



When the music starts playing

10 articles on the importance of school concerts for the cultural and aesthetic formation, well-being and social connectedness of schoolchildren in elementary school





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Published and edited by Live Music in Schools

ISBN: 978-87-976107-1-8

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Thank you to the Augustinus Foundation for supporting this publication



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With this knowledge catalogue, Live Music in Schools – in collaboration with researchers and experts – shines a light on what happens within the individual child and among the student body when professional musicians visit their home turf: the school. When the music starts playing in the school gym, the assembly hall or in the playground.”





Introduction

Why this knowledge catalogue?

Imagine there's a concert at your workplace today. Attendance is mandatory. You don't know the band, maybe not even the genre. You're standing with a large group of colleagues – some of whom you know well, others only by sight. The performers on stage are right up close – in fact, at eye level. You can see them; they can see you. When the music starts playing, what happens? To you? To everybody around you?

With this knowledge catalogue, Live Music in Schools (LMS) – in collaboration with researchers and experts – shines a light on what happens within the individual child and among the student body when professional musicians visit their home turf: the school. When the music starts playing in the school gym, the assembly hall or in the playground. The catalogue presents ten compelling perspectives on the significance of the professional school concert for the cultural and aesthetic formation (Bildung), well-being and social connectedness of schoolchildren, as well as describing areas where knowledge and answers are still lacking.

The school concert

But first, a brief overview of the key concept of the professional school concert: In Denmark, there are a number of providers of school concerts, and LMS is the largest organisation in this field, staging more than 3,200 concerts every year.

The vision of the Danish Arts Foundation under the Ministry of Culture is that all elementary schoolchildren should experience professional live music during school hours every year. Currently, this experience is delivered to approximately 500,000 schoolchildren – schoolchildren from all across the country, from all social backgrounds.

The concerts organised by LMS take place on the children's home turf – their school – and are usually performed for 120–200 children at a time, primarily from the same age group, i.e. grades 0–3, grades 4–6 or grades 7–9.

The bands featured in the LMS concert catalogue have been carefully selected from among a large pool of qualified applicants comprising professional musicians from all parts of the Danish music scene – and representing a highly diverse array of music genres, instrumentations, themes, presentation styles, genders, ages and ethnicities. All the concerts come with teaching materials tailored to the national public school mission statement and intended learning outcomes for the various age groups. The materials can be used both before and after the concert, across multiple subjects, if the schools so desire.

“The goal is to open their minds to the magic of music, so that children do not have to come from a musical family to start playing an instrument or find their way to the concert hall; to invite them into the community of music, and to support their cultural and aesthetic formation (Bildung) and well-being.”

And the goal? The goal is to open their minds to the magic of music, so that children do not have to come from a musical family to start playing an instrument or find their way to the concert hall; to invite them into the community of music, and to support their cultural and aesthetic formation (Bildung) and well-being.

Little research, lots of experience

However, little research-based knowledge exists on whether the concerts actually have the desired effect. Research on children and young people as live music audiences is scarce – both in Denmark and internationally. Against this backdrop, in 2023, LMS entered into a collaboration with four researchers from the University of Southern Denmark (SDU), University College Absalon, under the auspices of the Centre for Basic Education Research at SDU, as well as VIA University College, to look at the impact of professional school concerts on the cultural and aesthetic formation (Bildung), well-being and social connectedness of schoolchildren.

Since autumn 2023, the researchers have been testing qualitative methods with a focus on the children's perspectives, and have started analysing the schools' evaluations of more than 14,000 LMS concerts held between 2013 and 2023. As a result of this work, four research articles have been produced in 2024 and 2025. This is the first phase of a research project entitled "When the music starts playing", which shares its title with this knowledge catalogue. In the five research contributions included in the catalogue, you can read about the preliminary results, along with other relevant research. In these articles, we are developing a framework – a language – for talking about and understanding the school concert: As an example, what's going on when a year 4 pupil raises her hand after an opera concert and declares that she wants to be an opera singer when she grows up? And what does it mean when schoolchildren are impressed – time and again – by the quality of the music and the skills of the musicians?

The lacking research is more than made up for by experience. Every year, more than 1,000 Danish schools host professional school concerts, and the catalogue therefore also presents articles written by two teachers, a school head, a musician and three cultural consultants. How does the school concert programme work in practice? How does it support the school's music culture and music as a school subject facing significant challenges? And how can we ensure that the schools' collaboration with external partners, such as LMS as well as the local music and culture schools, is as effective as possible?

Key concepts: Cultural and aesthetic formation, well-being and social connectedness

But before diving into the catalogue, it is important to be familiar with the key concepts used in the articles. In a Danish context, cultural and aesthetic formation (Bildung), social connectedness and well-being are trendy buzzwords when discussing projects, teaching models, strategies and policies in the field of education. It is therefore essential to have a common understanding and definition of the concepts as used by researchers and experts.

Cultural and aesthetic formation (Bildung)

Cultural and aesthetic formation (Bildung) is the ongoing process of expanding the way you understand yourself, interact with others and engage with the wider world. At the same time, as an individual you develop by becoming part of something greater, by pushing your limits, and by being in dialogue with the world around you. It is about being

"When schoolchildren feel a sense of resonance, a vivid connection forms between them and the world – a feeling of being moved and touched."

open and receptive to new and unfamiliar experiences, without losing your sense of self and your autonomy in how you choose to respond to, for example, a school concert. In the context of the school concert, the encounter with a new and unfamiliar experience helps to open children's senses and minds by introducing them to the unknown. It sparks the children's curiosity and fosters a sense of community, bridging differences.

Several researchers speak of **world-centredness** and of the role of the school in directing the children's attention to something important and valuable in the world, such as a broad range of musical expressions. World-centredness and cultural and aesthetic formation (Bildung) are also about fostering a sense of community and focusing our attention on **'a common third'**, as opposed to seeing the world through a self-centred lens.

The sense of connection and belonging can also be linked to the concept of **resonance**, which is particularly effective in the context of music. When schoolchildren feel a sense of resonance, a vivid connection forms between them and the world – a feeling of being moved and touched. In this process, schoolchildren become active participants in a broader relationship with music and their surroundings, which can strengthen their curiosity, engagement and sense of meaning. You can learn more about cultural and aesthetic formation (Bildung) and resonance, and how they contribute to well-being, in the articles 'Meaningful encounters with live music' and 'Can I join in?'

Well-being

Well-being can be understood in many ways, and in the school setting, it can be viewed as active engagement with the school's social and academic communities, where children experience meaningful interactions with others, with the academic content and with the world around them. Well-being can also be understood through the concept of **flourishing**. This is not only about the well-being of the individual child, but about the sense of well-being that arises from the child's interactions with other people (musicians, teachers, other pupils) and the physical environment (music, instruments, the space) around them.

In this way, well-being is also linked to the aforementioned understanding of cultural and aesthetic formation (Bildung) and resonance: The fact that music is a part of us, and that we are a part of music, gives us a sense of connection with the world around us.

In our performance-oriented lives, professional school concerts provide a respite – a space free from the pressure to perform, where there is room for curiosity, attentiveness and engagement without being measured against some end-goal. Through music, children can lose themselves and become completely immersed in what is happening. It allows them to be in the moment and experience things with their whole body – without any filters. Thus, well-being is not just about being happy; it is also about challenging oneself, as engagement and curiosity are important catalysts for development and growth.

You can read more about well-being and school concerts in the articles 'Meaningful encounters with live music' and 'When children flourish'.

“Music plays a special role in creating and strengthening a sense of community, and both practice and research suggest that the encounter with live music can create, develop and strengthen social cohesion.”

Social connectedness

Social connectedness and the sense of community run as perhaps the most important common thread through the catalogue – whether we are talking about the sense of community that exists at school, in class and among KulturCrews or the sense of musical togetherness that arises during music lessons, during singing at morning assemblies and concerts. As pointed out in the article ‘Can I join in?’, music plays a special role in creating and strengthening a sense of community, and both practice and research suggest that the encounter with live music can create, develop and strengthen social cohesion. Conversely, where strong communities exist along with respect for the school culture, it is easier to create memorable concert experiences.

Articles by both researchers and practitioners make it clear that, to enhance the concert experience and make the most of it, it is important to focus on the periods before, during and after the concert. The importance of pre-concert preparations, the immediate environment and structure of the concert, and its lasting impact must not be underestimated. Dedicated teachers and support from colleagues, school heads and local authorities are essential for the full potential of the professional school concerts to be realised, and for the concerts to have the greatest possible impact in furthering cultural and aesthetic formation (Bildung), well-being and a sense of community.

More research underway

Taken together, the ten articles bring us closer to an understanding of the significance of professional school concerts, both theoretically and practically. But there is still plenty of uncharted territory to explore. As is made clear in the article “Self-forgetting and engaging community experiences”, it is difficult to make an informed assessment of the significance of school concerts for the cultural and aesthetic formation (Bildung), well-being and social connectedness of schoolchildren; therefore, further methodological development and more school visits are needed to substantiate the preliminary conclusions presented here by the researchers.

A big thank-you goes to the many Danish elementary schools that have hosted and evaluated LMS’s school concerts over the years, to the many professional musicians who have performed at school concerts all over the country, to the researchers and experts for embracing this under-explored topic so enthusiastically and for their contributions to the body of knowledge presented here, and last but not least, a big thank-you to the Augustinus Foundation whose support has made this publication possible.

Enjoy the read!

The editors, May 2025: Dorthe Damgaard and Ronja Petersen, Live Music in Schools



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Music, cultural and aesthetic formation and well-being in engaging communities

Teacher Christian Pedersen from Beder Skole in Aarhus, writes about how the school concerts and teaching materials put theory into practice and create memorable experiences for all.

“We believe that children will lead richer lives if, from an early age, they come to realise that shared experiences are valuable and that everyone has a duty to contribute to the community. Community means responsibility! We must listen to one another, support each other and make an active contribution.”



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Meaningful encounters with live music

Thomas Thorsen and Mikkel Snorre Boysen from University College Absalon explore the role of school concerts in fostering well-being through formation (Bildung) and resonance.

“Even when encountering unfamiliar music feels challenging, it can evoke resonant experiences that range from subtle influences to transformative moments. From an educational perspective, this is crucial, as such experiences give you a sense of your own boundaries and your own presence in an interplay with others in the shared musical encounter.”



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The dream of music in schools

- How LMS concerts and the school's music profile go hand in hand

Head of school, Henrik Garde, at Susåskolen, Herlufmagle campus, discusses the school's efforts to build and strengthen its music culture and the importance of collaborating with external partners.

“The LMS concerts provide the children at our school with unique musical experiences of a very high quality, which aligns perfectly with the strong music culture we are working to foster, the aim being to cultivate opportunities for engagement, strong communities, positive relationships and a high level of well-being.”



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Can I join in?

Researcher and school concert musician Jens Skou Olsen writes with one foot in research and one in practice about the potential of school concerts in fostering a sense of community, formation (Bildung) and a desire to co-create.

“Now more than ever, we need to cultivate a more sensory and open-minded world-centredness, one that allows us to rediscover the joy of being part of a community. Attending a school concert means exactly this: To be together and feel how a large group of people come together in the music.”



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The sound of presence and community in schools

Teacher Christina Andreasen, from Baggesenskolen in Slagelse, highlights how preparations and teaching materials are fundamental to ensuring that the concert experience leave a lasting impression on the pupils:

“In 10 or 20 years' time, the children will probably still remember the experience, the feeling, the atmosphere, and the sense of connection and community they felt during the concert a little better than what they were doing on that same school day on page five of their maths book.”



When children flourish

Henriette Blomgren from VIA University College in Aarhus discusses well-being as ‘flourishing’ – representing the dynamic interplay between the individual and its external environment.

“Viewing children as active participants means that they are seen not merely as passive recipients of aesthetic experiences, but co-creators of their own understanding of the music. When children engage with their surroundings, a space is created that invites curiosity, wonder and sensory exploration. This supports their development and well-being.”



When music becomes a gift you didn't know you were missing

Children's Culture Consultant Rikke Kamedula Skovsbo from the Municipality of Viborg discusses the municipality's focus on open school collaboration with the local culture school and LMS.

“Working with LMS has really stimulated our musical curiosity. The Municipality of Viborg has evolved from a place with very little live music in schools to a place where school concerts are now warmly welcomed and new concert formats are being developed.”



Make music matter for children and young people!

Researchers Mannuela Rauff Hansen and Anne Bang Larsen from the Center for Basic Education Research at University of Southern Denmark are actively working to generate knowledge and improve conditions for music education, which faces significant challenges. It is therefore important to focus on social connectedness, the student perspective and the school's collaboration with external partners.

“The data we have collected suggests that music in school has an impact on children's overall experience of school life.”



When children shape culture

Vicki Lindstrøm Frederiksen and Sisse Østergaard Ravnholdt from the Municipality of Holbæk offer insights into the municipality's efforts to engage young people, through the KulturCrew student-involvement initiative.

“It is not enough to simply provide encounters with professional music – young people must be provided with opportunities to engage with, reflect on, and play an active role in these encounters. This enhances individual formation (Bildung), strengthens school culture, and fosters a sense of community in society.”



Self-forgetting and engaging community experiences

Heidi Philipsen from the University of Southern Denmark highlights valuable methods for researching children and concerts, as well as the pre-concert and post-concert activities, that can help extend and reinforce the experience.

“Researchers and school teachers lack tools for following up on the aesthetic experiences of schoolchildren. Our study can therefore help draw attention to the tools available to teachers when it comes to supporting schoolchildren before and after school concerts, which can further enhance the value of these concerts.”



We believe that children will lead richer lives if, from an early age and throughout their school years, they come to realise that shared experiences are valuable and that everyone has a duty to contribute to the community. Community means responsibility! We must listen to one another, support each other and make an active contribution.”



Music, cultural and aesthetic formation and well-being in engaging communities

By Christian Østergaard Pedersen, Teacher, Beder Skole

Engaging in music and singing as part of a community make children smarter, happier and better people. There are few things more wonderful in the life of a school than listening to 200 children singing together, or watching them become totally immersed in a concert or a story. The great, enriching experiences that mean so much are built on a solid foundation of physical and educational resources, a culture characterised by a strong sense of community, and thorough preparation by a dedicated team of adults.

At Beder Skole, south of Aarhus, we have three core values: Life Skills and Resilience; Strong Sense of Community; and Openness to the World. We strive to translate these values into practice through concrete actions, so that children, parents and all our staff encounter the values as part of their daily lives, for example through activities such as assemblies for the whole school, morning assemblies with singing, project weeks, concerts, role-playing weeks, school-wide events, art salon, theatre performances, storytelling and much more.

We make a priority of ensuring that the children attending Beder Skole are part of an engaging community centred around singing, music, storytelling and other cultural activities. For children in grades 0–3 and grades 4–6, there is a weekly morning assembly with singing, where the rich tradition of Danish songs and the stories they tell come alive for the children. In addition to the aesthetic experience of singing in a group, the children learn to set aside their own egos and to listen to and accommodate the needs of the group. It's not about me, me, me, but about us, us, us. Building a healthy community takes hard work, a clear purpose and an actionable framework – in part because, as many people are likely aware, we are living in a strongly individualistic society today. Once a positive culture characterised by mutual respect for the community is in place, and when the majority of children and adults are acting as ambassadors for a set of shared values, it becomes easier to maintain and create those amazing experiences. In other words, a self-reinforcing effect occurs.

We believe that children will lead richer lives if, from an early age and throughout their school years, they come to realise that shared experiences are valuable and that everyone has a duty to contribute to the community. Community means responsibility! We must create a calm space, we must listen to one another, support each other and make an active contribution. The framework is established by teachers and educators together with the children. Once the framework is in place and the culture has been established, there is room for the joy of singing, storytelling, presentations, recitations etc. This broadens our horizons and helps us gain a deeper understanding of the world. We become capable

of shifting our attention away from ourselves and instead turn our gaze towards a common third. It creates a sense of belonging, connection and unity of purpose.

