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SongPump: Developing a Composing Pedagogy in Finnish Schools Through Collaboration Between Professional Songwriters and Music Teachers[1]

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Introduction

Based on recent research reports, one could argue that creative music making activities have not established a central role in Finnish music classrooms. According to the National Assessment of Learning Outcomes in Music (Juntunen 2011), composing is only occasionally taught in Finnish basic education (Grades 1–9). In addition, a recent nationwide survey indicates that as much as three out of four music teachers feel that they have not been equipped with adequate tools and skills for teaching composing during their studies (Partti 2016).[2] Facilitating group-based composing and collaborative creativity in heterogeneous classrooms is perceived as especially challenging. Yet, previous curriculum documents (e.g. Finnish National Board of Education 1970, 2004), as well as the recently introduced National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (Finnish National Board of Education 2014), indicate that the creative production of music should be taught to all pupils at all grades. The most recent core curriculum further emphasizes creative collaboration as a central learning approach in music, as well as in other school subjects (ibid.).

In this chapter, we examine questions related to teaching creative music making in schools. What could be the role of a professional composer or songwriter in music education? What would the introduction of such professionals into the classrooms require from the teachers? We examine these questions through the case of a recent developmental project that brought professional composers into music classrooms in Finnish comprehensive and upper secondary schools. The project, called BiisiPumppu [SongPump], was organized by the Finnish Composers' Copyright Society (Teosto) during the academic year of 2013–14. In the project, teachers collaborated with professional songwriters, lyricists, musicians, and music producers to instruct pupils in how to create their own pieces of music.[3] The BiisiPumppu project thus exemplifies collaborative efforts between teachers,

composers, and schools that may open new avenues for more participatory music education in a variety of musical-aesthetic contexts. Based on a case study conducted by the first author of this chapter, we will discuss themes pertaining to how the project succeeded, how the stakeholders benefited from the effort, and what kinds of development ideas emerged in terms of music pedagogy. We will also address some critical aspects of the project, suggesting ways in which similar initiatives can better take into account the specific characteristics of school music in the future.

Supporting Multiple Creativities

Creativity has been a central concern in the field of music education for decades (e.g. Burnard 2006, 2012; Paynter 1970; Webster 1996, 2002). In addition to the artistic processes and outcomes, creativity can also be discussed in terms of learning. From this standpoint, one can learn in more or less creative ways, although the judgment of what can be considered as creative in the musical learning process appears to be culture-specific and contextual.

If we accept Burnard's (2012) view that there is not only one kind of musical creativity but, rather, multiple creativities, we may pay attention to the differences in the ways in which our students create music. Thus, depending on the context, producing musical remixes in the digital domain could be understood as a creative activity as much as writing songs with a guitar or composing with a pen and paper. Moreover, there might not be a clear boundary between musical creativity and creativity in other artistic domains. The digital arts, in particular, tend to support hybrid creativities bridging conventional understandings of what the artworks are and how they should be produced (Hugill 2008; Michielse 2015; Väkevä 2010, 2012). Considering the aforementioned conditions may lead one to question whether it is possible to teach musical creativity in the first place. If we do not settle for psychological explanations for creativity as an individual characteristic lying within the human mind, but instead look for social interaction and mediated activity between an individual and environment as its clues (e.g. Hakkarainen 2013; Kenny 2014; Sawyer 2007), it seems reasonable to expect that teachers can have an impact on how creativity is developed in their pupils. On the one hand, the teacher could be considered as a specific conveyer of skills and knowledge who, for instance, instructs her pupils in the craft of songwriting; on the other hand, she could be viewed as a general facilitator of the culture of creativity, aiming to, for example, promote overall

attitudes favorable to artistic creation in the classroom (Muhonen 2016). Again, the division seems to be more a matter of perspective than of degree. Furthermore, learning contexts are always comprised of a wide variety of situational factors, including the pupil's cultural background, her current interests, the curricular goals relevant for her stage of development, and the teacher's aesthetic preferences. The music teacher's excellence in teaching creativity seems to be dependent on her ability to recognize its different manifestations in diverse domains of musical practices, and her aptitude to support these manifestations in educationally relevant contexts.

