



Children's singing ecologies in culturally diversifying Finnish schools and society



ANALÍA CAPPONI SAVOLAINEN

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CULTURALLY DIVERSIFYING FINNISH
SCHOOLS AND SOCIETY

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Children's singing ecologies
in culturally diversifying Finnish schools
and society

Lasten laulamisen ekologiaat
kulttuurisesti monimuotoistuvassa suomalaisessa
koulussa ja yhteiskunnassa

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Abstract

Children's singing has been extensively studied in music education over recent decades by emphasising effective vocal skill-development and vocal pedagogy, as well as by approaching children's cultures through song repertoires. However, little is known about the meanings young children ascribe to singing and their experiences of singing in increasingly diversifying educational contexts, in times when global (e.g. UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child) and national policies (The Child Strategy in Finland) are urging societies to better take into account children's perspectives on decision-making that concerns their own lives. The objective of this study is to develop a new, interdisciplinary understanding of young children's singing, conceptualised as singing ecologies, and to highlight that singing in schools may have a much wider role than mere musical learning and vocal expression. The knowledge gap is addressed by asking: What meanings do children ascribe to singing within their ecologies?

The ecological framework for exploring children's singing was constructed through four interconnected dimensions: 1) the ecology of children's development and its constituent processes as an existential matter; 2) the child's voice and the production of space and the power relationships as embedded in diverse spaces in children's everyday lives; and 3) ecological agency and singing as affordances; and 4) social-ecological systems thinking, which allows considering the school as 'a bridging organisation' in a culturally diversifying society. The concept of children's spaces, drawn from childhood studies, is used to conceptualize children's singing spaces as the core for understanding singing ecologies and the potential of singing to become an affordance in school. The case study's empirical material was generated in an ethnographic framework through semi-structured interviews with 6–7-year-old first-grade children (N=22) and their teachers (N=4) in one culturally diverse school in the capital area of Finland. In addition, the empirical material included researcher observations and a diary. Narrative analysis methods were combined with thematic analysis within an ecological framework.

The findings show that first-graders are already aware of how their singing relates to their social-ecological relationships and are able to reflect verbally on their experiences. They furthermore show how children navigate between public and private singing and produce spaces of trust and freedom through singing. They produce singing spaces for their own uses: to handle everyday life struggles, to create new ways of acting and participating, and to exercise their political voice by addressing their stance. The findings illustrate the importance of the qualities of the relationships that children experience in

places of singing. Children also recognise the difference between singing in school and singing outside school, as well as the meanings of singing in school, in which singing appears as an adult-led activity that is sometimes resisted. For the children, feeling connected with and accepted by others in school is fundamental. Children varied in terms of how eager they were to share their cultural differences and home cultures through singing and music education in their school. Furthermore, the findings show that young children seek for opportunities to produce in-between spaces of singing in school, for example in the school yard or even in secret in the classroom.

The dissertation contributes to a more complex, spatial, and relational ecological understanding of children's singing in school, as narrated by the children themselves. It challenges learning-centred teaching practices in music education in schools, teacher education, in-service teacher training, and research suggesting a new awareness of children's singing ecologies in educational institutions. It advocates for an awareness of the existential qualities of singing, which cannot be reduced to learning the use of the singing voice. It concludes that more attention should be given to singing as a powerful activity and affordance that can bridge home and school experiences, and to the school's ability to function as a bridging organization through a curriculum of caring that can help young children navigate their singing ecologies and lives in a meaningful way.

Keywords: children, singing ecologies, child voice, ecological agency, space, music education, school, cultural diversity, narrative inquiry, Finland

Tiivistelmä

Lasten laulamista on musiikkikasvatuksessa tutkittu viime vuosikymmeninä laajasti. Tällöin on korostettu laulutaitojen tehokasta kehittämistä ja laulopedagogiikkaa sekä lähestytty lasten kulttuureja lauluohjelmistojen näkökulmasta. Pienten lasten itse laulamislleen antamista merkityksistä ja heidän laulukokemuksistaan yhä monikulttuurisemmissä kasvatuksellisissa konteksteissa tiedetään kuitenkin vain vähän. Tiedon vajaavaisuus on hämmästyttävää ottaen huomioon, että maailmanlaajuiset (esim. YK:n lapsen oikeuksien sopimus) ja kansalliset politiikat (Suomen kansallinen lapsistrategia) kannustavat yhteiskuntia huomioimaan paremmin lasten näkökulman lasten elämää koskevassa päätöksenteossa. Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena on tuottaa uutta ymmärrystä pienten lasten laulamisesta kehittämällä monitieteistä laulamisen ekologian käsitettä sekä tuomalla esiin että laulamisella koulussa voi olla musiikillista oppimista ja lauluilmaisua paljon laajempi merkitys. Uuden tiedon tarvetta lähestytään tutkimuksessa kysymällä: Mitä merkityksiä lapset antavat laulamislle omissa toimintaympäristöissään?

Ekologinen viitekehys lasten laulamisen tarkasteluun rakennettiin neljän toisiinsa liittyvän ulottuvuuden avulla: 1) lasten kasvuympäristö ja siihen liittyvät prosessit eksistentiaalisena kysymyksenä, 2) lapsen ääni sekä tilan tuottaminen ja valtasuhteet lasten arjessa, 3) ekologinen toimijuus ja laulaminen tarjoumana (affordance), sekä 4) sosiaalis-ekologinen systeemiajattelu, jossa koulu voidaan ymmärtää ”siltaorganisaationa” kulttuurisesti monimuotoistuvassa yhteiskunnassa. Lapsuuden tutkimuksesta lainattua lasten tilan käsitettä hyödynnettiin käsitteellistämään laulamisen tilan käsitettä, joka mahdollistaa laulamisen ekologisen ymmärryksen ja laulamisen tarkastelun mahdollisena tarjoumana koulun kontekstissa. Tapauksittain tutkimuksen empiirinen materiaali kerättiin etnografista tutkimusotetta noudattaen puolistrukturoiduissa haastatteluissa 6–7-vuotiaita ensimmäisen luokan oppilaiden (N=22) ja heidän opettajiensa (N=4) kanssa yhdessä kulttuurisesti monimuotoisessa koulussa Suomen pääkaupunkiseudulla. Empiirinen materiaali sisälsi lisäksi tutkijan havaintoja ja tutkimuspäiväkirjan. Narratiiviset analyysimenetelmät yhdistettiin temaattiseen analyysiin ekologisessa viitekehyksessä.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että jo ensimmäisen luokan oppilaat tiedostavat laulamisen yhteydet heidän sosiaaliseen ekologisiin suhteisiinsa ja että he kykenevät verbalisoimaan kokemuksiaan. Tutkimus osoittaa, että lapset toimivat julkisen ja yksityisen laulamisen tiloissa ja luovat laulamalla luottamuksen ja vapauden tiloja. Lapset luovat laulamisen tiloja omiin tarkoituksiinsa: arjen haasteista selviytymiseen, uusien toiminta- ja osallistumistapojen luomiseen sekä

käyttävät 'poliittista ääntään' ilmaistessaan kantansa. Tutkimus havainnollistaa sosiaalisten suhteiden laadun tärkeyden paikoissa, joissa lapset laulavat. Lapset tunnistavat myös eron koulussa ja koulun ulkopuolella laulamisen välillä sekä merkityksellistävät koulussa laulamisen aikuisvetoiseksi toiminnaksi, jota toisinaan vastustetaan. Lapsille on koulussa olennaista, että he tuntevat olevansa yhteydessä muihin ja että muut hyväksyvät heidät. Se, miten halukkaita lapset ovat paljastamaan kotinsa kulttuuria laulamalla ja koulun musiikkikasvatuksessa, vaihteli. Tutkimus osoittaa lisäksi, että pienet lapset etsivät tilaisuuksia laulaa esimerkiksi koulun pihalla tai jopa salaa luokassa.

Väitöskirja edistää monitahoisempaa, tilallisempaa ja aiempaa enemmän suhteisiin perustuvaa laulamisen ymmärtämistä koulussa, jolloin myös lasten oma käsitys laulamisesta otetaan huomioon. Se haastaa oppimiskeskeiset opetuskäytännöt koulujen musiikkikasvatuksessa, opettajankoulutuksessa, opettajien täydennyskoulutuksessa ja tutkimuksessa sekä tarjoaa uudenlaista tietoisuutta lasten laulamisen ekologioista kasvatuksessa. Se pyrkii suuntaamaan huomiota laulamisen eksistentiaaliin kysymyksiin, joita ei voida pelkistää ainoastaan lauluäänen käytön/laulutekniikan opetteluun. Tutkimuksen johtopäätös on, että kouluissa olisi kiinnitettävä enemmän huomiota laulamiseen merkityksellisenä toimintana ja tarjoumana, joka voi yhdistää kotija koulukokemukset. Siltaorganisaationa koulu voisi toteuttaa välittämiseen perustuvaa opetussuunnitelmaa, joka voisi auttaa pieniä lapsia navigoimaan menestyksellisesti lauluympäristöissään ja elämässään mielekkäällä tavalla.

Avainsanat: lapset, laulamisen ekologia, lapsen ääni, ekologinen toimijuus, tila, musiikkikasvatus, koulu, kulttuurinen monimuotoisuus, narratiivinen tutkimus, Suomi

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Conference presentations relevant to the study

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Capponi-Savolainen, A. (2022). Listening to Childrens Voices: Singing and Identity in the Culturally Diverse Finnish School. Presidential presentation. 35th World Conference of the International Society for Music Education: A Visible Voice (July 17 – 22, 2022). Online. Brisbane, Australia.

Capponi-Savolainen, A. (2021). Children's Singing and Identity in Culturally Diverse Societies. IX Conference on Childhood Studies – Childhood and time (May 10 – 12, 2021). Tampere, Finland.

Capponi-Savolainen, A. (2019). Children's Singing, Identity and the Sense of Belonging: A Narrative Study in one Culturally Diverse Lower Level School in Finland. International Childrens Culture Forum. Session "Diversity in children's culture" (September 30 – October 1). Tampere, Finland.

Capponi-Savolainen, A. (2019). Canto, identidad y sentido de pertenencia en las escuelas Finlandesas con bagaje cultural diverso. International Conference of CIPEM – Challenges in Music Education (September 19 – 21, 2019). Porto, Portugal.

Capponi-Savolainen, A. (2019). Making Room for Childrens Voices: The Potential of Singing in Culturally Diverse Finnish Classrooms. 27th EAS Conference/7th European ISME regional Conference: "The School I'd Like" – Music Education meeting the needs of the children and young people today (May 15 – 18, 2019). Malmö, Sweden.

Capponi-Savolainen, A. (2019). Singing, Identity and the Sense of Belonging in Culturally Diverse Finnish Schools. Siba research days (March 18 – 19, 2019) University of the Arts Helsinki, Finland.

Capponi-Savolainen, A. (2018). Laulaen keitä olemme: Lasten äänet ja kulttuurinen monimuotoisuus musiikinopetuksessa (November 20, 2018). Lapset, musiikki ja kasvatus–seminaari (Fisime ry).

Capponi-Savolainen, A. (2018). Singing who we are: Children's perceptions of the roles singing plays in supporting democracy in culturally diverse Finnish schools. FERAConference on Education (November 15 – 16, 2018). University of Tampere, Finland.

Capponi-Savolainen, A. (2018). Singing who we are: The meanings and values of singing for children in culturally diverse Finnish schools. Interactive poster presentation. JustEd. Promoting justice through education (May 22 – 23, 2018). Helsinki University, Finland.

Capponi-Savolainen, A. (2017). Singing from the perspective of who-we-are in our body and in our world: Exploring the meanings of singing in early childhood music education. Hollo symposium "Back to senses – Exploring future directions of arts education" (October 12 –13, 2017). University of the Arts Helsinki, Finland.

Capponi-Savolainen, A. (2017). Meanings and values of singing for children. ArtsEqualPedagogical MiniFestival (June 9, 2017). University of the Arts Helsinki, Finland.

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1. Introduction

This doctoral dissertation explores the experiences and meanings of singing of 6-7 year-old first grade students in one culturally diverse school in Finland, defined as a school with a high number of students of non-Finnish background.¹ The study is meant to contribute to the music education scholarship on children's singing, however by emphasizing a wide understanding of children's experiences and listening to the children themselves. Experience is here understood as holistic, temporal, and always relational, in this way aligning with a pragmatist understanding of experience (Dewey 1938/1963), and in early childhood including "not only the experiencing of the organism but also the complexity of the environment where the organism interacts" (Capponi-Savolainen et al., 2017, p. 103).

Children's singing has been studied for decades from the perspective of learning, vocal development, and vocal pedagogy (e.g. Davidson, 1985; Dowling, 1984; Rutkowski, 1990; Welch, 2006). However, the most common discourse in music education - which emphasises skill-development, competences, learning of singing, and the musical quality of learning outcomes - tends to exclude children's experiences and the meanings that children themselves confer to singing in their multifaceted everyday lives. Music educators have thus recognised that schools are not necessarily reconnecting children's lived experience and communities with its educational practices (Stauffer, 2009). While schools are places constructed to support children's independence and to allow them to practice their interactions in a public place, at the same time they are adult-constructed places that tend to ignore children's visions and world views, especially if these visions do not align with the pre-determined structures in place and the school's planning. Moreover, the policy makers who decide on issues that affect children are traditionally adults, who tend to exclude children in conversations or who do not take their opinions seriously. Thus, "children's voices are often lacking and not heard, or not listened to in decision-making" (Tesar, 2016, p. 5). In this dissertation I seek to expand the understanding of children's singing by including the perspectives of the children themselves. This study thus responds to recent policies that highlight the importance of children's experiences in societal decision-making. It has

¹ While information about the citizenship and legal status of students is not public in Finland, and schools are not allowed to collect it, the school can gather information related to student's native language and language learning. In this study, according to the school principal, nearly half of the student population of the school speaks a native language other than Finnish or Swedish (the official languages of Finland). This information is an estimate, as there are bilingual students who might have registered as Finnish-speaking students only.

been argued that in the globalised world there is an even greater need for taking into consideration the relational and independent aspects of the lives of children and the ethics and politics around them (Spyrou et. al., 2019). Children have *the right* to be heard and be taken seriously. Their rights are stated, for instance, in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). In Finland, the realization of children's rights, including their cultural rights, has been advanced by legislation and the school curriculum for basic education (Finnish National Agency for education, 2016), as well as in the new documentation and strategic educational plans of the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, Strategy 2030 (2020). The country's recent National Child Strategy (Kansallinen Lapsistrategia, 2021) intends to respond to the Convention on the Rights of the Child of the United Nations (1989), and recognizes that children's rights are not fully realized in Finland and that the rights of children are neither equal in all areas nor for all the children. The National Child Strategy 2021 aims to establish a permanent plan and a coordinated structure with long term goals and actions based on the creation of a truly child-and-family friendly Finland, one that respects children's rights and consistently takes into account children's perspectives alongside other members of the society, and also safeguards the position of vulnerable children and better identifies their needs.

By drawing from studies on ecological theories of human development, children's geographies, and systems thinking, and also from studies in the fields of music education, childhood studies, sociology, and the philosophy of education, this interdisciplinary research aims to inform teachers in schools, music teacher educators, policy makers, and other societal actors; specifically, since the established understandings of schooling and music education may not necessarily be sufficiently effective to achieve the highest good for all children and society, we may require "a different understanding of children and their place in society and of the purpose of public policy in relation to children" (Moss & Petrie, 2002, p. 9). This research thus aims to investigate the experienced meanings of singing in children's lives, their ways of participation, and their uses of singing as affordances in relation to the various ecological systems and subsystems in which they live. School is understood as one of these social systems.

By focusing on young children who come from culturally diverse backgrounds and their singing experiences both in and out of school contexts, this dissertation also aims to contribute to the scholarship of intercultural music education, acknowledging issues of power and social justice, not only questions of culture (or different cultures). As the Finnish educational researchers Pia Mikander and colleagues (2018) argue, taking into account the very different conditions

under which children in Europe live today, “with problems such as increasing economic inequality, refugee children facing deportation and trans-youth at the risk of violence, a valid question is, if intercultural education does not engage with power, then what good does it do?” (p. 44). In other words, in this dissertation singing in a culturally diversified school is not simply about learning to understand diversity but also about experienced power relationships.

The starting point of this dissertation is that music education and school ought to strengthen the agency of children, and especially of children who come from culturally diverse backgrounds, by recognising them as who-they-are, listening to their voices, and learning about their experiences, in this way creating genuine connections with them. Neocolonialism in European societies may take different forms, including prejudices against and the stigmatization of immigrant people (see e.g. Huggan & Law, 2009), and a lack of recognition of both adults (Licata, Sanchez-Mazas & Green, 2011) and children (Wolf, Maio, Karremans & Leygue, 2017), especially if they come from less developed countries. While there is a general agreement that school is an important place for children to develop both as individuals and as active members of society, it has also been acknowledged that, in the process of finding their own voice in school and society, children live in a paradox: they are encouraged to be agents of their own lives, but they constantly encounter limitations that are mostly based on adult’s preconceptions and beliefs about what is good for them and what is not, or about what is good (or possible) for their future (Prout, 2000). For the children, this paradox can be difficult to overcome, as it can be challenging to find ways to develop and exercise agency in contexts such as culturally diverse schools, where the school’s structures, visions, and curriculum are often the priorities.

While the challenges of cultural diversity in Finnish music education were acknowledged in scholarly discussion already in the 1990s, little is known about how singing, in particular, is experienced by young children who come from culturally diverse backgrounds. The first multicultural studies urged for inclusion of a variety of musical repertoires (e.g. Westerlund, 1999), whereas the later research stream called for democracy (e.g. Väkevä, 2019) and intercultural sensitivity (Kallio et al., 2021; Miettinen, 2020; Westerlund et al., 2020). Sidsel Karlsen’s research project (2009–2012) in Nordic countries, including Finland, highlighted the diversity of backgrounds and experiences among the newly arrived immigrant students at secondary school, showing that children of this age do not always want to share their homeland songs in school and do not necessary identify with the music of their homeland (Karlsen, 2011, 2012, 2013; Karlsen & Westerlund 2010). This

dissertation addresses the lack of research on younger students, specifically first-graders, of whom many are adapting not just to school but at the same time to a new society. It advocates for a view that recognizes that the mere inclusion of newcomers into the Finnish school system may not be enough, and that the system itself may also require transformation (Biggs et al., 2021; Westerlund, 2021, 2023). Researchers have acknowledged that the transition from kindergarten to primary school is a significant challenge for all children (e.g. Babic, 2017; Broström, 2002, 2019; Dockett & Perry, 2014). Although in Finland the school and preschool collaborate, and the preschool year has become compulsory for all children, beginning school still remains a pivotal moment in children's lives. This experience may be accentuated if the child has, in addition, lived a cultural transition, as is the case with the various immigrant children attending culturally diverse Finnish schools. Hence, the role of adults in supporting children's transitions and learning is even more necessary, including in relation to singing. As Lev Vygotsky (2017) noted:

Learning and development are not encountered for the first time at school but are in fact connected with one another from the first day of a child's life... We have first of all to understand the relationship between learning and development in general, and then the specific peculiarities of this relationship at school age. (p. 365)

The phenomenon at hand in this dissertation is thus neither simply about diverse curriculum content nor about considering singing as merely a competence to be achieved through music education and instruction; rather, it is about considering singing as an important and existential matter for children.

As a whole, this dissertation seeks to develop an ecological framework for children's singing, a framework that could illuminate the complexity of the phenomenon – rather than oversimplifying it; and also to develop an understanding of singing and children's voices in a new, interconnected, socio ecological, and spatial way, especially from the perspective of the child – to keep up “the challenge of understanding the world in new ways” (Biggs, et al., 2021, p. 3). As pointed out by the educational philosopher Gert Biesta (2010), complexity can “help us to understand the complex character of the physical and social world. At the same time, it provides us with a different understanding of those aspects of the physical and social world that are or appear to be not complex” (p. 7). Thus, in this dissertation, I adopt a “complexity attitude” (Cilliers, 2007, p. 4) in relation to singing in childhood. Through it, various personal, professional, and often research-based beliefs related to what singing might mean for children, particularly in our contemporary culturally diverse

societies, may start emerging. According to Paul Cilliers (2007), “once we realize that we are dealing with complex things, and we accept the consequences of this, our approach to what we are doing, irrespective of how we are actually doing it, will change fundamentally” (p. 3-4). The vocabulary of complexity thus opens a window for understanding various processes and practices in completely different ways, something that has proven its generativity (Biesta, 2010). This dissertation therefore highlights that accepting complexity opens a window to understanding children’s singing and children’s experiences relationally, within the intertwining of the social and the ecological, showing the potential of nurturing children’s singing, providing the conditions for spaces for singing to emerge both within schools and outside them, aiding teachers’ ability to see children’s singing beyond their classrooms and school, and also to create meaningful connections with their students and to find the potential for new practices, participatory activities, and collaborations.

1.1. The relationality of experience

This study explores children’s singing as a contextual, relational, and also public and private phenomenon to increase understanding of how children experience singing in and as part of different places and spaces, connected with their past and present experiences. Studying first grade students’ experiences in one culturally diverse school in the capital area of Finland, this study responds to the broader need for understanding what is here called children’s *singing ecologies*. Regarding the study’s theoretical perspective, the research focuses on children’s singing and meaning-making within their experienced singing ecologies (Barrett, 2011, 2012). By ecology, I refer in general to the relationships and interactions that occur between living organisms and systems and their environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Biggs et al., 2021). Singing ecologies are thus defined as the intrinsically intertwined connections and relationships that grow out of children’s singing experiences within and across the ecological systems and subsystems in which they live, such as their homes, schools, and the wider community and society. In this dissertation the ecological framework is presented through four interrelated and overlapping dimensions, namely: the *ecological*, the *social-ecological systems thinking*, the *spatial*, and the *child’s agency and political voice* dimensions. I will first give a short overview of the ecological theory of human development, originally proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986), which encourages us to look at children in relation to the places where they sing (as described by themselves) and their interrelations, as they live their everyday lives: school, home, neighbourhood, communities, and society at large. Second, expanding on the ecological theory of human

development as an analytical umbrella understanding, I will set the stage to explore the topic of children's singing within its relationality, considering the child as part of the various social ecological systems and sub-systems of interaction where he or she lives and grows. This means that the exploration transcends an anthropocentric perspective. The structures presented by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986) form the children's ecosystems for agency and identity work, and are present from the very beginning of life, helping understanding how systems work, both temporally and relationally. However, I do not consider understanding the music and the child, or the social and ecological elements of their lives, separately; rather, the theorisation seeks to focus on *the social-ecological relations* (Biggs et al., 2021). Taking up earlier research in music education, in which an ecological approach has been conceived to take into account "the ways in which broad social and cultural factors shape the physical and biological environment, and, the human relationships and interactions that occur within these" (Barrett, 2011, p. 1), in this dissertation I propose a turn towards ontological thinking in music education, recognising "the materiality of life while understanding that discourse is entangled, produced by, and productive of this materiality... in discursive fields of meaning and power" (Spyrou et. al., 2019, p. 7).

Thirdly, I pay attention to the often missing spatial dimension of singing. The starting point is that the meanings of singing are constituted as part of children's ecologies and are hence understood as *spatial and embedded in the power relationships* of spatial realities. Furthermore, this spatiality and situatedness, together with children's subjectivity and identity work, participation, and political action are all entangled aspects of children's political geographies that cannot be understood separately (Kallio & Häkli, 2015), illustrating the complexity of the phenomenon. In line with this understanding, educational researchers Peter Moss and Pat Petrie (2002) define *children's spaces* not only as physical spaces but also as social, cultural, and discursive spaces. Children's spaces are contrasted with the notion of *place*, created *for* children *by* adults, where "children are social, economic, political and moral investments in the future" (Wyness, 2009, p. 396). Applying the theorisations of the sociologist Michael Wyness (2009), this study takes as its starting point that *children's singing spaces* are participatory and meaningful locations for the children to act as agents of their lives. Based on the notion of children's singing spaces, the study thus seeks to understand children's singing ecologies through spaces, as experienced and created by the children themselves. Specifically, the concept of children's singing spaces, in relation to children's agency and children's political voice, furthers our understanding of how children might *produce space* (Lefebvre, 1991) in

and through singing while they are at the same time produced by the space they inhabit and the power relations present in it (Foucault, 1977, 1982).

Drawing from sociological discussions on childhood studies (Corsaro, 1997; James et al., 1998), a fourth dimension of the ecological framework builds on conceptualising child agency and political voice. The notion of *ecological agency* (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) in childhood is instrumental in this research. Ecological agency is temporal and relational (Biesta & Tedder, 2007), referring to “something that people do or something they achieve” rather than something people have or do not have, denoting “a ‘quality’ of the engagement of actors with temporal-relational contexts-for-action, not a quality of the actors themselves” (Priestley et al., 2015). This is fundamental to this research study, because agency and students’ voices are essentially linked (Raymond et. al, 2022); student’s agency is affected by the characteristics of the engagement with the environment and the student’s possibilities to have a voice within that environment. The ecological conceptualisation of agency highlights the role of children’s interactions and experiences within their ecosystems, including their own subjectivity, beliefs, values, principles, and backgrounds. Thus, in this study, ecological agency is useful for exploring how children choose to exercise their agency in certain places but not in others, as well as how children either have possibilities to enact a political voice or do not have it. This illustrates the complexity of childhood and of singing ecologies, and its unique individual relationalities. As Kirsi Pauliina Kallio and Jouni Häkli, (2015) explain, “human life is always socially conditioned, culturally based and embedded in multiscalar power relations: There are no ‘normal’ conditions to childhood and youth” (p. 5). Based on recent discussions on children’s political geographies (e.g. Philo & Smith, 2003), in this dissertation I acknowledge “children and young people as *actors* and politics as that which is enacted *by them*” (Kallio & Häkli, 2015, p.1, italics original) – thus putting the focus on the *intentionality* of children’s actions (Kallio & Häkli, 2010).

Reaching beyond the individual child’s perspective and considering the potential of the school to reconsider its function, I further conceptualise schools as *social-ecological systems*, where the social and the ecological elements of the systems are seen as inseparable and the focus is put on their social and ecological relations (Biggs et al., 2021). The concept of *ecosystem*, understood as a group of organisms that live and interact with each other and with the material world in a particular environment (Biggs et al., 2021), expands to take into account the societal, cultural, and ecological factors present in that environment. In this way, a social-ecological systems perspective can contribute to a relational

understanding of children's lives, their childhoods, and their experiences within different systems, such as school and home, and the ways in which these different social ecosystems are connected or bridged. The school is ideally not considered as a separate system, operating in parallel with other systems that the child is interacting with, but as an integrated part of these other systems. The conceptual tools of the theoretical framework work together to build an understanding of how the interactions experienced within the child's social-ecological systems occur, and how they support or do not support the child's life as whole: how the school can ideally be seen as "a bridging organisation" (p. 5) that can connect children's own singing ecologies and school singing, with its curriculum, programs, and national guidelines. The social-ecological systems framework thus allows "understanding the intertwined nature of human and natural systems in this new, interconnected and interdependent way" (p. 5). Complexity is understood simultaneously as an ontological issue, as "a combination of the attributes of the system", and an epistemological one, as "a function of our present understanding of that system"(p. 39).

1.2. Expanding the view of children's 'voice'

The notion of children's voice is central to this dissertation. Two different approaches to children's voice can be identified: one in which voice is referring concretely to children's singing, and another that is based on the most recent discussions on children's political voice, agency, and children's rights (e.g. Welton et.al., 2022; Lundy, 2007; Kallio et. al., 2015). Singing is not neutral with regard to the places and spaces it takes place in, as physical, social, metaphorical, and conceptual aspects (Hunter, 2008) can amplify or silence children's political voices, framing in this way children's experience of life – and singing as part of it. With regard to putting forward children's political voices, in particular, this research highlights the potential of listening to children, building relationships with them, and respecting their right to be heard. This includes the problematizing of voice, understanding it not only as referring to the singing voice and verbal sounds, but also including the political voice of the child in all its complexity, as well as the situational environments in which the singing takes place. Hence, although this study is about children's singing, children's voice is not regarded only as an expression to be technically cultivated but rather as something to be heard and related in a wider political sense. Moreover, singing in this conceptual framework is *not only a private but public matter*. Voice is about being listened to, being heard, or being visible and audible in social situations; it is about being taken seriously (Bucknall 2014, p. 71). At the centre of this research, children are social actors and citizens in their own right – as "children are political agents

who construct and perform their political subjectivities through the spaces of their everyday lives” (Cele, 2016, p. 84). This research takes thus as its starting point the assumption that singing can offer children possibilities to be heard within places and spaces, including in school, and to claim spaces within contemporary societies to be heard and taken seriously. In other words, the spaces for singing in school can be seen not only as spaces for learning or enculturation, but also as political spaces for children to be and to be heard and seen. While the study recognises schools as places created *for* children by adults, and as regulated places where singing activities are typically delineated by adult-rules and instructions — including laws, national curricula texts, policy recommendations, as well as repertoire and song books – it suggests critically examining the possibility of strengthening children’s political voice in and through singing in the school’s ecosystem.

Underlying the research is thus an understanding in which children’s voice is also understood as political voice, and to which agency is intrinsically linked (Raymond et al., 2022). Also children’s agency is therefore dependent on the quality of engagement between individuals and the affordances or constraints of the environments in which they collaborate (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Consequently, “an understanding of how and why children participate in particular social settings and how others contribute to children’s interactions will allow children’s voices to be understood within their complex frames of culture and environment” (Lum & Marsh, 2018, p. 160). This understanding also in schools can influence children’s agency and their possibility to have a political voice as well as the ways in which children understand (or learn to understand) their roles as citizens in their societies.

This theorisation relates to the ideas of the philosopher John Dewey, who claimed that the arts and aesthetic education are tied to the ideal of becoming a moral person capable of political agency in the public sphere (1934). While student’s participation and voice in school and society is essential for the realisation of a democratic society (Dewey, 1976/1899), children are however given very little possibilities to develop their political agency. Allison James, Chris Jenks and Alan Prout (1998) have suggested that in modern societies children are put at the centre of political strategies designed to control individuals, not from the outside but from the inside. School tends to be focused on learning (see Biesta 2017) and on increasing institutional control over children (for example with the extension of compulsory schooling), in order to “regulate children and to shape more firmly the outcomes of their activities” and “to control the future through children” (Prout, 2003, p. 16–17). This dimension can be also seen through a Foucaultian lens as “new forms of

power-knowledge in which children are enjoined to speak, make themselves visible and to regulate their own behaviour, as well as to be controlled by others” (p. 8). Still, living with these limitations and under such control mechanisms, children search for ways to exercise their agency, their freedom, and to raise their voices. Children do not live in an isolated world, but actively participate in their social environments, being political agents, albeit not in the same way as adults. In this sense, children perform the political in their everyday lives through public spaces, both in social spaces and in spaces of solitude and contemplation, and both kinds of spaces (and the experiences of both spaces) affect the formation of children’s subjectivities (Cele, 2016).

As a whole, in this dissertation I ask if there might be ways to better understand children’s singing ecologies and ecological agency in diverse spaces. This understanding would help “open up” those places created *by* adults *for* children, which tend to stifle children’s voices. The study asks what both general teachers and specialised music teachers could learn from such knowledge concerning children’s singing spaces and their use of their own political voices. Given the entanglement relationalities of spatiality, children’s subjectivities and identities, participation and political action (Kallio & Häkli, 2015), I raise the question of how to allow for the emergence of spaces in which singing would transpire as agentic action and contribute to releasing children’s political voices. By leaning on childhood studies that argue that listening to children helps us understand children’s perspectives and create trustful relationships with them (Tesar, 2017, 2018; Tesar & Jukes, 2018), this study concurs that “[t]ruly listening to children’s voices and acknowledging the multiple voices of the children is to give children dignity” (Roth et al., 2022; Tesar, 2018). I therefore agree with Wyness (2009), who suggests that participation “acts as a bridge between children’s places and spaces” (p. 404). If children’s participation can bridge *places* and *spaces*, singing as a participatory activity can potentially enrich the quality of children’s participatory experiences. Schools can be imagined to offer opportunities for children’s spaces to be created within places, in-between spaces (Aminpour et. al., 2020), to foster a sense of belonging and, in the long term, enhance the construction of new shared collective identities in culturally diverse schools (Westerlund et al., 2017) and future societies. Giving children the possibility of participating as who-they-are in musical activities in culturally diverse schools and helping them develop a *sense of presence* (Biesta, 2017) in school is fundamental, as these experiences may affect other aspects of their lives as well as their social ecologies and identities.

1.3. Finnish basic education in culturally diversifying society

According to the Finnish educational researcher Pauli Siljander (2017),

Finnish schools are in transition and constantly adapting to new realities. This transition also pertains to music education and singing in schools. In Finland as in many other countries (Barrett & Westerlund, 2017), singing carries particular historical meanings. Singing used to function in the service of the construction of Finland's national, cultural, and religious identity and collective unity (Muukkonen, 2010). Earlier studies on music education in Finnish schools have emphasised that the singing practice is still deeply connected to the sense of community, group music making, trust, and respect (e.g., Lindström, 2011; Muhonen, 2016; Muukkonen, 2010; Nikkanen, 2015). In general, singing is related more broadly to collective activities and desires, conceptualised as a unifying element in, for example, political movements, festivals, and sports events (e.g., Aalberg & Siimes, 2007).

Today's Finland is, however, facing rapid cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and racial diversification. While the function and curricular values of music in schools have changed from the times when the national identity was being built through singing and religious sensitivities drawn from Christian song repertoires (see Muukkonen, 2010), singing today within the context of the current culturally diverse schools and as an adult-decided place may still be a power structure, one which ignores contemporary differences and cultural backgrounds of the students – their learning ecologies and lived experiences in various socio ecological systems. In the 21st century, the immigrant population in the capital area of Finland in particular has rapidly increased, and this is also the case in other larger Finnish cities, where the foreign population has more than doubled over the last few decades. For example, the population in the Finnish capital area currently shows an increasing number of residents who speak foreign native languages (Vantaa 25 %, Espoo 22 %, and Helsinki 18 %), which is also reflected in the increasing number of children from immigrant backgrounds attending schools (Statistic Finland, 2022). Recent research suggests that increasing urban segregation is challenging the ideal of the egalitarian Finnish school (Peltola et al., 2023) affecting children and their lives. Children's rights, and cultural rights, are part of these ideals, which extend to all children living in Finland, independent of their race, nationality, language, or religion. Along with these rapid population changes and challenges, inequality is also growing in Finland at all levels of education, affecting accessibility, equal opportunities, and social mobility (e.g. Peltola et al., 2023), with recent studies detecting structural discrimination in the country (Artemjeff & Sheikh, 2023). Inequalities have also been noticed in the arts (e.g. Ilmola-Sheppard et al., 2021), showing that teachers in Finland do not necessarily receive the education they need to navigate culturally diverse contexts (e.g. Juva & Holm., 2017). This situation permeates the whole socio ecological reality in which children are immersed.

Indeed, in 2019 the chair of the Trade Union of Education in Finland (OAJ) admitted that the Finnish educational system has failed to work towards the integration of children with diverse backgrounds (Helsinki Times, 8.3.2019), with researchers citing urban segregation, including in relation to inequality between schools, as a growing challenge in the country (Peltola et al., 2023).

The Finnish educational system is, however, officially expected to be grounded on the ideals of equality and inclusion, and aims at supporting democracy in society by considering citizens' rights, equality, and accessibility in education (Perusopetuslaki, 628/1998). These Finnish ideals have been materialized in citizens' lives over many generations, and are inspired by these values to help children develop their full potential both as individuals and as members of the society (National Core Curriculum, 2014). Responding to the new societal situation in an increasingly diversifying Finland, the Vision Europe Summit (2016) has also urged all parts of the society to rethink integration, because integration requires change from everyone, not only from the newly arrived migrants. In this respect, the Ministry of Education and Culture, with its Strategy 2030 (2019), has called for determined actions to stop the growing inequality in Finland. Furthermore, the sustainable development policy of the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (2020) has come to support and complement the implementation of the Strategy 2030 plan and its goals, such as reinforcing "educational equality and equity at all levels of education" (p. 11). Thus, the Ministry of Education and Culture, through this Strategy 2030, "aims to ensure that everyone's capabilities and competence become stronger. For example, this means equal realisation of educational rights, high-quality early childhood education and care, higher levels of competence and education, continuous learning, access to information and cultural rights" (p. 9). The Strategy 2030 plan further urges strengthening "the inclusion, the opportunities to participate and the democracy skills of young people through resources and information steering" (p. 10). The national core curriculum for basic education in Finland is meant to support recognizing the cultural rights of all children. In Finland, children enter primary school when they are 6–7 years old, although in recent years pre-school education also became compulsory for children of age 6. The core curriculum therefore stresses that the first years of primary school are critical for the children's identity and agency formation, where cultural sensitivity plays a crucial role. For instance, the National core curriculum for basic education (2014) states:

Each pupil is unique and valuable just as he or she is. Each pupil has the right to grow into his or her full potential as a human being and a member of society. To achieve this, the pupils need encouragement

and individual support as well as experiences of being heard and valued in the school community (p. 33).

By examining the changes that took place in the Finnish educational system since the 1960s, together with the corresponding society's educational mindset, Siljander (2017) however argues that transitions in the country have been historically guided by the Finnish ideal of equality and the main principle of *Bildung*.² In contemporary Finnish society, and even when changes can be observed on the surface, the idea of *Bildung* still remains (Heimonen, 2014). Yet, Siljander (2017) and others recognise the tensions generated in recent years by the influence of supranational educational policy agendas, as well as their implications for the Finnish school system and its reforms. According to Siljander, re-contextualizing school curricula, policy, and practice in contemporary society and understanding its social dynamics is essential. The Finnish educational researcher Eetu Pikkarainen (2017) has argued that the school ought to be seen as a bridge between contemporary societies and future societies, and that *Bildung*, or “human growth” (p. 101), is still at the core of the Finnish educational system. The Finnish educational researcher Tiina Soini and colleagues (2021) have more recently described the significance of “shared sensemaking” in curriculum reforms in Finland, and of “building bridges between the old and new understanding, and designing interpersonal arenas for learning across the layer of the educational system (i.e. a systemic approach)” (p. 249).

These transitions are not just taking place between the school and society, but between the children's own cultures and the wider community, in times when it is ever more important to build a new sense of belonging and sense of community among the students from different backgrounds (e.g. Boyle & Wilkinson, 2018) and inclusive and dialogic spaces through music education in culturally diverse schools (Rinde & Christophersen, 2021). In this sense, the interactions generated between school, home, and community in and through singing are relevant, as they involve multiple individuals and are influenced by different factors such as home routines and activities, school culture, the teacher's relationship to music, and societal discourses. Within this scenario, it is crucial for teachers to acknowledge that children who enter primary school in Finland (and elsewhere) have already constructed some understanding of their own social ecologies within specific locations,

² The concept of *Bildung*, namely the process by which a person develops his full potential through his own activities, first emerged in Germany (Masschelein & Ricken 2003; Kertz-Welzel 2017), but it has been important for the Finnish educational ethos and the construction of a national identity (Heimonen 2014; Siljander 2017). *Bildung* has been described as a concept broader than schooling, even though the role of school as a responsible agent guiding pupils in the cultivation of humanity is a crucial part; today it can be more broadly conceived as ‘human growth’ (Pikkarainen 2017).

and also of their positioning within social places and spaces in terms of singing. Children have different experiences of life that are part of their own subjectivities; they “possess a rich and in some ways sophisticated musical knowledge, acquired from a variety of outside-school musical activities” (Folkestad, 2015, p. 107). However, the school is a very different place than home, or even than early childhood education centres (and not all children attend early childhood centres). Like in other places of the world, Finnish school is a particular place where rules and adult’s instructions are at the core of the educational work, routines, and plans, also impacting singing activities. According to Biesta (2021), it is therefore more and more necessary to attend to the subjectivity of the student, and, as I argue, to their singing ecologies. Student subjectivity is, according to Biesta (2020, 2014), an important domain of education that has not received the necessary attention; as he explains, “subjectification is the core of all education” (Biesta 2021, p. 16). When we speak about qualification we speak about the transmission of knowledge and skills, and when we speak about socialization we speak about interactions, belonging, and cultures, whereas “education always also impacts on the student as individual, either by enhancing or by restricting capacities and capabilities” (p. 92) – making it necessary to attend to the subjectivity of the student and to the agency and freedom of the student (Biesta, 2020).

Adults such as school teachers play an important role in the lives of children, helping them to overcome difficulties or overpass uncertain or unstable times. As Panu Artemjeff and Liban Sheikh (2023) explain, as stated in the Finnish Equality Act (Yhdenvertaisuuslaki, 1325/2014), promoting equality is not only about principles but is also about the obligation to implement an action plan “to remove the barriers that place groups at risk of discrimination in an unequal position in the society” (p. 16, author’s translation). While children have the right to full development (National Core Curriculum, 2014), “to achieve this, the pupils need encouragement and individual support as well as experiences of being heard and valued in the school community” (p. 26). As there are more and more children in Finnish schools who come from culturally diverse backgrounds, for whom life transitions can be lived with exacerbation, developing sensitivity to the diverse experiences that children live through prior to school is essential for both teachers and students.

Students thus need to feel recognised as members of society, with all their rights and subjectivities, and teachers need to be able to offer educational opportunities for all students, considering them as subjects in their own right. As expressed in the Finnish National Core Curriculum (2014), students “need to feel that the community cares about their learning and well-being. Equally

important are experiences of participation and opportunities for working together with others to advance the functioning and welfare of the community” (p. 26). The Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2014) states that “basic education educates the pupils to know, respect and defend human rights” (p. 37). Underlying these considerations is the question of the purpose of education: why are we teaching or learning certain content in school and not others? In this respect, as research on the field of childhood studies suggests, it is essential for teachers to reflect on their own cultural constructions and perspectives, and to think beyond their knowledge and experiences in order to focus on listening to children (Tesar & Jukes, 2018). Concepts such as diversity, individuality, and difference-as-strengths are included in the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2014) and in the teacher education programs of the Ministry of Education and Culture (Teacher Education Development Programme 2022–2026). However, implementing these ideas in the classrooms can be complex and challenging, for example in connection with the idea of respecting the “uniqueness” of each child and their cultural heritage in schools – which is considered “richness” – or being aware of students’ different learning styles and work paces, as well as emotional needs linked to self-esteem and motivation (Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, 2014, p. 5). In this regard, Biesta’s theorisation (2020) helps us understand why a focus on the subjectification of the students is particularly necessary in culturally diverse schools (and in education in general), and why “those involved in the design and enactment of education — including policymakers and teachers — should always engage with the question of what their efforts seek to bring about in each domain” (p. 92) – i.e. those of qualification, socialization, and subjectification – and their interconnections.

To sum up, the present moment marks an inflection point in the Finnish educational path; yet, amidst the intensifying diversity of contemporary Finnish classrooms, the role that singing at school now plays warrants interrogation if it is to support democracy and to contribute to *all* students’ growth. When reflecting on singing in school and on the meanings singing may have *beyond* the development of technical singing skills or the learning of certain songs, questions such as *for whom* and *to what purpose* related to school communities arise. The National Core curriculum of Finland (2014) highlights the importance of recognizing students’ cultural backgrounds for the development of their personal cultural identities, while also promoting interest in other cultures: “Education supports the pupils in building their personal cultural identity and their growth into active actors in their own culture and community while promoting their interest in other cultures” (p. 32). On a more concrete level, we can therefore ask: how can schools

support *all* students' agency and subjectification while fostering a sense of community and promoting democracy in a culturally diverse classroom, in which teachers need to address the regulated values of the school itself – a compilation of aspects that produces what could be called a culture of its own (Bruner, 1996). Rooted in the Finnish ideals of democracy and equality, and transcending educators' good intentions of supporting students' growth, culturally diverse Finnish classrooms should seek to promote the voices and rights of *all* students, and not just those that belong to the dominant cultural group. Finland is however yet to recognize the implications of the increasing cultural diversity in the national core curricula, in teacher education, or in school practices, including music subject and singing. Therefore, rethinking not only *how* and *what* teachers teach for children in schools but also *when*, *where*, and *for what purpose* is important: it is about how to take into account children's previous experiences and knowledge and about how to further the *quality of children's experiences* in school (Harwood & Marsh, 2018).

1.4. Finnish music education and teacher education in transition

In Finland, classroom teachers generally teach music in the first grades of primary school (1 – 6), and music subject teachers teach music in grades 7–9 or above (Westerlund & Juntunen, 2015). This organization can be related to historical reasons, and to the reminiscences of a solid system of classroom teacher education in which music used to be a fundamental area of study (Muukkonen, 2010). The music school subject was called singing, not music, until the 1970s (Muukkonen, 2010; Rautiainen, 2020). As the name indicates, historically the music subject in Finnish schools was dedicated to singing songs; even though songs were mainly learned by ear, notation and song pitching were also taught in schools (Pajamo, 1976). School teachers evaluated individual singer's vocal abilities, rating their singing performance accordingly (e.g. Numminen et al., 2015).

In her dissertation, Katri-Helena Rautiainen (2003) offers an historical context for music in Finnish schools, by examining how music teaching methods were developed after the establishment of the Finnish teacher training institution in 1860 (Rautiainen, 2003). In public schools singing was taught as an individual subject, and was also used in the teaching of other subjects. Songs functioned to support socialization and religious values as well as a spirit of patriotism (Rautiainen, 2003; see also Pajamo, 1999). Singing was, and continues to be, an essential part of school celebrations and events. Traces of this historical background are manifest in the role of music in Finnish schools today. For

example, the tradition of singing religious hymns or certain Christmas songs is considered an important part of the school celebrations (Hebert et al., 2012; Nikkanen, 2014). Lauri Väkevä (2019) has raised the question of the religious song repertoire of Finnish school festivities and their contesting roles, particularly in times when classrooms in Finland are considered culturally and religiously diverse. He argues that there is a contradiction when including religious songs in public school, as Finnish constitutional law separates religion and schooling. Likewise, Hanna Nikkanen (2014) argues that musical performances in schools can be considered as rituals, supporting the musical, social, and physical relationships that form the culture of the school; however they might not necessarily reflect democratic practices in schools, as they might not represent all students. Calling attention to the intersection of music, education, and religion, Heidi Westerlund and colleagues (2019) suggest that “the teacher in today’s diverse schools is required to make conscious attempts to understand which musics and musical practices interpellate religious identities, and which school rituals may result in processes of (non) religious coercion or exclusion” (p. 64).

Influenced by global and social phenomena, music education researchers in Finland have focused on searching for solutions to the aforementioned controversies, specifically in relation to interculturality, equality, and inclusion in music education (see Juntunen & Partti, 2023 for an overview; Westerlund, 2021; Miettinen, 2020; Koskela, 2022; Thomson, 2021; Nikkanen, 2014; Laes, 2017; Kivijärvi, 2021; Treacy, 2020; Lehtinen-Schnabel, 2023; Iimola-Sheppard et al., 2021). The research calls for deepening music teacher reflexivity in facing “uncertainties, paradoxes, and societal tensions” in times of transition and change (Westerlund et al., 2021, p. 3).