Music delivered to your door!

For me as a music teacher at Beder Skole – which is a 30-minute bus ride from all that Aarhus has to offer in the way of music performances for schoolchildren – getting to concerts and other events is a logistical challenge. That is why we were very keen to join the ‘Live Music in Schools’ programme – because the concerts are held at the schools. It’s just amazing!

Over the past two years, all children at Beder Skole have attended high-quality concerts at their own school. This also goes for children with special educational needs, children in wheelchairs and the neurodivergent children for whom a trip to Aarhus might be too much of a challenge. We have a Black Box space designed for creative events. The walls are black, the floor is black, windows are fitted with blackout blinds, and stage lighting can be erected – in other words, the perfect space for holding concerts.

The LMS concerts align perfectly with our three core values. Through LMS, the children encounter a variety of professional musicians whom they would otherwise never have the chance to meet. As a teacher, you can tell that, prior to the school concerts, the LMS artists undergo training and are offered guidance on how to make their performances child-friendly.

Clear expectations and a well-defined framework are the way forward

We, as staff members, talk to the children about how lucky they are to be able to experience live music, and we tell them that we expect them to be welcoming to the musicians, for example by listening attentively to the concerts. As one of the musicians from the Aarhus Symphony Orchestra said after a concert for children in grades 0–3 featuring Vivaldi’s Four Seasons: “I must say the children are sweet and good listeners, but that’s probably because you’re very clear about what you expect from them. It’s just great, and it enhances the experience both for the children and for us.”

Elective courses and student engagement

For students doing music as an elective and who are preparing for exams, the LMS concerts can also make a very positive difference. The LMS concerts come with accompanying teaching materials that are aligned with the official national learning goals and curriculum guidelines (Fælles Mål), making it possible for Danish teachers and music teachers, for example, to use the content for exam questions. In my experience, the children whose teachers have gone over the teaching materials with them have the most rewarding concert experiences, because they have gained the vital context needed to understand the artist and the music they encounter. For example, I had a really great experience recently after using the LMS teaching materials on Niels Lan Doky to explore jazz improvisation. It ended with the artist himself showing up with his trio and improvising quite a show for the children! Apart from the experience being an amazing one, a shared point of reference was established as theory was translated into practice in the most effective way possible – and in a way students can apply in their oral and practical exams. It’s not often that you can offer students that kind of experience – except, of course, through the smartboard. In addition, children who are truly passionate about music can take on greater responsibilities through KulturCrew, helping to set up and get

“After every concert, I’m approached by children and adults who love the concept: ‘It’s the best cultural event I’ve experienced as a teacher’; ‘The kids were completely captivated’; ‘My dad said he’s going to try to sneak in to hear the Niels Lan Doky concert’.”

everything ready for the concerts, get the chance to meet the artists and gain hands-on experience of what is involved in putting on concerts.

“My dad said he’s going to try to sneak in to hear the concert”

Along the way, I have received nothing but positive feedback from my colleagues, from children and parents, who have all been impressed with the quality of the experiences we can offer students through LMS. At our school, we’ve had jazz, a recorder quartet, classical music, a pop musician talking about his difficult upbringing as a gay person in a not-so-tolerant provincial Jutland town... and much more. After every concert, I’m approached by children and adults who love the concept: “It’s the best cultural event I’ve experienced as a teacher”; “The kids were completely captivated”; “My dad said he’s going to try to sneak in to hear the Niels Lan Doky concert.”

Music brings people together, and the inherent magic of music is unlocked when we sing, dance or experience music. Our brains release dopamine; we channel our emotions and may feel happy, pensive or sad listening to music. Nothing new here – we’ve known that for years. Beder School and the local community in general are characterised by a strong music culture. However, declining prioritisation of practical and artistic subjects in Danish public schools has been a distinct trend in recent decades. There is therefore no doubt that a strong, creative school culture must be actively prioritised and nurtured at the local level. Fortunately, there are signs of change: The importance of communal singing and cultural experiences is being recognised by policymakers, and organisations such as LMS play an important role in supporting music, culture and a sense of community. There is no doubt that LMS is a fantastic thing for schools; working with the concerts pedagogically and academically, live music can directly support academic achievement, well-being, cultural and aesthetic formation (Bildung) as well as student influence.

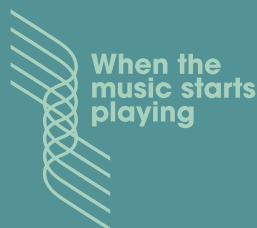


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christian Østergaard Pedersen is a teacher at Beder Skole near Aarhus, where he teaches Danish, English, Music and Physical Education. Teaching music in grades 4–6 and in the 7 and 8 grade elective music courses, he has extensive experience with the ways in which music enriches the daily lives of schoolchildren. He is the LMS contact at Beder Skole, which joined the LMS school concert programme ahead of the 2023–2024 school year. Christian is also involved in the local music scene in Beder and serves on the board of the ‘Beder Live’ association, which organises local concerts.



An important educational and didactic task is therefore to show schoolchildren that there is something in the world – outside of themselves – that is meaningful and worthwhile to engage with and enter into dialogue with.”



Meaningful encounters with live music

By Thomas Thorsen, Assoc. Professor, and Mikkel Snorre Boysen, Assoc. Professor

This article examines the significance professional school concerts may have on the well-being of schoolchildren. In this context, well-being is rooted in the concepts of cultural and aesthetic formation (*Bildung*) and resonance and should be viewed as a phenomenon closely linked to the children's active engagement with the world around them. We focus on the children's encounter with professional live music and the performing musicians. A musical encounter that invites the children into new musical worlds and potentially opens up meaningful spaces of opportunity for each individual child and for the school communities.

The article is based on a qualitative pilot study involving observations and interviews at three schools, as well as written evaluations by school teachers of school concerts organised by Live Music in Schools (LMS) over a ten-year period.

Well-being rooted in cultural and aesthetic formation and resonance

Recent educational research has shown that the well-being of schoolchildren is linked to their participation in the school's social and academic communities, where they engage with others, with the academic content and with the world around them in a meaningful way.¹ Well-being – in this sense – is thus closely associated with the concepts of 'cultural and aesthetic formation' and 'resonance'.

Cultural and aesthetic formation (*Bildung*) is the ongoing process of expanding the way you understand yourself, interact with others and engage with the wider world. The formation happens through becoming part of something larger, for example by engaging in dialogue with others and the world around you, thereby pushing your own boundaries and reshaping your perspective.² In the words of Jacob Kjærsgaard Mortensen, who is head of a Danish folk high school: "In encountering the world, you transcend yourself in order to become yourself." More than 200 years ago, the German philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt used the idea of 'self-world relation' to describe the mutual influence that arises in an individual's interaction with something 'other' or foreign. There are two key aspects to this encounter: receptivity and self-activity. Receptivity is about being respectful and open to new perspectives, while self-activity refers to the independence and freedom of individuals to explore and engage with the unknown. This interplay between receptivity and self-activity is key, and the encounter with the 'other' serves as a catalyst for cultural and aesthetic formation.

According to Dutch educational scholar Gert Biesta, the educational task is fundamentally about "arousing the desire for wanting to exist in the world in a grown-up way".³ Using the term 'grown-up way', Biesta suggests that each student can be 'a subject' in

1 Nielsen & Hansen, 2021; Munkholm, M. Skibsted & Blomgren, 2023

2 Hammershøj, 2017.

3 Biesta, 2018

the world without considering themselves as its centre. An important educational and didactic task is therefore to show students that there is something in the world – outside of themselves – that is meaningful and worthwhile to engage and enter into dialogue with.

With the concept of **resonance**, German sociologist Hartmut Rosa also directs attention to the relationship and connection between humans and the wider world. When we, as human beings, resonate with someone or something, the relationship is dynamic and responsive, and we feel both “called upon” and “heard” by that with which we resonate.⁴ In Rosa’s view, music is a particularly apt space for resonant experiences because of its ability to trigger immediate and powerful emotional responses. When playing, singing or listening to music, we can experience a kind of resonance whereby we not only hear and physically feel the music, but also feel that the music is part of us, and we are part of the music. The interaction gives rise to a sense of connection and belonging, transforming us from being merely passive recipients of a school concert into active parts of a broader relationship with music and the world around us – for example, with our classmates and teachers, and with the musicians.

Encountering the unfamiliar

As researchers, we experienced the schoolchildren’s encounter with something ‘other’ and unfamiliar during, among other things, an opera performance for grades 4–6. On this occasion, the children were treated to a musical experience quite different to what they were used to. Although the concert was acoustic, the students described the singers’ voices as very powerful and unusual. Many of the children’s immediate responses were along the lines of: “It’s loud” and “It’s for old people.” Despite this first resistance, the children were able to describe the nuances in the music and the voices and give quite a detailed account of the plot and storyline of the opera.

The experience of resonance seemed to vary greatly among the schoolchildren. For example, according to our observations, one of the children in grade 4 showed great engagement throughout the concert and was deeply moved by it. After the concert, she spontaneously expressed a desire to become an opera singer herself, which indicated that she had had a potentially transformative experience of resonance, opening up new horizons and possible life choices.

In contrast, two other students showed clear resistance, adopting a negative posture and distancing themselves both before and during the concert. However, halfway through the concert – as one of the opera singers made their way down into the audience and sang right up close to the two of them – they were confronted directly with the intense presence of the music and the singer. The move elicited an emotional response in them; at first they slid deeper into their chairs and pulled their hoodies all the way up, but eventually they couldn’t help but smile and laugh a little sheepishly. Although they quickly regained their ‘cool’ demeanour, a crack had appeared in their resistance, creating a small opening towards the music, which was reflected in subtle changes in their attitude and behaviour for the rest of the concert.

In this way, the opera performance demonstrated that even when encountering unfamiliar music feels challenging, it can evoke resonant experiences that range from subtle influences to transformative moments. From an educational perspective, this is crucial, as such experiences give you a sense of your own boundaries and your own presence in an interplay with the way others are present in the shared musical encounter.⁵

4 Rosa, 2021

5 Thorsen & Nielsen, 2024

“...even when encountering unfamiliar music feels challenging, it can evoke resonant experiences that range from subtle influences to transformative moments. From an educational perspective, this is crucial, as such experiences give you a sense your own boundaries and your own presence in an interplay with others in the shared musical encounter.”

Being captivated by the music

Looking at the teachers’ evaluations of LMS concerts in our study, it is striking how many of them emphasise the music’s ability to ‘captivate the students’. Teachers describe this tendency in countless ways, but fundamentally, they seem to be talking about the same thing. Examples of what teachers write include, “The students were spellbound by the concert”; “The music captivated the students”; and “The musicians had the students eating out of their hands”. The unique experience described here in metaphorical terms is indicative of the power of music, but also says something about the school as context. In their daily lives, schoolchildren are preoccupied with their social lives and their own role within those social dynamics. During the concert, things change. For a moment, the children turn their attention to the music being performed. In that moment, their shared focus pulls them out of their everyday roles and transports them into a shared space, where their self-awareness seems to diminish. The following observation from a concert for grades 4–6 illustrates this point:

The students are sitting in the sports hall listening to the music. The orchestra consists of three musicians playing lots of different instruments in a very playful manner. The children are really into the music and follow the musicians’ instructions to jump, clap and so on. At one point, the musicians encourage the children to do some wild and crazy dancing. Some children seem a little unsure of what to do and look at each other hesitantly. Others start jumping up and down. The grown-ups are standing together at the back, clapping on the second and fourth beats. Some of the children link arms and start swinging their legs back and forth, like in a line dance or folk dance. Several children in the audience start mimicking this choreography. Gradually, several groups form, each consisting of 3–5 children, who start dancing arm in arm in the same way. Girls on one side and boys on the other. (Field note, August 2024)

This example illustrates how children in a school context are often preoccupied with social dynamics and their own roles. At the start of the observation, the concert temporarily shifts the children’s focus away from the social dynamics. But when a musician encourages the children to come up with some fun dance moves, their attention to some extent shifts away from the musicians and back to themselves. At this point, the children land back in the school context, having again to think about how to move and their choice of dance partners, and how they may be perceived by their peers.

It is, of course, a good thing for children to express themselves and develop alongside other children in school communities. Still, this observation suggests that children may need a respite from these social roles, and that the concert offers them such a space where they can forget about themselves. Experiences of self-forgetfulness are well documented in connection with the concept of flow.⁶ ‘Flow’ describes the joy experienced by people when they are totally immersed in an active and creative process (such as climbing a mountain, singing in a choir or playing chess). At first glance, attending a concert does not seem to be comparable to flow, since the listener is not directly engaged in the creative process. However, when the listener resonates with the music, engages in a dialogue with it, and becomes one with it, experiences of self-forgetfulness – which share characteristics with experiences of flow – can occur, as illustrated by the examples provided. Concerts therefore offer listeners a space where they can share an experience, without having to perform in any particular way or be judged by one another.

High level of skill and artistic quality

In the teachers’ evaluations of the LMS concerts, the high quality of the music is one of the things that are mentioned most frequently. Examples of what teachers write: “Everyone was very impressed” or “The children seemed very impressed by the band”. Observing the concerts, that is also what we see. The schoolchildren show great interest in the music and the musicians, and after the concerts, they ask questions such as: “How long have you been practising?” and “When did you start playing your instruments?”

The students seem fascinated by the musicians’ high level of skill, finding it both exotic and extraordinary. These are grown-ups who, throughout their whole lives, have spent hour after hour practicing their instruments. And the schoolchildren see how these musicians are able to produce sound and artistic expressions with such virtuosity. For some children, this represents a whole new experience of music. One reason for this is that music education has been cut back in many Danish public schools. There is, therefore, a general shortage of music teachers, and as a result, not all schools are able to recruit qualified music teachers.⁷ In addition, music teachers in schools possess expertise and professional skills in music education that are quite different from the skills of professional musicians. In light of this, the school concert provides students with a chance to experience the power of music up close as professional musicians and bands perform live.

The importance of mastery and quality can also broaden children’s horizons from a more general perspective. Many children lead fast-paced and complex daily lives, requiring them to be constantly available across multiple platforms. Through being exposed to the musicians’ technical and artistic skills, schoolchildren gain insight into a world where immersion is the rule rather than the exception. In a society where the ability to immerse yourself is in high demand, concerts can offer students alternative perspectives on what life can be like, and on different priorities.

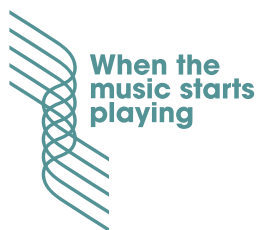
Strong and weak ties

A unique feature of LMS is that their concerts reach schools across the country, based on the LMS vision that all children should have the opportunity to experience high-quality live music. However, the actual impact of the concerts depends on the culture of each individual school and LMS’s collaboration with the schools. For the concerts to have a real impact on the children, it is essential that teachers locally integrate the concerts

6 Csikszentmihalyi, 1991

7 Holgersen & Holst, 2020

“Through being exposed to the musicians’ technical and artistic skills, schoolchildren gain insight into a world where immersion is the rule rather than the exception. In a society where the ability to immerse yourself is in high demand, concerts can offer students alternative perspectives on what life can be like, and on different priorities.”



into the school culture as the school concerts do not take up a lot of time in the school curriculum as a whole.

Strong ties are formed between people who interact regularly and share common contexts, while weak ties arise from brief encounters. Strong ties ensure stability and continuity, while weak ties can open the door to new opportunities. At school, students primarily form strong ties with the teachers and classmates with whom they share their daily lives. Their ties with the visiting musicians are weak, but they can still be of significant value, as meeting the musicians and attending the school concert come to serve as a gateway to new musical worlds. New worlds that can fascinate, provoke and inspire schoolchildren to explore new paths and opportunities.

