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# Towards offering equal learning opportunities for female students in popular music ensemble education: relate, respond, and re-do

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## ABSTRACT

Earlier research has stated that there is a risk that traditional gender roles are conserved in non-formal popular music education, which might challenge teachers when it comes to offering equal learning opportunities. This article presents results from an interview study regarding the situation of female electric guitarists in popular music ensemble education, in upper secondary specialist programmes in Sweden. To approach the teacher role, phenomenological *didaktik* was used as a theoretical starting point. The specific aim of the article is to describe the implications of experiences among electric guitar playing girls regarding *how the teacher may encourage equal opportunities for musical learning in popular ensemble education*. Five female students were interviewed, ranging in age from 16 to 25 years old. The interviews were transcribed and analysed in a hermeneutical phenomenological manner. The analysis resulted in three themes that – in terms of teachers' *didaktik* choices – related to equal opportunities for musical learning. These three themes are awareness when it comes to *what to relate to*, *what to take responsibility for*, and *what to do*. The discussion concerns how phenomenological *didaktik* could help to assure that teachers encourage guitarists equally, regardless of sex, in situations of popular music ensemble education.

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*didaktik*

## Introduction

Simone de Beauvoir's (1949) statement 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' concerns the ways in which human beings are ascribed gendered roles related to their biological sex in cultural, social and educational settings. Such processes are still taking place, not least in the music industry (Kelley 2019), and, according to current research, music educational practices are no exception. Not least, it has been shown that there is a risk that traditional gender roles are conserved in non-formal popular music education (Abramo 2011; Borgström-Källén 2014; Ferm Almqvist 2017; 2019). It also seems that the risk increases in upper secondary schools, partly because students are expected to identify more strongly with one main instrument; and instruments are gendered per se (Borgström-Källén and Lindgren 2016). To demand and break such processes, the responsibility of the teacher has been accentuated in studies focusing on non-formal music teaching (Folkestad 2006; Onsrud 2013), as well as in studies concerning gender issues, gender sensitivity, and equal learning opportunities within (music) education (Ferm Almqvist et al. 2017; Auhadeeva, Yarmakeev, and Aukhadeev 2015; Bergman 2009; Bergonzi 2014; Björck 2011; Garrett 2012; Gould 2007). It can

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be stated that development of gendered behaviours has been given space when the teacher steps back, as is expected in non-formal music education (Ferm Almqvist 2017; Veblen 2012). Other studies, on the other hand, show that the risk is still there even when the teacher is present, as choices seem to be steered more by gendered traditions connected to musical genres than by actual formulations in steering documents (Asp 2015; Borgström-Källén 2014). It therefore seems important to gain a close view of the lived experiences of students who have chosen a non-traditional instrument in non-formal educational settings, in order to say something about teachers' responsibility in relation to equal opportunities for musical learning.

Therefore, this article presents an analysis of interview material produced in a study focusing the situation of female electric guitarists in popular music ensemble education in upper secondary specialist programmes in Sweden. Teachers' choices, actions and responsibilities in relation to expressed learning possibilities among the girls, have been viewed from a phenomenological *didaktik* perspective (Ferm Thorgersen 2009; Meyer-Drawe 1986), as a way to shed light on possibilities for equal prerequisites for learning. *Didaktik* is defined as the theory of teaching and related learning based on the classical thinking of Rathke and Comenius (1999). Unlike the academic discipline of education, or pedagogy, *didaktik* concerns teaching and intended learning in organised settings, such as schools, and it has developed in close connection to teacher education (Kansanen 1995). And unlike curriculum studies, which is focused on essential development and aims to guarantee equal content and methods for learning, independent of geographical or social context (Uljens 2017), *didaktik* mainly focuses on frames for existential development and pays greater attention to teacher responsibility. Phenomenological *didaktik* concerns teachers' choices based on the philosophical statement that the lived experience of a specific subject constitutes both the starting point for and the process of learning. It thereby becomes relevant to take students' lived experience of ensemble education as a starting point for investigating the ways teachers might could approach the element of equal prerequisites for musical learning in current steering documents.

The specific aim of the article is to describe the implications of experiences among electric guitar playing girls, regarding *how the teacher may encourage equal opportunities for musical learning in popular music ensemble education*.

The regionalised situation for the study is ensemble-playing courses within an upper secondary school music specialist programme (Swedish National Agency for Education 2011). First, the formulated learning outcomes for the specific course are presented, to show what knowledge all students are to develop in ensemble education. There follows a description of phenomenological *didaktik* as a theoretical tool for understanding, followed by a methodological section. The main section of the article includes a presentation of and reflection upon the results of the hermeneutical phenomenological analysis of interview material. Finally, the article concludes with a discussion in which the results are related to the chosen theoretical framework.

### **Learning outcomes in ensemble courses**

Since 2011, curricula and syllabuses for each subject and course, including a grading system in seven steps (A–F/–), were implemented in Swedish upper secondary schools.<sup>1</sup> In the spirit of neoliberalism and the logic of individuality, the aim was to make clear what each student should learn, and become able to manage, through clear formulations regarding *aim, content, goals* and grading criteria for each course. Teachers are expected to take all parts of the syllabus into account when planning, performing and evaluating their teaching. The 'clear' goals of one ensemble course – independent of prerequisites such as musical background, ethnical origin, or sex – were formulated as follows (Swedish National Agency for Education 2011).

