Exploring the Potential for Music Therapy to Support 21st Century Education Goals:
Interviews with six Norwegian Teachers

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Abstract

School engagement is a global crisis predicted to intensify in the context of COVID-19. As a consequence, education agendas have increasingly adopted whole-child and inclusive approaches, leading to new mandates and curriculums designed to curb the associated individual and social outcomes of school dropout. Yet, teachers are often left to implement these initiatives with little to no support, and within the context of competing neoliberal aims. The subsequent pressure on teachers undermines whole-child and inclusive approaches, and has led to calls for increased teacher support. This includes support in novel teaching and learning approaches which meet the needs of a greater range of students. To investigate the potential role that music can play in this space, the present paper explores the experiences and attitudes of six Norwegian educators who attended two university-accredited continuing education courses on the use of music therapy with adolescents. Interviews sought to explore whether teachers gained new insights into the use of music in the contemporary Norwegian school context. Results showed that teachers did grow their understanding of how music can be used in schools, with a focus on the ability to use music to teach the new Norwegian curriculum. Findings also revealed the challenges faced by teachers wanting to use music in this way. Overall, results suggest music does offer great potential in contemporary school contexts, particularly when its implementation is informed by music therapy theory. Findings have implications for schools, educators, and policymakers.

Keywords: music therapy; education; preventive work; adolescents; continuing education

Introduction

This article has emerged as a shared interest in the link between music, music therapy, and education. Two of the authors (Crooke and Krüger), have previously published on the subject, and also taught at a university level about the importance of using music as both a medium and tool to not only help students achieve skills on instruments, but also using music to promote health and well-being, as well as facilitate levels of participation. The two other authors (Sæle and Solberg) were students at the 5-year integrated music therapy program in Bergen. Our shared interest concerns teachers' experiences of taking part in a continuing education module around music use, which was delivered at a university. As such, the current study can be positioned in the field of continuing education studies (Bradbury et al., 2010). Continuing education is an all-encompassing term, coined to embrace a broad list of post-secondary learning activities and programs, both formal and informal, usually offered at a university or higher education level (Eraut, 2004). Our investigation of this field involved interviews with teachers who in various ways shared their experiences of a continuing education module. The main objective of this module was to share knowledge of how music therapy can be used to support young people's school participation and engagement, and ultimately prevent school dropout. The rationale for the study was based on a wish to investigate how Norwegian teachers can develop the concept of *learning to learn*, using music therapy-informed theories and perspectives. By doing this we aimed to find out if, and how, music therapy-informed knowledge can be relevant in a classroom setting, and in particular, as a vehicle for creating learning environments that support students' psychosocial wellbeing. Given the global need for innovative solutions which both support school systems and engage students in their learning and wellbeing, the implications of our findings are significant.

The context for this research article is the Norwegian education system. Historically, music therapy has not been integrated into mainstream schooling, but used randomly, and often implemented as temporary projects. In special education, music therapy is used more readily, but often facilitated by music therapists trained as both music therapists and teachers. This situation illustrates a major barrier that has existed to music therapists' participation in Norwegian schools: full time, permanent positions, and salaries that reflect postgraduate study, depend on also holding a teacher's degree. This policy presents a missed opportunity, given that the 5-year music therapy program in Bergen specifically trains recruits to work in school and educational settings. Thus, we are left with a discipline and workforce ready and equipped to assist in education spaces, yet unable to do so in a sustainable manner – or without further postgraduate training as a teacher.

Another historical challenge has been an education policy that takes a traditional and limited view of arts and music participation in schools, which has focused on traditional music education paradigms, rather than more holistic, wellbeing-informed arts approaches. Taking the above into consideration, the present Norwegian school curriculum does in fact offer a valuable example of both engagement and holistic approaches. This curriculum describes a whole child approach as underpinning the pedagogical practice in all lower and secondary education and training, and the foundation for collaboration between home and school (Utdannings-direktoratet/Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training [UDIR], 2023. p. 2). New subjects such as "life skills" and "public health" offer social-focused curriculum themes which are meant to help teachers support their students in acquiring competence, while also providing opportunities for making responsible life choices. These topics are also said to help students learn to deal with success and failure, and personal and practical challenges in the best possible way (UDIR, 2023).

More specifically, the public health perspective is mentioned as one of several core elements in Norwegian music curriculums, as exemplified below:

> The music and the community around the music build relationships between people, give a sense of mastery and contribute to meaning in life, when the professional and aesthetic dimensions of music are taken care of. Music is a resource for emotional competence, which in turn is a basis for good mental health. (UDIR, 2023, para 1 [translated from Norwegian])

In Norway, music belongs to the curriculum in all stages of obligatory education (elementary and lower secondary school, 6–16 years of age). At the upper secondary school level (ages 16–19), music can be part of the curriculum, but at this stage, music is voluntary; students can choose music as part of their academic program and schools can choose whether or not to offer music education. While the evidence that Norwegian schools are focusing towards such themes is promising, commentators stress that further development of both knowledge and practice is necessary to see real benefits (Krüger & Hvidsten, 2020; Krüger et al., 2019). From a public health perspective, it would seem equal access to opportunities (musical, health-related, or otherwise) among students and schools is logical and necessary, yet it is something that has evaded many (Samdal, 2009). For example, participants in our study reported music activities were offered more or less randomly in their schools, and not necessarily as part of the teaching program.

