

Introduction

Health and Life Skills Through Music, Arts and Culture in Education

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Welcome to the anthology *Health and Life Skills Through Music, Arts and Culture in Education* [*Livsmestring gjennom musikk, kunst og kultur i utdanningen*].

This anthology describes and explores the field of arts, culture and life skills throughout the education system from kindergarten to university-based teacher training programs. It has been designed in close collaboration with the research project entitled *Universitetskulturskoleprosjektet (UniKuP, n.d.)* and the research group *Kunst- og kulturfaglig livsmestring i utdanningen (KuL-forsk, n.d.)*. The anthology consists of ten chapters, four in English, four in Norwegian and two in Swedish. All chapters have English abstracts. The anthology illuminates a diversity of

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professional perspectives and approaches on how arts and culture can strengthen public health and life skills, thereby promoting people's sense of well-being. The content deals with children and young people throughout the entire educational process from kindergarten and continuing on to higher education.

The impetus of creating this anthology came from the new Norwegian core curriculum: "The school's interdisciplinary topic health and life skills shall give the pupils competence which promotes sound physical and mental health, and which provides opportunities for making responsible life choices. In the childhood and adolescent years, the development of a positive self-image and confident identity is particularly important" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). The need for such an interdisciplinary topic is underlined by the Mental State of the World report¹ (Newson et al. 2023, 2024), which states that young adults are struggling far more with mental health problems than did older generations. This negative global trend started before the Covid-19 pandemic. Mental health is one of six prioritized areas in the Norwegian Strategy Plan on Public Health, one of its aims being to reduce reported low levels of life satisfaction in the population (White Paper 15, 2023). It is stated a governmental measure to support and evaluate the interdisciplinary topic *Health and Life Skills* as a means to even out social differences (White Paper 15, 2023). School is an important arena for learning life skills and implementing nationwide public health measures. At the same time, teachers report having a low level of competence in this interdisciplinary field (Ekornes, 2016; Heimdal, 2022; Holen & Waagene, 2014; Larsen & Christiansen, 2015; Mælan, 2018), so there is a need for them to acquire knowledge and skills in the area.

Furthermore, the Cultural Act on the responsibility of public authorities have the purpose to ensure that a wide range of cultural activities are promoted and facilitated so that everyone can have the opportunity to 1) participate in cultural activities, and 2) experience a diversity of cultural expression (Kulturloven, 2007). There is growing evidence concerning

1 The Mental State of the World report for 2022 (<https://mentalstateoftheworld.report/>) is based on 407,959 responses from 64 countries in nine languages.

the role of the arts in improving health and well-being (e.g. Fancourt & Finn, 2019, Jensen et al., 2020, Løkken, 2023). One common aspect for several of the chapters of this anthology is the use of cultural/artistic measures in safe spaces to explore diversity in society and achieve a sense of well-being. In 2017, governing documents for kindergartens, primary and secondary schools and higher education institutions presented some overarching values that have influenced the development of educational pathways for individuals wanting to work with children and young people in Norway (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017).

Three new interdisciplinary topics were presented, in the Core Curriculum, including *Health and Life Skills*; in other words, health and life skills should be implemented in all school subjects. Further, the principles for learning, development and education point out that this interdisciplinary topic shall give pupils the competence needed to promote their own sound physical and mental health. Relevant areas within this topic include lifestyle habits, gender, sexuality, media use and personal finances (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p. 16). Basic values such as the ability to create relationships with others, setting personal boundaries, respecting others and being able to control one's thoughts and emotions are also mentioned. The document Regulations for the National Curriculum for Teacher Education in Practical and Aesthetic Subjects for the 1st to the 13th grade (*Forskrift om rammeplan for lærerutdanning i praktiske og estetiske fag for trinn 1–13. 2020*) follows up the topic by requiring students to develop the competence they need to strengthen the school's work with the values and principles guiding primary and secondary schools; this means that *Health and Life Skills* is also a relevant topic in teacher education programs. The National Curriculum Regulations for Kindergarten Teacher Education (*Forskrift om rammeplan for barnehagelærerutdanning, 2012*) also points out that children's physical and mental health shall be promoted through increasing their sense of well-being, coping skills and ability for self-care (p. 11).

We would also like to mention the *kulturskole* [school of the arts] as an important institution of education for many children and young people in Norway. As part of the Education Act, all municipalities must, alone or in collaboration with others, provide children and young people with the

opportunity to participate in music and cultural activities that are organized in connection with their local school system and cultural life otherwise (*Opplæringslova*, 2023, paragraph 13–6). The *kulturskole* is therefore an extracurricular, statutory, municipal fee-based school for music and arts in Norway that aims to provide arts education for all pupils, as described in the curriculum framework (*Norsk kulturskoleråd*, 2017). On a national level, these schools collaborate extensively with municipal healthcare institutions (Berge et al, 2019). For example, they partner with care homes, health centers, nursing homes, psychological treatment centers, drug and crime prevention programs, child welfare programs, refugee, immigration and integration services, adult education programs, health centers, language schools and the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (Emstad & Angelo, 2021, p. 28). This means that many teachers in different arts subjects in the *kulturskole* also work in healthcare professions. Bringing *kulturskole*, culture and healthcare professions together is seen to contribute to improving people’s overall health and well-being as well as more diverse, inclusive and generous local communities (Emstad & Angelo, 2021, p. 38).

