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BoomTown Music Education – A co-creating way to learn music within formal music education

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Abstract

The general purpose of this presentation is to discuss how alternative forms of learning strategies in exclusively designed contexts may strengthen the development of musical, social and personal competences.

Research in music education has confirmed that how knowledge in music is created is highly correlated with context qualities, as for example the organization of musical learning and social interaction. Still, it is difficult to free the practice of learning in music from conservatoire tradition and didactic “hidden curricula’s”. Formal learning situations means benefiting from experienced teachers and mentors, but music institutions all too often suffer by institutionalization and a levelling of cultures. On the other hand informal music learning is largely characterised by co-creating and peer learning. By not paying sufficient attention to learning processes within smaller groups, the great opportunities for powerful growth in personal and social skills, are also passed over.

In the autumn of 2005, a completely new curriculum in music education – BoomTown Music Education (BTME) – was born within the School of Music in Piteå but as a branch of the municipal music project BoomTown in Borlänge. The educational baseline is resting on scientific theories and previous research dealing with informal learning strategies. Peer learning and playing by the ear is here acknowledged and strongly supported. The philosophy of BTME opens up to a wider musical, social and ethnic variety and is supported by a mixture of guest musicians, artists, innovators etc.

Several research projects are started, and data is already collected by observations during rehearsals and concerts. An interesting body of knowledge will also come from student’s diaries and written reflections, collected since the start. Research results will in time contribute with important knowledge about how learning in music is affected by the organisation and design of learning contexts.

Introduction

The BoomTown project

BoomTown is a long-term music project aiming to support musicians and musically active people to develop skills and ideas and put these to use in a professional context. BoomTown is based in Borlänge in Sweden, which is considered one of the hotbeds of Swedish highly expansive music business. To help identify and develop musical and cultural potential in the region, BoomTown embraces professionals, semi-professionals and amateurs. Certain aspects of BoomTown – infrastructure, financing etc – have a regional character, but the overall concept has a national and international scope. The project receives strong financing and support from several sources; Borlänge Municipality, the European Union, the School of Music in Piteå at Luleå University of Technology as well as a number of major development foundations.

BoomTown Music Education (BTME)

BTME is a sector of BoomTown where the School of Music in Piteå offers university level courses in popular music emphasizing collective creating and learning. The course project is not carried out in the traditional setting.

such as theoretical skills and knowledge of repertoire.

Two courses – *Music Creating A* and *Music Performance A* – constitute the first year and the third term consists of two 10 points courses under the same names. In short, the heart of *Music Performance* constitutes of playing in the key rock or pop band and working with ensemble performance, composing, recording etc. *Music Creating* contains four subjects; Song Writing, Sound Engineering, Music Industry (vocational guidance) and a socio-cultural part named as Music and Man.

Background and purpose

Contemporary pop and rock music is a great source of inspiration and motivation for children and youngsters. Self-image and identity development is often connected to musical genres mostly found in non-institutional environments. This situation is important to consider when discussing music learning and how this should be shaped. Many musicians within rock music and other popular music styles learn to play without a teacher – and in many cases, they learn to play, and compose, at a very high technical and musical level within their style. Musicians within such genres also devote many hours to practicing and rehearsing, quite comparable to the time music college students devote to their playing. Even though music education has gone through great changes in later years, the number of higher music education programmes focusing on these principles, however, has so far been very few.

In short, music learning can be described as formal or informal. Formal music learning means teaching at official institutions like Schools of Music, folk high-schools with music programs, aesthetical programs in high schools and municipal music schools. Formal learning situations means benefiting from experienced teachers and mentors. In formal institutions students have the opportunity to meet professional musicians and to join advanced classes in several instruments. School contexts offer help and support for progress and several adverse music playing situations like choirs, orchestras and ensembles. Students also learn a traditional canon of music that is usable in many situations. A solid organization and structured schedules can act supporting for a high number of people, and if one appreciate this kind of cultures the formal education has a lot to offer.

On the other hand – music institutions also suffer by institutionalization and a leveling of cultures.

Instead, it takes place in environments traditionally used by rock bands, mainly rehearsal rooms and studios. The education is owned and managed by the School of Music in Piteå where teacher education in popular music, since twenty-five years, is already a fact.

