practice sometimes considered as an authentic way of learning popular music (see Green 2001, 2008). The VS1 course thus made some small progress towards aligning the practices of learning in class with those taking place outside the formal classroom. However, fully exploring the continuum between the formal and informal poles (Partti *forthcoming*) in VS remains a future challenge.

### **Reflective group discussions as a pedagogical strategy**

Group discussions are not traditionally a part of the VS1 course. Discussion in general is not emphasized in the piano laboratory, where the students work individually and are isolated from each other by their headsets. The VS1 course in this inquiry is no exception. Although the idea of this inquiry was to explore the possibilities of a collaborative approach to VS1, the four group discussions held with both learning communities were initially included in the course simply as means of data collection. Although starting out as a research strategy, the group discussions eventually proved to be a valuable tool in the work of the learning communities, and thus slowly transformed into a pedagogical strategy.



*Group discussion (GD4), second cycle*

**Pia:** *My opinion is that it is really important that we have a lot of group tuition in our studies in music education – that we are taught in groups. After all, we are becoming music teachers. Just think what would happen if we would spend five and a half years in a practice booth by ourselves! How could we then go and teach others, without first having seen how other people act, learn, and go about doing things? And it is important that we do not only learn in groups but that we also talk about our experiences, like we have done. Like, when you Katri said in one of the group discussions that you had problems learning the diatonic cycle of fifths. I never would have guessed that you have any problems at all, I just viewed you as a really strong pianist, and concentrated on my own weaknesses. At that point I realized how I listen to myself playing in a completely different way than listening to anyone else.*

**Hanna:** *That is actually a really good point. I hadn't thought about it before like that, but it is true. When playing in class, I never paid attention to what mistakes others made, but I really concentrated on my own mistakes, assuming that everyone else was concentrating on my mistakes, too. In reality, nobody was listening to me playing, thinking that I should have used another chord position in the fourth bar. I am my own worst critic!*

For the learning communities, the group discussions were an essential forum for reflecting upon past and ongoing learning experiences. The group discussions created space and time to share visions and discuss challenges, while the lessons focused on hands-on music making. They increased the sense of community, and consequently shaped the learning communities and their practices. I therefore believe that although the group discussions started out as a means of data collection, they subsequently influenced the work of the learning communities so significantly that their involvement cannot be excluded from the outcome of this inquiry. I view the group discussions in VS1 as belonging to the process of aligning curriculum, pedagogy, practices, and assessment.

Including reflective discussions as a pedagogical strategy in aligning VS1 practices is justifiable in several ways. Firstly, in order for VS as a subject to be truly student-based and experiential, its practices cannot be based on guessing what those experiences are. Engaging in a dialogue with all participants who are involved in teaching and learning is the only way to begin to build genuinely experiential practices, and for VS to reach its stated goals. Secondly, the aim of this inquiry has been to expand the scope of the VS1 course from purely musical points of view to include larger issues of music teacher education. As I have repeatedly stressed, in this context it is important to include the pedagogical perspectives of the course as part of the process of reflection. Integrating reflective discussion as part of the learning process in VS1 is a step in this direction.

Practitioner inquiry always aims to blur the lines between existing dichotomies (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 2009), and blurring the distinction between research and pedagogical strategies is thus also in line with the overall approach of this inquiry. Moreover, engaging in an ongoing reflective dialogue is a way of ensuring the constant rethinking of VS1 practices, in the Deweyan view of education as continuous reflection and inquiry.

*Matti (individual interview): To future students I would say that don't be afraid to speak up if something is not going in the direction that you would like. The course is shaped according to the participants and their wishes, and nobody can know what you wish for if you do not express it yourself. People may have conflicting interests, at least we did, but you can always find a middle ground. If only one person expresses their wishes and the rest remain quiet, then the course can become really distorted.*

## **Assessment as learning**

There is a growing body of research on the relationship between assessment and learning (see e.g. Kohn 1993/1999; Boud & Falchikov 2007; Lebler 2008a; McWilliam & Lebler 2008). So strong is this link that Boud and Falchikov (2007) claim that, “assessment, rather than teaching, has a major influence on students’ learning. It directs attention to what is important. It acts as an incentive for study. And it has a powerful effect on what students do and how they do it” (p. 3). According to Lebler (2008b, p. 194), we can group assessments into three broad types: 1) assessment of learning, occurring when a student’s understanding of curriculum content is measured; 2) assessment for learning, occurring when the goal is to identify areas in which more work may be needed; and 3) assessment as learning, involving students in the act of assessment as active participants with the intent to produce learning in itself. McWilliam and Lebler (2008) ask,

[w]hy it is that relatively traditional assessment methods are normal in conservatoires, with a high incidence of student performances being assessed by staff, often in a recital framework and usually focussed on a single aspect of an individual’s performance. It is certainly not always because assessment is limited by institutional regulation. (pp. 4-5.)

If we look at the traditional individual exam of a VS course at the Sibelius Academy, it falls into the category of assessment for learning. In other words, areas in which more work may be needed are identified by the examination board and communicated to the student. In this regard, learning in VS is assessed in the same way as in Western classical music, with teachers in control of the feedback and the assessment. As already discussed, VS is

not limited to any particular musical style, and many different musical idioms are taught in its curriculum. However, the assessment of popular music has also been criticized by researchers like Green (2001, 2008) and Lebler (2008b), who claim that popular music is likely to be taught in more or less the same way as other more established content areas like Western classical music or jazz, with teachers being in control of the process and the curriculum, the feedback and the assessment. (Lebler, 2008b, p. 193.)

There were no institutional regulations limiting the design of the VS1 exam. And yet, in assessment much as in pedagogy, the practices of VS1 were guided primarily by the tradition of instrumental teaching in Western art music. Pairing a group course with an individual exam was a mis-alignment of assessment practices that was first acknowledged by the students of the first cycle, as described in Vignette 2. The subsequent process of developing the group exam was a collaborative effort of the learning community to better align assessment practices with the rest of the course. The efforts of the first learning community bore further fruit when the students of the second learning community also experienced the group exam as a meaningful method of assessment in VS1.

***Hanna** (individual interview, second cycle): I think the group exam was important, because it gave our learning a new kind of meaning. We were not learning in the same space as individuals, we were actually learning together. We did not study together as a group just because it is cheaper and the Sibelius Academy cannot afford individual tuition, the group actually meant something. And I think it is only logical that if we are learning together, then we continue together until the end. In the beginning I was a bit hesitant about the group exam, I considered myself more as an individual performer, but my views have changed during this year.*

Several other elements further assisted in aligning the group exam to support the students' experience of agency and empowerment in the context of this inquiry. The group exam was particularly empowering for the first learning community because the community had initiated the process of re-evaluating the assessment practices, and they were involved in this process throughout their involvement in the inquiry. Instead of merely being content with criticizing existing assessment practices, the members of the learning community created an opportunity to develop these practices in a way that they perceived as meaningful, and this development had an actual impact on the assessment strategies thereafter in their institution. For the second learning community, the empowering experience stemmed from being able to further develop the existing emphasis on the collaborative aspects of the exam. Framing the exam with collaborative performances involving the whole community increased their sense of ownership of the assessment process.

Assessment was a participatory process for both learning communities. Students were highly involved with the assessment discussion after the exam, and the discussion furthermore focused more on the students reflecting upon their learning process over the whole year than the examiners assessing the exam performances of individual students. During this inquiry, then, the assessment of the VS1 course shifted from being assessment for learning to becoming assessment as learning.

### **Alignment with/in/against the institution**

As I remarked at the beginning of this chapter, where McWilliam's and Lebler's (2008) work discusses alignment at the level of the institution, my inquiry does so at the level of one individual course, with me as the teacher. My work in this process as a teacher and a teacher-researcher is framed by the music education department of Sibelius Academy. I have previously emphasized the amount of freedom that Finnish teachers generally enjoy in their work. This applies equally to my inquiry; I was allowed a considerable amount of space by the department to develop my practices and to experiment with new, collaboratively developed ideas. To a certain extent, inside my classroom it was possible for me to start living the reality I wished to create. At the same time, the development of the piano laboratory following the inquiry demonstrates the limitations of change achievable by one person, and the ways the institution defines the boundaries of any developmental work by controlling the work's impact on its practices and conventions.

