

International Journal of Education & the Arts

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<http://www.ijea.org/>

ISSN: 1529-8094

Volume 18 Number 37

September 22, 2017

Teachers' Experiences and Perceptions of a Community Music Project: Impacts on Community and New Ways of Working

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Citation: Ansio, H., Seppälä, P., & Houni, P. (2017). Teachers' experiences and perceptions of a community music project: Impacts on community and new ways of working. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 18(37). Retrieved from <http://www.ijea.org/v18n37/>.

Abstract

This qualitative research discusses a Finnish community music project aimed at school pupils with disabilities. The practices of this project define community music as community-driven, goal-oriented participatory music-making with a musician as a facilitator. Instead of the effects on pupils, this research investigates the project's impacts on school employees. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with special class teachers and special needs assistants ($n = 8$) to examine their

experiences and perceptions of the project's influences on their work and work environment. The project's impacts were related to teachers' learning of new skills, positive feelings and increased sense of community within and between the classes of pupils with special needs. The research is linked to the discussion on artist-teacher collaboration in schools, on artistic interventions at work, and on artistic initiatives in the public sector more generally.

Introduction

This research discusses a Finnish community music project aimed at school pupils with disabilities. We investigate the project's impacts on *school employees* (teachers and special needs assistants) rather than on the pupils—their work, work environment, and working conditions.¹ We examine the employees' experiences and perceptions of a community music project at a school, and seek to determine how it influenced the employees' work. We focus specifically on the new skills and ideas they gained in the project, their feelings related to the music activities, and their perceptions of community. Our study is related to two research approaches: Research on artistic interventions at work and research on collaboration between arts and culture professionals and schools, especially teachers.

Basic Education and the Arts in Finland

In Finland, basic education encompasses nine years and caters for all children between the ages of 7 and 16. Municipalities are responsible for providing basic education in comprehensive schools. Finland only has a few private schools. The basic education system emphasizes equality and access for all. Education is free, and so are all school materials and school meals. Support for learning is provided on three levels: general, intensified, and special support. Forty-two percent of pupils receiving special support study exclusively in special needs classes. All schools follow a national core curriculum, but may draw up their own curricula within its framework. A new national core curriculum was implemented in August 2016. Its key goals include enhancing pupil participation, transversal competencies, multidisciplinary learning by means of phenomenon-based project studies, and learning outside the classroom. Phenomenon-based learning in the Finnish context refers to an investigative approach to real-life phenomena that are studied in their contexts, in a cross-disciplinary manner. Arts subjects taught in basic education include music and visual arts.

¹ Cf. Jensen's and McCandless' approach to integrated arts, not from the perspective of student benefits, but rather as a potentiality for teachers' professional development (Jensen & McCandless, 2013).

Crafts are also included, and drama and creative writing are studied as part of mother tongue and literature.²

The current Finnish government has launched a key project for facilitating arts and culture as part of the Government Program (2015), which pays special attention to children's and young people's access to arts and culture. The Government Program demands recognition of the 'wellbeing aspects of culture' and supporting young people 'in becoming more active' by means of art and culture. (Prime Minister's Office, 2015.) This has accelerated the spreading of the cultural dimension to health and social spheres as well as education in Finland. The community music project we are investigating was part of a cultural partnership program between a medium-sized municipality and a local cultural center, and though the partnership program is older than the Government Program, it is seen as part of the same agenda of promoting all children's access to art and culture. Previous international research has shown that art may have a positive influence on pupils' academic achievements as well as different aspects of their development (Culture and Sport Evidence Programme [CASE], 2010; Catterall, Dumais, & Hampden-Thompson, 2012; Deasy, 2002; Fleming, Merrell, & Tymms, 2004; Hallam, 2010; Schellenberg, 2004; Smithrim & Upitis, 2005; Standley, 2008). Equal access to arts thus seems to be important not solely for art's sake, but because art is an important promoter of well-being, learning achievements, and active citizenship.

Previous Research on Artists in Schools and Other Workplaces

This article, however, is not about the impacts of art on school pupils but about its impact on employees. Some research exists on multi-professional collaboration among teachers and artists in various sectors of education. According to these studies, artists working in schools have enabled teachers to learn new skills, motivated them to adopt creative approaches, encouraged them to explore new ideas, and enabled whole school activities that allow staff to collaborate. Frequently reported impacts on teachers of working with artists were on the personal level (e.g. enhanced enthusiasm for job, increased confidence to try new things) and the interpersonal level (enhanced communication and sharing of learning with colleagues). (Côté, 2009; Lamont, Jeffes, & Lord, 2010; Pitts, 2016; Thomson, Coles, Hallewell, & Keane, n.d.) These impacts are largely similar to those found in participatory art interventions at other workplaces and work communities (for an overview, see Berthoin Antal & Strauß, 2016). Previous research suggests that participatory arts activities at workplaces have improved working climate and cooperation, increased feelings of togetherness and sense of community at work, improved the quality of relationships, and increased solidarity.

² More information about the Finnish education system can be found on the website of the Finnish National Agency for Education, http://www.oph.fi/english/education_system. See also Kumpulainen, 2015.

