



Book review:

Advancing Music Education in Northern Europe

Edited by David G. Hebert and Torunn Bakken Hauge, Routledge, 2019, 280 pp.

Bendik Fredriksen¹

Oslo Metropolitan University

Copyright the author

Received 8 July 2021; accepted 8 July 2021

In the introduction to this book, the editors invite the readers to a journey, and the chapters indeed take the reader through time, countries, and concepts. The background for this anthology is the Nordplus-funded *Nordic Network for Music Education* (NNME). Founded in 1997, the network aims at strengthening “the reflection and the discussion of music education, and through this contribute to its development” (Hebert & Hauge, 2019, p. 11). The main target group of the network is master’s students in music education. As music education is a relatively young and small field in the Nordic countries, a collaboration between countries will expand the field and provide new perspectives for those involved. The increased emphasis on “core subjects” has further marginalized the art subjects in schools, which emphasizes the need for collaboration. The central activity in the network is intensive courses, revolving around designated topics, with invited keynote speakers and an opportunity for the students to present their theses and receive feedback. The quotes from students included indicate that the network has succeeded thus far, as they are all positive. Moreover, many former students in the network now hold positions at various institutions or have started on their doctoral studies. In addition, the teachers and keynote speakers mentioned in the book also express that they find taking part valuable. The history of the network and the development and expansion is described in some detail in the first and last chapters, with other details mentioned in several of the chapters.

Notwithstanding some obvious cultural and historical differences, the Nordic countries have many things in common, and within the field of music education, the region is by many recognized as pioneers. This status is achieved largely because of the inclusion of popular music in schools, and pedagogical practices derived thereof. In addition, there are extra-curricular

¹ Corresponding author: bendikf@oslomet.no

public culture schools in almost every municipality where children can learn an instrument or other art forms for a relatively low cost. Finally, we can add features as democracy, egalitarianism, and high quality of life, values that are present in the educational systems. The Baltic countries, which were the last to join the network, have a completely different history, being under Soviet rule for decades. The contributions from these countries are some of the most interesting as they provide some new insights, and glimpses from strong musical traditions, which are little described in English.

The chapters revolve around three themes: *current practices and background*, *higher education reforms*, and *professional networks*. In addition to discussing these themes from various viewpoints, we also get insight into what taking part in the network has looked like from the different countries. All the countries in the network are represented with at least one chapter.

In chapter 2 Cecilia Ferm Almqvist (2019), from Sweden, who has been involved in the network for nearly two decades, from master's student to keynote speaker and member of the steering group, discusses the seminars in light of the concepts of inclusion, equality, and democracy using the theories of Hannah Arendt. She ends by proposing a few topics that should be discussed to foster greater equality, including gender issues.

The second Swedish contribution, by Sæther and Di Lorenzo Tillborg (2019), is based on the former's research on the presence of the concept *El Sistema*² in Swedish music education, and the latter's research on the Swedish culture schools. They discuss the concepts of inclusion, sustainability, and democracy and maintain that to achieve these values it is important that researchers also engage in policy. In that regard, networks like NNME are important.

Tiri Bergesen Schei (2019) (Norway) discusses identity and self-censorship in musical performance and asserts the importance of reflecting on the role of culture in that regard. Also from Norway, Geir Johansen (2019) presents some challenges for music education in the coming decades. He is critical towards the tendency to turn to romantic notions of what music can do, e.g., in the field of globalization and inclusion, when justifying music and music education. As they are unreliable, he claims we must accept differences to arrive at deeper insights and move from a normative to a descriptive approach.

Helga Rut Gudmundsdottir (2019) presents music education in Iceland and describes her experiences with taking part in the network from an Icelandic point of view. An early challenge she mentions was the reluctance by several members to change to English as a language in the seminars. She also points to the fact that music education research in the Nordic countries is overwhelmingly qualitative, an imbalance that needs to be considered.

Lars Brinck (2019) writes about popular music education in Denmark, and in his discussion, he emphasizes the need to maintain both artistic and pedagogical competence, and the importance of relations. Contrary to Johansen (see above) Brinck points to music as a mutual language that maintains and nourishes human relations.

Marja Heimonen and David G. Hebert (2019) describe the general situation of music education in Finland, including music education research. The two related concepts equity and equality are central to educational policy in Finland, and the authors discuss topics related to them, such as access to higher music education, freedom, public funding of music schools, and

² See: elsistema.se

gender issues.