Yet, while Norway provides the context for this investigation, the issues addressed in this article are common to other settings. In Australia, for example, there has been clear recognition for over 15 years at both industry and policy levels that school-based music programs offer great potential for holistic student development. Nevertheless, there remains a dearth of music therapy-integrated services available across mainstream school settings (Crooke et al., 2016).

Global Education and the Crisis of School Engagement

School engagement continues to be a major challenge for governments and educators around the world. While some figures suggest dropout rates have decreased over time, in places such as the United States, the high number of students not enrolled in education remains a national concern (Plasman & Gottfried, 2018). Similar concern has been expressed globally, with scholars in countries such as Australia (Pascoe et al., 2020), and India arguing for better initiatives to address the issue (Maheshwari et al., 2020). Such calls include increased support for marginalised groups at higher risk of dropout, such as young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds (McFarland et al., 2018), youth in institutional care (Ozawa & Hirata, 2020), young people of colour (Brown & Rodríguez, 2009), and neurodivergent or disabled youth (Plasman & Gottfried, 2018; Syvertsen et al., 2020).

Many scholars have also stressed the integral link between school dropout and psychosocial wellbeing (Dupéré et al., 2018). Not only has poor mental health and/or social wellbeing been shown to double risk of school dropout (Butterworth & Leach, 2017), but disengagement from school is also a major contributor to negative long-term health outcomes including depression (Ramsdal et al., 2018) and substance use (Valkov, 2018). In addition, reports from the European Union have issued a comprehensive list of adverse, long-term impacts including unemployment, social exclusion, and poverty (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 2016).

The United Nations has recognized school engagement as both a human rights issue, and an unfolding global crisis. Released over 25 years ago, Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that "state parties recognize the right of the child to education, with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity" (UNCRC, 1989). Further, in the wake of unprecedented school closures due to COVID-19, the United Nations has predicted that school dropout numbers will climb well above the already high pre-pandemic figures, and presents a key

challenge for our global society going forward (de Amorim et al., 2022). In this climate, school dropout presents a major and current concern for countries across the economic spectrum, from low gross domestic product (GDP) countries like Uganda (Gilligan et al., 2022), to countries in Scandinavia which have some of the highest GDP per capita in the world. For example, school dropout figures in Norway are a national concern, with the government recognizing that early school leavers need significant support. As of the third quarter of 2021, approximately 8.7 percent of 15– to 29-year-olds in Norway were not in education, employment, or training (SSB/Statistics Norway, 2023). These numbers carry a heavy burden for policy makers, school leaders and politicians as statistics and research show that even one year of inactivity can impact future prospects (Bø & Vigran, 2014). Furthermore, the rate of "young people who are not in employment, education, or training" (NEET) in Norway was significantly higher when compared to Sweden and Iceland. Consequently, the government has offered significant support and funding for initiatives aimed at addressing school leaving in Norway.

The 'Whole Child' Approach and Inclusive Classrooms

Renewed interest in school dropout over the past 15 years has emerged in parallel with a global push to reframe education as a holistic process which attends to the needs of the whole child (Slade & Griffith, 2013). Proponents of these models also emphasise the role that educational experiences and school environments have on mental and physical health, as well as social wellbeing, social skills, and academic learning (Kochhar-Bryant & Heishman, 2010). Further, this model (sometimes also referred to as the Coordinated School Health approach) sees the development of each child as the purview of the whole school community (Lewallen et al., 2015).

Aligned closely with the push for the whole child approach are calls for more inclusive classroom environments (Black et al., 2015). Such calls relate both to the need for equity in access to positive educational experiences and environments for all students (Barnes, 2009), as well as more general recognition of the need for inclusive environments for increasingly diverse student populations (Gasser et al., 2018; Wagaman et al., 2018). This too has reached policy, with governments implementing strategies to promote inclusive classrooms in countries like the United States (Fabes et al., 2019), Australia (Steele et al., 2020), Indonesia (Djone & Suryani, 2019), Italy, Croatia, and Portugal (Čačija et al., 2019). Not only are such approaches said to be integral to school engagement, they have also been noted as necessary for schools to address social justice imperatives in the 21st century.

While the language offers a clear demarcation from curriculums driven by neo-liberal policies (Crooke et al., 2016), the new Norwegian curriculum is not without critics. The Norwegian psychologist Madsen (2020) argues it places too much emphasis on individual factors, neglecting aspects such as context, relationships, and community. In Madsen's view, the introduction of life skills in school shows a tendency in our society to place more and more responsibility on the individual, and closes one's eyes to the connection between poor mental health and poor living conditions. This evaluation echoes the critique of recent Australian policies and curriculums which are also said to harbour underlying neo-liberal ideals (Crooke, 2017). Nevertheless, we argue that the new Norwegian curricula provides language and mandates which can resonate with social outcomes, and the introduction of the arts. Therefore, we suggest it offers a useful and relevant framework for our analysis.