(Karpavičikūtė & Macijauskienė, 2016; Styhre & Eriksson, 2008; van den Broeck, Cools, & Maenhout, 2008.)

Thomson, Coles, Hallewell, and Keane observe that in studies concerning teacher development during the Creative Partnerships program in the UK, three types of teacher learning emerged. First, teachers can learn skills from artists and use them in much the same way. Second, teachers can learn skills from artists and transfer them to other similar topics. Third, teachers can develop new pedagogic practices on the basis of artists' pedagogic principles. The latter was less common than the first two types of teacher learning. (Thomson et al., n.d.)

However, it has been argued that artists and teachers employ different pedagogic approaches. For evident reasons, teachers are also more tied to the curriculum than the artists. These may lead to tensions and conflicts in artist–teacher co-operation. Long-term collaboration, open dialogue on different perspectives and mutual trust in each other's professional skills have proved significant in artist–teacher co-operation. (Burnard & Swann, 2010; Côté, 2009; Galton, 2010; Hall, Thomson, & Russell, 2007; Kind, de Cosson, Irwin, & Grauer, 2007; Thomson et al., n. d., Thomson, Hall, & Russell, 2006.)

Community Music

Community music can be seen as part of the collaborative and participatory turn in the arts field.³ Internationally, community music has been defined in many different ways, and the debate about the definitions and the boundaries between community music, music therapy and community music therapy goes on (see e.g. Ansdell, 2002; Daykin, 2012; Murray & Lamont, 2012; Schippers & Bartleet, 2013). Mark Rimmer (2009) defines community music shortly as 'music-making with social goals.' Community art projects are often targeted for individuals and communities who are disadvantaged in some way, and the aim is to empower them and/or boost their abilities to become civically engaged. It has been claimed that community arts and other forms of participatory art (Bishop, 2012; Finkelppearl, 2014) can enhance empowerment and confidence in individuals and communities (Guetzkow, 2002; Hacking, Secker, Spandler,

³ Collaborative and participatory art practices emerged as activist projects in the 1960s and 1970s. At large, community-based art involves members of a group in a creative activity leading to a public display or performance. This creative process is as important as the artistic outcome. (On different perspectives of participatory art, see Bishop, 2012; Kester, 2004, 2011; Kwon, 2002; Lacy, 1995.)

Kent, & Shenton, 2008; Matarasso, 1997; McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras, & Brooks, 2004; Ramsden, Milling, Phillimore, McCabe, Fyfe, & Simpson, 2011).⁴

In Finland, the term *community music* is mostly used for participatory music activities that take place in institutions (such as hospitals, nursing homes, reception centers for asylum seekers) and involve both members of the community (its residents or clients and staff) and a professional musician. Often the goal of (Finnish) community music activities is to promote psychosocial well-being. In addition to 'community music,' 'care music' has also been used in Finland (e.g. Lilja-Viherlampi, 2013), but this term is controversial. Internationally, as more and more musicians are involved in such activities, a professional category of community musician or health musician (Ruud, 2012) has emerged but remains difficult to define (Daykin, 2012). The situation is the same in Finland, where a professional specialization study program for community musicians started in 2017.

In the context of this research, community music is an emic term introduced to the school by the cultural center that produced the project. In practice, the activities in the school fell between categories of participatory and presentational music (Turino 2008, 26–65). Collaborative music composition for presentational purposes was emphasized more in some classes than in others. Generally speaking, the process and the final composition were equally important in this project.⁵

Study Aims

The aim of this study is to investigate how a community music project at a school influenced the school employees' work: their skills and ideas, their feelings, and their perceptions of community. This is examined by qualitative interview data ($n = 8$). The research is part of a larger research project that explores the impacts of arts on well-being and equality in Finland.

Research Methods and Material

The community music project was carried out in a Finnish comprehensive school among four classes of pupils with special needs (from 1st to 9th grade of basic education; 7 to 16 years of age) and the special class teachers (4) and special needs assistants (12) working with them.

⁴ It is worth noting that there is also a body of literature that critically reviews the methodologies of the so-called social impact studies in the arts (see e.g. Belfiore, 2002, 2009; Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016; Merli, 2002; White & Hede, 2008).

⁵ Murray & Lamont (2012) compare community music and (visual) community arts and argue that community arts projects are more centered on processes than the quality of the final aesthetic product, whereas community music emphasizes both process and product as intertwined.

The school in question is located in a medium-sized municipality in the southern part of Finland, and has approximately 500 pupils and 90 staff members. Four of the classes consist of pupils with developmental disabilities, learning disabilities or other special needs. These pupils study according to an adjusted syllabus. Other pupils in the school are basic education pupils with no special needs. The community music project was part of the municipality's cultural education program for children and young people. It is produced in collaboration with a local cultural center, which provides different art activities for schools to choose from every year.

The community music project was conducted in April 2016. It lasted for one month, during which a musician worked at the school every day, spending one to two days per week (2–3 hours per day) with each class. This was a new approach in the cultural education program, since in earlier years the arts activities were carried out in less intensive periods over a longer time span. The project ended with a performance at a celebration in the school in June 2016.

