

Arts based research of participation in music education

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Abstract

In search of validity in arts based research, the present article takes meaning as the point of departure asking the following questions:

- What or who constitutes meaning?
- In which context(s) and to which extent can the meaning in question be considered true or valid?
- How can aesthetic meaning support validity?

The context for the discussion is a previous study aiming to understand children's participation strategies in music activities. Using a phenomenological approach, the study aimed to understand in which ways participation proved meaningful to children.

After presentation of the study, the discussion focuses on concepts of meaning and validity and how they relate to arts based research in particular. Four different themes are briefly discussed: the theoretical basis supporting validity, aesthetic meaning in terms of ambiguity and recognisability, the role of aesthetics in arts based research, and finally the aesthetic attitude in aesthetic experience and research.

Keywords: Aesthetic meaning, young children, participation, validity

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Introduction

The main aim of the present article is to discuss criteria for and relations between ‘meaning’ and ‘validity’ in ‘arts based research’ (in the following: ABR). Phenomenology forms the primary philosophical basis for ‘meaning’ implicating that meaning in ABR is considered a matter of lived experiences. At a first glance, meaning and validity may seem incompatible because lived experiences are hard to validate. The phenomenological approach aims to offer another perspective. For this purpose, the article revisits a study of participation strategies in music education with young children. This study was searching for aesthetic meaning² as experienced by the participants as well as by the researcher observing the musical practice. Theoretically, the study was based on a phenomenological approach and investigating how aesthetic experience may be constituted, it represents a genuine example of aesthetic or arts based research.

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² # The term ‘aesthetic meaning’ is not restricted to the appreciation of art as such or works of art and it does not implicate a particular taste, rather one may as well appreciate aesthetic qualities in any everyday phenomenon.

From a methodological point of view, aesthetic experience, arts based research in particular, and qualitative research in general share some defining aspects connected to the discussion of ‘meaning’ and ‘validity’.

The following questions will guide the discussion about ‘meaning’ and ‘validity’:

- What makes participation in music education meaningful?
- What or who constitutes meaning?
- In which context(s) and to which extent can the meaning in question be considered true or valid?
- How can aesthetic meaning support validity in the reported study?

Participation strategies revisited

Revisiting the study as ABR not only refers to the musical practice under investigation, it implicates a particular emphasis on how research was conducted searching for aesthetic /musical / artistic meaning.

In the following, details about the case study will be presented including methodology and its philosophical underpinnings. As part of the case study, a model was developed as a tool for analysis. Results will be summarized referring to the model and with a few examples from the case study.

After presentation of the study, the discussion focuses on concepts of meaning and validity and how they relate to qualitative research in general and to arts based research in particular. Four different themes are briefly discussed: the theoretical basis supporting validity, aesthetic meaning in terms of ambiguity and recognisability, the role of aesthetics in arts based research, and finally the aesthetic attitude in aesthetic experience and research.

The discussion leads to a conclusion in which the phenomenological approach embraces a broad theoretical basis.

Methodology and philosophical underpinnings

The study in question (Holgersen 2002) was conducted between 1995 and 1999 and it focused on music teaching with young children 1-5 years of age.

The general objective of the investigation was to understand in which ways young children's participation in musical activities may be connected to perceived meaning, hence the title of the original study: *Meaning and Participation* (Holgersen 2002).

This was a longitudinal study of different groups of young children 1-5 years of age (n70) participating in music classes. A trained music teacher taught songs, singing games, dances, and playing simple percussion instruments. Invented stories or fairy tales in which children and adults played different roles often framed the music. The groups were formed in different ways:

- One day care group including 20 children 1-2 years of age + 7 day care mothers
- Two Kindergarten groups each including 18-20 children 3-5 years old + 3 early childhood teachers
- One family group including 12 children and their parents.

Most of the parents (n=55) answered questionnaires providing information about the children's background and musical habits in the family and in addition a few interviews were conducted with selected adult participants.