Changes can be also observed in the Finnish teacher education practices and programs, with recent studies (Suomi, 2019; Juvonen, 2008; Juntunen, 2017) suggesting that classroom teacher students are not currently offered the required training for teaching music for grades 1–6. Music education researcher Henna Suomi (2019) studied future Finnish class teachers’ musical competences in five Finnish teacher training schools. She found that teacher education programs’ entrance requirements do not highlight the musical experiences or competences of the applicants as in the past, and that the programs do not provide the necessary training to teach music at elementary level to accomplish the goals and contents specified in the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2014). Consequently, the subject of music requires teacher students to complete only five credits, which is equivalent to 60–80 hours of music studies during the entire program, and which should

cover acquiring the skills to sing and play different instruments, developing expressive and listening capacities in music, and learning appropriate music pedagogical skills (Suomi, 2019). In Suomi's study, only one in five teacher students felt fully or rather qualified to teach music in primary schools.

The lack of sufficient teacher training has been argued to generate unequal music education opportunities for primary school students in Finland (Juntunen, 2017). It also creates inequality in terms of the students' possibilities of participation and learning music, as well as creating a personal relationship with music that would encourage them to choose music as an optional subject later in upper secondary school. The lack of sufficient music teaching skills in Finnish teacher training is accentuated by the increased cultural diversity, which also increases the need for cultural and aesthetic sensitivity to recognize different cultural practices and customs related to singing and musical participation.

For teachers to be able to create communities in and through music and singing requires skill and an understanding of how musical activities are created. However, as has been shown in Finland (Suomi, 2019) and also internationally (e.g. in England Seddon & Biasutti, 2008), teachers exhibit a lack of confidence in their own singing skills, and this lack of confidence further negatively affects their students' singing activities in schools. Indeed, it has been shown that one of the biggest challenges in modern music classrooms is related to teachers' and students' lack of singing confidence and singing skills, both individually and in groups, when the feelings of insecurity or discomfort with one's own singing voice have implications for teaching and, for example, teachers may prefer to rely on recorded music instead of singing with their students in the classroom (Lamont et al., 2012). According to Margaret Barrett et al., (2019), teachers in early childhood education and care tend to have positive attitudes towards music (even if they do not have formal music qualifications). In order to explore this potential, Barrett and colleagues (2024) developed a mentorship program involving classroom teachers and music specialists in Australia and evaluated its long term impact. The study showed that "one year on, teachers participating in the mentoring programme reported continued and growing confidence in their ability to teach music and run music activities in their school" (p. 566), thus illustrating the potential of such mentoring programs.

This dissertation takes this observation further by arguing that in the context of culturally diverse schools, the lack of participation may not only be related to singing insecurity but to the socio ecological environment of the school system, which may promote only one normative stance towards singing and provide an unchanging repertoire of songs that does not take into account

the students' diverse backgrounds and their personal and socio-cultural relationship to singing in general. Based on earlier studies, it can be assumed that a teacher education deficit clearly impacts the students' later musical experiences and education. It is precisely in these times of transition that teachers also in Finland need more support, not only to develop musical and singing capacities and pedagogical competences, but also their cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity in relation to other cultures (e.g. Marsh, 2000; Ilari, 2013) and intercultural competence (Miettinen, 2020) in their classroom environments. Culturally responsive teaching, as described by educational researcher Geneva Gay (2010), is about teachers caring for their students and communities, building *pedagogical bridges* to connect students' experiences with new knowledge introduced in classrooms. As classrooms have become more and more culturally diverse, it is essential to acknowledge the presence of diverse values, expectations, and worldviews within Finnish schools. School is responsible for forming new communities of children by taking this diversity into consideration. This can be educationally challenging for teachers, because different cultures also have different norms, values, worldviews, and expectations (Igoa, 2014). While children's values and worldviews can vary, it is important to educate to generate a collective understanding of the differences, and to focus on how relationships are formed while preserving the dignity of difference (Boyce-Tillman, 2012).

While popular discourse in music education considers cultural diversity as an opportunity for learning, for connecting with others, and for forming culturally rich communities (e.g. Crawford, 2017), school practices might not necessarily reflect music education's potential or ideals. As has already been shown years ago, teachers in the Nordic countries may be aware of their students' cultural backgrounds and activities, but that may not necessarily be apparent in their teaching; this can also be related to the risk of stereotyping children of culturally diverse backgrounds (e.g. Karlsen, 2011). Collaborative projects and activities can help "translating" the Nordic ideals of inclusion and participation into action. The project *Global Visions Through Mobilizing Networks – Co-developing Intercultural Music Teacher Education in Finland, Israel and Nepal* (Westerlund et al., 2021) is an example of a large collaborative, transnational, and interinstitutional project in which learning and knowledge was co-constructed; the project represented "an extended engagement with, and exploration of, difference" (p. 3). The project broadly showed that the teachers not only need musical and pedagogical expertise in their work, but also continuous self reflexivity and active use of their imagination, in order to respond to social changes. Based on current discussions on interculturality, and focusing on the uncertainties and paradoxes present in Finnish music

education today (e.g. Juntunen & Partti, 2023), as well as on the broader need to improve class teacher education programs (Suomi, 2019), the school can be thought of as an intercultural institution that bridges ecosystems, as indicated by the social-ecological systems theorists (see e.g. Biggs et al., 2021). School can then potentially help children in their life transitions, as children can be seen to face a major transition from the time of early childhood (singing at home or as experienced in the own culture) to the school's normative, adult-designed environment, where singing is generally limited to school music hours assigned by the curriculum and where the repertoire and the ways of using the voice are approached following their teachers' instructions and competencies.

1.5. Rationale of the study

The objective of this doctoral dissertation is to construct a new ecological understanding of children's singing, conceptualised as *singing ecologies*, and to highlight that singing in schools may have a much wider role than mere musical learning and vocal expression. In this perspective singing is seen as an existential matter, and it is understood that the school's ecosystem could provide diverse opportunities for children to participate and engage in a diverse array of music-making practices, as well as to strengthen the connections between children's singing ecologies. It is assumed that such ecological theorisation could help the school and teachers to better understand children's experiences of singing and the meaning they ascribe to singing, and to be able to use the full potential of singing in school – beyond skill-development, competences, and achievement of learning outcomes. This theorisation would help teachers and communities see the potential of the school as “a bridging organisation” (Biggs et al., 2021, p. 5) that can further connect children's lives and their singing ecologies with the school system and school learning.

As mentioned earlier, the ecological theoretical framework of this study is based on four dimensions that build on the complexity of understanding children's voices. Starting from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory of a child's development through systems and different processes, towards Reinette Biggs and colleagues' (2021) social-ecological systems thinking theorisation for understanding human and non-human relations – the social-ecological relations – this theorisation connects to the conceptualisation of space in Henri Lefebvre's (1991) and Michel Foucault's theorizations (1977) for understanding space as produced and involving power relations. The concept of children's spaces developed by Moss and Petrie (2002) helps instrumentalise the concept of *singing spaces* as part of children's singing ecologies, and to consider the conceptualisation of ecological agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998;

Biesta & Tedder, 2007) in childhood in relation to the child's political voice.

In what follows, I will make a comprehensive review of prior research on children's singing in order to show its limitations in relation to the ecological and spatial understanding of children's singing. The empirical part of this dissertation includes a qualitative and narrative case study conducted with first graders and their teachers in one culturally diverse school in Finland. In this empirical part, I take up the challenge of conducting research with young children (age 6–7) in order to contribute to the still limited discussion on singing as a meaningful and contextualised childhood experience in culturally diverse schools and societies. The study thus focuses on first grade students who attend a culturally diverse school and whose lives are marked by rapid changes and the presence of special expectations about school life (Brostöm, 2002) (even more so the lives of children who come from culturally diverse backgrounds), a situation that opens new possibilities and beginning for social interaction and agency. Hence, the children of this study have recently experienced the transition from daycare, preschool, or homecare to school, in some cases also including a move to a new country. While the interviews were conducted inside the school building, the experiences of singing revealed in the interviews relate to singing both inside and outside school – these are thus experiences of the children's lives.

In Finland, students start primary school at approximately the age of seven (Finnish National Agency for Education), an age when children might be more conscious about transitional processes and experiences (Babić, 2017). It is therefore expected that the first graders are able to talk about their experiences of singing in relation to locations, places, and spaces (using an age-appropriate methodology, see Maybin, 2006). The design of this ethnographic case study and narrative research is based on the understanding that children are capable of saying important things about their lives and experiences (Bruner, 1986). As Margaret Barrett and Graham Welch (2023) explain, “children's perspectives concerning their musical experiences have been largely ignored, as common assumptions about young children's capacities to express their views verbally have led to a reliance on adults speaking for them” (p. 7). Thus, the methodological approach in this study of children's singing ecologies is through children's narration and stories – seeking to put forward children's voices and perspectives. Interviewing the children's teachers helped to contextualise the school and the children's daily routines inside school; in other words, approaching children's experiences ecologically by addressing the role of adults, such as teachers, in listening (or not listening) to students' voices, encouraging their processes, and

addressing students' subjectivities. Hence, within this framework children are not seen just as learners but as potential ecological agents (Biesta & Tedder, 2007) who make choices concerning their singing and intentionally produce their own spaces (and in-between spaces) for singing, while simultaneously being affected by the limitations imposed on them by adults.

Based on these underpinnings, this study is designed to answer the following research question:

What meanings do children ascribe to singing within their ecologies?

In this dissertation I will thus argue that the school *can* be conceived of as a bridge builder, as interwoven with various other ecosystems “in a complex interplay of local, regional, and worldwide dependencies” (Folke et al., 2016, n.p.). This building of bridges should be seen not only as a potential aid to learning but also in relation to children's broader experiences in school and elsewhere. Decades ago, Bronfenbrenner (1986) took into account “the experience of newly immigrant families, particularly those who come from, and enter into, markedly contrasting environments with respect to values, customs, and socioeconomic conditions” (p. 736), stating that children's capacity to learn in school is greatly affected by the relationships between the children's school and family. In this study, children's stories and experiences are also analysed against Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979, 1986), in which the *chronosystem*, described as “changes over time”, is important for understanding life transitions (such as beginning school). Figure 1 illustrates the interrelated and interdependent ecological systems in which the child is immersed and the interrelations that occur across systems and within subsystems. Each circle surrounding the child in the figure represents the unique environmental variables that affect children's lives, learning, and development.

In Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1979, 1986), the *microsystem* is the child's immediate environmental system, and the subsystem is where the child's immediate interactions occur. The *mesosystem* comprises the connections between immediate environments, for example the child's home, school, and neighbourhood. The *exosystem* includes external environmental factors that indirectly affect the child, for example the parents' workplaces. The *macrosystem* is the society within which the child grows and lives, as well as its values and expectations. The *chronosystem* shows events and transitions over the child's life course; specifically, singing can be present, with its various functions, across the lifespan. Bronfenbrenner (1986) included the *chronosystem* in his ecological theory of human development a few years

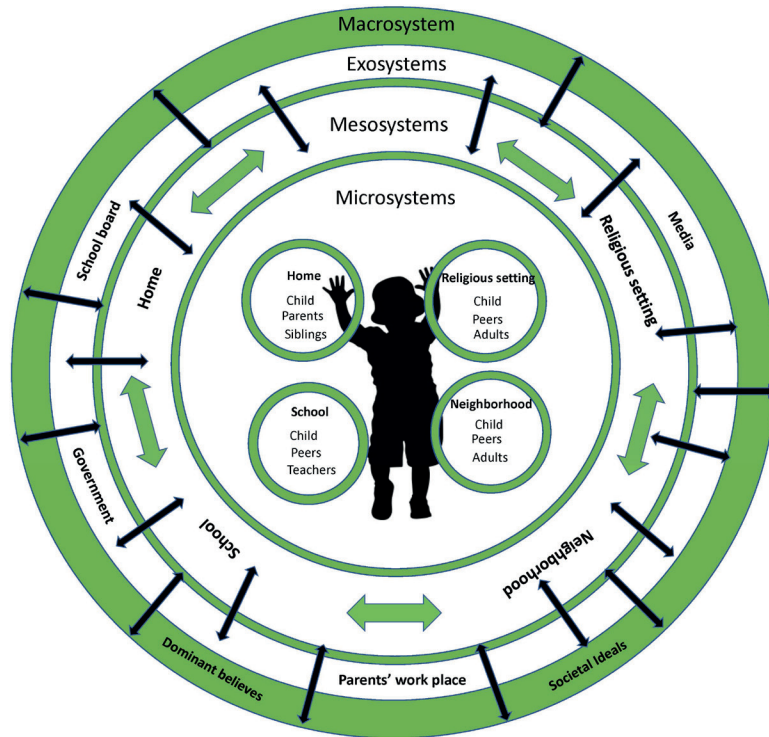


Figure 1. The child’s ecological systems (figure constructed based on Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

after the first formulation defining it as “changes over time”, including the changes on the side of the child and the environment – as well as their relations or interconnections. This relational aspect makes it possible to analyse the “dynamic relation between these two processes” (p. 724) and allows for an understanding of the temporal changes that occur on the child’s side in relations with the environment, as well as of the temporal changes that occur in the environment in relation to the child. These processes are easily represented in life transitions, and the chronosystem, in its simplest form, centres around life transitions. Distinguishing between two types of transitions: normative (entering school, puberty, entering working life, getting married, retiring from working life), and nonnormative (a death or serious illness within the family, divorcing or moving), Bronfenbrenner (1986) explains that “such transitions occur throughout the lifespan and often serve as a direct impetus for developmental change” (p. 724). Hence, the chronosystem is an analytic tool that includes all previously mentioned systems and subsystems, and can help us understand the lives of children and the interrelations generated both within school life and outside school life, especially during transitional times.

1.6. Researcher position

As a researcher and music educator, I represent a non-dominant cultural background in Finland, having lived and worked as a music teacher in Argentina and in Finland for more than 20 years. In my career as a researcher, my background as a music educator and singing teacher in various contexts (including kindergarten and primary school, private vocal studios, as a leader of a music school, and tertiary level music education conservatory students) has motivated me to learn more about how music education and music teacher education can better respond to the needs of contemporary societies. Through my work as a Suzuki Voice specialist, I have taught singing to children of different cultural backgrounds – and ages – and I have worked on bridging cultures through music and singing. I gained my first experiences as a teacher in Argentina; I built a private music studio with a strong community of students, parents, and teachers, with whom I still keep in contact. After relocating to Finland, I started a new singing studio in Helsinki that is a small, culturally diverse community of children aged from 1 year to youths and young adults and their families. I have learned from and with each of my students, from my current students and from my former students, from their families and from their diversities. I learned and I continue learning from the children's curiosity and creativity, and from their personal ways of engaging with music and singing. Being part of their lives, working with their families, and seeing them grow over the years is a fundamental part of my practitioner experience, which I bring to this research today.

As a foreign-born singer I have the experience of singing the songs of my homeland in Finland, something that possesses particular connotations when songs are meaningful for the performer. Making singing recitals entirely comprised of songs in the Spanish language in Finland (and even providing songs translations for the audience) has been one way of reaffirming my own cultural identity. Forming a Duo with a Finnish pianist, with whom I have performed already for 15 years, has been my way to work interculturally in and through music. Teaching Latin American songs in vocal seminars at Music Institutes and private music studios in Finland has also been an important part of the process of the affirmation of my cultural identity. Furthermore, my recitals and lessons have attracted a good number of people (and families with children of diverse cultural backgrounds) interested in exploring other cultures through singing.

This research has been informed by my experiences as a singing teacher and music education practitioner. Overall, my work intends to promote cultural diversity in Finland through research and active participation – I actively

participate in cultural and educational discussions in Finland and abroad. My work as an educator devoted to accompanying the vocal development of many students of different ages and socio-cultural backgrounds in various geographical locations has always been my passion. Even more, in this process of learning with and from the children, it was essential to work closely and in continuous cooperation with these children's families, and to get to know more about their lives and their musical experiences in and outside formal settings. Working in the field showed me that singing does not have a universal cultural meaning, and that singing needs to be understood in context. Reflecting on children's interactions, on the ways in which children use their voices in different places and spaces, on how they feel when singing in and outside of formal settings, singing alone, or singing with others, and many other things as well, has been my inspiration as a researcher and as a practitioner. These experiences form part of my reflexive process as a researcher. As pointed out by Frederick Steier (1991), we are reflexive when we have an interest in the ways we construct ourselves in a social context – at the same time, we construct our research, giving it meaning. Moreover, the reflexivity process has prompted me to ask difficult questions about myself and my life story, as well as to question the preconceptions and beliefs that I once considered “universal”.

1.7. Structure of the dissertation

This introduction has presented the general aims and objectives of the study, as well as its overall conceptual approach, within which an understanding of children's singing experiences as an existential matter, situated both inside and outside a culturally diverse school, is constructed. In chapter two, I present previous research on children's singing and meaning making, and children's singing development, as well as previous research on the functions of singing in childhood. The chapter shows the different models of singing development used in the past to measure children's proficiency in singing, classifying children as singers or not-singers or assigning a “stage” or a singing category to the children. The functions of singing in childhood are explained through the findings of earlier researchers, from which a contested discussion on the limitations of these approaches emerges. In chapter three, I further explore the theoretical tools that guided me towards understanding a phenomenon that is conceptualised here as children's singing ecologies. Singing affordances and ecological agency are part of these ecological lenses, through which the development of children's political voice can be supported. The conclusion of this chapter identifies the research gap that this dissertation addresses, and returns to the main research question. Following this, four sub-questions are posed to the empirical material. Chapter four describes the research approach,

the description of the empirical material, and the analytical process and methods, as well as reflections on interviewing the children, together with associated ethical issues. Chapter five presents the research findings, which respond to the four sub-questions. Chapter six discusses the findings by delineating the implications for the theory of children's singing, future research on children's singing, and curriculum development in Finland and beyond, and also creating a curriculum of caring through singing and (music) teacher education programs. The limitations of the study are also presented in this chapter, before drawing conclusions and presenting the final thoughts of the dissertation.

2. Mapping Research on Singing in Early Childhood

In this chapter I will present the earlier literature on early childhood singing, which shows distinct conceptualisations of *the child*, and consequently of the ways in which children's subjectivities are taken (or not taken) into account – as children learn how to make meaning of the world. Singing, as our earliest companion, is relational and part of our life ecology, wherein significant childhood experiences tend to be remembered for a lifetime. Listening to or singing a meaningful song can be an evocative subjective experience that can produce strong feelings, often difficult to describe with words (e.g. Dean, 2019). According to earlier research, singing can assist children in their daily lives, helping them to explore the self and giving meaning to present and past experiences, instigating new adventures, and generating meaningful interactions and relationships (e.g. Barrett, 2011; Bjørkvold, 1989; Knudsen, 2008). Singing can precipitate explorations and enquiries, and it can also be the motivation for engaging in conversation with other persons and communities, and for interacting with the material world (e.g., Barrett, 2006; Bjørkvold, 1989; Niland, 2012). Children can relate to past experiences in various ways, and strong feelings can grow when these experiences are accentuated by living circumstances, such as family relocation or feelings of being apart from the homeland and living in a different cultural context. This is because “children always make music in social contexts which are created and sustained through institutionalized practices and informal social interactions which ‘produce’ particular ‘readings’ of these music-making endeavours” (Kanellopoulos, 2010, p. 119). Thus, children bring with them experiences and memories that they may or may not be able to exteriorize verbally, but which nevertheless form part of their subjectivity and constitute their identities (Biesta, 2021, 2006).

In her seminal book “Sociology and Music Education” (2010), edited by Ruth Wright, Panagiotis Kanellopoulos (2010) reflected on how different research perspectives guide the conceptualisation of “the child” and the ways in which we understand children's music-making. Based on the theorisations of James et al. (1998), Kanellopoulos (2010) argues that “developmental psychology regarded the ‘child’ as a natural, uniform and unquestionable given and set out to identify the ‘normal’ process of development from a state of undifferentiated incompetence to a vague yet universally applicable model of adult mental maturity” (p. 120), suggesting that a sociological perspective can help in studying children's involvement in creative music-making practices and children's music. As Kanellopoulos (2010) has suggested years ago, the new sociology of childhood (Christensen & James, 2017; Corsaro, 1997; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998) and the music-as-social-action perspective

of the sociology of music (e.g. Martin 1995) can provide music education researchers with new possibilities to study children's music, and especially to question taken-for-granted ideas about children and their natural development, and thus "to create a perspective on children's music-making as a mode of sociopolitical and sociocultural action" (Kanellopoulos, 2010, p. 119).

Indeed, recent studies in the field of childhood studies (e.g. Prout, 2011; Wyness, 2009) have highlighted the limitations represented by the lack of communication between the individual disciplines that have dominated the study of children, such as education, sociology, medicine, and psychology. The discipline of childhood studies has focussed on re-examining the ways in which children's lives have been studied and analysed, challenging many universal ideas about children and their lives (e.g. James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). For example, based on this assertion, Susan Young (2012) and her collaborators explored the everyday music and singing practices of children aged seven in the context of their homes, in diverse international locations, with the purpose of understanding children's musical childhoods and demonstrating the need to consider the role of locations in music education research. Indeed, they too found that children's musical experiences need to be understood within their particular contexts. In a later investigation, Young (2018) elaborated on the relationships between developmental perspectives and cultures, pointing out that "childhood studies acknowledges that children undergo recognizable patterns of development and growth but argues that the meanings given to these vary enormously within and between cultures" (p. 60). This conversation is essential in music education, and especially in singing, because while singing development has been extensively studied it has been considered less so in relation to the meanings children ascribe to singing themselves. Seeing children's singing from an interdisciplinary and relational perspective can help researchers, educators, and other societal actors better understand the world of children, and in particular the world of children living in culturally diverse societies. As Jan Sverre Knudsen (2008) has noted, "children use their own idioms and practices to create and negotiate power" (p. 291) and to influence their identity work (Barrett, 2011). Even when places for children are defined by normative assumptions that position children as dependent on adults (e.g. Wyness et al., 2004), children seem to find their way and to create "in-between spaces" for self-directed playing and freedom (Aminpour et. al., 2020, p. 13). These findings show the need to study children's singing ecologically and relationally, to recognise the temporality and location of children's singing experiences and the ways in which children produce spaces in-between places, while they are also produced by the places and spaces they inhabit.

2.1. The emergence of singing in the early years

When children sing, they ascribe meaning to their singing. The making of meaning originates from the first experiences of intersubjective parental-infant interaction (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009; Stern, 1985; Dissanayake, 2000), when babies and young children imitate adults' actions, sounds, and expressions, not only to act like them but to enter into a communicative and cooperative relationship with them (Martinez, 2016; Trevarthen, 2009). For example, it has been shown that the most affective attunements between baby and mother are cross-modal (Dissanayake, 2009; Español et al., 2018; Stern, 1985), and that they are imminent ways of early social play in which mothers use their voices to establish connection with their babies through imitation or attunement (Español et al., 2018; Español, 2016). The innate desire for learning and communicating is latent in “the empowered child who is adept at meaning-making” (Clark & Moss, 2005; Waller, 2006) and communication (Edwards et. al., 1993), if given the opportunity to do so (Wake, 2008, p. 431).

Sandra Trehub (2011) has shown that the ways in which primary caregivers use their voice in the early years, the use of soft singing and melodic ways of speech, are significant, as infants become immersed in emotionally meaningful music; “presumably, those sounds patterns promote feelings of comfort, which are reinforced by the security of the dyadic context” (p. 661). In Western societies, the features of the lullabies performances such as high pitch intonation, wider pitch range, and the use of smooth and long pauses and inflections (Unyk et al., 1992), are similar to the attributes of IDS (infant direct speech) – the particular form of adult speech that appears when parents talk to their children. The use of IDS, including the use of certain contours when the message is directed towards infants, the use of expressive inflexion, the ability to take turns, and many other actions used by adults while interacting with babies and young children, all contain emotional disposition, and the feelings associated with them can be very strong, especially if the songs have been sung by the mother (or first caregiver). According to Trehub (2011), this is important to note because a) the sound patterns that emerge in this dyadic context in general promote comfort and safety, and b) also enhance attention and arousal, and c) through those patterns learning can be fostered and interpersonal bonds can be strengthened, providing the foundation for future emotional responses to music. Further, there are implications for the future, because “even in maturity, responses to music retain their basic social function of promoting emotional regulation, including self-regulation and connections with others” (p. 661). Suvi Saarikallio (2009) found that “the emotional use of music develops from parental regulation to self-directed regulation

through family examples, learning, and self-development” (p. 461). Thus, through these intuitive parental actions, the expressive manners of the musical performance are presented to the infant, who starts “to understand, to enjoy and to contemplate the art in his culture” (Español & Shifres, 2009, p.101). While there are studies based across cultures, for instance a comparative study about lullabies sung across different cultures, lullabies are recognizable because of the expressiveness printed by the particular use of the voice, especially that of the mother (Trehub et al., 1993; Unyk et al., 1992); cultural differences when interacting with babies and young children exist, and should be considered when discussing early childhood music education (Young, 2019). Indeed, intersubjective relations and experiences apprehended in the closest family environment stand as an important part of children’s subjectivity formation and their construction of meaning making. Children learn to make meaning through their experiences, but meaning making is not separated from the context or from the conditions under which it is experienced (Bresler, 1998). This is also relevant in education, because “contexts affect both *what* is taught and *how* it is taught, shaping explicit and implicit messages and values” (Bresler & Thompson, 2002, p. 9), and for that reason teachers need to be always aware of children’s stories, experiences, values, preferences, and subjectivities.

The making of meaning develops through recurrent social and ecological interactions with the environment. From the very beginning of life, the voice plays a central role in mother-infant (or first caregiver-infant) interactions, and infants use vocal sounds together with movements and expressions to create interpersonal bonds and connections and to communicate within their closest environment (e.g. Forrester, 2009). As Knudsen (2008) has explained:

through vocalisations children are exploring their musical body and its capacities, they are learning about relationships between sounds and emotions, and – through the reactions their utterances are met with – they obtain knowledge and understanding of their surroundings and their self in community with others (p. 291).

The emotional responses to music that take place in infancy have implications for the individuals’ future lives and their relationship with music. Stephen Malloch (1999/2000) introduced the notion of “communicative musicality”, which encapsulates the basis of human communication. In his work, communicative musicality was defined as the “expression of our human desire for cultural learning, our innate skill for moving, remembering and planning in sympathy with others” (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009, p. 4), where the focus is on the dyadic interaction adult-infant, which is embedded in the belonging

culture. According to Trevarthen (2005), infants are oriented towards sympathetic reciprocation – they participate and interact with others from the very beginning of life. As Trevarthen affirmed (2005), “in a good proto-conversation with a 2-month-old infant, infant and adult carry one another as complementary partners in a satisfying duet” (p. 102). Thus, “communicative musicality is characterized by infant and adult sympathetically synchronizing pulse and vocal quality in their interactions as they create shared narratives” (Niland, 2012, p. 29). While the boundaries between singing and speaking can be blurred, and adults can perceive them as ambiguous (Davidson 1994; Welch, 2009), the use of the voice with its expressive inflections and “communicative musicality” (Malloch, 1999/2000; Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009) starts to develop early in life, shaping children’s identities and influencing children’s agency.

It is in this context of mutual interaction that infant’s first vocal sounds and shared narratives emerge, in connection with authentic participation. According to Hanus Papousek (1992), two psychobiological aspects of preverbal communication can be identified: one is the “*intuitive parenting interventions*”, which offer the infant opportunities to practice vocal sounds and control and communicational skills. The other aspect of preverbal communication is “*parent-infant vocal interchanges*”, a didactic path for social environment interventions, “allowing caregivers to share their experiences, to guide the development of infant’s predispositions toward an optimal social integration and to support infants’ cognitive growth in general” (Papousek, 1992, p. 218, italics original). Helmut Moog’s (1976b) studies on young children’s music making from birth to 6 years were important in that they provided information on the more common types of young children’s musical activities. Studying 500 children, using tests, observing, and taking into account the comments of children’s parents, he focused on explaining the process of musical development in early childhood and how children use their voices and their bodies, how they imitate movement and singing, and how they then invent their own songs, showing that “vocalisations” and “musical babbling” (p. 40) represent the precursors to speech and music-making /singing. In later studies, W. Jay Dowling (1984) showed how the control of melodic-rhythmic contour patterns characterizes children’s spontaneous singing and, for example, how one- and two-year-old children’s spontaneous singing is characterized by the repetition of short melodic phrases.

Taking another perspective, Young (2002) investigated young children’s spontaneous singing and free-play and observed a great diversity therein. She also noticed how spontaneous singing is connected to the context and the activity, and is mediated by age. Focusing on musical awareness and creativity,

Young (2003a) explored young children's musicality, considering the dominant forms of musical cultures where the spontaneous music-making and play of 3–4-years old and their interpersonal processes in music can be easily disturbed if adult partners are not responsive or do not respond in a timely way as part of that "duet". The structural dynamics of the emotional engagement of young children's spontaneous singing experiences has also been studied by Young (2006), who noticed the prevalence of research on the performative aspects of children's singing over research on children's improvised singing and play. The emphasis on skills and competences has tended to overlook that

singing provides young children with one means among many, a musical means, to engage with experience ... the conversion of experience into a musical form makes it very malleable and adaptable in this dimension of time and its abstracted representation of space. (Young, 2006, p. 277)

In an earlier study, although in a similar line of thought, Norwegian researcher Jon Roar Bjørkvold (1990) claimed that children's culture and spontaneous musicality relates more to the concept of play than to the traditional (Western) concept of music coined by adults. Bjørkvold (1989), who studied children of 4–to 7–years-old in Norway, Russia, and the United States, found that children's spontaneous singing is connected to their play, and that children's introspective songs often reflect children's inner thoughts and emotions. For him, young children's singing can be both "egocentric" and "communicative" (p. 215). He suggested that egocentric singing is associated with young children's behaviour, and as they mature the communicative aspects of singing develop accordingly. Young (2006), on the other hand, has suggested that time-based processes of improvisation support ways of engaging, both with the material world and with others, meaning that the use of spontaneous singing is connected with children's immersion in the activity, where quiet singing and humming might be used to create a calm atmosphere for quiet playing. Moreover, in Finland, music education researcher Maija Fredrikson (2005) examined children's early singing as embodied experience with children aged one to three, and developed a situational and contextual concept, namely "body narratives", for understanding children's musical experiences holistically (p. 262). In other words, she approached singing in early childhood through the experiencing body, and by taking into account enculturation and the context of both the acting and the experiencing child. Researchers thus argue that children's spontaneous singing and musical creativity needs to be understood within its complexity.

According to Barrett (2006, 2019), children's creative music making and

children's invented songs are foundational to the development of children's creative thought and action. The term *invented song* (Barrett, 2019) puts the focus "on the generative rather than reproductive intentions of the singer and the song" (p. 475), hence recognising intentionality and agency in children's actions. Children's invented songs are structured around a topic of interest, around children's routines or life happenings. According to Barrett (2019), invented singing thus differs from other forms of improvised singing such as "pot-pourri" songs (Moog, 1976a), as invented songs are not a combination of known songs with additional comments, but rather emerge as children's reflexive, inventive singing influenced by factors such as location, mood, relationships, activities, and more. Children's invented songs can therefore be considered a

genre of children's early song-making that is generative in intention, draws on the musical materials of the child's cultural experience, and is used as a means to engage with and make sense of their worlds. (Barrett, 2019, p. 475)

As it has been noted by Barrett (2006, 2011, 2019), Bjørkvold (1989, 1987), Kanellopoulos (2007), Sundin (1997, 2007), Young (2006), and others, early childhood music education has tended to concentrate on musical performance and less on spontaneous or improvised singing, even when the spontaneous nature of vocal production in infancy and early childhood has proven to be a significant part of children's lives. In particular, as the child grows, music educators tend to focus more on children's musical performances, where for example the learning and development of singing is guided by an adult and adult evaluation criteria. This "music-as-performance" model described by Young (2006) not only carries assumptions and practices about *what music is* but also ideas about "*how children are musical*" and how music in early childhood education can contribute to their lives (Young, 2006, p. 270, italics added). This opens the discussion on the consequences of the music-as-performance model, which according to scholars (e.g. Bjørkvold, 1989, 1987; Sundin, 1997, 2007; Young, 2006) diminishes the attention paid to other aspects of music making, especially self-initiated music making. Little interest has been placed on studying "young children's spontaneous musical behaviours, in seeking to understand the competences and attributes which they reveal, or in analysing how they integrate and blend with other forms of play" (Young 2006, p. 270). Even though research has shown that children's improvisation "allows for the disclosure of the voice of the agent (equality and distinction), exactly because a core condition of its existence is plurality" (Ferm Almqvist et al., 2017, p. 34), music education continues to gravitate around adult-centric perspectives. In other words, the dominating views in music education have

put forward approaches that are primarily concerned with voice use and vocal proficiency and the singing of Western music (Young, 2004), with all of its conventions and aesthetics. According to Young (2006), “this version of singing perpetuates an ideal of pure vocal timbre and the accurate performance of precisely measured pitches and rhythms” (p. 272). This also relates to Young’s (2021) argument about how young children are perceived in their society, and on how they are often marginalised for being considered immature; however, “[m]usic education should be where all children, wherever they are on a map of maturing, depending, gathering experience, are seen as full-status holders, to be met and respected, never arriving, always growing” (p. 404).

2.2. Children’s cultures, cultural norms, and values

Singing, as a practice that always happens in a given sociocultural and social-ecological environment, carries different meanings and values. This consideration helps us understand children’s actions, since children are influenced by their contexts and their contexts are influenced by their presence; it can be said that “children and their contexts mutually constitute each other (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 8). As suggested by Cristina Igoa (2014), “different cultures have different norms, values, worldviews and expectations and those shape their members’ patterns of individual and collective behavior” (p. 17). Values are considered here as “components of any immediate experience”, of what is or what happens, of what we like or what we dislike, because we attach a value or significance to objects, events, situations, and people, and we act according to those judgments (Darras, 2015, p. 67). Furthermore, for Shalom Schwartz (2016) values are “broad, motivational constructs that express what is important to people” (p. 64). Interestingly, whilst values exist across cultures, what individuals and groups consider important can vary greatly from one culture to another. It follows that what singing is for families – and to the children of these families – can differ, and consequently the role of singing in their lives can be very different.

In her studies on children’s learning and development in everyday life situations, Barbara Rogoff (2003) found that children learn and develop through participating in their communities’ socio-cultural activities, in which the interactions of different contexts such as society, culture, economics, religion, and historical background are essential. This means that “for young children, musical learning becomes, then, synonymous with joining in a social activity” (Young, 2018, p. 61). The nature of music as a participatory activity (Turino, 2008) can be similar, in a way, to children’s playground music-making (Harwood & Marsh, 2018), as it functions within its ecology. As has

been shown, children's musical understanding and development is influenced by their family and the support they receive in their social environment (e.g. McPherson et al., 2012). As unique relationships, the home environment and the family influence their identity work to a significant extent, however the role of the society where the children live cannot be underestimated when it comes to influencing children's identities. According to Alan Fogel (1993), individuals think about and develop their sense of self-identity through interpersonal relationships; infants are introduced to their micro-cultures through parent-infant relationships, and through them to the macro-culture or community culture (p. 13). Infants are thus initiated into the micro-culture of the family already from the beginning of life, when music, as part of life, affects families relationships (Pitt, 2014). These connections extend to a wider community, and children start to understand other ways of enactment or interactions and cultures, but this can take time and requires quality interaction.

James et al. (1998) have described the concept of children's culture as "a form of social action, a way of being a child among other children, a particular cultural style, resonant with particular times and places" (p. 90). Moreover, they argued that "in exploring the ways in which children manage to make sense of their diverse encounters it may be possible to see how their strategic use of particular cultural styles of performance leads to a way of being and belonging which we gloss as 'children's culture'" (p. 98). The concept of interpretive reproduction by William A. Corsaro (2005) is at the core of children's culture, because children construct these cultures not only because they are motivated by the possibility of gaining control of their lives, but also to share that control with other children. Corsaro (2000) has defined children's peer culture "as a stable set of activities or routines, artifacts, values and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers" (p. 92).

Children's cultures have also been studied in culturally diverse contexts. For example, studies of older children and youths of second-generation immigrants have shown the influence of social relationships in the formation of identities. Lisa Haayen (2016), in a study of second-generation immigrant youths in the United States, described how close friendships among youths of similar backgrounds are built. She found out that youths create "spaces of friendship" that are dynamic social spaces important for the production, development, and performance of personal identities (p. 75). As she claims, "not only do friendships help youth to produce their personal identities by validating their conceptualizations of themselves; they also function as social spaces where identities can be developed" (p. 75). Further, "friends validate individual youth's notions of who they 'are'

as unique individuals” (p. 80). In a similar way, childhood friendships may function as a safe social space in which children are able to perform unique personal identities. This is particularly important in the context of a culturally diverse school and the first grade of school, where children usually need the support of a group of peers to get started in school life and its interactions.

Student’s values develop in relation to their closest circles of interaction, in a microsystem; these values influence their lives to a great extent and transcend the broader contexts of those interactions. It is precisely through the interactions generated within those extended circles that students learn to situate themselves (with their values and beliefs) in contexts such as school and society at large. That process of situating or “coming into presence” as unique individuals, as defined by Biesta (2006, p. 10, 34), happens when interacting with others who are different from us. Those interactions influence student’s agency and identity formation to a great extent. For example, regarding a discussion on immigrant children’s integration into educational settings in the United States, Igoa (2014) found that sometimes these children “think their beliefs and values are literally ‘thrown to the wind’ when they encounter the new culture” (p. 67). In this sense, supporting the creation of a safe space for these children, where their values and beliefs are recognised without being ridiculed, is crucial. In such an educational environment, children would be “free to feel different, be different, and make friends who are different. Together the children can find that they have more in common than they imagine” (p. 67). It can also be said that in safe spaces children feel free to make friends with children who do not share similar beliefs or values. This may enable them to find other means of connection, such as through making music or singing, to explore their relationships and to accept their differences as part of these relationships (and to accept what they have in common and what they do not have in common) in a holistic way. It is in this sense that singing can help children *create spaces* that provide opportunities for interpersonal and sociocultural connections. However, this does not happen automatically; co-constructed learning processes take time to come into being, and are influenced by children’s singing ecologies.

Researchers have pointed out that children’s musical cultures are pluralistic in nature, and that children can be members of various sub-cultures at the same time (Campbell, 2002). This means that there is no one children’s musical culture, but many, and that children’s musical cultures are in constant movement. Studies of Kathryn Marsh (2008, 2013) have shown the characteristics of children’s playground songs and musical games, and the ways in which children, as agents, take these songs from their cultures and

adapt them to their own contexts and needs. The idea of early childhood as a period of life in which children “move back and forth through Bronfenbrenner’s systems”, crossing borders and interacting with people in different places, has been addressed by Peter Whiteman in his chapter in the *Oxford Handbook of Children’s Musical Cultures* (2013); he affirms that by crossing borders children “actively engage with others and shape their cultures that in turn shape them” (p. 467). Music, songs, and musical games are part of this sharing of culture and “crossing borders dynamics” that influence children’s musical cultures, and within which children “move in and out, and through a range of musical tradition and customs as they weave new musical cultures with members of their families, schools, and communities” (Whiteman, 2013, p. 468). In this way, and leaning on the previously described concept of interpretive reproduction by Corsaro (2005), Whiteman (2013) has argued that “rather than the reproduction of established musical mores, these rich, sophisticated, and multifaceted musical cultures come about through children’s agency in musicking anew and adapting and recasting existing musics and practices” (p. 468). In other words, children’s musical cultures are much more than sites of preservation; they are also “sites for generation and renewal of cultural practices” (Barrett, 2023, p. 113). Kanellopoulos (2023) has also argued that children are “indispensable cultural agents” “who use, reuse, appropriate, transform, create and co create sound, music, participatory music performances and frameworks for making music on the basis of the affordances induced by the different cultural contexts in which they find themselves” (p. 141). Learning from this literature, this dissertation aims to explore the concept of children’s musical cultures through a socio ecological lens, focusing on its relationalities and connecting it to the child’s agency and political voice.

2.3. Functions of singing in childhood

According to Patricia Campbell (2002), “for young children, musical meaning is deeply related to function” (p. 61). In her studies, Campbell (2002) utilized Alan P. Merriam’s categories of uses or functions of music to stand the meanings of singing in childhood, noting that in “real life” these functions overlap one another. Merriam’s categories (1964), or lists of functions, of music in the lives of children utilized by Campbell in her study (2002, p. 61) are listed below.

It can be said that children’s meaning-making is constructed in the intersections of these categories, and through them; the space (physical, metaphorical, social) where these interactions occur may change the meanings significantly. As Campbell (2002) claimed, it is important to transcend the mere description of “how children use music” (p. 61). The making of meaning needs to be

Table 1. Functions of music in children’s lives (Campbell, 2002, p. 61).

Emotional Expression	<p>Singing far from everyone and everything. For releasing emotions, expressing feelings, and exploring musical thoughts without interference.</p> <p>Singing when safe at home.</p> <p>Singing when “I am happy”.</p>
Aesthetic Enjoyment	<p>Enjoyment is shown with body expressions, it is visible.</p>
Entertainment	<p>Music entertains children, and music is also part of the games that children play.</p>
Communication	<p>From an early age, parents and infants share a “prelinguistic alphabet”: infant direct speech and infant vocal sounds (Papousek, 1996). As children grow, music continues to function in this way.</p>
Physical Response	<p>Music and movement are inseparable for many children: e.g. dancing.</p> <p>Moving with the music. “Music moves and it makes you move.”</p> <p>Movement as a means of musical engagement.</p>
Enforcement of Conformity to Social Norms	<p>To provide instructions. This is adult-initiated, but children respond to them.</p>
Validation of Religious Rituals	<p>Songs of religious themes learned at churches, temples, religious schools, and at home.</p>
Continuity and Stability of Culture	<p>For linking the children to their cultural heritage. For maintaining the values of their culture.</p>
Integration of Society	<p>Music brings children together. Singing games bring them together.</p>

studied relationally, considering the various aspects that are part of children’s lives, including their singing ecologies. While children can actively build meaning, and singing can help them develop as agentic individuals (e.g. Barrett, 2006; 2011; Dean 2019), they also need opportunities to use music to develop that agency. As adults, educators, parents, and scholars, we are

involved in children's upbringing and in offering them opportunities to grow. Singing is also part of that upbringing and, for example, singing at home is very present in early childhood years. According to Inkeri Ruokonen et al. (2021), "music and singing are integral to quality early childhood education and children's positive learning, emotional, social and adult interaction experiences" (p. 642), affecting children's social interactions and well-being. Lori-Ann Custodero (2006) studied the singing practices of ten three-year-old children's families living in New York and identified various types and functions of these singing practices. In her study, data were collected from the parent's initial interviews, when they received instructions, and during follow-up interviews. The study showed how singing was used in those particular families to make routine activities special and to create and maintain traditions. These results resonate with the findings of Jessica Pitt (2014), who showed that the use of music in daycare settings can help children regulate their mood and feeling more secure during daily routines' transition times. Saarikallio (2009) found four regulatory functions of music in early childhood that could be initiated either by the children themselves (especially as children grow up) or by adults: "music helped the children to calm down, to keep concentrated and interested, to express and enhance happiness and energy level, and to fantasize through mental imagery" (p. 461). Furthermore, studies have shown that children use music "to 'regulate' and manipulate their feeling-states, a process that suggests a growing understanding of self, of emotional and feeling states, and the ways in which these may be monitored as a component of identity work" (Barrett, 2011, p. 407).

Tia DeNora's studies (2000) have shown that music can assist individuals in this process of self-regulation and the construction of self-identity, and argued that "music is appropriated by individuals as a resource for the ongoing constitution of themselves and their social psychological, physiological and emotional states" (p. 47). For the children, singing can also provide companionship, and children might sing to comfort themselves (e.g. Barrett, 2016; Dean, 2019; Custodero, 2006). Children not only sing at home to entertain themselves and to accompany their play, but also to explore their identities, to communicate their feeling states, and to nurture social bonding (e.g. Barrett, 2011; Campbell, 2010; Papoušek, 1996). Children's singing at home has been associated with creativity, self expression, and imagination, and children's invented songs have been considered forms of musical storying through which they understand the world and "perform and enact ways of being" (Barrett, 2011, p. 406).

The discussion about the uses of singing in childhood also relates to public singing and private singing. These terms have been considered through the

concepts of *social singing* and *self-directed singing* (Dean, 2017). Social singing is “singing with, for or in the presence of others when some degree of connection or communication is sought. Self-directed singing refers to singing that is only intended for the self” (p. 2). In a recent study of solitude and singing, Bronya Dean (2021) found that children use “self-directed singing” to influence themselves and the world in which they live. She argued that when children are alone they use their voices as a tool to shape their everyday experiences, not only engaging with their internal world but also with their external world. Dean’s (2021) research has also suggested that the children who participated in the study (of approximately 3 years old) used singing to transform their everyday experiences, and that, for example, “when a child’s opportunities for movement are restricted, singing can be harnessed to enliven a static situation and temporarily raise mundane experience to the realm of play” (p. 9).

Questions arise in relation to *how* singing functions for children in everyday life – within their social-ecological spaces, in public and private spaces – and how the interactions developed within the various subsystems wherein children interact (e.g. school, home, communities), influencing children’s agency and identities. If one considers that early childhood is a moment of exploration and discovery of one’s own emotions and feelings, singing can be equally or even more important for young children than for adults. The beginning of primary school (at age 6-7 in Finland) marks an inflection point in children’s lives, as social interactions and relationships expand and develop and children learn new things about themselves and others; these childhood experiences – including musical and singing experiences – tend to have a long-lasting impact on people’s lives, and the emotions and feelings connected to those experiences can be well recalled later in adult life (e.g. Vestad, 2014; Welch, 2016). During childhood, deeply rooted experiences of life are established while the foundations of the child’s identity develop (Trevvarthen, 2002, p. 22). It follows that children’s singing, and the functions of singing in childhood, should be understood in relation to the places and spaces children inhabit (and in which they build socio-ecological relationships), such as school and home; the emergence of children’s political voices are conditioned by the environment.

2.4. Children’s singing and vocal development

The musical development of infants and young children has been extensively researched. The research foci vary from ‘communicative musicality’ as a form of interactive ‘intonation’ between infants and first caregivers (Trevvarthen 2002), to the origin of the intersubjective multimodal interactions of infants as part of culture (Dissanayake, 2000, 2009), to the emergence of early vocal play

at around 4 to 6 months (Papousek, M., 1996; Papousek, H., 1996), as well as infant-direct-singing (and speech) and first caregiver emotional connections (Trehub et al., 1998; Trehub et al., 2003; Trehub 2011), to longitudinal studies of singing development from prenatal to 6 years (Tafari, 2008), and of 18 months to four-years-old children (Barrett, 2009, 2011, 2012), including children's singing and play in different contexts such as the playground and home (Custodero, 2006; Young, 2002, 2006). Research conducted in Western societies has shown an increasingly diverse vocal activity in the first year of life, where infant's vocalizations are clued into the language of their culture (e.g. Welch, 2016, 2002). In particular, Johannella Tafari's longitudinal study of children from pregnancy to age six (2008) has shown that infants' musical trajectory and musical development are always in relation to their environment and their social interactions (see also Tafari & Villa, 2002). In the pre-school years, children's singing behaviour exhibits an increasing interaction with the sounds of the native culture; it is between the ages of 1 and 5 years when this interaction manifests in children's different singing behaviours (Welch, 2016). As stated by Welch (2016, p. 444), these singing behaviours "relate to the young child's acquisitive, playful, creative and spontaneous nature as they engage with and make sense of their 'local' musical world" (e.g. Barrett, 2011; Niland, 2012).