Content of the Community Music Project

The music project was specially intended for the four classes of pupils with disabilities. Its main aim was to promote the community and collaboration in and between the classes with disabled pupils by way of music. The project also aimed to bring out the disabled pupils' voices by encouraging them to express themselves musically, and to support the adoption of phenomenon-based learning.

The daily work in the community music project consisted of experiments with instruments (Finnish zither, djembe, xylophone, ukulele, guitar, and wind chimes⁶), voices and singing, and different auditive elements of the environment and the body. In the project, each class had a special theme chosen together by the musician, employees and pupils according to their interests (see Table 1). Each class created a musical composition, using different instruments and further acoustic material, planned and recorded by the musician in collaboration with the staff and pupils. The audio tracks were performed at a school celebration, some accompanied with photographs and one with a live performance by the pupils.

⁶ One reason for choosing these particular instruments seems to have been that they are easily accessible even for learners with disabilities.

Table 1.

Content of the community music project

Class	Red	Green	Yellow	Blue
Theme of the work	Pupils' own voices and sounds, accompanied by photographs	Sounds of rescue vehicles, traffic sounds	Sounds of physical exercise and movement, accompanied by photographs	Everyday life sounds in the classroom, accompanied by photographs
The medium of artistic outcome	Recording and photographs	Live performance with background recording	Recording and photographs	Recording and photographs
What was special in the class?	Pupils had severe disabilities	Pupils were mostly boys	Heterogeneous class, pupils had differing interests and motivation levels. Physical education as the school year's special theme.	

In her interview, the musician explains her approach to music as ethnomusicology-based: ‘In ethnomusicology, music is understood very broadly [...] it’s thought of as part of culture, man-made. [...] This has had a great impact on my thinking about what music is and who can make music.’ For her, this project was the first that she perceived as community music; before she had only been involved in what she understood as ‘participatory music-making activities’ (with elderly people in nursing homes, residential homes and hospitals as well as with children in kindergartens). The musician perceived her role in the project as a facilitator:

I’m a facilitator, I’m not the focus, I give them tools to bring forth their subject matter. It’s important to find a balance between taking a big role for myself and allowing the activity to be anything. Balancing between leading the action enough but at the same time not leading it too much. It can’t be like ‘I did this’ but about bringing out what they want.

Although the artist-led music exercises focused on pupils with special needs, the teachers and assistants were provided with the opportunity to be highly actively involved in the project. The employees’ presence, attention and participation was required in the planning as well as the execution of the process. All the employees of the classes involved in the project were given the opportunity and encouraged to participate. According to the musician’s interview, their overall attitude was positive and they participated actively. In her opinion, this was essential to the project’s success, because the employees’ attitudes also affect the pupils. The employees and the musician mutually agreed on a performance as the outcome of the project. They decided together to include both everyday noises and soundscapes and more traditional musical expression in the project. Teachers and assistants also had a say in organizing the schedule.

In concrete classroom situations, pupils, employees and the musician brainstormed the process and the final musical performance. According to the musician’s interview, the employees’ knowledge of the pupils was extremely valuable for her work. The employees supported the musician in communicating with pupils who did not speak, for example. Some of the music exercises required group processes in which the teachers and special needs assistant also participated (for example, pupils with severe disabilities needed help to play the instruments). Even though the opportunities to be involved were the same for every teacher and assistant, in practice they had different levels of involvement and different strategies for approaching the music project. These are discussed in the Results section.

Participants and Procedure

The interview data consists of four semi-structured dyadic interviews of special class teachers and special needs assistants ($n = 8$). Six of the interviewees were female and two were male, and their age range was 31–56. Each teacher was interviewed with one of the special needs assistants of her/his class. The reason for choosing dyadic interviews was to employ a dialogic approach, based on the assumption that interviewees may provide more and broader perspectives to the topic via dialogue with each other. Interviewing coworkers together as a pair was compatible with the collaboration and community themes of the music project, and was supposed to help the interviewees pay attention to shared experiences in the class. Dyadic interviews are most useful when the aim is to acquire both social interaction and depth (Morgan, Ataie, Carder, & Hoffman, 2013). They are more intimate than focus group interviews, but still retain a slight sense of a public event (Morris, 2001). The interaction and mediation that occurs between the participants can result in shared meanings of events and experiences. Usually it is valuable that participants have a pre-existing relationship, like working partners or friends. (Allan, 1980.) In the process of analysing dyadic interviews, the relationship between the participants becomes a unit of analysis (Morris, 2001).

The interview themes were focused on possible changes in the ways of working, work environment and conditions during and after the music project, experiences of using music in the class and working with a musician, and previous experiences of using arts-based methods at work. All the themes were covered in every interview, but the order of the questions varied, and additional questions were asked if something was left unclear. The interviewees were also allowed to bring up topics of their own interest and discuss the experiences they considered important in the music project. The interviews were conducted two weeks after the ending of the actual music project, but before the performance. They lasted from 20 to 40 minutes. They were audio-recorded and transcribed.