Educational literature (see e.g. hooks 1994; Barrett 2005) widely acknowledges that the physical structure and shape of the classroom plays a significant role in teaching. From the very beginning my inquiry was confined to the physical space of the piano laboratory, thus providing an illuminating example of the constitutive power of space. Margaret Barrett (2005) urges us to

consider the ways in which the physical constraints of the music classroom shape the musical practices undertaken. Whilst the physical structure of a music classroom is shaped by the institution in which it is located, minor structural changes such as the identification of designed spaces for specific music practices may assist in creating public and private spaces for individual, small group and large group engagement. (p. 276.)

Every detail of the piano laboratory is designed to facilitate teacher-centered teaching and learning, and to support the control of the teacher over the learning environment; the teacher has absolute power to give students a voice or to silence them, by simply switching

their keyboards on and off the speakers or controlling the audio input of all students who are wearing headphones. As I was writing my thesis a rare opportunity to influence this situation suddenly emerged, when Sibelius Academy moved to a new setting in the Helsinki Music Centre. As a VS teacher with special insight into the piano laboratory, I was invited to participate in designing the new piano laboratory located in the Music Centre. In the numerous meetings and e-mails that followed, based on my experience as a teacher and my timely research findings I shared with the head of the department and the technical staff the difficulties of facilitating collaboration in the existing piano laboratory, and the possible benefits of being able to work collaboratively in a more equal and open environment. I submitted suggestions that I argued would help to facilitate collaborative learning in the piano laboratory, for example re-positioning the pianos in semi-circles and removing the teacher's pedestal in front of the class. My suggestions were welcomed, discussed, and developed further. They were also all eventually overturned at the last minute without any discussion or explanation, and a year later I found myself in the newly-built piano laboratory with all the student pianos facing the teacher, who was still ensconced on a large pedestal in front of the class.

Technology can liberate, and help educators face the challenges of today. It can also bind us, and restrict us from moving beyond the status quo. The new piano laboratory of Sibelius Academy has up-to-date technology in the form of document cameras, data projectors, and a new student console. At the same time, it lags behind as a learning environment by being built to uphold the traditional teacher-centered setting, putting clear physical restrictions on developing new, creative practices. As McWilliam and Lebler (2008) state,

[a]lignment of curriculum pedagogy and assessment is always a work-in-progress, challenging teachers, students and academic managers alike to 'unlearn' old practices (some of which may have served them well in the past), in order to engage students in the sort of creative thinking and doing that will continue to serve their interests in the 21st century. (p. 5.)

### **5.3 Teaching as learning**

When learning is viewed as a collaborative undertaking, the position, indeed the necessity, of a teacher is often called to question. When discussing collaborative teams in the process of improvising innovation, Sawyer (2007) makes the analogy of playing without a conductor, advocating for equal participation as a means to increase group flow. In music education, based on her research introducing the learning strategies of popular musicians to school music in the U.K, Green (2001, 2008) suggests that music learning should start

with largely informal and unstructured practices, and teachers should ‘fade in’ gradually during the process. Wenger (1998/2003) takes a slightly different viewpoint by arguing that teachers need to represent their own communities of practice in educational settings, since to “manifest their identities as participants” is their most powerful teaching asset. (p. 276.) I align my thoughts with Wenger in the following, and discuss the ways in which I, as a teacher, came to represent my own community of practice in the educational setting of music teacher education. I will also discuss the importance of the teacher’s emotional commitment and strong presence in the classroom. As hooks (1994) states,

[a]ny classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks. Professors who expect students to share confessional narratives but who are themselves unwilling to share are exercising power in a manner that could be coercive. (p. 21.)

In this inquiry, while putting much emphasis on collaborative practices and articulating the importance of their experience of being deeply involved in these practices, students also stressed the significance of the teacher in building this type of a learning environment. Students emphasised the importance of the teacher being enthusiastic and encouraging without letting her own musical preferences influence what is taught.

*Kaisa* (individual interview): The fact that you did not impose your value judgments on music that was played was especially important because that would have been very treacherous. For example, say that you would have yourself had bad experiences with tango, and because of that you would have given us hidden messages that tango music is stupid. That would have shaped our attitude towards playing it, and we wouldn’t have bothered to work at it as much. But no matter what music we played, your attitude was always enthusiastic, like ‘Yihaa, today we are playing humpaa!’

In addition to their interest in the subject matter, students felt inspired by my enthusiasm. In Rikandi and Jakob (*forthcoming*), Jakob argues that when teaching improvisation and composition to children it is not sufficient for the teacher to be intellectually committed to the process, or merely pretend to be enthusiastic; the most crucial characteristic for the teacher is the ability to be genuinely as excited about and involved in the process as the students. The findings of this inquiry support this view. Students acknowledged that a collaborative learning environment requires the full commitment of the teacher, and they were articulate about what was required of a teacher in a collaborative learning setting.

*Hanna (individual interview): I have been thinking about our course from the point of view of the teacher. Isn't this a whole lot of work for the teacher, teaching this way? We are bringing our own material, and you have to accommodate that and make sure that we hold up our end of the bargain. One would think that the old model of VSI would be easier to teach. It is a set package, and you just run with it. But you have had to throw your whole persona in to the mix, and do everything at full throttle.*

It is an interesting question to consider, whether “*the old model of VSI would be easier to teach.*” After all, in the old model, it was easier to plan the whole year’s worth of lessons and subject material in advance. Therefore, if we equate the level of difficulty in teaching with the ability to construct detailed lesson plans and predetermine the course of events, then we have to consider the old model as being easier. However, this inquiry started with me as the teacher feeling dissatisfied and uncomfortable with the old model, so clearly the answer cannot be that simple. To me, the missing part was what hooks (1994) calls engaged pedagogy, a pedagogy that emphasizes well-being. hooks (ibid.) sees the classroom as a potential space for the empowerment of both teachers and students. However, in order for teachers to be able to teach in a manner that empowers the students, they must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being (p. 15), and they should feel empowered by their interactions with the students (p. 152).

In the old model of teaching in the piano laboratory, I was not capable of fully engaging with my teaching in a way that would have promoted my own well being or supported the empowerment of my students - and this made the experience of teaching difficult. I am not claiming that working collaboratively in learning communities is always a straightforward or easy experience. In this inquiry, “doing everything at full throttle” also meant revealing my insecurities in the piano laboratory, which made me vulnerable as a teacher (Rikandi 2007). At the same time, it made me more present and engaged with the teaching process (Rikandi *forthcoming*). By allowing myself to be vulnerable and fallible, I also started to allow myself to learn from our daily practices and interactions in the learning community, as well as the group discussions, the group exams, and the peer teaching sessions, and I was empowered by this process. Following hooks (1994),

I share with the class my conviction that if my knowledge is limited, and if someone else brings a combination of facts and experience, then I humble myself and respectfully learn from those who bring this great gift. I can do this without negating the position of authority professors have, since fundamentally I believe that combining the analytical and experiential is a richer way of knowing. (p. 89.)

Engaging fully in the process of teaching means facing the mess called life, with all the feelings, contradictions, and confrontations that go along with it. We encountered the full range of human emotions in the two learning communities, including laughing, crying, joy, frustration, bewilderment, fear, and conflict. As already discussed earlier in this chapter, learning in a community with a strong sense of a group narrative does not exclude members of that community from having their own individual, highly diverse experiences within that community. The challenge for the teacher in an engaged, collaborative learning environment is to acknowledge and give space for all these different experiences to co-exist in the learning environment that she as the teacher is responsible for. At the same time, for me as a teacher, it was important to learn to acknowledge the experiences of everyone involved, without identifying with or trying to change these experiences. Here I draw on the work of Sennett (2012), who speaks about why empathy matters more than sympathy in achieving cooperation. He conceptualizes sympathy as identification with the ways of life, and particularly the suffering, of another, while seeing empathy as a curiosity about lives the observer cannot pretend to understand. He thus characterizes empathy as being cooler, but deeper.

