Music Unites Europe (MUE)

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Abstract
This article examines how the MUE project at the Sølund Music Festival challenges traditional music education related to special needs education. We are investigating whether a more professionalized approach contributes to a greater degree of psycho-social development and qualification of the aesthetic and musical-communicative skills. We find that the MUE project challenges the broad understanding of the didactic design of music offerings for people with disabilities. Furthermore, we find that the MUE project challenges the ingrained cultural beliefs about the concept of being a professional musician as being dependent on the individual's inherited intellectual powers and skills.

Preface
“Less vibrato. Don’t look at the lyrics. You can do it”. There are some good advices in the music practice room. The clock is ticking. 5 musicians and their coach have 5 five days to create a new band - The MUE. They will perform at the Sølund Music Festival's big stage, just before the most favoured danish artist Birthe Kjær. They will not stand a greater chance their your career.

A new identity
It's early Monday morning when I check in at the Sølund Music Festival in Denmark. At the back of the canteen, I notice the practice stage area. Empty beer mugs witness a cosy evening of music and dance. I am the first from the research group SPEDUCULT to arrive. By the means of participant observation (Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. 2001), we spend 4 days with the 5 musicians and their coach. The expectations for the 5 musicians are high. Kalle (Song) and Danne (bass) from Sweden, as well as Sonny (Bass / Song), Danny (guitar) and Jon (drums / Song) from Denmark, are responsible for joining into each other's musical and personal universe. Together with their coach, they challenge the classical and hierarchical teacher-student tradition, which much of the usual music education in special needs education is conducted today. (Georgii-Hemming & Westvall, 2010). Thanks to external foundings, the Music Unites Europe project (henceforth the MUE project) investigates if there exist new ways of music teaching as a pivotal point for the development of a strong personal, social and cultural identity (Ruud; 1997).

Wanted: Professional inspiration
Jon is the first to check-in. While I help to pack the stage equipment away and transport the stuff back to the practice room, Jon introduces me to his musical background. Together with Sonny and Danny, he plays in the band "The Mumes" (http://mume.dk/the-mumes). Jon's has many different ways into his music practice. He talks about traditional teaching and his participation in bands for people with disabilities. He informs me, that he gets his inspiration from other non-disabled musicians. This is the area, where he has gained many skills. But as he becomes more proficient, he faces a number of challenges. In some of the musical projects, the variety of the participants' musical skills is far too wide. In these projects, he finds that some projects, emphasizing the
potential of inclusion in the music-making to be rated higher, instead of a more profession-oriented training in musical theory and practice. It is a well-known and discussed issue that people with learning disabilities are not always offered the same teaching practice as the average learner. (Darrow, 2015; Dobbs, 2012; Matthews, 2015). Jon is therefore excited about what he learns from attending MUE. The other band members are arriving. We greet each other. Everyone agrees with my participation and observation during the project. We rig the last stage gear. The practice room is ready for today's lessons. Or is it lessons in a traditional way?

No backup - please
As a warm-up, The MUE plays a number of songs that they know well in advance coming from their respective bands. Kalle and Danne play with their trainers in the band Crazy Mike. During the warm-up, one of Crazy Mike's teachers plays along, which confuses me. After all, it's not an innovative approach. It is often seen that educators attend special needs band in a supporting musical role. Figueiredo, Soares, and Finck Schambeck (2015) find that inclusion is often addressed as a challenge that educators always orient their practice towards. Typically they are seen in roles, where they are backing up the performance. The advantage, of course, is that the teacher creates a controlled aesthetic space where everyone contributes to a collectively oriented final musical expression. The disadvantage is that a leading teacher role sometimes deprives the participants understanding and experience of co-responsibility. In situations like this the educator is potentially caught up in the role of a transmitter of a classic student-teacher relationship (Gillette & Schultz, 2008, p. 236). A relationship which I, inspired by Seligman's theories (2002), refer to as "profound musical helplessness". After a few tunes, the teacher steps aside and their coach Morten Marcher takes the lead. Now the 5 members are on their own.