The students should develop:

- ability to make music with an instrument or vocally, by notes, or by ear, and to use an artistic and musical expression.
- knowledge about music, concepts and stylistic features from different times and cultures.

- ability to improvise.
- knowledge about musical rehearsing, individually and collectively, and ability to take responsibility for one's own musical development.
- ability to value, co-operate and take responsibility in musical performance for and with an audience.

For the purposes of the current study, the most significant thing about these goals is that all students in the ensemble course should get the opportunity to learn and become able to handle both individual and social competences through action and reflection in the ensemble. When it comes to variation in genre, and to the kind of musical skills students are expected to acquire, the formulations are quite unclear and open to a multitude of interpretations. In any case, the task of the teacher is to offer all students opportunities to develop towards these goals. And, as we can see, there is an element of personal teacher responsibility for their actions, and thereby choices, in relation to content and form of teaching.

Hence, the theory of *didaktik* becomes relevant, since, as mentioned above, it concerns teachers' choices of content, methods and approach, together with how the choices are motivated and what consequences they generate (Hopmann 2007; Kansanen 1995). The current study focuses on the consequences of teachers' choices connected to equal learning opportunities among upper secondary music students. These consequences – experienced and expressed by the female students – can point to new informed choices that could be made by ensemble teachers in upper secondary ensemble education.

### **Phenomenological didaktik**

From a phenomenological point of view, it can be stated that human beings experience the world as bodily subjects, and internalise the world and make meaning through perception and reflection. Hence, the only way to develop knowledge and understanding about the world is through human being's lived experiences. Lived time, lived space, lived relations, and lived body, are all examples of lived experiences that influence learning (Van Manen 1997). Another important concept is co-experience, which implies that human beings' experience of the world includes more meaning than shows itself in the actual moment of experience (cf Kroksmark 2007). In other words, the world appears larger than is possible to perceive through the senses. Such a view of humans' relation to the world implicates broad and diverse expectations regarding what can possibly happen in a teaching situation. Hence, it is possible to say that there are no fixed rules for the same.

In addition, the world is seen as intersubjective (Merleau-Ponty 1945; Bengtsson 1998); human beings are closely intertwined with both things and other human beings in the world. Consequently, the sharing of experiences becomes crucial for meaning making.

A phenomenological view of teaching and learning, or *didaktik*, implies that lived experiences of the participants – teachers as well as students – constitute what is possible to learn in what ways (Bengtsson 2004, 1989; Kroksmark 2007; Ferm 2006). Teaching content can be seen as based on teachers' explicit or implicit choices (Bengtsson 1998), with the external frames for these choices constituted by curricula and teaching material. How the choices are made also depends on teachers' preconditions, values and interpretations of frames, as well as on participating students. Pre-conditions and interpretations are not entirely subjective: they may be said to be based on the teacher's being-in-the-world. Through bodily experience of the world knowledge base, personality and habits are internalised. It is thus possible to view teachers' interpretations, values and actions as personal as well as general. The wider frame for a teacher's teaching is the entirety of his or her life, which constitutes a pre-condition for the work. The inner frames are neither fixed nor universal (Bengtsson 1998).

Teacher's *didaktik*-related choices are made within a specific teaching context, based on earlier teaching experiences. These choices are made in the meeting with the world – constituted by humans and things, students and an intended teaching content. In planning, performing and assessing

teaching the teacher is directed towards the world in specific ways, at the same time as the world reveals itself to the teacher in specific ways. Being in the world as teacher carries with it an expectation of responsibility to allow students encounter and internalise music as teaching content, in this case the in the specific context of upper secondary ensemble courses. Teacher responsibility also involves showing curiosity about differences, sharing one's own experiences and encouraging students to share theirs, and inviting participation and mutual interest. As Meyer-Drawe (1986) might express it, it is about letting oneself be surprised, taking what happens in the moment and engaging the students. The perspective in this study is lived experiences among female students, which has implications for the responsibility of the teacher.

As already mentioned, phenomenological *didaktik* is based on a way of thinking in which the sharing of lived experience is seen as crucial for learning to take place (Meyer-Drawe 1986; Kroksmark 1989, 1996; Ferm 2004, 2006). The main task for the teacher in this *didaktik* tradition is to let students make and share experiences, regarding the specific themes that constitute the content of the particular learning activity (Kroksmark 1989; Meyer-Drawe 1986). Phenomenological *didaktik* demands that the teacher create an atmosphere of mutual curiosity and respect, and ensure that different experiences are constantly shared, valued and discussed, which in turn contributes to reflective learning and challenged traditions (Ferm Thorgersen 2009; Kroksmark 2007). Such an approach to teaching and learning demands that the teacher is open about and aware of individual students, the language that is used, and the multi-dimensional nature of musical content, as well as knowing how to respond to and take care of students' initiatives and imagination (Ferm 2004; 2006).