Composing Pedagogy in Finnish Music Education

Ojala and Väkevä (2013) have observed that there is a historical emphasis on performance-based studies in the Finnish music education system, and that composing has been traditionally seen as an art that only a minority of students are expected to be capable or interested to learn. Although there are projects that have been tailored to advance Finnish composing pedagogy at every level of the educational system (ibid.), it appears that Finnish music teachers do not generally get much training in composing pedagogy, regardless of how many years they dedicate to studying music education. Exceptions seem to be based on the teacher's own interest and her willingness to study composing outside the training programs (Partti 2016).

Even if reproductive learning practices are usually associated with classical music studies, the lack of a composing pedagogy in music teacher preparation does not seem to be genre-specific. Popular music became an integral part of Finnish classroom music in the 1980s, and popular music styles and genres still play a major role in how Finnish pupils are introduced to music in schools, especially in higher Grades (Kallio and Väkevä 2017; Muukkonen 2010; Väkevä 2006; Westerlund 2006). This is also reflected in the music teacher training programs, which frequently offer courses in popular music and popular music pedagogy. Although popular music pedagogy in Finland and elsewhere has emphasized the differences in how popular music and other musical genres are learned (Green 2001, 2008; Rodriguez 2003), it seems that such musics are most often rehearsed for performances utilizing ready-made sources, such as school music textbook arrangements or transcriptions. As Finnish music teachers themselves report (Partti 2016), there is a lack of pre-service and in-service training programs and available resources for creative music-making pedagogy.[4] Yet the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (Finnish National Board of

Education 2014) expects that teachers teach for creative cooperation in musical environments, and instructs teachers to support the students' productive efforts as one basis for assessment.

The Case of BiisiPumppu

The BiisiPumppu [SongPump] project was organized by the Finnish Composers' Copyright Society (Teosto), whose primary interest was to draw attention to composing and promote songwriting as a hobby, or even as a career choice, for children and young people. While the BiisiPumppu project was specifically designed for schools, its main priority was not to develop composing pedagogy, but rather, to increase the quantity and quality of Finnish songwriting (Teosto 2013). In order to inspire new songwriters—the possible future customers of Teosto—the project was designed as a collaborative effort bringing together schools and some of the most eminent Finnish composers.

The BiisiPumppu project took place in twelve schools around Finland during the academic year 2013–14. Schools could apply to participate in the project, which was free of charge for them. Teosto's aim was to choose primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary schools that varied in size and location as well as in curricular aims and expectations. Each school was assigned a pair of professional musicians—most often a lyricist along with a composer. There were altogether eighteen professional musicians involved in the project.

The data of this case study consists of individual interviews of eight teachers and four composers who participated in the BiisiPumppu project. The interviews were carried out by the first author between January and March in 2015. In addition to the interviews, the data consists of five journals, kept by the participating teachers during the BiisiPumppu project.[5] The journals provide an interesting insight into the process, and into situations that the teachers had perhaps forgotten by the time of the interviews. The journals were also used to generate interview questions and as a source for stimulated recall-interviews. The aim of the data analysis was to investigate questions related to composing pedagogy in school. The interviews and teacher journals were analyzed by "identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data", as well as interpreting "various aspects of the research topic" (Braun and Clarke 2006, 79). This thematic analysis was partly based on an analysis reported in a book on the project (Partti and Ahola 2016).

In addition to the interviews and journals, there was plenty of other project-related material available, such as recordings and notations of the pupils' songs made during the project, and newspaper articles and television interviews. This material was not included in the data analysis, but was used to corroborate findings and to introduce new perspectives of interpretation.

Promoting Musical Creativity Through Composer/Teacher Partnerships

BiisiPumppu was designed by Teosto along with a steering group that consisted of music educators and other professionals working in the field. The main purpose was to inspire pupils to create and share their own musical ideas, and to encourage and equip teachers to find new ways of introducing composing in music classrooms. The implementation of the project varied significantly, due to the participating teachers' different levels of expertise and confidence in teaching creative music-making. In some schools, the composers would lead the activities while the teacher would adopt the role of a supporter (see also Christophersen 2013), who would provide guidance in pupils' creative processes but also actively learn new skills in composing. In other schools, the teacher would have a clearer vision and plan for the project, and the composers would work alongside her by helping pupils to refine their ideas. In each school the teacher and visiting composers would work as a team from the planning stage to the end of the project, and pupils would compose music in groups.

