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Music Teachers – in Training and at Work A Longitudinal Study of Music Teachers in Sweden Stephan Bladh

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Music Teachers – in Training and at Work

A Longitudinal Study of Music Teachers in Sweden

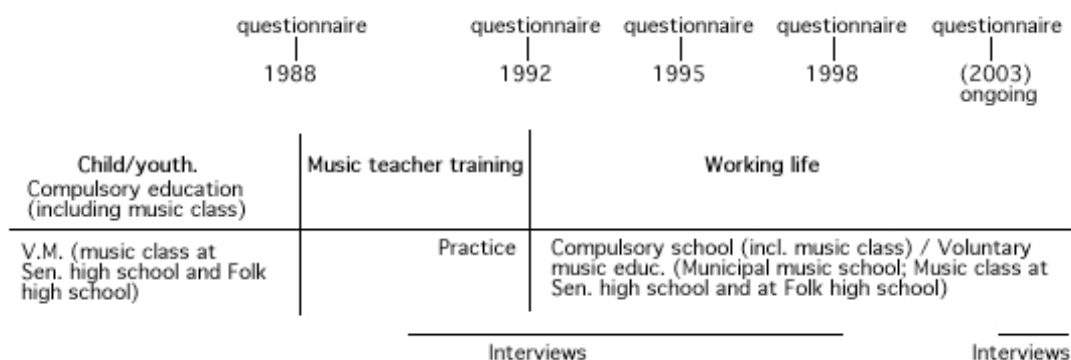
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Introduction

In this paper I'm going to make a short presentation of an ongoing longitudinal research project in Sweden. However, I want to focus on the theoretical perspective I have found fruitful for my understanding of music teachers' professional socialisation, and on the question whether the music teacher must also be a musician in order to possess adequate subject competence. This is and has been a constantly current issue for presumptions about the design of the music teacher training program, the admission tests and the professional life as music teacher.

The project is about a class of prospective music teachers in Sweden, from the time of their application tests for admission to the music teacher training program in 1988 up to their activity as professional music teachers in 1998. Four surveys have been conducted, in 1988, 1992, 1995, and 1998. Initially, the reply frequency was 73% (a total of 159 replies out of 232), with a gender distribution of 60% females and 40% males. Ten years later, the reply frequency was 55% with the same gender distribution, a decrease in reply frequency which mirrors partly the large number of dropouts from music teacher training, and partly the dilemma of longitudinal method in attaining only earlier reply frequencies, at best. Interviews have also been conducted over the years with 36 informants, strategically selected from the statistic material, interviews which comprise some 2000 pages of text in transcript. My colleague Christer Bouij, at Örebro University, has made the interviews (Bouij, 1998). For a chronological illustration of the project see figure 1.

Figure 1. The ongoing longitudinal research project.



Another way of describing the longitudinal project is through an illustration of a problem, which isn't limited in itself to the music teacher profession, but is rather a general problem in all teaching professions (i.e., how subject skills and teaching skills should be balanced against each other). For the music teacher, there is a difference in that another profession—that of the professional musician—is embedded in the subject skills. This makes the music teacher training useful for other purposes than those originally intended. The illustration shows the informants' preferences on whether really to become full-time music teachers at the time of their admission to the training program in 1988, how they have changed in direct connection with their exams, and how they continue to change, dramatically, over the first few years of their professional activity (figure 2). The patterns of preference can be seen as representations of socially concurrent processes, which the music teachers participate in during their training and in their professional life.¹ The survey question is formulated like this:

There can be many different reasons for choosing a particular education. Try to find a reason below that fits you reasonably well.

A) I'm convinced that a music teacher is what I want to be.

¹ Such representations are for example the status of music teacher in education and professional life, ergonomic perspective of music teacher profession - particularly hearing and voice, historical influences etc. Neither of these will be described or discussed in the paper.

- B) *I only want to work part-time as a music teacher. I want to devote the rest of my time to my own music-making or other activities.*
- C) *I want the music teacher training for a possible source of income, but primarily, I want to devote myself to my own music-making or other activities.*
- D) *I want the music teacher training because I'm very interested in music. But I probably won't work as a music teacher, as I don't believe I would make a suitable teacher.*
- E) *I'm applying for the music teacher training program because friends of mine who took it told me the program's really good and enjoyable.*

In summarised form, the replies in the four surveys gave the results shown in figure 2:

In 1988, the survey was completed by 169 informants. In the year field, their respective project numbers are given vertically. The distribution was A: 27%; B: 37%; C: 32% D: 4%. As the graph shows, one individual gave the answer E. This, then, is the response pattern brought into the music teacher training by newly accepted students. It is a mirror of both musical pre-training and individual hopes of what the music teacher training will lead to. In interviews and surveys, there is much talk of such hopes, and in summing up, they do not relate primarily to the teaching profession. As the graph shows, 36% don't have teaching jobs as their first choice at all. 37% have in mind a combination of teaching work and other work, mainly as musicians. Only 27% give teaching work as the main purpose of their music teacher training.

