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STUDENTS' EXPECTATIONS AND REFLECTIONS ABOUT PIANO COURSES IN FINNISH PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER EDUCATION

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Abstract. *In Finland, music subject is part of National Core Curriculum and in the primary school stage (grades 1-6) usually taught by primary school teachers. To assure instruction of music education on a highly professional level, pre-service teachers are taught piano course as part of music didactics.*
This article reports findings of the pilot study carried out as part of ArcTop research project between University of Lapland and University of Helsinki to develop and improve primary school teacher education in both institutions. Students' expectations and reflections are examined through the lens of self-efficacy theory by Bandura (1977, 1986, 1997).
The data were collected using an open-ended questionnaire to find out students experiences in piano playing and music reading as well as their self-reflections about the learning process. The answers (n = 97) were processed statistically and analysed using qualitative content analysis. The results revealed that most of the participants (n = 64) were inexperienced in piano playing. At the same time they were highly motivated and eager to learn and practice. The students also mentioned the lack of elementary music literacy knowledge and the insufficient number of contact lessons which give grounds for making further arrangements in the curriculum.
Keywords: *self-efficacy; music education; primary school teacher education in Finland; piano accompaniment.*

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Introduction

The success-story of Finnish basic school education is widely known all over the world: the equality in education, relatively low level of student assessment, school- and district-level leadership, teacher autonomy and professionalism are the key issues behind that accomplishment, just to name a few (Sahlberg, 2011; Niemi et al., 2012; Reinikainen,2012; Juntunen 2017). The renewal processes in Finnish basic school education, especially in connection with the recent National Core Curriculum for basic schools (NCCBE, 2014), require rearrangements and new approaches also in teacher training.

In this field, University of Lapland and University of Helsinki have been doing a lot of cooperation in sharing expertise and carrying out several studies to improve and develop music courses in primary school teacher training (Hietanen & Ruismäki, 2017; Tuisku & Ruokonen, 2017; Ruokonen et al., 2017; Enbuska et al., 2018).

This pilot study is part of a new research project "Arctic Reformative and Exploratory Teaching Profession" (ArcTop), aiming to support teachers' life-long professional development by organizing research based in-service courses; providing possibilities for cooperation and creating networks between universities and comprehensive schools in Lapland through shared expertise, critical reflections and research. Part of this project focuses on different possibilities for developing piano courses in primary school teacher training.

Music subject and teaching in Finnish basic schools

In Finland, music subject is part of National Core Curriculum of Basic Education (NCCBE) where the main objectives and activities of music subject are stated. The main tasks of music education - to create opportunities for versatile musical activities and active cultural participation- reflect the ideas of praxial music education (Elliott, 1995; Elliott & Silvermann, 2015): pupils learn musical concepts and expression skills through singing, playing musical instruments, composing, moving and listening to music. They are supposed to participate in making music together and building togetherness, take part in cross-disciplinary work in arts subjects and share their experiences with others. The ongoing and fast development of information technologies is observable also in music education, as the new NCCBE emphasizes the use of music technology when composing and expressing creative musical ideas. Thus, the local schools and teachers have the freedom and responsibility to choose the content and methods to achieve these goals (NCCBE, 2014). In grades 1–9, there is expected to be at least eight compulsory courses of music as, meaning that one course corresponds

to 38 contact hours. Music is obligatory subject in grades 1-7 and optional in grades 8-9. In addition there are 11 optional courses (one course corresponding to 38 contact hours) which may also be used for teaching arts subjects (handicraft, music, visual arts), but the decision about the number of hours each subject can use, lies on the local school (Valtioneuvoston asetus 422/2012, Suomen Säädöskokoelma, 2012). The study by Tossavainen and Juvonen proved that music as a school subject is considered enjoyable, but not as useful as mathematics (Tossavainen & Juvonen, 2015).

In grades 1 to 5 music subject is usually taught by the primary school teacher (sometimes referred to also as "generalist"), whereas from grade 6 and up the specialised music teacher continues the teaching (Sepp et al., 2010; Hietanen et al., 2017). Implementation of the music subject objectives presented in NCCBE (NCCBE, 2014), set high demands on teachers' pedagogical abilities, musical competence and skills like singing, playing different instruments, basics of music elementary theory (Anttila, 2010; Saarelainen & Juvonen, 2017; Hietanen et al., 2017).