Both sympathy and empathy convey recognition, and both forge a bond, but the one is an embrace, the other an encounter. Sympathy overcomes differences through imaginative acts of identification; empathy attends to another person on his or her own terms. (p. 21)

Following Sennett's ideas, I believe it is my task as an educator to provide students with meaningful and empowering experiences, but not to identify with these experiences, or define what those experiences should be. Building agency involves change and growth, neither of which tends to be painless. As Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) state, the process of building agency involves bargaining and negotiation as well as resistance and manipulation (p. 10). The best way to support students in this process is for a teacher to develop a deep sense of empathy - rather than sympathy - in the classroom.

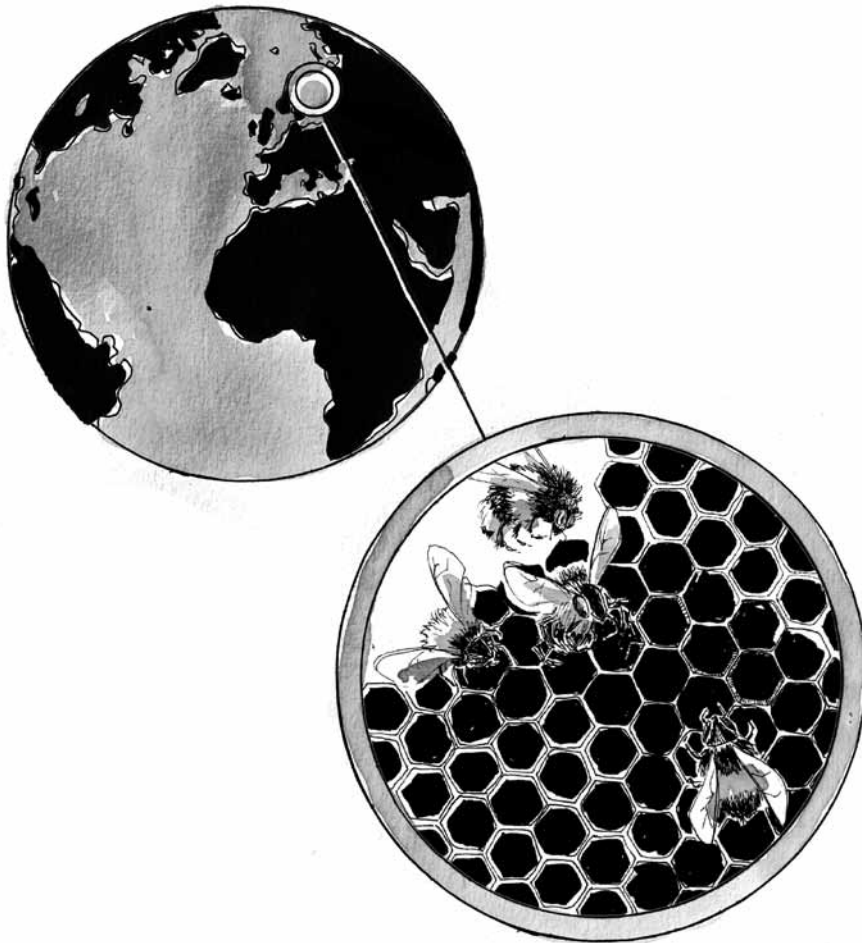
To strive towards being a teacher who is curious rather than certain, present rather than efficient, and prefers learning to being right is how I see myself representing my own communities of practice - VS and music teacher education - through my teaching. Returning to the question of assessing the level of ease or difficulty in a teaching assignment, I would base my answer on how well I am able to engage with that particular learning environment, and subsequently to what extent the students are able to engage with and be empowered by the learning environment.







## 6 Discussion



In this final chapter, I take a step back and discuss the relevance of this study within the larger framework of music education discourse. The titles of the remaining sections tend to start with the prefix “re-”, since in the following I revisit and re-evaluate my theoretical, methodological, and contextual lenses in light of the experience gained during the four years of this inquiry. In particular, however, I explore how the themes and findings discussed throughout this study interrelate, interact, and interconnect.

## **6.1 Reconceptualizing VS**

In Section 1.2, I conceptualized VS for the reader by viewing it as a potentially emancipatory subject on the one hand, and as a counterhegemonic force to traditional piano pedagogy on the other. As already indicated in that first chapter, and subsequently made more evident in Chapter 4, conceptualizing VS is far from unproblematic. Many of the students in this inquiry started their studies with a sense of confusion and uncertainty, unclear about the conception of VS. Subsequently, the learning communities of this inquiry started their process of negotiating a joint enterprise (Wenger 1998/2003) by negotiating the meaning of the phenomenon at the focus of their joint enterprise. Both learning communities discussed the problematics of VS through exploring questions along the lines of: What are we here to do and learn? What is VS? What and how are we supposed to rehearse VS? What is the difference between VS and learning classical or pop/jazz piano?

In Section 1.2 I claimed that when conceptualizing VS it is helpful to view the subject through its relationship with traditional piano pedagogy. I also suggested that when doing so it could be helpful to view the relationship using the Twelve Continuum Transmission Framework (Schippers 2010), as traditional piano pedagogy and VS seem to be inclined towards opposite ends of these continua. I now return to this framework, as introduced in Figure 1 (see p. 32). Schippers (2010) sees the most obvious application of his model as describing given teaching situations, whether they are moments in lessons or entire enculturation processes (p. 125). In the following, I use his framework to discuss the current tendencies of the enculturation processes of VS, informed by the results of this inquiry. As mentioned earlier, instrumental teaching is so heavily constructed through the western art music tradition that when other genres make their way into the curriculum the music is rearranged to fit the traditional form of teaching (Rostvall & West 2003). Although VS and traditional piano pedagogy can be viewed as situated on opposite sides of the continuum, with piano pedagogy tilting to the left and VS to the right side, VS is not immune to drifting towards the left side - for instance by falling back on pedagogical practices established largely in traditional piano pedagogy, and doing so without critical

reflection. Currently, VS is conforming its teaching practices to the existing pedagogical tradition by strongly emphasizing one-on-one tuition and adopting traditional methods of assessment. For example, while VS claims to value and emphasize the learning process as a whole, in reality most assessment takes place in individual examinations, and feedback and grading are based on the single performance given in that particular situation. In addition, VS seems to be in danger of becoming institutionalized through the canonization of its once counterhegemonic content of playing certain popular music styles and playing from chords. The canonization of VS is insidious, because it is mostly unconscious and tacit, a result of what McWilliam and Lebler would call a failure to ‘unlearn’ old practices (p. 5). Finally, instead of fully exploring the opportunities that new technologies offer us in teaching and learning music, and taking advantage of how students already learn in settings other than the classroom (see e.g. Partti forthcoming) or a piano studio, the focus of VS is currently on publishing an increasing number of textbooks with considerably similar structure and content. If not balanced by investigations into aspects of VS that do not fit the format of textbooks, this publication trend may help to further increase the canonization process of VS.

These trends can transform VS from being in a state of constant flux to becoming a static tradition; from tolerating uncertainty to avoiding it; from focusing on the collective to emphasizing the individual. The issue here is not, as Schippers (2011) also states, that one end of the continuum would be better than the other as such. The issue concerning VS is whether these changes are reflective, deliberate, and meaningful, or whether they are taking place unintentionally and without even being recognized. While the goal of VS is to be student-based and experiential, examples from current practices seem to reinforce the idea of the teacher as the only reliable source of knowledge, an idea that is deeply embedded in our teaching tradition. I am not suggesting that we avoid altogether the issue of what VS is, and what practices it entails. As this study has showed, there is confusion among teachers and students alike about what VS is, and consequently how it is studied, and we need to be able to address this issue in order to move forward in our teaching and learning. However, there is a difference between addressing the issue by attempting to define a set of fixed answers that can simply be distributed to all necessary parties, or on the other hand accepting that a situation with multiple vantage points - and all the accompanying confusion that entails - is a fruitful point of departure for ongoing collaborative negotiation and knowledge creation.