The musician was also interviewed. Unlike the interviews of the school employees, the musicians' interview was conducted while the community music project was still ongoing. The interview covers the musician's depiction of the process, her experiences, intentions and aims, and also her previous work history, education and other themes related to work in the participatory and community arts field.⁷ The musician's interview lasted an hour. It was also audio-recorded and transcribed. Additional data consist of the musician's diary of the project

⁷ The musician's interview is also used as a part of a corpus of artist interviews ($n = 39$) for other purposes in this research project. These artist interviews have been collected for examining hybrid working practices of Finnish artists who do collaborative, socially engaged or applied art. For this reason, the interview also covers other themes as well as the community music project.

(6 pages). In the diary, she describes the content of each day's exercises, and her reflections and feelings about the work. The musician's observations on the participating employees' roles are also included. The musician's diary was used to clarify, supplement or contradict the teacher interviews. It provided information regarding the daily progress of the project, whereas the interviews of the employees were retrospective sensemaking.

The reason that the researchers did not observe during the project themselves was ethical. Because the participating pupils had disabilities and other special needs, they were vulnerable, and the presence of several strangers in the classroom may have compromised the success of project.

All the interviewees were informed about the content and purpose of the interviews both orally and on paper, and they signed an informed consent form. The interviews were conducted in Finnish. Thus, all the interview excerpts in this article are translations. In the following text, the informants are referred to by pseudonyms given to their classes (Red, Green, Yellow, and Blue). The gendered pronouns used of the interviewees are mixed up so that they do not necessarily match their own perceived gender. These procedures have been undertaken to protect the interviewees from being recognized.

Analysis

The interviews of the school employees were analyzed thematically (Braun & Clark, 2006; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013) using Atlas.ti software. They were first carefully read through. Then text segments were coded according to the interest areas of the study, starting from one interview and proceeding to the others, all the time building on earlier codes, refining and developing them. Codes were added, removed, merged and refined throughout the analysis process. The codes were then connected into broader categories, and recurrent themes were identified. The analysis focused specifically on the teachers, because they plan and lead the pedagogic work in the classroom. The musician's interview was analyzed in a similar manner, comparing and combining her information with that of the employees' interviews.

Results

The overall impression from the interviews was that the employees found it difficult to recognize and articulate the influences of the music project on their work. They were much more prepared to consider the influences on pupils. Only one of the teachers stated in the very beginning of the interview that the project had an immediate impact on his teaching work. Even though most of the interviewees at first felt that the effects of the project on their work were scarce, several apparent effects arose during the interviews. They can be summed up in

the following three themes: 1) New perspectives, new ways of working, 2) Positive feelings, and 3) Sense of community. Table 2 summarizes the effects on each teacher's work individually and presents their relation to teachers' self-reported backgrounds and attitudes towards the project.

Table 2.

Teachers' backgrounds and the project's effects on their work

Class	Red	Green	Yellow	Blue
Teacher's attitude and background	Low confidence in teaching music, had slight doubts about the project but sees herself (and the other employees of the class) as receptive. Studies in drama pedagogy.	Expertise in music and dance education: used to work as dance teacher; studies in music therapy.	Sees music as his weak side as a teacher. Was skeptical towards the project beforehand.	Likes using drama-based methods in work, no specific relation to music.
The project's main benefits as experienced by the teacher	Gained a lot of confidence in music; learned new ways of using music as part of daily work.	Enjoyed the variety to normal routines; received recognition for the use of music as a pedagogical method in daily	Benefited from the role of a bystander; saw new sides to pupils; learned ways of approaching and motivating	Had chosen sound as the approach for a phenomenon-based learning module in the spring term. Utilized the

		work (pupils already had skills that could be utilized in the project).	pupils from the musician.	music project as part of this approach (by adding pedagogical material on senses and emotions).
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New Perspectives, New Ways of Working

Although most of the employees did not immediately recognize the changes in their ways of working as a consequence of the music project, during the interviews it became evident that the project had indeed influenced their working habits. However, the changes in ways of working were related to the employees' previous experiences and knowledge of arts-based methods, as well as to their attitudes towards music and their receptiveness to the project.

Some of the employees said that music had not been a familiar art form for them and they were hesitant to use it, but with the help of the project, their courage to use music in the class increased. One of the teachers related being encouraged to step beyond her own comfort zone in the project:

I have no musical talent whatsoever, and music is not my thing [...] but [the project] made me think that sometimes I could try doing things differently. I could, for example, pick up a single exercise to add somewhere. [...] It gave me courage to try musical stuff. Good, emotional experiences can be gained through small meaningful things. As a teacher, you sometimes fixate too much on the curriculum. You should remember that including a little extra could give strength on a larger scale. (Teacher, Red class)

Through the project, this teacher had learned new music techniques, and been inspired to include more music in her daily work (cf. *Bowell, 2014; Pitts, 2016*): Her confidence in teaching music and using music-based methods had increased. In the interview excerpt above she also implies that she overcame the often-mentioned obstacle to arts teaching – a crowded and fixed curriculum (see *Alter, Hays, & O'Hara, 2009*) – by integrating music across the curriculum (on integrated arts, see e.g. *Andrews, 2008; Jensen & McCandless, 2013*). The special needs assistant had also noticed the change in the teacher's habits: "There's now more

music in our class. More gym with music, more music-this, music-that. More playing instruments.” (Assistant, Red class)