Musical experience in this setting can be described as a meeting with the world in its musical form, where an intersubjective creation of meaning takes place and music is internalised (Alexandersson 1994; Ferm 2004). When music constitutes the theme of education, and at the same time exists between, within and around the human beings who make and learn music together, the subjects are intertwined with each other and the music (Ferm Thorgersen 2013). A phenomenological view of musical learning implies that human beings are parts of the musical world, and musical learning takes place through musical embodiment in the social setting.

The interaction between teachers and students can be understood as a meeting between their perspectives or as a fusion of their horizons of understanding related to chosen themes of musical content (Sainsbury 1992). Earlier experiences of music are recreated and developed. Based on phenomenological *didaktik*, teaching concerns how musical experience can be offered to the students. This implies that curiosity about, and respect for, the experiences of a multitude of students in teaching and learning situations are crucial, because such an approach can offer a variety of perspectives, values and ways of making music (Meyer-Drawe 1986). The teacher as a possibility maker, can have several different roles – instructor, pathfinder, guide and discussion partner – in relation to the student's earlier experiences, imaginations and preconditions, depending on what the situation demands. From this point of view, the teacher needs a holistic reflected music educational competence in order to offer the students as meaningful experiences as possible. Such competence includes openness to individual needs, and awareness when it comes to *didaktik*-related choices connected to the curricula (Ferm 2004, 2006).

## Method

In order to grasp lived experiences of being a female electric guitarist in ensemble education, associative interviews (Ferm Almqvist & Christophersen 2017) 2015; Kvale and Brinkman 2008) were chosen as a way to encourage engaged stories based on different aspects of the specific education. As electric guitar playing students are relatively rare in upper secondary music programmes, the first step was to find them, which was done through contacting teachers and students with relations to such institutions and ask for contact details. This resulted in that five female electric guitar playing students, who were currently or had been previously enrolled in upper secondary music specialist programmes, could be interviewed. Both the instrument and the ensemble education context were

chosen as they are both traditionally connected to male behaviour and traditions, which made the female experiences specifically interesting. The associative interviews were stimulated by a mind map, where the interviewees' earlier experiences of ensemble playing, the role of the teacher, learning outcomes, different ensemble roles, and thoughts about the future were connected to the phenomenon of the study: experiences of ensemble playing education at upper secondary level.

The interviews, which lasted for about one hour each, were recorded and transcribed. One interview took place in my kitchen, one in my office, two in cafes, and one in a meeting room at one of the schools before an ensemble lesson. My own lived experiences of teaching ensemble courses in lower and upper secondary schools took place between 1990 and 2000. Together with supervising in courses within music teacher training related to practice, I have some insight, but enough distance to be open for the lived experiences of the girls. It could be accentuated, that the fact, that two of the participants had finished upper secondary two respectively six years before the interviews can influence the results, as well as that one of them has studied gender theory during that time. I value the material as worthy for the analysis despite of that, but it can be relevant for the reader to have in mind.

The material was analysed in a phenomenological hermeneutic way (Van Manen 1997). With the specific aim of the current study in mind, the analysis where conducted in four steps, namely comprised naïve reading, structured analysis, comprehensive understanding, and the formulation of results in a holistic manner. In other words, the interview transcripts were first read and viewed several times in order to grasp the meaning as a whole, with the experiences of the students foregrounded. In this phase opportunities and challenges regarding learning of ensemble and guitar playing among the interviewees became visible. This naïve reading was followed by a phase of structural analysis, which can be seen as a way of identifying and formulating themes. In this phase opportunities for testing emerged concepts were provided, based on the naïve reading of the female experiences in relation to possible actions and responsibilities of the teacher. A theme is in this setting seen as a thread of meaning that penetrates parts of a text in the process of conveying essential meanings of the girls' lived experience. The process was finished when the themes validated and deepened the naïve reading. Then the main themes and constituting aspects were summarised and reflected upon in relation to the aim, the theory of phenomenological didaktik, and the context of the study. Finally, the results were formulated in language that includes words and expressions used by the participants. This last step included finding holistic examples that showed the different sides of the phenomenon in concrete ways.

### ***Description of participants***

The participants were chosen based on availability, as female electric guitar students are rather unusual in upper secondary specialist programmes, and on a desire to include different geographic settings, different kinds of schools, and girls at different ages. In the following brief descriptions of the participants, their current situations and their experiences of music education and ensemble playing demonstrate the mentioned variation.

Lucy was 20 years old at the time of the interview; she had finished upper secondary school one year earlier and her main instruments were electric guitar and trumpet. Before she started her upper secondary studies, she was enrolled in a music programme, including ensemble playing, at a lower secondary school. During the year before the interview, she had studied gender theory, held different temporary jobs, played in different bands, and released her first EP with her own band.

Anna was 25 years old at the time of the interview. (She is the only one whose education has not followed the policy documents of Lgy11). She, too, had studied at a music specialist programme in both lower and upper secondary education. Her main instrument was electric guitar, her second was classical guitar, and she also played violin and electric bass. After secondary school, Anna studied for two years at a folk high school, specialising in rock music; she had also completed four years of a five-year music teacher programme at the time of the interview. She had had one semester of sick leave,



caused by high pressure and stress. Anna has played in several band projects connected to her education.