Teaching in 21ˢᵗ Century Contexts

While many countries have moved to integrate holistic approaches into national curriculums, such integration has often relied on teachers adapting and extending their existing practice to address a wider set of goals and student outcomes (Muñoz Martínez & Porter, 2020). Yet, this expectation has often been paired with a lack of teacher support and training around how to address holistic and inclusive goals (Steele et al., 2020). As such, several studies have reported a link between inclusive education agendas and teacher burnout, citing that the extra pressure placed on teachers as leading to health issues and job attrition (Kuok et al., 2020; Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). This adds to a growing body of literature which stresses the need to better support what some call a teacher mental health crisis in contemporary classroom contexts (Glazzard & Rose, 2019; Jorm et al., 2010).

The incongruence between new holistic teaching imperatives and both teachers' wellbeing and readiness to implement such imperatives can largely be attributed to preparedness. Studies show teachers with insufficient training and support for implementing inclusive classroom strategies are among those most likely to burnout (Talmor et al., 2005). Yet in places like Australia, many teachers do not have the necessary pre-training or in-service training to follow inclusive policy mandates (Steele et al., 2020). In Norway the debate on neoliberalism has been connected to what is called New Public Management (NPM). In short, NPM concerns the idea that organizational practices from the private sector are suitable also in the public sector, such as schools. As such, NPM-practices are meant to enhance efficiency and reduce bureaucracy (Hernes, 2007). However, the implementation of NPM practices, such as the much-debated PISA test in Norwegian schools, has revived large degree of criticism (see for example, Busch et al., 2011).

The lack of support for and pressure on teachers has a flow-on effect. Not only does it impact teacher mental health, but teacher mental health is said to then have a direct correlation with student mental health (Glazzard & Rose, 2019). Indeed, a lack of educational support from schoolteachers is regarded as a direct antecedent of student marginalization, and thus creates a foundation for exclusion from the current knowledge-based labor market, as well as poor health and social problems throughout the lifespan (Vinnerljung & Sallnäs, 2008). Further, those like Holen et al. (2018) argue there is direct connection between the quality of teacher-student relationships and both mental health and school dropout in students.

Recent recognition of the relationship between teacher and student mental health has underlined a growing push to address the "mental health crisis" reported among teaching staff more generally (Glazzard & Rose, 2019). Not only is this critical in the context of inclusive education (Gray et al., 2017), but universally applicable given the substantial decline in teacher mental health since the onset of COVID (Kush et al., 2021).

In this context of poor teacher mental health, Steele et al. (2020) investigated the potential of music therapy consultation to both support teachers in creating inclusive classroom settings, and find ways to support their own wellbeing and teaching practice through music. Results showed teachers not only reconnected with their own musicality, but became comfortable using simple music therapy-informed techniques to support their own wellbeing in the classroom, and create inclusive classroom settings for their students.

Music, Schools, and Student Engagement

There is growing interest for how music can be used as a resource in schools. Such interest has gone beyond the more traditional modes of music education, and an increasing number of studies have explored the relationship between music and young people and wellbeing

in school contexts. Many of these studies have shown positive outcomes such as enhanced social functioning (Teachout, 2005), improved emotion regulation (Currie, 2004; Uhlig et al., 2018), better self-esteem (Costa-Giomi, 2004), violence prevention (Nöcker-Ribaupierre & Wölfl, 2010), increased coping skills, cooperation, and school engagement (Gill & Rickard, 2012; McFerran et al., 2017), and a reduction in anxiety and depression symptoms (Parliament of Victoria, 2013).

Uhlig with colleagues (2018) conducted a randomized controlled trial to test the impact of a rhythm and poetry music therapy intervention on adolescent emotional self-regulation in a school setting. The music therapy group showed a significant effect on emotion regulation compared to a control condition. Another cluster-randomized study by Gold and colleagues (2017) compared in-school group music therapy to self-directed music listening activities. While both showed small improvement over time, there was no significant difference in effect between the two. In Cobbett's study (2016), they set out to provide educators with clearer evidence for how the arts therapies, including music therapy, can help engage hard-to-reach adolescents. In their study, 52 adolescents received art therapy while 29 did not. Both students' self-rated scores and staff-rated scores showed a significant improvement in the group who received art therapy, compared to the control group. In a more recent study, Caló, and colleagues (2020) examined the impact of a community-based music intervention for young people's wellbeing. By the use of both quantitative and qualitative data, they found that students gained improvements in self-confidence, wellbeing, and engagement as a result of their participation in the school's music programs.

However, other studies, such as Rickard et al. (2012), have revealed more inconsistent findings, leading some to argue for a more nuanced understanding of music and young people which looks outside traditional music education models (Crooke & McFerran, 2014). In reviewing policy literature related to the psychosocial benefits of music in school contexts, Crooke and colleagues (2016) found no clear evidence that recommended forms of student musical participation would lead to student health-benefits. On the contrary, they found results from traditional class-based music training were most often inconclusive or negative. They went on to argue an extension of the term "musical participation" is necessary to include programs based not only on training or achievement as goals, but also on formats known to support wellbeing and social development.

