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Playing with tradition in communities of Swedish folk music: Negotiations of meaning in instrumental music tuition

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The present article explores meaning in relation to musical learning. One starting point is the assumption that a meaningful music education is strongly related to the social domain of music-making. The aim of this article is to provide analytical tools to understand how meaning is negotiated within instrumental music tuition. Our interest lies in formal higher music education, an arena where the social dimension tends to be rather obscure, in contrast to the genre of Swedish folk music, which is our empirical context. There is a strong case for revaluing the social dimension in the study and creation of a meaningful music education. In line with this, our analytical framework draws primarily upon theories of situated cognition, situated learning, and communities of practice. In particular, our analytical focus is negotiations of meaning, which are understood as constituted by two reciprocal processes of participation and reification. Meaning negotiation can be defined as a process that is incomplete, ongoing, and open-ended. Since negotiations of meaning refer to a larger picture, they become a useful point of interest in understanding the dynamics between a single learning situation, the educational framing, and the wider musical world of the learner. We exemplify how this analytical perspective can be applied by referring to our ongoing research project, which investigates trajectories of learning within different communities of Swedish folk music. We focus on two analytical nodes that have bearing across the communities and serve as locus points for ongoing meaning negotiations: (i) the identity of *spelman* and (ii) the approach to notation. With these two examples, we hope to show the potential of the framework. We also present methodological considerations that come from applying the proposed analytical tools in our study. Using an ethnographic approach, we lean toward the ideas of "messy research," musical research sensibilities, and stepwise-deductive induction. In the final section of the article, we elaborate on the educational implications that follow from a perspective that takes meaning as its point of departure.

KEYWORDS

music education, communities of practice, messy research, meaningful, instrumental education, identities, competencies, Swedish folk music

Introduction

"All bowings are bodeful" (Jonny Soling, fieldwork notes).

With this citation from one of the case studies of our project,[1] the master fiddler and pedagogue Jonny Soling, captures one of the important dimensions of folk music playing: To learn how to become a *spelman*[2] (traditional fiddler), a person needs to understand the power of the bowing, which is how bodily movements and musical ideas are expressed in the contact point between the bow and the string. The balanced tension created by the musician in action is crucial to the result of the intended musical communication, as musically argued by Jonny Soling in his playing and teaching.

The statement on meaningful bowing was made in a learning context, dominated by oral transmission, in a circle of learners learning from an elderly expert. Most of these learners are already insiders in a folk music community and thus active agents in the making and re-making of values connected to the transmission of Swedish traditional music. While our study uses empirical data from different learning contexts for folk music, our aim goes beyond the genre-specific findings, to contribute to the broader area of instrumental music tuition in formal and informal settings. More specifically, in this article, our intention is to contribute to the understanding of balanced tensions involved in "sense-making" and meaningfulness from the perspective of how instruments matter "to both our sense of personhood and as ways, we engage with/in/through projects of love with the world" (Silverman, 2020, p. 8). In engaging with what a meaningful music education might be, our study contributes to a growing body of research that explores alternatives to a narrow perception of instrumental education. Assuming that a meaningful music education is strongly related to the social domain of music-making, the aim of this article is to provide analytical tools for understanding how meaning is negotiated within instrumental music tuition.

Concerns have been articulated on music education being isolated in research silos of higher music education (Westerlund and Karlsen, 2016), and on educational cultures leaning toward simplified understandings of social and cultural diversity (Sæther, 2003; Schippers and Campbell, 2012; Westerlund and Karlsen, 2017). Thomson (2021) in her study on ensemble teaching with music teacher students and refugees, takes an active approach to break down educational silos. She shows how creative intervention initiatives might contribute to the reciprocal integration and inclusion of learners from inside and outside higher music education. With the concept of *musical thirdspace*, she outlines collaborative musicking as a tool to create a shared identity as a musician in the mixed ensemble. Further expanding on the theme of how music and the social domain are related, MacDonald (2022) calls for music education to include the development of new virtuosities, beyond exceptional technical skills.

Building our results, we present methodological considerations that come from applying the proposed analytical tools in our study. Using an ethnographic approach, we lean toward the idea of "messy research" (Law, 2004), musical research sensibilities (Sæther, 2015), and stepwise-deductive induction (Tjora, 2019). In the final section of the article, we elaborate on the educational implications that follow from a perspective that takes meaning as its point of departure.

Theoretical perspective

In this section, we outline the theoretical framework of this article. First, we outline key characteristics of the social dimension of music-making and introduce important concepts such as *art worlds, musicking*, and *tradition*. In the second section, we move to the central idea of *communities of practice* and introduce concepts connected to the negotiation of meaning.

The social dimension of music-making

Our project rests upon an assumption of music as a form of social and participatory activity. As such, our position is rooted in the works of scholars, who during the last decades questioned the implicit ideas of the nature of music through new perspectives. As a way to emphasize the often overlooked collective and social dimensions of artistic practices, Becker (2008) coined the term *art worlds*. Such an art world consists of people, "all sorts of people, who are in the middle of doing something that requires them to pay attention to each other, to take account consciously of the existence of others and to shape what they do in the light of what others do" (Becker, 2008, p. 375). Viewing art as the practice of an ecosystem of people rather than the result of an isolated genius, Becker made an effort to include people not usually regarded as important. This idea is shared by Small (1998) in his project of reframing our understanding of music as an activity rather than a thing. In this work, he coins the term *musicking*. Such a move brings forth the participative character of musical events, challenging an often assumed divide between (active) performers and (passive) listeners.