Plug and Play
As a professional musician in the band “Die Herren”, Morten Marcher has a different background than a music educator. I am eagerly awaiting how Morten manages his role as coach. The MUE plays their tunes a couple of times, and he only offers small adjustments, mostly aimed at Kalle's song. Rest of the morning session, Morten chooses not to go into the field of each of the five musicians personal expression anymore. Instead, he starts a dialogue about an appropriate set up on stage and how to switch between the songs. Possible solutions are outlined on the board. All participants come up with their own suggestions. Microphone shifts and plug-in and plug-out are practised. Inappropriate decisions are quickly detected through trial and error situations. "Your stuff must not interfere with your presence on stage," Morten says repeatedly. Gradually, the routine begins to take the upper hand and the rest of the morning the musicians change and swap themselves as agreed. My first impression is that the performative aspect is vital to Morten's contribution to the MUE project.

From street singer to rock star
During the lunch break, I talk to Sonny about the morning's experiences and his life as a musician. He describes himself as an autodidact musician, born into a family of street singers. Therefore, he thinks there is an obvious connecting thread between Morten's demands for scenic presence and the demands he remembers from his performances with his mother and father. But he is surprised that stage setting and shifts between the tunes are so important. It is new knowledge. That despite the fact that he often plays live. Later in our conversation, Sonny describes himself as cognitively challenged person. I ask how he experiences the session regarding this morning's many cognitive demands. He replies: “Morten is a professional. He knows. So it's just about learning it.
I'm allowed to do it my way. "Sonny's descriptions point towards a mentor-mentee relationship between Morten and him. The way he describes his experiences makes me think that this is a kind of masterclass in "technical scene skills". I reflect that Morten does not work from strict disciplinary boundaries and a music pedagogical practice model based on stereotypical notions about the abilities of the mentally disabled (Jaap & Patrick; 2015). I see this morning as a meeting between two musicians. One with a lot of touring experience, which he shares to the other.

No show without costumes
The first task after lunch is styling and choosing costumes. The 5 musicians have already visited various second-hand shops in the city of Aarhus. The framework for the concert is Woodstock festival. Therefore the stylistic expression is not limited in any way. In a relatively short time, the costumes have been chosen, and Morten focus on the next day's dress rehearsal. Morten announces that in addition to costumes and stage changes, the goal of the afternoon is to practice scenic presence. A popular term is "getting over the edge of the stage". Morten describes that the way to do this is by shaping the musical expression in such a way that the audience can stop listening at all. For that reason he starts a training session where they have to listening to each other's solos. Morten contributes with various ideas to how they adjust the level and intensity of the music.

With new options in the musical toolbox MUE practice the different suggestions, without Morten intervenes along the way. Instead, Morten comments on a performed level to which each individual musician and The MUE as a whole band manage to get beyond edge of the stage. Morten's positioning in the teaching situation reflect Bernstein’s theories about the importance of changing learning spaces so it stimulate the participants' learning outcomes and learning processes. (Bernstein, B; 2000). Still, the transition between the last 2 tunes in the set causes a number of problems. The intensity is not present. The final song "Hey Jude" doesn't come over the edge, despite countless repetitions. The frustrations are spreading, and The MUE is appealing to Morten to take the lead in the process. But Morten sticks to the basic idea of the project. As a musician, it is important to take responsibility for the challenges, musical as well as social, that is necessary for the collective artistic expression. Morten takes a break - stretches his legs. He leaves the room, while the MUE is told that they are now working on a solution themselves.