I suggest that there is a need for VS to establish reflective practices that cherish the latter. It is necessary to consider what approaches to learning and knowledge best support the

kind of learning that VS claims to value. I would argue that in addition to becoming aware of the extent to which the conservatoire-based model permeates current practices in VS, and then critically reflecting on these practices, we need to expand the scope of our discussion to include current educational ideas originating from other domains of learning. Furthermore, I believe that introducing the concepts of collaborative practices, learning communities, and creative teaching and learning to VS pedagogy provides us with much needed tools to work towards aligning curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment.

And yet there is no need to arrive at one answer, to agree on one set of practices, however diverse these may be. What I would like to suggest instead is the idea that more than simple diversity is needed, the idea that resisting canonization is at the very core of VS, and that by embracing this we can start to reconstruct our thinking about instrumental teaching in a way that also challenges us to reconstruct our hierarchies of knowing. To paraphrase Maxine Greene (1988) - to start thinking of music education in terms of a practice of freedom that provides an opening of spaces for new ways of thinking and being, and allows radical difference. I suggest that VS should, in staying true to its initial point of departure, be a context-related counterargument, a critical lens to reflect on existing practices of instrumental teaching. In addition to teaching the practical skills of how to accompany different styles of music, VS could also offer alternative views on how to think about teaching music by bringing the student to the forefront of teaching practices. As Lamb (1994) says with reference to Lather (1991), we working in music education have

to take responsibility for transforming our own practices so that our own empirical and pedagogical work can be less toward positioning ourselves as masters of truth and justice and more toward creating a space where those directly involved can act and speak on their own behalf (p. 70).

As this study has shown, this transformation may result in changing the way we make music, and the music that we make. However, these are the consequences of the transformation, not the transformation itself. In other words, bringing the student to the forefront of teaching practices and engaging in learning communities surely changes our daily music teaching and learning practices, but merely changing these practices does not necessarily validate the student and her experiences.

## **6.2 Reflexive musical and pedagogical agency**

Pedagogical issues first came to be a part of this inquiry through my reflection upon my own pedagogical agency and, more importantly, making this process visible to my

students. Instead of hiding my efforts to reconstruct my pedagogical agency in the context of the piano laboratory, I revealed this process to the students. It is important to point out that the students' reflection on their own pedagogical agency can be traced back to this turn in the process. In other words, I did not ask the students to start reflecting on their pedagogical agency, but rather started to reflect on mine. As Dolloff (2007) argues,

[t]eacher education programmes do not exist independently of those who teach in them. Therefore, for teacher education programmes to change there must be a change in way that music teacher educators approach their own identities as teachers and musicians. (p. 17)

In Section 1.3, I described the domain specific nature of agency (Ibrahim & Alkire 2007), and the subsequent issue of how musical agency (Karlsen 2011) interacts with the other forms of agency required in music teacher education. By adopting the practitioner inquiry approach, my task as a practitioner in the context of teaching VS in music teacher education (regardless of whether the tuition takes the form of one-on-one or group tuition) thus became to reflect on my own approaches to music and teaching; this was necessary in order to be able to design learning environments that facilitated the growth of agency in several domains, namely musical and pedagogical, for both the teacher and the students. As a result of this process, experiences of musical and pedagogical agency began to overlap and merge during the inquiry, rather than remaining as two separate, domain specific agencies. Based on the results of this study, I therefore suggest the concept of *reflexive musical and pedagogical agency* to describe a distinct type of agency in music teacher education (Figure 8).

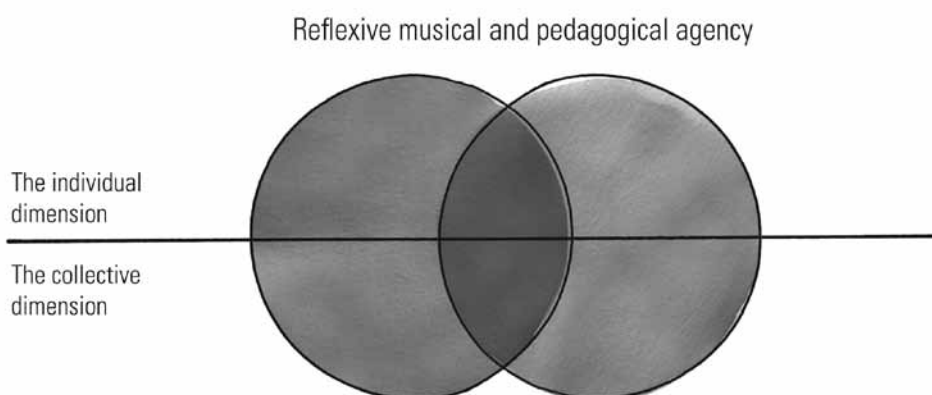


FIGURE 8. Reflexive musical and pedagogical agency.

As is depicted in the figure, musical agency and pedagogical agency do not overlap completely. Musical agency still exists outside the pedagogical domain, and vice versa. However, if agency is conceptualized as a kind of freedom for a person or a group to be able to achieve meaningful ends in pursuit of the goals or values they regard as important (Sen 1985; Ibrahim & Alkire 2007), then the areas in which musical and pedagogical agency overlap to form reflexive musical and pedagogical agency should be the special focus, or the lens, for examining issues of agency in the context of music teacher education.

### **6.3 Rethinking music teacher education**

Finnish music teacher education programs pride themselves on offering their students an extensive curriculum that includes a wide range of musics from classical, folk, and jazz to pop and rock styles. In this regard, the programs answer Sands' (2007) call for a fair and equitable representation of musics in music teacher education. The VS1 course is a good example of Finnish music teacher education, because almost all the musical genres just mentioned are included in that single course. Sands (ibid.) also states, however, that the curricular focus she advocates must not stand alone, but must be accompanied by "careful discussion and interrogation of rationales and justifications for teaching from more inclusive and more critically-informed perspectives." (p. 56.) In Finnish music teacher education, different pedagogical ideas and philosophies are currently taught primarily in pedagogical studies. However, is it sufficient for future music educators to learn about existing pedagogical theories or innovations in separate lectures? I would suggest that, in order to fully develop their potential for reflexive musical and pedagogical agency, students need to be able to experience working in learning environments that support the types of learning they are expected to facilitate as professional teachers. Extensive instrumental lessons form the lion's share of studies for Finnish music education students. Learning as experienced in these lessons is not limited to musical and instrumental skills alone, since the pedagogical models that students experience in the day-to-day practices of their instrumental tuition form an equally important part of each student's embodied experience.

VS1 serves as an excellent example of how, if not articulated, the pedagogical dimensions of instrumental tuition can go unnoticed, and subsequently its potential unrealized, with the focus being entirely on musical skills. Therefore, this inquiry reframed the teaching and learning in the VS1 course as a case of aligning the practices of a course in instrumental tuition with the overall goals of the teacher education program it is situated in. Redesigning VS1 from this viewpoint had several consequences for its curriculum,



practices, and assessment that I have already discussed thoroughly in this study. In this final chapter, I return to the findings of this inquiry once more, to discuss their significance in the broader context of music teacher education.