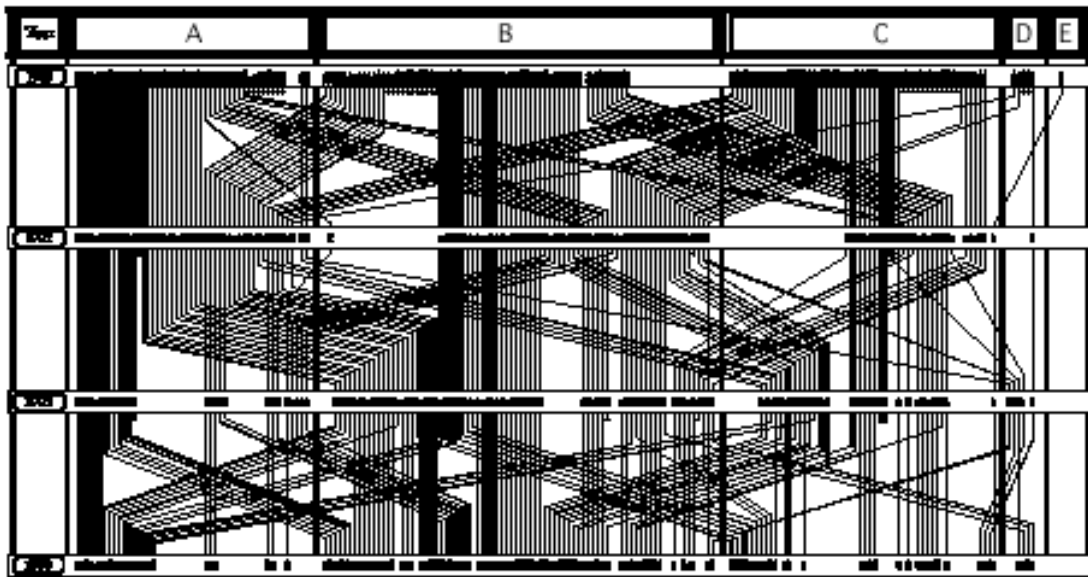


Figure 2. Individual distribution of replies to the so-called preference question in a ten-year perspective. The distribution in 1988 mirrors conceptions during musical pre-training, 1992 the music teacher training, 1995 the so-called "reality shock", and 1998 the first five – six years in the profession

[**Editor's note:** The original size of the above figure is much larger than can be displayed easily and accurately. While the above representation adequately shows the author's illustration of the graphical distribution of the data, readers who wish to read the detailed numerical information between the lines will find a larger version of the chart which they can download and view at 400% magnification at the following URL:

<http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/BladhFig2.pdf>]

In 1992, 136 respondents completed the survey and it was conducted in direct proximity to the music teacher exams. Using the lines, it is possible to follow each informant in their mobility, or their stability. (Broken-off lines ending in a black dot are dropouts from the training, or internal dropouts) Generally, all who move to the right in the graph turn their back on teaching to some extent, and the other way around. The distribution was A: 35%; B: 43%; C: 21%; D: 1%. As can be seen, there is a clear improvement in disposition towards teaching. The largest group consists of those who move from field C to B and A. In interviews, the respondents state that this

change is due to increased insight as to the difficulties of making a living as a musician, and that their own competence as musicians hasn't developed to meet their hopes of four years previously. Correspondingly, those who move from field A and B to C, state as their reason that they have received much support for their musician's competence during their music teacher training. They have received a great deal of encouragement and have been stimulated to proceed directly to employments as musicians, or to pure musician's training. As can also be seen, the field C (and D) has decreased as a percentage the most. The change in preference patterns in 1992 was regarded as an indication that the teacher training had a positive effect on the students' disposition towards teaching. To be sure, it had increased in sum. The problem, however, was that the very same training had largely contributed to a great number of dropouts and a decrease in disposition towards teaching. So, even though the overall picture was in favour of the capacity of the teacher training to stimulate and increase disposition towards teaching, the picture was not without its ambiguities.