Unlocking the Process of Composing

The twelve schools participating in BiisiPumppu differed from each other not only in size and location, but also in terms of teachers' and pupils' previous experiences in creative music-making. In some classrooms, composing had been a part of music teaching for some time, and the role of the visiting composers was to assist the pupils in developing their creative ideas by providing practical suggestions and advice.

For instance, in one upper secondary school where songwriting had already been an integral part of music teaching, the music teacher designed a songwriting camp which took place on school premises over a weekend. Prior to the weekend, the work had already begun in Finnish language classes, where a professional lyricist had visited to relate her working methods and to give students

guidance. After working on the lyrics for a couple of weeks, the music teacher would pair off the students who had written the lyrics with those who would compose the music. During Saturday and Sunday, the school would be transformed into a large 'hit factory' where the lyricist-composer teams would work on their songs with the help of their music teacher and the professional composers.

> We worked from 10am to 6pm on both days. The school was empty, with a number of classrooms available. This allowed us to distribute instruments around the school so that each team could work in their own space. The teams would work on their own for a while, after which [the composers] would wander around to help the teams to further work on their songs. By the end of the first day, every team had produced a demo version of their song, which we would listen to and comment on as a group. Based on the received ideas for development, the work continued on the following day. (Teacher A)

In other schools the project was the first step taken into the world of creative music making. In contrast to the schools where pupils were already comfortable with the idea of composing their own songs, and thus ready to be challenged to further develop their ideas, pupils with no prior experience in composing seemed to be surprised, even somewhat anxious, when introduced to the opportunity to produce their own musical thoughts.

A music subject teacher working in a primary school in Eastern Finland recalls doubts expressed by her pupils when she told them about the upcoming project. According to the teacher, the pupils had been worried about not knowing how to make their own songs. It seems that, in the pupils' minds, composing music required a special talent that would allow one to "come up with a hit song in one go" (Teacher B). This kind of reaction was not uncommon among other BiisiPumppu participants. Many teachers had encountered their pupils' reservations, even concerns, in the early days of the project. A journal entry by teachers of a primary school in the metropolitan area of Helsinki illustrates these attitudes:

> Some of the pupils were not that excited [when they heard about the project], because they felt that the content of the project (making one's own songs) was distant and too difficult. One reason for confusion was also related to the fact that songwriting was a completely new and unfamiliar activity for many pupils, something that they did not have any practical knowledge about. (School 1 Journal, September 24, 2013)

Soon after the project started, however, the initial worries vanished. The teachers emphasized the importance of meeting "a real professional" (Teacher B) in allowing pupils to get closer to a

world that would otherwise seem unattainable. One teacher describes a lesson, during which the visiting lyricist took the students on a step-by-step tour into the anatomy of one of her songs. Although the teacher had already tried to explain to his students that writing a song is a process, the opportunity to witness the progress of a well-known song from early drafts into a completed recording had finally helped to get the message across, "Undoubtedly, the greatest learning outcome was to see that…even professionals need to rework their ideas and make multiple versions" [of their songs] (Teacher A).

In addition to providing a model of "ways of being' a composer" (Barrett 2006, 210) the composers seem to have adopted the more general role of a facilitator of creativity, by making deliberate efforts to scaffold pupils' composing processes. Composing would often take place in small groups, and sometimes as one big group, where pupils would take the lead in sharing their creative ideas and commenting on those of others. The division of responsibilities between the teacher and composers was determined by the teacher's expertise in composing pedagogy, but also, and importantly, by the visiting composer's confidence in working with young people. While some composers considered it crucial that the teacher would be in charge (see Webb 2005), others seem to have been more confident in adopting a fluid division of roles. The division of roles also varied according to schools, as one of the composers explains:

> The two primary schools [I visited] significantly differed from each other. In one school, I was mostly an observer while the teacher would direct the activities. This teacher had a very hands-on approach to teaching, and a strong personality…While in another school [my colleague] and I had the responsibility to plan and lead the lessons…We visited three classrooms in that school, a few times each. During the first visit, we would introduce ourselves, our plans for the sessions, and so forth. The next time we would begin by giving the pupils ideas to get started in writing as well as some concrete writing assignments – a kind of raw material to muck around in their collaborative process of making a classroom song, which they all wanted to make. The pupils then kept on working on the lyrics of the song until the next session, during which we [the visitors] participated and helped in composing the song. (Composer B)