According to Laitinen, Hilmola and Juntunen (2011), the situation in arts education, including general music education at Finnish basic school faces several problems, such as the insufficient time available for music, modest results in musical knowledge and basic skills (at grade 9 level), inadequate qualification of teachers' teaching music (Laitinen et al., 2011, 14-16). The same tendency is common to educational policy in numerous European countries.

Literature and theoretical background

According to the study „Arts and Culture Education at School in Europe" (ACESE, 2009), in the majority of the observed 30 European countries, generalist teachers are employed to teach music on the primary school level.

Yet, several research results have revealed serious problems the generalists face when teaching music in basic school (Swanwick, 1992; Hennessy, 2000; Holden & Button, 2006; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008; Biasutti, 2015; de Vries, 2013; Gravis, 2013; Hallam et al., 2009; Russell-Bowie, 2009; de Vries, 2017).

In Finland, primary school teachers are facing the same complications: insufficient musical knowledge and skills have been reported in many research reports (Puurula 1992; Vesioja 2006; Ruokonen & Muldma 2007; Partanen et al., 2009; Anttila, 2010; Saarelainen & Juvonen, 2017; Hietanen et al., 2017; Mäkinen & Juvonen, 2017). According to Tereska (2003), nearly one third of primary school teachers refuse to teach music. Anttila (2010) points out that most of Finnish pre service teachers lack confidence in singing and many of them cannot play any instruments. In primary school teacher training entrance

examinations musical skills are not evaluated in any way. Also, the amount and quality of music courses in primary school teacher training vary a lot across Finnish Universities (Anttila, 2010).

For example, regular music studies for generalists include 10 academic hours of piano accompaniment lessons in University of Helsinki and 20 academic hours in University of Lapland. The decreasing instruction time and limited number of contact lessons challenge to find new solutions to equip pre service teachers with sufficient knowledge and skills in music. It is crucial to motivate students for acquiring skills needed for teaching music professionally. It also means creating supportive learning environments for helping to build students' positive self-efficacy, as it has major implications for their future work.

According to Bandura's social-cognitive theory, the concept of self-efficacy expresses a personal belief system of one's capability to accomplish certain tasks (Bandura, 1977). Several research results confirm that self-efficacy is extremely important when it comes to motivation, learning and academic achievement (Bandura, 1997; Multon et al., 1991; Schunk & Pajares, 2009; Artino Jr, 2012). Bandura also underlines the two important aspects reflecting the task- and situation-specific nature of self-efficacy: firstly, the most beneficial efficacy decisions exceed one's real capabilities, and secondly, individual's efficacy judgements aim to accomplish certain goals (Bandura, 1986). Yet, the mere possessing of the knowledge and skills is not enough - one must also have the conviction to perform the task not only under typical, but also challenging circumstances. As Artino Jr has put it: "Effective functioning, then, requires skills and efficacy beliefs to execute them appropriately - two components that develop jointly as individuals grow and learn" (Artino Jr, 2012: 77).

Self-efficacy beliefs play an essential role explaining phenomena like human motivation, learning, self-regulation, accomplishment. In other words, self-efficacy beliefs have a crucial role in "translating directed goals into actions" (Pajares & Urdan, 2005, ix). According to Bandura: "Belief in one's efficacy is a key personal resource in self-development, successful adaptation, and change" (Bandura, 2006: 4).

There are also significant connections between person's goal achievement, past experiences, internalised values and attitudes shaping one's self-efficacy, as these factors either increase or decrease motivation to participate in certain activities (Mayer, 2008). Accordingly, the higher the person's self-efficacy, the higher goals one sets for oneself. Whereas individuals with low self-efficacy may avoid certain activities to prevent failure or negative experiences (Morris et al., 2017). In the context of teaching this indicates that "self-efficacy is developed through the interaction between an individual's judgement of their teaching ability to perform a task and their perception of the actions required to perform the task

successfully" (Garvis, 2013: 86).

The four key sources that contribute to self- efficacy are: mastery experience (prior task-based achievement), vicarious experience (observation of peers and other role models), verbal persuasion (encouragement from others), and physiological states (emotional conditions, arousal) (Bandura 1997; Pajares & Schunk, 2001). Mastery experiences constitute the most reliable sources of efficacy information, as each success helps to build confidence whereas each failure weakens it (Hendricks, 2016). Self-efficacy focuses more specifically on the tasks or activities that an individual feels capable of performing. Accordingly, a generalist teacher's ability to teach a particular subject is determined by their level of self-efficacy.