Today there is a full-time, basic undergraduate study programme, for three terms that can be included in a Bachelor of Arts. Fifteen students are accepted each year after entrance tests in playing and presenting (interview) as already existing rock bands or as individual musicians. Energy, artistry and originality are valued just as high as more conventional quality criteria, to music teachers leaving their work (Bouij, 1998).

Informal music learning, on the other hand, takes place in all environments, when listening and playing, individually or together with others. To accept a genre like rock music, in its pristine form, should not mean that the music has to be "educationalized" with teachers, curricula, method books, and goal-orientation. On the contrary: an optimal learning environment ought to use the engaging forms of peer learning and co-creating.

Informal music learning is largely characterize by learning together, something that formal music education often has ignored (Byrne and Sheridan, 2000). Learning grows in playing together with friends and by interaction and communication with others. The social and cultural environment, teacher's attitudes to co-operation, pedagogical and social tasks and the physical environment are all factors that influence youngster's possibilities to learn from each other in school (Williams, Sheridan and Pramling Samuelsson, 2000).

Previous research in Gullberg (2002) has pointed at the fact that earlier experiences of different music making environments create specific knowledge in music. Former music students expressed, in an interview study, that they experienced not having the "right" characteristics to be able to conform to the musical values and the "scholastic way of living" within the School of Music. They felt that knowledge of informal learning in music and a curious, open-minded and outgoing personality were not encouraged within the music colleges. They further stated that to interact in a professional way and to have knowledge about extra musical aspects like attributes and attitudes within different music styles, are important qualities equally for teachers and musicians. Even if this were the memories from the eighties music teacher education institutions, it seems though that the Music Colleges still haven't made so many achievements in expanding their formal and informal cultures by providing fo various role models amongst teachers.

The main focus in this presentation is not about music teacher education and BTME are not preparing students for a profession as teachers in music. Even though, musicians often teaches "on the side" of there musical careers and teacher education students are often dreaming of a future as musicians. One may argument that the culture of higher music education with its values, attitudes and strategies is surrounding and influencing both music education and music teacher education.

Students in school situations are very often made conscious of their mistakes – playing the wrong notes, holding instruments in incorrect ways, or preferring "wrong" kinds of music (cf. Bouij, 1998; Persson, 1993; Rostvall and West, 2001). The student's own musical achievements are sometimes surrounded by stage fright and stress-related conditions that in time might mean problems related to work environment (Brändström and Gullberg, 1997). Such aspects in experiencing music education do not reinforce music knowledge and learning – neither in the short run, nor in the long run. On the contrary, at least the music teaching profession is surrounded by several antagonisms that not seldom lead university courses outside of a traditional university culture? How can new ways of learning music, methods from informal music groups, mainly rock bands, exist within higher music education? Can alternative forms of learning and learning contexts strengthen musical, social and personal competences for vocations within Music Industry and the cultural sector?

In short, the theoretical foundation comes from Swedish and international research about qualities in formal and informal learning e.g. Berkaak, O. A., & Ruud, E. (1992), Bjurström, E. (1997) and Lilliestam, L. (1995, 2001). Socialisation and learning perspectives (e. g. Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991), Nielsen, K. (1997), Säljö, R. (2000). Music pedagogy studying the inner life and culture of Schools of Music in Sweden (e.g. Bouij, C. (1998), S. Brändström, S., & Wiklund, C. (1995), Rostvall, A-L., & West, T. (2001), Tagg, P. (1982). Research angled towards the problems of "formal and non-formal learning" and rock music in school (e. g. Dunbar-Hall, P., & Wemyss, K. (2000a, 2000b), Campbell, S. P. (1995), Green, L. (2001). Musical taste and the importance of musical upbringing, has been studied by, among others, (Davidsson, W. J., Howe, M. J. A., & Sloboda, J. A. (1994, 1997).

Implementation and data collection

A base-line doctrine for the educational project was formulated that contained the following statements:

Aesthetical learning processes are developed in a relational perspective. The individual, the learning environment (the context) and the music are thus not separate levels, but interact in learning. The learning environments where musical experiences have been made, shape different musical ideas, experiences and pre-requisites – qualities that should be accepted and developed within an alternative context.

