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Contents

Særnummer · Music and Well-Being (volume 47)

Mikkel Snorre Wilms Boysen, Thomas Thorsen, Maria Westvall, and Thomas Husted Kirkegaard., Editorial: Music and Well-Being, pp. 4-7

Finn Holst, Musikalske læreprocesser, motivation og trivsel i dialogisk musikdidaktik, pp. 8-22

Guro Høimyr, Beatrix van Doorn, Kjersti Johansson og Karette Stensæth, "Korkompiser" – en unik måte å utvikle samhandlingskompetanser på for barn i småskolen? *En analyse av to korkompiser i et inkluderende klassekor*, pp. 23-41

David Sebastian Jæger, Trivsel og afstandsløshed? – *en eksistensfilosofisk refleksion over sansningens afstandsløshed, trivsel og sangskrivning som musikpædagogisk aktivitet*, pp. 42-62

Laura Rocchegiani, Free Music for Kids: Collaborative Music and Well-being in Educational Practices, pp. 63-83

Torben Westergaard and Cecilie Møller, Musical Waypoints in Primary School, pp. 84-100

Thomas Thorsen, Mikkel Snorre Boysen, Henriette Blomgren and Heidi Philipsen, Mødet med det fremmede. Trivselspotentialer i elevers møde med skolekonserter og professionelle kunstnere i folkeskolen, pp. 101-123

Frederik Pio, Musikaliserede vitaliseringsformer: ritualiserede overgange i livsløbet, pp. 124-138

Editorial: Music and Well-Being

In recent years, increasing attention has been directed toward what is often described as a well-being crisis among children and young people.¹ Although the magnitude and interpretation of this crisis remain debated, there is broad agreement that many children and adolescents experience periods of diminished well-being, particularly during their later school years.² The question is therefore not whether well-being is challenged, but how educational and cultural practices may respond constructively.

Engagement with aesthetic forms of expression has long been associated with positive contributions to human flourishing, a perspective supported by numerous contemporary studies.³ Within the field of music specifically, research highlights the value of musical communities and communal singing as well as creative musical activities in supporting well-being.⁴ Nevertheless, further research is needed to understand how music contributes to well-being across diverse contexts, and which pedagogical and artistic approaches, formats, and frameworks characterize a music pedagogy that meaningfully promotes well-being.

This special issue presents contributions from researchers across several countries, offering insights into how—and under what conditions—music pedagogy, broadly understood, may support well-being in contemporary society, particularly among children and young people.

The issue is framed and edited by the Danish Network of Music Education Research and Development (DNMpFU) in collaboration with the Danish Journal of Musicology. Several articles originate from presentations at the DNMpFU conference in autumn 2024 titled “Music and Well-being.” DNMpFU is a national research network comprising Danish universities, conservatories, and university colleges. The network encompasses

- 1 Mai Heide Ottosen et al., *Børn og unge i Danmark: Velfærd og trivsel 2022* (VIVE – Det Nationale Forsknings- og Analysecenter for Velfærd, 2022); Noemi Katznelson, Mette Pless, and Anne Görlich, *Mistrivsel i lyset af tempo, præstation og psykologisering: Om ny udsathed i ungdomslivet* (Aalborg Universitetsforlag, 2022).
- 2 Trivselskommissionen, *Et dansk svar på en vestlig udfordring* (Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet, 2025); Statens Institut for Folkesundhed, *Skolebørnsundersøgelsen 2022: Helbred, trivsel og sundhedsadfærd blandt skoleelever i 5., 7. og 9. klasse i Danmark* (Syddansk Universitet, 2023).
- 3 Daisy Fancourt and Saoirse Finn, *What Is the Evidence on the Role of the Arts in Improving Health and Well-being? A Scoping Review* (WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2019); Rarita Zbranca et al., *CultureForHealth Report: Culture’s Contribution to Health and Well-being. A Report on Evidence and Policy Recommendations for Europe* (CultureForHealth. Culture Action Europe, 2022).
- 4 Susan Hallam and Evangelos Himonides, *The Power of Music: An exploration of the evidence* (Open Book Publishers, 2022); Peter Schmidt Bruun, “Worlds Become in Sound”: A Study in the Phenomenology of Music Creation, Being and Pedagogic Processes of Bildung (Ph.D. diss., Aarhus University, 2023).

music education research across age groups, genres, institutions, and methodologies: music in daycare settings, schools, after-school programs, music schools, higher education, conservatories, teacher education, social education, and both professional and pedagogical musical practices.

Most contributions in this issue focus on pedagogical approaches and interventions within school contexts. This emphasis reflects the fact that well-being challenges are especially visible among school-aged children. The articles represent early primary, middle, and lower secondary school levels, thereby addressing music pedagogical practices across developmental stages. Complementing this, Rocchegiani examines inter-generational music pedagogical collaboration, while Pio situates music and well-being within a lifelong perspective through the lens of life transitions.