Whereas Becker (2008) primarily works from the perspective of jazz music, Small (1998) takes Western art

1 This article is based on empirical material from our ongoing research project "Tradition, Identity and Learning" (TIL).

2 "Spelman" (litteraly translated: Playman) is a term used for referring to the profession of a musician who performs traditional Swedish music. The gender component of the title is sometimes highlighted by using the term "Spelkvinna" (Playwoman) for female musicians in the Swedish folk music genre. The reification process of the term is not discussed in the present study, but it is of interest for future research.

music as his case, and our project is focused on the domain of Swedish folk music. As such, it is important to ponder upon the notion of *tradition*. Bearing connotations of history and approaching the meaning of cultural identity (Ronström, 1989), it is embedded in the understanding of traditional and folk music. In line with the ideas promoted by Becker and Small, tradition as a concept has undergone a transformation during the last decades. Tradition can be thought of in terms of an object or in terms of process, and Schippers (2009) distinguishes five approaches to understanding what constitutes tradition: "[i] tradition as canon or body of works, [ii] a standard with an explicit or implicit set of rules, [iii] a performance practice, [iv] music in culture, and [v] a mechanism of handing down music" (p. 45). Depending on which approach is taken, the emphasis shifts between object and process. As Schippers notes, even though the concept of tradition bears the connotation of history, it does not mean that it must be understood as static.

Emphasizing the interpretative dimensions of tradition, Rice (1994) brings in the four senses of tradition, proceeding from the non-reflective to the fully self-conscious:

> First, in some instances tradition must be constructed analytically by the researcher because it is beyond discourse in the culture itself; second, the word "tradition" sometimes labels a subset of the world or culture in which it is found, as for example, musical tradition, political tradition, literary tradition; third, where it is explicitly invoked in "native" and scholarly discourse, it is a concept requiring both historical or cultural distanciation and reflection; and fourth, when made the object of reflection, tradition becomes a "text" for interpretation and appropriation. (Rice, 1994, p. 13)

In this study, our data can be understood as reflecting all of the four above-described senses: beyond discourse in some of the case studies, clear political labels in at least one of the cases, an outspoken discourse of insiders, and finally as an object for reflection to us, the researchers. Furthermore, even if tradition has a collective scope, the understanding of, and approach to tradition may be different (Tullberg, 2018). As exemplified in our study, tradition is being used and commodified by musicians within the scene.

Finally, the influence of post-colonial thinking as introduced by Bhabha (1994) and Said et al. (1993) has implications on a meta-theoretical level to our study in which we lean toward the conceptual framework of communities of practice (CoP), elaborated in the next subsection. Bhabha's work on the concept of *third space* serves as a metaphorical way to acknowledge that there is a need for a space where working with differences can take place, without a dominant voice, allowing for epistemologies of "the other" to be included in the conversations and negotiations. His argument is that majority cultures tend to include minorities, only if they adapt to the rules and regulations stipulated by the host society. As higher music education takes place within an academic culture, the dominating discourses on music education are sometimes in conflict with other ways of approaching musical learning than what is suggested in Western classical music, for example, as other genres are included in the programs, and widened recruitment opens up for musicians with immigrant background.

Edward Said, interviewed by Beezer and Osborne (1999), suggests that academics (in our case, musicians) have a dramatical duty to perform in special arenas, to dramatize urgent questions, and make them visible. One concrete example of how the concept of third space can serve in re-imagining the role of musicianship and artistic practices is Thomson's (2021) study on collaborative music-making. Her study argues that "by creating musical thirdspaces through social innovations higher music education can prepare future musicians and educators to navigate the intersections of artistic, educational, and social dimensions of music and music education. . .(p. ii)." On an overarching level, our study is informed by post-colonial concepts, as intertwined with an understanding of tradition and musicking.

Communities of practice

Central to our theoretical perspective is the work of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (Lave, 1988; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

Before the two met at the Institute for Research on Learning, Palo Alto, Lave had authored the book *Situated cognition* (Lave, 1988), in which she questions the assumptions of human cognition as being isolated to the brain and constituted by linear, abstract calculations. The analysis draws upon extensive empirical data from her fieldwork in Liberia (further presented in Lave, 2011) and the "Adult Math Project". The latter project investigated how mathematical skills were used across different settings, in particular educational and everyday activities. Showing the situated nature of the use of math, Lave (1988) critiques the assumption of *learning transfer* that traditional school math rests upon. She argues that the gap is too wide between the abstractions in the educational settings and the real-world problems she investigates through field research. This has implications on how cognition is understood:

> The point is not so much that arrangements of knowledge in the head correspond in a complicated way to the social world outside the head, but that they are socially organized in such a fashion as to be invisible. "Cognition" observed in everyday practice is distributed—stretched over, not divided among—mind, body, activity, and culturally organized settings (which include other actors). (Lave, 1988, p. 1)

To study cognition and learning while considering the dimensions over which they are stretched, Lave (1988) states

that "a contextually grounded theory of cognition requires a theory of situations" (p. 84).

Lave and Wenger (1991) present such a theory of situations, in which a new concept is coined: *communities of practice* (CoP).