The main method applied to the study was participant observation during roughly 140 classroom periods over two years including video recordings from 38 periods. The video recordings were analyzed through several steps from over all

description of the activities down to microanalysis of single movements and interactions in selected situations. Video analyses went hand in hand with reflection based on theoretical knowledge as well as on the researcher's experience of being present in the situations.

Thus, analyses of the empirical material took place through abductive procedures in which phenomenological "techniques" formed a general *modus operandi* (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Levinas 1988/2002; van Manen 2016). The procedures may be very briefly explained as follows:

- *epoché*, i.e. openness to what appeared as meaningfully related to children's participation. Re-viewing situations on video over and over again to see new details unfold.
- phenomenological reduction, i.e. to describe how various forms or symptoms of participation could be related to (re-duced to) various qualities of meaning.
- imaginative variation implicated a conceptual analysis of what might or should be designated as participation, constantly asking "what else could it be"? Or what could possibly not count as participation.

The three procedures should not be seen as a stepwise script for phenomenological research, rather they are present as perspectives at any time of the research process.

The focus of observation was how participating in musical activities became meaningful for the children. A central reference for 'meaning' was the phenomenological concept of intentionality implicating that being in the world, "we are condemned to make meaning" (Merleau-Ponty 1962, p. xxii). Following Merleau-Ponty (1962), consciousness is always about something, that is, consciousness is constantly striving to make meaning through the merging processes of act- and

object-intentionality. As part of the case study, a tool for description and analysis (Figure 1) was developed focusing act- and object intentionality.

The circle on top of Figure 1 conceptualizes the act-intentionality (i.e. how consciousness is making meaning), whereas the layers exemplify the ‘aboutness’ of object intentionality (i.e. what consciousness is directed by and towards). The model does not intend to represent all relevant aspects of aesthetic meaning in music activities, rather it points out some basic and inherent qualities of the aesthetic phenomenon.

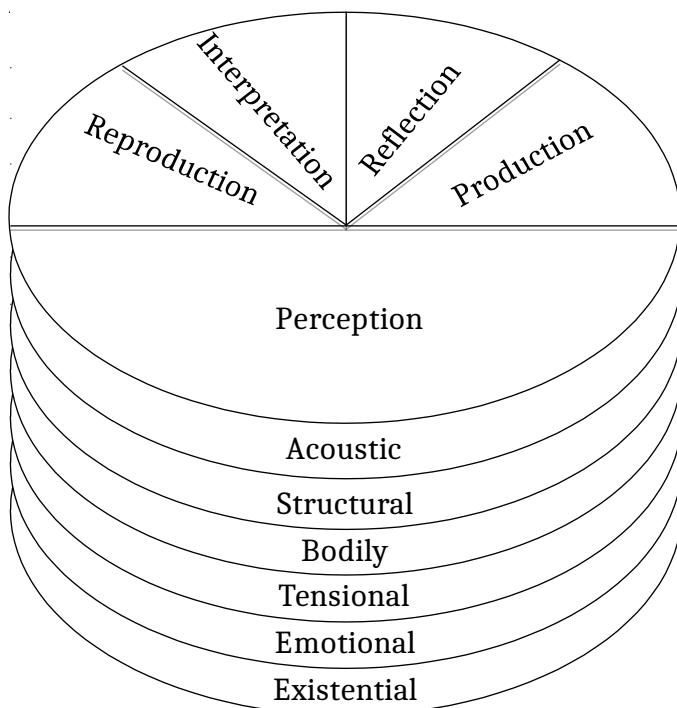


Figure 1: Aspects of meaning constituted through act- and object-intentionality. This figure was originally published in Danish (Holgerson 2002)

The model combines two sets of concepts provided by Frede V. Nielsen (1998) in his analysis of music as a teaching subject and in his theory of music as a multi-layered universe of meaning.

The first set of concepts (the circle on top of Figure 1) denotes forms of music activity or modes in which consciousness may be directed by and towards music in various forms of activity, namely through perception, reproduction, production, interpretation and reflection. Perception is the general way of being present as ‘body subjects’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962). Thus, the model illustrates that at any moment and in any mode of intentionality, consciousness is striving to make sense through perception and at the same time, one may engage in music through other forms of activity.