Firstly, this inquiry reconstructed VS1 as a collaborative process of negotiation in a learning community. In this process of negotiation, expanding the scope of the course to include pedagogical perspectives brought with it a need for more flexible positions in teaching and learning for the members of the learning community. The impulses of peer learning and teaching, for instance, are examples of how the students felt the need for, and subsequently developed ways to more deeply examine the pedagogical dimensions in the course through adopting various positions. These impulses, in turn, had a significant impact on the whole course thereafter. This study would therefore suggest that the ability of all those engaged in the learning process to fluently move between different positions is an important asset in teacher education. Being able to adopt and alternate various positions in teaching and learning processes is essential for both the students and the teacher. For students, exploring the positions of a peer teacher, peer learner, and a policy maker in a learning community was a way to develop reflexive musical and pedagogical agency. For me, as the teacher, being able to alternate between the position of a teacher, co-learner, and researcher was an important asset in finding spaces to develop my own teaching practices.

Throughout this study, the theme of being able to stand uncertainty has been central. Adopting the stance of a practitioner-researcher gave me the courage to move beyond the known and the certain, and to start exploring new practices. It was easier to come to terms with the risk of failure, since when taking the stance of teaching as inquiry any mistakes and failed experiments are part of the process and serve as material for reflection and further development. I concur with hooks (1994) that empowerment cannot happen if teachers refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks (p. 21). However, in the same way as students, teacher educators need tools to help them become vulnerable in a pedagogically meaningful manner. I see practitioner inquiry as a particularly valuable tool for teachers and teacher educators in this process.

Secondly, for an individual student to engage in the process of negotiation also entailed gaining experience of agency, and the responsibility that comes with it. As Allsup and Westerlund (2012) state,

[a] classroom dialogue that functions toward the moral growth of all involved is not a chat among friends or a competition among adversaries. Participation is ethically bound: teachers facilitate and guide without succumbing to domination, and students bear responsibility to attend to issues that are larger than themselves. What emerges is a 'laboratory space' where the results of dialogue, or the results of purposeful and diverse interaction, become new starting points, which in turn fund testable means to further ends. (Allsup & Westerlund 2012, p. 142)

In other words, through engaging in the purposeful and diverse interaction of the learning communities of this inquiry, both the students and I gained embodied experiences of agency that can later be used when engaging and participating in other communities within and outside music education. In today's society and world of education, the conception of knowledge has changed, and the teacher is no longer the only source of knowledge. This shift has far-reaching consequences for what it means to be a teacher in the future. Whether changing from analogical to digital forms of music, from distributing to creating knowledge, or from individual to collaborative learning – whatever the change, teachers need to grow into and learn to adapt to these changes, and teacher education needs to find the means to help future teachers in this process.

Thirdly, the process of building reflexive musical and pedagogical agency is always unique, on both the individual and the collective level. As this study showed, the individual members of the two learning communities had highly diverse experiences of the same, shared process. In addition, the two learning communities both had their own, unique experience of their shared history of learning. With each new classroom, student, and teacher, the process of teaching and learning is always different. Each teacher and student has his or her own unique personality and experiences, and the learning process has to be shaped accordingly. For me as a teacher, it was important to be able to engage in this process with my whole, quite lively personality. To another teacher, it could have been equally important to be able to work in a calm and serene environment. It is therefore important to acknowledge the difference between stating that it is important to be engaged in teaching with one's whole personality, and claiming that you need to possess a certain kind of personality in order to fully engage in teaching.

Finally, based on the results of this inquiry, including pedagogical reflection as part of the course in VS1 not only increased the students willingness and ability for pedagogical reflection, it also considerably enhanced musical learning by functioning as a tool for building a learning community and facilitating group creativity.

## 6.4 Revisiting the position of the researcher – issues of validity

As I am working in the realm of practitioner research that aims at transforming practices, I will next discuss questions of validity in relation to criteria developed especially for practitioner research: democratic, outcome, process, catalytic, and dialogic validity (Anderson, Herr & Nihlen 1994; Cochran-Smith & Lytle 2009).

As a researcher, I have conveyed to you an account of the inquiry, a story. But whose story or stories have I told? In the process of analysis, my memories of events were on several occasions different from what the data was telling me. Also, in many cases, students' reflections of events in the follow-up interviews seemed to conflict with video data of the lessons or the group discussions. In trying to honour the perspectives of all stakeholders, in other words striving towards **democratic validity**, I considered the experiences of all participants as remembered and told to be relevant. The research report is therefore a collection of stories from all participants that give multiple points of view to the inquiry as experienced and lived, rather than depicting factual events or aiming at one coherent story.

In practitioner research, resolving the problems addressed is sometimes assessed as **outcome validity**. In the case of this research, the overall aim was to design a learning environment that would support the development of students' musical and pedagogical agency in VS group studies, within the context of music teacher education. Because I see research as a stance and a continuing process rather than a means to find a fixed set of answers to a set question, outcome validity must be assessed according to this perspective. Therefore, rather than measuring outcome validity by means of the resolution of addressed problems, I choose to view it as the extent to which this study was able to make the problems it aimed to address a part of the on-going discussion of music education. As such, the outcome validity of this study has yet to be fully established. At present it is however worth noting that, although as already discussed the institutional context set limits to the impact of this inquiry on an institutional level, the study nevertheless had a concrete impact on the assessment practices of the VS1 course. Having participated in the assessment of the first group exam, one of my colleagues started utilizing a more collaborative approach, along with a group exam, in her own teaching in the piano laboratory, which in turn began an interesting and still active dialogue between us about our respective experiences. During the academic years 2010-2012, the practice of holding a group exam gained even more popularity, and eventually became standard practice in VS1 assessment. In addition, the practice of allowing the student to choose one piece to perform during examinations, also in VS courses with one-on-one tuition coupled with an

individual exam, is still the practice today. Therefore, in assessing outcome validity, this inquiry in many ways succeeded in creating knowledge from practice, for practice.

The major burden of functioning as proof of **process validity**, in other words the use of appropriate and adequate research methods and inquiry processes, lies on the work presented in Chapter 2. However, as part of assessing process validity, I would like briefly to discuss the improvisational elements of collaborative inquiry from a methodological perspective. Much like the pedagogical practices in this inquiry, the methodological choices also embraced the emergent, improvisational nature of collaboration (Gershon 2009; Sawyer 2011). I started this inquiry with some methodological guidelines and ideas related to data collection and analysis, but the process thereafter developed collaboratively, with the students and I negotiating the process of inquiry as the course progressed. For example, in terms of data collection, I had planned for the first two group discussions (GD1, GD2) that took place during the first term. However, the need and the themes for the remaining two group discussions, that took place in the second term of the course in the first cycle, arose from the project itself. With the students initiating the move towards a group exam, the need to thoroughly discuss the process of redesigning the assessment practices (GD3) arose, and the group exam itself brought with it the subsequent collaborative assessment discussion (GD4). In other words, predetermining all the details of the data collection process would not only have been against the collaborative nature of the inquiry, but would also have resulted in missing several valuable research opportunities.

Another example of how my methodological approach developed during the process of the inquiry is how the visual dimension of this study developed into a methodological tool in itself, as my collaboration with the illustrator Lissu Lehtimaja became an important part of the study. I had worked with Lissu before, and I was fascinated with her ability to add new layers to any written work by means of her visualisations. The importance of visualization as a methodological tool was heightened during the process of writing the final dissertation. I started discussing the overall visualization of the project with Lissu when I had outlined the first draft of the manuscript. By that time, the concept of using a spiral as the visual representation of my inquiry had existed for several years. I explained that I wanted the spiral to be present on several levels in the final dissertation: I planned to use it in describing elements of data collection and analysis, but I also wanted the spiral to convey the overall storyline of the work. My personal experience of reading dissertations was that their structure and logic is often hard to follow, and as a reader I often have to connect the dots when trying to figure out how different chapters relate to each other in the work. My aim was to avoid that by using the illustrations to convey and highlight the inner

logic of the work. Using a spiral as the metaphor for the inquiry, each chapter would begin with a picture about that particular chapter's link to the inquiry as a whole.