While in this research the focus is on children's experiences of singing, I acknowledge that children's vocal development perspectives have attracted considerable attention over the last decades in relation to the study of children's singing (e.g. models of vocal development and pitch-matching rate scales, singing proficiency, adjustments to the melodic contour, vocal range, and age related activities). Young children's increasingly sophisticated way of learning new songs from their native culture has been studied by different authors, and in different context within Western societies (see Lu et al., 2017; Mónaco, 2012; Welch, 2016), focussing on children's individual vocal development and singing proficiency. Children's vocal aptitudes and pitch accuracy development – from early age to school age – have been studied extensively, and different models of vocal development have been created and replicated (e.g. Davidson, 1985; Dowling, 1984; Rutkowski, 1990, 1997; Welch, 2002, 2006, 2016). In what follows I will describe the models of vocal development more frequently cited and replicated: one developed in the USA (Rutkowski, 1986, 1997) and the other in the UK (Welch, 1997, 1998).

Joanne Rutkowski's model (1986) of vocal development was created as an instrument to measure children's use of their singing voice. Rutkowski's singing voice development measure (SVDM) was designed, piloted, and implemented in the USA over 15 years. According to Welch (2006), the Rutkowski model is close to another longitudinal model developed in the

USA by Lyle Davidson (1994), which focused on the schematic processing of the melodic contour. Five levels of pitch development in young children's singing were identified for children aged one to six. Those levels were created as expanding from a basic melodic contour scheme, where the pitch interval was a third, to a more expanded one, with an octave (Welch, 2009).

Rutkowski's original version of the SVDM, which included 5 rating scales ranging from "pre-singers" to "singers", is described below (Rutkowski, 1997, p. 203). The original version of the rating scale developed by Rutkowski (1986) can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. Singing rating scale (Rutkowski, 1986).

1 "Pre-singer"- does not sing but chants the song text.
2 "Speaking Range Singer" - sustains tones and exhibits some sensitivity to pitch, but remains in the speaking voice range (usually A2 to C3).
3 "Uncertain Singer" - waivers between speaking and singing voices, uses a limited range when in singing voice (usually up to F3).
4 "Initial Range Singer" - exhibits use of initial singing range (usually D3 to A3).
5 "Singer" - exhibits use of extended range (sings beyond the register lift: B3-flat and above).

A revised, second version and then a third version of the SVDM were later proposed by Rutkowski, and included a study with first grade student participants during the 1991–1992 school year. In the third version of the model, additional rating levels were added, allowing for a more accurate evaluation of children's use of their singing voices (Rutkowski, 1997). The final rating scale, with explicative comments from the author, can be found below.

Table 3. Singing rating scale (Rutkowski 1997, p. 207).

1 "Pre-singer" - does not sing but chants the song text
1.5 "Inconsistent Speaking Range Singer" - sometimes chants, sometimes sustains tones and exhibits some sensitivity to pitch but remains in the speaking voice range (usually A2 to C3)
2 "Speaking Range Singer" - sustains tones and exhibits some sensitivity to pitch but remains in the speaking voice range (usually A2 to C3)
2.5 "Inconsistent Limited Range Singer" - waivers between speaking and singing voices and uses a limited range when in singing voice (usually up to F3)
3 "Limited Range Singer" - exhibits consistent use of limited singing range (usually D3 to F3)
3.5 "Inconsistent Initial Range Singer" - sometimes only exhibits use of limited singing range, but other times exhibits use of initial singing range (usually D3 to A3)
4 "Initial Range Singer" - exhibits consistent use of initial singing range (usually D3 to A3)
4.5 "Inconsistent Singer" - sometimes only exhibits use of initial singing range, but other times exhibits use of extended singing range (sings beyond the register lift: B3-flat and above)
5 "Singer" - exhibits use of extended singing range (sings beyond the register lift: B3-flat and above)

Rutkowski’s model shows the relationship between music and language in singing, and how this relationship affects student’s singing learning; it draws connections between children’s singing and speech patterns and acknowledges differences in individual children’s responses and their ability to learn a song’s music and text. In contrast to Rutkowski’s approach, the pioneering work of Moog (1976b) identified three stages of singing development, where words are the first element of a song that is imitated, followed by the rhythm, and then by pitch.

Although studying the relationship between speech patterns and singing evaluation is not the focus of this study, acknowledging children’s individual processes in singing, and attending to linguistic relationships (and a song’s lyrics) is important. This aspect of singing can open a profound discussion, especially as related to culturally diverse schools that are attended by children who come from various cultural backgrounds, who have different family languages, and who learn Finnish language as they interact in various social contexts, including school.

In the UK, a vocal pitch-matching development model (VPMD) was created by Welch et al. (1997, 1998). A three-year longitudinal study of 184 children who attended the first three years of compulsory primary school in the UK showed that singing behaviour is influenced by age and sex, and is task specific (Welch, 2009). Welch’s revised model of vocal pitch-matching development (1998) includes 4 phases that range from “chant like” singing to the “perfect pitch” singing. Welch’s model of vocal pitch development (MVPD) (1998) can be found in Table 4.

Table 4. Model of vocal pitch development (MVPD) (Welch, 1998, p. 35).

<p>Phase 1 The words of the song appear to be the initial centre of interest rather than the melody, singing is often described as ‘chant-like’, employing a restricted pitch range and melodic phrases. In infant vocal pitch exploration, descending patterns predominate.</p> <p>Phase 2 There is a growing awareness that vocal pitch can be a conscious process and that changes in vocal pitch are controllable. Sung melodic outline begins to follow the general (macro) contours of the target melody or key constituent phrases. Tonality is essentially phrase based. Self-invented and ‘schematic’ songs ‘borrow’ elements from the child’s musical culture. Vocal pitch range used in ‘song’ singing expands.</p> <p>Phase 3 Melodic shape and intervals are mostly accurate, but some changes in tonality may occur, perhaps linked to inappropriate register usage. Overall, however, the number of different reference pitches is much reduced.</p> <p>Phase 4 No significant melodic or pitch errors in relation to relatively simple songs from the singer’s musical culture.</p>

The discussion related to music and lyrics is also engaged with in Welch's studies (Welch et al., 1997, 1998), but this topic is approached from a different perspective when compared to Rutkowski's studies (1997). For Welch, children's ability to sing adjusting to tonic pitched appears to develop at a slower pace than the ability to learn the lyrics of the songs. This has also been found in a three-year longitudinal study that involved children attending their first three years of compulsory education in the UK (Welch et al., 1997, 1998). As Welch explains, the participants demonstrated little improvement regarding matching the sung pitches of the assigned songs, while they learned the words of the songs extremely well, even at the age of 5 (Welch, 2009, p. 4).

In the same study, Welch and colleagues (1997, 1998) observed that deconstructing the pitch elements of the songs into simpler musical tasks helped the children to gain significantly more pitch accuracy – something also demonstrated on a year-by-year basis. As an example, task deconstruction is when the children are asked to match individual pitches, or to imitate small melodic fragments (Welch, 2009). In the study, no gender differences were found when considering the deconstruction of tasks, however when assigned the task of singing a complete song boy's vocal abilities tended to decrease, as well as in the long term (Welch et al., 1997, 1998). Previous research has shown how the two scales developed by Rutkowski (1997) and Welch (1998) can be used alongside each other to research complementary aspects of singing (Welch, 2009). For example, the "Sing up" program in the UK, which was conducted in primary schools with children from 7 years old, focused on group singing and used both Rutkowski's and Welch's rating scales, separately and in a combined form.

Whilst these models of vocal development and vocal pitch-matching may be important for understanding children's vocal development, it is currently recognized that "the path of development is not necessarily linear for any particular individual" (Welch, 2016, p. 444). For example, Welch (2009) explains that when studying the spontaneous first songs of young children (2 years old's) in the USA, Davidson (1994) found that "phrases are the initial musical units" that present descending contour, limited vocal range, and a degree of tonal disconnection (p. 117). However, contrary to these findings, Tafuri (2008) in a study of 2–3 years-old Italian children found that for some children imitating a complete melody modelled by the mother was easier than singing individual phrases of the same songs. To what extent these differences are dependent on the context, the particular material, the cultural elements, or the social relationships remains open. For example, both of the models described above originated in English speaking countries and emerged from a particular socio-ecological situatedness. Limitations regarding the

analysis have also been noted, since the models are solely based on auditory analysis. Thus, the analyser's tendency to categorise unconventional singing through a Western musical lens cannot be ignored (Stadler Elmer & Elmer, 2000). Moreover, these models of singing development may have been successful in studying individual aspects of singing development, but they have been restructured and replicated without much questioning of issues such as individual differences, group/peers influences, family environment, or the cultural background of the students. Nevertheless, international research projects of the last decades have frequently cited these models, favouring, in a way, the emergence of implicit cultural bias on children's singing research, children's vocal development and singing learning – aside from children's cultures, musical traditions, values, and experiences.

2.5. Singing, identity work, and agency

As has been argued, singing is not only a channel for expression but is also important for children's growth, for them to understand themselves, and for their identity work (Barrett, 2011). The use of the specific term "identity work" acknowledges the continuously ongoing and evolving nature of identity (Snow et al., 1987), and it is essential to understand the ways in which identity work occurs (e.g. Barrett 2011; Goopy 2020) within places and spaces and in relation to children's subjectivity and agency. In this way music, and especially singing, "emerges as a flexible, open-ended, and powerful element of 'identity work' during which children "make sense of their lives" (Mueller, 2002, p. 595 in Kok, 2006, p. 68). Singing is a part of children's daily routines; for example, children tend to sing freely, usually while moving and dancing (Barrett, 2009, 2011, 2012; Bjorkvold, 1989; Campbell, 1998; Huhtinen-Hildén & Pitt, 2018; Marsh, 2017; Niland, 2012; Young, 2006), singing songs while playing games (e.g. Marsh, 2005, 2017; Moore, 2002; Niland, 2012), or inventing songs that often relate to family happenings and life events and include significant others (e.g. Barrett, 2016, 2009; Dean, 2019; Knudsen, 2008; Young, 2003a). However, it is also important to note that whilst most young children in Western cultures can sing freely at home, choose what to sing, when to sing, where to sing, and with whom to sing (particularly when they are at home and not at educational institutions) can be very different for children of non-western cultures, where, for example, music may be prohibited because of religious beliefs (e.g. Harris, 2006). In such cases, singing in school can be experienced by the children with a completely different meaning. Researchers have also shown connections between singing and identity, for example in how children can experience a fear of public singing, as it may relate to experiences of their singing being graded in front

of the classroom (e.g., Numminen, 2005; Whidden, 2015). Therefore, singing is intrinsically entangled in children’s lives in ways that makes it impossible to separate singing from children’s subjectivities and social-ecological systems.

Identity work and subjectivity relate to each other, as singing functions as a tool for identifying how one feels, and thus it is a “building material of subjectivity” (DeNora, 2000, p. 57); it is about acknowledging our inner feelings in and through singing. It follows that identity and agency are overlapping concepts in the classroom. Gaining agency can empower children to explore their identities and also to transcend their boundaries and learn more about themselves and about who they want to become. MacDonald and colleagues (2002) have discussed musical identities from a psychological standpoint and made a distinction between ‘identities in music’ (IIM), including those aspects of musical identities that are defined by “established cultural roles” and “music in identities” (MII) when referring to how we use music for self-identities. Lamont (2002) studied musical identities in the school environment using Bronfenbrenner’s theoretical tools, and suggested that children would be able to develop a musician’s identity only around the age of seven, when they can first differentiate identities. However, more recently, the authors included another essential aspect of musical identities: the performative and social aspects of musical identities (Hargreaves et al., 2017; Lamont, 2017). As David Hargreaves et al., (2017) explain, musical identities: “Represent something that we *do*, rather than something that we *have*, namely, the ways in which we jointly engage with music in everyday life” (p. 5, original italics). This also relates to ecological agency, as both constructs (agency and identity) are temporal and relational – something people can achieve rather than something people have (or do not have).

Following this line of thought, and studying musical identities from a sociological perspective and within specific contexts, DeNora (2017) has described how identities are emergent and dependent upon five features:

- 1) Identities as exchangeable, tradable, and stealable;
 - 2) Identities are both resources and statuses;
 - 3) Identities are plastic, malleable;
 - 4) The malleability of identities involves hybridization;
 - 5) This hybridization highlights the ways that identities take shape relationally, produced through reference to things outside individuals.
- (DeNora, 2017, pp. 59– 60)

According to DeNora, understanding the ways in which identities are manifested through social interactions, and in a variety of situations, helps

us to better understand the plasticity of identities. This can also be seen in childhood, for example when children construct their identities in and through their songs (e.g. Barrett, 2006). This helps our understanding that identities are:

Produced, distributed and consumed over time and space, how the plasticity of identities arises as people make and move through situations, social relations and circumstances, as they become attached and detached from aspects of their material and symbolic environments. (Barrett , 2006, p. 48)

Singing is a practice that is deeply rooted in *who we are*; but is also a practice that reminds us of *who we were* in a certain moment of our life (DeNora, 2000), something that can recapture the agency of that space and moment. DeNora (2003, 2013, 2017) acknowledges the temporal aspects of identities: the *before*, *during*, and *after* of identities, where “appropriation of affordances, attachment and detachment lead to identity change” (p. 48). Not only adults, but also children remember their feelings in connection with particular songs or vocal sounds, and sometimes we can tell stories that connect us with that past, with those life experiences. This is part of our human intersubjectivity, which is “constitutive of our very identity from our earliest days, and it is the birthplace of meaning” (Johnson, 2007, p. 51). In this way, as DeNora (2000) explains, music may be seen to serve “as a container” for the temporal structures of the past,

to the extent that, first time musical memories and feelings through, a past event was constructed and came to be meaningful with reference to music, musical structures may provide a grid or grammar for the temporal structures of emotional and embodied patterns as they were originally experienced. (pp. 67–68)

In this way, by relating the past and the musical abilities of that moment, past feelings and their ways of being are invoked as part of a reconstitution in which we present ourselves, not only to ourselves but also to others. “In this sense, the past, musically conjured, is a resource for the reflexive movement from present to future, the moment-to-moment production of agency in real time” (pp. 65–66) and in a concrete space.

The temporal aspects of identities described by DeNora (2003, 2013, 2017) are an essential part of this narrative research when it comes to understanding student’s identity work and agency. Westerlund et al. (2017) utilized the three categories of collective identities developed by Manuel Castells (2010) to analyse children’s identity work and its relations with agency in

the context of diverse music classrooms: The three categories utilized were: i) legitimizing identities, ii) resistance identities, iii) project identities. Exploring these categories, the authors conclude that collective classroom projects that foster the development of “identities of becoming” could be promoted through music education, in order to “create fruitful learning environments for students from a rich variety of national, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and geographical backgrounds” (p. 504). The authors advocate for a balance between “the past and the future” related to identities in music education in culturally diverse societies; this is not only including what students already possess but also considering what could be provided for students’ future identity development – possibilities for choices that could be made throughout their life paths and continuing possibilities of agency development to learn “plurality, change and following uncertainty” (p. 504). Mike Baynham (2015, p. 67) has stated that “identity is ‘brought about’ interactively, rather than ‘brought along’ and that “narrative is privileged as a site for researching identity”. Similarly, Anna De Fina (2015, 2003, 2006) accounts for the connection between narratives and identities. She affirmed that

narratives are a privileged genre in the negotiation of identities, as narrators construct story worlds in which they act in different capacities and use these story worlds to project and negotiate with their interlocutors images of themselves and of others as human and moral beings. (De Fina, 2015, p. 51)

Ylva Svensson and colleagues (2018) agree on the important role of stories, as “it is through the stories that people tell that identity is constructed and through which individuals make sense of who they are and what they have experienced” (p. 188).

In the context of this dissertation, student’s identity work in culturally diverse classrooms is conceived as permeated by student’s understandings of themselves, “but also through questions of what they are able to *do*, and who they are *becoming*” (Westerlund et.al., 2017, p. 493). Children’s individual identities are socially constructed, and consequently intricately intertwined with their identity development (Niland, 2019, p. 21). As Peter McInnes and Sandra Corlett (2012) explain, identity is “something that must be strived for, justified and defended on an on-going basis in everyday interaction” (p. 27) – even more so in culturally diverse classrooms where, for example, children may use singing to establish themselves within the socio ecological systems where they live.

Following the premise that “music is often employed as both a process in which identity/ies are constructed and a vehicle by which these are told to self and others” (Barrett, 2017a, p. 64), in this study the narratives of primary school children who attend a Finnish culturally diverse school are constructed and analysed. In order to carry out this task, moving away from the idea of identity as an object towards the idea of identity work (identity as a process) has been fundamental. This means abandoning the question of “what is somebody’s identity?” to focus on the question “how do they construct what they present as their identity?” or “how do they identify themselves?” (Risager et al., 2015, p. 8). Or, even more, how children’s agency enacted within places and spaces relates to children’s identity and to their political voice and subjectivity – reflecting on what children can potentially do with that identity (Biesta, 2021).

3. Towards Theorising Children’s Singing Ecologies

3.1. Beyond individualistic skill-oriented perspectives on singing

Research on children’s vocal development and their process of learning to sing has dominated the field of music education for decades. This research has, however, opened up a specific and valuable perspective for understanding the different vocal stages, or possible (hypothetical) developmental paths, that children pass through. Nevertheless, these models of singing development, which stem from the psychology of music and developmental psychology, have a tendency to universalize singing development in childhood, and establishing such models of development actually restricts interest in other aspects of singing. According to Kanellopoulos (2010), “psychology has not only colonised our perspective on childhood but has deeply affected educational thinking” (p. 121). Young has similarly pointed out that this tendency, which has created a universal singing development paradigm for childhood singing, has long been questioned (e.g. Young, 2006, 2018). For instance, Christine Thompson and Liora Bresler (2002) claimed decades ago that “the developmental process itself is far more idiosyncratic, culturally specific, and malleable than we had thought” (p. 5), illustrating a paradigm change in the study of children’s development in the field of music education. This resonates with the discussions generated decades ago in the field of sociology of childhood in which Prout and James (1990) argued for the need of a new paradigm in the study of childhood, moving beyond psychological models of development towards a new conception of childhood. In this conception, children are considered active social agents who are able to influence their own processes and the structures around them (albeit with limitations), depending on their environment.

This research steps away from the approaches in which *all* children are expected to ‘fit’ within certain developmental paths, and rather suggests recognising children’s uniqueness and their individual differences (e.g. in line with Young, 2018; Barrett, 2011; Kanellopoulos, 2010) as they navigate between various social ecological systems. It is in this sense that children’s singing ecologies are believed to illuminate our new understanding of what singing might *mean* for children within places and spaces – and in-between spaces created by themselves. As previously pointed out, children’s spontaneous singing, its attributes, and the ways in which children’s spontaneous singing intertwine with other forms of play – all of which are rich musical activities – have

attracted significantly less attention in music education research (Young, 2006). In general, according to Young (2006), the relational aspects of singing remain under-researched, with the literature showing only partially what singing is and how it functions in the lives of children. As early childhood music education researcher Amanda Niland (2012) states, few studies have focussed on studying what singing and songs mean to children themselves and how they can influence early childhood settings and musical cultures. For example, little is known about how children experience the connections between meaningful singing and their vocal abilities (both inside and outside school), or how relevant adult-defined vocal proficiency is for the children themselves. Whilst some of these questions go beyond the scope of this study, they demonstrate the complexity of children's singing when considering it from the perspective of the child's experience. Building on Biesta's views (2017), according to which education is about what it *means* and not about what it produces (p. 54), singing in education is here approached in terms of what it means for the child instead of what it produces in terms of proficiency – from the adult's perspective. Exploring singing ecologies is expected to help us understand what singing means for the child, focussing on the child's perspective here and now, and not on an adult's vision of a productive future.

In this context, it is important to recognize that young children who enter formal schooling already possess “a rich repertoire of music, [and] a capacity to engage in embodied musical experience” (Barrett & Welch, 2021, p. 1239). As my experiences of teaching various cohorts of students from diverse cultural backgrounds over many years has revealed, children's vocal development and their relationship with singing can greatly vary. Not only do some children veer away from pre-established developmental paths, but other children may also follow them in their own individual personal ways, transiting particular – and many times unpredictable – paths. This discussion expands to considering *what is musical* and *for whom*, because recognizing childhoods as socially constructed and acknowledging the existence of various musical childhoods (Rodoff, 2003) is to recognise that there may also be different conceptions of what it means to be musical (Young, 2019) and vocally capable. In this respect, the recent publication of the Oxford Handbook of Early Childhood Learning and Development in Music (2023), edited by Barrett and Welch, marks an inflection, because it acknowledges that music is a fundamental part of human experience and that experiences are diverse and related to the context. In the same handbook, Lucia Benetti and Eugenia Costa-Giomi (2023) analyse three children's singing developmental models to show how the findings and the interpretation of findings are dependent on the questions the research asks, on the data that is analysed, and on the researcher's own theoretical

understandings – which lead to one (among possible others) interpretation of the research findings. Furthermore, Benetti and Costa-Giomi (2023) suggest that:

to begin to understand the processes of changes in early childhood requires acknowledging that development is grounded in real-life experiences. Children learn from what is around them and adapt to the demands and opportunities they encounter in their environments. (p. 56)

The literature review on earlier research in Chapter 2 showed that the field of children’s musical education has evolved even when focusing on development. Young (2018) has suggested that taking a critical view of this field does not necessarily mean that one has to abandon psychological, and particularly developmental, approaches to childhood, but instead it obliges us to “reconstruct them within new disciplinary landscapes” (p. 19). Also, Welch (2022) has acknowledged that: “The diversity of musics in the world... imply that there may be many different sequences of musical development related to context, task, and whatever counts as local and regional musical behaviour” (p. 93). According to him (2022, 2017), children’s agency is related to the specific research task, which at the same time can be more or less connected to the child’s musical competency and musical identity. This aligns with statements of other music education researchers (Barrett, 2011; Hargreaves et al., 2022) who advocate for recognizing the power of culture in shaping children’s musical development. The recent work of Welch (2022) also points out the need to attend to some aspects of musical development that have been historically overlooked:

The research literature on musical development, including my own on children’s singing development, tends to employ simple musical tasks which can be used to make comparisons across large groups of individuals. However, such data gathering also needs to acknowledge the central importance of emotion and engagement, including in musical preferences. (p. 96)

Seen from an ecological perspective, all of this implies that singing development is not only - if at all – the result of an individual child’s educational trajectory. On the contrary, the ecological view recognizes the shaping influence of the various factors present in the ecological systems and subsystems within which children grow and develop (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Biggs, et al., 2021). Accordingly, children’s singing development is also context-related and relational, connected to places and spaces.

3.2. Diverse experiences and ways of connecting with the environment

This study leans further on the premise that childhood is “heterogeneous, complex and emergent, and, because this is so, its understanding requires a broad set of intellectual resources, an interdisciplinary approach and an open-minded process of enquiry” (Prout, 2005, p. 2). There is not one childhood, but many childhoods (James et. al., 1998); in the same way, there is not only one way to relate to the environment, but many possible ways to do so. As such, children’s relationship with the environment has been studied already more than 40 years ago by Edith Cobb (1977), who in her book “The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood” explored how children’s play favours the development of their imagination. For her, “the child’s reality is an interplay between outer and inner worlds, with imagination acting as a vehicle of exchange, the go-between and shaper of life” (1993, p. 9). Cobb recognized the value of ecological science in studying the “reciprocal relations of living organisms with their total environments and with one another as living interdependent systems” (p. 37). Emphasizing that children create their own worlds within worlds – in the context of their communities, families, and within their own private reflections, Cobb (1993) highlights that “the child’s openness to the world and wonder at what exists outside the self instigate creative action” (p. 9). Children’s sense of wonder as a spontaneous response to new experiences and “an expectancy of more wonders to come” precedes the creation of those play structures that are part of the world of children (p. 40). Cobb’s study (1993) shows that although some aspects of childhood could be considered similar, the values, worldviews, norms, and expectations of the children and their rooted experiences of life can vary from each other. Also, in music education, “the designations of what constituted childhood, its characteristic features and developmental contours, differs from place to place, from social group to social group, from culture to culture” (Barrett, 2018, p. 3).

Musicologists Roe-Min Kok and Susan Boynton (2006) have explained that “along with musical sounds and knowledge, children absorb behavioural norms and cultural values”, and also that while appearing very diverse, musical traditions “share connections in function, experience and meaning” (Kok & Boynton, 2006, p. xiii). Indeed, children have their own musical cultures, and by studying children’s musical cultures we can gain a better understanding of children’s musical lives and identities (Barrett, 2006, 2011; Bjørkvold, 1989; Campbell, 2010a; Sundin, 2007). By studying children’s experiences and musical performances, music education researcher Patricia Shehan Campbell (1998, 2010) has shown that children not only reproduce adults’ conceptions

about what music-making is, but also actively form their own musical cultures, which also come with “values that are transmitted in sonic but also physical experiences” (Kok, et al., 2006, p. xiv). For example, children’s musical play and spontaneous singing are used by the children as meaningful mediums in their daily lives (e.g. Barrett, 2011; Björkvold, 1989; Marsh, 2005; Young, 2006). Moreover, instead of considering them empty vessels that simply cognize songs that they are taught in school, children are seen as social beings who explore the world through singing and vocal sounds and play. A contribution to this understanding has been made by the musicologist Jon-Roar Björkvold (1989), at a time when children’s singing focussed mostly on behavioural and developmental research; he explored children’s singing as an interdisciplinary phenomenon using ecological theories to explain children’s singing in relation to their play in three different countries: Norway, the USA, and the Soviet Union. Björkvold (1990) suggested that children are “*homo ludens*”, who “seem to organize their social and cultural relations through play all over the world” (p. 120) – revealing on one hand the existentialist aspect of musical playing and singing, and on the other, the relational aspect of children’s experiencing, and of the ways they connect with the environment.

3.3. Singing, social connectedness, and the sense of belonging

Constructing a sense of community and inclusion in culturally diverse schools is an emerging field of Finnish educational research (however, see Juva et al., 2017; Peltola et al., 2023). Still unexplored, however, is what singing can convey, or what singing can carry for children within the continuous process of community building, and for promoting participants’ sense of belonging and of being part of diverse groups. Enabling equal participation is a key to social inclusion. Tess Ridge (2006) has explained that “‘Fitting in’ and ‘joining in’ with the everyday activities and expectations of peers is a driving force in children’s lives. Without satisfactory opportunities for participation, children’s social lives can be disrupted and restricted” (p. 23). Prout and colleagues (2006) identified three variables that can motivate participation: shared goals, shared values, and sense of community, suggesting that “the more each of these variables is present, the more likely people will be to participate” (p. 79). Although there are differences between adults’ and children’s ways of participation, researchers have developed an ‘analytically symmetrical’ approach to understanding both adults’ and children’s participation (Christensen & Prout, 2002; Prout, 2000, p. xi). By using “a single analytical language”, “differences must be allowed to *arise* from the analysis rather than being a condition of it” (Prout, 2006, p. 95). In this way, the quality of interactions between adults and children and their participation should be understood in context – within

places and spaces – considering carefully the effects of power relations.

As has been shown in previous research (e.g., DeNora, 2000), singing and music can be a motivation or a medium that invites us to interact with others, a medium that accompanies us from our earliest days. For DeNora (2000), music is a medium or a vehicle of social relationships that brings people together or closer to one another. Thus, music can be “a language” of interaction between children and adults, it can offer opportunities for participation – for different ways of participation. However, it is also important to note that music is not only a “meaningful” or “communicative” medium; for DeNora (2000, p. 16), at the level of everyday life, music has a special power:

Music may influence how people compose their bodies, how they conduct themselves, how they experience the passage of time, how they feel – in terms of energy and emotion – about themselves, about others and about situations. In this respect, music may imply and, in some cases, elicit associated modes of conduct. (p. 17)

If music can potentially imply or elicit “associated modes of conduct”, as DeNora (2000) suggests, then it is important to learn more about how these modes of conducts function – as they are associated with music (or with certain types of musics), places, and spaces, and are part of children’s daily life experiences, interactions, and identities. Moreover, we may ask what these “associated modes of conduct” would be for the children in connection with singing places and spaces and within the primary school environment. Are there significant connections between student’s modes of conduct in singing spaces and students’ motivation for sustained collective learning? The topic calls for wider investigations and discussions that exceed the scope of this dissertation. However, it exemplifies the lack of knowledge and problematization of the ecologies of singing in childhood; it shows the challenges to fully understanding the meanings of singing within children’s spaces – particularly because a partialized view of singing in childhood has dominated the field of music education.

As a starting point, this research suggests that singing in childhood could be explored and understood in the interrelations of the ecological systems and subsystems where the child lives. A profound understanding of singing and what it means in childhood, and particularly for children in culturally diverse schools, may support teacher’s work when aiming to enhance student’s motivation to ‘join in’ singing activities, while

experiencing a sense of “being present” (Biesta, 2006), and in this way developing a sense of belonging to the school and classroom community.

3.4. Singing as affordance

In what follows, singing is seen as an affordance for children’s multiple situational experiences, interests, and emotions. The term affordance was originally proposed by Gibson (1977, 1979) to approach visual perception, “at a time in which the representational approach to perception was at odds with a more ecological approach” (Chong & Proctor, 2020, p. 122). For James J. Gibson (1979), affordances were “relationships that exist naturally that do not require preexisting knowledge or necessarily need to be perceived” (Chong & Proctor, 2020, p. 120): “affordances are *perceived directly*, which is to say without intervening images, mental representations, inferences, or other processes” (Wilkinson & Chemero, 2024, n.p., italics added). Lately, researchers have applied the notion of affordance to inform “the nature of emotions and affectivity, agency, social cognition, neurodiversity, psychopathology, and...mental actions such as conscious thought and imagination” (Jorba & López-Silva, 2024, n.p.), thus also including affordances that are based on mental representations (Chong & Proctor, 2020) that are generated by our social and cultural environments.

DeNora (2003), in the music context, explains that affordance refers to the “music’s abilities to... ‘get into the action’, its mediating role in relation to social action and experience” (p. 170). In this dissertation’s ecological framework, affordance needs to be seen beyond the “perceptual origin of the notion” (Jorba & López-Silva, 2024, n.p.) in relation to the Deweyan pragmatist relational concept of experience and situational cognition. Then, experience is understood not as “a psychic realm that exists to the side of the natural and material world” (Westerlund, 2002, p. 48), but as “doing, trying out deliberately meanings in life”, in other words, as “a matter of interaction, or transaction” in the social and material world (p. 47). Experience is thus “ultimately social”, as it involves contact and communication (p. 47); however, it is not simply social, but it is “‘of the world’ in the sense of ‘in the world’ where being involves interaction with both the physical and the social environment” (p. 49). Moreover, the temporal aspect of experience and affordance is crucial; hence, what singing produces or brings forth also depends on children’s prior singing experiences and on the present and past circumstances of use (see also, DeNora, 2000). The meaning of singing is thus related to uses, and these uses further affect meaning-making processes. However, as DeNora (2000) states, “[t]he idea that music’s meanings are constituted in and through use in no way implies that music’s

meaning is entirely indeterminate. To the contrary, music may contribute to the sense that actors make of themselves and their social circumstances” (pp. 43–44). As DeNora (2000) explains, “music (..) provides affordances – for world building...just as music’s meaning may be constructed in relation to things outside it, so, too, things outside music may be constructed in relation to music” (p. 43). Singing and songs may thus help children construct their own spaces, and in-between spaces (Aminpour et al., 2020), and this can also take place in schools. Consequently, children may use singing in completely different manners, and with different meanings, in different places or spaces, not only in order to perform a singing repertoire or show their own skills. Furthermore, as has been shown by DeNora (2000), “music may influence how people compose their bodies, how they construct themselves, how they experience the passage of time, how they feel – in terms of energy and emotion – about themselves, about others, and about situations” (p. 17). Similarly, children are influenced by musical practices, and since their capacities are relational and context dependent, they are influenced by the affordances the socio-cultural environment provides. Hence, affordances do not function independently of children’s ecologies; rather, they are intricately related to them.

3.5. Including children in research

Contemporary research has insisted on the importance of doing research *with* children rather than research *on* children (e.g. Bucknall, 2014; Christensen & James, 2017), considering children as active agents who can influence their own lives. In this type of research the objective is “to include children’s voices in decisions that impact on them and their environment” (O’Reilly & Dogra, 2017, p. 3). According to Michelle O’Reilly and Nisha Dogra (2017), in the past groups of vulnerable children in particular (e.g. children from ethnic minority groups, refugee and asylum seekers, children who are victims of crime or abuse, children with mental disabilities, and others) have been excluded from research in order to protect them. However, she asserts that by taking this position their voices have been excluded and their participation rights removed. Researchers today have recognized the importance of including vulnerable individuals in research. Moreover, research should be conducted with a particular sensitivity and taking into consideration power relations: for example, in interview situations. An interview research can both silence and make children’s voices be heard (O’Reilly & Dogra, 2017). As Janette Habashi in the book “Power and Voice in Research with Children” (Diaz Soto & Swadener, 2005), suggests, “our struggles are in the lack of reflections on adult’s role, and its implications on restricting children’s voices, especially when their views challenge our status quo” (p. 34). The way in which research

is conducted is therefore crucial, as is researchers' awareness of their own preconceptions and beliefs. Thus, the question we should be asking is: "how we should start communicating children's views even if they challenge our scholarship" (p. 34). In line with this premise, this research was approached as a long-time process of reflexivity that not only included learning and reflecting on the research topic, its multidisciplinary angles and boundaries, but also on important ontological questions related to who is a child, to the diversity of childhoods, as well as to my own preconceptions and beliefs.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child of the United Nations (1989), which included the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of children, has had a significant international impact on the perception of children and how they need to be treated. However, there is still much work to do in order to safeguard the lives of children and their rights. In recent years the discussion on the cultural rights of children has indeed received increasing attention. Article 31 in the 1989 UN Convention also addresses the rights of all children to freely participate in cultural life and in arts. This has been noted in Finland, for example in 2019, when a forum was organised to discuss the implementation of the cultural rights of children in the country. The outcome of the forum was expressed in a document in which the international panel of researchers and practitioners put forward "the central role of rich and diverse children's culture and arts, as well as culture education for building a well-functioning and democratic society" (Tampere paper, 2019, p. 1). Furthermore, the forum stressed that "the child is an active agent in their own life and an active contributor and creator of culture" (p. 1). Six recommendations were made to respond to six identified critical issues, namely: 1) securing every child's right to participation, 2) advancing multi-professional co-operation and partnerships, 3) understanding diversity and the advancements of wellbeing, 4) encouraging critical thinking and self-expression, 5) building and supporting sustainable communities, and 6) arts education and cultural education founded on current research.

This research has been designed to make space for children's voices concerning their singing experiences and the meanings they attribute to singing. Children are not often consulted on issues that affect them and their lives, which reaffirms the idea that children's opinions are undervalued in our societies and neither fully understood nor heard, as pointed out in the Finnish Child Strategy (Kansallinen Lapsistrategia, 2021). This absence of children's perspectives and political voices has been noted in multiple disciplines. In the field of Philosophy of childhood and children, it is now recognised that children are able to do essential philosophical things, such as asking philosophical questions

– which grow out of their genuine curiosity; thinking about the meaning of concepts and situations of everyday life, and engaging in conversations that have a philosophical tone and evolve around philosophical topics (e.g. Haynes, 2009; Lone, 2012, 2019; McCall, 2009). For example, Jana Mohr Lone (2019) affirms that young children tend to ask profound questions, often related to larger philosophical issues of life such as ethics, the purpose of life, or death, but adults tend to diminish the value of these questions just because they are formulated by children. Children approach these questions with “openness” and authentic curiosity, something that tends to diminish in adulthood; as Lone (2019, 2012) suggests, philosophical discussions (and encouraging philosophical conversations) can help children gain the confidence to make their voices heard and be taken more seriously (Lone, 2021; Mathews, 1994).

While awareness of the absence of children’s voices has grown, there has been an increasing interest in research and policy that focus on children’s rights in Finland and internationally. Sue Bucknall (2014) suggests, however, that researchers and policy makers must be aware of the need for continuous critical reflection in order to respect children’s rights. It is necessary to question our findings and beliefs, to be reflective throughout the research process, and to connect with our own childhood experiences in order to better understand the experiences and voices of others (Lahman, 2008). As Bucknall (2014) has stated, particularly in studies with children we need to consider the complexities of voice and to be critical of “the ways in which this might be accessed, represented or silenced” (p. 82). This is fundamental because children’s voices (and even more the voices of children who belong to minority groups) can be easily diluted within adult’s perspectives. Reflexively attending to children’s voices can be even more challenging and necessary in culturally diverse schools, where daily interactions may be influenced by the student’s diverse values and views of the world and by teachers’ abilities to handle daily school situations in this context.

According to Barrett (2016), however, despite the growing research evidence and recognition of student’s agency and their contributions to “speaking to and from their own experiences of schools and schooling”, children’s voices and perspectives are generally absent, and their needs and aspirations are still not taken into account in policymaking (p. 178). This study therefore addresses this research gap, and aims to construct an ecological framework for understanding the meanings that young children themselves ascribe to singing in their lives, and for discussing the implications of considering young children’s perspectives in educational theory and practice.

3.6. Research questions

As stated in Chapter 1.5, the objective of this study is to construct a new ecological understanding of children's singing, conceptualised as *singing ecologies*, in order to contribute to the overall relational ecological understanding of children's singing in and out of schools, arising from the compilation of an empirical study, interdisciplinary reading, and ecological theorisation. The ecological understanding of children's singing, understood from the perspective of the children themselves, can be expected to renew educational contexts and adult-led social-ecological systems, such as schools, in which children can or are expected to sing. The understanding of children's singing ecologies can help teachers deploy the full potential of singing to strengthen children's agency and public political voice in culturally diverse schools. To address the lack of research that acknowledges children's needs and aspirations in singing activities and music education, this study poses the following overarching research question:

RQ. What meanings do children ascribe to singing within their ecologies?

Four sub-questions (SQ1–4) were posed for the empirical material, each of which contributes to the objectives of the study and to answering the main research question. Since the children of this study were chosen from one culturally diverse school in Finland in which singing was part of the education, it was necessary to also interview the teachers of the children. In order to understand this particular ecosystemic environment for singing, the following sub-question was posed:

SQ1. What meanings do young children and their teachers attribute to singing in a culturally diverse school?

While much of the literature on children's singing has been focusing on children's learning of singing and development, this study turns the common educational psychology framework towards an ecological framework and ecological agency in order to deepen "our understanding of the places where children make and experience music" (Barrett & Welch, 2023, p. 972). Sub-questions two and three therefore ask:

SQ2. In what singing ecologies do young children's singing occur?
SQ3. How do young children navigate these singing ecologies?

In order to understand the importance of including children's perspectives on singing in educational discussions, sub-question four asks:

SQ4. What are the implications for educational theory and practice when young children's meanings of singing (in their singing ecologies) are taken into account?

4. Research Methodology

4.1. The overall methodological approach

Methodologically, this qualitative research is a case study (Stake, 1995) rooted in ethnography and analysed through a narrative approach and techniques (Barrett & Stauffer, 2009; Barrett & Stauffer, 2012). As a theory-seeking (Bassey, 1999), instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) it was conducted within a particular school, in a specific social ecological context, involving a defined group at a certain period of time. It is a case “within a localized boundary of space and time (i.e. a singularity)” in which the knowledge interest reaches beyond the case towards exploring the more general phenomenon (Bassey, 1999, p. 58). It was conducted in the natural context of the participants, “within an ethic of respect for persons; in order to inform the judgements and decisions of practitioners or policy-makers; or of theoreticians who are working to these ends” (p. 58). The school was chosen intentionally, since it was known to include students with a variety of backgrounds. In other words, the case is *critical* (Yin, 2018) in terms of providing “richness” and “breadth of information” (Sena, 2023, p. 69) on the meanings that children with diverse cultural backgrounds give to singing and in terms of expanding upon the theorisation of children’s singing. Furthermore, the study is exploratory in nature (e.g. Sena, 2023), as the empirical material was meant to explore the features of the phenomenon so that tentative propositions could be made in terms of the practical and theoretical implications of the findings (Bassey, 1999).

The case study approach has “often been associated with ethnographic research” (Sena, 2023, p. 111), and this case study, as in ethnographic case studies in general, the researcher has been directly involved and participated in the context of the study (Brewer, 2000). Ethnography, according to Paul Atkinson and colleagues (2001), can be seen as a style of research in which the researcher can use a range of data collection techniques, but in which the research “remains firmly rooted in the first-hand exploration of research settings” (p. 5). Just as ethnography “assigns a privileged role to observation, especially participant observation” (Sena, 2023, p. 113), this study also includes the immersion of the researcher in the school setting and its diverse activities. The researcher was experiencing the culture of the school at the same time as she was conducting and participating in the study, interacting with the participants *in situ* and engaging in their daily activities, in this way creating a relationship with them. As an ethnographic

case study, however, in this study observation is not the main but a “secondary and marginal tool for gathering information utilized” (p. 113). Here, the main body of empirical material consists of the children’s interviews. As ethnography typically requires long periods of observation to provide the description of culture, it is “neither necessary nor common that case study-based research requires such long periods of field investigation” (p. 113).

The study approaches the empirical material provided by the interviews with a narrative approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2006; Polkinghorne, 1995) aiming to recognise the complexity of human experience, particularly within the given societal context (Phillion et al., 2005). As Martin Cortazzi (2001) explains, “there is increasing recognition of the importance and usefulness of narrative analysis as an element of doing ethnography”, since narrative is a human being’s fundamental way of understanding and making meaning of the world (p. 384). Cortazzi (2001) suggests four major reasons for doing narrative analysis as part of ethnography, namely 1) concern with the meaning of experience, 2) voice, 3) human qualities on personal or professional dimensions, and 4) research as a story. These criteria also pertain to the phenomenon studied in this study, and support the selected methodological approaches. In particular, “the concern with the representation of experience is related to ... the representation of *voice*, that is, the sharing of the experience of particular groups, so that others may know life as they know it” (p. 386, original italics). Underlying the narrative approach of this study is a belief that there is a great potential in children’s stories – particularly those connected with children’s own experiences, lived within places and spaces and defined by the children themselves. A narrative inquiry approach offers possibilities of focusing on children’s personal stories – to learn what is meaningful for the children about their own experiences with singing in culturally diverse school settings and beyond, and to understand the children’s engagements with singing as part of their everyday life.

Leaning on the work of D. Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (2000), I understand narrative inquiry as the study of experience. For Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) pragmatist (Dewey, 1938/1963) approach to narrative inquiry, the key term in a narrative study is not narrative, but relational experience, in this case the children’s singing experiences. In their relational understanding, life, experience, and education are understood as intertwined and cannot be separated: we are who we are because of the experiences acquired by participating in our cultural environments and in interacting with others (Dewey, 1934). Hence, as the interview situation is also relationally experienced, the researcher is also understood to be part of the study, with her

own stories and experiences stemming from her own cultural background.

Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) "metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space" (p. 50) provides the frame for the empirical phenomenon at the intersection of three dimensions: 1) the temporal, meaning the past, the present, and the future; 2) the personal-social, which is the intra- and inter-personal; and 3) the situational, including the cultural and physical contexts. These three dimensions are understood to give shape to the lives of children and the stories they tell in and through their lives (Barrett, 2011). Furthermore, the focus is on the particular and local, not on generalizing, since the main purpose is to learn about the individual experience, which resonates with the experience of other individuals (Barrett & Stauffer, 2009). The temporal element of narration constitutes an important part of this study. According to Barrett and Stauffer (2012), "narrative is temporal in that it provides an opportunity to revisit the past and consider its relationship to our present worlds and possible futures" (p. 5). Furthermore, studies have shown that "rather than producing words which then have particular meaning because of the context in which they were spoken, the children are creating contexts themselves in order to produce particular meanings within their talk" (Maybin, 2006, p. 21).

4.2. Data generation

The empirical material consists of semi-structured individual interviews with children (N=22) and their teachers (N=4), observations, and a researcher's diary and field notes. Although the focus is on meanings that children attribute to singing, the study draws on a researcher-participant co-construction of knowledge in which knowledge is understood as being produced in the interaction between the interviewer and interviewees (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, 2015). Acknowledging the role of the researcher does not imply abandoning research techniques, nor does it undervalue the participant's knowledge and experiences. On the contrary, acknowledging the role of the researcher as part of the research project adds to its transparency and credibility.

The study's methodological approach is further based on an understanding that children are indeed able to narrate their experiences and tell a lot about their feelings of everyday life (Bruner, 1996). As the Finnish educational researcher Liisa Karlsson (2013) suggests, children interpret life and the world through the stories they tell, and those are always influenced by the context; this implies again that "personal narrative is always also related to stories stored in general knowledge and culture, and to topical issues and imagination" (p. 110). Narratives are also affected not only by who is listening and by the

reactions of the listener, but also by the reasons for narrating (Karlsson, 2013, 2014). Therefore, the place and context for generating the empirical material, in this case the school, as well as the researcher and her approach, inevitably become part of what is understood as children's stories and perspectives. Although the research emphasises the children's perspectives, it is however understood that the researcher also brings her political, ideological, and cultural backgrounds into the research process, and in this sense the data is *co-constructed* rather than solely representing the children's views. In line with this study's theoretical frame, the ecological approach to children's singing permits the exploration of possible places and spaces of meaning making, including the school. The teachers' interview material serves to contextualise singing in the school, the ecosystemic environment, and the educational culture that the interviewed children experienced and narrated about.

During the field work I conducted altogether 26 *semi-structured interviews* with the children and the teachers. A semi-structured interview attempts to understand themes of the lived everyday world from the subjects' own perspectives; "this kind of interview seeks to obtain descriptions of the interviewees' lived world with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 31). According to childhood research (e.g. O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017; Flewitt, 2014), the semi-structured interview technique is suitable for research with children: firstly, semi-structured interviews provide flexibility as to how to ask the questions, and also on the order of the questions, allowing researchers to focus on what the children say and to listening to them carefully. Secondly, researchers can use the children's responses to change questions, or they can modify them or ask relevant new questions if necessary. Thirdly, semi-structured interviews can help researchers explore issues and ideas that they might not have previously thought about. In other words, existing questions can be adapted to suit the participants, meaning that the interview as a whole can be adjusted to suit individual needs (Flewitt, 2014), and this was considered a suitable technique for both the children and the teachers.

As the characteristics of ethnographic research discussed above indicate, the questions in the open-ended semi-structured interviews of this study functioned as a guide for conversations and for recognising emergent themes within the ecologies of children's singing. One part of the children's interview design employed a form of narrative and play-based technique (DaCosta et al., 2023) that involved the use of LEGO figures, in which the settled scenario was school, singing in school, and its song repertoire. This technique was included in order to encourage conversation with the young

children (6–7 years) and to cope with the potential challenge of conversing with sometimes less talkative children. Narrative and play-based technique is, according to DaCosta et al. (2023), “developmentally appropriate for and sensitive to young children’s communication preferences” (p. 359).