Paraphrasing Dufrenne (1973), music is “destined to be perceived”, that is, consciousness cannot help making meaning of music whether it is a live performance, electronically mediated, an imagination or a memorization of a previous performance. Singing or playing music may be a reproduction of something previously heard, yet, at the same time a creative or improvisatory aspect may be present in the performance. For example, young children may be simultaneously aware of music as something previously heard (memory) and of his/her own performance or reproduction (acoustic feedback). The processes of perception, reproduction, production, interpretation and reflection, however, make no sense without an intended object; again, intentionality is always about something.

The second set of concepts (the layers in Figure 1) are describing this “something” that becomes meaningful through acts of consciousness. These concepts denote multi-layered meanings in music: Acoustic, structural, bodily, tensional, emotional and existential layers of meaning that may be analytically distinguished as objects of investigation, yet they form a unity of lived musical meaning. Trying to separate them would destroy the identity of the music or even the holistic and aesthetic

phenomenon called ‘music’. As Nielsen (1998) put it, the multi-layered meanings belong together because they are heard together. Following Nielsen’s approach, I suggest the multi-layered meanings are perceived together, since they are simultaneously present in perception.

Furthermore, aesthetic meaning in music activities inevitably depends on previous experience beyond the actual situation. As Dufrenne put it, “Before the aesthetic object [...] I am neither a pure consciousness in the sense of a transcendental cogito nor a pure look, since my look is laden with all that I am” (Dufrenne 1973, p. 404).

Even when a child is self-forgetfully occupied with a musical activity, previous experience, embodied knowledge and lived relations in the situation form parts of the child’s lived experience. Imagine a 4 year-old girl participating in a farewell song concluding a music lesson. She is sitting on the lap of her father listening to the gentle voices of the adult participants singing this very simple but expressive tune, the lyrics saying, “No one in the whole world is as lovely as you”. Suddenly, the girl whispers to her father, “maybe they are all singing about me”. Recently, the girl had a little brother, and not least for this reason she enjoyed very much the time together with her father. Obviously this song was meaningful in many ways and in this particular situation, existential meaning became a central dimension of the aesthetic phenomenon.

The very schematic conceptualization in Figure 1 cannot do justice to the lived experiences of (young children) being directed by and towards musical activities. It is a well-established truth that meaning in music and music experience cannot be verbalized without loss of meaning. As seen from this perspective, it may be a dubious endeavour to discuss criteria for meaning and validity in ABR. Nevertheless, as always in phenomenological oriented research trying to capture preverbal (or pre-

conscious) aspects of meaning, it is necessary to refer to relevant concepts as tools for description and analysis.

Results

The longitudinal research design allowed the researcher to obtain a nuanced impression of each participant and to recognize or determine particular characteristics of children's participation in musical activities.

A pivotal question in the present study was, how young children's experience of meaning gave way to different forms of participation. Thus, the aim was to contribute to rendering visible such aspects of meaning as may otherwise remain tacitly implicit, lost to reflection or possibly completely overlooked in young children's participation in musical activities (Holgersen 2002). The result categories were established through a critical dialogue between the empirical material (observations, video descriptions, etc.), the researcher's lived experiences, and theoretical concepts that were discussed throughout the research process. The main result categories were four general participation strategies epitomizing young children's many different ways of grasping, imitating, identifying with and elaborating music activities.

Imitation means to give expression to selected and disconnected aspects of meaning. The participant is directed towards and by overt structural features of music, words or related movements, e.g. when a child immediately mimics a song reading the lips of another participant (grown up or peer) or imitates single gestures, movements or other aspects of the whole. Children often learn a song or a dance movement by imitating parts of it, which implies that a model must be present to "fill in the gaps". On the other hand, children often reproduce selected aspects of a song with or without accompanying movements only from memory. Referring to Figure 1, imitation is a matter of reproduction rather than production, interpretation

or reflection. A very obvious example was a 3 year-old boy clapping his hands as part of a song with accompanying movements. He did not attempt to catch the rhythm or the pulse of the music, yet for him at that moment it was a fulfilling experience to clap his hands as a token of social bonding with the other participants. Eventually, the boy turned his attention to the music-movement connection and he switched from imitation to identification.