Chapter 9 (Sepp et al., 2019), 10 (Marnauza & Madalane, 2019), and 11 (Lasauskiene, 2019) present music education in the Baltic countries. They all contain some historical background, current practices, and future challenges and opportunities. Estonia has a rich musical culture, such as the choral traditions and the song festivals, which played a significant role in the Singing revolution. However, to remain relevant music educators much include other material and new technology. These topics are discussed in chapter 9. In Latvia, a new paradigm has emerged in the educational system. The new competency-based approach emphasizes reflection and a more research-based education. This is exemplified by research on various music practices. Jolanta Lasauskienė also discusses the various competencies a music teacher must possess; pedagogical, research, management, and musical competence. She also identifies four challenges for teacher education in Lithuania, namely, a decreasing number of teachers, fragmentation and low prestige, need for targeted research, and the lack of a national teacher education strategy.

In the book, there is a second chapter from Lithuania (Navickiene et al., 2019) that presents a unique Lithuanian method, the emotional imitation method, which would be interesting and inspiring for other teachers and researchers in the field.

The penultimate chapter (Husby & Hebert, 2019) differs from the other in that it presents a project, instead of perspectives from a specific country. The *Biophilia* project deals with the album *Biophilia* by the Icelandic artist Björk, which was launched as an album and as an app. The chapter investigates how this app was used in an educational project, first in Iceland, and later in other Nordic countries. It is indeed interesting, but it also points at many challenges with introducing technology in music education.

Together, these different chapters paint a multifaceted and nuanced picture of music education in the Nordic and Baltic countries and the value of international collaboration. They also point at important topics that need to be further discussed and researched in the future. On the other side, the result is somewhat fragmented. The editors have allowed for freedom for the individual authors, but the publication would benefit from stricter editing. Some of the historical aspects are repeated in several of the chapters, and some sections suffer from too much detail. I nevertheless recommend this anthology, as it succeeds in offering a unique perspective on music education in the Nordic and Baltic countries, the aim stated in the introduction. Some parts will probably mostly interest those who are involved in NNME, but anyone interested in learning more about music education in this region, and those who want to learn more about how international partnerships can be fostered would benefit greatly from this anthology.

References

- Almqvist, C. F. (2019). Master's seminars in music education across 18 years: inclusion, equality and democracy as lived experience. In D. G. Hebert & T. B. Hauge (Eds.), *Advancing Music Education in Northern Europe*. Routledge.
- Brinck, L. (2019). Musician and teacher: higher popular music education in a Danish perspective. In D. G. Hebert & T. B. Hauge (Eds.), *Advancing Music Education in Northern Europe*. Routledge.
- Gudmundsdottir, H. R. (2019). An Icelandic perspective on the Nordic music education community. In D. G. Hebert & T. B. Hauge (Eds.), *Advancing Music Education in Northern Europe*. Routledge.
- Hebert, D. G. & Hauge, T. B. (Eds.). (2019). *Advancing Music Education in Northern Europe*. Routledge.
- Heimonen, M. & Hebert, D. G. (2019). Advancing music education via Nordic cooperation: equity equality as

- central concepts in Finland. In D. G. Hebert & T. B. Hauge (Eds.), *Advancing Music Education in Northern Europe*. Routledge.
- Husby, B. V. & Hebert, D. G. (2019). Integrated learning of music and science: reception of Björk's *Biophilia* project in the Nordic countries. In D. G. Hebert & T. B. Hauge (Eds.), *Advancing Music Education in Northern Europe*. Routledge.
- Johansen, G. (2019). Music, universality and globalization: some challenges for music education in the decades to come. In D. G. Hebert & T. B. Hauge (Eds.), *Advancing Music Education in Northern Europe*. Routledge.
- Lasauskiene, J. (2019). Music teacher education challenges: national and international perspectives in Lithuania. In D. G. Hebert & T. B. Hauge (Eds.), *Advancing Music Education in Northern Europe*. Routledge.
- Marnauza, M. & Madalane, S. (2019). A paradigm shift in Latvian music teacher education: a selection of research experience in the period, 2008-2017. In D. G. Hebert & T. B. Hauge (Eds.), *Advancing Music Education in Northern Europe*. Routledge.
- Navickiene, L., Rauduvaite, A., Gabnyte, G. & Hebert, D. G. (2019). Emotional imitation method in the context of Lithuanian music education. In D. G. Hebert & T. B. Hauge (Eds.), *Advancing Music Education in Northern Europe*. Routledge.
- Schei, T. B. (2019). Musical performance and tacit self-censorship. In D. G. Hebert & T. B. Hauge (Eds.), *Advancing Music Education in Northern Europe*. Routledge.
- Sepp, A., Läänemets, U. & Kiilu, K. (2019). Bridging the past, present and future in Estonian music education. In D. G. Hebert & T. B. Hauge (Eds.), *Advancing Music Education in Northern Europe*. Routledge.
- Sæther, E. & Di Lorenzo Tillborg, A. (2019). Reflections on research collaborations: a call for Nordic research on music education, sustainability and democracy. In D. G. Hebert & T. B. Hauge (Eds.), *Advancing Music Education in Northern Europe*. Routledge.