As a whole, the data generation of this study can be seen as an intervention, as it sought to help the interviewed children *develop the confidence* to express their feelings in and through singing and to gain agency and political voice. As Treacy and Westerlund (2019) have demonstrated, interview research “*is* intervention”, and the first interview questions implicitly carry “the seeds of change” (p. 519). Children whose opinions and ideas are usually heard grow into the opinion that their voices are valuable (e.g. Lone, 2021), which has implications for the development of their political voice. This relates further to children’s ecological agency and its relational and temporal dimensions (Biesta & Tedder, 2007), as children grow their capacity to act in the world in relation to the environment. Children who are heard (or children whose rights are recognized) can potentially have more possibilities for affordances and for connecting with the environment ecologically than those whose voices are systematically ignored.

4.2.1. Children’s interviews

As explained earlier, interviewing first graders and observing their interactions at school for a long period of time was a carefully thought-through decision. Entering primary school is a transitional moment for the children, and I also had to consider how my presence could affect them and their entry into school life. The empirical material was generated paying particular attention to the participants’ current and past experiences, recognizing and valuing the different ways of interacting between the researcher and the participants researched (Barrett, 2011).

In the Spring 2019, after having spent approximately four months in the school (although not participating in every school day), the semi-structured individual interviews with the children commenced. A total of 44 children received the basic information on the proposed research and the research permission forms, and I received altogether 22 interview permissions. With the teachers’ help, I gave the students the research information sheets and consent forms I had prepared in various languages (see Appendices A and B). Some of the children mentioned their wish to take part in the study, but since their parents did not sign the interview consent the interviews with these children were not conducted. The children’s interviews were conducted individually in order to guarantee a private context for them to express their views. The interviews lasted about 30 minutes, and the design included

artifacts (Bruner, 1996) such as colour pencils and LEGO figures to be used as facilitators for the children to express their feelings, tell their stories, sing their songs, make their drawings, or share their memories and experiences.

The interviews were conducted in the Finnish language during school hours; the teachers allowed the students to leave the classroom in order to participate in the interview. I picked up the children from their classrooms, and since the interview space, assigned by the school principal, was in another area of the school, I had the opportunity to talk briefly with the children on our way to the interview room. I used the opportunity to thank the children for agreeing to converse with me. Sometimes they added comments (such as that “My mom told me that it would be a good idea to join”, or “I really wanted to come to speak with you!”). The facilities were comfortable, well-lit, and spacious, with a nice table and chairs and colourful posters hanging on the walls. Five of the interviews were held in another available school room, as an exception. Once we were in the interview room, I double-checked the research permission and explained anonymity issues to the children again, using easy language. I also explained that the computer was recording the interview only for me, and to facilitate the transcription of what was said. Two children asked for more information, and in particular they wanted to know if their teachers would listen to the recording afterwards (or if they were listening online). Hence, it was important to clarify and re-explain that the recording was only for me and that no one else was listening.

The interview guide (see Appendix C) included questions such as when, where, with whom children sing and how they feel in these situations. In this way the interview questions already included an understanding of singing as not limited to school and music classes. The interview included questions related to what counts as singing for the child, and what does not count as singing (e.g., humming, whistling). In the interview, the children received a colouring-book, a “face’s emotion chart” (see Appendix D), from which they could select a “face” to relate to the situation they had described before and colour it. The chart included common expressions such as sad and happy, worried or surprised. There were also two empty “faces” where the children could draw their own expressions – and give them a name. It was important to offer the children this freedom to describe their own emotions and feelings. At the same time, the act of drawing or colouring offered a great opportunity for conversation, as the children felt more relaxed while they were colouring or drawing the chart – more as if thinking out loud, sharing the moment with me, instead of being in an interview. The interview also included questions related to school; for example, conversations were initiated with questions such as: when

was the last time you sang in school? These progressed into a description of the scenery, the feelings of the children, their social interactions, and the ecological space where that particular singing activity happened. I also asked the children about their favourite songs; I wanted to hear if they had any favourite songs in the first place and, if so, why these songs were different from others. For example, I was interested in learning where and how they learned them, and from whom. I also included questions about imagining situations, e.g., if you were a teacher, and were to teach a song to the group, which song would it be?

When I planned the interview questions, I was unsure about how discussing imaginary situations with a child of 6–7 years-old would work out. Hence, I used LEGO figures to recreate a classroom situation (DaCosta et al., 2023); playing with LEGO figures made the discussion easier and more fluid, and it also brought a familiar material to the children’s hands, with which they felt comfortable. Thinking retrospectively, it was good to include this tool, particularly for the children who spoke less; the children spoke about their favourite songs and the songs of their homeland, and told why they would or would not bring those songs to the classroom. For the more outspoken children this exercise might not have been needed, but it worked as a reaffirmation of their statements and gave them more space to expand their views (see an example of the discussion in attachment E).

In the interview situation, some children were outspoken, very talkative, and relaxed, while others were more quiet, some looking a bit anxious, and were brief in their conversations. This was not exclusively dependent on language skills, but was also connected with the child’s individuality, personality, or desire to discuss. Some children were emotional when telling about their lives, and for them the interview seemed to function as a space to tell things they considered important. However, other children were more reserved and quieter.

The interview data from the children interviews consisted of altogether 80 pages of transcriptions.

4.2.2. Teachers’ interviews

The children’s four teachers (who were the only teachers working with these children) received the basic information on the research and the consent forms, and they all agreed to participate in the research and to be interviewed. Three of these teachers were the children’s classroom teachers, and one was the teacher of Finnish as a second language. The teachers were interviewed individually, and the interview material was used to contextualize the

children's interviews and to gain an understanding of the school's ecosystem.

The four individual teacher interviews were conducted in the school curator's room when it was empty, or in another empty classroom, with each interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. Specifically, in the interview I wished to get information on the school's practices and the curricular activities in which the children were involved. The questions related to teacher's thoughts about singing in school, how the growing diversity impacted teaching, if in any way, or questions about the music curriculum and materials used in lessons (see the Teachers' Interview Guide in Appendix F). Since the teachers had considerable experience in the field, they commented on the differences they perceived, comparing the current situation with the school reality of past years. They also elaborated on the current challenges they found in their work. The interview questions were also related to the students' daily routines, the musical activities offered in the classroom, their daily interactions and engagement with singing at school, and the educational views supporting singing in the classroom. The interviews were characterized as being open and relaxed discussions. All of the teacher interviews were conducted in Finnish, except for one teacher who spoke in English. All of the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim (see an example in Appendix G).

The teacher's interview transcriptions came to 35 pages in total.

4.2.3. Observations, researcher reflections, and diary

I observed the children's interactions and activities in the school over approximately four months, starting at the very beginning of my stay in the school and concluding on the very last day. I immersed myself in the fieldwork by observing the children inside the classroom during music lessons and general lessons, observing the students in the school yard and in corridors, and attending the school's end of the year celebration. The observation period at the school served two purposes: 1) to generate a connection with the students (and teachers) so that they would feel safe enough to share their thoughts and feelings during the interviews, and 2) to become familiar with the students and teachers, and with the context of the school, and to keep a detailed research diary with observations of the daily routines. In this way I shared a long period of time with the students before the interviews commenced, as the interviews were conducted towards the end of my stay.

The research diary includes general observation remarks and specific notes made right after each interview. It includes comments related to the children's

activities and interactions inside and outside the classroom, in the corridors, and in the school yard, where it was important to see the children's activities, interactions, and group dynamics (see example in Appendix H). The researcher diary was an important tool in the overall data generation process; I had an easy-to-handle notebook which was always with me. The diary includes information about the activities the children did in the classroom, but also in other common spaces of the school, and especially in the school yard. The only place where I did not observe the children was at the school canteen. Otherwise, I was able to observe the children and to spend time with them freely and identify groups of friends playing together or discussing different topics, both inside and outside the classroom. I also observed moments of disappointment, or even fighting in the school yard. I found the school yard extremely interesting, because it was the place where the children had freedom to decide on their games, movements, and interactions. These moments revealed to me some of their preferences and mutual relationships; I observed children's play and some of their group dynamics, as well as how these developed over time during their first school year. I identified group compositions and changes in these compositions during the period I was observing. For example, the children who spoke native Finnish played together in their group, and the children who did not in another group. I observed the musical and other games children played, and the spaces they used for playing. I also realised that not all children had someone to play with in the school yard. The researcher diary also includes my own notes regarding children's activities inside the classroom as a whole; their ways of participation (or non-participation), their body language, and the ways they relate to other children, to the teachers, and to the activities. I also made additional notes about the environment in general; for example, I got to know an Algerian adult student who was practicing the Finnish language in the school and who, at the same time, served as an assistant for the Arabic speaking children (of other groups) who were not able to communicate with their teacher well because of language issues. In an informal conversation he also commented that there are Muslim families in the school for whom music is prohibited.

The audio-recorded researcher reflections consist of 15 pages and one full diary with field notes.

4.3. Site and participants

The empirical material was conducted in one culturally diverse primary school with more than 600 students located in the capital area of Finland. As already mentioned, the school was selected for this study because nearly half of the student population speaks a native language other than Finnish

or Swedish (the official languages of Finland), exemplifying the rapid demographic diversification in Finland. The school building accommodates primary school students (1st to 6th graders). It does not include an upper primary school. The school has the support of the parent's association, which organizes events and supports teacher, student, and school-wide activities. The headmaster has extensive experience in the role, and has worked at this particular school for a long time. Similarly, there are teachers who have worked at this school for years. While there are also teachers who are new to the school, the teacher community seems to be stable.

All of the first graders who participated in the study attended the selected primary school (group A and group B). These students' teachers were also interviewed to gain an understanding of the school context. The teachers I interviewed were experienced teachers. Moreover, these teachers worked with an innovative methodology, in which the two groups (A & B) worked together on a daily basis, not only on special projects and activities but also in certain classes. Similarly, teachers took turns and worked with one group or another, teaching certain specific areas or topics. For example, two of the teachers were in charge of the music lessons – they both seemed to enjoy teaching music to the children. The music lesson was conducted by one or the other (they took turns), but most of the time they made the lesson together (for example one teacher conducted the class and the other played the songs on the piano). Every morning the 44 first grade students and their three class teachers got together to open the school day; they would usually sing a song and then had a basic conversation about any special activities and planning for the day. The students' linguistic diversity is shown in Table 5. Although native language does not directly represent cultural diversity, the table shows that six participants had two native languages. Some of the children sang songs during the interviews, while others refused to do so. This affected, for example, the length of the interviews, which ranged from about 20 minutes to 40 minutes. The number of boys and girls was balanced, with 12 boys and 10 girls participating. I have used binary gender notions, although I understand that gender is more complex. Pseudonyms are used for anonymity.

Table 5. The linguistic diversity of the interviewed children as defined by the children themselves.

Child	Interview length	Native language	Other native language
Mohamed	33.50	Arabic	
Abdul	23.17	Arabic	
Aapo	26.01	Finnish	
Leila	39.18	Finnish	
Elias	18.22	Finnish	
Evgeny	19.56	Russian	
Edon	54.06	Albanian	
Hilja	19.18	Finnish	
Helmi	21.07	Finnish	
Jamil	28.02	Arabic	
Sharon	47.23	Finnish	Russian
Leevi	22.22	Finnish	English
Minna	28.31	Finnish	
Halima	29.03	Arabic	
Siim	30.49	Finnish	Estonian
Maria	26.11	Finnish	Indonesian
Achim	22.24	Vietnamese	
Niilo	18.18	Finnish	
Sasha	31.46	Russian	
Jasmin	35.13	Arabic	Finnish
Saara	24.59	Finnish	
Valentina	22.16	Portuguese	Niger-Congo

4.4. The pilot study

A pilot study of the dissertation project was conducted in Autumn 2018. To test and develop the methodological approach of the project, five children ages 7–8 were interviewed. No teachers were interviewed as part of the pilot study. The interviewed children attended various schools in the capital area of Finland and came from diverse cultural backgrounds, which included English, Indian, Arabic, and Finnish. They were willing to participate in the study, and their parents agreed and signed a participation consent. I was acquainted with the parents of most of the children. I conducted three individual interviews and one

couple interview (as requested by the children). These interviews lasted between 40–60 minutes (for the peer interview). Conducting the interviews of the pilot study was important for me to learn “on the making” how to conduct interviews with children and to experience the dynamics, challenges, and particular ways of interactions that can be expected when interviewing 7-year-olds.

The pilot study taught me that children participate in different ways in conversations, and that their personalities can be very different, something that requires from the researcher a wide range of experiences and the ability to respond quickly to a variety of emerging situations. It helped me to understand the interview as a dialogue based on trust. Through the pilot study I also experienced challenging and unexpected situations, from which I learned to question my own actions and thoughts. For example, during one of the interviews a child was eager to sing a song to me. It was hard for me to follow the tune she was singing, and I was confused about her vocal abilities. However, later she wanted to send me a recording of the music she hears and sings at home – which was not Western music. I understood then that my preestablished conceptions of music (which align with the Western music system) and my own cultural background had restricted my understanding of what the child was singing during the interview. In another interview, an interesting conversation about music and religion arose when a child referred to his parents’ singing at home. The parents commented later, in an informal conversation, that those activities are not singing but praying, and that they do not sing. The five children interviews were transcribed verbatim. The preliminary narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995) revealed the different meanings of public and private singing, inside and outside school, and formed the pre-understanding for the later process.

The interview data from the pilot study was not used in the final body of the empirical material of this study, which focused on one culturally diverse school. The children interviewed in the pilot study attended different schools in the capital area of Finland.

4.5. The analysis process and methods

In order to construct the stories, I approached the interview material with an analytical and reflexive mindset, to gain an understanding of the meanings that children ascribe to singing in their lives. The analytical process developed over an extensive period of time, which permeated the whole research process and included various levels of interpretation (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). The process involved three overlapping phases (see Figure 2).

During the first phase of the analysis, I first coded the material using different colours, identifying children's narration related to singing in different physical locations (e.g. home, school, natural surroundings) and social spaces (with others or alone, with family, with friends, with a close friend) by using my theoretical pre-understanding of singing ecologies – the importance of locations and spaces. Following this task, I categorised the places and social spaces where the participating children said that they sing. When analysing the connections between physical and social spaces, an ecological grounding of children's experience started to emerge. At this point children's bold statements about the distinction between singing "for themselves" (self-directed singing) and singing with others (social singing) was also revealed. In this first stage of the analysis I thus focused on the relationship between singing spaces and meanings in terms of how the children ascribe contrasting (sometimes even contradicting) meanings to singing within places and spaces, including within a particular microsystem (e.g. singing at home and singing at school). In addition, and in order to contextualise children's singing and to understand more about the school environment, I analysed the teacher interviews, which helped me gain an understanding of their relationship to singing, the singing practices in the particular school, and their implementation of the curricular framework.

The second phase involved the vertical analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995, 1998). I started configuring individual narratives for each interviewed child, but then focused on making 11 stories (see the steps for the configuration of the stories in chapter 4.6.2). At a later stage, after reflecting on the whole data set for an extended period of time, I was able to select 7 stories (from the 11) which were richer in expression and showed the children's perspectives more clearly (according to my view). The third phase involved the horizontal analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995, 1998), and included the identification of themes that appear across the entire interview material. The ecological theorisation was further developed in dialogue with the analysis of the empirical material. In the illustration below, the contextualisation of the school's ecosystem as well as the vertical and horizontal analysis are explained in more detail

4.5.1. Constructing an understanding of the school's ecosystem

In the first phase of the analysis process the children's interviews were approached through thematic analysis to allow for the identification of important themes or patterns from the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2006) in relation to the ecological preunderstanding of the significance of space in children's singing. I opted for a thematic

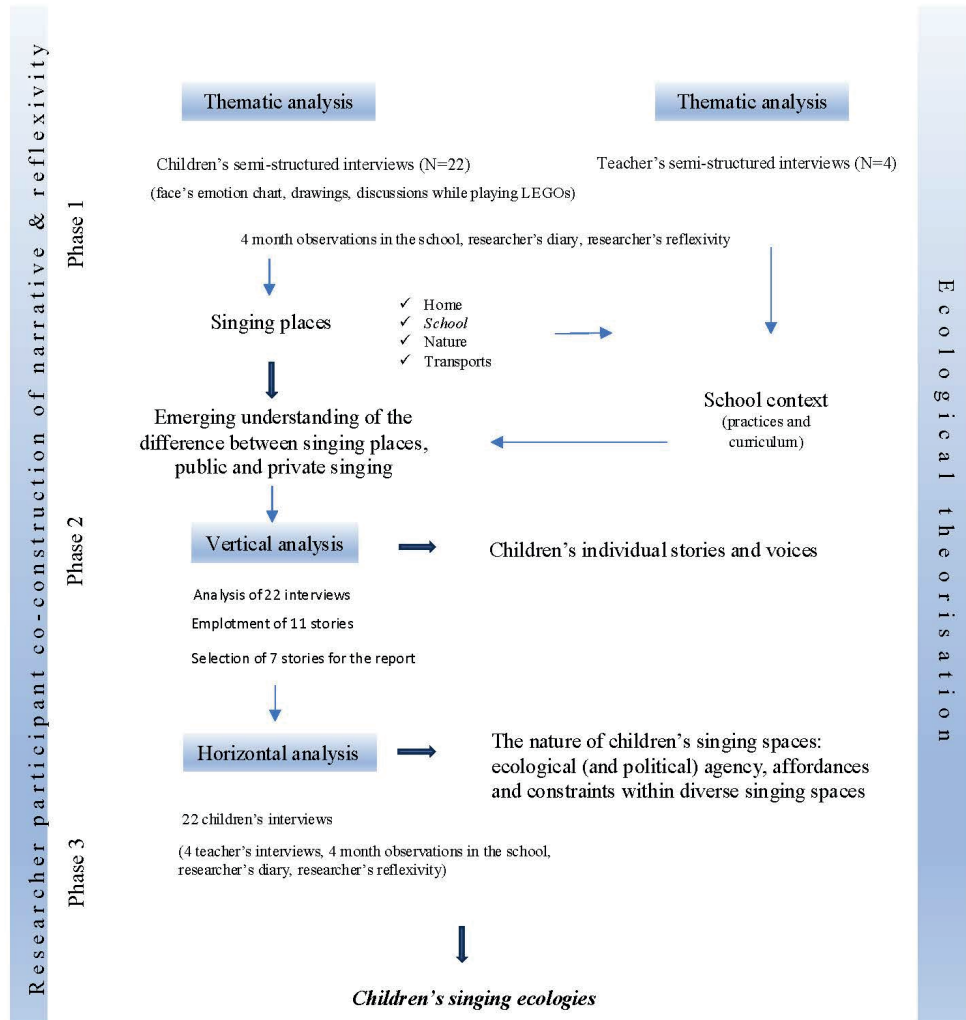


Figure 2. Phases of the analysis process

analysis because it provides “an overview of the salient issues raised by interviewees”; “it can capture the issues that are perceived to be relevant and important from the child’s perspective” (O’Reilly & Dogra, 2017, p. 170). In order to visualize the perspectives in the interviews, I firstly constructed a table that included only the physical locations where the children sang and their statements regarding singing in those locations. By analysing the children’s engagement within these locations in this first stage analysis, the distinctions between singing alone and singing with others started emerging, including the distinction between singing with close friends or family members (people who you can trust or understand you and your music) and singing

with (or for) other people. For example, the children described the social aspects of singing spaces in this way: “If I sing alone and then with someone else, then I take the voice (big voice), and if I sing alone, then I sing softly.” This phenomenon can also be seen from another angle: how is the negotiation of power regulated within children’s singing spaces? For example, the dynamics of children’s singing spaces with friends were described as follows:

L: It is nice to sing with my friends, but also sometimes I do not like it. It is nice, and sometimes I do not like it.

I: Can you tell me why you sometimes do not like it?

L: Sometimes my friends use all their voices and came up with very strong voices, and other’s voices are so quiet, and then it is weird.

I: Is your voice quiet?

L: My voice is a kind of quiet voice when I sing with my friends.

I: Ok, and what is nice about singing with your friends?

L: I like to sing with my friends, if they listen. And I said to them, let’s sing now with quiet voices...I like that.

As shown in the dialogue above, the child claims her own space (within a singing space), or in other words she claims recognition for her voice through singing in an environment where she can claim, where she can influence. The analysis thus started revealing how group dynamics and negotiations also exist within children’s singing spaces.

In the first phase of the analysis, the production of the spaces where children sing (spaces produced by children themselves) thus started becoming fundamental to understanding the meanings that children ascribe to their singing. It showed that children recognise and act upon the importance of feeling connected with other persons and with the material world, and for example may decide to sing in a certain space but not in another, and that their possibilities of action and freedom of choice are also part of singing ecologies (and ecological agency). At this first stage of analysis, the distinctions between public and private singing emerged, as well as between individual and group singing. In principle, this implies that children recognise and value interpersonal connections, their own sense of presence and action, and their emotions as manifested in and through singing, as well as their musical and cultural heritage (although mostly in private spaces and in the home ecosystem).

In the first phase of analysis, the teachers’ interviews were also analysed thematically (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2006) in order to help identify themes or patterns to contextualize the situations and issues that

emerged in the children's interviews, and to construct an understanding of the school as a social-ecological system (activities, routines, teachers' principles, and observations) and the ways that the school, with its structures and rules, was depicted by the children as a place created by adults, as well as how the school space relates to children's singing spaces in each interviewed child's individual experience. The themes that emerged from the teachers' interviews, especially in relation to the current situation of Finnish schools compared to the past, served to contextualise the school and its rapidly changing context. The teachers also referred to their need to explore the 'whys' of singing in school, particularly for children of culturally diverse backgrounds (if it is either enjoyment, togetherness, trying new things, or expressing feelings) and the possibilities (and challenges) of incorporating a culturally diverse repertoire into the lessons (an example of how the analysis was conducted can be found in Appendix 1). The analysis of the teacher's interviews situates the study and the children's interviews in the ecosystemic context, as the teachers described the school's practices and its culture, and consequently the place in which the children were interviewed and were describing their experiences of singing in school.

4.5.2. The vertical and horizontal analysis

In the second phase of the analysis of the children's interviews I followed Donald Polkinghorne's narrative analysis approach (1995, 1998), which involves both vertical and horizontal analytical procedures. According to Polkinghorne (1998), a narrative is an organisational scheme that can be expressed in the form of a story. In this study the emplotted stories follow the schematic configuration found in each of the interviews. Hence, a narrative refers to "a scheme by means of which human beings give meaning to their experiences of temporality and personal actions" (p. 11). Stories thus refer to the relational and temporal character of human experience and action. The primary analytical tools were the use of emplotment and narrative configuration (Polkinghorne, 1995).

All of the 22 (transcribed verbatim) children's interviews were used for the vertical analysis (Polkinghorne, 1988). As explained above, narrative analysis moves from elements to stories, and the result is an emplotted narrative (Polkinghorne, 1995). It is then crucial to be aware that the emplotment is a "dialectic process that takes place between the events themselves and a theme which discloses their significance and allows them to be grasped together as parts of one story" (Polkinghorne, 1988, pp. 19–20). Following Polkinghorne (1995), in the second phase I started configuring individual narratives for each interviewed child. In this process I selected 11 that were the most extensive in length, because some children were more talkative

than others and these accounts were the richest source of data regarding the research questions. Seven of these were then selected to be reported on in this dissertation in order to demonstrate the variety of children's perspectives.

The task of the vertical analysis was to “configure the data elements into a story that unites and gives meaning to the data as contributors to goal or purpose” (p. 15). The emplotment, as an heuristic process, included alternating back and forth between reading and writing and vice versa – and repeating the process several times until the story revealed, as close as possible (according to my judgement), the given child's perspective in a coherent form. The process resembles the hermeneutical process in which the structure of the story “is the two-way street that it travels its parts and the whole”... making stories “subject to interpretation, not to explanation” (Bruner, 1996, p. 122). The stories were configured following the steps below (although not in a strict order):

- Reading the full interview several times and throughout an extended period of time;
- Deleting unnecessary text, for example researcher's questions or side comments that I considered not relevant to the study;
- Deleting all the words that take the focus away from the key ideas expressed by the children;
- Reading the text again to evaluate if the text “makes sense” and transmits the children's accounts;
- Checking the specific language, the translation and the key words – as the interviews were conducted in the Finnish language and the transcriptions were then translated into English;
- Re-listening to the interviews, and re-reading the full transcripts as much as necessary, not only to check the language but also to attend to other verbal expressions, pauses, intonation of the voice, and signs of emotional expressions;
- Starting the process all over again and again, several times, until I found the best possible configuration where all of the key ideas were present;
- Identifying fragments that refer to themes from the ideas presented in the interviews and moving fragments of themes together if necessary, sometimes adding connectors;
- Re-reading the whole story to evaluate if the story represents as much

as possible the particular child's perspective.

In the third phase, a horizontal analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995, 1998) was conducted of all the children's interviews in order to identify themes that appear across the entire body of the interview material. The entire data set was organised by the identified themes, which were then approached within an ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) that provided a general framework for identifying the spaces of children's singing and the social and material connections and relationships that occur within the ecosystems where the children live. The horizontal analysis thus aimed to crystallize the relationality of children's singing, putting an emphasis on the place and space theorisation and on children's agency and political voice. The horizontal analysis identified socio-cultural, structural, and ecological factors, while the theoretical aspects of children's *singing spaces* started emerging via the dialogue between the current analysis and prior research. Reflexive and ecological thinking, as something that "might be viewed as a striving for connectedness, for the establishment of a relationship of the self to the inter-connecting systems in which we live and work" (Barrett, 2011, p. 6), was in this way the motor of the analytical work, which helped to crystallize the nature of singing spaces and to understand why children create these spaces in the first place. As Barrett (2011) elaborates, the search for connectedness "relates profoundly to notions of place and identity, to who we are, in what settings, to what we do and why" (p. 6).

As described above, the analysis was undertaken along different, albeit somewhat overlapping, stages and for an extended period of time, which allowed for reflexive ecological theorising throughout the process and bringing new elements to the surface. As time progressed, different layers of the work emerged. I wrote notes and reflections, as I was becoming immersed in the analysis. Within this process, the relational, ecological dimensions started gravitating around the concepts of *singing spaces*, and later *singing ecologies*. The analysis started moving from identifying places and spaces towards focusing on the qualities of children's singing spaces and what these spaces can afford for the children. Re-reading my notes and reflecting on them, revising the children's interview transcriptions and audio recordings, re-listening to particular expressions, silent moments, and pauses were all significant at this stage. I started to understand the connections and interconnections of the ecological systems and subsystems, and the affordances and constraints that the environment can provide for children's singing, as experienced and described by children themselves. The children's routines and habits inside and outside school were part of these entanglements.

4.6. Ethical considerations

Both the children's and teachers' participation in the interview was voluntary. The parents' approval was necessary in order for the children to participate, and a written document stating the main goals of the study and the role of the children in the study was given to the families to sign in advance. The research information sheet and the participant's consent (for children, tutors, and teachers), originally in Finnish, was translated into English, Somali, Spanish, and Arabic based on the general background information received from the school. In addition, I offered my personal contact information to answer questions about the research project. The research follows the ethical guidelines presented by the European Commission on research (EC 2010), the RCR guidelines of the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (TENK, 2012), and the ethical instructions of the University of the Arts Helsinki. The empirical material was handled following these guidelines, ensuring the anonymity of the participants and providing the full information of the study to the participants. The participants knew that they could withdraw from the study at any time with no need for explanations, and that the withdrawal would not have any consequences. While the participants were not compensated for their participation in the study, I wanted to organise a collective musical activity for them as a gesture of thanks for taking part in the research. However, since organising a big musical activity was not possible given the children's busy schedule at the end of the semester, I visited the classroom, sang with the children, and shared time with them.

The research plan was reviewed by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Arts Helsinki.

4.7. Credibility and trustworthiness

In this study the criteria for validation of the research is "built into the entire research with continual checks on the credibility, plausibility and trustworthiness of the findings" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 250). Validation permeates the whole research process - it is not a verification of a final product. Accordingly, validity can be seen as "quality of craftsmanship, as communication, and as pragmatic action" (p. 247) based on the researcher's continuous effort of questioning, re-questioning, checking, and interpreting the findings of the research. In qualitative research credibility is assessed "by showing the work is clearly grounded in the field texts, and by its plausibility, by demonstrating that the interpretation represents a plausible explanation for what has been examined" (Butler-Kisber, 2018, p.27). Trustworthiness is related to the viability

of the research findings and to what extent they are based on the research data.

A long-time process of reflexive consideration of the interdisciplinary framework and of my own researcher stance permeates the whole research process. My many academic discussions, with music education doctoral colleagues and music education scholars and scholars of different disciplines, were fundamental to understanding the phenomenon under study from different angles and perspectives. The researcher's diary included different kinds of reflections and documentation of special happenings, but also details of ordinary days and routines, which sometimes revealed important and hidden issues. The narrative analysis conducted for this dissertation required continuous reflexivity and questioning at different stages of the process, which helped me understand the interconnections between the layers of the analysis. Reflexive accounts based on the ethics of conducting interviews with young children helped me keep the focus on children's perspectives and on the co-construction element of the research with honesty, transparency, and care, involving my own integrity as a researcher – something that has been also associated with virtue ethics in music education (Björk & Juntunen, 2019).

4.8. Summary

To summarise, in this study I follow the methodological principles of qualitative research and narrative inquiry, where the analysis and interpretation are conducted at several levels and in several stages, and where “contact with the empirical material, awareness of the interpretive act, clarification of political-ideological contexts, and the handling of the question of representation and authority” are considered essential (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009, p. 263). The latter principle was especially important, since young children in particular have little influence over school happenings (Jackson, 1990). In culturally diverse school contexts the risks of overlooking children's public voices and perspectives increase, as the teachers have the added challenge of navigating within culturally diverse contexts (Juva et al., 2017), taking into account diverse learning needs, experiences, and the need for cultural integration.

Children's interviews form the main body of this study's empirical material, and they were analysed by following the narrative principles of Polkinghorne's (1995, 1988) vertical (the second phase) and horizontal (the third phase) analysis, although an initial approach (the first phase) to children and teachers' interviews was taken by following the principles of thematic analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis and reflexive interpretation acknowledged *all* of the empirical material and was understood

not simply as demonstrating how things ‘really are’ but was approached in relation to the phenomenon at hand and also by acknowledging the researcher’s political, ideological, metatheoretical, and linguistic backgrounds and contexts (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Hence, my experiences as a foreign person living in Finland and the experiences generated during the process of the construction of my own diverse identity, as well as my belief in the significance of democratic efforts in schooling and music education, need to be seen as relevant. As Klaus Mollenhauer (2014) states in his theory of education, when interpreting children’s responses we inevitably apply principles that come from ourselves and from our own experiences.

Next, in Chapter 5, I will present the study’s findings. In section 5.1 I will address the first sub-questions (SQ1) concerning the specific school as an environment and a space for singing as described by the interviewed teachers and children. My own observations contribute to the analysis. Section 5.2 will present individual children’s stories as the outcome of the vertical analysis. Altogether seven stories are reported. Section 5.3 moves to horizontal analysis, bringing up the meanings children give to singing in various places and spaces, presented thematically and in relation to the ecological theorisation. The themes identified were: 1) In-between spaces for singing; 2) ecological agency; 3) body movements; 4) technology in children’s singing spaces; 5) navigating between public and private singing; 6) individual and group singing; and 7) connection, empowerment, and emotions. By using ecological theorisation as a general framework and understanding the meaning of singing as depending on the experienced social qualities of situations, events, and actions in diverse places and reflecting the data against existing research, sections 5.3 and 5.4 together answer the second and third sub-questions (SQ2–3). By combining empirical material from the children’s and teachers’ interviews as well as my own participatory experiences in the study, and crafting a wider ecological framework for children’s singing ecologies, including children’s (political) agency in these ecologies, section 5.5 provides the final contribution for the fourth sub-question (SQ4) concerning the practical and theoretical implications of this study.

5. Findings

5.1. Teachers and children narrating the school's ecosystem

In the school under study, as in all basic primary schools in Finland, the subject of music is allotted one hour per week, following the curriculum. As currently established, music is taught by the class teacher, meaning that there is not a specialized music educator teaching music to first grade students. As the teachers I interviewed explain, if the teacher feels comfortable with singing and music, more music is done during the day (for example, using music as a resource to teach other subjects). If the teacher uses singing and music for teaching, then music and singing becomes part of the school life and classroom environment.

In this primary school, teachers use materials and songs they select from various sources. Like in many other primary schools in Finland, the teachers select songs from song books such as “Saa laulaa” (tr. You Can Sing), “Musiikin aika” (tr. Music Time), and also from other sources. As I observed, most of the songs are sung in the Finnish language, with one or two exceptions in English. Reflecting on what it means for a child to sing in a language he does not understand is relevant here, as more than one of the interviewed students commented precisely on this issue. One child speculated that those children who do not want to sing may feel afraid because they do not understand the song's lyrics – or cannot read them. One of the teacher's interviewed narrated something similar. According to her, sixth grade students who were requested to sing songs in Swedish felt uncomfortable: “Kids are really like afraid to sing the songs because they have no idea what they mean” (Teacher 2). Thus, in this school, both the teacher and the 6-7-years-old child referred to the same topic: children are *afraid* and feel uncomfortable singing something they do not understand. This may also apply to teachers, who might feel uncomfortable singing (and teaching) a non familiar repertoire, for example songs from another culture. An important aspect of school singing is the teacher's attitude, or teacher's relationship to singing. This is highlighted by Leila, who explains how the teacher's relationship with singing can influence singing practices in school as a whole:

I: What's your opinion, why do we sing in school?

L: Well, perhaps because... teacher's also like to sing?

I: Oh, nice.

L: I don't know what else...

I: Yes. And do you think that your teachers like to sing?

*L: Yes, they like to sing, that's why we have singing every morning.*³

In addition, Jasmin reflects on the teacher's education and intercultural learning. She refers to the inclusion of Arabic songs in the classroom as follows:

I: Would it be good to sing Arabic songs in school?

J: Yes, but then the teacher needs to know really what/how this singing is, because it is rare if she doesn't know.

I: And do you think that other children would like it, or not?

J: Yes, they like, they like,...yes, most probably they'll like it.

Students' participation may be affected by different factors; this includes thoughtful selection of repertoire, but also teachers' and students' attitudes and personal relationships with singing. Participation (or non-participation) can be connected to difficulties in grasping the meanings of the songs, or can be associated with the spaces (and quality of spaces) for singing in the classrooms.

5.1.1. Times of change

Pointing to the processes of change in the Finnish school system, the teachers' interview data helped understand the school ecosystem and its fluctuating reality. Teachers described: 1) the changing conditions of Finnish schools (and of this school) in recent years (e.g. the elimination of the preparatory years for immigrant students); 2) difficulties related to immigrant students' lack of language skills; and 3) the need for more multicultural teacher education, for all teachers. The Finnish school system can be seen from the perspective of Bronfenbrenner's chronosystem, as being in *transition*, allowing an understanding of children's experiences in the process through a systemic approach (Biggs et al., 2021). However, it can be also seen as a place that overlooks the needs of students and teachers, reducing opportunities of ecological agency and voice. The interviewed teachers were all experienced teachers who had worked in the same school for various numbers of years, which allowed them to describe the changes in the school over time. According to them, similarly to other Finnish schools, the situation is getting more and more challenging every year. One of the teachers explained: *It is a very different work than what I've done in this school, ten years ago, or even seven years ago.* When I asked *Why*, she responded:

Because so many children who do not speak the language have come here. Immigrants who have come here, or children born from

³ Citations from interviews are written in italics in the findings section.

immigrant families, have come here to Finland. They may not have even been in kindergarten. Some are, some are not. The immigrants who come now, they have been less than a year in Finland or something and will come to the class. That's why it's changed so much now in the last two years. When in 2017, the "valmisteleiva" [preparatory classes] stopped. That is, earlier a child that came, let's say, from Iraq, he went to a preparatory school and was there for one year, where he was taught the Finnish language, he was there with professionals. This stopped in 2017. And now the students come straight into our class. So, this is a completely new situation for us now for two years. That we have become completely incompetent, language incompetent. When I ask what's your name, the child is quiet. They don't know what I'm asking. It was good then, when they were learning those basic skills there in preparatory teaching, and now we have to take care of that preparatory teaching here at school. (Teacher 3)

In this culturally diverse school, and in many other Finnish schools with high numbers of immigrant students, the language barrier is difficult to overcome. Students lack language skills to communicate in the school, and that is a significant challenge that affects daily interactions and even basic communication with the students and their families. In most of the cases the student's families cannot help the children, because they do not speak the language either. The interviewed teachers agreed on the worsening of this problematic situation because of the elimination of the preparatory language course for recently arrived children, which they used to attend before starting school. This situation impacts all teaching areas, including music and particularly singing, with the addition that for some families, because of their religious beliefs, singing is not permitted. For example, a teacher explained that a child told her straight: *Minä [nationality omitted], mä en laula* (I am a [nationality omitted], I do not sing) but she could not explain further. The child was brave enough to communicate her beliefs to the teachers, using simple words and very clearly, and that should be always respected. However, the teachers would have hoped to communicate with the student's parents, for example to learn more about this family's beliefs or practices. Many times, parents cannot communicate with the teachers fluidly, either in Finnish or in English. To deal with situations like this, the school counts on a translator, who can help the families and the teachers to communicate, but daily communication with the teachers is not direct or fluid as with other students. On the other hand, it is also true that when students manage to understand and speak Finnish well enough, they can act as translators for their parents, if necessary.

Teachers claimed that they learned to work in culturally diverse classrooms and to handle problematic situations just by doing it, and that every child and family is different and has different needs, requiring different ways of addressing them from the teacher. Given this situation, teachers need new tools to deal with complex issues present in contemporary schools. This also raises questions of equal opportunities for students and teachers, since more experienced teachers may be able to offer more expert responses and to use more effective practice-lead strategies than non-expert teachers. In this self-taught learning and self-reflexive process, teachers' awareness of their own preconceptions and beliefs tends to develop over time, but questions related to professional experience arise as well, as matters related to culturally sensitive teaching and reflexivity. However, 'to what extent' it is actually possible to develop this kind of awareness remains open, since within this complex diversity bounded with societal transformations, there is conflict, change, and uncertainty, and no complete final solutions (Kallio et al., 2021).

5.1.2. Participation and non-participation in musical activities

In this section I discuss the notion of participation in the school and the challenges regarding participation in musical activities. As one of the teachers explains: *There are children who do not participate, who do not even want to try. A small group of children (mostly boys) do not want to participate in singing (or music) activities at all.* The teacher elaborates: *It is not just singing that they don't want to participate in. They don't want to express themselves in any other way either. But I was surprised they were dancing and enjoying themselves when we had loud music outside in the yard last week.* This brings forward three elements for discussion: 1) the physical space - the school yard offers possibilities for creating in-between spaces for playing; 2) the music and movement and dancing elements within that space; and 3) the possibility of participating and enjoying the music, not necessarily singing oneself but listening. In other words, children search for different *ways of participation*, in relation to their singing ecologies.

There are also children who are willing to participate in the activities proposed by the teachers, but their initial interest is lost when they see that others refuse to join. This situation was also referred to by the children themselves, as for example in one interview a child explained that it was 'not fair' when teachers ask him to sing and other children do not do it. One of the teachers reflected on her experiences and concluded that a few years ago, all children were excited about singing and playing. According to her, the situation is completely new now, a new phenomenon. She does not know what this is or why it happened.

When the children are small, they love to sing, most of them. But we are having this group of kids, who are not interested at all, this is something new (Teacher 3). When speculating on possible reasons, the teacher commented: *Is it the fact that little kids don't know how to participate and play?* (Teacher 3). Moreover, she elaborated: *Now it has changed – and young children want to decide whether to participate or not – if they consider the activities “childish” they will not join.*

Teachers would like all children to join and enjoy music inside the classroom, to feel that it is fun to sing together, to bring good feelings through songs – but they are confronted with the reality that some children refuse to participate. Similarly, teachers in other Finnish schools may face uncertainties and paradoxes, however, making these kinds of situations visible can contribute to changing educators' mindsets and visualising alternative ways for student participation and engagement (e.g. Westerlund et al., 2021). As one of the teachers explained: *I don't know where this comes from, maybe music is far from their home culture, maybe it's that they don't sing – or no one around them sings* (Teacher 2). Even more, one of the teachers reflected on the group of boys who do not want to participate in singing, saying that we do not know the meaning of singing in their lives, and the place music has had (if any) for them in early childhood. *Has music belonged to their lives? Or was there no space for music at all? And, if not, why would they be singing now if music never belonged to their lives?* – asked one of the teachers, and she concluded: *Maybe there should always be a reason, like why ... but it's hard to find it* (Teacher 2).

5.2. Diversity of children's voices: *the vertical analysis*

In this section, I present children's individual stories that address the question of *how children themselves describe their singing within places and spaces*. The stories are configurations of the 7 children's interviews that I selected from the total data set of 22 interviews and from the altogether 11 stories that were configured. The stories demonstrate how children expressed many things about their lives when discussing singing, but also during the time we shared together in the school. This contextualization was important when building up the stories, but the narratives were constructed following strict methodological procedures, and they present the children's views on singing within places and spaces, with affordances and constraints.

5.2.1. Mohammed: musical and cultural confidence

Mohamed speaks Arabic at home. He was born in Darab – and he made sure to clarify that to me in the interview that *It is Arabi, not Syria*. He

usually sings Arabic songs with his mother, and when I asked him about his favourite songs, he immediately asked back: *at school?* To which I answered: *Just favourite songs.* After the clarification, probably induced by the school context, Mohamed named five of his favourite songs one by one. Furthermore, he sang them to me with enthusiasm. He seemed happy to share his songs with me. Four out of five of the songs were Arabic songs that he learned from his mother. Three of them had religious meaning, or were related to it. And one of them was a Finnish song he had learned at school.

As part of this interview, Mohamed commented: *It feels nice to sing at home. Because I listen to my voice, it is nice.* Then he commented on his feelings related to school singing and singing at school with friends: *During the school recess I sing with my friends. It is this song (he sings “Sisan so helween”, an Arabic music game).* Mohamed taught me the song with its accompanying movements. He taught me the song carefully, part by part. He translated the words into Finnish for me, and according to him that was done so that I would understand the meaning of the song. Mohamed’s fifth favourite song was Ramadan. To my surprise, he sang the song entirely using Finnish words. I was confused. Mohamed was singing in Finnish, but the song was clearly Arabic. Kindly, he explained that he made the interpretation for me so that I could understand the meaning of the song.

Mohamed sings a lot, and he likes to sing a lot. I asked him what he likes about singing, and he answered: *I like, I like Arabia, I like singing. I listen, it is good.* He expanded that it feels good, and when I asked why it feels like that, he answered: *I listen to this, and it is so good, I dance. It is fun.* I asked him which song would be good to sing together in school, and he answered *Ramadan* and *Sisan*, two of his favourite songs, both Arabic songs that were learned at home. Mohamed’s favourite songs come from home and school, not only from one context. His narrative shows a connection with the microsystem where songs are present.

Mohamed has lived in Finland for some years, and during this time he seems to have developed a strong cultural and musical confidence. All of this is connected with his identity and with how he feels about his homeland, his music, language, and culture of origin. Mohamed exhibits a strong cultural identity – even in the context of the school; most of the children participating in the study have not shown cultural confidence in the same way.

During the interview Mohamed spontaneously translated one of his favourite songs for me – while he sang it. I take this action as a sign of empathy and care. Children and teachers commented in other interviews that you may feel

afraid of singing songs with lyrics in a language that you do not know (or understand). With this action Mohamed ensured that I understood his song, but also that I did not feel “afraid” of hearing a language I do not understand. Perhaps the ultimate purpose of this action is to communicate meaning, to sing a song that makes sense to the other person, to bring it closer to others. This agentic act of Mohamed shows how singing is an affordance for communicating with others. It also shows that he is aware of how cultural differences can be bridged and that he has developed cultural sensitivity.

Mohamed’s relationship to singing seems strong and meaningful. For example, the sentence “I like; I like Arabia, I like singing, I listen, it is good”, encapsulates the very meaning of singing in his life, suggesting that singing functions as an affordance for keeping his cultural identity “alive”. He feels proud of his cultural origin and celebrates it in daily life, through music and singing. Singing helps him to connect with his origins, his family, and friends, and to engage with others from his own subjective stance.

5.2.2. Halima: cultural roots, memories, and musical identity construction

Halima was happy to come to speak with me in the private interview – at least this is what she said while we were walking to the interview room. She seemed excited. Halima is an Arabic native speaker who relocated with her family (or part of it) to Finland. Halima speaks Arabic at home, but she does not know how to write it. Her mother wants her to learn Arabic language, but she refuses. She considers her native language – and family language – boring. She never took the Arabic lessons that the city government offers. In her interview she strongly commented: *I will never go*. Halima prefers to communicate in Finnish.

In our conversation, we discussed what singing is and what it is not. Is humming singing? – I asked. But Halima pretended not to listen, or at least ignored my question. She commented on the paintings hanging on the wall. Then, she commented on her drawing abilities... The question related to humming was still pending, and when I asked her “Do you hum”? Halima answered with a very soft voice: *sometimes*. Then, the tone of her voice changed completely, becoming a soft and sad voice. She said:

When I was very young, and I was in Egypt, we had a cat, and he was important to me. I used to imitate him, humming. So, every time I make that thing (humming) I remember him. Then the cat died. When I start humming... I remember the cat and I don't like it. (Halima)

The conversation with Halima was suddenly interrupted as she asked me: *Do they hear us?* (pointing to the computer with which I was recording the interview with her consent). I answered that nobody hears us. She insisted, and asked if her classroom teacher knows what we were speaking about. I explained that this is a confidential conversation and that everything she tells will be anonymised.

Halima spoke more about her own singing; she sings all the time, at home, when she is in bed, but also outside in nature. She sings during the day, in the evenings, and sometimes at night – and also in the morning! Halima sings with her mom, and sometimes with her dad, but not with her brother. She has not seen her brother for two years now. However, she is an optimistic young girl, who reminds herself: *But he will come to us soon.*

Halima tells me that she enjoys singing outside, in the yard where there is plenty of grass. Sometimes, she takes her headphones with her and goes to the forest to listen and play. And sometimes she goes with her friend. Halima has a favourite female artist, “Soy Luna”; she enjoys listening to her music. She thinks the artist’s voice is wonderful. Halima remarks: *She (the artist) never shouts at anyone, the voice is... I like the singing.*

As our conversation progresses, Halima explains that she does not need to sing along with the artist to enjoy the songs. She also enjoys “just listening”: *It sounds great, and I know many (songs). But I do not sing (along). I don’t need to. No need.* When I asked Halima if it would be a good idea to sing the songs of her favourite artist in school with other children, she said that it is not a good idea to do so. For Halima, it was great and beautiful to sing her favourite artist’s songs this morning by herself at home.