In short, imitation relates to aspects of meaning for example doing what other participants apparently do.

Identification means to give expression to one's understanding and sympathetic insight in the music activity as a whole and/or identify with the way other participants articulate meaning in the situation. Imagine children singing a well-known song: It is easy to point out those who tend to follow other models and those who personalize the models. Identification implies understanding how musical meaning may be expressed in various forms such as the layers of meaning in Figure 1. Referring to forms of activity, identification is a matter of production though reproduction is still included and with potential aspects of interpretation and reflection. Identification may also take place in the absence of a model, but it is not merely a matter of copying social behaviour (Bandura 1986). Imitation may eventually change into identification, but basically they are different strategies, since meaning is connected with different goals. The clapping boy described as an example of imitation was participating together with a mate who at first was clapping not exactly the pulse of the music, yet after a few seconds of listening to the music he hit the exact pulse and he concluded by following the stressed notes in double tempo at the end of the music. The two boys were participating together but directed by and towards meaning in different ways.

In short, identification relates to the comprehension of musical meaning in music activities.

Elaboration means to give expression to or deliberately perform one's understanding and sympathetic insight in the music through the elaboration of a personal and complex expression form. Referring to Figure 1, elaboration is primarily related to (creative) production, interpretation and possibly reflection, though often in connection with reproduction. Imitation may sometimes turn into elaboration that, of course, never comes out of nowhere. A vivid example was a girl 2,5 years old who in the course of two months created a personal choreography of a dance for which the teacher had instructed quite different movements. The girl apparently picked up elements of her dance from other dances or from activities outside the music class, but she composed a very complicated choreography that far exceeded her motor capability. The video analysis, however, revealed a tight connection between her dance movements and the rhythmic structure and energies in the music, only the movements were slightly delayed.

In short, elaboration relates to aspects of meaning that are new to the situation.

Reception means to be present in a receptive way, yet without deliberately giving expression to one's participation. Reception includes the latent possibility of partial as well as total comprehension or fulfilment. The 4 year-old girl in the example above incarnates reception as a participation strategy as she imagined herself being the centre of the activity. Another version of reception is when children apparently do not participate through deliberate forms of expression, yet suddenly from one moment to the other they participate through other strategies displaying deep familiarity with the activities. One very obvious example was a 1 year-old boy who during his first 5 weeks in the music class sat outside the group together with his day-care mother, he was very upset and he very often cried loudly. A particular song including a maraca (which the boy held in his hand) with accompanying movements convinced him to participate together with the group and from moment to the other, he became a full participant demonstrating his knowledge of the whole repertoire of

songs and dances. Referring to Figure 1, reception is primarily a matter of perception, yet it involves the latent possibility of reproduction, production, interpretation and reflection. Reception may even "cover up" for virtual participation or averted involvement including imitation, identification or elaboration. Reception may give way to learning new songs or (dance) movements through observation and imagination.

In short, reception means to be present in an open and sensitive though often restrained or even reluctant way.

The participation strategies do not form a hierarchy, since each one of them at any time may be intensely meaningful for the child, i.e. from a first person perspective. And they are certainly not meant as a typology about children, since children may pass from one to another participation strategy across various activities as well as in the course of one single activity.

Participation strategies run their course in parallel or in mutual competition, occurring discontinuously as they do, i.e. depending on the situation, and not in any predictable order. Furthermore, the participation strategies are main categories open for any variation that prove meaningful in music practices. Basically this study was a matter of understanding children's lived experiences as participants in music activities.

The study aimed to expand standard interpretations of 'participation' often described by the dichotomy of participation / non-participation or by 'imitation' as a generic term to explain a variety of child behaviour.

The relevance of participation strategies for pedagogical practice is that they may serve as eye openers for practitioners who for example may tend to deem reception as non-participation and elaboration as if children are not applying to the goals or rules of a set situation.