Based on a series of cases, Lave and Wenger (1991) highlight what constitutes apprenticeships and how such learning trajectories can be seen as a learner moving from being a peripheral newcomer to a central actor and finally an oldtimer. Communities of practice are the social landscape that is both essential for the learning process and the context in which competence is defined.

Wenger (1998) continues to develop the framework. He discerns three dimensions of a community of practice. (i) *Mutual engagement* corresponds to the social relations among the participants. As such, a *community of practice* is not necessarily equivalent to a workplace or a school setting (although they might overlap). (ii) *Joint enterprise* is the defining purpose of the group. Although this in certain contexts may be formalized, this is not to be understood as static, since the essence of the pursuit is negotiated among the participants. It is a coordinating feature. Wenger (1998) provides a metaphor from music:

> Rhythm is not random, but it is not just a constraint either. Rather, it is part of the dynamism of music, coordinating the very process by which it comes to being. Extracted from the playing, it becomes fixed, sterile, and meaningless, but in the playing, it makes music interpretable, participative, and sharable. It is a constitutive resource intrinsic to the very possibility of music as a shared experience. An enterprise is part of a practice in the same way that rhythm is part of music. (p. 82)

(iii) *Shared repertoire* refers to the resources of action and communication that emerge through the joint enterprise, and are available to the members of the group. The shared repertoire includes for example everyday verbal communication, specialized terminology, routines, anecdotes, and gestures. These are the means through which the involved individuals negotiate meaning, a process we use as an analytical tool.

Negotiation of meaning

Taken together, the perspectives presented above signify the importance of considering the situated and social dimensions of music when discussing meaningful learning. However, these wider perspectives may be hard to grasp and to be made concrete. In this article, we turn to one specific process, which is bound up with the wider social context and at the same time observable in everyday interaction—the negotiation of meaning. As Wenger (1998) states: "we produce meanings that extend, redirect, dismiss, reinterpret, modify or confirm—in a word, negotiate a new—the histories of meanings of which they are part" (p. 53). This process is incomplete, ongoing, and open-ended. As such, negotiations of meaning refer to a larger picture.

Wenger (1998) describes the negotiation of meaning as constituted by two processes: *participation* and *reification*. While participation refers to engagement and social interaction, reification is a less commonly used term in everyday speech. It refers to the generation of real and abstract objects through which aspects of the practice become concrete. Furthermore, reification refers to both process and its product; the two mutually imply each other. Products of reification may be artifacts (such as musical notation) or ideas (such as the identity of *spelman*). In short, "aspects of human experience and practice [that] are congealed into fixed forms and given the status of an object" (Wenger, 1998, p. 59). In Wenger's framework, reification does not necessarily come with negative connotations (Vandenberghe, 2013), but is rather a part of the structure of human thought:

> With the term reification I mean to cover a wide range of processes that include making, designing, representing, naming, encoding, and describing, as well as perceiving, interpretating, using, reusing, decoding, and recasting. (Wenger, 1998, s. 59)

Although music, as seen through the perspective of musicking (Small, 1998), should not be taken as a reified object (Ryan and Schiavio, 2019), certain aspects of music can. In fact, Wenger's (1998) description of reification fits well with the above-mentioned perspectives on tradition, which may also refer to both process and object.

As we shall see, notation (as object and process) and the concept of *spelman* (as within Swedish folk music) are two examples of reification of the music, which are taken as aspects of tradition. The negotiation of meaning, as constituted by processes of reification and participation (Wenger, 1998), has similarities with the concept of sense-making in music as explored in music education (Silverman, 2020). As a result, meaning is not a static characteristic, but rather is negotiated and continuously defined by the community of practice. Here, we will follow the two examples mentioned (notation and *spelman*) across different communities of practice within the Swedish folk music scene.

Method and "messy research"

Our study is conducted with an ethnographic approach, making use of our own musician identities as flutists and fiddlers, including six cases. In this process we are using a

range of methods, such as participant observation, observation, interviews, surveys, and group interviews. Presented with this wording, it sounds as if we are following an already decided plan, making use of established methods in qualitative research.

Working and living within the field of music education has already influenced our ways of performing research; however, there might be more to it, connected to the idea of "sensuous scholarship" (Stoller, 1997). In this line, ethnography is an art situated between different systems of meaning (Clifford, 1986): "Ethnography decodes and recodes, telling the grounds of collective order and diversity, inclusion and exclusion. It describes processes of innovation and structuration, and is itself part of these processes" (pp. 2–3). Therefore, all ethnographic texts cannot be more than "partial truths" (Clifford, 1986, p. 7), as power and history work through the researcher.