The initial idea was that I would explain the logic of the work to Lissu, and we would together design a series of illustrations that she would then create. However, and much to my surprise, the process of designing the illustrations to condense the main idea of each chapter into visual form also functioned as a way of making the inner logic of the work more clear, and in some instances the visualization process guided the actual structure of the work. For instance, I explained the idea of one of the chapters in the initial manuscript to Lissu four times, and each time she drew a new visual representation of that particular chapter. With each picture, something was off. After the fourth illustration, I went back to the text and realized that I had to construct the chapter from a different starting point altogether. Once the chapter had been rewritten, we had no problems in finding a way to illustrate it. In other words, Lissu's illustrations helped me realize that there was something wrong with the structure of the chapter. I believe that creating a sufficiently clear and logical structure for the study, to the extent that each chapter was eventually condensed into one picture, not only added a visual dimension to the dissertation, but also improved the quality of the written work.

To achieve **dialogic validity**, I engaged in critical and reflective discussions with peers in several ways during this inquiry. Firstly, at the end of both research cycles several VS teachers from the department were included in the assessment processes and the subsequent reflective discussions. In the process of deciding whether to use the Finnish concept of *vapaa säestys* in the dissertation, or try to translate the concept into English, I also received help from several VS teachers in the department. As a form of member checking, Carita Holmström read the sections of this dissertation concerning VS in Chapter 1. Secondly, regular critical and reflective discussions with peers and teachers of the doctoral seminar were essential and invaluable in all stages of this inquiry.

As already discussed in Chapter 2, student participants in the study were also included in the analysis and writing stages of the inquiry as commentators and contributors, including making the first complete draft of the manuscript available to read and comment upon. After sending the draft to the students, accompanied by an e-mail saying that I would welcome all observations and comments about the work, I received e-mails from half of the students within a week. The timing of this round of commentary was not ideal, as the academic year had just come to a close and the students were already on summer holidays. Also, it is worth keeping in mind that three years had passed since the first cycle

of the inquiry. I therefore consider the percentage of students who replied, especially considering the speed of their replies, to be quite high. Based on the student comments on the manuscript, it seems that the students generally focused on reading Chapters 3 and 4 of the dissertation, and that the reading experience evoked a sense of nostalgia and going back in time. Students commented on starting to read the dissertation with a feeling of not remembering anything from their first year of studies, but then suddenly recalling every detail while reading excerpts from lessons and discussions: where they sat, who said what, and even how they turned their heads. While some students clearly recognized themselves in the text, for others it was not so obvious:

*Excerpt from a student e-mail, June 2012*

*“I started to glance at the dissertation and ended up reading several pages of it, especially the parts where our group is working together on something. It was fun to return to the first year of studying in music ed. for a moment. By the way, you really succeeded in disguising our identities. It was hard for me to recognize anyone at first, even myself. But I do feel that Hanna had some comments that I could hear myself saying. Am I right in so thinking?”*

The students’ engagement with the inquiry outside their respective learning community can in Wengerian terms be described as peripheral participation (Wenger 1998/2003, p. 100). My engagement with this inquiry was one of full membership, and about achieving prolonged engagement with a studied phenomenon in order to grasp a deeper understanding of it (Bresler 2006). Therefore, the dialogic validity of this inquiry is closely related to **catalytic validity**, in other words deepening the understandings of all participants. For instance, requiring tools for building reflexive musical and pedagogical agency, and reflecting and articulating one’s experiences from this process, can be seen as increasing the catalytic validity of the study. As the subject of my inquiry was deeply personal to me, I was absorbed into the phenomenon I was studying (ibid.). As a result, not only did this study deepen my understanding of teaching, it changed me. My prolonged engagement with the phenomenon far exceeds the two-year time frame of the project; it also exceeds the subsequent process of analysis. As I find myself even now, during the final moments of writing this dissertation, learning new things from this study on a daily basis, I anticipate that my prolonged engagement will continue to be a source of embodied experiences and continue to add to the catalytic validity long after this dissertation is published.

As an example of how the process of writing the dissertation deepened my own understanding of the research experience, I will briefly return to Vignette 3, which described how we came about playing *Suivirsi* in the second learning community, and

how *Suivirsi* came to be an important part of the repertoire for that learning community. It is important to point out that *Suivirsi* was the only Christian hymn we played in our otherwise secular repertoire. The point I am making is that, as a teacher with a deep interest in critical and feminist pedagogy, I did not use this opportunity to contextualize and question the tensions that may arise from having a Christian hymn as a ritual in the increasingly multicultural schools of Finland. This is despite the fact that this very hymn, and the tradition of playing it at the end of every school year, had been a subject of much public debate at approximately the same time (see. e.g. Leppänen 2002; Kartastenpää 2011). Although an advocate for critical reflection, in the case of *Suivirsi* I was swept away by the excitement of making music and teaching, and failed to acknowledge the bigger picture. Even more importantly, I came to this realization only during the process of analyzing data and writing the initial results, when I had gained some perspective on the two cycles of data collection in the inquiry as lived and experienced.

To conclude, in parallel with other initiatives that aim to democratize the locus of knowledge and power, the practitioner research movement has the explicit goal of altering relationships of knowledge, practice, and power in universities and rethinking the hierarchical connections between teaching and research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 2009, p. 29). The relationship between research and teaching in a music university is unique, where research is a relatively new phenomenon and musical/artistic expertise is held in the highest regard. The first challenge for practitioner inquiry in this type of a setting is to articulate existing tacit knowledge and practices in order to enable critical dialogue about challenges that rise from practice. This inquiry was a move towards articulating and rethinking hierarchical connections between teaching and research as situated at the intersection of general music education, instrumental pedagogy, and the music university.

## **6.5 Closing words**

There are several issues that arose from this study which warrant more attention than the study could provide, thus stirring up more questions about VS pedagogy, higher music education, and music teacher education than could be answered. What this study did show, however, is that it is possible for an individual teacher to initiate change by exposing one's practices to the process of collaborative reconstruction, and that through this process change can take place in a relatively short time-span. This is essential, because in today's world the need to adapt to rapid changes is becoming ever more self-evident. The ability to adapt to change by constantly re-evaluating and renewing practices is especially important in a university aiming to be at the forefront of change and knowledge development. The

shared understanding among educational writers trying to find the means to cope with the challenges of the globalized world is that, rather than teaching students any fixed set of skills, education needs to start providing learners with the tools to adapt to ever-changing unforeseeable circumstances. A general understanding among writers who have addressed these issues is that developing creative collaborative skills is essential in this process (see e.g. Wenger 1998/2003; Westerlund 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2008; Sawyer 2007, 2010, 2011; Sennett 2012). Writers like Sawyer and Sennett, while working outside the field of music or music education, use musical practices as a metaphor when describing the significance, possibilities, and dynamics of collaborative creative practices. At the same time, music education is struggling with trying to move beyond the set ways of established traditions, and with embracing these very same issues of collaborative practices. VS is a good example of this, in that it was originally an intervention in the existing practices of piano pedagogy. However, today VS faces the challenge of keeping its edge, and resisting the slow process of transforming into a static tradition through the canonization of content and practices. As such, VS serves as a reminder for all of us who work in music education of the strength of the tacit traditions in our practices.

This study has been an effort to join in the broader discourse on music education by studying the examination and development of one's own pedagogical practices. It is of crucial importance that the topical issues in music education research reach and interact with the day-to-day teaching practices of music educators. It is of equal importance that this flow of information is not one-sided, but that the experience of reflective practices developed by teachers in turn joins the discourse on music education research. I see myself as a broker situated in the midst of this interaction, and I therefore hope that this study functions as a boundary object in the process of bridging the communities of music education practices and research.







# Outro



VS has not always been a part of my musicianship. I was born and raised in Estonia during the final years of the Soviet Union, and received my musical education up to the age of 14 in this cultural context. There was very little freedom (*vapaus*) involved in my musical education, and no accompanying (*säestys*) was going on in any other form than the chamber music repertoire of western art music. In fact, the very first time I saw a lead sheet with chord symbols was in an upper-secondary school music lesson after immigrating to Finland. This was a moment of revelation that marked the beginning of my journey with VS; and, I think, it also saved music for me. The novel idea of being allowed to make music without a detailed written score, to completely rely on your ear, and to create, arrange, and improvise music that did not exist before was utterly fascinating - and I dove in head first.