During one of our school visits, we had the opportunity to meet an enterprising and dedicated music teacher who masterfully incorporated into his music lessons an introduction to the musicians and the music the students would later encounter at the concert. He had even built a backstage area where students could meet the performing musicians. The story of this music teacher reminds us that it is the local resources (and strong ties) at the schools that create the constant environments in which schoolchildren can engage and explore creative and developmental processes.

Meaningful encounters with live music

From a well-being perspective, experiencing professional school concerts and encountering professional musicians can open up spaces of resonance and reshape schoolchildren's perspectives and cultural and aesthetic formation (*Bildung*) processes. Meaningful encounters with live music inspire, challenge and engage schoolchildren when they open up, are receptive and 'self-forget' in the shared musical flow. School concerts, of course, cannot and should not replace the school's day-to-day music education, where children have the opportunity to engage in creative, 'self-directed' processes and make the music their own. However, school concerts make a vital and engaging contribution by fostering new, meaningful ties between schoolchildren and the world of music. This has the potential to leave a lasting impression on the daily lives of schoolchildren and schools and to have a significant long-term effect. However, a more comprehensive and sustained research effort will be needed to create knowledge about the long-term benefits of school concerts in terms of their impact on the well-being and cultural and aesthetic formation (*Bildung*) of schoolchildren.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thomas Thorsen holds a Master of Education in Didactics (Music Education) and is an associate professor at University College Absalon, where he teaches music and is a member of the 'Movement, Creativity, and Aesthetics in Teaching' research environment. Thomas has previously taught and worked in state and independent residential schools in Denmark, as well as municipal music and culture schools. He has written and contributed to a number of articles and books on music, aesthetics and art education, most recently as editor and lead author of the anthology 'Musikken i pædagogikken' (2024). Finally, Thomas is part of the research team behind the research project 'When the music starts playing', and he is currently a PhD fellow in 'When the music starts playing - Phase II'.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mikkel Snorre Wilms Boysen is an associate professor, PhD and head of the 'Movement, Creativity and Aesthetics in Teaching' research environment at University College Absalon. He is also chair of the Danish Network for Research in Music Education. Mikkel is passionate about developing and researching teaching environments that promote the well-being, curiosity, creativity and development of children and young people. Mikkel has a background in music, which includes working as a musician and choir conductor, but today he is pursuing his interest in creativity in all its forms, a topic he has written about in two books (Vovemod og Handlekraft and Pædagogisk Entreprenørskab). Finally, Mikkel is part of the research team behind the research project 'When the music starts playing'.

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“There is general consensus among children and teachers that these assemblies help strengthen the sense of community and make everybody feel safe and at ease. We find that the children have become better at listening, engaging actively and supporting one another.”



The dream of music in schools

How LMS concerts and the school's music profile go hand in hand

By Henrik Garde, Head of Susåskolen, Campus Herlufmagle

We see open and curious children, who become better at listening, engaging actively and supporting one another. They have become more confident within the school community, and many now have the courage to stand in front of the entire school and give a presentation or perform a dance or a piece of music. All of this will – we hope – translate into shared memories and a lifelong love of music for the children at our school. But it doesn't just happen on its own.

"It really makes you want to get lost and dream in the music when you close your eyes and listen to the musicians playing for us" (child at elementary school after a school concert)

A little over four years ago, I had a dream:
Music should be a part of everything we do at our school.

In my experience, music can bring joy, new experiences, inspiration, cultural enrichment and a sense of community – regardless of a child's or young person's musical ability. I wanted the schoolchildren on the Herlufmagle Campus to benefit from that.

Concretising the dream took about six months, working with an external consultant. I contacted Næstved Music School and the Municipality of Næstved's Children and Culture Consultant to find out if they knew of any schools or municipalities that had done something similar, but I couldn't find any. We had to develop the project from scratch.

After that, the school's teachers became involved in the project – initially, mainly music and Danish teachers – and I reached out to potential partners to find out what we could create together.

Starting from the 2022–23 school year, the dream has become a reality, while also taking on a life of its own.

Herlufmagle Campus is one of three Susåskolen campuses in Næstved. A total of 215 children attend the school in grades 0–6, including three special-needs classes. The school concert scheme has been in place at the school since 1992, when it began as a pilot project under the auspices of Storstrøm County, and since 2007 under the auspices of LMS.

My background in Music

“I’ll never forget that particular encounter with music!”

And why music as a profile? I grew up in a musical family – more specifically: My father was an organist and gave piano lessons at home. And as a family we’ve always done a lot of singing together, both in connection with festive seasons and at family gatherings, so music became a part of me from a very young age.

At the beginning of 2nd grade, a man came to our class and played the violin for us. I was hooked! I really wanted to learn to play a violin like that. Hearing and seeing an instrument up close was so inspiring – an instrument that you even had the chance to play yourself. I’ll never forget that particular encounter with music!

I started playing the violin and later played the flute in the Køge School Orchestra. Later, I trained to become an elementary school teacher, specialising in music. At the school where I first taught, we had a lot of free music classes taught by volunteers, which a large number of the children attended. Every year, we were able to take about 80 children on a music camp. It was amazing for all of us.

All of this has given me an understanding of what children and young people can gain from working with music. It has also taught me that we need to create the right environment and opportunities, and that those of us who work with the children must take responsibility for this and inspire others to do the same.

Music profile in practice

“The children were clearly used to singing and to music being part of their daily lives. Thanks to Tove and Henrik for making music a priority!”

(LMS evaluation by musicians, 2024)

At Susåskolen, Herlufmagle Campus, our music profile means that we incorporate music into the annual lesson plans for as many subjects as possible; we sing at morning assembly every day; we have a school choir and ensemble playing as well as brass band instruction for children in grade 4. We also incorporate music into the school’s well-being initiatives (AKT) and collaborate with a wide range of partners. With that in mind, we have decided to have three trained, dedicated and competent music teachers on what is otherwise a relatively small campus.

In addition, the entire Susåskolen community works with the concept of cultural and aesthetic formation and engagement opportunities, with particular focus on the following five areas: curiosity, self-control, community, decency and courage. Music plays an important role in our work with the schoolchildren attending the Herlufmagle campus.

Below, I have selected a few examples to illustrate what schoolchildren gain from working with music.

Morning assembly every day

The first ten minutes of the school day are devoted to morning assembly (this time is taken from the first module). The children go with their teacher to the common room we use for assemblies, where each class has its own designated spot. One of the school’s

music teachers is given time to plan the week's programme and to plan which teacher will lead the singing accompaniment and who will be responsible for greeting the children and helping them settle in. As a rule, we manage the time so that all children are back in their own classrooms after ten minutes. The repertoire is a mix of folk songs, hymns and children's songs, as well as contemporary pop and rock songs. Sometimes assembly is used to give a brief presentation about a musical style or an artist, and it can be led by either teachers or children. Other times, we watch a music video that we can sing along to or dance to.

The morning assembly also serves as a sort of emotional buffer for children who are struggling with the transition from home to school at the start of the day. Some may need to stay in the background for a while, while others slip in and find their place in the group, even if they arrive late for one reason or another. Also, the children in the special-needs classes feel comfortable being with the rest of the school – so much so that some of them are even able to perform or speak in front of the entire school. It's a great start to the day. There is general consensus among children and teachers that these assemblies help strengthen the sense of community and make everybody feel safe and at ease. We find that the children have become better at listening, engaging actively and supporting one another.

Collaboration with others

As a natural part of our school day, we collaborate with, among others, Næstved Music School. For example, we have a brass band group for grade 4 children, where instruction is provided by the classes' music teachers in collaboration with music school teachers who are music conservatory graduates. We exchange ideas and draw on each other's expertise and organise several joint events in the course of the year: For example, the children from our choir, ensemble and brass band groups are invited to perform in the music school's concerts. In addition, in the past couple of years, it has been a great pleasure that children from grades 5 and 6 have been invited to perform as a choir at a major annual concert in Næstved, where previously only professional musicians used to perform on stage.

Well-being and music

We find that music plays a significant role in the well-being of the children at our school. One specific initiative involves visits by a talented teacher from the music school who comes to our school to inspire the children to do rhythm and singing games during breaks – something that brings joy and creates a sense of community among the children, even across year groups. In addition, we have also brought on board an occupational therapist who trained as a music therapist in Norway, and she is able to combine her skills in new and innovative ways when working with schoolchildren.

Parents and the local community

We have also focused on launching initiatives that extend beyond the school day, both for parents and for the local community: Our music teachers and children regularly visit the local senior centre and local kindergartens to entertain the elderly and small children with songs and performances, and we also collaborate with the church on various events. In addition, parents are invited to attend the morning assembly on Fridays, and in collaboration with Næstved Music School, we have just launched an 'Evening Sing-alongs for Adults' programme, which is an offer for everyone in the Municipality of Næstved.

LMS concerts

“It was the highlight of the year, and I’m sure we’ll all remember it for years to come. The room was buzzing with the energy of happy children.”

(Concert with Thomas Sandberg)

Within the bigger picture of the music culture described earlier, the LMS scheme has come to play a significant part. The opportunities for schoolchildren and grown-ups to experience such a wide variety of musical impressions over the years are invaluable. To give you an idea of how the school concerts are received at our school, in this section I will draw on feedback from the two most recent concerts featuring the Saxopaths Saxophone Quartet (grades 0–3) and Thomas Sandberg (grades 4–6). The evaluations were done by one of our music teachers, Tove, who also serves as our LMS contact.

But the concert experience itself actually begins with the preparations, before the children even meet the musicians on the day of the concert.

Preparations and practicalities

Tove says that preparing the concerts is a very rewarding task because she knows she has a pool of relevant and talented musicians to choose from. At our school, we look for concerts that offer a new experience and an encounter with a music culture that is quite unfamiliar.

The teaching materials provided are then used in class to prepare the children. This can be in music or Danish classes or in other subjects. The materials are important, both for the quality of the children’s concert experience and from the point of view of their music education, and it is great that the materials often offer different levels to choose from.

“The teaching materials were excellent. As a music teacher, you really feel like diving into rhythms and improvisation with the children. As a teacher of a certain age, using an iPad in my music classes isn’t something that would normally come to mind, but now it does.” (Concert with Thomas Sandberg)

During the concert

All concerts take place in the school’s sports hall, where the children sit on the floor. From our morning assemblies, everyone knows where to sit. Our special-needs classes and other children facing special challenges participate alongside everybody else, but are seated in such a way that they can step back a bit or move to the side while still being part of the experience and the community. We have found that the school’s morning assemblies and music culture play a key role in making everyone feel comfortable participating.

“Thomas played on anything he could lay his hands on and recorded sounds and rhythms in loops, creating a beautiful musical backdrop. He had a fantastic rapport with the children and showed us how, using simple tools (an iPad and a loop), you can start playing your own music and make it sound like a whole orchestra.” (Concert with Thomas Sandberg)

The schoolchildren say

The children think the LMS concerts are awesome: *“It was wonderful; they walked*

“The LMS concerts provide the children at our school with unique experiences of music of a very high quality, which aligns perfectly with the strong music culture we are working to foster, the aim being to cultivate opportunities for engagement, strong communities, positive relationships and a high level of well-being.”

around among us playing”; “It was wonderful to hear the music, especially with my eyes closed. Sitting there listening with your eyes closed, you could daydream a little. You could enter a whole new world.” (Concert with Saxopaths Saxophone Quartet)

Music and instruments leave a lasting impression and inspire: *“The music was awesome, and learning you can play music on an iPad was fun. I was inspired”; “Now I play a little myself and make drum sounds”; “Some of us have started our own little band.”* (Concert with Thomas Sandberg)

Finally, all teachers at the school fully support the concerts, for the educational benefits and for the music – also because it is a rewarding experience for all the teachers who participate.

The concerts provide experiences that the schoolchildren will remember for a long time, and it is our impression that, since the school launched its music profile, they have come to enjoy the visits from professional musicians even more. As mentioned earlier, we find that the children become better at listening, engaging actively and supporting one another. This is also clearly evident during the concerts. Because of the school’s strong music culture, and because many of the children play instruments and sing themselves, they are better able to embrace what the LMS musicians offer and inspire in them. We also hear from the visiting musicians that the children at our school are a great and attentive audience.

What sets our school apart

The LMS concerts provide the children at our school with unique music experiences of a very high quality. This aligns perfectly with the strong music culture we are working to foster, the aim being to cultivate opportunities for engagement, strong communities, positive relationships and a high level of well-being.

It would be great to see clear evidence of our results from a professional evaluation of the project, but we have not had the money to involve the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA), for example, and as a school, we are not able to raise funding from foundations. However, we have no doubt that working with music makes a real difference at our school, particularly by cultivating a zest for life, courage, decency, self-control and a sense of community – the very areas of cultural and aesthetic formation mentioned earlier that we aim to encourage.

Here are a few examples: Curiosity – the children try new things, ask questions about the world around them and marvel at the wonders of life; and, not least, they approach other people – and the musicians – with an open mind. Self-discipline – the children listen and make room for others, and they seek and accept help from others. Community – the children feel comfortable being part of the school community, and they understand that people have different needs and may need to be treated differently to enjoy equal opportunities. Decency – the children say “Hello”, “Good morning” and “Thank you for today” when interacting with others at school, and they help others without being asked. Courage – the children volunteer to serve on the student council and as part of the school safety patrol, and many have the courage to stand up in front of everyone else and give a presentation or perform a dance or a piece of music.

But it doesn’t just happen. It takes dedicated teachers, a supportive management that is willing to allocate the necessary resources and, finally, positive and close collaboration with the music school and other local stakeholders.

When I ask grown-ups what they remember from their school days and music classes, it is not surprising that they mention their dedicated and authentic music teachers, as well as visits by professional musicians who had something special to offer. That is what leaves a lasting impression and cultivates the courage and desire to play and sing yourself. As a teacher, I am deeply grateful to be able to provide the children at our school with similar experiences, and I hope that they will hold on to their love of music throughout their lives: The music they listen to, the sense of community they experience through music and, not least, the fact that it makes them even more eager to actively pursue music themselves.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Henrik Garde was head of Susåskolen’s Herlufmagle Campus in Næstved where he filled various leadership roles since 2006*. Henrik grew up in a very musical family and trained as an elementary school teacher specialising in music. He has worked as a music teacher for 15 years at two different schools and has also taught at music schools. Henrik takes a particular interest in school development through music and cultural and aesthetic formation. The music profile of Herlufmagle Campus was pioneered by Henrik who had a vision towards the end of 2020 of integrating music into every aspect of school life at Herlufmagle Campus. The dream was realised in August 2022, and music is now woven into the fabric of the entire school day.

*Henrik retired as of Dec. 2025, but the school continues the music activities.

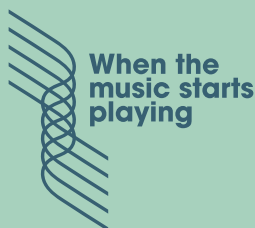


But it doesn't just happen. It takes dedicated teachers, a supportive management that is willing to allocate the necessary resources and, finally, positive and close collaboration with the music school and other local stakeholders."





Music and singing have the power to create, strengthen and develop social connections. When performing at school concerts, we leave the red carpets of the concert halls behind in favour of temporary *pop-up* stages right where our future is growing up in schools big and small all over Denmark – schools that need all the social cohesion they can get.”



Can I join in?

Notes from the LMS school concert tour bus

By Jens Skou Olsen, PhD and Improvising musician

In our lives, whether we are young or old, there is an important question that keeps cropping up. And that is the question: Can I join in? Can I experience the joy of becoming a WE without losing myself? This article follows the DRUMDRUM orchestra¹ on a school concert tour and discusses both what it is school concerts do, and what they can achieve in terms of cultivating communities, cultural enrichment and a desire to co-create.

When does the school concert start?

The school concert is a cherished institution on the Danish music scene. For 45 minutes, the school suddenly sounds different. Together, children and adults get to experience how professional musicians, of the highest musical and artistic calibre, bring the sports hall, auditorium or school canteen to life with joyful, sorrowful, quiet, groovy, wild and captivating music from all corners of the world. The concert is scheduled to start at 08:45 – but when does it actually start?