In exploring the relationship between experience and theory, Hastrup (1995) concludes that the task of a researcher with ethnographic ambitions is to construct a world outside time and place, a space for a shared social experience. Following this insight, the researchers' position can also be described as creating and investigating "in-between," moving between distance and proximity. Social anthropologist Stoller (2008) claims that the position of "between" is a productive and even powerful starting point for ethnographic work. With this study, we take the opportunity to use that power, resting on anthropological traditions. An early voice giving attention to the importance of researchers' cultural background and the impossibility of objectivity is anthropologist Gourlay (1978):

> The "scientific method" of this conception [objectivity] is self-contradictory in its failure to include all variables, while achieving a semblance of authenticity through the use of an abstract expression which conceals their omission from the writer. The analogical reasoning that empirical methods which have produced objective results in the "hard" sciences are equally and directly applicable to the human sciences may or may not be valid. (p. 7)

Following this line of thought, Law (2004) introduces situated inquiry as a way of dealing with the world, as the world cannot be understood in general by holding tight to methodological rules. Rather, deliberate imprecision might be a technique for grasping the indistinct, such as in our case negotiations on meaning. The messiness of research that comes with an improvised and intuitive study design opens up for "a way of pointing to and articulating a sense of the world as an unformed but generative flux of forces and relations that work to produce particular realities" (pp. 6–7).

Such an approach goes hand in hand with our chosen theoretical perspective, which emphasizes communities, practices, and negotiations, and with our understanding of the object of our study as belonging to a world of flux and unpredictability. Studying particular realities, our methodological considerations have mainly been an attempt to respond to the generative forces and relations that we, from our positions, understand the world to consist of. Systems, also those of learning, include a great degree of "mess" (Ackoff, 1973) and these unpredictable components and mechanisms cannot be overlooked other than risking obscuring vital aspects of the CoP. Inviting messy research often has a consequence; it implies slow research, which engages with detours and uncertainties. In our study, for example, the informal gatherings and the courses have been clearly defined by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Interestingly, the informal gatherings continued throughout the pandemic restrictions, with a higher level of motivation to compensate for the increased physical distance between the musicians. The courses at the folk high school[3] were periodically closed down which impacted both the course participants and our fieldwork. Thus, what we present in this article is a slice of our empirical data, produced by us as participants, folk musicians, and music education researchers.

With inspiration from Tjora (2019), our data have been generated and analyzed both upward, from the empirical ground to theoretical concepts, and downward, the other way round. Stepwise-deductive induction (SDI) does not invite researchers to use a standardized method for analysis, but rather to get prepared for a progression in stages with a consistent movement between the empirical and the theoretical to facilitate conceptual generalizations.

Examples from our data

Learning to play Swedish traditional music takes place across several different contexts. Our ongoing study explores six contexts that span from what is generally considered formal arenas to informal ones:

A. **Music academy (performers program)**
   Interview with the main teacher (129 min), individual interviews with students (n = 5) (60 min per interview).
B. **Folk high school (full-time course)**
   Observation of ensemble lessons, a group interview with participants (n = 5) (60 min).
C. **Folk high school (distance course)**
   Observations of group lessons with 27 participants and group interviews with six participants (55 min).
D. **Fiddlers' group (*spelmanslag*)**
   Interview with a musical leader (n = 1) (60 min).

3 Folk high schools are centers for adult education. Courses are not granting academic degrees. In Sweden, there are music education programs in several genres.

E. **Professional musicians** Individual interviews ($n = 7$) (45–90 min).
F. **Informal, regularly occurring jam sessions** Participant observation from July 2021 to August 2022 in weekly jam sessions organized by a loosely coupled group of musicians at two different venues in an urban setting: an outdoor café and a meeting room provided by a political party.

Although all of these are related to the broad umbrella of Swedish folk music and are interdependent and overlapping, they all have their own characteristics in terms of mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. As such, they can be articulated through the terminology of CoP, and distinctions and similarities are brought forth by the theoretical framework. To highlight the analytical tool of meaning negotiation, we present two analytical nodes, which cut across the different CoPs explored. The statements are taken from the empirical data articulate underlying value systems in terms of prioritized concerns. In the following, we have structured the text around two analytical nodes, the first one covering the use of notation in Swedish folk music and the second one discussing different constituting elements in the identity construction of a *spelman*.

Notation

Notation is not a recent phenomenon in Swedish traditional music. As such, it is a form of reification with a continuous history tied to the practice. An early form of sheet music is the so-called *spelmansböcker* (Ramsten et al., 2019), personal notebooks used by musicians to collect and store their repertoire. Contrary to Romantic ideas regarding folk music practices from the 17th to 19th centuries, musicians performing dance music were a diverse group, with many musical literates moving between different musical contexts (what we today may think of as genres) (Gustafsson, 2019). It is important to note that this is an era when the term folk music was not in everyday use. This means that this early notation, seen as the material output of processes of reification, was untinged by later, not yet emerging, ideologies (Wachenfeldt, 2015).

A later version of the notation process is the collections that became a part of the Swedish romantic nationalism (Boström et al., 2010). Primarily dance music—what was then being considered by the collectors as folk music (as coined by Herder)—filled a function in the larger project of nation-building. This collection process culminated in the publication of *Svenska låtar* (Andersson and Andersson, 1922–1940/2000), a 24-volume collection of tunes and short biographies. The publication was structured through a geographical perspective, a decision that contributed to a persistent way of thinking about Swedish folk music repertoire in categories of geography and individual musicians (Tullberg, 2018).[4] Also, the publication of *Svenska låtar* was preceded by a selection process that further conceptualized and defined the boundaries of the genre of Swedish folk music (Boström et al., 2010).

For an individual interested in Swedish folk music today, a significant amount of archival material (sheet music) is available, as well as printed publications from the 20th century up until today. These are products of reification processes and are in themselves objects for academic studies. However, with this brief background in mind, we now turn to the empirical data of the present study.