The composer-teacher teams could be understood to have worked as responsive guides (Viilo et al. 2011, 54), who seek to empower and equip pupils to find their own voice through musical explorations and peer-support. The need to challenge myths related to what composing is and who

can be a composer seemed to be on the agenda of both the teachers and visitors. Each of the interviewed composers emphasized their intent to unlock the process of composing. Although they were often introduced to and perceived by the pupils as 'celebrities', they appear to have adopted the role of a facilitator who encourages youngsters to get started and aims to de-mystify the art of composing. One composer repeatedly mentions the importance of openness and transparency:

> I wanted to show the kids how songs are born in reality. I didn't want to go and fiddle with the songs somewhere out-of-sight, but to make them then and there, together. In this way, the kids would see that there was nothing wondrous taking place – but all of a sudden we would have an audible song! (Composer A)

Another composer recalls telling the pupils that they should not feel discouraged if they struggled in writing songs, as the only way to get better is by practicing. He also highlights the importance of revealing the different stages of recording and producing. According to him, schools would do well if they invited pupils to witness the process of a hit song from its early drafts to the final product, as this kind of understanding would further de-mystify composing, particularly in the context of popular music.

A Leap into the Unknown

Both the teachers and the composers highlighted the importance of leaving the framework of the project as broad as possible. Pupils were not hurried to come up with songs. The main goal was to provide everyone with an opportunity to experience the process of creating and sharing musical ideas. BiisiPumppu challenged the participants to find their place in a new kind of setting. The pupils were not only rehearsing how to collaborate creatively. The visiting composers also had to find a way to apply their skills in a school context. As for teachers, conducting an open-ended project in collaboration with someone they were not familiar with required open-mindedness and flexibility, as is illustrated in a comment by a classroom teacher working in a southeastern primary school:

> The project forced one to look for creative solutions, as there was no set model available for the teaching…As a teacher, you needed enough courage to try something that you had not done before. Instead of staying safely in your comfort zone, anything could happen once you set out to compose with the students. It was a leap into the unknown! (Teacher C)

The teacher continues by pointing out the possibilities offered by the kind of situation in which no-one could hold on to familiar templates:

> Maybe this was exactly the feature that made room for creativity and freed both children and adults to invent. Everything could not be planned and considered beforehand. Instead, one had to come up with suitable solutions to different situations…It looks like the BiisiPumppu project took us to the very core of creativity. (Teacher C)

Such broad-minded attitudes towards possibilities, opened up by collaboration with the visiting composers, is evident throughout the teachers' stories. Rather than assuming a protective attitude toward their classroom activities or their own expert status, teachers underline the positive potential of receiving composers outside of school contexts. As a music subject teacher working in an upper secondary school states:

> I have worked long enough to know my own limitations. If there is someone who dares and cares to join in, it is not a threat [to my professionalism], but an opportunity, for sure. (Teacher A)

Although some of the teachers admit to having wondered what the professional composers would think about when they witnessed music-making activities in schools, the pride of one's own pedagogical skills eventually overcame the feelings of nervousness:

> But then I thought: let them [the visiting composers] think whatever they like, this is how we do things here. To me it is really valuable that in our classroom everybody – not just some specific, chosen group – does something and rehearses playing in a band, for instance. That is something I am proud of and something I wanted to show to the musicians as well. (Teacher E)

It seems that the participating teachers perceive their professionalism as a social journey that can be shared with other experts, in and out of school. This kind of understanding of the construction of expertise as a learning partnership, rather than merely an individual effort (see Riel and Polin 2004; Wenger 1998), can enable teachers to surpass their earlier level of expertise by utilizing each other's expertise as a learning resource.

Discussion

In this chapter, we have explored collaborative efforts between music teachers and professional musicians in promoting musical creativity. Our exploration proceeded through the case study of BiisiPumppu, a Finnish classroom composing pedagogy project. The project raises interesting questions regarding the possibilities and challenges of introducing professional composers to school music lessons. Specifically, it inspires discussion of the variety of roles that music teachers and visiting artists can step into when participating in such projects.