Coming as I did from a strict western art music tradition, the process of reconstructing my carefully supervised musicianship and finding musical agency time and again in new musical contexts was not always easy, straightforward, or painless. For instance, I recall a VS lesson from my first year as a music education student at the age of 18, when my teacher put a picture of a butterfly on the piano in front of me and asked me to play whatever came to my mind. I was familiar with chord symbols, I could accompany in different styles, and I was able to make variations from a theme; but this was something utterly new. I looked at the picture, horrified. The only thing that came to my mind at that moment was that Arvo Pärt had a piano piece that had something to do with butterflies. Failing to remember anything else about his piece, I ended up literally sitting on my hands, refusing to play a single note for half an hour, and waiting for the lesson to end. After the lesson I went home, sat down behind the piano, and started to figure out what had just happened and what I could do to avoid choking like that ever again.

Throughout this study, I have discussed how VS tends to be in a tensional or counter-hegemonical relationship with the surrounding pedagogical and musical traditions. On a personal level, my own relationship with VS represents these same tensions. On the one hand, VS has been my way of finding new ways of musical expression well beyond my classical training, new kinds of musical agency, and ways of breaking free from the strict limitations placed on what it means to be a musician that I was instructed to follow as a child. On the other hand, I have still struggled with the need to avoid failure, to succeed, to be perfect, and to achieve new aims without really stepping out of my comfort-zone.

While in the process of writing this book, I also recalled another moment from my first year as a music education student. Full of energy and feeling somewhat overwhelmed by my new surroundings, I was walking through the university corridor and talking to our music history professor, who was someone for whom I had, and still have, the greatest respect and admiration. Wishing to seem as cultured and cultivated as she was, I sighed: “I just finished reading Gandhi’s autobiography, and I can’t wait to be as complete and sure of myself as he is!” I do not remember what my professor said to me, but to this day I remember the expression on her face; an expression of calm understanding and quiet acceptance of my youth and ignorance.

Perhaps I recalled these stories now because they both resonate with where I find myself at the end of my doctoral studies. It seems that everything I have done since these events has lead me further away from certainties, truths, and established comfort-zones. During the last four years my doctoral studies have formed a large part of this process of accepting the futility, and in fact the redundancy, of striving for fixed truths and certainties. It has been, as Cochran-Smith (2003) writes, a process of unlearning beliefs and practices as much as a journey of discovery.

The biggest lesson of this process has perhaps been to learn to find one’s own agency in the midst of continuous tensions, paradoxes, and ever-changing contexts and situations. To find comfort in, and embrace, the fact that not everything can be resolved in the mess that we call life. To realize that most of the time even to start asking questions means that you first have to step out of your existing comfort-zone and accept the risk of failure. As a musician, I can embrace this – as a teacher and a teacher educator I have to be able to nurture this stance in my students. If, then, this inquiry has raised more questions than it has answered, I consider it to be a success.

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## Appendix 1: Glossary of Finnish terms

Akselin ja Elinan häävalssi = [Wedding Waltz of Akseli and Elina.] Composer: Heikki Aaltoila. For a complete list of Finnish recordings, see

<http://www.aanitearkisto.fi/firs2/kappale.php?Id=Akselin+ja+elinan+h%E4%E4valssi>

Humppa = A type of music and a social dance from Finland. Humppa is related to jazz and very fast foxtrot, played two beats to a bar (2/4 or 2/2), at about 220 to 260 beats per minute.

Jenkka = A fast Finnish partner dance originated in Finnish folk dance. It is danced to the music in 2/4 or 4/4 time signature of about 140 beats per minute.

fiilis = vibes, fiilistellä = to dig

Maija Vilkkumaa = A Finnish singer-songwriter. Her song Hiuksissa hiekkaa [Sand in the Hair] was released as a single from her 1999 album Pitkä ihana leikki.

Pepe Willberg = A Finnish singer-songwriter, who first recorded his famous song Aamu [Morning] with his band Pepe & Paradise in 1973.

Ranskalaiset korot = [French heels] A well-known Finnish foxtrot. Composer: Erik Wilhelm Lindström. For a complete list of Finnish recordings, see

<http://www.aanitearkisto.fi/firs2/kappale.php?Id=Ranskalaiset+korot>

Suvivirsi = [Summer hymn.] Originally a Swedish hymn (Den blomstertid nu kommer) that is traditionally credited to Israel Kolmodin, although the origin of the hymn is debated. It was first published in the 1695 Swedish Hymnal. The hymn is traditionally sung at the end of the school year, before the summer holidays, and it has achieved widespread recognition in both Swedish and Finnish culture. It is heavily associated with summer, as well as primary and secondary education.

Syysunelmia = [Dreams of the Fall] Original title: Songe d'automne. Composer: Archibald Joyce. A waltz, famously performed in Finnish by Georg Ots. For a complete list of Finnish recordings, see <http://www.aanitearkisto.fi/firs2/kappale.php?Id=Syysunelmia>

vaihtobasso = root five, playing in two

vapaa säestys = [Free Accompaniment]. A primarily Finnish (and Scandinavian) form of studying piano that does not have a well-established translation into English, although the terms “free piano”, “keyboard accompaniment”, “practical accompaniment”, “practical piano skills”, “secondary piano”, and the direct translation “free accompaniment” are sometimes used. Vapaa säestys is a student-centred approach that concentrates on piano improvisation and accompaniment, playing by ear and from chord symbols. The emphasis is on the process of music making and learning. In principle it is not bound to any particular musical style, although it often draws on various pop and rock styles. Vapaa säestys is most often studied with the piano. However, it can also be studied with the guitar, the accordion, or the kantele - in other words, instruments that can produce melody and harmony simultaneously. The majority of vapaa säestys tuition is offered in the form of one-on-one lessons.

## **Appendix 2: VS1 (Practical Accompaniment 1), and VS2 (Practical Accompaniment 2A) course descriptions 2008-2010.**

4a38

PRACTICAL ACCOMPANIMENT 1  
(PRACTICAL ACCOMPANIMENT D)  
(4 ECTS credits, 106 hrs)

This course is part of the qualification requirements for music teachers.

This module covers triads, four-note chords, typical chord progressions and comping. Students learn about improvisation and the different styles of Afro-American music and become familiar with a repertoire of at least 20 pieces, mainly from material used in music schoolbooks.

### **Objective**

To free the students from being tied to the score, and for them to be able to accompany on the piano from chord symbols and by ear without chord symbols. Students develop their piano skills and coordination, rhythm and pulse skills, as well as their hearing of basic chord functions needed for harmonization, and typical substitutions.

The aim is to be able to sing or play the melody with accompaniment, and to qualify for Practical accompaniment 2.

### **Instruction and study**

- Group instruction of 7 for a maximum of 30 hrs for one academic year
- Individual study 76 hrs

### **Requirements**

- Class attendance
- Completion of the assigned tasks
- Transcription: a lead-sheet with chord and structure symbols

### **Recommended year of study**

1st year

**Assessment** Pass/Fail

### **Transferable credits**

At the instructor's discretion.

Practical accompaniment 1 completed at a university or other institute of higher education.

Literature: Tenni – Varpama: Vapaa säestys ja improvisointi (Otava 2004).

4a69

## PRACTICAL ACCOMPANIMENT 2A/PIANO

(6 ECTS credits, 160 hrs)

This course is part of the qualification requirements for music teachers.

In this module, students increase their knowledge of genres in terms of harmony, rhythm and phrasing as well as the diverse potential of the piano. Additionally, this module covers the use of compound chords in different keys.

### **Objective**

To further develop the inner perception and hearing of rhythm and melody. Students practice a stylistically diverse repertoire of a minimum of 40 pieces. The objective is to learn to cope with various types of accompaniment and performance situations through hands-on experience.