Study Background

The background of this paper bears direct relevance to the literature above, and the wider implications of the findings. The study reported here was made possible by a larger Erasmus+ funded project called STALWARTS[1] (Einarsen, 2020; Krüger et al., 2020; Øye, 2020). The project, led by professor Leslie Bunt, was developed in five European countries – Estonia, Italy, Norway, Portugal, and the UK – and aimed to build on the relational dimensions of learning, in part, through the theoretical lens of the *lifelong learning* perspective. *Lifelong learning* implies that individuals achieve defined knowledge from formal institutions, such as at school or education, and acquire attitudes, values, skills, and knowledge from learning arenas such as in their own local environment, daily life, and leisure time. From a lifelong learning perspective, learning can be understood as social practice and access to various forms of learning resources is crucial for the quality of learning (Field, 2000).

The members of the STALWARTS project wanted to design continuing education programmes for teachers where the following issues and observations were addressed: 1) the quality of teaching and the competencies of the teachers are a determining factor in the contribution they can make to reducing "early leaving from education and training"

(ELET), 2) teachers and educators need the skills and abilities to work with other professions and partners to prevent ELET, 3) cooperation is particularly important in "second chance" education where learners often face multiple problems and require comprehensive support, and 4) cooperation needs to be centred on schools. The ELET and NEET (not in employment, education, or training) populations who normally face greater difficulties participating in the labour market, earn less, have higher unemployment rates, and are more at risk of social exclusion and poverty than those who complete higher levels of education. This can have negative consequences not only at the individual level, but also for the society in which they live.

In Norway STALWART was represented by GAMUT, The Grieg Academy Research Centre, located at the Grieg Academy, University of Bergen. The Grieg Academy has a tradition of Community Music Therapy (CoMT), and ideas from a CoMT tradition were reflected in the Norwegian program that was designed. [2] GAMUT was also invited as partner in STALWARTS because of their capacity to support training at a supporting school, Hyssingen Produksjonskole (HP). HP accommodates students between the ages of 16 to 21 who have dropped out of respective schools. Students may stay in the school for one year, and the main goal during their visit is to become motivated to qualify to continue their education in a regular high school, or to build skills to enter the work force. Activity plans in HP school are based on labour market-oriented work-based learning, development of social and basic skills, life-long learning and self-directed learning approaches and guidance and counselling measures.

Research Question and Theoretical Orientation

The aim of the current study was to further explore how the music therapy discipline can support the integration of music into educational spaces to help meet the needs of 21st century education. More specifically, and based on our shared interest in the link between music and education, we wanted to explore educators' perspectives of how music can be implemented in different school contexts to promote school engagement and lower dropout rates and associated negative outcomes for among young people.

To address this aim we undertook interviews with six educators who had participated in a continuing education program on music therapy and young people. Both the interview questions and the subsequent analysis were guided by the following research question:

> How do participants attending a music therapy-informed continuing education program for teachers and social workers understand the role of music in working with young people in school settings?

Importantly, we argue for the value of letting the knowledge of participants and practitioners enrich our existing scientific perspectives within the fields of music therapy and educational practice. Therefore, as has been described by Kvale et al. (2014), learning from the experiences of the participants was central to our approach. Furthermore, the research question was investigated through the theoretical lenses of sociocultural theory (see for example Wenger, 1998), music therapy theory (see for example Stige & Aarø, 2012) and research and relevant policy documents, especially the new Norwegian national curriculum (UDIR, 2023).

Method

Research Design

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a suitable approach to data collection given

they are seen to offer deeper insights into the participant reflections and experiences (Kvale et al., 2014). This research adopts a constructionist epistemology, with a theoretical perspective partially informed by phenomenology and hermeneutics (REFS). (Kvale et al., 2014; Matney, 2018). The study is approved by RETTE (System for Risk and Compliance). RETTE is the University of Bergen's system for the processing of personal data in research. All participating educators were informed of the purpose of the study, the length of the interview, and of various ethical aspects such as anonymity and the possibility to withdraw from the research project at any point. All participants signed an informed consent form before the interview started. For transparency, and to encourage reflection and conversation, we developed an interview guide that was also shown to all participants before interviews commenced.