In our material, there are both similarities and differences in how notation is used, produced, and approached. Taken in isolation, these statements of our informants may not be revealing. But seen through the rather vast empirical data, patterns are emerging in terms of tensions between these functions.

Notation in our study fills a number of functions, and the following section uses these examples: (i) building a repertoire from old sources (archival or published), (ii) an aid for memory, (iii) a tool for thinking (such as working out musical arrangements), (iv) a tool for learning, and (v) in performance.

These different functions are bound up with different sets of competences. One of the tensions concerns the importance of musical literacy. A statement made by one of the teachers in context A (the music academy) illustrates some aspects of this point:

> They [the students] do not read sheet music. As one student said: "I have a hard time finding repertoire." And I said: "You have [refers to major collections of tunes]. And the student responded: "Yes, but I find it hard to get anything out from the notation." And it is. You have put an effort into it. And that is something that has changed. The literacy has decreased. Playing technique is really good, but the literacy is crap. And it helps to understand your own role and to be able to navigate your role as musician if you have both a historical and future perspective. [. . .] It helps if you can handle a notation and if you are tempted at that. How can you get something historical? And it is hard. How do you interpret that [the notation]? (Informant A:1)[5]

In this statement, the teacher stresses the importance of being musically literate in order to access the repertoire and build a relationship with tradition. This has been a crucial part in his own path to becoming a *spelman* (see below). The students do not meet his expectations. The competing position

4 Hence, it is common to refer to tunes either as from a certain place or as *after* (collected from) a certain musician.

5 The quotations taken from the empirical data have been translated from Swedish into English by the authors.

is illustrated by one of the students in Study B (the folk high school, full-time course):

> Yes, I think it is super exciting, this way of making music. Because it is a big part of folk music in the whole world, what you do is that you learn tunes by ear, always. But this means that we spend much time on learning the tune, and don't have time to play it good or so. [. . .] What is great about folk music is that you should be good at learning tunes by ear quick. But at the same time, we don't have time for much else. (Informant B:3)

Development of skill (learning and playing by ear) is prioritized above repertoire development. Notation is sometimes distributed to the students after they have learned the tune, as an aid for memory. One of the other students (B:2) states that starting to play folk music was a way to avoid written music.

The leader of the *spelmanslag* (fiddlers' group) in Study D provides a counterargument: "It takes too much time to sit and drudge . . ." (Informant, 4:1). By this, she means to repeat phrase by phrase until everyone in the group knows the tune. Instead, they use a mix, where a notation is used as a reference point for learning the tune. While having the score in front of them, the group plays the tune phrase by phrase. The leader guides the fiddlers through interpretational aspects, such as dynamics, rhythm, and phrasing. During the interview, she also comments on what she perceives as a general view within the domain of Swedish folk music: "Sometimes I find it so silly, this [attitude] that you need to play without sheet music. No, you don't have to. Notation is there to help you." Developing a large, collective repertoire is more important than mastering the skill of quickly catching a tune by ear. Since sheet music is used in performance, it is not necessary to memorize the tunes. Furthermore, sheet music is also a means of inclusion, since it enables peripheral members of the group to show up for performance[6] even if they have not attended the rehearsals.

Among the professional musicians in study E, sheet music is frequently used: "Often, I send the other musicians notation before we meet. But that is because we have too little time. It's not as [.] when we had five days a week. I am happy if we find one or two days" (Informant E:1). The essence of this statement resonates through the interviews of Study E. The rehearsals are not primarily a place for learning, and the prioritized concern is to reach a musical result.

In the jam sessions (study F) sheet, music is not generally used during the meetups. The gatherings often commence with the tune-sharing. Usually, one of the group's more central participants teaches a tune by ear. Participants record the tune for the sake of memory and/or to learn it at home. However, notation carries other functions. Tunes are distributed among the members as a way to share repertoire between the sessions. In this way, the joint repertoire is expanded. During one of the gatherings, a brief argument arose since two participants had different versions of the same tune. The argument continued afterward on the Facebook group connected to the community. One of the involved tried to settle the dispute by uploading sheet music along with comments on the rhythmical interpretation and biographical notes on the composer.

The tensions illustrated here arise partly due to time pressure. But these tensions also point beyond pragmatic concerns. What is being reified here is not so much the notation itself as the competences related to notation: musical literacy and what we refer to as musical orality. These two competences are not dichotomies but exist in relation to each other as different methods of participating in music-making. It is not a binary position where one side is completely oral, and the other is completely dependent on symbols (some form of musical notation)—nor is it necessarily so that a musician masters one of the two, but can master both or be less capable in both areas.

A community of practice defines and redefines what competences are relevant and how they are valued (Wenger, 1998). This may change over time and the fluent nature is reflected in the above examples. For example, musical literacy in the contexts of A and E refers not only to decoding pitch and time but also to extracting an interpretation of the notated tune, something that is not always easy (Ahlbäck, 2010). This is, however, not required in the fiddlers' group (D), where the leader is scaffolding the interpretation of the notation. The statements in context B reflect an opposite position where the students hold aural competency as central.

To take part in, or even to be a central participant of, context F does not require musical literacy. It is, however, needed to participate in the (digitally) extended dispute regarding tune variations.