It's a quarter to eight on a Wednesday morning, and we're sitting on the tour bus in a rain-soaked school car park on central Zealand. It is late November, and it is dark, cold and wet – the air heavy with dampness. Benita has ventured out into the rain and gone to the office to find out where we should park our gear. Kaare and I remain seated on the bus for a little while longer, looking forward to the coffee that is probably waiting for us inside. A moment later, Benita reappears in the light of the headlights, waving her arms in the direction we should be heading. Time to haul some gear. Two girls walking through the school's main entrance shout: "Hi Benita, we've seen you play!". And we realise that the children have been working with the teaching materials – which is great because it means we have already made a connection! The two girls who recognised Benita have spread the word that DRUMDRUM has arrived at their school, and soon we are surrounded by a crowd of curious children. "Can we help carry?" the children ask, and all of a sudden there is no shortage of hands wanting to help carry our instruments inside. I manage to get an OK from a teacher peering into the sports hall – the children are welcome to help us! We are inundated with questions as we let our spontaneously appointed 'music crew' unpack our instruments. "What does that thing do?" We're now ready for the sound check. The contact teacher has brought us some coffee and fruit, and the concert is due to start in half an hour.²

As an *event*, the school concert has already started!

1 DRUMDRUM is led by drummer Benita Haastrup, with Kaare Munkholm on vibraphone and Jens Schou Olsen on bass.

2 Field note 1 is from a tour with DRUMDRUM to a state school on Zealand in November 2024.

On gauging the mood and being in tune with the school

Every school has its own unique sound and mood, and the moment we musicians walk through the school doors, we instantly help shape the mood for the day. Moods are a strange thing; we sense them intuitively, yet it can be incredibly difficult to pinpoint exactly what creates a particular mood. A school is, above all, a formal setting with rules, schedules and mandatory tasks to be completed; and for us musicians, it is clear that we have landed in a dynamic, complex and diverse life world. Children also get upset in school, and adults have days of feeling stressed, tired and not at their best in school.

As school concert musicians, for a time we become part of school life, and we need to be attentive and sensitive to the many – perhaps ambiguous – moods flowing through the school. The success of our concert at 08:45 depends on our ability to create a mood with the janitor who finds a power source for us; with the music teacher who picked up croissants for us on his way to school; with the children who just want to join in; and with the cleaning lady who puts down her broom and unlocks the door to the toilets. For a few hours this Wednesday morning, we are part of the school staff, and as we set up our instruments, we are creating our own little scenic hood. From here, we have the freedom to express ourselves through music together with a sports hall full of people young and old.

Music as social catalyst

Our lives begin with a lullaby, come of age with a wedding march, and end with funeral songs and music.³ Music, singing and dancing are among humanity's oldest social catalysts. When performing at a school concert, we draw on at least 35,000 years of musical tradition. Long before we humans invented written language and civilisation, we sang, played music and danced. To communicate means to unite, join and share, and music, singing and dancing are universal, foundational forms of communication.⁴ Viewed as an art form, music is special.

In three caves in southern Germany, bone flutes have been found, featuring markings to measure and space the finger holes as a way of tuning the instruments. These finds are evidence that the early Europeans had a rich musical culture featuring tuned flutes across various settlements.⁵ I am a jazz improviser, and I have devoted a significant part of my musical career to playing and creating music together with children. The finds from the 35,000-year-old human caves in Germany confirm my research: Music and singing have the power to create, strengthen and develop social connections. When performing at school concerts, we leave the red carpets of the concert halls behind in favour of temporary pop-up stages right where our future is growing up in schools big and small all over Denmark – schools that need all the social cohesion they can get.

The school's atmosphere is our shared responsibility

The school concert is a sociocultural event. It is shaped, developed and transformed by music, people, spaces, objects and events. How can we understand this interaction? We can all clearly sense whether an environment feels comfortable or perhaps unsafe. Do we feel at home, or do we feel at sea? The German philosopher Gernot Böhme suggests that we use atmosphere as a concept for describing how it feels to be, for example, at school. The school's atmosphere is the sum of all the people, things and events that fill the school every single day. This creates an atmosphere that either lifts us up with joy and anticipation or drags us down into anxiety and despair.

3 Wang 2015, p. 1

4 Blacking 1974, p. X.

5 Conard, Malina & Münzel, 2009.

“When performing at a school concert, we contribute to the school’s atmosphere. If we succeed in doing that, we see the atmosphere change and improve.”

Böhme argues that our daily lives are thus shaped by our experiences, and that people, spaces, objects and events all radiate specific moods, which together create the atmosphere in which we live.⁶ Once we musicians have set up our instruments and sound equipment, we tidy up the stage. We remove the empty instrument cases and coffee cups and tidy up the cables on the floor. We call it stage aesthetics! We adjust the lighting and temperature in the room, if possible, and we arrange mats and chairs in a harmonious formation around the stage. We basically try to make the sports hall or auditorium as harmonious and pleasant a place to be as possible. In this sense, the school concert is also about more than just the music.

When performing at a school concert, we contribute to the school’s atmosphere. If we succeed in doing that, we see the atmosphere change and improve. There is nothing like happy and inspired children and adults to lighten the mood and brighten up the day. According to Gernot Böhme, the school’s atmosphere is therefore our shared responsibility: What kinds of things do we surround ourselves with, and what are the narratives about what we are doing? All of these experiences contribute to the school’s atmosphere. As a result, the school concert is not merely a product that features music intended to entertain children at a school. Children and adults, the sports hall, the instruments, the teaching materials, the room temperature, the lighting, the scent, the acoustics and our understanding of what a school concert is – all these elements either enhance or detract from the school’s atmosphere. The school concert is not trapped ‘inside’ the musicians, just as walking is not trapped ‘inside’ our legs when we go for a walk.⁷ The school concert is our shared creation, and it will only be a success if we manage to give it the freedom to be exactly that.⁸

The school concert as a powerful vehicle for cultural and aesthetic formation

This is where the power of the school concert as a vehicle for cultural and aesthetic formation (Bildung) shines through. Throughout most of our school days – and our lives in general – we are left to being ourselves, shaped as we are by half a century of intense individualisation of society.⁹ This makes the school concert all the more important – as a chance for us to work together to share experiences and create a musical atmospheres. The Danish philosopher Peter Kemp says that “*the purpose of school should be to educate citizens who genuinely desire to live together*” (Kemp 2015). On this particular Wednesday morning at a state school on Zealand, we find ourselves practicing this very concept of living together.

We, meaning all of us, deeply feel and recognise that each of us matters when we contribute to the school concert. Radiating positive energy, we create a musical atmosphere that forges a sense of community among us. We are not confined to reflecting on the world as subjects. We may even experience things far more deeply and intensely through this

6 Böhme 2013, p. 19

7 Elias 1991, p. 114.

8 See also Olsen 2025.

9 Bauman 2001.

dynamic community when we feel ourselves becoming one voice through singing together and one being through our rhythmic applause after the school concert as we hope for an encore!

Children swaying to the music and teachers dancing

The American-Japanese artist and writer Makoto Fujimura writes that “*we are human beings before we are human doings*”. The school’s role in the cultural and aesthetic formation (Bildung) of children cannot be viewed purely as that of producing a workforce; rather, its mission is just as much – and perhaps above all – to nurture a zest for life, curiosity, compassion and the courage to live a full life. Children are our future, and schools must help them develop the skills required to tackle not only today’s challenges, but especially those of the future – challenges that may not yet be known. Here, my research highlights the transformative power of the ‘wow’ experience¹⁰ as yet another of the formative benefits of school concerts. Just as we in our culture perceive ourselves as independent individuals most of the time, each of us is also usually focused on a goal or a purpose. Those days when children could spend entire afternoons drifting aimlessly about without really doing anything are long gone. Idleness has become a rarity, as our world is increasingly dominated by electronics and screens that hijack our attention and tempt us into an endless loop of doing rather than simply being. The German philosopher Hartmut Rosa posits that the battle for our attention is intensifying rapidly, which is alienating us from the world.¹¹ Now more than ever, we need to cultivate a more sensory and open-minded world-centredness, one that allows us to rediscover the joy of being part of a community.

Attending a school concert means exactly this: To be together and feel how a large group of people come together in the music. Being as the opposite of doing is, by nature, aimless, and it cultivates an active and sensitive awareness needed to be able to create something together. We only truly discover what we can do together once we are fully immersed in doing it together. The feeling of being part of something bigger, of letting go of oneself and forgetting oneself, is a ‘wow’ experience with transformative power. Through being together at the school concert, we become something more than we ever imagined we could be on our own:

It is now 15 minutes until the concert starts. But we have spent the entire time among the children and their teachers. We have chatted a bit, played a bit and also showed the children what we can do with, say, one of Benita’s drumsticks. At the end of the drumstick, there is thick, soft white felt that feels nice to the touch. I show them how wonderful it is, and the children raise their hands in the air and get to feel it. We are well on our way to becoming good friends! I see a little girl at the very back of the sports hall, sitting on her teacher’s lap. She’s holding a little doll in her hand, and the girl is upset; she hides her face in the teacher’s sleeve as I crouch down in front of them from a distance. But then I talk to the doll instead. And the doll really wants to feel how soft the felt is. The girl peeks out from under the teacher’s sleeve with her right eye, and I can tell she’s puzzled – both by her doll’s boldness and her own curiosity. Half an hour later, the girl has forgotten her shyness and bravely raises her hand. She is ready to come up and play with us.¹²

Being yourself can also be a prison that is hard to escape. In this context, the school con-

10 Bamford 2018, p. 1.

11 Rosa 2013.

12 Field Note 2 is also from the aforementioned tour.

“Now more than ever, we need to cultivate a more sensory and open-minded world-centredness, one that allows us to rediscover the joy of being part of a community. Attending a school concert means exactly this: To be together and feel how a large group of people come together in the music.”



“Live Music in Schools, in collaboration with schools and musicians, brings school concerts to life as spaces for being together around something that is wondrous, life-giving, community-building – and therefore important.”

cert serves as an example of a vibrant community of practice that helps people of all ages step outside their comfort zones through transformative experiences. It is a gift for both the individual and the community. I am standing on stage playing my bass in front of a group of children who are swaying to the music, and I see two teachers starting to dance together at the back. The atmosphere is contagious, and it makes me smile. Children swaying and teachers dancing are people who, for a moment, have forgotten that life is usually something to be endured through focused and determined doing. Swaying and dancing together is a spontaneous and self-forgetful state of being that is joyfully and wholly connected to the world; a connection that can also cause our concentration, focus and actions to resonate and shine with a contagious vitality.

A deep longing

Living beings have a deep longing to be connected because we stem from a fundamental state of unity. Our individual existence seems to separate us from the community, locking us within our physical body and the person we are. Suddenly, in our independence (standing on our own), we may suddenly feel alone, lonely and left out. “Can I join in?” we ask, if we have the confidence and courage to do so. Live Music in Schools, in collaboration with schools and musicians, brings school concerts to life as spaces for being together around something that is wondrous, life-giving, community-building – and therefore important.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jens Skou Olsen is an associate professor and holds a PhD. He is the lead instructor on the cultural leadership programme at Roskilde Festival Højskole and has been employed by the Rhythmic Music Conservatory (RMC) in Copenhagen since 1997. His research focuses on transformative experiences through creative communities, and from 1997 to 2008 he was involved in the management and development of RMC. He is passionate about developing educational programmes in the fields of art, pedagogy and cultural management, and serves on the board of ‘Sophia’, a Danish think tank dedicated to pedagogy, education and formation (Bildung). Jens has been affiliated with a number of state and municipal institutions as a lecturer, philosopher, inspirational speaker, performer and moderator, and has written and edited articles and books on art, pedagogy and leadership. Finally, every year Jens goes on a school concert tour of Denmark, Sweden and Norway.

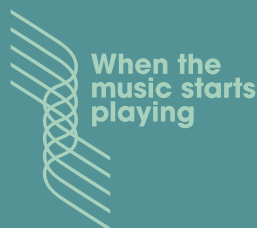
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The school concerts are a wonderful gift for our children. Ensuring that all children in every grade get to experience live concerts, is a very important part of their cultural and aesthetic formation. I believe one of the greatest strengths of the LMS concerts lies in the remarkable versatility of the many professional musicians featured in their programme. It's wonderful for our children and young people."

Helle Haim, head of Baggesenskolen



The sound of presence and community in schools

By Christina Lythjohan Andreassen, Teacher, Baggesenskolen

Sharing a special live music experience leaves a lasting impression on children and young people at school. By bringing their music into the school and the children's 'home turf', the musicians create a unique, shared experience – one that stays with the children long into their adult lives. Live music in schools broadens children's horizons in so many ways.

Baggesenskolen's assembly hall is filled with lively voices. A large group of children have sat down and are eagerly waiting to meet the musicians, who are about to treat them to a shared concert experience of music and storytelling. Beforehand, the children have been preparing for the concert in their music classes or in other subjects that tie in with the concert's themes and content. They have already seen short videos featuring the musicians, which makes them feel like they already know them and their music a little bit.

Still, the children also know that what they are about to share with one another is an absolutely unique experience that will never happen again, because that is just how it is with live music: No two concerts are alike – a concert is right here and now and can never be recreated. A moment of presence and community!

“It's fun to see the musicians in real life and listen to music, I've never heard before, with my friends.”

Kaj, 2nd grade

Reality check

When the world outside the school walls comes to visit, the children's eyes are opened to new and fresh perspectives on what they learn in school. What is it like, for example, to work as a musician?

When a musician stands before the children with authenticity and presence – both as a person and through their music – the children get to experience the real thing up close. With their natural curiosity, children can gain insights into a profession in which people pour vast amounts of creativity, empathy, passion and personality into their music – and that is a gift to those who listen.

The children witness the musicians' ability to immerse themselves in what they are doing – to put in the effort and thereby find satisfaction in what they devote their time and energy to. Valuable qualities for everyone to carry with them throughout life.

“You listen to music differently when it’s live, and it broadens your taste in music.”

Vigga, 5th grade

Music culture as part of cultural and aesthetic formation

What is the role of music in our cultural and aesthetic formation, and how do we use music? Fortunately, most people have unforgettable experiences of live music throughout their lives, created by both Danish and international artists – experiences that resonate throughout the body and are so powerfully sensory that the feeling from the concert can easily be recalled long after it has taken place. However, not all children have such cultural experiences at home, which is why it is important for them to have shared concert experiences at school in a safe environment alongside their peers and adults.

Most children and young people listen to music every day: They can pick and choose from YouTube or other music streaming services and create playlists of their favourite songs. They can skip tracks and listen again, but what is missing is a sense of connection, continuity and coherence – something that only happens as you immerse yourself in an artist's music. The school concerts deepen this immersion in music, while also introducing children to new genres, modes of expression and historical periods, as well as grown-ups from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Some concerts require children to be quiet and listen carefully, which can be a challenge for many. Other concerts are full of energy, fun, dancing, co-creation and dialogue with the musicians, and it is precisely the variety and versatility that make school concerts so great! The children should immerse themselves with their eyes and ears, take in the experience with all their senses – and learn what it means to be a good concertgoer.

Music in all school subjects

Another unique and obvious strength of the school concert is the learning that comes from working with the teaching materials produced by LMS for use both before and after the concert experience. These materials are not only a resource and a gift to the field of music education, allowing children to fully explore creative music-making and build knowledge of genres and instruments as well as music history. Subjects such as Danish, English, history and visual arts can also offer angles and perspectives on the given theme. In this way, the activities surrounding the concert can become interdisciplinary in nature, and the teaching materials can be used at different levels, depending on the time available, teacher resources and so on.

As the children work with everything around the concert, it becomes clear to them that, as a subject, music touches on elements from all the other school subjects, and that subjects can thus enrich one another: They realise that musical notation is essentially mathematics, and that we also work with the messages, language and rhythm in, for example, Danish and English. That movement is an important part of learning, that music is deeply intertwined with history and the world of art – and that we become better at using our brains when we engage in musical activities that involve both body and mind!