Maria was 17 years old at the time of the interview. She was enrolled in a general upper secondary programme and played in jazz ensemble consisting of female musicians in the municipal culture school. Maria has played acoustic guitar since she was ten years old and was enrolled in a specialist music programme in lower secondary school. In the ninth grade, she switched from acoustic guitar to electric.

Alice was 16 years old and had enrolled in a music specialist programme in the first grade. She went to a specialist programme for music, dance and drama in lower secondary, as a dance student. She had played acoustic guitar since she was six years old, and when she decided to apply for the upper secondary specialist programme she started to play the electric guitar. She had never played together with others before she started upper secondary.

Evelyn was 16 years old and had also enrolled in a specialist music programme. She played the acoustic guitar and started to play electric guitar when she decided to apply to the upper secondary programme. She had never played together with others before she started upper secondary school.

In the presentation of results, the quotations should be seen as examples of expressions that represent different aspects of a theme. They are not connected to any specific participant, partly for the sake of confidentiality, and partly because in most cases there is no reason to relate specific expressions to specific backgrounds. Where such connections are valued as important, they are made explicit.

## Results

The results of my analysis of expressed lived experiences of ensemble education among female electric guitarists are presented in three themes concerning teachers' *didaktik* choices related to equal opportunities for musical learning. These three themes are awareness when it comes to *what to relate to*, *what to take responsibility for*, and *what to do*.

### *What to relate to*

One important way in which teachers in popular music ensemble education can contribute to ensuring equal opportunities for musical learning is by knowing what to relate to when including female instrumentalists in ensemble education. Among other things, consciously or unconsciously, teachers relate to the experiences and opinions of female electric guitarists, and this influences their teaching. In the analysis of the material, crucial aspects for teachers to be aware of were the girls' *motives for choice of electric guitar*, *experiences of (lacking) role models*, *impetus to be the best*, *relations to chosen genres*, and *experiences of being the second musical sex*.

### *Motives for choosing electric guitar*

Girls' choice of electric guitar as their main instrument was either driven by fathers who were musicians or played the electric guitar themselves, or by the girls' own interest, which originated in ensemble playing at a music programme at lower secondary level, where all students were invited to try all traditional popular music ensemble instruments. Complementary driving factors were the presence of available instruments, uninterested male siblings, (which made their fathers engage in their daughters instead) supportive families, supportive male teachers, supportive friends and, in some cases, an impulse to do something 'different'.

When starting upper secondary school, the interviewees underline that students feel forced to identify themselves with an instrument. To be able to apply to the programme, becoming students have to choose a main instrument and show their instrumental skills. Some of the participants took



extra lessons from skilled (male) electric guitarists and practiced several hours a day to be equipped for the audition.

### ***Role models and the lack of them***

The lack of female role models became evident in all the interviews, which is also something that teachers have to be aware of. One of the participants expressed that she had wanted to play the electric guitar since she was 10 years old, but she couldn't imagine herself 'playing rock licks' and she didn't know (about) any women who played the electric guitar. She played the acoustic guitar for six years before she dared to apply for playing the electric one, after having tried it out in the lower secondary music programme. The lack of role models appears both outside and inside school. The musical idols of the interviewees mentioned included, for example, Jimi Hendrix and The Beatles, but some mentioned that they searched for female role models and liked to listen to them. In the families, some of the fathers are mentioned as musical models.

Yes, I have always played the guitar, my father is a guitarist kind of, singer and song writer, so he plays the guitar a lot, my mother played classical guitar, they met here at this school, so she plays as well, but not seriously at all, she is an upper secondary teacher, she plays in the summer, Taube [a Swedish traditional troubadour], and sings kind of...

Within the school all instrumental teachers and instrumentalists were male, but the ensemble teachers were in some cases female. There are examples of female and male ensemble teachers who seem to encourage equal prerequisites for musical learning, but the interviewees also relate issues that strengthen the sense of a lack of role models. For example, female ensemble teachers focused on the (female) singers in their teaching or expressed incompetence regarding amplifiers and other technical things. As none of the girls' instrumental teachers in these five cases were female, it follows that they did not serve as role model musicians either. Traditional ideas about what instruments should be included in an ensemble restricted the view of the female teachers, who tended to focus on traditional instruments, such as French horn, which were often also those they themselves played. The material showed that even female ensemble teachers who weren't singers often sang, thereby strengthening the view that women should be (bad) singers. With the exception of one girl who played in a female jazz band, all of the interviewees were rather alone in playing traditionally male-gendered instruments in their schools.

### ***Impetus to be the best – or something else***

A common thread among the interviewees was that their goal of excellence: they wanted to be the best instrumentalists and ensemble musicians, and in most cases, they also wanted to have good grades in all subjects and be the best social friends as well. It also became obvious that the girls were generally aware that they put high demands on themselves, and this is also something to which the teachers need to relate.