Hennessy (2017) argues that less confident student teachers will not be challenged to try music teaching in their future career and later they prefer to exclude music from their teaching responsibilities (Hennessy, 2017).

In order to understand primary school teachers' beliefs, experiences and challenges about teaching music and to help the student-teachers to develop confidence and add motivation for learning musical skills, self-efficacy theory provides good conceptual framework for research.

Methodology

According to Kaplan (1973), the aim of methodology is to help us to understand not the product of scientific inquiry but the process itself.

This pilot study is part of ArcTop design- based research project (2017 - 2019) between the Universities of Helsinki and Lapland for developing piano courses and learning environments in primary school teacher training. Instruction takes place in a piano studio, equipped with digital pianos, headphones and computer. The equipment in the class enables differentiated teaching and individual tutoring. The teaching contains basics of melodic piano accompaniment: accompaniment of melody based on chord symbols to support joint singing in the classroom. Music textbooks of the elementary school and additional materials compiled by the teachers are used as music sources, but students may also choose their own repertoire in accordance with their level of experience. In addition, the network study environments and teaching materials are used. At the beginning of the course, students' backgrounds, wishes and goals are mapped through discussion.

The aim of the present qualitative study is to find out the dynamics and developments in students' efficacy beliefs as the result of piano accompaniment course. Tha data were collected from primary school teacher students (N = 97) in Universities of Lapland (N = 14) and Helsinki (N = 83) after completing the piano accompaniment course in autumn 2017 (September to December) by using

open-ended questions. The questions were compiled to find out about students' earlier experiences in piano playing and accompaniment (self-assessment), goal setting and motivation after taking the course. The students in Helsinki were also asked one additional question - their general opinion and thoughts about the course. The answers of the students from Helsinki University are marked as HPP and Lapland University as LSP. The middle numbers "1718" indicate the years and the end of the code - the student's answer.

The data were coded and analysed using content analysis (Cohen et al., 2007) applying the conventional approach. Content analysis is regarded as a flexible method for analyzing text data (Cavanagh, 1997). Hsieh and Shannon (2005) suggest three distinct approaches of content analysis: conventional, directed and summative. As coding categories are derived directly from the data, the approach used in this analysis is conventional.

Results

The results were analysed accordingly in following basic criteria:

1) **students' mastery level in piano playing.** The results reveal that the students' mastery level in piano playing is very heterogeneous. Out of the total number of respondents (N = 97), 64 students (66 %) evaluated their piano playing skills as "total beginners"(B), 26 students (26,9 %) defined their skills as "some experience in piano playing, but not in accompaniment"(SE) and 7 students (72,1 %) - "experienced in both, piano playing and accompaniment"(PA).

2) **students goal setting.** With regard to the goal setting, the majority of the students (N = 92) set different musical goals to develop skills in piano playing and accompaniment. Students named various elements and components they wished to practice. Their goal setting was usually determined by their evaluated mastery level. Students from group B mainly mentioned playing the melody and bassline, reading music, finding notes on keyboard, learning the triads, playing some primary school songs as their main goals: *I would just like to learn the very basic of piano playing and learn to accompany some primary school songs* (HPP17181069). *I wanted to learn to play the melody from the notes (*HPP17181055). *I wish to learn the different possibilities to use chords and become more confident, to learn the main chords* (HPP17181042).

Some students mentioned that at first they had no goal except to pass the course, yet, they became interested in piano accompaniment during the lessons and plan to continue in the future. *At first I had no more goals to just pass, but as I noticed my progress during the course and understood I can learn to play, I became enthusiastic* (HPP17181079).

The students from group SE where more precise in their goals. *I would like*

to learn how to use different chords in different styles. I would like to make progress in my playing and it would be wonderful to learn to sing and play at the same time, be more creative: make changes in tempo, be more expressive (LSP1718106).

Some had been playing in bands (N = 3), yet lacked the skills to read music. *I have been playing in different bands, I can improvise on piano and I have a good musical ear. Yet, I want to learn to read music* (HPP17181001). *I can play the piano, but in accompaniment and music reading, I am a real "greenhorn". I can play the chords and melody, but not at the same time* (LSP1718103).

As students form group PA had the most experience, they also were more specific in their goal setting. *I would like to get some tips how to develop my playing; to learn more difficult chords (7, sus, add), learn different styles of accompaniment in left hand* (HPP17181008). *So far I've been accompanying my own singing. I'd like to learn to accompany others, I would enjoy it. And to learn new songs* (LSP1718111).