Even though the statements primarily concern the resources of shared repertoire, these perspectives are bound up with aspects from the dimensions of joint practice and mutual engagement. As such, the statements articulate the nature of the underlying value system and current negotiations. In short, these competences reflect the requirements for participation in the respective community.

Identities

During the Swedish "Folk music wave" in the 80s and 90s, being a traditional musician was loaded with a political dimension, implying an openness toward immigrant musicians and an understanding of the musician as a citizen. This dimension of a *spelman's* identity can be understood as growing out of the musicking approach with democratic ambitions that arose in urban cultural scenes, clearly noticeable in the new types of formalization that organize active folk musicians, for

6 Performances in this case include both concerts, contributing with music at church services, and playing for dancing.

example, RFoD.[7] In the following section, we mainly build on our data from two folk high schools, one attracting older students with a distance course (C) and another recruiting younger students with a full-time course (B).

In our six studied contexts, one of the folk high schools stands out as a context where the civic dimension of learning folk music is present. The ideological history behind the phenomenon of a folk high school underpins the musical activities that take place during the distance course for fiddlers, led by a legendary fiddler and pedagogue. To one of the participants, a reason for being at the course is that it takes place precisely at a folk high school and that this kind of learning environment is by its nature a democratic enterprise:

> . . .to travel here and actually support this activity, that it continues, that is important to me. As a place for Bildung [an institution that promotes education for all], the folkhögskola is threatened by political forces who want to cut the state subventions. That is a huge threat. Then you have to show that this is important. (Informant C:1)

As the average age of the participants at the distance course for fiddlers is rather high, 60 plus, the ideological heritage from the 1980s is still alive and nurtured:

> I think that the folk music wave was very good at emphasizing a resistance against that [xenophobia] by showing that we have musical influences from near and far, and that we love to mix traditional music from different countries – but that trend has disappeared, hasn't it? (Informant C:2)

The question about trends mentioned in the quote above is connected to how folk musicians identify themselves in relation to citizenship; (i) as musicians in a local tradition that strives to survive (as a member of a local Spelmansförbund) or (ii) as citizens striving for social justice, democracy, and inclusion. Ternhag (1996) describes membership in a Spelmansförbund as an important part of what constitutes a fiddler (*spelman*). In our study, the first type of identification is found in context D, the fiddlers' group, where the leader has her roots in a regional Spelmansförbund:

> And he [the informant's fiddle teacher] wanted to find out whether we had a local folk music tradition, and they found a few older spelmän from our region [. . .] The community that we experienced together with the folk dancers, because there were young members too, was significant [. . .] The joy of. . .and belonging to a group that shared an interest, it was incredibly important for my continued interest. It was decisive to me. (Informant C:1)

Keeping a focus on local traditions is typical for the activities of a Spelmansförbund; however, in relation to citizenship, there are different co-existing trends in our material, depending on the context of each case. For example, the young aspiring folk musicians in the full-time course do not place themselves within a community of cultural activists as the older students in the distance course tend to do. In positioning themselves, the younger students have a more apolitical approach toward folk music, mentioning international contacts with musicians from other musical traditions and connections with the jazz field.

The folk high schools in our study are two of many Swedish folk high schools that have developed a music profile. Most of these form part of the "education loop" (Borgström Källen, 2014, p. 286) for music education, preparing for the entrance tests to higher music education. Nylander (2014), in his study based on 50 folk high schools with a music profile, discusses these schools' position as intermediary education institutions, with local game rules and competitive relations. In these relations, value, selection, and career are at stake. Importantly, the original vision of the Swedish folk high school points toward the informal and democratizing qualities of these schools, providing an alternative to formal education. Consequently, the values at stake in these learning contexts balance between the approach toward the idea of "an education for all" versus the claim that there is a need for young folk musicians to gain skills needed for a future as "folk music professionals." As expressed by one of the young students in the full-time course, talking about why he applied to the school to prepare for a musical career:

> I felt that I had been at several other folk high schools before, and played for example Irish folk music. Swedish music mainly because I live here. You travel around [. . .] I did not know that many people who play this kind of music where I come from. So, another "folkis" [nick name for folk high school] where I can really do music and prepare for the entrance tests at one of the Academies of music. (Informant B:4)

At the folk high school offering distance courses, the students are not career oriented. The folk music courses that have been running since 1978 emphasize life-long learning, in line with the original idea of folk high schools as part of the Swedish "folkbildning" tradition. Söderman (2019) refers to former prime minister Olof Palme when describing "folkbildning" as a tool for civic education, promoting democracy, and gaining "insights about the complexity of

7 RFoD, Riksförbundet för folkmusik och dans, [the national association for folk music and dance], started in 1981 and exists as a parallell or alternative to the older Spelmansförbundet. The latter was formed in 1947 to promote folk music and dance, while RFoD's purpose is to strengthen, develop and spread folk- and world music. RFoD has 17,000 members, while Spelmansförbundet with its 23 regional sub-associations has 6,000 members (according to the organizations' respective webpages).

existence" (p. 487). Following this tradition of being a musician in the world, in a society characterized by cultural diversity, is a theme that stands out as a main area of concern to the distance course students:

> The multicultural aspect is extremely important in the music that we gain our influences from. In Sweden today, there are so many large immigrant groups, so we think it is super important that folk music is not kidnaped by a political party and defined as traditional [in the sense of national] and that it should not change. Folk music has always changed, and now the world looks as it does, then the music is there, in its openness. (Informant C:3)