I don't think ... in one way it's healthy to be pressed, otherwise I wouldn't develop, it would be, ok, but not more. So, I've got to have some pressure. But it's just me interpreting, because I know my male friend who plays the guitar, he doesn't interpret it that way at all, so it's me. I have always been like that in school as well, I have to get A [the highest grade] in all subjects as well. Somehow it has become important for me to show the teachers that I achieve what is expected.

All the interviewees expressed that they got more pressed, stressed and nervous when they started upper secondary school, and that they couldn't say no to anything, musical, academic or social, without being viewed as weird.

When it comes to the electric guitar skills, the material shows the demand to over-prove oneself. Expressions like '... and I will become good', 'to play fastest and nicest', 'I can't be bad', 'to know the music before the lesson starts', 'Do I dare to be the best guitarist?', are common in the interviews. All

the participants relate that they practice before the ensemble lessons because they want to be seen as skilled and don't want to fail in front of the others, with whom they feel they must compete.

Yes. Well, I don't want to sound bad, and that can happen when you practice.

They also showed awareness about how to show skills as an instrumentalist and what values are agreed upon; I will return to this below. The older participants witness that they started to accept not being the best all the time, after they quit upper secondary.

Better to have fun and learn at the same time than think that you have to be the best from the beginning.

As ensemble musicians, the interviewees showed in different ways that they accepted a great deal of responsibility, and that they expected the ensemble lesson to be a place for common learning. They took initiatives and acted in ways that contributed to the musical wholeness, and they did not experience the guys as doing this, at least not in the same way. The girls expressed that they tried to adapt to everyone else, they came with ideas for how to share tasks and put the music together, and they filled the gaps, for example by playing the bass when that was needed, all in contrast to what they experienced to be the behaviour of the male participants in the ensemble. They expressed that they wanted to make the result sound good.

I don't want to perform anything that doesn't sound good.

One way of showing skills was perceived as to contribute to the musical wholeness, which some of them perceived as more available to them than, for example, playing solos in the 'right' way.

Even in other school subjects almost all of the interviewees wanted to be good and have high grades. They went to all classes in all subjects and had high demands on themselves. They described feeling stressed – again in contrast to how they perceived the boys.

Boys bunked to have time to practice.

In addition to this the interviewees expressed that they felt they had to be social and hang out with friends in their spare time. They felt responsibility to gather the herd, and to have good relations with everyone. It was mentioned that boys could be sitting home and practice a whole weekend, but if girls did that they were defined as unsocial.

Doesn't she have a life?

It becomes clear that these girls are influenced by the result-orientation and the logic of individualism that plague education of today to rather high degree.

### ***Relation to genre(s)***

It became clear in the interviews that jazz, blues, slick and fusion music constituted the agreed-upon content of ensemble playing in upper secondary schools ensemble education, which should be relevant for teachers to reflect upon. The interviewees related to this in different ways: as something meaningful (educational), as something challenging (fun), or as something taken for granted and inflicted (frustrating). It was expressed that the skills needed in these genres (which must be mastered to obtain high grades) are being able to play complicated chord progressions and complicated rhythmic patterns, and especially being able to improvise over the same, which demands technique when it comes to fast scales and jazzy licks. It was expressed that 'the nerds', in most cases, were given space within the agreed upon genres, and that other ways of being good were perceived as less valued.

I think I play well, I don't want to do it in any other way. But according to the others I truly play badly.

When most of the girls played in other bands, outside or inside school, they choose genres like country, indie-pop, and blues.

### ***Invisibility and the demand to claim space – experiences of being the second musical sex***

‘Find something to play on the trumpet instead.’ As a fourth guitar they didn’t mind what I played. I was never the first guitarist.

The material presented various signs indicating the position of the girls as the second musical sex. The position was strengthened and maintained both by the surroundings and by the girls themselves, which should be important for ensemble teachers to relate to in aware ways. The positions also initiated a demand to claim space, instead of being given space.

They [the boys] dare to claim the space and get even more.

The diminishing of the female musical students took place in practice situations and in the actual ensemble occasions, but also in other places in school.

The interviewees related that they mostly practiced at home, or if they practiced in schools that they did it as quietly as possible. They practiced without an amplifier, and avoided rooms with windows or bad soundproofing.

No one should hear me making mistakes.

Girls didn’t practice in official spaces: ‘It would feel so ridiculous to sit there and play, to show off.’ But in some of the schools that was a common habit among male guitarists. Sound checks and the ensemble room while waiting for the lesson to start, were other spaces mentioned as those where male instrumentalists practiced in public.

I feel I can play guitar just the way I want, but not in that way, to ‘style’.

The interviewees expressed that it is in front of the other (male) guitarists that they want to succeed – that they don’t want to play badly or fail.

Boys have always been better guitarists, maybe not better, but more appreciated, so you want to accomplish in front of the boys.

What the teacher thinks is perceived as less important than the boys’ views. The interviewees explained that one reason for that their shyness or nervousness grew at the upper secondary level was that they met other electric guitarists there, and the expectations of nice solos got higher. The interviewee who played in a female ensemble expressed that she and her band members were afraid when they were to play for other bands at the same school, which included male instrumentalists. In a way, it can be stated that the interviewees gave the male instrumentalists the right to judge them. What other female instrumentalists think was not frightening at all.