In 1995, 133 informants completed the survey. The distribution was A: 19%; B: 52%; C: 25% D: 4%. The dramatic changes in the preference pattern that occur here are the mirror of a difficult reality of being a music teacher. Without doubt, the profession can be described as a shocking experience for many of the informants. Now, the opposite of the previous pattern applies. For example, field A loses a great number, 16% to B, C, and D. However, it should be added that a few informants move to field A, which is a reflection of the fact that they have found a teaching position, usually in voluntary music education, that they are comfortable with. This is poor comfort for all those who find everyday work as music teachers far too laborious. The move from training to the profession shows great difficulties, lined with personal disappointments. Among those, the harsh environment of schools with responsibility for large groups of pupils, often in an ambulatory existence where much time and energy must be set aside for planning, travelling and instrument transportation. The informants point to what they feel is disproportionately poor rewards, in terms of salary and other forms of appreciation. The latter applies in particular to relations with colleagues and school leadership, which is a particularly

conspicuous area in connection with the low status of the music teacher and their subject.

In 1998, 128 informants completed the survey. The distribution was A: 18%; B: 56%; C: 23% D: 3%. The majority of those who are found in field A are not in traditional music teaching positions in primary or secondary schools, but within voluntary music education in local music schools, music programmes at folk high schools or upper secondary schools, or at colleges of music or education. It is noteworthy that this also applies to those who only have been trained for class education (i.e., music teachers with one or two subjects and, to some extent, eurhythmics teachers). Several of those who give field B are women who work part-time or wish to do so in order to have time for family and their own children. Among men, maintaining musician competence is more important, which is impossible in a full-time position. Field C consists mainly of those who have established themselves as professional musicians or don't wish to work as music teachers at all for other reasons.

The theoretical perspective

The German social philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas' theory of communicative action is one of two themes I proceed from. The other theme is his view of society as divided in two parts, *lifeworld* and *system*. From the phenomenological concept of lifeworld, the system has developed in modern society, and according to Habermas, it has claimed an increasing amount of space at the expense of the lifeworld. He talks of a *colonisation* of the lifeworld, and it is in this lifeworld we live with family, friends, music and other relations, characterised by agreement through communicative rationality. The system is characterised by power and money through the strategic rationality. One could say that the system represents an external perspective, whereas the lifeworld represents an internal perspective. For example, in schools the mutuality of the lifeworld-thinking has gradually been pushed back by the inexorable orientation of the system-thinking towards success and efficiency.

In the social world, Habermas makes a distinction between strategic action, oriented towards *success* and communicative action, oriented towards *understanding*. In the latter form, *intersubjectivity* makes possible the understanding of self and the building of identity, socialisation into a profession, among other things. Habermas thus connects to the foundations of *symbolic interactionism*. Even scientific understanding must be brought into the lifeworld to be understood.

Among other things, criticism directed towards the theory of communicative action has had its origin in Habermas' scarce interest in its applications. In a context of (music) pedagogy, the question arises whether teaching is strategic or communicative, possibly something in between, and thus symmetric and asymmetric properties. Symmetry and asymmetry are connected to *relational* aspects (teacher-pupil), and hence I argue that relational aspects be toned down in contexts of music pedagogy to the advantage of musical *processual* aspects.

With Habermas thoughts on social theory, it has been brought to the fore that development of musical knowledge is not only a concern of the individual, but also to society to at least an equal extent.

The theoretical understanding

With Habermas' concept of lifeworld as background, and the idea of communicative action as foreground, I have developed understanding of the professional socialisation of the music teacher, bringing out and highlighting the complexity in this process. Through a *contextualisation*, the complexity of the professional socialisation of music teachers has been possible to make clear. The pre-training context is represented first of all by music programmes at people's high schools, which incidentally the informants have judged as being of highest importance for their musical development. After that comes musical upper secondary school and local music schools. Professional life context is represented by compulsory music education (primary and secondary school for example), and voluntary music education in local music schools.

In the contextualisation, I use what Habermas calls the *symbolic structures* of the lifeworld. In social theory, these structures have traditionally been called *culture*,

society and *person*. These lifeworld structures form a continuous resource for the individual, which Habermas regards as a purely analytical distinction.

Culture should be understood as one aspect of the lifeworld, a store of common knowledge for mutual understanding. It is in its resource *meaning* in its widest sense is created. Here, a cultural reproduction takes place, a passing on of traditions in order to preserve valid knowledge. At disturbances in the process, a loss of meaning occurs, and the lifeworld's schemes of interpretation will appear insecure and relative.

Society should be understood as the aspect of the lifeworld in which social integration takes place. It serves to co-ordinate actions through norms and rules, measurable through the degree of solidarity achieved within the group (the collective). Its resource is thus the ability to comprise a collective (societal) *solidarity*, which breaks down if the process is disturbed.