Applying participation strategies as a descriptive and analytical tool for reflective practice may help understand how mutual intentionality forms generative practices in music. What for the inexperienced music teacher may look like chaos in the room may also be interpreted as different participation strategies being intensely meaningful for each participant. In musical practices – with children as well as adults – it is the variation of meaningful participation that makes them generative practices.

Discussion of meaning and validity in Arts Based Research

Validity in ABR and other qualitative research depends on transparent procedures supporting internal as well as external validity (Barone and Eisner 2011, p. 162). Critique of ABR should be taken into account especially when discussion is about validity. In the present article, the general argument relies on the phenomenological approach that could also be the subject of critique, but then the critique would concern phenomenology rather than ABR³. Striving for validity, researchers aim to establish trustworthiness through *confirmability*, *dependability* and *transferability* (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p. 323ff).

In order to obtain *confirmability*, analyses of video examples and concepts were triangulated and discussed with research colleagues and participating preschool teachers. In some cases the meaning of experiences and articulations seems to be obvious while in other cases it may be ambiguous, difficult to grasp or even overlooked. Sharing knowledge about the participating children added perspectives

3 Jagodzinski and Wallin (2013, pp. 56, 93), for example, offer critique of many concepts and ideas in ABR including meaning and validity. The critique, however, does not concern phenomenological arguments, and therefore a discussion of this critique is not included in the present article.

to my (and to everyone's) understanding of what became meaningful for the children as they were directed by and towards the musical activity and other participants.

Dependability implicate that the conceptualization of participation strategies was established through a dialogue between theoretical and empirical knowledge. This argument is fundamental for the phenomenological approach entailing a critical and open-ended consideration on the internal empirical loyalty (that is to recognize participation as it appears rather than as presupposed) as well as the external theoretical anchoring of the result categories (Jørgensen 1989).

External validity in qualitative research also implicates transferability, that is, if the participation strategies are recognized as meaningful in a certain group, they should also apply to other similar practices, which they apparently do⁴.

The following discussion does not address the analysis of qualitative data as such (as for example in Silverman 2006); rather it unfolds four different but interdependent themes concerning implications of meaning and validity in the study of participation strategies.

First I discuss how the theoretical basis and consistency can support validity in the study of participation strategies.

The second theme concerns ambiguity and recognisability of aesthetic meaning and how it relates to the problem of validity.

The third theme is concerned with the role of aesthetics in ABR. A short excursus into visual arts aims to emphasize and explain connections between artistic meaning and validity.

4 According to Copy Dan registrations, selected texts about the participation strategies have been included in the curriculum of Danish preschool teacher education during the last two decades.

The fourth and last theme unfolds the aesthetic attitude, which is at the core of both aesthetic experience and research, and this leads to a conclusion about meaning and validity in ABR.

Theoretically based validity

The following discussion is concerned with the theoretical basis and consistency. The participation strategies form a coherent concept family combining musical meaning (Figure 1) - based on phenomenology of aesthetics - with the notion of mimesis as described by Aristotle (384-322 b.c.). Basic ideas can be traced back to Aristotle's analyses of artistic principles in his small but momentous work "Poetics" (from ancient Greek: *poïesis* ~ to make, do, create). This small treatise describes the root of creativity in a range of art forms and mimesis is the basic notion in which (re)presentation, performance and creative practices are rooted. Thus, mimesis is not restricted to imitation; rather mimesis can include all participation strategies. For Aristotle all kinds of artistic expression are ways of miming acting humans or human behaviour, and he explains poetry including the ancient tragedy as created by artists' improvisations. In "Poetics", *mimesis* includes aspects of recognition as well as surprise (cf. imitation, identification and elaboration). Mimetic artists (poets, musicians, actors, etc.) can delineate the human world as it really is or was, or as it appears or is said to be, or as it could or should be – better as well as worse, as Aristotle put it. Recognition should be understood in a very wide sense including experience of the well known as well as surprise and discovery of the unknown (Aristotle 2005 § 11 and 16). As it appears, this description may include all forms of imitation, identification and elaboration. Reception including virtual participation may designate the artist as "observer" or provide an appropriate example of the audience.