Brave adults inspire brave children

Performing in front of others takes courage, and when musicians give a concert, they demonstrate that courage, which is a great source of inspiration for schoolchildren. Performing requires thorough preparation and the courage to trust yourself and what you do. Musicians become powerful role models. The confidence children gain from a school concert doesn't just stay in music class – it gives them the courage to speak up, give presentations, and actively participate in all school subjects. At the same time, the children's respect for one another grows, and a focus is directed on well-being within the school community.

The good story

At Baggesensskolen, the concert has ended, and the children are clapping enthusiastically. Some of them remember from past experiences to shout “encore” – and if they're lucky, the musicians have saved the best for last. The assembly hall then empties of happy children, while the bravest among them make their way to the stage to talk to the musicians, ask questions or ask for an autograph.

Back in the classrooms, the children continue to chatter excitedly, and once they get home, it all starts over again as they recount the funny, quirky and exciting details from the concert to their families. In 10 or 20 years' time, the children will probably still remember the experience, the feeling, the atmosphere, the sense of connection with the musicians and the sense of community they felt during the concert a little better than what they were doing on that very same school day on page five of their maths book.

School concerts create shared memories and always make for a great story to share with the outside world!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christina Lythjohan Andreassen is a certified elementary school teacher and has been working as a teacher since 2000, the past 21 years at Baggesensskolen in Korsør. She primarily teaches Danish and visual arts as elective courses to the oldest children, while also leading the singing during morning assemblies and teaching music to grades 1–6. Her professional life is strongly influenced by the person she is in her private life, where music, singing, dance/movement and creativity play a central role. Throughout her years at Baggesensskolen, Christina has been the school's LMS contact and has therefore acted as a facilitator for the school's professional concerts, handling all aspects of the process before, during and after the concerts.



Viewing children as active participants means that they are seen not merely as passive recipients of aesthetic experiences, but co-creators of their own understanding of the music. When children engage with their surroundings, a space is created that invites curiosity, wonder and sensory exploration, which supports their development and well-being.”



When children flourish

Aesthetic processes and wellbeing among schoolchildren when experiencing live music

By Henriette Blomgren, Associate Professor, VIA University College

When schoolchildren experience music and art as members of an audience, they become part of an aesthetic process that is of great importance to their wellbeing. Wellbeing is often understood as something that takes place within the individual, but in the research project ‘When the music starts playing’, we examined how wellbeing can be understood and linked to interaction with the surroundings. In other words, we do not view wellbeing merely as an internal state, but as something that emerges through our interaction with the world – socially, sensorially and relationally.

In our study, we are interested in the relationship between aesthetic processes (involving beauty, art and sensory awareness) and wellbeing. We are inspired, among others, by scholar Donna Haraway, who posits that humans are in relational interaction with and fundamentally intertwined with the world. Relationships, therefore, do not exist merely between defined individuals, but arise and transform in the interaction between people, objects and the environment. From this perspective, wellbeing is not something the child possesses alone, but something that arises in the shared space where the child interacts (intertwines and ‘becomes’) with the world.

Viewing children as active participants means that they are seen not merely as passive recipients of aesthetic experiences, but co-creators of their own understanding of the music. When children engage with their surroundings, a space is created that invites curiosity, wonder and sensory exploration, which supports their development and wellbeing.

In this context, a professional school concert featuring musicians, music and musical instruments becomes a key element in its own right, with which the children interact and from which they derive meaning. In the concert situation, children are not just passive listeners, but are influenced by their interaction with the music. This interaction creates a deeper connectedness with the world.

School concerts contribute to children’s wellbeing by creating aesthetically meaningful encounters that resonate in the child and with the world. When that happens, even challenging encounters become meaningful. Encountering a new genre of music can give rise to uncertainty and wonder, but wellbeing is not just about joy – it is also about challenging yourself. The concept of flourishing views wellbeing as a dynamic process in which growth arises through engagement and wonder. A concert can seem overwhelming, but navigating that uncertainty and getting used to new experiences can strengthen flourishing over time.

The metaphor of flowers being planted in soil that must first be broken up, shaken out and cultivated can be used to illustrate this process. Aesthetic encounters can slightly shake up a child's world, but this is precisely what makes growth possible. In this way, concerts can be not only a source of joy, but also part of the important process of children developing and forming their identities through the sensitive-sensory, i.e. aesthetic experiences.

FLOURISHING – wellbeing as flourishing

The concept of flourishing describes a process in which children come together in their open, wondering and curious approach to the world. It highlights children's ability, in childhood, to discover new connections and experience the world as rich and vibrant.

Interviews with the schoolchildren reveal what we describe as flourishing in their encounter with the music. An old washboard, used as an instrument during a concert, piqued the curiosity of the children, who wondered how it could be used to make music. This example of flourishing illustrates how we link wellbeing to a sharpening of our senses, the awakening of wonder and recognising new possibilities in the world.

Flourishing is about children thriving through the relationships and materials they encounter. In school concerts, children take part in a shared experience where the music, the physical space and the social connections align in a pressure-free environment. Flourishing is a dynamic process that arises through interaction with the music, the musicians and other children. All those present become co-creators of the experience, and new connections are formed – like roots seeking nourishment. Music supports this growth and enhances children's wellbeing and engagement.

In a performance-oriented environment, school concerts offer a safe space where children can enjoy themselves without the pressure to perform. The musicians immerse themselves in the music, but they also need to engage the children – and vice versa. As they are captivated by the music, a shared experience is created that demonstrates the value of immersion and engagement, even without words. Children, musicians and music are all creators and creations.

Based on our understanding of wellbeing as flourishing, what is important is to make room for immersion and sensory exploration in school – giving children the opportunity to wonder and engage. School concerts create an aesthetic space where the sensitive-sensory dimension activates, and where children can experience something that transcends themselves. It is not a superficial influence, but a deeper and more meaningful experience that opens up new possibilities for how they can exist and come into being in the world.

VIBRANT MATTER and WORLDING

The concept of vibrant matter, developed by philosopher Jane Bennett, challenges the idea that matter is passive. Matter influences us through vibrations and energy, shaping our experiences. In school concerts, music is a force that vibrates and creates a physical resonance between bodies.

The children's drawings of the concert reflect these dynamics. A girl draws sound swirling round the room – at first like a snowstorm, but she explains that it is the sound that moves and creates a connection.

We connect the concept of ‘vibrant matter’ with Donna Haraway’s concept of worlding, which is the process of co-constructing worlds together through our interaction with our surroundings. We are shaped by our relationships and by ‘worlding with the world’.

In Haraway’s wake, we find the concept of intra-acting, which dissolves the distinction between humans (the human world) and objects, things, animals (the non-human world). For example, it illustrates sound as vibrations extending outwards in every direction, without physical boundaries – where does sound begin and end? Sound waves travel through space, strike bodies and objects, creating new resonances and new wave motions.

School concerts are not merely educational or aesthetic experiences, but also physical and relational ones that affect children both physically and emotionally. Through the concepts of vibrant matter and worlding, we come to understand how sound, matter and relationships create something that extends beyond the individual listener.

SENSORY CONTACT ZONES – experiencing with your whole body

Affect researcher Kathleen Stewart emphasises the importance of sensory ‘contact zones’ – spaces where the senses are stimulated and new insights are generated. School concerts serve as spaces where music is experienced aurally, visually and physically through sound, movement and vibrations.

Navigating a sensory contact zone requires active presence and sensitive awareness. This aesthetic experience creates connections and insights that cannot always be described, but which impact our bodies and our senses.

School concerts can thus be understood as a special space where the senses are heightened and connections are formed – a place where children are invited to participate in an experience that transcends the everyday and opens the door to an aesthetic experience that is physical, emotional and cognitive.

KINSHIP – part of something bigger

Kinship is another concept addressed by Donna Haraway. She uses the concept of kinship to describe new connections to the world – not as a break with existing relationships, but as an exploration of kinship across people, objects and nature. This underscores our deep connectedness with and obligations towards the environment.

When encountering music, children experience a sense of kinship as they engage with the musicians, the instruments and the details of the concert. The instruments become more than just objects – they vibrate and ‘talk back’. The children also express kinship through their drawings and stories, which shows that music is not merely an experience, but a sensory memory of encounters with musicians and instruments.

Forming new connections can be challenging and involve uncertainty. Cultural and aesthetic formation (*Bildung*) and development often involve overcoming adversity, and school concerts can be intense experiences. Some children find them overwhelming, but gradually they become familiar with the format, which is also a form of kinship. The sense of community created by music causes the individual to take a back seat, and in the children’s drawings, they are often depicted as part of the audience – i.e. not the centre of attention. School concerts become a zone for this process, where children, through their senses, experiences and reflections, become part of something bigger.

“The idea that children can only understand and engage with music through large-scale productions, imaginative costumes and spectacular stage shows is to underestimate children’s ability to sense and experience. Music is a unique power, and children are able to connect with that power...”

Experiencing the power of music

The idea that children can only understand and engage with music through large-scale productions, imaginative costumes and spectacular stage shows is to underestimate children’s ability to sense and experience. Music is a unique power, and children are able to connect with that power when it is allowed to unfold and express its own unique language, and to be of intrinsic value. It is not a question of telling children how to experience music, but about giving them the opportunity to encounter it on their own terms and on the music’s terms.

What makes concerts for children special is that they are live encounters between the children, the music and the musicians. In this encounter, the experience takes on its meaning – not as an isolated, individual sensation, but as a shared process in which energies, impressions and reactions merge into an unpredictable dynamic. It is precisely this unpredictability that creates a deeper, more meaningful experience.

Something that often surprises people is how intently children watch the musicians and their instruments. They are interested in what the musicians look like, what their names are, and what they are wearing. Their curiosity shows that children engage with things in far greater detail than one might expect. An example from an interview illustrates this: A girl was captivated by a musician – the shirt he was wearing and his instrument – drawn in by pure admiration for something that grown-ups might overlook.

When children see an instrument like a tuba or a washboard, they are often encountering something completely new – something that is not part of their everyday lives. It is a magical moment when they experience the world from a different perspective. At a time when many children’s experiences are shaped by standardised and functional spaces, there is a risk that aesthetic wonder and imagination will be lost. That is why it is important to create spaces where children can explore, wonder and experience the world in a freer and more open way.

Children’s aesthetic experience

Children experience the world aesthetically when they engage their senses (for example in their encounters with art or nature) to explore, feel, immerse themselves and wonder. Children are naturally curious, and school concerts activate their curiosity. The music draws their attention outwards – not passively, but through a state of sensitive openness to the sounds and the unusual instruments. This aesthetic encounter fosters a sense of presence and benefits both outgoing and more introverted children.

**“In other words,
experiencing music does
not necessarily mean that
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emotional sensibility and
inspire reflection.”**



Aesthetics is not just about being able to express yourself, but also about listening, sensing and being present in the world without passing judgment. Aesthetic experiences inspire further reflection and perhaps experimentation. Not in a performance-oriented fashion, but to relive and reconnect with the atmosphere and sense of presence you may have experienced. Aesthetics does not always have to be about impressions and expressions (as is the case with aesthetic learning processes). Basically, it is about being fully present and allowing yourself to be moved.

Aesthetic experiences leave a lasting impression on a person or child. A tune can come back to you, or a mood can shape the way you see the world. Children often process the world through play, reflecting on and translating their experiences into tangible actions.

School instruction focuses on academic progression, while aesthetic experiences have inherent value. They happen spontaneously, but can also be fostered through being present and open to seeing beyond the obvious. So this is not about achievement, practice or mastery, but about sensing, intuiting and being open to emotional sensibility. Sensing and intuiting are the foundational pillars of aesthetics, a perspective that Professor Dorthe Jørgensen has brought to the fore and that I have applied to understand aesthetic processes in children's institutional settings.

The importance of art and culture in schools

The school gives children the opportunity to explore art and music, and school concerts create a space where they can thrive through attention and listening. The focus here is on curiosity and reflection, not achievement – the children become co-creators of the concert and the stories that emerge.

When schoolchildren encounter music and art in an open, more relaxed setting, without constant adult guidance, it is an opportunity for them to explore their own creativity and tap into their emotional sensibility. This enables flourishing, allowing the children to flourish at their own pace and develop their full potential as human beings through self-discovery and reflection.

Introducing children to materials and experiences that spark wonder and encourage curiosity is an essential part of this process. Materials in the form of instruments, colours or sound can be more than just objects – they possess their own agency, a kind of vibrant matter. This concept highlights how materials and objects are not passive, but actually have the ability to influence us and stir something within us.

In other words, experiencing music does not necessarily mean that children have to play an instrument themselves – it can just as easily be a process in which they use their senses, wonder and let themselves be carried away by the power of music and its ability to evoke emotional sensibility and inspire reflection. When children interact with music in this way, they form a connection with it that is not based on achievement, but on outward-focused, sensitive-sensory awareness and togetherness. And then the magic happens!



OM FORFATTEREN

Henriette Blomgren is a qualified elementary school teacher with a Master of Education in General Pedagogy and a PhD in Aesthetic Processes. She is an associate professor on the social education programme at VIA University College in Aarhus, and is affiliated with VIA's research programme 'Børns trivsel på tværs'. The focus of Henriette's teaching, research and publications is on aesthetic processes, play, children's perspectives, children's culture and art education, and how these contribute to a fulfilling childhood. She is a member of the steering committee for the Nordic research network 'BLÆK' (Children, Play, Aesthetics, Art). Finally, Henriette is a member of the research team behind the research project 'When the music starts playing'.

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“

It was clear that the concerts made a difference both in terms of the sense of class community and the bonds between teachers and children; they were simply enriched by a shared experience and, together, let themselves be swept away by the music, the stories, and the physical impact that music often has.”



When music becomes a gift you didn't know you were missing

By Rikke Kamedula Skovsbo, Children's Culture Consultant the Municipality of Viborg

In 2021, the Municipality of Viborg made the important decision that all children attending the municipal schools must experience live music at least once a year – but not all of the schools were particularly enthusiastic about the idea. Why the resistance? What role did the culture school end up playing? And how did the initiative turn into a gift the schools didn't know they were missing? This is the municipal LMS contact's report.

Creating 'The Common Foundation'

In December 2021, two committees in the Municipality of Viborg – Youth and Children and Culture and Leisure – made the joint, forward-looking decision to create the best 'Open School' in Denmark. Following the 2014 public school reform, the Danish Ministry of Education introduced 'The Open School' initiative – requiring schools to engage more with local communities and collaborate with cultural institutions and other stakeholders. All schools were required to actively integrate cultural events and activities into their curriculum, and in Viborg, this led the two political committees to jointly create 'The Common Foundation' (Det Fælles Fundament) – a common strategic framework designed to ensure that all schoolchildren attending public schools in the Municipality of Viborg get to experience high-quality 'Open School' activities.

The strategic framework focuses on the following six core themes:

- History and cultural heritage
- Sustainability and natural sciences
- Visual creativity
- Business
- Cultural offerings
- Clubs and associations

As Children's Culture Consultant, my role was to deepdive into core theme number 5, which focuses on cultural offerings. My role was to support efforts to introduce schoolchildren to various cultural genres. As part of this initiative, the Municipality of Viborg entered into a partnership with LMS, and it was decided at the central level that all schoolchildren should experience at least one live concert every year. As a result, the Municipality of Viborg entered into a contract with LMS to organise approximately 90 concerts a year at the municipality's 25 public schools. This was to ensure that all schoolchildren (approx. 11,000) experience live music every year.

The Head of Culture & Events was happy. The Head of Schools was happy. The Children's Culture Consultant was happy.

But not all the schools were happy. Until the adoption by the politicians of 'Det Fælles Fundament', the schools in the Municipality of Viborg had enjoyed a high degree of autonomy and freedom to plan the school year and its content. With 'Det Fælles Fundament' came a great deal of external interference, which the individual schools had to address, accept and adapt to. The LMS concerts were therefore not viewed by everyone as a gift – nor as an enhancement of the schools' cultural life.