We see opportunities to strengthen life skills using salutogenic approaches (Antonovsky, 1987, 1996); indeed, the term *salutogenesis* appears to be this anthology’s theoretical framework around which every article is written.

The work of sociologist Aaron Antonovsky (1987, 1996) and his concept of *salutogenesis* illuminate health as linked to an individual’s energy, inspiration, creativity, sense of coping, self-efficacy and secure identity. The key for Antonovsky is a “sense of coherence” that involves the three aspects of understanding, managing and making sense of change. When life is felt comprehensible (predictable), manageable (conceivable) and meaningful, people feel coherence and continuity in life, and experience well-being. This involves understanding, managing, and making sense of change Antonovsky argues that an individual’s sense of coherence and meaning in life can contribute to the general resources of resist illness. A lifeworld that creates a sense of coherence through the arts shows how a salutogenic approach may be used as a device for creating a reflexive process among pupils, thus developing their self-efficacy and feelings of

coping with life's adversities and complications. As such, the new 2020 curriculum for primary and secondary education in Norway should include a focus on public health and life management, including as salutogenic way to promote health (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017).

In 2021, the research project *Universitetskulturskoleprosjektet (UniKuP, n.d.)* was started; its main goal was to strengthen work-life relevance in higher education and form committed and sustainable collaborations between higher education in music and arts, teacher education, and *kulturskolen*. For example, work package 3 *Culture & Health Educator* focuses on work-life relevance for trainee employees in the interdisciplinary field of teaching, artistic work and healthcare services in addition to collaboration on research and developmental work. This anthology is a result of the work package and research group *Kunst- og kulturfaglig livsmestring i utdanningen (KuL-forsk, n.d.)*, where most of the authors are participants.

The participants in *KuL-forsk* have competence in different disciplines of arts and healthcare; however, all share a common interest and passion for research which focuses on the application of the arts, culture and healthcare in education. In order to acquire a joint basis for writing, we chose the book *Lærerens arbeid med livsmestring* [The Teacher's Work with Life Skills] written by Anne Grete Danielsen (2021). The book is primarily aimed at teachers in primary and secondary schools and higher education, discussing how teachers can take ownership of the interdisciplinary topic *Health and Life Skills*, introduced in the new 2020 core curriculum. It also argues how teachers can do this well in their own teaching practice (Danielsen, 2021, p. 13). From an educational perspective, Danielsen illuminates her points by discussing mental health in children and young people in addition to empowerment and *salutogenesis*; this informative book has inspired many of the authors to pursue further research on these topics.

The subject of health and life skills is meant to be currently taught to a considerable extent in primary and secondary schools, and this situation has inspired new research and development to be pursued in higher education. This anthology is a result of the new focus on and approach to

the connection between the arts and health. The chapters present a rich diversity of perspectives and approaches that can strengthen the teaching of health and life skills in education. Also, the concept of “life skills” itself is discussed and further developed in several chapters.

The chapters of the anthology

The anthology *Health and Life Skills Through Music, Arts and Culture in Education* can be seen as a resource for teachers in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, *kulturskolen*, teacher education as well as arts and education; it can also be used in healthcare education and at any social arena where children and young people gather. We welcome you to read the anthology and give a brief introduction of its ten chapters to give you an overview of the content:

In **Chapter 1** (in English), Bente Irene Løkken and her co-authors examine how engaging in leisure activities over time affects levels of life satisfaction and loneliness among a population of Norwegian adolescents. Today’s young people report lower levels of mental health and well-being than ever before; consequently, there is a crucial need for new knowledge-based, preventive public health strategies. The authors use cross-sectional data from 25,245 adolescents (age 13–19) from the Norwegian Young HUNT Study (1995–2019) and explores sex- and age differences between their leisure activity engagement and levels of life satisfaction and loneliness.

Chapter 2 (in Norwegian): Jorid Bakken Steigum and Ellen Foyen Bruun examine how drama as a subject can give students opportunities to develop valuable skills for coping with life’s challenges. More specifically, the research question concerns how students’ experiences in the drama room can turn into lifelong learning and how these experiences can be transferred to other classrooms. Aesthetic learning processes that include active interaction and relational work, together with a performative approach to learning, are central themes of this research project. The qualitative analysis of interviews develop the concept of *livslæring* (life

learning) as an alternative to the term *livsmestring* (life skills) used in the Norwegian educational curriculum.