No, like, when I think about it, she is not, I don’t feel as much pressure from her, and that’s not because she is lousy or anything ...

In the material, the ensemble teachers seem to treat the interviewees as musicians to a rather high degree, and there are teachers who encourage claiming of space, not least when the students go into the expected (educational) genre role. But the interviewees also reported specific instances of behaviour by teachers that contributed to their secondary status. First, their effort at creating musical wholeness were not seen or appreciated. They were often given easier tasks than the boys on no grounds. Even the important aspect of assignment to a teacher was made based on assumptions arising from gender: one student was assigned to a classical guitar teacher based on the assumption that as a female that would be the kind of guitar she’d want to play. Finally, some comments from teachers were perceived as explicitly diminishing:

‘You [female electric guitarists] play so nice and quiet!’ even if we played complicated bebop licks.

Even in the ensemble situations, as we already have seen, the female guitarists also diminished themselves, by focusing on the whole rather than their own solos, for example, or standing in to

play the bass when needed. They mentioned that they perceived that the males wanted to take precedence, and didn't think about lifting others, as some of the girls expressed that they did.

The good ones claimed their space directly.

The analysis of the material implies that the girls perceived that the boys were viewed as better and more skilled, and that such a view is hard to change. Even between the classmates, girls were treated differently compared to their male colleagues.

I hang around a lot with a guy who plays the bass. He approached me and another friend, a guitarist. He approached us, and we are friends, all the three of us. And he said, to my friend; 'Do you want to come and play for a while?' or 'Have you heard this?' And it's not like my friend is a hundred times better than me. That's not the case.

It also became clear that the interviewees lived constantly with the fact that boys often are perceived as musicians, while girls are perceived as girls. Whether or not they were asked to play in a situation outside the ensemble class, they had to wonder:

Am I asked just because I am a girl? Don't they know what I am able to play, and don't ask me because I am a girl?

In other words, they both felt that they were undervalued because of sex, and overvalued because of sex.

### ***What to take responsibility for***

The interviews with female electric guitarists brought into focus some of the responsibilities teachers have for assuring opportunities for equal learning. These include *creating safe surroundings*, *assuring musical learning for all*, *showing different ways of being a guitarist*, and for *how to respond*.

#### ***Create safe surroundings***

The clear tendency in the material for the interviewees to show that they had high demands on themselves, had performing anxiety, and were afraid of being valued by the male electric guitarists and therefore didn't want to fail in public, points to the responsibility of teachers to contribute to creating a safe atmosphere, which could also strengthen the self esteem among the girls. All the girls felt safe with their ensemble teachers; but while some appreciated their teachers awareness when it came to equality, others found their teachers lacked self-reflection. The only really safe milieu expressed in the material was the female ensemble, but is that really the way to go? The interviewees ask for a safe space where mistakes are allowed and where good relations between all students/instrumentalists are taken for granted.

#### ***Equal opportunities for musical learning***

One thing for which teachers must take responsibility is that all students develop towards the goals for the ensemble course, which, as we saw in the formulation of the syllabus criteria, is generally to become functional skilled ensemble musicians and leaders. But, as stated earlier, the interviewees report that the teachers emphasise the leader role rather than good ensemble playing. To learn to play solos and improvise, and to embody the role of a guitarist in an ensemble, requires claiming space in the agreed-upon genre. Another aspect is that the interviewees felt that they had to know how and what to play before they entered the ensemble situation, which implies that teachers also have responsibility to make the ensemble room an arena for musical learning, and not for musical prestige. To take the responsibility for co-playing on common ground could be one way of offering equal opportunities for musical learning. Such responsibility includes ensuring that all students are seen as musicians who are able and expected to learn to play together, and that ideas, wishes and imaginations from all students are taken into account.

There has been a tendency for teachers to take a step back, not least in non-formal popular music settings, but the reported experiences of the interviewees clearly show the need for teacher intervention when it comes to engagement and sharing of responsibility and tasks. When the interviewees who had quit upper secondary looked back at their time in upper secondary, they stated that they were too young and immature to take responsibility, and that they had been given too much freedom from teachers who thought of them as adults. It became obvious that their freedom was limited by other forces, connected to gendered traditions, which the teachers might have influenced. In the cases where the teachers were more present and guiding, the girls perceived that they were treated more equally, even if there still were aspects of unequal sharing of responsibility and teachers' attention. Some of the interviewees tried to make their teachers aware, while others avoided talking about it, even if they saw and understood the structural problem.

### *Showing the different ways of being a guitarist*

The lack of role models, and the rather exclusive agreed-upon genre, together with some of the approaches of the teachers connected to the sex of the guitarists imply that teachers have a responsibility to show the different ways of being an electric guitarist. This responsibility includes acting with awareness about traditional gender roles.

### *Response*

The way a teacher responds – to students, their musical expressions, and their initiatives – showed to be a vitally important part of creating equal learning opportunities.