From Kaos to Kosmos
The MUE is now trying out a number of solutions. It is suggested that the transition is carried out by a “sing-along” with the audience and the backing choir. However, the solution is too complex as it requires many appointments with the conductor and sound crew. It is suggested that a guitar solo or a drum solo create the transition. The solos part turns out to be very complicated, and they struggle to turn the beat from up-tempo to downtempo. Nothing seems to work. Chaos lurks, and each of the 5 band members orients their attention inwards and jams on their own instrument regardless of what the other band members do (disorder). Sonny gets up and says, "I'll just get a cup of coffee." Shortly afterwards, the coffee drinkers follow him, while Danny continues his solitary solos. Back again Sonny puts the coffee cup on the piano and plays the intro to "Hey Jude". Danny notices his intro, stops his playing, listens for a while and join in with a quiet guitar riff. As the remaining band members return from the kitchen, they play along. Suddenly the tune and their arrangement come into harmony, and they play together as partners. And in return Morten evaluated their performance. "You played as a real band - and all of you came over the edge of the stage". All members of the MUE were delighted. When Morten subsequently describes, the
solution initiated by the band members, it seems to be very simple. "Sonny. You start playing the intro - even before the previous song has finished - the rest of you will stop your present tune, gently change tune, and drop in quietly ". But for the 5 musicians, the process was far from simple. If I analyze the afternoon's rehearsal from Snowden and Boones' (2007) theories around decision-making and meaning-making, I observe that the 5 band members find themselves in all domains, in what Snowden and Bones describe as "The Cynefin Framework". That is, decision-making and meaning-making, initiated on the basis of situations that are "complicated, complex, chaotic, simple and disorder". (Snowden and Boone; 2007). At the end of the day, I reflect on whether I - as an educated music lecturer - will loosen my grip upon the rehearsal process in the same way, that Morten did. Or do I teach my students to wear both belt and braces in their future practice, so that they do not risk leaving their target group in an uncontrollable process? I now see that the MUE project challenges both the role of the music teacher and the discourse of appropriate processes in the music practice room. I sense the contours of some new approaches that might point towards a broader understanding of the relationship between the art of musical performance and special needs music education. An issue that Cassidy & Colwell (2012) also discuss. Perhaps the MUE project also belongs to the type of music projects that Dobbs (2012) searches. Projects that challenge the special needs music pedagogy in today's music education, and therefore seek to raise this question upon a more political level regarding the overall purpose in our government's order of special needs teaching.

Birthe Kjær’s warm-up band

Early next morning I sit next to Danny on the tour bus. On the way to VIA University College in Aarhus, we talk about his relationship with music. Danny starts at the age of 8 in a public music school. Due to illness, he has a developmental cognitive disorder. Now he works in a part-time job as a caretaker. The rest of the time he is a musician. Today he is 50 years old and an extremely capable lead guitarist. His musical expression is especially shaped by listening to Eric Clapton. "In my solos, I always tell a story, just like Clapton. I practice 3 - 5 hours a day." We continue to talk, and discuss the MUE project. Danny tells me, that Morten teaches him how to create coherence in a tune. "I've learned to balance my riffs and keep on listening to the others, even when I play solo," I ask him (in a gentle way), how come, that he first realizes these skills at this point, well knowing that Danny has performed at least 100 concerts. "To me, all playing jobs are equally important," says Danny, "but now when we have to play warm-up to Birthe Kjær on the big stage, I am very motivated, and maybe starts to think how to improve my skills." It is clear that the Sølund Music Festival's framework contributes as a challenging and motivating learning situation for Danny. As the queue towards the city of Aarhus increases, my thoughts flashes back to my initial discussions with the festival manager Lasse Mortensen. With tongue in cheek, I ask him if Sølund Music Festival discriminates bands because the festivals policy is, that bands with people with special needs are only allowed to play at smaller stages. Only the the professional and well-known bands plays on the big stage. To this tricky question Lasse Mortensen replies, that if he sees the matter in that light, yes, it raises the question of whether there are Danish bands with members with disabilities, who hold a strong brand and a musical impact that gives access to stand on the big stage. When bands with people with disabilities performs on the big stages, the musical quality is too unstable, and the audience doesn´t get “the music festival feeling”. So if Sølund Music festival should compete with other music festivals their terms and conditions must be equal to each other.
"It is a delicate balance, on the one hand, we demand high musical and performative requirements and, on the other hand, we exclude musician related to the prerequisites of the band members." Lasse further states that the MUE project is the first step, in the journey to challenge this dilemma. In the MUE project, he makes explicit musical demands for the participants. There is a tight schedule in bootcamp. Today there is a dress rehearsal. Tomorrow there is a press conference. Thursday is time for their concert. On the other hand, the festival offers an optimal setting and they provide professional staff. Lasse's description makes me think of the concept of "arenas". The participants in The MUE enter these arenas in the role of "professional musicians". Burbles and Bruce (2001) describe these arenas as "the third room". A crucible for mutual and evolving processes between different experts. Because the processes are unpredictable and irregular it initiates many different processes of democracy. Seen in Sfard's (2015) and Hakkarainen's optics (2013), I observe that the MUE project contributes some of the sought-after ideas to how to promote and cultivate non-hierarchical learning communities of practice, where new discourses emerge and create meta-level learning. (Sfard, 2015; Hakkarainen, 2013).