The Continuing Education Program

Invited educators participated in two university modules titled "Music as a Tool in Preventive Work with Children and Adolescents" (university codes MUTP640 and MUTP641), organized as continuing education modules, both of which were developed as a direct consequence of the STALWART project, as outlined above. The courses ran in Autumn 2019 and Spring 2020. The teaching included lectures, group work, plenary discussions, and online activity. Both university employees and lay professionals taught the course. Themes spanned from music and the brain to musicology and music therapy. As part of the teaching, the students did qualitative research, inspired by a participatory action research design (PAR) in their own workplaces (Pant, 2014). PAR can be described as a research paradigm within the social sciences which emphasizes collaborative participation of trained researchers as well as local communities in producing knowledge directly relevant to the stakeholder community (Pinter & Zandian, 2015). A course module was organized in the form of two gatherings each lasting two days, in sum 20 hours per course module. In addition, each student was encouraged to work in between gatherings on writing and reading suggested texts. During the course, each student had one oral presentation in which they presented how they had thought about and integrated knowledge gained from the course into their own musical activity. Each student then received oral and written feedback.[3]

Participants

We interviewed six Norwegian educators in the age range of 29–52, referred to in the results as PARTICIPANT 1 through PARTICIPANT 6. Five were working in different schools at the time of the study, and the sixth worked in an institution for children with disabilities. One of the schools was a college, and the remaining four schools were secondary schools. All the institutions were government run and funded.

Four participants identified as women and two identified as men. All participants were recruited from a separate advanced course for educators, which focused on music use as a tool in preventive work with young people in educational and child welfare contexts. Following the example of Moser and Korstjens (2018), we chose these educators as a part of a purposive sampling strategy approach, given our expectation that their previous experience using music in education settings may deepen their understandings and responses on the topic.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted via the video platform Zoom and typically lasted between nine and 17 minutes. As described above, interviews took a semi-structured approach where authors 3 and 4 referenced an interview guide with written questions, but at the same time

made room for spontaneous follow-up questions. Specifically, these follow up questions were used to allow further development of emerging themes.

Analysis

Interview audio-files were transcribed to text using Microsoft Word. Text data was then processed using the thematic analysis approach described by Clarke and Braun (2014):

1. Familiarizing yourself with your data: Reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes: Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes: Collating codes into potential themes and sub-themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes: Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, generating a thematic "map" of the analysis. Third and fourth authors were responsible for doing the first three steps, but in the fourth step all the authors were involved in a collective analysis process (Eggebø, 2020). Here we reviewed the data and discussed the data material.

Results

Through the thematic analysis five overarching themes emerged as directly relevant to the question of how participants understood the role of music in working with young people in school settings. As the list below shows, these overarching themes ranged from the acquisition of new knowledge through the continuing education course, to the perceived challenges in the field going forward. In order to demonstrate tendencies in the data material, we use words such as "some of the participants," and "one of the participants."

Main themes:

- Reflecting on music's role in new ways.
- Music as a relational building tool.
- The potential role of music therapy in Norwegian schools.
- Music as a resource to meet the new curriculum.
- Challenges in utilizing music in schools.

Reflecting on Music's Role in New Ways

Some participants expressed the advanced training course helped them reflect on the use of music in new ways. One example was the introduction of the term musicking.

PARTICIPANT 5: The most important thing [about the course] is the broadening of the term "music." With "musicking" as a term we emphasize music as an activity more than the need to be good at music. If the attendees of this course will manage to implement musicking in our workplaces, we could reach the goals of pedagogy much better.

One participant found great value in learning musical activities where anyone can join with little or no musical knowledge.

PARTICIPANT 6: We were shown a lot of exercises that did not require any musical knowledge to use like music listening or a simple paper orchestra. You need absolutely no knowledge to join in and can still enjoy the benefits of musicking.

Some acknowledged how learning new ways of utilising existing resources was valuable for both resourcing and engagement.

> PARTICIPANT 5: I have now learned how to use equipment that we already have for music activities, like pen and paper for example. These kinds of resources are like a bank that does not run empty. As well, my focus has moved away from how nice it sounds and more towards the activity we are doing.

Another participant reflected on the teachers' need to gain confidence in their own music ability.

> PARTICIPANT 3: Many teachers think that they are not good enough musicians or not sufficient in playing instruments. For them to be signed up for a course like this I believe it can be of great value.

The same participant told us that a new room has now been opened for adolescents to pursue music activities, which also allows students to do so in their spare time:

> PARTICIPANT 3: We have now dedicated one room at our school to be used by pupils who need it. There we will use the tools we learned in the course, and it will always be available [.] We [also] decided to make the music room open in the breaks [and] since the pupils told us they wanted to practice at school in their spare time, we additionally decided to keep the music room open in the evenings as well.

Music as a Relational Building Tool

Some participants described how they had expanded their view on music as a relational building tool during the course. PARTICIPANT 2 started out by highlighting how music can be used to work collectively in fostering in-class relationships.

> PARTICIPANT 2: Some of what I take home is the sociocultural and relational building aspects of music. That is, how music can be used for getting to know each other and working with interactions in the class as a group.

PARTICIPANT 4 explained how the course has helped in using music in a more methodical way to create a collective and good learning environment in the class.

> PARTICIPANT 4: From before, I already used music as something that could support a good learning environment in the class. However, here I learned concrete methodological approaches of how to use music. Before my approach to music was mostly random, for example by putting on a song or doing some activity with music, but now I think of music activities in more a systematic and methodical way.

PARTICIPANT 4 further talked about how music can be used to foster relationships on an individual basis.

> PARTICIPANT 4: We learned how to use music to connect with individual pupils, both as in building new relationships and in maintaining them.