Person (personality) should be understood as the aspect of the lifeworld where socialisation occurs, which the individual carries as a fund of different skills that are employed in processes of understanding to assert a (role-) identity. It contributes the resource *ego strength*, which maintains the balance between individual (personal) and collective (social) identity, and the process can be measured by the actors' *responsibility*. Disturbances in the process lead to alienation (estrangement) that threatens the identity of the individual.

Pre-training and music teacher training periods

The pre-training period is strongly marked by artistic/musical conditions, where the culture generating meaning is obviously connected to the demands made on individuals by the admission tests at music teacher training programmes. The form of solidarity generated by the social aspect is also marked by artistic/musical conditions, where norms for what is judged to be good music as well as musical practice are integrated, thus developing a sense of unity to do with singularity; that which is different. Another integrated norm is the so-called "practice norm". It is through individual practice that success can be measured. As student in pre-training, one is surrounded by people who gradually adapt, and eventually share a common goal in life—to belong to an area of society where music/art is central and the means of

support are a matter of course. The ego strength of the personality aspect is rooted in the individual's ability to perform successfully in playing/singing, and, as stated above, it is connected to individual ability to compete successfully for admission to the college of music.

The various Swedish Academies of Music have somewhat different traditions and age, but generally share the conservatory tradition, which puts a premium on musical talent. To receive high marks in singing and playing at admissions is just as important to those who wish to gain entry to the music teacher training programme as to the musician's training. Once inside the music teacher training programme, an individual replacement needs to be found, in the cultural aspect of its lifeworld, for the driving force, generating meaning, which the completed admission tests constituted during pre-training. To many students, the goal of becoming a teacher has been articulated so weakly and insecurely that it doesn't function as such a driving force in music teacher studies. This is a reason for the high number of dropouts from the music teacher training programme, but also for many long interruptions during the four years of training. To a great extent, the collective lifeworld aspect in the music teacher training is characterised by the "protection" of its individuality, within the university organisation as well as towards society at large. The college of music as a cultural institution in a geographical area is based on its "unique" qualities, that which is missing in other areas of society or education. The music teacher training programme is a part of this, and is in harmony with students' pre-training. The unique quality, or the sense of being different, which was part of integration already in pre-training, is strengthened and developed further in music teacher training. The integrating norms create a form of solidarity that is closely tied to the artistic/musical element, with the identity of musician and the public part of the activities of a college of music as a cultural institution. This solidarity is a reinforcement of what applied already in pre-training. The practical, pedagogical part of the music teacher training programme is unable to balance or counteract the dominance of artistic/musical elements. It seems impossible to build a foundation for solidarity with future pupils, who do not look upon music as the main goal and means in life, or with future teacher

colleagues, who do not, either. The ego strength, created in the individual lifeworld aspect, is the resource that should provide a balance between individual and collective identity (i.e., the ability to handle the various roles the individual plays, some more desirable than others). Socially concurrent processes in pre-training and music teacher training, sometimes referred to as power fields, status, codes, etc., do not seem to lead to an attainment of balance in individual and collective identity for music teacher students.

Professional life

The music teacher profession, like most teacher professions, is characterised by a closer similarity to traditional worker's trades than academic occupations. In a school environment, most employees are academics such as teachers, whereas the opposite is true of most other work places. The tasks facing the newly hired teacher are more or less the same as those of a colleague about to retire. As an academic profession, there is practically no possibility for teachers to make a career, neither in wages paid nor in tasks.

Compulsory music education

The professional context of compulsory music education seems to appeal the least to graduated music teachers. For this reason, employment there tends to be regarded as transitory until a teacher's position that seems more fulfilling can be found, usually in voluntary music education. The cultural lifeworld aspect of music teaching in compulsory schools has no connection with the corresponding aspect in the student period of music teachers in pre-training or music teacher training. Here, neither art nor music takes centre stage, as was the case in pre-training and music teacher training. Instead, many teachers testify to the difficulties of asserting the position of the subject both with pupils, colleagues and school leadership. This state of things is apparent in a number of areas, from the physical environment of music teaching and the place of the subject in week timetables to the preposterous number of pupils per week and poor individual setting of wages. The music teacher, and the subject of music, seem to attain a position at some schools mainly through whole-hearted concentration on a public part of music teaching, such as more or less public

musical projects such as staging of musicals, "sing-in" projects, traditional seasonal celebrations, Christmas plays and other musical activities marking the end of term. Such public activities seem to be able to create a certain amount of solidarity between music teacher, pupils, and colleagues/school leadership, in its ability to provide the school with a public face. This activity mirrors some of the structural lifeworld aspects of the music teacher's own study period in many years of pre-training and the music teacher training. This means that the music teacher has some experience of balancing individual and collective identity, which partly becomes useful in the professional context of compulsory music education. The problem with public activities is that they demand such commitment from the individual, usually lonely, music teacher at the school, that it is impossible to maintain them over time.