Historically and within different theoretical areas, each of the four main concepts designating the participation strategies has implicated different meanings. In the present article, I shall mention only a few central references to the concept history of participation strategies. The tradition of Vygotsky and cultural psychology has produced a lot of theory about participation that formed one point of departure for the notion of participation strategies. The different roles of participants and the relation between enculturation and participation were the focus of many analyses, and particularly the notion of 'guided participation' (Rogoff 1993) contributed to the delimitation of what a participation strategy might be. Guided participation is a teaching strategy that functions well in music activities as described and as such, I would describe it as secondary to the four main participation strategies.

As previously mentioned in the above description of imitation and identification, these concepts have been used in a more specific sense in social cognitive theory (Bandura 1986). In developmental psychology, the notion of imitation has been interpreted in different ways implicating a continuum from mimicry to identification (Meltzoff 1999; Meltzoff and Moore 1997; Piaget 1962). Already from birth, infants use different participation strategies as they are directed towards and by the environment. Newborn infants are attentive to and able to mimic intrinsic meaning in facial and vocal expressions, which is an early sign of the ability to identify with another person. Furthermore, infants only few weeks old are able to initiate and conclude social interaction through eye contact, vocalizations and gestures. This is the basis of what Stern called the intersubjective matrix, i.e. the ability to understand the Other and to participate in social interaction (Stern 2004).

Malloch and Trevarthen (1999) have conducted similar research about 'communicative musicality'. Their research strongly supports the validity of mutual meaning making in infant communication. Further research has documented how communication through music, gestures and voice form the basis of intersubjective

knowledge as aesthetic experience (Malloch and Trevarthen (eds) 2009; Stern 2004, 2010; Godoy and Leman 2010). Recent brain research on mirror neurons has confirmed that human mind is hardwired to decode aesthetic experience communicated through sounds, facial expressions, postures and movements (Freedberg and Gallese 2007) – and in some cases more accurate than through language.

Stern (2010) established the concept of ‘dynamic forms of vitality’ to explain the basis of (aesthetic) meaning making. Stern defines dynamic forms of vitality as “the fundamental dynamic pentad of movement, time, force, space, and intentions” that altogether form a prerequisite of meaning making in music, dance, theatre and cinema.

To sum up, different participation strategies are theoretically based in the history of ‘mimesis’ from Aristotle to modern psychology. The four main concepts are rooted in theory and practice and as they are closely connected on the same level of abstraction, they form a coherent concept family.

Ambiguous meaning and validity

Ambiguity is an identifying aspect of meaning in aesthetic practices, artefacts, experience, etc. The ambiguity of aesthetic meaning, however, is not a problem for validity, but lack of recognisability would be. The ability to share aesthetic experiences has always puzzled artists as well as researchers, but as explained in the previous section, we are coming closer to an explanation of how aesthetic communication may be accepted as valid knowledge.

Human beings share basic experiences of meaning, not because we all have had exactly the same experiences but as Merleau-Ponty (1962) said, because we all have access to the same field of experience. Musicians, music teachers, participants in and researchers of music teaching and learning share some fundamental aspects of

aesthetic experience. Merleau-Ponty described this as a particular bodily readiness that allows us to understand the Other.

Music and other aesthetic phenomena always give way to multifaceted and ambiguous meanings and it is therefore important that fellow participants (and a potential researcher) are able to recognize the participant's subjective experience as a real experience. Subjects legitimately expect that other subjects are able to recognize and share their experience even if it is multifaceted and ambiguous.

We never doubt that our own experiences are real whether or not we are able to explain them in language. For example, the experience of aesthetic distance or alienation is well known for listeners and participants in music activities and though it may be difficult to describe, it is easy to recognize the feeling of being lost in the unfamiliarity or lack of resonance with this peculiar musical experience. The same goes for the experience of fulfilment when we participate in a concert, in a music performance as amateurs or professionals, or when we listen to a favourite piece of music. We never question the truth or validity of our own experience.

