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What is Music Education?

Discursive construction and
legitimisation of theory and practice in a
Swedish upper secondary school

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Title

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Abstract

The overall purpose of this thesis is to describe and discuss the discursive constructions and legitimisations of Music and Music theory in Swedish upper secondary school context. Thereby, this thesis is part of the construction and debate concerning theory vs practice in Music education.

The study is based on ethnographic methods including classroom observations and interviews with teachers and students. The study is conducted during two consecutive autumn semesters, where the first autumn observations are conducted in the Music subject Ensemble, and the second semester in the Music theory subject Aural skills and music theory as well as Ensemble. The results and analysis show that Music and Music theory are predominantly differently constructed, through the discourses permeating the courses within the subjects. Ensemble, as a Music subject, is constructed through musical practice, and only activities that are not directly related to playing – as an activity – need legitimisation, whereas Music theory as a subject appear as continuously legitimised through its connotations to the Music subject. The Ensemble course is constructed as the nucleus around which other parts of the education pivots, including courses in Music theory.

Through the analysis of events, event series, regularities and condition of possibility (Foucault, 1970), present thesis demonstrates that expressions of resistance and challenge for the regulatory discourses within the two subjects prevails. However, discourse flexes and bends though continue to permeate the regular events and thus also the conditions for possibility.

External context and professional culture (Ball et al., 2012), is viewed as entailing discursive rooms and views that construct both theory and practice. External context, such as genres of music outside of ensemble education, and the teachers' professional cultures as musicians permeates the discursive construction of the ensemble subject as well as teacher identity.

In conclusion, Music and Music theory as subjects in upper secondary education, as they appear in the context of this study, can hence be viewed as two points on a balance-board, where the weight of discursive power shifts from one side to the other dependent on within which discursive (class)room they are taught.

Keywords

Music education, music, music theory, aural skills, ensemble, discourse

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