Down on your knees
The dress rehearsal is a great success. Danny crosses the edge of the stage in both physically and musically way. In front of rolling TV cameras, he delivers the final solo on his knees in front of a group of women. When the TV reporter asks the group afterwards, if they noticed that Danny is mentally disabled, they reply "No we didn't notice". It is thought-provoking that the media deals with the human conditions rather than the qualities of music. As Lerner & Strauss describes, a disability is invisible until it is performed. In this case - triggered by a reporter's question (Lerner & Strauss, 2006, p. 9). In a follow interview with me about our participant observation research, I point out that the concept of "developmentally impaired" is a socio-cultural construction rather than a sign of an individual deficit (Garland-Thomson & Bailey, 2010; Lerner & Strauss, 2006). Ironically, this clip was cut out of the final reportage.

Straight from the heart
It's Thursday morning. There is 1 hour before The MUE will perform on the stage. I meet them backstage. The mood is cheerful and I am astonished by the absence of nervousness. I ask Calle to verify my observations. He tells me that the last thing they learned from Morten is to accept the musical moment and their actual performance. "I've learned that when I say to myself, I have done it in the best possible way. Then it's good enough, and I have to believe that." Wearing a sparkly shirt Danne complements. "As a bass player, I often look around at the other musicians. Now I've become better at focusing on the audience instead." "Yes, we trust each other, and we know we are each others back ups," adds Calle. At a press conference the day before Calle tells us, that he usually wears sunglasses. Today they are off. When I ask him about the sunglasses, Calle replies that the last several days in the bootcamp have equipped him with enough courage to exceed his own limit. "I've learned a lot about my voice. I have improved, so now I dare to sing straight from the heart". Before I leave the backstage area to attend the concert, I see the band giving each other the obligatory group hug and high fives. Then they step up behind the stage curtain. Along with the many fans in front of the stage, I'm excitedly waiting for Calle's interest in Lou Reed and Danne's fascination of Queens riffs and bass line to come alive. The spotlight turns on. The crowd is cheering. The concert with The MUE is a Danish premiere of a new learning strategy, which point in the direction of the discourse that Hakkarainen, Palonen, Paavola & Lehtinen (2004) and Mieg (2009) describe as an "extended professionalism." A learning
environment where different expertise (also including coaching, engineering, stage, PR and marketing) contributes equally with their special knowledge to a collective learning process.

Job done - what's next?
The concert is successful. Calle sings freely without the use of lyrics. Jon sings solo while keeping a steady beat on his drums. He effortlessly switches between the song's different temps and genres. Danne delivers a heavy and solid bass. At the top of the sound, Danny exhibit variations between, riff and solos. There is good contact between the 5 musicians. I notice that they all feel at home on stage. They perform an ensemble and direct their energy towards the audience. The MUE is supported by a really good sound, and the transitions between the tunes work as they have agreed upon. On stage, they act like professional musicians. I hear no mistakes. Or rather. I do not notice if they make some. I think they keep in mind the good advice from the boot camp. Here, Morten constantly talks about the tricks and scams he uses himself when he play and sing wrong notes or forgets the lyrics. Therefore, it is also not on the musical side that I see needs for improvement. In the unexpected interactions with the audience I notice some uncertainty. In these moments the concentration is weakened. It is in such situations that I see the glimpse the next steps they must walk on the road to becoming a professional musician. Perhaps it can be traced back to their own individual's disability, perhaps due to the lack of training or a combination of both. After all, disability is not a limitation. It is merely an invitation to find new and alternative paths to a goal. Sonny now strikes the chords to “hey Jude”. The last tune is in progress. The concert culminates in a large sing-a-long between choir, orchestra and audience as a golden climax for many days of intense training. I'm moving towards the backstage area, expecting to meet a band that is high on their success with the adrenaline pumping in their venes. I am astonished, for the mood is almost identical to that of the morning. Of course, they are happy. But I sense the mood as “another job done - what's next?”. Maybe this is a sign that they are heading towards an identity as members of a professional band. I'm checking out from the festival, with a "see you next year" from 5 happy musicians from The MUE.