Singing may serve as an example of the perceived reciprocity in musical meaning. Singing may be a touching experience both for the listener and for the performer as well as for fellow participants in a choir; certain reciprocity is embedded in this kind of musical experience (Stubley 1999). This is the experience of simultaneously touching and being touched by the music while we sing, play or listen to it. This also explains, why it makes sense to understand intentionality as being simultaneously directed by and towards something meaningful in music activities (Holgersen 2010). Why is it, then, that one can know that the Other can recognize ones own musical experience?

For reasons already described in the previous section, we may assume that our emotional and bodily experiences are not hidden to the Other, rather they may be recognized as embodied. From a phenomenological perspective, our emotional and

bodily experiences are “unhidden” as Heidegger would describe them referring to the Greek term “*aletheia*”. Even if we do not have access to the Other’s first person experience, there is no reason to doubt that we are able to recognize expressions of the Other’s embodied experiences. In other words, second person experience is no less valid than first person experience (Zahavi and Gallagher 2008).

We should respect and maintain the asymmetry between the first-person and the second- (and third-)person access to psychological states, but this is not a difference between an immediate certainty on the one side, and an insecure inference on the other. we should recognize that each type of access has its own strengths and weaknesses. (Zahavi and Gallagher 2008, p. 185f)

We do not have to enter other persons’ minds to understand them, because we already have access to the same field of experience. In addition to the shared field of experience, we also share narratives and metaphors that for the recognition of aesthetic meaning may be more accurate than other measures.

Artistic practice as Arts Based Research

To illustrate and unfold the idea that aesthetic practice per se is ABR, I shall refer to one of the earliest and most genuine examples of ABR that I am aware of, which is the brief essay by Merleau-Ponty called “*Cézanne’s Doubt*”. The essay was published in 1945 – the same year as Merleau-Ponty published “*Phénoménologie de la perception*” and long before the term ‘Arts Based Research’ was established. The general idea of “*Cézanne’s Doubt*” is that for Cézanne, painting is an open-ended investigation of the nature. Cézanne continuously doubted his own ability to capture the ‘origin’ of the motive, his favourites being the still life, the portrait and the landscape. The ‘origin’ of the motive does not signify any historic or physical origin rather the ways in which the aesthetic object is constituted in perception as a totality of meaning.

Scientific investigation and artistic reflection went hand in hand in Cézanne's analytical approach, painting techniques, and philosophical wonder. Cézanne prepared a painting of a landscape by investigating its geological elements, thus his artistic work should be seen as a continuation of – or rather as a continuum of – scientific knowledge. Turning to the lived experience of the landscape, he stood still for a long time gazing at the landscape. Suppressing (or bracketing) his scientific knowledge, Cézanne strived to capture the landscape as a *whole*. This was his motive. (Merleau-Ponty 1945).

Throughout his entire life, Cézanne doubted his own project, and “[h]e thought himself powerless because he was not omnipotent, because he was not God and wanted nevertheless to portray the world, to change it completely into a spectacle, to make visible how the world touches us.” (Merleau-Ponty 1945, p. 69f). Cézanne's doubt was real (i.e. phenomenologically valid) and it gave way to a profound anxiety that at the same time formed his most important motivation.

Merleau-Ponty compared Cézanne's lifelong doubt on his own artistic ability with the philosophical problem of the boundary between reason and unreason. He claimed, “We must form a new idea of reason that is not restricted to logic and mathematics, but wide enough to comprehend the meanings expressed in novels, poems and paintings [...]” (Johnson 1993, p. 3). Throughout his essay about Cézanne's doubt, Merleau-Ponty maintains that artistic meaning is neither a mystery nor pure technique rather it is the artist's lived experience of nature captured in colours on canvas, yet still open for interpretation. This is the reason why Cézanne never managed to finish his work. Cézanne's doubt illustrates what might be labelled ‘aesthetic responsiveness’. Cézanne had no reason to doubt his first person experience, but due to his aesthetic responsiveness he was painfully aware that despite his efforts capture the essence of his motive he could only come close to it. My point is that aesthetic responsiveness is a prerequisite of doing ABR as much as for the

artistic practice itself, which brings us to the last of the four sections about meaning and validity in ABR.