From crossed arms to craving more

"They had the children wrapped around their little finger. We had a lot of wonderful feedback from the children: 'I couldn't sit still at all – my body just wanted to dance', 'The best concert I've ever been to'." (Concert with Astro Buddha Agogo, school in Viborg, December 2024)

As Children's Culture Consultant and municipal LMS contact, it thus fell to me to organise and oversee all the concerts. I had to make sure that the schools knew when concerts would be happening and that they were prepared to welcome the musicians, organise the concert, and, not least, prepare the children for the experience.

The first year was an uphill battle. Each school was asked to designate an LMS contact, and that was not exactly easy everywhere. Not all school heads were willing to designate a contact or allocate time for that person to handle the concert arrangements. After a lengthy process, in the end the Head of Schools had to order that a contact be designated at every school.

During the first year, a good colleague and I spent a great deal of time supporting the schools. It was important that the schools' contacts did not feel left to their own devices – and at the same time it was important for us to get plenty of feedback on how the schoolchildren, and especially the teachers, responded to the LMS concerts.

Fortunately, the music worked its magic. After all, who can sit there with their arms crossed when the children are happily singing along or – eyes sparkling with curiosity – soaking up the music, knowledge and culture?

I saw teachers, who had arrived on heavy feet, dancing out after the concert together with the children, humming a shared melody. It was clear that the concerts made a difference both in terms of the sense of class community and the bonds between teachers and children; they were simply enriched by a shared experience and, together, let themselves be swept away by the music, the stories, and the physical impact that music often has.

Fortunately, now – four years later – we see no more crossed arms. LMS liaisons are well-versed in their responsibilities. Of course, there is still room for improvement here and there, but overall, all the schools are happy with the LMS initiative – and many are now saying yes to any 'spare' concerts available.

When music makes a difference – and builds bridges

In my role as municipal LMS contact, I have had the opportunity to attend concerts at

the various schools, and I have often seen how the music brings joy as well as prompting reflection in the children.

The music tells stories about people and cultures that are far removed from the realities of the children's daily lives. Through music, a whole new world opens up, and the children develop a sense of connection and an understanding of other cultures that cannot be gained through history lessons or random Google searches.

This sense of connection became clear to me at a concert for grades 7–9 at a large school in Viborg a couple of years ago. Many of the children at this school are from different ethnic backgrounds, and this is clearly reflected in the diversity of the student body. Some of the children are from Syria and have fled through Europe before being granted residency in Denmark.

On stage is Channe Nussbaum with her orchestra – performing poems by Henrik Nordbrandt. The concert is intense, with klezmer rhythms and Channe's melancholic voice. At one point, Channe sings the song 'Vuggevis', which is a lullaby for a child of war or a child on the run. The room falls silent. Everybody is deeply moved by the song – especially the young Syrians, who are in tears as they connect with their innermost feelings. Their classmates are quiet and pensive, and while some of the children from Syria go and have a chat with Channe after the concert, it is clear that the Danish children have also been moved by the experience. As we head out, several of the children exclaim: "To think that Omar experienced this – in real life" or "I've never talked to him about what fleeing was like, but now I understand".

Over the course of the 45-minute concert, these young people were let into a whole new world – a world they have, in many ways, been close to on a daily basis, yet without ever having talked about it. Suddenly, through music, they were able to open a door and build a bridge, making it acceptable to talk about their classmates' experiences and associated feelings.

I have since spoken with one of the teachers from the school, who told me that this particular concert had had a profound impact on the class community and made the children realise that some of their classmates had lived through traumatic experiences – and that the music had given them an opportunity to talk about it together.

“... miraculously, about 400 children end up playing together with an LMS orchestra – during two days of great music. The children are amazingly concentrated and feel like little stars because they get the chance to play alongside professional musicians. They are seeing the results of having practised their instruments – and they feel the sense of community that music brings.”

The gift that keeps on giving

“The whole atmosphere – with the dimmed lights and the string of lights on the floor, the storytelling between songs, the alternative setup, and the band’s ability to get the children to sing and dance along – was nothing short of magical.” (Concert with UNNA, school in Viborg, November 2024)

The school concert programme is now so well organised and has been so successfully implemented in the Municipality of Viborg that I do not think we can do without it. I have no doubt that the schools would be up in arms if we were to do away with the concerts, and the children in the Municipality of Viborg would be culturally poorer.

But luckily, the gift has not been fully unwrapped yet. In recent years, our partnership with LMS has also extended to our culture school, Kulturskolen Viborg. Over the past few years, we have been working to integrate a so-called Kulturspor (culture track), at all public schools. This means that the schools will implement long-term culture tracks developed by the culture school – but realised in a partnership between the public school and culture school teachers.

Culture tracks are not just focused on music, but also on other cultural and aesthetic subjects. Many of the classes that are offered a culture track in music are referred to as ‘music classes’ and are taught a specific instrument for a whole school year. Classes are held at the school during regular school hours and are free of charge for children. Right now, the Municipality of Viborg has 24 piano classes, 11 wind instrument classes, 12 guitar classes and so on. In total, 55 music classes.

Every spring, these classes come together for a music class festival, where we form a large orchestra of schoolchildren, which performs alongside an LMS orchestra. It’s a crazy project, and every year I think: How on earth is this going to work out? But miraculously, about 400 children end up playing together with an LMS orchestra – during two days of great music. The children are amazingly concentrated and feel like little stars because they get the chance to play alongside professional musicians. They are seeing the results of having practised their instruments – and they feel the sense of community that music brings.

Kulturskolen Viborg also works with culture tracks in other arts-related subjects, such as visual arts. In this context, we have also helped test new formats in collaboration with LMS. This school year, for example, we have been exploring whether you can draw music. Can visual art be created using newly composed music?

“Working with LMS has really stimulated our musical curiosity. The Municipality of Viborg has evolved from a place with very little live music in schools to a place where school concerts are now warmly welcomed and new concert formats are being developed.”

The track concluded with an exciting concert by the LMS music group Njyd performing newly composed music, while the schoolchildren displayed their artwork. In this way, the music complemented the art experience and vice versa.

Working with LMS has really stimulated our musical curiosity. The Municipality of Viborg has evolved from a place with very little live music in schools to a place where school concerts are now warmly welcomed and new concert formats are being developed – we are also partnering Paletten, a local music venue, where some concerts are held. At the same time, these hybrid aesthetic projects are being embraced with curiosity, and they certainly have the potential to evolve into new concert formats and music tracks.

Music is a gift that Viborg was missing

“One of the quieter children came up to me afterwards and said: “Wow, that was awesome. They were really good.” (Concert with Sunbörn, school in Viborg, September 2024)

Over the past four years, children in the Municipality of Viborg have truly been given a gift. Fortunately, once the initiative got underway, the adults involved were also swept up in the enthusiasm – and the general consensus is now that the LMS concerts are a true gift for the schools in the Municipality of Viborg.

As municipal LMS contact, it is wonderful to know that the quality of the concerts and the teaching materials is top-notch, and that, as a municipal gatekeeper, I do not have to spend time and energy selecting the concerts or the musicians. I get music of the highest quality and can send the concerts out to the schools with total peace of mind.

I’m pleased to report that music is alive and well at the schools in the Municipality of Viborg. LMS has helped ensure that music is thriving – both music in the form of listening concerts and also the music performed by the children themselves. The schools in the Municipality of Viborg have discovered that music has a unique power when it comes to building strong communities and inspiring cultural and aesthetic formation (Bildung) and understanding. Initial resistance has been turned into gratitude.

As Children’s Culture Consultant and municipal LMS contact. I look forward every week to giving children these wonderful experiences – experiences that fill them with wonder, challenge them, and help shape them into compassionate human beings.

The cultural and aesthetic formation (Bildung) gained by the children through these musical encounters is invaluable, and I am so happy to be helping to give them a gift they did not know they were missing.

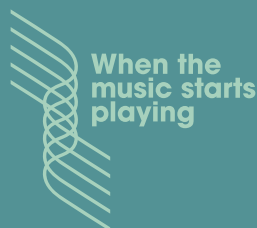


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rikke Kamedula Skovsbo is a children’s culture consultant for the Municipality of Viborg. She holds a degree in Musicology from Aalborg University and has worked at culture schools for a number of years, also as a music teacher. Drawing on her background in music and her degree in Arts and Culture Management, she works every day to ensure that children in the Municipality of Viborg have the opportunity to experience both live music and other art forms in their daily lives. As municipal contact for LMS, Rikke has attended many school concerts and conducted evaluations of them together with teachers and schoolchildren. Through her practical and strategic work, she has been instrumental in the success of LMS’s activities in the Municipality of Viborg.



“In this context, it is also important to emphasise the importance of live music. For example, many schoolchildren have told us that they have never seen a double bass in real life or experienced a live rock band. They listen to a lot of music digitally, but experiencing live music holds special value for them – and, unfortunately, not everyone has that opportunity.”



Make music matter for children and young people!

By Mannuela Rauff Hansen, PhD and Anne Bang-Larsen, PhD at the Centre for Basic Education Research

There is an imbalance in the music education offered by Danish schools. The Centre for Basic Education Research contributes relevant research and works to ensure that all schoolchildren have access to music experiences and dialogue-based music education. School concerts can play a significant role in the process, but it takes competent follow-up if they are to lead to meaningful learning.

At the Centre for Basic Education Research at the University of Southern Denmark, we focus on didactics and school development with the aim of promoting the well-being of children and young people sustainably. Some of our current research is linked to the 'Music in Schools' focus area group, where we are committed to creating the best possible conditions for music education, for schoolchildren and for teachers and other educators providing music instruction.

Because of the natural complexity of music education, our research has a broad focus. To ensure the best possible conditions for music education, we need a holistic understanding, factoring in teacher competencies, schoolchildren's experiences and overall education policy. We are also interested in current trends in music education, how the field has evolved over time and how we can integrate schoolchildren's perspectives in light of societal changes.

The latest research shows that the student perspective is particularly important in the development of music education. Schoolchildren's experiences and understanding of musical communities are crucial to determining how we can create the best framework for music education. Our research looks at these perspectives in light of teacher experience. It is important to understand what initiatives to deploy, how to facilitate the teaching of music, and what success criteria to apply to determine if a genuine musical community has been established – also in the eyes of schoolchildren. The term 'musical community' is often used in a normative sense and is usually defined as a pleasant and diverse community, but a community centred around music can also be challenging or fraught with conflict. For this reason, research interests also focus on shedding light on the experiences and perspectives of schoolchildren.

One of the challenges we have observed is that, in some cases, music education is provided by untrained music teachers due to a shortage. Many of these teachers point out that they need training – they do not have the time nor the didactic competencies required to teach music in elementary school. So it makes sense to look at the collaboration between

schools and various external stakeholders, such as Live Music in Schools (LMS), local music schools and others, to find out what can be done to support music education.

Relevance of the school concert to the centre's work

"We want to conduct research grounded in practice and focused on practice, which requires close collaboration with practitioners. LMS plays a central and exciting role in fostering encounters with music and advancing music education and didactics."

(Nikolaj Elf, Head of Centre for Basic Education Research)

The data we have collected suggests that music in school has an impact on children's overall experience of school life. We are not just looking at school concerts provided by external parties, but also at concerts organised by schools themselves as well as opportunities for children to participate in music activities at school. It affects the children's perception of the rhythm of the school year – for example, children mention that new children are welcomed with singing and that there are certain rituals that are repeated throughout the school year. It gives them a sense of belonging to a (musical) community.

A key point is the follow-up to the music experiences. Introducing schoolchildren to new or unfamiliar music requires a dialogue to enable the children to relate to the music and understand it in a broader context. The collaboration between LMS and the teachers must therefore play a central role as the teachers can facilitate a dialogue as an opportunity for the children to discuss and reflect together on their concert experiences.

Schoolchildren need to be able to connect with the music at the personal level for it to be a meaningful experience. If the music is to become part of their musical understanding, it must be emotionally accessible. Such access can be established, among other things, through conversations that allow the children to share their experiences and reflections.

It is not just a question of knowing the historical context of the music or its harmonic structure. It is also very much about the emotional experience – before, during and after the concerts. In addition, many schoolchildren do not have access to concert experiences outside of school, for example due to social or financial circumstances. That is why it is essential that schools offer music experiences that create a shared frame of reference for all schoolchildren.

Disparity between schools

However, there is a significant disparity between schools. Some schools have qualified music teachers and strong music environments that collaborate with culture schools and

"... many schoolchildren do not have access to concert experiences outside of school, for example due to social or financial circumstances. That is why it is essential that schools offer music experiences that create a shared frame of reference for all schoolchildren."

“However, there is a significant disparity between schools. Some schools have qualified music teachers and strong music environments that collaborate with culture schools and organisations such as LMS. Other schools do not have qualified music teachers or established collaborations, which leads to unequal opportunities for the schoolchildren.”

organisations such as LMS. Other schools do not, which leads to unequal opportunities for the schoolchildren. We therefore need to work towards ensuring that all children in public schools have equal access to music activities and experiences.

Qvortrup and Lykkegaard’s research on young people’s well-being suggests precisely that well-being encompasses academic, social and emotional dimensions. We believe that school concerts can contribute to all three dimensions, provided that they form part of a meaningful context. LMS is uniquely positioned to create a space where these dimensions of well-being reinforce one another – but always provided that a solid framework can be established for the experience. Close collaboration between LMS, the school, the teacher and the child is therefore of crucial importance.

Current challenges in music education

Our research shows that there is a need for teaching based on dialogue between children and teachers, and among the children themselves. In other words, the teacher fosters a dialogue in the classroom as an opportunity for the children to contribute to the content. For example, schoolchildren are asking to have a greater say in the music repertoire they encounter, perform, listen to and so on at school. Music education should not just be one-way communication where teachers follow a set agenda and the children being expected to listen; rather, the approach should be dialogic.

However, that does not mean that the teacher should refrain from setting boundaries. The teacher establishes the framework and provides clarity, but the dialogic approach is essential. In addition, it is important that the music preferences and the music landscape schoolchildren encounter outside of school are reflected in the classroom. In this way, schoolchildren are able to connect their in-school experiences with their out-of-school lives.

We need to build a bridge between schoolchildren’s music experiences outside of school and what they encounter in school. When schoolchildren are given the opportunity to share their personal experiences, music lessons become more engaging and emotionally accessible. When something connects with our own lives, we become more eager to engage with it. That is why it is vital to listen to the children and understand how they see themselves in the school’s music environment.

Some schools offer music as an elective in grades 7–9, but far from all children choose to do music. We must therefore investigate why some choose not to do music, and what motivates the children who do. Many schoolchildren work with electronic music and music production in their spare time – how can we integrate their interests into our teaching?

Enriching the music landscape in schools

LMS contributes to the music landscape in schools, helping to foster ties with the local communities, while also offering insight into the musical expressions of different cultures. School concerts expose schoolchildren to experiences they might not seek out on their own. They allow children to engage with what is familiar to them, while also introducing them to new perspectives, which is important for the children's understanding of society. LMS therefore plays a special role through introducing a wide range of musicians and musical styles that schools would otherwise not have access to.

Music education should provide schoolchildren with an understanding of both Danish and international music. The values of equality, democracy and freedom of thought are the cornerstones of the Danish education system, and diversity plays a central role. LMS can support this by exposing schoolchildren to various musical styles.

As mentioned earlier, it is essential to facilitate a dialogue with the children about the concerts in order to enhance their experience and maximise the learning potential inherent in attending a concert. If the school or class does not have a music teacher, another subject teacher can step in. It is important that schoolchildren have the opportunity to reflect on their experiences, share their impressions, and learn from one another.

This dialogue fosters an understanding not only of the music, but also of the way it is experienced by others. Students learn to view music from different perspectives, which opens new windows of understanding.

Hope and dreams are alive!