### **Instruction and study**

- Individual instruction max. 28 hours / two academic years (i.e. max. 14 hrs / academic year)
- Group instruction 10 hrs
- Individual study 122 hrs

### **Requirements**

Class attendance

Completion of the assigned tasks

Transcription (melody, chord symbols, solo part)

### **Exam**

- a) Harmonisation and accompaniment of a set melody
- b) Singing and accompanying a melody from chord symbols, according to the style
- c) Prepared ensemble or solo piece of free choice
- d) Accompaniment using compound chords
- e) 3 pieces of different styles from a prepared repertoire of 10 pieces

Total preparation time for a) and b) 30 min.

Section c) above is performed in the yearly matinee. The piece must be a composition, arrangement, or transcription by the student.

## **Appendix 3 Practical Accompaniment 1 course descriptions 2011-2012**

4a38

**PRACTICAL ACCOMPANIMENT 1**  
(PRACTICAL ACCOMPANIMENT D)  
(4 ECTS credits, 106 hrs)

### **Learning outcomes**

Students will:

have a command of the piano and a fundamental sense of coordination, rhythm, and pulse for singing and accompanying simultaneously;

have a command of different accompaniment styles or rhythms and be able to use them according to the style in question;

be able to accompany from a score, chord symbols, and by ear on the piano;

recognize phenomena related to harmony by ear and from the score;

be able to accompany from a score, chord symbols, and by ear on the piano;

be able to accompany progressions by fifths and blues progressions in different keys and styles;

be familiar with harmonizing melodies that use diatonic chords and secondary dominants;

be able to play rhythmical accompaniment patterns under the melody;

be able to accompany music found in school songbooks; and qualify for Practical Accompaniment 2.

### **Instruction and study**

- Group instruction of 7 for a maximum of 30 hrs for one academic year
- Individual study 76 hrs

### **Requirements**

- Class attendance
- Completion of the assigned tasks
- Transcription: a lead-sheet with chord and structure symbols

### **Recommended year of study**

1st year

**Assessment** Pass/Fail

### **Transferable credits**

At the instructor's discretion.

Practical accompaniment 1 completed at a university or other institute of higher education.

Literature: Tenni – Varpama: Vapaa säestys ja improvisointi (Otava 2004).

This course can also be offered via Open University. Prerequisites: Proficiency test

## Appendix 4: Letter to the participants in the inquiry

Tutkimukseen osallistujille

10.09.08

Hei,

Kiitokset halukkuudestasi osallistua tutkimukseeni, jossa kehitetään Vapaan säestyksen opetusta ja pedagogiikkaa Sibelius-Akatemialla. Osallistumisesi tutkimukseen on erittäin arvokasta ja odotan innolla yhteistyötämme. Tämän kirjeen tarkoituksena on osaltaan selvittää, mitä tutkimukseen osallistuminen kohdallasi tarkoittaa, jotta voisit varmoilla mielin allekirjoittaa liitteenä olevan suostumuslomakkeen.

Käyttämäni tutkimusote on kvalitatiivinen. Pysin selvittämään kokemuksiasi vapaasta säestyksestä ja saadun tiedon pohjalta rakentamaan yhdessä kanssasi opetusta, joka parhaalla mahdollisella tavalla tukee oppimistasi kurssin aikana. Tutkimukseni nojaa kriittiseen pedagogiikkaan sekä pragmatistiseen filosofiaan ja niiden käytännön sovelluksiin. Opetuksen keskiössä on tällöin opettajan ja oppilaan sekä toisaalta oppilaiden välinen dialogi, kriittinen tiedostaminen, yhteisöllinen oppiminen sekä oppilaiden kokemusmaailma.

Tutkimusvuoden aikana pyydän sinua sekä kirjoittamaan että kertomaan minulle kokemuksistasi, tavoitteistasi ja kohtaamistasi vaikeuksista sekä onnistumisen kokemuksista vapaaseen säestykseen liittyen. Keskustelemme sekä ryhmässä että kahdenkeskeisissä tapaamisissa. Keskusteluja ja tapaamisia äänitetään, lisäksi opetusta ajoittain videoidaan.

Kiitan Sinua jo etukäteen valmiudestasi sitoutua käyttämään aikaasi ja energiaasi edistääksesi tutkimustani. Mikäli Sinulla heräsi kysymyksiä tutkimukseen liittyen, voit aina ottaa yhteyttä minuun, niin sovimme tapaamisen keskustellaksemme.

Ystävällisin terveisin,

Inga Rikandi  
050-5993378  
040-710 4373  
irikandi@siba.fi

## Appendix 5: Consent form of participation in the inquiry

Suostumus tutkimukseen osallistumisesta

Suostun osallistumaan Inga Rikandin väitöskirjatutkimukseen, jossa kehitetään Sibelius-Akatemian Vapaan säestyksen opetusta. Ymmärrän tutkimuksen tarkoituksen ja luonteen ja osallistun siihen vapaaehtoisesti. Annan luvan tutkimuksessa kerättävän aineiston nauhoittamiseen sekä aineiston käyttöön väitöstyössä ja muissa julkaisuissa. Ymmärrän, ettei nimeäni tai muuta henkilöllisyyden paljastavaa tietoa käytetä tutkimuksen missään vaiheessa, vaan pystyn osallistumaan tutkimukseen nimettömänä. Suostun osallistumaan sekä ryhmäkeskusteluihin että kahdenkeskeisiin haastatteluihin tutkimuksen aikana enintään 10h laajuudessa.

-----  
10.09.08  
Helsingissä

-----  
10.09.08  
Helsingissä

## **Appendix 6: Guidelines for co-constructing the subject matter**

- I introduce a new style with a couple of musical examples, after which the students are given the assignment of finding their own choice of music in that style for next week's class;
- Students inform me of their choice of music by e-mail one day prior to class, so that I can find a recorded version of the piece for everyone to hear;
- If students have found or made a notation of the piece, they leave it in my locker before class for copying;
- We begin the second lesson by listening to excerpts from all the songs that have been brought to class;
- Each student can learn their song of choice, making it part of their required repertoire, and I am available for assistance if needed;
- As a group, we choose one of the songs to be covered in class by everyone;
- We begin the third lesson by playing the shared song together, continue on to practice and listen to individual choices, and at the end of the lesson I introduce the group to the next subject with musical examples, which begins the cycle all over again;

## **Appendix 7: Exam design of the first cycle.**

### **Individual harmonization and prima vista exercises**

Assignments are handed out 15min. prior to the exam. Students take turns playing.



### **Diatonic cycle of fifths**

Performed in pairs. Students take turns, one playing the accompaniment, another improvising the melody. Other students offer the key and style of the assignment.



### **12 bar blues**

Students take turns, one student playing the accompaniment, another improvising the melody. Other students offer the key of the assignment.



### **Individual repertoire**

Each student plays a selection of two songs from a repertoire of 10. One song includes the melody on the piano, the other is sung while accompanying oneself. The examination board chooses the pieces that are played. All students can sing along during choruses.



### **Collaborative assessment and evaluation discussion**



## **Appendix 8: Exam design of the second cycle.**

Collaborative piece, arranged, played, and sung by all members of the learning community.



### **Individual harmonization and prima vista exercises**

Assignments are handed out 15min. prior to the exam. Students take turns playing.



### **Diatonic cycle of fifths**

Performed in pairs. Students take turns, one playing the accompaniment, another improvising the melody. Other students offer the key and style of the assignment.



### **12 bar blues**

Students take turns, one student playing the accompaniment, another improvising the melody. Other students offer the key of the assignment.



### **Individual repertoire**

Each student plays a selection of two songs from a repertoire of 10. One song includes the melody on the piano, the other is sung while accompanying oneself. The examination board chooses the pieces that are played. All students can sing along during choruses.



Second collaborative piece, arranged, played, and sung by all members of the learning community.



### **Collaborative assessment and evaluation discussion**



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