One of the interviewees said: 'To be treated as a loser makes you a loser and vice versa'. This comment was responding to experiences of being given overly easy tasks, or to the low expectations based on the interviewees' sex, expressed by teachers and classmates. Others reported that they had to achieve an a much higher level to get positive response from their teachers and classmates.

When he says that I play 'nicely' and the other guitarist get to hear: 'God what a nice solo' or 'Hell, you are so good' a couple of times during an ensemble lesson. It would have been one thing if I was less good than him, but well, I am not silly, I know that I am not. We are both guitarists, and I know how he plays.

Other expressions imply that 'behaving laddish' makes the girls heard. The interviewees have accepted some of the expectations when it comes to behave as an (male) electric guitarist, but they are aware that they don't want to be perceived as 'laddish'. This can be a matter of refusing the 'patriarchal jazzy musical style' or avoiding t-shirts with a 'Fender' logo, or deciding to wear a skirt at a gig. How teachers respond to typical expected electric guitar behaviours is important. It is even important for them to reflect upon how they respond when they meet a female electric guitarist the first time.

When they got to know me, they didn't reflect upon my sex, I think, but the first reaction was always connected to my sex.

Response is not only about how teachers behaviours toward students, but also about the focus of their attention. Some of the participants expressed that the teachers were directed to the male instrumentalists to a higher degree than toward the female ones, and that the female teachers primarily turned toward the singers.

The interviewees deeply valued the response of their classmates, and they wanted to get credit from a teacher in front of the classmates. Teachers thus have a responsibility for the way in which feedback is given between the students.

And they give more appreciation to the boys, I try not to focus upon that, I have another impetus. But it demands ... like, he can play some pentatonic scale, and get applause kind of. It feels like it is hard for them to say that I play well. And I, I really say when I think that they do something good.

To guarantee aware response giving between classmates could be a way to encourage girls to believe in themselves and not be dependent on the response from the boys.

Finally, it is important to evaluate what kinds of musical skills get an appreciative response. The girls reported that some skills were more highly valued than others, and that they are connected to specific genres (even if that is not written out in the syllabus). For example, they perceived that being good at many things was less highly valued than a nice improvised solo over a complicated line of chords.

### **What to do**

This last theme elaborates upon the things a teacher in ensemble education can do to encourage development of guitarists independent of sex, drawing on the discussion above and further material from the interviews. The analysis of the material shed light on the activities of *making space and offering possibilities for growth, making girls visible, sharing tasks, and reflecting*.

#### ***Making space and offering possibilities for growth***

Teachers must create space for musical growth for all instrumentalists; the ones born female should not be given responsibility for creating that space themselves. Teachers must give equal amounts of attention and motivated response to all students, and they may need to encourage girls to be nerdy.

#### ***Making girls visible***

Ensemble teachers need to make all students equally visible. This can be achieved partly through conscious role modelling and partly by careful monitoring of feedback both from teacher to student and between classmates. The girls were all aware of the inequality of response, but they related to it in different ways. The responsibility to make this clear and open to change lies with the teacher.

S [another female guitarist] has spoken a lot about this. But I shouldn't talk about it with my male mates. Because I don't want ... in one way it is like, for me, it does not influence me so, I don't think ... of course it would have been fun with more appreciation but, yes, ok, it's just to face it kind of.

Teachers' expectations of students also need to be uninfluenced of sex. In addition, it seems there is a need for them to engage in the education in ways that encourage all students to take equal responsibility.

#### ***Sharing tasks***

All tasks connected to ensemble playing, such as solos and arranging, in class as well as at concerts, should be equally shared independent of sex. How the students experience taking, and learning in, different ensemble roles should be enquired after, taken into account and discussed in public.

#### ***Reflecting***

To minimise the risk of conservation of traditional gender roles, teachers must be open and aware. Based on the analysis of the interviewees reported experiences, it seems that in settings where the jazz genre is unquestioned, equality is established on an over-arching level. Even in those situations, though, differences related to gender occur on a more local level, for example when it comes to who is taking initiatives regarding sharing of tasks or preparations, who gets performance anxiety, and what kinds of response are given to whom.

### **Openness and awareness – phenomenological *didaktik* as a way towards equality**

The teachers seem, according to the analysis of the interviewees' expressions, to strengthen a hegemonic gender order. They don't seem to challenge the boys, or the girls who accept the agreed-upon music-, or more specifically, genre related values, and they thus reinforce traditional structures. This

implies that teachers have to become aware of gender issues, about how they approach individuals, how they organise their teaching, and what content they choose to create varied spaces of freedom, as the syllabus also encourages.

According to a phenomenological way of thinking, the responsibility of the teacher is to care for her students' lived experiences and imaginations, and to encourage and prepare them for going into each other's worlds without being steered by norms and traditions. The teacher's role becomes to organise for, and to be curious about, the students' sharing of experience, to be a role model, to confirm and challenge, to step back, to step forward, and to create a milieu wherein different abilities can be developed independent of sex. This is in line with what Gould (2007) already stated, that teachers and students have to traverse musical and educational borders together, which are illegibly constituted by school music programmes that systematically exclude their musics and musical ways of becoming in the world. She underlined the necessity to destruct what she defines as the *categorical gridding* that undergirds all systems of oppression. The results of the current study also underlines, that a part of such work should be that teachers and students interpret the curricula in collaboration with the above questions and ideals in mind.