Chapter 3 (in Norwegian), written by Anne-Lise Heide and Egil Reistadbakk, presents an action research study based on a workshop where students in the teacher education program improvise, explore and perform music and drama based on their own and peers' feelings as interpreted through artificial intelligence (AI). This performative approach to learning explores how teachers can facilitate students' knowledge of connections between arts, health and well-being. The authors present a model for how music, fiction and emotions can create a "distance for nearness" while at the same time being a way of co-creating arts which can also be a useful approach to teaching public health and life management skills in school.

Chapter 4 (in English) relates how famous musicians have experienced health and well-being throughout their careers. Kari Bjerke Batt-Rawden explores how coping with life's challenges can be strengthened through musical, artistic and cultural expertise from a salutogenic perspective. The findings from the interviews of eight Norwegian musicians from different musical genres may be transferable to school settings and lifelong learning classes. Learning musical skills may be significant for acknowledging music's power as an interdisciplinary subject in the education system; additionally, participating in musical activities may promote good health in children and young people throughout their education.

In **Chapter 5** (in English), Ronald Kibirige describes how social well-being is cultural-specific and largely dependent on phenomena relating to people. The social-artistic experiences in a community children's ensemble in Uganda are studied in teaching and learning contexts by the concept of *liminality* and a mixture of ethnographic and autoethnographic methods. The chapter focuses on musical and body-rhythmic action, reaction and interaction that unfold in transcendental pedagogical moments of musicking and dance-musicking. Kibirige discusses the multifaceted social benefits of the social-artistic processes of musicking

and dance-musicking that can determine, enhance and sustain students' well-being by creating a social-artistic interactive and safe environment for them.

Chapter 6 (in Swedish): In this chapter, Jenny Wiik investigates how artistic methods and practices can be used in art education to discuss the diversity of gender identities and sexualities. She has done her research based on interviews of two artists who work with queer and non-binary topics and perspectives in their art. The result presents artistic and creative themes and methods that can be used in visual art pedagogy to improve knowledge and understanding of LGBTQ+ issues among youth. A focus on changing societal norms might create a safer space to explore the themes without the need of individuals to be open about their own position in relation to the minority issue discussed. She also links the content to the interdisciplinary educational topic *life skills*.

In **Chapter 7** (in English), Elisabeth Nygård-Pearson describes an autoethnographic study and shares stories, observations and reflection notes from conversations with patients, relatives and hospital workers. Collated during years of singing at a university hospital, these data are used to explore micro-moments of encounters with patients and their families through singing, highlighting the importance of music and song for well-being. Through her singing, she invites people into a space with a sense of freedom, a brief rest or distraction. She identifies the need for accepting and examining her own vulnerability to create these safe spaces. We are challenged as musicians, human beings and educators to identify micro-moments in our musical encounters with fellow humans. Moments emerge and connections form – in hospitals, schools, and other contexts in society.

Chapter 8 (in Swedish) takes up the topic of “care” in early childhood education. The author Sofia Lång claims that an aesthetic understanding of creative activities might form a caring relationship with the world for

caring actions in kindergarten. She presents examples from literature for kindergarten professionals discussed through a phenomenological lens, with a focus on care as a fundamental aspect of the aesthetic experience. For the caregivers in the kindergarten, the staff raising awareness of a caring ethical perspective can promote a view of the aesthetic as a prerequisite for the ethical. Through this approach, an understanding of a transformational aspect of aesthetic activities may bring forth an awareness of life coping perspectives.

Chapter 9 (in Norwegian) is written by Runa Hestad Jenssen, who explores how dialogical encounters in vocal pedagogy might be spaces for discovering and empowering voices in higher music education. Leaning on the methodology of autoethnography and thinking with the concepts of compassion and care in addition to the liberation philosophies of Paulo Freire, she proposes a critical pedagogy as one of love and as a foundation for teaching voice in higher music education. Love, compassion and care might be ways to open a dialogue in safe spaces that may contribute to a multiplicity of voices in higher education. This method of inclusive and democratic dialogues might be applicable in other pedagogical encounters and not only when teaching voice.

In **Chapter 10** (in Norwegian), Dag Atle Lysne and co-authors examine students' experiences with the course *Praktisk og estetisk tilnærming til folkehelse og livsmestring i skolen* [Practical and Aesthetic Approaches to Public Health and Life Skills in School]. It was a cross-disciplinary course where employees from music, physical education, natural science and arts and crafts in the teacher education program collaborated on interdisciplinary approaches to health and well-being through practical and aesthetic processes. From semi-structured interviews with the students in the course, the authors have conducted a thematic analysis and found two main themes; (i) *quality of life for all*, and (ii) *in all subjects all the time*. The study shows how student teachers experience the overarching theme *Health and Life Skills* in school as an holistic, salutogenic topic.

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