This conversation with Halima shows how her relationship with singing can be misinterpreted or wrongly understood by adults, for example by thinking that singing would be of no importance to her because at the beginning of the conversation she mentioned that she does not need to sing but prefers to listen. However, Halima has a strong and emotional relationship with music and singing. She has strong opinions about her music and the significance of “her songs” in her life, which can easily go unnoticed by adults. For example, humming was attached to a sad memory, and for that reason humming was associated with sad feelings, but it was not because it lacked meaning. On the contrary - music was associated with a meaningful experience of life. Strong emotions were also attached to Halima’s favourite singer and songs, which however she prefers not to bring to school, and to keep in her closest environment in the microsystem, at home. The songs function as affordance for the identity work she is doing

in and through music. Singing is something very personal for Halima. She mentioned that there is no need for her to sing along with her favourite artist: “just listening” is enough. There is “no need”. With this action Halima also shows her agency. She shows that listening and singing-for-oneself can also be a meaningful act, and that it can be as rewarding as making music with others.

5.2.3. Siim: feelings of comfort and company

Siim speaks with a soft voice, at times with a shy or insecure intonation. I remember hearing his tiny voice, humming in the classroom when he was drawing his own picture during the art class. Siim tells how he sings at home or during the school recess, or with his friends, and for him singing with a small group of friends seems to be very important. He explains: *It is quite nice and pretty fun*. While working on the emotions chart for this study, he assigned a “surprising emotion face” to the singing activity, and explained: *Because it is a bit that I am surprised that I can sing with my friends, that I can do a lot with my friends*. He tells about his feelings of wonder and about how singing with friends can function as an affordance for discovering new things about himself.

Siim also sings in the school, *sometimes in the school celebrations...* but when referring to singing in school, Siim feels *half happy*. He sings raps with one or two of his friends, at home or outside, but he believes that in general he does not sing so much. He sometimes hears his older brother singing at home, as well as the recordings played at home. He named four favourite songs, including one rap and three international rock classics. Siim learned these songs (or at least the rock classics) from his mother. He thinks that it would be a good idea to sing rap at school: – *it would be nice* – he said.

Siim describes how he enjoys singing alone, even though he thinks that it is a bit different than singing with others. Siim elaborates: *When I am a bit lonely, when I do not have friends, then I hum (or sing softly) and... When I am a bit lonely, then I can sing, and I feel a bit better*. Siim starts the conversation saying that he does not believe he sings much. Still, as the interview progresses, he seems to show a strong connection with singing – and with music-making alone and with others. He also refers to the songs he sings with friends outside school – which are (again) distant from the *school songs* the teachers usually select.

Towards the end of the interview, Siim gives an important message: He tells me very clearly how singing, and humming, help him to change his mood and to alleviate loneliness. For him, singing functions as an affordance for changing moods, for feeling company or *less lonely*. Perhaps singing and humming is very

natural for him, and although it is very present, he does not realize how much it is present. Perhaps, it is part of him as a whole without him even recognizing this.

5.2.4. Maria: musical agency in and through social relationships

For Maria, friends are very important. This remains clear as the interview progresses, and she mentioned her friends' names various times. Maria sings at home, also with her mum and dad but in the yard, she sings with her friends, and she likes it a lot. She sings *everything*, including invented songs.

Maria hums during the school recess if she is outside with her friends, and also sometimes at home. Maria thinks that humming is a bit like singing. She sings in the music class, but she does not sing or hum in the classroom if the teacher does not require it, because *humming cannot be done there*. Maria feels good about singing in school because, according to her: *In school when we sing, we are many singing together, so it is nice when the voice goes up loud and there are many singing...*

At home, Maria sings with a soft voice, but if she sings with her friends then she sings with a bigger voice: *With my friends I can sing, and I like it a lot. I like to sing a lot!* Maria enjoys singing at home, particularly when she is alone. For her it is a bit different to sing alone or with friends: *If I am with my friends, I like to sing there so much! I can make (big voices) with my friends, all around the neighbourhood. I like to sing a lot. We create (improvise) our own songs.* Maria does not have a favourite song, because she has many favourite songs. She elaborates: *I like a song because I remember it better.* Another favourite song is one her friend taught her: *My friend Teresa taught me the song, you know, Teresa the girl who is in my class.*

In Maria's descriptions, singing is connected to her social experiences and is a way for her to bond and enjoy friendship. She enjoys singing with friends – something that is also empowering for her, and manifests in her ways of using the voice when singing with others. When she sings with friends, she has a strong sense of agency. In other words, singing works as an affordance for agency development, including both musical and personal agency, where the collective context plays an essential role.

Whilst Maria enjoys singing in school with others during the music class, she explains that she does not sing or hum in the classroom if it is not requested by the teacher because *humming cannot be done there*. This shows how the agency and freedom of the student is reduced to the point that humming on own

initiative inside the classroom is not acceptable. Teachers have not explicitly prohibited humming inside the classroom, but the context of the school indicates (and the teachers' instructions strongly support the idea) that maintaining a silent atmosphere during lessons is necessary – something that conflicts with the idea of making sounds inside the classroom (apart from music lessons).

5.2.5. Jasmin: self-directed singing and becoming aware of the school system

Jasmin was born in Finland, but since her mother has foreign origins, and her father also has a foreign background, she speaks a foreign language at home – as well as Finnish. Whilst she does not know how to write the foreign language well, she is proud to be able to write basic things: *I do not quite write stories, but of course my name and some more stuff, if the adults help me.* Jasmin remembers details about her activities and experiences – and about her own singing. She sings in school and then at home a bit too. She describes singing at home with these words: *When I sing there, it's like freedom in a way.*

Jasmin tells how sometimes she also sings in the car, and how she likes when her little brother can hear her singing – or when he sings with her. Jasmin sings, but she clarifies that she does not do it everywhere: *When I feel like so, and if familiar songs come up, if I like it, usually I sing along.* Jasmin also hums: *If I have a humming mood, it can be that I cannot stop it. When it is that moment of singing, I mean humming, then, when it is something in between, if there is silence, then my humming mood comes, then I can still hear it. I mean, I hear myself and sing in my mind.*

Jasmin remembers how she experienced humming in daycare and preschool contexts in contrast with the school context: *For example, in the kindergarten and in the preschool I had it (humming) in my mind, [but] in school there is not so much time to have this in your mind because usually I need to focus first on the lessons.* When I asked Jasmin if it is possible to hum in the school, she answered: *Well, in the middle of the lesson you cannot like hum, but you can think about humming.* However, Jasmin sometimes sings during the school recess with her friends – but, according to her, not so much anymore. I saw her in the school yard many times, always with her friends, walking around, but I did not notice any singing. Jasmin cannot remember more details, but according to her, she and her group of friends are singing less nowadays (this was also mentioned by another girl). *I don't remember because we have not sung for a long time now,* she said. She also remembers that at the very beginning of the first grade, when she had just started primary school, she did not have friends

and then she did not feel good: *When I came here, I did not have anyone (friends). It was difficult, when there are not friends... it was a bit boring.*

Jasmin does not have favourite songs because she likes many songs – and it is difficult to choose. But there are five Finnish pop songs she enjoys right now. She also hears songs of her mom’s homeland at home – for example, when her mother plays recordings – but she does not know how to sing them because she does not remember the words well. However, she enthusiastically explains: *But I know one (song), the alphabet song. That one I know, without any music. The letters are so different.* I asked Jasmin if she can imagine why we sing in school. According to her:

Singing is a very good ability. Think about, if you do not know how to sing! That’s a bad thing. Because almost all the others know how to sing, anyways, it’s terrible if you do not know how to sing. And if you do not know, then you cannot (do it) and you cannot participate in the class or in what comes in the class.

I asked Jasmin about her favourite (pop) songs and if those would be good songs to learn in the school. Her answer was very clear: *Normally we do not sing songs from these kind of singers because they are so long, we sing them in our life, but these (here) are teacher’s songs, the kind of songs the teachers teach.*

Jasmin selected a potential song to teach to the students (in a LEGO playing), a popular Finnish children’s song. According to her, the students will probably like it – but she added: *Not everyone likes the same songs.* She also thinks that singing songs in other languages (other than Finnish and English) in school would bring *just good feelings*, there are more languages to sing. Whilst she recognizes that it would be good to sing in other languages, she clarifies: *But then the teacher needs to know really what/how this singing is, because it is strange if she doesn’t know.* Jasmin thinks that most probably children will appreciate these songs.

The conversation with Jasmin shows how children are able to reflect on many things in their lives and the interrelations that occur in their ecological systems. This includes conversations about singing, but also life events with an apparently distant relation to singing, and also their own emotions, earlier experiences, and feelings, as well as details about other people’s actions and interrelations (e.g. teachers, friends, family).

Jasmin describes humming in her mind in a particular manner. She refers to it as if it would be almost as good as singing aloud. Singing (also “in the mind”) is

strongly related to emotions. As she describes it, humming in the school can be considered a way of resistance to the school rules and ecosystem (also perceived by Maria) where spontaneous singing is not celebrated outside the music lessons. Also in this sense, a secret singing space is created through humming.

This opens a discussion as to what is the implicit message that the children receive about the value and role of singing in schools; in other words, about how children understand (and experience) the school ecosystem. It can be said that Jasmin (as well as other children) developed an understanding of the school norms and its culture already during the first year of schooling, including the role of singing as part of the school ecosystem. Thus, possible tensions between school singing and children's singing ecologies can potentially arise, creating a gap. This aligns with Jasmin's memories of singing in daycare and preschool, when she used to sing more often and more freely than in primary school. The gap between the feelings of freedom related to singing at home and the absence of freedom for singing – or even humming in the classroom – is evident. Jasmin makes a distinction between the songs of her *own life* and the *teacher's songs* in school. Whilst Jasmin recognizes that incorporating songs in foreign languages in schools would be a good initiative, she also claims that teachers would need to know what they are teaching, otherwise this would not be good – it would be strange. Children are not expected to bring something to school that the teachers do not understand. Children come to understand all this implicitly, as part of the school ecosystem.

5.2.6. Edon: improvisation in “home” spaces

Edon entered the room quietly. He did not know the name of the language he speaks at home – it is the language spoken in (he named his homeland in Southern Europe). Edon spontaneously claimed: *I speak that language, but I live here! I also have a home there (in the home land), but I have two homes, there and here.*

Edon talks more and more, as if he had been waiting for this opportunity for a long time. *It is the home when I live there. I live in Finland (now). The mother of my mother is there* – he explained. The conversation marked the beginning of an emotional moment, in which Edon spoke about his grandmother and shared with me personal stories related to his origins. We engaged in a conversation about where-our-home-is. We concluded that we can have a home in another country as well, but we have a home here, in Finland, now. It may be that people who are important to us live in the homeland, in the other home.

Edon claims that he does not sing – or that he sings sometimes. However, he

is able to narrate daily life experiences related to singing at home. Music is present in the home environment – and as part of the family routines: *When my mom makes something, I have to be good, and I need to go away because she needs to clean the house. Then, all the time she puts on music. She listens to the music and works at the same time.* As Edon tells me, his mother sometimes sings at home. Edon appreciates so much his mother’s singing that he sometimes prefers not to sing himself, but to be able to listen: *mm sometimes ... No, because when my mom sings, it sounds good, I like it.* Edon listens to his homeland music, and he likes it. Sometimes he also dances to the music: *Sometimes, I am jumping in, I don’t know what ... or dancing.* Or he sings along. It feels nice for him. He usually watches the homeland song’s videos on the internet.

However, singing in school is different for Edon. He has one favourite song from school. He searched for it on the internet a few times but he could not find it. Edon has four favourite songs: one song was learned at school, another one is a song from his homeland learned at home, the third song is a pop-Latino song, and the fourth one is, as described by Edon, a song (or songs) invented by him, humming. As he explains, *I sometimes do it (humming), when I make different songs. My songs (when) I feel like doing those songs.* However, humming at school, or singing his own songs at school, is seen as too risky for Edon, who comments: *I do not want to make this (humming) at school because some can find it weird. I do not do that. I think that when I make those songs, the others laugh at me. For that reason, I do not sing.*

Edon also refers to the school as a place where other children do not sing. He is requested to sing and it feels weird. He does not know why some children do not want to sing at school, but he reflects: *I think they have other languages, so they are afraid of singing.* When our individual conversation ended, Edon seemed happy and somehow relieved. He drew a heart on his interview sheet, and he asked me to come back again some other day. Edon’s story depicts many things about his inner world, his feelings and thoughts. During the interview he talked about his personal life, and in many ways he took the space he needs. In this sense this type of conversation can be an affordance for telling, for raising voice.

Edon started the interview saying that he does not sing – or that he does not sing much. However, later he says that he improvises songs. Singing can function as an affordance for creating spaces of improvisation, even “if not singing much”. However, clearly this happens in certain contexts and not in others – and definitely not in school, because children can be afraid of being ridiculed. Edon is brave enough to say out loud something that may be felt by many school children nowadays. Perhaps there are other students who

do not sing for this reason in school. In other words, school seems not to be a safe space for improvising one's own songs, or to sing and hum songs freely. School is a distinctive place with its own limitations and potentials, and Edon knows that. The gap between the school and the outside school ecosystems seems to be wide. He shows appreciation for what music does in his life in different ways; for example, he listens to and appreciates his mother's singing. Similarly to Halima, sometimes he enjoys just listening. In this case singing also functions as an affordance for listening and awareness. Edon is able to appreciate music and singing in a special manner.

5.2.7. Valentina: freedom of choice and the school as a distinctive place

Valentina is a quiet observer. Her gaze seeks for connection, for response; and when our eyes encounter each other, I feel the need to show her appreciation and acceptance. Valentina was born in Finland, but her parents are originally from Congo and Angola. She speaks Portuguese at home and Finnish in school and with her friends. Valentina enjoys singing, sometimes at home and sometimes outside home – in the home yard. At home, she sings with her family, and she plays and sings *at the same time*. Last Saturday, for example, she sang an Angolan song with her mother, singing and dancing. Her older sister and her younger brother also sing at home, and music seems to occupy a special place in the family; it is an important part of the home ecosystem. When I asked Valentina to sing the Angolan song for me, she said “no”, without any more explanation. She expressed her decision of not sharing the song with such determination and agency that I did not ask again.

The conversation continued, and I asked Valentina if there are other places, apart from home, where she sings. She confidently responded: *In the shop*, and she narrated a story of a recent occasion when she decided to sing an Angolan song in a grocery store. As she described it: *It feels excellent when others listen (to her voice) in the shop. All people listen when I sing, and parents are pleased because children sing nicely.*

As the conversation with Valentina continued, she talked about her favourite song: a pop song her sister usually sings – which she enjoys dancing to and singing. When I asked her more about the song, and if she would sing it to me, her answer was: *It is in Norwegian*, and she indicated an end to the conversation. Later, Valentina referred to school singing as a very different activity than singing at home, and she explained what she enjoys about singing in school: *I like when all the children sing*

together in school – at the same time. I like it when everybody sings.

The school is a place in which it might not be safe to sing alone, and much less to share homeland songs (not even in an interview). In this case, a public place with unknown people (the grocery store) might offer more freedom and opportunities for agency than one's own school. Valentina chose to raise her political voice in a public place where *all people listen*, and where her parents can be proud of their daughter and of their family's music heritage. School is a place different from home and different from a public place. Valentina learned to navigate the school ecosystem with its limitations, and chose to put forward her political voice both outside school (by singing) and in school (by refusing to sing), as part of her singing ecology.

5.3. Children's singing spaces: *horizontal analysis*

While the vertical analysis showed the diversities between children's stories, in this chapter I will search for the commonalities throughout the interview material. Although the interview questions included questions concerning spaces ('where you sing'), the children in this study were aware of the meanings of the physical, social, and metaphorical locations of their singing, and of their own possibilities of action within them. Children recognized two essential characteristics of singing spaces: trust and freedom. Body movements relate to trust and freedom in ways that are important for children – for example, movement may liberate the body, but it is only present in trustful environments. An increasingly common factor in the children's environments are electronic devices, which serve as tools for singing along and listening, and for feeling more "connected" with your own music, with the self, with other people, and with the environment.

There are, however, significant differences in the children's interviews (N=22) in terms of the ways children communicate their thoughts and feelings in relation to spaces. While there are children in this study who immediately started to describe the environments within which they sing, others did so as the conversation unfolded. While there are children who can spontaneously narrate stories, others are more brief in their conversations. The children of this study were able to describe how they sing and how they feel when singing in different places and in the spaces created by themselves. On occasions, they referred to memories and past experiences and described their engagements in great detail.

In the horizontal analysis, it became evident that the children associated the question "where do you sing" with the question "with whom you sing".

Progressing with the analysis, I realized that the physical location was not as relevant as the qualities of the social relationships provided by or created in the specific location and environment; who was present and how the space was (co-)produced in the interrelationships with other persons and the material world. For instance, when I asked Maria where she sings, in her answer she spontaneously included the people with whom she sings: I sing at home, also with mom and dad. And in the yard with my friends. When I asked Siim where he sings, he responds with the word “somewhere”, highlighting the presence of others and the quality of the activity (even though he made sure to distinguish between school singing and outside school singing). Sometimes in the Spring celebration (school) or somewhere with my friends, sometimes I sing with my friends because it is fun.

Halima explains that she sings at home alone or with her sister, and outside with friends. She also describes the qualities of the natural environment.

Sometimes I sing outside, at home in my bed, and sometimes in the living room, and then sometimes in the school recess...I sing alone, sometimes with my sister... (I sing) in our yard, there is much grass... and sometimes I take my headphones to listen and I go to the forest, and sometimes I go with my friend.

Some of the interviewed children identify places that are not good for singing – where there are limitations on singing. For example, when I asked Jasmin the same question (where do you sing?), her first answer was “*Not everywhere.*” And later she elaborated: *In the school there is not so much time to have this (humming/singing) in your mind...In the middle of the lesson you cannot like hum, but you can think about humming.*

The interviews show that children are aware of and understand the dynamics and the characteristics of singing places and spaces. Based on Wyness (2006), singing spaces, as opposed to places, offer more possibilities for the children to be agents, to have freedom, and to negotiate power relations. For example, when I asked Aapo where he sings, he narrated a family situation at home singing with his small sister, in which he leads the activity and has power: *Sometimes we make with my sister “try-ourselves-game”, and I sing and play – and my sister, who is only 5 years, makes the chorus.*

Singing spaces created by the children have their own dynamics; power relations are negotiated by the children – including, for example, negotiations about how the voice should be used. Leila explained in detail how good she feels when

she sings with her friends, but also how she needs to take an active role within the group to regulate power relations: *Sometimes my friends use all their voices and come up with very strong voices, and other's voices are so quiet, and then it is so weird.* Is your voice quiet, I asked Leila, and she responded: *My voice is a kind of quiet voice when I sing with my friends... I like to sing with my friends if they listen. And I said to them, let's sing now with quieter voices, like that.*

In the interviews, the children refer to singing with others and singing alone, singing at home and singing in school, singing in natural surroundings and in vehicles, singing in hobbies, singing in shops or commercial centres, and singing while moving or dancing and using technological devices. As Aapo comments, the question “Where do you sing?” can be difficult to answer: *It is difficult to say (places) because I like to sing very much, and also in different places.* Hence, this indicates that the significance of singing within locations is provided by the quality of the connections generated within the environment. While singing location categories (or places where children sing) are not sufficient to show the extension of the phenomenon, they open the door for new discussions. Singing alone can have a completely different meaning for the children in different social situations, while relating to specific places. For example, *singing alone* in a school celebration (in public) can have a completely different meaning than singing alone in the school yard (e.g. as self-directed singing, in private), even when in both cases singing happens in school.

5.3.1. In-between spaces for singing

While Mohamed narrates in detail his experiences of playing with his friends (who also have foreign cultural backgrounds) in the school yard, and the construction of a social singing space inside the school, Minna (and others) explain that humming or whistling during the school recess, as self-directed singing, is important for creating in-between spaces in the school environment. On the other hand, Aapo, who often sings at home, comments on how intimidating singing in school is, particularly in school celebrations. Aapo elaborates: *(I feel) a bit nervous when performing in celebrations. When in the Spring celebration there are a lot of people ...*

Aapo's narration about public singing contrasts with the idea of singing or humming in the school yard, showing that the meanings of private and public singing in school can be very different, as private and public singing is experienced in a completely different manner by the children. The school yard is a place of *action* for the children. It can facilitate musical creativity, expressivity, social cohesion, and more (e.g. Marsh, 2008, 2017, 2013).

Furthermore, the school yard is somehow different from the rest of the school, as it offers possibilities of freedom (although with limitations). It can be a place of solitude as well, as it is for Achim, who had recently arrived as a refugee child and who spent the school recess alone for weeks until he made friends. Research on playground music has shown that children's playing can include a great variety of singing activities and musical games (e.g. Campbell, 2010; Marsh, 2008, 2017, 2013), as in the school yard when children are able to build *in-between spaces* for playing (Aminpour et. al., 2020) – and, as I suggest, they also create *in-between spaces for singing*.

The children's interactions in the school yard include instances of social singing, although the children themselves recognize that they sing together less and less in the school yard as time passes. A girl, here called Elisa, explains in her interview that she enjoys singing with her best friend and classmate and that they sing at school when they can, when they are allowed to do so. Elisa also explains that she typically sings with her best friend during school recesses, and then when they meet after school to sing and dance (making choreographies) together as they wish. However, she also explains that she sings with her friend much less at school now, during the time of the interviews, compared to when they started the first grade.

5.3.2. Ecological agency in singing spaces

Children's geographers focus on the study of the interrelations of place and space, and how thinking spatiality might contribute to studying childhood in new ways (Holloway & Valentine, 2000a, 2000b): "to demonstrate the difference that space and place make to childhood but also the difference that children make to the spaces and places in which they live" (Gallagher, 2006, p. 160). With this in mind, the empirical material and its analysis reflects on how and why places can afford or constrain children's voices and how children, through their presence and actions, can claim locations as their own. Based on the literature, it is thus important to understand the limitations that children encounter in their daily life and in the places they inhabit – what role children's ecological agency, as relational and temporal, plays in the construction of spaces and how spaces and places afford ecological agency. It has been shown that active participation grows when a sense of safety and belonging is established within groups or communities (e.g. Gallagher, 2006), and these constructs develop over time: hence, the importance of considering the temporal dimension of ecological agency. For instance, Sofia Cele (2016) explains that "childhoods are contextualized and situated, but children's agency to construct political subjectivities is always performed

through everyday life” (p. 85). This means that children’s everyday life experiences both inside and outside school influence their ecological agency.

As DeNora (2000) has suggested, people turn to music in order to regulate themselves as aesthetic agents and as beings who feel, think, and act in their particular daily contexts (DeNora, 2000). Taking an example from Mohamed’s narrative, Mohamed exhibits a strong cultural confidence, along with personal confidence, especially in the school yard, empowered by a group of children who mostly understand the Arabic language, but also for example in his interview with me. He is proud of his family’s cultural background and heritage, and of his music. He relates how he not only sings a musical game from his homeland in the school yard, but also leads the activity, engaging the other children in the game – in other words, he exercises ecological agency. This agency is relational (as it works in relation to a specific group of friends) and temporal (as he has constructed an understanding and appreciation of his native culture as part of singing ecology).

However, Mohamed’s case can be considered rather rare, since most children (including some of his friends) were shy about sharing their homeland songs in school. Children of this age understand when foreign languages, cultures, and family beliefs are different from the mainstream, and they also infer societal recognition (or neglect) of their cultural heritage. Children’s living heritage, which is formed by various materials and intangible elements coming from previous generations and featuring daily lives and environments, cannot be ignored or devalued. Failing to recognise children’s heritage is to fail to recognise the children themselves, their experiences, and to make them invisible, or *not present*. In such an environment, the emergence of ecological agency is reduced or nullified. Furthermore, since “agency is not simply concerned with the ways in which we engage with our contexts-for-action but rather has to do with the capacity to shape our responsiveness to the situations we encounter in our lives” (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 146), these agentic responses of childhood also influence children’s future lives and capacities to respond to future situations.

The analysis indicates that children’s singing spaces have the potential to influence children’s ecological agency, as they function as arenas for building relationships with the social environment and “enviro-ing” society. However, singing spaces are complex in nature; while the children in this study show that they know how to create these spaces in the first place, and that they use these spaces *with intention* to exercise their agency and put forward their political voices, they also need an environment that supports these intentions. If, as DeNora (2000) suggests, “music is in dynamic relation with

social life, helping to invoke, stabilize and change the parameters of agency, collective and individual” (p. 20), and if singing in early childhood is part of children’s identity work (Barrett, 2006, 2011), then school singing – and in first grade in particular – can be considered an important tool for supporting children’s ecological agency, sense of belonging, and identity work, not only in the classrooms but also within the school community and society.

5.3.3. Singing spaces as bodies-in-movement spaces

Singing and body movements are present in the discussions with the children – for example when playing with friends – and are mentioned repeatedly. Movements, dance, and other ways of body playfulness are clearly represented in the children’s interviews. Movement is for young children an integral part of their playing, and singing forms part of the same multimodality. Consequently, when the interviewed children speak about singing, particularly outside school, they relate it to dance, moving, acting, choreographies – and to the freedom these activities give them. For example, Valentina states in her interview that at home she sings and dances her favourite song, *singing and dancing at the same time*. As Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (1999) has suggested, “we literally discover ourselves in movement” (p. 136). Effectively, the children who participated in this study create spaces in which they discover themselves, their songs, their movements and dances, both individually and collectively through body movements and forms of vitality (Stern, 2010). This was manifested in the narrations, as they describe their multimodal performances in relation to three factors: the different kinds of musics they select according to their mood or needs, the different kinds of movements (or choreographies) they create (and their actions and intentions within these), and the possibilities of *jumping in and out* (Edon), as needed, the freedom these multimodal performances provide (also described by Minna).

In what follows, I open up this multimodality present in children’s singing spaces. Firstly, the children show that they are aware of song structures and the qualities of the music they sing and dance to. Furthermore, children categorise songs according to musical elements, such as tempo, general atmosphere and rhythm, performer’s vocal quality, vocal tenderness, or musical intentions (e.g. Leila, Halima, Sharon, Minna, Valentina). Children use songs accordingly, for example for dancing or for relaxing, and in their singing spaces they can decide on the functions of music, for example in relation to their emotional states. For example, Leila explains that songs have different qualities and thus belong to different categories:

I: And...what kind of songs do you sing?

L: I usually sing those kinds of songs... peaceful songs, then I sometimes sing songs that have strong voices and then songs with normal voices. And then I sing exciting songs and then sitting and standing (movements) and this kind of things...so that I can dance.

L: I sing those with both of my sisters.

...

I: So you sing peaceful songs, and then..?

L: Then strong songs, then those songs that are good for dancing.

As the interview progresses, Leila refers to “singing with close friends”, highlighting that:

We sing those songs, so that we can dance and sing at the same time.

Secondly, the interviewed children show an intrinsic connection between music and movement. Minna, Valentina, and others explain the significance of moving and dancing while singing. As a member of a choir and music theatre group, Minna experiences singing and movement outside school settings and recognises the lack of movement in school singing. For her, moving with the music and “dancing the songs” is not done in school. She claims that she enjoys singing and dancing at the same time:

I: Ok, and how did you feel singing at school then?

M: It is also nice, when it's a nice song.

I: Is it the same than when singing in your hobby? Or is it different?

M: No, or because in school we do not dance at the same time, like I almost always do when I sing in my hobby, the song can be danced.

I: And not in the school?

M: No.

I: Is it nice to dance?

M: Yes, in my hobby there is more choreography.

I: Yes. Is that nice?

M: Yes

I: And why is it nice to do choreography and sing and dance at the same time?

M: It is good that I can dance there, dance and also move, I like it.

In another fragment of the interview, Minna explains that singing gives her freedom and that the connections between singing and body movements are very important for her.

Thirdly, Edon refers to the ways he dances to the music of his homeland at home, showing how music and movement operate as a continuum that can be entered or exited, giving children freedom:

I: And you said that sometimes you listen to (the country of origin) music. Do you sing along?

A: I like this music all the time. Sometimes I chump in, I don't know what...or dance. Sometimes dancing, but sometimes I do not dance.

Children are also able to select songs with particular characteristics to organise their own activities within singing spaces (e.g. songs for dancing, songs for relaxing), while they recognise the central role of movement as an integral part of singing, and appreciate the freedom that singing can offer within singing spaces (e.g. the possibility of “jumping in and out” as they want, without adult’s judgements, instructions, or rules).

5.3.4. Technology in singing spaces

Technology is present in the interviewed children’s ecosystems, and permeates all of their ecological systems. According to Lydia Plowman (2016), “in terms of Bronfenbrenner’s model, the devices that may once have been thought of as being located within the microsystem are distributed across the concentric circles from the child at the centre to the outermost realm of the macrosystem” (p. 194). Thus, as expected, technology as a topic arose in the children’s interviews, showing how children use technological devices to access their musics, dancing and singing alone or with others. Not only individual singing, but also group musical performance can be fostered by the use of technological devices. The interviewed children explain that they find their songs by searching on the web, through YouTube, Spotify, or other online platforms. They also use devices and applications for playing music on their phones. Some of them use devices for singing when their parents do not sing, or when they are not available to make music with them. For example, when I asked the children “where do you hear others singing”, a child responded *on YouTube*.

In the following depiction, Abdul explains how he uses technology:

I: And where do you hear others singing?

A: On YouTube

I: Does your mom or dad sing?

A: No.

I: So, think about your song and about how it feels (when you

listen)?

(the child colours the “happy” face)

I: Why does it feel like this, happy?

A: They sing well.

I: Would you like to sing along sometime?

A: No. I listen. Some day.

I: Is this song on YouTube or where is it? Where do you listen to this?

A: On YouTube. The computer.

In this study, the use of technology for singing is present at the level of the microsystem (e.g. at home, where siblings also play an important role), however it is also extended into more distant systems. Technology as a tool provides the children access to their own music (sometimes not the same music as their parents) when and where they wish, giving them the freedom to organise their own activities with music. The children were able to turn on their music as they decided, select their own songs for listening, singing, or dancing, and even to manipulate certain features of the music (e.g. to manipulate the speed of a recorded song, to search for different versions of the same song). On the other hand, using technological devices can limit the time children spend doing other activities. While the use of technology permeates the whole of society (Plowman, 2016), and children can gain independence using technological devices, children’s and youth’s overuse of electronic devices and screen media can be also associated with negative effects (Riesch et al., 2019). One of the children commented on her use of mobile phone applications for playing the piano and for singing along, particularly when her mother was busy, at work, or otherwise working at home with her computer. While the child was connected with music and using the piano application, she was nevertheless alone in that instance.

In another interview, a child names two of his favourite songs: one from his homeland, and another of a foreign cultural heritage, a pop Latino song. He explains how he found both songs on YouTube. In this case, technology helps him to connect with the songs of his homeland and with a song of another (distant) cultural heritage. Edon: *I like the (name of country of origin omitted)’s song. It’s on YouTube, and then I like “despacito” (name of the song).* In another interview, the child explains how the teachers had taught a new song in the class, and how he wanted to find it later at home. He had searched for the song on the internet, but could not find it. This shows that children might actually search for the music that interests them (even a school song) using technological tools, and that there might be possibilities for connecting school music and outside school music. However, many times children are left alone in this matter.

In sum, technology gives the interviewed children independence and freedom, for example in deciding which music to select, what to do with the music, who gets involved in the activities, how long the activities last, when and how activities vary, and more. Children gain independence in how to organise their musical routines, both alone and with friends, but mostly apart from adults. This can be considered a private space in which children feel connected with their own music – and detached from adults’ judgements and influences. Social interactions in the “real world” (as opposed to the virtual world) can be limited if the use of devices is excessive, but again, children also interact with each other virtually. Technological devices can also help children create relationships and significant interactions with their peers, or promote independent ways of using the music. On some occasions parents are described as being included in some ways (e.g. when Saara depicts how she creates Spotify lists with the help of her mother). According to this analysis, children use technological tools mainly to sing along or to find “their music”, especially when adults are not available. Children use body movements and dance to appropriate their music and to explore their own feelings, moods, and boundaries. This means singing spaces are also spaces of expression in and through movement. Children also use body movements and technological devices in their spaces to explore their possibilities of action and agency within spaces.

5.3.5. Navigating between private and public singing

The school environment is a place designed for children by adults. It is also ruled by adults, limiting children’s possibilities of action. In the stories narrated here, even small instances of freedom materialized in singing spaces are important and necessary for the children to carry on their busy school routines. Children create singing spaces outside school, but also are willing to create them inside the school – as they can, if it is possible, either publicly or “in secret”. Private singing (also described as self-directed singing) is strongly represented, and it displays a component of privacy and secrecy. For example, referring to singing in the school yard, Sharon explains:

I sing when nobody sees me, and I am alone. Sometimes I sing to (a close friend’s name) and hum. Because this is a kind of friend, who will not tell anybody what I don’t want her to tell.

The children I interviewed explain that in the classroom it is difficult to create these kinds of spaces – the school yard is more accessible – but they try to find opportunities, and most of the time this is not even noticed by the teachers. I was present in the classroom when some of the children

started humming spontaneously in the art class while drawing their portraits. I was perhaps the only one who noticed the subtle humming. The children were immersed in the world of art, and the humming emerged as an almost mystical moment; it was a subtle moment of freedom inside the classroom.

I was in the classroom that morning. The teacher announced the art class, and the children were asked to draw and colour their portraits in colourful paper frames. Students were working on their portraits quietly. I perceived a nice, warm atmosphere. I was standing at the back of the classroom when I suddenly started hearing tiny, mixed sounds; sounds coming from different directions, soft sounds. I got curious, and I moved around carefully, trying to listen carefully but not interrupting or “breaking” the atmosphere. It was then when I noticed that some of the children were humming while drawing. Humming while creating their own portraits, colouring them. Perhaps without noticing, those colourful lines of music emerged as a source of companionship or as part of their own identities extended into their drawing. The sounds were tiny, then became clearer. The sounds were ethereal, an ethereal music floating in the air. The sublime intimacy of singing and the arts. (Researcher’s diary)

This event reveals that children can create private singing spaces inside the classroom, if they are given time and space. Humming can be considered a way of secret singing, *singing for yourself*; an act of freedom, of caring for yourself – feeling connected to your own subjectivity.

The dichotomy between private singing and public singing is significant in the interviewed children’s depictions. Children refer to public singing and private singing extensively in their interviews, showing the boundaries between private singing and public singing. In this sense, singing is also a place for developing interpersonal relations beyond the home ecosystem. Singing with the whole class in school, or singing with a small group of close friends or family members who appreciate singing, have a completely different meaning for the children. As described by the children who participated in this study, close friends (“those you can trust” – as defined by the children) play a special role in these situations. Family can be in general a location of trust, but this is not a given, particularly in relation to singing. Home environments differ, and singing experiences are influenced by religious beliefs or other family beliefs and values. In this sense, *trust* (or the absence of it) is a recurrent notion in children’s interviews, followed by the notion of *freedom*.

Some of the children speak about the differences between singing for “yourself”, singing with family and friends, and singing in a public place. Private singing is generally located at home, but also outside home, for example in natural surroundings or in other places which can also function as private space. As Dean (2017) has suggested, public singing can be defined as social singing and private singing as self-directed singing. In one of the interviews, the child explains in detail how private singing functions for her. She describes a family situation in the forest and a private moment of singing (or self-directed singing) that only happened when her older brother was apart:

I: And when was the last time you sang?

H: In the forest.

I: Oh in the forest! And when was that?

H: I don't know, on Saturday or Sunday.

I: Ok, and were you alone there? Or who was with you?

H: I was there with my family, my mom and dad were there like (doing something)... and then Leevi was there somewhere closer. And then he was well apart, and then I sang softly.

I: Yes, and who is Leevi?

H: My older brother.

Similarly, other children comment on their own feelings about singing at home with these words: *I like (to sing) when I am sometimes alone at home... [and] When I am at home I like to sing for myself.* Private singing – including humming and “singing for yourself” – is an important part of children’s lives and a recurrent topic in their interviews, indicating that children can also create singing spaces within places by singing softly or humming (both alone or with others). For the children, humming seems to function as providing a sense of companionship, or as an activity that emerges when there is time and space, but also when there is a need for companionship or in order to feel better. Children refer to a “humming mood” in the interviews, and explain that a humming mood may arise when there is “waiting time”, space, and silence. For example, Jazmin explains that the humming mood can be difficult to refrain from. It can be a continuation of a singing mood or a desire to continue - a private, personal, imaginary way of singing.

J: If I have a humming mood, it can be that I cannot stop it.

I: Ok, and when for instance do you have that kind of mood?

J: Well, when it is that moment of singing, I mean humming, then, when it's something in between, if there is silence, then my humming mood comes, then I can still hear it.

Moreover, later in the interview, Jasmin refers to the school's limitations and explains that *in the middle of the lesson you cannot, like, hum, but you can think about humming*. Minna also describes how her humming mood and whistling mood emerge as a feeling of companionship:

I: And do you know what's humming?

M: Mmm... this.

I: Yes! And do you make this?

M: Sometimes I do it, yes, and I also whistle.

I: Yes, and sometimes, where, for instance?

M: Well, if there is nothing else to do, if I am in the metro I can whistle.

I: Do you do this in other places?

M: When I am on public transportation, and I do not speak with anybody, then I whistle or hum something.

I: Yes...

M: What about school?

I: Sometimes in the school recess I can do it...

Children also refer to humming in connection with creativity and spontaneous singing. Edon elaborates on humming:

A: I sometimes do it. When I make different songs.

I: Aha, different songs?

A: My songs (invented songs).

I: And where do you make those?

A: When I go somewhere, when I go to (the child names a shopping mall where there is a children's train ride) I feel like doing those songs.

In the children's microsystem, the role of the family and their family interrelations are essential to their ecological agency and to the recognition of children's cultural and musical identities. For example, in the following depiction, Valentina talks about her mother's supportive participation in her singing:

I: When did you sing last time? Do you remember?

V: At home.

I: When?

V: On Saturday.

I: Which music was it?

V: An Angolan song.

I: I am sure it's beautiful music.
I: And how did you feel when singing this?
V: Good.
I: Did you sing the song alone or with others?
V: With my mom.

Public singing, however, is perceived as intimidating for many children, especially when referring to school public performances – an activity that implies the presence of unknown others – normally a large audience. In the following fragment Aapo explains his feelings related to singing, and compares the home situation and the public performance situation in school:

I: How do you feel when singing?
A: A bit nervous (excited) when performing in celebrations.
I: Yes, and when you sing at home?
A: Then it's easier, because then there are only two persons watching, because I have my mom and my sister. (...) But in the Spring celebration at the school where's lots of people... my memory just escapes into the crowd. I am surprised because I see so many people.

However, there are also individual differences; for instance, one child considers the school celebrations exciting and “normal”, because the child relates the celebration to home experiences and her mother’s artistic work. This shows that what is a “normal” or comfortable situation for one child can be a very uncomfortable or stressful situation for another child.

How do you feel when singing in school, is it different from singing at home?
S: Eh, well...Soon we will have the Spring celebration, and we will go to the stage. And people will come to see our performance... ahh!
I: Yes, and is this nice?
S: Yes, it is!
S: It is like normal, like my mom, she likes to sing, and she will also go to the stage to make a show for others.

These examples illustrate how the interactions within the microsystem (in this case home and school) can vary, influencing children’s actions and beliefs about themselves as ecological agents, as well as the use of affordances and the construction of meanings in the school’s ecosystem.

There are common elements in the children's description of their daily singing: singing with a small group of friends or family members (one or two persons) is different from singing with a large group of people you do not know. For example, Halima describes a moment of singing in a forest where she sometimes goes with one friend. Sharon sings in the school yard with a friend – one she can trust, as she describes it. These special moments of singing tend not to happen in large groups, they can be considered a kind of private space, where only close friends are allowed, but can also be understood as social singing within a trustful and mutually created space. In the following excerpt, Siim describes a singing space (at home or outside) and how he sings raps with one or two friends:

I: Can you tell me more about those times when you make rap with your friends? How many friends do this with you?

S: Two or one.

I: Where?

S: At home or outside.

Children can also create singing spaces while travelling in vehicles. For example, Hilja explains that she enjoys singing in the car, when family members can listen to her voice:

H: Sometimes I sing in the car.

I: Can you tell me more, why do you sing in the car?

H: I don't know, it is nice.

I: What's nice about it?

H: Well, when everyone is there, then they listen to my singing voice.

I: And who is normally there?

H: My grandma, when she is there, and then for instance my big brother.

In this case the need to be heard is present. For Hilja, it is nice when her family listens to her singing voice, and the car provides a shared space for that. Following this line of thought, and navigating between the entanglements of private and public space, the following excerpt shows how Sharon conceives school as a challenging place for singing. Sharon explains how a trusted, close friend, can sometimes access her private space of singing in the school yard. Sharon identifies two indicators that are present in her singing space: trust and freedom.

I: Do you sing at school?

S: mm. I sing when nobody sees me, and I am alone.

S: Sometimes I sing to (a close friend's name) and hum.

S: Because this is a kind of a friend, who will not tell anybody, what

I don't want her to tell. And I said to her, do what you want, if you want to sing, or if you do not want to, so no.

In the following excerpt, Helmi refers to the intimate relationships that can develop in singing spaces. Helmi's comments resonate with Sharon's comment, but she clearly explains the difference between singing with a close friend (or to a close friend) and singing publicly in school classroom, with the whole class:

I: And where do you sing with others?

H: Well, for example, if I am with my friend, somewhere.

I: And is it the same thing at school?

H: No.

I: Why not?

H: Well, because then I can't like to sing, because I don't like to sing here, when there are more children around.

In her interview, Sharon explains that she does not like to sing in school in the same way that she likes to sing with her friend elsewhere, because at school the group is too large.

5.3.6. Individual and group singing

The children in this study see individual and group singing as completely different activities. Furthermore, children engage in group singing and individual singing in different ways, including using the voice in different ways. It is not the same to participate in a musical performance with a singing group or a choir as it is to sing alone in a concert. However, as in other aspects of singing and singing spaces, the ways in which individual singing and group singing is experienced relate to children's ecologies and to their previous experiences. Singing alone in public can be engaging for some children, but too intimidating for many others. Children who are familiar with public singing, and in many cases have a music hobby or learn singing or instrumental playing, learn to handle and enjoy the public performance situation. However, for many children singing alone in public can produce unrest or even anxiety.

When I asked Minna how it feels to sing at home and in the school recess, she reflected for a moment and then commented: *Sometimes I start to whistle, I do not quite know how it feels... I try to think...it makes me feel free.* I asked her if she could imagine why it feels like that? And she replied: *Because it is nice and it gives strength. And this strength feels like freedom, and it gives freedom.*

In the following excerpt, Minna explains how singing with others gives her impulse.

M: I get from music strength and this happiness. Usually, I sing with a small voice. I enjoy performance, but I don't like to perform alone.

I: Do you like to perform with a group, then? Or with another person?

M: Yes, because others give a good impulse.

The following, for its part, demonstrates how Siim felt surprised about his own possibilities when singing with friends:

I: How does it feel when you sing with your friends?

(The child starts colouring the "surprised" face in the chart.)

I: Why does it feel like that?

S: Because it is a bit that I am surprised that I can sing with my friends. That I can do a lot with my friends.

I: Why do you sing with your friends?

S: I cannot say, but it's quite nice, pretty fun.

In the following fragment, Jamil explains how singing with friends is supportive, as he does not have confidence in his own singing abilities: *My friends know how to sing, but I do not know how. I try to sing with them, try to follow them.*

Importantly, Helmi confirms that the use of the voice is also dependent on the environment; we sing differently if we sing alone, or if we sing in a group. *If I am with my friends, I like to sing a lot! ... I can sing with my friends, and I like it a lot. I like to sing a lot!*

It should be noticed, however, that for some children group singing can also bring its own limitations, as was the case for Leila, who describes mixed feelings when singing with friends, mostly generated by her perception of "not being heard", as she was searching for her place within the group: *I like to sing with my friends, if they listen*, she said, and explained that she tells her friends: *Let's sing now with quiet voices.*

The children who participated in this study explained how they create their songs and improvise in private, in self-directed singing, but they also referred to social improvised singing with significant others within singing spaces. It is also clear that in places such as school this form of singing is less present than outside school. For instance, in the following depiction, Maria explains how her family and close friends, as part of her microsystem, influence her engagement

with singing and creativity. She describes how in the singing space she and her friends created, she sings with a bigger voice and enjoys it, and she also comments on how she creates or improvises songs with her friends, feeling empowered within these interactions. She describes how affordances for creativity emerge.

I: And did you say earlier that you make a big voice with your friends?

M: I can make it with my friends, all around the neighbourhood.

M: I like to sing a lot.

I: And what do you sing?

M: Everything.

I: But what?

M: We create (improvise) our own songs.

Sharon explains how creativity (and a sense of wonder) emerges when singing with her friends in this way: *When singing with my friends, new songs come, and we get surprised with our new ideas. Ah! This is so nice! – we say.* Edon refers to improvised humming in private space, as he explains that he hums and creates songs in a space in which he feels safe and comfortable – which is not home and not school, but a neutral space.

A: I sometimes do it (humming). When I make different songs.

I: Aha, different songs?

A: My songs (invented songs).

I: And where do you make those?

A: When I go somewhere, when I go to (the child names a public place) I feel like making those songs.

As narrated by the interviewed children, invented songs and spontaneous singing are important components of singing spaces. A singing space can be created either when singing with a small group of friends, or with a family member, or with one friend, or just alone; when feelings of safety, trust, and freedom – and also curiosity – are present, improvised singing and invented singing tend to emerge.

5.3.7. Connection, empowerment, and emotions

The children in this study express that music affects their mood, as Sasha describes: *It is nice to sing, it also gives you a good mood.* Other children also refer to this aspect in their conversations. In one of the interviews, a child claims that when he feels lonely (or does not have friends) he hums (or sings softly), and then he feels a bit better. The child is very shy, and his voice is so soft that I

had to ask him to repeat his answer. He reaffirmed his statements, using a soft but clearly understandable voice. I later reflected on the use of the soft voice and its possible connection with the kind of message he was giving. The child explains:

S: When I am a bit lonely, when I do not have friends, then I hum (or sing softly) and...

I: Sorry, I cannot hear you well... (the child was speaking very softly)

S: When I am a bit lonely, then I can sing, and I feel a bit better.

In the interview, Maria makes it clear that her favourite song was one she learned from a friend, not from her parents nor teachers. The song is called “Minun ystäväni on kuin villasukka” (My friend is like woollen sock) by Petri Virtanen. The child remarks on the importance of her friend’s support, and speaks about the enjoyment of singing with friends. This kind of information is also present in other children’s interviews, in which singing with others is considered important for getting impulse, strength, and motivation, and for gaining energy in and through singing.

In general, some of the children mention that they learned their favourite songs from their parents or other family members – or that they listen to these songs with their family at home. For example, Valentina narrates the most recent day of family singing, when she sang an Angolan song at home with her mom. Minna and Siim explain how at least one of their favourite songs is one they have heard from their moms. In another interview, and with an emotional tone, a boy expresses that his favourite song is one his grandmother taught to him when he was still living in his homeland. Based on the interviews, children are aware of the emotional power of songs. In the following excerpt, Sharon explains her emotions in relation to songs. Whilst she understands that the song’s stories (lyrics) are fictional, she also recognises that some songs produce strong feelings in her.