BTME will combine the advantages of formal music education with the strengths of informal learning. Students will be offered the best possible conditions for sharpening their skills and developing self-confidence in their playing. The courses shall offer supervision from pedagogues and guest musicians without piecemeal book studies or fulfilling general norms. The goal is to avoid institutionalization and standardization of musical tastes and ideals. Whether the students play acoustic pop or techno metal, the courses are meant to develop their ideals, not fundamentally change them.

Studying at BTME does not mean sitting in

Research questions

The whole process – formulating the philosophy grounded in appropriate research findings, planning and implementation, creating study environment and finally, investigating students experiences and knowledge creating – was from the start thought of as a experimental project itself.

Example of specific research questions are: How can knowledge and experiences that the School of Music's already possesses from research findings in music pedagogy (like Gullberg, 2002 and Johansson, 2002) successfully be implemented and integrated into With a foundation in the strengths of musical co-learning, we created a curriculum that would support the students developing of communicative resources and awareness of their own and other peoples learning. The contents of the courses was also based in science and art, but the building of knowledge would continually use the student's own practical experiences for a starting point. The challenge was to combine those standards with the student's own passion for playing rock and pop music.

Studies at the BTME give qualifications for further studies within different areas and all courses matches the demands for quality and university standard and build a foundation for future post-graduate studies. Different courses are integrated into the student's own activities, like knowledge in society-oriented questions concerning gender, the function of music in society, commerciality, originality, and so on.

The supervisor in Borlänge got free hands in planning and implementing these standards together with the student's desires and in relation to their needs. Regular meetings with the management group have since the start backed up the supervisors planning, thinking and realization. Data have been collected from student's concerts, rehearsals, diaries, interviews and written reflections. Information comes also from notes executed at management meetings and students meeting to be able to follow the implementing process in detail.

Conclusions so far...

Like all ventures, the BoomTown Music Educational project has its pros and cons. We aimed for implementing a new form of education in rock and pop music, based on our own experiences from working at a School of Music combined with our research findings. Even if all the Swedish institutions reflects on how institutionalization influences originally aural based genres like rock music, not until now has these reflections resulted in a serious attempt like the BTME. The extraordinarily opportunity came when the BoomTown project started and the School of Music in Piteå agreed to participate. This created an opening for placing the course packet in totally different surroundings and to "get away from the schooling" atmosphere. From a researchers point of view, this kind of engagement leads to a struggle with the different roles one enters, as a teacher, a researcher and as a manager. When dealing with questions within the organization, it's sometimes hard to separate between research, evaluation and didactic practices.

classrooms; instead, the students are provided top class rehearsal rooms and recording studios. Extensive music business studies further prepares for a life as musician. Each student also keeps a diary in order to be able to observe and analyse his or her own learning process. Seminars will be organized where learning oriented questions will be investigated together with other students and teachers.

The core of the implementation phase was to create a management group with teachers/researchers from the School of Music together with representatives from the BoomTown project, and an educational supervisor employed by the School of Music but placed in Borlänge.

has met some kind of vocational demands, and more specified research has been conducted. These points are: Context and management, Quality of staff, Curriculum, Student participation, Information and marketing and Reflections on musical and social learning.

Context and Management

In many artistic university educations, there are an awareness of an on-going institutionalization, in worst case scenarios leading to a situation where the education is more or less cut off from the "real" or outside world of the field. This is quite apparent in the field of rock music. In the region of Dalarna, there is an intense music climate, with almost a thousand rock bands in the region. To meet the needs and willpower of this presumptive student group, the argumentation for joining the BoomTown concept feels reasonable, even though the distance between Borlänge and the School of Music reaches 700 km. One important purpose of this project is also to counteract this mentioned situation, thus giving university education credibility in the world of rock music, and by extension proving that artistic university education does not have to suffer from negative effects of institutionalization.

One consequence of the fact that we wanted a non-traditional context ended in a very small staff on place. An obvious outcome of this situation was the absence of adults for the students to meet and get information from in daily work related questions. Some students have from time to time expressed their feeling of being abandoned and have had problems with self-discipline, autonomy and self-independence, legitimate claimed for within university cultures.

We are constantly working on creating an optimal management group that can have responsibility and authority for making educational and economic decisions in BTME. The fact that the management group combines three quite separate cultures – the academic, the community sphere and business, is a challenge in itself.