The teacher discussed above mentioned increased courage several times during the interview. Courage was also mentioned by another teacher who does not consider himself musically talented:

I openly admit that music is my weak point, I can't use music as any kind of a tool. I always try to grasp opportunities to provide it for pupils from somewhere else. [...] I don't really feel that I got more courage to use these techniques from this project. I still think that everyone should use their own strengths. (Teacher, Yellow class)

The two teachers who saw themselves as having no musical talent report different degrees of openness towards the project. The Yellow class teacher, whose confidence to use music did not increase, talks about having been ‘very skeptical’ towards the project in the beginning (even though he was satisfied with the process and outcome afterwards).⁸ The Red class teacher, who gained more confidence and inspiration, also admits to having small doubts beforehand but quickly losing them after the first session. She sees the receptiveness of all the employees of her class as one reason for the project's success: “We are very receptive. If someone comes to do stuff with us, we respond and want to be involved. This shouldn't be ignored. If we had been like ‘well, music...’, the whole thing would have dried up.” (Teacher, Red class)

Music was familiar to some employees. One of the teachers had a great deal of experience in different arts-based methods, and even studies in music therapy. This teacher said: “The exercises were familiar, we've used them ourselves, too. [...] I didn't get anything new for myself from [the musician's] activities, nothing I didn't know before.” In the interview, she had difficulties specifying the project's other influences on her work besides its refreshing effect, because she felt that she was not capable of learning new skills. She appeared to have been an active partner to the musician in planning activities suitable for her class. She and the assistant in her class emphasized that in special education, the boundaries of art and non-art are difficult to define:

⁸ The same is reported in the musician's diary. She gathered feedback from the pupils and staff on the last day of the project, and wrote: ‘The staff was like ‘ok’. They said that at first, they had difficulties piecing together what was going to happen and seeing the objective. But in the end, they were very happy with the outcome. I agreed with the class that somehow the objective was not clear until the final stages, but the outcome was good.’ (Musician's diary note, April 25, 2016)

Every possible thing is art, we make art with our hands and our bodies, our whole day could be seen as art. [...] It's very hard to define what is art and what is our daily work. We use a lot of creative methods, special education methods, they are creative and some of them include art. (Teacher, Green class)

We interpret this interview discourse as artification. According to Naukkarinen (2012), artification “refers to situations and processes in which something that is not regarded as art in the traditional sense of the word is changed into something art-like or into something that takes influences from artistic ways of thinking and acting.”⁹ These interviewees saw special education methods as thoroughly creative and artful. Interestingly, however, they also distinguished between the artistic methods used in daily work and bigger arts projects. They explained that they had not done ‘real’ art projects by themselves. From the assistant’s point of view, the main reason for this was that with pupils with special needs, most of the time and resources are taken by basic care work. From the teacher’s perspective, the special needs education curriculum was overloaded. Besides, every pupil had individual learning objectives, of which skills of taking care of oneself and managing daily life played a large part. She recognized that phenomenon-based learning as a principle enables all contents of instruction to be taught through integration with an arts project, but claimed that the planning of such work would require huge amounts of time.

One of the teachers had utilized the music project for pedagogical purposes. He had no specific relation to music as a pedagogic tool, but both he and the special needs assistant of the class felt that the musical methods used in the project were comfortable and familiar enough. In the interview, both of them emphasized that the project’s approach was characteristic for them and their class, even though the teacher normally used more drama-based than music-based working methods. The teacher had chosen sound as the approach for a phenomenon-based learning module in the spring term. He utilized the music project as part of this approach by adding a pedagogical approach to sense perceptions and emotions. In the interview, he says:

I started expanding the themes immediately when the artist left. [...] I decided to seize the opportunity. We had already decided before the project that our phenomenon-based module in May would be about sound. In the project, our theme was everyday sounds and sounds produced by the pupils, and I started adding pedagogical aspects to this theme. (Teacher, Blue class)

⁹ See also other articles in the special volume 4 (2012) of *Contemporary Aesthetics*.

The teacher had no ready-made plans before the project but he trusted that new ideas would arise during the work. The assistant saw the approach as typical of the teacher: “A small idea comes from somewhere, and [the teacher] starts immediately working on the idea, expanding it.” (Assistant, Blue class) For this teacher, the music project was a seedbed of new ideas to be applied to his own pedagogic work.

New ways of working could also relate to the employees' changed work roles during the music project. The Yellow class teacher, who was no expert in music and even felt suspicious about the project, said that adopting the role of a bystander in class situations, instead of a leading role, was beneficial for him. It allowed him a chance to learn. However, the musician's diary includes several references of her longing for more support from the staff of this class to stimulate pupils (Musician's diary notes, April 11, 2016; April 18, 2016). Thus, taking the role of a bystander was beneficial for the teacher, but left the musician with the feeling of insufficient support in classroom situations. In contrast, the Green class teacher (who had a lot of experience in music education methods), adopted a more active role and perceived herself, not the musician, as having the main responsibility for the class and the success of the project: “I'm the teacher, I'm in charge of the pupils. Even though [the musician] came to work with us, I carry the main responsibility. I can't just allow anything.” (Teacher, Green class) She believed that if the project had been about an art form foreign to her, she would have taken a more passive, learning role. The musician also noticed that this teacher was eager to take a lot of responsibility for the process: “The teacher wants to hold the reins, which makes my role smaller compared to that in other classes.” (Musician's diary note, April 8, 2016) Whatever their conceptions of their own roles were, all the interviewees felt they had been actively involved in the music project. It was something they felt they had done together with their pupils and the musician, not something they had passively received.