What we are seeing is a great deal of hope for music education and for music to continue playing an important role in the well-being of children and young people. A strong enthusiasm for music is evident in schools across the country despite a shortage of music teachers – and schoolchildren are very interested; they want music education and music in their daily lives in general.

At the same time, we are seeing a number of interesting shifts in society – for example, a growing recognition of the importance of singing together. This has, for example, made it on to the political agenda – the Danish Minister for Culture has even highlighted it. A shift is indeed happening in our shared understanding of what is of value to society and to communities.

Also, young people have become very skilled at taking an active interest in using music. There is generally a lot of focus on our need to step away from our screens, but in this case they are actually using their phones and laptops constructively to create and share music. They have a completely different relationship with music to previous generations. Before streaming services came along, you had to save up a month's worth of pocket money to buy a CD – today, children and young people have access to all kinds of music all the time. They share music with each other and talk about it.

“...well-being encompasses academic, social and emotional dimensions. We believe school concerts can contribute to all three, if they form part of a meaningful context. LMS is uniquely positioned to create a space where these dimensions reinforce one another – provided a solid framework is established. Close collaboration between LMS, the school, the teacher and the child is therefore of crucial importance.”



At the Centre for Basic Education Research, we find it encouraging and worth highlighting that young people are so engaged in music. In this context, it is also important to emphasise the importance of live music. For example, many schoolchildren have told us that they have never seen a double bass in real life or experienced a live rock band. They listen to a lot of music digitally, but experiencing live music holds special value for them – and, unfortunately, not everyone has that opportunity.

The Centre for Basic Education Research wants to create hubs for dialogue among various stakeholders for the benefit of children in elementary school. We hereby ask the Danish municipalities to contact us if they wish to launch projects in collaboration with us and, for example, Live Music in Schools. We are always open to exploring opportunities for collaboration on research projects.

The municipalities should ensure, firstly, that school concerts are made available to all children in Danish elementary schools as a way of reducing the imbalance in this area, and secondly, that teachers are properly trained to follow up on these experiences didactically. The concert must not stand alone – the children's music experiences must be followed up on and integrated into the teaching in order to have a genuine impact on their learning and well-being.

Ideally, every schoolchild should experience at least two school concerts a year. In the same dream scenario, a social educator should be assigned to all music classes, primarily in grades 4–6. That would free up time and energy for the music teacher to focus more on didactics.

But let us start by organising school concerts for everyone!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mannuela Rauff Hansen is a classical singer and holds a Master of Arts in Philosophy, with a specialisation in the philosophy of music. She is currently a PhD student at University College of Northern Denmark and Aalborg University, where she is researching music communities in elementary schools. She is co-leader of the 'Music in Schools' focus area at the Centre for Basic Education Research at SDU and is involved in the development of music education in a diverse educational setting. Her research interests centre on musical engagement and communities.



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Anne Bang-Larsen, PhD is a senior consultant in continuing education at the Centre for Upper Secondary and Vocational Education Research at the University of Southern Denmark (SDU). Anne is co-leader of the 'Music in Schools' focus area at the Centre for Basic Education Research and co-developer of a pedagogical training programme for music school teachers. Her interests in the field of music education focus on the professional development of teachers who teach in a highly diverse field.

ABOUT THE CENTRE FOR BASIC EDUCATION RESEARCH

A leading Danish centre for elementary school research that makes a difference locally, nationally and internationally. The centre conducts research on, with and for elementary schools. Through a practice-oriented focus on didactics and school development, we work to enhance the well-being of children and young people sustainably.

Research is being conducted in 14 different focus areas, including 'Music in Schools'. The Centre for Basic Education Research is a partnership between the Faculty of Health Sciences at SDU, the Faculty of Humanities at SDU, University College Absalon, University College South Denmark, UCL University College, and University College of Northern Denmark.

Read more: www.sdu.dk/forskning/center-for-grundskoleforskning Mannuela Emelia Rauff Hansen and Anne Bang-Larsen are co-leaders of the 'Music in Schools' focus area under the Centre for Basic School Research.

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“From a municipal perspective, exposure to professional art can open up new worlds and spark creativity in talented individuals. But the event can also serve as a valuable opportunity to engage young people before, during and after the event in new communities that foster engagement and participation more broadly.”



When children shape culture

By Vicki Lindstrøm Frederiksen, Children's Culture Consultant, and Sisse Østergaard Ravnholt, Senior Consultant, Municipality of Holbæk

Culture is not just an encounter, an experience or entertainment – it is cultural and aesthetic formation (Bildung). When the music starts playing, it is not 'just' the concert that matters. It is about the sense of community, the culture, the language and the meaningful experiences that schoolchildren, teachers and artists create together. KulturCrew is a unique chance for children to engage with the culture around them – and this process is at the very heart of what we are doing in the Municipality of Holbæk. But why do we do this, how does it work in practice, and what is its significance?

Lasting impact – KulturCrew as a student involvement initiative

In the Municipality of Holbæk, we believe that culture should not only be something you experience, but also something you help enable, shape and create. That is why we are working actively with KulturCrew, an initiative that empowers schoolchildren to take responsibility for planning and organising cultural events – from school concerts to theatre performances and large-scale municipal events. The KulturCrew project was launched by Live Music in Schools (LMS) in collaboration with Teatercentrum and inspired by a similar Norwegian initiative.

Through KulturCrew, schoolchildren develop skills that will be valuable to them far beyond their school years. They gain practical experience in planning, communication, collaboration and taking responsibility – relevant skills in many aspects of their lives. They also gain a unique insight into the cultural scene and various forms of artistic expression, which can ignite an interest and inspire them to engage with culture in many different ways.

Through their direct involvement in cultural activities, schoolchildren are given a voice and a sense of responsibility that strengthens their engagement. It leaves a lasting impact and creates value not only for them as individuals, but also for our school culture, cultural life and society at large.

Communities – KulturCrew in action

To strengthen the schools' professional involvement with the KulturCrew initiative and ensure that a systematic approach is taken, we have developed a KulturCrew annual cycle in which both local and national cultural stakeholders contribute to our crews' professional development and the building of our Kulturcrew communities.

The annual cycle includes, among other things, a series of KulturCrew days, where schoolchildren from different schools come together to share cultural experiences, for example a concert. Next, they participate in one or two workshops focused on Kultur-

Crew tasks. Here, they gain hands-on experience with what it actually means to organise, promote and run cultural events.

Among other things, they learn about:

- The role of hosting: Welcoming guests, presenting, facilitating talks and creating a positive experience for all participants.
- PR: How to market and promote cultural events, for example through posters, social media, articles or reviews.
- Setup and execution: Lighting and sound technology, safe handling of equipment and receiving guests.

The Kulturcrew days help equip the young people with a range of skills so that they feel as prepared as possible for their role as KulturCrew members. At the same time, they strengthen their sense of being part of something bigger, and friendships and connections are built between schools. Through the annual cycle, we also aim to raise the young people's awareness of artistic communities in the local area, while strengthening cross-cutting collaboration between local cultural stakeholders, teachers and social educators.

Student involvement adds value to the school

"I've realised that my voice matters, that I can help make decisions at my school."
(KulturCrew member)

The KulturCrew annual cycle also includes activities that give young people a say in the cultural events planned in their municipality and at their own school. They become actively involved and have a say in the selection and prioritisation of performances and concerts to be presented at the schools. When it comes to school concerts, they need to consider a number of factors, including genre diversity and the school's performance history from the previous year. The pupils discuss the concerts and agree on first, second and third choices for grades 0–3, 4–6 and 7–9. This process is facilitated by the teacher or social educator at the school who is in charge of KulturCrew and helps to strengthen the children's knowledge of music as well as their language skills and ability to reason.

The subsequent allocation of school concerts in the municipality is based on the KulturCrew's wishes. Seeing that the concerts they have requested actually come to their school fosters a greater sense of ownership among the KulturCrews. It gives them a real sense of being cultural organisers for their peers, which makes it easier for them to promote the concerts and build excitement leading up to the events.

Host of LMS Festival 2023

The Municipality of Holbæk hosted the LMS Festival in 2023. In addition to putting on a fantastic festival, the Municipality of Holbæk wanted to use the festival as a valuable opportunity to strengthen cross-cutting collaboration based on a before-during-and-after approach.

The hosting was based on three local objectives:

- *Co-creation: Children as co-creators*
- *Access: Children's encounters with music and music communities*
- *Bridge-building: Cross-cutting collaboration*

In addition, the Municipality of Holbæk has established a youth theatre committee and a youth music committee, which participate in the annual children's theatre festival, KLAP, as well as the LMS Festival or Showcase. Both committees consist of about 10 children from the schools' KulturCrews, who help select and book theatre performances and concerts for the municipality. Their direct involvement in selecting the artists gives the children a real say and a real sense of responsibility.

In the run-up to the festival, a wide range of local initiatives were launched to ensure a lasting impact. They included initiatives focused on building bridges between schools, music schools and school concerts; skills development; music on informal agendas; the targeted use of teaching materials prior to the concerts; and strengthening the involvement of children and young people via KulturCrews at all schools.

Formation (Bildung) and community – why it matters

When KulturCrews play an active role in planning and organising cultural events – whether at their own school or at the municipal level – they develop a sense of ownership and responsibility. Teachers find that it enhances their social skills, while building self-confidence and an ability to work with others.

Through KulturCrew, schoolchildren learn how to take responsibility, speak up and be part of a community. It is not just the cultural experience that matters, but the way in which the children create something together, learn from one another and grow as individuals. KulturCrew becomes an important part of the school culture and the schools' role in assisting in the children's cultural and aesthetic formation (Bildung) by transforming students from mere audience members into active participants.

KulturCrew is for everyone, including those who prefer to work behind the scenes with technical support, planning or communication – or who are maybe just looking for a community to be part of. The cornerstone of KulturCrew is precisely the sense of community – and that is often what attracts the children and young people in the first place. Once they begin to see themselves as part of it, they start opening their eyes to culture, and they discover new aspects of themselves and their potential. And yes, some are just there for the sense of community and to experience a different kind of schooling. As one KulturCrew member puts it: *"Count me in if there's cake!"* And that is a perfectly legitimate reason, which may subsequently open up new horizons.

In this way, culture is not just an encounter, an experience or entertainment – it is cultural and aesthetic formation (Bildung). When the music starts playing, it is not 'just' the

“... without being exposed to what inspires us, what puzzles us, or what annoys us, we would have no way of ‘utilising’ the many opportunities that these encounters open up – both in terms of establishing a foundation beforehand, the experience during the event, and the enduring impact afterwards.”

concert that matters. It is about the sense of community, the culture, the language and the meaningful experiences that schoolchildren, teachers and artists create together. KulturCrew is a unique chance for children to engage with the culture around them – and this process is at the very heart of what we are doing in the Municipality of Holbæk.

Youth involvement creates value in the municipality

We must do more than just make small changes and put together crews at individual schools. If we truly want to take cultural and aesthetic formation (Bildung), youth involvement, and co-creation seriously – and embed these values into our municipality's cultural framework – then we must commit to a long-term, strategic approach. It calls for willingness to organise our efforts around this young audience, and, fundamentally, it calls for a broader understanding of the different – yet equally valid – ways of viewing the value of art, and in this case, school concerts.

From a municipal perspective, exposure to professional art can open up new worlds and spark creativity in talented individuals. But the event can also serve as a valuable opportunity to engage young people before, during and after the event in new communities that foster engagement and participation more broadly.

From this perspective, the work with KulturCrew holds a value distinct from that created by the school concert experience itself. Here, we work with groups of young people who do not necessarily perform on stage or play instruments. Some young people may prefer to work behind the scenes, with communication, venues and platforms, or perhaps they are simply driven by a desire to be involved or by curiosity about new interests. If we are mindful of the value that can be created around these artistic encounters, and if we dare to discuss different understandings of the value of art, then KulturCrew and the school concerts offer potential that reaches far beyond the physical performance and deep into the municipality's core mission – to ensure the best possible conditions for diversity, well-being, strong communities and inclusive environments.

From this perspective, we 'use' the school concerts strategically, which is always a risky statement. Are we not, then, reducing art to a mere means to an end, using it to achieve a specific goal, trivialising it, and thereby overlooking its intrinsic value? Not at all – quite the opposite! High-quality culture and art are also culture and art that serve other purposes. Without being exposed to what inspires, puzzles, or annoys us – and without encountering the seemingly useless and unexpected in art and professional music – we cannot truly utilize the opportunities these experiences open up, whether in building a foundation beforehand, the experience during the event, or its enduring impact afterward.

Strategic efforts to engage young people in the cultural sector require a broader dialogue and a greater understanding of the equal value of the artistic experience (the school concert) and the surrounding cultural context. When discussing the value of school concerts and KulturCrews, we must look at cultural and aesthetic formation (Bildung) in the broadest societal sense. This highlights the municipal task of creating a vibrant, diverse, and inclusive cultural scene that means something more to more people. These perspectives are absolutely central to why it makes sense for municipalities and schools to work with school concerts and KulturCrews, as it is simply a growing task.

Youth involvement as a political goal

In autumn 2024, Holbæk City Council approved a new culture and recreation policy. The document highlights the policy goal “It starts with children and young people”: All children have the right to be part of cultural communities where they feel that their participation makes a difference. The goal reflects a political desire not only to ensure exposure to culture and the arts, but also to an equal extent, to ensure children and young people are involved in the activities surrounding these experiences – for example, through the further development of the schools’ KulturCrew initiative. The political commitment to youth involvement has evolved through several years of dedicated work involving young people as co-creators and support for creative youth communities.

So should children and young people be actively involved in shaping culture? Yes, of course - because it creates value on every level. But this is an ambition that calls for new ways of working together and new ways of talking about value. It is not enough to simply provide encounters with professional music – young people must be provided with opportunities to engage with, reflect on, and play an active role in these encounters. This enhances the cultural and aesthetic formation (Bildung) of each individual, strengthens school culture, and fosters growth, engagement and a sense of community in society.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vicki Lindstrøm Frederiksen is a Children’s Culture Consultant in the Municipality of Holbæk and works to enhance children’s engagement with art and culture. She is in charge of ‘Open School’, where she works to build strong partnerships between cultural organisations, schools and daycare centres. Her work involves developing and supporting external learning environments that ensure all children have the opportunity to both experience and create art and culture. Vicki’s responsibilities include serving as municipal LMS contact and facilitating a cultural network across the schools in the municipality. In addition, she is responsible for KulturCrew on behalf of the municipality, which involves engaging and involving children and young people as cultural creators and ambassadors for culture.

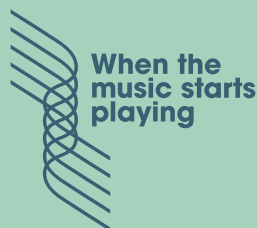


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sisse Østergaard Ravnholt is a Senior Consultant in the cultural sector, specialising in the development and implementation of major strategic and cross-cutting cultural initiatives. She is interested in the way professionals work towards shared goals and understandings as well as learning processes for, with, and by institutions, stakeholders and citizens. Her professional ambition is to incorporate initiatives into a developmental framework based on a before-during-after model, building on positive experiences and learning from the less successful ones. Sisse is particularly interested in how the Municipality of Holbæk not only ensures residents of all ages have access to art and culture, but also in how they can get involved and be included in a variety of ways, regardless of their background or prior knowledge.



Researchers and school teachers lack tools for following up on the aesthetic experiences of schoolchildren. Our study can therefore also help draw attention to the tools available to teachers when it comes to supporting schoolchildren both before and after school concerts, which can further enhance the value of the concerts.”



Self-forgetting and engaging community experiences

When mixed-methods approaches to aesthetic experiences meet schoolchildren at concerts

By Heidi Philipsen, Associate Professor, University of Southern Denmark

Researching and understanding schoolchildren's encounters with professional school concerts is a complex undertaking. It requires diverse approaches to data collection and the use of creative research methods. In the research project *When the music starts playing*, we have examined – and emphasized – the significance of the pre-concert 'intro' and the post-concert 'outro'. This has led us to reflect on a central question: How can we support the concert experience so that it unfolds meaningfully and takes root, and what can teachers do to facilitate this process?