Quality of staff

Organizing a pedagogical philosophy that engages instrumental teachers/musicians completely related to the needs of the students, means that the management needs to keep a staff of possible teachers who can be engaged at very short notice. Some teachers find this

The magnitude of the project is in itself an exploratory study. Something that in time will be divided into several specified research studies about learning and knowledge building in music.

One unique thing is the fact that the whole education was planned with consciousness of the research questions mentioned earlier. Almost every course is designed to create potentials for collecting different kinds of data. An actual illustration of this is student's diaries, rehearsal books, and specified task of writing about ones learning process, group interviews and so on. So far after nine month of schooling some summarizing points, worth thinking of, is here possible to present. Others are not achievable until the first group of students. A curriculum that focuses on transferable skills (e.g. not just instrumental skills) was also executed. An obvious challenge was to create curriculum models that embrace the commercial market - i.e. Students generating meaningful, effective, original pop music, and marketing it effectively and on the same time make a course package that opened for further studies. These combinations have been difficult to realize and we are constantly discussing the curriculum within the management group and with other researcher and musicians. What kind of knowledge do twenty years old pop- and rock musician actually need for a successful and meaningful future within the creative field of vocations?

Student participation

Absolute student participation means a lot of interesting discussions about a wide range of music-oriented questions. It also leads to a huge amount of difficulties to solve for the "spider" whose quest is to create productive meetings with artists asked for. We are now working on a model for student participation that will work out as a policy document for all connected actors – from students and more regular teachers to musicians and artists, whom only meet the students in clinics and seminars.

Information and marketing

Marketing and web presence are conducted both from The School of Music and on the BoomTown homepage, www.boomtown.nu. This situation suites the education well in relation to our wish of encounter young musicians from different environments, educational and cultural "capitals".

Reflections on musical and social learning

So far reflections has shown that when implementing informal learning strategies in music there are a lot of facts that is important to work with. One cannot take for granted that rock – and pop learning processes are progressing in a way that are predictable. Groups are developing in different directions and conflicts create "cross roads" in every music ensemble. When music education is opened for informal learners from different music cultures, progress in music knowledge is showing itself in many different ways depending on student's personality and musical socialization. For some students

learning situation interesting, others find it unfamiliar to cooperate with the students on an “equal” base and have problems with the voluntary situation. When it comes to the supervisor, the “spider”, we have struggled with the fact that the “brains” of the education are placed so far from where the action is. This has made the situation for the course supervisor very difficult to manage, from time to time. It’s also a challenge to find teachers that are highly qualified both in popular music and in the academic organization!

Curriculum

We aimed for a balance of vocational and academic learning, with academic infrastructure that stands governmental as well as industrial scrutiny. knowledge. A positive situation for the School of Music is that the BTME offer an experimental pedagogical workshop where new aspects of music learning can be evaluated at once. Findings from these evaluations will certainly, in time, also inspire curriculum progress within the School of Music.

Even if the BTME environment is a totally different socio-cultural context, young peoples expectations of what an educational environment should contain strongly affect their experiences. Every student group (rock band) in the education have a great influence on their own learning and progress by devising their own rehearsing procedures, choosing their own musical projects and developing their own style. This way of learning is most likely to recommend but has also meant that regular supervising has been necessary for aiming at this goal. It’s very clear that the students need situations where they can train aspects of group processing like problem solving, conflict solving, responsibility etc. To summarize – socially and personally related training has to be scheduled for reaching higher educational demands like autonomy, self-independence, organizing skills etc. Aspects also considered necessary for a professional career as musician and within the music industry.

In January 2007, the first student batch has finished their education and their experiences can be summarized. By this time, the philosophy of BTME should be well rooted. Hopefully, the musicians educated here will also make an impression on the national scene, something that university educated rock musicians almost never have done before.

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the biggest challenge is to create cooperatively, for others to stand alone. For some - to get up in the morning, for others to stop practicing at all.

Fifteen students, organized in four complete diverse bands, have so far sharpened their characters during this first demanding year, and some of the students have gone thru remarkable musical and personal development. These bands differ from each other in music style, attitude, attribute, expression, energy, and originality etc – a quite different situation from the ordinary School of Music ensembles.

A lot of important knowledge building has of course dominated the every day life for students, as well as for the personnel. Most of this intrinsic learning is still merely “inside our heads”, as a kind of tacit failure of instrumental learners. *Proceedings for the Fifteenth ISME International Research Seminar*.

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