All in all only a few students (N = 5; 1 on SE level and 4 on B level) did not set any goals except to pass the course. *My goal is just to pass. Sorry to say, but I'm just the beginner and too impatient to practice* (HPP17181070). *I am the beginner and had no great expectations considering the small number of lessons. Still, I learned to play melody and 1-5 in the left hand* (HPP17181074).

3) **levels of efficacy beliefs**

Although there were no direct questions about students efficacy beliefs for the piano course, we found several indications that gave grounds to decide about the self-efficacy level of the students.

The majority (N = 78) of the respondents expressed their high level of efficacy for piano playing, either directly: *I am very satisfied with the present situation. I learned the piano basics and some simple songs. I can continue on my own. I wish there could have been more lessons* (HPP17181062). *At first I couldn't play, but it was nice to learn, I even used some black keys. A longer course would have been better* (HPP17181067). *I learned the notes and could play with 2 hands. The freedom to play my favourite music was motivating* (HPP17181063). *I'll do my best to learn although I am the beginner. I learned to accompany about 6 songs every lesson. I got so motivated, that I am going to buy a piano for myself* (HPP17181069). *I started from the very beginning and I was successful. I learned to read the music and found some new songs myself. More lessons!* (HPP17181080).

or indirectly, through reflecting on their accomplishments in the piano course: *I could not set any goals, as I was a complete beginner. The goal set by the teacher (accompany 3 pieces) seemed impossible and I was surprised positively, I could accomplish it. I had always the idea that one has to start in childhood to learn to*

play. I would have started years ago, if I would have known that I progress in playing so well (HPP17181053). *I like to "colour" and fill the chords, add is "my friend". ….I think that developing my skills is fun* (LSP1718111).

Some students' (N = 14) efficacy level was somewhat in the middle, but they still pointed out some accomplishments in piano playing: *I passed it, can play the melody and bassline, but no chords. If I have to teach music, I will use ukulele instead* (HPP17181071). Some notes, need some training (HPP17181058). *Quite clumsy, learned by ear* (HPP17181028). *Seems I had too high expectations, and it disturbs that I could not accomplish my goals. Anyway, I got some new perspectives* (HPP17181005).

The answers of a few students (N = 5) revealed that they did not set any goals (see previous criterion) and did not express enthusiasm about practicing any musical instrument, express low efficacy level.

In addition, students pointed out some really interesting and useful ideas for further piano course planning concerning piano playing ergonomics, theory lessons, computer programmes, differentiated teaching.

Conclusions and discussion

The results reveal the uneven mastery level of piano playing: from the total number of the respondents (N = 97), only 7 students evaluated their piano playing level as "experienced". Most of the students defined themselves as the "beginners" (N = 64) and the remaining (N = 26) has some piano playing background. This gave grounds for expecting the same tendency displaying for the students self-efficacy beliefs. It was evident that goal setting depended to some extent on their prior experiences and achievements: the students from groups SE and PA were more specificwhereas students from group B wanted to acquire the basic skills in piano playing and accompaniment. Yet, considering that the number of piano lessons was only minimal, the idea of being able to accompany simple songs expresses the rather high self-efficacy level of students in group B. According to the study results, there is clear evidence that self-efficacy beliefs have substantial impact on students' goal setting and motivation for piano accompaniment studies.

This pilot study gives further ideas for continuing the study examining specifically the four sources of self-efficacy: prior experiences of mastering tasks, watching others' mastering tasks, messages or "persuasion" from others, and emotions related to stress and discomfort (Pajares & Schunk, 2001), in order to find more and different ways of encouraging students' self-efficacy beliefs connected with piano playing and accompaniment.

The importance and value of the arts education (including music) in developing creativity has been repeatedly underlined and EU strategic framework

for European cooperation clearly emphasises the importance of transversal key competences, including cultural awareness and creativity. Also the need to continuously improve its quality has also been underlined (ACESE 2009). Yet, the amount of music studies has been reduced substantially in primary teacher training. Still, teacher education has to guarantee primary school teachers the competence to teach music at basic education level (Juvonen & Anttila, 2003).

The task of teacher educators is to really encourage self-efficacy beliefs of pre service primary teachers in order to provide them with the best possible knowledge and skills to get involved with music teaching issues at primary school level.

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