The first part of the issue presents empirical studies emphasizing active musical participation, creativity, and expression. The later part highlights listening and reception. As listening and action are mutually intertwined, the articles collectively illuminate different dimensions and phases of music pedagogical practice. The special issue begins and ends with theoretical contributions, framing the empirical studies. The articles are briefly introduced below.

In the first article, *Musikalske læreprocesser, motivation og trivsel i dialogisk musikdidaktik* (*Musical Learning Processes, Motivation and Well-Being in Dialogical Music Didactics*), Finn Holst proposes a dialogical approach to music education grounded in interaction theory, phenomenology, and ecological psychology. He contrasts reciprocal musical interaction with stimulus-response teaching, arguing that dialogical learning processes fulfill needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. One identified interaction form particularly supports motivation and well-being by enabling meaningful engagement in collective musical activity. Holst concludes that teaching should facilitate participatory interaction and calls for further empirical studies to develop dialogical music-didactic practice.

In the second article, *Korkompiser (Choir Buddies)*, Guro Høimyr, Beatrix van Doorn, Kjersti Johansson, and Karette Stensæth investigate the Danish *Everyone Can Sing* school choir program through analysis of a “choir buddy” pair. Using video microanalysis, they identify interaction patterns such as unreciprocated initiatives, attention-seeking touch, negotiated movement, and synchrony. The authors argue that shared musical participation nurtures turn-taking, empathy, and mastery, strengthening inclusion and social competencies. At the same time, they caution that pedagogical balance is necessary so supportive students do not assume disproportionate responsibility within peer relationships.

In the third article, *Trivsel og afstandsløshed? (Well-Being and Distance-Less Sensing?)*, David Sebastian Jæger draws on Løgstrup’s philosophy of “distance-less sensing” to

reinterpret well-being as existential connectedness. Through collaborative songwriting in music education, he shows how shared creative processes counteract alienation linked to performance pressure and acceleration. Students participate through lived experience rather than technical skill, fostering attunement and belonging. Jæger presents songwriting as a pedagogical practice where sound and language interact productively, enabling collective exploration of well-being while preserving music's intrinsic educational value.

In the fourth article, Laura Rocchegiani explores the *Free Music for Kids* project, examining how removing hierarchical roles among children, musicians, and parents shapes well-being and creativity. Drawing on socio-cultural theory and self-determination theory, she shows that improvisational collaboration supports shared agency, intrinsic motivation, and relational confidence. Rocchegiani highlights how recognizing children's musical contributions as legitimate extends benefits beyond the classroom into family relations and social inclusion, positioning co-creative music-making as a holistic educational practice fostering emotional development and resilience.

In the fifth article, *Musical Waypoints in Primary School*, Torben Westergaard and Cecilie Møller present the *Musical Waypoints* project, testing whether specially composed audio-visual background music enhances student well-being compared with generic relaxation media. Although teachers noticed no behavioral differences, children reported higher well-being, particularly in grade three. Integrating artistic composition with empirical research, the authors show how designed aesthetic environments can support calm transitions and emotional regulation. The study suggests tailored artistic interventions may serve as scalable tools for improving attentiveness and classroom atmosphere.

In the sixth article, *Mødet med det fremmede (Encountering the Other)*, Thomas Thorsen and Mikkel Snorre Wilms Boysen examine how professional school concerts affect students' well-being. Using mixed methods, they conceptualize concerts as aesthetic encounters fostering resonance and *Bildung*. Students experience attentiveness, immersion, and reflective dialogue, broadening their relation to the world beyond everyday schooling. The authors emphasize receptive listening as educationally significant, arguing that encounters with unfamiliar music support both personal development and relational awareness through meaningful engagement with artistic otherness.

In the seventh article, *Musikaliserede vitaliseringsformer: ritualiserede overgange i livsløbet (Musical Vitalizing Forms: Ritualized Transitions in the Life Course)*, Frederik Pio develops a theoretical perspective linking music and well-being through life transitions, combining Christopher Small's concept of musicking with Dieter Lenzen's life-course pedagogy. Through illustrative narratives across major life phases, he argues that music functions as a ritual medium, enabling individuals to process existential change and

relational complexity. Both cultural rites of passage and everyday mood shifts are musically mediated, framing well-being as meaning-making and formation rather than comfort. Music thus contributes to coping, identity, and existential orientation.

Torben Westergaard, the author of article number five in collaboration with Cecilie Møller, sadly passed away just before the publication of this special issue, which has come as a shock to all of us in the guest editorial team and in DNMPFU. Torben's work within DNMPFU has been highly significant and inspiring, and his ideas and perspectives have been an important foundation for the creation of this special issue. Our thoughts are with his wife, family, children, and friends. He will be greatly missed.

In spite of these sad circumstances, we hope that this special issue will contribute to ongoing discussions about the role of music in education and society, and how musical practices may foster well-being in meaningful and responsible ways.

*Enjoy reading — Mikkel Snorre Wilms Boysen, Thomas Thorsen,
Maria Westvall, and Thomas Husted Kirkegaard.*