At best, the composers not only provided models of how to create original music, but also contributed in facilitating the creative culture in the school. Yet the need for teachers with a clear vision of educational aims to coordinate the learning environments seems evident (see, e.g. Mota 2014). Regardless of whether the teachers would have a visible role in guiding the composing activities during the composer's visits or not, all of them had been making plans and prepared their pupils weeks prior to the visits. This kind of pedagogical leadership calls for flexibility and resourcefulness from the teacher - inventiveness to fit the visits into busy school days; willingness to work along with other teachers to integrate composing as part of the learning; knowledge of how to team up the pupils in constructive ways; capacity to provide them with encouragement and emotional support for the creative processes in heterogeneous groups; and even commitment to work on weekends to provide access to the premises.

The composers had not been trained as music teachers, and some of them reported feelings of uneasiness in facing the pupils. Thus, it seems that a mutual clarity regarding the respective roles of the collaborators is an imperative in such projects. Projects like BiisiPumppu may offer indispensable opportunities for joint enterprises to advance educational development. However, most often these enterprises take place within such a limited period of time that the growth of learning partnerships seems to be somewhat restricted (Hart et al. 2011; Wenger 1998). The collaborators' ability to work as colleagues (Wolf 2008) by utilizing each other's expertise and experience as their learning resource thus becomes a central denominator of the successful composer/teacher partnership.

One could ask, how does a cooperation with such interest groups as Teosto frame the collaboration between teachers and professional composers? In this project, the focus of composing was on

songwriting, which was due to Teosto's interest in supporting the training of future copyright holders. However, according to the National Core Curriculum, Finnish classroom music education should be committed to a wide variety of musical approaches (Finnish National Board of Education 2014). In addition, one can ask whether compulsory education is the appropriate context for music instruction organized along with professional and economic interests, even when the interests are shared by the teacher.

It could also be interesting to compare notions of quality in connection to such projects. Are the criteria for quality drawn from those of the music industry, or from the goals of music education—or both? While BiisiPumppu proves, that constructive results can be obtained by pairing music teachers with composers in contexts where the teachers generally lack previous preparation in composing pedagogy, it also raises critical questions about whose criteria should be used when assessing the creative work of the students. Is the quality of a project to be determined on the basis of the musical products? Or should it also be assessed on the basis of the learning process, by taking into account the ways a "shared motivation, shared purpose, [and] solidarity based on shared values" (Renshaw 2013, 239) between the participants is facilitated? Perhaps too tight a focus on the creative product implies the danger of guiding the teacher's attention away from the learning process and its creativity, or rather, from the variety of creativities afforded by musical learning processes in different contexts (see also Burnard 2012; Kaschub and Smith 2009; Ojala and Väkevä 2013).

All in all, the BiisiPumppu project indicates that there are a variety of ways to facilitate creativity through introducing composing workshops in schools. While paying attention to the concerns mentioned above, a long-term goal could be to introduce such practices to everyday schoolwork, where composers could provide their expertise, but on the conditions established by the curriculum, and mediated by the teacher's pedagogical tact.

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Endnotes

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[2] In Finnish comprehensive schools, music at the primary level (Grades 1 to 6) is taught most often by classroom teachers who may or may not have been specialized in music during their studies. At the lower secondary school (Grades 7 to 9) and upper secondary school (Grades 10 to 12) levels, music is usually taught by qualified music subject teachers, who are professional music pedagogues with a Masters Degree in Music Education. It seems likely that teachers who hold no formal music teacher qualification especially lack the competencies to support creative music making. It should also be noted that Finnish municipalities and schools are allowed to write their own individual curricula based on the national core curriculum; thus, there might be differences in emphasis on creative musical production in different regions and schools.
[3] The participating musicians referred to themselves by different definitions, including a composer, songwriter, lyricist, and music producer. For the sake of clarity, they are in this chapter referred to as composers.
[4] The first national initiative for in-service training in composing pedagogy (SÄPE) was launched at the time of the writing of this chapter (Autumn 2016).
[5] The interviews were conducted, and the teacher journals written, in Finnish. The direct quotations in this chapter were translated into English by the first author.