Despite the long-standing tradition of school concerts, we still know far too little about what schoolchildren gain from the professional performances and about the potential value they may hold. After all, how does one even begin to 'measure' children's concert experiences? Researchers and schoolteachers have only a limited set of tools available for this type of inquiry; therefore, the primary aim of this article is to offer methodological insights. The study on which it is based was carried out by a team of four researchers who spent two years investigating the school concerts organised by Live Music in Schools (LMS). We approached this work from multiple professional perspectives, spanning cultural and aesthetic formation (*Bildung*), learning, and well-being.

In this article, I critically examine and discuss the methods used both by us (the research team) and by LMS to identify the effects of live music in schools. As a central basis for evaluating these methods, I also focus on the use of the teaching materials provided by LMS. This leads to a further refinement of the guiding question: How can professional school concerts be studied in a meaningful way, using appropriate methods and with particular attention to the role of teaching materials?

My study therefore explores the methodological insights gained through our examination of the LMS system. In addition, I consider the kinds of experiences and values that professional school concerts may generate for schoolchildren, and the ways in which the teaching materials shape and influence these experiences and values.

Mixed-methods approach

The research project involved four researchers: Henriette Blomgren, Mikkel Snorre Boysen, Thomas Thorsen and myself – in collaboration with LMS. In autumn 2023, we made field visits to a number of Danish elementary schools, and we subsequently used

the following data as basis for our research: (1) School evaluations¹ from LMS (2013–24); (2) observations of pre-concert preparations using teaching materials and concerts at three selected schools; and (3) interviews with schoolchildren and teachers involved in using the teaching materials, as well as drawings by the schoolchildren.

Our study thus combines quantitative and qualitative methods, with a greater emphasis on the latter. Relying on ‘methodological triangulation’², we have combined multiple research methods to collect data and gain a deeper understanding of the schoolchildren’s experiences. We have collected a wide variety of data and subsequently analysed some of it together. Working as a team has allowed us to cover a wide range of Danish schoolchildren and we have been able to compare and discuss our data analyses with one another. We have supplemented our analyses by looking at LMS’s own data (school evaluations). But the drawback has been that the dataset is extensive, making the analysis time-consuming. However, as a teacher, you can easily conduct your own small-scale surveys of the children’s concert experiences and actively involve them in the process.

My study involved studying the pre-concert ‘intros’ and the post-concert ‘outros’ as it became clear that they had an impact on how the concerts unfolded. By ‘intro’ we refer to the teaching materials the schoolchildren encountered before the concert (including the KulturCrews welcoming the musicians). By ‘outro’ we refer to the post-concert follow-up activities. According to LMS, the teaching materials are usually suited for using both before and after the concerts. However, according to our empirical data, the materials were used almost exclusively before the school concerts.

Measuring aesthetic experiences is not straightforward. What exactly should be measured, and by which means? And should the focus be on the processes as they unfold, or on how they are perceived afterwards?³ The school evaluations contained a large dataset that provided an overview but lacked a deeper understanding of the concert experiences from the schoolchildren’s perspective. The evaluations are completed by the teachers and therefore cannot stand alone. For that reason, we visited the schools and attended the concerts to take a closer look at the schoolchildren’s experiences through observation.

Professor Kirsten Drotner has highlighted the importance of knowledge about what she referred to as ‘aesthetic practices’ at the individual, social and cultural levels.⁴ She and other learning scholars have also outlined how encounters with so-called ‘otherness’ (Danish ‘andethed’) have the potential to foster cultural and aesthetic formation (Bildung). School concerts come with lots of potential for otherness: Featuring musicians and musical genres that schoolchildren would otherwise never encounter, and although cultural and aesthetic formation is not the focus of this article, otherness is still an aspect we take into account – especially at the social level. Encountering somebody or something that is different to oneself and the predictable rhythms of daily school life has the potential to broaden one’s horizons and foster personal growth – or ‘simply’ provide an unusual experience. But to identify these elements, we ideally need to look beyond teacher-completed school evaluations and take additional factors into account.

1 Evaluations conducted by teachers based on LMS school concerts.

2 Buscatto, 2016

3 Philipsen, 2022

4 Drotner, 1999: 62

Drawing as a method

Aside from interviewing two focus groups of children, we also used creative visual methods in our study, asking the schoolchildren to draw. The 8th graders I observed were asked to draw their experience of the concert to rate it on a scale from 1 to 10 (in terms of ‘how good was your experience?’). The average rating by 20 children was 6.3, which is, at first glance, a good score. But if we want to gain a deeper understanding of the children’s experiences, we must further examine their drawings and use visual methods to supplement our analysis.

As a phenomenon, creative visual methods encompass various approaches to generating research data by inviting respondents to use or create images.⁵ These can either be produced by the participants themselves (e.g. in the form of drawings), or they can be selected and assigned to the children by their teachers.⁶ Such methods are used, for example, in the field of media research, particularly when involving children and young people and often complex topics. They can be used to initiate conversations or to get a sense of the respondents’ attitudes towards a particular issue.⁷

For us, the visual method helped unlock insights into the schoolchildren’s minds and, by extension, into their concert experience. At the same time, the visual method is potentially able to trigger meta-reflections (“Ah, that’s why I experienced it that way”). However, images or drawings cannot stand alone; they should be used in conjunction with other data. In addition, we used artifacts other than just drawings in our study; for example, we used teddy bears and dolls that the children could communicate with (grades 0–3 and grades 4–6). All such artifacts used in a research setting play a role in shaping the research process and the research findings. For the research group, trying out the creative visual method described was an experiment, and we were pleasantly surprised by the relevance of the findings produced. Some of the schoolchildren added their own words to the drawings. In our study, some of the 8th graders added explanatory words to their drawings; for example, one person wrote “smile on my face” to accompany a smiling mouth, while another wrote “listening” next to a drawing of an ear. One might see this as a sign that they do not think their drawings are good or accurate enough. The beauty or technical perfection of the drawings does not determine the value of the method or what the drawings can help convey about the concert experiences.

The drawings ‘speak’

Despite the relatively small amount of data we collected, we consider these methods to be valuable. When participants are asked to describe an aesthetic experience, it can be particularly difficult to do so using words or numbers alone. Ideally, they should draw immediately after the experience itself, as otherwise the experience risks fading from memory or being overanalysed by the participants. In our case, we asked the respondents to draw their concert experiences and then used their drawings to elicit a conversation, which proved valuable (especially among the younger children).

5 Buckingham, 2009

6 Rose, 2022

7 Grønning og Tosca, 2024

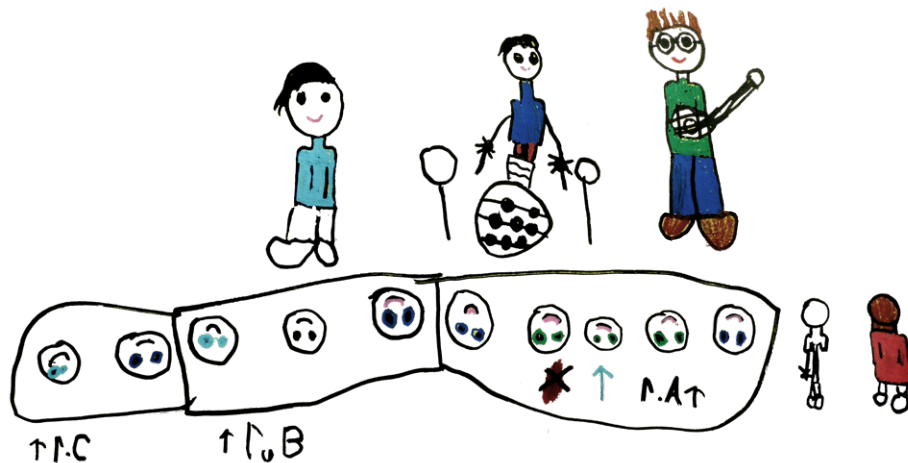


Fig.1. Drawing by a 1st grade student (researcher Henriette Blomgren)

Although one must be careful not to read too much into it, the drawing from grade 1 (Figure 1) conveys a sense of joy (smiling faces in the audience). The drawings can also be interpreted to mean that the children were seated in groups by class and were close to the musicians. The child has taken great care to draw the instruments and dress the three musicians in colourful clothes. It is evident that the musicians are depicted as larger and in greater detail than the audience.

We also found that being presented with sequential drawing panels (like comic strips), the children would construct a brief narrative as a way of capturing their concert experience. Our interviews also indicated that the drawings often served as a tool for dialogue between the child and the interviewer. The drawing (Figure 2) shows that the child has constructed a narrative based on the concert.

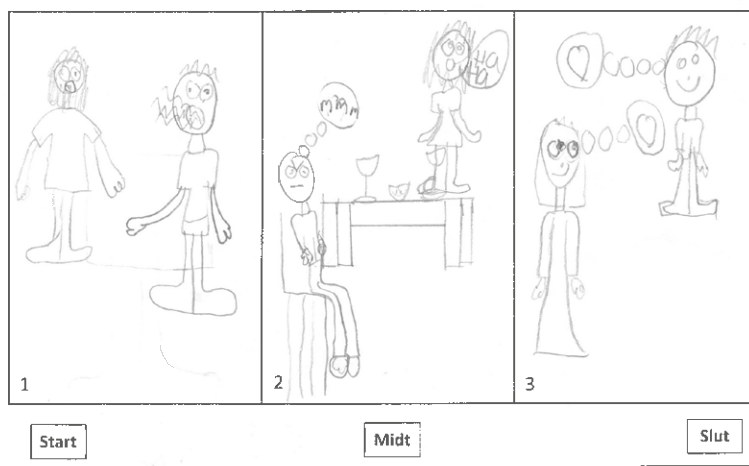


Figure 2. Drawings by 5th grader (researchers Thomas Thorsen, Mikkel Snorre Boysen)

The drawings of dancing were created by 8th graders in (Figure 3). They illustrate (in my interpretation) that the children experienced a sense of community through dancing during the concert.

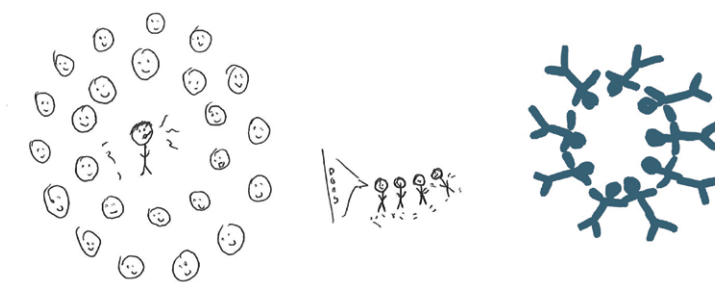


Figure 3. Drawings by 8th graders (researcher Heidi Philipsen)

Drawing can be a meaningful post-concert follow-up activity for the children. What did this experience mean to me? The ‘outro’ helps to prolong the experience and helps the children process the experience. Researchers and school teachers do not have many tools for following up on the aesthetic experiences of schoolchildren. Our study can therefore help draw attention to the tools available to teachers when it comes to supporting schoolchildren both before and after school concerts, which can further enhance the value of the concerts.

“The concerts seem to offer the children a break from their usual social routines. They went from sitting quietly on their chairs – many of them with their hoods pulled up – to letting go of their reserved body language and fully surrender to the dance.”

The drawings are supplemented by observations and interviews

For the 8th graders, two hours were allocated for the pre-concert preparations (using LMS’s teaching materials). The materials focused on the folk songs that were going to be featured in the concert. During the interviews, the children were eager to talk about the teaching materials, but they did not feature at all in their drawings. When asked what they thought of the pre-concert preparations, several children said that working with the folk songs was meaningful: *“I think working with it beforehand was great, because we knew what it was all about and what they meant.”*⁸ So the children were able to recognise some of the folk songs during the concert itself. Being familiar with the songs meant that the children felt safe and comfortable with the concert experience.

Judging by both the drawings and the interviews, the dancing – which lasted 5 minutes out of the 45-minute concert – made a big impression on the schoolchildren. In the interviews, the children were asked to describe what they liked or did not like about the concert. In one of the groups, several children talked about the importance of being active: *“I liked the fact that we were more active. We’ve never done that before – standing up and doing something, instead of just sitting down. That was nice.”*⁹ The schoolchildren seemed to agree that the dancing was a positive concert element. It got them moving and kept them engaged, rather than getting bored.

8 Interview with focus group, 8th grade. Researcher Heidi Philipsen, October 2023

9 Ibid

The concerts seem to offer the children a valued pause from their usual social routines. They went from sitting quietly on their chairs – many of them (especially the older children) with their hoods pulled up over their ears – to letting go of their reserved body language and fully surrender to the dance. One could interpret this as ‘surrendering oneself’ to the experience. Or at least giving it a chance. It was clear that the 8th graders’ scepticism about going to a concert featuring an unknown band had transformed into more enthusiasm than they had expected.

The concert rubbed off on their drawings and the interviews, and the dancing in particular made a strong impression: Everyone joined in the dancing, perhaps to their own surprise and that of their teachers. Perhaps because the band had clearly defined the dancing activity. Many pulled their sleeves down to avoid touching each other’s hands. They chuckled a little at the situation, but they took part, and they recalled the dancing both in their drawings and in the interviews. The band even managed to get all the children to go back to their seats when the dancing ended, without any trouble and without the teachers having to organise the seating (as they had done at the beginning). It was remarkable to be a part of. It was a sign of a kind of absorption – or at least acceptance – on the part of the older children. I would say it was an engaging experience.

Self-forgetting and engaging community experiences

In this article, I have explored a phenomenon that has not yet been thoroughly examined from a methodological perspective and about which more knowledge is needed. As a research team, we investigated the phenomenon of ‘professional school concerts’, using a mixed-methods approach. One of our conclusions is that our observations and drawings added important elements to our understanding of the schoolchildren’s concert experiences. The school evaluations could not stand alone but were supplemented by the children’s own reactions and drawings.¹⁰ It turned out that qualitative data was needed to understand the phenomenon from the schoolchildren’s perspective. Collecting this kind of data provided a basis for arguing that aesthetic experiences have intrinsic value for schoolchildren. Professional school concerts can expand the worldviews of schoolchildren and school communities. Our empirical data suggested that this happened during the concerts. The article’s two main points are:

1. From a methodological perspective, it makes sense to approach the phenomenon of ‘professional school concert experiences’ using a mix of methods, such as evaluations, observations, interviews and drawings. Teachers can also use these tools to enhance the concert experience for them and their class.
2. Methodologically, the individual elements cannot stand alone. But in combination, figures, drawings, observations and interviews help us understand LMS’s evaluations. At the same time, the methods provide a more nuanced understanding of school concert experiences from the children’s perspective.

We gained the most insight from the data collected through direct interactions with the schoolchildren. Our research suggests that concerts at schools can be engaging experiences, not only for schoolchildren, but also for teachers and scholars. Our research shows that concert experiences can have an intrinsic value that is not contingent on direct co-creation. The closest we get to describing the type of concert experiences we observed in our study is: Self-forgetting and engaging community experiences that offer schoolchildren values such as a sense of belonging to something bigger and other.”

10 To look beyond qualitative methods, researchers can utilize biometric tools such as heart rate monitors. This data can supplement behavioral observations with physical indicators of student engagement.

11 Philipsen, Blomgren, Boysen & Thorsen, 2025



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Heidi Philipsen holds a PhD and is an associate professor at the Department of Design, Media, and Educational Science at the University of Southern Denmark (SDU), and she also serves as head of the Screenplay Development programme at SDU. For many years, she has conducted research into creative processes and was previously involved in a project entitled 'Den magiske musikmaskine' (The magic music machine), which explored schoolchildren's processes of creating music in school. She often collaborates with the Centre for Basic Education Research. Finally, Heidi is part of the research team behind the research project 'When the music starts playing'.

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