As mentioned in the method, participants were recruited because of their previous experiences with the relational aspects of music. Some drew on these experiences when explaining their understanding of music and relationships during interviews.

> PARTICIPANT 3: One time when I had a new special tuition group, we started by playing guitar together. Soon this became central in the relational development. The guitar playing resulted in close relationships to several of them. One of them was into rap and another one

actually became a rapper, but I don't know how he is doing now since that is many years ago. But in the group, he was very accepting towards the music. In this way I discovered early that music has high value in special tuition.

Others talked about how the program helped them gain a broader view on how music can facilitate and support identity, and how they had been experimenting with these understandings in their work since.

> PARTICIPANT 1: Today when I had music rehearsal we were supposed to do warm up exercises. I put on some older songs by Karpe (a Norwegian band) because I know these students like rap. The whole room almost instantly filled up with singing from these 14- and 15-year-olds. You could see the movements, the dynamics, and the smiles among them. Seeing how beautiful that was really made me realized the value of musicking.

PARTICIPANT 1 continued with how creating space for music is about creating space for participation, as well as offering a sense of support and allegiance with the students.

> PARTICIPANT 1: To be aware of these kinds of musical meetings to a greater degree in the tuition, that is how to take sides with the students, is something that I need to think more about.

One of the participants highlighted how music can make it easier for students to cope with being in school, and as a way of helping them to re-enter the classroom space.

> PARTICIPANT 4: Several of the pupils I had in my class were youths who struggled to stay in school. Here music played an important role as an alternative to the tuition, helping them to get back into the class again.

The Potential Role of Music Therapy in Norwegian Schools

Finally, our informants reflected on music therapy as a practice and discipline, and how it may or may not fit within the core structure of Norwegian schools on an ongoing basis. One participant not only supported for role of registered music therapists in this space, but offered that music therapy could offer an alternative to existing healthcare approaches commonly used with contemporary youth.

> PARTICIPANT 5: I think that a music therapist would have more weight among the employees to communicate this with the music. And I think that the children can do good with the use of music in their treatment plan, instead of just medicine, medicine, medicine.

Another participant identified value in the specialized knowledge of music therapists, and suggested that these skills provide rich possibilities for interdisciplinary work.

> PARTICIPANT 1: I think that a music therapist would absolutely have its place in our school. We have got a school psychologist, a school nurse, one who is employed as a contact person for students. To have a music therapist into a team like this, I regard as very meaningful, who can work across classes with individual students or larger groups if it is possible.

A music therapist was also seen as a relevant collaborator for PPT (special psychology services for schools) and BUP (child and adolescence mental health service), and also to reach students with greater challenges.

> PARTICIPANT 3: A music therapist could be a good collaboration both with the teachers and the school, and maybe the PPT or BUP. If one uses it as a therapeutic tool directed at youth with greater challenges then there are often several authorities involved, like childhood welfare and so on.

One informant even expressed a desire to have dedicated rooms furnished as music therapy rooms in schools.

> PARTICIPANT 3: I also experienced that it would be okay to have dedicated rooms, rooms that were furnished as a music therapy room.

Even though we find a positive attitude towards music therapy, some of our informants were sceptical towards the term "therapy."

> PARTICIPANT 6: We discussed the term music therapy together on the course. I think "therapy" is a loaded term which can be intimidating.

This perception of terminology presents an important consideration and suggests there is a need to demystify/destigmatise the concept of "therapy" in mainstream social institutions, including schools. Likely this would include educating the community that many therapies, including music therapy, have moved beyond the more traditional/clinical-based models commonly associated with therapy in mainstream culture.

Music as a Resource to Meet the New Curriculum

The most frequent themes to emerge in our data was related to a newly implemented curriculum in the Norwegian education system, a curriculum that heavily emphasizes whole child approaches as described above (UDIR, 2023). All participants either directly or indirectly conveyed how participating in the course helped them think about and implement the use of music to meet these new whole-child curriculum goals. PARTICIPANT 2 illustrated this point explicitly.

> PARTICIPANT 2: In regard to the curriculum with the new broader goals, this course has helped me find support in the curriculum, and arguments for why we use music in terms of these broader goals.

PARTICIPANT 2 continued to explain why music should be used by all teachers, which is related to the development of the whole human being.

> PARTICIPANT 2: We want to implement what we have learned on this course and also try to get the other teachers to understand that it is not only bound to the music subject, but that it is important for the development of the whole human being, for example in relational building and the development of the brain.

PARTICIPANT 3 talked about how the classroom teachers are in a good position to implement music into students' daily educational experiences, and their lives more broadly.

> PARTICIPANT 3: It will be a strength if teachers have this tool [the course]. The teachers are often the persons who, especially in middle school, are closest to the youths. In some cases, the teacher can know the youth even better than the parents. I myself have worked with youths who lived at public care institutions where there was a rotation system. In cases like that the school becomes the continuity since the teachers meet the youth every day and even perhaps over several years. In this way, I think teachers are well equipped to accomplish the implementation of these new music interventions and music perspectives.