According to Bengtsson (1998), teachers' choices can be both explicit and implicit, and he states further that the way choices are made is dependent on teachers' preconditions, values, interpretations of frames and participating students, which accentuate the weight of awareness and self-reflection upon all *didaktik* choices teachers make. Teachers' interpretations are not totally subjective, but are based on their being-in-the-world. As bodily experience of the world influences the kind of knowledge base, personality and habits teachers internalise, there is a risk that un-reflected traditions steer the content that is chosen and valued as knowledge that should be developed among students. The analysis of females expressed lived experience suggests that such traditions also influence how their teachers create their inner frames, in relation to the outer. Bengtsson underlines that teachers have their whole lives as a wider frame for the teaching, which constitutes a pre-condition for the work. If their musical lives are dominated by specific views regarding how female and male artists should behave and act, there is also a risk that these views will influence their *didaktik* choices. As the current Swedish situation brings expectations of clarity about how musical skills among students should be documented and assessed, there is also a risk that teachers' views of the possible range of expressions of musical competency will shrink. The more precisely a level of competency is described or defined, the easier it is to assess, which in turn tends to reduce variation in performances.

Earlier research (Auhadeeva, Yarmakeev, and Aukhadeev 2015) has underlined the importance of gender training among teachers as well as the necessity to use the gender approach in professional teaching activities within general education, to contribute to successful gender socialisation, self-actualisation, and self-identity of students. The gender approach, they underline, requires targeted training for teachers as well as the development of a gender competence seen as a prerequisite for improving the quality of modern teacher training. Within the area of music education Bergonzi (2014) underlines the weight of that teachers, when they have come aware of the hetero sexual position of privilege in music education, have to step back from that and focus on the meeting with students' individual needs beyond gender and gender identities. The above results show that such work is still needed, at least among Swedish upper secondary ensemble teachers.

So how might phenomenological *didaktik* function as a guide towards equal opportunities for musical learning in ensemble education? To organise teaching within popular music ensemble education at a music specialist programme in secondary schools where all students are to develop towards the same goals, independent of sex, puts specific demands on music teachers. It is crucial to see all students as individual human beings, with individual interests, imaginations and needs. To be able to communicate with all students in fruitful ways, openness to different forms of intersubjective interaction is needed as well. Further it seems important that teachers are open to different ways of organising ensemble situations, with the aim of creating places for common growth and sharing of experiences where all share their inner experiences and create common understanding,



knowledge and music independent of sex: places where teachers encourage open aware and reflected meetings between their own lived experiences and those of students.

Sharing of experiences in musical situations make musical learning and aesthetic experience possible (Ferm Thorgersen 2013). According to the theory of phenomenological *didaktik*, mutual curiosity and respect is crucial for a weave that knits teachers' and students' experiences together. The result shows that the participating girls did not always experience curiosity and respect. Their freedom to develop seems to be limited in different ways, depending on several unreflected norms. The responsibility to change this should mainly be taken by music teachers and school leaders, as well as by teacher educators. Some of the teachers seemed to be self-aware to a rather high degree, at the same time as other teacher appears as relatively un-self-aware, according to the participants in the study. Still, it is obvious that gendered inequality is created at levels that are partly invisible and difficult to discuss, especially among the girls.

The results of this study could also be relevant to discuss in relation to music teacher education, as a way of hinder conservative gender roles in music education in secondary schools to maintain. Garrett (2012) argue that teacher educators in addition to develop an understanding of LGBTQ issues, should work with pre-service music teachers to emphasise the importance of inclusion for all students. He underlines, on a meta level in relation to what appears in this article, the importance of effectively model positive, safe, and inclusive learning environments. By that student teachers get the chance to reflect, share, and mutual respect personal experiences and visions regarding what changes that are necessary to create a safe learning environment for all students. Teacher educators can monitor their language for inclusivity, Garrett continues, pronouns and nouns can be chosen carefully when describing situations and providing examples and illustrations to students in an effort to avoid reinforcing hegemonic norms. May be what is illuminated in this article, can be used in developing a strategy towards inclusive teaching abilities among student music teachers.

As stated in earlier studies (Borgström-Källén 2014; Ferm Almqvist 2017, 2019) and strengthened by the results presented above, it is important to reflect upon how ensemble education that aims to be equally independent of sex could be performed. What musical values are dominating, how music teachers are functioning as a role models, how response is communicated, and how tasks are shared, are issues crucial to discuss among teachers and teacher educators. Based on discussions regarding what to *relate* to, take *responsibility* for, and *re-do*, music teachers could act in open and aware ways in relation to the students' subjectivity and inter-subjectivity, in the spirit of phenomenological *didaktik*.

## Note

1. Students who started secondary school in 2011 were born 1995. Hence, four of the five interviewees have followed the 2011 steering documents.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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