The music project provided an opportunity for mutual learning for the school employees and the musician. The interviews reveal that the musician's work with the pupils was under the close scrutiny of the employees during the project. All the interviewees commended the musician for her way of interacting with the pupils. Some had picked up new techniques of approaching pupils, motivating them, or supporting their concentration from the musician. According to the musician's diary, this experience of learning was reciprocal. The musician had no previous experience of working with children with special needs, let alone severe disabilities. She observed the employees' working practices sometimes with wonder (“The teachers and assistants are alert all the time, they watch blood sugars and bathroom breaks, etc.”), sometimes with admiration (“Some of the assistants especially act in a great, child-centered manner. I have a lot to learn from them.”). (Musician's diary notes, April 5, 2016; April 13, 2016.) Therefore, both the musician and the school employees felt that they had learnt from each other. (Cf. Côté, 2009; Kind et al., 2007.)

Positive Feelings

All the employees observed that the community music project raised positive emotions and feelings. The positive feelings were related to a refreshing change from routines and rejoicing over the project's influences on pupils.

First, all the interviewees stated that they had experienced temporary changes to their normal daily routines. However, they did not always relate these changes to the art form in question or to the community-arts-based working methods, but to the fact that something happened that was out of the ordinary. For example: "I felt that it was very nice for me as an employee, having a bit of a different day at work [once a week]." (Assistant, Green class) The interviewees felt that the changes in the daily routines supported their work-related well-being. They described the effects of variation to routines by an arts project in terms of refreshment, increased motivation, zeal, boost, and vitality. For example: "We got new ideas and enthusiasm, and all kinds of new ideas and enthusiasm always increase vitality and good feelings at work." (Teacher, Blue class)

Second, all the interviewees also saw the project as beneficial for the pupils. The employees depicted the experience of seeing the effects of music exercises in pupils as rewarding and pleasurable:

It felt good to see [the pupils] do it together and like the outcome. It made me happy, in my work, to see that they have such a 'yes' atmosphere. So my work gets a little boost, too, from the success of the children. (Special needs assistant, Yellow class)

The interviewees were eager to present their observations on the project's influences on pupils (such as increased concentration, pupils' excitement at making music, their experiences of success, the silent and withdrawn pupils finding a new way to express themselves and demonstrate their abilities). The project provided the employees with an opportunity to see the pupils in a different light and re-evaluate their abilities. Some of them found that for some pupils, music was their 'thing,' which they had not known before. (For similar findings, see Catterall and Pepler, 2007; Kilinc, Chapman, Kelley, Adams, & Soo, 2016; Pitts, 2016.)

Sense of Community

The theme of community was brought up in every interview by the interviewees prior to us asking. This was somewhat expected, because the intervention was introduced to the school as a community music project, not just any kind of participatory arts initiative.

The interviewees use the word 'community' in three senses. First, they described a sense of community being present in the fleeting moments of making music together: A sudden sense of being part of a community with other individuals *at the classroom level*. The following excerpt is from the interview of a teacher of a class of pupils with severe disabilities:

In my mind's eye, I can see [the musician] doing those things with someone individually, and somehow all our pupils were present in the moment, even though she worked with one pupil at a time. Such things don't happen often. The moment did it. We adults, we were there, too, and we could sense it, and the whole community became a community. [...] If such moments could happen every day, it would be perfect, but in practice it doesn't work that way in our class. These moments provide a good experience: If only I could achieve this some day. If I can get more of these moments into our daily routine, it will become our class's 'thing.' Even the name of our show is "We are us." (Teacher, Red class)

The teacher sees such special moments of togetherness as rare in work with severely disabled pupils, but considers that they have great value for the class and its identity as a community.

The following interview excerpt also serves as an example of whole class community, adults and children, experiencing an empowering moment of community, as one of them demonstrates a new side to himself with the help of music (cf. Kilinc et al., 2016, and the discussion above of the school employees' re-evaluation of pupils' abilities). An autistic pupil, 'Elias,' did not easily become involved in anything in the class, and at first, it was not easy to get him involved in the musical moments either.¹⁰ Then one day, he took the ukulele and started playing. This little moment was immediately recognized as important by everyone involved, and remained a source of strength for pupils and employees for weeks after the occasion.

A: Our composition starts from Elias playing the ukulele, and singing. He doesn't talk, but at that moment, he sang with that voice of his. The other pupils were excited about that afterwards, and told their music teacher that "Elias was playing and then he started

¹⁰ According to the musician's diary notes (April 11, 2016; April 18, 2016; April 22, 2016), she struggled to involve this pupil and felt that the teacher and assistants did not support her. In his interview, the teacher appealed to his knowledge of the pupils and explained that pushing this pupil into participating would not have helped. This was a small contradiction between the musician and the employees, but did not grow into a conflict.

singing and it was so wonderful!” It was wonderful that Elias could produce something that he normally can’t. And the others noticed it. It was a great moment.