Conclusion and new knowledge
When I subsequently look at the MUE project there are a large number of approaches to creating new knowledge in the field of music education. Throughout the project, two areas are particularly evident. First, MUE challenges our understandings of didactic design of music offerings for people with learning disabilities. For many years, Biesta (2009; 2011) has challenged our notions of the teacher-student relationship in the schools resulting in a dynamic and constantly evolving field. But when Tuulikki & Westerlund (2011 in Laes, T. & Westerlund, H (in press)) examine the professional didactics of music education, they find that the curriculum regarding music education of the mentally impaired has been positioned as a highly specialized field. The consequence is that the field appears narrow and therefore is perceived to be less important. They state this as one of the reasons why the development of new forms of learning around musical special education has stagnated.

Seale believes (Seale et al., 2015) that there is a need to create a new vision for music education, incorporating various forms of professionalism in the classroom. (For example, established musicians with disabilities as teachers). According to Seale, it initiates an inclusive and democratic third space borne of educational diversity. (Seale et al., 2015). In the MUE project, the teacher-student relationship has been replaced by a more symmetrical relationship. The didactic design is based on a meeting of musician <-> more experienced musician. Teaching is replaced by coaching
and masterclass. These are new methods whose advantages and disadvantages should be examined more closely so that they contribute to new knowledge.

The second relationship concerns the discourse of professionalism and expertise. Hulme, Cracknell & Owens (2009) and Hakkarainen (2013) all point out, that there is a need to challenge deeply rooted cultural beliefs about the concept of "professionalism" as being dependent on the individual's inherent intellectual powers and talents. UNESCO's thoughts on inclusion have always been part of the Sølund Music Festival's DNA (UNESCO, 1999; 2002). But nevertheless, over the years, the Sølund Music Festival has been caught in the dilemma of what musical standard a band should perform at, before it is financially viable to give them time on the big stages. I acknowledge that it is an extremely complex problem with no simple answers. Therefore, it is interesting that the festival with the MUE project challenges itself. Is it possible to produce a professional band of this caliber with members with special needs? What paradigms of inclusion are challenged when some musicians are selected for the next project and others are opted out? This leads to a discussion about what criteria do we use for the concept of a "professional band"? As a result, the question arises as to how learning processes are organized to provide optimal development opportunities for a professional band? The MUE project points out that concepts such as stage show, style and brand, and scenic presence play a significant role in this. Of course, there are many other elements that emerge during the life of the next project. Elements that should also be examined further.

Perspectives
The project's future direction is beyond our reach. We want to follow the project, and hope to find new aspects that require a more detailed analytist. Inspired by Darrow (2015), I still feel tempted to point out the following potential evolving ideas.
1. That The MUE gives masterclass on e.g. seminars' cultural lines or at conservatory / university music education lines.
2. That The MUE guest performs or acts as a backing band for an established artist.
3. That The MUE themself writes and performs their own music.

I am already looking forward to next year and send a big thank you to the Sølund Music Festival and not least the 5 musicians from The MUE band 2019.
In continuation of this article you can find a short and a long version of the follow-up film recorded as a documentary from this year's seminar Music Unites Europe 2019.
1. Short version: https://youtu.be/iZ_b_2d6BGw
2. Long version: MUE 8 min- https://youtu.be/OZPAr3ou7NU

Epilogue
The empiricism for this article is collected jointly by the four authors. We write the article in the first person to clarify our phenomenological and hermeneutic position in relation to the meeting and observations with all the project participants. SPEDUCULT is an 8-year-old Nordic-Baltic research group, funded by the Nordic Council. The field of research is illuminated by a variety of cultural, design and communicative knowledge areas.