As this quote suggests, teachers may also be well positioned to conceptualise and tailor music provision to meet the needs of specific students with whom they have had ongoing relationships. This speaks to the value of building the capacity of teachers to draw from music therapy theory and practice. The potential for the course which was part of this

study to build such capacity also seemed clear; many participants specified how the course had deepened the understanding of the effect of music. Importantly, this included strong recognition that music is not only linked to learning but is also tightly connected to wellbeing and the development of the overall human being.

> PARTICIPANT 1: I like music and have always used it a lot in my classes, but this course has given me a raised awareness regarding the biological and psychological effects of music.

Challenges in Utilizing Music in Schools

The fifth emergent theme related to the perceived challenges of introducing more music participation in a school context. These challenges were concerned with resources like time, space, and money, as well as the perceived value of music in the school, with flow-on effects for prioritizing of music activities, and colleagues' understanding of the value of music in education settings. As PARTICIPANT 3 shared, the most immediate and pressing challenges related to time and workload.

> PARTICIPANT 3: A part of the challenge is that we have to set aside time for preparation. We live hectic everyday lives as teachers with new tasks constantly, as well as it is often quite random how much workload each teacher has.

As a potential solution to these challenges, PARTICIPANT 3 went on to suggests the potential benefit of engaging external professionals, as long as they work in close collaboration with teachers towards shared goals.

> PARTICIPANT 3: To compensate for missing time in school, it could be clever to have someone from outside, like a music therapist. But still, it should be someone that has a good collaboration both with the teachers and the school, and maybe the school's service for mental health.

As PARTICIPANT 1 identified, space was another resource considered scarce in the school system. That the below quote links space to educational "politics" highlights how these resourcing challenges are often underpinned by how music is viewed, and whether it is seen as important or ancillary to the school's core business.

> PARTICIPANT 1: As well, there is a challenge concerning space. Though we want to make a music room, the politics of school go in the opposite direction. […] What I like to call "the fun rooms," all disappear one by one.

Discussion

As researchers we have found it enlightening to explore the reflections of the participants. Being able to learn from what is said in the aftermath of the course, gives us traces to work from in the continuing. To summarize the findings, the participants emphasize that the continuing education modules helped them to reflect on the role of music in education in novel ways. They informed us about how they gained new understandings of the affordances that music can provide, not only as an object to listen to or an activity to master, but a practice for promoting health, mastery and well-being. This aligns with existing research which has shown that supporting classroom teachers to develop capacity around music therapy practices can be an incredibly valuable way to not only support student development (Rickson & McFerran, 2014). While existing research in this area has focused on in-school support (Steele et al., 2020), these findings extend the potential benefits to external courses, and suggest they can benefit both student and teacher wellbeing.

Some participants linked their new insights around music to themes in the new curriculum such as life mastery and public health. Others described their new knowledge as "reaching the whole human being." These findings support existing literature which has highlighted the potential for music activities to access all aspects of the human experience, both in everyday life (DeNora, 2000) and in school settings (Crooke, 2016). Further, our data suggest music therapy-informed practices provide a valuable resource for reaching new whole-child imperatives in contemporary education contexts. The participants also identified the benefits of employing music as relation building tool, extending that it not only helped build social networks but also communities of learning. These findings support the idea that integrating music into mainstream teaching and learning on a global level has the potential to support United Nations mandates around school engagement and lifelong learning (de Amorim et al., 2022).

At a more local level, the participants' understanding of how music can be used in education transcended the way music has been delivered in Norwegian schools in recent decades. They also illustrated the idea that the school system itself (Norwegian and otherwise) can be responsible for hindering school music provision at several different levels – from the culture of a specific school to national curriculums and policies – and in this way, contribute to the reproduction of social inequality. This accords with existing research which illustrates that ecological context plays an integral role in informing school music provision, from high level policy (Crooke, 2015) to leadership buy in and support from colleagues (McFerran et al., 2021).

Lastly, our informants explain that schools should be more informed of how music works as a resource for promoting well-being and development, and that school leaders and teachers should have a broader understanding of how music can be implemented to meet new curriculum goals. This aligns with McFerran and colleagues' (2022) findings that helping teachers understand clear links between arts provision and curriculum and other student outcomes is critical for provision uptake and sustainability. Ultimately, this suggests more work is needed in knowledge translation between music therapy and education.

The participant responses suggest that the professional training was beneficial for their work in the schools. Music therapy was regarded a possible approach to reach those with challenges and need for treatment, as in the case for those in contact with the school's service for mental health.

Following the summary above, we argue that there is a need for both dialogue and action in expanding the use and role of music in schools. With mounting evidence for the relational qualities as well as learning and wellbeing benefits of school music, the present authors suggest the question is no longer, "why have music in schools?", but rather "why not have all students participate in music regularly?" The participant responses indicate the effectiveness of the training program in helping them to address classroom issues suggesting that continued exploration of the phenomenon is vital to ongoing curricular development at the classroom level and beyond. As indicated in the introduction, a major challenge is the lack of teacher training around facilitating relational learning environments for students. As our participants shared, building teacher capacity in this area requires teachers to have access to opportunities for learning through participation in social activities with other teachers and students. This is because the knowledge is practical and requires arenas and activities where teachers can experience music as a resource, *in use.* In relation to what we have observed and learned from our participants in this study, we suggest there is a need to further explore "the wholeness of the learning situation," and to understand the ecologies of the learning process.