T: Yeah, the insight that this fellow can produce something other than the sound of anger and rage that is familiar to everyone.

A: I remember when we were making music in the music class. Usually Elias only takes those [Boomwhacker] tubes. But now he took [the ukulele] when the others did, too, and he started playing. [The musician] started recording him immediately. We let him do it for as long as he wanted. Nobody interrupted, or asked him to stop, or said “good for you!” Everybody just listened for as long as he played. It was somehow so amazing. (A=assistant, T=teacher, Yellow class)

The second level of community depicted in the interviews was *between the classes*. The sense of community between the teachers and assistants of different classes of disabled pupils increased when all the employees found out what other classes had accomplished with the musician. This experience is articulated in the following interview segment:

We all worked in our own classrooms for the specific days [of the music project]. We had no contact with the other classes. We didn’t even know what they were up to. But when we had a shared rehearsal, seeing each other’s presentations created a community spirit: “Wow, this is us, this is a wonderful thing.” (Teacher, Blue class)

The sense of belonging to ‘us’ expanded from the classroom to a mutual feeling between all the classes that took part in the project.

However, the interviewees also recognized a third level of community, which was not greatly influenced by the music project: The *whole school community* as their workplace. The school had recently moved into a bigger building, and that was considered to have weakened the work community. The interviewees longed for justification for their classes’ existence as part of the school community. They found it important that the management, other employees and pupils were more aware of the music project, and through this, of the disabled pupils’ capabilities. They were aware of a deficit view that some of their colleagues might have of pupils with disabilities (see Kilinc et al., 2016). The theme of *empowerment* on the individual and group level is very much present in the interviews. The process boosted the employees’ confidence in their own abilities to use and produce music (see above), and in their pupils’ abilities to do this. It strengthened the employees’ faith in their pupils in front of the whole school community, and provided them with a chance to be proud of their pupils. “There’s nothing that can’t be done with disabled pupils if you find the right way to do it,” said one of

the assistants. However, the employees felt that recognition of their achievements by the management or the other community members was at least partly lacking.

The interviewees perceived the music project's approach as truly community based: They felt that the content of the project was related to the pupils' interests and their own. Each class's own characteristics and interests were taken into consideration. The interviewees highlighted the musician's skills of interaction with both the pupils and the staff as the central reason for the project's success. In the employees' opinion, she had treated the pupils openly and equally. The activity was depicted as 'sensible,' 'pupil-friendly,' not 'too high-flown,' having realistic skill requirements and no pre-set artistic objectives. At the same time, all the interviewees were impressed by the quality of the process and the artistic outcome. They all considered the presence of an artist as very important in the process; they could not have achieved the outcome without her artistic vision and her skills in music, technology and production. This notion of artistic excellence is important, since it is often missing in the evaluation of community arts processes; they are assessed predominantly in terms of their impact (Ramsden et al., 2011).

Discussion

This research investigated the perceptions and experiences of a community music project conducted in a Finnish comprehensive school among pupils with disabilities, their teachers and special needs assistants. Qualitative interviews of four teachers and four assistants revealed three kinds of impact: 1) Positive feelings related to changes in routines and perceptions of the project's influence on the pupils, 2) New perspectives, new ways of working (finding new ways of using music in the classroom), and 3) An increased sense of community within the class and between the classes of pupils with disabilities, although not necessarily in the school community as a whole. In addition to the work-related effects, the project as an artistic process resulted in four musical compositions made collaboratively by a musician, pupils with disabilities, and the school employees.

New Ways of Working

It is known from earlier research that generalist teachers may experience difficulties in teaching arts subjects. Teachers' perceptions of their level of arts experience, artistic abilities and skills influence their confidence in teaching art. In the research by Alter et al. (2009), teachers who saw their competence in teaching arts subjects as limited, tended to 'teach to their strengths' and focus on the arts subjects they felt most confident in, or delegated partial or total responsibility of arts teaching to experts. (See also Welch, 1995.) The teachers and assistants in our research also had clear perceptions of their own personal talent (or lack of it) in arts subjects, of their strengths as arts pedagogues and also their personal interests towards

(teaching) specific arts disciplines. In this respect, our research supports the findings of Alter et al. (2009). However, our study also shows that even quite small positive experiences can improve teachers' confidence in themselves as arts pedagogues and increase their interest towards specific art forms – e.g., the Red class teacher was inspired to use more music with the class (see also Bowell, 2014).

Some research on artist-teacher partnership points to tensions and even conflicts experienced in such collaboration (Galton, 2010; Hall et al., 2007; Kind et al., 2007; Thomson et al., 2006; Seppälä, Ansio, Houni, & Hakanen, 2017). In the case of our study, the collaboration seems to have been successful. Our interpretation is that the success was due to the involvement of school employees in the process from the outset. The engagement of the teachers and assistants was further supported by the fact that the pupils had disabilities; the artist needed constant, practical support from teachers and assistants. The mutual trust and respect between the school employees and the musician as well as the expertise areas complementing each other seem to have supported reciprocal learning in the project. Since the musician had no experience of pupils with disabilities, the school employees could retain their expertise in special education, while relying on the musician's expertise in music. A very important aspect is that the project was conceptualized as community music, not just participatory music-making. It provided the musician and the school employees with a framework of community arts. Regardless of whether the teachers and assistants were familiar with the term and principles of community arts, the mere name of the project hinted at an idea of something being done together.