Combined with the larger societal engagement comes a personal duty for the course participants to prioritize an inclusive atmosphere at the nightly jam sessions. In the evenings, the participants gather to share tunes in a large group including fiddlers at varying levels of competence. One of the participants confessed that there have been moments when she would rather have concentrated on in-depth duo or solo playing to develop her own fiddle playing, but that she prioritizes the social dimension of sharing and inviting. To the less experienced, the evening gatherings are truly important: "And that warm caring, it is comforting. As being a person who knows almost no tunes, I still feel included," says one of the learners. There is a shared consciousness about the collaborative aspect of learning that is expressed both in the nightly jams and in the group interviews, pointing toward fundamental dimensions of humanity, mainly a sense of belonging. Being in a community of learners is also emphasized by the students at the folk high school with the full-time course:

> Right now, I am very much in this bubble . . . and I have never before been at a place with so many people interested in the same type of music. So it is optimal to play together with the ones who are here. (Informant B:1)

In the group interview, one of the other students reinforces this statement by talking about how improving your instrumental skills is dependent on the learning environment:

> The bubble that he was talking about is really important to get better at playing your instrument, and to find yourself within the music. It is of very little importance what kind of music we play. It is the environment that matters. (Informant B:3)

The negotiations on what constitutes a *spelman* and on identification as a *spelman*, as illustrated in the voices from our material, touch on a dimension of education that is elaborated by Biesta (2022). In his concept of "a world-centered education," he dissolves the dichotomy between student-centered and curriculum-centered education. In doing so, he promotes the idea that "educational questions are fundamentally existential questions, that is, questions about our existence "in and with" the world [. . .] and not just our existence with ourselves" (p. 91). The examples of the two folk high schools as arenas for folk music education point to learning arenas that, in different ways, strive with, on a metaphorical level, being in the world.

Just as the negotiations on competences in relation to notation in the first node reflect requirements for participation in the communities of our study, the identification processes in the second node indicate issues of exclusion and inclusion. Expanding on the implications of negotiations in the two nodes, in the following, we turn toward the potentials of the analytical tools, as they bring forth the results through our stepwise-deductive induction.

Potentials

As stated in the introduction, the aim of this article is to provide analytical tools with which to understand how meaning is negotiated within instrumental music tuition. The focus here is negotiations of meaning. In our work, we seek to highlight the implicit and explicit connections between the concepts of reification and participation. In the context of the present article, this interplay is understood as relations between competences and identities (reification) and meaningful musical practice (participation), whether that refers to learning, professional performance, or rehearsals within a group of amateur enthusiasts. We also want to say something about how this perspective can be helpful for music teachers to reflect upon their roles and further develop as professionals.

In our continuous analytical process, the theoretical framework has been useful to highlight aspects of the various contexts that are being taken for granted by the insiders. While not always completely beyond reflection, approaches to the themes presented above remain intuitive in everyday undertakings. As Wenger (1998) states, "it is often convenient to act as though meanings are in actions or artifacts themselves." Naturally, we cannot scrutinize the rationale for our actions in every step we take, but it is necessary to take a step back once in a while and reflect upon habitual ways of proceeding. However, this is not an easy process. Even from our vantage point as researchers, it is a continuous struggle.

Our observations and the statements given by the informants have become more meaningful as the empirical material has continued to grow and the connections between competences and the contexts have been more clear to us along the way. In this process, we can discern both differences and similarities. What holds the separate contexts together as a whole, is among other aspects the repertoire. As such, the contexts can be seen as different parts of the same musical genre, with the tunes being reified objects of the Swedish folk music tradition.

However, focusing on the ways that this repertoire is approached, understood, interpreted, and learned reveals diversity. This includes ways of music-making, which implies that different competencies are needed for meaningful participation.

In some cases, the field of practice that is defining the value of competencies is the same as the learning context. For the fiddlers' group, there is a direct relationship between the rehearsals and the performances, and the same is true for professional musicians. In some of the other contexts, for example, the full-time course at a folk high school and the music academy, the desirable competencies are partially defined by the demands of other contexts. Such as folk high school is directed toward the music academy, and the music academy is directed toward the professional scene in the educational loop. As the statement made by the teacher in A shows, this is an area of debate. This is both due to the various understandings of the present state of the field and to the ever-changing landscape of musical practice. What is desirable at the present moment may be on the way to losing its relevance. For the next generation, there are other viable paths to take as a music professional, some of which lay outside the intuitive assumptions found within musical education. In her discussion on meaningful music education and projects of love, Silverman (2020) asks us to:

> [c]onsider the many musical activities one can pursue as an instrumentalist, depending upon the musical-social practices involved: performing, composing, improvising, arranging, conducting/leading, recording, producing, musicing and dancing/moving, musicing and worshiping, and more. An instrumentalist can become a coach and teach one or more musics to others, whether formally or informally. An instrumentalist can write about music, lecture about music, collect artifacts that surround musical ways of being (e.g., recordings, letters from famous instrumentalists), read about music, discuss music, argue about music, and so forth. (Silverman, 2020, p. 8)

This resonates with Becker's (2008) concept of art worlds being a building block of sociology of possibilities. This, in turn, implies that music education ought to be in close contact with the field of practice, not just as a way to calibrate their curriculum to meet current demands, but also to make these possibilities visible.