S: Yes, do you know what? Some songs make me cry.

I: Yes, why?

S: Some songs are so sad for me. Sometimes I cry, there is a song about a horse which was so lovely and happy, and then the horse disappeared. This is like “playing”, not real, but it is still a bit bad.

As Elias describes in the following fragment, there can be more than one favourite song, and the songs are associated with the emotions that they arose in them:

I: Do you have a favourite song?

E: No.

I: And two favourite songs, or three?

E: Five.

...

I: What songs are those?

E: Happy songs.

Siim explains that he gets surprised about the possibilities that singing together with friends offer: I am surprised that I can do a lot when singing with friends. Similarly, as it was shown in her narrative, Maria feels empowered singing with friends:

M: When I am with my friends and we sing together, I sing with a big voice. If I am with my friends, I like to sing a lot!

I: So, with your friends you make a big voice?

M: Yes, with my friends I can sing, and I like it a lot.

The role of friends in this stage of life is fundamental, and “children establish themselves as social actors through ongoing interaction with others, particularly their peers” (Wyness, 2006, p. 166). Especially if the family does not sing, or does not show interest or engage with singing, the children may find their songs from friends, or use electronic platforms such as YouTube or Spotify to access their music. In one way or another, children learn many songs from their friends. As the interviews show, it is not only the songs that are important but also the socio-ecological-emotional experiences of singing the songs (or hearing the song) with significant others, producing a space that provides possibilities for action. Children form groups and identify themselves with certain kinds of music and performers. Singing together (or listening to certain songs together) may also be important for establishing a strong sense of pertinence to the group (e.g. Kulset, 2020; Nibbs & Brettell, 2016). As the analysis shows, children produce their own singing spaces in which they can be themselves, and in which they are recognised as agentic members of the group and ecosystem.

5.4. Children’s navigation between singing ecologies

The interviewed children were aware of the school culture, and the role that singing occupies in the school, and of the currently fragmented view of singing in the school in relation to outside-school music. This was manifested, for example, when children refer in their interviews to repertoire, and indicate that school songs are not the songs they sing ‘in their lives’. Children’s independent music-making outside school tends to be more related to play – as in the invented

songs of earlier years (e.g. Barrett, 2006). Prior research also shows that music-making in school is experienced in a different way than singing outside school; according to Griffin (2009), who conducted a study with children aged 7 and 8 in Canada, children's music creativity outside the music class and outside the school is less structured than inside school. Following Wyness (2006, p. 145), three mechanisms structure children's school experiences: 1) timetables, where children's use of time and space are pre-determined by adults; 2) curriculum – which is determined by adults outside the school, such as policy makers; and 3) the school's code of conduct, the rules and regulations of the school, determined by the principal and teachers. This means that the spontaneous singing of early childhood might suffer from the major shift from home to the school's environment, where singing is generally reduced to school music hours assigned by the curriculum, and where the repertoire and the ways of using the voice are expected to be approached following teacher's instructions.

In the interviews, the children in this study explain with passion their experiences of singing outside school with friends, highlighting the freedom of their singing and of their playing, in the spaces created by themselves. As Barrett (2016) writes, children's musical play has been described as “reflective of their understandings of ‘culture in the small’ set against those larger musical cultural institutions they encounter in their daily lives” (p. 42). Indeed, the children who participated in this study recognized a different approach to singing and songs in school (in relation to singing outside school); for example, by describing the “lack of movements” associated with singing in school. The possibility of singing here and now versus regulated and controlled singing also marks a difference between inside and outside school singing.

Singing as a cultural tool is present in the environment at any time, accessible at any time, according to Dean (2019), and it can function as an affordance in everyday life. However, in school singing is not possible at all times, its use is limited. Children learn to refrain from their desire to sing in the here and now – waiting for opportunities, perhaps in the school yard or in singing spaces created by them inside or outside the classrooms – for example, humming or *thinking about humming* as described by Jasmin. According to this study's interviews, school songs (mostly children's Finnish songs) are perceived as different from the songs children listen to outside school (including popular music and songs of the homeland). The children in this study considered school songs “teacher's songs”, or the songs teachers' teach (Jasmin), something that most children accept as part of the school's regulations. As Jasmin explains: *Normally we do not sing songs from these kind of singers, because they are so long, we sing them in our life,*

but these (here) are teacher's songs, the kind of songs the teachers teach.

According to the teachers, some of the children resist singing activities proposed by the teachers, for example in relation to the selected repertoire, by not participating in the singing. The teachers of these children were dedicated and experienced professionals who prepared their lessons with care. However, the school in itself, with its limitations and structures, strict schedule and limited freedom, influences the ways in which children perceive singing in school. In one of the interviews a child recognises that singing in school is not fully an enjoyment (but a partial enjoyment). He recognises that singing outside school can be more engaging. The child comments:

I: How do you feel when singing in school?

S: Half joy.

Another child comments on her feelings when singing in school: *It feels... Nice (intonation of doubts), mmm, and perhaps sometimes I feel tired (explained as bored), not always.* However, other children focus on the possibilities of group singing, and on how their voices sound when singing in the music class, with the group:

I: How do you feel singing in school?

M: Good.

I: Why does it feel good?

M: Because in school when we sing, we are many singing together, so it is nice when the voice goes out and there are many singing...

In the context of the school, with its limitations and opportunities, where according to the children singing is not fully engaging and where the songs children sing outside school are not generally taken into account, it is pertinent to ask if children's political voices are heard, and if the differences in their home ecosystems are sufficiently taken into account.

5.4.1. Self-directed singing in school

As already shown, self-directed singing – also called private singing – is very important for the children I interviewed. Singing can be present in school in ways that teachers may not even notice (e.g. researcher's diary, humming inside the classroom). Singing can act as a form of companionship, an inspiration for creativity, and can promote feelings of freedom. Humming, as one important way of private singing, was also present in children's narrations, although it

should be noted that one of the interview questions related explicitly to humming and whether it counts as singing. In one of the interviews, the child referred to humming as a form of companionship in school, for example in situations when there is not much to do, and when the class situation did not allow for doing anything other than waiting. This function of singing while “waiting” is also present in other interviews. However, not all children are eager to sing or hum in school, and they may reserve this for a more private space, such as home. One child comments how he would not dare to sing in the classroom because students are expected to be quiet during lessons. A child comments against singing alone (or humming) in school, because someone can laugh at him; the same child explains that he hums when he improvises songs alone at home. In a very emotional conversation, another child explains that he hums to change his mood when he feels lonely at home – singing makes him feel better.

Among the interviewees, there were also children who considered themselves non-singers. For example, Nilo comments that he never sings in school and that he feels worried in the music class. He does not describe why he feels that, but he is very clear about his feelings.

I: When was the last time you sang in school?

N: I never sing at school.

I: Ok.

I: Why not?

N: I don't want. I have.... Tasks to do.

*I: How do you feel when there is a music class and singing in school?
(We read the faces chart again and the child selects “worried”.)*

I: Why do you feel worried?

N: I don't know why, but I am worried.

There are also considerations about the school structure and about how children feel about interacting in such places. Teachers have probably not said that it is forbidden to hum in the classroom, but given the school context, in which the students are requested to be quiet and listen to the teacher, humming can be understood by the children as prohibited. In the following fragment, Maria reflects on that:

I: Do you know what humming is?

M: This: “mmm”.

I: Yes, that!

I: Do you do this?

M: Sometimes.

I: Where?

M: At home.

M: Then also in the school recess if I am outside with my friends.

I: And is this singing?

M: A bit yes.

I: Do you hum inside the classroom?

M: mmm No.

I: Why not?

M: Because you cannot hum there.

Sharon refers to the ways in which children “think” the music – not necessarily humming or singing but still connecting with music throughout the school day. When I asked Sharon if she hums in school, she answered: *A bit in the school recess. Then it's like a thought, it does not come as “mmm” but it's in my mind.*

In the following fragment, Jasmin reflects on her experiences of humming in the past, and also reflects on possible ways of navigating the challenging structures of the school; “humming in silence” (thinking songs) in the classroom.

J: I mean, I hear myself and sing in my mind.

I: And where is this happening, for example?

J: For example (when I was) in the kindergarten, for example, when it is the day nap, and in the preschool and I have it in my mind.

I: Yes, and at school?

J: Well, in school there is not so much time to have this in your mind.

I: Ok, and why is that?

J: Because usually I focus first on the lessons, when the lessons are running.

I: Yes, and then?

J: Perhaps at home I do it also.

I: Yes, and in school, is it possible to do that (to hum) or not?

J: Well, in the middle of the lesson you cannot like hum, but you can think about humming. You have to focus.

The narrative continues, reflecting on the past and on how singing might diminish when it is not present in daily life in school. Jasmin continues:

I: And do you sing in the school recess? For instance, with your friends or alone?

J: With my friend, sometimes in recess, but not so much anymore.

I: What do you sing for instance?

J: I don't remember, because we have not sung for a long time.

I: Ah, ok.

I: And do you remember if you sang during the school recess, when you just started school?

J: No.

I: You do not remember?

J: Because then, I did not sing a lot – or not at all with my friends. When I came here, I did not have anyone (friends).

For Jasmin, singing in school is meaningful when it is connected with friendship. A similar story is narrated by another child who, however, refers to the decrease in her singing when she commenced primary school.

5.4.2. School songs, language, and connection

Some school songs may become children's favourites, and not others. There is one school song in particular that most of the interviewed children enjoyed. The song, named "Skidamarink", has English lyrics, and it belongs to a non-Finnish musical tradition. The lyrics refer to love, and the melody is rhythmical but also melodious, and it includes body movements/choreography and eye contact with others, something the teachers had taught to the children. One of the teachers accompanied the song playing the piano, while the other was guiding the performance and the choreography. The performance, which I observed in various opportunities, evoked positive feelings between students and teachers and a visible sense of togetherness in a way that I have not seen with the performance of other songs in the classroom. From my experience, within the interpretation of this song Thomas Turino's synchrony in performance (2008) was present in the classroom, carrying meaningful connotations. Perhaps teachers selected the song to reinforce the children's English language skills, as the group English language immersion (run by the class teachers), or because they appreciated the musical patterns of the song and its possibilities for collective musical performance, or because of both reasons. However, certainly most of the children were positive about this song, and many children referred to it in one way or another during the interviews. This resonates with the words of one interviewed child who attends musical hobbies outside school, and commented that in general there is a lack of songs with movements or choreographies in school. It is also possible that English lyrics were more understandable for the children whose Finnish language skills were limited, which affected their comprehension of lyrics.

Indeed, one of the children claims that singing songs in Finnish can be frightening for non-Finnish speaking children. During the period I spent in the school I got to learn a few words or basic greetings in Somali and Arabic. The children wanted to teach me those, and I taught them a few words in Spanish in response, something that made us feel closer. Considering the use of songs and language in school, challenges emerged when it is necessary to consider *all* children's feelings and sense of belonging. Moving between diverse songs and traditions, including Finnish traditions and songs, can be a path to explore in culturally diverse schools, where repertoire decisions need to be made "on the spot", where the teacher acts as an artisan facilitating the collective crafting of the school culture in daily interactions.

5.4.3. Justice and resistance

Children are very sensitive, and observe carefully what teachers say and do. At school, they search for justice and equality in everyday situations. They watch simple things, such as when the teacher requests some kind of action from one student and not from another. In an interview a child mentioned: *They (teachers) tell me, sing, you need to sing, but others do not sing, and that makes me sad because they ask me and not others.*

In their interviews, the teachers talk about a group of children who do not want to either participate in singing or to express themselves in any other way. Non-participation in singing the songs of the majority (or not joining the group in singing those songs) can however be seen as an act of resistance. Children can feel they are resisting a change in their beliefs, or that they can protect themselves from the unknown. Even when teachers and the school community have the best intentions, children might be at risk of experiencing "symbolic violence" (Kanellopoulos, 2019, p. 254) if teachers impose and naturalise musical practices that only represent the values of certain groups (normally the majority), refusing to address the plurality of student's meaning-making. As has already been shown here, children's singing – and the particular ways of using the voice when singing – is connected with emotions and feelings of everyday life, where individual experiences form the present. Participation can come with struggles or constraints, especially in institutions such as schools, where children's agency is often affected by school structures and adult's instructions. Michael Gallagher (2006) uses a 'spatial metaphor' to explain the struggles of participation children might encounter:

Participation is the political domain in which the distinction between structure and agency breaks down. It is the frontier on which the

will of individuals and the wills of institutions directly confront one another and are forced to acknowledge their mutual dependence. (p. 165)

One may well ask, how do children navigate these struggles, in which ways can they sustain their wills inside highly regulated institutions such as schools? And, most importantly, how can singing function as an affordance for helping children sustain their agency within the school environment?

These kinds of conflicts and contradictions could be also generated within the school culture and its members' understandings of the use of the voice inside schools. One of the girls I interviewed explains that singing or humming spontaneously in the classroom is not permitted – you cannot sing in school when you want. In other words, children quickly start recognising hidden school rules and act accordingly. Yet, there is no established rule that prohibits singing or humming in the classroom, but rather a collective understanding that classrooms should be silent. This idea contradicts singing's existentialism, because singing is present in everyday life – and, as Dean (2019) suggests, at any place, at any time. Although singing can be considered an affordance when used with and for care (DeNora, 2000), the highly regulated practices and structures of the school – the school culture (Bruner, 2006) – can reduce possibilities for affordance, and singing can become associated with contradictions and active resistance.

5.4.4. Striving for recognition

Children's identity work originates in their microsystem, where cultural and musical factors are present from the very beginning of life, and children are gradually influenced by their social interactions in more remote ecological systems and subsystems. The interactions generated at the level of the macrosystem (e.g. home – school) can influence how children feel about their own cultural heritage, their beliefs and values, and their musical preferences or musical abilities, not only in the school but also in relation to the larger society. Children's decisions regarding (non-)participation in the school's musical activities can be influenced by many factors in their singing ecologies. However, it is important to note that the school is a particular place, and not all children feel confident about their cultural background in school. Sometimes, a public place in which people are unknown can be easier to approach than school. This was shown, for instance, in Valentina's interview; she did not want to sing a song for me during the interview, but explained that during the previous weekend she sang a song of her homeland in a grocery store. When I asked how it feels to sing in the shop, she responded *Excellent!* claiming that *all people listen when I sing, and parents are pleased because children sing nicely.*

Valentina's performance in the shop can be understood beyond musical agency. Valentina acts in relation to the context and to the possibilities it offers in order to convey a message, in order to have a political voice. Through singing her songs in a public place Valentina shows she is proud of her culture, but she also strives for recognition by others and resists the discourse of the dominant culture. This is also related to her perception of how her culture is appreciated in the society. With this act, Valentina raises her voice in two ways; on one hand, she sings her Angolan song with agency and proudness, and on the other hand she shows her political voice and conveys a public message in a public place, directed to all, to the society - *all people listen when I sing* – but also to her parents (and herself), feeling proud of her own culture. This reveals *intentionality* in Valentina's actions, evidencing her political voice. As Kallio and Häkli (2010) have suggested, it is precisely the intentionality of children's actions that distinguishes children's politics from solely behaviour and agency.

The use of an active political voice can, however, mean diverse behaviours. As was shown, Halima does not want to formally study her native language, and she chooses not to sing the songs of her homeland outside home. A fundamental aspect of singing ecologies is its relationality and temporality – which is experienced in the places and spaces children inhabit, and is affected by their long-time perceptions of the appreciation, recognition, and respect of their native culture, including their linguistic background, or the lack of these (e.g. Pavlenko, 2005). Furthermore, Valentina decided not to sing her homeland songs in the school (even though she did so in the grocery-store), showing that school is a very particular place and that singing homeland songs in school has special connotations.

5.4.5. The songs of the homeland in the school's ecosystem

In a constantly changing world, approaching children's singing from the "angle of experience" can help understanding that there are different ways of making music, of learning music, and of engaging meaningfully with music (Karlsen, 2011, p. 118). This is closely related to children's experiences of the songs of their homelands, within specific places and spaces, and to how there are children who opt to not share those songs in their schools (Karlsen, 2013; Karlsen & Westerlund, 2010). However, as Karlsen has already shown in her studies with older students (Karlsen, 2013), children's choices about sharing or not sharing their songs in school, whether they are ethnic songs or songs that are significant to them, are related to their background, and as I argue in this study, are related to their experiences in their singing ecologies. In what follows, I will describe three situations from three different

interviews where the focus is put on singing homeland songs in school.

Sharing meanings and traditions

In an interview with one of the children, the importance of a sense of belonging and having confidence in his cultural and musical identity arose. In the interview, the boy explains that he would not sing the songs of his parent's homeland to his Finnish classmates (even though the boy knows the songs well and he sings them at home), *because they would not understand*. Instead, he would sing these songs with other children of similar cultural background, not only because they understand the songs but also because those songs are part of their cultural and religious traditions. Another important consideration made by another child in this respect has to do with the idea that children may be afraid of singing the songs of their homeland in school because schoolmates may laugh at them (Edon). However, as happened with the Arabic musical game played in the school yard (Mohamed), the support of a group of friends *who understand the music and its meanings* can make a huge difference. Furthermore, in the interview Mohamed sang and taught me that musical game with enthusiasm. He comments: *I like to sing with friends. In the school recess I sing with my friends*. The child sang various songs during the interview, and I had a revealing experience when he sang an Arabic song for me but he did it using Finnish words, making a spontaneous translation, and then told me about the background of the song. He explained that he did it so that I could understand the song. Hence, children can envision how singing certain songs produces different meanings for different people, in relation to the lyrics of the song, but also in relation to its meanings and traditions.

Only songs with lyrics in the majority language

Another child selected one of the songs of their homeland as her favourite song. I asked the child to sing the song to me, but the child refused to do so. At the end of the interview I asked again if she would be willing to sing the song, and the answer was negative again. However, the same child sang other songs freely during the interview, but those songs were sung in Finnish or in English. Yet, she did not want to share the songs that might sound “weird” to people who do not belong to the same culture. Although one can only guess at the reasons for not singing in this particular case, nevertheless the story shows that a young child can exercise agency and political voice when maintaining the decision of not singing a homeland song to me in an interview held at the school. There was an understanding between the interviewed children that school songs have Finnish lyrics – or eventually English lyrics. As part of another interview a child claimed: *I do not sing!* and the boy mentioned

that he likes to listen to songs and videos with his older brother at home. He enjoys the videos because the singers sing well. He also speaks about learning his native language (Arabic) with his mom at home, and he mentioned that the school songs are fine but that the videos he watches at home are better. By the end of the interview, the same child sang a song for me, which was very valuable for me, considering that he had described himself as “not-singing” at the beginning of the interview. However, the song he chose to sing in this situation was a Finnish children’s song learned in school.

Songs that form part of children’s subjectivity

In one way or another, songs, as part of life, form part of children’s subjectivities. The homeland songs emerge as forms of families’ heritage, mostly reserved for private use or for sharing with close friends. However, non-homeland songs can also be significant to an individual child. The case of Halima is an example of this, since she prefers not to bring to school the song that is most significant to her, and that was not a homeland song. She prefers to keep her song for herself and to maintain the relationship she creates with this music in private. In the interview she told how this song was not a song that belongs to her native culture, nor a song that belongs to the mainstream culture. Rather, Halima appreciates the quality of the voice of the singer, the tenderness of the voice. The lyrics of the song use a third language.

5.5. The potential of singing as an affordance in educational places

5.5.1. The situational sense of place intertwining with singing

The starting point of this research is that singing can potentially be an affordance for further action that helps children, for example, produce social spaces through singing. It is also based on a hope that school could be a place that supports place attachment for immigrant students in and through singing, not just within school but also across the place-based experiences of students. This understanding of affordance differs from the neo-Gibsonian interpretations in which, according to Silvano Zipoli Caiani (2014), “an affordance can be accounted for as a direct pick up of motor information in the perceptual stimulus ... without assuming the mediation of inferential processes based on the retrieval of inner resources to complement the stimulus” (p. 278). This *neo-Gibsonian* understanding also inherits “the largely dominant materialist view which considers any aspect of the perceived world in terms of physical

properties” (p. 289). Furthermore, in *post*-Gibsonian research, affordances can be seen as “not physical properties of the environment since they are not best conceived as properties at all, but relations between sensorimotor patterns conveyed by the perceptual stimulus and the individual’s abilities to act” (p. 289). As Zipoli Caiani (2014) argues, the post-Gibsonian interpretation has “interesting implications for a theory of art and esthetic experience”, since it “makes it possible to extend the notion of affordance by changing its referent from physical properties of the environment, to sensorimotor patterns in the perceptual stimulus that may or may not be associated with some target suitable for action” (p. 290). In this interpretation, as Zipoli Caiani argues:

affordance does not lie in the ontological claim that there are special properties that make objects suitable for action – this would be trivial. Rather, the intuition that would be retained is about the way perceptual processing is shaped by the perceiver’s *repertoire of action abilities*. (p. 290, italics added)

This does not mean that singing as an affordance would be merely about skills and competences. As Mark Reybrouck (2012) writes, after all skilled performance “is not the most common way of dealing with music. It is restricted to a minor part of music users in general and can be mastered only after years of special training” (p. 393). However, some of the children of this study described their use of music and songs in after-school activities that consist of listening to their favourite songs, singing along with and dancing to these songs with their best friends, together with inventing their own songs and choreographies.

While this dissertation does not deal with the perceptual or auditory processing of music and voice, it has located singing in the widely understood social-material ecology of children’s experiences and life. Within this experiential framework (see also Reybrouck, 2012), affordances can be understood as *both* perceived and socially constructed (Raymond et al., 2017). Singing related to perception, and as an affordance for multiple intertwined actions, means that the properties of songs, for instance, do not necessarily include anything that makes children act or feel in certain ways. Rather, by not considering the environment simply in terms of the physical environment, the meanings and experiences that an individual child ascribes to their physical and social environments in and through singing can be seen as *cues* to further action in the ecosystemic as a whole. These meanings strengthen the child’s “repertoire of action possibilities” (Zipoli Caiani, p. 290), not simply in terms of gaining knowledge and agency but in an existential sense. As this study’s interviews indicate, for children singing appears

not to be about dealing with songs (as objects) but as a transactional and intertwined relationship between a sense of place and one's own space. Such transactional relationships also include non-singing, which can be related to culturally learned rules of what singing means for specific groups of people.

As already stated (see e.g. Chapter 1.1), the temporal and spatial aspects are important in understanding children's singing and singing as an affordance. Theoretically, as Raymond et al. (2017) argue, the place and space of individual meaning-making can be seen as a complex combination of "attributes of environmental features and the attributes of the individual", in which the relationship between place attachment and behaviour is not linear but "constituted in dynamic relations among mind, culture, and environment" (n.p.). However, even in the theorisation of situated cognition, which highlights the "relatedness of the conjoining of people and place" (n.p.), the understanding of the meaning of place in music education often assumes only a *slow* process of sense-making, such as in multicultural music education theories in which the physical geography often becomes attached to categorising stable musical identities (see, e.g. Elliott, 1995). Raymond et al. (2017) explain how the meanings of place are often discussed in terms of slow adaptation and socialisation:

Places can have instrumental meanings associated with their material properties that contribute to desired social or economic goals. They can have socio-cultural meaning which recognizes that places can be socially or symbolically constructed within the cultural, historical, and geographical contexts of day-to-day life ... The identity-expressive layer focuses on how individuals become attracted to and attached to place because those places possess intangible emotional, symbolic, and spiritual meaning. (n.p.)

School can indeed involve emotional and symbolic meanings, yet often in a controlling sense, because of its strong goals towards socialisation and the goal of students to learn specific information. As Koskela's (2022) dissertation has shown in the Finnish music classroom context, students know who decides what is performed or listened to in school and what songs are considered appropriate and acceptable by the teacher and the school to be sung in school. The school framework starts operating in the school context even when the teaching practice involves student-centred possibilities for free choice. In this study, some of the children's recollections of singing in their homeland reveal how the meanings and sense of place for certain kinds of singing were not necessarily considered to be transferable to the school. Furthermore, the interviews with children show that children estimate their ability and willingness to sing situationally, and see it as

strongly related to the nature of the place. Children's singing is therefore not always an individual reaction towards a sound or a song (a song that a teacher teaches or that the family listens to) but a reaction to the sense of place or social situation. Raymond et al. (2017) explain how "perception–action process and associated cognitions always occur in a situation" and "[b]ecause perception is direct, meaningful actions are always spatially and temporally located (i.e., situated), providing information about 'here', 'there', 'me', and 'now'" (Chemero, 2009, cited in Raymond et al., 2017, n.p.). Hence, according to Raymond et al. (2017):

... immediately perceived place meanings are both temporally and physically located and are influenced by a range of physical and social elements in one's immediately perceivable environment and by socio-cultural processes....[T]hese perception–action processes are not static, but since they are related to activities, they happen over time and their actualization changes the subsequent patterns of relations between individual and environment ... Humans have the ability to learn new skills and to improve their physical condition which opens the potential for new forms of immediately perceived place meanings. We also change a place through our actions, which opens spaces for new meanings. (n.p.)

The children in this study describe how they often create singing spaces in ways that Raymond et al. (2017) describe as grounded in "perception and intuition", and in which "thinking is fast, automatic, effortless, and associative" (n.p.). The children created singing spaces in which the place intertwined with meanings formed through affordances in order to:

- Reinforce or experience freedom, recognition, and power in a social space;
- Gain/give impulse or motivation for collective action, particularly when singing in a group with close friends;
- Change moods or feeling states – humming or singing privately and creating one's own space (self-directed singing);
- Create and improvise with their voices and their bodies, but only within spaces of trust;
- Learn about their own potential and preferences in different situations, and about their own agentic possibilities;
- Feel emotionally connected – emotional connection and interactions

with close friends and family, and with their homeland places and spaces, collectively or privately, including singing the songs of their own culture (only in private spaces).

Children's singing spaces are, as described by the interviewed children, created more or less spontaneously, yet children are able to specify their function for *themselves* in diverse action situations and places. The empirical material of this study also indicates that affordances in and through children's singing are neither stable nor "naturally given entities", as Gibson (1977, 1979) tended to view, but rather emerge in "the realm of a socioculturally constituted and evolving world... in which humans may alter their environments, and themselves (again, for good or ill), so as to better function in them" (Pyysiäinen, 2021, p. 503).

Following Raymond et al. (2017), however, for many of the children in this study the meaning and sense of the school as a place for singing can be seen to function differently, although this is also dependent on the situation. According to Raymond et al., thinking in a socially constructed sense of place can be understood as "slow, serial, controlled, effortful, and rule-governed" thinking that involves "judgments" (n.p.). While the further theorisation of affordance goes beyond this study's focus, it is however worthwhile "to consider how immediate perceptual processes can contribute to longer-term processes of social construction and vice versa" (n.p.); how intuitive fast thinking regarding what singing is about might be wiped from the school context in favour of controlled and rule-governed thinking about singing as a competence. Research shows not only that physical changes can threaten place-based identities, but also that *place attachment can be enhanced* across place change. The meanings of place are not necessarily stable (not even in relation to school) but can change quickly, and the time aspect can be significant when trying to understand, for instance, what a first-grade student with a culturally diverse background experiences when arriving at school and starting to form the sense of this place. The theorisation of affordances can thus be helpful to teachers trying to understand how singing and a sense of place are intertwined, and how the transactional continuum from understanding to creating the world can be supported. As Raymond et al. (2017) argue, a holistic understanding of the meanings of place would "require a general willingness to explore sense of place across time, including a consideration of how sense of place forms and changes in response to both immediate perceptions and longer-term processes of social construction" (n.p.). Understanding the situated role of meanings that arise from the intertwining of place and singing is thus important in educational contexts, as are the individual differences between children in this respect. Although the children in this study describe the school as a place of control,

one of the teachers tells how singing had helped a recently arrived 7-year-old child with a refugee background to feel sense of community and safety:

He said nothing when he came to our class. And he was really wild and restless, and did not express himself. He was just forehead wrinkled, angry looking almost all the time. No, he was like scared all the time, it was such a new situation. He was really reluctant. He didn't eat anything. He always shouted "I will not try it" when we asked him to taste the food. "No taste" he shouted. He did not want to eat. He was able to communicate or express very little, and he was always very angry. Always. Little by little, when he learned to understand that he is safe, he started listening to what the teacher said. Little by little we began to find each other; then, when the music classes started, in those hours. There came a huge smile on his face, and he was really good at singing. And they were, especially, those English lessons, those English songs that were very simple. Very simple songs. Although what colour is it [sings]. A very different boy. And then, of course, little by little as time goes on and we are getting to know each other and so on, he became a really sweet boy who can speak a lot and express himself now. (Teacher 1)

I was able to confirm the teachers' story through my observations, and by interviewing the child to whom singing functioned as an affordance that instigated wider participation in the classroom and provided motivation to participate in social engagements in the school environment.

Taken together, the children's and teacher's interviews confirm that school is a particular place for children's singing in which music making carries particular connotations and has specific goals related to learning. It "is not a neutral space, but a functional space that receives meaning through interactions that are interpreted differently by each participant" (Reybrouck, 2012, p. 395). As the teachers described it, singing in school is mostly restricted to music lessons, and this means that singing – as understood by the teachers – is only possible when scheduled by the teachers. Despite this, some of the children created moments of freedom inside school, and in-between spaces, particularly during the school recesses or even secretly inside the classroom, in this way using singing to "alter their environments, and themselves" (Pyysiäinen, 2021, p. 503). The interviews show that children conceive singing *existentially*, in relation to and as part of their perceived and (co-)constructed social and material environments and spaces, rather than in terms of knowledge *per se*, as the curriculum expects. Children's

singing does not just take place *in* a concrete place and environment, but is understood by children as fundamentally conditioned and constitutive of spaces and a sense of place. Space can therefore limit singing, but space can also be (co-)created in and through singing. This co-creation is seen in how the teachers described the goals of joint singing and community building.

5.5.2. Affordances and the social qualities of spaces

Figure 3 illustrates and summarises the ways children depict singing in their lives. The mosaic of children's singing ecologies includes private singing and self-directed singing, improvising humming and songs, singing with close friends and family members *who you can trust*, and also public singing *with* or *for* people who are not close to the children, for example the audience of school's celebrations. The mosaic includes children's depictions about their agency, feelings of freedom, trust, and joy, but it also includes feelings of shame, anxiety, and worry⁴. Children described their singing interactions in different locations: a) at home: self-directed singing or singing with family members or with close friends; b) in school with peers in the classroom and with friends in the school yard, self-directed singing in the school yard (possibly with a close friend) and secretly in the classroom; c) in natural surroundings (the forest, the park, the neighbourhood) as self directed singing, but also with close friends; d) in public transport as self-directed singing and humming or singing softly, or in the family car, alone or with others (e.g. with siblings); e) in hobbies, mostly as group singing – sometimes with movements; f) at a shop or other commercial places as self-directed singing and singing for others.

The analysis shows, however, that the physical locations and environments are not as significant as the *qualities of the relationships* experienced in these environments. The children described their own experiences with singing in connection with a given place or space, where their actions (or [im]possibilities of action) were affected by the socio-cultural, structural, and ecological factors present in the environment. Ecological agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Biesta & Tedder, 2007) functions in its relationality and temporality as children strive for their political voices to emerge. Within this, children describe the spaces they produce as spaces of freedom. The children interviewed for this study show how they use singing as an affordance for creating spaces in which they are empowered by social-ecological relations.

⁴ The mosaic is a figure made up of small pieces that include photos and text and represent the whole. Unlike the original mosaic approach developed by Clark and Moss (2005), which was created by the children themselves (and the adults), this figure was constructed by the researcher, however based on the empirical material generated for the study.

For example, while colouring a happy face, Sharon explains that when she sings at home she is happy, and surprised by her singing: *Because I like, if a new song comes, I get surprised with the songs that comes. When singing with my friend, new songs come, and we get surprised with our new ideas.* Sharon produces a space in which creativity and wonder flourish in relation to her own actions in company of a friend. Similarly, Maria explains that singing with her friends is different from singing alone: *with my friends I can sing, and I like it a lot. I like to sing a lot!* The emphasis Maria puts on the words *I can sing* and *I like it a lot* (which she repeated two times) is significant. As she later explains, with her friends she can make big voices and sing all around the neighbourhood; in contrast, she sings with a small voice when she sings alone. Singing instigates the production of a social-ecological space, and singing with friends empowers Maria to get into action, to use her full potential. She used the word “voices” when she described her singing with friends and “voice” for singing alone, which can be connected with her perception of the many (various) possibilities of action that singing with friends can offer. Similarly, Jamil feels empowered by singing with his friends, and gets active because of their company. As he explains:

J: My friends know how to sing, but I do not know how.

I: And what do you do?

J: I try to sing with them (try to follow them).

Jamil explains that his friends sing Arabic songs and that he joins the group singing and playing in the school yard (see Mohamed’s narrative). Thus, singing functions as an affordance for Jamil, to get started, to sing while following his friends, supported by their singing and by their presence. Singing as an affordance is also present in school, in the social spaces children create by themselves, namely in in-between singing spaces.

Striving for connectedness is children’s driving force from the very beginning of their lives, and their wish to learn to understand as well as create the world in and through their social-ecological relationships. The findings of this study show that singing can be part of this transactional process and act as an affordance stretching beyond learned habits. As Figure 3 shows, the children who participated in this study were aware of their environments and their own actions and feelings within them. They not only described the physical locations of their singing, their own feelings associated with these locations, and the presence or absence of other beings and natural elements and their interactions, but they also explained the influence of these factors on their



Figure 3. Children’s singing ecologies.

agency and on their own political voice. To be clear, not all of the interviewed children spoke with the same intensity, and not all children spoke about all of these details at once, and there were different degrees of action and expression; however, these elements nevertheless appear throughout the interview material.

This analysis shows that active children’s participation and meaningful engagements within singing spaces are based on trust and mutual respect. Singing could be seen as an existential affordance that can help children create safe spaces in which a sense of freedom can grow. The children in this study revealed in their interviews the importance of trust and freedom in singing spaces, as they described singing spaces in their own ways and what these spaces afford them. They expressed in detail the dynamic interactions and many facets of singing spaces, including the value they assign to these spaces and the process through which they produce spaces (Lefebvre, 1991) – as they are themselves produced by these spaces and the power relations within them (Foucault, 1977, 1982).

6. Discussion

Our evolving understanding of children's singing, developed in this study through relational and ecological theoretical lenses together with the analysis of empirical material, has highlighted the complexity of multi-layered childhood experiences related to singing. It has revealed the ways through which we could better understand children and schooling in order to be able to make both political and ethical choices related to singing, which in turn influence children's daily lives and futures. The social and cultural factors present in children's ecosystems constitute the relationships and interactions of the child. As Barbara Woodhouse (2020) argues, "ecology and childhood are interactive. The environment in which the child grows plays a role in setting benchmarks on the road to adulthood" (p. 17). According to Woodhouse (2020), the ecological theory "captures a basic truth about human development: there is no one 'childhood'. Instead, every childhood is shaped by and experienced within a living context. A particular social, cultural, and physical geography sets the stage on which childhood is played out" (p. 15). Within the ecological understanding, this research has suggested that just as there is no 'one childhood', there is no one 'singing ecology'; there are no two identical singing ecologies nor relationalities within singing ecologies. The ecological lenses constructed in this study offer possibilities for considering the holistic potential of singing in children's lives, and specifically singing in schools, as well as the uniqueness of individuals and their interpersonal relations with their communities and cultures, their sense of place, and need for freedom to create spaces in and through singing.

I will next discuss the implications of the findings and the ecological theorisation in relation to the production of children's singing spaces in culturally diverse schools, the relationality and connectedness within singing ecologies, and children's ecological agency and voice. I will then return to the idea of teachers and schools being bridge-builders for spaces of trust (or in-between spaces), and for helping students bridge the gap between outside school and inside school ecosystems – advancing an ecological view of children's singing and political voice. Drawing from Bronfenbrenner's theorisation, I will suggest that school could be seen not just as a bridging organisation but as a caring ecosystem. I then reflect on possible implications of this study for future research on children's singing, school music curricula, and music teacher education programs. Finally, the methodological reflections and limitations of the study are presented.

6.1. The production of children's singing spaces in a culturally diverse school

The concept of *children's singing spaces* became central to this study already during the pilot study: by children's singing spaces I have referred to spaces where children can exercise their agency in and through singing and are capable of taking action and have a political voice. As already argued, these spaces are not just physical spaces as settings for groups of children, but social spaces. Children's singing spaces are 'children's spaces'. Children's singing spaces are thus children's spaces for them to use agentic power and understand the meanings of relationships in and through singing. As Moss (2006) writes, children's space is

a cultural space, where values, rights and cultures (including children's culture) are created; and a discursive space for differing perspectives and forms of expression, where there is room for dialogue, confrontation (in the sense of exchanging differing experience and views), deliberation and critical thinking, where children and others can speak and be heard. In this sense, the concept of 'children's space' implies possibilities for children and adults to contest understandings, values, practices and knowledges. (p. 186)

Focussing on children's spaces, Susan Wake (2008) has suggested that "research that focuses on children's personal experiences or geographies, rather than what the space might represent to adults, will give a clearer picture of what children think of these spaces and how they use them" (p. 431). Or, as Gallagher (2006) writes, research should "demonstrate the difference that space and place make to childhood but also the difference that children make to the spaces and places in which they live" (p. 160). Moreover, within prior studies much attention has been given to "children's negotiation of public-private boundaries in space, and how this process constructs children's identities" (Valentine, 1996; Aitken, 2000; Harden, 2000 in Gallagher, 2006, p. 160). These research interests support the findings of this dissertation, which show that children navigate singing ecologies and create singing spaces through private and public singing, and in relation to the liminalities of the places and spaces in which they live and act. This study has also shown that children can reflect on the differences they experience between the nature of places and spaces. They create singing spaces for private use and for participation in which their voices are likely to be heard. They also actively resist, avoid, or withdraw from spaces that do not respect their political voice, showing an understanding of the ethical grounds for such actions. Children's singing spaces can thus be seen as part of children's singing ecologies, also

involving, however, the notion of children as potentially competent and agentic individuals who can take action in their lives and their ecologies.

Reflecting on the implications of these conceptualizations in relation to children's participation and recognizing that these relations are complex, Gallagher (2006) has explained that whilst "children's participation in the production of social space always takes place through unequal relations of power, and therefore through power struggles... the ways in which spaces mould and produce children are both responsible for and beholden to their agency as human subjects" (p. 165). Gallagher (2006) suggests that participation is "the locus of an ongoing struggle, where the will of an organization and the will of its subjects engage with and attempt to influence and realign one another" (p. 165). As this study demonstrates, children have a great deal to say about issues that affect them, however, they are mostly at the margin of conversations that affect them. Advances have been made to support children's participation in society in Finland with the publication of the National Child Strategy (Kansallinen Lapsistrategia, 2021) and with student representatives elected to represent their classes in school-related issues (Perusopetuslaki, 628/1998). However, it is yet to be seen how, if at all, these policies affect music education in schools.

In the scholarship, participatory music making has been seen as possessing essential value when all participants are considered equally valuable (Harwood & Marsh, 2018), and when such music is creating shared spaces (Turino, 2008). However, music does not embody any automatic power to create positive relationships. As was shown in the analysis of this study, children do recognise inequalities in school contexts at a very young age, and are very sensitive to teacher's actions and attitudes (e.g. Edon's narrative). Consequently, while singing can function as an affordance in childhood, singing can also bring constraints and limitations, especially in culturally diverse and complex contexts. The lesson from the children in this study is thus that it is crucial to create a participatory music culture in school and in culturally diverse classrooms, however without necessarily seeking for homogeneity and sameness, but rather celebrating diverse possibilities and open arenas. Singing has the potential to foster these developments, supporting the idea posited in Finland and many other countries that school can and should be an environment committed to *all* student's growth, independent of their background (Pikkarainen, 2017). It should also be understood that the basis for non-participatory behaviour can be a child's ethical-moral respect for their home culture, instead of mere rebellious disobedience.

This study has been grounded on an understanding that *space is produced* (Lefebvre, 1991) and that people are also produced by space (see also, Gallagher,

2006; Foucault, 1977). In other words, space is not a given, but rather socially constructed, and that the process of producing space and the product (the produced space itself) are inseparable (Lefebvre, 1991). Children's individual will when producing singing spaces (albeit mostly outside school, but also in-between spaces in school) was expressed in various interviews, including the pilot study. The idea that the produced space is a tool for thinking and action (Lefebvre, 1991) denotes the process of the production of social space, including singing space. For example, Valentina produced a space in which she could think or reflect about her own cultural roots and exercise *political action*, as she decides to sing an Angolan song publicly, in a grocery store. The space produced by Maria outside the school with her friends served as a tool of thought and of *social action*, as she felt empowered by her friends' companion. The space produced by Mohamed served as a tool of thought and of *social action*, and had elements of *political action*, as he produced collective in-between spaces in the school yard when playing and leading a group of children singing an Arabic musical game. The space produced by Siim can be considered to serve as a tool for thought and of *self-care* when he is alone at home and sings softly or hums in order to feel emotionally a bit better. These individual voices, which form the centre of this study, show how children produce social spaces in and through singing, and how singing, as affordance that is intertwined with the sense of place, helps them produce space *for a purpose*. For children, the purpose of singing cannot necessarily be reduced to the established cultural values, rules, and principles, as the common conceptualisations would have us understand (see, e.g. Elliott, 1995).

These examples of children's space creation can be understood through the "trial by space" lens described by Lefebvre (1991), as children may need to produce their own singing spaces (and to experience the production of space as a process by themselves) to be constituted as subjects. If taking care of one's self within social relationships starts with knowing oneself (Foucault, 1988), it can be argued that singing helps children create these spaces in which they get to know more about themselves, about their potential and limitations. Leila's narrative, for example, showed how she is able to explore her potential in singing spaces, to take care of herself and to negotiate power relations. She explained that her friends use strong voices and that her voice is smaller, so she asks her friends to sing with less power so that her voice can also be heard, putting forward her political voice (*I like to sing with my friends if they listen*). As Foucault (1988) argued, "being occupied with oneself and political activities are linked" (p. 26). Children are in this respect reflexive of their own experiences of life when producing their own spaces and putting forward their political voices in and through singing.

This study did not aim to provide solutions to the challenge of creating participatory enactment of musical activities in culturally diverse classroom contexts. However, it demonstrated that “many types of provision have the potential to become ‘children’s spaces’ – ranging from lightly structured spaces for children’s outdoor, unsupervised play on the other hand to highly structured institutions of schooling” (Moss & Petrie, 2002, p. 177). Moss and Petrie (2002) affirm that “schools are a major challenge to the concept of ‘children’s spaces’” (p. 177) and that “rethinking requires an envisioning of what a school as ‘children’s space’ might be like” (p. 178). This dissertation has addressed this challenge, arguing that singing brings forth children’s creativity for producing their own spaces (children’s singing spaces) and hence their ability to shape their own singing ecologies. Following Moss and Petrie, school could be re-thought as a place in which children’s spaces – or “in-between spaces” – are made possible in and through singing. As Susan O’Neill (2017) argues,

[i]n highlighting the need to view music learning ecologies as ensembles of different forms of authority, expertise, materials, ideas, and people involved in ongoing contests and alliances, we are better able to identify affordances and constraints on the possible spaces where young people might encounter a sense of connectedness, and more expansive and creative alternatives for remaking and reimagining their musical selves. (p. 81)

It is not only the connections and interactions that occur within the immediate ecological subsystems that are important, but also those that occur within and across remote subsystems. Following Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory, the interactions that occur at the exosystem level and at the macrosystem are to be carefully considered, as they are societal factors that *indirectly* affect children’s lives (see Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986). Indeed, the influence of the society permeates the lives of the children in this study (e.g. Edon, Halima, Valentina). Since social construction accompanies an individual child’s experience, a democratic society must ensure that *all* students are offered possibilities to live meaningful experiences in connection with others at school. Music is then not only used to exteriorize emotional states, but “is part of the reflexive constitution of that state; it is a resource for the identification work of knowing ‘how one feels’ – a building material of subjectivity” (DeNora, 2000, p. 57). If children’s ecologies are not taken into account in educational settings – if students do not feel “present” in school (Biesta, 2017), if teachers do not understand their student’s learning processes more broadly, and if teachers and students do not feel connected, then student’s agency and their understanding of their possibilities for having a political voice in society can be affected

negatively - which in the long run influences their future. Creating opportunities and spaces that are optimal for affordances, both individually and collectively, can potentially help children strengthen their agency and subjectivity. Seen from this perspective, it could be also argued that not supporting the development of children's agency resonates with the concept of "symbolic violence" in music education, as proposed by Kanellopoulos (2019, p. 254).

This doctoral research was conducted with first graders, who can be more sensitive to changes, particularly when experiencing multiple life transitions. The first year of primary education can therefore be considered crucial for the formation of new communities of children who interact daily in school (and also outside school) and experience a transition in life. This transition when beginning schooling is even more pronounced for those children who have recently arrived in Finland. Within the transition to primary school children become more self-conscious and aware of others (Jackson, 1990; Babić, 2017; Biesta, 2005), and indeed learn to understand the norms of the school and its culture. The findings of this study show that first-graders are already aware of the boundaries of school culture and have become careful about testing these boundaries. Peers play a crucial role at this stage (e.g. Wyness, 2006). Children tend to look for their friends' acceptance in order to feel part of the group. This need for bonding, as opposed to self-representation, in school has also been shown in music education, for example in Eva Saether's (2008) study of adolescent immigrant students in two multicultural schools in Sweden, where the students wanted to play music together instead of popular songs from their homelands. Saether (2008) discovered that for the children of culturally diverse schools the quality of the engagement that their collective music making supported was more important than publicly showing differences and thus revealing geographically and ethnically defined identity-related pasts. Commonly known popular music formed a safe ground for the students to do things together and create a shared understanding and culture. Indeed, the school is an important place for social encounters, where every child should be given "the opportunity to develop social capital and secure social identities" as part of their experiences in school (Ridge, 2006, p. 29). However, participation in itself is not enough; it is the quality of the participatory experience, or the "coming into presence" (Biesta, 2006) that makes students feel part of the group, feel belonging. Recognising how the singing of young children can contribute to social relationships in a classroom of a culturally diverse school therefore requires from the teacher specific observation skills and a level of reflexivity that extends beyond merely identifying learning and learning outcomes.

The children's interviews in this study reflect how creating safe and *educational*

spaces is not as simple as finding culturally neutral or jointly accepted repertoire, considering that the school should also open spaces for learning to accept differences and allow for plurality in music education. Westerlund et al. (2017) have suggested going beyond geographical and ethnic identities and instead conceptualising ‘project identities’ that specifically support the participatory culture of classrooms. A project identity, according to Westerlund et al. (2017), is grounded on “bonds of collectivity” created between the members of the classroom community, through which children may redefine and negotiate their position in the school and the society (p. 502). The teachers of this study created a project identity that was related to the co-creation of a classroom as a collectivity, for example when introducing the song “Skidamarink” to the children, which included different ways of participation (singing and movements) and had elements that helped the children connect with each other.