A common trend in Swedish compulsory schools in the latest decades has been attempts to obtain permission to start special music classes, which give the subject more resources, a higher status, and consequently better wages. Music classes have a given place in the public activities of compulsory schools, and, as a consequence, in the public appearance of the school. When greater commitments can no longer be managed, it is hard to find ordinary classroom teaching, hour after hour, meaningful. Here, "small ingredients" of positive feedback from pupils are important, for instance the joy of finding the right chords or rhythm when making music, usually on a musical level which isn't particularly meaningful to the music teacher. However, such moments of positive feedback can hardly compensate for the known problems of music teaching in class rooms, for instance high sound-levels and poor acoustics, which result in voice and hearing problems, or restless and unruly pupils. Since the middle of the 1990s, the individual pupil has greater opportunities to choose courses and subjects in compulsory schools, and these opportunities made it possible for music teachers to set up small units for musical activities in schools, which can be likened to music classes or other voluntary music education within the framework of compulsory education.

Voluntary music education

In voluntary music education as a professional context, the music teacher must relate to the fact that pupils may end their music education whenever they feel the time is right. They remain only as long as they find it meaningful. The elements that generate meaning in a pupil's cultural lifeworld aspect do not necessarily generate meaning in the lifeworld aspect of the music teacher, however. In voluntary music education, it is common to explain individual pupils' lack of success by insufficient musicality. The norms for defining musicality are taken from the collective integration of norms and values in the music teacher's own pre-training and music teacher training. Far from all pupils in voluntary music education fit into this integration, and as a consequence, neither are they embraced by the sense of solidarity which is generated by collective integration. This may concern all aspects, from the choice of instrument to the methods of learning to sing/play, such as classical issues of music didactics such as playing from music or by ear, individual lessons or ensemble playing, choices of musical repertoire (genres), methods for practising, etc. As there are normally no musical tests in Swedish local music schools, the definition of musicality is a common method to effect a "natural" sorting out of pupils over time. Accepting a great number of beginners every year, who are "given a chance to try learning to play", at a moderate charge and with a borrowed instrument, results in a great number of dropouts over time. Of course, many of these are not caused by a sense of failure, but again many of them are.

In voluntary music education, above all in local music schools, the reproduction and development of local music making is taken for granted. In the latest decades, a musical development has occurred, where local music making has become an important base for further education as a professional musician. In this respect, voluntary music education has become similar to sports, where a small elite rests on a gradually widened base, in a pyramid model. Against this background, it is obvious that music teachers identify more easily with those who show promise of reaching a higher level in the pyramid than with those who end up below. The higher a pupil seems to be able to reach in the hierarchy, the more he or she reflects the music

teacher's own time as pupil in voluntary music education. Thus, the same artistic/musical ideals are confirmed and re-confirmed. Few music teachers can work only with elite pupils, however, and when it occurs it is usually as ensemble leaders for more or less well-established choirs and orchestras of various kinds with especially good working conditions. At best, the music teacher has a proportional distribution of pupils, with a few of the future elite (=prospective music teachers), and the rest from the widening base.

Music teachers who represent, for example, the subject of eurhythmics (but also recorder playing) have traditionally been regarded as close to preparatory music education in local music schools. These teachers often become engaged in full-time teaching based on large groups, often indiscernible from class teaching in compulsory music education. With these music teachers in voluntary music education, the same signs of strain are apparent as in their colleagues in compulsory music education. They wish to leave full-time work in order to develop themselves, work with adults, in theatre, etc. All in order to have some musical feedback and confirmation, insufficiently provided by their work as music teachers. The same phenomenon is also noticeable with music teachers who do not participate in the public part of voluntary music education, for various reasons. To teach pupils instruments or singing on an hourly basis week after week, year after year, eventually leads to being worn out in the same way, which is why these teachers, too, wish to leave full-time music teaching in favour of other work. Depending on individual circumstances, this is also what they do. The greater number of elite pupils a music teacher has, the more ego strength is generated in the individual lifeworld. This can be read from the degree of responsibility and the ability to balance individual and collective identity. It is through these pupils the teacher's role of musician and previous training is confirmed. These music teachers also hold greater potential to stay in the music teacher profession.

From the structural aspects of the lifeworld, transferred to voluntary music education as a professional context, there is substantial affinity with the music teacher's experience of his own pre-training and music teacher training. The picture

