Spoken Paper

Indigeneity and nationalism in the contemporary Swedish music classroom

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The inclusion of indigenous musics in elementary school music classrooms has great potential to be a powerful site for reconciliation and re-evaluation of national identities. The first decades of the 21st century have seen an increase in the visibility of indigenous issues in music education in the Nordic countries and worldwide, with policy and music education research initiatives providing different – and sometimes divergent – visions for reconstructing music education practices with a new place for indigenous musics. In Sweden, the most recent national curriculum (2011) marked the first time Sámi joik – considered one of Europe’s oldest living vocal traditions – was mentioned explicitly in guiding documents. However, results of a national survey of singing practices conducted in Sweden in 2016 found that school song repertoire continues to be drawn from a narrow national canon, with indigenous and non-western music almost entirely absent from music education in Sweden, despite decades of reforms in both teacher training and expanded curricular demands. Non-western musics were found to constitute less than one percent of singing repertoire, with only a handful of examples drawn from Sámi musical practices.

This paper presents the results of the 2016 national survey and examines them against a backdrop of the historical evolution of intercultural pedagogical thinking in Sweden as reflected in curriculum documents and in current music education research in the Nordic countries and internationally. The ambivalent attitude towards what significance indigenous music should be afforded in elementary music education – as an example of diversity or as a part of shared national heritage – will be discussed, examining in particular the most recent
curricular reforms and research trends in Sweden and Scandinavia. Issues such as learner identities, appropriation and ownership, nationalism and ethnic minorities, intercultural music pedagogy and teacher training will be discussed, as well as recent efforts to support the inclusion of indigenous musics and empower learners through learner-centered online platforms and virtual communities.