Aesthetic attitude at the core of experience and research

The investigation of young children participating in music activities provides an example of double phenomenology, that is, the researcher's first-person perspective focussed on the participants' first-person perspective both relying on aesthetic responsiveness. Thus, the investigation was conducted very much in concordance with the view of Liora Bresler (2006) stating that

[...] aesthetics is at the heart of both artistic experience and qualitative research, and that artistic processes, in particular, the space surrounding art experiences, can illuminate significant aspects of qualitative research, including data collection, data analysis, and writing.

'Aesthetically based research' seems to be an adequate term for the reported research, since it is not only concerned with music as an art form, rather focus is on any relevant aesthetic aspect of a music education situation.

Merleau-Ponty's quest for "a new idea of reason" is concerned with the validity of aesthetic meaning in and beyond the arts. Merleau-Ponty's claim had and still has fundamental implications for the discussion about criteria for truth and validity in qualitative research in general and in ABR in particular. Merleau-Ponty made only few references to the field of music education, but his analyses of how aesthetic meaning is constituted resonate with music education research as well.

The focus of the reported study was how young children engage in music activities and find them meaningful in many different ways. This focus demanded a very sensitive approach very much like the 'aesthetic attitude' that generally is related to aesthetic experience.

Dufrenne (1973) contributed substantially to the notion of the ‘aesthetic attitude’, which he explained as a prerequisite for the experience of art. It is essential for artists and for everyone engaging in aesthetic experience as well as for qualitative researchers trying to grasp the meaning of the object of their attention. The aesthetic object should not be seen as a concretion of the work of art; rather the aesthetic object is completed only in perception (Dufrenne 1973, p. 232). Whereas Dufrenne was concerned with the experience of Art, the aesthetic attitude is generally accepted as an open and sensitive attitude to the experience of aesthetic aspects in any phenomenon (cf footnote 1).

Benson (2003) continues the work of other phenomenologists, in particular Husserl, Heidegger and Gadamer, in his endeavour to formulate a phenomenology of musical performance, interpretation, improvisation, composition, listening, etc. Considering any musical activity an open improvisational dialogue, musicians, audience as well as researchers have to acknowledge the potential openness of the situation. Benson refers to Husserl’s notion ‘spaces of indeterminacy’ meaning as a defining characteristic of music and other forms of artistic expression.

Validity in ABR relies on the researcher’s willingness to constantly reviewing the empirical material and emerging results searching for ‘spaces of indeterminacy’. This may sound as a very general virtue that applies to all researchers across different fields, yet it has very specific bearing on the field of ABR that is entirely dependent on the possibility of validating aesthetic meaning.

Conclusion

The aim of the present article was to discuss relations between meaning and validity in an investigation of young children’s participation in musical activities.

The experience of multi dimensional and ambiguous musical meaning provided the empirical basis for the understanding and conceptualization of participation strategies in musical activities.

A growing body of research in developmental psychology and theories about embodiment emphasize the close relations between infant communication and aesthetic meaning making. These relations support that different participation strategies may be described as lived experiences, as ways of being directed by and towards aesthetic meaning in musical activities. Phenomenological analysis of artistic experience and arts based research provide further philosophical grounds for the validation of research based on the experience of aesthetic meaning. It is important to notice that the phenomenological approach embraces knowledge from ancient philosophy to modern psychology.

The question of validity in this kind of research is also connected to language as the most widely accepted medium for the presentation of results. It is therefore important for the discussion of validity that the result categories refer to concepts within philosophical and psychological traditions that form a coherent basis. In the case of participation strategies, the main concepts are grounded in philosophy from Aristotle to modern phenomenology as well as in modern psychology.

In support of validation, the concepts about participation strategies and generative practice may apply to other aesthetic practices. The aesthetic attitude as well as the participation strategies may be transferred to research of other aesthetic areas e.g. visual arts -, dance -, physical -, or related creative education.

As it appears, validity in arts based research may be hard to measure; on the other hand validity in terms of *confirmability*, *dependability* and *transferability* (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p. 323ff) should be considered a matter of meaningfulness rather than measurability.

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