For meaningful music education, it is necessary to see the relation between the competences valued and cultivated during lessons, and the competences needed to be a part of the community of practice. In our material, we have seen the connections between identity, competences, and educational contexts. It is interesting to note that at both folk high schools, the teachers are active during lessons. In the evenings, however, the students themselves meet in active groups of sharing and developing knowledge, maintaining the bond between self and others that contributes to a sense of meaning (Silverman, 2020). In these respective contexts, *mutual engagement* is expanded to include not only the teachers versus the learners but between the learners themselves. The folk high school context also facilitates the dimension of *shared repertoire*, by providing a free space for tunes and competences to be shared between the community members. The dimension of *joint enterprise*, shaping the purpose and goal of the activity is within educational institutions often a problematic area. At the folk high schools (B and C) and in the *Spelmanslag* (D), the joint enterprise is visible in the material in different ways. In the *Spelmanslag* (D), there is an understanding of notation as a tool for inclusion in a learning context of amateurs who come and go to the rehearsals but still want to perform. At the folk high school with the distance course (C), notation is more or less avoided, and oral transmission is promoted, connected to the idea of learning from and with peers.

In this article, our empirical data mainly focus on the communities under negotiation at the folk high schools and in the *Spelmanslag*. At higher music institutions, the overarching goals are set by curricula, state policies, and university strategies, possibly affecting the agency of teachers to work with the joint enterprise. Nevertheless, with this slice of data, we can point toward the implications for the teacher's role, when focusing on meaning negotiations as a central aspect of instrumental music tuition. As Wenger (1998, p. 145) points out, "Issues of identity . . . are inseparable from issues of practice, community, and meaning." At this point, we see different options, possibilities, and maybe hindrances for teachers to actively reflect and act on in what ways their own teaching relates to or enhances identity formations that allow meaningful learning to flourish.

Along this line, the "humble manifesto for care and compassion in music education research" (MacDonald, 2022), touches upon two points, relevant to our discussion. The first one emphasizes the need to fully integrate human universal musicality into music education research. The second mentions the development of "healthy" musical identities as an aim of music education. In our material, we see amateur musicians contributing to meaningful negotiations with dimensions that are of importance to other communities than the rather small communities that they belong to. In a Beckerian way, our research design has allowed us to include people (amateurs) who are not always considered as important, to inform the wider field of instrumental music tuition.

There is nothing in the theory of communities of practice that implies that CoPs are inherently good (or bad). A framework emphasizes that CoP serves as a productive model for meaningful learning, only when the tension between experience and competence in the communities remains dynamic: "The interaction of experience and competence is a fertile ground for learning, if the two remain in tension. If there is too much congruence, practice becomes stale and in the worst case boring" (Wenger, 1998, p. 214).

With this in mind, we lean toward our two nodes of meaning negotiations to reflect on how our conceptual playing with tradition in Swedish folk music communities might be of interest to educators and learners in other communities, just by providing new ideas. As indicated in our material, there is often a tendency in a community to stay isolated, as in the "bubbles" at the small folk high schools. In such "bubbles," the teachers and learners are not easily provided with tools to imagine what could be meaningful in the future. Any community runs the risk of stagnation, a risk that can be counteracted by giving attention to the main aspects of a functioning community: ".a well-functioning community of practice is a good context to explore radically new insights without becoming fools or stuck in some dead end" (Wenger, 1998, p. 214).

In focusing on meaningful negotiations, we have hopefully brought to the surface possibilities for change as imagined by post-colonial thinking, where negotiations on differences are of vital importance. With this overarching theoretical lens follows that music education could be imagined as a "scene" where societal challenges are dramatized and made visible, thus providing new models for breaking down walls between the "bubbles" described above.

Negotiation of meaning is ongoing and open-ended. With this follows possibilities for those who want to see change. To move forward and to change the current state of affairs, reification and participation offer separate but interdependent possibilities for action. While participation offers possibilities to "seek, cultivate, or avoid specific relationships with specific people" (Wenger, 1998, p. 91), processes of reification provide opportunities to "produce or promote specific artifacts to focus future negotiation of meaning in specific ways" (Wenger, 1998, p. 91).

In a particular community of practice, one or the other path to change will be more accessible than the other. An individual's ability to pursue change will probably align more with one of the paths.

To finalize, we conclude that the meaning of music-making/practice/learning is not inherent in the music itself. It is constructed in the dynamic between the teacher, the learner, and the community. Learning music can be understood as *a tuition of musicking* as much as a matter of skill acquisition. The educational setting depends on different communities, and the community may change, hence the definition of the required competence will change. Since competences are a requirement for participation, the acquisition of these competences—such as the communicative art of bowing described in the opening—is necessary for the formation of musical identity, which ultimately is at the core of meaningful learning communities of practice.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

Ethical review and approval was not required for the study on human participants in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Written informed consent was not provided. Due to the open design of the project, and informal character of data gathering the ethical review process has not been possible to conduct before this stage. The emphasis of the article is on the theoretical perspective rather than the empirical data. Furthermore, the article is based on the initial phase on our ongoing study, where an ethical review process is upcoming.

Author contributions

Both authors have designed and conducted the studies, conducted the analysis, wrote the manuscript and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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