From our analysis, we further argue teachers' need to participate and sufficiently engage in communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) in order to gain new experiences that can help them understand and express the meaning of themes such as life mastery and public health,

and their relationship to music. Such themes have little value in themselves if they exist solely as concepts with no root in lived experiences. For our participants, during the continuing education modules, music became a vehicle to improvise the meaning of concepts such as "a whole child" perspective, or the link between mental health and music. This resonates with a paraphrasing of Dewey's (1907/1938) idea that learning and creating new links between ideas, notions and concepts and practices and activities, is best achieved through embodied or experiential learning – or "learning by doing."

Dewey (1916) also saw modern civic society as having separated art and life and argued the need to restore the continuity between art and the ordinary processes of daily life. As such, Dewey's ideas support an expanded curriculum in music education. Metaphorically speaking, our informants' statements can be understood as the willingness to be open to new perspectives on the value of music. Following this line of thinking, and the use of musical metaphors, if the new curriculum was understood as a chord, then educators would need to practice its performance, especially if new themes such as life skill and public health are to resonate effectively at all. Without the ability to practice and explore what life skills means for children, the educators will end up handling "empty concepts," without content. Pursuing a continuing education program where music's role and functions were explored in new ways, would then represent a suitable "practice room" for gaining relevant experiences. Further, like musicians, it also offers the opportunity to improvise ways of being and performing.

Lastly, from a socio-cultural perspective, learning can be understood as social practice. Additionally, access to various forms of learning resources is crucial for the quality of learning. Wenger (1991) distinguished between talking about and talking within a certain community (an idea followed up by for example Dysthe et al., 2006). As students/learners move in what Lave and Wenger (1991) label "trajectories of participation," they gradually become more experienced and competent learners. We can understand our informants' participation in the module as a movement from being less unexperienced, to taking on an identity as an individual who is more skilful and knowledgeable in the area. As course supervisors we have taken on the role as being a facilitator of this movement, allowing for more or less structured scaffolding, but also allowing the participating teachers to be free and to discover the world of knowledge on their own. Following this line of thinking, as educators we should pay close attention to the learning processes, and support teachers'/educators' potential to discover links between music and health on their individual basis. As with clients in music therapy, what works for one learner may not work for another.

Implications for Practice

Following the above discussion, we suggest several implications for practice in both education and music therapy. First, to meet the demands of the new curriculum, schools need to seek and implement new knowledge, and find ways to use this knowledge to create new platforms for learning. We argue existing practices are insufficient in equipping teachers to embark on the new paths which the current curriculum urges them to find and follow.

Second, the new curriculum invites teachers to think of how they can involve their students in creating learning opportunities, as well as to evaluate these. Teachers should not only teach the students, but also facilitate experiences and settings in which students can also participate as teachers and evaluators.

Third, schools should consider how they can utilize their existing resources to better support student outcomes. For example, schools may make their buildings available before or after school hours, or they could lend out musical instruments to young musicians who want to practice. As has been suggested previously (McFerran et al., 2017), schools may

also draw on teachers' own interest in music, as well as arrange festivals, musicals or concerts. Such events would contribute to socialisation processes and build bridges between the formal and informal learning processes.

Fourth, university level courses which are meant to convey important knowledge about education for children work best when they build on participant's' own practical knowledge and experience working with children. As we have learned in our study, children's perspective can also inform educators' views on how school can be facilitated.

Fifth, strategies designed to target specific populations (i.e., ELET or NEET populations) should also be explored as potential strategies for creating positive psychosocial environments at whole-school level. As shown by Fyhn et al. (2021), positive relationships with adults and peers are central to the successful provision of follow-up support to young people in Norway. Thus, the relational aspects of learning should be emphasized as a basic understanding in future research on young people.

Recommendation for Future Research

Further research is necessary to explore and gain deeper understandings of the relationships between music, music therapy and schools-based education. A collaborative and participatory action research approach would allow for children and adolescents to be co-researchers and contribute to the design of future studies. Future research, then, may include studies of how music can function as a tool to facilitate decision-making processes in school, and how formal and informal learning possibilities could have been linked, as outlined by Dewey. Further research is also necessary on links between school music and policy, and should also include student involvement.

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[1] *Sustaining Teachers and Learners with the Arts: Relational Health in European School*–aimed to promote relational health for the early leaving from education and training (ELET) population in schools through engagement with arts.

[2] CoMT practices, for example in relation to school or education, employ social and ecological perspectives on music and health and explore how resources for change can be mobilised in and through communities of practice (Stige & Aarø, 2012).

[3] For more information about the the design of the course, and its content, see Krüger et al. (2020).