This finding of new ways and new perspectives of working and changing the social environment at work resonates with the construct of job crafting (Berg, Dutton, & Wrzesniewski, 2013; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Job crafting represents different kinds of proactive behaviors that employees use in their jobs to improve aspects of work and/or working conditions to make work more meaningful and engaging. These proactive changes that employees make may include different kinds of behaviors for altering a job's cognitive (e.g., shaping and redesigning the facets of the job – framing what the job is about), relational (e.g., alter the nature of interactions with others at work), and task boundaries (e.g., change the type and/or number of tasks and work activities; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Furthermore, job crafting can also be considered a collaborative and shared activity performed by a group of employees (Leana, Appelbaum, & Shevchuk, 2009; McClelland, Leach, Clegg, & McGowan, 2014; Tims, Bakker, Derks, & van Rhenen, 2013). In collaborative job crafting, group members decide to change their working conditions and characteristics in agreed-upon ways in order to attain their shared goals. However, to the best of our knowledge, no studies have thus far investigated the meaning of participatory (community) art activities in job

crafting and therefore, future studies should clarify the possibilities of participatory art for developing and shaping one's work.

Positive Feelings

All the participants expressed experiences of positive feelings and affects (e.g., enthusiasm, inspiration, attentiveness, alertness) during the music project (see Côté, 2009, on similar findings). The results of this study are partly in line with the previous research findings of Catterall and Pepler (2007), whose study showed that teachers saw the pupils differently after arts activities and perceived an increase in collegiality within classes. The results also link to the research by Kilinc et al. (2016), who argue that artistic working (in their case, drama exercises among preschool children with disabilities) mediated teachers' reconceptualizations of children's learning identities and abilities. Our research, too, supports the argument that artistic activities can highlight pupils' hidden personal interests and abilities and let the school employees re-evaluate what pupils with disabilities are capable of. However, this research adds some new perspectives to this discussion by including positive feelings and affects that are related to finding new sides to their pupils.

Interestingly, positive affects, which describe context-free dispositional feelings and emotions that reflect the level of pleasurable engagement with the environment (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) have also been found to be related to a positive work-related state of mind, that is, work engagement (Ouweneel, Le Blanc, & Schaufeli, 2012, 2013; see also Fredrickson, 2001). Thus, participatory art projects may even have longer-term impacts on work-related well-being. However, future studies are needed before further considerations.

Community

Finally, community-building in the community music project can be discussed from the perspective of the concept of social capital developed by, for example, Pierre Bourdieu (1986), James Coleman (1988), and Robert Putnam (1990). The sense of community experienced within and between the class communities of pupils with disabilities can be seen as the emergence of *bonding* social capital. However, the interviewees mention the lack of *bridging* social capital: Bringing different people together to create new links. (Cf. Lynch & Allan, 2007.) The latter was the aim of the public performances of the musical pieces composed in the project, but since the interviews took place before the performance, we unfortunately have no information on the interviewees' perception of its effects on the whole school community.

Strengths, Limitations, and Suggestions for Future Studies

A strength of this research is that it contributes to the limited knowledge of the impact of artists-in-school projects on school employees. Previous studies have mostly investigated artist-teacher collaboration in more pedagogically-oriented settings (artist being positioned as a teacher) and with pupils with no special needs. The project investigated in our study was a community music project that required active participation from the employees and the pupils alike.

The limitations of this study are its small sample size and limited interview data. Thus, the results are not generalizable beyond this specific group. In addition, the study design did not allow follow-up. Thus, unfortunately, we have no knowledge about the long-term impacts of the community music project. A detailed analysis of the process would also have required interviews both before and after the project.

As artistic activities and arts-based practices are spreading to the educational sphere and other sectors of public services (such as health and social care) in Finland, it is important to take their impacts on public sector employees into consideration. On the one hand, the employees may be seen as invisible ‘gatekeepers’ in public sector institutions and, by their attitudes and performed actions, either promote or complicate artistic processes in the institutions in which they work. On the other hand, it is important to further investigate how the employees themselves experience the art-based practices, as previous studies have implied both beneficial (Côté, 2009; Karpavičikūtė & Macijauskienė 2016; Lamont et al., 2010; Liikanen, 2014; Pitts, 2016; Thomson et al., n.d.) and controversial (Galton, 2010; Hall et al., 2007; Thomson et al., 2006) results and effects. Thus, more research is needed on the impacts of arts on employees and artists’ collaboration with them in public sector workplaces.

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doi:10.5465/AMR.2001.4378011

Funding

This research has been undertaken as part of the ArtsEqual project funded by the Academy of Finland's Strategic Research Council from its Equality in Society programme (293199/2015).

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