By conducting research *with* children, this dissertation has called for a change of mindset in Finnish schools and music education, particularly with the implementation of the National Child Strategy (Kansallinen Lapsistrategia, 2021) and the declaration of the children’s rights international act. The Finnish government intends to respond to this urgent need to include children in decision-making, as it has recognised that the rights of all children in Finland are not currently fulfilled. However, the implementation of the child strategy requires enactment at various different levels. It is in this sense that this study is expected to support the work of classroom teachers and music educators and to enrich teacher education. Teachers could start recognizing and valuing children’s fresh perspectives, as they can open new ways of understanding the complexity of everyday life, ecologically speaking. When children have someone who listens to them seriously, an adult interested in what they have to say, what they think, the way they experience the world, they feel they are really worthy of attention (Lore, 2021). The reverberations of these practices are huge, and these experiences are powerful both for the children and for the adults engaged in the encounter. As a whole, this research has shown how children make sense of the world in and through singing and how singing does not have a unique, universal cultural meaning. This was evident in the interviews of the children from the school in the capital area of Finland, where the students come from a variety of backgrounds. Scholars have argued that Finnish teacher education programs have not sufficiently addressed the needs of educators working in today’s schools to understand cultural diversity among students (e.g. Virta & Tuittu, 2013; Juva & Holm, 2017). While teachers may focus on treating all students equally and on being tolerant and open to diverse cultures, the idea that one should act as if there were no differences, ignoring the influences of cultural backgrounds

and ethnicity, can be counterproductive (Virta & Tuittu, 2013). However, as this study has shown, the solution may not be a multicultural curriculum (Elliott, 1995) with songs from different parts of the world, representing the ethnic-cultural background of the students. In music education there is a more fundamental need to understand the ecological nature of singing and how children approach adult-led singing in school. An understanding of children's use of singing as intertwined with their sense of place, freedom, and world-making could make a difference in designing music curricula and how teachers position themselves in the classroom. To start with, it could intertwine singing in school with the stories and life experiences of the children. It could also include the creation of extended project identities, for example incorporating the student's families in particular school music projects and activities.

6.2. Towards relationality and connectedness within children's singing ecologies

This study has aimed to expand the knowledge of how children experience singing in early childhood and what meanings they give to singing, in order to show that children's meaning-making and experiencing are interrelated and interdependent of places and spaces. As Biesta (2006) has argued, schooling has become permeated by 'learnification', meaning that the focus has become on learning and learning outcomes instead of education and children's subjectification. Instead of being viewed solely as curricula content, children's singing ecologies and the meanings they provide can only be understood in and through connections. Children's situated experiences of singing can influence children's agency and voice to a considerable extent, because through those experiences children learn to make sense of the world, and of singing in their lives.

As this study demonstrates, singing for young children is holistic and embodied, and is about world-making as much as it is about singing songs that they have learned from someone. This aligns with, but also expands on, the literature that highlights singing in early childhood as a multimodal experience that combines dance, movement, and acting; in other words, various elements of playing (e.g. Niland 2012; Marsh, 2017; Young, 2006, Huhtinen-Hildén & Pitt, 2018). Children can play with their toys and create singing spaces to practice interactions and negotiations – which adults might not even notice. This dissertation has underlined the potential of singing to become a positive transitional element that can offer young children possibilities of action and freedom even in highly regulated places such as school, if only singing is understood as relational beyond the mere willingness to use the physical singing voice. The study shows that children search for singing spaces in the school yard (openly in a

group or with a close friend or “in secret”), inside the classroom (e.g. humming or thinking about it), and especially outside school, creating singing spaces. One may then ask, what motivates children to sing and to create in-between spaces in places such as educational institutions, as this study has shown they do? Valentina’s narrative, for example, shows that a public place can be more appealing than her own school for putting forward her political voice. However, as has been shown earlier, singing space is more than mere location; it is a space for individual and collective memories and experiences, for social and collective interactions and self-directed action. Moreover, children’s spontaneous moments of singing can be considered one of the most precious things about singing in early childhood and experimenting with freedom, not simply for being musically creative but for creating private or collective spaces. As the children’s interviews in this study showed, however, singing in school is typically quite the opposite; inside the classroom children do not have freedom to decide on their singing, and public singing in celebrations is connected with anxiety and nervousness. One can further ask, what if the structure of the modern school and the place assigned to singing within the school does not correspond with children’s conception of singing and of what singing means for them? If the school structure does not allow children to sing beyond the music class (and the moment assigned to singing in the music class), the value of singing as part of the school community – and the role adults assign to singing – is tremendously reduced.

The inclusion of singing in a variety of activities throughout the school day (and starting from the first grade), instead of limiting singing to the music class, could bring music closer to the children and allow different possibilities for participation. Singing could be considered as one more component of the environment, and as an intrinsic element of how the social space in the school is created and developed. *Musical play* – or more specifically the characteristics of musical play and the space for musical play (ludic, spontaneous, and ecological) – in singing could have the potential to create a continuity between school and children’s experience of singing elsewhere. By reflecting on these interactions, tensions may however arise in the ways of participation that singing in school provides, and in the diverse participatory responses it allows (Turino, 2008). It is in this sense that creating diverse manners of participation in culturally diverse schools is essential. As Tess Ridge (2006) explains:

Participation is a fundamental principle of social inclusion, and “fitting in” and “joining in” with the everyday activities and expectations of peers is a driving force in children’s lives. Without satisfactory opportunities for participation, children’s social lives can be disrupted and restricted. (p. 23)

Giving children the possibility to participate as who-they-are in musical activities in schools and helping them to develop a *sense of presence* in schools is thus important for the development of their political voice and agency. This includes offering children opportunities to create spaces of interaction and participation beyond difference, such as singing spaces, where their individual needs can be addressed in different ways.

The narratives of Minna, Jasmin, Mohamed, Leila, and Maria in this study showed the importance of free singing and playing or dancing with friends in the school yard or outside school. In their interviews, the children described the scenery (the forest, the natural surroundings, the home yard, the neighbourhood, and also the school yard) and their own feelings associated with those spaces, including friend's support (musical and emotional), as well as a vibrant and engaging atmosphere generated by singing with significant others. In such safe spaces, children can take risks and experiment with singing without being afraid of making mistakes or being criticised. Singing can thus bring forth children's personal and individual ways of participation, and children's personal experiences can be acknowledged. Since children are experts in their cultures, by playing their games – with the meanings they carry – they are able to participate in their own individual ways based on their own singing ecologies. Starting from there, other ways of action and participation can follow. Thus, these developments are important to consider because they can accommodate rich culturally diverse responses and ways of interactions in classroom settings, and also because as an integral part of that playing children constitute themselves as full members of the school community and broader society. While they develop “connectedness” and learn to live in connection with themselves, with others and with the material world, students learn to live together and to find connections beyond differences. Students who do not feel comfortable singing may participate in their individual ways – or not do so at all – but knowing that the possibility of joining, if and when they feel like doing so, should be open. Singing understood in this manner, in a culturally diverse school, can serve as an affordance for exploring differences and for connecting with others, beyond differences, and in a trustful, ecological way.

Delving into these ideas makes us question the role of singing in schools and the ways in which singing is approached in general in culturally diverse schools. What if the ways of interacting and the connections generated in and through singing is what is really important about singing in schools? Ecological theorisation could provide a shift in understanding children's motivation in relation to participation, and to the *different ways and degrees of participation* in school. School children are not an homogeneous

group, and some children participate more than others in school activities. There is a need to shift the attention from the study of the children alone to focusing our attention on the children in relation to others (Prout, 2006), because “children’s participation cannot be understood outside of the set of relationships that constitute all the actors” (p. 243). Through fostering a sense of community in and through singing, a collective identity can be potentially constructed (e.g. Westerlund et al., 2017; Allsup, 2010). In this way, the school can help the students bridge their ecosystems, opening up student’s possibilities of action and participation, helping them feel that they belong whether they actively participate or not, whether they participate in passive ways, or simply develop a positive attitude towards singing together. In this way, the school could influence children’s vision of the world and conceptions of themselves, and of the places they occupy in their society.

6.3. Connecting voice and ecological agency

In the scholarship, agency and children’s voices are linked at an essential level (e.g. Raymond et al., 2022). Since childhood is a social construct, the ways in which societies understand childhood affect children’s possibilities for taking action and using their political voice – this is because “childhood as social structure is concerned with the large-scale patterning of the childhood of a given society” (Prout, 2006, p. 64). According to Spyros Spyrou et al. (2019), thinking of children’s agency through “relational ontologies” (p. 19) can help envision the political endeavours of societies. Marek Tesar (2017) describes how agency “relates to the structure and generational ordering of society and is concerned with how children are part of its structures, and how their voice, participation and power can be exercised” (p. 23). Thus, the conversation about children’s agency can be expanded “from *what* (agency is) to the *how* (agency is produced, facilitated or conditioned)” (Kontovourki et al., 2019, p. 154, original italics). While agency has been widely discussed, and from different perspectives, in this dissertation the concepts of voice and *ecological agency* (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Biesta & Tedder, 2007) have expanded the relatively established concept of *musical agency* (Karlsen, 2013).

Biesta and colleagues (2015) have explained that agency is fluctuating, emergent, and unstable, and that agency is “shaped by the interconnected interplay between cultural, structural and material factors” (Raymond & Cloonan, 2022, p. 3). Whilst cultural factors comprise our values, beliefs, views of the world, and language, structural factors are more related to relationships and roles, power relations and trust. Material factors include the environment and its materiality (Priestley et al., 2015). These interconnected factors manifest in

children's lives and ecological agency (see e.g., Mohamend, Halima, and Edon in the empirical material). Agency is considered dependent on the quality of the engagement with the environment within which individuals collaborate – including affordances or constraints (Biesta & Tedder, 2007). Moreover, “agency is supported by ongoing opportunities to engage in dialogical encounters of critical reflection on past selves, habits, experiences and patterns of interaction” (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Priestley et al., 2015, in Raymond, 2022, p. 3).

In music and music education, the concept of agency has been used in different disciplinary frames. According to Jackie Wiggins (2016), musical agency is related to how much individuals believe in the achievement of their goals. For her, children's musical agency derives from their experiences with music, but also from their own beliefs about how their ideas would be accepted or valued by others. In her studies of adolescent immigrant students in Finland, Norway, and Sweden, Karlsen (2011) defines musical agency as “the individual's *capacity for action* in relation to music or in a music-related situation” in both individual and collective contexts (p. 12, italics added). Both Karlsen and Dean (2021) relate musical agency to identity formation in which social singing and self-directed singing play important roles when assisting children in making identity work. According to Dean (2021), Karlsen's definition “recognizes that the ability to use singing as a tool to achieve extra-musical goals is as much an element of musical agency as the ability to use musical skills and knowledge to achieve musical goals.” As Dean (2021) has suggested “as a cultural tool, singing can be considered one of a network of elements that make up a child's agency at any time” (p. 4).

This dissertation goes beyond these prior conceptualisations concerning musical agency by building on the work of Emirbayer and Mische (1998) as well as that of Biesta and Tedder (2007), who have proposed the concept of *ecological agency* to highlight the role of actors in relation to their social-material environments. Ecological agency highlights the spatial ecological nature of musical agency and the power aspects of space; ecological agency captures the nuances of children's (singing) engagements within their environment. The notion of ecological agency, as something that people do or achieve (as opposed to something people have or do not have), is not conceived of as an individualistic capacity but as “an emergent phenomenon of the ecological conditions through which it is enacted” (Priestley, et. al, 2015, p. 3). In this view, agency has two dimensions: the temporal and the relational. As Biesta and Tedder (2007) write:

The achievement of agency will always result from the interplay of

individual efforts, available resources and contextual and structural factors as they come together in particular, and in a sense, always unique situations. (p. 137)

In this study, the concept of ecological agency was further taken as a lens to approach children's political voice. Agency relates to student's engagement and possibilities and willingness for participation, hence agency needs to be considered holistically and ecologically – namely, also beyond students' voices, in an intergenerational relationship between students and teachers (Raymond et al., 2022). Children can thus be understood as competent social actors who use their power to construct their social realities in everyday life situations and transactions. As Tesar (2017) explains, "in their private domain children experience being everyday dissidents through their specific play, toys, experiences and stories within their particular childhood undergrounds" (p. 25). This also means that through singing children can be dissidents, and in that way exercise their agency and political voice simultaneously.

Following the discussions arising from the field of childhood studies, the most important aspect of agency is that it is situated, relational (Prout, 2005), and temporal (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998): in other words, ecological. Thus, it can be said that situationality, relationality, and temporality are also important factors in participatory-agentic singing. In relation to this, Elin Eriksen Ødegaard's (2020) concept of participatory agentic space illustrates that educational environments preoccupied with learning and knowledge-acquisition are not ideal for collaborative meaning making, which raises questions about the school as an institution. Researchers have indeed pointed out how agency cannot be reduced into competence or simple terms of capacity to act. For instance, Biesta (2022) has explained that places are full of meaning for those who act within those places. Florian Esser (2016) argue that children afford agency differently, or in different ways according to the different circumstances and contexts. David Oswell (2013) has documented that agency is also influenced by human and non-human entities interactions. According to Esser (2016), the most important question about agency in childhood has to do with "what agency comes with childhood, and what positions as actors does this give children *as children* (Honig, 2013, p. 144) in different contexts?" (Esser, 2016, p. 176). Hence, children's agency in singing does not develop automatically through gaining confidence and skills in singing songs or knowing the rules and principles of difference genres (cf. Elliott, 1995). Various other factors that form part of the child's ecosystem are intertwined with the manifestations of agency, and these factors can be significant even when thinking of effective learning. As

the findings of this study show, and following Bronfenbrenner (1979), it can be argued that the ecological agency in singing is influenced by the many factors present in the child's ecosystem and by the experiences lived within ecological systems and subsystems. Experiences of the microsystem include the child's most immediate surroundings, family beliefs, and cultural identity, expectations, and other elements of family life, all of which are essential to consider. However, it also includes the school interactions with peers, teachers, and the larger community, the characteristics of the educational spaces where the child interacts, the curriculum taught in the school, the teacher's own beliefs and conceptions, and more. Taken together, it looks like agency in music education is more complex than previously understood, and it seems necessary to expand our understanding of the concept from the mere capacity to sing to include inter-relationships with ecological agency and (political) voice.

The findings of this doctoral research indicate that children create spaces of trust and freedom in and through singing in which they have an active role and the possibility of negotiating meanings, and that in places, such as school, where their possibilities of action are limited, children still try to create 'in-between spaces' (Aminpour et al., 2020), for example in the school yard and even inside classrooms (by humming or singing softly). The social-ecological relations of their lives are also present in the liminal spaces (e.g. Wood, 2012) where children can potentially exercise their political voices (Kallio & Häkli, 2011). As has been argued earlier (e.g. Tesar, 2018), respecting children and listening to children's voices is to acknowledge their intrinsic worth as human beings, it is to respect their dignity. This is further argued to be a fundamental value of a democratic society, and it is also addressed, for example, by the Finnish National Core Curriculum for basic education (2014), which is based on democratic values and the respect of human dignity (National Core Curriculum, 2014). As Patricia Holland (1992) and many others have argued, children do not have power in society and their dignity can be easily harmed: "Like all groups without power they suffer the indignity of being unable to present themselves as they would want to be seen – or, indeed, of even considering how they might want to be seen"

(p.19). Danica Facca and colleagues (2020), who have described child voice as "always already relational" (p. 6), have shown that children's voice is always a complex construction where meanings are situated and where different interpretations are possible. Facca and colleagues (2020) affirm that when discussing child voice, it is not possible to dismiss factors such as power relations by highlighting that "child voice is almost always produced through intergenerational dialogues" (p. 6). In the context of culturally diverse schools

and societies, it also means that the experiences and the voices of children who belong to minorities need to be included in the school curriculum as well as in societal discussions. A fundamental aspect of this noteworthy discussion is Spyrou's (2011) claim that school and its socio-cultural norms and regulations also contribute to *shaping* the voice of the child, meaning that the political voice of the child is shaped by the environment and the power relations embedded in it. Moreover, the discussion of child voice emphasises *silence* as an equally relevant aspect of voice as speech (Spyrou, 2016).

In this research, the interviewed children showed that they know *how* to use singing intentionally *for a purpose* in spaces they produce. These spaces have their own dynamics, which are regulated by the children themselves. For example, as described by Leila when she explained how she negotiates her role in a singing space with friends because she wants to be listened to. In singing spaces, children are free to participate (or not to participate) and to join as they wish – or as they negotiate with other members of the group. Edon, for example, enjoyed the possibility of jumping in and out, as he feels in the moment, exercising freedom of choice here and now. In many ways, these narratives align with previous research that has shown that in Western societies singing offers young children enduring possibilities of action in daily life; children can choose what to sing, with whom to sing, when to sing, and how to sing (e.g. Barrett, 2006; Campbell, 2010; Dean, 2021; Niland, 2012; Young, 2004). In a typical situation, young children singing at home can choose their songs, a group of friends can choose songs to sing together, or create their own songs, in a given place, at a certain time. The group can learn to negotiate roles, propose ideas and “ways of doing”, and listen to other’s proposals and suggestions. However, this study has shown that these possibilities of action are in fact conditioned by children’s own singing ecologies and the power relationships within the singing spaces. Furthermore, in the context of the school, children learn to navigate through a world of possibilities and impossibilities in relation to public and private singing. If teachers’ desires, institutional desires, and traditions are always the priority, then students may have limited influence over their own singing. If the students cannot choose what to sing, how to sing, when to sing, or with whom to sing in school, they may rather decide *not* to sing. Hence, children also exercise their agency in singing ecologies in relation to their political voice when they decide to sing or not to sing in the music class. As described by one of this study’s teachers (and in accordance with my observations), a small group of boys coming from a minority cultural background refused to participate in singing. Initially I thought that it was something temporary, but it turned out to be a persistent attitude. I learned from the teachers’ interviews that their refusal to participate was not

only with singing, but also with other artistic fields. By not singing the songs of the majority (or not joining the group in singing those songs in school) they may have been protecting themselves, as singing is grounded on personal life experiences and since singing with others also exposes your own vulnerabilities.

The children who participated in this study explained that singing gives them *freedom*, both in connection with self-directed singing and with social singing. Spaces such as home, the home yard, the forest, or the neighbourhood's natural surroundings were described by the children as potential physical spaces for freedom. Interestingly, the children always described freedom in context, for example: "when I am alone", or "when I am with close friends", or "when my brother cannot hear me", or "when I dance and sing as my "hobby". This suggests that singing can potentially favour freedom (both in private and social situations) but that, paradoxically, its presence is related to what the environment provides and the affordances intertwined with the environment. Freedom, understood in this way, is intrinsically connected with ecological agency and participation within places and spaces. This conceptualisation not only includes the freedom to sing a certain repertoire in a certain moment, but also the freedom to not sing it: *freedom of choice*. It includes the freedom to consider other people's desires in relation to their own desires, and to negotiate meanings. This is, according to Biesta (2020), the freedom that is attached to our existence as subjects. This quality of singing, as existential human practice, reveals the great potential of singing in schools, which still remains unexplored. Children spend many hours in noisy classrooms following adult's rules and regulations, which leave little space (or no space) for spontaneous vocal expression, much less for reflection, negotiation, and discussion, or for attending to student's subjectivities (Biesta, 2020). Singing in school can potentially help the children understand that they have the right of exercising their freedom and, as Biesta (2021) reminds us, that they are also responsible for that freedom.

6.4. Educators building spaces of trust

As schools and classrooms are diversifying, teachers and educators need more support for navigating diversity by developing cultural awareness and sensitivity (Marsh, 2000; Ilari, 2013). Teachers may think that they are acting in the child's best interest, while in reality they might be limiting the child's public voice and freedom of expression. However, how this can be done is not clear, and teachers need to learn how to navigate the diversity. Providing opportunities for the children to share the songs of their homelands – if they feel like doing so – is important, but it can also be controversial. In a recent ethnographic case study carried out in Norway, Burbridge Rinde (2022)

investigated “teacher and school leader perspectives on the potential of music activities for promoting an inclusive school environment for newly arrived children” (p. 429). The study was conducted in a Norwegian primary school, in an introductory class designed for newly arrived children, age 7 to 13. Based on observations and on eight recorded interviews with the head of the school, the deputy head, and three introductory class teachers, the study shows that “music activities could become more inclusive if the needs and resources of introductory class pupils were more central both in choice of repertoire, content and how activities are organised” (p. 439). The study also shows that group singing in primary schools is “often firmly based in the majority culture and the activity is reproductive and predominantly teacher-led” (p. 439). Three fields of tension in the introductory class classroom were identified, and those were related to: “(i) boundaries to what cultural expressions are welcomed and represented in school; (ii) visibility and performance of newly arrived children’s home cultures and (iii) exclusion and self-exclusion through musical markers of belonging” (p. 439). These fields of tension represent the constraints experienced by the children in their everyday life, which are also present in other Nordic countries such as Finland, (e.g. Virta & Tuittu, 2013), with researchers looking at how the diversity associated with student’s values, cultures, experiences, and backgrounds are taken into account in Finnish schools.

As this study has suggested, trust and freedom are essential factors of the school ecosystems, in which students and teachers are able to build intersubjective relationships. In an extended project named “Pockets of hope – Education as a practice of freedom”, Eileen de los Reyes and Patricia Gozemba (2002) have shown that in some cases students consider that “teachers must take the first steps in creating a trusting relationship; only then will students know that they can trust their teachers and each other” (p. 166). Hence, teachers play an important role in supporting students’ freedom, constructing a trustful environment and caring for children’s emotional health and well-being.

A trusting and caring environment has been described as a safe space (e.g. Hendricks et al., 2014). Mary Ann Hunter (2008) explains that in safe spaces people become empowered by the social environment. The safety element of children’s singing spaces is grounded on the notion of trust. The children who participated in this study were able to create their own singing spaces that operated under *their* rules and not under adults’ regulations and instructions. For example, Leila explained how she created singing spaces with her friends, and how the space was negotiated and transformed through the use of different dynamics and tools within the group. Singing spaces can be also spaces of confrontation and dissensus, which can help the children develop their political

voices. However, singing spaces can also be secret spaces (e.g. humming inside the classroom), something that can be also considered an important part of children's development (Marek, 2017). The motivation for such experimenting and testing of boundaries is about being in the world, a basic existential way of exploring one's own subjectivity and power to exist in the environment.

Studies connect the building of trust with a sense of belonging and full participation in communities (e.g. Prout et al., 2006; Tisdall et al., 2006). The process of building trust (to trust others and to be trusted by others) can be a long-term journey, which is connected with the individual's sense of belonging to communities and groups. Educators work to promote spaces of trust within schools and communities, however their individual work is defined by the school system with its rules, underlying power relations, norms, and structures. What previous research reveals is that in order to truly understand children's participation, attention should be given to the relationships that children build with others in places and spaces, for example with teachers, parents, peers, and neighbours (Prout, 2006). As Moss (2006) argues, professional adults need to build relationships with children based on "ethics of care", or "ethics of the encounter" (p. 190). Thus, if school as a place is more than a physical location, and locations become places in relation to the meanings people give them (Casey, 1998), then teachers are also participants in creating the school spaces and "can encourage students to connect with the wider neighbourhood in acts of place-making" (Thomson, 2015, p. 303). For this, teachers also need institutional support and the skills to work in partnership with the school, families, and the community (Epstein, 2018). The school, as an institution, is also responsible for creating partnership work and plurality in education.

Biesta (2006) has argued that the first responsibility of the educator is the "responsibility for the *subjectivity* of the student, for that which allows the student to be a unique singular being" (p. 30, italics in the original). Making efforts to connect with students as subjects allows educators to connect with their students with respect, trust, and freedom (Biesta, 2021). In this respect, "educational pointing", as Biesta suggests, manifests "in what we show we have the interest of our students in mind and need to find a connection to those interests, and not let our pointing be led by our own interests" (p. 26). Educators can demonstrate or point in certain directions, and try to show the students valuable knowledge, but the students will ultimately decide whether or not to take the teacher's suggestions (Biesta, 2021). The freedom of the students is grounded in those decisions, which are also acts of agency.

Acting with agency in culturally diverse contexts and situations is not an easy

task – not for the children, and neither for the adults. It is a task that not all children can or necessarily want to take. As was mentioned previously, in culturally diverse schools there may also be issues related to cultural appropriation (Young, et al., 2009), joint decision making about repertoire, and issues of authenticity (or assumptions about what is authentic for the children) that also need to be addressed when discussing the songs of the homeland in the classrooms. Within this complexity, there are no theories to ‘fit all’; instead, attending to the uniqueness of each child, understanding his or her feelings and needs, connecting with his or her cultural heritage with respect, not oversimplifying cultural works, respecting the students wishes and timing, are all important parts of the educational process that cannot be forgotten. Only if respectful attitudes are established in the classrooms may it be possible, in the long term, to develop a sense of trust and belonging along with students’ “sense of presence” (Biesta, 2006, p. 41).

Exploring the possibilities of school public performances or enabling endorsement by the wider school community has been relevant in recent studies in Western societies (Marsh, 2012, 2013; Nikkanen, 2014). For example, in research carried out in Australia, a girl with a culturally diverse background “was invited by the teacher to sing a song (of her homeland) at the school assembly and felt confident enough in her musical and cultural identity to do so” (Marsh, 2017, p. 68). However, some children may not feel comfortable performing publicly in school (for example, Aapo on school celebrations) and not all children are ready or willing to participate (or want to participate) in singing activities in the school. Rather than being forced to sing when they do not want to, children could be offered non-conventional possibilities of participation, which may be also generated from their own initiatives.

On the other extreme, teachers can have students who may feel that school music class is not interesting enough or that it does not align with the commitment they have with music in their lives. An example of this can be found in Barrett’s article (2007) and the case of Alana, a girl for whom singing is at the centre of her life and school music seems not to respond to her relationship with singing outside of school (see also Barrett & Smigiel, 2007). Her commitment “to singing and to a life in music, to the ensemble in which she sings, to the teacher who inspires her and leads this ensemble to make music at the highest levels” (p. 37) is evidence of the “importance of the arts in young people’s lives, of the time and dedication they devote to arts experience and activity, and their desire to achieve in the arts to the best of their ability” (p. 38). This resonates with Minna’s narrative (particularly when she described her singing hobby), and also with my own experiences

as a teacher practitioner. For children who have created a solid relationship with singing in their lives and communities, school singing (e.g. in a certain school with a certain teacher and with a certain group of peers and their dispositions) may not make sense or may even contradict their beliefs, values, and feelings about singing in their lives. In this respect, “the role of the teacher is to understand these possible/actual relationships in creating successful scaffolded musical activities in which children’s current expertise can be made manifest, celebrated, shared and developed” (Welch, 2022, p. 100).

According to this study, singing is not experienced by children as the same activity inside school as it is outside school. Singing in different places and social spaces has different meanings for the children. The discrepancy between school education and out-of-school music activities has been highlighted by studies on informal music learning (see e.g. Green, 2008). However, from the perspective of this study, the dualist notion of “formal” and “informal” in early childhood music education is a limitation, because it does not capture the complexities of music as experienced by the child (Young et al., 2018). The emerging gap generated between children’s prior musical experiences and school experiences can deepen if teachers do not relate to their student’s experiences and background, or they do not support their students in the process of making meaningful connections between their previous knowledge and experiences and the new learnings (Rosabal-Coto, 2016). This gap has been conceptualised as *cultural dissonance* (Feichas, 2011; Rosabal-Coto, 2016), and illustrates the tensions and challenges that are typical for culturally diverse schools, which require action from the entire community, and in particular from teachers. bell hooks (1994) called the classroom “a location of possibility” for students and teachers, in which trust spaces can indeed be created. However, teachers need to initiate the process of creating a trusting relationship inside the classroom, since “for the students to believe that there is an authentic invitation to share their experience and co-construct knowledge, they need to experience their teachers as learners” (De los Reyes, 2002, p. 46). Teachers and the school as a whole can help students bridge this gap or reduce cultural dissonances, but for that to happen it is necessary to create spaces of trust in which teachers and students can practice caring from one and another.

6.5. School as a caring ecosystem

In early childhood music education, Barrett (2011) has elaborated on the concept of ecological thinking, arguing that “[e]cological thinking might be viewed as a striving for connectedness, for the establishment of a relationship of the self to the inter-connecting systems in which we live and work” (p. 6). Stauffer (2009),

who has explored the interconnections of ecological thinking and philosophy of place in relation to school curriculum, claims that the curriculum has been preoccupied with answering questions of “what”, “how”, and “why” when in fact more relevant questions such as “who” and “where” have been at the margin of curriculum design. For example, in relation to listening to songs or singing along in school, considerations such as *who our students are* should stand as a priority. This idea can be expanded by considering, for example, in which ways the children listen to music (and to which music), or how they experience music inside and outside school; what music they consider “their music” and which not; to what extent the children feel connected and comfortable singing the school songs, or to what extent they feel uncomfortable or intimidated in their own classrooms. In other words, what does the musical activity mean for them? We can further ask how they experience the possible existing gaps between the “musics” of school in contrast with outside school music.

This study aligns with findings by Antonia Forari (2007), who studied students’ and teachers’ perceptions of the curriculum in Cyprus and showed that teachers and students have different views of what music education in school is, with teachers considering music education as aesthetic education and students taking music education as an “escape from the stress of other curriculum subjects” (p. 142). Policymaking and implementation needs to be understood as a dialogic process in which all participants, including the children, participate. Indeed, Barrett (2017b) has discussed including children’s interactions in classrooms as essential for the understanding of policy making as a “polydynamic” process in schools, because children are not just receivers of music education policy but “they also engage in acts of meaning-making and interpretation as they participate in the practical manifestations of music education policy” (p. 177). In this respect, and in relation to the school system of which children are unavoidably a part, it is worth noting that children’s home cultures affect their interactions in school and vice versa. This study has therefore suggested that the school could be envisioned as a bridging organisation – a bridge builder (see Biggs et al., 2021) – between children’s experience in the home ecosystem and society’s expectations from its citizens in the ecosystem of school. Equally, singing in school could be seen as a space for connecting children’s earlier and ongoing experiences of singing at home and the directions that the curriculum gives for singing and music education. Children’s singing, as well as children’s playing with songs, can serve as a bridge-builder between a child and his or her closest family environment and another child’s family environment, and this can extend to the Finnish school and wider society, helping children form meaningful experiences as part of these interactions. Singing is one core element in the lives of children, and is a part of their social

ecology (e.g. Barrett, 2011; O’Neill, 2017), of which school is also a part. Consequently, this study suggests that school ought to transform itself based on the environment, and that student’s ecosystems are relational counterparts of that environment. Figure 5 shows how school is fed by children’s ecologies while at the same time school gives back to children’s ecosystems. In this conceptualisation of “bridging ecosystems”, where the school has a central role in developing ways of connecting these ecosystems, it cannot leave the students alone to navigate; rather, it is the school’s responsibility to care for students and their integrity.

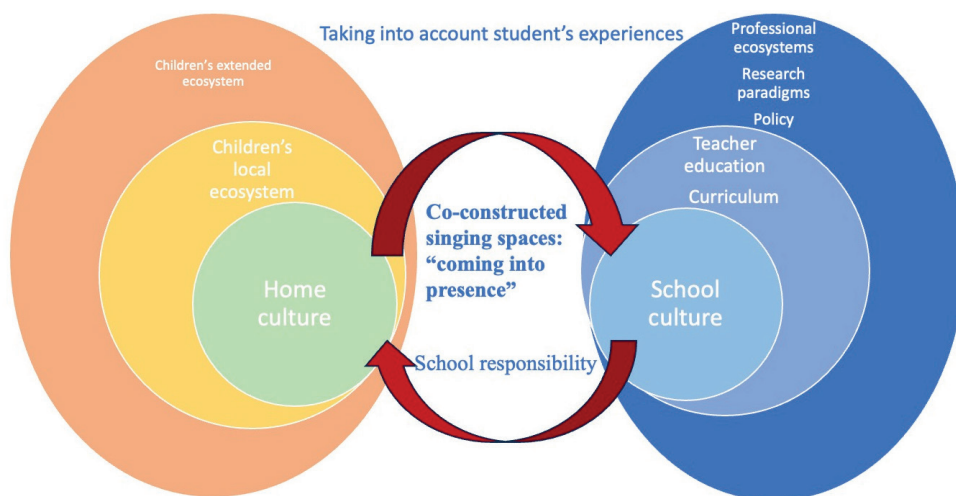


Figure 4. School as a bridge-building and caring ecosystem (adapted from Folke & Berkes [1998] in Biggs et al., 2021).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) addressed societal sustainability, explaining that “no society can long sustain itself unless its members have learned the sensitivities, motivations, and skills involved in assisting and caring for other human beings” (p. 53). Moreover, he suggested that generally schools do not prioritise these kinds of learning and advocated for a *curriculum for caring* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) which should be implemented from the earliest grades of schooling – and which in practice also transcends the school setting. Bronfenbrenner (1979) writes:

The purpose of such a curriculum would be not to learn about caring

but to engage in it: children would be asked to take responsibility for spending time with and caring for others – old people, younger children, the sick, and the lonely. (p. 53)

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), such a curriculum for caring has the potential to exceed the microsystem of the classroom and the school in order to “invoke new interconnections among home, school and neighbourhood at the level of mesosystem” (p. 54) with possible effects in the mesosystem. Questions arise regarding how a curriculum of *caring through singing* would create connections between the children, the school, their neighbourhoods, and society at large; for example, learning from the children and from how they create and enact their own spaces for singing, especially outside school. If in ecological thinking connectedness is essential, then learning from the *singing spaces* created by children and from their social-ecological dynamics can be revealing and provide a vision for a new kind of ecological music education. In Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) curriculum for caring, children engage in caring in a practical manner and spend time with and care for others in society – for example elderly people, kindergarten children, lonely or sick people; children thus connect with their communities, and learn to care for them. A curriculum for *caring in and through singing*, for connecting school and the community in and through singing, would reach beyond the classroom and the microsystem, generating new interconnections which extend to the mesosystem. Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000) explain:

in order to develop – intellectually, emotionally, socially, and morally – a human being, whether child or adult, requires – for all of them – the same thing: active participation in progressively more complex reciprocal interaction with persons with whom he or she develops a strong, mutual, irrational attachment, and who, over time, become committed to each other’s well-being and development, preferably for life (p. 122).

If the making of meaning starts at the very beginning of life, when the baby becomes involved in reciprocal interactions, first with the main caregiver, then with primary connections in the family, and later extending these social connections when entering daycare and school (as a place where children can practice more complex interactions), a “curriculum of caring” through singing can facilitate the extension of this complexity, generating meaningful connection within children’s neighbourhoods and communities.

Thinking ecologically then, is thinking about connections, about living in connection with other persons and with the environment in an ethical manner

– and this can be understood as caring for other members of the community. The implementation of a caring curriculum through singing in school would not only help students experience what caring for others looks like “in reality” (not only learning about caring in the abstract), but it would also help them to generate connections with members of their local communities and to practice important issues related to what it is to live in a democratic society. Such a curriculum is political, since care as a concept is political, and since “children express political acts through caring” (Bartos, 2012, in Skelton, 2015, p. 128).

6.6. Advancing the ecological view of children’s singing

This dissertation has addressed the concern that the world is changing rapidly, and with it children’s positioning in our societies. More than twenty years ago, Prout (2000) claimed that neoliberalism utilises children to control the future: “children, precisely because they are seen as especially unfinished, appear as a good target for controlling the future” (p. 306). This can also be seen from the point of view of the production of power (Foucault, 1977, 1982), where subjectivity is considered as “the twofold process of subjection and subjectivation: as subordination to someone else’s control and embracing of those conditions that form one’s existence” (Kontovourki et. al., 2019, p. 156). I have used Lefebvre’s (1991) idea of the social production of space in this study in order to highlight how power forces and human practices (Foucault, 1977, 1982) manifested within children’s spaces define their lives and subjectivities. While singing, children claim their own human freedom and dignity, they claim their voices to be heard in a world in which they have no or minimal power. Children’s singing improvisations have previously been identified as a way to resist the “symbolic violence” of society and institutions (Kanellopoulos, 2019, p. 268). The findings of this study have shown how singing is also part of human existence for children, and how it cannot be reduced to productivity or learning outcomes, as is common in the neoliberal perspective. As Haenys Yoon and Tran N. Templeton (2019) note: “more than the process of learning, [in contemporary society] we have grown accustomed to valuing the production of learning or visible markers of achievement” (p. 58).

The ‘learnification’ of education has indeed become a problematic development in recent years, which has degraded rather than enhanced educational practices and thoughts (Biesta, 2010). This development is also clear in music education (see an analysis in Laes et al., 2024). As previously shown, reflecting on the purpose of education, Biesta (2020) suggests that the reason why the subjectification in education has been difficult to grasp is because “what is at stake in the idea of subjectification is our freedom as human beings

and, more specifically, our freedom to act or to refrain from action” (p. 93). The discussion on learnification resonates with this study, which has shown that the meanings children address in and through singing, even in school, are not only related to learning; rather, singing is an existential issue. As Bjørkvold (1990) writes, “canto – ergo sum! I sing – therefore I am!” (p. 118).

The children who participated in this study described a significant gap or disconnect between school singing and singing in “real life”. As Biesta (2006) writes: “something has been lost in the transition from ‘education’ to ‘learning’” (p. 10). This means that focussing only on learning – and the quantity of learning – can lead to disengagement in students, especially if children’s experiences are systematically ignored. These relational aspects of singing have been recently acknowledged by researchers (Barrett & Welch, 2023; Welch, 2022), indicating a major turn in the field of children’s singing research, not only in considering children’s individual singing skills and development but in acknowledging the value of deepening our understanding of children’s cultural backgrounds, experiences, and environments. When reflecting on the functionalist approach in connection with singing in schools, the question we should be asking is what education *means*, not what education *produces* (Biesta, 2017), and consequently what singing means to the children rather than what it produces from an adult point of view. Skills and competence-based music education and research may position children’s singing in public places as meritocratic, where the public voice is only about showing what has been learned (and is considered valuable by adults), and not about the authenticity and inclusivity of student’s perspectives, negotiations of power (Fielding, 2006), and meaningful participation (Bahou, 2011). Indeed, researchers such as De los Reyes and Gozemberga (2002) have already shown twenty years ago through six concrete educational projects that “it is the lack of opportunity to experience their own power that prevents them [the students] from regaining their place as active social actors in their schools and wider communities” (Bahou, 2011, p. 7).

A change of mindset is thus necessary in educational institutions, not only in relation to the singing voice but also in relation to the student’s political voice. Teachers need to be aware of the existential qualities of singing and singing spaces that lie not in singing itself (as a decontextualized activity) but in the singing ecologies of individuals and their own subjectivities. Singing is a way of being, of being in the here and now – it cannot be only about learning a certain repertoire of songs as part of the school curriculum. Singing happens in places and spaces (defining individual’s capacities of action) where meanings are constructed. The children who participated in this study narrated the places where they sing, but they also explained that not every place is

good for singing. Indeed, Biesta (2022) reminds us that not all places are the same – and not all places are the same for singing or enacting a political voice.

The question of where we are and where things ‘take place,’ is a really important one. After all, not all locations are the same and, more importantly, locations differ with regard to what can be done and what cannot be done, what is easy to do and what is difficult, what is ‘in view’ and what is hidden, what can be said and what remains silent, what makes sense and what appears as nonsense, what is possible and what is impossible, what is allowed and what is forbidden, and so on. (Biesta, 2022, p. 1)

This study has shown how first grade students, who live in a transitional time, experience school singing as detached from outside school singing, and perceive a reduced role for singing in schools. Children understand already at this age what is allowed and what is not allowed inside the school, and also what is expected from them – even if school rules about singing (e.g. stay quiet in the classroom and sing only when required by the teacher) may contradict their own understanding of the meanings of singing. This gap between understandings of what singing is in children’s lives can be even more evident for those children who come from culturally diverse backgrounds, where, for example, singing and movement are an integral part of daily family routines, or for children whose cultural background disapproves of singing altogether. However, even under these conditions, tensions, and contradictions, children strive for connectedness and have the right to freedom and political voice.

Whilst schools may be neither the best environments for collaborative meaning making (Ødegaard, 2020) nor for learning (Biesta, 2022), this study has urged the adoption of a view in which singing could help children create meaningful connections in and through singing spaces also inside the school and in-between-spaces. The children in this study were aware of the differences between school singing and outside school singing; they explained that school songs are teacher’s songs and not “the songs of our lives”, and they particularly understood the difference between private and public singing. Children were aware of the power of singing within *singing spaces* they created themselves for exercising their freedom, agency, and political voice. Showing the relationship between *singing spaces* and meaning making and the meanings children ascribe to singing within places and spaces, this study has aimed to demonstrate that singing cannot be understood as an “unspaced” practice, in which all students are supposed to participate in the same way and for whom the songs carry the same meaning. As described by Yoon and Templeton (2019):

children's ways of being are impacted by adults' responses and interventions in their spaces, and their natural processes are stifled by our narrowed understanding of the world... It is an adult's world, and children happen to live in it. (p. 59)

Approaching children's singing ecologies from the perspective of the children themselves, this study has made an attempt to show the meanings of singing and how children make sense of the world in and through singing, in order to inform teachers and schools education. The relational, ecological view can be a starting point for understanding why singing in school in some cases may even contradict children's previous experience of singing.

6.6.1. Implications for future research on children's singing

In the field of early childhood music, two emerging recurring themes were recently identified (Barrett & Welch, 2023): "the ongoing importance of researching young children's development (a) both in and through music; and deepening our understanding of the places where children make and experience music" (p. 972). This doctoral research contributes to the field of music education by theorising children's singing ecologies and singing spaces, deepening our understanding of what counts as singing for the children and of how children experience singing within places and spaces (and in between), and offering tools for understanding and allowing for children's exercise of agency and political voice in culturally diverse schools and societies.

Future research on children's singing could aspire to expand the study of children's singing by examining the meanings of singing for children of different age groups in local and international communities. Seeing singing as an existential tool, and examining singing ecologies across different cultural landscapes and societies, would reveal more about children's ecosystems and individual subjectivities, teaching us to not generalise. This includes the study of singing ecologies involving children who are experiencing life transitions, for example children who are entering primary school or starting daycare. On the other hand, looking more closely at children's singing ecologies and "family culture" and cultural heritage seems a promising area of research. By putting the focus on cultural diversity, new methodologies for conducting singing research *with* children as co-researchers may arise. There are no fixed solutions regarding future research on children's singing, but the clear understanding is that generalisation is (and has been) problematic in the field of music education and singing research – as it can easily lead to misconceptions related to what "every child should do" (and should not do) at a certain stage of life,

underestimating the complexity of the phenomenon and student's subjectivities. Furthermore, the discussion on children's singing research within institutional environments leads us to question the very purpose of education and singing education in schools and to consider, as Biesta (2022) writes:

whether education should be positioned on the side of control or on the side of freedom; whether it should be positioned on the side of domestication or the side of emancipation; whether it should focus on 'useful knowledge' – so that students can become productive workers and obedient citizens and have the skills to flexibly adjust to everchanging circumstances – or rather on 'really useful knowledge,' so that students have the courage to say no when adjusting to the circumstances around them is precisely what should not happen.
(p. 8)

This dissertation has drawn from childhood studies that consider children as agentic, fully participant members of society in their own right. Future children's singing research needs to be nurtured by the discussion on childhood studies, ecological agency, and children's rights, particularly now with the implementation of the Child Strategy in Finland (2021). Furthermore, this study has aimed to show that children can be approached by dialogical interviews. Research that involves children has long tended to be avoided (for example in order to protect vulnerable children, or because children's statements were considered inaccurate or difficult to interpret). Studies *on* children received attention, but it was not until the twentieth century that research *with* children properly emerged. In contemporary research, collaborative research *with* children is gaining more and more space because it includes the children as active participants and even as co-researchers (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017), providing children with possibilities to influence decisions on issues that involve them. As suggested by Kallio and Häkli (2015): "The emphasis given to the child's right to be heard, combined with the approach stressing children as agents 'here and now', generated a concept that has thereafter dominated both research and policy agendas: children's participation" (p. 8).

Nevertheless, research with young children can be considered difficult to carry out, particularly when it involves interviewing young individuals and interpreting their conversations. Certainly "children know when adults are truly engaged in the conversation and when they are not. This does not only have to do with researcher's interviewing and communication skills" (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017), which are both necessary and important, but also with their sensitivity and genuine desire for connection. As Mollenhauer (2014) has

claimed, “we can never know exactly how or what is precisely to be done in engaging with the child, yet the call of the child for us to be engaged is unmistakable... and as adults, we are always already called” (p. xlvi). Interviewing children is about mutual engagement; and thus it is about giving the children the time they need to say what they feel is important. It is about having time to listen to them, creating safe and inviting spaces based on respect and freedom. However, establishing a connection with children, for example during an interview, can be challenging. Norm Friesen (2014) has illustrated this with these words: “there is a kind of natural light or energy associated with childhood, and as we grow older – and are increasingly defined by culture and customs – we gradually lose contact with this original source” (p. xl). Conversing with children can be understood as “coming back” to that original source, responding to our primary and existential human need for connection; or in other words, connecting with children at the level of human subjectivity.

The narrative inquiry approach taken in this study has given me as a researcher and music educator a frame for conversing with children. It gave me the freedom to focus on children’s personal stories and to delve deeper into these children’s lived experiences. Thus, narrative inquiry as a method was helpful for connecting with the children, accessing their world, and better understanding what is meaningful to them about singing. More research *with* young children (as opposed to research *on* young children) is necessary to understand ‘ontological questions’, such as “How is the child possible?” As Spyrou and colleagues (2019) have argued, “the question invites us reimagine the child not by reducing our understanding to essentialist assertions but through a fresh look at matters of ontology, which highlights the complexity of the child” (p. 8), such as in this study, which included questions about children’s voices and about what it means to be present (sense of presence), and to be an agentic person who experiences singing as part of life. As this study has shown, while freedom, social engagement, and connection with others and the self were recurrent topics in children’s interviews, feelings of shame, insecurity, and disconnection with “real life” were also present, and related to how the children described their singing ecologies. More research on music education is needed in order to build “an understanding of children as ontological becomings” (Spyrou et al., 2019, p. 8) and to understand more about how children could influence the spaces they inhabit as they are influenced by them.

The potential of studying singing ecologies transcends early childhood research, as singing ecologies can be studied on other educational levels, such as secondary school or higher education. Identifying the dynamics of singing ecologies and singing spaces on other educational levels by studying

singing from the perspective of the students and taking into consideration their experiences and “sense of presence” within places and spaces can be revealing. Especially in higher education institutions, where singing is mostly approached from the perspective of musical knowledge, skills, and traditions in search of excellence in performance, the subjectivity of the students can be easily overlooked. Since the three educational dimensions of qualification, socialization, and subjectification cannot be separated, it is increasingly necessary to attend to the subjectivity of the student and their singing ecologies in higher education. Excellence in performance does not diminish by taking into account singing ecologies and singing spaces; on the contrary, the ecological view can favour the performer’s connections with the audience, with themselves, and the meanings attributed to singing within places and spaces – and it can also help performers create “in-between” spaces for raising their voices.

As already explained, the analysis in this study has drawn from Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model (1979, 1986), which the sociologist Prout (2005) has, however, criticised for being a “relatively static framework” in which “the ‘micro’, ‘meso’ and ‘macro’ levels are treated as if they were different containers within which children are held” (p. 81). Prout (2005) acknowledges Bronfenbrenner’s assertion that “these separate contexts are ‘linked’ and, in turn, ‘nested’ within broader ‘macrosystems’ of ideology and institutional structure” (p. 81). Prout questions the fluidity of the model for understanding the complexity of social life, seeing the locales of childhood as “places constructed through flows of heterogeneous materials” (pp. 81–82). Bronfenbrenner himself assessed his original model from 1979 in later theorizations (Bronfenbrenner, 1995), and included the person-process-context-time model and the study of space through time. However, Elliott et al. (2020) still consider that the human-nature connections are not clearly articulated in Bronfenbrenner’s model. The model has also been criticized for its anthropocentricity and for not clearly addressing the human-nature interconnections, because “ecology is as much a human science as it is about the nonhuman and has led to the parallel/intersecting field of human ecology” (p. 49).

Being aware of these criticism, I have still found Bronfenbrenner’s theoretical lens useful when examining children’s narrations of their situational and context-specific experiences, and when bringing up complexities and individual differences in this respect (e.g. Bruner, 1986; Maybin, 2006, 2013). The narratives from this study’s children revealed the spatial meanings of singing, in this way overcoming an overly human-centred understanding. However, Bronfenbrenner’s model (1979, 1986) provided only an abstract starting point against which the empirical material was analysed, and other lenses supplemented this general frame. It would be necessary for future

research to further develop the ecological lenses for music education.

6.6.2. Implications for music education and teacher education

This study shows the potential of conceptually combining the concrete use of musical singing voice in schools and the relational, political voice (Moss & Petrie, 2002; Wyness, 2009), in this way advancing a view in which children themselves could contribute to the what's, how's, where's, why's, and when's of singing in schools. As Biesta (2006) explained, "coming into presence" in schools might enable children to live in constant movement, constructing their subjectivity and searching for ways of being, exploring their agency within ecological spaces and raising their voices. Moreover, children whose opinions and ideas are usually heard grow into the opinion that their voices are valuable (e.g. Mohr, 2001), which has implications for the development of their political voice. These children will be more able to express their views, to give good reasons for them, and to be willing to consider other people's perspectives with "open eyes"– even if those perspectives might be very different from their own (Lone, 2021).

The general aims of this study have aligned with the main aims of the recent National Child Strategy (Kansallinen Lapsistrategia, 2021), which recognises that "in reality" all children's rights are not fulfilled in Finland. A central aspect in this discussion is the lack of participation of children in school and society. Since participation is a fundamental right, children should have the same rights as other members of society, for example in issues that affect them such as their own education and schooling. This includes the right to not participate and to be respected. Indeed, these are considered the basis of political dialogue. As Liam Cairns (2006) explains: "The adoption of a rights perspective simply asserts the entitlement of children and young people to take part in political dialogue" (p. 219) and to have a political voice, which is also to respect their dignity. In educational contexts, two notions of dignity interact: "one related to whether education systems teach us to respect the dignity of others, and the other is related to whether these systems themselves treat us with dignity when we go through them" (Roth et al., 2022, p. 1151). This means that the educational system should ensure that all children are treated with dignity across their educational paths, teaching them at the same time to respect others' dignity. In this regard, supporting children's connections with their communities, so that they can experience what it means to care for other members of their communities, and with the environment, is fundamental. As mentioned before, a curriculum of caring (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) in and through singing can be implemented as a

practical tool for connecting students and communities, school and society.

This study indicates that music educators ought to see music making and singing from a more holistic perspective, and as relational and situational activities. Only then can music in school be truly transformational. Westerlund and Karlsen (2020) write, “[a] time is approaching when we can, and we need to reposition music education at the heart of societal transformation where living with diversity becomes an everyday, and ethical, way of living together (p. 216). Leaning on Westerlund and Karlsen’s (2020) words and reflecting on the sense of urgency manifested in this study, the discussion on the current educational problems of the Finnish education system should continue. School teachers face challenges every day in schools; they are conscious of those challenges, and they do ‘the best they can’ for the children. Common topics of discussion and preoccupation between school teachers nowadays include: increasing workload, the lack of methodological strategies, the lack of tools to deal with current problems, and feelings of frustration and discouragement. Similar preoccupations were narrated by the teachers I interviewed for this study already 5 years ago. I have recently seen a young teacher in the school yard shedding tears because she felt she could not handle conflicting situations related to her students’ behaviour. What else can be done to help the children and the teachers in their work in culturally diverse schools? This study has suggested that children’s singing spaces can offer new possibilities; approaching children’s singing ecologies can help teachers see what is already there, present in children’s lives and environments, and it can also reveal where and why problems may arise.

As in other parts of the world, in Finland, global challenges also manifest in education, and the tensions generated by the variety of children’s musical experiences and expectations “challenge us to consider the development of curricula that can build on the rich resources young people bring to the experience of schooling” (Barrett, 2007, p. 38). Developing cultural sensitivity and implementing “culturally responsive teaching strategies” (Gay, 2010) is increasingly necessary for “creating democratic learning spaces in contemporary classrooms” (Kelly-McHale, 2016, p. 220). As Gay (2010) suggests, “the knowledge that teachers need to have about cultural diversity goes beyond mere awareness of, respect for, and general recognition of the fact that ethnic groups have different values or express different values in similar ways” (p. 107). Teachers need to transcend awareness and “get into action” what is to be learnt and understood in terms of the diversities of their classrooms. Thus, the transitional moment that Finnish teacher education is facing may not only bring deepening struggles but also hope and new

opportunities, for example by experimenting with what a *curriculum of caring in and through singing* (see Chapter 6.6.) might mean in practice. This study shows that living with diversity *is* an everyday issue in Finnish primary schools and other educational institutions in Finland. It also shows how educators can find ways to work to generate connections with *all* children in school through singing, cultivating safe spaces within places, supporting the students, and getting involved while giving space for children's own voices to be heard. Children can potentially "take risks" in singing spaces, and share their voices, their songs, or their stories. We can ask what the role of trust and freedom is for agency development in places such as school. This question is relevant, because in order "to be willing to take risks learners need to have a certain level of personal agency" (Wiggins et al., 2018, p. 123).

Interestingly, this is true for both students and teachers, and it has to be noted that those who "take risks" have more possibilities to develop agency, within both individual and collective contexts. Risk-taking can be challenging not only for students but also their teachers, especially if the teachers do not feel confident about their singing voice or with music education in general. In the same way as children, teachers have different personal relationships with their own voices and their own singing in the public space of school, and nurturing a relationship with singing based on one's authentic and personal engagement takes time, and only develops through experience and multiple interactions. However, one can well ask: how can teachers help students develop these kinds of relationships with singing if they have not experienced them themselves?

Based on this study's theoretical understanding, it can be argued that it is not only the number of hours dedicated to singing in school nor the repertoire of songs alone (something that however definitely needs to be considered) that motivates children to actively participate in singing activities in school. Rather, it is freedom and the quality of the participatory experiences that arise within various spaces that may empower children (and teachers) to sing inside and outside school, and to feel part of the group. However, participatory performance can not be forced, as its value resides in people's freedom to join and to form part of the group. As this study has shown, non-participation is also a way to use one's political voice. As a singer and member of musical communities, I recognise these feelings of inner-freedom and belonging, but also those of political freedom, as powerful components in the process of reaffirming my own agency and identity. The experiences of my own childhood also played an important role in this inquiry. As Mollenhauer (2014) reminds us,

we can only "understand" children through analogy to ourselves,

our own upbringing and experiences – trans, we need to first reflect on ourselves and on what we mean when we talk about ourselves as “adults” (p. 119).

If the need for connection, belonging, and freedom are basic human needs that are with us from our earliest days and accompanying us across our life span, then caring for the fulfilment of these basic human needs for all children in culturally diverse schools and societies is an urgent task. There are no final answers in this respect, and the certainty that “where there is mystery, paradox and aporia, there are also questions that have no final answer: How can we initiate self-activity while at the same time giving the space needed for the child to become active?” (p. xlvii) However, caring for children, taking their experience seriously, and respecting their rights and dignity as well as their political voice, should be the priority in schools in order for schools to be educational (Biesta, 2022). In a more contemporary discussion, children’s geographers and political geographers suggest that

transformative work with children and young people not only advances the debates within the academic discipline, but it provides the research participants with stronger senses of their own political identities and agencies (Skelton, 2015, p. 133).

The implications of these actions are enormous, because they also affect children’s sense of worth and respect for their own integrity: “if our integrity is threatened, our ability to cope with life’s challenges is also threatened” (Bjørkvold, 1989, p. 127). Only by respecting children’s integrity and dignity is it possible to say that education is working towards the future, acting in the present, and responding to the often-unheard voices of children, in search for democratic ways of living together (Dewey, 1938/1963).

6.7. The performativity, ethics, and emotionality of co-constructed interview spaces

6.7.1. From interviews to complex conversations

My research journey started with reflecting on a fundamental ethical question: the justification of the study. It was followed by another ethical question, which pertains the methods of study. In childhood studies, the researcher’s ethical responsibility is to put forward children’s voices and take care that children’s voices are heard (e.g. Kontovourki, et al. 2019). This investigation

was carefully constructed over several years of work, and focused on respecting children's voices and children's rights. While listening to the voices of young children, and the ways they narrate their everyday lives, continuous reflexivity was necessary. In particular, I needed to question my own preconceptions and beliefs regarding hearing the voices of the children. While I prepared myself for receiving and documenting the children's accounts through careful listening and observing, I also recognised my own limitations: to what extent can I reconsider my preconceptions and beliefs and open myself up to listen to the children? Or, even more, how can the silent voices of children in school (and in society) be revealed and understood as part of the Finnish educational landscape?

Ethics plays an integral role in the research process, including how the findings of the study are respectfully presented and interpreted. As Priscilla Alderson (2014) explains, "ethics help researchers to be more aware of hidden problems, although it does not provide easy answers" (p. 98). While the ethical considerations that apply to research with adults also apply to research with children, additional considerations of research with children have been documented (e.g. Punch 2002; Morrow, 2008). According to Virginia Morrow (2008) there are added conditions in research with children; for example, "children's competencies, perceptions and frameworks of reference may differ according to a range of social differences, including culture, age, gender, ethnic background, personal characteristics" (p. 52). Adults have specific responsibilities towards children because children can be considered a potentially vulnerable population, and also because adults should be aware of power relations, especially in a school context. While attention has been paid to ethical considerations in research with children related to data collection, it is also necessary to understand research ethics beyond the scope of field work – to attend to the dissemination and the political implications of the research, and to the ways in which it may affect broader groups of children (Morrow, 2008), for example children of immigrant backgrounds.

In planning the research process, I intended to prepare myself to reflect on the potential ethical issues and limitations of the study. When preparing myself for interviewing the children, I realised that while the design of the interview was important, the critical point of the interview was the manner in which it was conducted. When interviewing the children, I noticed how the interview questions expanded into discussions. As children bring with them different stories and experiences, and there are also differences in what children want to tell or do not tell, or which topic they want to expand upon or explain in detail and which ones not, interviews can vary from each other. As has been explained earlier, the interviews helped me learn about children's

everyday lives and to focus on their experiences. According to Svend Brinkmann and Steinar Kvale (2015), interview research can be considered the art of listening, in which the researcher follows with passion and genuine interest the interviewee's words, interacting with the interviewee, re-questioning, listening, and building a conversation. When interviewing the children for this study, I realised how well children understand adults' intentions, interests, and involvement. Listening to the children's whole body, and not focusing only on listening to the verbal voice (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017), was important for me, and helped me to strengthen connections with the children. It was obvious that the researcher is also part of the process of data generation, with his or her own identity, beliefs, values, and subjectivity. As Clark et al. (2014) remind us, interviewing children is a task that can differ greatly from interviewing adults. In this sense, my experiences as a practitioner with long experience teaching young children of all ages helped me interact with the children, both during the school stay and also during the interviews (which I would call conversations). However, I realized that interviewing children for a research study poses particular challenges compared with interviewing adults, even for an experienced practitioner; this is because interviews are particular research-oriented conversations, and because of the "potential complexity of interviewing younger participants" (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017, p. 3).

Historically, perhaps because of these difficulties, and because of the general belief that children do not have the social competence to remember their experiences and talk about them (Fraser et al., 2014), interviews of young children can generally be considered rare, thus silencing children's voices. However, contemporary research has challenged this absence of child-voice, and has shown that children can both remember their experiences and describe them in detail. The conversations I had with the children is an example of this. The conversations were at times so engaging that it was difficult to conclude the interview, although there were also shorter interviews. Some of the children even spontaneously manifested their interest in having another interview at a later time.

6.7.2. The interview space as a performative act and space of power

The space of the interview can be considered a performative space (Kontovourki, et al., 2019). It is "the space of the interview (jointly shaped by both us as researchers and children as participants) as a space of performative acts which could not have been sanctioned or acknowledged as legitimate performances in the space of the mainstream classroom" (Kontovourki et al., 2019, p. 154). During the process of this research, I learned that when

conducting interviews with children – and in order to encourage a dialogic conversation with them – the researcher needs to develop skills that go beyond the mere formulation of questions and are more connected with the actual interactions generated within the conversation, in order to create that performative space; to support the fluidity of the interview, but also to engender a sense of “safety” and trust during the interview. This sense of trust is fundamental to interviews of children and is the basis of their value. For example, in this study it was necessary to be aware of the children’s feelings and needs at all times; to be sensitive and observe the children carefully in order to understand their non-verbal gestures, movements, the tone of their voices, and pauses. The children brought up emotional stories during the conversations, which required careful, attentive listening and sensitivity.

Even in trustful environments, the asymmetry of power relations when interviewing children cannot be avoided. As Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) remind us, “the research interview is a specific professional conversation, which typically involves a clear power asymmetry between the researcher and the subject” (p. 37). When the research involves children, such as in this case, this is accentuated. Thus, to minimize the effects of power relations, I concentrated on being sensitive to the children’s behaviour; feeling connected with them was particularly important. I also decided from the very beginning of the field work not to teach music to the children (for example as part of the music lesson) but rather to participate in the group as one more learner. I did not want the children to consider me as a teacher. Instead, I offered to organize a shared musical activity at the end of my stay, after the interviews concluded.

Emphasizing awareness and reflexivity throughout the whole research process helped me understand that children may express their ideas in different ways. Children need time and space to express their opinions, and the researcher needs to be patient and listen without hurrying. In the interviews, I aimed to be open to listening to and observing a great variety of responses, to understanding children’s different ways of responding and not responding. I focused on not re-interpreting but listening to what they were saying with patience. During the research process, I learned that reflexivity not only involves the particular topic of research, its contextualisation, and the participants, but also the researcher’s own experiences of life. As O’Reilly and Dogra (2017) explain, the researcher needs to address her or his own epistemological position and theoretical understanding of children. O’Reilly and Dogra advise that “when you engage children in your interview research therefore, it is important that you are reflexively aware of how you view children and childhood” (p. 9). Reflexivity further helped me understand

my own experiences of life and reflect on my childhood experiences; it helped me understand my own beliefs and conceptions of the world.

6.7.3. The interview space as an ethical and emotional space

Many unexpected things happened during the process of generating the empirical material. When I approached the school classroom, I had the research information and consents ready in Finnish, and I also had the English, Arabic, Somali, and Spanish translations made. Teachers helped me distribute the documents to every child/family accordingly. It was important to count on the teachers' assistance in this matter, as I did not have access to the students' personal information because the school is not allowed to distribute this information. However, the teachers explained something that I did not expect: not all of the students' tutors would understand the research information, as there were cases of analphabet parents, visually impaired parents, and parents with whom communication is limited because of the lack of a common language. One of the teachers also told me that two Muslim families contacted the school's teacher/interpreter to inform them about their children's non-participation in the research. As the headmaster commented in an informal conversation, the regular percentage of participation in previous research studies in this school had been about 60%. I obtained a 50% response for this study, which can be seen as a good response considering the particular topic, music, and what it represents for some of the families of this school.

Spending time in the school enriched my experience enormously, and new questions and ethical dilemmas arose during the interviews and observations that took place there. Similarly, the analysis process was filled with reflections of the ethical questions that I was prepared to face, but also with others that I was not previously aware of. For example, some of the children I interviewed expressed disinterest in formally learning their native language. In particular, one of the children expressed this very strongly. According to her, her attitude contrasts with her mother's wishes, who would like her to learn and write the family language. During the interview the child was very emotional when telling a story of the past that took place in their homeland, and especially when telling about a close family member who cannot yet be reunited with the family. I decided to take a pause in the interview at that point, to show all my empathy for the child, hoping that even a small pause in the interview could show the child respect and provide a feeling of being heard.

In another interview, I experienced an emotional moment when a child had

the need to remark – during a conversation in which we were discussing our origins – that he belongs to Finnish society. He expressed it strongly: *But I live here now!* He also explained that his home is here, even though he has another home in eastern Europe where his grandmother lives. The conversation with this child was significant, since he was a quiet and shy boy who does not speak much in the classroom – and when he does it, he usually uses a small voice. However, in the interview he told his life history, and he was visibly moved. I was also moved by his remarks, and I had to pause the interview, not only to show empathy and respect but also to let him speak about what he wanted to speak about at that moment. I decided not to disclose this part of the interview for ethical reasons. At the end of the interview, and after that sensitive moment, the child drew a heart next to his name on the faces chart. While we walked away from the interview room, the child expressed the wish to come back some other time to speak more.

I experienced another emotionally and ethically challenging moment while interviewing a recently arrived child with a refugee background, because of what he said during the interview and, as I interpret it, because of what he was expecting from me. Even though he had language limitations, the child was able to communicate and talk about his life. This is important to note, because the teachers had suggested, with all good intentions, not to interview this child because of his language restrictions. However, when the interview commenced I showed him the globe and the child immediately mentioned the name of his country of origin. The first thing he said after that was that he was not happy in the school because he did not have friends to play with during the school recesses (something I observed in the school yard). He made a big effort to communicate this to me, again and again, using simple words, the faces chart, and non-verbal expressions. I understood the message, and I immediately paused the interview to show my understanding and solidarity to him. The child mentioned that at home he sings songs of his native country with his mother and sister, and by the end of the interview he was willing to sing a song to me – not in his native language but in English. He seemed comfortable singing in English. This response resonates with the response of another child who was not authorized by the tutors to participate in the interview but who sang a song to me in the classroom; even though the native language of this child was Eastern African, the child decided to sing in English.

The interview described above was particularly moving for me, and it was an ethically demanding situation. I had to consider my responsibility with this child, regarding what he said in the interview, but at the same time the basic principles of research and its confidentiality needed to be respected.

After discussing the situation with my supervisor, I decided to follow up the case carefully, and as I still had time to spend in the school I was attentive to developments in the school yard and to this child's social interactions. Fortunately, the child's situation improved as the days passed by, and when I left the school the child was playing regularly with schoolmates in the school yard and was more relaxed inside the classroom. However, this was probably the most demanding ethical situation I have ever faced as a researcher; the child wanted to tell me about his difficult situation in school, something I interpreted as asking me for help. Doing nothing would have been to ignore his voice and his needs, which is exactly what I aim to contest in this study and in my life.

Following Mats Alvesson and Kaj Sköldberg's (2009) conceptualisation, "the whole idea of reflexivity in qualitative research is the very ability to break away from a frame of reference and to look at what it is *not* capable of saying" (p. 270). This is even more accentuated in children's studies, as children have often been "valued and understood only in terms of being 'a work in progress' towards adulthood ...the concern being with what they might become instead of what they presently are" (Fraser et al., 2014, p. 41). As O'Reilly and Dogra explain in their book *Interviewing children and young people for research* (2017), in qualitative research with children it is important to use child-friendly language and to "develop partnership with children as they can provide you with important insights into their worlds" (p. 91), thus preventing the creation of potential misunderstandings that may arise from the differences in meanings between children and adults. For this reason, during the field work in the school I tried to focus on sharing the day with the children and fostering an incipient relationship with them before interviewing them.

Learning from the children, week after week, both in informal conversations and by observing them in formal and informal situations, has been crucial for me. It was important to observe the children's music lessons, but it was equally important to share time with them during the recesses or in other informal activities during the school day. By being part of the daily school routine of these children, I was able to notice what was, using Alvesson and Sköldberg's words (2009), "not capable of saying" but still present in the school environment (p. 270). This can also be understood as an ethical issue when one wishes to understand children's voices. Giving voice to children, including in the individual interviews, was an unique experience in which unexpected findings, stories, and experiences were shared with me constantly. Within this, I find it important to reflect on the effects of re-questioning, and where the boundaries on re-questioning are, when interviewing young children. My aim has been to respect children and to respect the limits

established by them during the conversation. I have wished not only to be sensitive to children's verbal responses but also to react appropriately and in a timely manner to their non-verbal responses or indicators. In one of the interviews I asked a child to share a song from his home-land, since he had named it as one of his favourite songs. The child's brief and determined answer was *some other day*, and with these words the child marked a limit in our conversation and exercised his agency. However, at the same time he left the possibility open for future interactions. I understood this answer as a powerful, impressive attitude from the child. However, not all children can, or know how to, set a limit in a conversation with an adult in the same way.

A second lesson from the children has to do with the boundaries between question reformulations (for a better understanding of what has been asked) and a child's decision to not answer a question they are expected to answer. I consciously reformulated questions and re-questioned them depending on the situation, not only to clarify the question but also to motivate the discussion and to double-check the responses. I believe that, at least in most cases, I learned how to recognize the boundaries set by the children when conversing with them. However, given that children have different personalities and sensitivities, this is a difficult task, especially when it is necessary to recognize those boundaries on an individual basis, generating a personal connection with the child.

Sharing time with the students and teachers helped me to understand the urgency of listening to children's voices and to consider them seriously. Being open to listening to *all* children, showing genuine interest in their stories, thoughts, and reflections, and empathising with their feelings and needs was important in this study. I learned that questioning pre-established practices and conceptions was necessary in order to understand what singing means in the lives of the children – both in and outside the school. In this learning and self-reflexive process, I intended to develop an awareness of my own preconceptions and beliefs. All children have the right to be heard, including those children who cannot speak the majority language fluently or who do not have similar beliefs and values to the researcher or the teacher. Children have shown that they are capable of political action and voice. However, not all children have equal possibilities or ecological agency, and there is inequality in the ways in which children's rights in education are fulfilled. Every child is different, every childhood is different, and the ways in which children build relationships with the world - including through singing - are also unique and personal. For this reason, to see the "real child" in front of us, awareness is needed in the first place, followed by action, in order to make a difference. According to my perception, a stereotypical view of children with an immigrant background is spreading

in Finland, one that in general ignores the child's subjectivity and unique life experiences. Thinking with relational ontologies can help us reconceptualise the child, taking into account children's subjectivities, acknowledging the right of *all* the children to decide not only who they want to be and who they want to become, but also how they want to be seen by others in the society.

6.8. Limitations of the study

This study had limitations that need to be taken into account when reading the findings and interpretations. First, people's knowledge and experiences are difficult to study, because the relationship of a person to him or herself is not directly observable. This applies to children and adults alike. For instance, Mollenhauer (2014) reminds us of this limitation, but also indicates that outside indicators can reveal important information about humans: "Although knowledge of others' self-awareness is difficult to come by, we definitely do have something to go on: outer signs which we try to read as best we can" (p. 118). While focussing on children's experiences, I was aware during the course of this study that children's experiences cannot be directly observed – they can only be observed and deduced from "the outer traces the child leaves behind" (pp. 118–119). When trying to understand these outer traces, as researchers, we bring with us our backgrounds, stories, and experiences; the principles we apply in our investigations are grounded in our own experiences of life.

The second limitation of this study is that the sample size was relatively small, as the intention was to focus on in-depth conversations and not on numeric or statistical indicators. The study is also contextualised in only one culturally diverse Finnish school. While the children I interviewed for the pilot study attended different schools in the capital area of Finland, only one highly culturally diverse school was selected for the study itself, and for me to become immersed in this school's life and culture. This decision also left out other Finnish schools of the capital area of Finland and of other areas of Finland. The sample size was, however, large enough for ecological theorisation that can be empirically used in other educational areas such as higher education. Therefore, this research ought not be evaluated against the principle of empirical generalisation (Lincoln et al., 2000), but against theoretical generalisation.

The fourth limitation of the study has to do with the empirical material generated based on the principle of volunteer participation. During the time of data generation and while present in the school, I observed and shared time with all of the first graders, but some of children did not have parental consent to participate in the interviews, and they were therefore

not interviewed. Questions arise regarding those children who did not participate in the interviews, since their experiences were not recorded as part of the interviews. Details about all of the children's interactions and singing in school were documented in my researcher's diary, as well as my observation of activities and interactions in the classroom and in the school yard. It could be that the children who participated in the interviews were more positive towards singing, or that singing played a more significant role in their lives or the lives of their families. As was explained earlier, there were families who decided to not allow their children to participate in the interviews because of their religious beliefs. This raises questions regarding the voices of those children who did not participate in the interviews.

7. Concluding Thoughts

Although previous research on children's singing has typically been approached as one single, undivided activity, this study has suggested that children's singing ought to be understood as an integral part of and within their ecologies, as a relational, spatial endeavour. The findings have shown how children navigate between public singing and private singing, producing spaces of trust and freedom which influence the formation of their subjectivities. Moreover, as this study has shown, when children engage in singing they do it by not only reacting to the world around them but by exploring their situational political voices. Hence, from an early age children are not only aware of their own intersubjective relations, but are also able to recognize their position and emotional responses within their transactions. Independently of physical locations, children identify singing spaces through the quality of involved relationships, including the trust and freedom. Within singing spaces, children are open to discovering new feelings and to rehearsing new ways of being and acting. Within singing spaces that children create for themselves and for their own purposes, children work intentionally to handle everyday life engagements. Thus, the ecological view of children's singing presented in this dissertation opens up new pathways for understanding children's singing in all its complexity, beyond the learning of curriculum content and the singing of repertoires. As has been shown in this study, children's singing in school can also be seen as more than merely an individual process of vocal development, but rather as an existential matter.

Learning about children's fresh perspectives and openness to the world, and allowing them into our everyday classroom practices, can be a way forward in music education. Singing can potentially open up spaces of connection and caring based on trust and freedom, inside and outside the classrooms where students can be agents and raise their political voices - spaces in which they can resist inequalities and injustices, contributing in this way to developing a more democratic and socially responsive music education. However, for children's voices to be really heard, it is necessary that a "change in the way that children are seen" (Prout, 2003, p. 22) takes place.

Taking into account the complexity of children's singing ecologies, this dissertation has argued that children have the right to stand up for themselves, including in school, and to explore their positioning in the world. Through this process of "coming into presence" (Biesta, 2006), children would be able to show to others who they really are and where they stand. However, they also

need agency in the here and now, as agency functions in connection to their ecologies. Searching for what it can be, exploring ways of becoming, and searching for a sense of presence in different contexts when interacting with different types of people is also a bold decision, and some children may need more support than others in exercising their agency and their political voices.

The social-ecological systems perspective has been used in this dissertation to model and theorise how school could be seen as a bridging organisation by adopting a curriculum of care. Such bridging would try to acknowledge what singing means for the children, in and beyond the school and as a part of the ecosystem's interactions. Perhaps the most important aspect related to singing in school is that singing can be an invitation for connectedness, which can awaken in students the desire for participation – finding new ways of coming together. Given the increasing diversity in schools in Finland, the context of this study, it is becoming more and more necessary for educators - and for the community - to promote profound discussions around children's experience and meaning-making and to develop sensitivity towards the child's voice and the child's subjectivity.

As an immigrant myself, a researcher, professional singer, and singing teacher of children, I am also part of this research, to which I come with my own experiences of life. I was interested in interviewing young children with culturally diverse backgrounds, something that is not often done, in order to understand more about their world. Allowing children's voices to emerge in the context of culturally diverse schools in our culturally diversifying society means listening to the voices of all children, including to the silent voices of children who belong to minorities; the silent voices of the children who choose not to be seen, even when they are offered (certain) possibilities of participation. An understanding of agency, as “the fulfillment of participation and voice” (Kellet, 2014, p. 28), reminds us that it is through action that children can influence their lives. Even more, since ecological agency is temporal and relational (and thus evolves on time), children need continuity in spaces of trust and freedom to be able to put forward their political voices.

The relational and ecological view of children's singing, as advanced in this dissertation, is a way to resist the globally expanded functionalist educational approach that focuses on controlling children and their future (e.g. what they learn and how) (Prout, 2000, 2003), thus limiting children's freedom of choice, the very freedom that helps them constitute themselves as subjects (e.g. Biesta, 2020). This research has changed me personally, as I have become more critical and active in the field of music education and

cultural diversity. The reflexive process upon which I embarked over these past years has been materialized today in concrete actions and new beliefs concerning music education as a profession. Hence, this doctoral research project underpins the hope that this research could inform decisions and understandings of educators, policy makers, and other societal actors who are working for the good of children and teachers in Finland – and beyond.

8. References

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Appendices

Appendix A: Research information sheet, translated from the original in Finnish

Research project: **Singing who we are: Children's perceptions of the roles singing plays in supporting democracy in culturally diverse Finnish schools**

Responsible researcher: Analia Capponi-Savolainen

Center for Educational Research and Academic Development in the Arts (CERADA) University of the Arts Helsinki.

1. General description of the method:

This is a qualitative narrative research which focuses on learning what is important for children about their own experiences with singing. Children will have the possibility of using small figures or pictures in the interviews, as facilitators to express their feelings, tell their stories, sing their songs, make their drawings, or share their memories and experiences. Confidentiality and anonymity is assured and participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. The responsible researcher is an educator with long experience in childhood music and singing education in diverse contexts and has experience in conversating with children of this age.

2. Purpose of the study

This research is important for educators to understand more about their students' emotional needs and to learn from them what role can singing play in the construction of their individual and social identity and in the development of agency in individual and collective contexts. Since emotions and feelings connected to experiences such as singing can have a long-lasting impact on people's lives, it is important to consider the roles that singing at school may play *beyond* the development of technical singing skills, and as a social activity.

3. No monetary compensation will be paid for participants but the responsible researcher will offer children a symbolic prize (stickers or similar) for their participation and the possibility of making a singing-together activity after the interviews conclude.
4. The study is voluntary and participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without obligation to disclose any specific reasons. This will be made clear for parents and children.
5. The responsible researcher will interview the children focusing on being aware of children's feelings along the interview and to attentively perceive if the child may want to stop the interview. The researcher will be sensitive to children's behavior, the use of the voice and the body language and will react immediately if they indicate discomfort, offering children to rest or to stop the interview.
6. The responsible researcher can be contacted by phone or email at any time during the course of the study.
7. Children's interviews will be individual and they will be held in a location convenient to the participants/researcher. The interview will start with open questions to support children's

Appendix B: Participant consent

Research participant of “Singing who we are: Children’s perceptions of the roles singing plays in supporting democracy in culturally diverse Finnish schools”.

Consent of the child who participates in the study:

I have understood that participation is voluntary and at any point in the research study, I am at liberty to notify that I no longer wish to participate in the study, but all the information gathered up until that point can be used as described.

I have received sufficient information about the research study, I have had the possibility to have my questions answered, I have understood the information and I wish to participate in the research study.

Signature (name) of the research participant

Consent of the guardian of the child:

I have received sufficient information about the research study, I have had the possibility to have my questions answered, I have understood the information and I wish that my child participates in the research study.

The processing of data collected in the study is in accordance with the EU’s General Data Protection Regulation.

Signature and name of the guardian

Place and date

Contact details:
MMus. Analia Capponi-Savolainen
Doctoral candidate, University of the Arts, Helsinki
Tel:
analia.capponi-savolainen@uniarts.fi

Appendix C: Children's interviews



The interview started with a short introduction about our cultural backgrounds, and for example, the language or languages we speak at home. We then located Finland and their homelands in a globe (world map).

Interview guide

Do you sing? If so, tell me more, please - when and where do you sing?
Do you remember how you feel in these places and situations you described?
(face chart and discussion) What words would you use to describe the feelings you selected or drew in the chart? Or can you tell me more about that?

Is humming and whistling also singing?

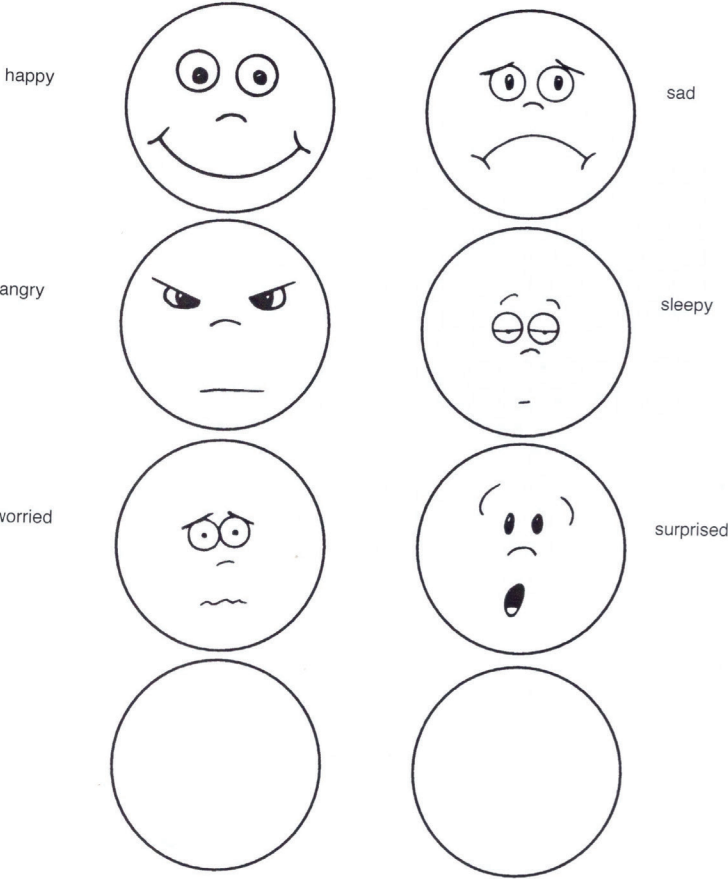
When was the last time you sang? Who was there? How did you feel?

When and where do you hear other people singing?

When was the last time you sang in school? Can you tell me more (e.g. which song, where, and with whom)? How did you feel in that situation?
Why do you think there is singing in school?

Do you have a favorite song (or more than one)? Where did you hear the song for the first time? Did you learn it? Where and how? Would you like to sing it to me?

Appendix D: Face expressions chart
(source: teacher creative resources, Inc.).



Appendix E: LEGO playing example



The last two questions of the interview were approached through playing with LEGO's (DaCosta et al., 2023)

If you were to sing a song with your class, which song would it be?

And, if you were the teacher, which song or songs would you select to teach to the group?

The child selected the LEGO figures and together we improvised a story. The child played the role of the teacher, and I played the role of the student. The topic of the play-acting was school singing.

The following example shows the interactions between the investigator and the child.

I: Teacher, which song we will sing?

C: Despacito (name of the song)

(singing together)

C: You do not sing! (directed to figure 1)

I: What if I do not want to sing?

C: Oh, the police comes and tells you, what? You have to sing!

Ok, now you can have a sit. You do not have homework. And your school day has finished (directed to figure 2). Not for you! Because you did not sing (directed to figure 1).

Appendix F: Teachers interview guide

Tutkimukseen “Laulaen keitä olemme: Lasten näkemyksiä laulamisen merkityksestä demokratialle suomalaisissa monikulttuurisissa kouluissa”

**Children’s singing, identity and the sense of belonging:
A narrative study in culturally diverse lower level school in Finland**

Capponi-Savolainen, Analiä
University of the Arts Helsinki, Sibelius Academy

Teacher’s interviews

Taustatietoja: Background information:

Please tell me about yourself as a teacher:

1. Montako vuotta kokemusta opettajana? Millä luokka-asteella olet opettanut? How many years of experience? In which levels/grades have you been teaching?
2. Kauanko olet ollut töissä tässä koulussa? How long you have been working in this particular school?
3. Kertoisitko minulle lyhyesti omasta kehityksestäsi opettajana? Please tell me (briefly) about your own development as a teacher
4. Missä roolissa musiikki ja laulu on sinun elämässäsi? What role do music and singing play in your own life? Haluaisitko kertoa minulle jonkin kertomuksen musiikista ja laulusta elämässäsi? Would you like to share with me a story about music and singing in your life?
5. Mitä ajatuksia sinuilla on laulusta koussa? What are your thoughts about singing in school?

About singing in schools in Finland

1. Mitä sinä toivoisit laulun voivan olla koulussa? What do you wish or hope singing could be in school? Mitä mieltä olet, miksi koulussa on laulua ylipäättään? Why do you think there is singing in school?
2. Miten (vaiko mitenkään) monikulttuurisuuden lisääntyminen suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa on vaikuttanut opettamiseesi, eritoten musiikin ja laulun opettamiseen? How (if in any way) has the growing diversity of Finnish society impacted on your teaching practices, particularly in relation to music and singing?

About your class

3. Miten laulu on läsnä luokkahuoneessasi? How is singing present in your classroom?
4. Milloin sinä laulat oppilaitesi kanssa? When do you sing with your students? Mitä mieltä olet musiikin Opetussuunnitelmasta? What do you think about the curriculum for music education?
5. Mitä asioita otat huomioon kun valitset lauluja oppilaillesi? What do you take into consideration when selecting songs for your students?

Appendix G: Excerpt of a transcription of a teacher interview (conducted in English)

R: What are your thoughts about singing in school, in general?

T: Well, exactly when they [the children] are now small and little they love to sing, most of them. But we are having this group of kids, where are not interested at all, this is something new, because usually kids really love to perform and express themselves with singing, we have some of these kids as you have seen, that do not participate. But singing, should really be done when they are kids, when they are small because later they kind of become shy and they do not want to do it anymore and now it would be so great time to develop their ear training and development, and sing the notes. There are so many kids who do not know how to sing, they just speak or they do not know how to sing by tone. So, yeah, I think it should be done now when they most of them want to do it. That's why we sing so much in first and second grade and then take little bit more those instruments.

R: Yes, and I have seen that you are doing all these activities. Is there anything you wish or hope about singing in school?

T: Well, now I would just want all these kids enjoying it. Because now we are having these kids who don't enjoy it. They don't want to say anything, they don't even want to try. I don't know where this comes from, may be music is far from their home culture, may be, that they don't sing – or no one around them sing – so I want them to feel also that it's fun to sing together, it's a great feeling when everyone sing, most kids enjoy it, so I would like everyone to enjoy it. And, sometimes if we record or we see in a video or something then the kids can realize, it really sounds nice when everyone sings from their heart.

....

R: ...So, what are the challenges regarding student's participation in singing at school?

T: Well, you've seen this class, we have lots of diversity and we have lots of challenging kids, so sometimes, like when we are about to sing, then someone starts doing something and then requires teacher's attention and then other kids have to wait and wait and wait. And I'm always thinking how they can wait so long, even I can, I don't want to wait this long. So, then they 'll be waiting and waiting, so it's really like, OK, now you should be ready to sing, when they've been waiting for 10 minutes for other kids to be ready.

So, it doesn't go smoothly, this enthusiasm that they have dies at some point and then to be waiting up again. I feel bad for those kids who would like to do it and who are able to do it right away, but they have to wait for others to behave. So, I think that's one challenge.

R: So, has anything surprised you about singing with your students?

T: Well, that there are so many of those who don't want to do it – or who don't care about it – But they are all boys, they are all boys... it's not just singing that they do not want to participate. They don't want to express themselves in other ways either. They really like writing with pen, sitting on the table, and they do not want to express themselves in other ways either. But I was surprised to see some of the kids (those kids) dancing outside last Friday when we had loud music outside, we had some dancing. I was very surprised two or three of them were dancing! They came to me and "teacher, show us some moves, no I don't know those, teach me!" And they were showing me some moves. And I was really happy to see that at least they were like, somehow they could express it and music was involved, so.. That was surprising to me.

R: And do you have a story to tell me about an occasion when everything worked wonderfully? when singing with these children?

T: Well, now we have been doing this spring song thing with movements, I don't know if you saw it, and yesterday we went to the gym and we did it there. There were just two boy who didn't even try. But other than that, it was so great, they sang so, like, they had a smile on their face and then they do this dancing thing, and I tried, because I was playing piano, I tried to see, I wanted to see how it was like, yeah, we were all like wow!

R: Do you remember any occasion when things did not work quite as expected? with singing.

T: Well, not really like, it's never been a catastrophe. But it's the same problem always, that those certain kids don't participate and it's annoying because you can't just pick what things you participate in school. I tell you this is a math book, start to count, you can't say, I don't count, I don't do it. So, you can't say, I do not participate in this. Because we are always, we are trying to tell them, there is a point why we are doing all this.

R: How do you deal with cultural diversity in your class, in this, your class

and then, how you have learnt actually to do that?

T: well, sometimes we do not know how to handle some issues, because now for example, there was this one little girl who came to tell us, suddenly, she doesn't speak well Finnish,

Minä [nationality omitted], mä en laula (I am a [nationality omitted], I do not sing) but she could not explain further. So, we don't know if it was because of this research, or because now is coming Ramadan and some families don't want music in Ramadan.

Now is the fasting month in Islam. For some kids, usually it's very extreme, for example you can't sing or participate in music in this month. So we don't know what was the thing she was saying. So, she did not want to participate at first in this singing, but then, it kind of went over, we were all like ok, we did not really discuss with her, she doesn't speak, and we were ready maybe the parents will send us some message, that she can't participate or something... So sometimes situations come, and we don't really know how to deal with them. But because they are so small, usually cooperation with home helps, we always have to just ask the parents. Also sometimes parents don't know what we are doing here, so we are trying to teach the parents and tell them what we are doing here, and the curriculum requires this and requires that. And then we try to find solution what is good for everyone ... sometimes is not always... somehow in my life I have learned that is not always the cultural background but many times the family background, the family culture affects more than the culture.

Appendix H: Excerpt of the research diary

I am watching how the children play in the school yard. Today is my last day in the school. The girl who used to be alone in the school recesses is playing with another child – at one point, they walked hand-in-hand. The child who did not have friends to play with during the school recesses (and who expressed this in the interview) is now playing with a group of children, also of immigrant backgrounds. They communicate using basic Finnish language and they understand each other well. Next to them, a group of native Finnish students play sport games. Suddenly, both groups play together for a while. Sports and games that include movements seem to be important to children's social interaction in the school yard.

I do not hear much singing in the school yard, except for a group of older children who sing a song related to their upcoming graduation, but the atmosphere in the school yard is comfortable and easy. I think there is much work to do in relation to children's feelings and attitudes towards each other in school, but at the same time I appreciate the process.

In future studies, it would be interesting to observe how group dynamics progress through time, how students' interactions and connections develop further. It would be good to learn more about the long-term process; for example, how, and at which point, are students of immigrant backgrounds able to interact more openly and freely with native students in the school yard.

Appendix I: Excerpt of the thematic analysis of teacher's interviews

The need to learn more about how to deal with culturally diverse classrooms

Teacher 1: Teacher education, for example doesn't give you tools – the usual teacher education – doesn't give you tools to deal with this. Even though we have great teacher education. I think the teacher education should be like that (focus on multicultural educations) like all of them should be nowadays like that. Because our classrooms, especially in big cities they are all like so diverse, so teacher's need to be aware of certain things. Yeah, so thinking of those issues for 5 years, may be has helped but still every time when you face something with the child you have to take it as a unique child, unique timely, unique experience, like then, just deal with it like it is. It can't always compare, well because they did that way so may be this family does this way. You can't expect, even though they would be from the same culture.

Teacher 2: So the challenges are, how, what am I doing for him, how can I make this work meaningful for him. But I'm not so conscious of how I deal with multiculturalism in our class or so. It's just a natural part of it. We just do what we need to do for every child to learn. And then we need to design the material that suits him.....Especially when there is no money to buy different books or anything else. And we try so hard that they learn as much Finnish as possible. It's challenging. It's really challenging. It is a very different work than what I've done at this school, ten years ago, or even seven years ago.

Changes in recent years in schools: participation

Teacher 1: It is not just singing that they don't want to participate. They don't want to express themselves in any other way either. These children who do not participate, annoy others.

Teacher 3: We make the best we can, but it is not enough.

Teacher 2: And I feel like a few years earlier, all the little kids got excited about it. And now we live in a time where you realize that even young children want to decide whether to participate or to think that that is very childish. And that's completely new to me. it is a completely new phenomenon. And I don't know exactly what it is and why. Is it some Fortnite games that you shoot and kill you kids don't play such crazy games today that parents don't care. Either where it comes from or is it the fact

that little kids they don't know how to participate and play? it may be due to these many changes, surely what we have here. You do not now have children from so different backgrounds and from across the globe and from different cultures. That there is someone like that, but when something feels like you kids are always kids. Why not? Why not get excited and play? Nowadays, when a child is playing computer games, he doesn't play. Computer games. May be you are so much but there in that world.

Singing with first graders: Belonging and togetherness?

Teacher 1: I would just want all these children to enjoy. Because now we are having these kids who don't enjoy it. They don't want to say anything, they don't even want to try. I don't know where this comes from, may be music is far from their home culture, may be it's that they don't sing – or no one around them sings – So, I want them to feel also that it's fun to sing together, it's a great feeling when everyone sing, most kids enjoy it, so I would like them to enjoy it!

Teacher 2: "I wish that the child would enjoy, the sense of belonging, the spirit of togetherness. And play. Creativity. That the child wouldn't dare to express himself. By singing or through music. The fact that that song would give your child a good feeling and that they would not make this nonsense some of them are doing now."

"So then, yeah, even for those kids who feel like they are interested in singing or music but they will find the excitement and the fun and creativity in themselves through music".

The Curriculum and the hours assigned to music in first grade

The amount of music and singing children get depends of the teachers, her or his preparation. If the teacher feels comfortable with singing and music or not. If the teacher naturally uses singing and music for teaching, if music and singing is part of the school life and of the classroom.

Teacher 1: I think the time assigned to music (1 hour) a week is ok.

Teacher 2: I think that in 1st and 2nd grades, if the teacher is musical, then the children get more than the 1 hour because we use singing to teach English and in other eventual performances along the week, then it is ok. Even though sometimes I think that sports gets double time... If we would not have those additions, it would not be enough.

Teacher 3: It's ok because we make other additions.

Teacher 4 (Finnish as second language): It's not enough.

Bringing the music of children's culture to school

Teacher 1: I did it with older children. First the kids were little bit shy but then they got relaxed. But maybe they did it because they were familiar with me (I was their teacher for 5 years) and the group, they felt safe to do it. With first grades can be also done, why now? But it would take so much time (repeat and repeat) because children do not know how to read well.

Teacher 4 (Finnish as second language, group of 8 children): Of course, I do it all the time. And children appreciate it.

Lack of language skills to communicate in school

Teacher 2: The problem is that now the children do not make the preparatory course before they come to the classroom; when they come to Finland, after 2 weeks, they are here with us, so, they come straight to our class and that's not good for anyone.

Teacher 3: They do not know how to communicate. I asked to one child, what's your name and she did not know what it means.

Teacher 1: We cannot communicate fluently with some children. We try to wait for parent's comments, but sometimes parents do not have either language skills to explain more.

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